In the eye of the beholder? An investigation of student assessment in the creative arts in universities

Christopher John Morgan

Southern Cross University

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In the Eye of the Beholder?

An Investigation of Student Assessment in the Creative Arts in Universities

Christopher John Morgan
BA, MDEd
Thesis submitted to fulfill the requirements of
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Southern Cross University,
Australia
December, 2011
I, Christopher John Morgan, certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis.

I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Print Name:...........................................................................................

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Date: .................................................................................................
This thesis addresses the question of how university academics in the creative arts might assess students’ creative works fairly and appropriately. Specifically, it considers how these academics conceptualise and approach the task of student assessment, what tensions and dilemmas are experienced in student assessment, and how student assessment practices in the creative arts might be made more transparent and robust. The complexities of student assessment in the creative arts, and the uncertainties and vulnerabilities that beleaguer academics when making judgements about the quality of their students’ creative works are widely recognised, but not well understood. This investigation employed Naturalistic Inquiry to illuminate the assessment experiences in creative arts of 30 academics from across three countries. It documents how these academics conceptualised creativity in their own disciplines, how they conveyed their understandings to students, how they provided feedback on students’ creative development, how they prepared students for assessment, and how they made judgements about students’ creative works. Four interlinked dilemmas of student assessment practice in the creative arts were thus identified. The first is the lack of a shared understanding of creativity and of its manifestations in particular disciplinary settings. The second is the difficulty of explaining creativity to students. The third is the challenge of providing transparency for students about how their creative works are to be judged. The fourth is the decision about what role subjectivity should play in judgements about creativity in student works. The findings from this investigation challenge accepted wisdom about student assessment that is based largely on positivist paradigms. Outcomes-based education, for example, does not readily allow for the unexpected or unanticipated – yet these are highly prized qualities for academics assessing students’ creative works. Based on the insights obtained, a seven-phased, cyclical model of student assessment in the creative arts is proposed. This model identifies the purposes of each phase of the student assessment cycle, addresses the dilemmas of student assessment that have been identified by academics in the creative arts, and provides indicators of sound practice. The model is
designed to support assessors to navigate through a complex terrain, to reflect on current practice, and to harness their activities consistently towards the central purpose of fostering creativity while at the same time assessing student work with demonstrable fairness and appropriateness.

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Nothing that we do to, or for, our students is more important than our assessment of their work and the feedback we give them on it. The results of our assessment influence our students for the rest of their lives and careers – fine if we get it right, but unthinkable if we get it wrong.

Race, Brown and Smith (2005)
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David: I’m giving this film three stars. What are you giving it Margaret?
Margaret: I’m giving it six stars
David: You can’t do that! Our scale only goes to five.
Margaret: I don’t care. I loved it so much I want to give it six.

(Excerpt from At the Movies, ABC Television)

1.1 Background

In recent years, television has spawned an ever-increasing number of competitive entertainments in which participants showcase their creative talents in fields as diverse as dancing, singing, and cooking. The tensions mount in these highly popular programs over successive weeks as participants perform designated creative tasks or routines. Participants are judged and, one-by-one, they are eliminated, with their disappointed dreams showcased to a voracious viewing audience. In a slightly different vein, we find another popular television format: the arts review program. Here the creative merits of books or films are warmly and sometimes passionately discussed and debated. Yet another popular format is inventors’ programs, in which aspiring inventors showcase their innovations to a panel of expert judges.

The common element in all these entertainment formats is the assessment of creative works by a panel of experts. Judges may be required simply to assess the merit of a work, or more specifically to provide scores, or rank performances in order of merit. As the viewing audience gets to know the judges, we are privy to their individual aesthetic tastes, their quirks and idiosyncrasies, their biases and preferences. Some are ‘nice’, others ‘nasty’. Disagreement amongst judges is common and sometimes very theatrical. Indeed, it is this collision of taste and aesthetics, and how these are formulated into judgements, which become the essential drama of these programs and captures much public interest and comment (Holmes, 2004; Hall, 2006; Redden, 2008; Baltruschat, 2009).
In the popular imagination, assessment of creative work is about the elevation of subjectivity and the drama of difference. It raises questions about how, if at all, creative works can be fairly judged when there is such evident lack of consensus among experts. It also calls into question the experience of those starry-eyed creative performers who enter into these competitive environments. Is it a fair playing field they are entering? Are the rules of the game transparent? Do they know how they will be judged, and by whose criteria? Did the experience ultimately foster, or crush, their nascent creative drives?

In universities, the assessment of students’ creative works is a commonplace, daily event far removed from the scrutiny of a national television audience. Universities are not, overtly, competitive environments in the manner of these popular entertainments. Yet many of the questions raised above might still be asked. In a range of university disciplines, such as visual arts, design, music, dance, and creative writing, the qualities of innovation, imagination and creativity are brought into play by students to develop creative works. Students need to develop their creative abilities and aesthetic sensibilities, informed by theoretical perspectives and underpinned by a developing mastery of the craft or techniques relevant to the field (Nightingale and Magin, 1995). For students, it is a complex, singular and, at times, personally exposing and potentially bruising journey.

For assessors of student work, the task is equally complex. Assessors must balance their desire to foster students’ creative abilities with the need to make summative judgements about their outputs. In terrain that is significantly subjective, assessors must also be able to set aside their own personal biases and tastes, and make judgements that are demonstrably fair and transparent, in a university environment that demands accountability for their decisions. It is a terrain that, as revealed in this study, requires considerable sophistication and expert professional judgement by assessors, and yet remains in many ways a deeply problematic and conflicted one for assessors and students alike.

This study is located at the intersection of two significant bodies of knowledge. The first is the study of creativity, and how it is conceptualised and fostered in educational
settings. The second is the study of student assessment, and how we might make fair, transparent and reliable judgements about the quality of student work. There are long traditions of scholarship in both these fields, however, at their intersection – the assessment of creativity – our understanding is limited, and the extant literature is partial, speculative and contested.

1.2 Focus of the study

The central aim of this study is to investigate how university academics in the creative arts might assess students’ creative works fairly and appropriately. In pursuing this central aim, the following three questions are posed:

1. How do academics conceptualise and approach the assessment of students’ creative works?
2. What are the tensions and dilemmas experienced by academics in their assessment practice?
3. How might assessment practice in the creative arts be advanced and strengthened?

The study commences with the assumption that there is much existing sound practice in the assessment of creative works in universities, and that there is a variety of ways in which academics have sought to overcome the difficulties inherent in the task. The study has sought to provide a rich picture of how a range of university academics in the creative arts negotiate their way through these dilemmas and seek to resolve them in practice.

Central to this study’s aim are the highly subjective notions of ‘fairness’ and ‘appropriateness’. These have been selected in preference to more commonly employed assessment terminology such as ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’, as these latter terms belong to a paradigm of assessment that is somewhat contested in the creative arts. It was important to conceptualise this study without inherent bias towards any particular paradigmatic assumptions. However it is acknowledged that all these terms are value laden, so this is necessarily a qualitative, interpretative study that enables meanings to be constructed from the voices of academic participants.
A distinctive aspect of this study is that it adopts a *holistic approach* to the study of student assessment. Assessment theorists (for example, Rowntree, 1987; Gibbs, 1995; Ramsden, 2003; Biggs, 2003) have long stressed that student assessment is not an isolated end-of-term event, or an add-on to teaching and learning. Rather, it is argued, assessment drives and shapes student learning and, therefore, it should be viewed as an event that infuses the whole teaching and learning process from its first inceptions. The various elements of the process, such as intended learning outcomes and teaching and learning activities, should be closely integrated and aligned with assessment, and send a clear and consistent message to students regarding assessment expectations.

It was important, therefore, in this study to initially explore participants’ own *conceptions of creativity* as a learning outcome, and how they communicate this to students. It was also important to explore how participants *foster creativity in the classroom*, and the kinds of developmental support and activities they offer students to prepare them for summative assessment. This data provides essential insights into the central question of how participants *make judgements about the quality of student work*. The three focal points of this research are developed as Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis. The resulting frameworks for sound assessment practice, offered in Chapter 8, are similarly holistic, in that they conceptualise teaching, learning and assessment as integrated and interdependent activities.

### 1.3 Scope of the study

In exploring the assessment of creative works in universities, a number of approaches might have been taken. One option was to examine the assessment of creative works across a wide spectrum of higher education disciplines, from the arts to the sciences, examining the differing disciplinary conceptions and forms of creativity and how they are assessed. A study framed in this way would yield broad comparative and contrasting data about the assessment of creative works in higher education. A second option was to select one key discipline, such as visual arts, and undertake a contextualised study of assessment in a situated disciplinary culture. In contrast, this approach would provide depth, rather than breadth, and yield data that illuminates in fine detail the phenomena of student assessment in a particular domain.
In this study, however, I adopted a middle course focusing on a cluster of disciplines. Participants in this study were drawn from visual arts, design, music, dance, filmmaking and creative writing. These disciplines, loosely categorised as the *creative arts*, share a common primary purpose in developing the creative abilities of students. Similarly, assessment in these disciplines is commonly designed around a significant creative work or performance. In selecting this middle ground, I have aimed to gather data that incorporate elements of both depth and contrast and that enabled the identification of assessment issues, concerns and dilemmas that are shared across the creative arts. The findings of this research have the advantage of being potentially resonant with all disciplines where creative products or performances are at the heart of the assessment experience.

### 1.4 Significance of the study

Many observers have noted that society has moved into an era driven by the so-called ‘creative class’, described by Florida (2002) as hybrid professionals whose work generates ‘creative ideas and conceptual innovation’ in all areas of industry, entertainment and the arts. The creative economy is now accepted as a large and rapidly growing aspect of most advanced economies (Howkins, 2005). Universities throughout the Western world have a declared commitment to developing creativity as a graduate attribute, yet evidence of its attainment is elusive. As Jackson (2006, p. 4) notes, we barely acknowledge its existence in many university disciplines and it tends to happen ‘more by accident than design’.

A large part of this problem is the elusive nature of creativity itself. Despite a considerable volume of research, there are no shared definitions or models of creativity, and the more it is analysed, the more elusive its meaning becomes (Greene, 2004; McWilliam, 2007). As explored in Chapter 2, universities are grappling with key questions such as how students learn to be creative, how we can teach to foster creativity, and what kinds of curricula and learning environments are appropriate for creative endeavours. At the heart of these concerns is the ability of universities to
foster creative capacity and adequately prepare students to take their place in the burgeoning creative industries workforce.

The topic of student assessment has persistently remained at the forefront of concerns in higher education. It intersects with a range of other key issues such as quality assurance, the maintenance of academic standards, and the qualities and skills of graduating students. With the recognition that assessment drives and shapes student learning, much attention has been devoted to ‘getting it right’: using assessment as a tool to motivate students, to prompt the right kind of learning, and to offer fair and defensible judgements about student work (Gibbs, 1995; Brown and Knight, 1994; Knight, 1995; Morgan et al., 2004).

Yet the assessment of students’ creative products or performances has been identified as an area of assessment that is plagued by a range of tensions and dilemmas. A key tension, referred to earlier, is the essential subjectivity of assessment judgements and the necessity of assessors to make fair and reliable judgements about creative work. A further tension explored in the present study is the evident mismatch between the demand in universities for measurable learning outcomes and the necessity in the creative arts to encourage novel or unexpected creative outcomes. Two markedly differing approaches – standardised, quality assured outcomes and open-ended, creative pedagogies – are grafted together in a prevailing climate of ambiguity that culminates in student assessment.

The significance of these issues and tensions for universities is exemplified through the following controversy that arose at Newcastle University in Australia. As Cowdroy and Williams (2006) recount, a group of students lodged a formal appeal against a fail result in a design studio in architecture. The University conducted an inquiry focusing on the evident inability of assessors to distinguish between fail and pass standards, and the failure to define specific criteria for assessment of creative ability. The inquiry led to the University exerting pressure on academic staff for more ‘objective’ and ‘transparent’ assessment that conformed with the University’s quality assurance protocols. A number of teaching staff, however, maintained that creative ability could not be ‘adequately assessed objectively or transparently in the
conventional meaning of these terms’ (Cowdroy and Williams, 2006, p. 97). As the writers describe, investigation showed:

...widespread disagreement among the various design and creative arts disciplines (within the University and beyond) on what constitutes creativity; whether creative ability could or should be reduced to quantifiable parameters for assessment; and whether the most important aspects of creative achievement reside in the initial thinking (creative ideas) or in the subsequent process of development of the idea (‘crafting’ a work of art, design, etc) or in the creative work that is the end product (the work of art itself) (Cowdroy and Williams, 2006, p. 97).

This account provides a window into the complexities of assessment in the creative arts, and the uncertainties (and indeed, vulnerabilities) that beleaguer academics when making judgements about the quality of students’ creative works. It also highlights how real and present these concerns are for students, teachers and universities with quality assurance commitments upon which funding and accreditation is predicated.

There is a clear need for empirical research that examines the assessment of creative works in universities. In particular there is a need to identify models of assessment that are able to meet quality assurance expectations, yet remain demonstrably fair and appropriate in the eyes of both assessors and students, while preparing students to take their place within the burgeoning creative industries.

1.5 The values I bring to this study

As qualitative, interpretative research is inherently value laden, it is important to briefly unpack the experiences and values that have lead me to this research. This study has evolved from my fifteen years of experience and scholarship in the field of student assessment in higher education. As a curriculum designer and educational developer, located in a centralised teaching and learning centre at an Australian university, student assessment has always been a central aspect of my daily work. I work alongside academic staff to support them in realising their ambitions to make assessment as meaningful and productive as possible.
In this time, I have become crucially aware of the importance of assessment in the minds of students, and how it can shape learning, either positively or negatively. No matter how thoughtfully a university subject is developed and taught, if the assessment is not working congruently and seamlessly with the goals of that subject, there is likely to be unintended consequences and lost opportunities. When used to best effect, assessment is a purposeful dialogue with students about their ideas, achievements and opportunities for improvement.

A second important value about assessment I bring to this study is the issue of fairness. Assessment entails power relationships and has high stakes for students, whose lives and careers may be significantly shaped by their results. If handled inexpertly, assessment can hurt people, dent self-esteem and discourage further participation. It also generates a great deal of stress. In the light of this, there is an overwhelming requirement that assessment is conducted openly and fairly, with as much transparency and accountability as possible about the judgements and decisions we make.

A focus in recent years on outcomes-based education and assessment may lead us to believe that assessment is a relatively neutral or objective activity. From my own experience, the making of judgements about student work can often be fraught with problems and subjectivities. It is important to be up-front with students, and not pretend that assessment is a sleek, well-oiled piece of machinery. Although our judgements are made with the best of intentions and considered professionalism, we need to be reflexive and wary of a prevailing university culture that positions the assessor as the lofty expert and arbiter of student achievement.

With colleagues in my centre, I have co-authored two texts on student assessment over the past twelve years (Morgan and O’Reilly, 1999; Morgan, Dunn, Parry and O’Reilly, 2004). These texts sought to integrate much empirical research about the purposes, principles and practices of assessment to assist academics in their daily assessment practice. In both texts, the chapter on assessing creative outcomes was always the most difficult to write. There was little published research at the time that shed light on how academics in the creative arts went about their assessment practice.
Creativity, as a learning outcome, seemed particularly fuzzy, and assessment judgements in aesthetic domains also seemed, from the outside, quite problematic. We came to view assessing creativity as the ‘last untold story’ of university assessment practice. It was with these values and questions in mind that I framed my doctoral study.

Finally, it should be noted that as I am not a teacher/practitioner in the creative arts, I do not come to this study with any preconceived beliefs or biases about creativity or creative arts assessment practice. While I am certainly influenced by the various theories and perspectives on student assessment more broadly, as discussed above, I understand that issues of creativity and its assessment are grounded in the complex disciplinary cultures and practices within the creative arts. Although my perspective could never be considered neutral or objective, I do however bring the relatively fresh perspective of the ‘newcomer’ to situated practice in the assessment of creativity.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

Following from this introductory chapter, this thesis is divided into eight further chapters as follows:

Chapter 2 investigates the broad phenomena of creativity and its long and complex research tradition throughout the twentieth century. The chapter then focuses on creativity in the context of higher education. It explores academic conceptions of creativity and how it variously manifests in university disciplines. The focus is narrowed further to explore creativity in the creative arts, along with contemporary literature that provides insight into how teachers foster creativity, how students learn to be creative, and curricula and learning environments that support creative practices. This chapter establishes key issues that are revisited throughout the thesis, including the elusive nature of creativity and creative processes, and the somewhat inhospitable climate offered by universities for the pursuit of creative outcomes.

Chapter 3 investigates the traditions of student assessment in higher education. It provides an overview of key assessment theories and studies that illuminate how
students perceive assessment and how it impacts on their learning processes. This chapter then focuses specifically on assessment in the creative arts and reviews the literature that provides a foundation to creativity assessment. In particular, it identifies important issues and dilemmas for assessors and students and the complex range of issues balanced by academic staff in preparing students for assessment, and making judgements about their creative work. Taken together, Chapters 2 and 3 provide a detailed context for this study.

Chapter 4 discusses the *methodological foundations* for the research. To appropriately address the questions raised in this thesis, I argue for the necessity of a qualitative, interpretative study that explores participants’ perceptions of, and experiences with, the assessment process in the creative arts. Naturalistic inquiry is presented as a framework for the design, method and conduct of this study. The chapter provides details of the research design, the approach and format of interviews, the transcription, coding and analysis of data, and important ethical considerations that framed this study.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 collectively present the findings from data gathered during the interview process. The first of these chapters, Chapter 5, explores how participants in this study *conceptualise creativity*. It also digs beneath the surface to consider where the boundaries of creativity lie, and how explicit these boundaries are to their students. It looks at how participants talk to their students about creativity and how students are inducted into the discipline and the tacit knowledge of the field.

Chapter 6 explores how participants *foster creativity in the classroom*, how they provide feedback on students’ creative development, and how they design summative assessment tasks to assess student achievement. This chapter reveals the range of values and experiences that shape and inspire participants’ teaching and assessment activity. It also reveals the many competing tensions that sit underneath their formative and summative assessment practice.

Chapter 7 explores the process of *making judgements* about the quality of student work. Participants reveal the processes they employ in making judgements, setting aside their personal aesthetics, and the confidence they hold in their professional
expertise. This chapter also explores the assessment panel and jury process including areas of disagreement or conflict, and how these are resolved in practice. Participants also encapsulate their thoughts and experiences about the subjectivity of their decision-making, their fairness and transparency, and how assessment affects their students and the risk-taking qualities necessary for creative outcomes.

Chapter 8 builds directly upon the analysis and discussion occurring in the prior three chapters to advance various aspects of theory and practice. There are three key objectives of this chapter: (1) to distil a series of key findings that advance our theoretical understanding of student assessment in the creative arts; (2) to consider options for reform of assessment; and (3) to posit some conceptual models and frameworks which advance our understanding, and which may guide future practice in student assessment.

Finally, Chapter 9 concludes this thesis by providing a synthesis of key findings and ways forward with the assessment of creative works in the creative arts. The chapter also considers potential areas for future research to extend the findings of this study.
CHAPTER 2

CREATIVITY AND ITS PLACE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Introduction

This chapter provides insight into the extensive research into creativity conducted over the past sixty years, and tracks the development in thinking about this somewhat enigmatic subject. Key definitions and conceptualisations of creativity are explored, and the four key focal areas of research are explained: (1) creative persons, (2) creative products, (3) creative processes and (4) creative environments. The significance of these four key areas for educators seeking to foster creativity and make judgements about the quality of student work is also reviewed.

This chapter then shifts focus to examine the issue of creativity in the context of higher education, and the intractable dilemmas experienced by universities in preparing students for creative futures. This section also explores recent literature about teachers’ and students’ conceptions of creativity and the ways creativity is being interpreted and fostered in specific disciplinary contexts.

2.1 The elusive nature of creativity

Human creativity is commonly referred to by psychologists and researchers as a mystery and a paradox (Boden, 2004; Cropley and Cropley, 2009). By its very nature, creativity is unpredictable and tends to defy precise definition or scientific explanation as to its origins and processes. Yet it is something that pervades all aspects of human endeavour, and is an aspect of human intelligence that is grounded in everyday abilities such as conceptual thinking, perception, memory and self-reflection (Boden, 2004). There are many contemporary discourses around creativity, including personal exploration through creative endeavour, competitive advantage in business enterprise, the need to foster a creative economy, and the need to educate for creative outcomes, to name but a few (Gibson, 2005).
Systematic research into the nature of creativity has been underway intensively since the 1950s, primarily in the field of psychology. The emphasis in the early years was on personality and intelligence studies of highly creative individuals, in an effort to discern their special qualities or characteristics (for example, Guilford, 1950). Implicit in this approach was the view that creativity is largely confined to certain individuals who possessed innate or acquired characteristics, which separated them from ‘non-creative’ people.

Although personality or person-focused studies continue to the present day, research has broadened in focus and creativity is researched through a variety of different lenses, including:

- **product-focused studies** that explore the characteristics of a creative product and what distinguishes it from less creative ones;
- **process-focused studies** that explore the kinds of cognitive and other processes commonly employed during the development of creative ideas or products;
- **environment-focused studies** that explore the kinds of social and physical environments that support and foster creative effort.

These four categories will be reviewed in some detail, but first, it is necessary to consider some definitions of creativity, and how it is conceptualised.

### 2.2 Conceptualising creativity

Given the variety of lenses through which creativity is explored, it is not surprising that there are many hundreds of efforts at definition, each with its own particular emphasis or context. Historically, conceptions of creativity have been heavily influenced by two distinct philosophies: romanticism and rationalism. Rationalists argued that creativity was the product of conscious, intelligent thought, whereas romantics believed creativity filtered mysteriously from the subconscious mind, and that rational thought hindered creativity (Sawyer, 2006). Although romanticist notions of creativity have been overwhelmingly rejected by scientific research over the past 50 years, Sawyer (2006) notes that many romantic myths of creativity linger in the popular imagination, including ideas that creativity is the product of spontaneous
inspiration, that creative products project the inner spirit of the individual, that creative works are a form of therapeutic self-discovery, and so forth.

Scientific study commenced in earnest during the first decades of the twentieth century and definitions in the 1920s focused on the creative process (Wallas, 1926, in Cropley and Cropley, 2007). Later efforts from the 1950s emphasised the creative personality or the creative product. Amabile (1996) notes that definitions focusing on the characteristics of creative products have tended to be the most useful for researchers and those seeking to understand the phenomenon. At a broad level of abstraction, there is some consensus amongst contemporary creativity researchers about what being creative means. A relatively simple definition, for example, is offered by Boden (2004, p. 4):

*Creativity is the ability to come up with ideas and artefacts that are new, surprising and valuable.*

Definitions of creativity commonly include aspects of newness, surprise and value. According to Boden (2004) ‘newness’ might simply be new to the creator, or at the other end of the spectrum, new to humankind. ‘Surprising’ denotes the unfamiliar, or disruption of a familiar way of thinking, or in exceptional cases, astonishment at the seemingly impossible. The ‘value’ of an idea or artefact is relatively subjective and relates to a particular time, place and culture. It is valuable (or useful, or pleasing) to the extent that appropriate observers agree it is (Amabile, 1996). Although ideas or artefacts may in some ways be both new and surprising, if they are not judged to have value in some understandable way, then they are not considered to be creative, although as Sawyer (2006) discusses, this is one of the many contested areas of creativity definition.

Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004, p. 90) analysed the literature of creativity and developed the following more complex, synthesised definition:

*Creativity is the interaction among aptitude, process and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context.*

Similar concepts such as ‘novelty’ (newness) and ‘usefulness’ (value) are offered in this definition, along with the recognition that these concepts are social constructs.
The definition also introduces four key focal points of creativity research: person, product, process and environment and, significantly, argues that creativity is the *interaction* of these elements. These issues are explored in detail later in this chapter.

### 2.2.1 A typology of creativity

According to Boden (2004) creative acts or ideas can be categorised as belonging to one of the following categories:

1. **Integrative creativity.** A common or everyday form of creativity occurs when familiar ideas are brought together in unfamiliar combinations to create new or fresh ideas or products. Examples of this abound in the creative arts in musical composition, poetic allegory, and visual imagery. However it must be more than just random juxtaposition – it must make sense to the viewer, and be satisfying and meaningful in some way. This kind of creativity, at its best, requires a rich store of knowledge and judgement that enables free experimentation with differing combinations.

2. **Exploratory creativity.** A more sustained form of creativity occurs when new ideas or artefacts are developed over time within a known or recognised conceptual space, for example, writers developing new pieces of fiction within an established genre, developing a new variation of a known recipe. In these cases the creator is developing something that is recognisably new and valuable, yet it may not be highly surprising as it belongs to a well-established tradition or line of thought with clear antecedents. Creativity in this case is bound by tradition.

3. **Transformative creativity.** Rarer and more exceptional forms of creativity occur when there are leaps of creative thinking that develop new terrain in a field, or new understandings that were previously inconceivable to the viewer. In these cases the creator is taking a significant leap into the unknown and so the level of surprise and impact upon the viewer is very high.

The issues of definition, typology and models of creativity are, however, an ongoing problem for researchers. The extent of the difficulty is highlighted by Greene’s (2004) review of no less than 552 scholarly articles on creativity in the literature since 1996. Greene’s work reflects a widespread concern that the field is characterised by theoretical models that are so rarefied or misunderstood that enacting the key concepts
is extremely difficult. Greene’s own scholarly efforts have focused on establishing a meta-model of 42 models of creativity that, as McWilliam (2007, p. 2) reports, consists of ‘seven types of models, with six models in each type, and 13 types of 303 variables’.

McWilliam (2007) notes that while there is much effort to exert some order, focus and convergence, there is clearly only modest consensus or shared understanding within the field. McWilliam (2007, p. 2) concludes that:

Notwithstanding academic longing for a theory or model for everything, creativity continues to be regarded by many both within and outside academic circles as so mysterious and serendipitous that it defies definition and thus also defies any attempt to foster it systematically.

2.3 Four focal points of research

Despite the relatively modest level of consensus amongst researchers about definitions and models, there are consistently developing bodies of knowledge about key aspects of creativity. The four key focal points for ongoing research are: (1) the person focus; (2) the process focus; (3) the product focus; and (4) the environmental focus. Each of these focal points provide important windows into the enigma of creativity and some research provides useful assistance for those wishing to support the development of creativity in others. These four focal points are briefly considered below.

2.3.1 Creative persons

The ‘creative person’ focus explores creativity as a personality trait, or a set of cognitive abilities and processing styles. According to Tardiff and Sternberg (1988) traits commonly associated with creativity include intelligence, curiosity, verbal fluency, a good imagination, and a proclivity to taking risks. Cognitive abilities usually include the ability to think metaphorically, flexibility in decision-making, independence of judgment, recognition of patterns, finding order from chaos, logical thinking, and internal visualisation. Processing styles include a preference for wide
categories and ‘big picture’ images, a facility for non-verbal communication, devising new structures, questioning given norms and assumptions.

It is mostly agreed that people are creative in particular domains of endeavour, rather than possessing generic creative abilities that can be applied in any domain. However, debates in relation to the person focus include: whether creative aptitude in a particular domain is innate or acquired by highly practiced skills; and whether creative people are more likely to be social isolates rather than social, collaborative individuals (Tardiff and Sternberg, 1988).

Researchers have developed measurement tools to identify highly creative individuals, to understand and predict creative productivity in the workplace, and to help individuals understand their own creative abilities. For example, Torrance’s Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance, 1966; 1998) measures qualities such as originality, elaboration, flexibility and fluency in one’s thinking processes. Personality measures, such as the Group Inventory for Identifying Creative Talent (Rimm and Davis, 1976) have been often deployed to identify gifted and talented children. Such creativity tests have been the subject of much critique in recent years. Although the tests do measure abilities and dispositions that are considered important elements of creative performance, it is argued that they are inadequate and misleading as a global measure of a person’s creativity (Amabile, 1996), and may at best be considered as a means of establishing creative potential (Proctor and Burnett, 2004).

The issue of creative talent is a thorny one for educators, particularly given the implicit elitism in the idea that only those few with special traits or abilities are destined to shine in creative endeavours (Proctor and Burnett, 2004). Although educators may often recognise and acknowledge particularly talented creative individuals, they are also quick to argue that talent does not necessarily equate with productive creative outcomes. Talent may only be a relatively small part of the equation when considered alongside sustained effort and application (Sawyer, 2006; Cropley and Cropley, 2009). Moreover, tests to measure creativity are not particularly useful for educators who work on the understanding that all students possess certain creative talents, whether latent or not, and it is their job to support and foster those talents in students as best as possible.
Yet the ‘creative person’ focus does contain relevance for educators, as it reinforces that there are important personal qualities that can be encouraged and fostered in students. For example, personal traits such as the ability to take risks, or the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, are qualities that can be acquired and developed through experience, experimentation, encouragement, and feedback, which are ideally all part of a creative learning process.

### 2.3.2 Creative processes

The *creative process* focus seeks to understand the kinds of thinking and problem solving processes commonly undertaken while creating new ideas or products. Studies with a process orientation began in the 1920s and sought to identify and understand phases in the creative process utilising the lives of artists and writers as case studies. Arthur Koestler’s (1964) influential work, *The Act of Creation*, sought to identify the intuitive processes associated with the creative leap of the imagination, bridging previously unconnected frames of reference. The phenomenon of intuition or instantaneous insight, however, remains a vague notion, and is challenged by many theorists who argue the greater importance of the long gestation period to creative outcomes (for example, Sternberg, 1988).

A series of studies also explored the process of creativity and the cognitive skills required for creative acts (for example, Newell, Shaw and Simon, 1962; in Amabile, 1996). Osborn’s (1963) classic study developed the idea of ‘brainstorming’ as a process for the generation of creative solutions to problems, a process still commonly used today in educational and business contexts. Commonly reported creative processes, regardless of the problem on which they are focused, include:

- forms of lateral thinking that seek to bridge conceptual gaps using analogy;
- constant redefinition of problems and reviewing the taken-for-granted;
- applying recurring themes and recognising broad patterns and images to assist in making the new ideas more familiar, or to refresh existing ideas; and
- the use wherever possible of non-verbal modes of representing problems.
The creative process is often conceptualised as a two-phased activity: the divergent and the convergent phases (Sawyer, 2006; Cropley and Cropley, 2009). The *divergent* phase focuses on relatively freeform generation of ideas, solutions or problems to be resolved. Amabile (1996) argues that during this phase, students should be motivated by intrinsic interest, freedom, enjoyment and commitment to the task, and not be waylaid by extrinsic concerns such as whether they are ‘right’ or how their work will be perceived or judged by others. Rewards, it is argued, have a negative effect on creativity if students perceive that their role is to produce something that pleases or ‘wins’. This point has important ramifications for the assessment of creative works. The *convergent* phase entails decision making, embarking on a process, completing the task and communicating the results. In this phase, argues Amabile (1996), extrinsic structure in the form of time frames, assessment criteria, and teacher evaluation points are generally useful to keep students engaged and on track. There are important implications in this research for assessment culture and practices in universities that will be discussed later in this review.

As Kleiman (2005) and others note, there are significant links between Amabile’s (1996) intrinsic motivation hypothesis, and various discussions in education about taxonomies of learning (for example, Biggs and Collis, 1982) and concepts of ‘deep and surface’ approaches to learning (for example, Marton and Saljo, 1976; Ramsden, 2003). The intrinsic motivation ideally experienced by students during the divergence phase of creativity resembles Biggs’ description of an ‘extended abstract’ response to a learning task and Marton and Saljo’s ‘deep learning’ approach to study.

Some of the major debates about creative processes, noted by Tardiff and Sternberg (1988) include:

- the degree to which creativity is an active, planned endeavour as opposed to chance-related or speculative activity;
- the degree to which creative processes are generic or specific to a particular domain of practice;
- the degree to which creative processes are available to all and can be learned;
- the degree to which creativity is only achieved when the right combination of particular problems, skills, individual and environment come together.
Although we can identify broad stages of creative processes, this literature suggests that there are inherent problems in imposing particular creative processes upon students. The ‘creative process’ focus of research is perhaps more useful to educators in understanding the richness and variety of possible pathways that students may choose to take, depending on their own preferences, interests and context. Like most other aspects of creativity, research into the creative process is still highly contested and speculative, yet arguably of interest to educators as discussion points and exemplars rather than templates for prescribed action.

2.3.3 Creative products

The ‘creative product’ focus seeks to understand the qualities or characteristics that distinguish creative products from those that are less so. Product-oriented studies are of particular interest to the degree that they grapple with questions such as ‘what are the qualities that make ideas or products creative?’ This is a key question for educators in the assessment of students’ creative works.

Jackson and Messick (1965) proposed that when judging outstanding works of creativity, there are four aesthetic responses occurring simultaneously. Amabile (1996) summarises them as follows: (1) surprise is the aesthetic response to the novelty or unusualness of the product, when judged against the accepted norms; (2) satisfaction is the response to the appropriateness of the product, judged within the context of the work; (3) stimulation is the response to transformation in the product, evidence that the product breaks away from the constraints of the situation as typically conceived; and (4) savouring is the response to condensation in a product, the judged summary power or ability of the product to condense a great deal of intellectual or emotional meaning in a concise and elegant way. In a similar vein, Besemer and O’Quinn (1987) identified three categories of specific characteristics against which to measure creativity: (1) novelty – the product’s originality, spin offs, and impact upon society; (2) resolution – appropriateness of the product for its intended audience or purpose; and (3) elaboration and synthesis – the stylistic features of the creative products. Clearly these criteria are oriented more towards
creative innovations with practical application rather than artworks, creative writing or performance.

These two conceptual frameworks are examples of a long history of efforts by researchers to bring objectivity to the assessment of creative products, by the development of universal, de-contextualised criteria that distinguish them from less creative ones. While these efforts are important as attempts to dissect and find commonality in all creative products, subjectivity is never far below the surface. What is ‘surprising’ or ‘stimulating’ to one may be less so to another. Teresa Amabile’s (1996) influential work, *Creativity in Context* puts the case for a social psychology of creativity, arguing that creativity is a social phenomenon and can only really be understood in situated social contexts. Notably, Amabile argued that ‘a product is considered creative to the extent that appropriate observers independently agree it is creative’ (p. 230). Thus panels of artists should consensually determine the degree of creativity in an artwork, given their in-depth knowledge of the context in which the work has been produced.

This ‘consensual assessment approach’ to the evaluation of creativity in products relies on notions of contextual understanding, disciplinary knowledge and professional judgement as a reliable way of distinguishing creative products or ideas. Amabile (1996, p. 39) critiques creativity tests and efforts to objectively measure creativity in works:

> We have repeatedly found that our expert judges are able to reliably assign degrees of creativity to the works we show them, whether those works are produced by ‘ordinary people’ or by high level professionals in a particular field.

This consensual assessment approach lays the theoretical foundations for much assessment practice in the creative arts today, in schools, conservatories, universities, and in a variety of creative professional contexts such as auditions, eisteddfods, competitions and awards.

### 2.3.4 Creative environments
The *creative environment* focus explores the relationship between an individual’s environment (social, educational, cultural, occupational) and capacity for creative thought and action. Environment focused studies have mostly sought to measure the psychological climate in settings where creativity occurs, mostly schools and workplaces, using indicators such as risk-taking, playfulness, challenge, freedom, trust, conflict and debate (Ekvall, 1996). Again, Amabile’s work has been influential. Amabile’s (1983) intrinsic motivation principle of creativity was developed out of a series of studies of the phenomenology of creativity. This principle is that the enthusiasm and passion people feel for their work is closely associated with the creativity of their performances. It echoes aspects of Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) ‘flow state’ experienced by people at the peak of creative insight. While environmental researchers concede that personal qualities of ability and personality have a large part to play in creative behaviour, they argue that a range of ‘extrinsic constraints’ in the social environment can have a consistent impact on the motivation and creativity of people. Auh (2000) outlines four key environmental contexts that could play significant roles in affecting creativity, including: (1) the home environment; (2) school or learning institutions; (3) the political and economic conditions of the country; and (4) the culture of the country.

More recent research has capitalised considerably on earlier environmental studies, taking the view that creativity is a fundamentally and necessarily social, collaborative endeavour, particularly in the creative industries and business (for example, Montuori and Purser, 1999; John-Steiner, 2000; Littleton and Miell, 2004). These studies have sought to reveal the ‘socio-emotional, interpersonal and cultural dynamics which support and sustain creative activity’ (Littleton and Miell, 2004, p. 1) and the ways in which educational and institutional contexts for creativity are enabled. Moran and John-Steiner (2004) explore issues of creativity in collaborative environments in the light of three key characteristics of collaboration: complementarity (differing perspectives, expertise, working methods), tension (as a mechanism for revealing latent opportunities), and emergence (outcomes that become greater than the sum of the parts).

The ‘creative environment’ perspective is important to this study because educators have a particular concern with fostering learning environments that are conducive to
creativity. This includes both the appropriateness of the physical learning environment and, perhaps more importantly, the right psychological climate in which creativity can flourish. The latter has various layers of impact, including both the climate in the classroom in encouraging and motivating creative activity, and also a broader institutional culture that is capable of acknowledging and rewarding risk-taking, non-conformity and uncertain outcomes.

While the four focal points of creativity research – person, process, product and environment – have been examined here as separate entities, more contemporary research in the field of creativity is recognising the limitations of examining aspects of creativity in isolation, with an associated reliance on quantitative methods and efforts to find objective measures for aspects of creativity. Sociocultural approaches to creativity assessment seek to examine how variables associated with person, process, product and environment interact in complex ways in situated social settings (for example Henessey and Amabile, 1988; Puccio and Murdock, 1999; Sawyer, 2006; Isaksen, Dorval and Treffinger, 2010).

Additional perspectives are noted in the historiometric work of Simonton (1999) who explores the qualities of creativity, genius and talent by the psychometric study of famous high achieving individuals. A further important focus of research has been the work of Csíkszentmihályi (1996) whose psychological research has identified the ‘flow state’ – an optimal state of intrinsic motivation when people are at their most creative. These various perspectives on creativity are further discussed in this chapter, in the situated setting of universities.

2.4 Creativity in universities

Creativity is an ideal that is closely allied with central tenets of a liberal university education that espouses concepts such as the freedom to pursue ideas, and to imaginatively address the key issues and problems of the day. As Whitehead (1927, p. 4) expressed it: ‘The proper function of a university is the imaginative acquisition of knowledge… A university is imaginative or it is nothing – at least nothing useful’. Creativity is also a quality or attribute that is expected of any student graduating with
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a university education (for example, Candy, Crebert and O’Leary, 1994). Most universities have adopted generic skills or graduate attributes that include creativity in one form or another, such as ‘creative responses to problems’ or ‘creative thinking’. As Schon (1990, p. 3) argues, most professionals need creative thinking abilities and artistry to respond to the complex and ill-structured problems presenting in practice. ‘Technical rationality’ he argues, ‘is sufficient for managing tidy problems, but complex, unpredictable, unusual problems need more than familiar rules, theories and techniques’.

University interest in creativity as a graduate attribute is being significantly driven by the demands of business and industry. A raft of government committees, both in Australia and abroad, have released papers in recent years calling upon governments and universities to stimulate innovation and creativity, and acknowledge the central role of the creative arts in the new economy. In the UK, a report to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2006, p. 11) states that:

Work in the modern British economy will increasingly involve creativity and innovation as a mass and everyday activity, applied not just to leading edge high-tech and cultural industries, but to retailing and services, manufacturing and sales. Britain will need an education system that encourages widespread development of generic skills of creativity which include: idea generation; creative teamwork, opportunity sensing; pitching and auditioning; giving criticism and responding to it; mobilising people and resources around ideas to make them real.

In the US, Florida (2002) argues that we have moved into an era of economic development that is driven by the so-called ‘creative class’ – writers, designers, scientists, educators, and various hybrid professionals whose work generates ‘creative ideas and conceptual innovation’. This creative ethos, he argues, translates into a significant competitive advantage for business and has been responsible for a dynamic revitalisation of centres in the US that have successfully attracted creative professionals.

In Australia, the Prime Minister’s Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (2005, p. 5) reported in a similar vein:
To be globally competitive, Australia needs to formulate a comprehensive approach to fostering creativity. Essentially, this means that we need to implement the political, economic, social and technological infrastructure that facilitates relationships amongst creative industries sectors and between creative industries and other sectors.

The report argued that the siloing of disciplines in higher education militated against the kind of cross-disciplinary fertilisation necessary to achieve these goals.

Employers, too, are seeking graduates who bring with them ‘new ideas’ and introduce ‘fresh thinking’ into their organisations. In the UK it is noted that graduates who are creative will:

...be prepared for a rapidly changing world where they may have to adapt to several careers in a lifetime. Many employers want people who see connections, have bright ideas, are innovative communicators, and work well with others and are able to solve problems. In other words, they need creative people (UKDCMS, 2006, p. 7).

A survey of employers, commissioned by the Australian Department of Education Science and Training (Nielson, 2000) found that the three most significant skills deficiencies of graduates entering the workforce, relative to value by employers, were creativity and flair, oral communication skills, and problem solving.

These reports are resounding in their appeals to universities to foster creativity and innovation in their undergraduate and research programs. In addition, they commonly call for a radical restructuring of universities away from their traditional groupings in disciplinary clusters, to enable cross-disciplinary fertilisation that is considered essential for the new creative economy. The next sections explore how universities have taken up this challenge.

2.4.1 The ‘problem’ of creativity in higher education

In a background paper presented to the Australian Research Council Centre for Creative Industries and Innovation, Jackson (2008) presented six linked propositions about the problem of creativity in higher education, summarised as follows:
1. Creativity is vital to both personal productivity and to the health and economic prosperity of society at large.

2. We barely acknowledge its existence in most fields of higher education. As an explicit, desirable outcome, creativity occurs ‘more by accident than design’ (p. 2).

3. Teaching in higher education is an inherently creative process: ‘Creativity emerges spontaneously through the relationships and interactions of teachers with their students in highly specific and challenging situations’ (p. 4). Yet most teachers have limited formal knowledge of creative processes or the forms it takes within their discipline and require persuasion that ‘teaching for creativity is no more or less than good teaching to achieve particular outcomes in disciplinary learning’ (p. 4).

4. The barriers and inhibitors to creativity in higher education are vast. Many purposes and goals of higher education are often in conflict, such as staff and student resistance, along with organisational, cultural, resourcing and managerial problems. ‘We squander the opportunity to help learners to develop their creative talents, preferring conformance and compliance … and penalising mistakes rather than seeing them as valuable opportunities for learning’ (p. 7).

5. The problem will not be solved without strong leadership.

6. There is much that individual teachers in higher education can do to create a climate of creativity in the classroom.

Jackson (2008) argues for funding and support for universities to enhance teaching quality, to develop creative capacity within disciplinary communities, and to reward creative endeavours and outcomes. He also argues the need for disciplinary exploration to find shared meaning about conceptions of creativity in the design and facilitation of programs. If teachers are to devise creative curricula, facilitate creative environments and make judgements about the quality of students’ creative output, he argues, they need to have a shared understanding about the endeavour and be able to communicate this to students effectively.

McGoldrick’s (2002) study of academic and student conceptions of creativity highlighted a series of inherent contradictions, particularly in relation to the rhetoric or ‘spin’ about the importance of creativity, in contrast to dominant management
Discourses which reinforced constraint, conformity and scarcity of resources. This contradiction is described by McWilliam (2007) as the gap ‘between leaderly rhetoric of risk-taking, and the managerial reality of bean-counting’ (p. 5).

A key concern, expressed by Buss (2007) and Hale and Harding (2007) relates to the contemporary focus upon quality assurance and measurable learning outcomes in universities, and the impact this is having upon creativity. They argue that the necessity for pre-specified or ‘expected’ learning outcomes sits uncomfortably with creative processes such as risk-taking, tolerance of ambiguity, innovation and unexpected or novel outcomes. Buss (2007) echoes Ecclestone’s (1999, p. 2) concerns that ‘increasingly prescriptive, standardised outcomes will create cynical, instrumental attitudes to learning in teachers and students alike …’ (It should be noted, however, that there are a range and variety of views among teachers in the creative arts about the value of learning outcomes that are discussed in later chapters of this thesis).

Csikszentmihalyi (2006) notes the problematic structuring of higher education disciplines and departments, and the associated fragmentation of knowledge. ‘A great number of breakthroughs in science’, he argues, ‘have come at the interface of disciplines: between physics and chemistry, between chemistry and biology’ (p. xix). As the disciplines become deeper, more complex and more specialised, the opportunities, he claims, for cross-fertilisation become more difficult.

In a similar vein, McWilliam (2007) argues that as the creative industries are now so centrally positioned within contemporary economies, it is ‘self-evident that preparing students for the creative workforce of the future requires at least some trans-disciplinarity in the university environment’ (p. 4). It should extend, she argues, not only to teaching and learning arrangements and associated curricula, but also research and research training endeavours, and lead to new ‘epistemic cultures built out of a gradual process of change, accommodation and resistance’ (p. 11).

At the subject level, Jackson and Shaw’s (2006) analysis of university subject statements and learning outcomes in the UK revealed an ‘impoverished’ situation in relation to the promotion of students’ creative thinking abilities, or the development of imagination and originality. Yet curiously, this is at odds with teachers’ own views
on the importance of creativity, which, as discussed in the next section, is a very significant part of their thinking, teaching and identity as academics.

2.4.2 Teacher conceptions of creativity

Part of the problem as outlined by Jackson (2008, p. 8) is the ability to define and understand what creativity is in the context of higher education and, more particularly, in one’s own discipline: ‘The complexity of creativity is a confounding issue for higher education teachers who are often deeply perplexed by the whole idea … What exactly is it they are trying to develop?’

There has been much recent interest in this subject in the UK, and various studies have explored and sought to capture teachers’ broad conceptions of creativity (McGoldrick, 2002; Oliver 2002; Jackson and Shaw, 2006; Kleiman 2007, 2008; and Jackson, 2008). These studies reveal a surprising commonality of views about the characteristics of creativity which are summarised by Jackson (2008) as follows:

- Imagination – thinking ‘outside the box’, generating new ideas;
- Originality – inventing or producing new things, or re-working existing things in novel ways; expressing ideas freshly or re-purposing them to create value;
- Risk – purposefully exploring issues or problems where there are no certain pathways, solutions or outcomes;
- Synthesis – making connections between previously unrelated objects or ideas;
- Critical reasoning – making good decisions based upon sound thinking and reasoning methodologies;
- Persuasive communication – capturing the imagination of others by persuasive argument and representation of ideas or outcomes.

Jackson and Shaw (2006, p. 2) argue that ‘at the highest level of abstraction there is a good degree of consensus as to what being creative means in any context’, yet they question whether generic qualities with this degree of abstraction are useful to either teachers or students seeking to enact creativity in very particular disciplinary contexts.
2.4.3 Disciplinary expressions of creativity

Disciplinary understandings of creativity are prefaced by the idea that creativity is a social and cultural activity and has most meaning in its particular context. This is frequently referred to as a ‘situated’ view that emphasises the practical, applied, social and values-based practices in any disciplinary domain (Craft, 2000; Whitelock and Miell, 2007). It sees learning as a form of apprenticeship into certain ways of thinking, behaving and practising. Entwistle’s (2005) research pinpoints what many lecturers regard as the most important overall thing for students to acquire: the ways of thinking and working in the field, with the particular understandings, forms of discourse and values that underpin it. Creativity, it is argued, is a key aspect of this acquired, tacit, disciplinary knowledge.

Czikszentmihalyi’s (1999) systems model of creativity explicitly recognizes the importance of disciplines and cultures to the development of creativity. His model identifies the dynamic interactions between an individual, a culture, and a society in producing and recognizing creative work. He argues that for creativity to occur, an individual brings an innovation into a domain within a culture that has its own symbolic rules. Experts belonging to the relevant field within society then validate the innovation. The individual, the domain and the field, it is argued, are all necessary factors in the development of creativity.

The graduate attribute movement in higher education has provided a vehicle for higher education teachers to consider the domain of creativity. Teachers are commonly encouraged to explore the meaning of creativity within their disciplinary contexts (for example, innovation, enterprise, lateral problem-solving, etc) and to articulate an appropriate series of learning and assessment outcomes within their subjects. This reveals another more detailed and contextual layer of understanding about creativity in higher education.

Jackson (2008) argues that each discipline has sites for creativity, focusing around the broad goals of disciplinary enquiry, problem solving and creating new and useful things. For example, a traditional view of history would emphasise research and analysis of historical facts and an understanding of historical movements and periods.
and key figures. Echoing Knight’s (2003) comments, Jackson argues that a creative approach to history, however, would be more inclined to foster ‘new approaches to historical problems; new techniques to gather and analyse data; new approaches to validate evidence; new interpretations of evidence; new forms of history and new forms of communicating historical information’ (Jackson, 2008, p. 16).

In the field of urban planning, Frank and Buining (2007) argue that the complex problems of practice, such as global warming and deteriorating urban conditions, require a new set of creative abilities in the graduating urban planner. They report on a project to develop a range of creative abilities, described collectively as ‘creative urban planning intelligence’ alongside a traditional knowledge-based curriculum. These authors note that to introduce creative teaching practices into the department requires ‘clear and tangible visions for the future, a sequence of interventions, and time for staff to learn, experiment with and adopt new teaching ideas’ (Frank and Buining, 2007, p. 1).

Moore (2007) analyses creativity in the disciplinary context of marketing and entrepreneurship, and notes a range of ‘chaotic complexities’ of contemporary practice that require creative problem solving and innovation. She explores the tensions between creativity and conformity in designing, delivering and assessing a module of study in which creative problem solving was positioned as a key learning outcome. She found a plethora of constraints that ranged from student discomfort with ambiguity, to bureaucratic resistance to non-conforming assessment tasks.

These are but a few examples of the application of creativity to specific disciplinary contexts. Kleiman’s (2007; 2008) cross-disciplinary study of academics’ perceptions of creativity in teaching found considerable complexity and richness in the variety of expressions of creativity. Yet he observes that creativity is clearly not a regular part of teaching discourses, and that the creativity research findings of educational or psychological researchers do not communicate readily with them. He argues that academics need to ‘be involved as agents in their own and their students’ creativity rather than as objects of, or more pertinently, deliverers of a particular “creativity agenda”’ (Kleiman, 2007, p. 16).
Having explored broad conceptions of creativity and their applications in universities, I now focus more closely upon creativity as it manifests with the creative arts disciplines.

### 2.5 Creativity in the creative arts disciplines

Creative activity in higher education is most commonly associated with the field of creative arts, in disciplines such as music, design, visual arts, literature, writing and performance. Here the term ‘creativity’ is more overtly part of teaching and learning discourse, and is often stated as an explicit learning goal (Jackson, 2008). In these disciplines, *originality* is usually considered to be the core of creativity, unlike a range of other more applied disciplines such as architecture, engineering and design, where both originality and *functionality*, or suitability for purpose, are equally important. Originality may be seen along a spectrum of possibilities from ‘interpretation’ at one end, to ‘innovation’ at the other end. Artistic traditions, represented by movements or genres, will tend to steer practitioners towards interpretation, whereas highly creative expression will usually be found at the innovation end of the spectrum (Amabile, 1996).

There are, however, subtle but important distinctions to be made regarding the expression of creativity in each discipline in the creative arts. Amabile (1996) explains that dancers, actors or members of an orchestra will be generally expected to interpret rather than innovate, although contextual innovations are quite possible. On the other hand, writers, composers or artists have more freedom to innovate, push boundaries, or explore the novel. Practitioners in some artistic disciplines and cultures subscribe to an evolutionary model of creativity, where creative output obeys strict traditions, with only minor variations or appropriations expressed in a work. Thus creative statements can be very subtle and require detailed appreciation of the discipline to recognise (Amabile, 1996).

Drawing upon creativity research, researchers in arts education have explored various approaches and pedagogies for fostering creativity. Sir Ken Robinson’s influential body of work (Robinson, 2001; Robinson & Aronica, 2009; for example) draws upon
interviews with leading creative practitioners to explore the nature of achievement in creative fields. He links high levels of creative achievement to the intersection of personal talent with passion, where artists become fired with a strong sense of self-efficacy, motivation and inspiration. Another influential creative arts researcher, Elliott Eisner (2004) argues that learning in the creative arts develops cognitive thinking in ways that have important application in all areas of human endeavour. He analyses differing approaches to teaching within the creative arts and how they hone particular thinking skills during the act of creation that contribute to society in unique and invaluable ways.

The following sections provide an analysis of how creativity manifests in four fields of study; music, visual arts, creative writing and design.

2.5.1 Music

Performance and composition are key elements of creativity in music. Undergraduates learn to create by induction to a variety of traditions, stylistic models and techniques, with incremental encouragement to push boundaries, combine sounds and develop individual modes of expression. Jazz improvisation, for example:

*involves years of learning routines, listening to and notating the improvisation of great performers and analysing how to improvise within a musical tradition. Then a performer can transcend existing patterns and spontaneously create a performance that is innovative and compelling* (Morgan et al., 2004, p. 146).

Musical composition takes on a variety of classical and contemporary forms. The creative process in classical composition, notes Sawyer (2006, p. 266), differs notably from its romanticised mythology:

*Like all creativity, musical composition is 99% hard work and only 1% inspiration, and that 1% is sprinkled throughout the creative process in frequent mini-insights that are always embedded in the conscious hard work underway.*

Composition in popular music formats is frequently collaborative in nature:

*...a band experiments with many different versions of a song, and may have many potentially final and releasable versions, yet they must select only one to*
release. The selection process is collaborative and collective; sociocultural rather than psychological (Sawyer, 2006, p. 227).

Another contemporary music format, ‘techno’ or ‘electonica’, has an approach to composition that entails the digital recording or ‘sampling’ of existing pieces of music. Creativity resides in the juxtaposition of musical fragments in novel, surprising and elegant ways to create a new musical product. Electonica artist Moby (in Sawyer, 2006, p. 228) describes the creative process as follows:

*I want to have the broadest possible sonic palette to draw upon when I’m composing music. I want to hear pop records, dance music, classical records...On my records I’m the composer, and the musician and the engineer, but also the plagiarist and the thief.*

Sawyer (2006, p. 239) argues that musical creativity, whether in performance or composition, is a significantly social activity: ‘The most important aspects of musical creativity occur outside the head of the musician. They occur in musical conversations and in interactions between musicians’. In other words, Sawyer argues for a sociocultural rather than psychological approach to the understanding of contemporary musical expression. He argues that creativity research, being focused on individualist ‘high art’ conceptions of creativity, has no particular explanations for contemporary music forms and expressions, or the processes that enable it to come into being.

Indeed these emergent postmodern forms of creative expression, found in many areas of the creative arts, challenge traditional dichotomies of high versus low art, and creative versus derivative work. Complex debates open up about the relative creative merits of disparate work, such as a symphony orchestra’s performance of Beethoven or its popular corollary, a tribute band’s performance of Abba’s greatest hits. These debates pose particular challenges for the assessment of creative works that are developed more fully in later chapters of this thesis.
2.5.2 Visual arts

Visual arts programs in universities commonly offer a blend of art and cultural theory, politics, and contemporary issues, activated by students’ practical incursions into existing artistic techniques, styles and movements. Hence creativity in the visual arts is the combination of intellectual and aesthetic activities with a developing mastery of technique. In visual arts, creativity is conceptualised as

...a higher-order activity that is not based purely on intuition, feeling, emotion and talent, but emerges from intellectual activity by, for example, combining two sets of knowledge to produce a work that shows an understanding of both – and rewriting them in an innovative, unexpected and perhaps emotional way (Morgan et al., 2004, p. 146).

Aesthetic judgements will therefore often focus on the surprise, emotion and communicative power of the work.

Foundational research into creativity in the visual arts includes Arnheim’s classic treatise Art and human perception (1954) that provided a major linkage between psychological research into creativity and art theory and practice. Drawing from gestalt psychology, his work sought various explanations for how artists perceive, think about, and create artistic works. Further foundational research is found in Ehrenzweig’s work The hidden order of art (1967) in which he explored the role of the unconscious mind in the act of creativity, and the multilayered mental processes employed by artists during the creative process.

Sawyer (2006, p. 181) notes similar misconceptions of creativity in the visual arts to those of music. In particular, he cites the stereotype of artists as ‘lone outsiders’, and artworks as the ‘unique inspiration of a solitary individual’, neglecting the social networks and systems of collaboration, particularly in studios, that have given rise to much art production. The visual arts, spanning such activities as painting, sculpture, photography, film and graphic design, have diverse creative and collaborative processes. Studies by creativity researchers into the personality traits of individual artists have given way in recent years to studies that are exploring artists in their sociocultural contexts, looking at the processes and relationships that together forge creative output.
In relation to creative processes in the visual arts, a particular research focus has been on the approach of ‘problem-finding’. In problem-finding approaches (contrasted with problem-solving approaches) problems are not known in advance, but are developed and re-framed cyclically during the creative process, encouraging the artist to deeply engage at a conceptual level with the subject and to employ convergent and divergent thinking (Freeman, 2006). In contrast, problem-solving approaches entail more linear thinking in which students direct their attention to the problem provided and work through to a more pragmatic solution. Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels’ (1988) longitudinal study established that artists who adopted a problem-finding approach at art school experienced significantly greater creative and professional success. Problem-solving students, it was found, often developed more craftsmanlike work, but were less successful in terms of sustained creative output. This distinction has clear links to the broader conceptions of ‘deep’ and ‘surface’ learning approaches articulated by Marton and Saljo (1984).

2.5.3 Creative writing

In undergraduate writing programs, students are introduced to the conventions of a variety of writing genres, as well as broad techniques of narrative, voice, theme, language and structure, as underpinned by theories of text and contemporary culture. Creative output commences early and is commonly developed and assessed through individual feedback, portfolios, group workshopping practices, and self- and peer assessment. Like the visual arts, creativity resides in the ability to master theory, convention and technique in the production of a written work that is engaging, elegant, original, or risk-taking in its execution (Morgan et al., 2004).

The creative myths of the lone writer are dispelled by Sawyer (2006), who supplants them with arguments that creative writing is disciplined, hard work; a conscious and directed activity, and an activity that is deeply embedded in culture and social processes. He points to the close collaborations of author and editor, the collaborative processes of scriptwriters and playwrights, and the unavoidable engagement by writers with the domain and culture of the written word, to dispel myths of the writer as ‘outsider’. 
2.5.4 Architecture and design

Creativity in architecture and design is often expressed as the pleasing reconciliation of form and function in a design. MacKinnon’s (1962) research on creative architects culminated in a search for the 40 most creative architects in the United States, in which the following criteria were devised:

- constructive ingenuity;
- ability to set aside established conventions and procedures when appropriate;
- a flair for devising effective and original fulfilments of the major demands of architecture, and original thought (Mackinnon, 1962, p. 484).

In undergraduate programs, design projects tend to mirror these criteria in the union of technical knowledge and skill, familiarity with materials, interpretation of client needs and aesthetic considerations. Students often undertake a formative, iterative process of framing and re-framing the design problems, with multiple versions of sketches, working drawings and models, before summative assessment occurs, often conducted by panels of professionals (Morgan et al., 2004).

Swann (2002, p. 2) describes creativity in graphic design in the following way:

*The designer often telescopes a mass of fragmented bits of information and then – usually after a period of incubation – invents a coherent and often elegant proposition that embodies all or most of the rag bag of bits.*

Hence not all design is, or needs to be, original. According to Pritchard and Albon (2003, p. 3) the ‘unexpected’ component of product design is something that results from lateral thinking, and the ‘aesthetically pleasing’ component relates to the marriage of a pleasing form with appropriate function.

As we have seen in this chapter, the first wave of creativity research focused on a personality or ‘individualist’ approach by researching the characteristics of individual creative artists. Much of this research operated on assumptions about creativity that are now widely referred to as myths: that creativity involves flashes of inspiration from lone geniuses, that social expectations and conventions inhibit creativity, and so forth. As Sawyer (2006) reports, studies since the 1980s that have focused on the lived experience of working creative practitioners have successfully debunked these
ideas. There are few bursts of great insight in the creative process. Rather, it is characterised by diligent, sustained effort peppered by ‘mini-insights’ along the way, in fundamentally social, collaborative and negotiable contexts. Yet Sawyer (2006, p. 259) acknowledges that our understanding is at best partial, and that ‘to explain creativity we need an action theory, a theory that explains how the process of doing a work results in the product.’ Given this lack of theoretical coherence, the next sections of this chapter explore how teachers foster creativity in the classroom and how students learn to be creative.

### 2.6 Teaching to foster creativity

‘Can creativity be taught?’ asks McWilliam (2007, p. 1) and ‘if so, what should university teachers be doing if it is to be added to a burgeoning list of graduate outcomes for which we take pedagogical responsibility?’ This is one of the more critical questions currently facing university teachers in many disciplines who are aware of the growing link between creativity and economic productivity, reinforced by the calls of employers and policy makers for greater creative capacity building in universities.

Creativity learning theorists such as Amabile (1983, 1996) and Sternberg (2007) argue forcefully that creativity can be fostered in students by: (1) the acquisition of appropriate domain relevant skills; (2) an understanding of creative processes common to the discipline; and (3) intrinsic motivation for the creative task. In the context of the creative industries, McWilliam (2007) puts the case for a fundamental shift towards a more complex and experimental pedagogical setting, where students are actively engaged in knowledge production, adaption and re-purposing, rather than being passive recipients of pre-packaged content. She echoes Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) observation that creativity is enhanced by social processes and therefore requires collaborative teaching and learning environments where outcomes are mutually negotiated and evaluated.
Jackson’s (2008) analysis of twenty-eight accounts of teaching that were intentionally designed to foster creativity in a variety of disciplines, reveals certain common themes and approaches, summarised as follows:

- **Permission and encouragement** – students are actively encouraged and rewarded for taking risks, to build the necessary confidence that they are capable of creative acts;
- **Tolerance of ambiguity** – students need to develop the confidence to work in unpredictable environments where there are no prescribed outcomes or right answers;
- **Intrinsic motivation** – real-world, meaningful, fun and challenging learning contexts are developed that activate students’ curiosity and motivation;
- **Collaborative, fluid working environments** - teachers and students work collaboratively towards agreed outcomes in environments that are flexible, safe, discursive, questioning and appropriately critical;
- **Reflexivity** – enables students to develop self-awareness and understanding of one’s own creative processes and developing strengths.

In the domain of art and design, Harding and Hale (2007) argue that the capacity to tolerate disorder and ambiguity is essential in the creative process, where problems are clarified and solutions considered. Students need to be supported to actively seek out and explore ambiguities during the process and also to be able to reflect this in the novelty, complexity, illusion and multiple meaning of a finished work. In the creative arts there is a range of recent reports of teaching approaches to foster student creativity, including: the use of analogy as a tool for generating new ideas (Rampino and Ingaramo, 2007); games, simulations, and role play (Ellington, 2004); classroom critique sessions (Owens 2007); and active deconstruction of the myths of creativity with students (Freiman; 2003).

Not surprisingly, there is a diversity of views about the degree to which creativity can be effectively taught, although there is consensus that at least some aspects of it can. McWilliam (2007, p. 1) summarises a range of research in arguing that certain creative thinking and problem solving skills can be taught and acquired by students, whereas other aspects ‘remain idiosyncratic and mysterious, despite the plethora of
research literature that is dedicated to pinning the frog of creative endeavour’. She notes, however, the recent efforts of creativity researchers to detach creativity from notions of intelligence, giftedness, ‘artiness’, and individual idiosyncrasy, and to render it more accessible to teachers as everyday processes and practices. Jackson’s (2008) small-scale survey of academics in the UK reported encouragingly that the great majority believe that creativity is not a rare gift, and that it is possible for most people to develop their creativity if they are given the appropriate opportunity.

These reports and studies demonstrate that despite the definitional difficulties of creativity, there is a growing interest and enthusiasm in exploring and devising ways to foster creativity in students. These efforts represent, more often than not, highly creative pedagogies in their own right. Enthusiasm is often tempered, however, with concerns about resource constraints, and the difficulties of working in an environment where increasingly quantifiable and measurable outcomes are required. The issues of whether creativity can or should be taught, and how students might be encouraged to take creative risks, are major themes that are developed in this thesis.

### 2.7 Learning to be creative

Intimately interconnected with the issue of teaching creativity is how students learn to be creative. A study by Oliver et al. (2006) into students’ perceptions of creativity provides us with a relatively rare window into how students conceptualise and experience creative activity in higher education. Some of the key findings of Oliver et al.’s study can be summarised as follows:

- Students find it difficult to explain the notion of creativity with any coherence or consistency, but will commonly relate it to ideas such as ‘freedom from routine’, ‘imagination’, ‘risk’ and ‘independence’;
- Students were mixed in their views about whether creativity is innate or can be learned. The authors note the significance of this in relation to efforts to foster creativity in the classroom;
- Students find creative expression to be personally satisfying, therapeutic and very motivational in terms of personal expression, ambition, and curiosity. Balanced with this was some fear associated with exposure, risk and failure;
• Students could commonly identify creative teachers but cited assessment regimes, conventions and the traditional curricula as counterproductive. Some felt creativity was an anathema to ‘academic-ness’ and often contrasted it with the creativity they found in the workplace, where individual expression was more prized. The authors conclude that for students to lay claim to an emerging creative identity they need to be more articulate about it. It may be possible, they argue:

... that even a small change – helping students learn how to talk about creativity, particularly in the context of their study – would have an important effect, enabling students to lay claim to creativity in a way that currently eludes them within academic contexts (Oliver et al., 2006, p. 58).

An interesting and important contrast is found in Dineen’s (2006) study in the domain of visual art and design in two UK universities. Her study found students’ understandings of creativity to be highly developed and articulated. Student conceptions of creativity were expressed as a blend of cognitive and motor skills, imagination and self-expression, and originality and freedom from constraint. Students articulated strong connections between creativity and their everyday lives; an ‘innate and unproblematic aspect of their identity as learners, practitioners and individuals’ (Dineen, 2006, p. 111). In this study, students’ evident confidence with notions of creativity was largely founded on teacher-student relationships where personal expression, risk-taking, and the freedom to fail were explicitly supported, valued, and rewarded by assessment structures. Students in this study understood from the inception of the course that art and design, by their nature, deal with ‘speculative and divergent ideas, the negotiation of uncertainties and ambiguities’ (Dineen, 2006, p. 110). They understood that to succeed in this environment they must learn to take risks, imaginatively and intellectually, and be prepared to learn from failure along the way.

Of particular interest in Dineen’s (2006) study is the degree to which the pedagogies of the visual arts can be adapted to promote and develop students’ creative potential in other disciplines. The pedagogic model that emerges from this view of creativity, notes Dineen, does not appear to be discipline-specific. Rather, it belongs to a broader commitment to emancipatory and transformative education, articulated as follows by
one academic in her study: ‘My job is to tap into the imagination and curiosity of the student, helping them access something that’s deep inside themselves’ (Dineen, 2006, p. 112). The study also paints a vivid portrait of how students are actively inducted into a community of practice in the visual arts, where creativity is positioned centrally in this process. It demonstrates the importance placed by Entwistle (2005, p. 72) on ‘ways of thinking and practising in a subject area’ as a primary outcome, and the importance for students to gain an early understanding of the forms of discourse and values that are central to the discipline.

2.8 Creating better curricula for creativity

A further aspect of creativity in higher education is the issue of curricula, and the capacity of curricula to accommodate and welcome creative activity. Much has already been said about content-laden curricula, driven often by the requirements of accrediting bodies, and an audit culture in which defined and measurable outcomes are demanded. Jackson (2008, p. 20) summarises the challenge as follows:

*The higher education curriculum is an environment that seeks compliance and conformity and the amount of autonomy for self-expression is often severely restricted by the norms of self-expression accepted in the academic forms of the discipline. So we have to think more expansively than the traditional academic curriculum if we are to nurture learners’ creativity.*

Elton (2006) notes that there have been elements of creativity in the most traditional curricula for many years, but suggests that a more widespread move would require major curriculum reform including: the move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning; the adoption of problem-based and enquiry-based curricula; and the move from positivist to interpretivist assessment, particularly portfolios. His argument is founded on the idea that if a curriculum is to encourage creativity, then it must hand over a high degree of the responsibility of learning to students: ‘In such curricula, where learning starts with the student, creativity – which inevitably must start with the student – becomes possible’ (Elton, 2006, p. 3).
In response to a concern about the instrumentalism of learning outcomes, Buss (2007) argues that we need alternative ways of accommodating outcomes that cannot be anticipated or determined in advance. In addition to intended learning outcomes, he posits an additional three categories – expressive, holistic and ancillary learning outcomes. Expressive outcomes are those negotiated between learner and teacher as the work progresses, and may be renegotiated according to directions the work is taking. Holistic outcomes are broader outcomes relating to ways of thinking and practising in the discipline. These may not be evident until the end of a learning experience when reflection and assimilation takes place. Ancillary learning outcomes comprise ‘value-added’ learning that may be tangential to the main objectives but nevertheless worthwhile and should be acknowledged. The thrust of Buss’s (2007) argument is that we need more sophisticated tools to help shape and evaluate student learning that are more supportive of the processes of creativity.

Jackson (2008) proposes a ‘life-wide’ curriculum framework that is comprised of three components: an academic curriculum; a practice-based curriculum; and the co-curriculum. The academic curriculum moves away from transmission models towards problem-based, and ‘facilitated discovery models’ that are more in line with creative activity. This is predicated on disciplinary exploration to identify the forms of creativity that are valued and where in the curriculum they may be effectively developed. A practice-based curriculum provides extensive opportunities to apply theory into practice through work-integrated learning. The co-curriculum is a complementary curriculum that provides extended opportunities for students to develop their creative capacities in workshops or practice-based environments, or in service to the community through voluntary roles such as peer mentoring.

In relation to the academic curriculum, Knight (2002) and Jackson (2008) provide some guidance to teachers to foster creativity, including mapping and expanding upon exiting opportunities for creativity, making creative processes explicit, developing student independence, creating opportunity for student choice and negotiation, devising novel tasks and authentic assessments, placing emphasis on knowledge transfer, developing student reflexivity and metacognitive skills.
Echoing concerns about the siloing of disciplines in Australian higher education (PMSEIC, 2005), McWilliam, Hearn and Haseman (2007) make the case for the development of transdisciplinary curricula to meet the needs of creative industries in Australia. They argue that the highly educated and flexible workforce necessary for our economic future is insufficiently supported by curricula that are curtailed by traditional disciplinary boundaries, and by the requirement that disciplinary knowledge be reproduced in traditional forms of student assessment. Transdisciplinary endeavours, they acknowledge, are somewhat difficult to implement, given prevailing academic culture, leadership and resources.

In contrast, Tait (2002) argues that while large-scale curriculum reform is necessary, it takes time and high levels of sustained commitment that may be found wanting. She argues that it is also productive to work from existing sites of creativity in the curriculum, building on existing successes, supporting collegial dialogue and promoting opportunities for individual academics to think differently about their subject area. This ‘ground-up’ approach recognises the complexity of reform when curriculum is driven by external forces such as accrediting bodies and quality agencies, and reasserts the importance of the individual teacher in facilitating creative learning opportunities.

The issue of creative curricula, which includes assessment of creative works, is a central one in this thesis. There are essential contradictions between traditional models of curriculum and assessment in universities and the kinds of models required in the creative arts to enable creativity to flourish. The literature in this section provides important pointers to both the kind of reform required and the practical difficulties and constraints in enacting this reform.

2.9 Creating better environments for creativity

When considering the issue of environments for enhancing creativity, two issues are particularly pertinent for higher education: (1) the university environment and the prevailing culture of creativity and innovation; and (2) the physical spaces for learning and their appropriateness for facilitating creative activity.
Students, teaching staff, the curriculum and technology come together in the physical teaching spaces and their configuration. In the creative arts these are reflected in the variety of studios, performance spaces, labs and collaborative work areas commonly found on university campuses, which have been designed to reflect industry practice. Jankowska-Kolasa (2007) points to a variety of recent studies that have spotlighted the importance of the physical learning environment to creative development. Stimulating learning spaces can create an atmosphere of surprise and challenge in students, prompting greater attention, motivation, playfulness, risk-taking and divergent thinking. Gill and Oldfield (2007) for example, report on the development of an ‘innovation lab’ that enabled, literally, scribbling on the walls, extensive collaboration and role play, and multimedia access points used during creative problem solving sessions. While regularly found in creative workplaces, these kinds of innovative spaces are a far cry from university classroom designs which are still largely based on 19th century conventions of teaching and learning.

With regard to university culture, McWilliam (2007, p. 7) argues that:

the challenge for universities seeking to equip undergraduates to enter the creative workforce is to promote and support a culture of teaching and learning that parallels an unpredictable and irregular social and commercial world.

This requires, according to McWilliam, a significant cultural shift in funding priorities and leadership, along with innovative pedagogies that move away from content transmission towards more negotiable, flexible curricula that emphasise communities of learning and ‘messy social processes’ for creative activity. She notes the risk for universities in both holding on to the status quo and also in letting it go. Yet she also argues that we now know so much about the importance of creativity to enterprise and social futures that universities can no longer afford to be passive on these issues. Tait (2002) echoes McWilliam’s concerns and highlights the necessity to develop a psychological climate in universities of ‘enhancement and professional trust, rather than assurance and compliance’ (Tait, 2002, p. 10), along with recognition that not everything in the curriculum can be controlled, measured or assessed.
2.10 Concluding remarks

In the past sixty years, a great deal of creativity research has been conducted and a wide range of theories has been developed. The paradox about creativity, introduced early in this chapter, is that the more we investigate and seek to explain creativity, the more elusive it becomes. During this sixty-year era of research, however, there have been important developments and shifts in emphasis; most particularly, the growing acceptance that creativity cannot be captured or explained through empirical measurement. Rather, creativity is widely acknowledged as a social construct, with unpredictable social processes and a myriad of environmental and personal variables that render generalisation implausible.

This review of the literature of creativity highlights a range of questions and gaps in the literature that will be advanced in this thesis as follows:

The first is in relation to assessment cultures in the creative arts in universities. One of the most valuable contributions of the sociocultural approach is the understanding that creativity doesn’t happen in a vacuum. It dispels much popular mythology and firmly focuses our attention on domains of creative activity and their associated cultures, relationships and processes. This alerts us to the necessity to gain a clearer understanding of the culture of creativity assessment in universities; how it is experienced, and the meanings derived from those experiences. In particular, this study will focus on the tensions and mixed messages that might coalesce around student assessment.

The second is in relation to the types of creativity that are valued, fostered and rewarded in the creative arts. Conceptions of creativity are clearly diverse, multifaceted and problematic. Questions arise regarding whether there are shared conceptions of creativity within creative arts disciplines, how teachers commonly talk about creativity with their students, and how this is then woven into the cycles of formative and summative assessment that comprise the student experience in the creative arts. This study will explore teachers’ conceptions of creativity and the way in which these conceptions are enacted through teaching and assessment.
The third is the evident *conflicts and dilemmas* associated with fostering and assessing creative works in a university climate that is arguably inhospitable to creative activity. Higher education is clearly struggling with notions of creativity and how to embrace it in its curricula and teaching. In particular, there is an inherent conflict between the requirements of pre-specified learning outcomes and the ‘secret destinations’ associated with creative processes and journeys (Buss, 2007, p. 1). This study will explore how this dilemma is experienced in practice, and how academics balance the needs of university requirements without undermining creative pedagogies and outcomes.

In the next chapter, these questions are further pursued through the lens of assessment theory and practice. Fundamental principles of student assessment are initially considered, and then explored in the creative arts in relation to assessing students’ creative works.
CHAPTER 3:

ASSESSING CREATIVITY IN UNIVERSITIES

Introduction

Following an examination of notions of creativity in Chapter 2, this chapter focuses upon student assessment and the assessment of creative works in universities. The chapter initially examines some key assessment constructs, such as formative and summative assessment and constructive alignment, addressing their particular significance in the creative arts. Students’ perceptions of assessment and how these impact upon their learning are also explored, along with recent studies that shine light on to the student experience of assessment in creative arts subjects.

The chapter then raises some key issues and dilemmas reported in assessing creative work, including unpacking creativity in the classroom, providing developmental feedback, designing appropriate assessment schemes, and making judgements about the quality of student work. Finally, I review some suggestions from the literature for reform of assessment in the creative arts.

3.1 Assessment in higher education: An overview

During much of the 20th century, scholarship in student assessment mostly belonged to an essentially quantitative paradigm of educational measurement. Studies focused on issues such as producing better multiple-choice questions, statistical solutions to test scores in cohorts of students, and a variety of efforts to make assessment more scientifically valid, objective and efficient.

Derek Rowntree’s (1977, 1987) influential book, Assessing students: How shall we know them? created a significant paradigm shift in how we view student assessment. He elegantly argued that assessment was a social activity, full of inherent flaws and inconsistencies with which we needed to grapple. Rather than an end-of-term measurement, he conceptualised assessment as the engine which both drives and...
shapes student learning – the ‘de facto curriculum’, which could produce both positive and negative side-effects for learning, depending on the appropriateness of the assessment scheme. He also brought a fresh focus to the formative role of assessment; the idea that assessment should be developmental, motivating and capable of providing the basis for a dialogue between teacher and learner. Rather than an event that was separate to teaching, assessment went to the very heart of the teaching role.

Rowntree (1977) established a framework based upon five key dimensions to the process of assessment: (1) Why assess? (2) What to assess? (3) How to assess? (4) How to interpret? and (5) How to respond? These questions led to an examination of key theoretical constructs and debates about the purposes of assessment, the alignment of assessment with desired learning outcomes, the modes and methods of assessment, the interpretation of students’ achievements, and the kinds of responses and reporting that are desirable once assessment has occurred.

Further research in the 1980s from the ‘Gothenburg Group’, a collaboration of European scholars, explored learning and assessment through the lens of student perception and experience (Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle, 1984). Through extensive phenomenographic interviewing, they explored how students perceived and tackled particular assessment tasks, and the impact that assessment had on the nature and quality of their learning. Their studies confirmed that students’ perceptions of what is required of them in assessment profoundly affected their approaches to learning, irrespective of teachers’ intentions. For example, if students perceived assessment as primarily to examine content knowledge, they would tend to do little more than rote learning, regardless of how they had been taught and the kinds of approaches they had been encouraged to adopt.

Research has taken a variety of directions since the 1980s. The scope today, as Ramsden (2003, p. 177) describes it, is as follows:

Assessment is about several things at once. It is not about simple dualities such as grading versus diagnosis. It is about reporting on students’ achievements and about teaching them better through expressing to them more clearly the goals of our curricula. It is about measuring student learning; it is about diagnosing
misunderstandings in order to help students learn more effectively. It concerns the quality of teaching as well as the quality of learning; it involves us in learning from our students’ experiences, and is about changing ourselves as well as our students. Assessment is fundamentally about helping students to learn and teachers to learn about how best to teach them.

Thus, an ongoing preoccupation in assessment research and practice has been the notion of ‘getting it right’ – the ability to use assessment as a tool to motivate students, to facilitate the right kind of learning, and to offer fair and defensible judgements about achievement (for example, Brown and Knight, 1994; Gibbs, 1995; Knight, 1995; Nightingale et al., 1996; Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; Morgan et al., 2004; Joughin, 2009).

3.1.1 Theoretical perspectives on student assessment

The aim of ‘getting assessment right’ and the pursuit of objectivity have been critiqued, of recent times, as a positivist approach to assessment. With its emphasis on the pursuit of transparency and clarity, positivist assessment implies that perfect control and total explicitness is attainable, and standards are measurable, fixed and immutable (for example, Delandshere, 2001; Broadfoot and Black, 2004; Orr, 2007). A positivist view of assessment sees all student work as having a correct mark or grade, and that efforts should be focused upon maximising the likelihood that such a grade is awarded. Judgements about the quality of student work are made in an implied climate of neutrality and impartiality.

By contrast, a poststructuralist view sees assessment as a social construct that is ‘co-constructed in communities of practice’ with standards that are ‘relative, provisional and contested’. The pursuit of clarity is replaced by a recognition that assessment is a ‘messy practice with multiple subjectivities and contingencies’ (Orr, 2007 p. 647). Poststructuralist views are concerned with power relations and hegemonic assessment discourses that have particular currency in the context of both the quality agenda and the outcomes-based movement in higher education (Orr, 2007). These views have particular resonance in the creative arts, owing to the inherent difficulty for an assessor to maintain an objective stance about relatively subjective and personal subject matter. Moreover, creativity research strongly suggests that negotiable, social
processes are essential to the assessment of creative endeavour, and that instrumental and narrow assessment practices, where outcomes and criteria are highly pre-specified, can be highly counterproductive (Jackson, 2008).

A third epistemological perspective in student assessment has been identified by Orr (2007, p. 684) more broadly as an ‘interpretive’ one:

*The territory between positivism and poststructuralism is textured and many researchers (me included) draw upon interpretive perspectives that sit between and across these polarities.*

The interpretive perspective is characterised as a ‘middle ground’ that nevertheless adopts a critical stance in regard to core assumptions of positivism, particularly that assessment is a neutral and impartial activity, and that perfect control and transparency are attainable. Orr (2007) notes the variety of interpretive positions adopted by researchers that, while offering a selective critique of prevailing practices, fall short of an entire rejection of positivist assumptions, or entire acceptance of poststructuralist perspectives (for example, Cowan, 2006; Elton, 2007). The implications of these differing theoretical perspectives are further explored in later sections of this chapter.

### 3.2 Constructive alignment

A key guiding principle in the design of student assessment is constructive alignment. This principle, developed by Biggs (2003; Biggs & Tang, 2007), results from the interplay of two educational constructs:

1. *a constructivist approach to learning*, where learners construct meaning and knowledge from their own experiences and understanding, and are actively involved in the learning process; and
2. *curriculum alignment*, where there is a clear and explicit thread throughout the learning encounter, so that learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks and marking criteria are explicit, clear, aligned and consistently support the desired learning.

The principle of constructive alignment supports teachers to: articulate intended learning outcomes; design appropriately developmental learning activities in support
of learning outcomes; assess student learning using methods consistent with learning outcomes; and make judgements using marking criteria that enable useful feedback to be provided to students on progress in achieving learning outcomes (Biggs, 2004). It is the underpinning principle behind the development of much contemporary higher education curricula, including outcomes-based education and criterion-referenced assessment (Biggs and Tang, 2007).

The great value of constructive alignment is that it provides an organising principle for teachers who might otherwise undertake the various elements of their teaching, such as lecturing, tutoring or examinations, in relatively compartmentalised or unconnected ways. It thus harnesses all teaching efforts towards clear and consistent goals that are transparent to students. Yet there are particular tensions associated with constructive alignment in the creative arts, where the practice of specified learning outcomes sits uncomfortably with exploratory pedagogies, in which the unexpected and the unanticipated are highly prized. As Buss (2007, p. 1) asks:

*If learning outcomes prescribe the results of a period of learning before the outset of the learning journey, how appropriate are they to learning in subjects where we are educating for creativity, subjects where often we want our students to discover secret destinations, and where we may deliberately wish to avoid prescribing clearly defined goals?*

Similar concerns have been expressed in relation to the expectation of detailed, comprehensive marking criteria accompanying assessment tasks in creative fields (Eisner, 1985). While marking criteria enable markers’ judgements to be more transparent to students, and provide a structured method for detailed student feedback on progress, there is an assumption that all ‘appropriate’ outcomes have been anticipated within the criteria. Assessors may understandably fear that they may be inhibiting the very creativity they are hoping to encourage by defining and bounding creative responses within criteria (Eisner, 1985).

### 3.3 Formative and summative assessment

Assessment is commonly recognised as having two key forms and purposes, described as formative and summative. Formative assessment includes those kinds of
assessment tasks that help to form and develop student learning and provide feedback to students on progress. Formative assessment also provides information to teachers to evaluate their teaching approaches and whether they need to be adapted (Black and William, 1998; Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009; Joughin, 2009). Summative assessment, on the other hand, describes assessment tasks that are assigned a grade or provide a summation of what has been achieved, often at the end of a teaching period. These will often take the form of examinations, coursework assignments that contribute to a final grade, supervised practical demonstrations, or completed creative works. In practice, however, the delineation between formative and summative assessment becomes a little more blurred. Assessment tasks that attract grades may be designed primarily for a formative intent, such as to provide feedback on works-in-progress. Many tasks in higher education, it can be argued, have an interwoven purpose that could be described as simultaneously formative and summative, with varying degrees of emphasis. The terms ‘formative’ and ‘summative’ are used in this thesis to indicate primary intent – formative for the primary intent of feedback, summative for the primary intent of grading and summation of achievement.

In the creative arts, the issue of formative and summative assessment are both critical and controversial. Formative assessment is particularly crucial as a means of providing students with insight and understanding about how they are progressing in their work and whether they are developing appropriately creative abilities. It is often difficult for students entering the creative arts to understand what is expected of them in an area that may seem, initially at least, confusing and subjective (Oliver et al., 2006). Formative assessment is ideally designed to give students developmental feedback upon creative works in progress, enabling the teacher to make suggestions about the student’s creative process, using the same criteria that will later be used in their summative assessment (Oliver et al., 2006).

3.3.1 Summative assessment and creativity

While summative assessment is widely embedded in creative arts programs, the question is still often asked whether students should be graded at all: Does assessment stifle creativity (Kroll, 1997; Brophy, 1994)? In the context of creative writing,
Brophy (1994, p. 55) argues that summative assessment of student work is anathema to the discipline:

*The problem with assessment in creative writing involves the problem of power relations between pleasure and education. Any imposed grading re-inserts the authority of the teacher and the institution while the workshopping processes favoured in creative writing tend to offer some “author-ity” to every participant.*

Kroll (1997, p. 1) similarly questions the role of summative assessment, arguing that an ungraded ‘pass/fail’ result offered her students the opportunity to write, rather than being constrained by competition: ‘Students felt liberated from anxiety over marks; they could take risks’. Moreover, awarding grades is problematic when ‘marking someone else’s creative work can sometimes provoke emotional reactions far stronger than marking an academic essay’. Yet Kroll argues that writing professionals are ‘assessed’ frequently, by their readers, reviewers, editors and publishers, and the ability to respond to feedback is part of the discipline.

Balchin (2006) makes a case that teachers should be actively persuaded to assess creativity for a range of important reasons. First, it helps to demystify the idea and develop a language for communication amongst professionals regarding the processes and products of creativity. Second, it sends a message to students regarding the value and importance of creative enterprise in a way that ideally harnesses intrinsic motivation and rewards risk-taking. Third, it provides a way for students to unpack concepts and expectations and to allow them to assess and monitor themselves. Finally, it provides important information to help teachers evaluate their efforts to foster creativity and facilitate creative learning environments.

### 3.3.2 Summative assessment and student motivation

In his review of the psychological research, Beghetto (2005) notes a consensus that assessment itself is not necessarily a negative influence upon creativity, but it *can be* depending on how it is used to motivate students. Beghetto outlines an argument, derived from the motivational sciences, that assessment practices are laden with goal-related messages that strongly influence the way students will approach creative tasks. If an assessment culture reinforces *performance* (ranking students by ability, who’s
best, smartest or most capable) then students will be grade-focused and reluctant to take risks, particularly during the necessary divergent phase of creativity, where intrinsic interest, enjoyment and freedom to explore are essential elements in the process. By contrast, if the assessment culture emphasises mastery (individualised objectives; feedback on how students are developing in relation to their own prior performance; students competing against themselves not others) students are much more likely to demonstrate high levels of engagement, positive attitudes, risk-taking and perseverance. Collins and Amabile’s (1999) synthesis of research on creativity and motivation similarly asserts that creative output is associated with high levels of student interest, curiosity, enjoyment and intrinsic motivation that are normally associated with mastery assessment environments.

This tension between performance and mastery echoes an earlier debate outlined by Rowntree (1977) about ideographic versus nomothetic assessment. Nomothetic assessment – the tendency towards labelling achievement into broad bands or categories – sits in contrast to ideographic assessment, in which the focus is upon the unique achievements of the individual. While Rowntree (1977) accepts the pressures of universities to assess and report in nomothetic ways, he argues that we have neglected the primacy of ideographic assessment as the best and most useful portrayal of presenting achievement and future potential. Ideographic or mastery assessment is more commonly referred to in educational parlance as ipsative assessment (Freeman and Lewis, 2002). In an ipsative assessment model, a student’s achievement is only evaluated with reference to prior performance (such as beating one’s own previous score) rather than with reference to fixed criteria and standards (criterion-referenced assessment) or with reference to the performance of the cohort (norm-referenced assessment). For the sake of consistency, the term ‘ipsative assessment’ will be used for the remainder of this thesis in preference to very similar terms such as mastery, ideographic, or self-referenced assessment.

3.3.3 Ipsative and self-assessment models

Jackson’s (2008, p. 18) survey of higher education teachers in the UK established that a majority believed that, at best, the assessment of creativity is implicit. A dominant view emerged from the study that:
…the primary role of the teacher is not to define creativity for students and assess them against set criteria. Rather it is to help students recognise and understand their own creativity and help them express it and make claims against the evidence they feel is appropriate (Jackson, 2008, p. 18).

This gives rise to a teaching and learning scenario where an understanding of creativity, and the criteria through which it is evaluated, is developed collaboratively by teachers and learners, in the situated learning context. It also significantly shifts focus to a self-assessment model in which students are supported to make informed, reflexive judgements about the quality of their achievements.

These findings pose particular challenges to universities steeped for generations in a performance-based assessment culture in which students have been sorted, selected and ranked by merit; a culture, according to Kvale (2007) of discipline and control. Although the shift in recent years from norm-referenced to criterion-referenced assessment in many universities has sought to alleviate some aspects of this problem, ipsative assessment is still a relatively novel concept. Beghetto (2005) argues that teachers must monitor how students perceive the assessment culture and recommends the following strategies to promote an ipsative assessment culture:

- Minimising comparison and student rivalry – when assessments are viewed primarily as sources of information for self-improvement rather than a vehicle for ranking achievement, students will focus upon developing their own creative abilities rather than efforts to maximise their mark;
- Minimising the pressure of assessment – if students feel pressured by an assessment regime that emphasises surveillance, their intrinsic motivation declines and is likely to be replaced by anxiety and competitiveness;
- Focusing on feedback – ensuring that assessment results are informative and useful, focusing on individual mastery, rather than simply letter or numerical grades that reinforce performance; and
- Reward risk-taking and creative expression – for students to express their creativity, they must feel that their ideas, however unconventional, are welcomed and valued.
In many ways, the creative arts are better positioned than many other disciplines to develop a culture of ipsative assessment. Given the level of personal expression and personal meaning that students invest in creative work, it is likely that students are more intrinsically motivated than in many other disciplines. Yet it would be premature to assume that assessment cultures in the creative arts are naturally less competitive than other fields, or that students’ needs for extrinsic reward and public recognition are not equally felt.

3.4 Student perceptions of assessment

A considerable body of literature has developed in recent years regarding students’ perceptions and experiences of assessment. Unsurprisingly, students’ perceptions of assessment tasks, and what they perceive is expected of them, may vary significantly from the teacher’s expectations or the intentions articulated in formal curriculum documents. Snyder’s (1971) seminal study highlighted the contradictions of what became known as the hidden curriculum: the distinction between ‘what is meant to happen’ and what learners actually do and experience in the classroom. He exposed the way in which a formal curriculum emphasised higher order educational objectives, such as critical and analytical thinking, problem solving and originality, while assessment schemes suggested strongly to students that the real curriculum was about rote learning to achieve success. Rowntree (1977, p. 1) similarly noted that ‘if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system we must look to its assessment procedures’.

Rowntree (1977) documented various unintended side-effects of assessment, such as the effects of competition, that created undesirable impacts upon student learning. In a similar vein, Ramsden (1992) notes how unsuitable assessment methods place very distinct pressures on students to take inappropriate approaches to learning tasks. Sambell, McDowell and Brown (1997) report how students themselves have perceived assessment tasks to ‘contaminate’ their learning. Various studies by Hounsell (1984); Knivetton (1996); Sambell and McDowell (1998); and Gibbs and Simpson (2004) have each explored aspects of the student experience of assessment and its side-effects, noting that students import a range of individual experiences and
perceptions to the learning encounter, all of which may influence their response in differing ways. Boud (1995, p. 39) summarises the situation as follows:

*Every act of assessment gives a message to students about what they should be learning and how they should go about it. Assessment messages are coded, not easily understood and are often read differently and with different emphases by staff and by students.*

Although the outcomes of assessment, as experienced by students, are never entirely predictable (Sambell and McDowell, 1998) and thus notions of ‘ideal’ or ‘foolproof’ assessment schemes are misguided, research does provide some useful guidance on minimising the hidden curriculum. Gibbs (1995), for example, argues persuasively for effective induction of students in assessment methods in a way that problematises these issues and shows an awareness of students’ learning contexts. This includes the provision of a clear rationale for the assessment task along with explicit values, aims, criteria and standards: ‘Students need to be on the inside of the logic of the course, believing in its rationale, not tagging along, feeling bewildered and jumping through hoops’ (Gibbs, 1995, p. 8).

A study by Oliver *et al.* (2006) throws a particular spotlight on students’ perceptions and experiences of assessment and creativity. Students in this study were frustrated and angered by inappropriate methods of assessment, such as examinations, that were counterproductive to creative responses, and prompted empty experiences in rote learning. Essays were considered to offer greater opportunity for personal expression, although they were still very bounded by academic conventions. Some students expressed concern that markers’ expectations of academic writing were such that they could never move beyond exploring existing arguments, to develop their own ideas and interpretations. Students often experienced academic values as being ‘controlling, conformist and inflexible, more concerned with producing clones than supporting new ideas’ (Oliver *et al*., 2006, p. 54).

The results of a study by McKillop (2006), in which art and design students were requested to make visual representations of their assessment experiences, are even more disturbing. Students employed a number of metaphors and similes in their drawings to highlight how they experienced assessment of their creative works: being
measured; put in the spotlight; humiliated; a lucky dip; a rat in a maze; a seal balancing a ball; a gun in the mouth; a brain filled with TNT explosives; plunging knives, and so forth. These student representations of assessment were relentlessly negative and characterised as ‘something violent, painful and humiliating being done to you’. Overall, these studies present a bleak and sobering dichotomy between the rhetoric of creativity embodied in mission statements and the lived experience of undergraduate students.

3.5 Assessing creative works in the creative arts

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I focus directly on the process of making judgements about creative works in the creative arts. This includes a range of issues, concerns and dilemmas raised in the recent literature of assessment. Before proceeding to this section, it is important to initially provide a brief contextual explanation of the forms and common elements of creative tasks and how they are commonly assessed in universities.

3.5.1 A typology of creative assessment tasks

In their study of assessment and key learning outcomes in higher education, Nightingale and Magin (1996) identified three main categories of creative tasks:

(a) Designing
Design tasks are typically found in product or fashion design, engineering, architecture, computing science and multimedia, and involve the interplay between criteria of utility, practicality, functionality and aesthetic appeal. Assessment often takes the form of a ‘design and build’ project, comprising a brief with supporting information or may also include a project of the student’s own choosing. The project will usually have multiple formative assessment points, which are designed principally to provide feedback on work in progress. Summative assessment often consists of a verbal presentation together with the visual material that demonstrates the outcome of the project. Assessments may range from simple design tasks, but with multiple design solutions, to complex tasks with multiple criteria. In the latter cases, individual aspects of the design can be judged in isolation, but the overall interplay is
more than the sum of its parts, and is ideally assessed by design experts who have a professional understanding of the problem and its potential solutions.

(b) Creating
The creative arts encompass the work of painters, sculptors, jewellers, photographers, creative writers, composers, graphic and multimedia designers, theatrical and clothes designers, and so forth. Products offered for assessment often take the form of a portfolio of creative work, and may be assessed by panels or individuals. Assessment in this category commonly wrestles with the balance between the technical and artistic components, and the subjectivity of judgement regarding the value and appeal of the finished work. Emphasis is usually placed on developing technical mastery of a medium in the early years of study, while creative elements gradually become emphasised as students progress.

(c) Performing
Performance tasks generally involve a blend of creativity, criticality and skill acquisition in varying degrees. Disciplines such as music and dance are often structured to support individual development and it is not always expected that students will complete a program at the same levels of ability. Assessment judgements in these contexts therefore contain a mixture of both individual progress and standards achieved. Progress may often be assessed at the end of semester by comparison with skills exhibited at the commencement of a semester. Performance assessments are routine as a means of evaluating student achievements in an authentic and holistic manner.

It should be noted, however, that this typology may be of limited use in practice, as there is a range and variety of shared assessment types that are commonly employed across most disciplines in the creative arts. More recent empirical work, particularly the model posed by de la Harpe et al., (2009) provides further understanding of the focus of assessment in the creative arts, and in particular, what is being assessed and why. This model is addressed in the following section.

3.5.2 The focus of assessment in creative arts
A key area of debate in the creative arts is about the focus of effective assessment. Should the central focus be upon the finished product, the creative process or the personal qualities, skills and attributes developed by the individual student? Should all these aspects be assessed but with what emphasis? An important cue to the focus of assessment in the creative arts is found in the work of de la Harpe and Peterson (2008) and de la Harpe et al., (2009). Through an analysis of 118 journal articles published over the previous ten years in the disciplines of art, architecture and design, the authors identified eleven indicators of assessment, including product, process, person, hard skills (eg critical thinking, techniques), soft skills (eg communicating, visual literacy), content knowledge, technology, learning approaches, professional and innovative practice, reflective practice and interdisciplinary collaboration. A holistic model of assessment was developed that clustered these indicators into three focal points for assessment including (1) outcomes (product, process and person) (2) knowledge and skills, and (3) reflective and professional practice. This resulting model sheds light upon the richness and diversity of assessment focal points in the creative arts, although noting that the emphasis may change between these indicators according to disciplinary context.

3.6 Issues and dilemmas in assessing creative work

A number of issues and problems arising in the assessment of creative work have been noted already within this literature review. This section expands upon and explores these issues. While not an exhaustive list, it provides an overview of major issues common to most creative disciplines including:

1. Unpacking creativity in the classroom;
2. Providing developmental feedback;
3. Designing appropriate assessment schemes; and
4. Making judgements about student work.

These four issues are now considered.

3.6.1 Unpacking creativity in the classroom
Students in the creative arts typically learn through undertaking activities (designing, creating, performing) that are authentic replicas of those undertaken by professional practitioners in the field. They begin to recognise themselves, and are recognised by others, as fledgling but legitimate members and participants within a community of practice, referred to by Lave and Wenger (1991) as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’. The teacher adopts the role of a mentor who gradually inducts students, both formally and informally, into the ways of thinking and working in the field. However, as Shreeve et al. (2004) argue, students are variously equipped to pick up on essential cues, and may be hampered by issues such as maturity, prior experience, cultural differences, and so forth.

In the creative arts, there is generally less focus on formal knowledge and more on procedures, techniques and ways of working that are appropriate in particular situations. This body of knowledge and experience is often tacit and not readily articulated (Shreeve, Waring and Drew, 2009). As Canatella (2001) argues, creative arts fields are multi-sensory in nature and not all aspects of the field can be readily verbalised in ways that communicate well to others. It underscores Wenger’s (2004) argument that communities of practice are defined by ‘what is said and what is left unsaid’ (p. 47).

A central problem for assessors of creative works, therefore, is to articulate what they value and why, in a manner that can be commonly understood by students. Many different descriptive terms such as ‘flair’ and ‘gusto’ are used to describe what is sought in a student performance. Yet with such high levels of subjectivity involved, these terms do not necessarily provide students with a shared understanding of what is being assessed. In this context, performance criteria may be of little use to students as indicators of what they are striving for, unless they are problematised, discussed and examined in detail throughout a program of study.

Eisner’s (1985, 1991) concept of *educational connoisseurship* is relevant here. Eisner defines connoisseurship as the ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex qualities in creative works. Through a connoisseur’s capacity to describe, interpret, evaluate and recognise the persuasive qualities in a work, others can enter into a heightened understanding about this complex interaction of qualities.
Eisner (1991) argues that, in the teaching of creativity, students need to acquire heightened perceptions about the interplay of creative components in a work. Language and terminology may limit a student’s understanding, so perception and discernment of the creative qualities should precede the act of labelling. Eisner alludes to the commonly-expressed concern that language can get in the way of artistic expression, and that overly detailed or prescriptive criteria may have the reverse effect by stultifying student creativity. Clearly there are subtle balances to be struck here. The concept of connoisseurship is an important one that is revisited in this thesis.

At the heart of this dilemma is the pursuit of transparency: the concern that students be provided with equitable access to clear and consistent messages about expectations and standards, and that assessment processes are not shrouded in mystery (Biggs 2003). For students, this is perhaps the cornerstone of an assessment scheme that is regarded in their eyes as ‘fair’. Yet the idea of transparency in the creative arts is a problematic one, and has been critiqued as an idea belonging to a positivist or ‘techno-rationalist’ assessment agenda, that seeks perfect control through written statements of criteria and standards:

*The concept of transparency implies that total explicitness is attainable, which the role of tacit practice within assessment militates against. In addition, the assumption that written language can ‘make things clear’ challenges an interpretive view of language where writers and readers co-construct understandings* (Orr, 2007, p. 646).

Orr’s (2007) research explores the disjuncture between written assessment criteria and the multiple interpretations of both students and assessors in the visual arts. She repositions assessment in the creative arts as a distinctively social practice where ‘multiple subjectivities and contingencies affect the ways that judgements are made about students’ work’ (Orr, 2007, p. 647). This argument, presumably, does not exclude the use of written criteria, but highlights the inadequacy of a list of criteria as a sole form of communication to students about assessment judgements. A key element of this social practice is negotiation and discussion among students and assessors, and also between assessors, about the qualities of student work.
3.6.2 Providing developmental feedback

A common method of providing feedback in the creative arts is the critique or ‘crit’ session, as it is commonly referred to in art, design and architecture circles. Most creative arts disciplines offer a similar feedback process, such as the writers’ or performers’ workshop, where works-in-progress are discussed and feedback is provided from teachers and peers. Although there is a clear formative purpose to these sessions, they may also form part of a summative assessment scheme and marks are commonly awarded for evidence of substantive progress and demonstrated good process. They provide students with an opportunity to share practice with peers and see a variety of solutions and ways of thinking within their discipline. They also hone students’ professional presentation skills and their capacity to articulately evaluate their own and other’s work (Shreeve, Waring and Drew, 2008). Importantly, crit sessions also become significant vehicles for the induction of students into disciplinary communities of practice; the ways of talking and thinking in the discipline (Percy, 2004), and the unpacking and discussion of assessment criteria and standards.

However, a study of the crit in the visual arts (Blythman, Orr & Blair, 2007) reveals a plethora of problems relating to the purposes of such sessions, along with class sizes, the quality of facilitation. Burgeoning class sizes in crits has meant that students are experiencing more public exposure of their work. A core notion in fostering creativity is the establishment of a learning environment where trust, security and openness are accepted norms. Increased class sizes mean more pressure, less time spent on individual work, and generally less dialogue and exchange. In addition, inexperienced facilitation of crits has resulted in the tutor dominating proceedings, so that the developmental, discursive elements of the crit are lost and are replaced by a climate of summative judgement.

Blair’s (2006) study also paints a bleak picture of students’ disillusionment with the quality of feedback during the crit process, as well as the nervousness and anxiety
experienced during the actual session. These concerns are echoed by Shreeve, Waring and Drew’s (2008, p. 11) observations:

*Students report being nervous, anxious and even terrified, and unable to listen to comments made about others’ work as they wait their turn to explain and defend their own work. Afterwards they can be so relieved that they switch off from the rest of the session.*

While pitfalls and dilemmas with crit sessions are evidently considerable, recent studies offer constructive advice on more appropriate and strategic forms of facilitation and feedback provision that enhance student learning (Barrett, 2000; Conanan and Pinkard, 2001; Elkins, 2001; Percy, 2004; Taylor and McCormack, 2006; Shreeve Waring and Drew, 2007). The crit session (or similar discipline-based workshops) is an important aspect of the present investigation because of its demonstrably central role in the development and assessment of creative works. As these studies note, the crit or workshop has a vital role to play in developing students’ ability to engage in peer and self-assessment, to learn about disciplinary expectations and standards, and to indenture students into the ways of talking and thinking in the discipline.

### 3.6.3 Designing appropriate assessment schemes

Assessment methods in the creative arts have largely reflected a tradition of preparing students for professional practice in authentic ways. Hence the production or performance of creative works, in the most lifelike conditions possible, is the key common element of assessment methods. It is common to find, for example in music or dance, that assessment comprises the performance of a piece in front of an audience, which replicates professional performance. Similarly, visual art students will commonly work towards a completed artwork that is presented, sometimes in the form of an exhibition, at the completion of a term of study. In creative writing, students work through drafts towards a completed piece of work that aims to be as close to ‘publishable standard’ as possible. This emphasis on creative products is usually balanced, to some degree, with a parallel focus on creative process. This may take the form of a reflective journal or portfolio that provides evidence of the creative process. In the visual arts, for example, this may take the form of documented
research, early drawings, artefacts, samples, prototypes, sketches, thoughts, and developmental ideas (Shreeve, Waring and Drew, 2009). Summative assessment often includes elements of both process and product, although in highly variable combinations.

The following section briefly explores three recurring problems in assessment design evident in the literature: the balance between process and product, the use of portfolios, and the design of appropriate criteria and standards to accompany assessment tasks.

(a) Assessing product versus process

The assessment of the creative process has been a significant area of psychological research since the 1950s. Foundational research by Wallas (1926) identified a four-phase model of the creative process that included: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. Pritchard and Albon (2003) summarise the principal skills associated with creative processes, including sensitivity to problems, fluency of ideas, ability to produce a quantity of solutions, flexible thinking, production of original ideas that demonstrate analysis and synthesis, and self-evaluation. To some degree these skills and processes can be assessed by inference in a completed creative product. But in tertiary settings there is a concern that too much emphasis is placed upon polished professional outcomes, with insufficient attention to nurturing students to conceptualise unique ideas and to reward demonstrated ‘good process’. Assessment of process rewards students for a deep engagement with their own creative processes, for risk taking, and for the use of experiences of failure and frustration to further hone their creative abilities (Cowan, 2006).

Yet assessment of process is controversial on a number of fronts. The first concern is in relation to the highly personal and idiosyncratic nature of the creative process. As Cowan (2006, p. 157) argues, the creative process varies from situation to situation, and often has at its heart a ‘flash of inspiration’ that is extremely difficult to capture and record or be judged by others. The second concern relates to the lack of clarity about how students are expected to demonstrate their process and how precisely it is to be judged. The third concern is that universities should be simulating the real world
environment where the creative process is largely irrelevant and consumers make their assessment on the finished product (Pritchard, 2004).

Although many creativity assessors agree that it is appropriate and fruitful to summatively assess both the process and products of creative output (see de la Harpe et al, 2009), there is little detailed discussion in the literature about this inter-relationship, or the appropriate combinations and relative weightings between the two, or how those weightings may shift over a program of study.

(b) Concerns about portfolios
Portfolios are commonly employed as an assessment method in the creative arts to capture a student’s developmental process and finished outcomes. Portfolios have grown out of the need for a flexible assessment method that can capture the complex and multi-dimensional nature of creative output, and usually comprise a wide range of artefacts, including analytical and reflective written work, along with sketches, research documentation, early drafts, developmental thoughts, and completed works, such as artworks, compositions, recordings of performance, or completed drafts of creative writing. Portfolios can be a creative work in their own right, as they are often personal and freeform in style, and may be highly individualised in presentation. Through portfolios, assessors are thus provided with a holistic picture of the student’s intentions, process, application and achievements in a given time frame.

However, as Shreeve, Waring and Drew (2008) report, it may be unclear to the student, and indeed the new lecturer, what actually is being assessed and what the expectations are regarding these potentially large, relatively unstructured, and high-stake tasks. Assumptions about the focus of the portfolio, and thus where to place one’s effort, vary considerably, and may include the finished product, the developmental process, the artistry of the person, or the stated learning outcomes. This ‘variation in belief’, argue Shreeve, Waring and Drew (2008, p. 10), ‘gives rise to discrepancies in practice between tutors and difficulty on the part of students in understanding the nature and intention of assessment’.
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(c) Developing assessment criteria and standards

One of the most controversial issues in the assessment of students’ creative works is the development and interpretation of criteria and standards by which judgements are made. The essential dilemma is the incongruity that exists between pre-specified assessment criteria and creative work that is novel, unexpected or ‘out of the box’. Criterion referencing, by its nature, is predicated on the known. Leading creativity researchers, such as Sternberg (1988) and Amabile (1996) argue that any products that have been derived from a known formula or set of instructions can never be considered creative. They claim that it is impossible to develop assessment criteria for truly creative outcomes. Kleiman (2005, p. 21) similarly argues that the learning outcomes/criterion referencing framework is a closed system that perpetuates non-creative outcomes:

As long as the expected learning outcomes are carefully set and defined; as long as the assessment tasks are designed to enable the student to meet those learning outcomes; and as long as assessment and grading are arrived at fairly and reliably against carefully designed criteria, then the system is deemed to work. Essentially it is a closed system which, like any closed system, will tend to encourage and enforce replication and formulation rather than innovation and origination.

Canatella (2001) argues that criterion-referencing in art assessment is too ‘crude and insensitive’ and not able to cater to the intricacies of creative activity. In creative writing, Boulter (2004) critiques the hidden assumptions and ideologies evident in assessment criteria that reveal widespread confusion about what is being assessed and why. Yet, he argues, if efforts are not made to articulate assessment criteria and standards, we return to the days when judgements had no transparency and students are at the mercy of potential preferences and prejudices of the assessor. Assessment criteria and standards, argues Boulter (2004), are key components of an assessment system that is demonstrably valid, reliable and fair, and which enables students to prepare for assessments, engage with judgements and appeal against results. Given that it is unlikely, and arguably unprofitable, to dispense entirely with assessment criteria, the question arises regarding how can we devise assessment criteria that
values and promotes creativity, yet meets requirements of quality assurance frameworks.

Sadler’s (2005) analysis of the use of criteria in higher education reveals a startling variety of conceptions of criterion-referenced assessment practice. He identifies four discrete models of criterion-referenced assessment with some considerable confusion between criteria (elements of the work under consideration) and standards (the level of attainment of the work). While criteria are often well-articulated, standards of attainment tend to be less so, and thus the fundamental judgements assessors make about student work remain hidden from view. Sadler argues that while criteria are an essential element of the process, ‘it is the students’ appreciation of quality, set against a background of external standards, that is of significance’ (p. 190). Standards, it is argued, that are hidden and based on tacit knowledge have a ‘certain mystique’ that reduces transparency and promotes a dependency relationship between teacher and learner. He advocates a shift from criterion-referenced assessment to a focus on standards that are more fully explicated through verbal descriptions and exemplars in practice.

The lack of engagement with assessment criteria and standards is exemplified in Thomson’s (2007) study in design. She also noted how infrequently tutors referred to the criteria when discussing creative work in class. These findings echo Rust, Price and O’Donovan’s (2003) call for criteria and standards to be more carefully woven into students’ learning and socialising processes and, where appropriate, students join with staff in the judgement of their own and others’ work. Price and O’Donovan (2006) present a constructivist assessment cycle in which explicit criteria and standards are unpacked with students prior to assessment submission with exemplars and dialogue, student self-assessment which accompanies the assessment submission, and active interpretation of the feedback with sessions designed to help students interpret feedback usefully and to bridge gaps between their own and the assessor’s understanding of the work.

A further problem has been identified by Gordon (2004, p. 62) with the inadequacy of criteria to address work that goes well beyond the brief and contains a certain ‘wow’ factor. Gordon defines a work with ‘wow’ as having ‘an elegance, which will arrest
and satisfy the reader, in the terms of the medium, beyond the norm’. Going beyond the written brief, with work that demonstrates inventiveness, inspiration, ingenuity and freshness is what creative arts teachers prize more than anything, yet current practices tend to focus assessors on the more formulaic, technical aspects of student work that can be more objectively measured.

The issue, addressed earlier, of ‘what is being assessed and why’ is a critical one to the debate about criteria and standards in the creative arts. Clearly there are problems if learning objectives and outcomes are expressed in highly directive, behavioural terms, as assessment will then seek to measure those precise, anticipated outcomes. However, if learning outcomes and criteria are framed more broadly to address desirable abilities and attributes there is far less prescription about the particular qualities of individual assessment products. Such products are repositioned as ‘the means by which’ students can evidence their learning, and from which assessors ‘draw inferences’ rather than measure their achievements. The issue of criteria and standards are pursued in some detail in further chapters of this thesis.

3.6.4 Making consistent, reliable judgements

A commonly expressed concern of assessment in the creative arts is that, compared to other fields of academic endeavour, it is subjective, unreliable, and lacking in rigour (for example, Shreeve, Waring and Drew, 2009). Amabile’s (1983, 1996) ‘consensual assessment approach’, and Csikzentmihalyi’s (1988) research on domains of work and fields of knowledge, have established that a group of experts in the field, when presented with a creative work, were commonly able to agree on the quality of the work, despite sometimes significant or fundamental differences between them. This method of creativity assessment, commonly employed in higher education, is not dissimilar to the tradition of expert peer review in relation to scholarly output.

Although experts may be able to commonly reach agreement on the quality of a work, the key question is how reliable the judgement is. Reliability is a term of educational measurement that explores the degree of subjectivity and consistency in assessment decision-making. It is defined by Morgan et al. (2004) as an assessor’s ability to judge different students’ work consistently and to judge the same work consistently on
different occasions. It also refers to different assessors, or different panels of assessors, judging the same works consistently. Yet, in accepting that assessment is a human, social process, reliability can be viewed as a desired goal that assessors should strive towards.

As mentioned earlier, there are various critiques of the ideal of objectivity and reliability in assessment in the creative arts (for example, Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2000, 2001; Orr, 2007) arguing that such consistency is not possible, and that assessors’ values and biases, both implicit and explicit, cannot be simply expunged from these decision-making processes. In the context of the creative arts, Elton (2007) distinguishes between positivist assessment approaches (pre-determined criteria and standards, reliability and validity in assessment) with interpretivist assessment (negotiable outcomes and shared assessment) in which validity and reliability are replaced with notions of ‘credibility’ and ‘transferability’ as more appropriate measures. While assessors clearly aspire to the broad notions of fairness and consistency, there are a variety of complex dilemmas with which they grapple when making judgements. These include (a) making holistic judgements; (b) setting aside personal aesthetics and ideological debates; and (c) finding consensus on juries and panels. These issues are briefly considered below:

(a) Making holistic judgements
A common theme in assessing creativity is the sheer complexity of making judgements when there are potentially so many elements under consideration, including technical mastery, theoretical knowledge, presentation or performance qualities, aesthetic interest, novelty, client satisfaction, and so forth. Some components can be assessed semi-objectively, using rating scales; other components are more elusive. Analytical marking schemes, enabling marks to be awarded for individual criteria, are sometimes used, yet are also critiqued as an atomistic approach that may obscure the overall quality of the creative work. Kimbell (2009, p. 6) describes such an approach as follows:

The teachers started their assessment process by laying out the portfolios across three lines of tables, with the ‘best’ at one corner of the room and the ‘weakest’ at the other. They then examine each in turn and go through the
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*detailed process of ascribing scores for each of the criteria. My question is – how do they know which are the best/worst before ascribing the numbers?*

While this may be a familiar scenario to many, Kimbell (2009) points to the contradictions in marking practices such as this, that rely on both holistic judgement (overall impressions) and norm referenced assessment (ranking students comparatively in order of merit), as well as atomised, analytical marking of individual criteria. The resulting fine-grained mark conveys a false sense of exactitude: that markers are confidently capable of distinguishing between potentially hundreds of differing ‘micro-standards’ of work. Kimbell (2009) argues that the overall impressions (holistic marking), with reference to the criteria and standards, are actually the most accurate and robust of judgements in the creative arts, and that we are straying into pseudo-science by attempting to become more fine-grained. Yet there are pressures upon teachers in the creative arts in many universities to apply fine-grained marks to student work for a variety of purposes, including ranking and progression to higher awards, scholarships, and so forth.

Many assessors in the creative arts strive for holistic judgement, rather than analytical marking of each criterion (Nightingale and Magin, 1996), yet this is not entirely without problem. Holistic judgement can be rendered more difficult when some elements of a work are rated very highly and others poorly. Added to this is the complexity of student progression, where expectations regarding the balance of elements will change as technical mastery increases (Morgan *et al.*, 2004). Judgements in these instances are highly complex and multi-dimensional in nature and require a detailed, shared understanding between assessors about each of the elements and their overall contribution to the creative work. As Eisner (1991) would argue, it requires a connoisseurs’ ability to interpret the interplay of complex qualities and make reliable, robust discriminations of judgement.

(b) Setting aside personal aesthetics and ideological debates

One of the critical elements in assessing creative work is the willingness and capacity of assessors to set aside their personal aesthetics, and even their ideological persuasions, to judge the work on its own terms. Personal aesthetics may relate to the preference or dislike of a particular genre such as science fiction in writing, or abstract expressionism in art, or jazz improvisation in music. Ideological preferences
may relate to a particular sympathy or dislike of work influenced by movements such as Marxism, post-structuralism, and so forth (Morgan et al., 2004). How, for example, is an assessor in creative writing with a strong commitment to feminism able to fairly assess a student’s work in romance fiction, when she is ideologically opposed to the representation of women in that genre? Questions arise regarding the ability of assessors to set aside these considerations, or whether these biases and preferences should be acknowledged and thus be made more transparent to students.

There is little in the literature to guide us on these important questions, although there are many broad references to assessors’ ‘professional experience’ and ‘industry expertise’ in the creative arts, which might include a capacity to set aside their personal biases. There are also a few studies that assert the opposite. Leach, Neutze and Zepke (2000), for example, argue that there is ample evidence that markers are consciously and unconsciously biased by their own values, preferences and dispositions. In the context of creative writing, Boulter’s (2004) analysis of marking criteria reveals a range of hidden assumptions and ideologies that reflect unresolved debates and tensions at the heart of the discipline. These tensions relate to key issues such as the artistic experimentation versus commercial viability of the work and how they are respectively privileged when judgements are made. Such ambiguities in marking criteria as these give rise to a latitude for markers to consciously or unconsciously impose their own understandings and interpretations.

(c) Finding consensus on juries and panels
Jury and panel assessments are commonly employed to assess creative works in order to provide authenticity or ‘real world’ flavour to the event, to introduce differing professional perspectives, and to relieve an individual assessor from the fear of bias when cast as the sole arbiter of aesthetic qualities. As such, they ideally provide a vehicle for robust moderation of assessment results. Yet, as Nightingale and Magin (1996) reveal, this consensual assessment process (Amabile, 1996) is not without its problems, including differing interpretations of criteria, and differing philosophies, schools of thought or allegiances amongst panel members, along with unequal power relationships. Panels bring expert professional judgement to an assessment event, but do not assure reliability or fairness.
Orr’s (2007) work provides us with a rare window into the consensual assessment process at work. Her study of behind-the-scenes panel discussions in a UK higher education art department explores the way in which art and design lecturers talk about and arrive at marks. She reports on the different ways that they ‘co-construct meaning’ (p. 645) and the series of ‘rhetorical moves’ (p. 649) that enable them to reach agreement on marks that minimise divisive argument and enable face-saving where necessary. Orr (2007) likens the process to a dance, with a well-rehearsed choreography to accommodate personality and preference. When significant differences arose, she likens it more to a skirmish, in which the climate becomes a little more adversarial, but within tight boundaries, and with various strategies employed to engender agreement. Pragmatic reconciliation strategies include splitting the difference in the marks, which may simply mask differences in understanding regarding criteria and standards. In some instances a marker would defer to another in a process of self-correction. Of more concern, however, are situations where a casual tutor feels compelled to defer to the status of the subject leader. Orr (2007) notes that subject leaders were less likely to shift ground, underscoring power relationships at play within the assessment panel. Tellingly, a casual tutor asked during the course of a disagreement: ‘At what point do I give up?’ (Orr, 2007, p. 651)

Orr’s (2007) study also reveals the hidden curriculum at work in art assessment. In discussions where marks are being refined, it was not unusual to find marks adjusted on the basis of personal characteristics of students such as perceived ‘laziness’ or ‘diligence’. Lecturers, she notes, will also award particular grades to motivate students, to act as an incentive, to reward improvement, to avoid complacency or to send the student a message in some form:

I found that lecturers do, in some cases, give marks dependent on factors pertaining to the individual student. One lecturer repeated a mantra of ‘we are marking what we see’. This was said so often that it served to raise the question about whether or not this was indeed possible. The work in front of the marker is set in the wider context of the lecturers’ experience of the students and their own belief systems (Orr, 2007, p. 653).

Given the close daily proximity, in many art schools, between students and their lecturers, and the somewhat public nature of the students’ creative processes, it is
natural that lecturers form private views about their students’ dispositions, talents and efforts. It is easy to see how this may spill over, almost unconsciously, into the decisions of assessment panels on creative work. However, it casts serious doubts upon the reliability or ‘transferability’ of these decisions, without the involvement of an external panel member who can challenge these intrusions, and refocus attention on explicit criteria and standards. Sadler (2009, p. 60) argues that: ‘Such rewards compromise the meaning of grades and retard the development of evaluative expertise’ and that lecturers ‘have to be hard-nosed in their focus on quality alone … and rigorously exclude all non achievement from the assessment environment.’

3.7 Assessment reform in the creative arts

The final section of this chapter reviews two significant suggestions for reform of assessment practices in the creative arts. The first posits a further development of outcomes-based education to provide for more subtle and diverse outcomes. The second argues for a replacement of outcomes-based education with a new model in which student self-assessment is the central defining feature. These models are briefly considered below.

3.7.1 Alternative outcomes-based models

While accepting that traditional learning outcomes models have their place, Buss (2007, p. 7) argues that we ‘need to devise, test and gain recognition for alternative ways to accommodate outcomes of learning that, for whatever reason, cannot be anticipated or determined in advance’. Nowhere, he argues, is this more important than where the desired outcome is creativity. Building on the work of Eisner (1979) and Davies (2002) he posits a four-dimensional model of learning outcomes incorporating:

1. Intended learning outcomes – specified outcomes such as essential skills acquisition;
2. Expressive outcomes – those outcomes that emerge or become more clearly defined as the creative journey proceeds;
3. Holistic learning outcomes – reflective, big picture outcomes relating to disciplinary ways of thinking and practising, that may often emerge at the end of a creative project; and
4. Ancillary learning outcomes – value-added learning, over and above specified outcomes, that results from the learner’s own unique journey.

This model requires a more flexible approach to assessment criteria, allowing for some specified criteria and standards, while others are negotiated during the learning process, or in some instances, dispensed with altogether.

3.7.2 Self-assessment model

In contrast to the proposed model above, Jackson (2008) and Cowan (2006) argue that creativity cannot be grafted onto an outcomes-based model. Rather, they argue for a self, peer and teacher assessment model that is negotiated and grown out of the learning process. Jackson (2008, p. 18) argues that:

*the primary role of the teacher is not to define creativity for students and assess them against their criteria. Rather, it is to help students recognise and understand their own creativity and help them express it and make claims against the evidence they feel is appropriate.*

Similarly, Cowan (2006, p. 167) argues that ‘the person nearest to the creativity is the creator. It surely then makes sense to move the assessing activity and responsibility as near as possible to the person who is best informed’. A self-assessment model is predicated on the idea that the most important thing that a university education can provide to a creative person is the capacity to self-direct and self-assess in their own professional life. Assessment in this context might focus upon a student portfolio that contains the following elements:

- a definition of the learner’s stance in relation to creativity;
- a statement of the aspirations of the learner’s own creative development over the span of the portfolio with a set of criteria by which the learner can judge their achievement;
- an indication of sources drawn upon to enable a judgement to be made;
- a self-assessment of achievements and the reasoning behind it.
The purpose of this strategy is to encourage learners to explore and develop a better understanding of their own creative pathways in their disciplinary context and to provide them with the confidence to make self-assessments of their achievements. Rather than judging the quality of student work, the teacher assesses the rigour of the student’s self-assessment and whether or not they are persuaded to endorse the student’s judgement. These are, of course, sophisticated activities requiring considerable synthesis and self-confidence on the part of learners. It is therefore recommended that much classroom time is spent on formative, developmental activities that help shape learners evolving ideas, and it may only be a suitable strategy in students’ upper or final years of study (Cowan, 2006).

3.8 Concluding remarks

Taken as a whole, there is a notable impasse in the debates surrounding creativity assessment in universities. There is a clear vein of critique of outcomes-based education and assessment, and some suggestions for assessment reform that shift the emphasis away from outcomes-based models. Yet the utility of these models in practice must be questioned when countervailing pressures of accountability, quality assurance and demonstrable graduate outcomes in universities are greater than ever. Questions arise about whether these new models of assessment are desirable or whether they could possibly be accommodated in higher education.

Before it is possible to reform assessment in the creative arts, it is necessary to better understand existing practice. There are no broad studies of assessment in the creative arts that shed light on how academics conceptualise and approach the assessment of creative works. In particular, it is important to understand the values, practices and choices academics make, along with the tensions and dilemmas they experience, and how they seek to resolve these in practice. Without a clearer picture of these issues, along with questions such as academic interest and willingness to embrace reform, it is difficult and problematic to posit new models of assessment practice that would meet with widespread acceptance.
It is important that any new models of assessment incorporate the practice wisdom developed in the creative arts and retain the values that underpin it. It is also important to document sound practice where evident, and to consider ways forward that help assessors retain focus on the ‘big picture’ goals of creativity, while meeting the needs of the universities within which they operate. It is with gap in mind that this study has been framed.

The next chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study, and discusses the details of the design, method and conduct of this investigation.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The concepts underpinning this investigation, including creativity, the creative process, and the quality of creative work are all largely subjective and not clearly observable. They can, however, be inferred from evidence of the values, beliefs and practices expressed by academics in the creative arts. This investigation therefore required an interpretive approach to understanding the phenomena, as it largely entailed the construction and interpretation of meanings given to these concepts by the creative arts academics who were the informants for this investigation. The particular approach of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was chosen because it is well suited to research issues that are context-specific and tacit in nature. It also provides ample for consideration of the trustworthiness and reliability of the data collected.

This chapter presents the details of the design, method and conduct of this investigation. It commences with an explanation of qualitative, interpretative and constructivist research, along with some of the key principles of naturalistic enquiry and how these have has been operationalised in this investigation. The chapter then explains the approach and format of interviews, the sites for investigation, and the transcribing, coding and analysis of data. Finally it reports on issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

4.1 Constructivist and ethnographic foundations

The approach to the collection and interpretation of data for this investigation draws upon the epistemology of constructivism (that meaning or knowledge is a human construct) with the methodology of ethnography (the study of human behaviour in a natural setting) and the use of qualitative research methods (such as interviews, observation, documentary research). It is an approach that draws upon a tradition of
qualitative research developed through the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Denzin and Lincoln (1994; 2008), Schwandt (1997), and Patton (2002), amongst others.

Constructivism is a philosophical perspective that is concerned with how human beings construct their social worlds in particular contexts (Schwandt, 1997). According to Patton (2002, p. 96), constructivist research poses three key questions about lived experience: ‘How have the people in this setting constructed reality?; What are their reported perceptions, truths, explanations, beliefs and world-views?; and What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviours and for those with whom they interact?’ Constructivist philosophy has developed from an ontological position that there is no objective reality. Rather, truth is ‘a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 44). Similarly, facts ‘have no meaning except within some value framework’, and phenomena can ‘only be understood within the context in which they are studied’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 44).

Ethnography is a methodology developed originally in anthropology to describe and interpret cultural behaviour. It involves first-hand intensive field study of the features and patterns within a culture, to explain the culture in the context of its natural setting (Schwandt, 1997). While traditional ethnography was concerned primarily with ‘primitive’ cultures, Patton (2002) notes that applied ethnography is employed to study a wide range of contemporary phenomena including social problems, organisational dynamics, and applied educational settings. Patton (2002) notes conceptions of ‘the field’ or ‘a culture’ have evolved to include anything from small groups to nation states, and participation within that culture may take a number of contemporary forms that are not necessarily geographically defined, such as virtual environments or networks. From an ethnographic point of view, this study sought to explore the cultural elements of an academic community in the creative arts in terms of beliefs, values and practices surrounding student assessment.

4.1.1 Naturalistic inquiry

Elements of constructivism and ethnography are drawn together into Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) construction of naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry grew out of
Egon Guba’s (1978) classic treatise in which he posited a ‘discovery oriented’ approach to research. In contrast to scientific enquiry, this approach sought to minimise manipulation of the research setting and to place no constraints on the research findings or outcomes. Robertson (2007) notes that constructivist inquiry has developed and grown out of naturalistic inquiry and that the terms are often used interchangeably. He notes that although constructivist inquiry has developed to be the more preferred term in recent years, Lincoln and Guba’s definitional work in naturalistic inquiry remains at the core of this theoretical approach.

There are five underpinning assumptions of naturalistic inquiry as articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, realities are multiple and constructed. This ontological perspective argues that reality doesn’t exist until it is constructed by people, and that these constructions are multiple and diverse. Second, the researcher and the researched are interactive and inseparable. This epistemological perspective argues that meaning is co-constructed by an interactive process of influence throughout the research process. Third, only working hypotheses that are time and context bound are possible. Reality, it is argued, is contextual and provisional, and no claims to generalisability can be made. Fourth, it is not possible to distinguish between cause and effect. Rather, the complexity and mutuality of human inquiry is such that cause and effect simultaneously shape each other. Fifth, inquiry is value bound. Values of the researcher, it is argued, are integral to the research process and are not only accepted but welcomed and embraced.

Further to these five axioms, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose a range of characteristics for naturalistic enquiry that form the basis of their framework, and which operate synergistically throughout the research process. These are now discussed and also related to the present investigation.
(a) Natural setting
First, *research is conducted in its natural setting*. A key principle of naturalistic inquiry is that, whatever the phenomena under study, it draws meaning as much from its context as it does from itself. Schwandt (1997, p. 102) describes this approach as a commitment to studying human action ‘in a setting that is not contrived, manipulated, or artificially fashioned by the inquirer’. This stance rejects the positivist assumption that there is a single, tangible reality and asserts an ontological position that no phenomena can be understood outside of its relationship to the ‘time and context that spawned, harboured and supported it’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 189). It also rejects the positivist stance that knowledge can be generalised as ‘truth statements’ free of time and place. Rather, naturalistic inquiry asserts that only time- and context-bound ‘working hypotheses’ are possible.

The natural setting inherent in naturalistic inquiry shares a common ancestry with the methodology of ethnography, and the particular reliance upon fieldwork (Schwandt, 1997). Fieldwork is the process by which anthropologists investigate and come to know a community and a culture. Naturalistic inquiry, particularly as applied to educational investigations, has developed a broader understanding of what constitutes the ‘field’ (for example, Agostinho, 2005). In the present investigation, the community under investigation were academics in the creative arts, geographically dispersed, and yet united by a common set of university practices, cultures and concerns regarding the teaching and assessment of creative works. The natural setting, for the purposes of this study, was their situated working worlds.

(b) Human as instrument
Second, *a human is the instrument of the inquiry*. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that only humans have the capacity to adapt and respond appropriately to the variable circumstances of field research. This stands in contrast to the use of ‘non-human’ instruments (such as questionnaires) that are insufficiently adaptable to recognize the variety and range of realities encountered. The naturalistic researcher is able to grasp and evaluate the nuances of different contexts and engage with participants in a mutual construction of meanings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that all instruments, whether human or not, are value-based, but it is only when there is a human as researcher that these values or biases are made explicit and negotiable.
(c) Tacit knowledge

Third, the enquiry should draw upon tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the complex web of personal values, judgements and understandings acquired through experience in a cultural setting. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 198) assert that revealing tacit knowledge is ‘an indispensible part of the research process’, and becomes the basis upon which many insights and hypotheses develop. This use of tacit knowledge sits in marked contrast to positivist positions that reject any kind of knowledge that would be regarded as personal judgement or emotionally-based reasoning. As Schwandt (1997 p. 151) explains: ‘Legitimate, genuine scientific knowledge was regarded as impersonal, objective and universally established’. The philosopher Michael Polyani (1958) is credited with laying the foundations for the admission of personal, tacit judgements in all aspects of knowledge acquisition. He theorised that the processes of knowledge need not be constrained by detached objectivity as the best scientific inquiries are infused with imagination and tacit understandings, and are ‘rooted in commitments and beliefs about the nature of things’ (Polyani, 1958, p. 63).

In naturalistic inquiry, tacit knowledge has two recognised dimensions, relating to both the researcher and the researched. As the researcher, my tacit values and beliefs were evident in the way I framed the research issue, methods, and interview questions. These have been discussed in Chapter 1. They were also evident in the understandings I gained about the topic that were brought to each interview. This was met in the interview by the tacit knowledge of participants in this study – their assumptions, theories, perspectives, social norms and personal idiosyncrasies – to bring about a shared or co-constructed version of reality. This highlights two key epistemological aspects of naturalistic enquiry: the legitimisation of values in inquiry, and also the relationship of the researcher to the researched. In contrast to positivist perspectives, where the researcher and the researched are independent and ‘constitute a discrete dualism’, in naturalistic inquiry the two interact to influence each other. In this way, they are considered inseparable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 37).

(d) Qualitative methods
Fourth, the enquiry should employ *qualitative methods*. Qualitative methods, it is argued by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 199), are most appropriate in naturalistic research because ‘they are extensions of normal human activities: looking, listening, speaking, reading’. In this sense they are more adaptable to dealing with multiple realities. Qualitative research is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 4) as a ‘situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible.’ These research practices transform that world into ‘a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world’. The researcher’s aim is to gain a better understanding of the subject matter, or a new way of seeing a situation or problem. However, the researcher is not seeking to capture an objective reality. Rather, the researcher is seeking to understand the subject matter through its representations. The product of the interpretive researcher is ‘a complex quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage – a set of fluid interconnected images and representations’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 4).

While qualitative research is interdisciplinary and privileges no single theories, paradigms or distinct set of methods, qualitative researchers generally share a common commitment to postpositivism, humanism, naturalistic conceptions of the human experience, and an interpretive understanding of that experience (Schwandt, 1997). Qualitative research sits in marked contrast to quantitative or positivist research in that there is no attempt to experimentally measure the quantity or frequency of the phenomena at hand. While quantitative studies are concerned with the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, qualitative researchers are concerned with a socially constructed reality and the situational constraints that frame human inquiry. While quantitative studies claim to operate in a value-free framework, qualitative research acknowledges the value-laden, contested nature of inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

**(e) Purposive sampling**

Purposive sampling is the selection of cases or interview subjects for particular purposes, in contrast to random or representative selection procedures. Naturalistic sampling is designed to maximise the quality and richness of information rather than
to facilitate generalisation. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, the objective of the research is ‘not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalisations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavour’ (p. 201).

Participants in this investigation were recruited using a purposive sampling technique described by Patton (2002) as ‘sampling critical cases’. Critical cases are chosen on the basis of prior knowledge that it is likely to be particularly revelatory or significant. Critical cases ‘permit maximum application of information to other cases because, if the information is valid for critical cases, it is also likely to be true of all other cases’ (Patton, 2002, p. 243). The issue of sampling in this investigation is considered in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

(f) **Inductive reasoning**

When adopting a naturalistic approach, explain Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher does not use established theory to develop a hypothesis in the first instance. Rather, working hypotheses emerge from the data and develop to a more general conclusion. The naturalistic researcher rejects the hypothetical-deductive method of explanation in favour of commencing with specific observations and building towards general patterns. As Patton (2002, p. 56) explains, ‘categories or dimensions of analysis emerge from open-ended observations as the inquirer comes to understand patterns that exist in the phenomenon being investigated.’ This is important as such analysis is more likely to acknowledge: the multiple realities of each case; the co-construction of meanings between interviewer and subject; the recognition of values inherent in the inquiry; and the issue of context specificity and the potential for transferability to other settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

(g) **Theory is developed from the ground up**

Drawing from Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) framework of grounded theory, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that an essential quality of naturalistic enquiry is to build understanding from the data, rather than collecting data in response to an existing theory. As they explain: ‘No *a priori* theory could anticipate the many realities that the inquirer will inevitably encounter in the field, nor encompass the many factors that make a difference at the micro or local level’ (Lincoln and Guba, p. 205).
Although the present study was informed by an existing literature that has raised many questions about the subject, the research was not built around a particular theory or argument. Rather, it sought to illuminate how academics in the creative arts conceptualise and approach the assessment of students’ works, along with the many dilemmas faced in the assessment process. The resulting frameworks for sound practice are thus developed from the ground up to extend the body of theory and practice in relation to creativity assessment.

Further principles of naturalistic enquiry, which follow logically from these first seven major principles, are as follows: emergent design of the research; negotiated outcomes; ideographic interpretation; tentative application; focus-determined boundaries and trustworthiness. These principles are discussed at appropriate points during the remainder of this chapter.

### 4.2 Sampling decisions and study participants

*Purposive sampling* was employed to recruit informants for this study. Informants were selected on the basis of their prior interest and expertise regarding the topic of assessing creative works. Patton (2002 p. 40) explains this form of sampling as follows:

> Cases for study (e.g. people, organizations, communities, critical incidences) are selected because they are information rich and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest.

The principal criterion for establishing critical cases was a pre-existing interest or concern with the issue of assessing creativity in the creative arts. I wanted to attract experienced teachers and assessors in the creative arts who had particular interests or concerns with assessment, and more generally, a sophisticated experience and understanding of creative pedagogies and assessment.

#### 4.2.1 Recruitment of participants
I adopted a twofold strategy for recruitment of participants. First, I made personal approaches to creative arts academics who had an existing publication record on aspects of student assessment. These people were identified during a preliminary literature search early in the study. These personal approaches resulted in the recruitment of five participants to the study. Second, I promoted the study through international web-based special interest groups including the Imaginative Curriculum Network, ArtNet, and an online forum for creative writing academics. These are popular discussion forums for university academics in the creative arts, with membership primarily in the UK, but also including Australia and New Zealand, and a representative sample of European countries. I placed an invitation to participate on each of these sites (see Appendix 1), receiving approximately fifty responses from individuals indicating a willingness to participate in the study.

Amongst potential participants there was a variety of expressed motivations to participate. Some wished to use the interview as a vehicle for reflection on their existing practice. Some had undertaken substantive reforms within their faculties and were keen to showcase these reforms. Others were struggling with assessment issues and wanted to voice their concerns. Most potential participants offered a ‘critical case’ in the sense that they viewed assessment in the creative arts as a problematic, complex issue and it was evident that they could bring to the interview particular reflexive understandings about these complexities.

An eventual list of international participants was finalised by negotiation to coincide with a six-week study tour I had planned that enabled me to visit Norway (3 participants at 3 different sites) and the UK (15 participants at 12 different sites). In Australia I conducted a further 12 interviews at 9 different sites. Given the geographical spread of participants, and my commitment to personally interview and spend some time with each participant, the study is delimited by a series of pragmatic considerations relating to location, time and the necessity of travel. The three major delimitations are as follows:
(a) Geographical constraints
While this was intended to be an international study, in practical terms in was not possible or affordable to include further countries beyond Australia, UK and Norway. Early plans to collect interview data in the US and Japan were necessarily curtailed, owing to the cost and complexities entailed. While additional data from other countries might have added considerable interest, particularly in relation to differing university systems as well as cultural constructs around creativity, this study was not primarily intended to be a cross-cultural comparison of creativity assessment. Rather, it has largely focused upon the shared concerns and dilemmas that tend to intersect around assessing creativity. It should be noted that the resulting study is clearly located in a Western cultural framework and thus the concerns and dilemmas identified in this study may only have resonances in that context.

(b) Representation of disciplines within the creative arts
In framing this study in the situated context of the creative arts, I had sought a reasonably balanced representation of participants from each discipline. However it transpired that creative writing academics (n = 14) had a higher representation in the sample due to their greater response to my initial recruitment activities. This gave rise to a concern that the voices and practices within creative writing would dominate the findings of this thesis. I was careful, therefore, to monitor this issue during data analysis phases. It was interesting to note that while each discipline had its own contextual understandings, there was no greater unanimity within creative writing about major themes in this thesis than across the cohort as a whole. There were many areas of divergence in response to key issues, but the views of participants were rarely divided solely along disciplinary lines.

(c) Time spent with individual participants.
Prolonged engagement by the researcher with the researched, note Lincoln and Guba (1985), is an important part of establishing trustworthiness of the data. As nearly all interviews were conducted while travelling, either within Australia or internationally, it was not realistic to maintain a prolonged engagement in the field with most participants. However, I maintained contact with participants and provided avenues for them to respond to my analysis of data and development of findings. The issue of trustworthiness, and the strategies to ensure it, are discussed later in this chapter.
A final issue in relation to sampling was the sample size. The total participation of thirty was not a pre-planned number. It was my intention to continue to gather data until a point where data saturation had been reached. Saturation, in the form of information redundancy, had been achieved by approximately the twenty-fifth interview, however I continued to gather data for a further five interviews to ensure that no significantly new issues emerged. Hence the final sample size was thirty participants.

4.2.2 Profile of participants and sites for investigation

Participant interviews spanned a period of twelve months, entailing thirty interviews in twenty-four different sites in the UK, northern Europe and Australia. During this period, I continued to recruit participants and conduct interviews until I judged that data saturation had been achieved: that no new issues and themes of major significance were emerging from interviews. The following two tables provide a snapshot of the thirty participants in this study, including their discipline, location and coding for the purposes of this study. Table 4.1 shows the disciplinary representation in this study from the creative arts. Table 4.2 shows participant demographics and coding for individual participants.

Table 4.1

**Disciplinary representation in this study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Discipline code</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative Writing</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Arts</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music (contemporary or classical)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design (product or fabric design)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filmmaking (including screenwriting, acting)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choreography and Dance</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total 30</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.2
Demographics and coding of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Filmmaking and scriptwriting</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Contemporary music</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Choreography and dance</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>3C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Visual arts</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>4V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Visual arts</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>5V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>6W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>7W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>8W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>9W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>11W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>12W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>13D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>14D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>Classical music</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>15M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P16</td>
<td>Classical, contemporary music</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>16M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17</td>
<td>Visual arts</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>17V</td>
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<td>P18</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>18W</td>
</tr>
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<td>P19</td>
<td>Visual arts</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>19V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P20</td>
<td>Visual arts</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>20V</td>
</tr>
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<td>P21</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>21W</td>
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<td>P22</td>
<td>Visual arts</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>22V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P23</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>23W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P24</td>
<td>Classical music</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>24M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P25</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>25W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P26</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>26W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P27</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>27W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P28</td>
<td>Creative writing</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>28W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P29</td>
<td>Contemporary music</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>29M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P30</td>
<td>Film, screenwriting and acting</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>30F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4: Methodology

The number and letter coding in the right hand column of Table 4.2 was devised for participant identification and to enable citation of individuals with anonymity. The letter designates the participant’s disciplinary grouping. This coding system is used to identify participants in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

4.3 Data Collection

Participant interviews occurred over a fourteen-month period. Interviews in the UK and Norway coincided with a study tour that enabled me to visit 15 sites within an intensive six-week period. The remaining interviews, located in Australia, were interspersed throughout the remainder of the data collection period. The following section provides details of the interview approach, the collection of secondary sources of data, and relevant ethical issues.

4.3.1 Approach and format of interviews

Participants were largely interviewed in their own university offices, amongst the bustle of their daily academic life. In a naturalistic approach, as Patton (2002, p. 39) describes, participants ‘are interviewed with open-ended questions in places and under conditions that are comfortable for and familiar to them’. It was important in this study that participants felt at ease with the interview situation. Some broad questions were supplied to them in advance of the interview so they could gather their thoughts and not feel ‘ambushed’ by unanticipated issues. Often I accompanied participants for part of their day, sitting in on classes, meeting and discussing issues with their colleagues, sharing lunch in the cafeteria. Although these interactions were not part of the formal data gathering, they enabled me to develop a comfortable rapport with participants, to gain insight into their particular contexts, and reduce any discomfort during the interviews. By contrast, two early interviews that I conducted by phone were shorter, more formal and inevitably, yielded data with less depth. From these experiences I learned the value of visiting each participant in their own setting – the additional effort on my part was always rewarded with additional commitment and enthusiasm on the part of participants.
During the fourteen-month interview period, the interview method and questions evolved significantly. To begin, my research interest and questioning was focused closely upon issues of summative assessment. However, it became apparent very early that summative assessment could not be viewed in isolation from the whole teaching and learning endeavour: how students were inducted into the discipline; how creativity was unpacked and fostered in the classroom, the feedback that students received and how they were prepared for summative assessment. Associated with these central issues was how academics turned their minds to the design of assessment tasks and what guided their thinking. Only in this context could I understand how participants went about the process of making judgements about the quality of student work.

Consistent with naturalistic enquiry, the research design was thus *emergent* in nature and evolved during the data-gathering phase because ‘what emerges as a function of the interaction between the inquirer and phenomenon is largely unpredictable in advance’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 41). Patton (2002, p. 40) discusses emergent design as the:

*openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change; the researcher avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge.*

As discussed, open-ended questions were provided to participants prior to the interview to help them understand the nature of the interview and to enable them to prepare if they desired. However, this did not constitute a fixed agenda, which would be counterproductive to a constructivist approach that seeks to co-construct understandings. Interviews were semi-structured in nature and proceeded in a fluid, open-ended way. The questions were ‘open-ended’ in the sense that they prompted discursive, evaluative responses, rather than simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses. While the provided questions gave some structure to the interview, participants’ responses were variable in length and depth – some participants became very animated when talking about particular aspects, whereas other aspects were less significant to them and were passed over. The questions evolved somewhat after the first few interviews, and stabilised for the remainder of the interview schedule as follows:
The first question in the interview schedule was: *What does 'creativity' mean in the context of your discipline?* This opening question was intended to elicit participants’ conceptualisations and constructs about creativity. It was an important question as it became evident that participants’ constructs of creativity were intimately enmeshed with the ways they reported going about their teaching and assessment activities. To help them articulate the somewhat elusive concept of creativity, I asked a series of three sub-questions, including: How are students expected to demonstrate creativity? Are there more and less ‘acceptable’ or valued forms of creative expression in your discipline? Do you talk about the issue of creativity much with your students? These sub-questions particularly helped to give insight into how students learned about creativity, and how they were inducted into the creative enterprises of their discipline. They also prompted exploration of whether certain kinds of creative outputs were privileged over others and how this played out through assessment. The analysis and findings from these questions are presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis: ‘Conceptualising creativity in the creative arts’.

The next three questions related to how participants enacted and fostered creativity with students, and how they prepared students to undergo summative assessment of their creative work. These three questions were: *How do you create a learning environment that is conducive to creativity? How do you provide feedback to students on their creative development?* and *What methods have you designed to assess students’ creative output?* Drawing from their conceptualisation of creativity, these questions allowed participants to explain how they developed and fostered students’ creativity throughout the teaching and learning encounter, and how assessment schemes were designed, developed and explained to students. A series of sub-questions were developed from the analysis of early interviews, relating to the various forms of structured and informal formative feedback, as well as the interplay between the development of craft and creative expression. The analysis and findings from these questions are presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis: ‘Creativity in the classroom’.

A third set of questions related directly to the process of making judgements about the quality of student work and the particular dilemmas with which participants wrestled. The questions included: *How do you make judgments about the quality of students'
work? Do you devise and provide students with criteria upon which assessments are made? How do you devise them? Do you moderate your grading with others? Do you have differences of opinion? How do you resolve them? These questions were designed to elicit a detailed description of the process of making judgements about students’ creative works. Further sub-questions were developed during the course of the interview period that honed in on issues arising from earlier interviews. These included the issue of assessing talented students and the assessors’ perceptions of effort. An additional question was devised about power and dominance within panel or jury processes. The analysis and findings from the third and final set of questions are presented in Chapter 7 of this thesis: ‘Making judgements about student work’.

A final set of questions sought participants’ reflections upon some key issues and concerns posed in the literature of creativity assessment. These included: Do you feel you are doing the right thing with student assessment? Are your judgements fair and transparent to students? How subjective do you consider your judgements to be? Are students less risk-taking because of the assessment process? Would students be better served with ungraded assessment in the creative arts? What do students tell you about your assessment practice? These questions were designed to assist participants to encapsulate their thoughts and concerns about assessing in the creative arts, and were important to my understanding and interpreting their overall position on key issues and emerging themes. Findings from these chapters are integrated throughout chapters 5 to 7 as relevant to the themes and issues raised by participants.

As discussed, interviews in this study were quite fluid and took a number of directions, based upon the particular concerns or enthusiasms of each participant. This often yielded interesting data that could not have been anticipated prior to the interview. The time spent with participants before the interview – usually over a cup of coffee and a tour around the faculty – enabled me to think about how to best shape the questions to their particular context and to draw them out on issues that were clearly relevant to their circumstances. As such, I was able to be responsive to context and adaptable to individual concerns. I was also able to reflect back issues during the interviews and summarise their position on certain matters in a way that allowed them to clarify, amplify or correct my interpretation on the spot. Occasionally I was able to generate and test a working hypothesis during an interview, and refine or reject it.
based upon responses. At times I encountered atypical or idiosyncratic responses that notably differed from those of other participants. These presented opportunities to dig deeper, to test data reliability, and to gain greater understanding about the variety of contextual positions capable of being held on the issues.

4.3.2 Secondary sources of information

In addition to interviews, participants often also offered documentary sources of information during, or at the end, of interviews. This mostly comprised student handouts, written descriptors of their assessment tasks and marking criteria. These documents were provided as additional evidence of participants’ efforts to address key issues or problems identified in the discussion. As such, they became useful source for triangulation when analysing interview transcripts and, in some instances, excellent indicators for sound practice in assessment.

On five occasions participants invited me to sit in on workshops and critique sessions that were conducted during the time of my visit. These provided the opportunity to observe feedback, peer review and other formative assessment processes in action. The resulting fields notes and reflections from these sessions became a further useful source of information, particularly in relation to how participants’ intentions and beliefs were enacted with students.

4.3.3 Ethical issues in data collection

Ethics approval for this research was successfully gained from Southern Cross University Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the data-gathering phase. Participants were provided with three key documents before the interview commenced:

(1) the participant invitation and information sheet (Appendix I). This document provided a brief background to myself as researcher and the research area, and also functioned as an invitation to participate;

(2) an indicative range of questions that were to be asked in the interview (see 4.3.1 above). These were provided to participants by email well in advance of the appointed time of the interview; and
(3) the informed consent document (*Appendix 2*). This sheet was provided to participants and explained prior to the commencement of the interview on the appointed day. The document enabled them to indicate informed consent and also provided them with a suite of options regarding anonymity and the use of tape recorder.

While there were no particularly sensitive issues identified during the research process, it was nevertheless important that participants felt free to discuss any issues without concern that they would be identified, or any adverse outcomes would result. It was also important that participants were assured that any documents they handed to me would be used for private research purposes only. The participants were provided with options such as the ability to terminate the interview at any point, to not be recorded on audiotape, for their anonymity to be protected, and that of their University. Although participants raised no concerns of this kind during the interviews, informed consent and confidentiality was essential to give participants the confidence to talk freely of concerns about the assessment process that may have involved their colleagues, heads of program, or other parties with whom participants shared a power relationship.

### 4.4 Data analysis

Three main sources of data were available for analysis: (1) interview transcripts; (2) documentary data such as assessment descriptors and student handouts; and (3) a range of field notes from class observations and my own reflections at the time. While these three data sources were important for triangulation purposes, the primary source of information was the interview transcripts. These became the real focus of data analysis as they provided detailed pictures about assessment cultures and academic values and practices. I audiotaped and personally transcribed the interviews to enable me to become immersed in the data. It enabled me to recall the many emphases and hesitations expressed by participants on a range of issues, which assisted significantly during data analysis. By revisiting and transcribing the interviews myself, I was able to ‘re-live’ the interviews and freshly experience the nuances of each.
Inductive data analysis provides a process for making sense of field data using tools such as coding and categorising. Coding is a procedure introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and is described by Patton (2002, p. 465) as building the ‘foundation for the interpretative phase when meanings are extracted from the data, comparisons are made, creative frameworks for interpretation are constructed, conclusions drawn and in some cases, theory is generated’. In the present investigation, a broad analytical framework for data analysis was provided initially by the questions asked during the interview. Responses to each question were initially clustered together on a question-by-question basis so that the range of responses to each question could be analysed. This enabled me to discern patterns of recurring regularities that became convergent responses, from others that were more atypical or divergent in nature (Patton, 2002).

Further clustering of the data enabled me to identify discrete categories that included ‘conceptions of creativity’, ‘assessment processes’, ‘issues’, and ‘dilemmas’. Further sub-categories were developed under each of these major headings. For example, in relation to assessment processes I developed six sub-categories as follows: (1) designing assessment tasks (2) developing criteria and standards (3) talking about assessment tasks with students (4) providing feedback (5) making judgements (6) evaluating and reflecting upon assessment practices. Similar internal categories developed in relation to each of these six sub-categories representing the range of participants’ responses and views about that sub-category.

In a final phase of analysis, broad themes emerged from the data. These broad themes became evident from the interviews, but particularly emerged from their responses to the series of reflective questions posed at the end of the interview. In these questions participants reflected back over their views and experiences expressed during the interview, and commented on their overarching concerns relating to fairness, subjectivity, risk-taking, and the reliability of assessing creative works in higher education. These themes form the basis of tentative theory building found in Chapter 8 of this thesis.
4.5 Trustworthiness issues

A vital element in qualitative, interpretative research design is the issue of rigour. Interpretative studies require considerable care to ensure that unconscious bias and other subjectivities do not intrude into the analysis and interpretation of data. In naturalistic enquiry, Lincoln and Guba, (1985) introduced the umbrella concept of trustworthiness to guard against a range of potential subjectivities, and to ensure that the findings of a study are rigorous and ‘worth taking account of’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290). They liken the stance of the researcher to that of the investigative journalist who, while never able to claim objectivity, can certainly make claims to ‘being balanced, fair and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities’ (Patton, 2002, p. 575).

To achieve the goal of trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985); Patton (2002); Erlandson et al., (1993) and Creswell (1998) suggest a variety of techniques. In this study I adopted the following five strategies: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and compiling an audit trail. These five techniques are briefly discussed in turn below.

(a) Prolonged engagement
Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that sufficient time should be spent in the field to build trust, identify the culture, and to test for misinformation. Prolonged engagement, according to Erlandson et al. (1993), provides a foundation for credibility by enabling the researcher to learn the culture of a social setting over an extended time. Data collection in this study occurred over a period of fourteen months, in which time I became steeped in participants’ cultures and practices through various site visits in Australia, UK and Norway. I remained in email contact with participants and provided each participant with opportunity to comment upon the emerging themes and findings. This is discussed in detail in the section on member checking below.

(b) Triangulation
Triangulation contributes to trustworthiness by the use of multiple sources of data to strengthen and confirm findings (Erlandson et al., 1993). In this investigation,
triangulation occurred during the data gathering and data analysis phases. While interview transcripts were the major data source for this study, I was able to use the other data sources for important secondary references. For example, when considering participants’ values and concerns about assessment design, I was able to triangulate their stated intentions with documentary evidence contained in their student handouts or marking criteria. When analysing their approaches to student feedback, I was able to triangulate my field notes and class observations. These additional sources of data helped primarily to confirm and animate the interview transcripts, particularly in relation to how participants’ intentions translated into demonstrable action.

(c) Peer debriefing
Peer debriefing occurred informally and fluidly throughout the research process with my doctoral supervisors, and also with colleagues from my university workplace who shared my interests in student assessment. I had worked collaboratively with these colleagues in co-authoring two texts on student assessment over the past ten years, and thus their input and expertise as critical peers was invaluable. Two critical friends provided additional feedback on an early draft of key chapters of this report. This helped me to refresh and sharpen my interpretations. In this way, peer debriefing posed searching questions about my own biases and assumptions, and helped to test my developing hypotheses. The peer debriefing process was particularly useful at times when I felt I had become ‘over-familiar’ with the data. It allowed me to see the data freshly through the reactions and responses of peers.

(d) Member checking
Member checks occurred in both formal and informal ways during the research process and when full first drafts of the research report were completed. It provided me with the opportunity to check that that my developing understandings ‘were recognizable to them as adequate representations of their own (and multiple) realities’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 314). There were four stages to my member checking design as follows:

i. During the interview I posed a series of broad questions at the end of the interview that revisited the interview content in a slightly more evaluative or holistic way. A series of five questions in this style provided me with reflexive data that enabled
me to check and clarify my understanding about earlier discussions, and participant stances on a range of ‘big picture’ issues, including fairness, transparency, and subjectivity in creativity assessment.

ii. During my site visits I was occasionally invited to present my research-in-progress in sessions to participants and other interested creative arts academics. This provided me with the opportunity to share my preliminary interpretations with members of the stakeholding group. As a member-checking exercise, their responses and input were invaluable as it helped me to check whether I was asking the right questions, and gathering the most relevant data.

iii. During formulation of themes and findings I returned a summary of participant data and a digest of themes and findings to all participants via email for comment, feedback, clarifications and confirmation. As far as possible, this summary was reduced to point-form overviews and limited to a total of five pages to enable participants to easily engage with the material. I also asked them to comment on the usefulness of the research in relation to their own practice. Most participants replied only briefly to acknowledge that they were satisfied with the reported themes and findings. Some also commented that they found it very interesting and challenging, and a few made some minor points of clarification. Three participants were keen to engage further, and requested a copy of the Discussion chapter (Chapter 8) to more closely engage with the findings. Two of these provided detailed feedback that challenged aspects of my interpretations and provided greater robustness to the discussion in this study.

iv. As a final part of the member checking process I considered it important to check the trustworthiness of findings beyond the participant cohort in the study. It is noted that generalisability is not sought in naturalistic inquiry, as findings are contextual and provisional. However, I considered it important to assess the transferability of the model developed in this thesis to new similar settings, and to explore whether the findings ‘ring true’ in others’ experience (LoBiondo-Wood and Haber, 2006). I therefore recruited three new participants – each senior, experienced academics in music, visual arts and creative writing – to provide commentary on the first draft of this research report. I asked them to report
particularly on whether the data and findings resonated with them and their usefulness for practice.

It was heartening that these new ‘participants’ overwhelmingly concurred that the data and findings presented in this thesis resonated with them. Each reported being very familiar with the issues and dilemmas documented in this study, and the frameworks and models posited in Chapter 8 of this study were useful and challenging to practice. Each provided detailed feedback relative to his or her own discipline, assisting me to correct any errors of fact, or misunderstandings in my interpretations.

These member-checking activities, which spanned four stages of the research process, were designed to provide an external check on the enquiry process and to increase the probability that credible and dependable interpretations and findings have been produced in this investigation.

(e) Accessibility to an audit trail
A research audit trail, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), comprises six categories of information: raw data (recordings and notes); data reduction and analysis products (summaries, theme identification); data reconstruction and synthesis products (interpretations and final report); process notes (methodological and trustworthiness notes); information about intentions and disposition (research proposal, personal notes) and instrument development information (design of semi-structured interviews etc). An audit trail, including these six categories, was compiled as a series of digital files and is stored securely on CD-ROM and hard copy.

4.6 Concluding remarks

This chapter has provided a detailed justification and description of the methodology and methods chosen to answer the broad questions posed by this study. The framework provided by naturalistic enquiry was employed because it provided the opportunity to explore in depth the situated experiences, issues and culture of academics in the creative arts involved with the assessment of students’ creative
works. With its blend of constructivist epistemology, ethnographic methodology and qualitative research methods, a naturalistic approach had the benefit of being able to be flexibly applied, while offering rigorous methods and processes to ensure trustworthiness of the findings.

The next three chapters provide an account of participants’ values and practices in relation to student assessment, ordered as follows:

Chapter 5: Conceptualising creativity – in which participants’ conceptions of creativity are explored;

Chapter 6: Creativity in the classroom – in which we discover how creativity is explained and fostered in the classroom, how formative feedback works, and how students are prepared for summative assessment;

Chapter 7: Making judgements about student work – in which participants explore the issues and dilemmas about assessing student work, and how these are handled in practice.
Chapter 5: Conceptualising Creativity in the Creative Arts

Introduction

This chapter is the first of three chapters to report and discuss the interview data collected during this study. This first chapter explores participants’ conceptions of creativity. In Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis a range of themes from the literature were explored, including tacit knowledge, hidden curricula, and the ability of university teachers to unpack and discuss their conceptions of standards and expectations with students (for example Eisner, 1991; Shreeve et al., 2004; Wenger, 2004; Orr, 2007; Sadler, 2005; 2009). The consensus of this growing body of literature was that assessment is central to the teaching and learning dialogue, rather than an event separate to teaching. Students need to be actively and explicitly inducted into the ways of thinking and working in their discipline, and to develop, over time, a connoisseur’s appreciation of quality and standards, and a deep understanding of expectations. Students need to be brought inside the logic of a program, and its associated assessment schemes. Assessment should be transparent and interwoven with learning, rather than being shrouded in mystery or uncertainty.

It was important, therefore, to explore the ways in which participants in this study conceptualise creativity as it sets the scene for much of their teaching and assessment activities. How participants conceptualise creativity is interwoven with: (1) how they explain and communicate expectations to students; (2) how they induct students into the field; (3) how they frame teaching, learning and assessment activities; (4) how they provide feedback on creative development; and (5) how they make judgements about the quality of student work. There is a thread that connects all these activities, not dissimilar to Biggs’s (2003) idea of constructive alignment discussed in earlier chapters. According to theory, when all these elements are aligned and connected, the culminating assessment event becomes one that is arguably more consistent, transparent, and thus more demonstrably fair to students.
5.1 Conceptions of creativity

The thirty participants in this study were initially asked to define or explain creativity as it related to them and to their particular teaching context in higher education. It was clear that many were not used to being asked this question, and spent quite some time framing, re-framing and qualifying their responses. Many indicated that it was an important, but complex, question for them, and they found it difficult to articulate it concisely or satisfactorily.

There were three distinct categories of response. There was high consensus among participants that creativity is a process. There was moderate to low consensus among participants that creativity is an end product with particular characteristics, and low consensus that it is also a series of personality traits or attitudes of the individual that are either innate or acquired over the course of the university program. Some saw it as a mixture of these different elements. These three categories closely align with three out of the four focus areas of creativity research identified in Chapter 2 (namely: person, process, product and environment). However, as discussed above, some participants openly acknowledged the impossibility of defining creativity and felt that it was beyond definition. This latter category of participants instead explored the difficulties of defining creativity and why they preferred to steer away from using this term with their students. The three major conceptions of creativity are considered below:

5.1.1 Creativity as a process

Participants commonly conceptualised creativity as a process. There were five key elements to the creative process that were regularly identified by participants: (a) experimentation and risk taking; (b) drawing upon knowledge of tradition and the profession; (c) developing craft and technique; (d) developing intellectual curiosity; and (e) developing an artistic consciousness. Each of these is briefly considered in turn.
(a) Experimentation and risk taking
Participants commonly spoke of the primary necessity for students to ‘push out of their comfort zones’ during the creative process. They aimed to stimulate students to identify their boundaries and to push beyond them by taking risks and engaging in experimentation. They sought to stimulate motivation and an enthusiasm in students to take risks and to foster a safe environment in the classroom where it is okay or even noble to fail, but, critically, to learn from failure. In the context of a filmmaking program, one participant typically described risk-taking as follows:

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What we’re looking for is that students can draw upon the conventions, identify their own boundaries, recognise if they’re stuck in any way, then ask them to move beyond that. It’s about an instinctive desire to make your mark on the world, and then stretch beyond with experimenting and risk-taking. That’s where the creativity is measured in our courses (1F).
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(b) Drawing upon knowledge of tradition and the profession
Some participants argued that experimentation should be prefaced by an understanding of disciplinary traditions and professional expectations. It was stressed that creativity rarely occurs in a vacuum; it is grounded in history, traditions, culture, professional standards and expectations. Students need to explore these traditions in tandem with their own creative efforts, drawing from traditions and yet mindful of the necessity to push beyond imitation and to find one’s own voice. A representative comment was:

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The first thing we talk about in performance is that in order to be liberated into the creative zone, you have to have informed and open ears, and you have to recognise your place in a community of musicians and musical practices. We say creativity only emerges from disciplined skills and technique along with an awareness of what's going on around them (2M).
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(c) Developing craft and technique

Many observed that highly creative output is founded upon the discipline of practising and developing one’s craft – learning how to use the raw materials with sophistication. For example, in creative writing, craft was considered to include syntax and grammar, point of view, imagery, plotting, structure, voice, and a range of stylistic concerns appropriate to the genre. A few participants observed that if creativity was lacking in a piece, it is probable that there are problems with craft that are impeding the capacity of the story to flow or to work as a satisfying creative piece. Similarly, in music, it was noted that:

there is a lot of craft – my sub-tribe is the brass instrumentation of an orchestra – a lot of the emphasis is on ‘getting the business done’. That means the technical performance and the right notes at the right time. Of course I want students to build on that artistically, but that’s the basis (15M).

(d) Developing intellectual curiosity

Many participants stressed the importance of intellectual curiosity to the creative process. Intellectual engagement was variously described as ‘thinking laterally and imaginatively’ (18W), ‘making unexpected connections and imaginative juxtapositions’ (17V), and ‘experimentation and problem solving’ (10W). It was also conceptualised as a critical engagement with ideas and the capacity for students to evaluate differing perspectives, ideologies and debates of the field, to formulate their own positions, and to give expression to this in their work. One participant described how she sought to stimulate this with students early in their study:

I help them position themselves in their own worlds. What they notice and how they act and interact in their worlds. Getting them to become curious. I want them to ask questions (28W).

For some participants, the creative process was founded upon developing the habits and discipline of the creative practitioner, described by one participant in design as:

a creative way to think and a creative way to work. It applies to the search for ideas, what you do with your ideas, how you develop them and the inspiration you bring to the process – it’s like a method (20D).

(e) Developing an artistic consciousness
This final element of the creative process was a more global one, which encapsulated many of the previous four elements into a single state of consciousness:

I want them to develop an artistic consciousness and artistic expression founded upon choices (15M).

Another participant similarly commented that:

I want students to integrate knowledge into something personal for them. I’m looking for individuality. I believe they have a holy flame inside and my job is to give oxygen to that – a personal signature. To find their voice (6W).

These five key qualities of the creative process were mostly not considered by participants to be preconditions for creativity. Rather, they sought to foster and develop these processes alongside students’ creative efforts. They hoped that students’ awareness of concepts such as risk taking or intellectual curiosity would become part of a cycle of learning and reflecting and thus be acquired in greater depth with developing maturity and confidence throughout a program of study.

5.1.2 Creativity as found in an end product

Although most participants defined or explained creativity primarily as a process, there was some consensus that it could also be explained by the qualities of an end product or creative work. Creativity, in other words, is defined and evidenced by particular qualities of the creative output. There were two key qualities that were consistently raised in this category:

(a) Originality
A variety of words were employed to capture the idea of newness in the creative work, including ‘originality’, ‘freshness of thought’, ‘surprise’ and ‘novelty’.

(b) Provoking a special response in the viewer
Connected with the newness above is the reaction of the viewer who experiences a kind of excitement or even tension: ‘it’s new, exciting, you want to hold it, use it, lay with it’ (13D), or it ‘creates a sense of questioning or wonderment in the viewer’ (19V), or it ‘disrupts and disturbs in some way’ (27W).
5.1.3 Creativity as personal traits

As part of their efforts to define or explain creativity, participants often mentioned a wide variety of ideal student traits, dispositions and attitudes. Six traits were identified as follows:

(a) Self-awareness
Participants sometimes referred to self-awareness as a critical factor in creativity: the ability to understand one’s own strengths, weaknesses and boundaries in relation to creativity, and a willingness to confront boundaries:

I encourage them to develop self-awareness about their own personal moments of big creativity. A lot of them will operate instinctually, but I would like to help them to understand the mechanics of their own creative process, to push up against their boundaries (1F).

(b) Vision
Vision was occasionally described as a special quality that was a catalyst for inventiveness. One participant described it, in the context of creative writing, as ‘the seeing and then re-seeing through drafting, reflecting and re-drafting’ (10W).

(c) Enthusiasm and drive
Enthusiasm, drive, passion and commitment were typically depicted as important traits of the creative person, particularly the ability to sustain it over a program of study: ‘All students can produce flashes of creativity but my challenge is to help them sustain that across a program and a range of products’ (3C).

(d) Curiosity and excitement
Similarly, curiosity and excitement are commonly cited personal qualities: ‘I nurture an ability in students to get excited and pursue that excitement to its end. It’s an investigation that comes from a curiosity’ (3C).

(e) Self-directedness
The ability and disposition of students to direct their own learning was seen as a key quality and a critical outcome for students in the creative arts. As one participant put it: ‘It’s about making them their own teachers, to take control of their learning and develop their own musical personalities’ (24M).

Participants did not see these as necessarily innate qualities, without which the student would be destined to fail. Rather, they described these qualities as present by degrees in most students, and it was the teacher’s job to foster and nurture these qualities in students over the course of a university program.

### 5.2 Disciplinary expressions of creativity

In addition to the three elements of creativity discussed above, which were largely generic to all creative arts disciplines, participants also provided some rich descriptions of what creativity meant to them in a specific domain of practice, such as a particular instrument in an orchestra, or particular art practice such as ceramics.

Notably, at this level of specificity, participants rarely faltered or stumbled and often became very engaged and passionate about creative practice. For example, in visual arts:

*Creativity comes into play when they're looking at the status quo in terms of visual culture. They question how it comes into being and reflect on why things are so, rather than just accept them the way they are. Even with the craft of making something, there’s intellectual engagement with that too* (22V).

In creative writing:

*Creativity is about wordliness. As humans we are all wordlings – to use and manipulate and exploit the ambiguity of language and words. It’s also about story. All stories are mediated. That’s the other creative element in writing. How you tell a story* (10W).

In music:

*The focus of creativity with brass instruments is storytelling. The story is given by the composer. I ask students to focus on the story and encourage them to see that there are choices – emotional content – and you need to be very accurate about emotions and so there are many choices and variations* (15M).
and also in music:

In classical piano there are rules about the type of articulation. It’s not a fixed thing, it’s always developing, but there are boundaries. But I don’t say to students something is wrong. I encourage them to see it for themselves through their own scholarly understanding about the composer and the period. It’s not just about what you like or don’t like. To be creative you have to develop a connoisseur’s appreciation (24M).

In choreography and dance:

There are particular areas of creativity in the composition and crafting of choreography. It’s the most contentious area and more so than most other areas of dance. By this I mean the compositional building blocks and the way students use the stage space and time (3C).

5.3 Debates in conceptualising creativity

During discussions about the nature of creativity, participants touched upon a range of issues where there were significantly divergent views and perspectives. These divergent views and tensions are discussed below:

5.3.1 Embracing or avoiding creativity as a concept

As briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, most participants struggled with defining or explaining creativity. Some participants were reluctant to define or explain creativity because of its elusive nature, and were very hesitant about even employing the term in their teaching because of its inherently subjective nature. For example, one participant commented that ‘it’s a difficult word to define and as soon as you start it slips away from you. In a way it’s beyond definition because it’s too subjective and personal’ (6W). This comment was mirrored by another who spoke about the creative process as being ‘very intangible. There’s no formula. It can only happen through encouragement of students...for people to see they’re capable of it’ (13D).

Other participants, however, were keen to embrace the concept and to explore it directly with students. We find a division amongst participants into two camps: those
who embraced the term ‘creativity’ with all its associated ambiguities, and those who were more inclined to steer away from it, fearing that it may confuse students or, worse, inhibit their creativity. These ambiguities and divisions are further explored in the next chapter, Creativity in the Classroom, where we look at how participants talk to students about creativity and how they foster students’ creative development.

5.3.2 Tension between creativity and craft

A second area of divergence amongst participants was the degree to which creative expression is preceded by the acquisition of a particular level of craft or skill. For example, can it be expected that a ceramics student is able to express creativity in work before the component skills and craft are mastered to a competent level? Many participants expected creativity to be present from very early stages in a student’s career and that craft and creative development occur in tandem over a degree program. As one argued:

*I was forced in at the deep end as a student and discovered that you can be creative without huge background knowledge. But a deep knowledge of, and sensitivity to, materials is vital to being very creative – it’s a balance* (13D).

Yet in some fields, particularly musical instrumentation and vocal performance, it was considered essential that a certain level of competence be achieved before any creativity can come into play. There is a dance between the development of craft and creativity that was never far from participants’ thinking and expectations of students. This is an issue that is further discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

5.3.3 Tension between talent and effort

*Talent* was an issue that arose regularly in participants’ talk about creativity. Participants commonly described talent as a series of personality traits or abilities in individuals that predispose them towards success, such as a particularly good ear for music, a natural singing voice, an evolved artistic aesthetic, an ear for dialogue, a personality for risk-taking, and so forth. When a series of these qualities come together serendipitously in a student, participants recognised this and felt a responsibility to nurture them to the best of their abilities. Yet it was argued by some
participants that there is no necessary connection between students who possess natural talents and sustained creative output. As one commented:

*There’s this assumption that if someone is said to be talented, they can do no wrong and I feel that’s just not appropriate – it’s got to be more than that. There’s got to be a rigorous engagement – intellectually and in terms of artmaking (22V)*.

Another similarly commented: ‘*Talent is simply not an issue. It’s much more about the commitment to the process and the craft*’ (21W).

It seems that for a number of participants there was an unresolved tension around the issue of talent; on the one hand, an excitement at the possibilities offered by highly talented students, and yet, concern that talent is used as a substitute for hard work, or that talented students may be privileged in some ways. A few participants argued that talent was not particularly relevant to creative output at all: ‘*Creative writing is a great leveller – everyone has good ideas and people bring different skills and experiences to the course, but they’re all coming in at the same level*’ (28W). Others recognised differing levels of talent, but stressed that the creative arts offers a personal journey with a unique trajectory for each individual. This issue is further explored in this study as we investigate whether, and if so how, students are rewarded through assessment for their perceived efforts.

### 5.3.4 The tensions of technologies and culture

An interesting dilemma about conceptualising creativity related to the ambiguities of contemporary culture. Some participants noted that the concept of creativity required constant challenging in the context of postmodern and technological cultures that are dynamic and rapidly evolving. Participants reported that particular challenges arose when students are exploring on the edges of contemporary culture beyond the knowledge or appreciation of teaching staff. Questions also arose for a few participants about the nature of originality in postmodern creative environments where pastiche, referencing other work, and sampling are the norm:

*I am very interested in the idea of one’s own voice and what is the nature of that – and how we relate to that when we live in a creative culture that is all about*
reappropriating materials. Working with music sampling – how can you say whether it is creative or derivative? And is being derivative not creative? (2M)

In a similar vein, new technologies posed questions for some participants about authorship and originality:

*It is very easy to lay down a very sophisticated sounding dance track but there’s almost no creativity in it because it’s all pre-packaged in the technology. Same with composing. We have to wean students off technology and then wean them back on again as far more critical users* (29M).

One participant argued that these ambiguities should be embraced, rather than shied away from, and should be discussed with students in the context of contemporary cultural theory:

*Creativity these days is often about eclecticism. We embrace the idea of inclusivity of all sorts of different kinds of music, styles of musicians and also the multiplicity of ways in which people use music as consumers in their lives* (16M).

### 5.3.5 Tensions between traditionalism and innovation

At the other end of the spectrum, there were concerns and debates about traditionalism and its place within creativity and innovation. This tension was illustrated by the comments of the following participant:

*In artistic creativity there’s a premium on being different. But we have folk and traditional music here, and shouldn’t we reward people for performing in a traditional manner too? And then, who should get the most credit? So we’ve had to make decisions about that – a beautiful performance in a traditional style is worth as much as a very innovative performance. Innovation is something we have to think very carefully about* (2M).

These tensions reflect both the complexity of creativity as an applied construct in the creative arts, and the diversity of understandings and conceptions of creativity among disciplines, and within disciplines. While some of the tensions discussed above were more pronounced in some disciplines, they were evident to some degree in each of the
disciplines considered. These differences and tensions became more pronounced as we move to the next section that explores the boundaries of creativity.

5.4 Exploring the boundaries of creativity

Participants were asked whether there are more or less acceptable forms of creativity in their discipline, or within the culture of their own school, that might not be readily apparent to students. This question sought to explore the borders or boundaries of creativity as an applied practice in a disciplinary setting. The question also sought to explore the idea that, tacitly, certain forms of creativity or creative products might be more highly rewarded, and other kinds might be filtered out through assessment. As discussed in Chapter 3, these tacit understandings may become part of a hidden curriculum - tacit values, ideologies, or biases that may not reveal themselves in course documents, or in the classroom, yet may be discernable by what is valued or rewarded through assessment.

This was not an easy question for participants to respond to, as it assumed that participants could step out of their own immediate world and make an assessment of their potential biases, or how they might be doing some injustice to their students. Some participants were confident in readily dismissing the idea of a hidden curriculum. Others were much more hesitant in their responses. Three positions emerged as follows:

1. No boundaries on student creativity;
2. Clear and explicit boundaries on creativity;
3. Boundaries that are not well articulated.

5.4.1 Position 1: No boundaries on student creativity

A small number of participants argued that there were no boundaries on student creativity within their programs and they would view any creative work on its own terms ‘whether it be a rap poem or a Shakespearean-style sonnet’ (18W). The goal, it was argued, is to create ‘conditions for independent, mature practice, not disciples of a particular house style or pet theories of the lecturer’ (1F). Many participants from
the visual arts did acknowledge that, historically, art schools had tacit house styles to which students needed to conform for success. However, it was argued, most contemporary art schools eschewed that culture, embracing a diversity of practices that reflect a postmodernist respect for the subjective, and a rejection of notions of high versus low art. Participants from creative writing were most likely to reject the idea that there were more or less acceptable forms of creativity. They consistently argued that they embraced all genres of writing, from experimental fiction to popular romance, and their role was to support all student work to be the very best it could be, on its own terms. They also encouraged students to move freely between differing forms, genres and techniques, providing that students bring a critical perspective to each.

5.4.2 Position 2: Clear and explicit boundaries on creativity

More commonly, participants acknowledged that there were more and less acceptable forms of creativity, and that creativity is bounded in important ways, but these issues do not form part of a hidden curriculum. Rather, these respondents argued that the boundaries were explicit, discussed and negotiated with students from early stages in their program. In design, for example, students are working to a brief: ‘There are constraints. There’s no point producing something that’s wildly creative but doesn’t serve its purpose’ (13D). Similarly, ‘students have to have one eye on the commercial context and another on creativity and experimentation and marry the two’ (14D). In visual arts, one participant commented:

Yes, art schools do tend to privilege certain kinds of creative work, but it must also be negotiated with students in relation to their own goals. We would generally try to give students their own agency. There’s no dominant aesthetic (17V).

A further example in classical music performance:

If you go too far out for example with rhythmic games, then it is considered too ‘exotic’ for the real world. There is accepted taste and students must learn those boundaries and they also must learn when they can break those boundaries (15M).

In these examples we see how creativity is bounded in relation to particular professional standards that are embedded within teaching and assessment. This does
not represent a hidden curriculum; rather, it is a process of revealing the tacit knowledge and understandings of the field, inducting students into the discipline, and preparing them for professional practice.

5.4.3 Position 3: Boundaries on creativity that are not well articulated

This final category includes responses where participants were notably less confident about the explicitness of boundaries, or whether particular aesthetics dominate, and the consequent dangers of a hidden curriculum that may impact negatively on students. In the context of dance choreography, one participant commented: ‘I would like to say that there are no biases, but I think there are. It’s about high art versus low art’ (3C). This dichotomy reflected the tensions between traditional, modern and popular culture in dance, along with the historical traditions of dance training in conservatories coming into conflict with a more pluralistic university culture.

Another participant reflected that:

*There can be a dominant aesthetic when you have very strong teachers with very strong views. We’ve wrestled with this as a faculty because we’re known here particularly for photography and film. We have had some famous staff, but this creates the potential for students as disciples rather than independent practitioners* (1F).

A third participant reflected on the unconscious ways in which her judgement was influenced by her own cultural biases:

*I’ve been teaching in China, and Eastern notions of creativity are very different. I also realized that my aesthetic tastes were very much to do with the eclecticism of postmodern design – in China students found (postmodernist aesthetics) bewildering and unclear* (4D).

Some participants revealed their uncertainties about how clearly bounded and articulated were their, or their institutions’, notions or assumptions about creativity and what that may mean for students. One participant recounted the following anecdote from his own student days about the mixed messages students receive:

*One of my teachers – very influential on me – gave this session about postmoderism and pop culture. We now live in an era where we can compare*
the Beatles with Mozart, and just at the end of the session after we were all feeling good about breaking down the barriers between high and low art, he said ‘Andrew Lloyd Webber – his music is just shit... it really is!’ It was a really subjective eruption that almost contradicted his whole session (1F).

Another participant recounted a conversation between students he had recently heard in the cafeteria:

*I overheard one student say ‘What should I do? Should I do what he says in order to get a good grade, or should I be true to myself and blow the grade?’ I thought that was a tragic dilemma. And it was being reinforced by the other students in the group who were all nodding and saying, ‘Yes, I have that problem too’ (19V).

What really concerned this participant was that the conversation seemed to reflect a shared understanding among students in this art school that taking personal risks, or being ‘true to oneself as an artist’ is antithetical to getting good grades. For this participant, there were deep concerns about the mixed messages surrounding creative practice, student agency and the value of risk-taking.

Participants’ stories here reveal that there are differing conceptions of ‘appropriate’ creativity located in underlying issues of ideology, culture and personal taste. Cues to students about what is valued and why may be highly variable and inconsistent, and may impact on student’s creative impulses and efforts in ways that are not intended or expected. One participant argued forcefully about the necessity for academics in the creative arts to find more common ground in the way that creativity is articulated:

*We need to hold a public position about creativity. Part of the joy of exploring creativity is bumping up against other people’s views and expressions of that. It’s our duty as artists to come and make judgements. We have to make judgements about students’ creative work, so we have to navigate through these debates and find some common ground (1F).*

That creativity is a complex, contested construct is perhaps not surprising. The problem of particular interest here, I argue, is the degree of transparency of these preferences, expectations, boundaries or biases. In Chapter 3 the issue of the hidden curriculum, and its particular impact upon students was discussed (Biggs, 2003; Sambell and McDowell, 1998; Cannatella, 2001; Shreeve et al., 2004; Orr, 2007).
Questions arise about whether students are appropriately inducted into the expectations of their assessors, or whether they are left to flounder, discovering all too late that their work is not ‘appropriately’ creative. This question is further pursued in the following chapter: Creativity in the Classroom.

5.5 Concluding discussion

In this chapter the rich variety of conceptions of creativity have been explored, along with the ways in which participants’ disciplines and personal philosophies have shaped their expressions of creativity. Given the evident complexity of creativity, both as a concept and a key outcome in the creative arts, it is not surprising that this study reveals differing conceptions, divergent views, and at times, some controversy. While participants were not always articulate about creativity as a concept in broad or theoretical terms, they are clearly deeply engaged with it when viewed as a more concrete manifestation in their own disciplinary context. Indeed, there is much evidence from this study to suggest they are excited, passionate and also challenged by the notion in a variety of ways.

Notably, participants’ conceptions of creativity were not grounded in the literature and theory of creativity research. Very few participants mentioned a particular theory or theorician that was influential to their thinking about creativity, or how their understanding had been shaped by research. This atheoretical approach tends to reinforce Kleiman’s (2007, 2008) observations that creativity as a concept is not a regular part of academic discourse and the psychological research literature on creativity does not communicate well to teachers in the creative arts. Rather, participants in this study conceptualised creativity as a social and cultural activity that has most meaning for them in their own situated, disciplinary contexts. This situated perspective, as discussed in Chapter 2, emphasises the practical, applied, social and values-based practices of the discipline, and that understandings of creativity are a part of this acquired, tacit disciplinary knowledge (Craft, 2000; Entwistle, 2005; Whitelock and Miell, 2007). According to this view, learning about creativity takes the form of an apprenticeship in which forms of discourse and values and standards underpinning them, are acquired over time within the disciplinary setting.
Participants’ conceptions of creativity can be described as *personal practical* theories, as distinct from formal knowledge, that are, according to Clark (1988, p. 6):

*eclectic aggregations of cause-effect propositions, from many sources, rules of thumb, generalisations drawn from personal experience, beliefs, values, biases and prejudices.*

There are resonances, too, with the psychological theory of ‘the natural’ and ‘the problematic’ as developed by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987). This theory distinguishes between a model of naturally acquired understanding and expertise, and a model in which understanding and expertise is acquired through more complex, problematic routes. Naturally acquired understanding may come through lived experience, which may thus be partial, or constrained by circumstance. Problematised understanding, however, is more likely to result from active interrogation and formal reasoning, leading to potentially more sophisticated or more realised conceptions (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). In the present study, participants’ conceptions of creativity had developed largely from the ground up, and were influenced by a complex range of idiosyncratic factors relative to their own education and values formed throughout their professional lives as creative artists and teachers. This issue of acquired expertise and understanding is further developed in later chapters when we explore how participants developed their understanding of standards and quality in creative work.

There was a high consensus among participants that creativity was most tangible or most readily defined when looking at the *creative process*. This focus suggests that, as teachers, this is an issue of primary concern to them. They are charged with the responsibility of facilitating creative processes in the classroom and instilling in students robust and productive processes to equip them to enter professional life in the creative professions. Participants’ secondary focus on *creative products* reflects a twofold concern – a responsibility to make judgements about students’ creative products, and also the desire to instil in students the ability to evaluate their own output and be able to talk fluently about the work of others. The third focus on *creativity as personal trait* reflects participants’ efforts to inspire, provoke, mentor and generally foster excitement and an atmosphere of creativity in the classroom or
studio, and to ensure that whatever talents students bring to the program are appropriately nurtured.

Yet, from a student learning perspective, a number of questions arise from this data. How do students navigate these different conceptions and potentially coded messages? Should students not expect a more coherent and consistent message about creativity and its attendant processes from their lecturers? How do these differing conceptions and practices translate into classroom culture and, inevitably, how they are to be judged on their creative work? It can be argued that these differing conceptions of creativity can be helpful to students. It is reasonable to assume that students’ conceptions and approaches to creativity will be just as personal and individual as those of their teachers. In this sense it may be constructive for students to be exposed to a variety of views and approaches. Some may resonate whereas others may not.

However the critical issue raised in this chapter is what’s not said: the hidden curriculum that belatedly reveals itself at assessment time. Because of the inherent fuzziness of creativity, there may be a greater danger than in most other disciplines in higher education that students will fail to pick up on cues essential to their success. These vital cues include what is expected of them, what are considered appropriately creative outputs, and how they are to be judged on their work. These cues may be further confounded by a mismatch between what the teacher says and what actually happens in the classroom and in assessment processes more generally. This chapter has offered some insight into the web of biases, personal preferences and ideologies that may not always be evident to students. There are also boundaries to acceptable creativity that are not always well identified and may contribute to a lack of transparency about how assessment judgements are to be made.

The next chapter leads into the classroom and the creative curriculum. It explores how participants talk about creativity with their students, how they foster a climate of creativity, provide feedback to students on their creative development, and the ways in which summative assessment is planned and designed.
CHAPTER 6

CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Introduction

The previous chapter explored participants’ conceptions of creativity. This chapter follows the thread of alignment into the classroom, to see how participants talk about creativity with their students, and how creativity is developed and fostered throughout the teaching and learning encounter. Participants reveal how they foster creative learning environments, and how they provide developmental feedback to students on creative works-in-progress. Data is also presented in this chapter about how participants plan their assessment activities, including the methods used to assess student achievement, how marking criteria are formulated, agreed upon and discussed with students. This chapter also explores in detail some of the more contentious issues about preparing students for assessment.

6.1 Talking to students about creativity

This first section explores the ways in which participants’ conceptions of, and expectations about, creativity are communicated to students in the classroom, and how they are inducted into their disciplines as aspiring creative arts practitioners.

Participants revealed an interesting variety of methods they employed to explain and explore creativity with students. However, a significant gulf opened up between those who explicitly unpacked the notion of creativity with students, and those who avoided using the word, due to fears that it would overwhelm or stifle students, particularly in their early years of study. These two differing approaches are considered below.

6.1.1 Steering away from creativity

Those who steered away from unpacking creativity offered the following typical explanations: ‘It’s not useful for students. It’s too abstract as a concept’ (19V), or
‘it’s frightening for students, crippling for new and nervous students’ (6W), or ‘students’ confidence in their own creative spirit is developed incrementally, the concept of creativity can be a burden for them’ (7W). One participant had ideological reservations about elevating creativity as a concept:

*I don’t explain creativity at all. I don’t like to separate creative writing from any other form of writing. I don’t like the attempts to bring this into the open and perhaps make a mysterious god of it and the people who are already feeling insecure about their work are not going to be helped by these attitudes* (23W).

While some were very confident in their decision to avoid discussing the term, others were more conflicted:

*I am a little torn on this issue. I don’t discuss it overtly but it’s underpinning everything I do and the expectations I have of students. I’m concerned that it’s such an individual journey and I would never want to interrupt it by making it too visible. It’s a private thing* (3C).

Some participants in this category substituted creativity with other terms they consider more helpful, such as ‘imagination’:

*We don’t unpack creativity in direct ways. We talk about being imaginative…. to arrive at creative solutions to something which might mean something unexpected, a lateral leap of some kind* (5V).

Similarly, another participant commented: ‘We steer away from creativity. We talk about imagination and how you can make it work for you’ (21W). Others used self-reflective activities as a substitute: ‘I get students to engage with their own notions of creativity, their own processes, and what’s novel or unique about them – to develop confidence in their own voice’ (7W), or ‘I encourage students to reflect on their own “wow” moments’ (1F).

### 6.1.2 Unpacking creativity with students

By contrast, an approximately equal number of participants in this study felt strongly that it was important to unpack with students the notion of creativity. Four key strategies for unpacking creativity were identified from the data as follows:
(a) Dialogue
Participants commonly discussed creative work in class with students, unpacking what is interesting or distinctive about the work, its novel or unexpected qualities, how it may have come into being, and comparing it with other work. Students were also commonly prompted to discuss the source of their creative ideas, how they’ve developed and where they might be heading. Participants also spoke about unpacking the language of creativity or terms used commonly in marking criteria, and discussing them in class with exemplars and comparisons. In the context of design, one participant explained:

I get them to bring in a product that they really love and explain to the class why [they selected it]. We discuss what’s creative about it. Why it’s really special. I get them to bring in really naff things too. Sometimes they are beautiful to look at but the function isn’t right. So they get to understand that creativity is about combining the form and the function into a satisfying whole (13D).

(b) Modelling
Some participants described a strategy of modelling their own creative processes and decisions, as case studies in creative practice. One participant described this process as follows:

I play for them. Understanding can move ahead much faster by me demonstrating rather than describing. Often in orchestras the bass may only have one or two notes. You can play them technically well, or you can start to innovate and add interest – same two notes, same timing, same intonation, yet very different effects. There’s a danger in this however, so I want to be more and more on the sideline, not showing them what to do (15M).

This participant referred to the danger of students becoming dependent on the teacher’s expression of creativity, rather than developing their own. Thus she viewed this technique more as an induction technique than an ongoing teaching strategy.

(c) Creativity processes and techniques
A small number of participants described specific exercises or techniques that are taught in the classroom to expand students’ understanding of creative processes. One participant commented that:
In the past we just said “You’ve gotta be creative” and left it to them. But I think you have to guide them more about what it means. We unpack divergent and convergent thinking and the creative process itself, and the importance of making time for reflection and research. Also we use techniques such as brainstorming, using random words, the flower technique, De Bono’s creative thinking (4D).

(d) Debunking myths of creativity
Some participants stressed it was important to address misguided romantic or popular notions of creativity: ‘the image of the artist in the garret, the tortured creative soul, the idea of the creative muse with inspiration only coming in rare flashes of insight’ (9W), and so on. These ideas are replaced with an emphasis on sound creative processes underscored by a culture of ‘perspiration rather than inspiration’ (9W).

Here we see a rich variety of ways in which students are inducted into the world of creative practice. The concept of creativity was woven into the daily fabric of teaching and learning activities of many participants in this study. These findings resonate strongly with studies reported in Chapter 2 (McWilliam, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Sternberg 2007; and others) about the diversity of approaches to teaching creativity in universities. McWilliam (2007, p. 1) argues, for example, that creative thinking and problem solving skills can be taught, whereas other aspects of creativity still remain somewhat ‘idiosyncratic and mysterious’. Jackson (2008) identified five common approaches including permission and encouragement; tolerance of ambiguity; intrinsic motivation; collaborative working environments; and reflexivity.

Yet questions arise in this study about the significant divergence on the issue of unpacking creativity with students. This divergence is perhaps a little less dramatic than it first appears. Those participants who avoid talking about creativity with their students were in no way ‘lesser’ teachers. It was clear that they were demonstrably vibrant teachers who were keenly engaged in inducting students into their fields, prompting student reflexivity about their own creative processes, and encouraging them to find their own creative voices. Their reluctance to unpack creativity directly with their students suggests concerns about the word itself, given its cultural complexities spanning almost a century of research and popular speculation.
In addition, many participants who avoided unpacking creativity were also clearly concerned about overwhelming or inhibiting students. They believed that constructs of creativity and creative processes are essentially highly individualised and personal. Some avoided the term, it seems, because of their own lack of confidence with the use of the term. As discussed in Chapter 3, much of the scholarship in creativity emanates from the sciences and psychology and does not readily communicate with practitioners in the creative arts. Moreover, it is a complex field without agreed theories, models or definitions and it is evidently not easy for teachers to distil a ready explanation for students.

### 6.1.3 Unpacking creativity – a case study from Music

One participant (15M) had gone to extensive lengths to devise her own model of creativity that she used regularly as a teaching tool in the classroom. Her aim was to problematise creativity, and to provide students with an inspirational holistic model of the creative musician and the various elements that they need to work on to explore and develop their creativity. She represented creativity as a concept comprising three key elements: technique, musicianship and courage. Within ‘technique’, she listed a range of technical skills such as breathing, dynamics, articulation, accuracy, sound, posture, and stage presence. In ‘musicianship’, she listed a range of interpretative abilities such as imagination, taste, phrasing, passion, rhythm, contrasts, and charisma. In the third category ‘courage’, she lists a series of personal qualities such as confidence, discipline, generosity, passion, humour, personality, liberty and philosophy. She described this model as an intensely personal expression of the creative musician, which encapsulates her thirty-five years of experience as a performer and teacher in a European music academy.

Clearly there is a spectrum of responses amongst participants to the question of whether or not to unpack creativity with students. These differences related to a range of issues, including disciplinary differences, personal philosophies and the experience and confidence of the teacher. In this case study, the participant arrived at this model after many years of reflection about music teaching and a somewhat existential journey:
As a musician, as a teacher, as a person, I wonder what is it all about? Why are we producing all these sounds, refining our detail, worrying to get the notes, tuning and re-tuning our strings...? (15M).

She questioned this further, in an excerpt from an unpublished poem she wrote, which was provided during the interview:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Is the point} \\
to have fun? \\
to comfort the listeners? \\
to please the critics? \\
to satisfy the musicologists? \\
to help the composers? \\
to learn more repertoire? \\
to play better together? \\
to get away from it all \\
by indulging in music?
\end{align*}
\]

During our interview she reflected further:

I started to worry that my teaching was becoming drowned in details and practicalities – this obsession with accuracy. I was worried that the art of truly communicating would get overshadowed by the sport of playing well. The point is to get beyond the bare production of correct notes and sounds, to make the music independent of gravity and logistics. To make it float. To be giving. To be personal. That’s the point. That’s what I want to convey to my students. (15M).

Like most accounts of creativity, this is a personal and relatively subjective one. Yet in this account we find a teacher who has clearly struggled with the essential nature of the creative endeavour; to find the right words to communicate with her students about the nature of creativity in a way that seeks to inform and inspire them and to set explicit goals and expectations.

### 6.2 Fostering creative environments

When questioned about the kinds of environments that are conducive to creativity, most participants focused on the psychological climate rather than the physical. Although physical environments were important, most reported they had little
capacity in higher education to alter the brick and mortar, or even, by and large, the furniture in existing teaching spaces – albeit that some participants were fortunate to be occupying teaching spaces with contemporary purpose-built design. The single most significant factor mentioned by participants in relation to creative environments was the maintenance of a vibrant *studio/workshop culture*. The studio or workshop was seen to be at the heart of the learning experience in the creative arts, in which students experienced a series of planned and spontaneous interactions with teaching staff and other students. Student work is discussed and reviewed during these events, and feedback is provided in a range of formal and informal ways.

### 6.2.1 The studio/workshop

The central purposes of the studio/workshop, according to most participants, were to (1) establish trust, (2) build the confidence of students, and (3) provide a safe environment in which students can take risks with their work:

*Creative writing classrooms are very different from others – it’s essential to build trust and you have to understand that at times people will become very upset or stressed. Most people write very personal material, particularly to begin with, and they touch upon emotionally difficult areas. They have to know they can trust the class with the material (9W).*

Many participants similarly commented upon the importance of building trust due to the personal exposure and speculative nature of the work in the creative arts. It is important that students believe that they will not be penalised or ridiculed for risk-taking practices that don’t succeed. If a culture of safety is established early, participants noted how students’ confidence develops and they start to find their feet as creative practitioners:

*I believe that confidence building is a huge predictor of academic and creative achievement. Building confidence is a motivational issue that allows them to develop courage and perseverance through the creative process (1F).*

### 6.2.2 Collaborative and activity-based learning

A further important aspect of the creative environment is collaboration:
Students have different backgrounds and experiences and can help each other. It really shows in student work. They get used to talking about their work and having it looked at, and the day-to-day communication is important and influential (20D).

Participants commented on the importance of the studio as an informal means of seeding ideas, engaging in peer discussion, receiving feedback, and becoming familiar with the discourses of the field. One participant referred to the notion of ‘studentship’ as a criterion on which students are assessed:

It’s about turning up, being active in the studio and engaging in collaborative activity. It’s a difficult thing to monitor and assess, but we see it as being fundamental to fostering creative environments (1F).

A number of participants referred to a common strategy of activity-based learning in class to foster creative environments:

It’s very much about doing. We tell them beforehand that you have to be prepared to participate, to do practical activities, to write stuff, to read it out, to deal with people’s criticisms and absorb people’s responses. That’s the deal (25W).

In a similar vein:

I try guided visualisation that gets students focusing inwards before they do anything else. On a topic they visualise how they might turn that into physical movement. I ask them to write about it and then perform it. Visualising, writing, doing is the cycle (3C).

One participant spoke about the delicate balance between structured creative exercises and free-form exploration by students, and the way in which that shifts as students gain maturity and confidence.

6.2.3 Constraints on creative environments

A few participants commented upon the difficulty of establishing creative environments in higher education, referring particularly to growing class sizes and corresponding growth in student anonymity with less opportunity for one-on-one attention to students. As one participant commented:
It’s incredibly difficult to foster creative environments in universities because everything seems to work against it. You’ve got assessment, set teaching periods, you’ve got mixed and large classes (9W).

Another commented upon the nature of risk and creative effort in higher education:

Isn’t it extraordinary how creativity is such a risky business for students? Young children just do it. It ushers in the whole question of creativity in universities. I think it’s more than just a tension – it’s an active conflict. We talk about this in class (28W).

The risk referred to here is one of failure, and for students it was not just an issue of potential exposure or embarrassment. It was also a concern that risk-taking may result in poorer grades and, therefore, diminished opportunities upon graduation. It was evident that there was also an element of risk for teachers in fostering creative environments. Some participants talked about the problems of fostering creativity and risk taking in a university environment that is focused upon compliance, along with declining budgets that require the processing of undergraduate students as efficiently and inexpensively as possible.

6.3 Feedback on students’ creative development

Connected with the question of how students are inducted into creative processes, and how creative environments are fostered, is the key question of how students know whether they are developing in appropriately creative ways.

6.3.1 Short and long term dimensions

Participants reported that students’ creative development had both short-term and long-term dimensions. Short-term development is usually about how a specific project is proceeding in a semester-long module or unit. Longer-term development related to a student’s creative trajectory over a whole program of study, or over a much longer time as a creative professional. Although most participants were very interested in the longer-term development of their students, the demands of the short-term, including
scheduling, outcomes and assessment, tended to occupy most of their time. As one participant commented on the competing pressures of the short and long-term:

*I talk with them about their creative development. The course they’re doing for twelve weeks is only a small part of their development as a writer. They often need much longer than that time to develop and find voice to their creativity. It’s hard to mix the creative development of individuals with the need for scheduling and assessment (9W).*

With the modularisation of university programs, some noted that it is more difficult for both teachers and students to form a longitudinal perspective on creative development.

**6.3.2 Group and peer discussion**

Most participants in this study facilitated group environments, such as workshops or ‘crit’ sessions that aimed to provide guidance and feedback to students, stimulate debate and discuss creative development. Discussion in these environments revolved around technical and creative issues, with the aim to motivate, inspire, prompt critical thinking, self-evaluation, and experimentation. These discussions were often a mixture of formal and informal exchanges:

*As part of an art school we live and breathe student projects – they are all complex and diverse and we need to be on top of them all. Students get a mix of developmental feedback from casual conversations, formal crit sessions, peer review and written feedback at various points in the project (17V).*

Appropriate facilitation of workshops was viewed as critical to ensure that students get the most useful and motivational kinds of feedback. One participant described her process as follows:

*I make descriptions rather than judgements. ‘What I see you’ve done here is to...’ and check then with the student that you’ve interpreted it correctly. ‘Have I seen what you wanted me to see?’ I get students involved in this too. Students aren’t allowed to say ‘I really liked it’. They have to be more analytical and describe what they see. And then we probe further about choices, dynamic qualities and so forth. Students learn how to accurately describe and evaluate a performance which is constructive for everyone (3C).*
Peer review was also considered to be a key element in students’ creative development. Participants noted that students learn to be very astute judges of work and that, in the right environment, students learn well from each other. One participant described this phenomenon:

_Students themselves are aware about who are the best students in the group and why – over and above our own assessment of them. And there’s a great deal of respect for them. It’s not because they get good marks – it’s because students see the creativity and specialness in the work (4D)._ 

Some participants spoke about providing training in constructive peer feedback, including discussions about purposes of feedback, appropriate language, timing, balance, and issues such as generosity and shared endeavour in the group crit process. Participants noted that students learn over time to be much stronger and more articulate in assessing their own creative development.

### 6.3.3 Tensions in critical feedback

The provision of feedback to students in the creative arts was not without a range of dilemmas. Participants spoke about a key tension: while students are hungry for as much feedback as possible, it can also be crushing for them and can act to extinguish rather than foster creativity:

_When I’m providing feedback in first year, there may be any number of suggestions and criticisms I can make, but it’s not always useful to them at that point. I have to be very selective and judge what they are able to absorb and act upon constructively at that point in their development (23W)._ 

Participants commonly reported complex decision-making around feedback that was dependent upon their knowledge of individual students and their needs and ambitions. Tensions mount as students progress and the emphasis in feedback swings from the developmental to the judgemental:

_In their final year the feedback is more hard-hitting and critical. Some of them fall apart. So it’s not an easy balance. The conflict is between what we know will help their creative development as individuals – feedback and encouragement – and the benchmark standard that is public and judgemental (4D)._
For most participants in this study, the way in which feedback was provided on creative development was part of their personal signature as a teacher. It also was closely related to the class atmosphere they fostered, the style of dialogue developed, and the rapport created between learners and participants. For example:

*I aim to develop a trust with students over time so that if I make a really critical comment they will recognise the honesty and respond to it with honesty. In this way I can really support their creative development and see them fly* (3C).

A few participants reported that they had been scarred, to a degree, by their own experiences of receiving seemingly brutal feedback during their training, and that they were determined to avoid that culture in their own teaching. Some participants actively chose to minimise their feedback:

*I don’t give much feedback unless they ask for it. And maybe there’s just one thing I will say that is useful to them that they are able to take in at that moment that will stay with them* (24M).

Comments such as this were based on a concern that students could become dependent upon the teacher for feedback when they were ideally attempting to foster a culture of student self-assessment and autonomy as a creative artist.

**6.3.4 Tensions in student responses to feedback**

Participants were divided on the degree to which students were able to successfully receive and respond to feedback. Variable factors included student motivation, enthusiasm and engagement with the program, which may fluctuate in individuals from semester to semester, and also extended to issues such as talent and commitment:

*I think maybe only fifty percent of students really get it. They’re the ones who are already thoroughly engaged with you – they ask questions, discuss their work, there are no surprises in their feedback. Assessment for them is just part of the dialogue. For the remainder – the other fifty percent – it’s variable. They are tuned in at some points and not others. Their work may be partially going well, but they have chronic problems that they aren’t resolving* (4D).

However, some participants also recognised that poor or disappointing feedback could really fire a student:
I’ve had students who can be absolutely crushed with the feedback they’ve received, but they’ve taken real risks. We speak about risk-taking and why it’s important. The failures teach you the most. The successes you just move on from, or repeat ad infinitum because it’s safe. This particular student’s next piece of work was fantastic (3C).

At the other end of the spectrum, participants noted that there were students who do not seem to have the capacity, regardless of the nature of the feedback, to improve their work:

Sometimes we get sad little questions from students about how to improve their work. You feel like saying ‘You need a new head’. It’s sad because ultimately it’s not about feedback or following suggestions – some just have that flair and others don’t (4D).

The data in this chapter thus reveals that feedback on students’ creative development, for these academics, was occurring in a variety of ways – both short and long-term, written and oral, teacher driven and peer driven, formally and casually, and as a part of formative and summative assessment events. There were a variety of opportunities, depending on individual learning preferences, for differing forms and timing of feedback on development.

This data sits in significant contrast to much of the literature discussed in Chapter 3 about the student experience of assessment, and in particular, the student experience of crit sessions in the visual arts (McKillop, 2006; Blair, 2006; Blythman, Orr and Blair, 2007). In these studies the student experience of formative assessment was seen to be an overwhelmingly negative one, characterised by extreme nervousness, anxiety, pressure, poor facilitation and overly critical feedback. This disjuncture suggests that there may be considerable differences in perception between teachers and students about how constructive and benign the developmental process actually is for students.

However participants in this study were by no means blind to aspects of developmental feedback that were problematic for students. A number of participants noted that students absorbed, with varying degrees of success, the expectations of
their teachers. Students launched into a creative project, and then discovered that the landscape had changed:

_They thought they knew what the expectations were and then they get feedback on progress and the landscape shifts and they become confused or uncertain. They may successfully navigate this, often to their benefit. Or they might also become angry, defensive or just disengage. The experience, communication skills and sensitivity of the teacher is a critical factor in all this, but it’s a minefield (1F)._ 

Another participant (2M) commented that the most intensive area of student complaint is the lack of clarity about expectations, noting that in the UK it has been a sector-wide problem in the creative arts. He expressed some ambivalence about the issue:

_I’ve seen instances where I’ve heard teachers unpack their expectations and I’ve really winced at their abstract language and lack of clarity. Yet I’ve also seen fantastic models of that too. I’ve also seen students in those briefing sessions being totally disengaged and then get shocked later when they don’t get it and will get defensive and blame the teacher. In between those two extremes, there’s a whole lot of exemplars with varying degrees of culpability on the part of students or lecturers (2M)._

The metaphor of a ‘minefield’ (used by 1F) seems to characterise many of the tensions revealed here in relation to fostering and assessing creative work. This section has explored the particular tensions experienced by teachers in fostering creativity and their efforts to inspire and not deflate students; to respond with honesty but also with considerable sensitivity; and to prompt and suggest without directing student effort. Clearly there are subtle balances to be struck that require a great deal of skill, experience and sensitivity.

### 6.4 Designing summative assessment methods

A further critical element in the overall constructive alignment of a course is the appropriate choice of assessment methods that are valid and also congruent with the
kind of learning that is being fostered in the program. Participants were asked about how they went about designing their summative assessment tasks and the factors that influenced their choices. Participants spoke with great enthusiasm about the methods of summative assessment employed in their programs and their reasoning for adopting particular approaches. Their choices of assessment tasks and patterns of assessment across a program were impacted upon by four interconnected factors:

1. the educational philosophy and goals of the program;
2. the traditions of assessment within the discipline;
3. participants’ own experience of assessment as a student; and
4. the changing culture of higher education.

These four factors are considered in turn below.

6.4.1 The educational philosophy and goals of the program

Summative assessment choices of participants had a clear relationship to the overall goals of the program in which they taught, and by implication, an educational philosophy and approach. In particular, a key factor was the degree to which the program aspired to vocational or industry relevance, in contrast to programs that were more oriented towards a traditional academic experience.

Programs that claimed a highly vocational approach aimed to produce work-ready graduates who could be quickly absorbed by relevant creative industries. Summative assessment items in these programs were designed to develop strong industry skills and were conducted in the most lifelike, authentic conditions available. Typical patterns of assessment included simulated creative events such as performances, concerts, auditions, compositions, exhibitions, publishable written work, objects designed to specifications, presentations or ‘pitches’ to clients, and so forth. At the extreme end of this approach were a small number of programs that were modelled on the conservatory approach, principally in dance and music. The conservatory tradition echoes an era before the creative arts entered universities, in which education was viewed as practical training. Programs modelled on this approach tended to operate with differing approaches towards teaching and assessment. Typically assessment was embodied in end-of-year performances that comprised most if not all of the student marks (in contrast to continuous or process-based assessment models). These ‘high-
stake’s assessments, it was argued, mirror the reality of creative artists’ professional lives. Marks for evident good process were considered unnecessary as:

*we believe that the effort and application is evident in the work on the day – those who work very hard are rewarded by the final assessment. If they haven’t put in the effort they won’t have the nuances required to do really well in assessment. It’s all about steady application (3C).*

More typical, however, were programs that provided a blend of practical and theoretical dimensions, with an equal concern for both traditional academic rigour and industry employability. In contrast to the ‘high-stakes’ tasks, these assessment schemes in these programs tended to offer a spread and diversity of assessment items, to develop a variety of graduate skills and attributes appropriate to the contemporary practitioner in the creative arts. Although creative project or performance work remained the focus of assessment, evidence of process was an important part of the summative assessment.

Participants who adopted this blended approach had a very strong commitment to assessing and rewarding students’ development of good process. ‘Process’ was seen as the research, conceptualisation and development of the creative product which is evidenced through student work in portfolios, logs, reflective journals, drafts, and participation in critique sessions. Participants generally felt that it was important to assess process as a way of instilling and providing feedback to students on their developing professionalism, along with the methods and discipline that underpin sound practice. Moreover, it was seen as a way of rewarding risk-taking when the finished product was not satisfactorily realised. Participants were keen to reinforce the idea that not all risks pay off, but that they are fundamental to the creative process and to students’ development as creative artists. By assessing process, teachers were able to give recognition to risk-taking elements of student work quite independently of the success or otherwise of the finished work.

Process-based assessment schemes took a variety of forms, with a shifting relationship between process and product, depending on issues such as student development and progression. For example:
In earlier years we have a heavier emphasis on process rather than end product. In first year, approximately 70% of students’ final grade is based on process assessment such as a reflective journal, work in progress, professional conduct, and 30% is based on their final performance. This weighting shifts by third year so that the reverse is true – 70% is based on their final performance (30F).

Although all assessment tasks in these schemes are summative, in that students are earning marks, there is a clear underlying shift in the intent of the assessment, from the more formative and developmental in students’ early years, to the more summative and professionally-oriented in final years.

6.4.2 The traditions of assessment within participants’ disciplines

When designing assessment, some participants admitted to being strongly influenced by traditions within their discipline, which gave particular and recognisable form to the assessment scheme. For example;

In choreography, it’s principally about performance. Each student will make a piece of work, perform it and be assessed on it. There’s two different sets of skills: there’s the skills of being able to stand outside as a choreographer and direct and evaluate what’s happening; and then there’s the skill of performing your own work which is quite difficult because you can’t stand outside of it and evaluate it. This comes when students are advanced (3C).

In the visual arts a common pattern emerged that comprised of: (1) a proposal for a creative piece; (2) crit sessions in which work-in-progress is discussed among peers (3) a mid-semester review, where formal feedback is provided, and (4) an end of semester presentation of the finished work along with an exegesis or written statement that contains scholarly reflections upon the outcomes and influences of the work. This was a flexible assessment pattern that could be expanded or contracted according to the scale and time span of the project.

In the field of design, a similar pattern emerged, comprising: (1) research and initial ideas; (2) development of ideas through 2D and 3D modeling; and (3) a presentation of finished product with written self-evaluation and critique. In creative writing,
patterns of assessment were focused upon drafting and re-drafting of creative work, with iterative feedback provided through workshops and peer review, culminating in the presentation of a finished work and a critical commentary.

Most disciplines in the creative arts seemed to have familiar patterns of assessment that have been shaped by disciplinary traditions and are built upon the processes inherent in creative production in the field. Yet innovation was sometimes evident as well:

*We use a range of methods that steer away from the standard model in creative writing: case studies of the working methods of a writer; exercises that give dramatic form to random incidents, research and interview tasks; pitching to publishers, collaborative activities, and so on. These are authentic real world tasks to make them aware of what professionally might interest them (20W).*

Although most participants were keenly aware of disciplinary traditions, many were enthusiastic about innovations to assessment that seemed more relevant to contemporary professional life and provided a closer fit to industry demands:

*We adopt a mixed assessment approach that includes presentations, group work, essays, written analyses, reports, performance, pitch to a client, slide tests, research journals, personal development journal – more or less every form of aural, visual and oral presentation imaginable. Our philosophy is to find as many ways as we can to both engage them and allow them to communicate with us. This is a graphic communications course so we’re trying to get students to be excellent communicators in industry settings (4D).*

### 6.4.3 Participants’ own experience of assessment as a student

As briefly mentioned earlier, a few participants spoke about the various degrees of trauma experienced in assessment during their own arts training. It was noted that some creative arts assessments became, inadvertently, ‘exercises in humiliation where tears were often the order of the day’ (3C). In their own practice, they were concerned to break down this ‘school of hard knocks’ culture, where critical feedback was often received by students as a personal attack rather than as a comment on the work. These participants were seeking a softer, more balanced assessment scheme, with methods
that were more diverse, and that spread the assessment load, and the resulting tension, over the semester, rather than a single, high-stakes task at the end.

A few participants further noted the mystery associated with assessment in their own undergraduate experiences, without the benefit of a rationale for particular tasks or the provision of criteria upon which judgements were made. These reflections highlighted, for some participants, the necessity to address these deficiencies in the way they designed and administered assessment in their programs.

6.4.4 The changing culture in higher education

Many participants observed that their assessment schemes were affected by changing institutional culture and resourcing constraints, and more broadly, by reforms to higher education felt both nationally and internationally. A range of issues were raised, most particularly the impact of the learning outcomes movement in higher education that has required a closer examination of the ways in which their assessment methods are linked and explicitly aligned with intended learning outcomes. While most participants were not comfortable with the degree to which creative outcomes are now to be anticipated in the form of expressed learning outcomes, they were mostly happy with the way in which assessment tasks had become sharper and more focused as a result of the alignment process and their intent was therefore more transparent to students.

It was also noted that the growing influence of the graduate attribute and transferrable skills movement had led to a significant broadening of assessment types:

A creative writer cannot these days just be content with good craft as a writer – they have to pitch and market their work, they have to collaborate with other authors and editors, they need to be articulate about issues and may often join in public discourses (23W).

Many participants recognised that their graduates pursue a variety of career directions, some of which are difficult to anticipate and cater for in curricula and assessment. Yet it was generally considered that a broad suite of graduate skills was necessary for any graduating student entering the creative arts professions.
Some participants mentioned declining resources as a key issue in their choice and design of assessment methods. It was noted, for example, that in some instances it was necessary to set more standardised tasks for students because the degree of individualised assessment was very difficult to maintain. Creative arts faculties, it was noted, were struggling to maintain budgets and services and were under pressure to cut costs in program delivery.

A final issue was the changing nature of students themselves, combined with the growing importance placed on student satisfaction data in academic career progression and quality rankings. One participant noted that graduates in the UK have consistently rated their assessment experience in creative arts subjects below the national average over a number of years. He questioned this trend and speculated on its likely cause:

As a discipline we have striven to find a place in academia and achieve that respectability, but we have taken on these forms of work that are unnatural and irrelevant to students, such as lengthy text-based dissertations and exegeses (1F).

This participant argued that it was essential for creative arts academics to be far more creative and relevant in the way they conceptualised assessment methods, which should be more coherent to students, while maintaining the rigour of a university experience.

Hence, this data would suggest that academics in the creative arts balance a range of competing tensions in the design of their assessment schemes. Disciplinary traditions sometimes sit uncomfortably with individual desires to be bolder and more innovative in assessment design. A concern for ensuring academic ‘respectability’ of assessment tasks comes into conflict with a competing concern that assessment tasks have real-world relevance and application. The relative merits of assessing process and product, and the impact this might have on risk-taking culture, was an ongoing tension for many. The desire for maintaining a tradition of personalised assessment sat uncomfortably alongside the current economies of higher education that have required larger classes and more standardised teaching of undergraduate students. Participants in this study chartered their own particular journeys through these competing pressures and tensions.
While acknowledging from time to time the problematic positioning of creative arts in the academy, along with the irritations of University policy and economies, participants mostly considered they still had some room to move; to make their assessment scheme their own, and to foster an assessment climate that was largely conducive to creativity.

6.5 Developing criteria and standards to accompany tasks

Hand-in-hand with the design of assessment tasks is the complex and often problematic issue of developing criteria and standards by which judgements are made about creative works. Like assessment tasks themselves, criteria and standards need to be aligned to ensure that the elements of the task are clear and consistent with overall objectives and intended outcomes. Criteria flag to students what is expected and valued in an assessment task, and standards explicate the corresponding levels of achievement or performance, represented often as bands such as High Distinction, Distinction, and so forth. This section considers initially how participants develop criteria and standards, how they explain and communicate their expectations to students, and finally, concerns that participants raised about these issues.

6.5.1 The process of developing criteria and standards

While most participants reported developing criteria as a solo activity, some undertook this work as a collaborative task with academic peers. Collaborative development of criteria was seen by these participants as an important developmental activity for academic staff in the program; a way of moderating each other’s understandings and expectations about particular tasks and drawing out areas for discussion where there was a divergence of views. One participant commented that the collaborative development of criteria was:

...a nice process, because it was done in a collegial way – we argued but made compromises. It also allowed for a lot of discussion across the sub-disciplines about what and how they teach which was very interesting too. It was a great staff development activity (17V).
Another commented that:

We’ve worked hard at our learning outcomes on modules. So we really know the sorts of things we’re expecting and then the assessment criteria really have to be aligned with the outcomes. So students have common goalposts, yet there’s much latitude for their processes to be very different and individual. We have to be open to individuality (13D).

Notably, in one instance (5V), students formed part of the academic committee that developed schemes of assessment criteria.

Criteria and standards were developed in particular ways according to the circumstances of the program. Some were devised holistically across a program. In one visual arts program (17V), for example, there were six levels of objectives and matching criteria, which corresponded with each semester of the program. This provided a gradated structure that set out standards and expectations as students progressed through the program. In this exemplar, the criteria and standards were expressed so as to be generic to all sub-disciplines in the program, including such diverse activities as printmaking, sculpture, glass, painting and graphic design. The challenge, it was noted, was to enable the criteria to be generic, yet still have meaningful application in all sub-disciplines.

These whole-of-program approaches to criteria and standards, however, were relatively rare. Often program structures did not provide this opportunity, and student progression was not this defined or sequenced. Some participants developed specific, tailored criteria for each assessment task, but sought a common approach to similar tasks in other subjects within their program. Criteria significantly varied according to the intent of the assessment task or whether it was an early developmental task or a completed creative product:

At proposal or first draft stage the criteria are weighted toward the developing ideas and the potential of the piece. The criteria for the finished piece of work are weighted towards how successfully they’ve realised their ambitions and how effectively they’ve engaged with feedback, taken on ideas and improved their work as a result (6W).
In creative tasks there was a range of common criteria that were employed. In creative writing, for example, ‘we tend to focus on originality, or whether it’s a good read. And then we break it down with words like, interest, maturity of work, characterisation, ideas, and so on’ (28W). Originality was cited as a key criterion in the assessment of most creative work, yet the similar term ‘creativity’ rarely appeared as a criterion. As one participant explained: ‘we do not have a specific criterion for creativity, but it is really a part of nearly every criterion. Creativity is really more a level of performance or standard than a criterion’ (20D). Similarly, risk-taking was not often cited as a criterion, but ‘it is implied in other criteria such as originality’ (21W).

Participants generally worked hard to develop criteria that expressed the elements of creative work they valued and wanted to elicit in students. However, there was a certain circularity in the use of particular terms, and avoidance of others, that clearly related to problems of definition and articulation of creativity discussed earlier.

Further difficulties were revealed in discussions about standards, and the interaction between standards and criteria. Standards were rarely articulated as part of their written assessment schemes. Rather, they were something that were discussed in class, or in markers’ meetings, or in feedback provided to students. They were generally viewed as too complex to document or embed in the assessment design. For example:

I explain standards in the class. I rarely give a HD for a piece of work and I explain to students what a HD is in my books: it’s a piece of work that is complete that doesn’t need any further work, and has successfully realised its ambitions with sophistication and depth and insight into character, place, and narrative structure (6W).

6.5.2 Unpacking criteria and standards in the classroom

Many participants recognised the importance of discussing and explaining criteria with students, acknowledging that much of the terminology used in criteria and standards are subjective in nature, and require much further explanation than just a simple list:
When we unpack the criteria in class and talk about how to approach a task, much of the subjectivity falls away, because I think we arrive at some kind of shared understanding about what’s expected and how they will be marked (27W).

One participant argued that it was essential to use criteria in one’s teaching:

*It’s part of the whole teacher/learner conversation. It’s also a big part of the interaction amongst tutors as well when marking student work. An understanding of these terms becomes part of the culture of the place* (28W).

These comments have strong echoes in the literature, particularly the work of Sadler (2005; 2009) and Price and O’Donovan (2006) who argue for the importance of closer student engagement with criteria and standards. Sadler (2005), in particular, argues that standards have a certain mystique that may work to reduce transparency and promote a dependency relationship by students on the judgements of others. Rather, Sadler argues that students should be developing the expertise to make their own professional judgements of quality, in a similar vein to Eisner’s (1991) concept of ‘educational connoisseurship’, discussed in Chapter 3. Many participants in this study were alert to the value of assessment criteria and standards as teaching tools in the classroom, to enable students to deepen their understanding about expectations, and to engage with professional standards.

### 6.5.3 Degree of specificity of criteria

When devising criteria for specific creative tasks, participants reported a significant dilemma in deciding the degree of specificity of the criteria. For example:

*We’ve explored the possibility of complex breakdown of criteria – you see it at some universities – tick boxes for all kinds of different aspects of the performance – technique and skills, presentation, interpretation with sub-descriptors for each. We do that to a degree, we use them as prompts, but don’t require marks to be attached to each one* (2M).

Similarly, another participant noted:

*We have tailored criteria for each task, although there’s similarity across the program. My aim is always to shave the criteria down to a minimum and to give a degree of simplicity to them* (28W).
Most participants spoke out strongly against criteria that became too fine grained. A typical comment was:

_We make the criteria as clear as we can but also leave them as open as possible because what we really want the student to do is something that we could not have imagined. We want them to totally break through our expectations. You could argue that learning outcomes are meaningless, because what we want them to do is something that you can’t articulate. It isn’t until they’ve shown us what they can do – that extraordinary thing – that we know what it is._ (22V)

This comment articulated much of the frustration felt by participants with the learning outcomes movement prevalent in most Western universities, and it also signals how criteria can derail the creative process. As another explained:

_You can over-describe criteria. There’s a point at which you can’t explain, or it’s not helpful to students. They start to become very small picture and compliance focused. It’s a question of academic judgement – what is optimally useful for the student at that point in their creative development._ (21W)

In an early iteration of her attempts to grapple with marking criteria, one participant foundered in her efforts to use creativity as a criterion:

_We used to assess creativity quite explicitly with the criterion ‘the imaginative leap’ – something we hope they’re all doing in their work. But we dropped it because we couldn’t really nail it. In a world of outcomes based education, we couldn’t assess it with the required transparency and explicitness._ (10W)

Yet most participants were not necessarily opposed to assessment criteria. As one participant argued:

_I am in favour of criteria – students have the right to gain detailed feedback and transparency. But there is an important role of intuition and intuitive responses when assessing work. I like very simple criteria: Technique, Music, Artistry. But then if you have a whole lot of sub-criteria it becomes confusing and difficult to separate. You get so busy as a marker that you’re not really taking in the performance. You’re losing the forest for the trees._ (15M)

As discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, the value of criteria in the creative arts, and the appropriate degree of specificity of criteria and standards are areas of controversy.
Leading creativity researchers (Amabile, 1983; Sternberg 1988; Canatella 2001; Kleiman 2005) argue persuasively that criteria and standards are antithetical to creative outcomes, because they encourage replication and formulation rather than innovation. Yet most participants in this study, it seems, would accord with Boulter’s argument (2004) that despite the flaws and hidden assumptions evident in criteria, it is vital that assessment judgements have a level of transparency to enable students to understand expectations, prepare for assessment, engage with professional standards and, if they so choose, appeal results.

6.5.4 Implied or hidden criteria

Participants were asked about hidden criteria, the potential for which becomes more possible if criteria are under-specified or minimalist in nature. One participant argued that there are potentially many hidden criteria – an example cited was ‘political correctness’:

*Clearly you couldn’t have that as a criterion and yet it is an important one in terms of publishing standards and material that might be deemed offensive. We can discuss this in class and problematise it. Someone will say, for example, ‘I want to include an Aboriginal character but I’m worried about cultural stereotyping issues’. We’ll then have a rich discussion about it. But I don’t want these things to become explicit criteria as it would be crude and might be taken as a form of censorship (6W).*

The ‘wow factor’ was often cited by participants as a special, defining feature of some students’ work, particularly those in the very high bands of achievement, yet is rarely explained or specified in criteria. One participant compellingly explained it as follows:

*‘Wow’ is not its own criteria – and yet it’s what we are all hoping for. It’s a fusion of everything. It’s in the chemistry of the work and how it comes together into a satisfying whole. ‘Wow’ happens in a couple of different circumstances – when the student has done something very professional. Also when there’s surprise. It goes beyond our expectations. It also happens sometimes when a student is visibly struggling, but then pulls a rabbit out of the hat. But how do*
you define it? How do you reward it? Most teachers can’t really tell you that. They just know it when they see it (1F).

This final phrase – ‘they know it when they see it’ – is revealing in that it represents everything that is tacit and, according to conventional assessment theory, unacceptable in relation to issues of explicitness, accountability and transparency in assessment. According to theory (for example, Rowntree, 1977; Biggs, 2003), if assessors know it when they see it, then they should be able to describe it, analyse it, and unpack it with students through assessment criteria and discussions. Participants in this study frequently agreed that to attempt to unpack elements like the ‘wow’ factor is almost tantamount to destroying them.

Many participants felt that not all the various elements of complex assessment judgements were able to be formularised into criteria. Transparency, it was felt, may be more an aspiration rather than a reality. Hidden criteria, inevitably, were a part of the daily reality of students’ assessment experiences. The following comment tended to typify participants’ views:

I try to be full and frank with students that criteria aren’t always absolutely transparent. It happens in professional life as well in publishing houses. I don’t like being mystical about it, but there’s various aspects of transferring words to the page that are sub-textual, and are just not describable and quantifiable. If you tried to prescribe things you would end up with pages of criteria that wouldn’t be helpful. Some things you can be prescriptive about – like technique. But it’s good to encourage them to plunge in and have a go, and then get feedback on it. Assessment is after the fact – you can’t front end it all with criteria like it’s painting by numbers (21W).

These comments offer a significant critique of traditional notions of transparency in assessment, and echo the comments of Orr (2007) discussed in Chapter 3. Transparency, it is argued by Orr (2007), is a concept that implies perfect control and total explicitness and belongs within a positivist or ‘techno-rationalist’ assessment paradigm. In the creative arts, it is argued, such transparency is not possible given the complexities of language and the tacit nature of practice.
Herein we encounter a further tension in participants’ decision-making around assessment. Participants in this study were balancing the need to provide students with appropriate cues about assessment judgements, and to be accountable for their decision-making, yet also to avoid the over-specification of criteria that becomes formulaic and counterproductive to the creative process.

### 6.5.5 Rewarding student effort

Participants were divided on the issue of student effort - whether it should be included as a formal criterion in creative work, and thus form part of a student’s grade. One participant argued forcefully in the affirmative:

> When I develop criteria I do try to include effort. Effort is important as it demonstrates discipline and I suspect that those who have this will have longer careers perhaps. You do have students who can create fantastic pieces of work with very little effort and you can’t penalise them for that, but I’m hoping criteria will catch and reward effort (17V).

Another argued with equal force in the negative:

> It’s got to be assessed on the end product rather than the effort. There’s so many different variables that can impact upon effort that we don’t really know about. Ultimately, it’s what they do with it and the end product that is judged (14D).

Most participants considered that student effort was important, yet it should not be assessed as a formal criterion. Some argued that it should be rewarded as a by-product of process-based assessments such as portfolios where evidence of effort can be more reliably measured than simply the perception of the marker:

> Effort is assessed through the portfolio assignments and their participation in class – you can see if they’re reading, critically thinking about things, struggling with ideas, engaging with others (P18).

Yet others expressed concern with this approach:

> This worries me. We have students who fill up their portfolios with lots of research and reflections but haven’t worked at being creative. At times I say you won’t get marks for fatter portfolios. Their research should be appropriate,
not necessarily lengthy. The process should be authentic not manufactured. I
don’t want them to jump through hoops – it’s antithetical to creativity (13D).

Another participant expressed concern about the quality of evidence available when
attempting to assess effort:

In the visual arts you see that effort is assessed, particularly as you can see the
students working in the studio and you can actually see the effort that is going
into something. It’s rather more difficult, however, with creative writing. You’re
hoping it’s going to be there but you have to base it on the finished product. It
would be unjust and also very hard to measure these things separately (27W).

Some participants considered that effort is naturally rewarded by the quality of the
finished work:

Effort is essential to mastering the medium of ceramics – you won’t get there on
talent alone. In early years there’s less emphasis on finished work, but in latter
years their work must be judged on the quality of outcomes alone (17V).

The issue of student effort and how, if at all, it should be explicitly acknowledged and
rewarded was thus a contentious issue in this study. Participants, it seemed, struggled
with this tension because clearly they valued student effort, and many were
instinctually inclined to reward it, yet they were concerned about the validity of
evidence required to make robust, defensible judgements. This may lead to somewhat
arbitrary or ad hoc decisions, as evidenced in one participant’s comment: ‘I don’t
have effort as a criterion, although I will consider it when determining a grade, but
only when they’re on the margins’ (9W). In this way, marker perceptions of student
effort can become a hidden or tacit part of their grading decisions, and potentially
another part of the hidden curriculum.

6.5.6 Creativity and failure

As seen in the prior section, creativity is rarely specified as a criterion. Rather, it was
viewed as a standard that infuses many criteria. For example, in creative writing,
criteria may include plotting, characterisation, narrative structure, and so forth. For
each of these criteria, student achievement was to be judged according to the degree
of creativity and imaginative power that is brought to the piece, along with the
success of the technical or craft components.
However, the question arises about whether it is essential to demonstrate significant creativity to progress through a program in the creative arts. Is student effort, combined perhaps with a level of technical competence, but without any significant creative outcomes, sufficient to pass a subject? In other words, can students fail for lack of creativity; or lack of acceptable creativity?

Many participants acknowledged that there were always students in their program who, for whatever reasons, were unable to exhibit much creativity in their work:

_There are students with good technical skills but are not taking risks or imaginative leaps. The work they produce will be technically competent, and that will be rewarded, but they will only end up with fairly average marks overall_ (17V).

Another participant argued that ‘it’s unrealistic to expect creativity of all students … It’s not a pass or fail thing. It’s a bonus when it happens, but it’s not do or die’ (23W).

Most participants, particularly those in the creative writing field, argued that high levels of creativity in an undergraduate program are relatively rare, and that it was quite challenging for students to demonstrate an understanding of the techniques of storytelling and be able to competently produce them: ‘I’ve only had one or two students over the years who I would say their work is singing off the page’ (25W).

This participant also noted that an absence of creativity or dullness is often related to:

_...some aspect of technique that’s not working. There’s quite clear things to do with craft, pace, sentence writing and structure that can dramatically improve the dullness factor_ (25W).

One participant from the visual arts expressed concern that their criteria were designed so it was very difficult for students to fail:

_They get marks for process and studentship, irrespective of whether they flopped with their creative work. It worries me that sometimes failure is necessary for big creative and artistic growth – finding your voice_’ (1F).
Participants in this study implicitly distinguished between two kinds of failure in the creative arts. The first kind of failure was the modestly competent but uninspired pieces of work or performances, where the student had failed to take risks or imaginative leaps. The second kind of failure was where students had taken risks – perhaps quite substantial and desirable ones – but that these risks significantly failed in their final resolution. While the latter is encouraged and the former is accepted, neither is necessarily tantamount to overall grade failure because of the range of other outcomes that are assessed in most undergraduate programs.

The issue of failure presents a further tension for creative arts educators who welcome student risk-taking and failure as an inherent part of robust creative process. Clearly participants would like to encourage risk taking and the associated learning from failure, yet they accepted that, in the competitive culture of higher education, failure was overlaid by many more negative connotations, as well as practical implications for student grading and progression. These issues are pursued further in later chapters of this thesis.

6.5.7 Criteria and program philosophy

A few participants reported that critical internal debates emerged in the setting of criteria that lead back to the philosophy of the program and foundational questions about what is really valued and rewarded. One participant (1F), for example, referred to the tensions in his animation course whereby employability skills were rewarded at the expense of experimentation. This particular program was accredited with a government agency that required very defined sets of measurable skills outcomes. These outcomes, however, sat uncomfortably with the existing program objectives relating to risk-taking and open experimentation:

Right at the heart of the philosophy of art teaching is resistance. We have a lot of debate about the collision of these issues. You have government agencies wanting us to be fodder for big business and very commercial filmmaking (1F).

This participant argued that, irrespective of the rhetoric of a program, the criteria accompanying assessment tasks became the very clearest delineation of where a program stands on these issues, and what is practically valued and rewarded.
6.5.8 Criteria and the stultifying of creativity

Participants were divided on the question of whether criteria actively stultify creative impulses in students and create a culture of compliance. Some participants noted that criteria might stultify some aspects of creativity, yet the trade off, on balance, was acceptable. For example:

> Not all works are required to have high-end originality. Particularly if it’s a commercial brief with particular constraints – it’s more about appropriateness than creativity. Criteria provide important signposts in a complex environment. Without the structure and guidance they provide the students could easily be entirely at sea (4D).

On the other hand, a number of participants felt that student engagement with criteria was often disappointingly minimal, or selective: ‘To be brutally frank, I don’t think students engage much with marking criteria’ (23W). These sentiments were echoed by another:

> To be honest, I think about half the students make strategic decisions around criteria. They will focus on some things that they can gain marks easily and glide over the harder things like innovation or experimentation (14D).

Some participants considered it to be an issue of confidence and maturity with individuals:

> Students who do produce those really imaginative works, I don’t think they get limited by criteria. But students who are less confident who stick closely to criteria probably wouldn’t be doing adventurous work anyway (17V).

This comment was echoed by a number of other participants, one of whom felt that:

> ...if students are immersed and motivated, then the criteria are simply there to support what they’re doing. If they’re bored or not enjoying the process, then they start nitpicking through the criteria in a way that tries to satisfy with the minimum effort or involvement (13D).

At the other end of the spectrum, there were students who will ‘privilege the creative plunge over everything else’ (10W) and who may also have only minimal engagement with criteria.
However, most participants agreed that there was a role for criteria to provide some structure, guidance and transparency, with the important proviso that criteria were not over-developed or specified:

If they’re written in the wrong way then, yes, they can be stultifying. Very definitely. If they’re too dogmatic about what you must do. Also if they accentuate individual academic preferences, or if they give students routes to follow, then that would impinge on creativity. Criteria shouldn’t stultify creativity. It’s how they’re used. Criteria should be as developmental as your teaching – a way to help with student understanding and learning (14D).

A couple of participants commented that while they did not think criteria particularly improved or impacted upon creative outcomes, they nevertheless improved the student experience:

If they know what’s expected it gives them the freedom to know that they’re supported and what the goalposts are. There’s less anxiety. But in terms of student performance, there’s so many things going into the mix it’s hard to say whether criteria make much difference (17V).

Although the literature is largely critical about the negative impact of criteria and standards on student creativity (Cannatella, 2001; Beghetto, 2005; Kleiman, 2005; Cowan, 2006; Orr, 2007; Buss, 2007; Jackson, 2008), most participants in this study seemed to have found acceptable compromises in relation to the use of criteria and standards within assessment schemes. While participants recognised many of the negative aspects of criteria, including a concern for formularising creativity, and the inability of language to encapsulate all expectations, they mostly argued that there were still positive and important principles supporting the use of criteria. Particular amongst these were the ideas that criteria provided a vehicle for discussions about expectations and professional standards, and also that they provided a degree of accountability to students about how assessment judgements were made.

6.6 Concluding discussion

This chapter has explored how participants have fostered and negotiated creativity in the classroom. Its particular focus has been on how students are prepared for formal
assessment, including: (1) how creativity is unpacked with students; (2) how learning environments are facilitated to support students to develop their creative ideas; (3) how students gain feedback on their creative work-in-progress; and (4) how participants plan and prepare for formal assessment, including the devising of assessment methods, and the development of criteria and standards to accompany assessment tasks.

The findings in this chapter are notable for the series of tensions that participants needed to balance when facilitating creative work, providing feedback and preparing for assessment. The tensions, as discussed in this chapter, are summarised below.

In relation to feedback on student development, tensions were noted in:
- providing detailed supportive feedback versus prescribing students’ creative directions;
- providing judgements on quality versus creating a culture of dependency on teacher judgements;
- providing robust feedback that motivates versus feedback that crushes student confidence or creative impulses; and
- providing individualised feedback versus the need to standardise feedback with larger class sizes.

In relation to the design of assessment methods, tensions were noted in:
- assessing fixed learning outcomes versus seeking the unexpected in student work;
- disciplinary traditions of assessment versus innovation in assessment design;
- traditional academic tasks versus real world and industry relevant tasks;
- individualised assessment versus standardised assessment.

In the development of criteria and standards, tensions were noted in:
- fixed criteria and standards versus criteria negotiated through individual projects;
- the benefits of rewarding process versus the benefits of rewarding end product;
- perceptions of student effort versus the qualities evident in the finished outcome;
• the desire to reward risk-taking versus students’ concerns about failure; and
• the desire to promote learning through failure versus the negative construction of ‘failure’ in higher education culture.

This chapter has documented and analysed how participants have navigated their way through this complex terrain. In particular, it reveals the decisions and choices they make, and what principles and issues underscored their decision-making. It was clearly very important for participants to create valid and robust foundations for the assessment of student work, both in the preparation of students and the design of appropriate assessment schemes. Yet inevitably, debates and differences abound, arising from participants’ own personal beliefs, philosophies and experiences, along with the broader forces of institutional change.

As a result, participants’ assessment schemes, with accompanying marking criteria, represent a complex distillation of what they valued and sought to reward in student work. They were sometimes forged from collegial debate, steering between competing needs and conflicting paradigms to reach acceptable compromise. There was an evident concern among participants about getting these things as ‘right’ as they possibly could, not only because they wished to provide the best possible signposting to students, but because they lived with the many consequences of these schemes.

Many participants were alert to unintended consequences of their assessment practices, particularly as they impacted upon students’ creative processes and preparedness to take risks. This demonstrates a close engagement with the complex nature of cause and effect in assessment design, discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. It also shows a nuanced sensitivity towards what Boud (1995, p. 39) describes as the ‘coded messages of assessment’ and how students respond to these signs and signals in sometimes unanticipated ways.

In this thesis we have so far examined how participants conceptualised and explained creativity to students, how they fostered creative learning environments, provided feedback and planned and devised assessment schemes. We now move to the final
data chapter to explore how participants make judgements about the quality of student work.

**CHAPTER 7**

**MAKING JUDGEMENTS ABOUT STUDENT WORK**

**Introduction**

In this chapter we explore the issues and dilemmas in making judgements about students’ creative work. Key issues will be considered regarding the inherent subjectivity of creative work, how teachers make fair, consistent and reliable judgements about such subjective material, and whether they are able to set aside their personal tastes and preferences.

The chapter commences with participants’ explanations of how they go about their marking and decision-making processes. Participants explain their intuition at work, how this relates to their professional expertise, and also how they navigate the complicated terrain of interpreting criteria and standards. It explores moderation processes and collegial interactions about the quality of student work, with a particular focus upon the operations of assessment panels and juries.

**7.1 Processes in making judgements**

Participants talked with some enthusiasm about the variety of ways in which they go about their marking and decision-making processes. The marking processes described in this section are individual ones, in which the participant is the sole marker, before moderation processes come into play. Panels and juries, which are essentially collaborative decision making processes, are considered later in this chapter.

Typically participants described a process of laying out the creative work and getting a sense of the quality and standards across the student cohort. In design, for example, one participant stated:
I lay them all out on the table and get a really good feel for them as a whole. I get a gut feeling and in my mind I tend to grade them according to the three bands. Then I check each piece of work against its respective folio. It’s very much at first about gut feeling – but then I investigate each work and test my gut feeling to see if it holds up (14D).

In creative writing, where written scripts are being assessed, participants commonly described a process of marking as follows:

I first do a read through and do a line edit. That’s the first process. Then I cogitate – is it working? What problems are there? I look at it as a whole. Is it a satisfying piece in its own terms? Is it just not working at all and why not? Then you have to do a lot of work - the dialogue is wooden, things are overstated, clichéd, etc. My overall grade is weighing up the things I really like about it, even if it has heaps wrong with it, and what I didn’t like about it (21W).

One participant described how he fixed upon a grade as he read through a piece of work, and how that grade fluctuated as he progressed:

I have a graph in my mind which, by the time you’ve read the first page, you set a point on the graph, then as you read on it might go up if the work gets better. Then it might go down again. If it started off pretty good and then it gets better, it might go over the 70 mark. Then you’re thinking if this can be sustained through to the end it might be... but no, it’s not, so it drops back down again (23W).

Participants had developed a range of quite individualised processes derived from their own experience that informed their marking activities. Such processes clearly combined a diagnostic role (how could this work be better?) with a summative, evaluative role (what grade does this deserve?). The creative component of the work often provides markers with a significant challenge:

I often find it hard to identify what isn’t working in a creative sense. It’s just not coming alive for me. But you have to try. Looking at sentence structure, it’s a little slow on the page. Syntax. I can give some hints and directions but can’t always nail what they should have done. It’s easy if it’s just clichéd, but it’s harder if it’s decently written (21W).
These accounts provide a rich picture of the complex nature of the marking process. Of particular interest is the way that various interconnected elements vied for attention in the markers’ minds as they formulated a judgement. An interesting aspect of this is the role of intuition, or ‘gut feeling’ that helps markers shape an initial impression of the work. This idea is explored further below.

7.1.1 Intuitive responses

One participant, in graphic design, provided a particularly vivid account of how she encountered a new piece of student work:

>I think the very first moment is a purely emotional or intuitive response – which is probably the least safe of all. I really love the velvety richness of post-modern design. So even before I even decide whether it works or not, I can be seduced by it, and I also really love calligraphy and contrasting pieces of type, so that’s something that immediately hits me. It’s personal and emotional. Then the next thing that happens is to do with originality. Because we teach very similar projects from year to year, we get a lot of clichés. So if a student can produce something original then it’s very noticeable. Newness is very fast to notice. Then I would start to engage my brain directly to decide how it is functioning as a piece of design – what does it mean, how is it communicating, technical features. I’d drop back to the technique and craft (4D).

Participants variously described their intuitive response as being about pleasure, the occasional wow factor and a kaleidoscope of sensations about texture, colour, fabric and design. Intuition often provided participants with an immediate sense of the quality and creativity in the work:

>You get a sense straight away that it’s skilful, or it’s beautiful, or it’s grotesque but so exciting. Others you have to explore. The body of supporting documentation reveals another layer. You can have an instantaneous response, but I don’t think it’s any more subjective than the works you need to explore more (22V).

Another participant (6W) noted that one can easily pick the works that are going to get the high distinctions, or first class grades, and those that are going to fail. The
students in between can be broadly banded through initial impressions, but often require much more scrutiny to arrive at a considered judgement.

### 7.1.2 Holistic versus analytical marking

Participants’ comments revealed that they tended to employ a combination of holistic marking (based upon overall impressions) and analytical marking (fine-grained judgements based upon criteria). While initial, holistic impressions were influential in their overall judgement of the quality of the work, analytical marking schemes were seen to support and verify, or sometimes contradict, initial impressions. As one participant noted:

> Most of the things I notice in my initial response are covered in the criteria, but I find it a little difficult to separate them out at first. It’s a holistic impression I have. Then I track through the criteria and start to be a little more analytical about the elements (14D).

This dance between holistic and analytical marking echoes the debates encountered in the previous chapter about marking criteria: How specified and fine-grained should criteria be and, ultimately, how useful are detailed criteria when making judgements about creative work? When making judgements, participants were divided on the usefulness of fine-grained criteria with some preferring a minimum of criteria so that a more holistic, impressionistic judgement prevailed. Others were less trusting of their initial impressions and felt it was necessary to support one’s judgement with a detailed analytical response against each criterion:

> I always go to the criteria – detailed criteria saves me, particularly in situations where I might be struggling with not finding the work visually or aesthetically pleasing (17V).

Some, such as the following participant, sought the middle ground on this issue:

> We do that to a degree, we have very detailed criteria, but don’t require marks to be attached to each one. Markers still give an overall mark under each of the main headings and use the rest as prompts (2M).

The fear for some participants was that the more fine-grained the judgements became, the more one loses sight of the integrated whole, and that this conveyed to students a
false sense of exactness in the derivation of grades. As one participant commented: ‘The trouble with the tick-box method is that a student can come back to you and say that, ‘well, you ticked this box and so therefore I get a distinction right?’’ (23W).

These comments echo many of the concerns reported in the assessment literature in Chapter 3, notably Kimbell’s (2009) critique of marking practices in the creative arts. Kimbell’s argument, in essence, is that atomised, analytical marking of creative work strays into a form of ‘pseudo-science’, and that overall impressions provide the most accurate and reliable way of making judgements. There is considerable further weight from the literature for this view (Nightingale and Magin, 1996; Morgan et al., 2004; Sadler, 2009) but also, as previously noted, there are countervailing pressures on academics in the creative arts to undertake fine-grained, criterion-based judgements for a variety of assessment purposes including ranking of student merit, student appeals, progression to higher awards, awarding of prizes and scholarships, and so forth.

As part of the learning outcomes movement in higher education, most participants in this study have been required in recent years to develop detailed, analytical marking criteria to accompany assessment tasks, for the purposes of greater reliability, transparency and accountability in assessment. It has been interesting, therefore, to explore how these are being adopted and used in practice. Many participants in this study revealed a confidence in the role of intuition and holistic impressions when assessing the quality of a work. Yet reference to articulated criteria and standards was seen as an important safeguard, as a way of double-checking that initial impressions were accurate and robust. Many were wary of fine-grained or formulaic judgements as the primary means of deriving a grade, yet there was a considerable amount of uncertainty and variance among participants about how holistic and analytical marking approaches interact to derive a final grade for the student work.

### 7.1.3 Setting aside personal aesthetics

Interconnected with an assessor’s intuitive response is the issue of personal aesthetics and taste. This is a critical issue in relation to perceptions of subjectivity and fairness in creativity assessment. Participants were asked about their own personal taste and
aesthetics, and how they interacted with their decision-making process. ‘There is a lot of debate about this’, responded one participant. ‘Everyone will say that your personal taste is always present, so how do you make a judgement that isn’t based upon your personal taste?’ (3C). Most participants recognised this as an important issue that needed to be actively confronted as part of the process of making judgements. A typical comment included:

I find this hard. I do have my personal preferences and aesthetics, for example I really enjoy cross-cultural literary works and I’m really not very keen on works of fantasy as a genre. But it’s really important not to mark a work down because of my own personal taste. I do bring my own experiences and personal aesthetic into the class – this is part of what brings me alive and gives passion to my teaching. But when I’m assessing I look at the quality of the response with a lecturer’s hat (9W).

The metaphor of ‘switching hats’ was employed sometimes by participants to describe the process of setting aside their own personal tastes and biases. One participant (10W) described the many different hats she might wear as a marker in creative writing – including the professional publishing expert, the more subjective, personal response as a reader, and the detailed eye of the editor and proofreader. She argued for the importance of being able to move consciously between roles as appropriate:

As assessors I think we have to negotiate this. There’s the ‘process hat’ and the ‘product hat’. When I’m assessing process I adopt a reader’s perspective, a collaborator, a guide. It’s where a lot of the creativity happens so I don’t want to bring in too much judgement. But when I’m assessing the final product, then I’m looking at the work from the perspective of the qualified expert, the professional publisher (10W).

All participants in creative writing were keen to point out that, while they have personal preferences in relation to particular genres, their professional obligation is to help students develop to the best of their abilities in any chosen genre:

Sometimes I feel that if I have to read another piece of adolescent chick-lit I’m going to expire, but it’s my responsibility to ensure that I understand this genre and can give the most professional feedback to help the student do the very best work they can (21W).
Similarly, in the visual arts, a participant elucidated the principle of treating the work on its own terms:

\[\text{Whether I like the work or not, I look at what it’s doing. Aesthetically I can go ‘Urgh!’}. \text{ But hopefully there’s something about what they’ve achieved that is still exciting. Of course I have my preferences and some work I find pretty daft. But I think over the years I’ve really learned to appreciate what’s dynamic and challenging across all the disciplines and processes involved in fine art (22V).}\]

A few participants commented upon the occasions when there were more visceral reactions to the creative work:

\[\text{You can walk into a room and think … oh shit – it’s hideous, and then you just have to park that judgement and look at it on its own terms. What were you trying to achieve? What’s the context? What has been achieved? Maybe this becomes easier with experience, but if it’s your first time as an assessor you will need to understand this straight away: It’s not a judgement of taste (17V).}\]

Similarly, another participant described the ‘Are you kidding?’ moment:

\[\text{I’ve heard this said on panels. ‘Is this person serious?’ It might come from someone who has fairly conventional taste or art background seeing, say, a scatter installation in a sculpture department. The panel leader will then take the time to ensure that it’s understood that there are practice traditions, the kinds of constraints, and how we judge whether it’s succeeded or failed. In this place there are nine art disciplines so, as an assessor, you have to be able to shift gear and conduct assessment as openly as possible (5V).}\]

Although there is some literature about hidden assumptions, biases and ideological preferences that become evident during marking of creative work (Leach et al., 2000; Boulter, 2004; Orr, 2007)) there is little in the literature about how these issues are regarded and addressed by academics in the creative arts. Although the relatively small sample size in this study would preclude any generalisations about sector-wide norms in practice, the data suggests a very strong sense of the heightened awareness of this issue among participants, and the strategies used to minimise the concerns of bias and personal taste. We see the interaction of two common elements; (1) the acquired professional expertise of the assessor, engaged closely with (2) their sense of professional responsibility to students and their creative works. The assessors’
professional expertise or connoisseurship enabled participants to cast an evaluative eye over creative works of any genre within their discipline with sufficient knowledge of context, technique and conventions to understand and position the work, to provide feedback on progress, and to make summative judgements about its quality. Their professional responsibility required them to set aside, as much as humanly possible, their personal tastes and preferences, and to evaluate creative work on its own merits, relative to industry expectations and the intentions and aspirations of their students. (As referred to in Chapter 4, it is noted that as participants recruited to this study were all experienced teachers and assessors of creative work, no comparisons can be made in relation to age and experience).

**7.1.4 Employing professional expertise**

Given the evident importance of professional expertise and connoisseurship to the decision-making process of assessment, it is important to consider how this has been acquired, and how it is employed during assessment. Most participants described their professional expertise as the sum total of a lifetime of professional experiences. In relation to assessment, participants commented that they had been judged themselves as students, and continue to be judged as practising artists or writers. They are regularly called upon to judge in professional contexts, such as awards, scholarships, prizes, and contests. In addition, they have developed a body of experience as assessors in higher education in which they have engaged in debates and extensive moderation procedures, and have been exposed over time to a variety of student work. As one commented:

*I have a lot of industry experience, not just in academia, but in writers’ groups and in the publishing world as an editor and also providing commercial feedback to aspiring writers. I know that it’s valuable. I feel confident that I can make professional judgements about student work. It feels a little like teachers’ professional judgement has been undermined in recent years and we have to stand up for it. We can make professional judgements about this (25W).*

This participant felt the learning outcomes movement, and the demand for greater explicitness and accountability in assessment had contributed to an undermining of teachers’ professional judgement.
Another participant provided an account of how professional judgement comes into play:

You’ve got in your mind the brief and the criteria, and you have your professional experience watching all sorts of different things. It’s a case of this all coming together. But of course it doesn’t always come together – sometimes you struggle and think I’m not really sure about this piece. Which is when it’s really useful to have the criteria at hand. It’s terribly unscientific, but what proves that it works is that if you have a group of 20 students and consistently your colleagues each get the same approximate marks for maybe 18 of those 20. You see it working – that professional experience does carry weight. It’s like an intuitive, embodied knowledge that you can’t measure, but it’s there. And it’s clearly there because it’s demonstrably shared (3C).

In creative writing, most participants felt particularly confident of their knowledge of industry standards and expectations:

I feel very confident in providing feedback to students along the line of: ‘this is an interesting idea that you’ve developed but it wouldn’t get published for X and Y reasons’. I know this because I work with editors. I have had a lot of children’s books published. I know what the requirements are. You can make judgements about how the marketplace might receive your work. You can say if it’s original. You can comment accurately on the craft. You can talk about potential and steer it in certain directions. You can make judgements about all these things with fair degrees of accuracy (18W).

While most participants in this study had close affiliations with their communities of practice, and well-grounded claims to professional expertise, some participants expressed discomfort about assuming the role of ‘expert’ in assessment, particularly in discussions with students:

There are many examples of students with very average grades during the course who went on to have outstanding careers in a field. So what does that say about our judgements? (1F).

This participant argued that it is important to retain a degree of skepticism about one’s capacity to consistently and fairly make judgements about creative work, and that the
role of the expert implies a degree of accuracy or objectivity that may not always be possible. He considered this an important issue to discuss with students:

*I try to topple myself early from the role of expert, and even in assessment I will say my job here is to make some value judgements with the best of my professional expertise. I think we have to be wary of our notions of expertise* (1F).

While acknowledging the important role of his professional judgement, this participant expressed a desire to establish an appropriate culture and realistic expectations in the minds of students about the nature of judgement making in assessment. This issue is pursued in some depth in the next chapter of this thesis.

**7.1.5 Training and induction of assessors**

While experienced creative professionals are generally well versed in industry expectations, they are not necessarily well versed with the university assessment context and culture. Participants discussed the various difficulties and pitfalls for the new assessor. Commonly participants found problems with marking that was either too hard or too generous. For example:

*As part of the mentoring process for new markers, I will explain to them that you’re not doing students any favours in their creative development by over-praising or rewarding with marks. A marker will come to me with a distinction assignment and I’ll say – look at all these mistakes and problems, you can’t give this a distinction. It’s sending all the wrong messages to the student about their need to get things right* (18W).

On the other hand, another participant commented that inexperienced assessors tended to fall into the trap of assessing too hard, because they had a need to show how rigorous they are. Moderation and panel processes were generally cited as the most effective way of inducting new markers into the role: ‘*it becomes an educational process for the newer academic about how judgements are made and the kind of discipline and debate that is brought to the process*’ (19V).

In the case of external examiners, usually from industry or professional backgrounds, training in university assessment is a more sensitive issue. As one participant commented: ‘*...to try to train them would appear a bit condescending as they are our*
peers on our level’ (15M). Yet it was hoped that ‘they are people who just know our standards. They may be from another institution or an orchestra, but they studied here perhaps...’ (15M). It was evident in this study that training and induction of inexperienced assessors was unsystematic and often ad hoc in nature. This led to problems in relation to the consistent interpretation of criteria and standards when judgements were made. This issue is developed further in the following section on moderation.

7.2 Moderation processes

Participants reported a variety of moderation processes that were largely tailored to meet the needs of the discipline, and to a degree, the size and capacity of the program or faculty. Juries and panels have a long tradition in the creative arts in the assessment of artworks and performance. In panels and juries, moderation of assessment occurs through collegial discussions and deliberations on the quality of the work. By contrast, in creative writing, assessment was reported as being a largely private activity as markers work individually on student scripts. In creative writing, participants commonly reported that moderation tended to occur before grades were finalised, typically taking the form of double blind marking of a sample of scripts across the grade range. The practice is briefly considered below.

7.2.1 Double marking

Participants who were involved in assessing written scripts reported an array of double marking practices, although there were subtle variations depending on issues such as the degree of experience of the marking team, and their familiarity with the assessment task. One participant described a thorough moderation process for creative scripts that entailed three phases as follows:

I meet with the tutors before the assignments are in, to discuss what we are expecting in the work. Then we meet again as the marking is progressing, just to discuss any issues. We double mark as necessary. Then we meet again at the end when tabulating marks to iron out any final issues. At the markers’ meetings we look at the consistency of marks across assignments in a subject –
if there are significant inconsistencies I will investigate to make sure that there’s been no over-generous marking (18W).

When a marking team had been working closely over a number of years, and achieved a confident and consistent level of consensus about interpretation of criteria and standards, moderation processes tended to become a little more relaxed. In such instances, double marking may only occur for high distinctions and fails, and works that are on the margin between grades. As one participant reported:

Nearly always you find yourself in agreement with the first marker, but it can be sometimes useful to check that there isn’t a halo effect around a particularly good student and that their work genuinely deserves the mark. It’s like a fresh take on it (23W).

Similarly, another participant expressed concern that sometimes her judgement might be ‘clouded by issues such as whether the student has been a pain in class or not. Sometimes it’s tricky to step back from this and a second opinion is valuable’ (14D).

Apart from occasional instances involving inexperienced markers, where whole batches of student work were re-marked, participants reported very few problems with double marking processes. They often commented on the consistent level of agreement about grades, or the relatively minor degrees of variation, that gave them confidence in their consistency and reliability as markers. This reportedly high level of consensus among markers of creative work is a consistent finding of this study and will be discussed further in this chapter, in the context of assessment panels and juries.

7.2.2 Peer assessment

Another form of moderation was often found in peer assessment. Peer assessment is a regular feature of the creative arts occurring in writer’s workshops, visual arts ‘crit’ sessions and music workshops. Work is read, performed or viewed by the group and feedback is commonly provided by other students as well as by the facilitator. Rarely, however, in this study, were there marks associated with this feedback that contributed to a student’s grade. Peer assessment was largely used for formative
purposes, not only for the recipient but for the provider of feedback as well. As one explained:

*There are difficult students who are overly critical but this is not usual. Generally they are way too nice with each other. I have to encourage them to be more critical and break through the fear of offence. It’s about distancing – to be sufficiently distant that they can take and give criticism without it being personal (21W).*

Similarly, another explained: *‘I model how to do it and give them some training in the form of guidelines and criteria. The mantra is that you’re assessing the writing not the person (9W).*

Giving and receiving feedback in this manner was considered to be an important skill for students to develop in the creative arts, as it mirrors many professional relationships that develop in their working careers, such as writer-editor, musician-producer, and artist-curator. The ability to discuss works and provide feedback that was constructive yet frank and professional, on creative work that was often highly personal, was considered to be a complex and sophisticated attribute that should be fostered and modeled during students’ undergraduate years. Some participants also articulated another element of peer assessment – the importance of multiple voices and viewpoints in the feedback process. This contributed to the richness of ideas in the creative process and also relieved the assessor from being the lone voice of praise or critique and the lone arbiter of quality.

### 7.3 Assessment juries and panels

In the visual arts and music, and many other creative disciplines where performance or demonstration is inherent in the work, juries or panels are often constituted to make an assessment. Panel assessment is, in effect, a moderation process, because it entails discussion and debate among panel members before a grade is agreed upon. In this study, the extent of the use of panels and juries tended to vary according to the size of the faculty. In larger faculties, panels were often assembled to assess all relevant creative outputs, whereas in smaller faculties this was often less viable, and tended to be used only for major outputs such as end-of-year performances or concerts.
7.3.1 Composition of panels

Panels were commonly comprised of between two to six members, depending on the significance of the assessment event. Commonly they were comprised of in-house faculty with occasional outside examiners to provide external moderation. External examiners were either visiting academic staff from another university, or practicing professionals in the field. Participants noted that in music conservatories it was commonplace that experts in the students’ field assessed performances, so if the student is a pianist there would be a jury of pianists to assess the work. However in universities there was rarely sufficient depth of expertise in one area of musical practice to staff a whole panel. As one participant noted: ‘this gives rise to complaints by students and also by teachers who are unhappy, say, that their piano students are being judged by a horn player, etc, etc’ (2M). This participant introduced a system whereby every assessment jury had at least one relevant specialist expert, and also someone who performed in the genre, such as classical or jazz, in another instrument. A third panel member in this system may not necessarily be a specialist in either the relevant instrument or the genre.

Considerable care was evident in panel composition, due to concerns about the capacity of assessors to judge unfamiliar work, and also the perception of fairness in the minds of students. Another participant commented that a ‘mixed’ panel ideally brought additional rigour to the process:

There are issues about who the assessor is and what their background is. Some may be a combination of professional educators and performers, some may be largely performers and not much educational experience. Others may be strong educators but no performance experience. They bring different slants to the process and can see things differently (1F).

Regardless of their background and the particular strengths they brought to the panel, one participant argued that there was a particular ‘order’ to the jury process:

Firstly you need to know what your assessment philosophy is. It needs to be then reflected in your assessment descriptors and methods and criteria and all those
sheets and proformas that are used. Then, thirdly, you have to train people to use them well (2M).

7.3.2 How panels work

The following description provides a typical account of how panels operate in visual arts:

*Often consensus is arrived at very quickly because we’re all used to the process and generally we’re in agreement. Whether it’s a sculpture or a painting you get a fairly good sense straight away of where the student has attempted to position themselves in the field, and how successfully they’ve been able to bring it to fruition. The student talks to the panel for 10 or 15 minutes and that’s when they locate themselves theoretically; what they’ve been reading, etc. The panel members, usually 4 or 5, discuss the work with the student and then the student leaves the room for the grading discussion among the panel (5V).*

Similarly, in dance performance:

*There’s always at least two and often three, including an external examiner on the panel. This morning we had a panel of three for a major assessment. After each performance we make an individual estimate, and then we compare notes at the end and discuss it if there’s any significant difference. On the whole, we’re bang on, apart from one or two [differences of opinion] (3C).*

The discussion amongst the panel often helped participants to moderate their initial impressions and to give a more considered response:

*At undergrad level, you don’t often see things that you haven’t seen before, so there is a history and precedent. In post-grad assessment you see things that you haven’t thought about or assessed before so you need a little time to think about it. You have a dialogue in your head, and then a dialogue with the other assessors (17V).*

Although there was a broadly common approach, juries and panels in this study tended to operate slightly differently in some key areas: the degree to which the discussions of the jury were private or public, whether or not there was an individual or ‘blind’ grading process before panel members openly discuss a work; and finally, how a final grade for each student was derived. In relation to the latter issue, some
panels averaged the marks of each assessor to arrive at a final grade, whereas others sought consensus through discussion to reach a shared grade. This was a critical distinction in relation to panel process, as the need to reach consensus generally created greater opportunity for debate and disagreement, in contrast to the ‘agree to differ’ approach. Yet it would be wrong to assume that even in this latter model there wasn’t robust discussion:

*Often with the really good pieces of work there is little debate. Everyone tends to agree on these. It’s the poorer students’ work that often attracts the most debate about whether to pass or fail. We usually continue the debate until we reach a compromise position that we are all comfortable with, or somebody may beg to differ for the record. The grades given by individuals in the panel are averaged so that, in itself, forms a compromise of everyone’s input* (19V).

### 7.3.3 Areas of debate and disagreement

Typically, participants observed that there were differing perspectives on panels, differing levels of experience and types of expertise, so there was usually robust discussion and occasional disagreements. One participant attempted to quantify the level of significant disagreement at approximately 10% of cases. Another cited 15% as the norm. One participant similarly commented: ‘in a cohort of 10 we will agree on five, and the other five are discussed and consensus is reached. Maybe only 1 or 2 will lead to deep disagreement’ (30F).

However, most participants described serious disagreement as ‘rare’:

*Occasionally, only now and then, you’ll get a wild disparity in assessment – one will give it an A and another will give it a D – and then there’s a gasp in the room! How have we got it so wrong? And then the markers will feel almost obliged to defend their position. It’s very exposing for people and leaves them very vulnerable* (1F).

Another participant commented that:

*When there’s a disagreement it seems to be colossal. I might give something a top of 2/1 and someone else the bottom of a 2/2. Mostly we’re quite close but sometimes people come from quite different directions. Some people who teach in this course started off as filmmakers, others typographers. So they see*
different things in the work. It’s very interesting. So we have to have arbitration. We get a third party in (4D).

Participants commented that the disagreement, whether major or minor, tended to revolve around the intrinsic merit of the work:

*Disagreements may be about the particular qualities of students’ works that aren’t up to par. Sometimes students produce work which is creative but a well-worn pathway and not pushing anything. Maybe their conceptual framework or research has been too narrow, not stepping out of their practice. Sometimes it’s a lack of imagination, or understanding about what a critical process is. Maybe it’s our own fault sometimes; that we haven’t directed a student in the right way or haven’t pushed enough (17V).*

Differing perspectives also arose due to panel members’ differing areas of expertise:

*The technical specialist might say ‘well, you might think that there’s great wow factor in this, but a big part of this module is about concrete skills’. And then the other will reply that ‘the student has developed a technically sound piece of work, but in addition has taken risks’. Others will weigh in with another argument and they talk their way through to an agreement. That would be a typical discussion (1F).*

Most participants shared the view that these kinds of discussions were, generally, valuable and an important part of their professional development. As one commented:

*We try not to be too adversarial about it. We keep going back to the work itself. It’s quite a good process to go through because you get to feel the edge of things and you can come away from it with a stronger take on standards (28W).*

Another noted that when there are striking disagreements, it causes everyone to critically reflect on their judgements and the assessment process: ‘You wonder what’s going on here? Is this where we’ve got a personal taste thing going on? Or some kind of unspoken take on what’s good and what’s bad?’ (23W). Another commented that disagreement might expose some flaws with the marking criteria or the team’s lack of shared understanding of expectations of students. This may lead to re-drafting of assessment tasks or clarification of marking criteria.

7.3.4 How disagreements are resolved
Participants reported that there were reasonably well-rehearsed processes in place to resolve differences on panels, although good panel facilitation was also critical to achieving resolution. When there were only small differences between panel members, compromise was readily found: ‘Pragmatically speaking, if one marker gives 55 and another gives 50, we will be usually happy to split the difference and give 53’ (14D). If the difference was more marked, panel members will put a particular point of view or make a case:

We usually each put up a good argument. Sometimes if you point things out to another they will say, ‘Oh yes, I see that now. I didn’t realise that’. If there’s no ground given then the head of team is called in. She’s very impartial and she will also call in an external moderator to help make the final judgement. This is pretty rare (14D).

There was much evidence in this study to suggest that most panel disagreements were negotiated with pragmatism, and some participants accepted that their first take on the quality of a piece of work may change after discussion:

You’re watching a lot of work and sometimes you just get a bit confused and you are readily persuaded by others. You know you got it wrong. That happened to me today. I gave a student a really high mark and the other two gave it really much lower. I held my hands up and said I think I was wrong. That’s why it’s really good to have more than one person, because it’s difficult to sustain it consistently over the whole assessment event, which can run all day (3C).

Another participant similarly commented on the value of the discussion and debate on panels:

You can get into this sausage factory mode when marking student work and there’s a danger it becomes very mechanical, and when we have discussions and debates about marks it actually reminds me how important it is and how human we are and how we owe it our full attention and care (27W).

There was also some evidence to suggest that the quality of interactions on a panel is a litmus test of the broader culture within a university school or department. A few participants expressed concerns about the collegiality and the lack of shared understandings and values in their school: ‘We fight! We’re not very similar in our
views and we don’t really share a common understanding about standards’ (20D). More tellingly, another participant commented: ‘We’ve had some pretty nasty confrontations that haven’t really been resolved where a whole lot of other agendas have come into play’ (17V). This participant noted that in such environments, where collegiality is less evident, appropriate facilitation and structure are essential:

*We always go back to the criteria and it provides a solid rock. If you have good process and good facilitation you can fall back on those things. If the discussion becomes too horrendous you can pull it back to the criteria* (17V).

### 7.3.5 Gender and power relationships on panels

Most participants reported that there was a significant distribution of power on panels in which there are insiders and externals, permanent and casual staff, heads of faculty and beginning teachers, all with differing levels and types of experience, expertise and influence. Some argued that this created diversity that was positive and developmental:

*Colleagues who have not been performers themselves often find it hard to assess someone’s performance, particularly when it’s not very good. They just say ‘that’s not very good’. Those more familiar with performance are able to still acknowledge that the end result was not so good, but they see a lot more positive elements in it that just need a little more development. It’s about understanding the level that the student should be performing at that point in their development. That’s hard for some, but others on the panel can share this* (3C).

Panels can clearly work cooperatively, recognising the strengths that each panel member brings. Yet, depending on the culture and the quality of facilitation, panels were also open to instances of domination by more powerful staff:

*You ultimately agree to differ. But it’s interesting because there can be a power relationship on panels – new staff members, casuals who are seeking further employment, a head of school. It puts pressure on people. There is a pressure to fit in with the status quo on a panel* (19V).

Another participant commented on problems of ego and prestige, citing an instance where all the students belonging to a particular discipline in a cohort were awarded
‘firsts’ because of the dominance of the corresponding head of discipline on the panel. This participant (17V), a female, noted that while panel dynamics were sometimes discussed within the school, and there was a consciousness about panel flaws, a range of subtle issues relating to power and gender sometimes revealed themselves in panel discussions. These include differences in the degree of forcefulness in arguing a case, and also differences in ‘masculine and feminine sensibilities and taste’ (17V). Another male participant (2M) acknowledged that both ‘gender and power issues were potentially a problem that worked at various levels and could impact in subtle ways on both students and panel members’. He observed that contemporary music is a male dominated domain and his faculty was concerned about this, particularly if assessment juries were commonly comprised entirely of men.

There is little contemporary literature about the role of gender and power in assessment juries, although Orr’s (2007) study, reported in Chapter 3, made important observations about power relationships within assessment panels in the visual arts. This study reveals that there may be complex dynamics at play, relative to both power and gender, in how agreement is reached and grades awarded. Some participants in this study commented on this as a positive; that ‘diversity’ in all forms added to the richness of the decision-making process, whereas others saw it as a problem that went largely unchallenged, and needed to be actively addressed.

7.3.6 Artificial consensus or ‘groupthink’

Given the generally high level of consensus found in panels and other moderation processes, participants were asked to consider whether it was possible that an artificial consensus or groupthink could develop amongst panels that routinely assess together. Some participants held concerns about this, particularly in contexts where external moderation was not the norm:

*I think there is something in this. I do wonder whether XX (colleague) and I have a groupthink thing going on. We’re on a number of panels together and I sometimes think, oh my god, we always agree* (27W).

Another expressed the importance of encouraging a ‘culture of autonomy’ among panel members, and ‘to bring everything in their professional kitbag to the table when they’re marking student work’ (28W). Others commented on the variety of
backgrounds and experiences most panel members bring to assessment, including many who have parallel careers as practicing artists, musicians and professional jurists for prizes and awards.

However, participants who served on assessment panels with regular external or professional representation were much more confident about dismissing the possibility of groupthink. External examiners played an important role in unsettling any formulaic consensus that may develop on panels:

_The outsider is more likely to be an artist rather than an academic. They sometimes bring a different perspective – they notice things freshly that the local teachers have come to accept, maybe because we are tired of fighting it. So it can become very valuable – they pick on issues we may never have raised in classes_ (15M).

Similarly, another participant reflected:

_The outside person helps to be a correction to our marking. It is rare, but sometimes we will find that the outsider has very different views to the insiders, and this causes us to review and reflect upon our judgements. This is very difficult, because the teacher inside has to defend the students’ work, and sometimes also has to defend their own teaching as well_ (20D).

### 7.4 Problems of subjectivity

Given the extensive professional expertise of most participants, and the relative confidence that this seemed to bring to the assessment process, participants were asked how subjective or personal they considered their own judgements ultimately to be. This question sought to clarify the evident tension, already identified, between professional expertise and personal subjectivity, and more broadly, how problematic the issue of subjectivity was for participants.

Most participants considered their judgements were either highly subjective or at least significantly so, particularly in relation to the creative elements of the work:

_In the end, everyone’s experience of music is highly subjective and there’s no reason why the assessment process shouldn’t reflect that. Having said that, it’s_
important to remember that subjective doesn’t mean random. You can try to make your judgements more objective but ultimately you have to accept this fact (2M).

Similarly, another commented that:

...my experience is that if you play for a jury of nine people in an orchestra audition and five people like you a lot and four are much more hesitant...that’s a good indication of how subjective it is (15M).

Participants from creative writing tended to qualify their comments, acknowledging that there are preferred and valued industry conventions that allowed them to comment in quite objective ways on many aspects of the work, such as syntax, grammar and genre expectations. Another noted that these conventions could be broken, in highly creative ways, but students need to know what the rules are that are being broken and why. In relation to creative components:

I can say this is a well-constructed piece of writing, but it just doesn’t get my juices flowing. I will justify the reasons why. It’s not necessarily bad, but maybe it’s imitative (10W).

Similarly, in music, the craft elements of a performance had comparatively higher levels of objectivity, compared with more creative elements such as ‘musical storytelling’ or ‘artistic charisma’:

For some people these creative elements are more important. That’s where the subjectivity comes in – the weightings of these different components such as craft versus artistry and where you finally sit with your judgement (15M).

Given participants’ acceptance of the high levels of subjectivity in judgements, the question arises about how consensus is so readily achieved in most instances. One participant noted that it is because process is such an important part of the overall assessment of creative work in universities. By contrast, in industry or professional settings:

...it’s entirely about outcome. It’s what’s there. But because in universities we’re trying to build up someone’s expertise we focus on process as well. Process is more demonstrable and more objective to assess in a way. The rigour is either there or it’s not. It's not as debatable as aesthetic qualities (13D).
One participant recounted the objections raised by the academic governing body at his university about lack of objectivity:

They asked: ‘Why can’t you have more precise criteria? Either you play the right note or the wrong note?’ My response was that, in many kinds of music, playing the wrong notes might not be a problem, it might even be encouraged. So the fact is, in the end, yes there is a necessarily high level of subjectivity. For example, you might say Rod Stewart can’t sing. Yet he’s a great artist. Would we fail him in a course like this? I hope not (2M).

This participant was accepting of the necessarily subjective nature of his judgements:

Ultimately I think this subjectivity is okay, as long as it’s clear to students what the playing field is. Much better than it being wrapped up in pseudo-objectivity that nobody really can carry through with any real consistency. This won’t help the students (2M).

Despite some concerns about subjectivity, particularly that which was voiced at the institutional level, participants largely displayed a level of confidence in their judgements that echoed Eisner’s (1991, p.69) notion of educational connoisseurship: ‘the ability to see, not merely to look’ in order to know. Connoisseurship, according to Eisner, entails drawing complex strands together, some observable, some subtextual, to make nuanced professional judgements. Observable elements in the assessment mix such as process and craft were important anchors for participants as they provided terrain that was clearly more objective and dispassionate than creative components.

7.5 Assessment and the creative process

An important question identified in the literature of creativity assessment was whether summative assessment operates to stifle or suffocate creative processes. In the last chapter we looked at the question of whether criteria actively stultify student creativity. This question is now broadened to view the impact of summative assessment as a whole. Participants were invited to reflect on the impact of their own assessment upon their students’ creative processes and their willingness to take risks.
Most participants readily concurred that invariably students are cautious and concerned about assessment:

For many students it’s a big ordeal. The last thing you want to do is publicly expose yourself and to be found wanting. I can’t think of anything in higher education that is quite as exposing as this. To sing in public is an enormously exposing thing. It’s like taking your clothes off. If you’re nervous and stressed that’s obviously going to show to some degree. Inevitably students who feel more confident are going to do better (2M).

Participants largely agreed that assessment did significantly affect creative risk-taking, although many acknowledged that some students – often the really good ones – are more naturally inclined to take risks, irrespective of the assessment process:

If creativity is just built into them, then they just get on with it. Those who come in who are less confident or able, they may well be adversely affected by the assessment process. So you want to move this latter group into the other side. You see that happening and it’s enormously satisfying (13D).

A number of participants commented on how some of the natural creative exuberance of students gets eroded by the assessment process:

We often comment that the most creative work comes from our first years. They’re suddenly let loose in the playground with this raw creative wildness. Then they tighten up a little in second year. Then they get more serious. By third year, when they’re assessed by external examiners, they’re like rabbits caught in the headlights. When some of our very best and most engaged and fabulous students hit third year they freeze. The outcomes have become more significant and are more heavily weighted at the summative end of the spectrum. They’re great at the research and experimentation phase, but they freeze about the creative choices (4V).

This is a compelling account of how assessment impacts on student creativity. A number of other participants echoed this account with varying inflections according to the context:

I get severely upset and unhappy with a lot of the work that’s handed in for assessment. A lot of creativity is stifled by this portfolio of work that has to be handed in. A lot of the excitement and spontaneity that goes with creating a
piece of artwork or design, whatever you’re creating is lost. They play safe way too much. They become very marks oriented. It’s a pity because they pay so much money to come here and have to make a lot of sacrifices (14D).

Similarly, another commented that:

…one of my greatest fears in the academy is that you kill what’s important in playing music by making students take exams. When they’re feeling nervous and judged, inevitably they’re going to give a performance that’s not their best. The situation is terribly artificial (2M).

Yet other participants felt that the greater conservatism evident in students’ creative outputs was a natural response to their impending transition into the professional world. In relation to the graduating performances of classical music students, one participant commented:

They need to be strategic, Even if I don’t like it personally. Don’t be too exotic on this occasion. Play safe. It’s about careers, survival, getting a job. It’s not just about assessment; it’s the societal culture (15M).

Similarly, in creative writing, students:

…need to be prepared to play the industry game. I think in this program they get a very fair balance between encouraging creativity and stifling excess creativity! There are many competent writers who get published who aren’t necessarily high on the creative stakes (10W).

In a similar vein to earlier chapters, we see again in this chapter how participants have sought to navigate through a complex set of tensions that coalesce around assessment. The theme of finding the right balance is, again, a key one in this discussion. Clearly participants did not want students to develop an unbridled creativity that has no reference to the professional world, particularly if the student has professional aspirations. Yet risk-taking and development of one’s creative abilities are key outcomes in any university program in the creative arts. Achieving this balance through assessment is a central dilemma in this study that is developed further in the next chapter.
7.6 Considering assessment reform

As a final consideration in this chapter, we turn to the question of assessment reform. As discussed in Chapter 3, the literature offers wide-ranging critique of current assessment models in the creative arts, particularly with respect to outcomes-based education and criterion-referenced assessment. Learning outcomes and criteria, it is argued, are predicated on the known or the anticipated. Leading creativity researchers, such as Amabile (1983) and Sternberg (1988) argue that any products that have been derived from a known formula or set of instructions can never be considered creative. Canatella (2001) similarly argues that criterion referencing is crude, and unable to account for the intricacy of creative activity. Boulter (2004) critiques the hidden assumptions and ideologies evident in criteria and the resulting confusion for students about what is being assessed and why. Concerns about learning outcomes and criteria in the creative arts are encapsulated in Kleiman’s (2005, p. 21) comments that: ‘Essentially it is a closed system which, like any closed system, will tend to encourage and enforce replication and formulation rather than innovation and origination’.

Suggestions for reform are similarly wide-ranging. At one end of the spectrum, there are calls to work within existing assessment models, but with clearer conceptualising and modelling of criteria and standards (Sadler, 2005), and closer engagement with criteria and standards in the classroom (Rust, Price and O’Donovan, 2003). Further along the spectrum, we find calls for ungraded (or ‘pass/fail’) assessment schemes, with only very minimal use of learning outcomes or criteria (Brophy, 1994; Kroll, 1997). At the other end of the spectrum, we find persuasive arguments for dismantling outcomes-based education altogether in creative fields, replacing them with individualised self-assessment models based upon fully negotiated criteria (Cowan, 2006; Jackson, 2008). These two models – ungraded assessment schemes and negotiated self-assessment schemes – are discussed below, along with participants’ perspectives on these reforms.
Chapter 7: Making Judgements About Student Work

7.6.1 Reform option 1: Ungraded assessment schemes

As discussed in Chapter 3, ungraded assessment schemes provide vastly simplified portraits of student achievement and largely avoid complex articulations of marking criteria and standards. It is argued that with less differentiated grading (such as pass or fail) the intense student focus on assessment and competition subsides, allowing for a renewed focus on experimentation and risk-taking (for example, Kroll, 1997). This model, at least in theory, successfully avoids many of the dilemmas outlined in this chapter.

A few participants reported working, historically, in programs that were pass/fail only and noted how successful they had been, particularly in relation to the lack of competitiveness and a grade-chasing culture among students. However, most participants argued against ungraded schemes for a variety of reasons. Some noted that such schemes are no longer acceptable in higher education because they did not provide sufficiently detailed data on student outcomes. A few also argued that ungraded schemes were unpopular with students for similar reasons. Students, it was asserted, want to be graded and have their achievements portrayed in traditional ways.

However, the most significant critique of ungraded assessment schemes was that it sheltered students from the reality of their own professional cultures. To shield students from a culture of graded assessment, it was argued, is doing them no professional favours:

\[ \text{I say to them, look, it's the same as getting some funding to perform a piece and then on opening night the critics come to assess the work. You have to persuade students that assessment is an opportunity (3C).} \]

A few participants also commented that a wide range of other academic skills aside from creativity was being assessed, such as critical thinking, research and communication skills. They argued that it is important to encourage and represent achievement across all of these attributes through assessment. Ungraded schemes, in this regard, were considered too narrow and undifferentiated and wouldn’t portray the richness of individual student achievement.
7.6.2 Reform option 2: Negotiated self-assessment schemes

Jackson (2008) and Cowan (2006) advocate the dismantling of learning outcomes and teacher-led assessment in the creative arts, replaced by a model that positions student self-assessment at the centre of the process. In this model, students develop their own objectives and statements in relation to their creative output, accompanied by a self-assessment of their achievements in the finished work. Teachers assess the rigour of the students’ self-assessment and whether they are persuaded on the evidence to support it. As discussed in Chapter 3, this model represents a significant shift in the locus of control in assessment away from teachers. As Jackson notes (2008, p.18) the primary role of the teacher is ‘not to define creativity for students and assess against their criteria. Rather it is to help students recognise their own creativity and help them express it and make claims against the evidence they feel is appropriate.’

Most participants strongly supported the principle of student self-direction and sought to support a high level of student agency in devising and conducting their creative projects. Some also noted a range of existing peer- and self-assessment activities supported in their programs. Yet there were concerns expressed about this model for a range of reasons. A few participants expressed concerns about the impracticalities of such a high level of individualised, negotiated assessment with declining budgets and burgeoning class sizes. Others were more concerned about abrogating their role in maintaining professional standards. As one commented:

*It’s no good supporting work that isn’t grounded in reality, so they go out from the university and have a gallery say no, we can’t exhibit this, it’s not developed enough. That’s a cruel thing to do to students* (1F).

These participants noted that there were many professional elements to creative work that were less negotiable with students, such as certain required levels of skill, craft or functionality. Although these participants recognised the shortcomings of an outcomes-based model, it was nevertheless viewed positively in capturing essential industry standards and expectations about the quality of work. As assessors they had an essential role to play in assuring these standards.
7.7 Concluding discussion

A key focus of this chapter has been upon the processes by which academics make judgements about creative work. The theoretical foundations to the assessment of creative work lies in the ‘consensual assessment approach’ developed by psychologist and creativity researcher, Therese Amabile (1983, 1996). To briefly recap this model, discussed in Chapter 2, Amabile argued that creativity can only be understood in its situated social context, and that a work is creative to the degree that an appropriately qualified group of experts belonging to that social context agrees that it is creative. ‘We have repeatedly found’, she explained:

that our expert judges are able to reliably assign degrees of creativity to the works we show them, whether works are produced by ‘ordinary people’, or high level professionals in a particular field (Amabile, 1996, p.39).

This chapter has provided insight into how Amabile’s model of consensual assessment operates in the situated context of creative arts departments in universities. Consistent with Amabile’s findings, juries and panels reported on in this study seemed to provide a generally robust and reliable form of assessment of creative work. Consensus was commonplace and minor disagreements were readily resolved through processes of discussion and debate in which consensus was reached. Participants generally welcomed these debates as a form of collegial exchange and professional development, which often helped to clarify issues and questions of standards.

However, major disagreements, while not commonplace, could be quite problematic both in how they were managed and what they revealed in terms of cross-disciplinary and ideological difference, as well as issues of gender and power. It is evident from this study that panels and juries are social constructs that, like most other structured forms of human interaction, have occasionally flawed and messy processes. This study confirms what Orr (2007) describes as choreography: the series of rhetorical moves within panels and moderation meetings that minimised divisive argument and enabled face-saving where necessary. In this study there is similar evidence of
pragmatic strategies such as mark-splitting, self-correction and deference to power that enabled the panel to efficiently operate within the usual constraints.

The data in this study suggests that a key issue in the rigour of panels and other moderation activities is the capacity of academics to critically engage with moderation and panel processes and to actively guard against some of the issues uncovered in this study, including various forms of bias, domination of individuals, or formulaic consensus that is too easily or readily achieved. Key strategies noted in this study were: (1) experienced leadership by facilitators who are familiar with potential problems in panels and moderation processes; and (2) regular use of experienced outside assessors to bring fresh perspectives to the panel, to have standards externally verified, and to disrupt habitual or formulaic processes.

This chapter also provides much insight into the range of ways in which participants have sought to deal with the inherent subjectivity of their decision-making. It reveals just how hard participants are balancing their work to ensure that assessment processes are fair and reliable, while serving the interests of students’ creative development, the demands of university policy and professional standards and expectations. There was considerable evidence amongst participants’ stories of a sophisticated, reflexive understanding of how assessment could be shaped and honed to provide balance to competing tensions, and to minimise undesirable consequences.

This chapter also comes to the heart of participants’ most significant concern: that for all their efforts, assessment might be undermining the one thing they value most – the creative drive and a culture of risk-taking among their students. In the next chapter, the principal themes and tensions that have been identified in these data chapters will be further discussed along with ways forward for assessment in the creative arts.
Introduction

In the previous three chapters, a detailed picture has been developed of the range of existing assessment practices in creative arts disciplines. This picture includes the ways in which participants have: (1) conceptualised creativity and unpacked it with their students; (2) fostered creativity, provided feedback on students’ creative development and prepared students for assessment; and (3) made judgements about student work. In providing this picture, I have highlighted a series of critical tensions in assessment practice and discussed these in relation to relevant contemporary literature.

The aim of this discussion chapter is to distil and discuss the key findings. Initially, I will review the critical tensions explored in earlier chapters, and provide a framework for understanding these dilemmas. Second, I will consider the question of assessment reform in the creative arts, and review participants’ reflections upon other assessment models that might better serve the creative process. Third, I will present a conceptual model for assessing creativity in the creative arts, which seeks to take account of the dilemmas and provide some ways forward for student assessment. Finally, the implications of this model are discussed in relation to theory and practice.

8.1 Key dilemmas in the assessment of creative works

In the prior three chapters, we have explored in detail the critical tensions of assessment in practice: How, for example, should creativity be defined and how should it be unpacked with students in a way that is not too burdensome for them? How should assessment be designed to prompt the best appropriately creative outcomes? How do we design and articulate criteria and standards to students to provide transparency and yet not stifle their creativity? In each of these chapters, participants have reported a myriad of tensions resulting from these key questions. Participants have also provided a range of responses that have sought to balance the
pressures resulting from these tensions. To move forward with assessment in the creative arts, it is essential that these tensions are clarified and better understood.

Figure 8.1 below provides a representation of these tensions, clustered into four key dilemmas: (1) definition, (2) explanation, (3) transparency and (4) subjectivity. These dilemmas are discussed in the following sections.

![Four dilemmas in the assessment of creativity](image)

**Figure 8.1**

*Four dilemmas in the assessment of creative works*

### 8.1.1 The dilemma of definition

A series of tensions encountered in the data of this study can be clustered around the theme of ‘definition’. Participants’ conceptions of creativity were largely developed from the ground up, rather than from theoretical or empirical perspectives. Creativity had most meaning in its disciplinary context, as a situated practice that was acquired incrementally throughout participants’ professional lives. Through the sum of their experiences they acquired what one participant (3C) described as ‘an intuitive, embodied knowledge that you can’t measure, but it’s there’. This tacit knowledge, relating to the ways of thinking and working in the field (Entwistle, 2005), formed the
basis of their professional expertise and educational connoisseurship (Eisner, 1991) that in turn provided them with the confidence to foster and assess student creativity.

Despite the richness and variety of participant conceptions of creativity, the dilemma of definition is that conceptions of creativity tended to be atheoretical, individualistic and, at times, idiosyncratic. The data provided little evidence of common, shared understandings of creativity across the creative arts, within disciplines, or even within teaching programs. Differences clearly flourished in terms of how it was articulated and what was valued, preferred, and rewarded. In this sense, there may be some similarities to other disciplines in higher education, where debates about core theoretical constructs are commonplace. However, in the creative arts, the issue of creativity is at the very heart of the endeavour. Without this theoretical common ground, it is difficult for academics in the creative arts to engage in nuanced peer debate. These findings echo the work of Jackson (2008, p. 8) who notes that ‘the complexity of creativity is a confounding issue for higher education teachers’; and McWilliam (2007, p. 2) who notes that ‘creativity continues to be regarded by many both within and outside academic circles as so mysterious and serendipitous that it defies definition’.

This study revealed a notable disconnect between creative arts academics and creativity research. It reflects, perhaps, the somewhat overwhelming and fragmented nature of theory and research into creativity itself. As discussed in Chapter 2, much creativity research does not readily speak to academics in the creative arts, nor does it form part of their daily discourse (Kleiman, 2007, 2008). Yet we have also seen in Chapter 2 that, in recent years, the gap between theory and practice is being notably bridged by a variety of sociocultural studies exploring creativity processes in disciplinary settings (Sawyer, 2006). There is also a proliferation of texts addressed to educators to assist in fostering creativity (Cropley and Cropley, 2009; Kaufman and Sternberg, 2010 are recent examples). This recent scholarship is designed to bridge the significant gaps between theory and practice, and to enable practitioners to engage with and apply creativity theory in their disciplinary settings.

If creativity pedagogy is to develop and thrive, and to embrace the challenges laid out in Chapter 2 regarding the creative economy, it needs to move beyond the
individualised understandings of creativity revealed in this study. This is not an argument for a single or standardised explanation of creativity, but rather the development of some broadly shared theoretical understandings about the nature and characteristics of creativity in disciplinary settings, which can provide a platform for debate, research, and the further development of pedagogy and assessment.

8.1.2 The dilemma of explanation

Associated with this first dilemma is the second dilemma: explaining and unpacking creativity with students. While participants were alive to the complexities of constructions of creativity in postmodern culture, there was considerable division about whether creativity as an issue should be unpacked directly with students, or perhaps skirted around, or even avoided altogether. In some instances, it seemed to underscore a lack of confidence in using the word, given its inherent fuzziness and significant cultural baggage.

The dilemma of explanation relates to the ability of teachers in the creative arts to induct students into the tacit knowledge of the field, to unpack the ways of thinking and working, and to develop a deep understanding of expectations and standards. Many participants found this to be problematic; that the concept of creativity ‘can be a burden for students’ (7W) or that it was ‘not useful and too abstract as a concept’ (19V). As one participant commented: ‘I don’t discuss it overtly, but it’s underpinning everything I do and the expectations I have of students’ (3C). A clear theme emerged that creativity is such an individual journey for students that it would be wrong to unduly influence or disrupt it, for fear that it may in some way hamper or extinguish it.

However, the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 is persuasive in arguing that students need to be brought inside the logic of a program and its associated assessment, and to develop a clear understanding of what is valued and expected (for example Gibbs, 1995; Eisner, 1991; Shreeve et al., 2004; Sadler, 2005, 2009). The danger is that creativity becomes the ‘elephant in the room’, unless it is openly addressed and discussed with students. Instances of sound practice were identified in this study, where creativity was openly discussed and deeply problematised as a contested notion.
through a variety of individual approaches. Students may be exposed to a range of potential ideas and approaches, some of which may resonate and support their developing creative momentum, others may not be so useful and may be discarded. Sound practice identified in this study included exemplars, modelling, and dialogue as means of unpacking the creative elements of a work, the creative process, the nature of risk, and the nuances of what, contextually, might be commonly considered as ‘pushing boundaries’, ‘well worn’ or ‘too exotic’ (15M).

While it would clearly be wrong to prescribe approaches or creative directions, a reluctance to unpack and explain creativity may stem from a lack of confidence with the notion, and can lend unnecessary mystery to the endeavour. Participants who sought to immerse students in the debates and perspectives surrounding the nature of creativity achieved two important outcomes. First, students were being actively inducted as fledgling professionals into the ways of thinking and working in the field. This is in contrast to a situation where understandings remain tacit and potentially revealed to students only in incremental and sometimes painful ways when their work is summatively assessed. Second, they are providing students with the capacity to more confidently choose and reflect upon their creative directions and to help them make realistic, grounded judgements about the quality of their own creative output. This is in contrast to a situation where students remain dependent upon the expert advice and judgements of their teachers. The stance of participants who unpacked creativity with students, and also with colleagues, was typified by the comment: ‘We need to hold a public position about creativity... we have to navigate through these debates and articulate some common ground’ (1F).

8.1.3 The dilemma of transparency

The issues of definition and explanation, discussed above, lead directly to a third, dilemma of transparency. Whereas the dilemmas of definition and explanation are focused upon defining and unpacking creativity, the dilemma of transparency relates to the clarity with which judgements are made. As discussed in Chapter 3, transparency is a central tenet in assessment theory. Students, it is argued, should be provided with equitable access to clear and consistent messages about what is sought, valued, and rewarded, and that assessment judgements should not be shrouded in
mystery or uncertainty (for example, Rowntree, 1987; Biggs, 2003; Gibbs, 1995; Ramsden, 2003). Lack of transparency gives rise to what has been characterised as the hidden curriculum: a mismatch between what is articulated or intended, and what is actually rewarded through assessment.

There is some evidence in this study to suggest that the hidden curriculum may be flourishing in the creative arts. Although participants had clearly sought to be as open as they could about values, criteria and standards that underpin their assessment, there was a range of issues reported that, at times, present a different picture. As we have seen, tacit knowledge was not always well explicated with students. Boundaries were often unclear about what was considered appropriately creative work, and whether students got cues about this. Despite the belief in inclusive, democratised creative expression that eschewed house styles or genre preferences, concerns about biases relating to ideology, culture and personal taste were evident in some participant narratives.

Given the complex, contested nature of creativity, these findings are not necessarily surprising. As a human, social process, creativity assessment clearly entails divergent views, differing approaches and unspoken assumptions. These findings support a critique of the notion of transparency (Delandshere, 2001; Broadfoot and Black, 2004; and Orr, 2007) that has been discussed in Chapter 3. According to this critique, transparency is a positivist assumption in which total explicitness is attainable, and standards are measurable, fixed and immutable. Transparency, argues Orr (2007, p.647) is an illusory pursuit in creative domains where teachers and learners need to ‘co-construct understandings’ and where ‘multiple subjectivities and contingencies affect ways that judgements are made’. The pursuit of clarity, argues Orr, should be replaced by a recognition that assessment is a ‘messy practice’ with ‘multiple subjectivities and contingencies’.

While Orr’s (2007) argument is persuasive, it is notable that participants in this study by no means rejected the notion of transparency. Rather, they sought a form of functional transparency, in which the basis for judgements were made as clear as they possibly could, given the evident limitations and subjectivities of language. Transparency, for participants, seemed akin to notions of openness, fair play and
accountability, in regard to their relationships with students, and also with their university communities. In practical terms, it meant being able to (1) explain a judgement to a student if questioned; (2) make a case for a grade in moderation or panel discussions with colleagues; and (3) defend the legitimacy of assessment approaches and methods within the university community if challenged.

However, because of the inherent opacity of creativity, there is a greater danger than in most other disciplines in higher education that students will fail to pick up on essential cues. In the visual arts, for example, participants reported that students may become disaffected with the way in which their creative work is being assessed. Students may perceive that ‘they didn’t get my work’, or ‘I didn’t fit in’ or there was a bias towards a particular movement, or their work wasn’t political enough, or sufficiently experimental, and so forth. A cue to this problem is found in Flint’s (2007) study about students’ perceptions of ‘fairness’ in assessment. Flint noted that the single largest concern among students was the _unstated expectations of assessors_. Questions arise from these stories about whether students had been appropriately inducted into values and expectations of assessors, or whether assessment acts as a belated filtering process for students who have insufficiently understood what forms of creativity are rewarded.

There were many instances of sound practice identified in this study in relation to transparency. Sound practice was particularly evident where participants sought to extend and problematise expectations well beyond lists of criteria and standards that accompanied assessment tasks. Some participants recognised that transparency was the result of ongoing dialogue, to the extent that students ideally ‘_live and breathe the criteria through multiple activities – peer discussions, teacher discussion, casual exchanges, working shoulder to shoulder… Students are immersed in a culture of dialogue and evaluation_’ (17V). While accepting that total explicitness is illusory, it is argued that assessment expectations and standards should be part of the daily fabric of the student experience.
8.1.4 The dilemma of subjectivity

The dilemma of subjectivity was well recognised by participants – the judgements they make were acknowledged to be at the very high end of the spectrum of subjectivity, particularly when compared to most other disciplines and assessment types in higher education. However, participants were mostly confident in their own connoisseurship and professional judgement, and they commonly shared a strong sense of responsibility to their students in getting assessment as ‘right’ as they possibly could. Many also understood the need to maintain a strong reflexive stance about the possibility of getting assessment wrong, particularly in relation to their own personal preferences and taste. Participants were also largely confident that, in their own practice, there was sufficient rigour and functionality to assessment designs and statements of criteria to provide a buffer against subjectivity.

The dilemma of subjectivity was more evident, however, in the social processes surrounding assessment – agreeing on criteria and standards, moderating assessment results, debating the quality of work on panels and juries, discussing assessment results with students, and responding to appeals. While juries, panels and moderation meetings were, by and large, collegial and consensual in nature, when significant differences arose amongst colleagues, these could be problematic. It was also evident that panel processes could operate to isolate and polarise individuals; that power relationships on panels could function to intimidate and skew results; and that the sheer burden of assessment with increasing class sizes (the ‘sausage factory’, as one participant referred to it) put pressure on assessors to reach a pragmatic consensus.

On the positive side, panels, juries and other moderation processes were more frequently seen as valuable learning and induction experiences, which enabled participants to explore and debate subjectivities and develop shared understandings about standards and quality. Yet even these consensual processes had their potential dangers – most notably in highly cohesive groups where the collective desire to minimise conflict could result in a contrived consensus or groupthink. Participants identified a range of sound practices in guarding against subjectivity problems by the use of skilled facilitators on assessment panels, the regular use of external examiners as a means of disrupting in-house thinking, active training and induction of assessors,
and more generally, a critical reflexivity about these problems and a willingness to openly discuss and address them.

At another level, the dilemma of subjectivity is revealed more broadly in the *culture* of assessment within universities. Broadly speaking, assessment systems in universities tend to position assessors as objective experts upon whose judgements we rely. These judgements need to be accounted for, and defended, both to colleagues and students. As we have seen in panel assessments, and also student appeals, assessors in the creative arts can readily find themselves unintentionally fixed and isolated in defence of their judgements. Some participants expressed concerns that they are somewhat ill-equipped to ‘objectively’ account for their decisions, when their grades are queried, given the complexity of factors that are interacting to arrive at a judgement.

This dilemma creates difficult and sometimes untenable situations for assessors in the creative arts. A few participants in this study were notably keen to reject these constructions of expertise and to openly acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of their judgements. For one participant, this meant being able to readily say to students: ‘I think I got this wrong and I went in too hard and I’m sorry for that. And in doing that you open up a new conversation’ (28W). This participant argued that assessors need to publicly confront the culture of objective assessment and replace it with a culture that is more overtly provisional and contested. Another argued that it was important to retain some scepticism about one’s capacity to make consistent and reliable judgements: ‘I try to topple myself early from the role of expert. I will say my role here is to make some value judgements with the best of my professional expertise’ (1F).

It is very evident that assessors in this study strove to deal with problems of transparency and subjectivity in their assessment systems and processes. Yet the culture of assessment in universities does not serve assessors well in the creative arts. Although they come to the act of assessment with a considerable weight of experience, the role of ‘expert’ implies to students a degree of accuracy, consistency or objectivity that is simply not possible. Although assessors may not wish to adopt the ‘expert’ role, they may find this occurring by default. As one commented: ‘It’s
about building a culture and not setting yourself up as the mighty arbiter. Unless you actively confront that role you sort of get slotted into it, particularly by students’ (28W). It is important for assessors to problematise their judgements with students, and to actively construct a culture of assessment in the classroom that is more aligned with the reality of this work. The issue of developing an appropriate assessment culture is further pursued later in this chapter.

8.1.5 The four dilemmas – cultures and paradigms

The four dilemmas discussed here operate separately, but are also somewhat circular in nature and thus interact to reinforce and compound the tensions. As illustrated in Figure 8.1, the lack of shared academic conceptions about creativity leads to the dilemma of explanation to students about creative process and products in the discipline. This in turn leads to problems with transparency in making judgements, which then heightens problems about perceived subjectivity in assessment judgements. Perceived subjectivity leads back in a reinforcing way to the first dilemma regarding the difficulties of achieving shared understandings about creativity. If it is perceived to be subjective, then it is not necessary to strive for shared conceptions of creativity in the first place. Hence these four key dilemmas work in a circular way to compound and reinforce the tensions of assessment.

At the heart of these dilemmas is an epistemological conflict in assessment in the creative arts. At one end of the spectrum, we find a positivist assessment paradigm that demands fixed standards and criteria, a reliance on a set of processes and procedures, an emphasis on measurement, a belief that there are right and wrong judgements and grades, and that transparency is unproblematic. At the other end of the spectrum, we find a poststructuralist assessment paradigm that eschews notions of fixed standards, requiring that assessment be co-constructed in communities of practice, with standards that are negotiable, contextual and contested. In poststructuralist assessment, it is accepted that transparency is illusory and that subjectivities are inevitable and acknowledged.

It was evident in this study that the dictates of the learning outcomes movement drew assessors towards positivist practices, while the necessarily discursive, social process
of making judgements in the creative arts drew assessors closer to poststructuralist approaches. Yet neither paradigm, in pure terms, provided a functioning model for assessment in the creative arts. Most participants steered a course between these polarities, in seeking to establish an appropriate assessment culture for creativity. In the territory between positivism and poststructuralism, participants adopted a more pragmatic interpretivist stance, in which:

- standards are important, but not necessarily fixed or finite, and require robust interpretation and debate;
- transparency is necessary, although problematic, and is an ideal that is strived for rather than always achieved;
- judgements are interpretations that can be right and fair, but should be conducted with an openness to possibilities that, at times, they could be wrong or unfair;
- rationalist approaches to assessment (instruments, rubrics, etc) can be useful, if used critically and reflexively in relation to the central goal of fostering creative outcomes.

This essentially interpretivist assessment stance (Orr, 2007) was founded upon participants’ professional and disciplinary expertise, along with their multifaceted experience in making judgements and applying industry standards. Moreover, it was evident in their understanding of the academic teaching context and students’ needs and concerns. This collective experience, according to Shulman (1986), is referred to as ‘practice wisdom’. Practice wisdom in education develops from a complex interaction of knowledge and experience relative to the discipline and the cumulative experience of teaching. McAlpine and Weston (2002) build upon Schulman’s work in identifying the two sources of this wisdom – experiential knowledge and tacit knowledge – that interact to develop practice wisdom. They suggest that intentional reflection is the primary way of turning experiential and tacit knowledge into explicit, principled knowledge.

These paradigmatic complexities have created a complex decision-making environment for assessors in the creative arts. The data in this study reveals a variety of ways in which participants have sought to expertly balance these competing tensions and assessment paradigms. Assessment necessarily entails choices that, as we
have seen in this thesis, are complex, multifaceted and may have a range of consequences that are either intended or inadvertent. It entails a variety of small decisions that, taken together, may have a critical impact, either positively or negatively, on students’ creative impulses and efforts. When providing student feedback, for example, participants were concerned about providing timely and appropriate feedback that supported, but did not prescribe students’ creative directions; that was truthful, but not crushing; nurturing, but not creating dependency; individualised, but accepting of the limitations of larger classes. When designing assessment, similar tensions were felt around fixed outcomes versus the unexpected; process versus product; risk-taking versus failure; effort versus achievement.

For most participants, beneath these tensions lay a central concern: that for all their efforts, assessment might be undermining the one thing they value most – the creative drive and a culture of risk-taking among their students:

*I would hate to think I’m destroying students’ creative side in their infancy, particularly by the requirements of the system in universities. I talk to students about this. I am doing the right thing as far as the universities goes. Doing the right thing by the students is another question altogether* (9W).

Participants were most concerned that their assessment decisions did not stifle creativity and sought the right balance in meeting their own objectives as a teacher, along with university requirements and the needs and aspirations of their students. However, the data in this thesis suggests that some decisions may be, in principle, more effective than others. What is missing is a model of assessment in the creative arts, and a framework to guide the myriad of decisions that academics make about assessment on a daily basis. The issue of models and frameworks are developed in more detail later in this chapter.

### 8.2 Considering assessment reform in the creative arts

Before considering new models or frameworks of assessment, it is important to briefly discuss the broader issue of *assessment reform* in the creative arts. While participants were generally interested in issues of assessment reform, and cognisant of the shortcomings of outcomes-based education, they tended to be wary of new
assessment models that placed them outside the mainstream of university assessment practice. Assessment was seen, at worst, as a ‘necessary evil’; a sentiment no doubt shared by many in academia generally. Yet participants also saw assessment as a positive tool to engage students with professional standards, and to prepare students for the kinds of judgements that would be made about their work as practicing artists and industry professionals. Assessment schemes that avoided or sought to minimise these experiences, it was felt, were doing their students no favours.

Rather, participants’ prime interest was to accommodate existing university requirements to the best of their ability, and to strike particular balances that worked on the ground. Significantly, most participants felt that, on balance, they were doing the right thing with their assessment design:

*Our assessment scheme is our best attempt to get the best possible model that everyone is satisfied with – the government, quality assurance agencies, the university and also the students* (1F).

In relation to their assessment judgements, they tended to voice similar sentiments:

*I’m never entirely sure that I’m doing the right thing. Yes I can get it wrong, but hopefully not very wrong. I always have to keep a strong reflective core to assessment and close monitoring with other staff to ensure that I’m minimising the possibility of getting it wrong* (8W).

While participants in this study voiced a range of complex tensions in seeking to ‘get their assessment right’, it is interesting to note that many felt, upon reflection, that they had achieved an accommodation of sorts – an acceptable balance between the competing demands of stakeholders, university systems, and constructive, creative outcomes for students. The data in this study speaks largely to an acceptance of university requirements; a desire to belong within an academic community; and a concern to accommodate, wherever possible, existing stakeholders’ needs and pressures.

### 8.3 Developing a model for assessing creativity

Imposing major assessment reform, or new models of assessment practice in the creative arts could well be counterproductive if assessors themselves are not seeking
it, or do not see value in it. Yet it is also clear that, by working within existing models, the competing tensions of practice are precarious. It is with these issues in mind that a conceptual model for assessing creative works is devised and presented in this chapter. The model is not, therefore, a reforming model, but rather, a consolidating and strengthening of existing theory and practice, drawing significantly from interpretivist assessment approaches identified in this thesis. The following perspectives have been drawn upon in the development of the model:

(a) Practitioner perspectives
The development of a model is informed primarily by the arguments, observations and reflections of the thirty participants in this study. This data, taken together, represents a ‘practice wisdom’ of assessment in the creative arts (Shulman, 1986). Through the interview process in this study, participants have reflected upon and articulated their tacit values and experiences. They have sought to express the concerns and tensions with student assessment, and how they have accommodated these tensions in practice. While there is a variety of divergent views and responses, relative to context, discipline and personal experience, there is more than sufficient commonality in participant data to distil a picture of practice wisdom, and to develop a provisional model of this kind.

(b) Disciplinary studies in the creative arts
The model has been informed by the influential findings of some key studies in assessment in the creative arts that have emanated from the UK over the past five to ten years. These studies, cited regularly during this thesis, include Canatella (2001); Boulter (2004) McKillop (2006); Orr (2007); Blair (2006); Blythman, Orr and Blair (2007). The studies have explored various problems in the use of assessment criteria and the subjectivity of judgements, which have been influential to the framing of this thesis and the development of an assessment model. In particular, these studies have foregrounded significant problems with the student experience of formative and summative assessment in the creative arts, and have contributed graphic insights into the dilemmas of explanation, transparency and subjectivity.

(c) Creativity research
The model has been informed by leading creativity researchers, including Sternberg (2007) and Amabile (1996). Their research points clearly to the idea that creative outcomes can never be derived from prescriptions or known formulae, such as those contained in detailed assessment criteria. This concern is echoed by the significant tensions noted in this study about over-specification of criteria and the consequent stifling of student creativity. Tensions about over-specification versus transparency have helped to forge the notion of *functional transparency* advanced in this thesis.

(d) *Research into student assessment*

The model is further informed by the principles and values found in the broader literature and debates of student assessment in higher education. Leading assessment theoreticians, such as Rowntree (1987); Gibbs (1995); Ramsden (2003); Biggs (2003); Boud (1995); and Sadler (2005) have consistently argued for an awareness of the impact of assessment on learning, the need for consistency and transparency of processes and judgements, and the importance of bringing students inside the logic of our programs, our intentions, our assessment schemes and judgements. While acknowledging the particularity of issues and dilemmas of assessment in the creative arts, these arguments and principles advanced in the literature of student assessment are enduring ones that are highly influential to this model.

These four sources bring differing focal points to strengthen the model and particularly in relation to suggested sound practice strategies. However, it should be stressed that the model is untested and must therefore remain tentative and provisional, subject to further research.

8.4 A model for assessing creativity

As discussed, the model presented here does not represent a new model, but rather, it is a consolidation and strengthening of existing theory and practice. This is achieved by:

- mapping the different phases of assessment and their interrelationships;
- clarifying the goals in each phase of the assessment cycle;
addressing key dilemmas experienced in practice in a way that helps academics to retain focus on the ‘big picture’ goals of creativity;

- presenting indicators of sound practice in each phase of the cycle of assessment; and

- repositioning assessment culture so that it is more conducive to creativity.

The model is presented below in two interconnected parts as follows:

Part A: A cyclical model of student assessment in the creative arts (Figure 8.2);

Part B: Phases of creativity assessment with purposes and strategies (Table 8.1).

### 8.4.1 Part A: A Cyclical model

**A Cyclical Model of Student Assessment in the Creative Arts**

Part A of this model clusters all assessment-related activities into a cycle with seven distinct phases. The cycle commences with assessment design, which is notionally the
foundation of all other assessment activities within the cycle, including developing criteria and standards, unpacking expectations with students, providing feedback, making judgements, moderating judgements and evaluating assessment. This final evaluative phase leads into another cycle where assessment may be further developed based upon evaluative data.

The phases of the cycle are logically ordered according to the usual rhythms of teaching and learning, however it is acknowledged that in practice there may be a range of alternative sequences, depending on context. Each phase in the cycle contains a series of recognisably discrete activities, however it is also acknowledged that these activities may overlap with those of other phases. Student assessment practice is necessarily eclectic and the intention of this model is not to constrain practice. Rather, this model is designed to bring some clarity, coherence and intent to a range of activities that may otherwise be fragmented or neglected. As argued throughout this thesis, assessment is a holistic practice that reaches into all areas of the teaching and learning encounter. It is important that all assessment activities are consciously aligned with a central intention to support learning and enhance students’ creative outcomes.

Two underpinning concepts in the model require a little further elaboration. Firstly, the model is underpinned by shared conceptions of creativity. It has already been argued in this chapter that it is difficult for assessment to move forward in the creative arts without efforts to develop greater common understandings about creativity as a disciplinary outcome. Put simply, this is about finding common ground within a discipline, or at least within a teaching program, about the nature of the creative endeavour, and to unpack this with students in ways that are helpful but not prescriptive or undermining of students’ creative agency.

As discussed, much of the mystery and serendipity that has traditionally surrounded notions of creativity is being usefully explained in recent sociocultural studies located in disciplinary settings (for example, Sawyer, 2006). Studies of this kind are seeking answers to key questions such as: What are the key creative processes of the discipline? How do students acquire creative expertise? What kinds of attributes should be fostered with students? What are the key qualities of creative products, and
how are they distinguished from products that are less creative? The findings from these studies provide excellent material for teachers to help frame students’ understanding, to unlock some of the tacit knowledge of the field, to induct students into the ways of thinking and working in the field, and to prepare them for assessment.

A second key concept that is central to the model is the notion of functional transparency. Transparency in assessment relates to the clarity about (1) what is valued and rewarded through assessment and (2) how judgements are made about the quality of work. Transparency as an ideal pervades all areas of assessment, based on values of fairness and openness. It is also underscored by university policy and quality assurance systems that require, for example, explicit learning outcomes and marking criteria be available to students. Yet as we have seen in this thesis, transparency in the creative arts is a deeply problematic concept, owing to the inadequacies and imprecision of concepts and language in such subjective domains. Calls from the literature for a rejection of transparency in the creative arts, in favour of individually negotiated models, were largely rejected by participants in this study. Rather, participants sought what I have termed ‘functional’ transparency. This discursive form of transparency seeks to open up and reveal the standards and professional expectations, and to minimise hidden curricula, while recognising the subjectivities of concepts and limitations of language.

Functional transparency seeks to provide some guidance and goal posts, while being careful not to prescribe directions or undermine essential student agency in relation to their creative work. Theoretically, this construct grows out of an acceptance that in this most subjective of domains, complete transparency is illusory, yet complete lack of transparency is undesirable and unfair. Functional transparency occurs when teachers and students are immersed in a culture of dialogue and debate about notions of creativity, professional standards, and the criteria that underpin judgements. It requires that students not be sheltered from debates about creativity as ‘too burdensome’. Rather, they are essential to students’ developing mastery of the ways of thinking and acting in their fields.

When adopting functional transparency as an approach, the assessor:
values the ideal of transparency in assessment as akin to notions of ‘fair play’ and ‘openness’;
accepts that transparency is a problematic, negotiable construct requiring ongoing debate and flexibility;
seeks a rigorous, consensual approach to the interpretation of standards and making of judgements; is alert to the problems of singular views from dominant individuals;
deconstructs a culture of the assessor as lone ‘expert’ in creative domains, acknowledging the multiple subjectivities of the field;
recognises the inherent strength of one’s professional expertise and seeks to develop a similar connoisseurship in students; and
makes confident, accountable judgements while acknowledging these judgements are contestable.

Functional transparency, I argue, has resonances well beyond the teacher-student relationship. It extends to various other stakeholders of the assessment process and the maintenance of academic and professional standards. Functional transparency provides a necessary platform for academic colleagues within a program to discuss approaches and values, and to engage meaningfully in moderation and panel assessment discussions. Functional transparency also enables accountability to the broader university community; that assessment processes in the creative arts are robust, fair and compliant with policy. Finally, it enables a dialogue and exchange between the university and creative communities, whose standards are maintained and advanced through assessment. For each of these stakeholders, a dialogue in which values and standards are articulated, moderated and debated is essential to rigour and ongoing development of the creative arts and industries.

8.4.2 Part B of the model: Purposes and strategies

The following table (Table 8.1) comprises a second part of the model, which encapsulates the central purposes and strategies that comprise sound practice for each of the phases in the cycle of assessment in the creative arts. The central purpose of each phase is captured, along with successful strategies reported by participants in this
Assessment design is the foundation of all other assessment-related activities, and it is in this phase that some of the key tensions and dilemmas are first encountered. A whole-of-program approach is essential to ensure that the assessment design in individual units or modules is consistently contributing to the big picture goals of creativity in the program, and meeting stakeholders’ needs. Such a whole-of-program approach assumes that academic staff in the program can develop shared conceptions of creativity (or a working version thereof) that informs key assessment decisions about the nature of assessment aims and methods, along with particular tensions such as negotiated versus fixed outcomes, formative versus summative assessment, risk-taking versus failure, and process versus product. The aim of this phase is that in each unit or module, the assessment design is working coherently with overall aims of

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<th>Phase</th>
<th>Central purposes</th>
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<td>1. Designing assessment</td>
<td>Assessment design addresses the multiple stakeholders and purposes of assessment including the need to: 1. foster valued learning and creative outcomes 2. judge the quality of student achievements 3. maintain and promote industry/professional standards</td>
<td>- whole-of-program approach to assessment that incrementally fosters higher levels of creative output; - risk-taking and learning through failure is explicitly supported and rewarded; - student agency and self-directedness is explicitly supported and rewarded; - flexible and negotiable assessment outcomes where appropriate; - mix of tasks that fosters a range of creative and professional skills; - balanced assessment of process and product in strategic ways to maximise creative outcomes.</td>
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creativity, and considers the student experience, inside an individual subject, and across the program as a whole.

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| 2. Developing criteria and standards | Written criteria and standards are a complex distillation of what is valued and rewarded in particular tasks. They operate to increase transparency and accountability, and reduce subjectivity, while acknowledging the limitations of language. | - develop holistically across program with consistent frameworks and terminology;  
- develop collaboratively with student, collegial and industry representation;  
- develop with reference to shared conceptions of creativity as developed in a program/discipline;  
- adopt rigorous critique and moderation of criteria to expose hidden, implied or overtly ambiguous criteria;  
- avoid over-specification of criteria to prevent formulaic responses or stifling of creativity. |
3. Discussing assessment expectations with students

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| 3. Discussing assessment expectations with students | Assessment rationale, processes, expectations, criteria and standards are actively discussed, negotiated and problematised with students. The aim is to set an appropriate culture of assessment that fosters transparency, and minimises the hidden curriculum. | • disciplinary conceptions of creativity are explored with students, alongside program philosophies and values;  
• practical creativity explorations – analysing works, modelling, exploring creative processes, reflecting on personal creativity experiences, etc;  
• boundaries of acceptable creativity are explored – eg ideology, taste and functionality;  
• criteria and standards are regularly discussed, debated and openly problematised with students. Students learn to ‘live and breathe’ criteria and professional standards;  
• myths of creativity are discussed and debunked;  
• use self- and peer-assessment to engage students with criteria and standards - develop student capacities to astutely judge their own and others’ work. |

A third, key step in this cyclical process is unpacking expectations with students about creativity and its associated assessment. This occurs early within individual subjects, and across a program as a whole, with the aim of bringing students inside the logic of an assessment scheme, and its associated values and expectations. While acknowledging this is complex and contested terrain, it is argued that students should
not be sheltered from notions of creativity. Rather, it is an opportunity to indenture students into ways of thinking and acting, professional standards and to actively shape an assessment culture of fairness and transparency.

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| 4. Providing developmental feedback | Feedback and discussion are essential to the creative process. Feedback should be discursive, and designed to enthuse, motivate, prompt reflection; to give insight into students’ creative development; and to help prepare for summative assessment | • set appropriate culture and values around feedback: trust, honesty, respect, scholarly, non-directive, well-timed, constructive;  
• multiple voices in feedback process (peers, colleagues, self-assessment);  
• multiple forms of feedback – formal/informal, written/oral;  
• feedback addresses both short and long-term creative development of students;  
• develop students’ abilities to interpret criteria and provide constructive feedback to others;  
• use failure constructively as feedback and learning opportunity. |

As students’ ideas and creative works develop, formative assessment comes into play. Data reported in this study provide much insight into the tensions associated with feedback on creative works, and also provides some excellent pointers in achieving a balance, so that feedback is rigorous yet motivational for students. It is important to establish an appropriate culture around feedback and to ensure that the teacher/assessor is not cast as the lone provider of feedback. Robust developmental feedback was characterised in this study by: (1) multiple voices in the feedback process; (2) active support for risk-taking; and (3) the repositioning of failure as opportunity.
### Phase 5. Making summative judgements

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| Summative assessment in the creative arts is a consensual process by which judgements are made about the quality of creative outputs. Assessors use their professional judgement to arrive at grades, assisted by agreed criteria and standards, and with the moderation of their colleagues. | • actively set aside personal taste and aesthetics;  
• trust intuitive and holistic judgements about qualities of work, using criteria as reference or back-up;  
• avoid dependence on atomised marking or fine-grained judgements;  
• problematise summative judgement with students:  
  - multiple potential viewpoints;  
  - subjective but not arbitrary;  
  - value of professional expertise;  
  - transparency and fairness of process;  
• induct and support new assessors;  
• develop students’ ability to make their own astute judgements on their work;  
• retain strong reflective stance grounded in principles of fairness, transparency, consistency. |

When judging students’ creative works, it is envisaged that all the efforts invested into assessment in earlier phases now come to fruition. The efforts made in discussing expectations and establishing an appropriate culture means that summative assessment is a natural extension of this process. If students have ‘lived and breathed’ the criteria, there should be no surprises at this point, and fairness should be largely self-evident. Yet as we have seen in this study, nothing is quite as simple as this in
such subjective, personal terrain. A key finding in this study is the need to actively deconstruct the role of assessor as the ‘lofty expert’ whose judgement is fixed and immutable. Assessors may more fruitfully construct their role as authoritative professionals or connoisseurs who make provisional judgements in contested contexts.

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| 6. Moderating judgements | Moderation is the process in the creative arts through which individual differences are managed, to arrive at a consensual judgement. Moderation seeks to minimise subjectivities and to strengthen consistency and fairness of judgements. | • set appropriate culture and values around moderation: respect, valuing of difference, scholarship, flexibility, openness, rigorous compromise;  
• accept that moderation can be a challenging social process;  
• use moderation as a developmental opportunity for staff to investigate and constructively debate professional standards;  
• jury/panel leadership is alert to:  
  - individual bias or dominance;  
  - polarisation or defensiveness;  
  - easy consensus or groupthink;  
• use external examiners to add rigour and disrupt comfortable practices;  
• retain strong reflexive and critical stance in relation to moderation processes and dynamics. |

While assessment moderation is a commonplace activity in higher education, there are particular imperatives in the creative arts owing to the higher levels of subjectivity associated with judging creative merit. As we have seen, moderation of assessment of creative works is founded on the theoretical premise that the consensual judgements of experts can more consistently assign degrees of merit than individuals acting in isolation (Amabile, 1996). Judgements are necessary discursive and negotiable, and
robust and scholarly moderation processes are vital in achieving this. This study has revealed the importance of moderation occurring in an open collegial environment that welcomes divergent views and effectively negotiates difference.

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<td>7. Evaluating /improving assessment</td>
<td>Evaluation is essential to the iterative development of an assessment scheme. Evaluation has a particular focus on the student experience of assessment, perceptions of fairness, and how successfully it is fostering appropriate learning and creative outcomes.</td>
<td>• evaluation of assessment assumes multiple stakeholders and sources of data; • the student experience of assessment in the creative arts is complex and variegated, and cannot be readily captured by simple instruments; • mixed method evaluation of assessment is necessary to provide rich pictures of student experience and satisfaction with assessment; • industry input provide important sources of advice about assessment standards and graduate qualities; • maintain critically reflexive stance in relation to ‘getting assessment right’.</td>
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Evaluation is a key element in the model to maintain a four-way dialogue between academics, students, industry, and the university, to ensure that assessment remains relevant and balances the sometimes competing needs and demands of stakeholders, including the arts industries, universities and students. As the final stage of this cyclical model, assessment in the creative arts is positioned as a dynamic complex organism that develops and improves with every iteration.

8.4.3 How this model differs from other assessment models
As there are number of assessment models and cycles, which may bear some superficial similarities to the model presented here, it is worth briefly discussing the elements of this model that distinguish it from others:

1. Most assessment models are presented as a cycle of some form. Typically they provide a generic a four-step process including: (1) defining intended learning objectives; (2) providing learning opportunities; (3) assessing student learning; and (4) evaluating and modifying to improve programs (for example, Coastal Carolina University, 2008). Another common version is a little more specific to the assessment process, including (1) specification and design; (2) preparing the assessment; (3) service delivery; (4) marking and results; and (5) evaluation (for example, Cambridge Assessment, UK, n.d.). The model developed in this thesis has reference to these ‘generic processes’ but is more fully elaborated to acknowledge the complex decision-making phases inherent in creativity assessment. It recognizes, in its seven discrete phases, that so much more needs to be unpacked, problematised and aligned in order to create an appropriate assessment culture that is conducive to creativity.

2. An ‘holistic model of assessment in the creative arts’ was developed by de la Harpe et al., (2008; 2009) as part of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded investigation into studio teaching and learning in the creative arts. The resulting assessment model is focussed on ‘what to assess’, including domains of (1) outcomes: process, product and person (2) knowledge and skills: soft and hard skills, technological literacy and content knowledge and (3) professional and reflective practice: interdisciplinarity, reflexivity and innovation. By contrast, the model developed in this thesis focuses on ‘how to assess’, clarifying the process and stages of assessment, and providing guidance drawn from practice about sound choices in each stage. The de la Harpe model interrogates and extends Phases 1 and 2 of the model in this thesis regarding the design of assessment, and is thus complementary but quite different in focus and intent.

In the next section, I outline the particular value of the model for practitioners, and the implications of the model for assessment theory.

**8.5 Implications of model for theory and practice**
As noted earlier, this model is untested and must therefore remain tentative and provisional, subject to further research to investigate its application in practice. However, even in its untested state, the model as a whole offers significant implications for theory and practice, as follows:

8.5.1 Furthering a holistic understanding of assessment in the creative arts

The model maps the influences of assessment upon the teaching and learning terrain in the creative arts. Theoretically, the model presents a holistic view of assessment as a process that infuses almost all areas of teaching and learning. Cycles of formative and summative assessment are the backbone of the teaching and learning encounter in the creative arts, from which many other activities are aligned. The model supports the construct of assessment as the ‘lived curriculum’ (Rowntree, 1987) and the lens through which students take their cues and shape their learning.

The model also establishes the interconnectedness of each phase in the assessment cycle, and the importance of ensuring that activities and values that underpin each phase are working in alignment. The model posited in this chapter challenges the notion that assessment is an end point in the curriculum. Rather, it positions formative and summative assessment at the centre of teaching and learning in the creative arts, threaded throughout the learning process as students conceptualise and then work to realise their creative products.

In this regard, the model extends existing assessment theory by developing upon Biggs’ (2003) model of constructive alignment. Biggs’ model proposes that: (1) learning outcomes, (2) teaching and learning activities and (3) assessment be in alignment to enable curriculum coherence. Outcomes-based education models have been widely critiqued in relation to the creative arts because of their inadequacy in accounting for the tensions of practice, and the tendency to undermine creative processes and outcomes. As we have seen in this study, achieving alignment for creative outcomes is a far more complex process, entailing much thoughtful balancing of potentially conflicting or undermining messages and stimuli. This model proposes
that each of its seven phases need to be working closely together in alignment to foster creative outcomes and enable appropriate, fair assessment.

8.5.2 Addressing the dilemmas of creativity assessment

This model explicitly acknowledges and addresses the four key assessment dilemmas identified in this thesis; definition, explanation, transparency and subjectivity. These intractable dilemmas become unlocked in this model by the positioning of ‘shared conceptions of creativity’ and ‘functional transparency’ as central, underpinning concepts, driving assessment in the creative arts. Theoretically, this positions (1) creativity as the central underpinning goal and outcome in assessment and (2) the pursuit of transparency, however problematic, as the central value in assessment.

The impact of these two underpinning concepts is to encourage academics to develop shared discourses and public positions about creativity in their disciplines, based upon developing research understandings. It encourages academics to shape their assessment activities based upon these shared goals and understandings, and to account for them openly with stakeholders such as the university and creative communities. It encourages academics to more confidently unpack with students the creative endeavour, and the expectations and standards of the discipline. It enables a dialogue with students about standards, expectations and creative outcomes that seeks to add balance and rigour to students’ essentially self-directed, creative projects.

8.5.3 Providing indicators of sound practice

The model posits a range of sound practice recommendations (presented as Table 8.1) that have been developed from the data of this thesis. The central purpose of each stage of the assessment cycle is defined, along with a series of strategies that support the central purpose. These strategies are not offered as prescriptions necessary for sound assessment. It is important to re-emphasise the variance of context and discipline in this study, which render generalisations impossible. Rather, the strategies are more appropriately offered as ideas and suggestions that illustrate ways in which assessment practice may be shaped more effectively to promote desired creative
outcomes for students. Some strategies will resonate in some contexts more strongly than others.

The central idea for practitioners in this model is that there is much complex decision-making about assessment. As discussed earlier in this chapter, there is a complex dynamic of cause and effect in assessment, with the potential for a range of different impacts and outcomes, intended or otherwise. As we have seen in this study, decisions are often made in response to tensions felt, or balances to be found, yet it was not always clear whether decisions made in one instance were congruent with others, or how these smaller decisions, taken together, aligned with central values and goals.

This model provides a framework for academics in their assessment decision-making process. It helps to delineate areas of significant decision-making, and how this may impact elsewhere. It aims to provide order to the otherwise potentially overwhelming series of decisions and tensions we have explored in this thesis. The model also operates as a useful reflective tool for academics about their current choices and decisions, and how effectively these choices are working together to a consistent, articulated purpose.

‘Sound practice’, as a concept, is offered in contrast to other terms such as ‘best practice’, in recognition that in complex systems such as this, there are no simple prescriptions or templates for practice. As discussed in Chapter 4, the underpinning assumptions of naturalistic enquiry are such that meaning is provisional and contextualised. Claims to ‘best practice’ would thus be inappropriate and subjective. As we have seen in this study, participants offered a variety of responses based on personal values and experience, along with contextual issues relative to their universities, countries, and specific disciplinary traditions. It is unsurprising that there are many different ways of navigating through the maze of dilemmas of teaching and assessment. These choices and decisions by participants cannot be evaluated in any absolute terms, such as right or wrong, best or worst. Rather, I have sought to distil ‘sound practice’ as a way of identifying what seems to work better, or more consistently, toward creativity outcomes, given the complexity of issues involved.
8.5.4 *Creating a positive culture of assessment*

The ultimate goal of this assessment model is to enhance the right psychological environment for learning and creativity. As we have seen, the coded messages of assessment have a profound influence upon student approaches to their creative work. In the creative arts, students’ perceptions of assessment will significantly impact upon their willingness to take risks, to be self-exposing, to develop self-directed professional approaches, and be able to learn from failure in constructive ways. The model proposed in this thesis also has a clear emphasis on helping students to learn more effectively, and to engage more meaningfully within notions of creativity and creative processes. As such, it emphasises assessment as a vehicle for valuable learning in the creative arts, rather than only a vehicle to evaluate achievements and evidence standards.

This model seeks to develop a climate of *mutual understanding and trust* that underscores all assessment activities. In establishing this climate, there is a necessary deconstruction of the prevailing culture of assessment that places assessors on pedestals of expertise and power. It entails explicit discussions about multiple voices and subjectivities inherent in the role of assessor, while acknowledging the experience and expertise that the assessor brings to the role. It entails admitting the voices and experiences of students more actively into the processes of assessment, while acknowledging that there will always be elements of vulnerability and discomfort for students in such personal terrain. It problematises notions such as transparency and consistency, while seeking to eliminate as much mystery as possible from the assessment process. These discursive, mutual processes are essential for students to understand the playing field and to view assessment as part of the learning process.

As noted in Chapter 4, student assessment has been focused historically on its summative purposes. In recent years assessment scholarship has reoriented to focus more clearly on the role of assessment in promoting student learning. In the creative arts, I argue, student learning is profoundly affected by assessment, and particularly in relation to the capacity for them to master professional expectations and industry standards. Thus the model presented in this chapter is designed to promote student
learning in the creative arts by an approach to assessment that is open, consistent, transparent and fit for purpose.

8.6 Concluding comments

The central question raised in this thesis was: How can we assess students’ creative works fairly and appropriately in universities? It is important to briefly return to this question and these two key terms. Fairness and appropriateness are both subjective notions, yet it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions about what constitutes fair and appropriate assessment in the creative arts.

*Fairness* in assessment comprises the key constructs of:

1. **transparency** – assessment schemes, values, processes and judgements should be explicit and evident to students as much as possible;
2. **consistency** – judgements are free of personal bias and hidden assumptions and that moderation processes are robust and equitable;
3. **openness** – assessment is openly problematised in relation to the role of the assessor and the multiple subjectivities of the field.

* Appropriateness in assessment comprises the following:

1. **fitness for purpose** – assessment is congruent with the broader creativity goals of the program, prompting the right kind of student learning, and helping to foster appropriately creative outcomes;
2. **awareness of cause and effect** – a positive assessment culture is created by a complex web of smaller decisions working in alignment throughout the learning process;
3. **awareness of the student experience** – attuned to the unique experiences and challenges faced by students in the creative arts.

The model posited in this chapter is designed to help conceptualise and support fair and appropriate assessment in the creative arts. It offers a framework to guide decision-making. It seeks to map the phases and interrelationships of assessment, clarify goals in each phase of the assessment cycle, clarify common dilemmas, and
provide indicators for sound practice. Its purpose is to assist in navigating through the dilemmas identified in this study and to ensure that decisions are made in alignment with the broader goals and purposes of the program.

The next chapter concludes this thesis by responding to the initial questions posed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. It offers some tentative conclusions and final reflections, along with some suggestions for further research in this field.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis is concluded by returning to some of the key questions posed at the beginning of this study. Initially, this chapter briefly revisits the concerns created by popular notions of assessing creativity in contemporary culture, and relates these to the findings of this study. The chapter also explores the transferability of a creativity assessment model developed in this study, and its potential relevance in broader educational settings. Finally, this chapter concludes with an account of potential areas for further investigation.

9.1 Creativity assessment: Popular versus academic constructions

In the introductory chapter, the issue of popular perceptions of creativity assessment was raised. These popular perceptions, formed by television programs, are such that one could reasonably wonder whether it is at all possible to make consistent or fair judgements in such subjective terrain. While popular constructions of the assessment of creative works are not the subject of this thesis, they have highlighted the potential controversy in this field and also provided an entry point into many of the issues explored in this thesis. It is worthwhile to now return to compare the differences between popular and academic constructions of creativity assessment, as they help to illuminate the particular qualities of creativity assessment in university settings.

While the culture of television elevates subjectivity for dramatic purposes, this study has revealed that very different evaluative cultures prevail in universities. First, assessment is *pragmatic* (rather than dramatic) in nature. Assessment is a routine event often involving significant numbers of students. It would be impossible for most academics to allocate extended periods of time to debate the merits of individual student work, or to be regularly swimming against the tide of collegial opinion. Assessment in universities is framed by pragmatic considerations of time and cost.
Second, assessment is *consensual* in style. In contrast to the individualistic ethos of assessment in the public sphere, assessors in universities often work together through panel discussion and moderation processes to arrive at judgements about creative works. Consensus processes enable assessors to benchmark their interpretations of standards, and they also help to guard against personal bias or idiosyncrasy.

Third, the *purposes* of assessment are significantly different. In the public sphere judgements are largely summative in intent: to evaluate a finished creative work. In universities, however, assessment is significantly educative. Assessors strive to balance summative judgements with a variety of other tasks that are more formative and developmental in intent, such as workings, drafts, and journals. In addition to good outcomes, assessors seek to reward evidence of good process, risk-taking, and other qualities considered essential to students’ longer-term development as creative artists.

Fourth, assessment in creative arts departments is framed by a broader network of institutional rules and quality assurance processes that are largely absent, or at least not apparent, in popular entertainment. Thus, assessment decisions in universities are made according to published criteria and standards, enveloped within outcomes-based education models, and further framed by institutional policy. Moreover, assessors have *obligations to be transparent as possible* in their judgements, and are accountable in various ways for their decisions, most notably to their students, their colleagues, the university and the creative communities with which they are linked.

Taken together, these four factors contribute significantly to a picture of creativity assessment in universities as a more rigorous, safeguarded, and reliable process than its popular counterpart. This is perhaps an unsurprising finding, given the vastly differing goals of popular entertainment and university education. Although this comparison speaks partially to the superior systems and safeguards in universities, it also speaks to a commitment in universities to concepts of fairness and appropriateness. Like creativity itself, these values are highly contested and situated constructs. However the evidence in this thesis overwhelmingly confirms that we are able to assess creativity fairly and appropriately in universities. To briefly synthesise
the data and findings of previous chapters, fairness and appropriateness in creativity assessment can be improved in the following ways:

- a move towards greater shared understanding in disciplinary settings about conceptions of creativity and the creative process, based upon contemporary research;
- an ability to articulate and demystify creative processes and professional expectations more consistently and effectively with students;
- a closer engagement with the student experience of assessment and how this impacts upon their creative and risk-taking drive;
- an open dialogue with students that problematises subjectivities and the role of the assessor;
- the active fostering of a positive culture of assessment based upon mutual understanding, trust and respect; and
- an ongoing evaluative dialogue with other assessment stakeholders – the university and creative communities – about standards, purposes, processes and outcomes in assessment.

9.2 Relevance and transferability of creativity assessment model

In Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, many calls from government and industry were noted in relation to creativity and innovation. These calls continue unabated. For example, at the time of writing (March, 2011), Senator Chris Evans, the Australian Minister for Tertiary Education, in a speech to the Universities Australia Higher Education Conference, argued that creativity and innovation are of the upmost strategic importance to the country’s ongoing economic development, productivity and wellbeing. A snapshot of the creative economy (March, 2011) reveals that it is burgeoning in a range of important ways. The contribution of creative industries toward GDP is presently at A$31.1 billion, and is rapidly outstripping, in size and growth, many key industries such as agriculture and administrative services. In the last 5 years, almost 40,000 new jobs were created in this sector. Over 80,000 students are enrolled in creative arts disciplines in Australian universities, exceeding enrolments in many other major discipline areas such as the natural and physical sciences, engineering and information technology (ARCCCI, 2011).
The challenge for universities is unequivocal: to actively foster greater creative capacity among our graduates, and to prepare them to participate in the burgeoning creative economies of the future. Yet in most disciplines of higher education, we barely acknowledge its existence as an explicit, desirable outcome, and according to Jackson (2008, p. 8) it occurs ‘more by accident than design’. Jackson (2008) notes the need for disciplines to develop their own conceptions of creativity and how it might be meaningfully taught and fostered in students. McWilliam (2007) argues that because creative industries are now so centrally positioned within contemporary economies, universities must break down their silos and create more eclectic, transdisciplinary opportunities for students to develop creative capacity.

Potentially, the creative arts are centrally placed in these reforms. As we have seen in this study, there is a sophisticated expertise around creativity in the creative arts that most other disciplines are only beginning to come to terms with. McWilliam (2007) notes the necessity for many disciplines to shed the habits of delivering pre-packaged content and adopt more experimental pedagogies in which students are more actively engaged in production, adaption and re-purposing for creative outcomes. The pedagogies of the creative arts, argues Dineen (2006), are by no means discipline specific. She argues that they belong within a broader commitment to emancipatory and transformative education, founded on teacher-student relationships in which creative personal expression is explicitly supported and rewarded. Creativity, argues Dineen (2006, p. 111) becomes an ‘innate and unproblematic aspect of students’ identity as learners, practitioners and individuals’.

The creativity assessment model developed in this thesis may also be adaptable to many disciplines beyond the creative arts. Although this model is clearly grown from the creative arts, there may be many resonances for other disciplines that are struggling to conceptualise and explain creativity, to foster creative processes, and to develop formative and summative assessment designs that support and shape these outcomes. Beyond the creative arts, for example, we find related disciplines such as architecture and engineering that have important creative and innovative dimensions. Also closely related are disciplines such as multimedia and information and communication technologies, in which creativity and innovation are also central
outcomes. Further afield, in disciplines of business and commerce, we find the need for creative capacity in a range of key activities including marketing and entrepreneurship. In the hybrid creative economy, there are few disciplines of higher education that can claim to be unaffected. As disciplines come to conceptualise and articulate their creative terrain, so too will they need to find ways to assess it.

Yet the model posed in this thesis is not one that can be simply grafted onto existing conventional assessment practice. Students who are schooled in didactic pedagogies and ritualised, reproductive assessments are likely to flounder if these structures are suddenly removed. It is no help for students to be told that they ‘have to be creative’. At the heart of this model is cultural change in assessment to position creative outcomes as the central focus, in which personal expression, risk-taking and the freedom to fail are explicitly supported and rewarded through assessment. Students need to develop understanding about these new expectations, and to develop trust that such assessment is negotiable, transparent and fair.

9.3 Limitations

While there are many potential opportunities for transfer of the creativity assessment model, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. As noted in Chapter 4, constructivist ontology rejects the possibility of generalisation or direct transferability of findings. The naturalistic inquirer aims to provide insight about the phenomenon, but does not claim to be able to make direct generalisations from a sample to a population (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In practical terms, the following limitations apply to this study:

1. **Educational setting.** The focus of this study was creative arts assessment practice in universities located in Western cultural settings. Thus the perspectives of other educational settings, such as secondary schools and institutes of technology, or universities in non-Western contexts remain unrepresented.

2. **Disciplinary representation.** This study does not offer proportional representation of all disciplines within the creative arts. Some disciplines, such as creative writing, were clearly more represented in this study than others. While there was
solid representation of the visual arts, design and music, others such as dance and film had only minor representation.

3. **Interview method.** As the primary data gathering method in this study, the interview method has inherent limitations relating to the potential for distortion or bias, owing to the human, social nature of interactions and interpretations (Patton, 2002). This study therefore offers a series of necessarily provisional findings that are bounded by context, culture and through the processes of social mediation. Clearly some of these findings may resonate more or less in other contexts and cultures.

4. **Representativeness of participants.** Participants were recruited to this study on the basis of their own interest and expertise in student assessment. They were mostly very experienced and also committed to reflecting on and questioning assessment practices in the creative arts. The findings in this thesis need to be considered in this light, as these participants do not necessarily represent the views and experiences of the ‘rank and file’ of creative arts academics.

### 9.4 Potential for further investigations

This thesis confirms that creativity is a complex, contested construct, both in theoretical terms, and as a set of situated disciplinary practices. A model such as the one presented in this thesis cannot hope to account for or resolve all the complexities of theory and practice that have been uncovered in this thesis. There are various opportunities for further investigation that are briefly explored below:

#### 9.4.1 Understanding the student experience of assessment

There has been much discussion and speculation in this thesis about the impact of assessment in the creative arts on students. It is clear that due to the personal nature of creative projects, and the considerable public exposure associated with formative and summative assessment events, the student experience in the creative arts is significantly different in particular ways to those of other disciplines in higher education.
Concerns have been raised in this thesis about how assessment affects students’ creative motivation. Participants have observed how students can become disaffected or disillusioned during phases of developmental feedback. They may form somewhat cynical ideas about what they may need to do to ‘play the game’, to bury their own creative urges, and to satisfy requirements. For these students, there seems to be critical loss of trust in assessment as a benign, supportive process, or in the judgements of their assessors as fair and transparent. Questions arise about when and how these kinds of views were forged, and whether they could have been avoided.

In developing a climate of mutual understanding and trust, it is essential that we engage more closely with and respond to this experience. Studies that investigate aspects of the student experience of assessment might explore experiences with the cycles of formative and summative assessment, their willingness to take risks, their conceptions of fairness and their views and suggestions about the appropriateness of assessment schemes in their discipline. The findings of studies of this kind would shed further light on the assessment process, and would also test and potentially extend the assessment model presented in this thesis.

9.4.2 Risk taking and failure in assessment cultures

A second important thread from this study is the issue of student risk-taking. Risk-taking has been established as a vital part of the creative process, yet highly problematic in relation to assessment culture. A clear tension was identified in this study about participants’ desire to reward students’ willingness to take risks, yet to fairly judge a risk-taking work that has significantly failed. Moreover, how is this failing work judged against a competent work that has demonstrated little risk-taking?

At the heart of this concern is the understanding that in creative work, failure is where much important learning occurs. As essayist Laurence Shames argues: ‘Success and failure. We think of them as opposites, but they’re really not. They’re companions – the hero and the sidekick’. Participants in this study wanted their students to extend themselves, to push out of their creative comfort zones, and to understand that cycles of risk and experimentation are critical processes for creative professionals. Yet in a culture of summative assessment, where grades determine futures, how do students
Chapter 9: Conclusion

negotiate these risks when failure is a distinct possibility? How, indeed, can failure be reconstructed in the creative arts to counteract student fears about public humiliation and diminished grade point averages?

Clearly there is an important relationship between risk-taking and student assessment that requires further investigation in situated contexts. As noted earlier, students’ perceptions and experiences with risk-taking are a vital piece of this puzzle. There was widespread disappointment noted by participants about the reluctance of many students to take risks, particularly as the summative assessment stakes grew higher. Further investigation into student risk-taking in the creative arts could be significantly informed by risk perception theories (for example, Slovic, 2000). This cluster of psychological and sociological theories shed particular light upon the nature of risk (such as whether risks are voluntary, encouraged or forced) and human decision-making when faced with risk (such as how people process information relative to risks; evaluate probabilities, select courses of action). A study of this kind would aim to inform practice about how student risk-taking behaviours are affected, positively or negatively, by differing assessment stimuli.

9.4.3 Managing difference in assessment processes

A further important thread in this thesis is the management of consensual assessment processes. Although participants mostly reported that panels, juries and other moderation processes worked reasonably smoothly, there was also significant evidence to suggest that these processes could, occasionally, go seriously awry. This study tended to confirm Orr’s (2007) observations of the ‘choreography’ of panel discussions, in which power relations skewed assessment results. This study also posed concerns relating to gender relationships, the isolation or polarisation of dissenting individuals, and that consensus may at times be too cosy, or too pragmatically achieved.

Assessment panels in the creative arts cannot function effectively without a degree of appropriate self-management and reflexivity. In positing the creativity assessment model in Chapter 8, I have argued that panels cannot operate healthily unless they are underscored by appropriate values of respect, openness, valuing of difference,
scholarly exchange and rigorous compromise. Such collegial culture is really no more than an extension of a culture that ideally prevails across the whole teaching and learning environment. Arguably it is difficult to achieve such a culture among students if it is not modelled among academic staff in a department.

Yet these cultures are clearly not easily achieved in departments where there may be elements of ideological division and differing areas of expertise brought to a panel. Some participants noted the importance of sound panel leadership in setting appropriate cultures and guiding robust, inclusive discussion. Participants also noted the opportunities that panels and moderation processes presented for collegial debate about conceptions of creativity and professional standards. In relation to further investigations, action research methods could effectively be developed to support reflexivity and change in decision-making dynamics on panels and juries. Such an investigation would likely adopt a community of practice approach, informed by various bodies of theory associated with social processes, group dynamics and the management of conflict.

**9.4.4 Questions of structure and self-directedness**

Questions surrounding the tensions between structure and self-directedness in assessment remain critical ones in the creative arts. As discussed in Chapter 3, Cowan (2006) and Jackson (2008) have argued that creativity cannot be grafted onto an outcomes-based assessment model. Rather, it should be replaced by a model of self-assessment, in which students define their own creative directions, and assess their own achievements against negotiable criteria. Teachers do not assess the work, but rather the rigour of the student’s self-assessment, and whether they are persuaded to endorse it. The philosophy underpinning this model is that creativity is uniquely personal; that creative trajectories are necessarily individual, and that the person best equipped to understand and assess it is the creator. It is also underpinned by the philosophy that the abilities to self-direct and self-assess one’s learning are the most valuable outcomes of an undergraduate education in any discipline.

This self-assessment model is both elegant and persuasive, yet it requires much further interrogation and investigation as a viable model in higher education. It was
evident in this thesis that there is already a very high level of self-directedness in the creative arts, arguably more so than most other disciplines in higher education. Students commonly devise their own creative directions and projects, and maintain a high level of agency throughout the process. When presenting their completed work for assessment, it is also likely that their intentions and reflections on creative outcomes are considered. In a self-assessment model, however, questions arise about the ability of students, particularly in earlier stages of their study, to survive and flourish without the usual subject-based assessment structures, and to make scholarly judgements about their own work.

Questions also arise in self-assessment models about the purposes of assessment and the role of the assessor. Most participants in this study argued that assessment was an important vehicle for maintaining the standards and the professionalism of their respective creative industries. Assessment criteria were carefully devised to reflect certain less negotiable outcomes, particularly in relation to levels of demonstrated craft, skill and functionality. Indeed this was a key part of their external accountability – to the university who accredits the program and the creative communities into which their students are absorbed. In self-assessment models it is unclear whether student outcomes might be inappropriately privileged over the legitimate needs of other stakeholders of the assessment process.

It is not possible, in this thesis, to draw conclusions about these issues. It is reiterated, however, that participants were largely satisfied that there was sufficient room within outcomes-based structures to accommodate student agency and to enable valued learning. Further applied investigations in situated contexts will shed more light on these debates, although evidence would clearly need to be compelling to persuade creative arts academics to disrupt their existing assessment practices, or to remove them from the mainstream of university assessment processes.

9.5 A final word

As a final word, I would like to reflect upon the importance and the far-reaching impact of assessment in universities, and the duty of care, as academics, to engage
deeply with the assessment cultures we construct. As Derek Rowntree (1987) notes, we are all assessed from the cradle to the obituary. We have scarcely taken our first breath before we have a label fastened to our wrists, a file opened, and the first of a series of diagnostic assessments. From then on, the assessments come regularly – from parents, doctors, siblings, peers, teachers, employers, and just about anyone we come into contact with. For better or worse, assessment has irrevocably shaped our lives and identities.

Assessment cultures are deeply ingrained in universities, and they are not easily disrupted or challenged. David Boud (1995) recounts a workshop for new university teachers in which participants were asked to provide autobiographical narratives of their own assessment experiences as students. The results he describes as ‘devastating’. He noted that:

even successful, able and committed students – those who become university teachers – have been hurt by their experiences of assessment, time and time again, through school and higher education. This hurt did not encourage them to persist and overcome adversity... it caused them to lose confidence; it dented their self-esteem, and led them never to have anything to do with some subjects ever again (Boud, 1995, p. 35).

Boud (1995) also noted the tendency among academics to unthinkingly carry forward many of the negative experiences and values embodied in prior assessment experiences into their current teaching and assessment practice. It is not until these practices are actively reflected upon and held up to the light that much of their hollowness is revealed.

However, assessment reflexivity and reform in universities are more difficult than ever to enact, given increasing regulation, quality assurance initiatives, accountabilities and student numbers. Cultural change in assessment cannot be left to overburdened individual academics. It requires sustained leadership that is founded upon well-developed policies and practices, in which values, purposes and directions are clearly articulated and shared. It is hoped that the findings in this study provide some of the building blocks for new policy and practice for assessment in the creative arts.
Yet there is still much that academics can achieve, in their daily interactions with students, to reposition assessment culture. A few participants in this study reflected upon their own experiences as undergraduates, and particularly of assessment cultures that were overtly competitive and personally bruising. They were keen to shape their assessment practices in ways that actively reversed that culture, to minimise the negative impact of assessment, yet retain and strengthen the robust discussion and honest, frank feedback integral to the creative process. We thus see the beginnings of a new culture emerging from the ashes of the old, in which assessors are able to step out of outdated power relationships and establish new cultures founded on mutual trust and respect.

As we have seen in this study, assessment in the creative arts is a particularly exposing process for students. As assessors it is important to retain some humility in the face of this, as well as a strong core of reflexivity about the process, understanding how significantly it may impact upon students’ lives and careers. As the poet, William Butler Yeats poignantly reminds us:

*I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.*


Blair, B. (2006). ‘At the end of a huge crit in the summer, it was “crap” - I'd worked really hard but all she said was “fine” and I was gutted’. *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education, 5*(2), 83-95.


Cambridge Assessment (n.d.) Delivering assessment

Cambridge, UK.


Coastal Carolina University (2008). Assessment cycle,


Cardiff, 8-10 January.
Education Conference, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, 8-10 January.


Kleiman, P. (2005). *Beyond the tingle factor: Creativity and assessment in higher education*. Paper presented at the ESRC Creativity Seminar, University of Strathclyde, 7
October.


LoBiondo-Wood, G., & Haber, J. (2006). *Nursing research: Methods and critical appraisal*


Tait, J. (2002). *What conditions and environment could support teachers in finding space for 'creativity' in their work with curriculum?* York, UK: LTSN Generic Centre.


supervisions be seen as a 'creativity lab'? Paper presented at the Creativity or Conformity? Building Cultures of Creativity in Higher Education Conference, Cardiff, 8-10 January.
Assessing students in the Creative Arts

I am undertaking an international PhD study exploring academics' conceptions of and experience with the assessment process in the creative arts - the dilemmas and issues in assessing students' creative work, and the variety of ways in which they are handled. I am particularly interested in how assessors:

* make judgements about the quality of students' creative works
* provide developmental feedback to students,
* develop and apply criteria to marking and grading activities
* moderate their marking with colleagues
* conceptualise 'creativity' and explain this to students.

If you are a teacher/assessor in disciplines such as the visual arts, music or creative writing, and you have an interest or concern for the issues involved in the assessment of creativity, then I would welcome the opportunity to interview you. It is not necessary for you to feel that you have entirely conquered these complex issues - I am interested equally in your perceptions and concerns as much as your actual assessment practices. The interview usually lasts for about 2 hours, so would hopefully not be too demanding on your no doubt very busy schedule. I will be in the UK during the month of November and would be able to meet you at your convenience.

Most participants to date have found the interview to be a stimulating experience, offering the opportunity to articulate issues that may not find a forum elsewhere.

If you are interested, please don't hesitate to contact me at chris.morgan@scu.edu.au. I will be happy to provide you with a list of questions prior to the interview.

Chris Morgan
(Phd Candidate, Southern Cross University)
APPENDIX 2

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project

An Investigation of Student Assessment in  
Creative Fields of Higher Education
Chris Morgan (PhD Candidate)
Southern Cross University. Australia

☐ ___ I agree to participate in the above research project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and I am satisfied with the answers received.

☐ ___ I agree to my interview being recorded on audiotape.

OR

☐ ___ I do not agree to my interview being audiotaped and prefer the researcher to take hand written notes.

☐ ___ I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time and I have been informed that prior to data analysis, any data that has been gathered before withdrawal of this consent will be destroyed.

☐ ___ I agree to be identified as the provider of this case study and to be acknowledged in any resulting scholarly publications, along with my employer University

OR

☐ ___ I wish to offer this case study anonymously and do not wish to be identified in any publications. I would like my anonymity protected in all ways.

☐ ___ I understand that the Southern Cross University’s Ethics Committee has approved this project.

☐ ___ I am aware that I can contact the researcher at any time after the interview. If I have any further questions about this study I am free to contact Dr Renata Phelps on: (02)6620 3792

☐ ___ The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the HREC through the Ethics Complaints Officer, Ms Suze Kelly, (telephone [02] 6626 9139, fax [02] 6626 9145, email: skelly1@scu.edu.au
Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence.

☐ ___ I understand that I will be given a copy of this form to keep.

*I have read the information above and agree to participate in this study. I am over the age of 18 years.*

Name of Participant: …………………………………………………

Signature of Participant: ……………………………………………

Date: …………………………………

I certify that the terms of the Consent Form have been verbally explained to the participant and that the participant appears to understand the terms prior to signing the form. Proper arrangements have been made for an interpreter where English is not the participant’s first language.

Signature of Witness (independent of the research, where possible):

………………………………………………

Date: …………………………………