

Teaching creativity in the academy

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433 words

Is it possible to teach creativity? **Brad Hokanson** (Graphic Design) believes it is and sets out to do just that with his DHA 1111 Creative Problem Solving course, a requirement for Retail Merchandising students. Hokanson says that while he thinks we can teach creativity, it's been trained out of us and we can get it back by learning processes and methods.

Look, for example, at the uninhibited drawings of pre-school children. Five-year-olds know they can draw, sing, and dance; they have complete and unfettered confidence in their abilities. Unfortunately, within four years or so, this grand confidence somehow diminishes – it gets trained out of us, as Hokanson says.

Yet, creative critical thinking is crucial in the new economy. Creative thinking leads to innovation by sparking novel insights, unique approaches, entirely new perspectives, and wholly new and different ways of conception and understanding. Employers say the top criteria they're looking for in employees is creativity. This was the finding of the Lumina study which included the College of Design's Graphic Design program and graphic design programs from three other Minnesota colleges and universities. Hokanson agrees with Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 hour rule as articulated in the latter's *Outliers* (Little, Brown; 2008). It takes 3,000-5,000 hours to gain competency in a given field and 10,000 hours to attain expertise. But Hokanson is careful to point out that creativity is not an area of expertise – the best we can do is teach the ability to spark creativity, the fluency, frequency, originality, novelty, and applicability of ideas.

Hokanson teaches his students to spark by creatively generating ideas and then to critically evaluate them. Like others in the field, he believes that creativity can be quantified, and the discipline is still using the tests and methodologies developed in the mid-1960s by Paul Torrance (an alum of the University) – the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking. Torrance's tests score creative and divergent thinking on four scales:

- Fluency – the number of meaningful and relevant ideas generated
- Flexibility – the number of different categories of relevant responses
- Originality – the uniqueness of relevant responses
- Elaboration – the amount of detail in relevant responses

Each week, Hokanson's students are required to “do something different” and then are scored on the creativity of their activity, using Torrance and Hokanson's own scales of surprise, novelty, and applicability. The creative problem solving students

are also building musical instruments and will play them in the Creative Problem Solving Orchestra. Finally, Hokanson's students are required to ask three of their non-design professors, "How are you creative?" The idea is to plant the idea seed and improve the University.