

Clearing the Clutter:
Organizing and Decorating using Creative Problem Solving

by

Lori M. Kiefer

An abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

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Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

Abstract of project

A major component of the Masters program in Creative Studies is Creative Problem Solving (CPS). This project was conducted using CPS. I needed to organize and redecorate my house, but did not know where to start. There was so much clutter that it seemed like an overwhelming task. Using Creative Problem Solving gave me a process to use in order to complete the steps needed to organize and redecorate five rooms in our house. I used the components of CPS and incorporated appropriate tools to use throughout the stages. I have included my process as well as what I have learned throughout that process. As a result of this project, I was able to create an organized and inviting home, which fosters creativity.

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Dates of Approval:

Cynthia Burnett
Lecturer

Lori M. Kiefer
Student

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Section One

Project Description

I am finally home. I can breathe a deep sigh of relief. After an exhausting day of work and an hour-long commute, I'm ready to get into my house and relax. I'm ready to put the stresses of the day behind me and spend time with my family. But instead I feel overwhelmed, as I look around at the clutter that is consuming my house. Who can feel organized and in control of their life when the place they come home to is unorganized and seemingly dull at the same time? I need a change.

The purpose of my project was to organize and redecorate the rooms of my house using the Creative Problem Solving process. In essence, I wanted to transform my house, and this could be quite an overwhelming challenge. Creative Problem Solving provided me the necessary tools and techniques to allow me to foster my creativity, while also providing a step-by-step process to keep the overall project on task. My husband and I gathered data, generated ideas, and put the plans into action. I focused on creating organization in each room, adding color, and creating a creativity center in each room. I wanted the daily reminder to foster my creativity, even after the project and my Masters degree program, were complete.

Rationale for project

The Creative Problem Solving process is essential when working on a challenge. I identified my challenge as: How might I create more organization and foster creativity in the spaces of our home? We have lived in our house for over three years. We have decorated to an extent, but have only painted two rooms- our bedroom and our daughter's nursery. I felt that organizing and redecorating would inspire new life and creativity in

our home. The rooms that were on display to visitors lived their own plain existence. Sure, there might have been a box of junk here or there, but for the most part, what people saw didn't send them running for hand sanitizer and a shower. Still they held no character. They were decorated but they didn't have a unified theme. The rooms *not* made readily accessible to guests held their own dirty secrets- literally.

With the addition of our daughter to our family, we accumulated more and more tangible items (aka "stuff") without the addition of extra space for this stuff. My husband and I both work full-time as teachers and have been trying to complete our Masters degrees. This left little time for the upkeep of our house. We have not had a major organizing overhaul since we moved in. Trying to be organized is a big part of my personality and I felt that our home was too cluttered to feel at ease. Reorganizing each room gave me a sense of peace and I had hoped would in turn, allow me to foster creativity in myself, as well as in my husband and daughter. I wanted a home that would nurture my daughter's creativity from an early age.

The CPS process was used throughout each step of this transformation- the organizing, the decorating, the creation of creativity centers (such as a place for my daughter to create projects or a place dedicated for my meditation), and also to control the costs of the project.

Section Two

Pertinent Literature

This section discusses the literature I used throughout this project and how it influenced me in doing the project.

There are many definitions of creativity. Some think that it cannot be defined by a single definition at all. I used this quote on what creativity is, to guide me in my project:

We describe creativity as making and communicating meaningful new connections or outcomes. Creativity helps people think and experience in varied ways and from different points of view. Of course, the new connections and possibilities must ultimately result in something of value for the individual, group, organization or society. (Isaksen, et. al., 1998, p. 4)

Mel Rhodes (1961) described creativity with the “Four Ps.” The 4 Ps of creativity are person, press (or environment), process and product. For the purpose of this project, I focused primarily on the process and press. The majority of the literature I utilized, came from books and articles dealing with the Creative Problem Solving process. I used books such as Vehar, Miller, & Firestien’s (2001) *Creativity unbound*, and Isaksen, Dorval & Treffinger’s (1998) *Toolbox for creative problem solving*, (among others) as references for information on the CPS process and on the tools to use throughout the process.

This project relied heavily on the use of the Creative Problem Solving process. CPS was developed in the 1950s (Osborn, 1953) and further developed by Sidney Parnes (1959, 1992), Ruth Noller (1977), Roger Firestien (1982, 1983, 2001), Donald Treffinger (1983, 1994, 1995, 2000), Scott Isaksen (1994, 2000), and most recently, by Gerard Puccio, Mary Murdock and Marie Mance (2007).

I used Vehar, Miller & Firestien (2001) throughout my project to show the Creative Problem Solving process. “CPS is simply a description of the stages people go through when they take on a problem for which they don’t know the solution” (Vehar, et. al., 2001, p. 8). I had a problem with the organization and look of my house. I knew I had

to fix the problem but did not how to go about starting. I needed to try to solve my challenge through the CPS stages. The components of CPS are: “exploring the challenge, generating ideas and preparing for action” (Vehar, et. al., 2001, p. 65). I went through each stage and its components for this project. The stages for exploring the challenge are: identifying the goal, wish or challenge, gathering data, and clarifying the problem. The idea generating component is exactly as it says. The stages for preparing for action are: selecting and strengthening solutions and planning for action (Vehar, et. al., 2001, p.66). You can start at any stage in this process, however I went in that order for the purpose of this project. Each stage incorporates “divergent thinking and convergent thinking” (Osborn, 1953) and this is what is called the “dynamic balance” (Vehar, et. al., 2001, p. 21). Although both divergence and convergence are needed in the CPS process, I focused more on divergence for this project.

Another driving force behind the project was creating an environment that would foster creativity. This is the “P” Rhodes referred to as press. I needed to know exactly what that environment would entail. For this, I used my individual profile results from the Productivity Environmental Preference Survey (www.collegesuccess1.com/PEPS.htm) that I had taken in CRS 580- Creativity Assessment. I wanted to incorporate my preferences into the rooms that I would be doing creative work, or just work in general. This included my bedroom and the upstairs room in which I had my scrapbooking workstation and computer desk. In the re-decorating of these spaces, I included my preference for brighter light (I added an additional lamp to each room) and preference for tactile and kinesthetic (I have out my Labyrinth and my “mindfulness items” in the creativity center in my bedroom and my scrapbooking material for the upstairs room).

Additionally, I read Amabile's (1983) research on how climate affects a person's motivation. Her research "has revealed that climate does affect a person's motivation for a given task; and motivation is the key to creative performance" (as cited in Vehar, et al., 2001, p.16). Understanding the research done on motivation was essential to completing this project. Transforming five rooms was a massive undertaking and I needed to be motivated to finish the project in the allotted amount of time. I found that I had intrinsic motivation keeping me going in doing this project. According to Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe (1994) "The major elements of intrinsic motivation are self-determination, competence, task involvement, curiosity, enjoyment and interest" (p. 950). After I began the physical work, I discovered that these elements were what motivated me to see this project to the end.

Isaksen, et al. (1998) described the characteristics of an environment which fosters creativity. There are some I wanted to focus on in the "doing process" of the transformation and characteristics I wanted to make sure the rooms portrayed after the transformation. The most important characteristic for both the *doing* process and *after* the transformation, would encompass is "having a relaxed and playful environment" (Isaksen, et al., 1998, p. 12). I did not feel relaxed when I came home into the dull and unorganized house. I felt the contrary- tension. The environment itself did not give this feeling of being "relaxed and playful." In order to create this atmosphere, I knew we had to have this type of environment in the *process* of creating it as well. My husband and I made sure that we did keep it playful and relaxed. There was so much to be done but we always managed to have fun while doing the "work." This project itself has been enjoyable, which I attribute to this environment. We also had plenty of time to "discuss

ideas and a diversity of perspectives” which Isaksen, et al. (1998) described as another characteristic.

Ekvall (1996) described climate as “an attribute of the organization, a conglomerate of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors which characterizes life in the organization” (p. 105). This description applied to what goes on in the home organization as well. Ekvall concluded there are ten dimensions of organizational climate. I would like to say, that I considered each dimension in re-decorating each room, but some were more important to me than others- for our “organization.” They are all important in fostering a creative climate, but for me, I wanted to focus on creating a climate that would encourage “challenge, dynamism, playfulness, and idea time” (Ekvall, 1996, pp. 107-108).

For further reading on Creative Problem Solving and developing a creative environment, the following books and articles offer a plethora of useful information.

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Section Three

Process Plan

This section explains the process I took in completing the project. It goes through the specific steps I took in organizing and redecorating each of the five rooms.

After the initial research and concept paper was approved (see Appendix L), I began work on the actual project. I had taken pictures of the current state of each of the rooms I wished to transform. I began with an initial sweep of each room- eliminating items I knew had to go. I made a throw-out pile and a donate pile, and these built up in my dining room. This initial purge really helped get things going and provided motivation to keep going. It was making me feel good about the decision I had made to do this project in the first place.

I started using CPS with the idea generation of the creativity centers for each room. I decided that I wanted to create these centers on my own- it would give the project more meaning. My original thoughts were that the creativity centers would be in each room; and an item, collection of items or just the way certain things were arranged in the room, would constitute it being a “creativity center.” I didn't necessarily want anything too cliché as the center, so I decided to explore the options for these using the iTool “Vision Walk” (Bissett, 2008). I wanted these ideas to come to me through the deliberate use of my intuition rather than the result of a brainstorming session. I set my intention as: What are some things that I should include in my creativity centers that would remind me or encourage the use of creativity within family members?” I really wanted to keep my

daughter Elena in mind while creating these centers. As I was doing my “Vision Walk,” I stopped to journal ideas that were coming to me. When I returned home, I wrote down the rooms I was working with, and matched up my ideas to the room in which I thought it would work best.

Before getting into the actual Creative Problem Solving process with the transformation of the rooms, I had to teach my husband the basics, as he was also going to be key player throughout this project. I needed him on board and feeling comfortable with using CPS. I presented the CPS process to Jon- how it was used and why it works. I taught him the divergent and convergent rules to follow throughout the process, and introduced tools that we would be using. He's heard me talk so much about this “CPS stuff” throughout my time in the Creative Studies program, that he was coming into the project with some helpful knowledge of CPS.

I decided to change the order of the timeline. Instead of having idea generation for all the rooms at one time (that would've probably turned into a really long session), I decided we would have a session for each room and then do the actual work for that room before having our next idea generation session for the following room. This would keep us from feeling “idea overload” and kept us fresh with ideas when we got to the next CPS session.

The first room we started with was our bedroom. This was one of the few rooms which already had color. We had painted it about a year and a half after moving in, and until we had done Elena's nursery before she was born, it was the only room we had truly made “our own.” However, these days it was looking a bit too “worn in.” Actually, it was looking somewhat disastrous. The closet area with the laundry organizer was taking over

the room- at least a big corner of it. The laundry organizer was not living up to its name- or I was not making the best use of it. The closet had become a space to collect junk, even if the original intent wasn't to keep the junk there permanently. It was not the room I went into at night feeling relaxed and ready to wind down into a peaceful state. Because this was my husband's room as well, we did a CPS diverging session together for ideas for the organization of this room. We used "Classic Brainstorming" (Osborn, 1953) for diverging and converged on our most novel and useful ideas using "Highlighting" (Firestien & Treffinger, 1983). Some improvements put into action as a result were: the purchase of a new Queen sized bed, the purchase of a new four-drawer chest (for more clothes storage), the purchase of a canvas over-the-door storage hanger (this would also let us get rid of a plastic drawer shelf housed in the closet, freeing up space to hang pants that were hanging on the laundry organizer), moving the laundry organizer upstairs, a new quilt for the bed (one we had already but would fit much better in this room), the purchase of a new area rug, and the creation of the creativity center on the new dresser chest. (See Appendix A for flipchart)

The creativity center for this room was a meditation center for me, created on the dresser next to my bed. Mission accomplished- room #1.

The next room to tackle was the bathroom. From the start, we knew this wouldn't be as significant a transformation as the other rooms. However, we only have one bathroom and it is by no means spacious. Therefore, I did need to include it in my project to at least organize. We began by doing a CPS session using "Classic Brainstorming" (Osborn, 1953) to create priorities/criteria for the completion of the bathroom. Those divergent ideas we liked included: making more actual physical space, painting the walls,

organization of closet, new bathroom accessories, the creation of a creativity center and redoing the tile floor. After choosing a few of these, we did a “Paired Comparison Analysis” (Isaksen & Treffinger, 1985) rank of these priorities. Even though this is a beneficial tool in a bigger group setting, the results really got some helpful dialogue going- and it gave me a chance to practice with a tool that I hadn't had much experience with.

First we decided to organize and better use the existing space of the closet, and then add extra color without painting. I bought a door hanger for our towels- hanging them on the closet door handle was messy and took up too much walking space. This 50 cent mounted-on-the-door organizer that I scored from a garage sale was an easy solution to that problem.

Then I went shopping for some accent towels and bath mat. I knew I wanted a darker sage color, but I had no idea just how many shades of sage there were. So my search included quite a few more stores than I had originally planned on. Finally, after searching through the typical places like Bed, Bath and Beyond, and JCPenney home department, I actually ended up finding the perfect color at Family Dollar. I purchased a bath mat, a new rug and two accent towels, for the low price of \$12.50. This touch of color brought the room together, with the existing yellow painted walls and existing accessories. Finally we bought a new toilet seat from Home Depot to finish off the accents.

The next task was to organize the closet space. First I needed to purge- a lot. This step itself brought about big changes. I went back to Family Dollar (I'm discovering I love this store for bargains) and found an organizational storage piece that would fit

perfectly in the closet. Including this eliminated the clutter while actually making better use of the space, almost making more usable space in the closet.

The floor was dirty and had a layer of hairspray. Two of the tiles were cracked and the grout was chipped and coming out in pieces. Jon's project was to re-grout the tile floor and clean off the tiles. This completed the bathroom's makeover. Mission accomplished- room #2.

The back addition is where we spend most of our time. This room combines our family room and our informal dining room. It was a massive undertaking to organize and re-do this area. It houses Elena's toy box and we wanted to keep it in there but also add to what was "hers" in the room. Therefore the creativity center was dedicated to fostering her creativity. This included her toybox- play is a huge part of imagination and creativity- her rocking chair, and a new canvas sling bookshelf- the kind that you find in the children's section of a library. This bookshelf was probably the best purchase we made throughout this whole process. Elena is reading so much more and I account this to the fact that her books are now more visible and accessible. The bookshelf also has two drawers where we have stored her crayons, paper, coloring books and animal masks we have made as a side project to encourage imaginative play. I love the fun we are having with the stuff in this creativity center. It has definitely served the purpose of my original intention for the centers.

To diverge ideas for the transformation of this room, we used "Stick 'em up brainstorming" (Isaksen, 1988). I chose this over "Classic brainstorming" (Osborn, 1953) because I knew we would both have many ideas for this space. And we did (see Appendix A for flipchart). The ideas we chose for the transformation were new color (paint it), new

furniture, new arrangement, new dining table, and new rugs. We also came up with ideas that we would still like to consider if we come into extra funds in the future (such as having a wooden mantel built for our gas fireplace).

For the color, we went to Valu and took just about every cardstock paint palette they had in the store. We went through and “Highlighted” (Firestien & Treffinger, 1983) our favorite. From that, we took the ones we both “hit” (three of them) and ranked them by “Card Sort.” We converged on a deep red color called Brick Fleck. It was actually very similar to the color we had in our bedroom.

Next was the issue of furniture. Originally we had converged on the idea of getting a sectional sofa. I spent a few hours on the internet researching ideas. We measured the room and headed off to Value City Furniture, from which my online research showed was in our price range. We spent hours, more than I care to recall at this point, measuring and discussing all options. We even kept reminding ourselves to defer judgment at first glance and look at each piece of furniture, opening up our search to regular, sofas, loveseats and chairs as well. In the end this process served us well and we love the sofa we ended up buying. But there were numerous challenges with size of the pieces, space of the room, and the availability of the furniture we wanted. We used the “Pluses, Potentials, and Concerns” tool (Firestien, Foucar-Szocki & Shephard, 1982) when making our final decision. We loved everything about the sofa but were concerned that it wasn’t the best use of space- it was the biggest sofa we had looked at but that didn’t translate to the largest physical *seating* area. We wanted to do this PPC to make sure it was still the right decision- and it was.

We wanted a new room arrangement, but the room didn’t initially lend itself to

multiple options. We couldn't make the room physically bigger, nor change the location of the sliding glass door or Pergo floor. We talked this one out, and did a lot of measuring. We didn't want to over analyze a situation that had fixed limitations that we couldn't change and had no choice but to work with the layout of the existing space.

For the finishing touch of cleanliness and freshness to the room, we steam-cleaned the carpet and bought new area rugs for the dining area. Mission accomplished- room #3.

Our upstairs is divided into two rooms. Both areas were in desperate need of organization. I wanted to divide the rooms by themes. I decided to begin with the smaller area at the top of the stairs, and designated it the "laundry room." It would not be a laundry room in the truest sense, housing our washer and dryer, but rather a room to keep and organize laundry waiting to go into the washer. This wouldn't need much redecorating, but *would* require organization. After deliberation, I put the following into action: moving the laundry organizer that was in our bedroom up to this area; along with one of the wicker laundry baskets, the towel drying rack and Jon's dresser. From this, the room was completely designated for the purpose of laundry and clothing storage. Mission accomplished- room # 4.

My daughter, Elena, needed some organization in her bedroom. We wanted to keep the color and theme already decorating the room. For this, I diverged on my own. I generated a list of ideas and then used "Hits" (Firestien & Treffinger, 1983) to converge on the ideas I wanted to put into action. I decided to change the furniture layout and reorganize. I got rid of her changing table, and moved the crib, shelving and glider. This gave the room a fresh look. I also cleaned up her existing stuff with the purchase of organizers. Mission accomplished- room #5.

The final room was the upstairs bedroom. This room needed a lot of work, in both organizing and decorating. It had become a dumping ground for clothes and we needed to make it into usable space again. To generate ideas, we used “Classic Brainstorming (Osborn, 1953)” (see Appendix A for flipchart). To converge on the most workable ideas we used “Hits” (Firestien & Treffinger, 1983) again. Some of the ideas we wanted to put into action were: painting the walls, adding a library area, putting the computer desk into that room, creating a creativity and play area for Elena, and creating a scrapbooking center for me. We cleaned out the piles of clothes and then I went to work on painting. To choose the color, we used “Card Sort” with color swatches I took from Home Depot. After painting, we put the furniture back in the room after much deliberation about the layout. We created the library center, scrapbooking center, work station computer desk and Elena’s creativity corner. Mission accomplished- room #6.

The following is a breakdown of the steps I had taken to organize and redecorate my house:

Timeline

Date	Action	Time spent (in hours)
September 1- 16	Research for bibliography	6 hours
September 5- 18	Type up concept paper	6 hours
September 1	Take pictures of current condition of rooms	½ hour
September 19	Gather data for budget/expenses	½ hour
September 19	Make a Plan of Action- timeline in which rooms are to be completed	½ hour
September 19	Generate ideas for creating creativity centers	2 hours
September 19	Converge on best ideas for each room	1 hour
September 20	CPS training for Jon	1 hour
September 20	Generate ideas for bedroom (diverge)	1 hour
September 20	Converge on best ideas & sketch out plan of action	1 hour
September 26	Clean out, organize bedroom & re-decorate bedroom	9 hours
September 27	Generate ideas for bathroom (diverge)	1 hour
September 27	Clean out, organize and re-decorate bathroom	14 hours
October 2	Generate ideas for back room (diverge)	2 hours

October 2	Converge on best ideas & sketch out plan of action	1 hour
October 3-10	Clean out, organize and re-decorate back room	20 hours
October 16	Generate ideas for upstairs “laundry” room	1 hour
October 16	Converge on ideas & sketch out plan of action	1 hour
October 17	Clean out and organize “laundry” room upstairs	3 hours
October 24	Generate ideas for upstairs bedroom	2 hours
October 23	Converge on best ideas & sketch out plan of action	1 hour
October 25- November 9	Type up chapters 1-3	8 hours
November 8	Generate ideas for Elena’s bedroom	1 hour
November 8	Converge on best ideas & sketch out plan of action	1 hour
November 8	Clean out, organize & re-decorate Elena’s bedroom	3 hours
November 15	Clean out, organize & re-decorate upstairs bedroom	12 hours
November 15	Take pictures of transformation of each room	½ hour
November 20-21	Evaluate success of project	2 hours
November 21-29	Type up key learnings, results, evaluation (chapters 4-6) and make revisions.	12 hours
		Total- 114 hours

Section Four

Outcomes

This section explains the outcomes of the project. As a result of this project, I have...

- created a more organized and efficient home- making better use of the space.
- created a more colorful and inviting home, transforming room by room.
- furthered my own understanding of CPS.
- taught my husband more about the Creative Problem Solving process.
- created centers to foster my creativity as well as my husband’s and my daughter’s creativity.

As a result of this project, I have been able to change the look and feel to my house.

The rooms are now organized and I can walk into each room and feel at peace. I no

longer feel anxious looking around at the clutter and disorganization of my house. After three years, I can finally say that our house is our home. I feel that we have tailored it to our needs and preferences. We have been able to turn the drab walls into inviting space. We have added usable space through re-organization and have, in a sense, increased the area in certain rooms and made the space more efficient. Everything seems to have its place and we no longer have piles of “stuff” wasting space. Even rooms that didn’t need painting, still have a new feel and organization of the things in them.

Our bedroom

We kept the original color in the first room that we transformed- the bedroom. This room needed more organization than redecorating. I organized the closet space and added a new dresser for the clothes that had piled up in the closet, spilling out into the room. I put the laundry organizer into a different room designated for laundry and clothes storage. This opened up a lot of space and added much needed organization. To clear out some space in the closet, I bought an over-the-door-organizer to put some items that I had stored in a bulky, unsightly, plastic storage drawer in the closet.

To freshen up the decorating (appearance), I put a new quilt on the bed and bought a new area rug, which both matched better with the colors of the room.

The creativity center for this room is a special area for me. I have set up a meditation center. This included a basket with a decorated journal, a pen, affirmations from Creative Visualization (Gawain, 1982) printed on cardstock to use during meditation, a voice recorder (includes tape with Vision Walk guided meditation), and quotes/notes/ and mindfulness items for the Holistic Approaches to Creative Problem Solving course I took with Cyndi Burnett. In front of the basket, I have the labyrinth

given to me by Cyndi at the CRS 594 course closing, and a picture of my daughter, who is always inspiring me in everything I do.



The bathroom

In the bathroom, we now have a more organized closet, which was the biggest challenge for this room- and our number one priority. We were able to fix the chipping, ceramic tile floor by regrouting it, and added accent colors to change the initial appearance of the room without repainting and without breaking the bank.



The back addition

The back addition had the biggest transformation. It looks like a completely different room. We painted the walls a dark red, and despite the myth that dark colors make a room look smaller, the room now looks bigger. We have a cathedral ceiling and the contrast between the red walls and white ceiling accents the height of the ceiling. We bought a new sofa that matches better in color and changed the layout of the furniture. We were able to separate the room into two areas- the family room and the informal dining room, yet blend the rooms together in a natural way.

The creativity center for this room is dedicated to foster Elena's creativity. We bought a canvas sling bookshelf to store her books and art supplies, and have her toy box and rocking chair in the room as well.



The laundry area

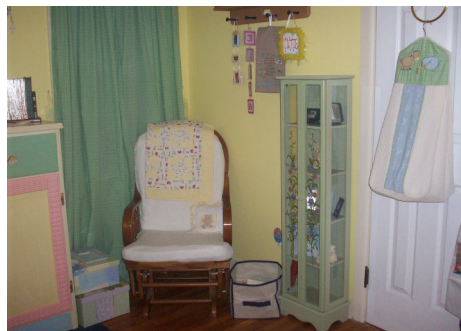
The laundry room upstairs needed organization. We needed one space designated specifically for laundry and storage. Jon already uses the closet in the room so we moved Jon's dresser into the area as well. We put the laundry organizer that was formerly

housed in our bedroom, up in this area as well. And what laundry area would be complete without the classic wicker laundry basket and ironing board?



Elena's bedroom

We wanted to keep the farm animal theme in Elena's room so we decided that it needed more organization and rearranging than redecorating. We moved the furniture around to make better use of the space. I bought another over-the-door-organizer for items that were stored in the changing table. Elena was outgrowing the changing table so we decided it was time to pack it up. I bought a shelf at the Salvation Army, painted it and hung it for more space for knick-knacks. The final purchase for this room was a plastic chain that hangs from the ceiling and has clips on it to hang her stuffed animals. This was a great way to organize her ever-expanding stuffed animal collection.



The spare bedroom

The final transformation was the guest room upstairs. This needed major work. It needed to be painted, organized and redecorated. It needed to have a unified theme. We decided almost the entire room could be dedicated to creativity. We kept the bed for guests but changed the quilt on it. We got rid of Jon's dresser, which would save a lot of mess with clothes not being strewn about. We made Elena's play and creativity center, complete with an art easel purchased at a garage sale. This serves a dual purpose as I use it for my CPS facilitation flipchart easel as well. My creativity center was my desk and area dedicated to my scrapbooking. We also put the bookshelves together to create a library effect.

The room needed organization, and to do this, we bought a filing cabinet. We efficiently stored our paperwork and moved our computer desk into the room near the filing cabinet, so all of our "work stuff" would be together in one area.



Further project ideas

We also have a list that we diverged, on things we would like to do for two other rooms in our house at a later date- the kitchen and formal dining room. This project has motivated us to keep going, eventually redoing these rooms as well.

Personal transformations

Of course, another outcome of this project was furthering my understanding of the CPS process. I was able to practice with tools and *personally* see how beneficial using CPS with challenges truly is. I was able to practice teaching and training creativity, which will help me in future facilitations. My husband also has a better understanding of what I have been learning in my Master's program and could now *himself* explain how to use CPS with a challenge.

Fostering our creativity

Our house is now organized and more efficient than it was a few months ago. It is more inviting and instills a sense of peace and creativity. We now have an environment that we could characterize with Ekvall's (1996) characteristics of a creative climate. Some rooms have an area, or center, dedicated to fostering my own creativity, as well as my husband's and my daughter's.

Section Five

Key Learnings

I have learned so much from doing this project. I was able to go in depth with the Creative Problem Solving process, and had many personal insights along the way. My key learnings consisted of:

- Deepening my understanding of the Creative Problem Solving process through personal use and through teaching it to my husband.
- Finding a connection between this transformation and my need for a change in my life.
- Finding a connection between this transformation and my own creativity.
- Creating a home that will foster creativity for years to come for myself, my husband and my daughter.
- Staying motivated to complete the entire project and to keep going with other projects.

Deepening my understanding of the process

I enjoyed teaching the CPS process to my husband, yet at the same time, being part of the process as well. It was not a situation that warranted the traditional roles of CPS, where the facilitator stays out of the content. There was a way to help facilitate the sessions and still be involved in the actual divergent and convergent processes. Being able to do this, helped me with my facilitation skills while reinforcing the recognition of the usefulness of CPS. It is easy to learn more about the process by teaching it, and it's definitely easier to teach the process to someone you are really comfortable with. I was able to make mistakes and learn from them. I used tools that I had not had much experience with, such as the Paired Comparison Analysis (Isaksen & Treffinger, 1985). It gave me the experience and confidence I needed in using it. I found that I really liked this tool and can see it being useful in a variety of situations.

I also realized that not all rooms that I wanted to change were a good fit for a traditional CPS session. As Miller, Vehar & Firestien (2001) stated, "To be a good fit for

CPS, a challenge must have ownership, motivation and require imagination” (p. 21). The laundry room upstairs only had so much that could be done with it. I used CPS to diverge on ideas, but having a “Stick em up brainstorming” session for ideas on what could be done to this area, might have been counter-productive. The room is what it is. My vision wasn’t to create this radically different room in that space. This room didn’t require too many imaginative, creative solutions. I was able to recognize that a full CPS session was not needed. This situation helped me prepare for situations that might come up with real clients that I may be considering facilitating for, where during the gathering data pre-facilitation interview, I need to be able to recognize when CPS is a good fit and when it’s not.

Even when not in one of the CPS diverging or converging sessions, we tried to think using CPS. When painting the back addition, I thought “How might I make painting this room easier and more efficient?” Just thinking this way, yielded results. I came up with the idea to put cardboard in the space under the baseboard so I wouldn’t have to take extra time to tape the floor or be extra careful when cutting in down there. I also asked to have the primer tinted gray so it wouldn’t require as many coats of the red. These ideas both paid off.

Using the CPS process is crucial to bare down the choices from the ideas and for picking the most doable option. The process allows you to dream and use your imagination, yet be realistic when choosing which ideas to put into action. This is the perfect example of the “dynamic balance” at work.

Making connections on a personal level

Throughout this project, I've had many personal insights on things such as my motivation for the project and the feelings this project has evoked. I have been feeling for some time now, that I needed a change. As I was going through this project, I was feeling that need for change being satisfied. I think I was feeling that I was settled in life- a job, a house, a daughter- but that something in the equation was off. I thought I needed the change to come in the area of my job. However, I am still at the same job yet I am now feeling more at peace with *all* of my surroundings and where I am in the journey of life. The change needed to come from where I call home.

I was really able to use my creativity with this project. I had a blank canvas to work with and I could change my house into whatever I wanted. It was always a childhood dream of mine to be an architect or interior decorator. I used to draw floor plans of houses and envisioned what these houses would be like. This project let me live out that dream and get back in touch with that creative side I utilized so much when I was younger.

Before entering this Master's program, I never considered myself to be a highly creative person. However, now looking towards the end of the tunnel, I realize that I am creative and have been able to increase my creative abilities through my education in the CPS process. I have no formal training in interior decorating and this is what my project was calling for. I wanted to prove to myself that I could do this using what I have learned throughout this program- that creativity can be transferred to other domains, with proper training.

Isaksen, et al. (1998) stated:

When you learn about your own creativity and become more deliberate in applying it, you can increase your self-confidence. Implementing new and useful outcomes that you have generated helps to do so. Understanding your own creative talents and finding ways to apply them to challenges and opportunities enhances personal health and enjoyment. (p. 6)

It has certainly helped me in my self-confidence, health and enjoyment. I was able to do what an interior decorator goes to school to be trained in, all with using CPS. I am more calm, at peace and happy with my home now.

Creating a home which fosters creativity

It's important to have a vision before you start a project like this. I knew I wanted to have a home that fostered creativity and could be characterized by Ekvall's conditions of a creative climate (1996). However, I wasn't sure that I knew how to do that. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that, while using the guidelines set forth by Ekvall, I was actually able to do incorporate creativity into my home. The rest fell into place- the transformation of the house and my own personal growth.

Motivation

I found that once I got rolling, I wanted to keep going and keep adding projects. I was excited to see how each room would turn out and that is what in part, motivated me to keep going. Then, once I saw great results in one room, that was motivation to go on to the next room. Motivation is crucial. As Csikszentmihalyi (1999) stated, "Our motives are always a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic considerations" (p. 824). I had both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to keep the project going. Despite the amount of time

and hard work it required, I *wanted* to see it through. I found that when I started a new room, I was excited and happy to do the work. I learned that this is what Csikszentmihalyi (1999) referred to as “flow of deep task involvement.” He stated, “One dimension of happiness is the flow experience, or the state of total involvement in an activity that requires complete concentration” (p. 821). I *enjoyed* doing the work and experienced “flow.” The extrinsic motivation of finishing the project for a completion of my Master’s degree played a role, but there was certainly more intrinsic considerations in my motivation. I learned that I was able to think more freely and creatively due to my intrinsic motivation, when I wasn’t taking into account the pressure of the extrinsic elements.

Section Six

Conclusion

I am finally home. I can breathe a deep sigh of relief. After an exhausting day of work and an hour-long commute, I’m ready to get into my house and relax. I’m ready to put the stresses of the day behind me and spend time with my family. As I step inside the door and look around, I am...content. I am satisfied at what my hard work has accomplished. Our house is an inviting place to come home to, and I am at peace.

A few months ago, I set out on a journey to reorganize and redecorate my house using the Creative Problem Solving process. This project has done more than transform a house. It gave new life to what had become a seemingly dull home. I love walking into our transformed home of beautiful new colors, and seeing the results of our hard work. It is also a great feeling not to feel overwhelmed by clutter when I come home.

A big part of the Creative Studies program is Creative Problem Solving. I wanted to be sure that when I have completed my Master's degree, I had a strong knowledge and understanding of CPS. This was the perfect project for me to ensure I met that goal. I was able to take everything I have learned and use it for my own personal challenge. I can go out in the community with confidence, singing the praises of using CPS, because of my personal experiences with this project.

Upon completion of this Master's project, I see myself continuing with projects around our house using Creative Problem Solving. I still feel that our home will always be a work-in-progress. There will be future projects that will need to be done, but I am okay with that now. The initial work has begun, instead of just staying on a "wish to-do list." It has given me a great outlet to express my creativity and use the skills that I have learned in my Master's program. It inspired me to utilize my creativity in ways that I've wanted to since I was little girl. It has given me new self-confidence in my own creativity and I have been able to pass along what I have learned to my family. This is so important to me because it is something I want to take priority in my daughter's life. I want her to grow up in a creative environment and I want to always encourage her to use and foster her own creativity. Without this project, that may not have been the case. We now have designated places in our home to creativity and my daughter will be raised in this home, which will show her firsthand what can be accomplished when tapping into your creative talents.

Mission accomplished.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Flip Chart pictures

Appendix B: Before pictures of our bedroom

Appendix C: After pictures of our bedroom

Appendix D: Before pictures of bathroom

Appendix E: After pictures of bathroom

Appendix F: Before pictures of back addition

Appendix G: After pictures of back addition

Appendix H: Before pictures of Elena's bedroom

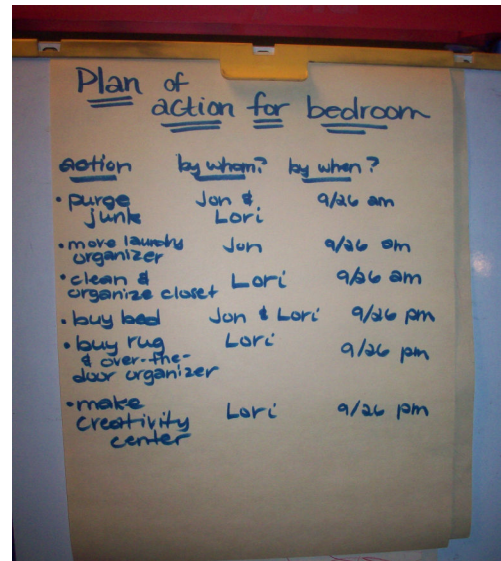
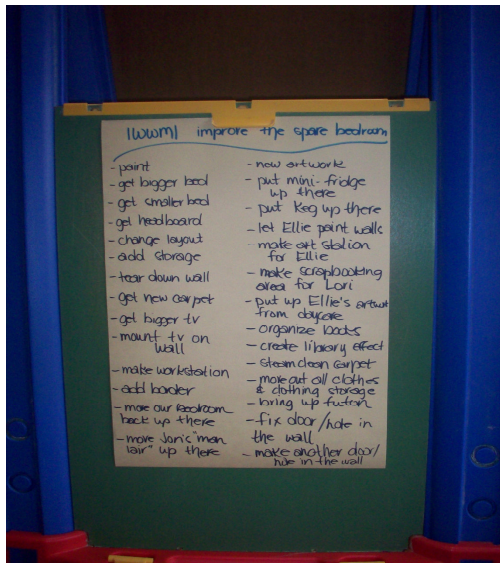
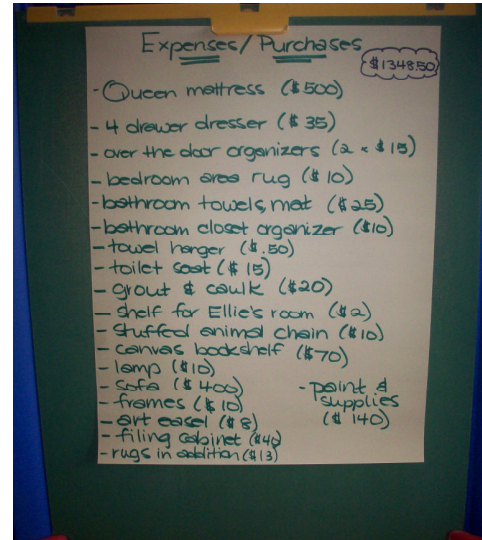
Appendix I: After pictures of Elena's bedroom

Appendix J: Before pictures of upstairs

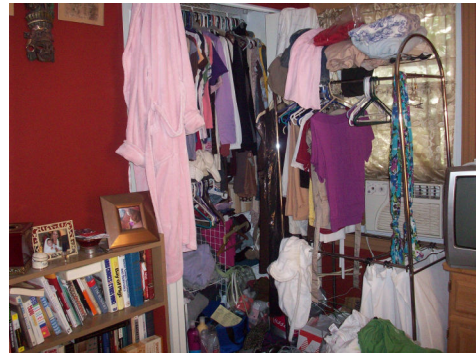
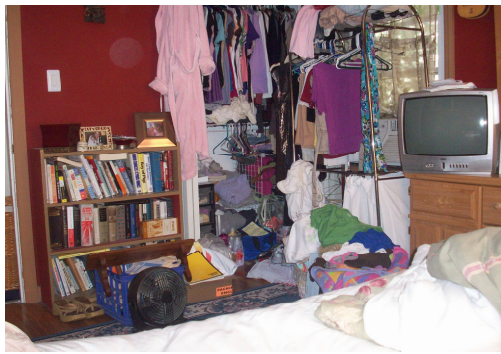
Appendix K: After pictures of upstairs

Appendix L: Concept paper

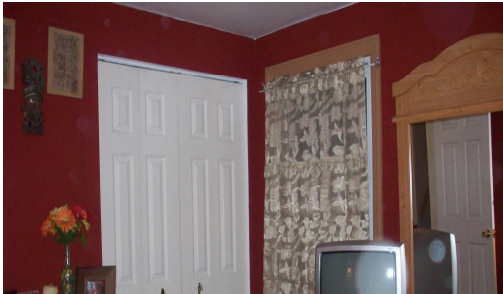
Appendix A: Flip Chart pictures



Appendix B: Before pictures of our bedroom



Appendix C: After pictures of our bedroom



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