Creative Engagement

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Abstract
This presentation explores the role of creative thinking in helping people engage in meaningful activity, both individually and in their communities. It incorporates research and applications about creativity from the fields of psychology, education, business, art and beyond during the last 60 years. Several connections are made between creativity, technology and new media. Finally, some possible future impacts are suggested, building on the "creative engagement" ideas.

Keywords
Creativity, engagement, creative process, models

ACM Classification Keywords
J4. Computer applications: Social and behavioral sciences.

Definitions
Creativity: Creativity here refers to a way of thinking and a way of seeing, and one's ability to learn to think and see in new ways. It includes a process of thinking and related skills that people can learn to apply in deliberate ways. Frequently, researchers focus on the "4 Ps of Creativity": the creative person, creative process, creative product, and creative press (or environment) [11]. German artist Joseph Beuys often said: "Everyone is an artist" [6]. He meant that every

human being has the capacity to create – in all disciplines, not just art. He viewed all of life as creative; and all people's thinking, feeling and willing as creative acts that form all aspects of society. Beuys referred to this process as "social sculpture" [3].

Engagement: Engagement includes not only participation, but also being emotionally involved in an experience or activity in which one finds meaning, happiness or flow. Engagement can apply to not only the process of creating or enjoying art, but to work in general, to leisure activity, and to other areas of life.

Historical Context

Research into creativity particularly began following J. P. Guilford's 1950 Presidential Address [5] to the American Psychological Association in which he argued that creativity should be studied. He pointed out the lack of research on creativity in the psychology field, which tended to focus on pathology and "fixing." However, he did acknowledge earlier related work in other fields such as philosophy, education, art, etc.

Guilford began to develop tools and processes for identifying and measuring creative thinking abilities. One of his key contributions to the creativity field was his work related to the brain's capacity to think divergently and how that capacity can be applied to creative thinking and problem solving.

Following Guilford's address, researchers such as E. Paul Torrance in education and psychology [12], Alex Osborn in business and education [8], Sidney Parnes in psychology [10] and many others started to develop the Creative Problem Solving Process and other tools (such as Brainstorming [8]) that can be applied to identify creative strengths and enhance the creative process.

From Creative Engagement to Community Engagement

We are all born with creative capacity. Watching a child at play shows what creative engagement can look like. Indeed, it was Pablo Picasso who reminded us that: "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up."

Creative Thinking in Problem Solving

Both personal experience and research demonstrate that creativity tends to get stamped out as people move through their educational and work experiences. As a result, it requires deliberate attention and encouragement to develop and apply these abilities in most people. Tools such as the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) process provide a structured way for children and adults to intentionally produce more creative ideas, responses and solutions.

The Creative Problem Solving Process consists of three stages (find problems, solving problems and implementing solutions) and eight distinct steps (problem finding, fact finding, problem defining, idea finding, evaluating and selecting, action planning, gaining acceptance, and taking action) [1].

Creative Thinking in Possibility Generating

Unfortunately, "Creative Problem Solving" is a bit of a misnomer, given that the process can be – and is – used for much more than solving problems and challenges. It is also used to teach creative thinking skills, such as divergent thinking, convergent thinking and deferring judgment. Such thinking can be applied

to explore possibilities, future scenarios, new creations and more.

Creative Thinking in Community Building
For this reason, perhaps CPS^2 is a better model to consider: Creative Problem Solving and Creative Possibility Seeking. For it is in this combination that this process is applied everyday with youth in schools, as well as with adults in professional settings.

Ultimately, creativity relates to core aspects of our selves as human beings. The challenge is how to (re)discover that part of ourselves and deliberately apply it and express it in our personal and professional lives. When we do, we can combine our creativity and purpose with other people's creative purposes to enhance the well-being and common good of our communities.

Blogger Mark Kuznicki described this kind of community as a place

> where every individual has the power and ability to discover his or her creative passions, and to resolve their multi-dimensional identities into a coherent whole through their interaction in open community with others. The holy grail is the unification of one's practical needs with one's hopes, dreams and aspirations. It is a universal desire, and it is the most powerful force in human civilization. [7]

Creative Engagement, Technology and New Media

One definition of creativity is that it is a function of knowledge, imagination and evaluation.

> Without knowledge, imagination cannot be productive. Without imaginative manipulation, abundant knowledge cannot help us live in a world of change. And without the ability to synthesize, evaluate and develop our ideas, we achieve no effective creativity. [9]

These categories provide areas in which technology and new media can serve as a means and/or an end. For instance:

- Knowledge can be generated through the use of technology to learn and discover new things – while one's existing knowledge can be applied with imagination and evaluation to produce new media and technology as creative products.
- Technological tools can be used to help prime the imagination in the search for new connections and new ideas – while, as we all know, people's imaginations are continually creating new forms of technology and new media. The constant challenge of innovation asks of us: How might we push our imagination even further – using knowledge, imagination, evaluation *and* technology – to come up with novel and useful products?
- Evaluation is one area that may be enhanced greatly from the integration of new media into the creative process. Involving many, many more people in the evaluation process – through the use of technology and new media – can radically

> change the final outcome of a creative task. In the case of new products, the judgments, opinions and feedback of "the many" look very different than the evaluation of 10 or 20 internal people in a conference room or office. Technology can also shorten and speed up the evaluation process.

Another area where technology has been widely developed to support Creative Problem Solving is in software designed to provoke and prompt new insights in the idea-generation process. For instance, software exists that randomly offers words or images of seemingly unrelated content in which to look for connections to the challenge at hand. However, there does not seem to be great use of technology in other aspects of Creative Problem Solving, such as defining the problem, evaluating alternatives, and planning for implementation. This is an area for further growth.

Two possible ways to define the "problem" of the creativity and technology are:

- How might we apply the creative process to produce technology and new media?
- How might we use technology and new media to enhance the creative process?

Likely, of course, both challenges are relevant.

Impact

Overall, the greater goal of my creativity work is how to use creativity to engage people in meaningful activity – whether in learning, work, community, aging, politics or whatever. Therefore, my approach to using technology and new media is as a means, if and when appropriate, to enhance and achieve this goal.

Creative engagement matters because it's not enough to say that "creativity is important." It's not enough to say that "we value innovation and creativity." It's not enough to say "we need to attract the 'creative class' [4] to our organizations and cities."

What's needed is an approach to *deliberately* unleash, harness and apply individuals' creative thinking skills – to engage their creativity *and* their communities.

Educator Berenice Bleedorn suggests:

> This period of radical change in personal, social, and world affairs challenges the human mind. New ideas and new ways of thinking are more critical to human society and to our institutions than they have ever been. Isn't it logical that everyone who is concerned with the quality of life on planet Earth would want creative and other complex thinking processes to be specifically taught to everyone …? [2]

Processes, tools and experiences exist for accomplishing this. We must choose to use them in our personal lives, organizations and communities. The result can be people who know and use their strengths, express their creativity in purposeful activity, and create the communities in which they want to live.

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