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Experiencing the External Press: Insights Gained during the Development of a Creativity Website

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Section One: Background for the Project

This Section Includes

- Purpose
- Description of Project
- Rationale for Selection

Purpose

The purpose of my project initially is to create an online resource (e.g. website) on the subject of creativity and leadership. The expectation is that people knowledgeable in a particular area of creativity will contribute to the website much like Wikipedia. As the internet becomes a bigger part of daily life for society, my hope is that others will be able to use the information contained in this website to further their knowledge of creativity in a community-like setting.

Description of Project

I would like to create a website that will be an online encyclopedia related specifically to the field of creativity and leadership. It will have search options for people, keywords, terms and theories. On each page there will be hyperlinks to other terms, etc. in the body of the text. The final format will have a side bar with key terms that are hyperlinks to other pages as well. I have begun and will further generate more ideas and options for the website as I progress, realizing that many may not come to fruition.

My husband is a network engineer for a large organization. His background also includes web design as he owns his own small web design business. He is familiar with several types of computer languages and therefore will be my main resource and mentor in the learning of this new skill. I plan to work with him as an expert in the field and will use his expertise in web design. He will help to not only build this site but also guide me in what content should be included and in deciding when I am trying to do too much.

Rational for Selection

I am relatively knowledgeable in computer use and desktop publishing and I frequently go to the internet as a resource for any question I may have. The instant gratification I get from the internet is something that I feel I could not do without. Technology is very important to me, to my teaching and to my way of life.

I have often wanted to learn web design for personal purposes as well as for my work as a teacher. I would like to someday create an interactive website for my students that would allow them to continue their learning of art when they are not at school. I realize that I will not be able to develop the skills necessary for a website of that nature in the limited time for this project. It has taken my husband years to learn his skill, so I need to start small. So, for the purposes of this project, I will most likely only be able to design and complete a few pages of the site.

The content of this website will be of service to others interested in the field of creativity. There have been countless times that I have heard the name of a scholar or a term that I was unfamiliar with and wished there was a resource that I could use to quickly look up the information. My hope is that this website will be a tool for others interested in the field of creativity. Moreover I chose to use the community website design which allows users to contribute and interact in addition to using the information already available. This will enable the website to grow and evolve along with the field of Creativity itself.

Section Two: Literature Review

This Section Includes

- Introduction
- Skill and Task Motivation in the Literature
- External Factors that Inhibit Creativity

Introduction

There are two major obstacles for me when faced with a large project: one is the motivation factor and the other is the “mommy” factor. Before I discuss these inhibitors, I will first explain the way I work under normal circumstances.

I take pleasure in the planning and implementation of anything artistic, including my personal artwork and art lesson planning. When I think of a new idea for an artwork (usually one I will teach to my students) I want to do it right away. I will immediately go to the internet to find art exemplars and other images that I might use to introduce the lesson and I create a PowerPoint presentation or slideshow. The next step that I take is to make the artwork myself to use as my teacher product to show to students as an example. This helps me to anticipate any problems or issues that the students might have when they do it for themselves. The last step is to write the lesson plan out including objectives, learning standards, and process. This is the step I usually skip. Even though I know that the lesson plan is such an important tool for the teacher (first, because it helps to organize thoughts, and second, it ensures that important information isn't left out when presenting it to students) I still don't always do it. I know that I skip it because I simply do not have enough hours in the day to write them, but I also do not enjoy writing them. I enjoy teaching and making things.

In general, I am not a very motivated person regarding certain tasks, especially housework and writing. If I had to choose between the two, the house would be immaculate. Herein then lies the challenge when developing a creativity website and then writing a Master's Project. Where do I find the motivation? Where do I find the time? I managed to get the bones of the website up and running in a couple of days, writing about the process is the real challenge.

Skill and Task Motivation in the Literature

In 1996, Conti, Coon and Amabile wrote about the three components considered essential for the production of creative work. They were *Domain-relevant skills*, *Creativity-relevant skills* and *Task motivation*. Domain-relevant skills are those that are required to perform the task at a competent level. Creativity-relevant skills are those that contribute to creative thinking such as cognitive style, working style and divergent thinking ability. Task motivation includes attitudes and perceptions of motivation for the task.

I already have some of the domain-relevant skill for creating a website and am learning more from my husband with each task. Though this is a little challenging at times, I am persistent about getting the website to work the way I want it to, and can usually do so after several tries with little outside help. I enjoy working on computers and I think my years of doing so have given me adequate skills for this task.

As for creativity-relevant skills, I have had extensive training and experience in divergent thinking as part of the program at the International Center for Studies in Creativity that have changed the way I approach every problem that I am faced with. At the beginning of my course of study at the Center, we were shown an inverted pyramid graphic (see figure 1 in appendix C) that shows the different levels of expertise that come with training in creative problem solving (Puccio, Murdock, and Mance, 2007). At the base (the smallest section of the

pyramid) are the words *Unconsciously Unskilled* . This represents the majority of the population and illustrates the amount of skill that they have. Most people do not know they need, nor do they have the tools for creative problem solving at this level.

The next level up the pyramid has the words *Consciously Unskilled*. This level illustrates that the learner is now aware that they do not have the skills needed for creative problem solving. It is at this level where motivation becomes a factor. In order to achieve a higher level, the learner is going to have to want to gain these skills. That is where I began my real learning of the Creative Problem Solving process (CPS). After being introduced to the tools I wanted to know more and began to practice the tools being taught.

The next level of the pyramid is labeled *Consciously Skilled*. At this point, the learner has a knowledge base of CPS and consciously makes decisions to use them to solve problems.

The last level, the largest section, is labeled *Unconsciously Skilled*. This is where the learner is now mastered the CPS process and uses the tools without much thought. I notice that I am beginning to transition to this level when, without thinking, I ask questions of myself like, *How else might I do it?* or *What might be all the ways to...?* CPS is becoming a part of my lifestyle. I am always asking questions and weighing many options before I make a decision on bigger problems or challenges. This is part of the transition, but not all of it. I know that I still have to work on the

problem solving tools, and that can take a lifetime. This is my motivation; the desire to be better and to share my knowledge with others.

Task Motivation is the hardest part for me. As I stated before, if I had the choice between the two things I don't like doing (housework and writing) my house would be very clean. In this particular project of developing a website, I am more motivated to work on the website rather than to write about it because I enjoy it. The motivation for me to create something is always stronger in this way. The writing piece is more of an external motivation. I know that I have to write in order to fulfill the requirements of this project, so I do it, but it is not as enjoyable.

External Factors that Inhibit Creativity

The “mommy” factor is linked to all of the external factors that inhibit my creativity. I have three full-time jobs; Teacher, Graduate Student, and Mommy. As if one of those titles isn’t enough on its own, I have to juggle all three. Let me take you through a typical day in the life of Amy Cappuzzello.

I start my day at six o’clock in the morning, provided my three and a half year old son Jack doesn’t wake me at five. If I can pry my eyes open when the alarm sounds, I can have a whole hour to get myself ready before the children get up. My husband gets up and out of the house by 6:45 AM and I am left to get the kids ready. I dress, feed and pack lunch for Jack, and make sure the eleven-year-old, Danyal is up before I leave at 7:45. I drop Jack off at daycare by 8 o’clock and get Kayla to school by 8:10. After I get the kids to their destinations, I make the 25 minute trip to work. I teach five 45 minute periods a day, where I have to plan for five different grade levels each day plus a lunch duty. I also am a member of the Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS) team in my building and a Mentor teacher to three new Art teachers in the district. Each of these extra responsibilities requires at least one meeting a month on top of my regular duties.

Most teachers that I know spend extra time after work, and even some time at home, preparing lessons and grading student work. I have to do all of that for approximately four hundred students in my two 45

minute preparation periods during the school day because I do not have time to take the work home. At 3:35 PM I either rush out of work to pick up Jack by 4 PM from daycare or, two nights a week, I head over to class at Buffalo State until 9 PM. On those nights I have to arrange care for Jack between my friend and mother because my husband teaches a class on the same nights.

On the evenings I do go home, I pick up my son and rush home to meet the older kids' bus. By the time everyone is settled, homework is checked, chores are done, dinner is made and eaten, it is well after 6pm. There is also the matter of cleaning up dinner, which I am not supposed to have to do. My husband and I have an agreement: I cook and he and the kids clean it up. I have to cook or we don't eat. Unfortunately, the clean up usually gets put off until the next evening when I start to prepare dinner and I am the one to do it: arrangement out the window. By this point, all I want to do is sit down for a minute, but it is impossible when I am running after a three-year-old, giving him a bath and snack, throwing in a load of laundry, and cleaning up after four other people. While I do all of this, Kayla, the thirteen year old, is usually in her room listening to her radio, Danyal is either on the couch watching television with Dad or playing video games, and Hubby is on the laptop in front of the TV. When 8 o'clock rolls around I am ready to drop. Against my better judgment I put Jack in bed with me to study and watch some television myself. Of course the studying almost always gets put off as I, more often than not, fall asleep by 10 PM.

To most people, this probably seems like a typical hectic day, but when you add trying to go to graduate school and write a Master's project to the mix, there are just not enough hours in the day. It seems to me that some of those responsibilities could have been taken over by someone else. I don't think I am alone when I say "I wish my husband would help out more". I cannot express enough how much easier the last two years might have been if some of the mommy factor had been relieved.

I have spent these last eight semesters feeling angry, unappreciated and resentful, and unfortunately this has been the case for most of my young son's life. I had such great plans for being a mom. I wanted to teach my son to read and paint, take walks and play in the snow, go to the zoo and to the movies. The reality is I have to try to find the time for these things and it is a rarity because Mommy doesn't have any time to spare. I wanted to make a playroom for him in the basement, but Mommy doesn't have the time for that either. Mommy is tired and busy and so very disappointed with herself because she can't get it all done.

When I do get the motivation and time for something creative, whether school related or otherwise, it is very often short lived and either hastily done or not done at all.

Goran Ekvall named ten dimensions that define an organization's creative climate. These dimensions are: Challenge, Freedom, Idea Support, Trust & Openness, Playfulness & Humor, Debates, Conflicts, Risk-Taking, Idea Time, and Dynamism & Liveliness (1999). In Ekvall's eyes the odds are stacked against me. The climate of my daily life does not lend itself easily to

authentic creative endeavors, only to those activities that can get me and my family from one day to the next. Of the ten dimensions, the only one that works to my advantage and is readily available to me is my sense of humor. I suppose I should be grateful for this, "You have to laugh at yourself, because you'd cry your eyes out if you didn't" (Emily Saliers, *1200 Curfews*, 1995).

It was within this climate that I faced this challenge.

Section Three: Project Planning

This Section Includes

- Project Plan
- Goals

Project Plan

Usually when I am faced with a new project, I dive right in without giving much thought to its development. I don't plan out the steps I am going to take to get to the end result. In this situation however, I have been thinking about this website for quite some time. Back when I first began the Creative Studies program I wished that there was a one-stop resource for all things Creativity. I remember hearing so many names and terms in the foundations courses that I had never heard of before. Immediately after class I would go home and start researching contributors to the field of creativity and their theories on the computer. Many times, I found nothing of value. My favorite search engine would commonly find people with the same name but not the particular theorist or author I was looking for. It is frustrating when you are looking for something very specific and the search results come up with five thousand items that have nothing to do with your original search.

There are very few creativity resources out there in cyberspace, which I found surprising. Sure there are plenty of sites that associate themselves with the term "creativity", but they are usually geared toward art or music and not truly the study of Creativity. So, how then, might I remedy that?

My solution was to create a website strictly on the topic of creative process. My goal would be an easy to navigate and robust resource for individuals to use as a reference when researching the field of creativity.

I began with the question “How to design a creativity website?” (see Appendix A). From there I brainstormed options that I needed to take into consideration before beginning to develop the actual site. These options clustered into three categories: Things to include, Design items, and Questions I still need to look into. I then asked myself, “What might be all the categories for the website?” From the options generated I determined that the framework of the website was to be based on the 4 P’s: Person, Process, Product, and Press (Environment). I also knew that I wanted to have a section on terminology and a tools database.

Goals

At the onset of this project I had four primary goals.

- I will have a working website available to the general public where users can review the content and contribute their own articles.
- I will develop a logo for the website that would be recognizable to members of the creative community.
- I will contribute one or two articles to the site to begin building an information database.
- I will be able to manage the website myself with professional guidance from my husband as needed.

Section Four: Results and Outcomes

Results and Outcomes

Once the idea for the framework came together my implementer tendencies took over and I took action. At first I thought I would start from scratch and make a site that had five or more search areas and each area would have its own look and feel. For example, all of the pages for terminology would each use the same theme i.e. color scheme and layout, and the same for Person, Process, Product, and Press. I learned from my husband that creating a website of this nature from scratch was not impossible, but would be extremely time-consuming and potentially costly as well. After explaining my vision for the website to my husband, he suggested that I use Tikiwiki software to develop the site. Tikiwiki allows novice web designers to create a website that is community-powered using templates. I downloaded the Tikiwiki software and began developing my site.

The initial steps of creating the website involved determining preferences such as layout, theme and user privileges. The themes available were very limited, but after trying all of them, I chose the format that I felt would be most appealing while maintaining a professional appearance. Due to the limited options available I was unable to select a separate theme for each section as I had originally intended. Consequently the entire website is visually the same (see Appendix B5-7), but I have personally found that this does not negatively impact the functionality of the website. It will be interesting to see if the same holds true for general

users once I am able to obtain and review user feedback during the Exploring Acceptance portion of the CPS process. I have already posted a forum addressing this on my website, but currently only have one registered member who has not yet commented (see Appendix B9).

At this time I have set up and contributed to my on-line creativity community. Members can join the site for free and begin reading and adding content. Members will have very limited administrative capabilities in the beginning. I have submitted one article, which I authored, to the website. The article is on J.P. Guilford and his Structure of Intellect model (see Appendix B11). I have linked the article to a figure of the model on the website as well (see Appendix B12 & 13). I plan to add more articles to the site in the future.

Currently, members can change content that is submitted by another, and they can comment on it. Users can also participate in forums set up by myself as administrator but cannot start a topic themselves. Though there is no mandatory field as of yet for referencing submitted articles and pages, I am considering requiring that. I have added a disclaimer to the home page that warns against citing the website for educational purposes, but it would be great if members willingly cite their references for others to look into. The idea is to share knowledge of creativity that includes references to allow for members to further their inquiry with published works as well.

From the onset of this project I defined success as creating a collaborative place for learners of creativity, and possibly experts in the

field, to share their knowledge in an encyclopedia-like format. I wanted to design all aspects of the website including: color schemes, fonts, layout, search categories, and logo. I planned to contribute articles to the website that I personally wrote through my own research in order to influence other users to do the same. Finally I wanted to learn about the website development process so that I may independently maintain the site with minimal assistance from experts.

A website of this nature is constantly changing and improving, and as such, there should never be a point when I can consider this site “complete”; laying the initial groundwork was the purpose of this project. Once I had developed the foundation of the website, I knew that much more lay ahead as far as adding substance such as articles, resource links, definitions, forums, etc.

A site logo was part of my initial project plan. It was my hope to have an easily recognizable symbol for this resource that could become as well known to members of *Amy's Creativity Community* as the “G” is for Google. Unfortunately this was beyond the scope of this inquiry, though I do hope to have a logo developed for the site in the near future.

Section Five: Key Learning, Evaluation and Recommendations

This Section Includes

- Key Learning
- Evaluation of Outcomes
- Recommendations

Key Learning

- Through this project I hope to use my expertise of the CPS process to contribute to the creative community by providing free and accessible setting for collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- I will use the tools I've mastered throughout my time at the Center to successfully execute this project and will continue to use them in future releases and enhancements of the website.
- I hope to find the balance between my daily responsibilities and the requirements necessary for completing this project and my degree.
- I will use this experience as a model for finding the time to incorporate authentic creative activities into my life after the International Center for Studies in Creativity.

Evaluation of Outcomes

Through the use of forums on the website, I will obtain feedback from members on their experience with the site and request suggestions for improvement. The first of these forums has already been posted and I am awaiting responses from users (see Appendix B9).

As a more formal review, I have completed a PPC (Pluses, Potentials, Concerns) analysis on the site to uncover any areas of weakness (see Appendix D). Through this analysis I have found that the area that will determine if the project was successful ultimately is in getting people to join and contribute to the site. Without the community the site is just me, in which case, I will not have reached my goal of developing a *community*-powered website.

Recommendations

It should go without saying that taking on a project of this magnitude as a mom is difficult to say the least and I understand that my situation is in no way unique. I found that there were several rules I had to stick to in order to successfully complete this task. I would recommend these to other parents facing a similar situation.

First, make sure that you set aside adequate time for focusing on your project. It is important to determine these times and to stick to them because your day can easily get away from you when you're focusing the majority of your time on meeting other people's needs.

Realizing that there is always something that will inevitably come up to distract you or take you away from your work, it is key to set up a support system of individuals who are there to step in when you are not available. In my case, I had the help of my mother and friend to watch my son while I was at class and when I needed to set time aside to work on my project.

It is all too easy to find yourself getting distracted by the day to day responsibilities and putting off your school work for later. Eventually, this will catch up with you. Trying to write or study when you have a three-year-old running around is not the ideal environment for productivity. I found that it was best for me to "lock myself away" in my room where I could concentrate on my tasks. I also worked out of the house whenever

possible, using the resource room at the Center, the library, or even a coffee house.

Knowing your limitations and coming to terms with those restrictions will protect you from getting in over your head. When I first planned this website I wanted control of every aspect of its development. I quickly learned that it would take me months, if not years, to learn the skills required to do so. When my husband suggested using software that already existed, I was initially against the idea because I wanted to develop the site myself. However, when I took a step back to think about what starting from a blank slate would entail, I realized that using the software was much more realistic given the time constraints and my limited knowledge of the process. Sometimes the overachiever inside of me wants to take on more than I can handle. If I have learned anything from this experience, it was to keep it simple whenever possible and never to set goals that are beyond your reach.

It's also hard to let go of your power when you are "wife-in-chief" of your household as I am. As Carin Rubenstein, a psychologist and author, points out in an interview by Redbook's Nancy Yorio, many women have the attitude that "If I don't do things, they don't get done" (2009). There were times when I stepped away from being Mommy to work on my project and I found myself concerned with what was happening around the house without my supervision. Things were not being done the way I would do them, or not being done at all, and that loss of control brought out feelings of resentment and frustration in me.

In her book *The Superior Wife Syndrome*, Rubenstein suggests ways to alleviate these feelings which are so common in working mothers by “reconfiguring the wife” (2009, p.289). She suggests seven techniques.

1. *Be less than you can be*- limit your proficiency in domestic matters in order to allow for your husband to take on his fair share.
2. *Silence your inner critic*- try to replace criticisms with opportunities for teaching your husband how to do these domestic chores, and then let it go.
3. *Be kind, don't mind*- your way is not necessarily the right way, you need to rid yourself of the sense of your own superiority.
4. *Expand your friendships*- you cannot rely on your relationship with your husband completely, you have to have friends.
5. *Focus on work*- it is important to have parts of your life that give it meaning aside from your marriage.
6. *Develop manly skills*- try to swap responsibilities for a while to show him that if you want him to do some of your chores you can do some of his.
7. *Contemplate insurrection*- in extreme circumstances you may need to set consequences for non-compliance and give specific instructions to remedy the situation.

While I found this section of her book light-hearted and humorous, Rubenstein really makes valid points. If you want something done you do not have to do it yourself, there are ways to relinquish that self-appointed superiority and still get the desired outcome.

In my situation it has been helpful to delegate household responsibilities to not only my husband and myself but also to the older children. I created a simple chore chart that is a daily reminder of who is responsible for what job on any particular day. So far it has been

moderately successful as I have limited time to follow up on the completion of tasks and to address those items that were not completed.

My primary challenge in completing this project was finding the balance between my school work and my life. I feel as though I have only just begun to work through this challenge even now as my time at the Center comes to a close. I have made significant progress within the last few weeks especially. I have begun to follow Rubenstein's advice and let go, and allow others in my life to take over when I need to step away. There is still progress to be made, but I see myself using what I've learned in a personally meaningful way, and thus plan to be a model for my family.

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