“I don’t regret anything” – A case study on creativity in higher education

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Abstract

Even though labelled as one of the core skills for the challenges of today’s society, creativity in higher education appears to be rare. This paper retrospectively describes how students and teacher collaboratively re-designed a master’s course during a COVID-19 semester. The group used the relative flexibility that higher education institutions provided during the pandemic to allow for a complex process that fostered creative teaching-and-learning in the virtual classroom. We describe and discuss the challenges and strengths of this collaborative process from the teacher’s perspective, supported by the reflexive voices of some of the participating students, against the backdrop of theories on creativity in higher education.

Keywords: Teaching creatively, teaching for creativity, co-creation, higher education

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1 Introduction: On the need to be (more) creative in higher education

“The dedicated examination of detours and failures that we experienced in this course has made me think of them in a different, more loving manner. I learned [...] I don’t

regret anything." (learner Hartmann, 2022)[1] This statement describes how a student came to think of failures and detours as crucial parts of – rather than distractions from – his learning process during a master seminar in cultural musicology. This approach to learning was a shift from how he had previously dealt with failure. Such a radical departure from what is – within a specific learning context – perceived as a norm is one of the main defining principles of creativity in both teaching and learning (Sternberg & Williams, 1996). As we argue in this paper, creativity is not simply a nice-to-have and perceivably natural talent reserved for the few born with this ability (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). Instead, we follow an understanding of creativity as a learnable set of crucial skills that allows individuals "[...] to take better advantage of opportunities and to respond more productively to the challenges and difficulties in their personal and professional lives" (Alencar et al., 2017, p. 554). As such, creativity is a key competency for the future that can and should be cultivated within higher education (Fadel et al., 2015; Jahnke & Haertel, 2010). But what can creativity mean within teaching-and-learning contexts? How can teachers become more creative in their teaching and how does this relate to supporting learners in developing creativity skills during their studies? In short: how can we foster creativity in our classrooms?

In this paper, we address these questions through a case study that retrospectively describes the didactical approach of a master seminar at the Georg-August-University of Göttingen. To do so, we first explore creativity as conceptualised in theories on teaching and learning in higher education. We include several approaches to creativity, indicate ways to foster the skills for both teachers and students that allow for creativity in students' learning processes, and address ways to detect and assess creativity in the products learners create. This illustrates that fostering creativity within a higher education context is complex and necessitates creativity in both the course design and the teaching process. After this theoretical mapping, we introduce the above-mentioned case study: we describe a course that has partially been co-developed by the teacher (van Straaten) and the students of a seminar during the COVID-19 pandemic. The case study is written from the teacher's perspective and is interspersed with and enriched by statements from the students' perspectives, cited from their reflection papers submitted at the end of the semester. It depicts both the challenges as well as the possibilities the experience of student participation in designing a seminar and applying creative approaches to the teaching and learning offered. In a question-answer dialogue between the two perspectives presented in this paper – the theoretical question and the practical answer based on the experiences in the course – we conclude by discussing the possibilities to foster creative learning in higher education. Ultimately, we inquire how such a creative approach can potentially support students in acquiring the skills so highly necessary for mastering the uncertainty and complexity of life in the 21st century.

1 The quotes from learners are taken from the reflection papers that they submitted at the end of the semester, based on their reflections on their learning process throughout the semester. Every learner gave their permission to use the quotes used in this paper. Learner Hartmann wrote in German. The translations were made by Van Straaten.

2 Theoretical perspectives: On creativity and how to foster it in higher education

For more than two decades, researchers have promoted the benefits and necessity of creative teaching in higher education (Ismayilova & Bolander Laksov, 2022; Wisdom, 2006). Creativity is crucial as the future becomes increasingly insecure and unpredictable.[2] We are at a critical time for our (planet's) survival. The ability to find solutions to the problems younger generations inherit from us will "define the future of our species and our planet" (Craft, 2006, p. 23). It takes creativity to recognise and foresee "coming changes, anticipate their consequences, and thus perhaps lead them in a desirable direction" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. XVIII). This underscores the relevance of creativity for society at large: the ability to solve problems and respond quickly to complex issues regarding health, environment, economic, and social issues on a national and global level is highly needed today (Smith-Bingham, 2006). Not only does creativity allow us to cope better with such issues and uncertainties, but it also contributes to quality of life. Developing and using one's creative skills is "usually accompanied by feelings of satisfaction and pleasure, which are fundamental elements of emotional welfare and mental health" (Alencar et al., 2017, p. 554). This is even more crucial in contexts in which students' and teachers' mental health is increasingly vulnerable. Furthermore, individuals who can see opportunities in new scenarios "are going to be in a better position to add value to their communities, and prosper in the process" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). In sum, fostering the development of creativity skills in processes of teaching-and-learning in higher education can help students become better equipped to deal with the uncertainties of our rapidly changing world (Fadel et al., 2015; Jackson, 2006) and thus having a positive influence on mental health and allowing them to add value to their community.

While these perspectives all argue for the necessity of developing creativity, what is understood as creativity often remains vague. In fact, there is no agreed-upon definition of the concept. Rather, there are multiple, context-specific characteristics. All definitions agree, however, "[...] that creativity involves notions of novelty and originality combined with notions of utility and value" (Kleiman, 2008, p. 209). Similarly, creative teaching and learning lack an agreed-upon definition. Tosey (2006) argues that creativity in teaching and learning can be thought of as a "process through which locally developed new ideas and practices become engaged in, and are taken up through wider conversations" (p. 38). Such a focus on both the individuals who (inter)act within a course as well as on the academic system of which it is a part is crucial when examining creativity in higher education. In this paper, we understand creativity as both contextual and relational: within a specific academic discipline, a particular teaching-and-learning

2 Related to this, creativity belongs to the so-called future skills, 21st century skills, or 4C-skills (in which the four C stands for constructive, critical, collaborative, and creative), which are said to be the key competencies to address the (individual and global) challenges of the future (Fadel, Bialik & Trillig, 2015). However widely discussed, the demand to focus on future skills in higher education needs further analysis, as Bettinger (2021) and Kalz (2023) emphasise. An elaboration on these skills is beyond the scope of this paper.

approach might be perceived as the norm, while that same approach can be considered radically novel in another. In this light, Jahnke et al. (2015, p. 3) also label creativity as a subjective category that connects a person's perception with teaching-and-learning actions within a specific didactical context.

Besides the subjective and context specific nature of creativity, it is often talked about in terms of skills (Wisdom, 2006; Jackson, 2006). Jahnke and Haertel (2010), for example, developed the following list of competencies that are characteristic of creativity in teaching-and-learning: the ability to think flexibly, to be open-minded, to question existing knowledge critically, to discover and highlight problems and find new solutions to them, to develop new products and processes, and to challenge and for a time silence existing systems of (ethical or social) value. These skills, they argue, can – and should – be trained and cultivated within the higher education classroom, as it is crucial for students to learn to think and go beyond the spectrum of given options, to combine elements anew, and to be able to discover new ideas and make connections that no one has made before (ibid.). They can hence be used both to inscribe creativity into the intended learning outcomes of a course and simultaneously as categories used for the assessment of creativity in the learning process and/or outcome.

In sum, creative teaching, as we understand it in this paper, is an educational approach that, so far, has not been applied in a given educational context. Furthermore, teaching creatively involves being flexible in the course design as well as its execution, being open to input from students and sharing course responsibilities, critically questioning taken for granted teaching methods, subject-specific academic canons, and the institutional assessment system within which one teaches, being open to making mistakes and discovering challenges within one's own teaching, reflecting upon one's own subject position within a specific course context, and being open to change and finding new methods and connections to overcome challenges and failures. Creative teaching, in turn, encourages and nurtures creative learning, which we understand in this paper as follows: it allows students to develop creative skills such as flexibility, curiosity and resilience; it fosters their ability to create new connections and relationships between seemingly divergent ideas; and it invites them to challenge normalised systemic inequalities and power dynamics. We understand creative learning as a complex, multilayered process that can be facilitated by educators – a process in which students are guided through open-ended, collaborative, and reflexive tasks that relate to real-world problems. It is a learning experience that allows for exploration, failure, and detours and, at best, stimulates life-long learning.[3]

Despite the above-emphasised importance of creativity for higher education, creativity is still not very present in the higher education classroom, neither as a learning objective nor as part of a teaching philosophy and approach. The latter can have several reasons. Philip (2015) points out that sometimes creative teaching approaches are simply overlooked in (research on) higher education, as academic environments tend to

3 Of course, there are related educational approaches that inhibit (some of) these characteristics (e. g., challenge-based learning (Gallagher & Savage, 2020)). To us, creativity in teaching and learning can be differentiated from these approaches due to its flexibility.

recognise and value research and publishing more than teaching. Furthermore, most academics receive neither the encouragement nor the structural support that could potentially stimulate them to change their teaching routines. Departmental structures especially play an important role in fostering or hindering teaching creatively (Ismayilova & Bolander Laksov, 2022). Academics seem to be more creative when they are not restricted in their teaching but rather are encouraged to re-think their teaching designs to allow students to be creative in their learning (Wilson, 2006).

Creative learning can also be inhibited by predictive outcome-based course designs that map out what students will be expected to have learned at the end of the course "with no room for unanticipated or student-determined outcomes" (Jackson, 2006, p. 4). Such learning leaves little room to breathe, reflect, connect, fail, make detours, and take the risks necessary for developing the set of skills essential for creativity. Similarly, normalised and formalised assessment tasks and criteria can create a learning culture that cultivates a fear of failure. Combined with teachers dreading or simply lacking the extra time they think they have to invest in creative teaching, students' and teachers' creativity often remains uncultivated (Jackson, 2006).

To conquer these potential hindrances to creative teaching-and-learning, higher education needs a transformation. First, it should foster a culture open to flexible teaching-and-learning, enabling teachers to "[...] enhance their own creativity and to recognize this as an integral part of their professionalism" (Wisdom, 2006, p. 183). Such an institutional climate might also encourage the reflection of former learning and teaching situations, thereby allowing for both teachers and students to develop reflective skills that are such a crucial element of creativity (Alencar et al., 2017). Furthermore, Steinberg and Williams (1996) recognise that it is crucial to adapt the assessment system and process of learning to embrace and value creativity, which – somewhat paradoxically – necessitates allowing for risk and mistakes in both the process as well as the assessed products of learning. Learning to be creative, Tosey (2006) adds, can be fostered by collaborative and social tasks, as "connections and relations in which individuals are fully engaged are vital if dreams and mistakes are to become manifest as new forms" (ibid., p. 30). Both aspects – focusing on the process instead of the product and implementing collaborative tasks – underscore the importance of a transformation in the re-location of time in higher educational environments, where currently the higher value placed on research and publications leads to a prioritisation of these aspects over education. In our view, a cultural transformation in higher education includes a change in the allocation of time: both students and teachers need time for thinking, time for reflecting, time for failing, time for detours, and time for connecting.

But how can we implement creativity in our courses? Haertel and Jahnke (2011, p. 240) summarise elements that can be implemented in higher education courses to help students develop creativity skills and pointed towards some crucial considerations in this process. These didactic elements can be summarised as follows:

- Ask students to reflect on their learning process and/or product, e. g., in peer feedback situations or reflective papers.
- Help students to learn independently, e. g., to make decisions about what, when, how, and where to learn.
- Address the students' excitement, e. g., by asking students to connect topics to their everyday situations or by helping students reflect on their individual motives in a course.
- Invite students to produce something, e. g., a podcast, a conference, a solution to a real-life problem.
- Introduce students to diverse ways of thinking, e. g., by asking students to apply multiple perspectives or inviting them to share their individual approaches (to learning) thereby detecting the creativity of their peers (and themselves).
- Provide students with support and resources needed to develop completely new and original ideas.

While developing and implementing a course design based on these features, teachers need to be able to put themselves in the position of their students, to relate to and tend to the insecurities and uncertainties that can emerge with the possibility (and request) to choose for themselves what to learn (Haertel & Jahnke, 2011). This also necessitates a teaching and learning culture of failure, where failure is no longer treated as an error but instead an essential part of learning (Haertel & Jahnke, 2011; Halberstamm, 2011). Teaching creativity thus includes supporting students to deal with the risks of stumbling and failing during their learning processes.

The following case study did just that. It offered a course structure flexible enough to be partially re-designed collaboratively by teacher and students throughout the semester. How this introduced creativity in the classroom, will be elaborated in the next part of this paper.

3 Case study: On storying and process-oriented assignments

3.1 The course structure and its context

The descriptive case study is based on the master seminar "Music and Cultural Analysis" (6 ECTS, 2 SWS) that took place at the Georg-August-University Göttingen in the winter semester 2021/2022 and was taught by one of the authors (van Straaten). The course is part of the two-year master programme "Cultural Musicology" and is intended to be taken in its first semester. Seven students started the course, and five of them finished it. Main learning goals are the ability to: 1) critically examine musical objects beyond normative musicological methods; 2) use critical theory to carry out a socio-political themed appraisal of these objects with relevance to the lives of the students; 3) create a "story" of one or more "textures" about this process (McKittrick 2021, see below); and 4) critically reflect on this unusual and challenging learning process.

Learning goals 3 and 4 were developed together with the students during the semester, in response to our engagement with the course content (throughout this chapter, the plural refers to the students and the teacher together, unless indicated otherwise) and an altering of the original course setting: although the weekly 90-minute sessions were envisioned as face-to-face meetings, we had to return to a complete online learning environment after three weeks due to an upsurge in COVID-19 cases in Germany in November 2021.

Learners prepared for our meetings by reading texts, working on assignments, and doing guided research for and working on their individual case studies. The content of the (online) meeting sessions alternated between three interrelated elements: 1) applying the critical theory we read (e. g., Bal, 2002) to musical case studies I provided; 2) examining exemplary published case studies of audio-visual objects (e. g., Aghoro, 2018; Murphy, 2019); and 3) peer feedback on progress and challenges learners encountered whilst working on individual case studies.

The latter were approached as follows: each student chose an audio-visual "object" (Bal, 2002) of a maximum of ten minutes that they wanted to work on during the semester. Each case study should – from the learner's perspective – comment on a sociopolitical phenomenon relevant to their own lives. The "objects" chosen by students were the music video of "Anaconda" by Nicki Minaj[4] brought into conversation with Sir Mixalot's "Baby Got Back"[5] (commenting on gendered and racialized body aesthetics), a historical (1917) audio recording of Jakob Jost's "*Mei Glück is a Hütterl*"[6] (commenting on migration), the music video of Dhee ft. Arivu titled "Enjoy Enjaami"[7] (commenting on relationships of nationalism, nature, and class systems), Harry Styles' live cover of "Juice"[8] juxtaposed with the music video of the original song by Lizzo,[9] (commenting on musical queerbaiting and systemic racism in music), and finally the music video of Sylvie Kreusch' "Wild Love"[10] (commenting on queerness in music). Learners developed their case study step by step, guided by assignments and feedback. Depending on the objectives of the week, during the meetings, the students worked with a variety of collaborative methods, including moderated discussions, several forms of group assignments, and moderated peer feedback on the individual case studies. The latter were half-jokingly dubbed "therapy sessions" (learner Hartmann, 2022), indicating the importance of these elements for the students' mental health during the semester. At the end of the meetings, students were asked to note down the next step they envisioned necessary for furthering their case study and to reflect on their individual learning process.

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDZX4ooRsWs
5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X53ZSxkQ3Ho
6 https://archive.org/details/78_mei-glck-is-a-htterl_jakob-jost_gbia0310770b
7 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYq7WapuDLU
8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPS1qFK6PAM
9 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaCrQL_8eMY
10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kf3VR63pduE .

3.2 Developing a creative approach to teaching-and-learning

A central theoretical-and-methodological thread throughout the course that facilitated the creative teaching-and-learning and was a guidance for students as they worked on their cases was an approach called "storying". This approach was based on our reading of several chapters from the book "Dear Science and Other Stories" by McKittrick (2021). In her book, McKittrick (2021, p. 3) explores "how we come to know black life through asymmetrically connected knowledge systems", thinking "through how racism and other forms of oppression underpin the political economy of academic and non-academic disciplinary thinking" (ibid., p. 4). Similar to the natural sciences that McKittrick mainly focuses on, musicology is born out of and inherently intertwined with systemic racism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression (Brown, 2020; Ewell, 2020; Morrison, 2019; van Straaten, 2021). Reading McKittrick prompted the realisation in learners that "if close reading merely sought to reinforce the ideals of the canon, as does most musicological analysis [...] even today, then it is merely a tool for hegemony and control of resources" (learner Boddapati, 2022, p. 4). This led us – as a group, during the course of the semester – to ask how we might approach music without reinforcing systemic inequalities. McKittrick (2021, p. 3) proposes alternative modes of knowing: "restless and uncomfortably situated and multifarious rather than definitive and downward-pressing".

Central to McKittrick's (2021, p. 9) argument as we understood it through our readings and discussions, both on the level of content and form, are stories: "a verb-activity that invites engagement, curiosity, and collaboration". To story, is to

> "[...] question the analytical work of capturing, and the desire to capture, something or someone. [...] an ongoing method of gathering multifariously textured tales, narratives, fictions, whispers, songs, grooves. The textures offer one way to challenge the primacy of evidentiary and insular normalcies because they are allegedly incongruous. In assembling ideas that are seemingly disconnected and uneven [...] the logic of knowing-to-prove is unsustainable because incongruity appears to be offering atypical thinking. Yet curiosity thrives. [...] Telling, sharing, listening to, and hearing stories [...]it prompts. The story does not simply describe, it demands representation outside itself. Indeed, the story cannot tell itself without our willingness to imagine what it cannot tell" (McKittrick, 2021, p. 8 f.).

This is a radical departure from normative scientific truth production and singularity; stories do not seek to provide answers. Instead, they are relational, inviting active engagement and the making of new connections, thereby strongly resonating with creativity as understood in this paper. In fact, McKittrick herself refers to stories as creative text, explicitly distancing her understanding of creativity from aforementioned popular connotations of innate genius: "The creative text does not have to be good or artful or aesthetically pleasing or popular. What the creative text is does not matter as much as what it does. [...] (To story is to) create conditions through which relationality, rebellion, conversation, interdisciplinarity, and disobedience are fostered" (McKittrick, 2021, p. 51). To story, we – as authors of this paper – would argue retrospectively, is one way to learn the skills needed to be creative. To foster storying in a classroom, then, means to foster creativity: to dare to experiment, to take risks and fail, to relate in ways beyond

the familiar, to connect to and with other learners, with as a result "no longer a soothing of the question, but the stimulation of curiosity" (learner Hartmann, 2022, p. 7).

Our joint exploration of McKittrick's stories, parallel to working on their case studies, prompted the learners to understand their own case studies as stories as well. As textures that invited them to relate, to together imagine that which is perhaps not made explicit in its analysable structures, to become "thinkers who refuse, resist, and renege on the demands of "rigor," "excellence," and "productivity" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 8). Such subversive learning opened up a "listening practice that is 'neither disengaged nor wanting to master what it sees and hears'" (McKittrick, 2021, p. 8, citing Georgis, 2013). For example, listening to a song while sitting in the sun in the open window of a bedroom, suddenly hearing a "detail that still amazes me [...] and I missed it with my obsession" (learner Boddapati, 2022, p. 8). It meant sharing fears and experiences with other learners and collaboratively finding new ways of dealing with challenges that came up. For the learners, this was a complicated process, full of experiences they at first framed as frustrating failures. However, we kept communicating and emphasising that experiences of losing "one's way [...] confusion" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 6 ff.) are central parts of any learning process.

The longer the students explored their case studies, the more we realised that we needed to adapt the assessment process of this course. Presenting what they were learning through conventional Zoom presentations and a paper structured according to question, argument, and answer would not do justice to the centrality of risk, failure, reflection, and collaboration in their learning process. After discussing this challenge in class as a group, we agreed that each of the students would create a "story" and write a reflection paper about this creative learning process. Based on the variety of ideas the students had regarding the textures of their stories, we agreed that the students could choose the form of the story freely. This resulted in five very different stories, the description thereof here, is based on van Straaten's relating to those stories: a (partially sampled) interview conversation between Nicki Minaj, Sir Mixalot, and the learner about racialised and gendered norms of beauty. An audio fairytale about Prince Harry wanting Queen Lizzo's magical juice explored dynamics of white cis-male appropriation of black cis-female cultural expression and queer baiting. A digital folder containing a puzzle of various elements invited the puzzlers to make connections between affect, migration, and nostalgia. A podcast telling a story of love, voice, and the utopian potential of song. A Prezi inviting us into an experience of sonic wildness and questions (without answers) about queer love. The stories were diverse and individual, each in their own way incorporating the complex relationships between learner, theory, and object that developed collaboratively over the semester. Crucially, each of the stories also "prompted" curiosity in the listeners/readers/puzzlers; they invited the rest of the group to take on relationships with the story, thereby inciting the furthering of creative skills on the side of the recipient as well. Producing these stories, in the words of a learner, was "a time-consuming but welcome possibility to not only experiment with unconventional methods and academic form but also to explore and reflect about myself in relation to aesthetic form [...] which was a lot of fun" (learner Hartmann, 2022,

p. 2). Writing the reflection papers allowed the students to realise that so far, their learning had very much been oriented towards products and grades, with them aiming to reproduce what they thought their teachers might want to read. In contrast, in their reflection papers and during our meetings, the students described their learning experiences during this course as liberating. For the first time in their studies, they wanted to write in "a way that helps me grow, rather than to write it because I have to write it in order to get credits" (learner Sandor, 2022, p. 3).

3.3 Challenges of learning and teaching creatively

Besides being fun, the process was not without challenges for both the learners as well as for me. Challenges that the learners encountered included the fear of doing something wrong, having too little time, and the distinct discomfort of being vulnerable and letting go of their own expectations of what learning is: "It was difficult to go on without finding evidence, to go on with the threads I had gathered. This song offered sonic material, it offered lyrical material, it offered thoughts, relationships, and generations. My own storying was weaving with the threads that were offered by the song" (learner Boddapati, 2022, 10). For the learners, it meant courage, time, and developing trust in the process and the group, as they came to retrospectively think of the experience as "only just the beginning of this – hopefully – never-ending journey of becoming, being, staying, and changing me" (learner Sandor, 2022, p. 3). Only through cultivating this process can the skills they learned become "something I will carry with me forever" (learner Boddapati, 2022, p. 14). Moreover, on a structural level, the course had a specific workload that made exploring at leisure, failing, and getting lost too time-consuming compared to the number of credits received for the course. The students were so motivated that they voluntarily spent the extra time, but this is not sustainable if each course in the curriculum would require a similar workload. Furthermore, while the storying approach combined with reflection papers as assignments was process-focused, the grading system used at the university focuses on results graded based on the normative system of logic, structure, and answers that we sought to work against. This meant that I, as a teacher, had to take the risk to work on the very edges of what was possible in relation to this system to centralise criteria that valued the creative competencies the students acquired in my assessment of the products the students produced (story and reflection paper). I also had difficulty resisting worrying that the students wouldn't *know* enough at the end of the semester. Letting go of perceived control over what was learned and how was harder than I wish to admit. Beyond that, creating an atmosphere in class where students felt safe to express difficulties, to rethink perceived failures as part of their learning processes, and to be vulnerable in expressing their worries about their own capabilities was also a challenging task. It involved a willingness on my part to be vulnerable as well, to share moments during which I experienced failures myself, and to repeatedly state that it is OK to feel uncertain, to have doubts, to be stuck, to take your time and just let the process be and do something else for a couple of days. This also involved creating a basic structure through clear assignments, transparency in expectancies, and the points of assessment the grades would be

based on, as well as the willingness to remain flexible, to listen to the needs of the students, and to change the design of the course in response. It also meant resisting the urge to find solutions for their challenges, instead just listening to learners and acknowledging their process, to give them, as one of the students described, the possibility to "incite a learning process in myself" (learner Hartmann, 2022, p. 6). This, for us, is reason enough to encourage creative teaching approaches in higher education.

4 Discussion: A dialogue between *theory* and teaching experience

Theory (T): This case study emphasises that there appears to be a connection between teaching creatively and fostering the development of creativity in one's learners. Creativity in teaching, which here involved openness and flexibility of students and teacher to adapt the design of the seminar collaboratively, allowed for the emergence of learning assignments that could be characterised as fostering creativity skills. What were your experiences with the assessment of the products of these tasks?

Teaching experience (E): The elements put forward by Haertel and Jahnke (2011) and also Jahnke et al. (2015) proved to be helpful in examining the stories and reflection papers produced by the students. The first element, "reflecting on the learning process or product", was present in each of the reflection papers. However, even though I had created a clear written guideline with *guiding questions* aimed at reflection on the learning process, the amount and depth of reflection within the papers differed vastly. Some students took the guiding questions as a structure, answering each of these in depth; others took the guidelines but also described their story, while in some only the bare minimum of reflexive thoughts was written. Furthermore, the making of independent decisions was present in each of the students' stories, but again, some of the products revealed much more individual decision-making than others. One learner mainly used theoretical materials I suggested to create their story, while others included a variety of theoretical approaches and contemporary and historical documents that they selected themselves. Each student decided on their own case study and the form of their story, however, some needed more (peer) feedback before they made their decisions than others. Through the creation of the stories, all the students also met the element of producing something. Where some students stayed with more familiar formats, others came up with forms that are far from normative academic forms of knowledge representation. The audio fairytale, for example, actively played with the academic norms of narrative within the humanities. It also used this form to induce relationality, encouraging a thought process in the listeners and inviting them to think along with the story. Similarly, the puzzle, including *Mei Glück is a Hütterl* as well as short archival video clips, photos, sounds, and theoretical and poetic texts about nostalgia and migration, was created with a complexity and originality that went far beyond what I had imagined the students would produce.

T: *These examples indicate the amount of curiosity the students developed regarding their stories. How would you describe the motivation of the group of students during the semester? Could you offer some insights on this element to foster creativity?*

E: Even though the curiosity and enthusiasm of the students were clear throughout the semester, my exploration of the complexity and originality of the stories they developed and reading their reflective papers illustrated to me how much energy they all invested in their learning. They all pointed out that they were highly motivated by the course focus and approach, that they wanted to keep doing research on their story to find out more, and that they ended the course with more questions than they had at the beginning. For example, one student wrote: "I am [...] still an amateur in this field, but [...] – and this thought is new to me – why not change that? [...] In my case study, I explored the idea of starting anew [...] why not take this as an impulse for myself as well and start to learn something new here and there?" (learner Hartmann, 2022, p. 11).

T: While introducing your course concept as a case study here, you highlighted the importance of the feedback sessions for the learning (and teaching) process. What was key for you as you implemented this regular and respectful feedback in the didactical design of the seminar?

E: First, it was the learning tasks' context in which the feedback was implemented. Students were free to select which knowledge was relevant to them and their case study, to decide what they needed to learn to be able to create the story they wanted to, and what (form of) feedback they wished to receive from their peers. This, combined with the reassurance that failure is part of the process, allowed them to learn that they all had similar experiences of error, panic, failure, and stress. By taking myself out of the peer feedback process as well as by always underscoring my own failures in my learning processes, I sought to cultivate a relative lack of inhibitors and create an atmosphere in class that facilitates an open and honest discussion, a "culture of failure" (Haertel & Jahnke, 2011) that acknowledges errors as essential parts of exploring new grounds. This included making it transparent that the process was more important than the outcome of the learning process and that grades would not be based on the usual normative academic representation of knowledge acquired during the semester. Rather, in constructive alignment with the learning goals, the grades were based on the ways in which the students: 1) critically examined musical objects beyond normative musicological methods in their stories and reflexive papers; 2) used critical theory to ask object socio-political questions of relevance to the lives of the students within the stories and reflexion papers; 3) created a *story* of one or more *textures* about this process of exploring relationships between critical theory, self, and music; and 4) critically reflected on this unusual and challenging learning process in their reflective papers submitted at the end of the semester. The combination of peer support and assurance that they had and the time they needed to try things out without fearing failure and repercussions on their grades were key in this process.

T: The case study underscores a connection between teaching creatively and fostering the development of creativity in one's learners (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004), and that – once initiated – creativity in higher education fortifies itself. Would you agree to such a hypothesis?

E: To me, this teaching experience underlined that creativity in higher education is relational regarding two dimensions. First, my own creativity as a teacher was a response to and enhanced by the input, worries, and hopes of my students. Without them, the creativity in my teaching of this course would not have emerged. Second, teaching to enhance the creativity skills of the students does not necessarily mean that all students become equally creative in the products they design. Rather, students who already possessed certain skills allowing for creativity were able to produce more creative products while also learning new skills, while those who had fewer skills in the beginning, added new skills to their list but produced less creative products. Therefore, my answer would be *yes, but*. Yes, creativity in teaching can foster the development of creativity skills in our students, but only if we as teachers are open to navigating through a course in collaboration with our students and their individual creativity skills.

5 Conclusion

This paper introduced and discussed a case study of creative teaching (and learning) in higher education that hopes to encourage creative teaching approaches in higher education. Following Alencar & Feith (2004, p. 27), who suggest that the topic of creativity should be discussed regularly in educational development settings, we discussed which elements can potentially hinder and foster creativity in teaching-and-learning. Based on a selection of studies spanning over twenty years of research on creativity in higher education, we argued that the relevance of the skills needed for creativity has only increased over the last decades. Higher education institutions, as we followed these studies in arguing, should equip their students with the skills to better deal with the increasingly uncertain future that we are all approaching.

The case study that we presented in this paper stressed the role of institutional contexts in the emergence of creativity. Here, being able to flexibly design learning assessments allowed creativity to emerge in the course. The uncertainty of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic might have added to the emergence of creativity as it forced a rupture in normalised processes of course design and execution and necessitated a flexibility in teaching-and-learning on several levels. Crucially, the case study illustrated the importance of several forms of openness and dialogue between students and teachers, which we perceive as vital for creativity to emerge. Creativity here could emerge thanks to the educational partnership between teacher and students. Collaboratively re-designing the seminar during the semester established the groundwork to enhance creativity in the teaching as well as the learning approaches and allowed learners to fail, reflect, and try again, thereby developing skills necessary for creativity. It seems that if higher education wishes to emphasise the training of creative skills in our students and teachers, support on both the didactic as well as the structural levels is crucial. Both can invite students and teachers to think *outside the box*, to challenge teaching formats, to learn with and from each other, to collaborate on learning tasks, to relate to

and with each other on both a cognitive and emotional level, and to question assumptions underlying normalised systems of knowledge production. All of these elements can foster the emergence of creative skills that our students (and we as teachers as well) increasingly need.

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