
Peer-Reviewed Article

Free Your Mind: Reflections on Bridgett McGowan's Lights, Camera, ACTIVE!

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Abstract: The online environment challenges instructors to engage students in the learning process. The live session attendance has lagged in the past. The webinar presentation attended and reviewed provided some creative, attention-grabbing ideas designed to stimulate the curiosity and compel the student to attend. This article focuses on the need for instructors and students alike to increase their curiosity, thereby increasing learning. Learning to improve the creative thought process within a standardized format becomes a challenge and a technique to be mastered. The education system prioritized uniformity and diminished the opportunity and exercise of creativity, impacting the progression of society and socioeconomics. To continue competing in the global market, those creative ideas become crucial. Everyone has the capacity to engage in creative thinking, allowing for diffuse attention to exercise that thought process. Rather than focusing on a prescribed format for delivery of information, the instructor is urged to think creatively in providing attention garnering invitation and content.

Keywords: creativity, online learning, creative thinking, diffuse thinking

“Free your mind, and the rest will follow...” (En Vogue, 1992). The Bridgett McGowan webinar “Lights, Camera, ACTIVE!” included suggestions for some significant changes that could be made to increase attendance and attentiveness at Live Sessions. While many educators may not have the effervescent quality of the presenter, simple steps, such as use of catchy titles, can draw the intrigue of students (McGowan, 2018).

The suggested examples of catchy titles that would give the reader a sense of immediate value were all creative and thought provoking in nature. Attendees were asked to consider using announcements or emails inviting students to attend by offering a “quick and easy fix”, a “no fluff/smart and sassy” a “play on fear” or theatrics. While examples were given for each category, attendees were also asked to suggest titles.

The format for live sessions was presented as Lecture, Engage, Recap. Finally, Closing Credits were proposed to include an agenda for the next session, links to articles or videos, a shared personal experience, or an invitation to students to share what they had learned with others. Again, attendees were given the opportunity to brainstorm ideas. In fact, throughout the webinar instructors were urged to share their thoughts and ideas.

The ideas produced by the instructors displayed a quick response to a brainstorming request. It was evident in the chat replies that the instructors were engaged and inspired by the webinar. It became apparent that the creative responses were readily produced, and that the brainstorming of the attendees reflected a high degree of creativity. That led to a later reflection, not dissimilar from a “why didn’t I think of that before?” The answer lies in the suppression of the creative mind.

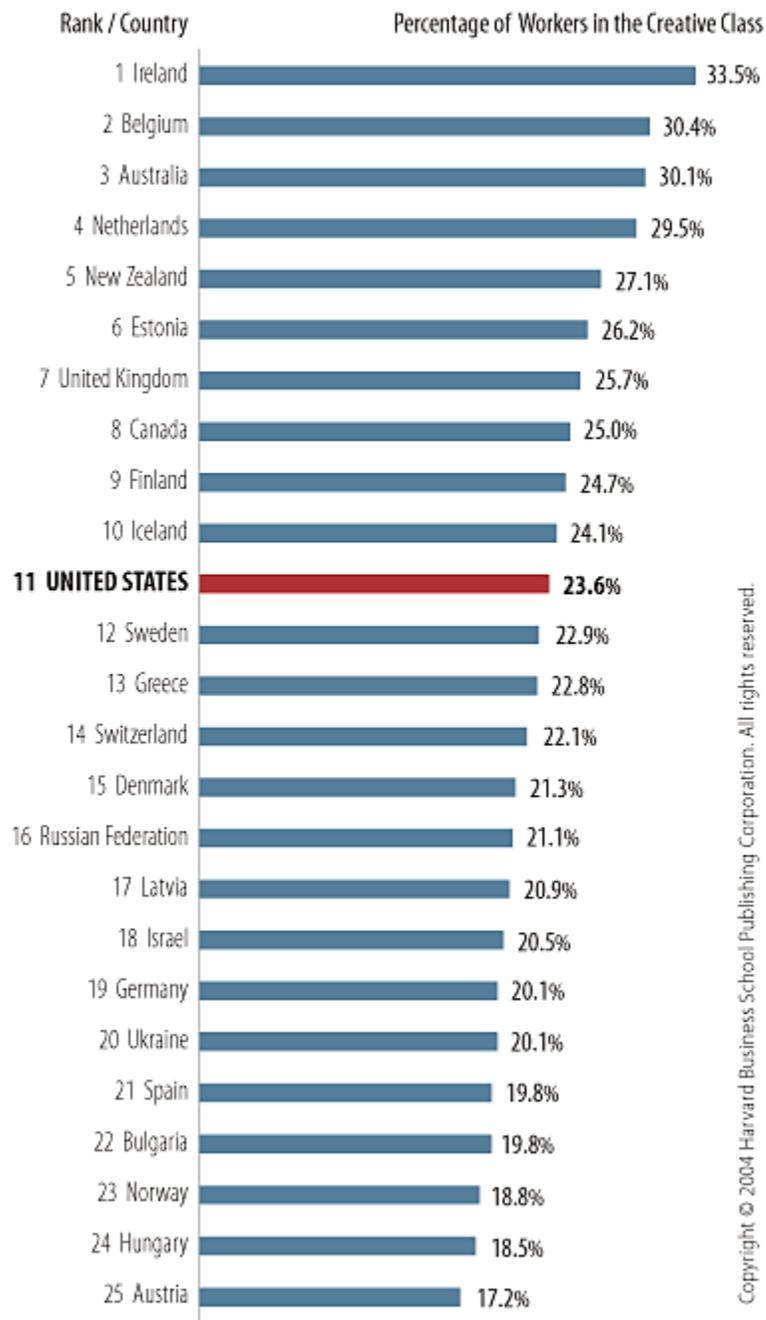
When or how did we lose that creativity? Is it inherent in course Masters and standardized content? Is it a by-product of training an instructor to follow the manual? While these may be factors, they are not the source of the squelching of the creative mind. That begins at a much earlier stage.

Some argue that creativity is discouraged as soon as a child enters the educational system. We are required to sit silently, read the same content and take the same exams regardless of interests or intelligences (Maccabi, 2014). Creativity is strongly discouraged, uniformity required. Creative expression through art or music is considered an elective, not necessary to education, and not an individual pursuit but a curricular design. However, this does not do anything to address the needs of the workforce.

As shown in the table below, the United States is trailing in the number of creative minds needed to produce the ideas and technology driving the global economy (Florida, 2004). As stated over 40 years ago by Rogers (1970), education has time and time again been criticized for turning out “conformists” and “stereotypes” rather than “freely creative and original thinkers”. Equipping students with skills required by employers must include creative skills if we are to be competitive in the global market. While so much emphasis has been placed on critical thinking, it is time to focus on creative thinking (Shaheen, 2010).

The Global Creative-Class Index

America may be the land of opportunity, but it no longer has a lock on the best and the brightest jobs—the ones that create new ideas, new technology, or new content. When we calculated the number of people engaged in such jobs as a proportion of the general workforce in scores of countries, the United States wasn't even in the top ten.



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Note: Data for the Russian Federation refer to 1999; for the Netherlands and Bulgaria, 2001; for the United States, 2003. All other figures refer to 2002, the latest year for which those data are available.

Source: Compiled by Irene Tinagli from International Labour Organization and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Fostering creative thinking means leading by example. As the creative ability has been evident in the brainstormed ideas in numerous webinars and meetings, we see the gap occurring between ability and application. The educator must demonstrate the skill to be learned. When we address needed soft skills, the strengthening of creative thinking skills should be a goal (Ryan, 2016).

Just as brainstorming produced some creative ideas in McGowan's (2018) webinar, encouraging such activity among students can be a very effective tool. Inviting students to ask questions and to propose solutions is a method for both engaging and for spurring the brainstorming (McGowan, 2018; Eragamreddy, 2013). For educators trained traditionally, terms like divergent thinking and diffuse attention may have negative connotations.

Our brains have a high capability for creative thinking, as reflected in the evolution of society. While such thinking may have been suppressed over time, the ability has not diminished. That diffuse attention is a mark of creative thinking (Takeuchi, Taki, Hashizume, Sassa, Nagase, Nouchi, & Kawashim, 2011). As presented by Dr. Barbara Oakley in video (n.d.) we need both focused and diffuse thinking modes. We need to allow a little inattention, allow the mind to wander to divergent thoughts and questions, moving from the analytical left hemisphere to the creative right hemisphere domination in brain activity. The neural pathways engaged allow for that big-picture perspective (Oakley, n.d.).

The creative mind has brought us from transport by horseback to the concept of flying cars. We use cell phones and computers, microwaves and smart doorbells. According to the late Wayne Dyer (2015) "the greatest gift that we all have, every single one of us, is our imagination. Everything that exists was once only imagined".

While we apply the ideas presented by Bridgett McGowan, we need to preface our interactions by modeling and by inspiring the basic creative stimuli, curiosity. As a child, I entertained my fantasies while studying the shape of clouds, imagining them to be my favorite animal or character from fairytales. It did not stop there, though, it led to a curiosity about those clouds, why they were different and what that might mean. That curiosity spurred learning. Research shows that curiosity leads to information seeking, which in turn increases workplace learning and performance (Relo & Wiswell, 2001). We can use that curiosity to apply the techniques offered by Bridgett McGowan (2018). What message would excite students? What words would propel them to attend live sessions? How can we check for comprehension and continue their learning process beyond the session? If we free our minds, the rest will follow.

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