Creativity and Pedagogy: Is It a Final Fantasy in the Age of Pandemic? 7 Lessons for Life on the Ground Floor

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Abstract: "Creativity is the new literacy; we cannot leave a whole generation of people behind." – Chase Jarvis (TNW, 2017)
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"If I can try to make it fun that for me is what being creative is about; it's having fun and looking at life through like a sort of the lens of a child really." – Taika Waititi (TED x Talks, 2010).

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1. Introduction

> "*Creativity is the new literacy; we cannot leave a whole generation of people behind*." – Chase Jarvis (TNW, 2017)

The COVID-19 pandemic caught the world of education by surprise. As schools around the world were temporarily closed, the pedagogical paradigm shift from traditional face-to-face teaching to online teaching has accelerated considerably. To facilitate this change in teaching modes, schools have provided various e-learning tools in an attempt to compensate for the absence of face-to-face interactions. However, despite relevant training and applying a range of e-learning tools, many teachers have struggled to replicate their expected level of outcomes, be it interactivity, understanding, engagement, or simply response, let alone creativity. This raises the question: is creativity in pedagogy real or just a fantasy? In this article, I argue that creativity in pedagogy in this age of pandemic is possible by offering my views on creativity and its development, and by sharing my experience on how I realise creativity in pedagogy. This includes seven appliable lessons I learned from my four years of PhD research on creativity, 16 years of application of creativity in English language teaching, as well as from my experience in bank marketing, digital marketing, software development, and hospitality management.

As an applied linguist and 'creativist', I attempt to construct this article in a way that is unlike the ones in academic journals. It aims not to be a literature review written in formal language that no one reads (see Eveleth, 2014, for related studies on how rarely scholarly articles are read), but at the same time, also not one of those ubiquitous Top-Tips guides on the internet, which offers a buffet of 'solutions' without scientific evidence. Instead, it is a text type that lies somewhere in between the two poles. Inspired by the work of the founding father of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) Prof. M.A.K.

Halliday (1990), this article aims to be interpersonal, and easy to read, yet evidence-based, functional, and practical. Also unlike the Top-Tips guides, this article does not give suggestions to teachers based on the assumption that they have unlimited support from their organisations, but instead aims to inspire teachers to go creative when resources are severely limited. (How else should an article in this Special Issue on Creativity and Critical Thinking in Practice be written if not creatively?)

2. My Journey with Creativity

> "*You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have*." – Maya Angelou

Before diving into my seven 'lessons for life on the ground floor', I shall take you through my journey to understanding and applying creativity. Prior to my bachelor's degree years, I worked as a part-time cards marketing assistant in Citibank Singapore and was given many chances to run creative promotions, including handling the graphic design for a giant helium balloon outside TANGS on Orchard Road. This eye-opening, fun, and creative marketing experience has greatly influenced everything I do ever since.

After completing my bachelor's degree in computer science in 2004 and learned about game development, I chose a completely different path and began my English-teaching career in Hong Kong. For most part of the following ten years, I worked multiple English-teaching jobs on the same day. In the mornings, I taught short English courses in over 20 primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. In the afternoons, I taught 5-contact-hour-per-day at a local government secondary school as an English drama teacher. In the evenings, I taught listening and speaking classes to adult EFL learners at a local commercial English learning centre and business English corporate classes onsite in weekends, trained new EFL teachers and designed my own English course and materials. Because students of different ages from various backgrounds have very different needs, teaching them required a range of tailor-made creativity approaches and quick adjustment of the teaching mindset. It was this period that I gained the most experience in on-the-field teaching, and course and material development in a metaphorical 'time-compression' manner (see Fandom, 2019 for description of the term).

Upon attaining my master's degree in English language teaching 2014, I taught computer-mediated communication (CMC) courses as a visiting lecturer at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HKPolyU), and soon I began my Ph.D. study in creativity (Law, 2018) under the tutelage of Prof. Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen and Prof. Francisco O. D. Veloso, who are both renowned scholars in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). I was also involved in several creative projects, such as joining a local electric vehicle (EV) association and handling its public education events, media interviews, and the production of all its social media posts and videos (see Charged Hong Kong, 2020, for a list of references); as well as creating my own open-accessed crowd-sourced EV-charging car park map and world's first APA 7th edition stylesheet for Microsoft Word on GitHub.

After I had attained my doctoral degree in 2018, I taught bachelor's degree courses offered by an American university at a local college. Half a year later, I decided to step outside my comfort zone and took up a position of Innovation and Public Relations Manager at a 4.5-star upscale hotel in Hong Kong. I had the opportunity to learn hospitality management from top hoteliers, propose innovative ideas, research in language in hospitality, teach business English to hotel staff, and be fully immersed in the world of digital marketing and public relations. Although I left hospitality management when a research position became available in the Centre for Applied English Studies (CAES) at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), I have transferred the knowledge and skills I picked up as a hotel's marketing manager to my current project. Notably, I have pioneered the adaption of research methods from business management and human resources development to the research of learning transfer of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for undergraduate students (Law & Fong, 2020). In addition, I am using my research findings to inform my teaching of EAP to HKU undergraduates and contributing to the revamp of course materials and the refinement of EAP pedagogy in CAES.

3. The Ubiquitous Top 'n' Tips on the Internet: Do They Work Now?

> "*To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science*." – Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld (1938)

Having spent two decades with creativity in English language teaching and research, bank marketing, digital marketing, software development, and hospitality management, I have learned numerous lessons of creativity worthy of sharing. Most of these lessons are useful but rather commonplace and can be found as recommendations in many Top-Tips guides on the internet (see Clifford, 2012; Davies, 2015; Johnson, 2019 and Appendix for the list of general recommendations). While these recommendations should generally be welcome by teachers and students, they can be difficult to realise in practice. One main reason is that the 'creativity' involved is product-oriented and originality-based (see Starko, 2010). This means that both teachers and students are expected to, at the very least, produce something of originality and value – both concepts subjected to opinions of their superior others rather than their own. When this happens, when one's 'creativity' is judged by others who are more powerful – which is often the case – the parties involved (i.e., school, teacher and students) tend to be caught in a mistake-avoidance loop. Sir Kenneth Robinson (TED, 2007) expresses such concern about how children around the world are losing their capacity to be creative because of their fear of being wrong and how societies stigmatise mistakes. Eventually, it stands to reason that 'the less you do, the better'.

The other main reason is that there is a general assumption in the recommendations about the parties collaborating within a receptive, non-hierarchical environment. The reality of our education systems, Robinson argues, is hierarchical in structures and dichotomised in notions of organisation of the school curriculum. A report published by The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) (1999) identifies "an explicit hierarchy of subjects" as a major cause for the decline in young people's creative capability (p. 85), and urged for "a new balance in education: in setting national priorities; in the structure and organisation of the school curriculum; in methods of teaching and assessment; in relationships between schools and other agencies." (p. 9). It is hoped that this 'new balance' would neutralise dichotomies "as a choice between the arts or the sciences; the core curriculum or the broad curriculum; between academic standards or creativity; freedom or authority in teaching methods" (p. 9). However, twenty years later, how well are we doing with creativity in education so far?

In 2020, we enter a new decade greeted by a global coronavirus pandemic into a world that forces teaching, learning and human interactions behind computer screens and masks. Our reality has been impacted so dramatically and unexpectedly since November 2019 that few industries on this fragile planet of ours can be spared from disruptions. We are busy using Zoom or Google Meet for teaching and meetings, contacting students via instant messenger apps, asking students to type in Google Docs or live-chat apps as means of 'interaction' because students are not showing their faces on camera or speaking to the microphone. It is fair to say that creativity, in learning or pedagogy, is hardly most teachers' top priority. But those of us who still believe in creativity in education and are looking at the Top-Tips list may be asking, "how many of those recommendations still work?"

4. My 7 'Lessons for Life on the Ground Floor'

> "*If I can try to make it fun that for me is what being creative is about; it's having fun and looking at life through like a sort of the lens of a child really*." – Taika Waititi (TED x Talks, 2010)

I am fortunate enough to have studied both science and arts because the 'old imbalance' (as opposed to the 'new balance') I had experienced as a student helped me realise how important they both are to the development of creativity. I am even more fortunate to have worked, researched, and taught in different fields where very different mindsets and approaches to creativity are required. These experiences have equipped me with the essential mentality and skills to tackle some of the most difficult problems in the age of pandemic. In the following section, I shall share my seven appliable lessons on how I realise

creativity in pedagogy, based on the assumption that one is operating in a non-receptive, hierarchical environment with very little resources to work with.

4.1 Lesson 1: Turn Creativity into a Verb and Own It

Let's begin by defining the term creativity. Generally, the first step of defining a term is asking a related open-ended 'WH-' question, and 'what is creativity?' is presumably a popular choice. However, if we take one step further and also ask the question 'who/what has creativity?' We may see a wider picture. Starko (2014), for example, takes this approach and groups popular theories of creativity by the 'who'. Those that focus on individuals are generally psycho-cognitive-oriented, including psychoanalytic theories (see Jung, 1972; Kris, 1951; Kubie, 1958; Miller, 1990; Rothenberg, 1990), humanist and developmental theories (see Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1962), behaviorist or associationist theories (see Mednick, 1962; Skinner, 1972), and creativity as cognition (see Guilford, 1959; 1967; 1986; 1988; Perkins, 1981; 1988, 1994; Weisberg, 1986, 1988, 1993, 1999, 2006; Ward, 2001). Those that involve more than a single individual are generally systemic, including sociocultural theories (see John-Steiner, 2000; Vygotsky, 1930), and systems theories (see Amabile, 1989, 1996, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Feldman, 1993, 1999; Sternberg & Lubart, 1991, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1981; Simonton, 1999, 2004; Law, 2018, 2020b). This 'who has creativity' categorisation allows us to infer 'what creativity is' as defined by various theories: theories involving single individuals tend to see creativity as innate or learned; theories involving multiple individuals generally consider creativity as collaborative or a combination of the three (see Rhodes, 1961). For instance, the classic Big-C/little-c creativity (Simonton, 1977, 1994, 2004) and the Four C Model of creativity (i.e. Big-C, pro-c, little-c, mini-c) (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) both consider the Big-C creativity as an innate ability that only an elite few in the human history possess, but that everyone is capable of lower-level creativity which can be developed through interactions with people and the environment. At the same time, these two models exemplify 'what creativity is' in the western culture – creativity is largely defined by its products and their originality. In this case, creativity is measured by the degree of impact of one's work on the human society at some point in time.

But there is still one part of the proposed question yet to be answered, 'what has creativity?' This, in fact, is the key question that defines what creativity is in this article. By asking 'what has creativity' instead of 'who has creativity', I intend to provide another perspective for our discussion. Specifically, are we humans the only species on this planet that is capable of demonstrating creativity? We know that sea otters use hard objects as tools to crack seashells open; research shows that world-renowned western lowland gorilla Koko had the ability to use learned American Sign Language (ASL) to create new signs for untaught or non-existed vocabulary (Ahamo, 2015; Patterson, 1979; Patterson & Cohn, 1990); and the list of examples continues. So if creativity is not the sole property of human beings, then determining creativity based on human-experiential concepts such as originality (in the history of human inventions) or impact (on a culture in the history of human civilisation) would seem unfair or unreasonable. If we posit that creativity is not the ability to be creative (as measured by a range of subjective human standards), it follows that creativity should be the ability to create (which is relatively more objective). Therefore, 'creativity is the ability to create' is the definition I emphasise in this article.

Defining creativity as 'the ability to create' rather than 'the ability to be creative' is crucial and beneficial to the development of creativity for teachers as well as for our students. For one, the emphasis of creativity is not on products and their quality as perceived by others, but on the mental and physical process of creating. Linguistically, the idea is to move away from the noun creation (i.e., a product) and the adjective creative (i.e., a standard) to the verb create (i.e., actions). This should help to alleviate psychological stress from both external (e.g. peers and public opinions) and internal (e.g. self-inflicted) sources and focus on what truly matters – you, me, ourselves. In my own research, I adapt Carter's (2004) hypotheses of creativity and consider the verb create to be an action (rather than a product or a standard) that involves the interplay between references and explicitness, generating both forming and reforming of patterns in the process (Law 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). In this context, creativity encompasses both individual and collaborative efforts that break away from existing norms, or form new (but not necessarily original) patterns from existing ones (Carter, 2004). In other words, the verb 'create' also encompasses verbs such as make, build, construct, produce, imitate, adapt, improvise,

co-create, form, and collaborate, all in the general sense. Using these words, teachers and students can focus on the dos rather than the don'ts.

4.2 Lesson 2: Think Creativity, Not Innovation

The word innovation has long been a popular term in the business world and is beginning to make its way into education. Interestingly, despite its similarity with the word creativity, innovation is found to be five times more likely to collocate with business (n=4049, span=20) than creativity does (n=782, span=20) in 1.9-billion-word Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) (Davies, 2013). One possible reason is that innovation in business is more closely related to tangible products (Dodgson et al., 2002; Purcell, 2019; Startupr Hong Kong Limited, 2018), while creativity in business has a meaning closer to my definition, that it is focused on the mental or physical process of creating (including identification of opportunities) rather than the products (DeTienne & Chandler, 2004; Gundry & Kickul, 1996; Sarasvathy, 2001; Timmons, 1989).

There are two worrying messages for teachers and students that I can think of: the first is that education is likely to become more commercialised than it was and thus teachers and students' innovation would be quantified, measured and compared by Key Performance Indicators (KPI) of some kind; the second is that creativity (i.e., process-oriented) could be further marginalised while innovation (i.e., result-oriented) takes the centre stage. As inevitable as this may sound, there is in fact a way to overcome this trend. Educators will need to call for creativity instead of innovation in our field. Because "language does not passively reflect reality; language actively creates reality" (Halliday, 1990, p. 11), if there is a demand for creativity, there will be a supply of it, but the same applies to innovation.

This is not to say that innovation is an evil entity in education; quite the contrary, innovative products are always good inspiration for further development, but innovation should not precede and outweigh creativity in education. We should first think creativity (and not innovation) because it is where creations and innovations start to take form in our imaginations. If we are lucky, we produce innovations, but innovations are not to be taken for granted and most definitely not a prerequisite for creativity.

4.3 Lesson 3: Abandon Perfection and Embrace Failure

My experience with the management in the business world is that they often claim how much they embrace creativity, but at the same time, they prefer stability and aim for perfection in things they seek. The companies led by these leaders often revert to their conventional practices in operation and thus fail to create or innovate. Also, because most companies are hierarchical, this creates an environment in which subordinates fear of making even the smallest mistakes, be it missing a full-stop in a presentation slide, or not being able to instantly provide certain information when asked. It is this belief in perfection that kills creativity in an organisation. Robinson (TED, 2007) witnesses how this trend has permeated from the business world into education systems in the U.K. and said, "we run our companies like this, by the way, we stigmatise mistakes. And we're now running National Education systems where mistakes are the worst thing you can make."

We all know that it is important to be right because mistakes can be costly, but we must learn to accept that it is even more important to be wrong. This is especially the case when mistakes have minor consequences, because learning from these minor mistakes actually prevents more detrimental errors in the future. The two Boeing 737 Max plane crashes in 2019, for example, were highly preventable had the company learned from their minor mistakes. Had Boeing learned from the minor design flaw on their 737 Max aircrafts and decided to re-engineer the planes instead of reverting to a quick software 'fix' to the high angle of attack problem, or had Boeing mentioned the installation of the new software in the pilot's training manual and what the software was doing to the flight, or had Boeing listened to the eight pilots who complained that the 737 Max was "suddenly nosing down", two major plane crashes could have been prevented and a total of 346 lives could have lived (Yglesias, 2019). It is often because one's fear to be wrong and their belief in perfection cause fear to admit flaws and imperfection, which in turn, brings disastrous consequences.

Certainly, not all leaders in businesses believe in perfection. Elon Musk, founder/co-founder of multiple corporations such as Tesla, SpaceX, The Boring Company, Neuralink, and OpenAI, is well-known for his disbelief in perfection. In an interview with Fast Company (Reingold, 2005), Musk elaborated on his attitude towards making mistakes at SpaceX, "There's a silly notion that failure's not an option at NASA. Failure is an option here. If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough." His senior design engineer, Kevin Brogan, added that "the first time we had a major engine failure Elon was kind of excited. It gave him some street cred", to which Musk reacted, "If I had the option of not having it blow up, I'd rather not, but it was pretty cool." From this short dialogue, we can appreciate how much Musk values failure and creativity as an integral part of his companies' success. So maybe this is something we can learn from one of the world's most innovative entrepreneurs/engineers (see Glanville, n.d.)?

In fact, engineers generally understand well that perfection does not exist. That is because the belief in perfection implies that there was an end to engineering improvement, which violates the fundamental principle of engineering and is something that has yet to happen in the entire human history. If scientific evidence and facts matters to educators, and I believe it does, we should abandon the pursuit of perfection and instead embrace imperfect and failure and strive for creativity and continuous improvement.

4.4 Lesson 4: Just Start with What You Have, and Take Small Steps

Striving for creativity does not mean we have to create something amazing with huge impact every day, but we need to kick-start the process by creating something from what we already have and then take small steps day by day. I have been teaching English since 2004 and I have not written a single word on the board with a chalk or a whiteboard marker since 2006. If I need to 'write' anything, I type it on Microsoft Word and project it on the screen instead. Even students sitting on the last row in the lecture hall can read the text on the screen because a simple Ctrl + scroll on the mouse can zoom in the text up to five times the original size. After class, I save a copy of all the useful words and expressions I type onto my USB drive (and that was before we have internet cloud storage), and email it to my students for their note-keeping. Then for my own research, I use the saved texts for my own mini-corpus analysis to improve my teaching materials. Certainly, this is not something that can earn me an innovation award in pedagogy, but a simple typing-on-computer creativity has more benefits in terms of viewability, transferability, reproducibility and reusability than the traditional 'wipe and gone' writing-on-the-board method. It is taking these small steps that fosters bigger creative ideas.

Another example of how taking small steps in creativity can go a long way can be found in our young children who lend a helping hand during this time of great need. Eight-year-old Nahla from the U.K. (Batty, 2020) and 12-year-old Vince from the United States (Whitfield, 2020) and 12-year-old Quinn from Canada (World Scouting, 2020) are among the many creative young children who are using their 3D printers at home to print protective masks and ear guards, and donating them by the hundred and even thousands to hospitals across the country. Nahla said in an ABC interview that "the message that I'd like to give to other children that would like to help during this time is that no gesture is too small". I think that 'no creativity is too small' and 'no one is too young for creativity' either. We adults should learn a thing or two from our children.

4.5 Lesson 5: Think Fun, Fun, Fun!

In addition to thinking creativity, educators should also be thinking fun. Fun is a crucial motivating factor of creativity, which means if fun is the goal or product, then there is no lack of creativity. The global gaming industry is an exemplar of this, and it is set to reach a value of US$256.97b by 2025 (Mordor Intelligence, 2019). Yet, despite the importance of fun, there seems to be a negative correlation between fun (and thus creativity) and educational stage. My personal experience is that fun mostly appears in pedagogical discussions in early childhood education, but it is almost non-existent in higher education. Indeed, researchers have pointed out that "[t]he psychological literature on fun is very limited" and the three-letter word is mainly found in journal articles of education as a variable in

structural equation modelling (McManus & Furnham, 2010, p. 160), not as a component in a pedagogical framework. Whatever the reasons are, it seems that our education systems are not at all prepared to train fun-loving talents to meet the needs of the booming creative industry.

If we should call for creativity in place of the product-oriented innovation in education, we should also call for fun as a preferred product of creativity over innovation. One reason supporting this proposition is that brain-based research has long revealed benefits of joyful education to students' effective information processing and learning retention (Willis, 2007). Neurologist Judy Willis even comments that "when the fun stops, learning often stops too" (Willis, 2007). In fact, in the last decade, gamification has been gaining more attention in education, but because the development is still in its infancy, much work is needed to link up fun and play with learning and teaching (Klopfer et al., 2019; Whitton & Langan, 2019). This work, I argue, should come from teachers as well as students. Students should not be limited to solely following game rules prepared by their teachers; they should also be allowed to actively create the fun that they crave for. The goal is to use creativity to create fun (or maybe produce innovations) and achieve learning, which is similar to that in the gaming industry. For example, to promote the concept of learning transfer to all CAES students, both my team and a handful of HKU students are currently working hard to produce an animated video using Nintendo's Animal Crossing: New Horizons, the world's second best-selling game on Nintendo Switch (Nintendo, 2020) and The Game Awards' 2020 Best Family award winner (Nintendo, 2021). Hopefully students can produce their own educational videos using their favourite games in the near future.

4.6 Lesson 6: Understand the Relationship between Creativity and Learning

In order to effectively design fun and creative lessons, it is important for teachers to understand the relationships between creativity and learning. Adapting Halliday's (2013) three foci of language development, I consider three aspects of creativity development are learning about creativity, learning through creativity, and learning creativity.

Learning about creativity is the study of creativity. This refers to the study of relevant theories, models, frameworks, and concepts from a wide range of disciplines, which includes observing changes in the theoretical and methodological approaches, and examining empirical findings from research performed at different times and in different cultures. We study the history, the culture, the 'grammar' and the approaches to the analysis of creativity.

Learning through creativity is using creativity as a tool to learn subject knowledge across the curriculum. Through making creativity central to the teaching and learning of subject knowledge, or alternatively, embedding the study of creativity into the teaching process, students can have the freedom to create, question, debate, correct as they acquire knowledge from a specific discipline. The explicit teaching of creativity studies is optional and depends on students' needs.

Learning creativity is realising the creativity potential through actions in our everyday life, which includes observing and recognising instances of creativity, thinking about the construction of creativity (see Law 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), actively applying and analysing creativity, and learning from our mistakes. It is similar to what we do when we are construing the mother tongue, which occurs from birth and even before that (Halliday, 2013). One popular form of creativity production that has immense impacts on the reality is digital creativity on the internet, which is an area in urgent need for more related studies of creativity and critical thinking (Law, 2020c).

Understanding these three aspects of creativity development not only helps us "neutralize the difference between theory and application" (Halliday, 2013, p. 65), but also provides us with clear orientation toward addressing students' needs for creativity development.

4.7 Lesson 7: Know the Market by Asking the Right Questions

Another small step we can take is getting to know – in economics term – the market. Education, in modern times, resembles a service industry (if not already is), partly contributed by the needs of industrialism (NACCCE, 1999) and partly by the popularization of tutoring/'shadow education' (see Bray, 2013; Craig & Evers, 1981; Hurrelmann & Engel, 1989). Teachers resemble service providers; students resemble clients, and collectively, they make up the market. If we posit that one cannot provide good services without knowing what the market wants, it follows that one cannot teach well without understanding students' needs. The same applies to creativity in teaching.

Because creativity involves constructing and co-constructing meanings implicitly or explicitly using references, I must ensure I am familiar with the references that are popular among my students. I have two approaches to achieving this. My first approach involves spending a decent amount of time watching online videos. This indirect method includes randomly watching what is trending on YouTube, Twitter, and Twitch with my visual-creator wife, Cecilia, as well as kids' videos with my two daughters, Muse (seven-year-old) and Belle (three-year-old), who are all my inspirations. While I am watching these videos with them, I would observe and ask my ladies (and myself) what makes them laugh and enjoy watching these videos, which elements in these videos make them attractive to viewers, and what makes them think that these videos are fun or creative. These questions allow me to understand the mechanism involved in the construal and the construction of creativity.

My second approach involves directly asking my students, not just once but regularly throughout the academic year, what they enjoy doing and learning and in what ways they find doing and learning them the easiest. The reason is simple: they know what is trending, popular and enjoyable to them, and if I do not know the answers, I cannot create fun activities that will fit their learning style. Sadly, these are questions that few educators I know would ask nowadays, and even fewer would use the collected information to improve the creative aspect of their lessons.

During this pandemic, I have attended many online seminars and conferences, and watched speakers present many ways of conducting online teaching. Some worked for them, others less so. What really interested me is the pattern I discovered in the audience's questions. More than often, they are: "what is your pedagogy?", "what tools did you use?", "how to use it?", "how did you assess your students?", and "how did you engage your students?" Putting aside the fact that the speakers' students and the audience's students are very different in terms of background and demographics, the question is not so much about what you would do if the keynote speakers say certain pedagogical methods or tools are promising, but rather if they tell you that some methods did not work. Would you still dare to try them? In fact, what the audience really should be asking are questions such as "what is the demographics of the students in your classes?", "what (games) do they enjoy playing at their free time?", or "what kind of online videos do they like watching the most?" Methods and tools cannot make us more creative, but understanding what our students' perceive as fun can give us more references for creativity.

5. Conclusion

So far, I have shared my 7 'lessons for life on the ground floor' with the hope that all readers of this article can be inspired to practise creativity in a less supportive environment, but like most tech companies' press conferences nowadays, I have 'one more thing' to share. It is not so much of a lesson but a realisation in these challenging times of COVID-19.

To facilitate online teaching, schools around the world have provided additional software programs with an aim to enhance interactions and thus compensate for the absence of face-to-face interactions. As supportive as the initiative is, the application of these 'creative' tools are not eradicating camera-offs nor teachers' discomfort from talking to a blank screen and the lack of responses. Time and again I hear speakers and audience in online talks asking for possible explanations for the phenomenon, but few, if any, are able to offer a satisfactory answer. As this article comes to a close, I hope my 7 lessons have somewhat provided clues, but in case the lessons have not been explicit enough, I shall offer a couple of my views: 1) The application of a teaching tool (e.g. a software program) is not creativity, we are. We are the persons to inject our creativity into the content and give life and meaning to the activity we design, not the tool. We should use the tool, and not be the tool of a tool. 2) Neither creativity nor the

application of any teaching tools guarantees the kind of responses we receive during face-to-face teaching. Remember that we are teaching through digital means and therefore, it is natural that students' behaviour also follows the practice of netizens in the internet world. Ultimately, we all need to know the market. This includes knowing our students' situations and understanding difficulties they are facing.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses in our societies, including the fact that our underprivileged students do not enjoy the same level of technological convenience as we teachers had originally thought (Law, 2020c; García et al., 2020; Whitacre & Gallardo, 2020; Yates, 2020). Not all students have a top-of-the-line laptop at home. Some students could be using their one-and-only 3-inch mobile devices with limited internet bandwidth and mobile data to attend our Zoom lessons during which we happily demand our students to switch on their cameras (in their very private space), use virtual background (which is a function privileging devices with high computational power), read our ultra-small texts (which is proportional to the size of device screen), and type essays in the chat boxes or editable cloud documents while looking at paragraphs on their already-diminished screens. In addition, we throw in even more 'interactive', graphics-heavy teaching apps during the online lesson that require session codes, logins, passwords and even multiple devices, all these just so we can collect evidence of their engagement (or for our assessing of their performance) or even tell ourselves that we are 'innovative'. Perhaps it is about time we go back to basics and rethink what creativity or innovation really should mean to us and our students. Allow me to give an example to illustrate this point by decrypting the title of this article.

The title of this article pays homage to Final Fantasy VII Remake (FF7R), which is the part one of a remake of the 1997 PlayStation classic action role-playing game Final Fantasy VII (FF7). This remake was first announced in 2006 (Sato, 2006), but was not until April this year that it was finally released (Wald, 2020). In order to ensure FF7R "feel[s] both new and nostalgic" for players of the original FF7 and those who have not, the game developers placed far greater emphasis on character development and storytelling in this new game (FINAL FANTASY, 2020). One of the newly added character is Marle, a grandmotherly leader-like figure who lives on the ground floor of an apartment block in the Sector 7 slums and shares her wise 'lessons for life on the ground floor' with the protagonists (Fandom, 2020). Among the lessons she has imparted, the one that left an impression on me is about the importance of human relationships, "it's not what you know, but who you know." The literal meaning is clear: Connections are important in business and job searches. However, for those who have known and followed the core team of creators for a long time (e.g. Hironobu Sakaguchi, Shinji Hashimoto, Yoshinori Kitase, Kazushige Nojima, and Tetsuya Nomura) and understand their creativity and the years of effort they have devoted to this game, there is an extra layer of meaning to this quote in the educational context: It is not what creative skills or pedagogical approaches you know, but who you truly understand when you are creating. Do we understand ourselves, our students, both, or none?

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Appendix

A list of general recommendations found in many Top-Tips guides on the Internet (see Clifford, 2014; Davies, 2015; Johnson, 2019):

Schools should:

1. give teachers freedom and space to be creative.
2. emphasise less on traditional formats of assessment and embrace new ideas.
3. provide training workshops for teachers on how to teach creativity.
4. welcome and promote candid feedback from teachers and students.

Teachers should:

5. stay updated about the latest creativity research in the field.
6. apply models of creativity into pedagogy and course design.
7. use different assessment criteria for creative assignments.
8. teach students the creative skills they need.
9. ask students open-ended questions that can provide a different angle, e.g. What if?
10. give students freedom and space to be creative.
11. show (students what is creative) but not tell.
12. allow students to collaborate with each other.
13. give students time to think and ask questions.
14. maintain a friendly and supportive environment.
15. be open-minded when challenged by students.

Students should:

16. be ready to think out of the box.
17. be critical with information provided.
18. be ready to question or challenge norms.
19. welcome collaboration and embrace teamwork.
20. be happy to share comments and feedback.
21. maintain a positive attitude when participating in activities.

About the Author

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