

## 48 Towards a Creative ID in Fashion Business Education

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### Abstract

This paper challenges the conventions of fashion business education and its ability to develop creative graduates. The place of creativity is not well established, but its need is: fashion business students need to have the opportunity to develop the ability and skills needed for creativity.

Teaching for creativity on fashion business courses focuses on knowledge acquisition and the development of visual communication skills. Although useful, these attributes reflect a limited view of creativity, and do not develop the creative thinking for idea generation and problem solving needed by fashion business graduates. Fashion business educators have an important role in students' creative development. However, their individual experiences of creativity determine their personal identity of creativity and how they teach for creativity. Similarly, students have their own creative identities which may vary from those of their peers and teachers.

There is a lack of awareness of the multiple identities of creativity within the fashion business education community. Together, the university education systems, the personal creative identities of teachers and students, and the lack of knowledge and discourse about creativity, produces limited and accidental teaching for creativity.

This paper argues for recognition of these multiple IDs of creativity, and teaching that enables the development of the personal ID of creativity of each fashion business student through the development of a community ID of teaching for creativity. How a new community of creative educators can be built is based on McWilliam's theory of creative capacity building. This paper extends and challenges her theories by calling for a new model of creative fashion business education that challenges preconceptions about what and how fashion business students are taught. The paper concludes with a new creative ID for the community of fashion educators and students, created through teacher education and management support.

## **Introduction**

This paper challenges the conventions of fashion business education and its ability to develop creative graduates, by discussing the reliance on the individual fashion business educators' (FBE) own creative identity in the teaching for creativity. This paper argues for recognition of the multiple identities of creativity that exist and teaching that enables the development of the personal identity of creativity of each fashion business student through the development of a community identity of teaching for creativity.

The place of creativity is not well established in Higher Education (Jackson, 2006; Cropley, 1999) but its need is (NACCCE, 1999; Craft, 2005). Further, in an earlier phase of this research, fashion industry managers' views of creativity confirmed the need for creativity, particularly at senior management level. Creative pedagogy literature advocates that students need to have the opportunity to develop the ability and skills needed for creativity and makes recommendations for how this can occur and points to the teacher as pivotal in achieving this (McWilliam, 2005:2007;2009; Craft, 2005). However, teaching for creativity on fashion business courses was found to focus on knowledge acquisition and the development of visual communication skills. Although useful, they reflect a limited view of creativity and do not develop the creativity needed by fashion business graduates that supports creative thinking for idea generation and problem solving.

This research project assumes that fashion business educators have an important role in the students' creative development but highlights the inadequacies of the current approach to teaching for creativity, which was found to be informal, infrequent and individual. The FBE's creative identity was found to determine teaching for creativity on fashion business courses and this was formed from their personal experiences of creativity rather than knowledge of creative pedagogy theory, course teaching strategies or management direction. In addition, it was found that the students and FBEs' creativity was often inhibited by the university systems and structures.

Through exploration of the FBEs pedagogies, their views of creativity and what informed their views, the research identified how creativity is taught but also why creativity is taught as it is. The literature that underpins this research will be presented initially and will highlight that the range of views that exist about creativity are more diverse than the theories of teaching for creativity. The research approach will then be described, followed by a discussion of the findings that show how personal creative identity determines the teaching for creativity on fashion business courses. The limitations of the current approach to teaching for creativity will be discussed with reference to McWilliam's theories of creative capacity building. Recommendations will be made for the need for how a community identity in the teaching for creativity can be created.

## **Literature Review**

The phenomenon of creativity is discussed in the literature of different academic disciplines, particularly that of psychology and increasingly education and

management. Within each of these disciplines, diverse views are expressed about what it is, who can be creative, how to measure creativity, how to improve it and how to manage it. The literature includes different approaches to creativity research and beliefs about creativity's purpose. It also discusses the reasons for the recent interest in creativity and the problems creativity can cause as well as the issues with being creative (Kleiman, 2008). However very little literature discusses the reasons for the absence of overt action to enable and develop creativity within higher education and none was apparent that discusses how teaching for creativity occurs on fashion business courses, the need for fashion business students to be creative or how they can be taught to be creative.

The different approaches to the study of creativity as detailed by Sternberg (1999; 2006) highlights the multiple definitions and interpretations of what is creative, who is creative, how creativity occurs and what affects creativity. Conversely the research that discusses the teaching for creativity reflects a confluence approach to creativity (Amabile, 1996; Sternberg, 1999, 2006). The confluence approach makes assumptions about creativity that challenge popular views and myths about creativity (Weisberg, 1993) and leads to an inclusive, 'democratic' (Craft, 2008) approach to what is creative: who can be creative and how creativity can be taught but does not reflect the diversity of views reflected in the general theories of creativity. The confluence approach to creativity evident in creative pedagogy literature indicates a community identity of creativity, whereas the diverse of views of creativity that exist indicate an individual and personal identity of creativity.

Within the literature reviewed there is criticism of university management for the lack of teaching for creativity in Higher Education (Banaji, Burns and Buckingham, 2010; Cropley, 2009; Jackson, 2006). The lack of direction to teach for creativity and the teaching approaches and structures traditionally used by universities were identified as inhibiting teaching for creativity. Recommendations are made for flexible and forward-facing approaches to teaching for creativity (EUA, 2007; McWilliam, 2007; Ryan and Tilbury, 2013). These criticisms and subsequent recommendations focus on the impact of the external environment on the teaching for creativity and assumes teachers' all have the same personal identity of creativity. It does not discuss why teachers teach for creativity as they do and how the teacher's individual interpretation of creativity- their creative identity - affects how they teach.

McWilliam's creative pedagogy research (2005, 2007, 2009) describes teaching for creativity in universities and what is required to teach it. She emphasises the importance of creativity and that it is possible to 'foster small c creativity through sustainable and replicable pedagogical practice' (McWilliam & Dawson, 2008; p.634). The focus of McWilliam's theory is the teacher and how their actions and interactions affect what she describes as 'building creative capacity' (2009; p.282) but her theories assume a cohesive creative community exists within the teaching environment that supports the teaching approach she advocates.

The review of the literature showed that creativity is complex and that many understandings of the phenomenon exist. However, it also identified that research into teaching for creativity within universities is limited, in that it assumes a confluence approach and second-generation understandings of creativity. The absence of research about teaching creativity to fashion business students led to

research questions, first to identify how creativity is taught by FBEs, and second, why they teach it in particular ways.

## **Methodology**

The research was designed to explore the creative pedagogies of fashion business educators, to discover how teaching for creativity occurs on fashion business courses and why. The complexity and many interpretations of creativity identified in the literature highlighted the need to understand each fashion business educator's understanding of creativity and their personal reflections on their views and practices of teaching for creativity. Interviews were identified as the method to collect the thick and rich data required (Kvale, 1996). As the aim was to uncover the range of views and practices that exist in the teaching for creativity maximal variation sampling was used (Creswell, 2014).

Interviews were conducted with thirty-two fashion business educators from five universities in the UK. The selected interviewees had taught across a range of subjects on fashion business courses but had different backgrounds, responsibilities and years of teaching experience. Most of those interviewed had worked in the fashion industry in a variety of roles and sectors prior to joining Academia. The universities from which the interviewees were selected ranged in size, location, the number of fashion business courses they ran and the subject discipline they were aligned to. For the purpose of this research fashion business courses were deemed to be any course that sought to prepare students for a role within the fashion industry that focused on the operational and commercial side of the sector rather than design, product development or garment technology. These include course titles that include management, marketing, buying, merchandising, communication.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was conducted at multiple levels to retain the integrity of the data during interpretation to generate findings that accurately reflect the richness of the views expressed. These multiple levels of analysis uncovered significant insights into the FBEs' pedagogies, their definitions of creativity and what they believed were the components required to teach for creativity. This analysis also identified what had informed these views and a further stage of holistic analysis revealed the contradiction and uncertainty of the views expressed, which are explored in the next section.

## **Findings**

### *The creative identity of the fashion business educator*

The findings demonstrated that the creative identity of the fashion business educators was determined by their personal experiences of creativity. This determined how they defined their own creativity or what they perceived as creativity in others. Creativity was often described as individual and unique, magical and inexplicable. Creativity was believed to be 'innate', and consequently their approach to teaching for creativity was to encourage, enhance or enable the creativity 'within the individual'.

Initial descriptions of creativity were of artistic creativity but thinking creativity was often referred to subsequently and at this stage many that had not described themselves as creative thought they could think creatively. The presumption that creativity was demonstrated via artistic modes dominated the discussion of creativity, affecting attitudes to what modules did or did not require creativity and how students were taught and assessed for creativity.

All of those who had an art and design background believed they were creative however many of those with a business background did not describe themselves as creative or indicated that 'their creativity' was not recognised and were critical of the 'soft and fluffy' creativity most often described. The confidence in their creativity expressed by those with an art and design background reflected the expectation of creativity they had experienced as students and had continued into their professional lives in the fashion industry. Although artistic creativity was how many initially described creativity, it was evident that they believed creativity was also a way of thinking, an approach to 'seeing the world' or 'solving a problem'.

By contrast there was more uncertainty among FBEs with a business background. Some described themselves as not creative and often described creativity as something artistic. Others were unsure and said they 'didn't know' or they 'didn't really think about it'. Conversely those who were confident in their definition of creativity would describe creative thinking and non-heuristic problem-solving as more important elements of creativity than making something 'look pretty'.

Those from both backgrounds who considered themselves creative said they taught for creativity when they could and described teaching as they had learned. However, many said they couldn't teach for creativity because they didn't have the time, the module content didn't allow it or the 'dull grey lecture halls weren't conducive to being creative. Some thought the students weren't able or willing to be creative. They pointed to the students' lack of innate creative ability, the spoon-feeding education they'd received previously, their lack of real experiences and reliance on social media for their views and their unwillingness to take risks. Some FBEs also emphasised the pressure on them to 'not let the students fail' because of the financial investment the students had made. However, some FBEs indicated they did not know how to teach for creativity and were obviously embarrassed by this as they recognised the importance of creativity.

What was significant in these findings is that the FBEs had no awareness of each other's definition of creativity and creative identity. No FBE indicated that creativity, its meaning and its teaching was discussed amongst peers, management or students but the concept was 'banded about' and its meaning assumed. When creative teaching was described, FBEs of both backgrounds described teaching that was visual, used props, or involved making things. It was noted that one university had introduced a creative framework but the interpretations of what this meant varied: not all staff mentioned the framework and some were sceptical about its feasibility for their modules or courses.

In addition to a lack of discourse about creativity there was a lack of knowledge of creative pedagogy theory and limited training for how to teach for creativity even

amongst those who had teaching qualifications. Teaching was by instinct and intuition, developed from prior experiences.

The research was expected to identify groups of FBEs who shared similar approaches to teaching for creativity and looked to identify if background or where they taught influenced their teaching for creativity. What was found was that there was a spectrum of views and practices for the teaching for creativity ranging from those who stated they taught for creativity and those that said they didn't. However, some of the described practices unintentionally contradicted creative pedagogy theory about enabling or inhibiting creativity. For example, some described teaching for creativity by 'telling the students to be creative' and requiring the ideas to 'be commercial' or 'work'. Conversely, some who did not believe they taught for creativity described setting assessments and class activities where students determined what they would do and how. The only clear group identified was that of those with an arts and design background. Its members were usually confident in their views of creativity, reflecting that creativity had been integral to their learning experiences and expectations of them. However, the views and practices of this group were not the same as each other's. Some expressed broad views others that recognised artistic and thinking creativity as equally important, whereas others only described artistic and making things as creative. Their views were informed by their individual experiences of creativity.

Because each FBE described creativity based on their experiences of creativity what was described as needed to teach for creativity reflected their definition of creativity. The range of creative identities was found to be diverse but approaches to teaching for creativity were found to be limited. The FBE's described encouraging, enhancing and enabling as how they taught for creativity. Most indicated that teaching for creativity was not a priority or a requirement. Consequently, teaching for creativity on fashion business courses was found to be informal, infrequent and most importantly, individual to each FBE and so not replicable. Problematically, teaching for creativity relied on the FBE's actions and interpretations of creativity which assumed the same approaches and outcomes for each student.

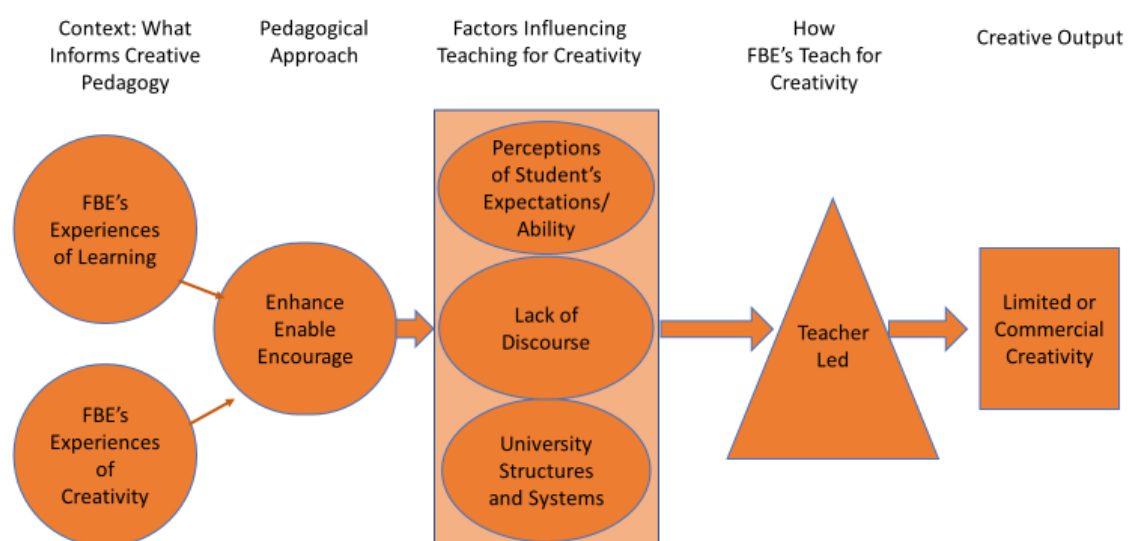
Visual communication skills were the main example of teaching for creativity on fashion business courses. Visual skills were sometimes 'added to dry subjects... to make them less dry'. The FBEs often said that the creativity had to 'work' or 'be commercial' and assessment of these attributes was based on their views and experience of the industry. However, the range of assessments and what was assessed limited creativity. Although risk taking and challenging the norm were identified as required for creativity, there were few examples where this could happen, as risk taking necessarily requires the possibility of failure and challenging the norm will also include challenging the beliefs of the FBE who is assessing the work. An example where risk taking was encouraged was a business game that was assessed on reflection of the process rather than the success of the business. Making connections and thinking outside the box were also identified as required for creativity, and some indicated their desire for more interdisciplinary teaching and experiential learning. However, the examples of interdisciplinary teaching were minimal and opportunities for experiential teaching had declined due to large cohorts and cost.

Work experience was often cited as key to enhancing students' creativity. Many initiatives to increase work experience were evident at department and institutional levels but the objective was to increase students understanding of the industry, the concepts taught and ultimately employability on graduation. While increased understanding of the industry could lead to students generating creative ideas, creativity was not a stated objective of their work experience but an additional and optional benefit.

Irrespective of their creative identity all interviewees thought creativity was important for fashion business students. The lack of direction to teach for creativity at course, department or university level was also surprising, given the stated importance of creativity as important as 'human capital' (Craft, 2008; Bourdieu, 1986) and universities' current emphasis on employability. The lack of discussion is evident in the findings; that creativity's meaning is assumed and that views of creativity reflect and are determined by personal experiences of creativity.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrated that the FBEs individual creative identity borne from their experiences determines their creative pedagogy. How they teach for creativity is influenced by their perceptions of the students' abilities, a lack of discussion about the meanings of creativity and the limitations of the university systems (figure 1).



*Figure 1: How individual creative identity of the fashion business educator determines their teaching and limits the creative output*

This approach is problematic as it relies on the FBE's individual and sometimes narrow interpretation of creativity, and the students creativity is judged by the FBE's view of what is acceptable as creative within the fashion industry. It also assumes FBEs have the time, ability and motivation to teach this complex phenomenon, within an educational system that does not support or guide the teaching for creativity and

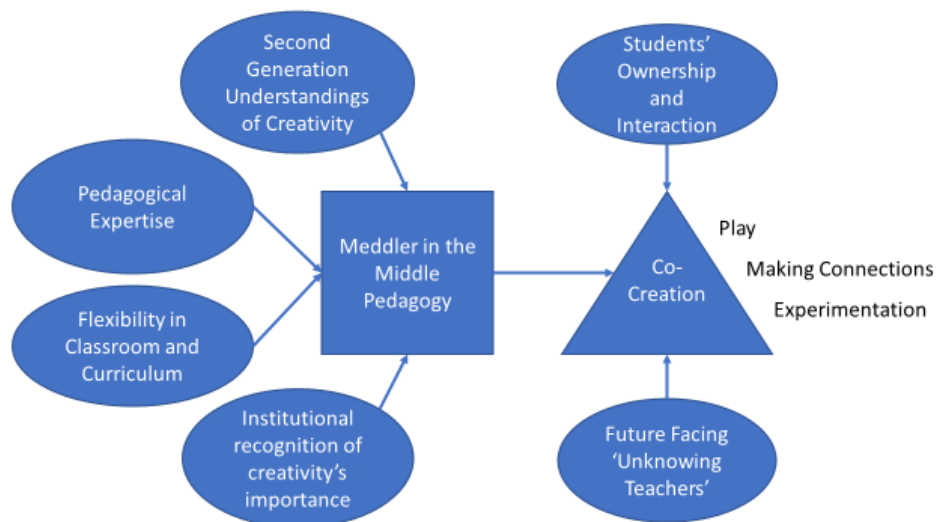
does not allow the risk taking and challenging of the norm, required for creativity. Although each FBE may be consistent when they teach for creativity, their methods are not consistent across the teaching community, they are not replicable and only encourage, enable and enhance forms of creativity that are identified by the individual FBE.

Creative pedagogy theory appeared to adopt a confluent approach to creativity recognising the complexity and contradictions that are contained within the phenomenon. Although each theorist emphasised the different elements required to teach for creativity, creative pedagogy theory did not rely only on the actions of the teacher, but assumed the environment (physical and emotional), the curriculum and student were aligned to enable teaching for creativity to occur. Amabile (1996; 2012) describes an integrated componential model, Jackson (2016) an 'Ecology' and Robinson (2006) compares it to an organic agricultural system. All describe a system of teaching that is replicable and allows the creative output to be new.

McWilliam's (2005; 2009) theory of creative capacity describes a process with the teacher at the centre. However, their role is to be a *Meddler in the Middle* to challenge the student and their position vis a vis the student as a 'co-creator'. This approach varies significantly to what was found amongst the community of FBEs where they either adopted a didactic *Sage on the Stage* or a facilitating *Guide on the Side* approach. What approach FBEs used was determined by what they perceived the student needed or what the university required. What, who and how FBEs taught for creativity was determined by their experiences of creativity. The meddler in the middle approach described and advocated by McWilliam was evident in some of the teaching described by the FBEs, and in how some described their preference for teaching. However, this was infrequent and not usually possible due to a focus on knowledge acquisition, the inflexibility of timetables and large student cohorts.

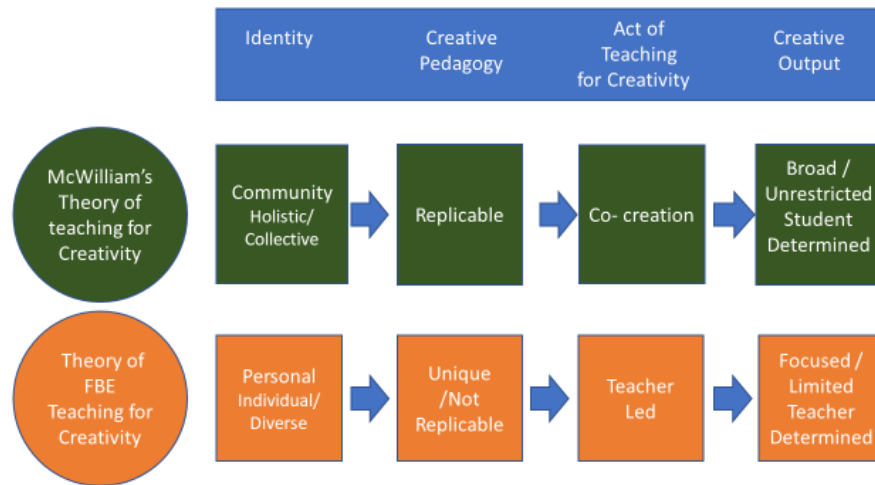
Importantly, McWilliam's theory assumes that all aspects of the educational environment support the teaching for creativity, that there is a community creative identity. Figure 2 (below) demonstrates McWilliam's theory of teaching for creativity. Her theories assume teachers are knowledgeable about creativity and the differing theories that exist. According to this theory, teachers have second generation understandings of creativity, they do not believe it is a mystical skill possessed by a few, but it can be taught and is replicable. McWilliam assumes teachers are pedagogically expert and have been taught to teach, that they have autonomy and flexibility in the classroom, and, are supported by the institution in their teaching for creativity.





*Figure 2: McWilliam's theory of creative capacity building*

The theory generated from my findings of how FBE's teach for creativity indicates that FBEs' creative identity is individual. They have first and second-generation understandings of creativity, most of those interviewed had not been taught to teach and no one had been taught to teach for creativity. The narrow views of the type of creativity needed by the fashion industry and achievable by the fashion business student, restricts what is recognised as creative and taught on fashion business courses. University systems and structures were found to inhibit how FBEs taught and there was limited direction and support from the university or management for teaching for creativity. Consequently, teaching for creativity was unique to the individual FBE reflecting their creative identity. Figure 3 shows how McWilliam's theory compares with the emerging FBE theory and highlights how the creative output is determined and so constrained by the FBE's creative identity. Conversely, the community creative identity advocated by McWilliam produces broader student determined creative outputs.

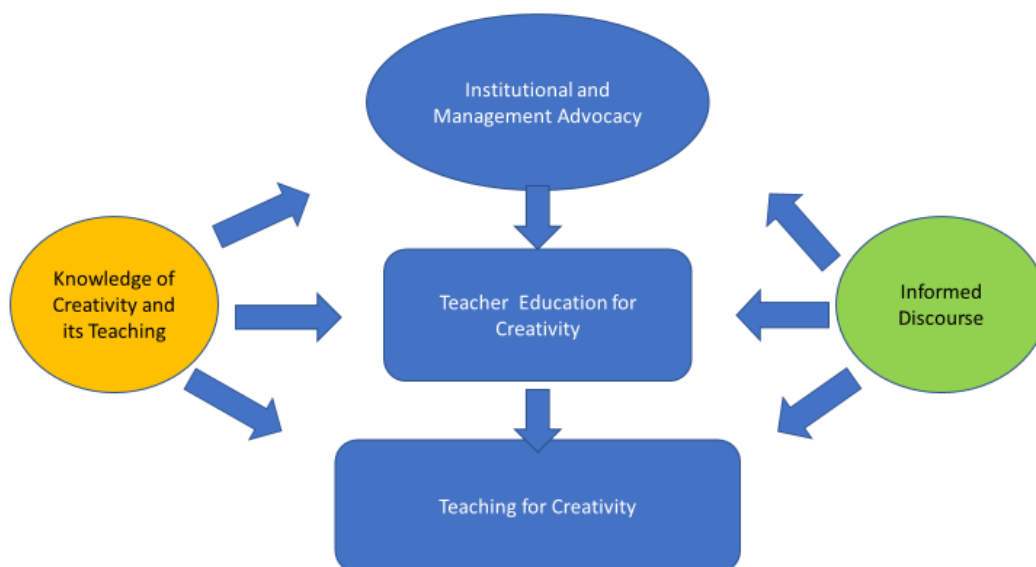


*Figure 3: Comparison of personal and community identities in the teaching for creativity*

## Recommendations

This paper argues for recognition that multiple identities of creativity exist, and for teaching that enables the development of the personal ID of creativity of each fashion business student, through the development of fashion business educator community ID to teach for creativity.

Figure 4 illustrates how this new community could be built. Using McWilliam's theory of creativity as a base, a new model of creative fashion business education is proposed but it requires significant changes in attitudes and structures within Higher Education and fashion business education.



*Figure 4: Approach to transform teaching for creativity from a personal creative identity approach to a community identity approach.*

Teacher education is required about creativity and how to teach for creativity. This education needs to be ongoing and include discussion of the varying theories and forms of creativity, and how each module or discipline can include creativity within their teaching and learning. In addition, constant and informed discourse is required to ensure that practices evolve as greater knowledge of what is required to teach for creativity becomes known. All those involved with the teaching and management of the students' learning experience, not just front-line teachers, need to be included in this education and discourse.

However, teacher education cannot exist in a vacuum. What is also required is a rethinking of the purpose of university education, who teaches and what and how it is taught. This teacher education will not occur without institutional and management support that creativity is an attribute, an objective and expectation of, academic achievement. Management leadership is required to change current practices to enable more cohesive teaching for creativity, that can in turn enable the personal and individual nature of each student's creativity to be expressed.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed how the individual creative identity of the fashion business educator determines how they teach for creativity. This finding highlights the absence of a community identity for teaching for creativity on fashion business courses, by contrast with the creative pedagogy literature that advocates a collective community approach to teaching for creativity. A community identity for teaching for creativity on fashion business courses is recommended that recognises the different forms creativity can take, and enables its teachers to teach creativity that reflects their personal identity, and also the creativity of others, and most importantly their students.

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