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Zenventures: Unwind Your Imagination with Guided Meditation

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Running head: ZENVENTURES

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
(Department)

Zenventures
Unwind your imagination with guided meditation

A Project in the Creative Studies Department
by
Darlene Kent

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Science

April 14, 2014

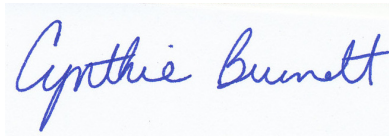
Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Computer Information Systems

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Dates of Approval:
April 14, 2014

_____ Dr. Cyndie Burnett _____
Project Advisor



April 14, 2014

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Candidate

Abstract

This project was designed to create guided meditation to enhance creativity. Research was done to gather information on guided imagery, meditation and storytelling to gain a strong understanding of meditation in general, and to determine the themes of the various meditations. The guided meditations for this project were called, *Zenventures*, a combination of peace and adventure. The guided meditations take the person on a journey where they connect to their creative potential. A success plan was created to ensure the project stayed on track. There were several outcomes from the project: seven written meditations, seven *Zenventures* (recorded meditations with music), a website and a music distribution channel. During the creative process of designing and developing the *Zenventures*, several key learnings took place. Finally, the student writing this paper came to appreciate how much she had learned during the two years of her Master's program, and could see information from various courses reflected both in the *Zenventures* and in this paper.

Please note, that the website links were current at the time this project paper was submitted. If the links change in the future they will no longer work.

Darlene Kent

____Darlene Kent_____

____April 14, 2014_____

Date

ZENVENTURES

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Zenventures: Unwind your imagination

Welcome to Zenventures, a Master's project that focuses on the goal of increasing and enhancing creativity. The project aims to use guided meditation, as a form of incubation, to help people to pause and to discover new opportunities and ideas.

Section One: Background to the Project

Over the last few years I have discovered meditation, and I practice it regularly, because it makes me feel better emotionally and physically. It brings a feeling of calmness and a sense of being better able to get through my day. To explain it in a more vernacular fashion, I can say that meditation helps “to smooth out the bumps of life.”

My decision to enroll in a graduate program began with a crazy idea of mine to start a creativity church, a place where people could go to find support and encouragement in their desire to be creative. My vision was to have a big church with a big congregation, with lots of money to get my plans off the ground. But since I did not have a lot of money, what was I supposed to do?

While I was attending the first two weeks of the Creative Studies program, which was a summer intensive, we worked on a personal challenge. And one of my solutions was to place the creativity church within the heart, to use guided meditation as a way to reach a “congregation” and enrich people's lives through creativity.

I did not know that the idea of placing the church within the heart had taken such a hold in my psyche and soul. During the last six months I have dated, flirted with, and had flings with several ideas for my Master's project. I love ideas; I love to discover them, to play with them, and to develop them. Then in the fall of 2013 the idea of guided meditation took hold; it sneaked up on me and placed itself in my lap. That is how

I became the parent of *Zenventures*, a combination of zen and adventures, a way to take your heART, body, and mind on a peace journey.

What are Zenventures?

Zenventures are instances of guided imagery, meditations that are designed to be mini-adventures of peace, of heart, and of mind. Zenventures are about taking a journey, about taking a moment to pause, to unplug, and just to be. The aim is to be you, relaxed and in the now. Everybody needs a coffee break, and our brains do, too. Zenventures are all about the art of the pause.

A Zenventure takes us to a place where we may never have been before. It allows us to put on new possibilities and try them out. Meditation can help us to become comfortable with new skills, ideas, and options. Zenventures open your heart and your mind to new prospects. They provide a safe and relaxing way to try out and practice new traits and attitudes. For my Master's project I wanted to help people to relax and to discover within themselves their creative potential, to embrace their imagination, insight, and artistic selves.

Discover SIM: Story, Incubation, Music

We live in a busy world, a world that seems to have forgotten how to breathe, how to pause, and how to unplug from our constant, everyday internet access. Discover SIM: unplug by plugging in. You may be wondering: What is SIM? SIM is an acronym that taps into three powers to help you to get in touch with your imagination, creativity, and insight:

- Power of Story
- Power of Incubation

- Power of Music

Humans have an affinity for stories. We respond to them, remember them, and share them. Zenventures tap into our desire for stories and use it as a vehicle to help people to connect to their inner potential.

I believe that in our busy and increasingly interconnected world we are forgetting how to incubate. Guided meditations help people to find time to pause and to give themselves the permission and the time to let the answer find them. Zenventures help us tap into this deep well of potential, which is often overlooked.

Humans experience music on a different level, beyond words, beyond logic, beyond the everyday. If you hear some music, some part of your body wants to move with it. With Zenventures we use music to move the mind, the heart, and the soul.

Internal Sounding Board Partner

Many of the courses we have taken in the Master's program required us to have a Sounding Board Partner. This person helped us to stay on track, helped us to consider possibilities, and helped us to pause and reflect through discussion. While guided meditation cannot replace a human being, it acts like an internal sounding board partner and, by giving people a way to "converse" and to reflect, it leads to the discovery of possibilities that can push a project to a new level. It is a way to pause, reflect, and consider. Sometimes in the push to see a final product, we forget to take the time to process. As a goal-oriented individual, I have sometimes forgotten to stand back, incubate, and just let the answer and the creativity emerge.

Rationale for Selection

As a writer and a creative person, I understand and fully appreciate the value of incubation. Guided meditation is one way to bring the art of the pause, the incubation, into a creative project or Creative Problem Solving (CPS) facilitation session.

I chose this project for several reasons. I am a writer; I love to write; and the prospect of doing something I am good at for my Master's project is appealing. At the same time I wanted to stretch, to try something new, take a risk, and see what would happen. Prototyping the Zenventures, recording the audio and adding music, and then placing the results onto a website where they can be sold is a chance to stretch. Perhaps the project will lead to a new source of income.

I have passion for this project. It has been a recurring theme over the last six months as I have contemplated a variety of options for my Master's project. While I have examined many ideas, this one has returned again and again with an appeal to my head, heart, and gut. I did not pick this idea. It chose me, and as I believe in following my intuition, it felt like the right path to follow.

My motivation for this project is simple. It is a way to realize my "crazy" dream to "open" a creativity church, to reach out to people in order to help them to enrich their lives with creativity. The goal of the Zenventures is to support people while they are engaged in a creative project.

While my immediate goal with my Zenventures work is the partial fulfillment of requirements for my Master's degree, my greater purpose is to lead others to become more creative. I believe that creativity is a life skill. Creativity brings out our humanity and reminds us of the goodness of life, even if someone is writing a slasher horror story during the Christmas holidays (as I did one year).

A few years ago I took a course to become a Certified Kaizen Muse Creativity coach. The average coaching fee, which starts at \$125 an hour, is out of reach for many people. A guided meditation that costs under \$5, or an album that costs \$12, is affordable for most people. And to those for whom even that cost may be too much, I plan to offer a few free Zenventures. These free items will work as a marketing tool as well.

Section Two: Pertinent Literature

Research has clearly proven the existence of a mind-body connection and has established the benefits of meditation: quicker recovery from stress, increased alpha rhythms, enhanced synchronization, muscle relaxation, less emotional reactivity, increased empathy, more happiness, increased creativity, and heightened perceptual clarity and sensitivity (Bodian, 2006). A journal article by Sawyer (2011) on the neuroscience of creativity suggested that creative people experience higher levels of alpha-wave activity, and that creative people use both hemispheres of the brain. You can connect that information to the benefits of meditation [increased alpha rhythms and increased brain synchronization (Bodian, 2006)] to see how meditating increases creativity in general. What I enjoyed most about the research for my project is that it strengthened my belief in the value of guided meditation as a means of increasing creativity.

Research also helped me to create richer and deeper meditations. For example, the books by the Rogue Hypnotist helped me to establish the language to use during the meditations. The book *Mastering Hypnotic Language* (2013) addressed the use of the word *now*. If you end a statement or request with the word *now*, it acts as a suggestion for the subconscious (Hypnotist, 2013): Relax, and open your imagination, *now*. Notice how the preceding sentence tells the subconscious to become more creative at this very moment, and all I did was add the word *now*.

The best journal article I read on creativity and meditation was *The Neuropsychological Connection Between Creativity and Meditation* (Horan, 2009). The section labeled *Insight* provided a good overview of creativity and meditation. The

research indicated that meditation helps with incubation and insight through the processes of transcendence and integration.

Transcendence bypasses limits in information. In essence you could say that it creates a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts of the knowledge. And integration is about transforming information. You can think of it as an enlightened state. I have posted the section that defines transcendence and integration in detail to enrich my explanation (emphasis added):

Transcendence is herein defined as a state of synchronized neural activity in which an existing informational set(s) is attenuated or surpassed; where psychological = **cognitive closure is not yet in effect**; and where attention is broad and sustained on explicit, or implicit, phenomena in a defocused, yet alert, witnessing mode. Synchronized neural activity, broad attention, and defocused attention are all associated with processing efficiency in creativity, as well as in meditation. Integration is defined as a state of synchronized neural activity in which informational sets, both across and within explicit and implicit domains, are matched, bound, and encoded; where psychological = **cognitive closure is in effect**; and where attention is focused, sometimes over multiple modalities.

Integration is a major brain function. (Horan, 2009, p. 202).

Transcendence is about diverging, and integration is about converging. After I read this article, I concluded that transcendence and integration are part of the yin/yang of creativity.

Meditation and guided imagery fall within the psychedelic approaches to creativity. *Psychedelic*, which comes from Greek and means “mind manifesting” (Cabra,

2012), emphasizes the expansion of awareness and consciousness to help a person to be more creative by opening up new ideas and untapped resources and experiences (Treffinger, Isaken, & Firestien, 1992). A fundamental assumption of this approach is that most people are unable to tap into the most potent and creative aspects of the mind (Cabra, 2012). While the use of drugs and alcohol to alter consciousness is controversial (Cabra, 2012), meditation and guided imagery constitute a safe way to expand the mind through a psychedelic approach. Music therapist Helen Bonny suggests that music is a way to induce an altered state of consciousness that enhances access to the unconscious, reduces defenses, and facilitates insight and creativity (Beebe & Wyatt, 2009). J. C. Gowan, who was an early creativity researcher in the field of psychedelic approaches, produced some work that is worth checking out.

Miller and Utay (2006) have written a good article that provides a brief review of the history of research on guided imagery. The article explains that guided imagery helps people connect with their cognitive and affective resources [according to the book *Creative Leadership*, creativity is about using cognitive and affective skills (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2010)]. The article went on to mention that guided imagery is useful in helping people to relax and in motivating them to imagine a positive future and to discover insights by exploring possibilities. Guided imagery is about using the imagination to promote mental and physical health (Ford-Martin, 2006). It uses a two part process: (1) Reach a state of relaxation, and (2) once relaxation is achieved, the visualization process begins and imagery can be used to heal, to control pain, or to learn and rehearse skills (Ford-Martin, 2006). Guided imagery is effective for three reasons: (1) The body responds to the imagery as if it were real; (2) in a meditative state a person

can heal, grow, and learn more rapidly; (3) imagery gives a person a sense of mastery which reduces stress and improves self-esteem (Bodian, 2006).

Meditation gives people the time to incubate, and that, in my opinion, is its magical power. Incubation can be thought of as an active and unconscious process that leads to more creative options (Dijksterhuis & Meurs, 2006). Incubation, by providing an opportunity for the exploration of the subconscious, overcomes the limits of the conscious mind and of fixed patterns of thought (Schofield, 2002).

Meditation and guided imagery help people to be happier and enhance self-actualization (Bodian, 2006). This consequence of emotional movement toward the more positive will in turn enhance creativity and broaden the mind (Schofield, 2002). This dynamic of “broaden and build” suggests a theory that positive emotions widen a person’s awareness and lead to experimental thoughts and actions (Fredrickson, 2009).

When I was doing the initial research for my project, I checked Amazon.com and SoundsTrue.com for relevant materials. I found that most guided meditations refer to creativity in general. For instance, an album entitled *Creativity: Open the wellspring* stated that the music had “seductive rhythms, passionate melodies, exotic chanting and instrumentation” (Brandmeier, 1999, para. 4). What appears to be lacking in the current guided meditation landscape is the development of the skills, traits, and attitudes that support creativity. I decided to use meditation, guided imagery, and visualization as a way to help people to practice and master the skills, traits, and attitudes associated with creativity. For example, one meditation, Bounce and Shift, has a section near the end that specifically uses guided imagery as a way for people to practice the traits associated with

creativity [tolerance for ambiguity, surmount obstacles, desire to grow, willingness to take risks, and courage (Sternberg & Lubart, 2002)].

The book *Wired for Story* (Cron, 2012) discussed how stories can help to rewire the brain as a means of assisting people to see the possibilities of the future, and of teaching them the way of the world. Human beings connect to stories in a strong way, and I used the power of storytelling to take the meditator on a journey. One way I did that was to use a theme in the meditations, and I connected that to something that happens in music lyrics — a chorus. Theme is the universal message that you want to share; it tells people the point of the story, and it conveys information about the human experience (Cron, 2012), in this case the creative aspect of being human. Research helped me to pick the themes that I explored in the guided meditations. In Section Four, if the meditation was influenced by something that I had read, I included the reference for people who want to dig deeper.

The best way to make people believe in something is with repetition, and another way is with simple language (Kahneman, 2011). I employed both of these strategies in creating and writing the guided meditations. So the chorus, repeated a few times during the meditation, is the key attitude, skill, or trait of creativity that I want the person to experience. The power of SIM (Story, Incubation, Music) lies with the repeated chorus, and the familiarity and comfort that come from listening to it, especially from doing the same meditation over and over again. The chorus is my secret weapon; it is how I plant the seeds of creativity that will blossom into a more creative person.

In pursuing my research, I read many articles and books on meditation, creativity, and storytelling. The list below contains some resources that I found particularly helpful.

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Section Three: Process Plan

I created a plan to be successful. The plan started with a roadmap with deadlines that kept me on track. The next step was to create a workable timeline to reach my goals and objectives. The Master's project was approximately three months in length and so I created a calendar with key milestones to keep myself motivated and on schedule.

My original calendar was very linear. I would do one thing one month, and something different the next month. For example, research in February; guided meditations in March; and prototypes in April. That was the plan, and the plan got messed up very early.

By the end of February I had created two prototypes, written three guided meditations, and created a website. The website was not part of the original plan. It came from a moment of inspiration during the process. Sometimes following such an inspiration works out, and sometimes it takes me on a tangent that yields no clear benefits, but it is always a learning process. In this case the website was a great addition to the final project.

Whenever I am involved in a creative project, I get a lot done early in the process. My enthusiasm keeps me up late as I use the energy that comes from starting something fresh and new. I completed almost 100 hours of my project in the first two months. Then March arrived, and I had a bit of a slow spell, which was a natural part of my creative process. Then in mid-March, with the end in sight, I once again found enthusiasm for the project.

Initially I had hoped to get all the research done in January and February. What happened instead is that I continued to read and learn about guided meditation during the

entire length of my Master's project. Research is part of the process, but creating and building are more enjoyable for me. As a result, I had the prototypes and the website done early in the process. I have no regrets about this. Because I had met most of my objectives by the end of February, I felt less pressure about meeting the final deadline.

The big thing was to keep on top of writing the project paper. I did not want to have to write the paper in its entirety at the end. It was easier to write it as I went along, because I would remember better where I was and what I was doing. I actually wrote a full draft of the paper in early March before I completed all my objectives. I had 90% of the project done, and to me it made sense to write the whole thing, since I had to hand in a draft of Sections 1-3 in mid-March. Thank goodness for school deadlines. In this case, the date forced me to get back to work on the project after my slump.

Table 1: Project Timeline

DATES	ACTIVITY	HOURS
JANUARY		0
	Write up concept roadmap, including rewrites and edits.	6
	Connect with sounding board partner.	1
	Connect with academic advisor.	1
	Initial research.	15
FEBRUARY		0
	Create: Kchant website.	17

DATES	ACTIVITY	HOURS
	Learn how to use Audacity (audio recording & editing).	11
	Create: Wander Zen.	7
	Play with Bandcamp, a music distribution site.	6
	Create: Cre8 Mantra.	5
	Literature review.	20
March		0
	Write up Sections 1–3 of final project paper.	8
	Write up Sections 4–6 of final project paper.	7
	Create: Unwind.	5
	Create: Ice Peace Zen.	6
	Create: Stand Tall.	5
	Create: Head, Heart and Gut.	5
	Update Bandcamp and Kchant website.	6
April		0
	Final write up of paper.	5
TOTAL		136

Table 1: Project Timeline

Section Four: Outcomes

My Master's project had four outcomes/products: the Kchant website (<http://kchant.weebly.com/>); the music distribution channel (<http://kchant.bandcamp.com/>); the prototypes of the guided meditations; and the written Zenventures.

Kchant Website

The [Kchant website](#) is the means by which I connected to people who wanted to use the guided meditations to enhance creativity. The website made it easy to share the meditations, and it provided some background information on the project and on the Zenventures. The site also gave people a way to contact me and to learn the benefits of meditation, including its enhancement of creativity.

Music Distribution Channel

Once I got into the project, I realized I was going to need a simple way to distribute the music. Sharing and downloading mp3 files from the internet turned out to be challenging. I needed a way to simplify the process. [Bandcamp](#) is a website that distributes music and makes it possible to stream music on a website. Distribution and streaming turned out to be quite valuable. I can also charge a fee for the music, give it away for free, or let people donate what they want. I chose Bandcamp because they do not charge a fee; instead, they take 15% of all fees, and if you make nothing, you still get to use all the features of the website. As part of the process I was able to create the look for my Bandcamp site and create the album covers. The prototypes of the Zenventures are available on [Kchant Bandcamp](#), and I stream them on the [Kchant website](#).

Zenventures (Written Guided Meditations)

I wrote seven guided meditations for my Master's project. They are:

- Unwind: This Zenventure was inspired by focusing on the breath, a very common meditation. I thought that focusing on the breath would be a good way to start off the program. Osho's *Book of Secrets* (1974) was the foundation for this meditation.
- Wander: The mind-wandering Zen was inspired by research that illustrates the power of incubation through mind wandering in the performance of an easy task (Baird et al., 2012). During this undemanding task, your mind is free to go hither and yon and stumble across insights and possibilities.
- Cre8 Mantra: A mantra is a sound that you repeat to help you achieve a deep meditative state ("Mantra meditation," 2007). A mantra provides you with a gentle focus on one thing. The mantra can be a single word or a few words, or even just a sound or a syllable. A mantra is a powerful way to connect. It helps you to disconnect from your thoughts and step between them, where you find room for new discoveries.
- Ice Peace: We all run into stumbling blocks sometimes, and we all need reminding that we are capable of finding a way to move forward. This great Zenventure helps you to release blocks and find those innovative solutions.
- Stand Tall: I wrote a paper on embracing failure for one of my graduate courses. And during my research I discovered that people need to feel capable and confident to take a creative risk (Pychyl, 2009).

- **Head, Heart & Gut:** One of my professors created a CPS tool called Head, Heart and Gut (Burnett, 2010). She graciously agreed to let me turn her work into a Zenventure. This guided meditation can be used in several ways. You can listen to it to connect to the wisdom that exists within you. Or you can use it while converging during CPS: (1) Pause the meditation after each section, and have people choose options when connected to a specific wisdom; or (2) listen to it completely and then have people choose three options, one for each wisdom (you may want to mark each option differently for head, heart, and gut).
- **Bounce and Shift:** One way to increase creativity is with psychological distance (Shapira & Liberman, 2009) and change of perspective (Silverstein, 2012). For example, you might imagine yourself in some else's shoes to establish distance and change perspective. This Zenventure brings a dream team of geniuses to the table to accomplish a shift in perspective and to help people be more creative.

A few of the written meditations and/or prototypes are ones that I had previously created. I then updated them, with an appropriate theme and chorus, to make them support creativity. For example, the Unwind meditation was one that I had written earlier, and I adapted the script for this current project with a focus on changing the language to support creativity traits, skills, and attitudes.

Zenventures (Recorded Prototypes)

As I got into the groove in mid-March, I managed to create prototypes for all the written guided meditations. The prototype that best exemplifies my original intention is

Stand Tall. Below is the full script for Stand Tall. It will give you the flavor of the guided meditations and will illustrate how the Zenventures incorporate chorus and theme.

Zenventure Example

Relax, and take deep breaths. Notice your breath, and where the in-breath becomes an out-breath. Notice the first moment when you can feel the in-breath in your nose. Notice the last moment you can feel the air of the out-breath. Notice the pause between each breath. Notice how with each breath, you relax, release, and unwind.

We are going to take a journey. And you will need to use your imagination. Imagine you are a chestnut growing on a tall, strong tree. You see the ground below, you are waiting for your moment to let go, to plunge into the unknown. The day comes, and you are ready. You take a deep breath, you puff out your chest, and you drop gracefully into a whole new world.

You land, and kiss the ground, grateful it was there to catch you. You roll around, looking for a new place to grow tall. You find a spot, a place with sun and rain. You embrace the rain, knowing that you can only stand tall when sun and rain work together to help you grow proud and true.

Every moment you grow taller.

Every moment, you add to your skills and abilities.

There are moments of sun, and moments of rain.

With each passing moment, you feel more capable and more confident.

Stand tall now.

You dig deep. Your roots search and find the nutrients it needs to grow taller. You soak up the sun and the rain. You feel yourself sprout, and you feel more confident, and more capable as you stand tall.

Enjoy this moment; breathe deep; breathe in confidence and stand tall. Drink in the confidence from the earth beneath it. Feel its warmth as it travels up your limbs and spreads out in your leaves. Stretch yourself and reach for the sun and the stars.

Every moment you grow taller.

Every moment, you add to your skills and abilities.

There are moments of sun, and moments of rain.

With each passing moment, you feel more capable and more confident.

Stand tall now.

Seasons have passed and you look around and know it's time to move. You pull yourself up, and find a new spot to stand tall. You settle into this new role, this new forest. You meet new plants, and discover new animals, and enjoy a new harmony. Your roots dig deep and you stand tall as the sun and the rain nurture you.

Every moment you grow taller.

Every moment, you add to your skills and abilities.

There are moments of sun, and moments of rain.

With each passing moment, you feel more capable and more confident.

Stand tall now.

Believe in yourself. Over your lifetime you have grown skills and knowledge you need to succeed. For 15 seconds stand tall, completely, totally, from your roots, to your trunk, to your limbs, to your leaves. For 15 seconds feel capable and confident, feel it in your art, body, and mind. Feel deep, feel capable and confident deep inside and let it take root now, and stand tall.

Section Five: Key Learnings

Life is filled with moments, and from each you learn something. Perhaps that is the meaning of life — taking something of value from each moment, even if it is something small. The Master's project took about three months to complete, and with reflection I came to see that I underwent some key learning experiences, which I will share with you.

My key lessons were: (1) Each project is unique. (2) You create a plan, then maybe forget the plan. (3) You deal with a slump in the middle of things. (4) You see that creativity is a many-splendored thing. (5) You discover and use a variety of tools — a double-edged sword. (6) You finish with Rock Star Zen (7) A creativity church opens.

Each Project is Unique

Each project I do is a journey, beginning with the individual parts and continuing to the final outcome. No project ever takes the same path, although sometimes they travel a similar road. And that was very much the case here. I used three different audio programs to record and edit the audio. This was partly because I wanted to find the most appropriate software, and because I like to explore and experiment. I also signed up for a few websites in a search for the one that would suit my needs and my wallet when it came to creating the Kchant website and distribution music channel.

Create a Plan, Forget the Plan

Whenever you take on a project, especially a big one, it is important to create a plan. It is necessary to do this because you need to have some idea of where you want to go and how you plan to proceed.

Plans give you a path to follow, and they make you feel more confident about being successful. Never be a slave to the plan, as that can ruin a project. You need to be free to explore possibilities as they come up. So while creating a plan is important, it is just as important to forget the plan and throw it aside if discarding it appears appropriate. For example, the Kchant website was never part of the original plan; it was a moment of inspiration that turned out well.

How do I deal with the middle slump?

Generally when I do a project I get a lot done up front. The enthusiasm keeps me working long and hard in the early days. And then in the middle I lose steam. I begin to avoid working on the project, or I really have to force myself to show up. I had most of the project done by the end of February, and then I hit a real slump. The only reason I sat down in front of my computer to work on the project in March was to meet an assignment deadline for the graduate class. That was fortunate, because it helped me to get back onto the saddle and work on the project again. I shudder to think of what would have happened if this had been a personal project with no hard deadlines attached to it.

Right now I do not have an answer to the question of how I might cope with the middle slump. I am giving myself permission to incubate on this question and see what possible options appear. Sometimes in the process of learning you get a question and not an answer. Sometimes the answers come later. That is all right. The most important thing is to recognize the existence of the issue and then to give yourself time to find options and explore possible solutions.

During a telephone discussion with my academic advisor, Dr. Cyndi Burnett, on March 31, 2014, she suggested some options for dealing with the middle slump. They

include: Accomplish something every day on your project, even if you only work for 20 minutes. Make your project a daily habit. Stop when you still have some thoughts or ideas that you want to play with, or even stop in the middle of a sentence. This kind of stopping place allows you to start with momentum the next day, because you already know that you have something to say, a place to move forward from.

Creativity is a Many-Splendored Thing

Creativity is not a single trait, attitude, or skill. Rather, it is a variety of traits, skills, and attitudes. What made this project such a challenge and a joy was the variety of creativity themes I could choose when I launched into creating the guided meditations. Although a number of traits, skills, and attitudes are associated with creativity, not one of them is predictive of creativity. Instead, what is most important is a constellation of skills, attitudes, and traits (Runco, 2007).

Creativity happens when a variety of appropriate traits, skills, and attitudes come together in a person. That means if I want to delineate practices that lead to creativity, I need to create a variety of guided meditations that reliably cover a wide range of creativity elements. I had to make a selective choice of what skills, traits, and attitudes I thought would be most helpful in planting seeds that would sprout into creativity. For example, the Stand Tall meditation was based on research showing that a person needs to feel confident and capable of taking a creative risk (Pychyl, 2009).

Discover and Use a Variety of Tools — A Double Edged-Sword

It is natural for me to do research, to clarify, and to try a variety of tools to find out which one works best. For example, on this project I used Audacity, Reaper, and the Mind Workstation software to find the best system to record and edit the audio. And, in

all honesty, I could have recorded and edited them all, and done a good job with Audacity, the first program that I used. But instead I tried Reaper and subsequently bought Mind Workstation.

The bad part to my exploration of options is that I lost time that I could have used to create other meditations. Also I think that the variety of software programs, all of which I had to learn to use, was part of the reason that I lost momentum during the middle phase of my work. Instead of focusing and grounding myself, I was out exploring. This is not something that only happened with this project — it has happened with many of my projects. Personally, though, I think that a desire to experiment is part of being a creative person, but also means that I can lose momentum and focus and drift away from a project.

The good thing is that I often find elements that are helpful during my explorations. For example, Reaper does a better job of cleaning up the background noise in the audio than Audacity. And Mind Workstation is able to integrate the various elements better that go into creating an audio-guided meditation than the other two programs.

This is not an either/or problem or solution. I need to learn to balance better the need to explore with maintenance of momentum on a project. Maybe I should only allow myself to explore a limited number of programs, or I should set a time limit on my exploration (unless, of course, I find something really enticing).

Rock Star Zen

I am not musically inclined. I cannot sing or play an instrument, and mostly I listen to music as background noise. Nonetheless, a small part of me dreamed of being a

famous musician and creating songs that people would respond to. I have now realized, unexpectedly, that I made that dream come true with this project. I wrote the lyrics and added music — and that qualifies me as a singer/songwriter. From now on, just call me Rock Star Zen!

Creativity Church is Open

With the publishing of the Zenventures I have “opened” the creativity church, or at least taken a big first step. We will see where the future takes me, what empire I might build. I am not good at promoting or celebrating my accomplishments. Once a project is finished, I am done, and I move on to something new. It was Paulina Larocca who pointed out to me that I had actually accomplished my intention regarding a church, and that this was something to appreciate. Thank you, Paulina.

Section Six: Conclusion

No project is ever truly complete. You always fiddle with it, either for real or in your head. You imagine a different way that you could have tackled a project or a part of it, or you wish that you had done things differently. You also want to fix the imperfections that probably only you can see. This is the nature of any project. You learn from it, and you grow, and as a result you see what you could have done differently or better.

What I now know about creativity that I did not know before is that even when I finish my graduate program, I will continue to grow and learn. What I think is associated with creativity today may be different in a few years. It is hard to know how neuroscience will change our understanding of creativity. What makes creativity hard is the absence of a clear path to success, the lack of a way to ensure a good outcome each and every time. Creativity is a mesh of many things: enthusiasm, frustration, success, and failure — all of which I experienced on this project.

What the study of creativity has brought me is an understanding that the status quo is not something to hang on to out of fear, and that it is all right to be afraid of change even when you desire to move forward in a new direction. In the past I have hung on to the status quo in certain areas of my life from a need for safety. I am more likely to make a change now, even if the change is scary, because I accept that fear and change are a NORMAL part of life. Somehow culture teaches us that change and failure are bad, that they are not part of everyday life. This misconception about change keeps us from reaching our full potential and from making the world a better place (even if only in a small way). Change is normal or, as Heraclitus would say, you never step into the same

river twice (Rayner, 2008). Every moment of every day, the world and all the people in it are changing. This change is not something that we can escape (although, goodness gracious knows, we try). I wish I could be more like Heraclitus, and go with the flow, and enjoy the wild ride (Rayner, 2008).

I keep trying to make the ride what I want it to be instead of what it is. I do not mind the ride — it is the wild aspect that worries me, because anything wild scares me. With knowledge comes awareness, and with awareness comes the possibility of change. Wild and change are not bad words — they are simply a part of life, and with them comes a deeper and richer human experience, a life more fully lived.

Next Steps

The next steps are easy. I will continue to play with the Zenventures and see where they take me. I hope that one day they might provide a form of income. I recognize that it will take some time to become better at using the software to record and edit the audio, and to write better guided imageries, and — I hope — to gain a congregation that will enjoy my meditations. I have a feeling that, as my skill, knowledge, and experience grow, I will return to my work and update the versions of guided meditations that I created for this project. In the future I may create different Zenventures, perhaps with the creativity theme, or maybe at that time I will want to explore different topics and themes.

Others might build on my work with research to check for the effectiveness of guided meditations written for a specific creativity trait, attitude, or skill. Can listening to a guided meditation make you more open? Can meditation be used as a way to plant specific creativity seeds that bloom in the future? It is clear that meditation enhances

creativity in general. The question now is whether guided imagery can be used to enhance the specific traits, attitudes, and skills associated with creativity.

Final Thoughts

As I looked over this paper I realized that I have learned much about creativity over the last few years. I now have a much better understanding of the various components of creativity. I have the theoretical underpinnings necessary to discuss creativity as an expert. And I now know about the history of creativity, the early researchers, and the current theorists.

As I edited the paper and reviewed it, I could see aspects of each class and the information that I had learned in lectures and from assignments. Each course increased my knowledge and my skill in creativity and innovation. I am now able to lead a creative problem solving session, or speak with confidence on the topic of creativity and on the theories and themes that make up this complex and multifaceted phenomenon that helps express the richness of humanity.

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