LEEP’s Creativity & Collaboration in Action: The Case of REVERB

Mary Scully ’14 & Taylor Johnson ’15 (Sponsor: Professor Seana Moran)

What Is REVERB?

REVERB was a three-hour interactive event of activities, performances, and shared projects in music, art, theater, science, sports, poetry, social activism, spirituality, circus, dialogue, and more. Held April 5, 2013, it was designed by four students in a psychology capstone course in collaboration with Student Leadership and Programming. More than 50 students, student groups, faculty/classes, and staff showcased their creativity and engaged attendees to “reverberate” creativity to others. REVERB was created as a venue for manifesting two capacities of effective practice—creativity and collaboration—that are part of Clark’s LEEP learning outcomes. This study aimed to evaluate how students who attended REVERB conceptualized creativity and collaboration, and how they perceived REVERB as a venue for exploring these two skills.

Research Questions

1. What are attendees’ conceptions of creativity?
2. What are attendees’ conceptions of collaboration?
3. What did attendees think of REVERB as a venue for collaborative creativity?

Method

During REVERB, six LEEP Lab researchers collected 133 questionnaires and audio-recorded 163 spontaneous interviews. The questionnaire asked about reasons for attending REVERB, overall impression and most impactful aspects of REVERB, and activities attendees might take after REVERB. Each interview asked one of the following questions: What does the word “creativity” mean to you? When was a time or situation when you felt really collaborative? What is most creative about REVERB? This fall, two LEEP Lab researchers qualitatively coded these data then conducted frequency, cross-tab, and chi-square analyses.

Conceptions of Creativity

Of the 30 students interviewed, more than half (58%) considered creativity as engaging in self-expression: “Creating to me is the ability to express yourself in whatever way makes you happy.” One in four thought of creativity as diversity (24%), which corroborates the large portion of statements (41%) suggesting the diversity of acts was the most creative aspect of REVERB.

I think what is most creative about this REVERB event is that you look around and you see people from different parts of Clark kind of representing what Clark is all about in creative terms. So, look over here and you have your shuttle and stationed to a board, and then you look over here and you have some kind of structure being built, and it’s just so many different aspects of Clark life coming together and it’s really exciting to see.

In general, attendees feel creative when artistic (38%), in creative environments (29%), and engaged in hands-on activities (23%). REVERB fit this description since the majority of activities came from the arts, the event included many hands-on activities for attendees to try out creativity in various domains, and several attendees mentioned the “creative vibe” (15%) and the Downing street area (7%) as a creativity-stimulating environment.

Attendees rarely mentioned science in their conceptions of creativity (4%) or as examples of when they felt creative (4%). Although science was less often noted from a list of potential REVERB impacts (4%), the few science booths at REVERB, including making slime and designing the Downing Street lawn, were mentioned in the open-ended questions about what attendees found interesting. Thus, there is an opportunity to better highlight the creative dimensions of science. Surprisingly, other less mentioned aspects of creativity were originality of ideas (5%) and playfulness (2%).

Conceptions of Collaboration

Among the 30 interviewed, REVERB attendees feel collaborative when they work in small groups (60%) with shared goals (40%) and tasks (37%) to make something together (40%), often in school venues (37%). One attendee described an experience in elementary school when students worked together to create a large newspaper dome. Another recalled: “I was in this art retreat in the forest with a bunch of women and we just worked with nature to make beautiful sculptures together.”

Rarely did attendees consider situations in business (7%) or the workplace (7%) to be collaborative, but this finding may result from a lack of opportunities in these venues. Fewer attendees mentioned working in pairs, science activities, or helping others as distinctly collaborative. The shared payoff aspect of collaboration, where collaborators equally succeed or fail together based on their joint efforts, was not part of REVERB attendees’ conceptualization of collaboration.

Interestingly, these findings suggest an unstable relationship between collaboration and creativity. The social interaction at REVERB was well represented in statements about what made REVERB creative (44%) and in describing other situations when students felt creative (29%). Furthermore, knowing someone who was a participant in REVERB as an artist is so frequently taken for granted and an impact of others than interaction with others.

REVERB for Collaborative Creativity

Of the 133 surveyed, attendees tended to find REVERB by wandering over (60%), already having an interest in creativity (36%), knowing a participant (33%), and seeing publicity (29%).* Most considered REVERB fan and engaging (69%) or interesting and different (27%). The highest impact were performances related to art (33%), music (29%), and science (10%), although dialogue (4%), poetry (5%), and athletics (5%) were also mentioned.

Knowing or being a participant was quite influential on attendees’ perceptions of REVERB. Participants’ friends were already interested in creativity (χ²=9.71, df=1, p=0.002, phi=.27), and participants were more likely to plan to further develop their creativity after REVERB (χ²=3.43, df=1, p=.009, phi=.17).**

Interestingly, REVERB characteristics that attendees identified to be the most creative were not necessarily also considered the most impactful. While two out of five attendees reported both the event’s sociality and diversity of acts to be most creative, only 6% and 4%, respectively, identified these characteristics as the most impactful. Instead, performances (37%) tended to make the biggest impact, possibly due to their large visible presence, which seemed to overshadow the more subtle aspects attendees had defined as creative.

As a result of REVERB, almost half of attendees indicated they would further develop a creative skill they already had (44%), around a quarter wanted to pursue a new creative endeavor (28%) or collaborate with someone new or in a new way (22%), and one in five considered applying to participate in future REVERB events (19%).* Two out of three (62%) attendees who said they would further develop their creativity as a result of REVERB also said that the biggest impact of the event was that it was art oriented. Because REVERB was not part of the collaborative dimension, with only 11% mentioning “sharing” as an aspect of creativity. Creativity was defined more often in terms of freedom from impingement of others than interaction with others.

Implications

Preliminary implications provide a launch pad for further evaluation work related to LEEP learning outcomes. Although there is some variation, REVERB attendees generally believe creativity involves self-expression, especially of feelings through the arts, that is free from the judgment of others, and results in creating diversity. Although creativity is less often defined as collaborative, social or prosocial, social interaction during creative activities was a key impact of times students felt creative, including at REVERB.

*Percentages add up to more than 100% because attendees marked all that apply.
**Because of the relatively small sample size and the exploratory nature of the study, Fisher’s exact test was used and findings are reported at p < .05.

Acknowledgments: Spring 2013 LEEP Lab data collectors are Rebecca Sizer, Olivia Vande Gek, Hannah Vallee, Yuki Iwata, Tao Niederer, and Jacob Feodor. REVERB Branders are Sarah Hebert, Aimee Mallan-Martin, Keaton Driscoll, and Lorena Segijan.