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'Creatively brave': how marketing became environmental pedagogy in Scottish education

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ABSTRACT

Creativity occupies a prominent place in environmental and sustainability education, where it is presented as the capacity young people need to solve the world's ecological problems. This article examines what happens when that creativity is derived from marketing and advertising. Drawing on documentary and network analysis (2018–2022, with a follow-up wave in 2024–2026), it traces how a Scottish creativity consultancy, Daydream Believers, imported the genre conventions of the advertising industry into resources badged as environmental learning, asking students to study award-winning corporate campaigns (including the Trash Isles plastic-pollution stunt and Lacoste's Save Our Species promotion) and replicate their style. This material is situated against the institutional centre of Scottish environmental education, the Learning for Sustainability entitlement, and against a typology of three competing discourses of creativity in the field—critical and arts-based, Indigenous and decolonial, and instrumental-commercial—the first two of which are rendered invisible when corporate constructions dominate or co-opt them. The follow-up analysis examines newer environmentally badged resources (Solarpunk Island, #GetOnWithIt) and documents a trajectory from free downloads to credit-rated national qualifications, delivered in some seventy secondary schools and cited within Scotland's national curriculum review, the Curriculum Improvement Cycle. Using Biesta's purposes of education heuristic, I argue that what is being institutionalised is not creativity in any ecologically meaningful sense, but marketing as pedagogy. This displacement matters for accountability and for the critical ambitions of environmental education, but more fundamentally it forecloses young people's subjectification and their capacity to imagine alternative ecological futures.

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Introduction

In 2017, the creative agency AMV BBDO, working with the Plastic Oceans Foundation and the online publisher LADbible, petitioned the United Nations to recognise the Great Pacific Garbage Patch as the world's 196th country: the Trash Isles. The campaign recruited celebrity 'citizens', designed a flag, currency and passports, and won two

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Cannes Lions Grand Prix awards for design and public relations. However, the United Nations did not recognise the Trash Isles, the plastic remained where it was and the campaign website is no longer updated. Three years later, the campaign suddenly reappeared, this time in Scottish secondary classrooms. It was not presented as an object of critical analysis, but as an exemplar of 'creative bravery' that students were invited to admire and emulate, in a free lesson resource produced by an advertising industry association and distributed by a Scottish creativity consultancy whose work was promoted by Education Scotland, the national education agency.

This article is about that journey, and about what it reveals concerning the place of creativity in environmental and sustainability education. Creativity has a high profile in contemporary education policy at national and supranational levels (Lucas and Venckutė 2020), and environmental crisis supplies its most insistent justification: education systems must cultivate creative capacities so that young people can devise solutions to the world's ecological problems. The inclusion of a Creative Thinking assessment in the OECD's PISA 2022 cycle, with prompts addressing environmental and sustainability issues such as the reuse of waste materials, marks the consolidation of this framing at the global level (Foster and Piacentini 2025; Gelmez Burakgazi and Reiss 2025; Grey and Morris 2024). What receives far less attention is the provenance of the materials through which 'creative' environmental learning actually reaches classrooms: who produces them, what model of creativity they encode, and what understanding of environmental problems they make available to students.

This article is addressed to two audiences. For environmental educators, it asks how and why creativity is being brought into environmental education resources and initiatives, and what is meant by creativity in each specific context. For those concerned with creativity in education more generally, it asks how and why environmental examples are being deployed in creativity resources, and what work those examples do. Underlying both is a broader concern for everyone involved in public education: the ethical and political questions raised when commercial actors fund, produce and promote initiatives. Such initiatives appear self-evidently aligned to 'good' ends, such as supporting children's creativity and encouraging concern for the environment, while at the same time they encode answers to contested questions of educational purpose (Biesta 2009).

I pursue these questions through a single national case, Scotland, examined in depth. Scotland is an instructive site for three reasons. First, Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is a formal entitlement of every learner under Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, and is embedded in the professional standards that all teachers must meet. Second, Scotland is mid-way through a systematic national curriculum review, the Curriculum Improvement Cycle, in which both creativity and LfS are being repositioned. This is a conjuncture in which definitional questions about creativity have unusually high stakes. Third, between 2020 and 2026 a consultancy-produced construction of creativity moved, in Scotland, from the periphery of the system into its credentialing infrastructure: free downloadable resources became national qualifications, credit-rated by a university, delivered in around seventy secondary schools, and cited approvingly within the national curriculum review's own communications. This trajectory can be documented, and documenting it is this article's central empirical contribution.

The argument proceeds as follows. I first map the contested terrain of creativity in environmental education, distinguishing the politics of competing constructions and locating the marketing-derived version within them. I then describe the Scottish environmental education settlement against which the case should be read, before setting out the documentary and network methods. Three findings sections follow: an analysis of marketing as environmental pedagogy in the Creative Bravery resource; an account of the consultancy's institutionalisation through credentialing between 2020 and 2026; and a brief tracing of the transnational network within which the Scottish case sits. The discussion draws on Biesta's account of educational purposes and on the literature on commercialisation and network governance in education (Ball and Junemann 2012; Hogan 2016; Mockler et al. 2021; Williamson 2021) to consider what is displaced when marketing becomes environmental pedagogy, and what forms of accountability the case demands.

Creativity in environmental education: a contested terrain

Creativity is a notoriously difficult concept to define, and these foundational difficulties are intensified when creativity is located within the context of education (Chan 2013). There are many, often competing, perspectives on what the purpose of education should be, and what it should aim to achieve and how. Hence, the role of creativity within education (and questions about what it is, what it can contribute, and how) varies according to which educational purposes and models are in play (Chan 2013). Banaji, Burn, and Buckingham (2010) identified nine distinct 'rhetorics' of creativity in circulation, from democratic and political conceptions through to creativity as economic imperative. The concept's elasticity is precisely what makes it so serviceable to such different projects (Gibson 2005; Pope 2005). The same acknowledgement needs to be made in relation to environmental education: creativity in this field is not one thing with one politics. Before analysing a corporate construction of creativity, it is necessary to map the terrain which this construction occupies and obscures. I distinguish, heuristically, three broad discourses of creativity in environmental and sustainability education. Throughout, 'discourse' and 'politics' are paired rather than interchangeable terms: 'discourse' names the constellation of language, exemplars, practices and evaluative criteria through which a particular version of creativity is made thinkable and teachable, while 'politics' names what each discourse carries with it—a distribution of educational purposes, interests and resources, and an implicit answer to the question of whose creativity counts, and to what ends. Each discourse, in other words, has a politics, and part of the typology's work is to make those politics available for scrutiny. These are ideal types; actual initiatives combine them, and the boundaries are blurry. However, the typology performs analytical work, as it converts questions about whether and how to use creative approaches in environmental education into critical questions such as: 'Whose creativity? For what purposes? And on whose terms?'

The first of the discourses in the typology is *critical, arts-based and place-responsive creativity*. The longest-standing association of creativity in environmental education is with the arts: aesthetic, embodied and imaginative engagement with more-than-human worlds as a route to ecological understanding and care (Curtis, Reid, and

Ballard 2012; Inwood 2008). Critical place-based pedagogies extend this into explicitly political territory, treating creative practice as a means of 'reinhabitation and decolonisation' (Gruenewald 2003). This refers to learning to live well in damaged places while identifying and resisting the forces that damage them. Climate-activist art, from school-strike placards to community theatre, belongs here too: creativity as the capacity to imagine and enact alternatives to the systems producing ecological crisis, rather than to optimise within them.

The second discourse is *Indigenous and decolonial creativity*. Indigenous educational traditions have never separated creativity from ecological relation: creation stories, land-based practices, storytelling and art are simultaneously epistemology, pedagogy and environmental ethics (Cajete 1994; Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy 2014). The land education literature within this journal has insisted that environmental education's settler-colonial inheritances cannot be addressed by adding Indigenous 'content' to unchanged frameworks; what is required is engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems as living intellectual traditions in which creative practice is constitutive of human–land relations (Bang and Marin 2015; Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy 2014). This politics of creativity is increasingly visible in postcolonial curriculum reform; Aotearoa New Zealand's current curriculum refresh, for instance, positions mātauranga Māori as foundational rather than supplementary, an approach that has travelled into international curriculum policy analysis (Priestley et al. 2023)—including, as discussed below, into the evidence base of Scotland's own curriculum review.

The third discourse is *instrumental and commercial creativity*. Here creativity is a generic, transferable, assessable capacity, frequently described as a '21st-century skill' or competency, and justified by economic imperatives. This form of creativity is increasingly specified through frameworks of habits or dispositions (Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer 2013; Lucas and Venckutė 2020). Within this politics there is an important internal distinction. Its *techno-optimist problem-solving* variant frames environmental challenges as design problems awaiting innovative solutions: this is the framing of the PISA Creative Thinking assessment, of World Economic Forum reports, and of UNESCO's competence-oriented sustainability frameworks (UNESCO 2017; World Economic Forum 2020). Critics observe that this construction is largely silent on ethics, value-orientation and power, treating creativity as value-free capacity rather than situated practice (Amprazis and Papadopoulou 2025; Glaveanu et al. 2020). Its *marketing* variant goes further: creativity is what the advertising and design industries do, and learning to be creative means learning their genres, namely the campaign, the pitch, and the brand (jagodzinski 2013; Pope 2005). Gibson (2005) argues for an 'unheroic' term to separate this commercial creativity, concerned with novelty and saleability, from creative practice concerned with values and meaning. Within environmental education specifically, the marketing variant connects to what researchers have identified as the migration of marketing techniques into environmental pedagogy more broadly (for example, nudging and relentless positivity; Petel 2020) in which the methods of consumer persuasion are repurposed as educational strategy.

The instrumental discourse also connects to what environmental education researchers have termed petro-pedagogy: the shaping of school environmental learning by fossil fuel interests, through sponsored programmes and resources that promote individualised, consumption-based and depoliticised responses to ecological crisis

(Eaton and Day 2020; Tannock 2020). Petro-pedagogy has typically been studied where the industry's hand is visible, in branded energy resources and sponsored science outreach. The cases examined in this article suggest a subtler variant, in which the fossil economy's preferred framings travel without its branding, carried instead by the genres of marketing and the language of creativity. Nor is depoliticisation confined to corporate materials: Dunlop and Rushton's (2022) analysis of England's sustainability and climate change strategy finds state climate education itself framed by economic priorities, driven by the 'net zero' agenda and stripped of attention to the political dimensions of climate change. This produces a policy environment in which marketing-derived 'creative' responses to environmental crisis encounter little official friction.

Two features of this terrain matter for what follows. First, the three discourses are not equally resourced. Critical, arts-based and Indigenous creativities are sustained largely by educators, communities and underfunded cultural organisations, whereas instrumental and commercial creativity is sustained by consultancies, corporate philanthropy, assessment agencies and supranational organisations with considerable capacity for dissemination (Hogan, Sellar, and Lingard 2016; Williamson 2021). Second, the instrumental discourse has a distinctive relationship to definition. Because its purposes are served by creativity's measurability and transferability rather than by any particular content, it can absorb environmental themes without absorbing environmental commitments: so, an ocean of plastic becomes a brief. The empirical sections of this article examine that absorption at close range. The point of the typology, however, is to establish from the outset that the critique developed here is not a critique of creativity in environmental education. It is a critique of one discourse of creativity displacing the others, and doing so, in Scotland, with public endorsement.

The Scottish settlement: learning for sustainability, creativity and the curriculum reform conjuncture

Claims about what is peripheral or central to environmental education in Scotland need to begin from the field's actual institutional centre. Scotland's policy architecture for environmental and sustainability education appears to be strong. Learning for Sustainability, which is an umbrella concept integrating sustainable development education, global citizenship and outdoor learning, is an entitlement of every learner within Curriculum for Excellence, a whole-school commitment, and a requirement embedded in the General Teaching Council for Scotland's Professional Standards, which since 2012 have obliged every registered teacher to demonstrate LfS in their practice (GTC Scotland 2021*)*. The national action plan, Target 2030: A Movement for People, Planet and Prosperity (Scottish Government 2023), renews the entitlement and commits to embedding LfS across curriculum, campus, community and culture. Enactment is supported by an infrastructure including Eco-Schools Scotland, alongside outdoor learning provision. Research on LfS has documented both the ambition of this settlement and the persistent gap between policy vision and classroom enactment, with implementation uneven and dependent on committed individuals (Christie et al. 2019).

For the purposes of this article, three features of the settlement matter. First, LfS is explicitly framed in terms of values, namely social justice, ecological literacy and citizenship, not merely employability. Whatever the enactment gap, the official construction of environmental education in Scotland is not reducible to skills formation. Second, LfS is largely uncommodified: its delivery infrastructure is public, its resources free and unbranded, and its pedagogical centre of gravity is the school and its locality. Third (and this is the conjunctural point) the settlement is currently in motion. Scotland is in the second year of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC), a ten-year systematic review of the 3–18 curriculum led by Education Scotland, catalysed by the OECD's 2021 review of Curriculum for Excellence, with a refreshed technical framework to be adopted in schools from August 2028. Within the CIC's emerging architecture, both creativity and LfS are being repositioned as cross-cutting 'core competencies' (the review ran parallel public engagement strands on each in 2025). The wider skills landscape continues to be shaped by Skills Development Scotland's 'meta-skills' framework, in which creativity appears as one of twelve meta-skills under the cluster of 'innovation', and which schools are actively encouraged to translate into curriculum planning (Skills Development Scotland 2018).

If LfS is the institutional centre of Scottish environmental education, creativity has held a comparably official position in the Scottish curriculum since long before the CIC, acquired largely outside environmentally related areas. Curriculum for Excellence has framed creativity as a general attribute of learning from its inception: the four capacities specify that successful learners can 'think creatively and independently' (Scottish Executive 2004). This aspiration was consolidated through Education Scotland's thematic review Creativity Across Learning 3–18 and Scotland's Creative Learning Plan, which defined creativity for schools as four transferable 'creativity skills' (curiosity, open-mindedness, imagination and problem-solving) to be developed across all curriculum areas (Creative Scotland 2013; Education Scotland 2013). Two features of this history matter here. First, creativity entered the Scottish curriculum through a generic-skills construction—cross-cutting, transferable, dispositional—rather than through an arts-based conceptualisation. Nor was it explicitly connected to environmental education. The official construction of creativity sits closest to the instrumental discourse of the typology (cf. Biesta and Priestley 2013, on the capacities). Second, the official infrastructure supporting that construction has been one of advocacy rather than credentialing. Creative Scotland holds a national creative learning remit and, with Education Scotland, has maintained the Creative Learning Plan and supported local authority Creative Learning Networks through modest, annually contingent grant funding. This apparatus defines, promotes and networks creativity; it does not certify it. Before the developments documented below, creativity in Scotland had no qualification and no assessment rubric—pervasive as aspiration, absent as credential. LfS and creativity therefore enter the current review from asymmetric positions: LfS values-rich and statutorily anchored but unevenly enacted; creativity rhetorically ubiquitous but definitionally underspecified and, crucially, uncredentialed—a space that a consultancy supplying definitions, worked examples and a credit-rated qualification stands to fill.

The conjuncture is consequential because curriculum reviews are definitional moments: the constructions of creativity that circulate during a review stand to be inscribed in the framework that emerges from it. The question of *which* discourse of

creativity informs the CIC's 'core competency' is therefore not merely academic. As the findings below show, at least one answer is already visible in the review's own public communications; and it is supplied by a consultancy.

Methodology

This study uses documentary and network analysis to examine how a corporate construction of creativity entered, and became institutionalised within, Scottish environmental education. The approach draws on the methods developed in the policy sociology of educational commercialisation, in particular network ethnography: the systematic tracing of connections between organisations, funders, personnel and resources through public documents, websites, social media, financial reports and archived web pages (Ball and Junemann 2012; Hogan 2016). Network ethnography is suited to a field in which influence travels through consultancy relationships, advisory group memberships and resource distribution rather than through formal policy instruments, and in which the actors concerned are often, as Hogan and colleagues and Williamson have variously shown, scarcely visible to the publics whose education they shape (Hogan and Thompson 2021; Mockler et al. 2021; Williamson 2021).

The research was conducted in two waves. The first (2018–2022), undertaken as part of a doctoral study of creativity and assessment in Scottish education, mapped the network of creativity advocacy connecting Scotland to England and Western Australia. This research assembled a corpus comprising: the complete set of free teaching resources published on the Daydream Believers website (thirty-eight resources at the September 2020 capture for the doctoral research); the organisation's self-descriptions, partner and sponsor listings; promotional appearances at national education events; and the connected organisational materials of the Creative Schools programme (Western Australia) and the Rethinking Assessment network (England), including annual reports, board biographies and archived webpages (Schuler 2022). The second wave (2024–2026) returned to the same organisations and captured: the specifications, learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the Daydream Believers Creative Thinking and Creative Innovation qualifications; the current resource set; the organisation's reported delivery footprint and partnerships; and its appearances within Curriculum Improvement Cycle communications.

Analysis proceeded in two stages. Resources badged with environmental or sustainability content were subjected to close reading attending to provenance (who produced the resource), exemplars (what materials students are asked to engage with), learning outcomes (what students are asked to do and how success is framed) and silences (what understandings of environmental problems are foreclosed). Network analysis then situated the resources within the relationships of funding, personnel and endorsement through which they reach classrooms. Ethical approval for the doctoral research was granted by the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel (Reference: 666), and all materials analysed are, or were, publicly available; no claims are made about the motivations of named individuals beyond what the documentary record supports.

Marketing as environmental pedagogy: the creative Bravery resource

Daydream Believers describes itself as 'a group of passionate, award-winning educators, employers and students who came together to put creativity at the heart of education because we believe innovation and curiosity are key to unlocking the potential of the future workforce'[1]. At the 2020 capture, its sponsors included a university, a further education college, a global investment management company and Education Scotland, which promoted the organisation's resources at national conferences. The resources are free and explicitly mapped to Curriculum for Excellence; their producing partners include design and advertising organisations.

Creative Bravery: campaigns as exemplars

My initial analysis centred on Creative Bravery, a five-lesson unit created by D&AD, a non-profit association of the advertising and design industries, and distributed through the Daydream Believers site. I focus on this resource for two reasons: it is the unit in the 2020 corpus most explicitly aligned with environmental and sustainability themes, and it exemplifies with unusual clarity the genre transposition this article describes. The unit gained additional reach during the coronavirus pandemic through the online Creative Bravery Festival (2020), in which Daydream Believers participated alongside the (now defunct) consultancy Hidden Giants.

The resource asks students to study a sequence of celebrated advertising campaigns: Nike's 'Dream Crazy', featuring Colin Kaepernick; Lacoste's 'Save Our Species'; Dove's (Unilever) 'Campaign for Real Beauty'; and the Trash Isles campaign described in the introduction. Students are told that these campaigns are 'really brave' and are asked to generate ideas of comparable bravery. The pedagogical framing is the framing of the agency pitch: 'What makes this stand out? What makes it different from other campaigns?… Selling this kind of idea in a market place that looks like what we saw before is a tough sell. But by making work like this it becomes an advert that really stands out'.[2] The learning outcomes are likewise the competencies of campaign development: understand the need for bravery in creativity; understand creative bravery and where to start; develop brave ideas; push your ideas; learn how to pitch an idea.

Three observations follow. First, the resource performs a complete substitution of evaluative criteria. Evaluation and judgement are important dimensions of creative work (Sefton-Green 2011) and of learning more generally, along with knowledge, understanding and reflection (Biesta and Priestley 2013). However, the environmental campaigns are assessed, and students' responses to them are to be assessed, by the standards of the advertising industry: distinctiveness, memorability, saleability in a crowded attention market. Whether a campaign produced any sustained environmental effect is not a criterion. This matters because, on the industry's own evidence, the flagship exemplar produced none: the Trash Isles generated publicity and two Cannes Lions for its agency, but no UN recognition, no structural response to ocean plastic, and an abandoned website once the marketing value was exhausted. Within the resource's evaluative frame, none of this registers as failure. The campaign remains exemplary because the criteria are generic to the genre, not specific to the cause,

which is a clear illustration of how the marketing variant of creativity absorbs environmental themes without environmental commitments.

Second, the exemplars are presented without critical apparatus, in contexts where the contradictions are well documented. Academic analysis of Nike's campaign concludes that its commercial logic undermines the social cause it appropriates (Hoffmann et al. 2020); Unilever's 'real beauty' messaging has also been the subject of wider debates concerning the relationship between corporate social-purpose branding and business practices (ibid.); and in December 2025 the UK Advertising Standards Authority banned Lacoste advertisements for unsubstantiated sustainability claims, with the company conceding that terms such as 'sustainable' and 'eco-friendly' were difficult to substantiate (ASA 2025). The subsequent regulatory finding is significant for this analysis: a campaign presented to Scottish students as exemplary environmental creativity has since been formally judged, within the advertising industry's own accountability regime, to be greenwashing. Nowhere in the resource are students invited to anticipate, or even to imagine, such a judgement. They are positioned as apprentice campaign-makers, not as critical readers of campaigns; a positioning that inverts the media-literacy and greenwashing-literacy aims that environmental educators have argued for (Eng et al. 2021) and that LfS's own framing of critical citizenship would seem to require.

Third, the resource constructs environmental problems themselves in the image of the genre. An ocean gyre of plastic appears as a brief: raw material for an attention-getting idea. Systemic questions of production, consumption, regulation and corporate responsibility, which critical environmental education treats as the heart of the matter (Eaton and Day 2020; Gruenewald and Manteaw 2007) are not so much answered wrongly as rendered ungrammatical within the genre. One cannot pitch a structural transformation of the plastics economy in a campaign concept. This is the precise sense in which I argue that marketing has become environmental pedagogy: not that students are taught marketing alongside environmental content, but that the genre conventions of marketing constitute the entire pedagogical frame within which the environment appears.

Since 2020, Daydream Believers have updated their corpus to include a range of environmentally-badged creativity resources (Forestopia, Circular Brand, SeaStory, #GetOnWithIt and Solarpunk Island). To consider whether the critique outlined above (namely that these commercial creativity resources do not support meaningful environmental education and are underpinned by an instrumental discourse of creativity) still holds, I will review two of the resources, Solarpunk Island and #GetOnWithIt, in more detail.

#GetOnWithIt: the advertising workflow undisguised

#GetOnWithIt is the easier target, and the most blatant example of the genre in the corpus. It is created by Dentsu Creative, part of one of the world's largest advertising networks (clients include Adidas, Heinz, Coca-Cola, Asahi, Lego, Oreo's, VW and KFC). Where Solarpunk Island routes ecological imagination through branding, #GetOnWithIt is simply an advertising workflow: a five-part sequence of brief, ideation, craft, pitch and publish, in which the climate crisis is the account and the pupil the junior

creative. Pupils are taught the agency planning formula directly – the 'Get. To. By'. model (who we are targeting; what we want them to do; how we are going to convince them). The pre-written brief instructs them to make world leaders 'sit up, take notice… and take-action now!' The arc culminates, as in the other resources, in a pitch.

The resource contains no environmental content as such: climate change enters only as a cause to campaign about, introduced through an Attenborough address and then left behind for the method. This is the 'environmental themes retained as motivating content' mechanism in its undiluted form. Further, the model campaigns the resource holds up include not only NGO advocacy (Greenpeace's Wasteminster) but also Burger King's McWhopper – a fast-food chain's World Peace Day stunt proposing a collaborative burger with McDonald's. This is offered as 'a great example of a simple idea that then grew out across lots of different executions', with pupils invited to 'take note of how the idea was pushed much much further'. The slide gestures at self-awareness, asking 'Is this case appropriate?', but supplies no apparatus to pursue the question and praises the campaign's craft regardless. That a burger chain's publicity stunt can model climate action, without friction, is the clearest evidence that the marketing frame here is total: a brief is a brief, an execution an execution, whether the object is a burger or a habitable planet. Here the critique developed for Creative Bravery holds without qualification.

Solarpunk Island: the harder case

Solarpunk Island is a substantively different case. It aims to foster speculative ecological futures, and is a multi-week, cross-curricular design-fiction challenge. Pupils are asked to imagine they have been shipwrecked en route to the Galápagos and must build a community on an uninhabited island. They research island biodiversity and volcanic formation, choose among four biomes with different resources and constraints, design shelter using available materials, solve survival problems (water safety, solar cooking, first aid, sunburn), confront ethical dilemmas (endangered Blue-Footed Booby eggs), draft community laws and governance and reflect on whether they 'got it right'.

Solarpunk Island clearly does have real environmental content. Further, it carries a genuine politics; perhaps surprisingly, this is not a techno-optimist orientation, but is explicitly post-capitalist: degrowth-adjacent, anti-dystopian, DIY and commons-oriented (Reina-Rozo 2021). The resource keeps this texture ('fairness and respect for everyone', 'everyone's opinion matters… everyone shares responsibility'), building only from what nature and the wreck provide, and emphasising community law-making and anti-bullying in the pupil mind-maps. This is closer to the first discourse of creativity (critical, place-responsive, leaning towards anti-consumerism) than to the marketing variant.

Ultimately, however, Solarpunk Island offers branding solutions for ecological problems. The evidence for this is that the community-formation sequence is structured as a brand-build: name the community, design a flag (with explicit design-agency criteria: 'memorable and recognisable', 'simple shapes and symbols', 'maximum of four complementary colours'), create an anthem, hold a flag-raising ceremony, and finally pitch (twice: a 5-min pitch to other 'tribes', with reflection framed as ensuring 'your

pitch captures the heart of your journey'). The scheme of work's learning objective is literally 'To understand what branding is and how this gives identity'.

Trash Isles reappears here as the worked exemplar of 'branding': pupils review the materials and are asked 'Would you want to be a citizen of Trash Isles?' and 'Could they have done something more to improve their cause?' The second question is an opening toward critique, an improvement on Creative Bravery's uncritical 'this is really brave', but the campaign is still introduced as the model for how you 'raise awareness'.

The deeper criticism lies in the pedagogical weakness of the resource, which amounts to an aestheticisation and depoliticisation of environmental education (cf. Dunlop and Rushton 2022). Solarpunk Island forecloses subjectification, because it resolves every civic and ecological question into a design output to be pitched. The resource may aim to encourage imaginative responses to political and environmental challenges, but it channels that imagining through the conventions of branding. This is what jagodzinski (2013) describes as the capturing of imagination and desire itself from the earliest age.

Further, Solarpunk Island is a *terra nullius*. Survival is individualised and apolitical: water, food and shelter problems are solved through ingenuity and craft. There are no structural impediments. The island is uninhabited and resource-rich; there are no scarcity politics, no prior inhabitants, and no colonial history. This is a notable erasure given the Galápagos/Ecuador setting and the shipwreck-on-an-empty-island trope (the scheme of work notes Ecuador 'gained control' of the islands in 1832 but does not elaborate on this). The resource imagines ecological futures while reproducing the settler grammar of the unpeopled frontier. From a decolonising perspective (Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy 2014; cf. Calderón 2014), this is clearly problematic.

Politically, Solarpunk Island's anti-capitalist orientation is aestheticised into a 'vibe'. The slide 'Solarpunk Vibe—sum it up in three words' then feeds those three words into Generative AI image tools (Padlet) to render the habitat. So a degrowth, DIY, anti-consumption movement is compressed to a three-word aesthetic prompt for an AI image generator: the mechanism by which a politics becomes a style.

As such, the critique of these resources holds. Solarpunk Island and the integration of Daydream Believers into the mainstream are strong illustrations of the core thesis that one discourse of creativity is being displaced by another. The default grammar in these resources for identity, values and communication is the grammar of branding and the pitch. Even where the content is authentically ecological and the politics communitarian, the form through which pupils are asked to express community and imagine 'otherwise' is taken from marketing – the same displacement at work in Creative Bravery and #GetOnWithIt, but here in a subtler and more deeply embedded form. I will now consider Daydream Believers' institutionalisation into the core of Scottish education.

From free resources to national credentials, 2020–2026

If the analysis ended in 2020, scepticism would be warranted: it could well be argued that these are free resource packs, however problematic, that teachers could simply ignore. The issue is peripheral: the resource is produced by an organisation at the margins of a system whose environmental education centre lies elsewhere. However, the most significant empirical development since the first wave of this research is

that this marginality has not persisted. Between 2020 and 2026, Daydream Believers underwent a transformation that I characterise as institutionalisation through credentialing, documented here from the organisation's own materials and from public records.

At the 2020 capture, the organisation offered thirty-eight free resources and one 'Creativity Skills' module for schools and colleges. In 2026, it now offers two national qualifications: a Creative Thinking qualification at SCQF levels 5 and 6, each worth 24 credit points and credit-rated by Edinburgh Napier University. It also offers a Creative Innovation qualification at the same levels, developed in partnership with the same university, whose launch challenge, 'Caring Innovators', was created with NHS Scotland and supported by a technology consultancy. Daydream Believers reports that around seventy Scottish secondary schools now deliver its qualifications; that the qualifications are recognised in admissions by several Scottish universities, with one programme leader describing the level 6 award as possibly the strongest preparation an applicant could offer; and that its assessment framework comprises five learning outcomes: Research, Concepts, Fail & Fix, Communicate, and Evaluation. The organisation's resources have meanwhile been translated for use in the Netherlands, showcased at a co-created festival in Sydney, and recognised by international awards for digital and AI-supported creative education. Its public framing now explicitly grounds its skills claims in the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs reports, citing the 2020 report's ranking of problem-solving and critical thinking among the top skills for 2025 and the 2023 report's placing of creative thinking as the second priority for skills training to 2027 (Daydream Believers n.d.; World Economic Forum 2023).

Three features of this trajectory deserve emphasis. The first is the migration of assessment criteria. The learning outcomes of the national qualifications (research, concepts, fail &fix, communicate, evaluate) reproduce the design-agency process as an assessment rubric. What the 2020 resources modelled informally (the brief, the ideation, the pitch), the qualifications now certify. The marketing genre has acquired the durability of credential infrastructure: it is inscribed in assessment standards, university credit-rating agreements and school timetables, none of which are easily abandoned. This is the institutional answer to the question of whether such resources could 'be easily removed or ignored'. The Trash Isles website could be, and was, abandoned by its makers; the qualification built around studying such campaigns cannot be, by its adopters. Content such as the Trash Isles may be ephemeral, but this assessment infrastructure is durable.

The second feature is endorsement within the national curriculum review. During the Curriculum Improvement Cycle's public engagement on creativity in 2025, guest contributions published through the review's official channel featured practitioners describing their delivery of Daydream Believers courses. This included Solarpunk Island as an exemplification of 'creativity as a core competency', with links to the consultancy's website. The CIC ran its creativity and Learning for Sustainability engagement strands in parallel in the same period. The significance is not that Education Scotland has formally adopted the consultancy's model; the refreshed framework is not due until 2028. The significance is that, at the definitional moment when 'creativity' is being specified for inscription in the national framework, the worked examples circulating through the review's own communications are supplied by a commercial

consultancy whose construction of creativity derives from the advertising and design industries. A construct that entered the system in 2020 as downloadable lesson plans is, by 2025, providing the national review's imagery of what creative learning looks like.

The third feature is what the institutionalisation reveals about accountability. At no point in this trajectory was a public decision taken that Scottish environmental learning, or Scottish creativity education, should be shaped by the genre conventions of the advertising industry. Each step was locally reasonable: a college credit-rates an innovative qualification; a school adopts an engaging course; a curriculum review showcases positive practice. The cumulative effect is that a commercial construction of creativity acquired quasi-official standing during a national definitional moment. No single decision appears to have produced this outcome; rather, it emerged through a series of locally rational decisions distributed across multiple organisations. This is the characteristic accountability structure of network governance in education (Ball and Junemann 2012; Hogan and Thompson 2021; Williamson 2021).

The transnational network

The Scottish case does not stand alone, and its network context, examined at length in the first wave of this research, can be summarised briefly. One of the creativity experts associated with Daydream Believers also delivers professional development for Creative Schools, a programme run in Western Australian schools by the cultural organisation FORM. This programme is designed around the 'five habits' model of creativity developed by Bill Lucas and colleagues (Creative Schools n.d.). FORM's private funders have included BHP, the world's largest mining company by market value (FORM 2019), identified among the ninety companies responsible for two-thirds of industrial-era greenhouse gas emissions (Heede 2014) and responsible for the 2020 destruction of the 46,000-year-old Aboriginal sacred sites at Juukan Gorge (Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia 2020); its board has included former BHP and tobacco-industry executives. This configuration is petro-pedagogy in Tannock's (2020) precise sense—fossil fuel interests funding school programming—but it operates through creativity rather than through energy or science education, and has thereby escaped the scrutiny that branded industry teaching materials increasingly attract. The same network of personnel connects to the English assessment-reform advocacy group Rethinking Assessment, whose advisory membership spans creativity consultants, former Conservative government ministers and the heads of elite private schools, and—through Lucas's role in developing the PISA Creative Thinking assessment (Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer 2013)—to the global metrics through which creative education is increasingly governed.

I draw two limited conclusions from this network, deferring fuller analysis of the Western Australian case to future work. First, the construction of creativity circulating in Scottish classrooms is not locally idiosyncratic: it is the local expression of a transnational advocacy network whose nodes include programmes directly funded by extractive industry. Second, the network embodies, at its Australian node, a stark illustration of the typology developed earlier: a mining corporation funding 'creative learning' in the state where it was responsible for the destruction of the 46,000-year-old Aboriginal sacred sites at Juukan Gorge. The juxtaposition of corporate-sponsored

creativity programming with the destruction of Indigenous creative heritage is not a rhetorical flourish; it is a precise statement of which discourse of creativity is resourced, and at whose expense.

Discussion: purposes, displacement and accountability

What, finally, is wrong with any of this? After all, it may be objected that the Daydream Believers resources are free, professionally made and popular; teachers choose them; students may well enjoy them and gain credentials which have currency (although further research is needed to evaluate this); the consultancy is transparent about its partners; and nothing analysed here involves concealment or bad faith. The case of FORM in Western Australia is more obviously objectionable, but it could be countered that the funding sources and directors' backgrounds do not have a direct relevance if the creative programme's content and pedagogical approaches are sound. The objections fail, I argue, on three grounds, and specifying them precisely is more useful than gesturing at corporate influence in general.

The first ground concerns educational purposes. Biesta (2009) distinguishes three functions of education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. He warns against the collapse of educational decision-making into whatever can be measured and credentialed. The marketing construction of creativity performs exactly this collapse within environmental education. It qualifies (demonstrably, through SCQF credits and university recognition); it socialises students into the norms, genres and evaluative habits of the persuasion industries; and it forecloses subjectification. For Biesta (2009), subjectification involves the emergence of students as subjects who can judge, resist and begin something new. This cannot happen in the commercial discourse of creativity because the genre itself has no grammar for refusing the brief. Environmental education conceived under LfS's official aims of critical citizenship and ecological literacy requires precisely the capacities the genre forecloses: the ability to ask whether the campaign form, the consumption model and the corporate self-presentation should be accepted at all. The displacement is therefore not of content but of purpose. Students working through Creative Bravery or Solarpunk Island are not learning false facts about the ocean; they are learning, through assessed practice, that the appropriate response to ecological catastrophe is a distinctive idea, well pitched. This finding extends, into the domain of creativity, a displacement that the petro-pedagogy and ecopedagogy literatures have traced elsewhere: the reframing of environmental problems as matters of individual behaviour, consumption and communication rather than of structure and politics (Eaton and Day 2020; Petel 2020; Tannock 2020). Where that literature has examined fossil-fuel-sponsored science resources and behavioural 'nudge' pedagogies, the present case shows the same depoliticising move accomplished through the apparently benign vehicle of creative skills.

The second ground concerns the differential resourcing of the discourse of creativity. The typology established that critical, arts-based and Indigenous creativities in environmental education exist and are pedagogically rich; the findings show which discourse has acquired qualifications, credit-rating, international distribution and standing within the national curriculum review. When the CIC specifies creativity as a core competency in the refreshed framework, the worked examples, the assessment models already

operating in seventy schools and the consultancy infrastructure ready to support delivery will all belong to one discourse. Frameworks are written from available materials. Unless the CIC review deliberately resources alternatives (and the parallel positioning of LfS within the same review provides an obvious vehicle) commercial creativity is likely to be inscribed as the national default, with environmental themes retained as motivating content. That outcome would not be anyone's intention, but would be an artefact of which discourse of creativity could afford to be present at the definitional moment.

The third ground concerns accountability. The problem is not secrecy: the funding relationships, partnerships and board memberships documented in this article were assembled from public (or, at least, available on request) sources. The problem is salience at the point of educational delivery. Disclosure in an annual report, a partners webpage or a credit-rating agreement is not accountability in the classroom: the teacher downloading a resource, the student studying Lacoste's 'bravery' before its advertising was banned as greenwash, and the parent of a pupil enrolled in a creativity qualification are not informed of the provenance of the construct being taught and assessed, or of the interests its exemplars serve. Democratic accountability for the curriculum presumes that those affected can see who is shaping it; network governance distributes that shaping across so many locally reasonable decisions that no point of visibility exists (Ball and Junemann 2012; Mockler et al. 2021). Policy responses should therefore distinguish three forms of corporate presence requiring different treatment: direct funding of programmes by environmentally implicated corporations (the Western Australian configuration); the incorporation of corporate marketing materials into educational resources without funding relationships (the Trash Isles configuration); and ideological convergence, in which initiatives adopt commercial constructions of creativity without any corporate involvement at all. The third is the least visible, yet it is the most consequential.

Conclusion

This article has traced how a construction of creativity derived from marketing and advertising entered Scottish environmental education as free lesson resources, was institutionalised in national qualifications, and arrived inside the communications of the national curriculum review at the moment when creativity is being specified for the next curriculum framework. Against the reading that such materials are problematic but ultimately peripheral, I have shown that the periphery has moved towards the centre through credentialing. Creativity is not one thing, but is multivocal: creativity in environmental education has critical, arts-based, Indigenous and activist traditions, yet one commercially sponsored discourse of creativity is becoming dominant.

For environmental educators, the implication is practical. The resources analysed here can be used as objects of exactly the critical analysis they omit. A classroom that studied the Trash Isles alongside its abandonment, or Lacoste's 'Save Our Species' alongside the ASA's ruling, would be conducting critical environmental education, and would be enacting, rather than merely receiving, Learning for Sustainability. For those involved in Scotland's curriculum review, the implication is definitional: the specification of creativity as a core competency is a choice among discourses of creativity, and it should be made in the open, with the alternatives resourced and at

the table. And for research on the commercialisation of education, the Scottish case adds a finding about durability: corporate content is ephemeral, but the consultancy infrastructure that imports it, especially once it is credentialed, endures. Observing who and what gets credentialed and institutionalised, rather than only what gets sponsored, may be where the field's attention is now needed.

Notes

1. Daydream Believers: https://daydreambelievers.co.uk/our-impact/[Accessed: 01/06/2026].
2. D&AD Creative Bravery, Lesson No 2: Creative Bravery: https://daydreambelievers.co.uk/resources/creative-bravery [Accessed: 01/06/2026].

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