Practising creativity to develop students in marketing

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a 'client-based' experiential learning innovation introduced into the curriculum of a postgraduate marketing and advertising programme at a UK higher education institution. Based on interview data from current and former students, academic staff and industry participants (representing an evaluation of up to five years post-implementation), and this research sought to offer empirically generated understanding of student engagement with creative problem-solving. Students worked in small groups to synthesize their prior learning of the subject in order to devise and competitively present an advertising campaign to a client firm. Findings highlighted the important role of realism in the approach adopted that led to the development of creative skills and resilience among the cohort. This paper concludes that whilst students place emphasis on skills that make them more flexible in the application of creative problem-solving, firms appear to value their fluency and ability to elaborate on their decision-making. With the increasingly prominent feature of experience in contemporary business and marketing programmes today, this paper therefore contributes to an understanding of the process and value of such experiential project-based teaching and learning approaches.

Keywords

Student engagement, project-based learning, creativity, employability

Introduction

It has long been recognized that recruiting and retaining a highly skilled workforce is a critical success factor for achieving competitive advantage (e.g., Mazzarol, 1998; Teece, 1998). However, an academic degree alone is no longer sufficient. According to a survey by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR, 2014), employability skills are more important to an organisation when recruiting than the specific occupational, technical or academic skills associated with the degree. Surveys of employers found that soft skills including teamwork, confidence, business sense and social skills are highly valued (Sheba, 2015) – between 75-85 percent of long-term job success depends on people skills, while only 15-25 percent on technical knowledge (Klaus, 2008; Aasheim et al., 2009). The challenge, however, is how to provide experiential ('client-based' projects) opportunities to develop skills-based competency within a marketing education system. Focussing on the advertising sector, two specific soft skills identified in the literature by employers are creativity and resilience (e.g., Anderson, 2006), reflecting the increasing emphasis on the Creative Economy. The ability to generate and use new ideas to achieve strategic outcomes within a marketing context is the 'bread and butter' of brand advertising but the process is inherently risky. Failure is inevitable and happens at every stage from ideation to target market

engagement in industry. To succeed, graduates need resilience in order to manage and learn from failures and use knowledge and experience to build their creative practice. Thus, a practice-based teaching innovation was developed that introduced a client-based project into the curriculum in a postgraduate programme at a UK (North East) university. Students were thereby provided with opportunities to develop identified soft skills.

Literature Review

Creativity is a core skill within marketing that underpins, at least on the face of it, many aspects of the discipline such as new product development, advertising and strategy development (Anderson, 2006; Titus, 2007) yet little has been undertaken to embed practice-based approaches within the curriculum (see e.g., Eriksson & Hauer, 2004; Ramocki, 2014). McCord, Houseworth and Michaelson (2016) highlight that the lack of practice as a focus within contemporary business teaching leaves students under-prepared for their future careers in four key ways:

1) they do not have relevant knowledge grounded in practice (Mintzberg, 2004);
2) they are unable to synthesize a breadth of information that pertains to 'messy' everyday problems (Starkey et al., 2004);
3) the narrow focus of programmes of study leads to ethical or moral incompetence and a lack of creative problem-solving (Salbu, 2002; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2013); and
4) they lack intra- and interpersonal skills such as reflection, collaboration and analytic thinking skills (Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002) and interdisciplinary team skills required for business (Darian & Coopersmith, 2001).

Whilst pedagogic frameworks that emphasise experiential learning (such as Kolb, 1984 and Schon, 1983) provide scaffolding for individual learning that includes the stages of act, reflect, conceptualize and apply, others suggest that it is a project-based approach that enables students to learn from interdisciplinary practice (Liu et al., 2010; Kubiatko & Vaculová, 2011; Walters & Sirotiak, 2011; Heywood, 2016). In turn, a project-based approach can be particularly helpful for collaborative and group-based learning, albeit much of the literature focuses on its application in fields such as construction, engineering and design (Heywood, 2016). Group-based approaches have been recognised to provide the experience of high quality interaction resulting in collaborative learning that can motivate learners' engagement (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Garth, 1999; Littleton & Hakkinen, 1999; Kirschner, Paas & Kirschner, 2009; Gregory & Thorley, 2013). Prior research indicates the benefits of using group-based learning to develop employability skills (for a summary see, Parsons & Lepkowska-White 2009). However, Soller (2001) and Kirschner et al. (2009) argue that group-based approaches do not guarantee a positive outcome if leaners do not work well together. Parsons and Lepkowska-White (2009) view a 'client-based' project, that is, the process of consulting with real companies, as a motivational learning device to develop marketing skills. Within this, the emphasis on creativity, however, has received little attention and is of particular interest as a focus for practice in the current research.

Within marketing practice, creativity as a skill is aligned with innovation in problem-solving (Schlee & Harich, 2014) whilst McCorkle et al. (2007) identify it as comprising a sub-set of skills including flexibility, originality, fluency and elaboration. Davis (2004) highlights four interrelated components of creativity in marketing: the person, the product, the process and communication. Creativity is also seen as complementing rational thinking (McIntyre, Hite & Rickard, 2003) and is a useful learning exercise in building personal confidence and resilience (Anderson, 2006; Healy et al., 2011). For example, several authors (see Ramocki, 2014; Calco & Veeck, 2015) report on teaching and learning developments that primarily focus on ideation as a structured practice, including aspects of problem-solving, use of stimuli, selection and group-based approaches. Brainstorming has a long history of use within this domain: pioneered by Osborn (1957), this group creativity technique was developed for application in the advertising industry. The skill of ideation has been found to improve through brainstorming (e.g., Clapham, 1997). Other approaches to developing creativity include the use of metaphors to devise analogies (e.g., Gordon, 1980), incubation (Davis, 2004) and dreaming (e.g., DeAngelis, 2003) which induces a state of unconscious flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Ramocki (2014) suggests that the goal is for students to be able to relate their learning to entirely new contexts and, in so doing, produce novelty ('high-road transfer'). Importantly, however, the ideas generated need to be realistically contextualised for them to be applicable to a commercial problem. Thus, creativity in business is not a problem waiting for a solution but is focussed and outcome driven. Whilst Ramocki (2014) reports increased creative abilities from an experimental study where students were guided to develop promotional materials for well-known retail products and services, as Anderson (2006) and Munoz and Huser (2008) acknowledge, exposure to real-life ('client-based') problems involving firms (such as agencies and clients) is difficult to achieve in a classroom setting.

Experiential pedagogies have long been recognized as beneficial for activating students' learning (e.g., Weeks et al., 1997), however, client-based approaches reported in the literature are few and far between (see Jaskari and Jaskari, 2016). Challenges exist for educators in implementing these, such as the level of detail required for their successful application (Lopez & Lee, 2005), time investment by students (Razzouk et al., 2003) and academic support (Goodell & Kraft, 1991). Requiring constructive alignment with teaching and learning objectives for the curriculum (Biggs, 1996), Jaskari (2013) has suggested it may be challenging to assess student performance. One of the main difficulties is, however, achieving a level of realism that balances differences in students' background knowledge, motivation and engagement, experience of teamwork and the roles of teachers in the learning process (Jaskari & Jaskari, 2016).

Reflecting the considerations reported in the literature, the current study reports on a teaching and learning innovation that implements a client-based project approach to developing students' creativity and resilience in the advertising sector. It does this by exposing them to the lifecycle of a client-based project in which students are required to work with a brief from a local client firm to

develop an appropriate advertising campaign plan for one of their core products or services. The aim of this, as a pedagogic innovation, was to extend students' experience beyond a structured process of ideation to include the lifecycle of a creative process, including competitive pitching, receiving feedback on their ideas from clients, and evaluation of the implementation of their ideas within the client firms. In addition, students were also provided with an opportunity to assess their solution compared to the solutions devised by other groups of students addressing the same or a different brief.

Methodology

Creative project brief

Academic evidence indicates that the use of client-based projects in conjunction with group works is a powerful pedagogical learning tool in teaching marketing skills (Razzouk, Seitz & Rizkallah, 2003; Spackman, 2016). The group work was designed to provide opportunities for embedding student learning about the marketing discipline and skills, specifically creativity, through a project-based approach with a local firm. This also included a constructed aim to develop communication skills across the diversity of national cultures represented among the student cohort (e.g., West Africa, Asia-Pacific, Western and Southern Europe).

A client project-based brief involving a series of tasks (see Appendix 1) was developed in collaboration with an international advertising agency and its clients. This was embedded into the learning and teaching processes of a postgraduate advertising module as an assessed group project. The live project has been run annually since the 2011/12 academic year. The brief was used by students to develop a project working with the academic team and the client, including lectures and tutorials that explored relevant marketing knowledge and skills, and project consultation sessions. Academics and firms presented the brief to students, which required them to become informal associate members of the advertising agency in order to develop a promotional campaign for an identified product or service. The brief comprised key information of a client firm's background and products as well as its target audience. The live project took place over a three-month period at a North-East UK Business School.

Students worked in self-selected groups of 3-4 students to produce and competitively present an advertising campaign plan. Chapman et al. (2006) found the influence of group selection method negatively influences student efficiency and conflict in the learning task but positively enhances communication among group members (see also Russell, 2010; Mushtaq et al., 2012). Self-selection was therefore deemed appropriate for the exercise since, as a second semester module, students were already familiar with the wider cohort having previously participated in a range of group projects in other modules. Not only was it therefore difficult to attempt to manipulate groups but a core aim was to encourage collaboration which necessitated active communication between inter- and intra-group members. To encourage further creative practice, this project required students to produce good quality advertisements in terms of print advertising, video advertising, and other

promotional materials. During the project period, students applied their knowledge of advertising and media strategies. They conducted market research, learned software skills, negotiated advertising and media costs to develop advertisements and contacted various suppliers to produce an estimated budget for their plans. Academic teams provided advice on reviewing students' initial plans and helping them to overcome difficulties. The brief required students to seek information and develop ideas outside the normal curriculum. That is, students had explored the selected market to observe reality through personal contact with firm members and customers as well as conduct surveys, contact media suppliers, etc. to build their knowledge-base and competence. The client firm also collaborated in the brief development and participated in preliminary discussions with students, answering questions after they had undertaken a preliminary situational analysis of the problem. In this way, the project-based brief gave students an opportunity to explore how advertising agencies work with clients, as well as expose them to a problem for which a real solution was required.

Whilst still a safe environment for failure, the process of developing the solution gave students insight into a real-life scenario of identifying a brand problem, positioning, advertising messages, media strategies, implementation and budgeting requirements, which aligned with the academic requirements of the curriculum. To further enhance project realism, the university provided a budget of £60 (pounds sterling) to each student team to support project related expenses in developing proposals for the promotional campaign, including, advertising, mood and/or storyboards of a quality that might be expected by a client. To encourage participation and active engagement, a competitive process was introduced, also reflecting similar approaches used in the advertising industry: prizes were offered to best performing teams, judged by the advertising agency and clients with academics following a 'pitch' style presentation by groups (see Figure 1). An exhibition of projects was hosted on campus to which students, academics, members of participating firms and other employers, as well as the general public were invited (see Figure 2). Students were assessed on their contributions, including conceptual and practice-based aspects of their project (see Appendix 2).

Figure 1: Photograph of group pitch

Figure 2: Photographs of open public exhibition

Research design
Given the emergent nature of the phenomena investigated in this study, the research design followed an exploratory approach (Geertz, 1973), drawing on qualitative data (collected over two months) from focus groups with students and interviews with employed graduates who had previously experienced the module (see Table 1). Student data were collected during the 2015/2016 academic year (at the end of the module) and graduate data was drawn from previous cohorts (2011/2012 to 2014/2015). Firm and academic team members participating in the study that had been involved with the module since the incorporation of the project-based brief were also interviewed. Content analysis was used with datasets to extract convergent themes (Krippendorff, 1980).

Table 1 Sample Descriptive and Summary of Dataset

Data	**Format**	**Analytical Method**
2 focus groups with 20 students (MSc Advertising, 2015/16 academic year) (FG1, FG2)	Appx 3 hrs audio recording (moderated)	Transcription, content analysis
12 interviews with graduate students who participated in the module during studies, currently employed in the advertising sector (client or agency) (2011/12-2014/15) (G1-12)	Semi-structured typed responses (email)	Content analysis
4 interviews with firm (advertising agency and client firm members) (2011/12-2015/16) (E1-4)	Appx 4 hrs audio recording (phone and Skype)	Transcription, content analysis
3 interviews with academic team members (2011/12-2015/16) (L1-3)	Appx 2 hrs audio recording (face-to-face); 2 semi-structured typed responses (email)	Transcription, content analysis

Findings
Research highlights contributions from the teaching and learning innovation through the client-based project related to its realism, failure/resilience and the development of creative skills. Two key perspectives are identified (see Table 2) with further insight provided by firms.

Table 2 Summary of Key Findings

Realism	Failure/Resilience	Creativity
Student Perspective		
Pros Reduces perceived gap between theory and practice	*Pros* Builds self- and other-awareness of skills and knowledge strengths and weaknesses	*Pros* Demonstrates how to differentiate between creative and design processes

Applies theoretical models and frameworks Emphasises business urgency Provides sense of responsibility ----- *Cons* Highlights lack of practical experience Emphases their unpreparedness for 'messiness' of real life ----- *Outcome* Practice provides competitive advantage in job market	Spreads risk across team Promotes breadth of knowledge in marketing discipline ----- *Cons* Raises many doubts that have to be resolved through the project lifecycle ----- *Outcome* Generates confidence through collaborative processes of learning Learn how to deal with criticism Highlights role of adaptability and attitude for future scenarios Enhances decision-making competency Job ready	Opportunity for practising creative skills and overcoming creative block Emphasises importance of collective solution building through creative tension and roleplay ----- *Cons* Perceived over-emphasis on creative outcomes Time required for learning skills ----- *Outcome* Learn how to modulate creative outputs for different audiences
Tutor Perspective		
Pros Provides valuable learning practice Reflects on broader life experiences Enables synthesis of theories and practice Goes beyond ideation process ----- *Cons* Time and resource implications ----- *Outcome* Recognition of value for learners and business	*Pros* Provides opportunity for learning from mistakes with a safe space for feedback Provides opportunity for adaptability Gives sense of urgency by design that resonates with business world ----- *Cons* Time pressure presents unrealistic options Level of care required to support learners with low self-esteem ----- *Outcome* Builds repertoire of experiences that may increase future choices	*Pros* Challenges creative solution for target audience ----- *Cons* Not a skillset focussed on business and marketing classes Investment and resources required ----- *Outcome* Highlights cultural differences

Realism

Current students highlighted the significance of the project in enhancing their learning, closing their perceptions of a gap between theory and practice. A current student comments:

> "*I thought it would be really overwhelming to speak together but it was not as hard as I thought*" (FG1).

Whilst they highlight the models and frameworks, students identify it is the application to the project that makes it different to previous/other studies and the realism provides a sense of urgency and responsibility that gives them impetus to progress. One graduate comments:

> "*marketing is quite different to the reports we did at university… its more about brainstorming an idea and seeing it being born… the project definitely helped me to mature, helped me understand that teamwork is not just the people you work with*" (G7)

and another comments:

> "*marketing class-based or research-based assessments are different from live commercial projects when I prepared for work. The assessments were focussed on analysis but the live commercial project was focussed on practice… that helped me to prepare for work*" (G6).

Despite this, the findings highlight that students have little experience of applying their knowledge, consistent with McCord et al.'s (2016) criticisms on their current limited ability to understand the 'messiness' of real-life problems. One student comments:

> "*the project gave them opportunities to analyse a problem, and develop and design a solution, requiring them to take ownership of and responsibility for their final proposal*" (FG1).

Particularly, graduates ultimately felt that the project's realism gave them a competitive advantage in job interviews, for example:

> "*the project simulated a real business environment which helped students know better how to use their academic skills in work*" (G11).

Academics highlighted the importance of getting students out of the classroom and away from the internet to undertake research by physically experiencing part of the service they were tasked with promoting. An academic comments:

> "*I was pleased [students] visited Scarborough and took the open top bus… [project brief] makes it much more fun with tangible contacts… enabling students to demonstrate their abilities*" (L1).

This component of the process reflects the importance of using metaphors from a breadth of experiences beyond the classroom (Gordon, 1980) and the process of incubation of ideas (Davis, 2004) over the course of the lifecycle of the brief. This academic goes on to say:

> "*teamwork is unavoidable… I expect students to learn certain skills… a live project provides them with a more realistic application of judgement [so the brief] is not just based on assumptions*" (L1).

Another highlight was demonstrating the experience was valuable from both the student and academic perspective, enabling learners in particular to synthesize their knowledge with new contexts that they were previously unfamiliar with. Thus, the realism of the brief extends well beyond the process of ideation, which is clearly recognized by learners in their application of extant knowledge to addressing the project-based brief. Another academic says:

> "*having the skills and knowledge to be work ready [and] being able to analyse complex situations and provide unique and creative solutions… [project is about] blending academic and professional material*" (L2).

Notwithstanding this, students also recognized their personal weaknesses in the conduct of such a project, outlined in the next section on failure and resilience.

Failure and resilience
Academics highlight how the project addresses students' perceived lack of applied knowledge and difficulties in providing effective means to practice skills that build resilience and creativity. They comment that through the client-based design there is an opportunity to learn:

> "*learning from mistakes during tutorial practices will highlight some points… the more they talk, the more confidence they build*" (L1), who goes on to state "*most students are enjoying the experience gained at the exhibition and feedback from the publics… students can see the benefits immediately, which makes them work*" (L1).

In particular, adaptability was highlighted:

> "*[students need to be] able to think on their feet and respond to potentially difficult questions… there is extra pressure being able to deliver ideas to a client*" (L2).

Whilst this does not evidence the flexibility and elaboration outlined by McCorkle et al. (2007), it was apparent that students developed a repertoire of experiences that may in future provide them with concrete examples on which to draw (e.g., Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1983). Thus, it is the experience of failure in the challenge that builds resilience by enabling students to develop more sustainable solutions based on broader knowledge (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Neil & Dias, 2001).

Students and graduates recognized that they learn from mistakes and understand how they think about using the knowledge generated to ask more appropriate questions. One student emphasizes:

> "*what we had done was completely wrong [but it] was a good experience because we will never make that mistake again hopefully*" FG2).

Consistent with research that indicates students build resilience by mitigating exposure to risk with access to support (eg, Claxton, 2002; Sterling, 2010; Mirza 2018), students made use of consultations with academics and firm members to clarify doubts. This highlighted how they learn from mistakes. Self and other awareness (limitations and strengths) was developed over the project lifecycle and whilst generally lacking in confidence, there is evidence to suggest confidence builds through the collaborative processes. As this graduate comments:

> "*it's not always easy to deal with so many different types of people… To deal with [team conflicts], we had a team meeting, aired out the issues and got back to work… It's important that you're a confident communicator because it's likely that you'll be involved in presenting and dealing with difficult clients/stakeholders throughout your career*" (G4).

In turn, this helped them overcome fear of failure, effectively spreading the risk. Perceived low self-esteem and sensitivities around their identified weaknesses emerged as a language of 'valuing opinions', distributing strengths to each other and providing a mechanism for building confidence in their decision-making. Students thereby realized it was their adaptability (e.g., McCorkle et al., 2007) to the emergent context that had potential for their future as employees within the sector, for example:

> "... *research ability, creative thinking and long life learning are the most important [skills] because a person really needs to adapt to a situation with adequate knowledge or be able to learn new knowledge for the sake of being a better person in future*" (G5).

Others commented that the project "*enhanced my confidence and promoted my interest in advertising*" (G6), which reflected the links between creativity and confidence (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Titus, 2007).

Interestingly, students acknowledged they were under-prepared for the level of questions they would face from both firms and academics in delivering their projects, as this firm manager comments:

> "*if someone comes with a suggestion that isn't quite backed, I will dig and dig and dig… its hard to be diplomatic, especially when ideas are thrown in without any real thought*" (E3).

They generally accepted criticisms well, both on their academic and practice-based contributions, perceiving it to be constructive and informative. For example:

> "*[Xxx] from advertising company gave a lot of crucial comments which related to the campaign – he has a lot precious experiences in advertising industry…*" (G5)

and for some this feedback was inspirational:

> "*it made me far more ambitious and helped solidify my feelings about getting into marketing*" (G4).

Again, this highlights the lack of preparedness for real-life experiences that traditional approaches to teaching and learning had afforded them (e.g., McCord et al., 2016).

From the firms' perspectives, resilience was less about failure, for example:

> "*some of them made such big errors, I'd liked to have seen how they came up with that error. Did they all sit around and discuss it and came up with the error, or did someone say 'let's do this' and they all said yes…*" (E1)

and more about adaptability and attitude, as this client comments:

> "*you've got to have the ability, attitude, to want to keep up with the latest technologies and techniques and not just stick with what you've learned at university. You've got to keep on developing*" (E2).

Furthermore, as this agency manager comments:

> "*what I look for is one thing alone: have they got a good attitude. You can teach the rest… can do, willing to learn, sponge-like, common sense, work ethic…*" (E1).

Resilience was also about challenging the status quo, one firm comments:

> "*[students] didn't just agree with everything we said, they challenged it and said 'well, you might think that, but actually we looked at this'… it was good they had confidence to defend the decisions they had made […which…] showed they'd thought about it and had opinions on things*" (E2).

The ability to 'hit the ground' running was emphasised as important, as this client says:

> "*they could have literally walked in and got straight on they got it that right… you have to have the knowledge but then you must have common sense on top of it*" (E1).

This is particularly interesting as it demonstrates that the firm emphasises the skills of fluency and elaboration in creative practice over flexibility (e.g., McCorkle et al., 2007).

Creativity
Creativity was identified by current and graduate students as the hardest part of the learning process albeit key to the design of an advertising strategy, as this graduate comments:

> "*creative knowledge is really important in this campaign… most crucial parts in the campaign related to creative ideas, for instance, posters, videos, radio jingles*" (G5).

It is clear from such comments that students refer to their design competencies. Conversely, firms felt that creative solutions tended to be overworked but reflected that experience was crucial. One agency says:

> "*they all came up with very complicated solutions to a very simple problem... I think it was probably just an experience thing – lack of*" (E1).

Importantly, students identified the role of practice in developing creativity, suggesting it is a learned skill that requires a heavy time investment to be successful. A current student expresses:

> "*[the] project enhanced my creativity… [it] started from zero and we would need to brainstorm the whole idea… without creativity, the work would not be stand out from others*" (G9).

Students quickly realized that one way to overcome creative block was teamwork, identified as a collective approach to building resilience to failure, for example:

> "*teammates must be very active… without all the efforts from all of the teammates, idea would only be an idea*" G9).

This point was reinforced by firms:

> "*every team needs a researcher, some left brain and right brain thinkers, some ones who can drive the project forwards, some organizers… a good team will always simplify stuff*" (E1).

Interestingly, cultural differences were highlighted as both a source of tension and creative inspiration, as this graduate comments:

> "*it was very interesting to work with Chinese students because their ideas and work are different to mine*" (G2).

In addition, roleplay was helpful in achieving the project outcomes, as this graduate comments:

> "*we have different roles which mean everybody had tasks to finish… after discussions we learnt more from our group*" (G11)

and the added pressure of competition in developing a prize-winning solution became a supra-ordinate goal. It is not surprising, therefore, that students reflected more on the process of achieving their project outcome than they did their creative solution. Firms, however, felt differently:

> "*creativity sells but if the creative [solution] is wrong then the campaign is never going to work*" (E1) and "*there's a reason why creative ideas aren't used…[maybe] they're not grounded in the real world*" (E2).

Discussion

The challenge of this study was to explore the roles of experiential learning opportunities to build students' confidence and competency in developing their employability skills within the marketing education system, particularly their creativity. We found the client-based approach succeeded in providing an experiential learning opportunity for students that extended beyond ideation to reflect a more realistic lifecycle of creative marketing agency-client projects (Jaskari & Jaskari, 2016). This study identified three key influential and interrelated aspects that motivated and encouraged students to develop skills beyond their academic knowledge: the project-based realism; the scope for failure and building resilience; and the opportunity to develop creative competency.

Realism was embedded in the teaching and learning process by working with firms (Biggs, 1996). The client-based project was a real problem that required realistic solutions and research suggest that it is the level of realism achieved through the design of the curriculum that led to deep student engagement (Ramocki, 2014). Partially, this was because there was a clear link between the students' approach to the problem (creativity), their understanding of the impacts of their solution (failure), and direct and indirect instrumental outcomes of their studies (confidence and resilience), i.e., course grades and competitive advantage in the job market emanating from their practice-based experience (Healy et al., 2011).

Failure is a constant pressure in the design of the module, as it is across all curricula, but the added dimension of 'third party' firms witnessing collective failure (from team effort) is an interesting dynamic in this research. Students quickly developed a professional approach to the project, and the instrumentality embedded in the process necessitated that they sought to spread the risk. Whereas group work can be challenging for students for a range of reasons (e.g., Barr & McNeilly, 2002), it was evident that this became a

preferential mechanism for developing solutions. Students learned to effectively communicate with each other, use roleplay to establish each other's strengths and weaknesses (Healy et al., 2011), and configure their work together to develop solutions largely without academic intervention. Yet the learning environment provided a safe haven through a range of support mechanisms (consultancy style tutoring, peer support, firm interaction, live brief, etc.). It is through this process that confidence was gained and demonstrated in presentations and subsequent question and answer sessions with firms that students pitched to. Their ability to synthesize material from a range of non-academic sources to which they actively exposed themselves in a metaphorical approach to learning (e.g., Gordon, 1980) during their project development stages, demonstrates their inherent capacity for flexibility. This aligns with findings in previous research which suggests that resilience is the ability to adapt when exposed to risk (eg., Neil & Dias, 2001; Place et al., 2002), whereas factors such as self-reflection, self-reliance and positive interaction with others contribute to the formation of resilience (Place et al., 2002; Wegerif, 2008).

From the firms' perspectives, it was felt important that students learned to reflect on both the process of developing a creative solution and the solution as a practice. Firms expected opinions that differed but were in some way complementary to their own. This is perhaps the primary reason for their focus on skills of fluency and elaboration, enabling them to make sense of the processes students had adopted in their approach to the solving the problem (e.g., McCorkle et al., 2007). In recognizing failure as a component of learning, firms pointed out that it should lead to adaptability, reflected in students' attitudes towards the client-based project. This perspective gave students a unique insight into how and why they should develop a continuous approach to learning – probably the most important life lesson in becoming resilient they could have experienced.

Creativity is a challenging skill to develop, as this research evidences (see also Andersen, 2006; Munoz & Huser, 2008; Ramocki, 2014). Students highlight the significance of client-based approaches, reflecting the value of an experiential pedagogic design in generating idiosyncratic (personalized) knowledge (e.g., Schon, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Jaskari & Jaskari, 2016). Whilst students acknowledge this is not a quick or easy process, they do connect this with their longer-term goals beyond studies. Moreover, the practices they used to generate knowledge and employability skills such as roleplay, group work involving different cultural perspectives, and their own instrumental impetus, gave an added dimension to their soft skills' toolbox. They would be unlikely to have developed these had they followed a more traditional classroom based curriculum. Notwithstanding this, the academic and firm investment in the learning process design is costly in both money and time. Evidence highlights how students balance realism with contextual (environmental) understanding through creative practice, but that tolerance to the client-based approach is needed by all parties for it to be successful.

Conclusion

The aim of the teaching and learning innovation reported on, using a client-based approach that extends students' experience beyond ideation, was designed to engage students in creative practice. Findings highlight how the realism of the innovation developed resilience and creativity among student participants. It enabled students to apply their knowledge and skills to a project lifecycle, working collaboratively with a brief set by firms that incorporated competitive pitching, feedback and potential implementation of their ideas by firms. Evidence from the exploratory investigation with current and former students suggests that realism embedded into the curriculum through this innovation led to deep engagement among the student cohort. In turn, the realism led students to maximise opportunities presented by the range of support mechanisms that ultimately helped them to build personal confidence. The range of creative skills they developed, particularly adaptability enabled them to become more resilient, and in the process gain an 'edge' in the jobs market, providing demonstrable outcomes beyond classroom based instrumental learning.

Firms involved in the curriculum development also highlighted the value of the experience and insight they gained, evidenced by their ongoing commitment to the module and their willingness to engage directly with students through the teaching and learning processes, such as involvement with pitches and support of prizes. As a model for client-based teaching initiatives, the approach reported on could be adapted to other contexts in marketing such as sales management, retail, etc., and may also be applied in other disciplinary contexts where creative solutions are an ultimate goal. Although challenging, processes such as teamwork to achieve project outcomes are potentially scalable and different methods may be used, albeit this research used self-selecting groups. The implementation reported on involved postgraduate level students, whose awareness and understanding of core theory (cognitive) and skills is, however, likely to be better developed than undergraduates, not least because they have potentially more years of experience on which to draw. Thus, careful consideration of the strategic alignment of learning outcomes with firms' goals is paramount. That said, the approaches used could certainly be applied to different levels and types of study including undergraduate and distance, providing that appropriate support mechanisms are implemented to ensure learning is optimised in each context. For example, students with limited experience and low levels of confidence in their abilities are likely to need access to higher levels of support.

Finally, this type of innovation does require investment – resources such as time and seedcorn funding to support activities were found to be particularly important. The process involves the development of relationships with firms that necessitate negotiation and communication skills among both academics and students to optimize outcomes. A limitation of the current research is its qualitative nature that obviously impacts the generalizability of findings. Thus future work could expand the study to a broader cohort across a range of disciplines, particularly those that attempt to develop creative skills. An interesting future development of this research would be a more detailed

analysis of the ways in which the range of creative skills interlink to build resilience in order to shed light on their influence in experiential learning processes. The nature of the problem-based approach and its influence on the design of future marketing modules is one specific an area of disciplinary focus into which this work could be expanded.

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Appendix 1: Example of a project creative brief

Introduction to EYMS
East Yorkshire Motor Services (EYMS) is a bus operator, running bus services throughout Hull, East Yorkshire and into North Yorkshire.

Product range
EYMS offers the following range of products/services:

Local bus services
- Standard local bus services, including buses in and between cities and towns in the region, used by people travelling to work, school, college/university, shopping, visiting friends, getting to medical appointments etc.

Tourist bus services
- Open top buses along Scarborough seafront.
- Open top buses in Bridlington.
- Buses between the East Coast holiday villages and Bridlington, Filey and Scarborough.

Target audience
The target audience for our Scarborough open top buses are tourists - visitors to the Scarborough area (both day visitors and those staying for longer).

Current marketing
The main marketing methods of EYMS in promoting the Scarborough open top buses are:
- A leaflet distributed to outlets along the coast, e.g., Tourist Information offices etc.
- Posters inside standard buses.
- People seeing the buses themselves – i.e. going up and down the seafront – and the bus livery.
- Information in timetable cases at bus stops along the seafront.
- Website (www.eyms.co.uk)
- Facebook (www.facebook.com/EYBuses)
- Twitter (www.twitter.com/EYBuses)
- Attendance at occasional local events.
- Sending info about the open top buses out to local Tourism Associations etc.
- Occasional other promotions, e.g., adverts on tourism websites/publications etc.

Competition
- There is another bus operator running a very similar open top bus service along the seafront.

Your task

Working in a self-selected group of three students as an advertising agency, produce an advertising campaign. Your advertising agency has been asked to prepare an advertising campaign plan for EYMS to meet the following aim:

EYMS want to increase the number of people using their Scarborough open top buses by using advertising strategy through various media, including traditional and digital media to raise awareness of the product available.

To set up the advertising objective(s), you will need to understand the market environment. You will need to consider specific advertising content when employing different media. You will be expected to use relevant academic and marketing concepts/theories to justify your decisions in the report. Recommendations should take into account the following requirements:
- The budget for this advertising campaign should not be costly.
- Social media management/posting/updating will be undertaken by EYMS staff in addition to their main roles, therefore time is also a limiting factor.
- EYMS has an in-house designer, therefore artwork costs are not a factor in your total estimated budget. EYMS will credit your work if adopt it.
- EYMS are looking for a 'big idea' in your advertising strategies which will be consistent across all media and translated into tactics that are actionable.
- The bus livery will remain in the 'sunbeam' design (although wording on the bus can be amended if required).
- Your group is prohibited from posting any messages on the EYMS official social/digital media.
- Your group is prohibited from contacting EYMS directly.

Key Outputs in the Exhibition and Plan:
- A brief analysis/introduction of the situation
- Target audience
- Brand positioning
- Advertising objectives
- Big idea – this is not about creative message only, as is in the media strategy and implementation.
- Message design and content
- All developed advertising
- Media strategies
- Roll out schedule
- Control and monitor

Appendix 2: Assessment Criteria

Marking Criteria
The final mark will be based on the group presentation during the exhibition, academic posters, PowerPoint slides with extra written discussion in the Notes Page, and the group evaluation form.

The following summary of marketing criteria are based on the University of Hull Postgraduate Taught Grading Descriptors (Level 7 – See the Postgraduate Programme Handbook).

Marking Guideline

Criteria	%	Learning Outcomes
Target Audience	10	1,2
Brand Positioning	5	1,2
Advertising Objectives	5	1,2
Creative Idea	15	1,2,6
Visual advertising	15	6
Imaginative/Original	10	6
Media Planning	10	1,2,6
Clarity	5	3,4
Research Evidence	10	2.6
Team Working	5	3,4,5
Response to Questions	5	3,4
Presentation Skills	5	3,4,5

Learning Outcomes To Meet The Module Specification
This assessment is designed to meet the following learning outcomes:

1. Drawing heavily upon current academic research and communications practice, make a persuasive case for the adoption of recommended action in a marketing communications context
2. Identify, access, select, evaluate and present complex data from a range of secondary sources
3. Demonstrate effective communication in a team environment both orally and in writing
4. With minimal guidance, work in groups demonstrating team work and collaborative thinking
5. Manage time effectively
6. Design and implement work that is sensitive to cultural, ethical and legal constraints in a global environment