

Throughout most of the Creative Thinking course, my natural inclination was to consider new insights and possibilities as the some of the “discoveries” which I had been hoping to find when I entered the CCT program. At this point as I reflect back on the past few months, I am more inclined to refer to these as “anti-discoveries” instead. In many ways, the process of experiencing a deeper attention to Creative Thinking has actually been a destructive process instead of a constructive one. Of course, I mean that in the most positive way! I can see now that my previous understanding of Creative Thinking involved a collection of ideas, insights, and assumptions, and throughout the course, my main change in understanding has actually not been *more* ideas, insights, and assumptions, but instead a process of removing the assumptions about Creative Thinking. For example, my mental model of Creative Thinking a few months ago perceived it as a “tool”, a methodology or way of solving a problem that could be used or not used on a given occasion. Now, I see it as something much more dependent on many factors, a true component of a “systems thinking” approach, something which cannot be isolated from a collective whole and therefore worthy of many more inquiries than I might have allowed before. In addition to this type of change in thought, I will describe how the conclusions of certain research that our class has discussed has encouraged me to take a much broader view of Creative Thinking, and how all of these kinds of ideas encourage me to consider a number of “next” pressing questions.

One particular analog that occupies my mind in a forceful way is the suggestion that creativity flourishes when the environment encourages it. Csikszentmihalyi spoke of the balance between the individual and society and the idea that even though creative output may be perceived relative to a domain, it is the culture of a society that can greatly influence that domain. I’ve considered that our culture may recognize, promote, and encourage creativity, at least within certain domains, but the

limitations on this may still be present because many of our broad cultural conditions are not set up in the best possible way. Work life is perhaps more competitive rather than collaborative, possibly discouraging the sharing of ideas and methods. Also, quantitative production is rewarded and stability is sought, particularly with regard to economic and political conditions.

In "Creativity Across Cultures", Lubart mentions the differences of western and eastern creativity appreciation and recognition in which the differences between observable outcomes become more pronounced. Several of Shekerjian's subjects in "Uncommon Genius" refer to the kinds of freedom that they were allowed during childhood, particularly related to encouragement from parents/family life. I'm not sure how this might work, but what if one next phase of creativity research focused especially on setting up the conditions of the creative society, without any particular bias toward finding any creative results or even assuming that creativity would become "better" at all? In Barton Kunstler's book, "The Hothouse Effect", he spends some time describing how certain central areas of Renaissance movement, for example, met the conditions required for aforementioned effect - they supported new ideas, encouraged freedom, invited strangeness, and allowed for all of the other means that allowed that period and its influence to have long-lasting and far-reaching effects. Ultimately, isn't a culture composed of a group of individuals and a social contract between them? Perhaps in the United States at least, there needs to be more than just a group of people who desire a cultural Renaissance. Perhaps there is a need to have a more organized effort to encourage this, through education, promotion and marketing, even propaganda? The possibilities and challenges are both overwhelming and thrilling.

As mentioned in my first paragraph, deconstructing my own creative assumptions also leads me to an idea that deconstructing the barriers to creativity is perhaps even more important than “creating creativity”! Davis lists a number of these barriers such as traditional norms, personal habits, inflexible educational structures, cultural blocks, and resource limitations. This seems like a clear and discrete list, but as I more deeply consider each one, I am more discouraged about systematically removing each one by itself, as these influences are woven into the fabric of all of life! Personal development, cultural structure, workforce development, national economy, national politics, all levels of the educational system! These all lead me to feel a tremendous need to explore removing barriers to creativity. It may be too early for me to understand why, but this feels like a most significant area of concern that will affect my future life. My focus has been the field of adult education for some time now, but the Creative Thinking course has inspired me to look to other domains and fields for defining creativity, and this may broaden my view of my “life’s work”. As a result of these observations, I have become more aware of the creative life of children, which I must admit has been interesting to me in the past but to which I gave little attention. Now, these observations have clarified a (maybe controversial?) belief that I have owned and allow me to express it in words.

I believe that **all** of us are born *perfect*, in the creative sense. The so-called “tabula rasa” is not so much of a blank slate that needs filling in order to function correctly, but instead it is a *model* for how much potential our creative minds really have. Humans have an inclination to fill the slate so that it feels like it is being used to its full potential. What if we really should be leaving vast areas of this slate blank on purpose? What if we fill the areas of the slate so that we won’t be *childish*, but we fail to notice when we are also filling those areas that allow us to be *child-like*?

Consider some of the language we have used to describe how creativity can arise? Encourage play, embrace the ridiculous, use our imagination without judgment, resist authority and rules. Are not all of these things the characteristics that we attribute to children? Not only that, but don't adults have a way of actively placing those barriers that ultimately prevent all of these qualities? To be clear, I don't think it's necessary to forego the elements of our social contract that allow us to maintain safe and productive communities. It just seems that we must spend much more effort removing the barriers to a creative society - at the level of nations and communities and individuals. As adults, don't we spend much effort filling the slate, filling time, filling our lives? As time has passed, I've been excited about opportunities to encourage creative thinking within the realm of my own adult education environments and even the possibility of forming my own creativity teaching program. At the same time, I recognize this very fundamental need of *removing* the barriers and returning our culture to one which allows some areas of our communal slate to remain blank. When discussing his approach to sculpting his famous David, Michelangelo supposed was asked how he knew which parts to carve out. He replied that of course David was already inside the block of marble, he only needed to remove the parts which were not David.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I'm left with fewer answers and more questions, although I am encouraged that this means there are many exciting times to come. I still need to further explore how creativity can be taught. Given what I stated above, is the teaching of creativity simply a matter of reminding us about something that we once knew, something about how our child-like mind works?

Despite the presence of all of these barriers, creativity still seems to shine through in plenty of cases - might it be better to think of creative development not as a *problem to solve* but instead an existing and ongoing *process in which we should join*? If technology really allows us to communicate, interact, and understand each other better remotely, will that produce a healthier, happier, and more secure world? What will be missed by removing the tactile interactions with our environments? What outlets are there for adult learners who want to restore their child-like creativity? - rather than enrolling in "Creativity Training" specifically targeted to the work world, are there any ways to people to understand the same concepts that we have discussed in the Creative Thinking class that are accessible, affordable, and which do not seek to enhance the financial success of the individual? Finally, if we are to develop into a more creative society, how can we not only help people to develop their own creativity but also do so in a way that encourages collaboration toward resolving more serious world issues?

Through my improv. theater training, one important concept continues to ring true. As a student in that process, I was exposed to a renewal of understanding of my *fear*. Rather than consider it a hurdle to be conquered, I was encouraged to "follow the fear" - to actively seek that which was most frightening to me. Instinctively, my own creativity is always that which is just beyond the edge of my fear. I'm not concerned about actually reaching it but rather in reaching for it.