

# How do People Construct Communication about their Creative Process? Study on Future Creative Professionals

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Process of communication can be challenging. At first participants must standardize their concepts of things to hold them close enough to others' concepts, then it's crucial to use appropriate expressions to verbalize those concepts to ensure the mutual understanding. Therefore, it can be problematic when cognitive constructs are hard to standardize, as in the case of creative process. That's because communicating about socially constituted objects is much easier than talking about those that are distinctive. Data in this study was gathered by qualitative survey with self-completed questionnaire of open-ended questions. It was conducted between students of creativity-related studies right after their creative work on a project. The aim of the study was to evaluate and observe proficiency in talking about one's ideas and communicate about creative process that led to them. The study has shown that creative process is identified only with its final phase – ideation. This “big idea” is seen as the result of having talent, not as the result of analytical thinking. Over half of the respondents believe that their idea was created by accident.. Respondents don't see creative process as a common phenomenon, they only refer to it as an inner experience of a certain individual.

*Keywords:* creativity, communication, creative process, concepts, ideas, construction, verbalization, review

## CREATIVITY IN CONSTRUCTIVISM

All communications are based on cognitive constructs. Those are the concepts created with individuals' perception by biological structure of senses. This narrows people's ability to observe the world since it is structured by identical physical strings. After this process the meaning of constructs is shaped culturally, for them to be consistent enough to have similar understanding for society. Therefore, everything that we are able to perceive is standardized; so those concepts that differ – and by that I mean creative ones – are less likely to be adapted into communication. Thus, the more procedures to normalize and constituting the

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reality, the less diversity is possible.

To construct every statement, we have strictly defined carriers of significance, such as language, picture, behavior or affection (Fleischer, 2011). This is why even if we come up with an excellent idea, it's basically worthless if no one except for us can understand it. All in all, success in understanding is not based on clarity of utterance of the speaker or careful listening by receiver, but on recurrence. Those statements that successfully guarantee perpetuity of communication are preferred, because they allow to perpetuate the act of speaking, so even more statements can be created (Fleischer, 2011). For this reason, creativity is a vague process by definition, because it is intended to function in a world which is based on recurrence (Glaserfeld, 2001). Therefore, it is necessary to maintain the balance and coordinate our perceived schemes with socially constituted construct (Glaserfeld, 1991). Two main cognitive processes that applies to adjusting constructs into our cognition are diversification and differentiation (Fleischer, 2011). First one is to perpetuate existing system, the other is to disrupt it.

Creativity in the paradigm of constructivism is understood as avoiding already existing solutions. It can be explained by few statements about creativity from constructivism perspective:

1. There's always more than only one solution. Every single idea might be important to evolve the concept or generate a new one.
2. One brain is not enough. Working in teams or groups is a way to widen the spectrum of possible solutions.
3. Creativity comes from analytics. Solution of the problem lies somewhere in its deeper aspects.
4. The more judgmental and self-absorbed you are, it's less possible that you will see alternative solutions.
5. The less inspiration – the better. What was seen cannot be unseen.
6. And finally – creativity is not a talent, it's a skill possible to be practiced. Science has already provided enough tools to solve things methodically, not chaotically.

## CREATIVITY IN PSYCHOLOGY

Psychological theories about creativity can be divided into scientifically oriented (based on empirical research and quantitative data) and metaphorically oriented (based on analyzing creative act as a personal introspective phenomenon) (Kozbelt, Beghetto, Runco, 2010). Creative research can focus on one of four P's: person, product, press or process (Kaufman, 2010). It can be targeted either on personality or behavior of creative individuals, outcomes of creative process, environmental

### **State of the literature**

- This paper's theoretical foundation is based on paradigm of constructivism which understands perceiving world as a subjective construction of individual, shaped by socio-cultural knowledge and denies existence of any objective reality. Recommended additional reading: Piaget, Maturana, Watzlawick,
- General concept of creativity is examined in perspective of constructivism that places it in a different context than existing psychological creative process theories like Kaufman's or Guilford's, which focuses more on process itself, than its representation in communications.
- Exceptional theories about creativity by psychological field's scholars are noticed as relevant for creativity in constructivism paradigm, such as work of Csikszentmihalyi, Langer and Finke.

### **Contribution of this paper to the literature**

- This paper's aim is neither to understand nor propose any creative process model or its real existence, but to examine the communication strategies associated with creative process in social and cultural knowledge.
- Research was conducted among students wanting to pursue career in creative industry, which also makes this study an evaluation on existing didactics.
- As for the results, the originality of this research can be noticed in showing surprisingly homogenized answers and categories when there was only one open-ended question asked and no instructions for answering was given.

factors that are relevant to the process or the process itself. In this area most popular theories come from Wank, Guilford, Schank, Gabora, but for constructivist's perspective most influential might be Csikszentmihalyi's System theory, Langer's Mindfulness concept and Finke's Geneplore model.

## METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research was to verify students' proficiency in communicating about their creative work. Because they're educating to become professionals in creative industry, later in their career they will be expected to understand and describe step-by-step their creative process and also communicate about it. But the expressions used to communicate about creative process are not necessarily what has happened in this particular case, whether it's physical reality or biological perception; but is a pattern that has been developed in this not well constituted construct of "coming up with an idea".

Research was conducted at January 2014 between 120 respondents. They were students of Communication design, Communication management and Graphics majors in University of Wroclaw and University of Social Sciences and Humanities. Study took place right after participants had finished creative activity (ex. during classes like Creative writing, Design thinking or Creative solutions). They had unlimited time to complete the survey as well as no restrictions on how to answer it.

Data was gathered by qualitative survey, with self-completed questionnaire that consisted of open-ended questions. This method was chosen because of the possibility of free choice of expression and because of possibility of interpreting qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups as testing participants' knowledge. Questionnaire consisted of only one question which was "How do you come up with ideas?" with several blank spaces left for answers. Because of possibility of multi-choice answers, the percentage of respondents in each category don't sum up to 100%.

## RESULTS

The study resulted in 390 unique answers. Answers were classified into 15 categories. Most frequently used answers were: *inspiration* (38), *spontaneously* (22), *associations*(21), *interpersonal contacts*(19), *observation* (17), *thinking*(15), *brainstorming*(14) and *music*(10).

Most frequently answers were given in category **spontaneity** (69), which were used by 57,5% of respondents. There were answers like *spontaneously* (22), *by accident* (8), *suddenly* (6), *pops into my head* (6). This is proving that over 50% of respondents understand creating ideas in a metaphorically oriented paradigm. It might be connected with the educational system which defines outstanding geniuses as individuals whose ideas are coming from their talent, illumination and metaphysics. It's also giving the impression, that creative process is the moment of generating "big idea" only, as if no creative work was done before this "eureka" moment.

Next category is **collectivity** (47) used by 39,2% of participants. This category gathers all collective activities mentioned in the survey, such as *interpersonal contacts* (19), *brainstorming* (14), and *teamwork* (7). This suggests that over 1/3 of respondents do not associate creative process with individual work. It's a progressive approach, since Polish educational system is treating working in teams as "playing", not "real work". The more competitive students are, teachers grades them better. Also, teachers tend to see group activities as too dynamic, distracting and hard to control.

Another category is **inspiration** (41), which was used by 34,2% of respondents. This category is way too frequent for creative-oriented students. It means that ideas that they generate are not that original, if more than 1/3 of them thinks they need to be inspired by others' work in order to create something by themselves. This is the reason why we're teaching our students to use their own head, paper, pencil and imagination and avoid starting a creative work with pressing "on" button in their computers. What was seen cannot be unseen. All the images seen before are still in cognition and it's impossible for them not to make an impact on creative thinking.

Category **creative process tools** (39) was used by 32,5% of students. This one is finally showing that respondents can be perceived as professionals, because they are naming concrete work tools, such as *brainstorming* (13), *text [notes, dictionary, keywords, proverbs]* (6), *selecting best ideas that came from brainstorming* (5), *mindmap* (4). It is also showing diverse methods: individual or collective as well as based on verbalization or visualization.

The following category, which is **everyday situations** (35), was used by 29,2% of participants. This one is showing that people are convinced to be surprised by their ideas in least expected situations like *driving the car/travelling by train* (7), *in the bathroom/during shower* (6) or *while smoking* (6). Those answers are quite different from the previous ones, because all those situations seem to be unsupportive for creative thinking, since they are done schematically and reproducibly. The interesting fact is that respondents didn't specify whether they consider those creative ideas coming as it is happening unconsciously or just as supportive environment for their creative thinking.

This next category is actually opposition for the previous one. Category **thinking** (31) was used by 25,8% of respondents. Some consider creative process not as side effect of other activities, but an action that needs focus and analytical work by *thinking* (15), *focusing on the problem* (9) or *deduction* (5). For those, concentrating attention on the problem is a key to solve it.

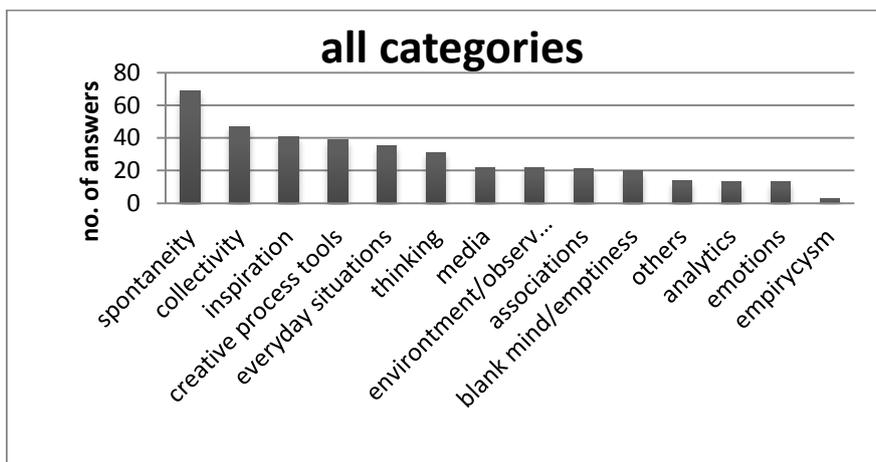
Another category is **media** (22), which was used by 18,3% of students. This one is no surprise because "*everything we know, we know from the media*" (Luhmann, 2009). To work in creative industry general knowledge must be very eclectic, so it is important to gather more and more information from e.g. *music* (10), *books/magazines* (7), *and movies* (4) to be able to refer to it in different contexts.

Next category, **environment/observation** (22), was equally used as the previous one. They also have something more in common – the assumption that only by observing and gathering information, without judgment, is crucial for creative work, to be aware of others' way of thinking and avoid just "the one and only" personal perspective.

Category **associations** (21) was used by 18% of participants and was already examined by associative theories of creativity. But, from constructivism perspective everything is an association, as parts of constructs. Nevertheless, there's a lot more in creativity than just combining similar things together.

The last big category is **blank mind/emptiness** (20) and was used by 16,7% of respondents. This one is a very tough to analyze, simply because it's impossible to see what is happening in other person's mind except for what this person is communicating. Moments of *blank mind* (9), *sleeping* (6), *idleness/boredom* (4) in my opinion can be considered as similar to **everyday situations** and **thinking** that might suggest that some people need a clean environment to focus on creative process.

Next three categories were small, but important enough to be separated from other answers. Those were **analytics** (13), **emotions** (13) and **empiricism** (3). Such a low rate in analytical methods was surprising, because strategic thinking and research is a base of every creative task the students are asked to do for school projects. The emotional state of self during creative process also seems to be



**Figure 1.** The categories for answers

important factor, especially if you consider *under pressure/deadline* (5). Also, personal experience also seems to be important in creative process, as a base for inspiration. Regardless, it is important to have different points of view, except for only personal one.

To sum up, all categories that were distinguished from 390 answers are: **spontaneity** (69), **collectivity** (47), **inspiration** (41), **creative process tools** (39), **everyday situations** (35), **thinking** (31), **media** (22), **environment/observation** (22), **associations** (21), **blank mind/emptiness** (20), **others** (14), **analytics** (13), **emotions** (13) and **empiricism** (3).

## CONCLUSIONS

Participants of the study believe to have their own individual strategy for creative process, when according to constructivism theory of communication, all of those strategies were socially established way before. The only reason they have it in their cognition is because of communication.

Even though none of the answers were pre-coded in this study and no instructions were given ahead, over half of respondents' answers were just the same expressions or constructs, since it was possible to connect only few concepts with creative process topic.

Over half of respondents are convinced that they come up with ideas by accident. The moment of ideation is considered as something that is not under creator's control, which leaves the solution to be just a matter of coincidence. Creative process is not understood as "a process", but just as an unexpected moment of clarity.

The reason for the creative process concept to be categorized this way can be found in socialization and educational process. Terms like "talent", "inspiration" or "genius" are functioning as things that were given by higher power, not by creator's hard work. It is also interesting that it's very common to think about genius as an individual, less likely to associate it with group of people.

This case is particularly interesting because the research was conducted among future professionals in creative industry. If in their future career, the client asks them how did they come up with this exact idea for his brand, and their explanation would be "oh, it just popped into my head" or "you know, somehow it came to me", it will be considered, to say at least, very substantially unprofessional. Not to mention, not worth paying a lot of money.

But individual aspects are not the only way to think about creative process. Next two categories were about teamwork and creative process tools. This first one is proving that individual work is considered as overrated and, especially in this

industry, everything is about accepting different points of view and new possibilities. The second one shows that creative process is constantly under professionalization and soon due to established discourse, creative work will be more understandable not only for its creators, but also for their clients.

Unfortunately, next category is all about inspiration. This result indicates that the amount of "original" and "fresh" ideas will be getting smaller and smaller. If it is necessary to see the others' work to create your own, it is impossible to avoid influence one makes on another.

To sum up, research conducted among students aiming to work in creative industry that was focused on their ability to communicate about creative process shows that respondents have limited possibilities relevant to communicate about it. It is proven by single answers repetition and lack of diversity in each category.

When communicating about coming up with ideas, respondents are more likely to use metaphorical discourse that somehow takes away their power over creative process to leave it with contingency and spontaneity. It is also hard for respondents to recreate their creative path, and analogically, systemize it. Creative work done by them might be just as intuitive as one made by people that weren't educated in this field. This means that creative industry will continue to be full of arbitrary, short-term and reactive forms of creativity.

The results show that constructs that are unclear in their definition are less constituted in social communication. Even though, simple and basic acknowledgement about the world sometimes seems enough to classify some objects to wider cognitive categories, even without dissecting them or deep understanding what they are

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