

TEACH^R

Unlocking innovation and critical thinking: The transformative role of creative practice in Humanities Education

Lynnette Lounsbury

Avondale University, Cooranbong, NSW Australia
lynnette.lounsbury@avondale.edu.au

Aleta King

Avondale University, Cooranbong, NSW Australia
aleta.king@avondale.edu.au

Jim Lounsbury

Filmmaker, Avondale University, Cooranbong, NSW Australia
jim.lounsbury@avondale.edu.au

Keywords: Creative practice, humanities education, innovation, critical thinking, creative writing.

Abstract

This paper examines the role of creative practice in enhancing humanities education. Through an examination of three programs at Avondale University, the authors highlight how creative practice can foster critical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and professional skills development in students. This paper contends that traditional approaches to humanities education often overlook the process-based learning central to creative practice and suggests that incorporating creative activities into humanities education can significantly contribute to students' emotional, intellectual, and professional growth, enabling them to adapt more readily to the demands of evolving social and professional environments.

Creative practice is presented not merely as a method of artistic expression but as a tool for transformative learning. By engaging in projects such as creative writing, filmmaking, and choral performance, students are encouraged to develop technical skills while also embracing emotional resilience and iterative learning. Each case study emphasises the importance of experiential

learning, where students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in creative processes. Throughout these creative endeavours, students not only gain technical expertise but also cultivate soft skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and self-awareness. The resulting artefacts, whether poems, films, or performances, are not simply final products but are integral to the learning process, inviting continuous reflection and reinterpretation. The paper advocates for a broader integration of creative practice in humanities education and suggests that creative practice provides students with the tools necessary to engage with the world in innovative ways.

Unlocking innovation and critical thinking: The transformative role of creative practice in Humanities Education

Creative practice is a valuable tool within humanities education, cultivating the development of technical skills, as well as enhancing the emotional expression, critical thinking, creative development and interdisciplinary investigation of the students (Ramish, Shaikh, & Zahra, 2024). Creative practice also offers the chance for students to work alongside professionals in their chosen field of interest with the chance to build networks and learn professional skills. As the humanities evolve in response to social change, integrating creative

“
In theory, the idea of creative practice is simple: students 'do' the thing they have learned
”

practice into learning frameworks has become essential in education. This article examines creative practice projects across three areas of arts and humanities programs at Avondale University, highlighting their role in fostering innovation, critical thinking, and professional connections. Educational research has highlighted the importance of experiential learning in both secondary and higher education, particularly in disciplines that examine and emphasise creativity and innovation (Ramish, Shaikh, & Zahra, 2024).

There is a tendency within the existing literature to focus on traditional instruction and neglect the process-based, experiential learning that is central to creative practice. This gap necessitates an examination of how creative practice can support artistic skill building as well as personal artistic growth, and this article will do that through the examination of three particular creative practice experiences in the arts: a creative writing publication program, a filmmaking program, and a performance choir experience. The purpose of this interrogation is to investigate the educational value of these creative practice experiences in the humanities and to suggest that similar programs of creative practice, and indeed different programs within other fields, can foster critical reflection, collaborative practice, problem-solving and self-awareness. By analysing both the theoretical perspectives and the practical case studies, this article aims to contribute to ongoing discussions with educators about the transformative role of creative practices in humanities education.

Creative learning in theory

There is a sense in creative practice that the creative endeavour itself is as much the objective as the resulting artefact. Unlike traditional research or learning, where the end goal is an outward-facing essay, report or paper designed to be experienced by a particular audience, the creative artefact is experienced by the creator, the collaborators, the mentor and the audience in its different stages, in different ways and in many incarnations, all of which are valuable pedagogical experiences to every party involved. As Barone, Eisner and Barone state, “truth is not owned by simple propositional discourse but by those activities that yield meanings”, and these meanings are not in some “isomorphic relationship between a statement and an event” but in the degree to which “it makes our conversation more interesting” (2011). In simpler terms, “the journey is the destination” with creative practice. As a research method, arts creative practice is designed to explore subjective and ambiguous spaces, to look at what doesn’t work, change things in real-time

and explore the feelings of the researcher as they develop a project (Barone, Eisner & Barone, 2011). The artefact itself, whether physical (a movie or a painting) or transient (a performance), has been described in many ways, as researchers attempt to grapple with something almost indefinable: “alternative compositions” (Davis and Shadle, 2007); “experimental compositions” (Bishop, 1997), “non-linguistic signifying systems” (Shipka, 2011) and the lyrical “other ways of knowing” (Dunn, 2001).

These “other ways of knowing” are as important as they are intangible. Students who practise as they learn, learn more than one thing, more than once. Every draft, every take of the camera, every rehearsal and performance is a new learning experience. They are also learning more than the original brief asked of them. They may have been told to write a haiku poem, something short and simple but in each incarnation, as they pluck words and put them into different shapes, they have a new experience and understanding of the haiku. When they read it aloud to an audience, that experience will be another learning moment as they take in information from the reactions and advice of others. These new learnings are hard to quantify, Dunn’s “other ways of knowing”, but they are invaluable. The way that student reads the haiku of others has now changed. The way they think about syllables has shifted. The way they listen to the poetry of others has adapted to include an empathy born of experience.

Early theorists on the educational value of creative practice agreed that it could mean the difference between a human who had great knowledge but no ability to apply it, and one who was flexible and had the inner resources to engage with their environment no matter how it changed or evolved (Lowenfield, 1957). Dewey, in his seminal work *Art as Experience* (1934) claimed that it was a catalyst for mental integration and that through experiential learning new forms of meaning would arise that could not be reached in any other way, and certainly not simply through the acquisition of information. Both were essentially proposing that creative practice had a humanising purpose that created mental and emotional growth as much as it did individual artistic talent (Lowenfield, 1957). They believed that properly supported creativity given opportunities to develop through practice, would lead to personal autonomy (Lowenfield, 1960). This idea of autonomy is championed by Sole, Sole-Coromina and Poole who suggest that it allows the autonomous individual to mobilise what is subjective and use it to make sense of what one has experienced, lived or known (2020). Creative practice is repetition, and repetition allows

“There is a tendency within the existing literature to focus on traditional instruction and neglect the process-based, experiential learning that is central to creative practice.”

an individual to diverge in their thinking, offering multiple responses to a problem or question, inducing inspiration and opening pathways for more significant and ongoing learning (Sole, Sole-Coromina & Poole, 2020). In other words, every stroke of the brush, or recital of the poem is a learning experience and also an experience of how to learn that will enhance and expedite all future learning.

Creative learning in Practise

In theory, the idea of creative practice is simple: students ‘do’ the thing they have learned. The practice of this pedagogy, however, is more complicated than simply unleashing students upon a writing, musical or film project. A finely balanced supervisory role is needed, requiring an educator to encourage collaboration, define parameters and provide a sounding board based on experience – all without interfering with the learning experience of the student. Sometimes they will write something uncomfortably personal, deal with intonation issues and memory lapses mid-performance, or end up in a fractured film team with nobody speaking to one another, and sometimes a GoPro will get left on the beach and washed out to sea with the entire project’s footage on it. In some creative projects, the educator will have a much more structured role, such as a choir leader or editor, giving detailed feedback on every part of the creative process; in others, they may write and share their work as a peer to model the role of the practitioner.

Case Study 1: The creative writing anthology and ‘Niche’ Zine Projects at Avondale University

The creative writing program at Avondale University sits within the English and Communications majors, and it is taken by students enrolled in various degrees, though most often the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Teaching. The first-year writing students are often nervous about sharing their work publicly, and some have done very little in the way of publishing their work. Students write a blog post-style piece on their most unique niche interest as part of their first semester writing portfolio. They pitch to the class several of their personal hobbies; for example, a student might say that they love to collect vintage music boxes, participate in marching bands and are a K-pop superfan. The class then asks them about these interests and gives them feedback, in particular, suggesting which topic they would love to hear more about. Students then pick their favourite and write an official pitch email to the lecturer, who either accepts the pitch as is or asks for more detail or clarification of the idea. By the time the students start to write, they feel confident

that the class is actively interested in their ideas and stories and, indeed, in them as people. By pitching their own topics and navigating the feedback, students develop autonomy and the ability to turn their subjective experiences into resonant narratives, echoing Lowenfeld’s vision of creative practice fostering personal and intellectual growth. The blog posts are shared again over the next few weeks with other students in the process of peer workshoping and editing. After they are submitted, they are published and graphically enhanced to form an online zine called “Niche” which is published yearly. Some of the posts with broader appeal are also published in the on-campus student magazine “The Voice”, while others are published in the end-of-year University publication “The Jacaranda”. Each time, they go through the editorial process with an editor who gives them feedback and suggests potential changes to refine the piece.

In their third or fourth year of study, these same English and Communications students participate in a capstone creative unit that requires them to draft, workshop and write a poetry and short story collection for submission to a university-published anthology. This assessment asks them to read widely and workshop repeatedly. Each poem is drafted at least three to four times and shared with peers for detailed feedback as well as with the class as a whole for further responses, questions and commentary. The lecturer also provides draft feedback, and by the time the poem is in its final submission state, it has likely been written, read and spoken a dozen times. Through the drafting process and the workshop discussions, students are not merely learning to write; they are uncovering alternative ways of knowing, as described by Dunn, experiencing writing as both a personal exploration and a communal exchange of ideas. Portfolios are submitted to an editorial team that includes the unit lecturer and alumni editors from previous years of the same writing program, and from each portfolio, one or two poems are selected for the final publication. The student must review the proofs of the final manuscript, which includes editorial suggestions. They can once again approve or disregard these suggestions for the final edits of their work. Alumni, partner institution students and staff, and professional poets within the networks of the university are also invited to submit to the anthology and are published alongside the students. The anthology is launched bi-annually in a university-run event that invites the students to read their work aloud for guests and celebrate the publication of their work and the works are available for purchase through online bookstores.

The result of these avenues to publication is a

“
In theory,
the idea
of creative
practice is
simple:
students ‘do’
the thing they
have learned
”

creative experience extended over the entire period of their degree. Students learn not only writing techniques but also how to “practice” writing. They have timed writing sessions in class, conversations about writing, workshops where they read their work aloud and structured drafting that requires them to rewrite their work repeatedly based on feedback. The program’s structure, from first-year blog posts to final-year anthologies, embodies Dewey’s concept of learning as experience, where meaning emerges not merely from the finished publication but from the iterative, reflective process of creation. It creates a supportive environment where students feel that their voices matter. They learn resilience in the face of feedback early on in their writing journey and gain a sense of accomplishment around writing practice through publication and recognition. The rigorous drafting and feedback processes mirror professional writing practices, equipping students with skills in revision, critical analysis and peer collaboration. Moreover, publication alongside alumni and professional writers elevates their work, offering networking opportunities and practice experience in navigating what can be a daunting publication landscape. The anthology launch is a final creative practice that underscores the value of public recognition and serves as a platform to present work to a wider audience, building confidence and a sense of the self as a writer.

Case Study 2: Filmmaking start to finish

In the Communications course Video Production and Digital Technologies at Avondale University, students take part in the creation of their own film and thereby begin the process of developing the critical thinking and creativity required to move from spectator to filmmaker. The rationale behind this shift is the argument that “one must internalise the rules of the domain and the opinions of the field, so that one can choose the most promising ideas to work on and do so in a way that will be acceptable to one’s peers” (Csikszent-mihalyi, 1999, 332). This process of developing ideas within a group of peers provides students with opportunities to discover unique perspectives to their own ideas and therefore challenge them to find innovative and resonant ways of communicating. In addition to this, an iterative framework throughout the ideation, development and production of their film amplifies the feedback loop for creative ideas and promotes innovation with the rationale that “visual media can travel much faster and be seen by many more people as more important and powerful” (Daniels, Velody, & Atakav, 2020, 22).

The course, taught by a professional filmmaker, is designed to mimic the production process

and begins with a grounding in film and media interpretation and film industry terminology. The first assignment is a film analysis task that encourages students to begin deconstructing the films of others in an effort to nudge students beyond spectatorship and prepare them for the ideation process, where they begin the process of making their own film. This process of watching, deconstructing and debating the merits and creative approaches to film continues throughout the course, with each class beginning with the screening of a short film or documentary, inviting students to analyse and critically evaluate the work through their growing knowledge of film theory and interpretation. “If a reflective argumentative process is performed, via questioning reasons or identifying counterarguments, there is more depth and density in the argumentative structure, achieving greater confidence and validity.” (Rivas, 2022)

The first step of ideation is for the student to generate a single sentence as the central idea of an artefact they intend to create, such as “a short documentary about horse trainers” or “a contemporary music video done as a period piece” or “a short film exploring the horror of feeling followed”. As the student will be working on a three to five-minute audiovisual artefact, this single sentence provides enough insight to guide students toward ideas that can be captured adequately with the limited time and resources available.

This initial statement of purpose also invites the participation of their peers through constructive feedback and validation of the most resonant ideas through their own assessment criteria, developed through the previous film assessment and critical thinking exercises. This follows the process of a four-year study done at the University of Cadiz that found “when students participate by being involved in producing assessment criteria or in selecting assessment instruments, it contributes to their competence development due to the learning produced by assessing their own learning and that of their peers.” (Ibarra-Sáiz, 2020)

The class then quickly transitions from this single-sentence synopsis into workshops where students write a script for their film. A variety of scriptwriting tools and forms are explored to illustrate the many ways creative projects are developed. For example, two-column and three-column formats are explored as an option for developing documentaries and music videos, but the screenplay format is taught as the standard approach for scripted drama. These script forms are chosen from produced documentaries, music videos and films to expose students to standard professional approaches to the creative

“*They learn resilience in the face of feedback early on in their writing journey and gain a sense of accomplishment around writing practice through publication and recognition*”

development process. The role of the instructor during this process is to provide a selection of tools, illuminating how each is used, while allowing students to choose tools that suit their own creative process. Students are not assessed for using a tool that is 'right' or 'wrong' but rather on how they used their chosen tools to reach a specified outcome.

Once the student has chosen a form for their script, the next assignment is to submit a script proposal, which includes a script, a market statement, and a paragraph on tone and creative approach. This is where the student begins to explore their stylistic choices for the project, externalise their creative impulses and identify an appropriate audience for their creative work. The externalisation of their idea might take the form of a mood board constructed from visual or filmic references or as a pitch for their film, which can be used to solicit involvement from fellow classmates and peers. This process also mimics the cadence of creative practice in the professional world, as the ability to externalise and pitch creative ideas is central to the process of producing creative work. This encourages students to become active participants as Film-makers who 'exist on a spectrum that oscillates between creator and spectator who is enabled by the technology, the logistics, their craft skills including their mastery of storytelling and narrative codes and conventions internalised through their spectatorship' (Kerrigan, 2016). It is often observed that students gain the confidence to begin asserting their opinions throughout this process and share their insights more readily. This crystallisation of thought helps shape the creation of their own film, as students begin to understand the meaning of tone, colour, pace and juxtaposition in the work of others, and make decisions about the choices that will inform their own work.

As the class moves from development into pre-production, the introduction of 'on-set' roles, logistical planning and traditional film roles are introduced. Camera workshops are staged in class, to give students hands-on experience with operating professional cameras and the sound and lighting equipment necessary to complete their own film. Students are encouraged to collaborate on their project and identify the strengths and weaknesses of themselves and their peers as they build a film crew. As film-making exists at the confluence of numerous artistic disciplines, this identification of artistic strengths is critical to building a high-functioning team. The concept of creator and spectator, enabled by technology, their craft skills and narrative codes and conventions, can be referred to as the 'filmic agent' and "When

the filmic agent is multiplied, as is the case in a film crew, a director is joined by a writer, a producer, a cinematographer, an actor and so on. Each of these individuals becomes a filmic agent who joins with others to create a complex film-making system" (Kerrigan, 2016). This film-making system is a highly creative environment that stimulates innovation through the sharing of knowledge and ideas throughout the film-making process. "The objective of practical tasks, apart from developing fundamental knowledge, is to develop critical thinking skills among students in both comprehension and expression in order to favour their learning and its transference" (Rivas, 2022).

As the class transitions into film production, students are often working in pairs and are given two weeks for the primary production of their film. They are given access to professional filmmaking equipment and given technical support when needed. Upon returning to class, there is time spent reflecting and debriefing on the production process, allowing the students to apply critical thinking to their experiences, by inviting discussion about their skill development and the challenges they encountered. This provides a deeper understanding of the resourcefulness required to adapt to weather, locations, actors and other unpredictable aspects of the film-making process.

Finally, the students are given a grounding in basic film editing, and as they begin to shape their film in class, they are introduced to concepts of pacing, sound design and colour correction. These concepts are not new at this point but are now seen through the eyes of a creator rather than a spectator, and students are encouraged to use these techniques to achieve an aesthetically pleasing, emotionally moving creative artefact. Rough edits are given feedback, so students have an opportunity to adjust and adapt to the perspective of the lecturer and their peers, and in the final week of class, the films are screened in class. These screenings often draw audiences larger than the class itself, as the new filmmakers invite the actors and other participants in their films to watch their work.

The screening of films is a rewarding facet of creative practice for the students, as they not only watch their own work but celebrate the work of their peers with a newfound awareness of the challenges of producing creative work. Though the majority of these student films may not go on to have widespread distribution (though some have gone on to have a life online and in international film festivals) the screening of these works can have a purpose beyond the development of the student. As an added benefit, the artefacts can provide

“It is often observed that students gain the confidence to begin asserting their opinions throughout this process and share their insights more readily”

“further dialogue, with broad or targeted audiences, academics, activists, decision-makers, individuals, or other filmmakers” and therefore become an artefact that has cultural value (Johnson, 2022). Some have even been used as promotional tools for different departments at Avondale University, highlighting extracurricular aspects of student life.

The final assignment students are required to submit is a production diary, where they are asked to reflect on the process of making their film and explain what went to plan and what did not. The production diary is also a place where students discuss what they could have done differently, and how that might have resulted in a different outcome. This post-creation deconstruction of their process and creation of their artefact is a vital part of helping students develop critical thinking and an understanding that creative practice is an ongoing process, where future work builds upon the skills and knowledge of the past, to create more profound and emotionally fulfilling outcomes. Reflection is an important part of creative practice as, “it is through reflection that students can develop criticality and, thereby, begin to view reflection as an important lifelong learning strategy” (Bharuthram, 2018).

Taking students through this incredibly complex process is daunting, particularly as each discipline within the filmmaking process can take a full university degree and beyond to achieve mastery. However, it is undeniable that “being a film creator provides quite a different perspective to that of a spectator,” as observed by Brad Aldridge, a director of a student crew who made *Aquabike Man* (2008), “as filmmakers draw on different domain knowledge, field opinions and practices,” this immersion into the film-making practice is transformative, giving students agency through the process of putting their own creative work into the world while accelerating the feedback loop for that work through collaboration, presentation and critical thinking.

Case Study 3: Avondale Conservatorium at the The World Choir Games

Music as a creative practice fosters a unique way of knowing. Well-known music philosopher David Elliott refers to this unique way of knowing about music as a praxial concept of musical understanding that is embodied and enactive (Elliott, 2015, p. 204). This case study explores the creative practice of music as a unique way of knowing through the embodied, enacted, lived experience of an Avondale Conservatorium vocal ensemble that took part in the World Choir Games.

Avondale University’s premiere vocal ensemble *The Promise of Avondale* won double gold at the 13th World Choir Games in Auckland, New Zealand,

in July 2024. The World Choir Games saw over 250 choirs from 42 countries, with over 11,000 vocalists coming together to sing. It is the largest international choral competition in the world. The Promise was awarded a gold diploma in the Open Gospel category and a gold diploma and overall winner of the Open University and College Choirs category.

The Promise was formed in 2005 and, over the past two decades has achieved an enviable reputation for musical excellence. They have recorded six studio albums, collaborated with several outstanding Australian artists like Jazz giants James Morrison, John Morrison, and Adrian Cunningham, elite Australian vocal ensembles like *The Idea of North* and *The Song Company*, international artists like *Amarcord* and Wayne Bucknor, and recently released two very successful online performance video recordings *How Great Thou Art* (2023) and *Man in the Mirror* (2024).

This vocal ensemble is positioned within the ensemble performance program of Avondale Conservatorium. Originally formed as a vocal octet, this ensemble has evolved in its versatility ranging from a small (one-voice-per-part) vocal quartet to its current larger formation as a 16-voice (three to four voices per part) chamber ensemble. Entry into this ensemble is by audition and members are generally music students, and often principal study vocalists, drawn from the Bachelor of Arts degree or Bachelor of Arts / Bachelor of Teaching degrees, and many members elect to sing in this ensemble for academic credit. However, in any given year, there are often a handful of members who are principal study instrumentalists, or experienced vocalists who are passionate about ensemble singing and would like to continue singing as an extracurricular activity alongside other study programs at Avondale. Repertoire ranges from traditional classics to original gospel and jazz arrangements.

During any given semester members are expected to commit to a rigorous ensemble routine involving individual practice, weekly rehearsals and regular performances. Music students are supported by a holistic music program where essential vocal ensemble skills such as sight singing, audition and musical memory are developed in musicianship classes based on the Kodaly concept of music education (Szönyi, 1973). There is a strong emphasis on memorisation as most repertoire is performed by memory. Music students who are principal study vocalists also have weekly voice lessons with a vocal coach. In addition, there is a vocal tuition scholarship program for those members who are not principal study vocalists and would benefit from voice lessons with a professional vocal coach.

“This post-creation deconstruction of their process and creation of their artefact is a vital part of helping students develop critical thinking”

“
Individual practice involves a commitment by every member to the regular self-monitored practice of individual vocal parts away from the ensemble
”

Individual practice involves a commitment by every member to the regular self-monitored practice of individual vocal parts away from the ensemble. Students are expected to engage with the practice materials provided and are encouraged to study the vocal score and listen to recommended recordings and/or live performances where possible. The process of memorisation begins here within the individual practice routine. Each member is encouraged to develop their own individual practice routine which fosters personal development through commitment, discipline, and a strong sense of the value of the individual contribution to the overall ensemble. Members learn to value individual practice as an essential ingredient to personal success in creative practice.

Rehearsals are usually a weekly two-hour commitment during the semester in which the entire ensemble comes together to learn newer repertoire and review older more well-known repertoire. Over the past decade, members have been increasingly encouraged to perform without a conductor which is one of the unique features of this ensemble. Therefore, the artistic director's role is to facilitate a creative practice learning environment in which to develop the overall choral sound that is unique to this ensemble. Rehearsals include vocal warm-ups in which good vocal technique is emphasised and developed. Musicianship skill development is also a key feature of the rehearsal process, particularly sight singing, intonation, and the ability to know the function of one's vocal part and how it relates to the other vocal parts.

The repertoire ranges from classical to contemporary, popular, gospel and jazz standards with an emphasis on original compositions and arrangements specially commissioned for the ensemble. These original compositions and arrangements help to establish the unique sound of the ensemble. During the early stages of learning new repertoire, the vocal ensemble often splits up into four separate voice (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) sectional rehearsals to learn vocal parts. Students really enjoy this valuable part of the creative process learning and reviewing vocal parts together with other members of their section. Once vocal section parts are learned the next stage is to come together as a complete ensemble and sing through the entire work for the first time. This is often a fulfilling moment in the rehearsal process as the individual parts come together to create a unified whole. The sum of the parts is greater than the whole is certainly true in this context. Once each part is secure in sectionals and the entire piece holds together as an ensemble then begins the process of transforming the raw vocal sound into a refined and

polished choral sound ready for a performance.

Guest mentors offer important opportunities for students to work with industry professionals in a workshop scenario during the rehearsal process. Recently the ensemble had the invaluable opportunity to work with Dr Wayne Bucknor from Oakwood University, America. Wayne is the pianist for the famous *Oakwood Aeolians* choir and has sung with the acapella vocal ensemble *Take Six*. The *Take Six* arrangement of Ralph Carmichael's *A Quiet Place* was one of the works chosen as a competition piece for the World Choir Games. The ensemble had been struggling to grasp the intricacies of this very challenging arrangement and there were times during the rehearsal process leading into the World Choir Games when the wisdom of choosing such an exceptionally difficult vocal arrangement for an undergraduate vocal ensemble was questioned. However, a few days of working with Wayne Bucknor, and with a considerable amount of individual and collective effort thereafter, was a game changer as the group began to catch the vision as to how this piece could be interpreted in new ways that would culminate in an award-winning performance just eight weeks later on the day of the competition.

Performance opportunities range from those on the Avondale campus, from the local community to regional areas, interstate and international locations. Learning how to lead each other together onstage and engage with the audience authentically are essential skills to be developed as the ensemble often performs without the aid of a conductor. How far the ensemble has come in this regard was never more evident than at the recent World Choir Games. An early reading of the competition rules and regulations created uncertainty about entering this ensemble into the Gospel category up against larger choirs singing powerful renditions with more specialised authentic cultural experiences in the gospel genre. This ensemble's smaller, more agile choral sound could earn points for harmonic complexity and clarity in its lesser-known repertoire, given the way the musicianship program at Avondale University develops students with good aural skills which helps to produce a unique, crisp sound.

The experience of the World Choir Games itself was one of immersive creative learning for the choir participants. The first performance they witnessed was a large youth choir from New York singing "Joyful, Joyful" from the movie *Sister Act*. They had an impressive entourage which included hair, makeup, costumes, wardrobe, dance coach, vocal coach, choreographer, musical director, conductor: everything a choir could possibly want.

The Avondale students' immediately felt a sense of insecurity but that was assuaged by a reminder that this was why songs are chosen carefully for their particular group. This moment was an important part of the creative process for the students, facing a fear of failure, of putting faith in their learned skills and hours of practice. They chose to face their fears and performed, achieving success beyond their expectations. One of the sopranos later said they were shocked that the ensemble did so well coming from a small regional university and credited not only good leadership but also the bonds the students developed. Receiving gold diplomas in the Open Competition earns *The Promise* an invitation to compete in The Champions Competition at the next World Choir Games in 2026 which is both an honour and a challenge.

The World Choir Games provided Avondale students with an innovative, once-in-a-lifetime, opportunity to experience how individual determination, dedication, focus and effort are rewarded with the collective thrill of success on the international stage. The creative process was transformative from beginning to end. Critical thinking, self-reflection, and teamwork were vital at every step of the creative process. Throughout the creative process, students were able to achieve meaningful connections with the professional choral world that will hopefully foster a lifelong thirst for personal artistic growth as future professional musicians and music educators.

To summarise, the Promise of Avondale's involvement at the World Choir Games was a uniquely creative educational experience that was praxial by nature (McCarthy, Goble, 2005, p. 1951) provided the powerful opportunity for continuous live transformation in real time. Participants were continuously transformed by the "about-to-happen into the happening into just-happened" (Thompson, 2007, p. 14) through the creative process from first rehearsals to final performance. In other words, the journey is the destination, once again.

Creative Practice in the School Setting

The case studies offer transferable insights that can be effectively applied in school settings. In a broad sense, each of these case studies underscores the value of guided long-term projects that allow students to take ownership of their creative output. Implementing term or semester-long projects modelled on these examples and culminating in exhibitions, showcases, and performances is a way to allow creativity to develop and mature. The use of production diaries, workshoping and debriefing could also be adapted for the school situation through journaling and allowing students

time to reflect on learning processes, challenges and solutions within the creative context. Providing structured time for this and sharing the results can create a strong culture of self and peer acceptance and a lowering of performance anxiety. Hosting events can be complicated and time consuming, but allowing students to present work to peers, family and the community through concerts, screenings and publications is a great way to build a sense of pride in achievement and a belief that what they have produced is making a creative impact in the world. These events can be combined with other school programs like end of year celebrations so that the work is not excessive, but still very valuable. Adaptation of these creative practice methodologies can provide students with engaging interdisciplinary experiences that push them creatively, fostering collaboration and promoting critical thinking, preparing them for future creative and professional pursuits.

In Summary

Creative practice clearly has transformative potential and the integration of creative practice into humanities education, as seen in these three program case studies at Avondale University, demonstrates its capacity to foster innovation, critical thinking and professional opportunities. The case studies creative writing, filmmaking and choral performance all underscore the value of experiential learning where students engage deeply with creative processes that go far beyond traditional academic frameworks. Csikszentmihalyi (1999) highlights the importance of internalizing a domain's rules and standards to produce work that resonates with both peers and broader audiences, a process clearly seen in the iterative and collaborative frameworks employed in these programs. Students gain, through these creative exercises, not only technical skills but also emotional awareness, resilience, bravery and a profound understanding of iterative learning, where feedback and even failure are integral to growth. The iterative nature of these activities aligns with Dewey's (1938) emphasis on "learning by doing," where hands-on engagement leads to meaningful growth. This is evident in the filmmaking course, where students move from spectatorship to active creation, a practice that encourages them to see the world through the lens of a filmmaker. Similarly, in the choral ensemble, the collaborative rehearsal and performance processes cultivate both individual discipline and collective harmony, exemplifying the transformative potential of artistic practice to foster teamwork (Kerrigan, 2016). This reflective and practice-based learning environment encourages

“
Creative
practice
clearly has
transforma-
tive potential
”

students to navigate complexity, to collaborate effectively and to develop a nuanced understanding of their own creative abilities and agency. And, when Daniels, Velody, and Atakav (2020) argue that visual media's ability to disseminate ideas widely and powerfully enhances its capacity as a learning tool, they could well be discussing the way in which poems, films and performances become dynamic vehicles for dialogue and interpretation. Each new viewing, reading and performance invites new perspectives reinforcing the idea that creative practice is as much about process as product. Each new experience is a new lesson learned. Creative practice is not merely a vehicle for artistic output but a catalyst for personal growth can encourage the development of the skills crucial for navigating evolving social and professional landscapes. Humanities programs that include practice-based real-world experiences prepare students for future careers in a way that theory-only study simply cannot. These programs have also provided an insight into what is possible if creative practice is expanded throughout the humanities, and for all ages, proposing that its capacity for fostering critical reflection and problem-solving is of great value and offers a deeply humanizing approach to education that should be recognised and cultivated as a cornerstone of contemporary humanities education.

These examples showcase how practice-based, real-world experiences prepare students for the complexities of modern professional landscapes in ways that theory-only study cannot. By fostering critical reflection, resilience, and problem-solving, creative practice offers a deeply humanising approach to education that addresses both personal and professional growth. Johnson (2022) suggests that creative works can extend their impact by engaging diverse audiences, further demonstrating their cultural value and significance in fostering lifelong learning. Programs like those at Avondale University highlight the potential for creative practice to serve as a cornerstone of contemporary humanities education, equipping students with the skills and insights necessary to navigate an ever-evolving world. **TEACH**

References

- Aldridge, B. (dir.). (2008). *Aquabikeman*. Student film, University of Newcastle, Australia.
- Barone, T., Eisner, E. W., & Barone, T. J. (2011). *Arts based research*. Sage.
- Bharuthram, S. (2018). Reflecting on the process of teaching reflection in higher education. *Reflective Practice*, 19(6), 806–817. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2018.1539655>
- Bishop, W. (Ed.). (1997). *Elements of alternate style: Essays on writing and revision*. Heinemann Educational.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Daniels, J., Velody, R., & Atakav, E. (2020). Against the grain

women film practitioners and theorists talk creative practice and theory. In A. Piotrowska (Ed.), *Creative Practice Research in the Age of Neoliberal Hopelessness* (19–33). Edinburgh University Press.

- Davis, R. L., & Shadle, M. F. (2007). *Teaching multiwriting: Researching and composing with multiple genres, media, disciplines, and cultures*. SIU Press.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Putnam.
- Dunn, P. A. (2001). *Talking, sketching, moving: Multiple literacies in the teaching of writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Elliott, D. J., & Silverman, M. (2015). *Musical Understanding*. In *Music Matters*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ibarra-Sáiz, M. S., Rodríguez-Gómez, G., & Boud, D. (2020). Developing student competence through peer assessment: The role of feedback, self-regulation and evaluative judgement. *Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education Research*, 80(1), 137–156.
- Johnson, R. (2022). Producing Maka: Hybridisation and dialogue in academic filmmaking. *The Italianist*, 42(2), 211–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614340.2022.2090063>
- Kerrigan, S. (2016). The spectator in the film-maker: Re-framing filmology through creative film-making practices. *Journal of Media Practice*, 17(2–3), 186–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682753.2016.1248172>
- Lowenfeld, V. (1957). *Creative and mental growth* (3rd ed.). New York: MacMillan.
- Lowenfeld, V. (1960). Creative intelligence. *Studies in Art Education*, 1(2), 2225.
- McCarthy, M., & Goble, J. S. (2005). The praxial philosophy in historical perspective. In D. Elliott (Ed.), *Praxial music education: Reflections and dialogues*. (pp. 1951). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ramish, M. S., Shaikh, N., & Zahra, G. (2024). Experiential learning: A real source of creativity among students. *International Journal of Trends and Innovations in Business & Social Sciences*, 2(2), 176–182.
- Rivas, S. F., Saiz, C., & Ossa, C. (2022). Metacognitive strategies and development of critical thinking in higher education. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 913219–913219.
- Shipka, J. L. (2011). *Toward a composition made whole*. University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Solé, L., Sole-Coromina, L., & Poole, S. E. (2020). Mind the gap: identifying barriers to students engaging in creative practices in higher education. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 12(2), 207220.
- Szönyi, E. (1973). *Kodály's principles in practice: An approach to music education through the Kodály method*. London: Boosey & Hawkes.
- Thompson, E. (2010). *Mind in life: Biology, phenomenology, and the sciences of mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Appendix

1. QR Code link to the Niche Zine 2024:



2. QR Code link to The Promise of Avondale Recommended Listening:

The Promise, *How Great Thou Art*, S. K. Hine arr. Aleta King (2023)



The Promise, *Man in the Mirror*, G. Ballard & S. Garrett arr. Phil Tweed (2024)



The Promise, World Choir Games, Open Gospel Choir, July 2024



The Promise, World Choir Games, Open University Choir, July 2024



Author Information

Dr Lynnette Lounsbury is Head of the School of Arts and Business at Avondale University and is a lecturer in creative writing, media studies and ancient history. She is a poet, writer and filmmaker and her research interests are in education, popular culture and speculative histories. She is the author of *Afterworld* (Allen & Unwin) and *We Ate The Road Like Vultures* (Inkerman & Blunt).

Dr Aleta King is the Director of Avondale Conservatorium and Associate Dean of Learning at Teaching at Avondale University. She is an experienced musician, composer and arranger, choral and orchestral conductor, and musicianship educator. Her practice-led performance research interests lie at the nexus between musicianship education, choral performance, composing and arranging.

Jim Lounsbury is an award-winning filmmaker and has worked with fellow artists, online communities, and some of the world's biggest brands to explore new ways to engage with people through story. From feature documentaries *The Meaning of Vanlife* [STAN] and *The Aussie Who Baffled the World* [National Geographic] to his feature film *Love is Now* [Universal], Jim is passionate about stories that explore nomadism and conservation and is currently working on a number of environmentally focused projects.

Strengthen your career Free micro-credential

Mentoring a teacher education student?

Advance your knowledge with a free online postgraduate unit*. Receive credit toward a Master of Education degree and learn:

- Mentoring vs Coaching
- How to be an effective mentor
- How to develop a mentoring program
- Reporting practice

*Terms and condition apply

