Teaching Outside the Rubric: Qualitative Student Insights about Creativity

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Purpose of the Study - The overarching purpose of our study is to explore the creativity perceptions of students, in an attempt to understand how they define it and how they believe it can be infused into any marketing curriculum. Our interest lies in gathering student insights as this is a gap in the current pedagogical literature.

Method/Design and Sample - We qualitatively analyze 41 student comments using a semantic analysis tool, we then interpret the results and merge them into a theoretical framework.

Results - We find that students value creativity and have definite ideas for infusing it into virtually any marketing curriculum. The exploratory analysis shows that active learning in combination with social construction of knowledge can foster creativity enhancement in the classroom, and we offer the Constructivist Learning framework as our theory base.

Value to Marketing Educators - As marketing courses often involve projects and those are usually done in groups, the intersection of creativity with social processes is fortunate. Professors can readily create an active learning environment wherein groups encourage creative collaboration through divergent thinking. The incorporation of these group sessions into regular courses, even if done as separate lab sessions, will build team cohesion, increase contagious motivation, and ultimately increase team creativity. Our study indicates that students are cognizant of the concept of creativity but believe that it is not normally rewarded and that they are given minimal time to commit to creative endeavors. Therefore, it is incumbent upon marketing professors to redefine rubrics and reward increased student creativity.

Keywords: creativity, active learning, social constructivism, constructivist learning framework, semantic qualitative analysis.

In a recent global study of 4,000 adults, half of which are educators, researchers confirm the age-old notion that the education system often deters, stifles, or decreases student creativity over time (Adobe, 2013). According to this study, educators in the U.S. in particular cite reasons for not integrating creativity in the classroom which include lack of resources, the fact that the system does not value creativity, it's not a priority, and it's the role of other educators. On the other hand, 86% of the participants indicate that creativity in education will fuel the economies of the future. Another study of 5,000 adults evenly distributed from

five different countries (U.S., U.K., Germany, France, and Japan) reveals a creativity gap, with claims such as: (1) only 1 in 4 people feel that they are living up to their creative potential; (2) there is a universal concern that the educational system is stifling creativity; (3) there is a workplace creativity gap wherein people feel pressure to be productive instead of creative at work; and (4) unlocking creative potential is seen as the key to economic and societal growth (Adobe, 2012). This study also states that 76% of the U.S. participants feel that being creative is valuable to society.

Even though there is a well-articulated need for creative people and ideas throughout the world, a clear pathway and a coherent definition for the concept of creativity is still lacking. In terms of an overarching and simplistic definition, Lee and Hoffman (2014) cite Ciardi (1956), a writer by trade, in defining creativity as a new idea which is born from existing concepts combined in a novel way. Whereas this is a very clear overarching definition for creativity, the true question of our research lies in the implementation of creativity in the classroom when it is not the focus of a course. For example, in the realm of *advertising creativity*, plenty of research indicates that creative promotion increases advertising effectiveness and recall (Baack, Wilson, & Till, 2008; Krishen & Homer, 2012), yet practitioners and customers are not even consistent in their definitions of the concept (West, Kover, & Caruana, 2008). In a completely different domain, namely *organizational creativity*, existing research argues that it is defined as a combination of novelty and usefulness of products or ideas (Amabile, 1982), but has conflicting views on whether it should be measured as a single dimensional or a multidimensional construct (Sullivan & Ford, 2010). With regard to selecting *creative marketing personnel* for a firm, there is general agreement that such employees produce innovative products, and novel approaches to solving problems (Andrews & Smith, 1996); however, the assessment of creative ability itself is not consistent across studies and organizations (Althuizen, 2012). Lastly, while existing research on the benefits of business level creativity is generally consistent, the unit of measure for creativity itself is debated. The measurement of individual creativity is problematic because studies show that in most organizations, the unit of creativity measurement will eventually be at the team level (Mueller & Kamdar, 2011). Therefore, the ability to produce creative work in a team environment will require not only individual creativity, but also creative self-efficacy, or confidence in one's creative abilities, within a team (Richter, Hirst, van Knippenberg, & Baer, 2012). These inconsistencies are troubling because business schools strive to increase the creative potential of students with the assumption that that concept has even been defined.

Given this gap in the understanding of creativity itself, the overarching purpose of our study is to explore the creativity perceptions of students, in an attempt to understand how they define it and how they believe it can be infused into the marketing curriculum. The goal of our study is to essentially create a dyadic view of creativity by adding in the student perspective. As can be seen in

our forthcoming literature review, scholars in multiple fields discuss and implement creative thinking in the classroom. Our aim, then, is to augment this set of literature with the student perspective on creativity. Essentially, how do students view creativity itself? How can we bring their ideas into our implementation of creativity in every classroom and in multiple ways? Rather than trying to argue that creativity has never been defined, we want to explore how students define it and use their ideas to derive a framework. However, when dealing with pedagogical approaches to creativity, some research speaks of incorporating exercises into business courses to actively increase student creativity. Conversely, the real challenge for educators lies in incorporating and allowing for creative output from students during every single assignment or project. In essence, this would entail allowing students to think and work outside the rubric, or augment the basic expectations. Our premise is that while creativity can be treated as a separate module or course, infusing it into every course will ultimately increase a student's educational experience and value. We begin by reviewing the marketing pedagogical literature on creativity in the classroom. In the next section, we provide a qualitative study of 41 marketing research students, a course traditionally considered fairly rote and often mundane. We next present and discuss the unguided semantic analysis of the student comments, offering the Constructivist Learning Theory framework to summarize our findings. Finally, we close with conclusions, limitations, and managerial implications.

1. Literature Review

As McIntyre, Hite, and Rickard (2003) mention, both anecdotal evidence and academic studies confirm that, in its most basic form, creativity decreases as education increases. For this reason, teaching students to be creative continues to be a challenge and a goal for professors; students indicate that even though they feel that professors encourage creativity and often attempt to develop it, it is rarely rewarded in the classroom (McCorkle, Payan, Reardon, & Kling, 2007). Yet, creativity is one of the key components in the marketing curriculum that can increase the aesthetic sensibility of marketing student outputs (Petkus, Budeva, Chung, & Dzhogleva, 2011).

Few theoretical frameworks exist for the implementation of creativity into the marketing curriculum but one of the most prominent ones is the Creative Marketing Breakthrough (CMB) model (Titus, 2007). The key components of this model are task motivation, cognitive flexibility, disciplinary knowledge, and serendipity. The disciplinary knowledge facet of the CMB model is consistent with the fact that many creative theories have been developed from the overlap of two seemingly disparate disciplines, such as Prospect Theory, which combines the disciplines of Psychology and Economics. Likewise, while concentrated, domain specific knowledge is important, the ability to divergently think can be

lessened when individuals develop mental set fixation, or discipline-specific myopia (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009). Based on metaphorical pairings, Finke, Ward, and Smith (1992) suggest a second framework for developing creativity, called the Geneplore model. In this model, a preinventive form or structure is paired with a problem to be solved by students. Extending the Geneplore model, Ramocki (1996) defines the MAP model as a combination of metaphorical thinking, analogous systems, and preinventive forms. This model also builds upon the idea of merging seemingly disconnected chunks of information to solve problems. Yet another method, named the Iron Inventor (based on the Iron Chef Television program) combines creative problem solving with active learning with an innovative product development goal (Lee & Hoffman, 2014).

In addition to the inherent difficulty of teaching students to think outside the rubric or provide something unexpected in an assignment, marketing professors are often challenged by the need to assign student projects to teams or groups. When working in teams, students face the additional challenge of keeping motivation levels high for every team member to create functionally satisfactory work (Krishen, 2013), keeping group members at high performance levels or staving off the slackers or loafers (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008), and avoiding conformity pressure which can facilitate lower group creativity (Goncalo & Duguid, 2012).

Extant research identifies creativity as a personality type or orientation measure, classifying individuals as either high or low in creativity. Such measures of creativity consist of a 30 item creative personality scale (CPS; Gough, 1979), the Creativity Domain Questionnaire (Kaufman, 2006), the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TCTT; Torrance & Goff, 1989), the 60 item Abedi-Schumacher Creativity Test (CT; Abedi, 2002), and the Creativity Achievement Questionnaire (Carson, Peterson, & Higgins, 2005), to name a few. To measure creative personality in the marketing classroom, McIntyre, Hite, and Rickard (2003) utilize the TCTT scale while McCorkle and colleagues (2007) employ the CT scale. Since most of the constructs and tests that generate creativity ratings rely on the fact that it is a stable trait, an important question is whether educators should strive to increase it in individual students or whether the aim would be to pair creative personalities together.

At the core of much of the creativity research lays the central question of whether individuals can actually rate their own creativity. In essence, when researchers rely on personality measures of creativity, several implicit assumptions take place; the first of which is that individuals are creative or not, regardless of the domain. In testing this assumption, research suggests that individuals may not self-report their creativity across the domains of work, leisure, or school in a consistent manner (Reiter-Palmon, Robinson-Morral, Kaufman, & Santo, 2012). A second issue with creativity research lies in the fact that even the word itself is so elusive that truly defining creative work can be difficult for individuals. Given the immense research underscoring the need for

creativity in employees and the equally important goal of educators to increase student creativity, an exploratory, descriptive study involving qualitative methods examines student perspectives on the meaning of creativity in a classroom and meaningful ways to infuse it into the curriculum.

2. Emergent Framework: Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivism, otherwise known as a Theory of Active Learning, Constructivist Learning Theory, or Productive Constructivism, centers on the pedagogical idea that learning happens when the student takes new knowledge and material and organizes it into existing cognitive structures to construct new understandings (Zahorik, 1997). Productive constructivism as a learning theory originated social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) as well as social constructivism (Vygotsky 1986). Social learning theory argues that learning occurs through several cognitive processes such as abstraction and integration of information based on the modeling behavior of others as well immersion into social encounters, and the use of symbols which lead to actions; this theory is in opposition to prior behavioral theories which claimed that individuals must be conditioned prior to taking action (Grusec, 1992). Social constructivism contends that individuals construct their own meanings as opposed to acting as pure mirrors of their teachers; in essence, the theory claims that knowledge is co-constructed when learners represent new information (Vygotsky, 1986). Newer pedagogical research combines these two theories into a productive constructivism learning theory which emphasizes the need to increase cognitive activity in learners (Adrian & Palmer, 1999).

3. Qualitative Study

The aim of the study is to obtain student perspectives on the meaning of creativity in the classroom.

3.1. Participants and Procedure

A total of 41 undergraduate students from a large state-supported university in the western part of the United States provided insights regarding creativity and infusing it into a teaching environment (25 females and 16 males; mean age = 23.03). Participants were enrolled in a marketing research class and voluntarily completed the survey for course credit. Students were allowed to self-select into groups for project work. The survey was administered just prior to the end of the semester during class time and included filler questions before asking open-ended

questions as follow: (1) Please define creativity in your own words; and (2) How could creativity be infused more heavily into classroom projects and lectures? Students were allowed to write as much as they wished to answer each of the questions.
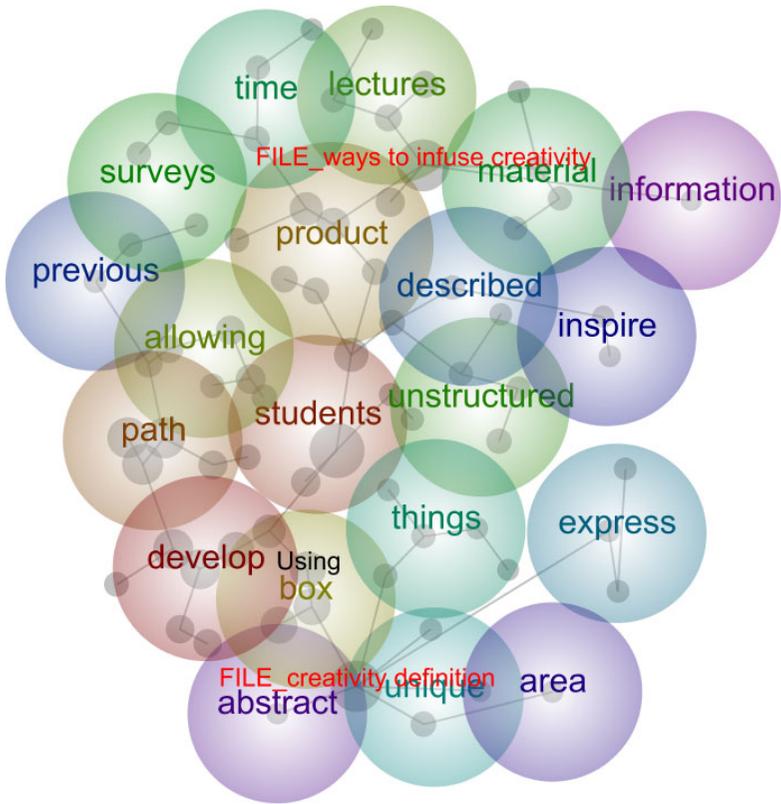
3.2. Procedure and Analysis

The literature review provides ample evidence that creativity is not only a difficult concept to define, but it is also layered with complex interpretations and domain-specific components. In a manner similar to Voorhees, Brady, and Horowitz (2006), we gather insights from open-ended responses to survey questions as qualitative data; this use of data as a form of qualitative inquiry is consistent with the definition of qualitative research as exploratory and as a method to gain insights. To analyze these thoughts, we utilize an unguided semantic analysis tool called Leximancer. Leximancer (www.leximancer.com) ascertains the underlying concepts and themes within verbal data (Smith 2011) through a machine learning technique. Essentially, the tool objectively analyzes data through complex automated statistical processes (Dann, 2010); as such it uncovers semantic or relational analysis as well as conceptual or thematic analysis (Campbell, Pitt, Parent, & Berthon, 2011). Several existing research studies contain analysis performed by this tool, which is based on Bayesian theory (e.g., Campbell et al., 2011; Dann, 2010; Krishen, Raschke, Kachroo, LaTour, & Verma, 2014). A unique aspect of Leximancer is the ability to graphically represent the key concepts and themes which students associate with creativity.

3.3. Results

Analysis of the data consists of semantically characterizing each question individually as well as their interrelationship. Figure 1 provides a set of themes and their interrelationship, mapped with respect to the two questions, shown as FILE_ways to infuse creativity and FILE_creativity definition. To define creativity, students utilized themes including *abstract, unique, express, develop, path,* and *unstructured*. To describe ways to infuse creativity, they identified themes such as *lectures, material, information, material, surveys*, and *time*. Drilling down further into the data, Figure 2 shows concepts and their connections, again with respect to the two sets of data. In terms of infusing, concepts such as *opposed, lectures, interactive, believe, information, hands*, and *learn* surface; whereas for the definition of creativity, the concepts arise including *appealing, flowing, thoughts, express, abstract, process, unique, ideas, better,* and *freedom*.

Figure 1: Emergent Themes

Figure 2: Concept Connections

Sample student comments are provided in Table 1 for the main themes with lower level concepts. Regarding the relationship between the actual sample comments, key concepts, and themes, note the following relevant points : (1) the sample comment provided in the table is not the only comment which maps to a particular key concept and corresponding theme, (2) as can be seen in the table, the comment does not always contain the literal word or words provided in the key concept or theme, and (3) the abstraction of the key concept from the sample comment and then the further abstraction to the theme represents the point of utilizing a tool which derives concept correlations, relational analysis, and meaning rather than counting words. For example, the student comment provided here:

Adding spice or flare to something that normally would not be implemented to that activity, process, or subject.

This comment maps to the *develop* key concept and then the same named theme. However, note that whereas the term fits the meaning behind the student comment, it is literally provided in this particular comment. Several such examples are provided in Table 1 and demonstrate the importance of deriving both relational and semantic analysis through this qualitative method.

*Table 1*: Themes and Concepts Sample Comments ($N = 41$)

Theme	Key Concept	Sample Comment
Develop	Develop	Adding spice or flare to something that normally would not be implemented to that activity, process, or subject.
	Normal	Creativity is thinking beyond conventional means to produce something.
	Everyone	Being creative means to think outside of what one would default to.
	Norm	How did that person do that, it's cool!" Creativity also means thinking outside the box, not being subjected to rules or norms on how to do things.
	Beyond	Means to develop your own thought process. Also means going beyond what is normal or asked of you.
Students	Students	Make them make the presentation new and exciting not only for the students but for the instructors.
	Ideas	Creativity is the secret sauce that highlights an individual's personality. It is the showcase of abstract thinking and ideas.
	Exercises	I think maybe it would help people like me to get better ideas if we did more creativity exercises and/or lessons during class because I feel that as students, we get so caught up with what we have to do that we end up just doing what is asked instead of actually being creative with it (if that makes sense). For students, I feel that it's easier to fall into a box and be just straight forward instead of actually thinking outside the box and going through a creative path to get where we need to get.
Path	Path	The ability to create something that other people never thought of.
	Lessons	Creativity is used like a muscle. The more one practices creativity, the better one becomes using creativity and the more comfortable one feels using creativity.
	Instead	Encouraging students al students not just a few to participate. It gets annoying hearing the same people share they tend to have the same perspective/questions every time.
Product	Product	Project, the class should have to make their own ads. An "Ideal" advertisement for their product, to apply what they've learned.
	Projects	Maybe if the lectures were more interactive and if we had more time to work on our projects during class.
	Group	I like the project as-is, but I think we could have been given more time to create our own content. As an example, I would have liked to create a third ad with my group after collecting reviews on the first two ads.
Allowing	Allowing	I already think that the projects are creative. Everyone has their own topics and the freedom to make it creative in their own ways.
Lectures	Interactive	Lectures are interactive, fun, and relate to things happening now.
	Work	Maybe if the lectures were more interactive and if we had more time to work on our projects during class.
Unstructured	Unstructured	Thinking outside the box. Creativity is more unstructured and you have more freedom to get creative.

4. Discussion

The most prominent concepts for the definition of creativity include: (1) the adjectives - *original, unique, appealing, normal, better, different, unstructured*; (2) the nouns - *thoughts, means, situation, process, mind, box, norm, ideas*; (3) the verbs – *express, develop*; (4) the pronoun – *everyone*; and (5) the prepositions – *beyond, outside*. For infusion of creativity, the most prominent concepts are the following parts of speech: (1) adjectives – *previous, interactive*; (2) nouns – *lectures, examples, time, class, hands, product, classroom, work, advertisements, projects, group, material, muscle*; and (3) verbs – *infused, grab, surveys, allowing, research*. Whereas when asked for the definition of creativity, students provide seven descriptive adjectives and only two verbs, when they are asked for ways to infuse creativity, they report only two descriptive adjectives (one of which is *interactive*) and five active verbs. For the creativity definition, students list more "concrete" nouns such as *box, ideas, norm, situation,* and *process*; for the infusion of creativity, students also list several "interactive" nouns such as *lectures, examples, hands, muscle, projects,* and *advertisements*.

In combination with productive constructivism learning theory, we propose a creativity framework based on student comments on how to infuse creativity into the marketing curriculum. Figure 3 displays an emergent framework for understanding the student comments regarding infusing creativity into the marketing curriculum; in this diagram, the key concepts that students discussed are spatially depicted on two axes. Using an iterative understanding of the derived key concepts and themes, we mapped them into the figure in one of four quadrants, representing the level of active versus social learning. Whereas the high social learning quadrant includes *research* and *group* (both of which are activities which involve groups of students), high active learning contains more action-oriented words such as *interactive*, *hands*, *grab*, and *work*. The axes consist of active learning and social learning, thereby integrating cognitive constructivism with social learning theory. The framework shows that the social aspects of the student experience, such as group projects and classroom participation, are as important as active learning at the individual level.

Figure 3: Framework for Combining Constructivist Learning Theory with Creativity
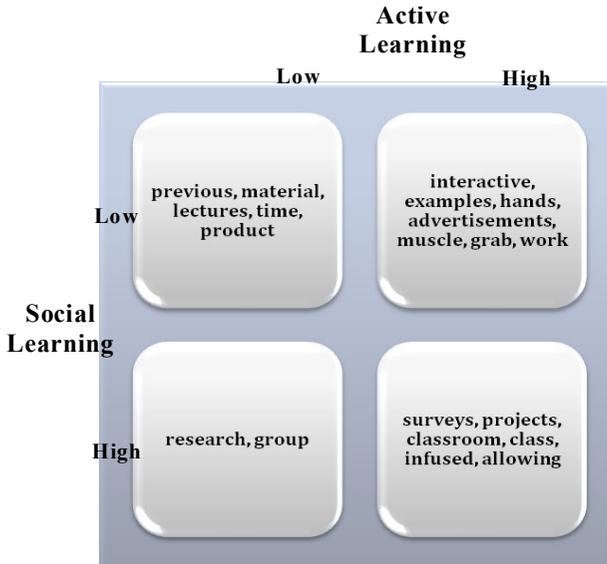
5. Conclusions, Future Research, Implications, and Limitations

Our research has several implications for pedagogical practice. Our most important finding is that not only do students value creativity, but they consider it an important part of any pedagogical environment. Creativity in the classroom also produces practitioners who know the value of applying creativity in the workplace and leads to practitioners who use creative marketing skills. Evidence of creativity in a marketing student is a valued attribute that employers are seeking (Ramocki, 2014). Students who have opportunities to be creative in the classroom may develop a stronger ability to apply their imagination to problem solving and strategize using multiple perspectives instead of a narrow focus (Schlee & Harich, 2014).

In order to increase creativity, every aspect of the four quadrants in Figure 3 must be addressed in classroom environments. In the low social learning and low active learning box, to move to a creative-centric environment, professors can change lecturing style into conversation and two-way learning by infusing questions and open-ended conversation starters. By doing so, they would empower students to actively cogitate, and allow for unpredictable deviation and creative passionate learning. Professors would then be fostering divergent thinking during normal classroom lectures. In addition, students could be randomly assigned to small teams and be given "quick think" assignments wherein students of all levels of diversity and personality characteristics could

feel confident to share their creative thoughts and ideas. Lastly, the importance and role of technology and social media in providing students with an opportunity to be creative cannot be understated. The inclusion of technology and social media also needs to be further explored in terms of how students can use these modalities to enhance their creative tendencies. In terms of Figure 3, technology has the potential to lend itself to both high active and social learning and should be explored further with quantitative inquiry.

According to our findings, when active learning and social learning are low, old material, lectures, time and products may be areas in which creativity is more difficult to infuse. Time is one of the major hindrances that students seem to discuss in terms of infusing creativity. This speaks to the process orientation of creativity; indeed, creativity is a *process*, not an end. To produce creative output, students must feel that they have ample time, and that the environment allows and encourages both social and active learning. To create a less time-sensitive environment, professors can encourage brief in-class group assignments so that teams continue to interact both within and outside of the classroom. Such group project work can increase both social learning as well as group-level divergent thinking; this will ultimately increase creativity.

Although our title is somewhat figurative, literal meaning can be derived from it as well. In essence, creativity can be enhanced when students feel that they can *augment* (not replace) the rubric with their own creative techniques. At the onset of a course, a professor can ask students to define each assignment in their own words and then provide examples of creative augmentations of the rubric. Professors must ask themselves if they are allowing risk in the classroom, or allowing for important and timely deviations from the rubric, so that courses are adapted to current environments and creativity is encouraged both in verbal and written form. Another possible way to imbue creativity would be to ask students to do an open assignment, allowing them to invent the connections between their assignment and the course learning objectives and materials. To be creative, students need to interact both through social learning and active cognition, therefore allowing themselves to connect outside but also introspect and learn about themselves and ways they can produce creative work. In this way, they would not only benefit themselves, but also increase group creativity through contagious motivation (Krishen, 2013). Projects which involve surveying or interviewing consumers would allow students to learn creative techniques and become passionate about learning. As an added pedagogical benefit, creative projects have a legacy; if students go beyond the university hedges and enter the surrounding communities, they can enhance the environment around them. Such projects and assignments would not only allow the university to collaborate with additional stakeholders, but also encourage students to make a difference for actual organizations. In addition, students can be given the choice to select an organization to help, giving them even more ownership and "hands" on the project. Related to this, our study suggests that when active learning is high,

students seem to associate physical characteristics with learning – such as hands, grab, and muscle. Essentially, they think of making things, such as an advertisement, a video, a campaign, all of which do not follow a cookie-cutter rubric.

Our research on creativity in the classroom only explores the surface of this vast area, allowing for many avenues for future research. Future research will need to address the intersection of thinking, creativity, and learning. In essence, how can learning be increased or maintained while creativity is encouraged? Future research should also explore whether there is a difference between infusing creativity in undergraduate and graduate classes. Research which can assess professor attitudes toward creativity and the relationship of those with student attitudes would also be interesting and yield important insights. In terms of projects, are they always creative, or do students feel that they are limited in their ability to diverge? Additional studies should explore learning styles and big five personality characteristics and their impact on creativity endeavors in the classroom. Finally, several individual differences measures may impact student creativity; these include self-esteem, self-confidence, regulatory focus orientation (prevention versus promotion focus), risk attitude, curiosity, and innate creativity, among others.

As with all studies, this one has limitations. The study could have been given to many other students in various marketing classes to provide a more generalizable sample. Creativity will vary based on course topic area; essentially the method of infusing creativity will depend on the learning measures per course. From a methodology standpoint, a positivistic approach could be used to gather information that is more detailed and with a larger sample and provide more predictive components for creativity infusion. Future research can propose a structural equation model of the key creativity components and test the model in a larger cross-sectional study which takes individual differences measures into account as well as group measures. In addition, our framework itself is based on a creative leap of iterative faith from the key concepts and themes provided by our semantic analysis tool to the synergizing of those ideas into the constructivist learning approach. Future research can gather more qualitative insights from additional courses using online techniques (netnographic analysis, for example), in-depth interviews, focus groups, or even projection techniques.

In sum, this study finds that students have views on the meaning of creativity and have definite ideas of how to infuse it into virtually any marketing curriculum. Previous research assesses student innate creativity or identifies ways to teach creativity courses as part of a business school curriculum; instead, we focus not on turning creativity into a course, but on making every marketing course creative. The exploratory analysis shows that active learning in combination with social construction of knowledge can foster creativity enhancement in the classroom. As marketing courses often involve projects and those are usually done in groups, the intersection of creativity with social

processes is fortunate. Professors can readily create an active learning environment wherein groups encourage creative collaboration through divergent thinking. The incorporation of these group sessions into regular courses, even if done as separate lab sessions, will build team cohesion, increase contagious motivation (Krishen, 2013), and ultimately increase team creativity. As can be seen from this study, students are cognizant of the concept of creativity but believe that it is not normally rewarded and that they are given minimal time to commit to creative endeavors. Therefore, it is incumbent upon marketing professors to redefine rubrics and reward increased student creativity. Given the large number of creativity measures and the interdisciplinary nature of the construct itself, our exploratory study allowed students to explain their ideas of creativity in the classroom; we then provided a Constructivist Learning Theory as a framework to capture and dimensionalize the student feedback.

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