Fostering Innovation and Interdisciplinarity in Higher Education: A Project on Creative Writing for Marketing and Language Students

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Abstract

This paper presents an innovative pedagogical initiative integrating interdisciplinarity and interdepartmental collaboration in higher education. The project "From Marketing to Languages: The Art of Creative Writing" brought together marketing and language students to engage in creative writing and storytelling. Designed to respond to the growing demand for transversal skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and communication, the project employed active learning methodologies and a tailored workshop led by a renowned author. Students collaborated in interdisciplinary groups, addressing societal challenges through narrative while bridging knowledge from distinct academic fields. This initiative exemplifies the potential of interdisciplinary and interdepartmental practices to enhance student engagement, foster innovation, and develop competencies crucial for navigating complex professional and societal contexts. The outcomes underscore the importance and the challenges of such approaches in driving pedagogical transformation and equipping students for the challenges of a globalized, interconnected world.

Keywords: Interdisciplinarity; Innovative Teaching and Learning Experiences; Active Learning; Transversal Skills; Marketing Education; Languages.

1. Introduction

Higher education must equip students with the skills to successfully navigate complex professional and societal challenges in a rapidly evolving global landscape. Pedagogical innovation, experiential approaches, and the development of transversal competencies such as creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration (Carvalho et al., 2020) are crucial for enhancing student engagement and also for fostering adaptability and lifelong learning—essential traits for success in the modern workforce. Interdisciplinary and interdepartmental collaboration stands

out as transformative approaches in higher education. Integrating perspectives and methodologies from distinct fields enriches the learning experience and prepares students for interdisciplinary work environments (Repko et al., 2020). Studies highlight how such collaborations amplify critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills (Frodeman & Klein, 2017).

Creative writing and storytelling, valued for their artistic and cultural contributions, have gained renewed attention as pedagogical tools. By enhancing narrative skills, students improve their capacity for self-expression, empathy, and persuasion—skills critical in diverse professional contexts (Li & Su, 2021). Storytelling also fosters deeper engagement with content, connecting theoretical concepts to real-world applications (Neira-Piñeiro & Montañez, 2017).

This article explores the project "From Marketing to Languages: The Art of Creative Writing," a pedagogical initiative integrating marketing and language students in an interdisciplinary framework. Employing storytelling as a central method, the project fostered collaboration, creativity, and communication skills while addressing the need for innovative pedagogical methods that bridge disciplines and enhance employability. Through this analysis, we explore how such an approach can serve as a model for innovation in higher education, contributing to the broader discourse, contributing to the broader discourse on interdisciplinary education and its role in preparing students for the complex demands of contemporary professional environments.

2. The Project

The University of Aveiro, where the project presented in this paper was conceived and implemented, has launched several initiatives aimed at promoting pedagogical innovation and enhancing opportunities for interaction and collaboration among faculty and students across different departments. Within this context, a competition was established to award incentives for Pedagogical Innovation Projects. These projects, developed within the framework of one or more curricular units, can be proposed by an individual lecturer or a group of lecturers. A monetary prize is granted each academic year, preceded by an evaluation conducted by a jury comprising lecturers from two universities. The prize supports teaching-related activities, including acquiring goods or services for the project's successful implementation. The case study presented in this paper originated from a competition application involving two lecturers, two curricular units, two departments, and eighty third-year students from three undergraduate degree programs.

Before delving into any other details about the project, it is essential to highlight that this project brought together two lecturers: one specializing in marketing and the other in languages, specifically in the teaching of German. The undergraduate programs involved the Bachelor's in Marketing (a daytime class and an evening class), the Bachelor's in Languages and Business

Relations, and the Bachelor's in Languages and Editorial Studies. The marketing students were enrolled in Marketing Seminars, and the language students were in German Vi - Communication Techniques. In total, approximately 80 students participated in the project.

2.1. Preparing the project

The project stemmed from a prior collaboration between two lecturers and the belief that interdisciplinarity between their fields would greatly benefit students in the respective degree programs. The project's goals had to be clearly defined to participate in the university competition and align shared interests between Marketing and Languages students. The aim was to create an initiative leveraging their skills while fostering transversal abilities essential for future challenges. The initial challenge was identifying a meaningful, engaging, and stimulating activity for all students.

The chosen initiative was a creative writing workshop, Storytelling: The Art of Writing Stories, led by a renowned Portuguese author. The workshop aimed to enhance participants' writing skills in Portuguese and foreign languages as well as their creativity and collaborative abilities. It explored narrative, dialogue, character development, structure, and writing style, providing a foundation for more effective and creative self-expression.

2.1.1. Background, relevance and assumptions

As background, the needs identified by final-year students in these courses were highlighted, as they pointed out the necessity to refine their writing skills, thus complementing their academic formation. Creativity plays a crucial role in enhancing employability and developing personal projects. This initiative aimed to bridge this gap, equipping students with essential tools to stand out in the labor market.

The growing demand for professionals who can use writing as a strategic and creative tool in an increasingly competitive job market underscores the relevance of this project. Final-year students, particularly those studying marketing and languages, must communicate effectively, persuasively, and creatively in various national and international contexts. Therefore, the workshop was designed to address these needs, providing an enriching experience and increasing the participants' employability. The underlying assumptions were based on the premise that creative writing is a valuable and versatile skill with transversal benefits. For the evening students (many working while studying), the workshop allowed them to apply what they had learned to their professional contexts. Many marketing students, already completing internships in companies, were able to direct their creative efforts toward producing texts within these environments. For language students about to enter the job market and work with various types of texts, this project represented a valuable asset in fostering their ability to work in multidisciplinary teams and enhance their writing and creative skills. The dynamic and

stimulating learning environment, guided by an experienced writer, sought to expand their worldview and encourage creative expression.

Another important aspect was the establishment of relationships between marketing and language students, which was also one of the project's key objectives. These two fields offer complementary perspectives that, when combined, can lead to innovative solutions. Interdisciplinarity and collaboration were essential to stimulate knowledge exchange, joint project development, and the formation of multidisciplinary teams.

2.1.1. Innovative approach

In addition to the assumptions already outlined for this project, ensuring that it had an innovative character was essential. Therefore, the innovative features that stand out the most, in our view, are, first and foremost, the combination of marketing, languages, and creative writing, which not only promotes interdisciplinarity but also introduces students to the importance of this intersection; the design of a customized workshop, tailored explicitly for final-year students in these fields, adapted to their needs and interests while aligning with the specific objectives of each course unit and ensuring they were respected; an active approach, where the learnings from the workshop could be immediately applied in the development of creative stories and the production of an e-book; and, finally, the involvement of a prestigious speaker, providing an inspiring experience.

As previously mentioned, focusing on the course units' specific objectives was also crucial. In the marketing case, within the Marketing Seminars unit, the focus was on helping students understand the role of marketing in various market contexts and the underlying dynamics and challenges. The German VI – Expression Techniques unit emphasized improving students' writing skills in different professional contexts.

2.2. Implementing the project

The implementation of this project involved several crucial phases for its success. Initially, the planning and design phases were paramount, followed by the necessary operational and logistical preparations to ensure the smooth execution of all activities. Each phase is detailed below, highlighting the steps that ensured effective implementation and alignment with the established objectives.

2.2.1. Planning and Design

The initial phase of this project included a thorough market survey to identify creative writing speakers who could lead a workshop with the specific characteristics required. Following this research, a writer was selected, which involved making contacts, requesting quotes, and coordinating dates, procedures, and logistics necessary for the workshop's implementation. At this stage, a suitable venue was identified, including round tables for the planned activities, a

seating capacity for around 40 participants (two groups), and all the necessary audiovisual resources to ensure the workshop ran smoothly. It is essential to highlight that the project encompassed two main dimensions: a pedagogical intervention, comprising several activities related to the workshop, and a study on the activities carried out, focusing on the perceived impact on students and the invited author.

Furthermore, the workshop's program was organized in close collaboration with the writer and the faculty members involved in the project. The preparation phase also included the development of data collection instruments, such as a final questionnaire for students to evaluate the activity and assess the pedagogical experience's impact.

2.2.2. Involving and Preparing Students in the Workshop

This phase marks the concrete operationalization of the project, beginning with sharing information with students. It is crucial that this communication clearly emphasizes the project's objectives and the benefits that the activity will bring to the participants. At this point, a date had already been set for the workshop, in line with the availability of the involved classes and the invited speaker. It was also decided that to develop the work, a draw would be conducted to form the working groups, ensuring a balanced composition with students from different degree programs. We conducted warm-up activities in the first in-person meeting, which gathered all participating students and where the interdisciplinary groups met for the first time. These activities aimed to create a pleasant and stimulating working environment conducive to multidisciplinary collaboration while helping reduce communication barriers and anxiety levels among students.

This was also the moment to explain to the students the final objective of the project: the collaborative production of an e-book to be published, outlining the key aspects and criteria related to this production. The students were encouraged to choose the theme of their creative story, guided by the prompt to reflect on the societal problems they perceive as the most pressing for their generation while anticipating future challenges. To prepare for the workshop, they were asked to think in advance about the problem they wanted to address and key elements of their story, such as the plot, characters, and other essential aspects. This preparatory phase aimed to stimulate critical thinking and creativity, providing a solid foundation for meaningful participation in the workshop and, most importantly, absorbing the valuable insights and knowledge shared by the author.

2.2.3. The Workshop

The highlight of the project was the creative writing workshop. The event was led by the author, who was carefully chosen to ensure the pedagogical relevance and impact of the experience. The workshop was structured to balance theory and practice, offering students a mix of technical foundations and creative applications. During the workshop, students explored key concepts

such as narrative construction, character development, dialogue, and textual structure for creative writing. Students were also challenged to apply their newly acquired knowledge through concrete examples and hands-on exercises, fostering experimentation and creativity.

Additionally, the speaker shared their experiences as an author, providing valuable insights into the creative process. The direct interaction with a professional in the field proved to be highly enriching, allowing students to understand the real-world demands and opportunities of creative writing. The workshop also served as an opportunity to foster teamwork, as students, organized into interdisciplinary groups, began outlining the stories that would form the final e-book. This moment of collaborative work, guided by the speaker and faculty members, was essential for aligning expectations, consolidating learning, and preparing the project's next steps.

2.3. Evaluating the Project

The survey conducted among participants provided valuable insights into their experiences and satisfaction levels with the pedagogical project. Thirty-four responses were collected, encompassing both quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback. This section focuses on its alignment with the objectives and analysing positive aspects and areas for improvement.

The project successfully fostered participant engagement and promoted interdisciplinary collaboration, two core objectives of the initiative. The warm-up session received an average rating of 5.6 out of 7, with half of the respondents rating it highly (6 or 7). Comments emphasized its engaging and interactive nature, which set a positive tone for the project and encouraged initial group cohesion. Similarly, the workshop with the author, although slightly lower rated (average of 5.1), was praised for its dynamic and creative approach, which inspired participants and provided a novel learning experience. Teamwork was one of the most positively rated components, with an average score of 5.8. Participants appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with peers from different departments, enriching their perspectives and fostering mutual respect. One respondent noted, "I learned to adapt and accept different ideas, even when they did not align with mine, which strengthened my communication and collaboration skills". Skill development was another notable success of the project. Respondents frequently mentioned improving competencies such as creativity, communication, and problem-solving. Many participants highlighted how the project's interdisciplinary nature pushed them out of their comfort zones, enhancing their adaptability and tolerance. Additionally, the project's innovative approach was highly appreciated, with an average rating of 5.9, reflecting its ability to challenge traditional pedagogical methods and promote creativity.

Despite the positive outcomes, several aspects require refinement to align with the project's goals. A recurring critique was the lack of clear connections between the activities and the overarching objective of creating short stories. One participant remarked, "The workshop was dynamic, but its relevance to creating the short story was unclear." More explicit guidance on how each session contributed to the final goal would enhance coherence and focus.

Logistical issues were another significant challenge. Scheduling conflicts, especially between day and evening students, hindered collaboration. Group sizes were occasionally deemed too large, leading to uneven workload distribution and reduced engagement from some members. Addressing these logistical barriers through better scheduling and smaller, more manageable group structures could improve participant experiences.

Furthermore, while the interdisciplinary and interdepartmental nature of the groups was appreciated, it also posed challenges. Differences in departmental priorities and expectations sometimes created friction, which impacted group synergy. Providing structured support, such as facilitators or more explicit task distribution, could mitigate these issues.

The survey results indicate that the pedagogical project was a valuable and enriching experience for participants, achieving its goals of fostering engagement, creativity, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The positive aspects, such as high participant satisfaction, skill development, and innovative methodologies, highlight its success. However, addressing the areas for improvement—including more precise alignment of activities, better logistical planning, and enhanced group dynamics—will be crucial for future iterations. By building on this feedback, the project can further optimize its impact and continue to provide meaningful learning opportunities.

3. The Project's Outcomes

As a result of this project, 11 creative stories were developed by mixed groups of students from the bachelor's programs in Marketing, Languages and Business Relations, and Languages and Editorial Studies. Inspired by societal challenges concerning their generation, the teachers compiled the stories into an e-book titled "The Stories That Unite Us: Creative Writing and Linguistic Diversity," published by the university press.

These narratives address pressing issues such as loneliness, misinformation, high rents, the housing crisis, financial struggles, social anxiety, mental health, and emigration. Presented in Portuguese and German, the e-book celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity, reflecting the curricular units' learning objectives. Marketing students enhanced their intercultural skills through exposure to the German language and culture, while German language students applied their linguistic abilities in a specific and creative context. This project challenged students to collaborate across disciplines and aimed to inspire deeper reflection on contemporary issues and foster dialogue, inclusion, and mutual understanding. It represents a meaningful contribution to discussing societal challenges through creative and intercultural engagement.

4. Conclusion

The project "From Marketing to Languages: The Art of Creative Writing" was an innovative and enriching initiative that fostered interdisciplinary collaboration between marketing and

language students. This dynamic and creative learning environment significantly impacted participants' academic and personal development. By engaging students in practical activities like creative writing and group discussions, the project emphasized active learning, promoting the application of knowledge to real-world scenarios. It also facilitated the development of transversal skills, including creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and effective communication, while encouraging self-expression and the exploration of diverse perspectives. The project's interdisciplinary nature expanded students' academic horizons, fostering collaboration across fields and stimulating innovation. The workshop format inspired participants to explore novel approaches, develop original solutions, and adopt an entrepreneurial mindset. The initiative also provided networking opportunities and culminated in the production of an e-book showcasing students' creative and linguistic achievements.

Despite challenges in bridging distinct academic perspectives, these obstacles became growth opportunities, reinforcing the value of interdisciplinarity in education. The project met its pedagogical objectives, leaving a lasting impact on participants and demonstrating the transformative potential of interdisciplinary collaborations in higher education. We hope that the experience shared here serves as a stimulus for new endeavours, continuing to advance creative and impactful educational approaches and inspire future interdepartmental collaborations that are equally transformative and impactful. Finally, it is important to reinforce that the success of this initiative owes much to the support of the University and the dedication of its students, whose creativity and commitment brought this unique project to life.

Acknowledgements

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