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Exploring Entrepreneurial Students' Perceptions of Online Mindful Creativity Training: A Mixed Methods Case Study

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Abstract

Postsecondary education requires research on effective elements and best implementation practices for creativity training at all levels. Mindful Creativity (MC) is a three-module, asynchronous, online creativity training program delivering mindfulness, creativity, and applied neuroscience instruction to support creative awareness and development throughout all postsecondary disciplines. Each 90-minute, MC training module, "Mindfulness, Creativity, and Mindful Creativity for Education and Work," was designed for institutions of higher education (IUE) to support dispositional mindfulness and creativity by conceptualizing both in neuroscience. Utilizing a convergent, mixed-methods case study design, this study examined how postsecondary entrepreneurial students perceived and experienced the impact of an MC training program. Quantitative data was collected from the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and Reisman Diagnostic Creativity Assessment (RDCA). Qualitative data was collected from course assignments, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews. The analyses' results demonstrated the effectiveness of utilizing MC training, a combination of *mindfulness, creativity,* and *applied neuroscience*, as elements of creativity training in IHE. Participants reported the MC training program provided a transformational learning experience that supported creativity in three ways: 1) enhanced self-confidence of creative attributes and the ability to articulate creative strengths, 2) supported a creative mindset by assisting participants with the mindful awareness needed to realize opportunities to improve critical and creative thinking, and 3) provided a path for sustainable creative growth.

Aim

To produce innovative solutions to complicated problems, postsecondary graduates entering the complex and rapidly changing world require 21st-century skills, including creativity and mental flexibility (Rios et al., 2020). While research supports the need for postsecondary creativity education, it also suggests institutes of higher education (IHE) struggle to promote and maintain conducive learning environments (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Nerantzi et al., 2018) or inadvertently diminish creativity by offering little attention or understanding of the topic to students (Tanggaard, 2018). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a mindful creativity (MC) training utilizing *mindfulness*, *creativity*, and *applied neuroscience* as elements of creativity training for postsecondary students.

Problem

Creativity is a necessary 21st-century skill, yet IHE struggle to develop, promote, and support creativity training programs.

Research Findings

Six themes emerged from the data directly related to the research questions and further revealed the impact of the MC training. Those themes include awareness, confidence and motivation, acknowledgement, balance, behavioral change, and control. *Change in awareness.* Following the MC training, participants reported increased awareness in the "ability to observe" and described the experience as "eye opening." *Confidence and motivation.* Participant noticed increased confidence and motivation through statements such as "being mindful is not weird," and [mindfulness is] "scientifically proven to be beneficial." *Acknowledgement*. Prior to the MC training, participants described creativity as "subjective," "abstract," and "really hard to conceptualize" Following the MC training, participants acknowledged a new awareness of creative strengths and weakness. *Balance.* All participants suggested the MC training supported mental balance related to creativity. Statements included "positivity can help trigger creativity," "first accept the risk of failure," "the effort will equal a result," and "welcoming the results." *Change and growth.* Conceptualizing MC through neuroscience provided participants with tools for change and growth. One participant confirmed the impact of growth by stating conceptualizing mindfulness and creativity in neuroscience helped to "realize how much it is changing me and doing assessments and looking at course materials is reinforcing that." *Control.* The final theme that emerged explaining the impact of the MC training was control. Participants described feeling more control over their creativity stating, "the one thing that you can control is who you are going to be for you and where your energy goes."

Conclusion

Three results, written as over-arching themes, are articulated, synthesized, and compared with key research from the literature.

Result One: A Mindful Creativity training program can impact mindful awareness of creative strengths and weaknesses enhancing well-being but also the clarity, confidence, and motivation of creativity.

Result Two: A Mindful Creativity training program can impact the acknowledgment of a creative mindset supporting a feeling of balance and growth.

Result Three: A Mindful Creativity training program can provide a foundation of mindful and creative skills and strategies that impact an individual's plan for controlled personal change.

Research Implications

Recommendation one: IHE should offer creativity training that provides not only instruction in creative thinking but also in mindfulness and the application of current advances and insights from neuroscience. Results and findings from this research suggest the three elements: *mindfulness, creativity,* and *applied neuroscience* positively impacted student mindfulness and creativity. Participants reported that the information, tools, skills, and strategies presented in the MC training supported their learning about creativity and mindfulness. Together, the three elements of the training supported the development of mindful awareness, leading to enhanced creative capacity, motivation, and a feeling of control. By incorporating aspects of what Larrison (2013) defined as mind, brain, and education science (MBE), the MC training

program offered participants with opportunities to consider “high-level cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and creativity and address the connection between motivation, emotions, sleep, stress, circadian rhythms, and development in learning processes" (xxiv).

Recommendation two: IHE should offer creativity training experiences that facilitate the application of mindful and creative skills learned through experiences that provide access to valid and reliable diagnostic mindfulness and creativity self-assessment tools. IHE should consider providing students with access to creativity training opportunities like the MAAS and the RDCA. Although generalizations beyond this small population cannot be made, the strong results, all 11 participants (100%), experienced a transformational learning experience. The entrepreneurial participants interviewed felt that the MC training provided them with an "eye-opening" self-reflective experience of their mindfulness and creativity. All five interviewees expressed a desire to share information from the MC training program with friends, family, and colleagues. The information most shared by participants related to the neuroscience of neuroplasticity, understanding how what we practice grows stronger in the brain, (Shapiro and Carlson, 2017) and how awareness of self-assessment tools, like the MAAS and RDCA, supported their plans for personal development. As a result, participants described a sense of controlled creative growth that felt sustainable. Therefore, it is recommended that IHE offer postsecondary students access to learning experiences like that of the MC training program.

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Melissa M. Schmitz, EdD, is an educational consultant and owner of WISE-HD, a workplace for innovative, sustainable, education and human development. Receiving degrees from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Music Education, University of Tennessee in Education, and Drexel University in Educational Leadership and Management, Melissa is an experienced leader of educational change and organizational development. In addition, Melissa is an active researcher and writer. She is an Associate Researcher with Drexel University's ELaBS an Education, Learning and Brain Research collaborative, and she is featured in the video resources *Welcome to the Writing Workshop: Engaging Today's Students with a Model that Works* by Stacey Shubitz and Lynne Dorfman. Melissa is a passionate educational innovator whose research interests include mindfulness, creativity, and applied educational neuroscience.