

Teaching Creativity Across Disciplines

Preliminary Results - July 2010

Research Question:

How do instructors in various disciplines at McMaster define, value and teach creativity?

Methodology:

- Electronic survey sent to approximately 1750 McMaster faculty in May 2010.
- Mixture of forced-choice and open-ended questions

Respondents:

- 87 respondents (response rate = 4.97%)
 - **Faculty:**
 - Business: N=7 (8.01% of total)
 - Engineering: N=5 (5.75%)
 - Health Sciences: N=30 (34.48%)
 - Humanities: N=14 (16.09%)
 - Science: N=16 (18.39%)
 - Social Sciences: N=15 (17.24%)
 - **Instructional experience** (higher education):
 - 5 years or less: N=14 (16.1%)
 - 25 years or more: N=19 (21.84%)
 - Average: N=16 years.
 - **Gender:**
 - Female: N=38 (43.68%)
 - Male: N=45 (51.72%)
 - Transgendered: N=0
 - Did not respond: N=4

Key Findings

Definitions of creativity:

- Respondents from different faculties held similar understandings of creativity, but displayed some variability in the selection of elements that are important to creativity in their fields.

Estimations of creativity's importance:

- Across faculties, instructors indicated that creativity held a significant place in their disciplines.
 - Average ranking: 7.63/10 (for 59 responses).
 - Highest mean ranking: 8.73/10 (Humanities instructors)
 - Lowest mean ranking: 7/10 (Social Sciences instructors)

Teaching Creativity:

- The majority of respondents (N=47, 54.02%) suggested that creativity in their disciplines could be taught. Only 9.2% (N=8) claimed that creativity could not be taught, while 36.78% (N=32) did not respond to this question.
- Participants reported using a wide range of strategies to develop students' creativity. Many of these were linked explicitly to disciplinary features and/or to teaching methods that are understood as signature pedagogies of the field in question.
- Data thus provide preliminary support for the idea that creativity is best taught in discipline-specific ways.

Next Steps:

- An article describing this study is in preparation and will be submitted for publication shortly.
- Given the interesting preliminary data gathered here, we plan to circulate the survey to instructors at two or three additional Ontario Universities in order to increase our subject population and to consider the possible influence of location-specific variables.
- More locally, the results from this survey, and from any subsequent studies, will be used to inform professional development activities at McMaster University. Given sufficient interest and demand from faculty members, workshops and other activities devoted to developing creativity within and across subject domains will be offered.