

Moving Beyond the **ART** of Creative Thinking

by Nick Nissley and Chuck Palus

Nick Nissley, Ed.D., is assistant professor of Organization Learning and Development at the University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is a pioneer in the field of arts-based learning in organizations.

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Traditionally, the creativity literature has described the creative process as creative ‘thinking,’ implicitly asserting that creativity is framed by a logico-rational way of knowing. Yet, many practitioners assert that there is an ‘art of creative thinking’; implicitly asserting that creative ‘thinking’ may be understood as ‘artful’—framed by an ‘aesthetic way of knowing.’ Such metaphorical references to the ‘art of creative thinking’ are becoming dated, as practitioners are *actually* engaging with artful creation as a way of facilitating ‘creative thinking’ in organizations.

In his research, Nissley (2002) has named this phenomenon, of actually engaging with artful creation, as ‘arts-based learning.’ Essentially, arts-based learning offers a creative alternative to the dominant, traditional, logico-rational approach to organizational learning. Arts-based learning is facilitated by art forms (e.g., visual art, music, drama, literature, etc.) that mediate the learning process. We are no longer merely referring to ‘the art of’ metaphor when seeking to understand organizational life—or, more specifically, creativity in organizations. Today, we are beginning to see jazz ensembles and symphonies mediating leadership development; blues music mediating organization development; as well as visual art, drama, and literature—all serving to creatively broaden our understanding of organizational life (e.g., problem solving, conflict resolution, leadership and teamwork development, etc.), and creativity itself.

The Theory Behind the Practice

Theoretically, ‘aesthetic epistemology’ and ‘presentational knowing’ offer the creativity practitioner insight to the emerging practice and phenomenon of using arts-based learning to facilitate the creative process in organizations. Here, we briefly describe these theories.

Aesthetic Epistemology—Strati (1996) describes the history of aesthetic epistemology and the development of organizational aesthetics, noting that the German philosopher, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten developed the field of inquiry we refer to as aesthetics, during the mid-18th century, in response to the emphasis on rationality and intellectual knowledge extending back to Descartes. Strati notes:

Baumgarten conceived of aesthetics as one of the two components of the theory of knowledge or gnoseology: on the one hand, logic, which investigates intellectual knowledge; on the other, aesthetics, as both

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President's Column
by Tara G. Coste

VALUING Creativity

Do you ever feel isolated in your understanding that creativity is an essential part of the human spirit, rather than a mystical gift some higher power has selectively bestowed on a chosen few?

That it is something we all possess as children and can learn to harness with impressive effects as adults? Professionals who promote creativity are often called upon to define what deliberate creativity is and what it can do for an individual, a group, an organization. Unfortunately, after over 50 years of research specifically focused on creative output, the field of creativity remains remarkably vague in its definition of what exactly creativity is and what the outcomes of it are.

Sure, as creative individuals you and I instinctively know the worth of the creative process, but can we describe this value effectively for others? Perhaps the difficulty lies in the very nature of the beast. For something to be creative, it must be something new, something that has not been fully defined before. Due to this novelty, we can perhaps only identify it when the process has been completed and the product is recognized as an innovative contribution.

To make matters more complicated, the products of the creative process look very different in different walks of life. To an outsider, what similarity does a creative classroom technique have to the path a successful research and development team takes? What does an extraordinary painting have in common with an amazing new car design? Although we may understand that they are cut from the same foundational cloth, many people do not.

Simply put, creativity is the process by which something new and useful comes into being. However, this typical definition does not give us anywhere near the specificity required to explain that creativity can make the difference between dismal failure and stellar success. The relatively weak wording of this traditional description does not give us nearly the power we need to persuade the ambivalent to see the importance of nurturing creative energy in all fields of endeavor.

So how do we give the creative process its proper due? We must use words that advance understanding that *creativity* and *innovation* are not merely empty buzzwords that we like to have associated with our names, that the creative process is an extremely powerful tool that can propel our thinking into new realms of ability. Selling others on the importance of enhancing their creative potential requires effectively detailing the better ideas, better problem solving, and better products they will gain from this effort. Without communicating the specific benefits that will speak to the audience we are addressing, we are unlikely to close the sale.

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the theory of the beautiful and of the arts, which investigate sense knowledge (p. 216).

According to Strati (1999), aesthetics in organizational life “concerns a form of human knowledge; and specifically the knowledge yielded by the perceptive faculties” (p. 2). He argues “that it is possible to gain aesthetic, rather than logico-rational, understanding of organizational life” (p. 7).

Presentational Knowing—Heron & Reason (2001) define four ways of knowing, moving beyond the logico-rational orthodoxy; and they acknowledge the aesthetic way of knowing that Strati (1999) asserts, naming it “presentational knowing.” The four different ways of knowing that they identify, are: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical. They explain them as follows.

Experiential knowing is through direct face-to-face encounter with person, place or thing; it is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy or resonance. *Presentational knowing* emerges from experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expressing meaning and significance through drawing on expressive forms of imagery through movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story, drama, and so on. *Propositional knowing* ‘about’ something, is knowing through ideas and theories, expressed in informative statements. *Practical knowing* is knowing ‘how to’ do something and is expressed in a skill, knack or competence (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 183).

Simply put, art (presentational knowing) and logic (propositional knowing) provide different ways of understanding and expressing ourselves and our notions of creativity. This is a challenge to the dominant, intellectual forms of knowledge about ‘creative thinking.’ Palus & Horth (1996) go as far as asserting the following.

In attempting to make sense of their challenges, organizations have become overly reliant on rational-analytical competencies, such as deductive reasoning employed within a set of accepted paradigms, numeric criteria and formulae, compartmentalizing problems, and standard operating procedures. Rational-analytical competencies are obviously valuable but, we argue, insufficient by themselves. The full repertoire of competencies for effective co-inquiry includes what we call *aesthetic competencies*.

Examples of Arts-Based Learning

Here we offer two brief examples of arts-based learning—specifically, showing how the craft of artful creation can facilitate creative ‘thinking’ in organizations.

First, Marjory Parker (1990) describes an application of visual arts-based learning in the workplace. She focuses on a process of arts-based learning of the organization’s vision and values, at Europe’s largest producer of aluminum, Norway’s Hydro Aluminium Karmøy Fabrikker. In *Creating Shared Vision: The Story of a Pioneer Approach to Organizational Revitalization*, Parker, the organizational consultant who helped them through the strategic visioning process, describes why pictures really are worth a thousand words. The final vision statement was co-created by nearly every employee, over a two-year period. It was not a piece of writing at all, but an extraordinary mural of a flourishing garden, in which every plant and element embodied rich metaphorical

meaning. This is an example of art (and, more specifically, visual images) being used as a mediate—to creatively facilitate articulation of the organization’s vision.

Second, Visual Explorer (VE) is a tool, created at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), consisting of over 200 printed images, designed to help people in organizations make sense of complex challenges. The use of visual media results in a process called mediated dialogue (Palus & Drath, 2001). Visual Explorer works like this: each person in the group selects one (or more) images that they think represents some important aspect of a complex challenge they face. Each person then takes a turn at putting his or her image(s) in the middle of the dialogue. The first person (named “Pat” let’s say) starts by describing the image itself—the details, the whole scene, what’s clear in it, what’s mysterious. Then Pat describes her challenges and how it relates to the image(s) she chose. Each person in the group then reflects on Pat’s image(s) and challenge—first reflecting on the image itself, and then relating it to the challenge, using language such as “What I am noticing about that image and your challenge is...” or “If that were my image...” When all have had a chance to speak, Pat has the last word, “taking back” her image, challenge, and interpretations from the group. Then, each person in the group takes the same steps as described for Pat. From this foundation, the group is encouraged to continue the dialogue on their own terms, looking for patterns and building shared meaning.

Conclusion

Traditionally, the creativity literature has described the creative process as creative ‘thinking,’ implicitly asserting that creativity is framed by a logico-rational way of knowing. Yet, many practitioners assert that there is an ‘art of’ creative thinking, implicitly asserting that creative thinking may be framed by an ‘aesthetic way of knowing.’ In this article, we describe how creativity practitioners are engaging with aesthetic epistemology—calling upon a combination of presentational knowing (the imaginal mode of knowing in which a literacy of images resides) and propositional knowing (the conceptual mode of knowing expressed in intellectual statements). We describe how practitioners are *actually* engaging with artful creations and arts-based learning as a way of facilitating creative process in organizations—moving beyond the ‘art of creative thinking.’ We assert that artful creations and arts-based learning can help organizational members show-and-tell their ideas, or engage in presentational *and* propositional knowing.

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Reviewed by Lynne Krause
ACA Executive Director

An Education Track for Creativity and Other Quality Thinking Processes

by Berenice Bleedorn



... book could easily be called
a Roadmap for Creativity and Other
Quality Thinking Processes.
For in fact that is what this work is,
a roadmap for anyone
involved in the multidisciplinary
field of creativity.

Dr. Berenice Bleedorn, educational entrepreneur extraordinaire, has once again focused her insights on the human brain/mind as one of the most powerful resources available for managing a society in transition. Her examination of the relationship between the institution of education and the real world of business and our global community is layered with the wisdom, uncommon forcefulness, knowing and urgency that we have come to expect in her work. These are the words I used to describe her new book, *An Education Track for Creativity and Other Quality Thinking Processes*, when I had the opportunity to preview several chapters of the book pre-publication. To say I was eagerly awaiting publication to savor more examples of her insight and reflections on the developmental state of human minds is an understatement. Her words flow from a voice rooted with an inner passion that transcends the written page urging not just educators but everyone of us to recognize the real threat to our planetary survival if we refuse to acknowledge the crucial role of teaching creative thinking processes in our educational institutions.

The one minor criticism I have with the book is its title, which leads one to believe that the target audience is educators. Nothing could be further from the truth. Dr. Bleedorn's book could easily be called a Roadmap for Creativity and Other Quality Thinking Processes. For in fact that is what this work is, a roadmap for anyone involved in the multidisciplinary field of creativity. Dr. Bleedorn fuses her thirty-five year history of working in creativity programs and institutes teaching, lecturing and writing with her educational entrepreneurship in advocating the need for stronger relationships between the institution of education and the "real world" of business. Upping the stakes, she moves beyond the business world and makes the connection to our global society, "the ideals of peace and justice in the world, the quality of life, and maybe even the survival of our planetary home depend upon the evolution of the mind to higher, more complex levels."

This is precisely where Bleedorn targets educational institutions; after all they are the training grounds of our future leaders and citizens. In her previous book, *The Creative Force in Education, Business and Beyond: an Urgent Message*, she aptly cites that "education is in the preferred position to raise the human consciousness."

In this book she reiterates that position and

makes even more definitive the arguments on the right of every individual to think at the highest possible levels. Just how do we provide that right to people? We start with our schools providing the deliberate teaching of thinking processes, an integration of both traditional and creative thinking processes, that is described as "learning to think; thinking to learn." There is no question we live in turbulent times and it is because of our global environmental uncertainties that providing climates for nurturing creative thinking processes must be our nation's highest priority. Bleedorn elaborates "the discovery and practice of creative talents for flexible thinking are particularly relevant for a diverse, pluralistic global society that is searching for unity in cultural and ideological differences... Injustice and ignorance grow when human thinking processes are fixed on a single, preconditioned habit of mind based on superficial labels and prejudice. The recognition and practice of flexible thinking talents encourage the art of thinking at a level of paradox that, if readily available, would result in more understanding and less fighting. Love of homeland is not opposite, but is compatible with planetary citizenship. Genuine solidarity and respect for differences can coexist."

The book is divided into twelve chapters reflecting the broad scope of Dr. Bleedorn's interests in the application of creativity. At the base of her treatise is Guilford's Model of the Structure of Intellect. She focuses on the processes as suggested by the products dimension of his model to highlight creative and other higher order thinking processes including systematic thinking, global dimensionalities, futuristic and visionary thinking and the need for transformational leadership. The chapters are not presented sequentially so you can read them in any order you wish. Bleedorn's reasoning for this presentation format is clear, "they represent a somewhat random reminder of the broad diversity of human experience that depends upon the thinking and collective wisdom of everyone involved." Chapter 12 is a must-read for educators, a how-to for teachers to immediately begin the process of integrating creative thinking processes into any curricula. Chapter 10 is a must-read for anyone involved in training and development focusing on the creative business of educational entrepreneurship, "initiating and pro-

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ACA United States Chapters and Foreign Affiliates

Local and regional chapters of the American Creativity Association offer you a way to become involved in fulfilling the association’s mission to promote a creative society. Chapters offer a convenient, on-going, low-cost way to network with other people interested in creativity and innovation, attend stimulating programs that broaden and deepen your knowledge of creative thinking approaches and innovation practices, and participate in events to help your community become more creative.

Foreign affiliates are creativity associations representing other countries around the world that share the ACA vision of building a better world through creative thinking. ACA and its foreign partners are joined together in a federation to promote creativity and innovation worldwide through sharing ideas and practices.

We encourage you to look below and find a chapter near you or in your country and get involved. Don’t find your area or country listed? Then why not start a chapter or create your nation’s own creativity association?

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... start with our schools providing the deliberate teaching of thinking processes, an integration of both traditional and creative thinking processes, that is described as “learning to think; thinking to learn.”

moting the development of a work force prepared for leadership in the dynamic, demanding, complex, global, interrelated world of business.” Dr. Bleedorn is giving creativity training practitioners a heads-up. Are you ready for the challenge? “Corporations report plans to increase the teaching of problem solving, creative thinking, teamwork, and other basic skills in training development programs. Managers and administrators will not have to wait for on-the-job training and development in creative thinking and

problem solving if educational entrepreneurs recognize and seize opportunities to provide leadership in the design and introduction of formal courses in thinking up, down and sideways.”

This book, along with Dr. Bleedorn’s previous book, is required reading for those of us who profess to be advocates for teaching creative thinking processes. Bleedorn points out “both education and business sit on the

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Innovating Your Opportunities

Creative Problem Solving for the Second 50 Years

(From a forthcoming revision of *Visionizing*)
by Sidney J. Parnes



Sidney J. Parnes, Ph.D.

is Professor Emeritus of Creative Studies at Buffalo State College and Founding Director of the Center for Studies in Creativity. Dr. Parnes is a member of the ACA Advisory Board. His three most current books are *Visionizing*, *Source Book for Creative Problem-Solving*, and *OPTIMIZE the Magic of Your Mind*.

In her previous book, *The Creative Force in Education, Business and Beyond: an Urgent Message*, she aptly cites that “education is in the preferred position to raise the human consciousness.”

WHAT IS THE CPS OBJECTIVE?

- Creating
- Purposeful
- Satisfying
- Innovations

Results CPS Seeks: INNOVATION!

Bringing about:

- New and Accepted—Action, Behavior, Product, Process, Service

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- Re-Viewing What IS—Fact-Finding
- Re-Defining What MIGHT BE — Opportunity-Finding
- Re-Structuring What MIGHT BE — Idea-Finding
- Re-Solving What SHOULD BE — Solution-Finding
- Re-Assuring What CAN PRESENTLY BE — Acceptance-Finding
- ACTING What WILL BE...the NEW IS — Committing, accomplishing

I find the more different ways I describe the CPS process, the more diverse people I reach. So I now offer one more way that may reach many new people who think knowledge is the be-all and end-all in discussing creativity:

- Mining Knowledge Fact-Finding
- Managing Knowledge Opportunity-Finding
- Producing Knowledge Idea-Finding
- Judging Knowledge Solution-Finding
- Implementing Knowledge Acceptance-Finding

In order to emphasize Managing Knowledge as Opportunity-Finding, I stress this stage as discovering possibilities and opportunities in WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS by phrasing many open-ended, divergent, opportunity questions—“In What Ways Might I” followed by a verb suggesting ACTION.

“In What Ways Might I” (IWWMI) questions elicit alternatives, options—ways, not a single way.

We ask “Might” not “Can” or “Should” thus we express hopes, desires, wishes. The “I”—or “We”—emphasizes OUR responsibility, not “theirs” or someone else’s. IWWMI followed by a verb leads us toward ACTION.

Missing data may suggest Opportunity Pathways such as “IWWMI find out?”

The major re-emphasis in the five steps I have referred to above is the change in step 2 “Problem-Finding” to the new emphasis, “OPPORTUNITY-FINDING.” This makes a major difference in the way people focus on their challenges. This emphasis will be provided throughout the revision of VISIONIZING.

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threshold of new realities. One of the components of the paradigm shift is the activation of the unlimited thinking potential that is so often denied and used. A major challenge faces both business and educational institutions: to free up human resources from the organizational constraints that prevent their full participation.” Another gem to add to this precious mix of wisdom and insight is the book’s preface by Dr. Piet Muller, a creative professional leader and philosopher from South Africa. It contains a fascinating discourse on the evolution of education and its relationship to work.

It seems to me that Dr. Bleedorn sees our

“spaceship earth” with the same eyes and wonder as astronaut Edgar Mitchell did when he referred to the epiphany of seeing earth as “the Little Blue Marble” when he stood on the moon and looked back realizing our connectedness to a much larger universe. She not only sees but articulates the journey as well. “Society is increasingly aware of the need for a major transition. We have changed everything we do except the way we think....The freedom to think at the highest possible level is an essential part of every human’s intellectual growth and maybe the ultimate destiny of the human race.”

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Marilyn Schoeman Dow, chair of the Awards Committee,
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This award is presented to an individual whose life and career are characterized by extraordinary creative accomplishments that have substantially contributed to the betterment of society. Such accomplishments may be in the form of inventions, discoveries, works or performances of art, a body of research, educational curricula or practices, professional service, or service to the community in general.

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This award is presented to an individual who has made an outstanding creative contribution to the field of creativity or to society in general. Such contribution may take the form of an invention, discovery, work or performance of art, research study, educational program, or special service to the community.

David Tanner Champion of Creativity Award

This award is presented to an individual who has been an outstanding proponent of creativity and has put forth extraordinary effort in the service of creativity and innovation as evidenced by their vigorous advocacy for the development and support of programs or environments that support and encourage creativity; and /or their courage and persistence as an advocate or sponsor of a valuable concept, service or product.

ACA Special Service Award

This award is presented to an individual who has given generously of their time, energy, or resources in support of the mission and values of the American Creativity Association.

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- David Tanner Champion of Creativity
- ACA Special Achievement Award
- ACA Special Service

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Nominee: _____

Achievement: (attach narrative—up to 250 words describing why this person is being nominated.)

Information for contacting nominee:

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September 21-24, 2003
 Radisson Hotel and Conference
 Center Minneapolis
 Minneapolis, MN

The American Creativity Association (ACA) is the national organization of professionals in the field of creativity. Through its programs and services, it offers individuals and organizations opportunities for learning, professional development and networking. It is dedicated to enhancing the use of creativity throughout our society for the betterment of the human condition.

ACA is the virtual academy that leaders and professionals in the field of creativity turn to as the primary source of ideas and information dealing with creativity and where initiates to the field can begin their journey of discovery. To achieve its vision, the ACA provides: 1) forums to present, test and exchange ideas; 2) opportunities for networking and fellowship; 3) clearing-house services for information on the state of the art in creativity research and practice; and 4) means to link theorists and practitioners.

Membership (Check One)

- Individual \$ 75
 - Two Year Membership 125
 - Three Year Membership 170
- Student (full-time) 40
- Business & Institutional 125
- Business & Institutional 300
5 member pkg—5 copies of **FOCUS** and other mailings and 5 ACA discounts at conferences. Includes a listing on ACA web page with link to your site.
- Business & Institutional 750
12 member pkg—12 copies of **FOCUS** and other mailings and 12 ACA discounts at conferences. Includes a listing on ACA web page with link to your site.

Add 10% for Canada/Mexico,
20% for other countries for international postage

Societies (Check One)

- Business and Industry
- Communications and the Arts
- Education and Training
- Science and Technology

Please print clearly in black

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 City _____ State _____
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 Phone: (____) _____
 Fax: (____) _____
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Method of payment (U.S. Dollars)

- Check (payable to ACA)
- AMEX VISA MC Discover
- Card # _____
- Exp. date _____
- Name as it appears on card _____

Signature _____

Received member information from _____

- I do not want to receive mailings from other organizations.

Return payment to:

ACA, P.O. Box 5856, Philadelphia, PA 19128
 Fax: 502.254.5746 • E-mail: ACAinformation@aol.com

*William “Bud” Wurtz, chair of the Elections Committee,
 requests nominees for the ACA Board of Directors
 from our ACA membership.*

INFORMATION on applying to be a candidate for a
 January 2004-December 2005 two-year board term —

Board expectations:

- participate in monthly board of directors conference calls
- attend annual ACA conference
- recruit new members to the association
- contribute articles to **FOCUS** and/or encourage others to contribute
- be actively involved in association initiatives

Two ways to nominate:

1. Nominate a colleague/friend by mailing, faxing, or e-mailing the ACA office with name and contact information.
2. Nominate yourself by sending the information requested.

To be considered as a candidate for the board of directors, please send the following:

- a letter stating your willingness to be considered as a candidate
- brief background information to be used in the ballot for selected candidates (100 words or less)
- the talents and expertise that you are willing to share to make ACA a stronger organization

Excerpts from ACA Bylaws . . .

Candidates for the ACA Board of Directors will be elected by the membership in the fall/winter to serve a two-year term. Members of the board oversee the organization, set policy, and give necessary direction to ensure that recommendations from committees and member input are carried out. The board meets annually at the conference. There is no compensation for the members of the board of directors.

mail to: ACA Elections
 PO Box 5856
 Philadelphia, PA 19128
 fax to: 502.254.5746
 e-mail to: ACAexdir@aol.com

due by
August 15, 2003