

Investigating the Investigators: An Executive Summary of Balance's Master's Work

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Introduction

The intent of *Investigating the Investigators* Master's project (Balance, 1986) was to focus on creativity researchers to gain more insights into creativity research and the field in general. The author noted that, "the majority of our information and understanding about the various aspects of creativity have come from the research efforts of the creativity investigators since 1950" (1986, p. 1). With this in mind, Balance determined that a significant deficit was apparent – there was little to no research to date (1986) that explored the subjective element of the creativity researcher. She went further to say that "seldom is it explicitly acknowledged that the 'sources' of this objective knowledge about creativity, the creativity researchers, are also influenced by many factors which may also influence the type of information that is being presented for use" (1986, p. 3).

Methods and Procedures

Balance used a qualitative approach to gather comments and perspectives from the participants. She created a survey questionnaire using 11 open-ended questions that she believed would provide flexibility in participant response. The following questions were used in the questionnaire:

1. When and where did you first get involved in studying creativity? What were the background factors or circumstances that influenced you?
2. Who or what have been the major influences on your thinking as you have pursued your work on the subject of creativity?
3. Who do you consider to have been your "mentor(s)" in creativity?

4. Who do you consider your “protégé(s)” in creativity – writing and research?
5. Of your contributions to our understanding of creativity, which contributions give you the greatest sense of satisfaction?
6. What do you consider the three (3) most important qualities of the creativity researcher?
7. What do you think the future major trend in creativity research will be?
8. What do you feel has been your biggest “disappointment” regarding creativity research?
9. What is the one thing you would most like to see “discovered” about creativity?
10. Do you consider yourself creative? Why?
11. Please describe briefly your own creative process. Are there particular settings, circumstances, times, or procedures you consider important in describing how you do your most creative scholarship? (Balance, 1986, p. 7-8)

After she selected this approach Balance identified a population for the study. She compiled an extensive list of published individuals from the *Journal of Creative Behavior* (JCB). The survey population included all the contributing writers to the above journal for a ten-year period spanning 1971 through 1981 (1986, p. 12).

The survey population began with a list of 265 authors that a selection committee (consisting of the Managing Editor of the JCB, the Director of the Center for Studies in Creativity, and a Senior Professor in the Creative Studies Graduate Program) narrowed. Each committee member was given selection criteria based on the following guidelines:

“To your knowledge,

1. The study of creativity has been a major focus of their work.
2. The products of their work have been publicly recognized as contributing to the understanding of the nature/nurture of creativity.
3. The person is publicly recognized as having expertise in the field of creativity.”

After the selection process was completed, the survey sample included 42 names of creativity researchers (Balance, p. 10). Of the 42 researchers that received the questionnaire via mail, 27 responded making the response rate of this project 64% (Balance, 1986, p. 12).

In the data analysis, the responses to each question were analyzed separately, assigned equal importance and treated at face value (Balance, 1986, p. 13). Four of the 11 questions were answered by all the researchers and the remaining seven questions got response rates ranging from 81% to 96% (p. 13).

Results

Balance's project contained 32 pages of data and results. In this section I will present the major themes found in the responses to each question, however, the reader should keep in mind that Balance goes much deeper into the results than I have. Also, I will refer to the questions by their numbers rather than restating each again.

In question 1 regarding when, where and what factors were of influence, 100% of the participants responded. Both parts of the question received individualized answers; however, three generalized themes did occur. For the first part, the two main entry points for the group were through a personal or professional challenge or by working on an advanced degree (Balance, 1986, p. 15). The second part's theme "might generally be classified as an act of serendipity (1986, p. 18)."

Question 2 regarding influences in thinking also got a 100% response from the group. The most influential individuals mentioned were J. P. Guilford and his work, by 60%, followed by E. Paul Torrance and Donald MacKinnon, both with 36% (Balance, 1986, p. 19).

Question 3 about mentors had a 96% response rate. The theme suggested that several people within the field of creativity are viewed as mentors by others in the same field (Balance, 1986, p. 20). The response rate for question 4 about protégés was 93%. Of the two-thirds in responses that indicated a protégé relationship, there were 21 connections that could be paired to the answers in question 3 (1986, p. 22).

One hundred percent of the participants answered question 5 relating to their contributions to creativity. Balance suggested that the researchers gained the most satisfaction by “being creatively productive themselves (1986, p. 23).” This was deduced by the themes in their responses.

Question 6 had a 96% response rate. The top mentioned themes for what qualities the respondents felt were most important in a creativity researcher were an extensive knowledge base, a creative personality and a research style that was innovative and sophisticated (Balance, 1986, p. 23).

Question 7 regarding opinions about future trends was answered by 89% of the participants. The themes here indicated what the researchers wanted or hoped to see and how they actually viewed the trends in the research (1986, p. 25).

Of the 27 respondents, 93% answered question 8. “From the responses of the creativity researchers in this study, the most frequently cited ‘disappointment’ regarding creativity research is creativity research (Balance, 1986, p. 27).”

With only 81% participation, question 9 in regard to finding ‘discoveries’ in the field received the lowest response rate. Balance classified these responses into two groups, nature and nurture, and then into the following sub-categories: person, process, product, and environment (1986, p. 29). With the exception of product (that got no responses), the other categories received numerous, very specific answers (Balance, 1986, p. 31).

One hundred percent of the survey-takers answered question 10 regarding their personal creativity. Only one researcher stated that he or she was not creative. Of the rest, the responses to the “why” part of this question fell into one or more of the following categories: recognition by others, productive accomplishments, personal characteristics, universal human trait, problem-solving, and approach to living (Balance, 1986, p. 31).

Question 11 concerning the researcher’s own creative process had an 89% response rate. The themes were broken down into six parts including: the influence of others, personal experiences,

incubation process, writing process, quality and amount of time, and circumstances when ideas became conscious (Balance, 1986, p. 34).

Summary

After Balance analyzed the results of the survey, she elaborated on each question in Section VI, pages 37 to 51, of her project. This was her “Discussion” chapter, in which she added her own insights about the responses. Balance thoroughly and thoughtfully examined each survey response; so again, the reader must understand that this paper was not intended to delve as deeply into the information as Balance did. That is why I did not include her detailed insights; rather, I chose to briefly comment on the issues that really stood out to me.

One of the issues that arose was the underlying notion of antecedents. Although not explicitly mentioned, it was clearly apparent not only in question 3, but also in Balance’s (1986) following statement:

“Contemplating the results of a survey of creativity researchers 30 years from now, it will be interesting to note if the early ‘roots’ of creative studies will still be strong and visible (p. 39).”

Considering that just 16 years have passed since this project’s publication, would the same “roots” exist? Another aspect that ties into this is the responses to question 1 concerning when (what year) the researchers became involved with creativity. The earliest date listed was in the 1930’s and the latest date was in the early 1970’s (Balance, 1986, p. 17). If another survey was conducted using the same criteria, but a ten-year span from 1992-2002, would the prior “roots” and tenure in the field still exist today? In my opinion, I think we would see some of the same influences, but many new ones.

Another issue that surfaced appeared in the results of questions 7 and 8. To me, these responses were particularly interesting because the researchers in this study were chosen based on the criteria of being published, yet they were extremely critical of the quality of research in printed circulation.

According to Balance, the answers to question 7 regarding future trends:

“indicated that several of the creativity researchers ‘did not foresee any major changes in research procedures for investigating problems of creativity’ and they are not optimistic about future

research progressing beyond this point (1986) and rather ‘expect that the yield (of creativity research) will be scanty’ (p. 27).”

Balance quoted one of the researchers further in the results for question 8, concerning ‘disappointments’ in the research, when she included the following statement:

“second rate researchers doing unimaginative things and claiming that their work (1) illuminates creativity, or (2) really helps people develop their creative potential. Both journals and popular press articles are cluttered with such junk. No one is any wiser for it’ (1986, p. 27).”

Hopefully, that was and still is in the eye of the beholder. I am very optimistic of where the field of creativity research has the potential to go.

As I read Balance’s project several themes emerged. Although the majority of the responses were unique because Balance used open-ended questions, the themes allowed me to understand how the researchers, as a group, were thinking. “Included in the distinctiveness of each creativity researcher’s response was the common ground of a ‘significant relationship’ to creativity. This was reflected by the sense of commitment, caring, honesty, respect and love for creativity that the researchers’ responses demonstrated (Balance, 1986, p. 52).” One could feel these emotions when reading this project.

The main purpose of *Investigating the Investigators*, as stated earlier, was to find out more about the human factor – the creativity researcher – in creativity research (Balance, 1986, p. 55). “It is suggested that their personal thoughts, opinions, and observations are as important a source for understanding creativity as the empirical research studies. And for the future creativity researchers, it may be wise for us to know the people upon whose shoulders we stand (1986, p. 56).”

Reference

Balance, P. A. (1986). *Investigating the investigators*. Unpublished master’s project, State University College at Buffalo, Center for Studies in Creativity, Buffalo.