

Influences on creativity in Youth Work

'Everything that can be invented has been invented'

Charles Duell, Head of the US Patent Office (1899)

As individuals we are located within a social context and this context influences our preferences, the choices we make and how we choose to behave.

Family, culture, political institutions all also influence who we are and how we are creative in our everyday lives. This short paper explores creativity and how youth workers can adopt an approach which builds on the theory of creativity to ultimately understand young people a little better but also to improve their subsequent work with young people.

First of all it is important to carry out a personal stock take of our preparedness for creativity.

What makes us what we are? Have you ever thought of that? Working alone make a drawing of the factors in your life that have made you who you are. These may include for example:

- The time of year you were born
- Birth order
- Family size
- Parental personality
- Parental creativity
- Your development
- Your motivation
- Interests

It has been said that creativity is spread out, for instance, in terms of formal educational institutions, it resides not exclusively in the individual student but is dispersed among classmates, the teachers and the professionals who oversee the classroom, the cultural prosthetics that augment creative and intellectual growth.. and the larger school and the community (Seitz, 2003). So it is important for us to work together, to collaborate and support each other in creating a community of learning building on a greater understanding of creativity. Social networking for example will enable the creative worker to engage with others on collaborations which could until fairly recently have been unimaginable.

The conventions (the norms) of a family, a community or society helps define its culture, these influences direct our thinking toward normative behaviour (what is the norm, what is easily acceptable), also this sort of thinking can constrain reflections and can easily inhibit creativity – constrained thinking (thinking within the box?) is to be avoided at all costs!

Creativity, on the other hand requires originality, self-expression (not only group expression) and unconventional thought or action. Conventions can be quite useful,

but they can also mislead the individual, at least when we accept conventions without closely evaluating them. It has been said that rules are for the obedience of fools and the guidance of wise men [sic].

What are the aspects of education which have influenced your creativity? Schooling in Wales is constantly under scrutiny, we have a devolved system of education in Wales, the scope of this system includes Youth Work. There has since devolution been a 'made in Wales' approach to education. On a macro level education in Wales has a vision of improving attainment and aspiration.

Take a few moments to consider how should the success of education be judged?

How would you judge the effectiveness of your education – what sorts of indicators do you use to judge the effectiveness of your education, whether it worked for you?

The way teachers teach of course has implications for you as a person and as a learner, the classroom environment, the condition of the school buildings all have implications for you as a learner. The level of advantage or disadvantage around you, the availability of resources for creativity, all these factors influence you. How has creativity been modelled for you in the classroom? These factors all influence how creative and innovative you are in your approach to life. It has been suggested that creativity is a mixture of a number of factors, (non traditional) intelligence, imagination, originality, innovation, invention, discovery, serendipity, intentions and adaptability (Runco, 2007: 375).

What does creativity enable one to do as a youth worker?

Creativity will bring the ability to solve problems, to envisage new solutions to social problems, to exercise the imagination and exercise playfulness, to allow colleagues and young people to revisit and make sense of their experiences. In that sense creativity in our work has a use, it has a real value to add into the youth work mix.

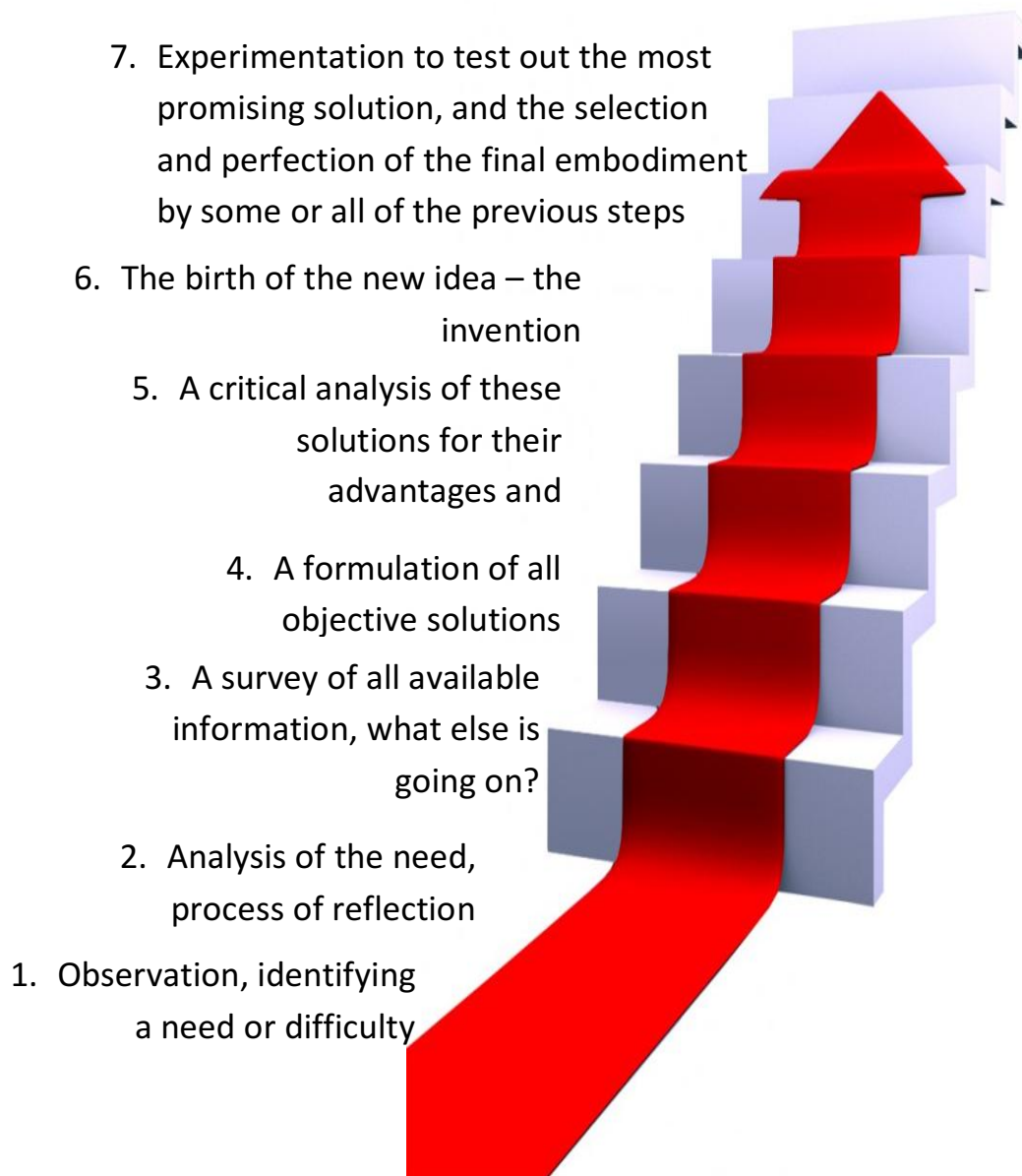
How then can a youth worker ensure their approach to youth work is creative?

It has been argued (Richards, 1999, Runco, 2004 and Simonton, 1990) that the major approaches to creativity can be outlined thus:

- Process – ask yourself, how is the youth work process creative?
- Product – how can the experiences of young people be made to be increasingly creative?
- Place – how can the places where youth work happens be made to encourage creativity?
- Persuasion – how can you as someone committed to creativity in youth work persuade others to buy into the approaches and importance of creativity?
- Potential – how can we as youth workers reach the people that need creativity the most, the ones with untapped potential?

Youth work as invention – have you invented anything recently?

Research with over 700 inventors (Rossman, 1964 cited in Runco, 2007: 388) suggested that there are clear steps to inventiveness, these are steps which arguably should be followed by a creative and innovative youth work practitioner:



Let's think what comes first – Bandura (1997) has suggested that creativity comes before innovation and that a creative person must commonly persevere in the pursuit of innovation. What messages does this provide for the youth worker – the process of pursuing creativity is not straightforward, it is certainly not all plain sailing!

Having completed the formation of the earth, on the seventh day the Lord rested. Then on the eighth day the Lord said, 'Let there be problems' and there were problems.

Cartoon from the New Yorker Magazine (18.10.93, p90)

In youth work we can count on problems, foul up factors, cock ups, errors, mistakes. These may stem from a number of sources including the personality types of youth workers (not generally fond of detail or beauraucracy) and also in the fact that we work with a generally unpredictable client group prone to regular changes of mind.

Being reflective and creative will enable you as a youth and community work student to invent solutions to previously unanticipated problems. This ability is one greatly prized by employers.

So why the need for innovation and new solutions? Higgins suggested nearly twenty years ago that innovation and inventiveness were necessary for human flourishing and put forward some reasons why this was a good thing:

- The accelerated rate of cultural change
- Increasing competition
- Globalisation
- Rapid technological change
- Increasingly diverse workforce
- Resources shortages
- Transition from industrial to knowledge based society
- Unstable economic and market conditions
- Increased demands
- Increased complexity within the environment

Young people are at the forefront of lots of developments in contemporary society, fashion, education, training, work, relationships, health, diet, self-esteem, managing their online lives. As a youth worker all these aspects of the lives of young people can be somewhere they may need a hand with.

Using the principles of creativity outlined within this paper will enable the practitioner to work with the young person, using a process of experiential learning through which they can seek solutions to problems with which they may require some adult support.

Darrell Williams, 2015

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