Daufuskie Magazine Website: Strengthening and Reconnecting an Island Community

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A Project in Creativity Studies
Department of Creative Studies
by
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Science

April 29, 2013
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Dr. Cynthia Burnett

Catherine O. Tillman
Abstract of Project

Systems analyst and organizational behavior expert Margaret Wheatley (2006) compared healthy systems to spider webs. She contended that if a web breaks and needs repair, the spider doesn’t cut out a piece or tear the web apart; instead, she reweaves it, “using the silken relationships that are already there, creating stronger connections across the weakened spaces” (p. 146). For my Master’s project, I created a website for the rural sea island community where I live—Daufuskie Island, South Carolina. Following Wheatley’s advice to consider organizations as webs of relations rather than relying on the common paradigm of looking at organizations as machines, I designed the website using a magazine-style format, and included features designed to help readers strengthen their connections to the fundamental identity of the community, to connect them to new information on a regular basis, and to provide a means for residents, non-resident property owners, major land owners and developers, and elected officials and government agencies to reach beyond traditional boundaries and develop relationships with each other. Another primary goal was to foster community members’ creativity by providing an ongoing means for islanders to provide input and make creative contributions to the magazine. At the completion of this project, I will continue to develop and maintain the website as part of my ongoing commitment to the health of the community, and as a vehicle for my creative expression. Visit the website at www.daufuskieislandmagazine.com.

April 29, 2103

Date
Copyright Notice

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Printed and bound in the United States of America.
Dedication

For the people of Daufuskie Island who have supported and encouraged my volunteer work in the community for the past ten years, and for public relations genius, Joe Sports for giving me the opportunity to experience – firsthand – the power of the press.
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the many mentors and teachers I have had throughout the years who have taught me new skills, challenged my thinking, and inspired me through the examples of their own creative endeavors. Those whose influence played a major part in some aspect of this project include: Tom Williams who introduced me to the world of magazine publishing; Natalie Goldberg who taught me the value of writing practice; Edwene Gaines who showed me how to reach my goals by taking one step at a time; Jean Houston who reawakened my childhood fascination with nature; Byron Katie whose work reminded me that life is story; and the late Billie Burn whose history book, An Island Named Daufuskie (1991), provided a wealth of information and hours of entertainment. The book, which took “Ms. Billie” 20 years to complete, has far-reaching influence and served as an inspiring example of the fruits of perseverance.

I am also grateful to my professors at the International Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State College who taught me the value of scientific inquiry and gave me the freedom to follow an authentic path of self-discovery. Special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Cynthia Burnett, for her support and encouragement, and for her contagious enthusiasm for life.

Members of my cohort, “The Supremes,” were a source of support, inspiration, and laughter, and our time together resulted in friendships I will treasure for a lifetime.

Finally, thanks to my family members: my mother, Mary Ozburn, who is responsible for my love of learning; my daughters, Ashley Steele and Cali Freeman, the most creative women I know, who kept me afloat when I was sinking; and to my beloved husband, David Tillman, for his unwavering support of my decision to attend graduate school, and for his infinite patience as I worked toward my degree and immersed myself in the completion of this final project.
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Section One: Background to the Project

Purpose and Description of Project

Daufuskie Island is a two-and-a-half by five-mile barrier island located off the coast of South Carolina. Part of unincorporated Beaufort County, it is accessible only by passenger ferries, barges, and boats. As a result of its insulation, the island is self-contained with needs distinctly different than those in surrounding mainland communities. Even though Daufuskie is small, the island has a wealth of natural and historic assets, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This is a designation given to selected areas in the country deemed worthy of preservation.

The island’s population consists of approximately 300 full-time and 600 part-time residents, ranging from seventh generation native islanders, who are descendants of Gullah slaves from pre-Civil War plantation days, to retired corporate executives. Homes range from those in the Historic District, many which are examples of historically significant Gullah architecture in states of perilous disrepair, to multi-million dollar waterfront mansions located in one of three resort developments.

Within this diverse community, a handful of volunteer organizations work independently for various purposes, however the island is without a reliable system to facilitate island-wide collaboration. There is no town hall, mayor, chamber of commerce, newspaper, or official community website. Without a means to unify community efforts, it is often difficult to make a case to the county for resources and necessary improvements. This is particularly challenging in a time when state and county funds are limited and experiencing further cuts. Because of the island’s remote location, it is also often logistically challenging for elected representatives to
come to the island and “get to know” the community and fully understand its unique requirements.

I have been a full-time resident of Daufuskie Island for ten years. For my Master’s project, my goal was to use my skills and knowledge as a creative change leader to fill this gap in our community. To that end, I created an online magazine which is designed specifically to help the island become more connected to who we are and what makes us unique as a community; to help us become more connected to our natural and historic resources; and to help us become more connected to each other including part-time and full-time residents, governmental representatives, island organizations, visitors, and our surrounding lowcountry neighbors.

It is my hope that the magazine will also become a vehicle for better understanding between islanders who live in gated resort communities and those who live “outside the gates” in the Historic District. Often those in gated communities miss out on the truly special nature of the island, either because they don’t know or understand people in the Historic District, or they are unaware of events that are designed for all islanders. On the flip side, members of the Historic District tend to be contemptuous about the resort residents, and have little understanding of their lives. The magazine can become the common link, and a step towards uniting all islanders.

Finally, the magazine is designed to give voice to the incredibly gifted and diverse nature of the Daufuskie population, and will provide a means to celebrate a wide variety of islanders’ creative contributions.

**Rationale for Selection**

As one of only 300 full-time residents of Daufuskie, I serve in a variety of leadership roles in the community, and I am continuously searching for ways to help our community thrive. In Dr. Puccio and Dr. Zacko-Smith’s class on Creative Change Leadership, I became intrigued
with the work of Margaret Wheatley. Dr. Wheatley, whose work focuses on systems, change, and organizational behavior, applies the new sciences in biology, evolution, chaos theory, and quantum physics to leadership (2006, 2007). Her research, which relates organizations to living structures, gave me new ways to think about the challenges of our community.

In her book *Leadership and the New Science* (2006), Wheatley contended that to effect change in any organization, we must use a new story, and consider that we are working with *webs of relations* rather than relying on the common paradigm of looking at organizations as machines. She used a spider web as a metaphor, explaining that if a web breaks and needs repair, the spider doesn’t cut out a piece or tear the web apart, instead, she reweaves it, “using the silken relationships that are already there, creating stronger connections across the weakened spaces” (p.146). If a system is in trouble, Wheatley said, it can be restored to health by “connecting itself to more of itself” (p.146).

Wheatley (2006) wrote:

People need to be connected to the fundamental identity of the organization or community. Who are we? Who do we aspire to become? How shall we work together? And people need to be connected to new information. What else do we need to know? Where is this information to be found? And people need to reach past traditional boundaries and develop relationships with people anywhere in the system. Who else needs to be here to do this work with us? (p. 146)

Because I have a strong connection to my community, I decided to use my Master’s project as an opportunity to use my skills as a creative change leader in service to the community and attempt, through the creation of a sustainable online magazine, to make our community
“web” stronger by connecting the island to more of itself through news articles, photos, stories, and ongoing delivery of new information.

This project also gave me the opportunity to: engage my passion for writing; learn a new skill in website development; and, renew my relationship with photography, a hobby I have neglected over the past few years yet enjoy immensely. Additionally, although the magazine is not a physical classroom, I think of it as a virtual classroom. In this capacity, it will give me an opportunity to use my education and experience as a teacher and life coach to introduce principles of creativity and creative thinking to a large and diverse “student body.” It is my hope that reading inspirational stories, quotes, and scientific evidence related to creative living will inspire a creative revolution in our community! Perhaps most important of all, this project will provide an enticing outlet for my ongoing creative expression and has the potential to fuel my creative fires for years to come.
Section Two: Pertinent Literature

Introduction

In comparing the creation of systems to life’s natural processes, Wheatley (1999) used the following key elements to demonstrate how life, therefore systems, come into being:

- Everything is in a constant process of discovery and creating,
- Life uses messes to get to well-ordered solutions,
- Life is intent on finding what works, not what’s “right,”
- Life creates more possibilities as it engages with opportunities,
- Life is attracted to order,
- Life organizes around identity, and
- Everything participates in the creation and evolution of its neighbors. (pp. 13-14)

When I considered my Master’s project through the lens of these key elements, I saw the process of my project’s unfolding as a compelling demonstration of the validity of Wheatley’s theory. When I started working on this project, I found that once I clearly identified the “self,” or the core purpose and mission of the project (the identity), then the information and resources I gathered - although they first appeared random and messy - eventually became the silken strands that held the project together and led to a well-ordered solution. The primary “strands” of my project’s web were based on the three elements that Wheatley (2006) identified as necessary components in a healthy system: sense of fundamental identity, connection to new information, and development of relationships with people and resources anywhere in the system. I explain my exploration of pertinent literature and resources using this lens.

Sense of Fundamental Identity

When I started to develop the idea for my Master’s project, I originally started with a different project. In the course of my research, I found myself gravitating toward work that
would help me commit to the deep dive I knew this project would require. *What was this project and what ultimate purpose did it serve?* If I did not have a clear sense of purpose and was not 100% committed when I chose my Master’s project topic, I knew my ship would probably sink not long after it was launched; at the very least, I knew I would not be able to maintain the level of enthusiasm necessary to create a truly creative and authentic project. To shore myself up, I was drawn to popular business writer Seth Godin (2012a, 2012b) who delivered compelling arguments to “live outside your comfort zone” (2012a), and “to find a journey worthy of your heart and soul” (2012b). I also reread educator Parker Palmer’s work (2000), and felt compelled to answer the question posed throughout his book: Is this life I am living the same life that wants to live in me? When I examined my project in light of my answer to that question, I discovered that while my original Master’s project topic was worthwhile and “right,” meaning it met the Master’s project qualifications, it did not address the ‘vocation’ that wanted to live in me. So, in this process of discovery, I found a different project that was a better fit for my long-term goals and to which I could make a strong commitment. The online magazine project described in this paper is one that fully engages my vocation for service and my passion for changing the world through writing. Once the *identity* of the project was strongly established, it was a joy to find literature and resources to support its development. With the first element of my Master’s project or metaphorical “web” in place, I was ready to weave in the other two elements: information and resources as one strand and relationships as the second.

**Information and Resources Related to Website Design and Content**

In connecting to new information, I utilized resources in two areas: 1) education and information related to building a website and creating the magazine design, and 2) resources related to creating the actual content of the magazine.
**Website Design.** I completed two courses in website design through lynda.com. One was a refresher course on Wordpress and the other was a course on using magazine template designs. Through these classes I was able to find additional resources for magazine designs and eventually selected one that I believed was a great fit for the ideas and content I had in mind.

Since I intended to include a blog as one of the magazine’s regular features, I searched online for successful bloggers to see what I could discover about the art of blogging. In that search, I discovered a fantastic assessment tool in the book *Building a Blog for Readers: 101 Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Launch Your Blogging Empire* (Thacker, 2012). The exercises included strategic questions as well as structural and tactical information and proved to be a valuable tool. Because my goal was (and is) to blog with a purpose, that is, to produce writing that inspires or invites creative change and collaboration, I revisited one of my favorite books, *Writing to Change the World* (Pipher, 2006). Finally, although I have experience as a publisher of hard copy newsletters and magazines, I wanted to understand how an online magazine might differ in design, and in what ways readers’ expectations may differ with an online vs. hard copy magazine. The book that informed my thinking in this area was the excellent work of Nicolas Carr (2011) *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. His alarming research, which related the ways in which constant connectivity to the Web may be constricting rather than expanding our horizons, inspired me to use the magazine’s online presence as a way to remind people to get *offline* and go *outside!*

**Magazine Content.** When I considered resources and information related to content for the magazine, I used my goals for the magazine to guide for my search. One goal was to help readers become more connected to “who we are as islanders” and to “what makes us unique as a community.” Since I have been collecting information about the island for years, I was able to
dig into my own resources for this category. I pulled books, magazines, studies, and recorded histories of the island and other materials, and created a mini-library. I used some of the information from the library to populate parts of the website, and I will continue to utilize and build the library as a resource for future blog posts and articles. The library includes resources related to: the island’s history, the natural environment including the geographic area known as “the lowcountry,” nature as it relates to health and creativity, books of poetry, and newsletters and magazine articles about the island that I and others had previously written. In addition, I created a file that included names of representatives and others who might serve as subjects for future articles and with whom our community might start to build stronger relationships. Finally, I organized my extensive collection of local photography, and I brushed the dust off my cameras and camera lenses.

**Relationships**

In the area of strengthening and expanding relationships, I explored the “tone” of the content I wanted to develop with the understanding that my philosophy on teaching and learning could impact future relationships with the magazine’s readers, either positively or negatively. With this in mind, I looked at the work of feminist and educator bell hooks (2003) who wrote about the necessity of teaching to transgress and embracing values that lead to social change. I also revisited works on creative education and learning including work by Torrance (1995) and work related to accelerated learning techniques (Meier, 2000).

Recognizing that the effectiveness of the website will be related to readership, I looked into books and resources related to building and strengthening connections with readers through social media marketing (Evans, 2008 & Scott, 2010). Due to rapidly changing technology and
the broad expansion of social media outlets, this is an area I will continue to explore at the conclusion of this project.

Finally, I engaged community leaders in conversations about ways to use the website as a means to forge stronger relationships with each other and with elected representatives and county officials. We also explored ways to make the website as impactful as possible for the community. Their insights were a valuable resource throughout the development of the project.

Selected Bibliography

In addition to the work previously mentioned, the following is a sampling of writers and resources that informed my thinking related to this project.


Section Three: Process Plan

After deciding on a project, I divided the work into an implementation plan and blocked out specific times on my calendar to complete the work. Since I have a tendency to get myself involved in too many activities, this helped me set boundaries and stay focused.

Project Phases

The project fell into three fairly distinct phases: planning, development, and refining solutions. Writing the Master’s paper was included as part of each phase of the project. Each phase formed the foundation for the next, and together they created a strong, interrelated web.

Planning

One of the most important aspects of this process for me was scheduling. According to my FourSight™ profile, I am a high Ideator. Because coming up with ideas energizes me, I often find it hard to stop diverging and start converging. Deadlines have always helped me by forcing me to choose from among the various possibilities, make decisions, and move into the next step of the process. Creating a master calendar with due dates and time allotments for each phase of the project was important to my success. I knew I had to create and deliver a final tangible product in a limited period of time, and while I knew the time I allotted to each phase was only an estimate and would probably change, at least I had a framework and some boundaries. Structuring my time in this manner also helped me deal with the avoidance tactics my inner critic manufactures when I enter into challenging creative projects.

Development

The next phase of the project involved developing the actual website and creating the content for the magazine. I completed online coursework related to website development and the
The next step in the development phase was selecting information to populate the website and then writing the content.

In this first educational phase of the development process, I relied on the wisdom of Seth Godin (2012) who advised that you must “ship” even if the product is not perfect. In other words, this reminded me to “get on with it.” Applied to the context of my project, there is always more to know in terms of website development, hence education in this area will be an ongoing commitment, especially in the rapidly changing world of computer technology. With this in mind, I learned enough to get the website up, and I selected a template design that might not be the perfect one, but was one I knew would work.

The most challenging part of setting up the website was coming up with a hierarchy of categories that met the criteria I had established for the website. I played around with many solutions, finally landing on one that seemed to work. I had to decide, once again, to give up my perfectionistic tendencies, make a choice, and go with it.

The remaining bulk of work was writing the content. For this portion of the project, I relied on tried-and-true writing rituals that work for me. Typically I cocoon myself, do not answer the phone, and, armed with plenty of food and situated in a room with bright light, I write until I just can’t write anymore. Then I take a physical and mental break, and come back later to edit. Uninterrupted time with a clear intention to complete a certain number of pages seems to be the key to success for me.

**Refining Ideas**

This portion of the project included obtaining feedback from potential magazine readers and incorporating their comments into the final product. As I was developing the site, I gathered input from trusted friends and community leaders. They provided valuable suggestions that
helped me clarify my thinking and refine elements of the site along the way. They also came up with some great ideas; some I was able to incorporate into the website design and others I filed away for future reference.

Writing the Master’s Paper

In the beginning of the project, we were provided with a clear outline of the various sections of the final paper, and we also reviewed a final Master’s project from a previous graduate of the program. Because I knew what was going to be expected in each of the various sections of the final paper, I kept journal notes of key insights throughout the process. This was very helpful as I was writing the paper. It was also helpful to have deadlines for each of the sections. The Master’s paper was much easier to finish because we created it in “chunks” or sections. Normally, I don’t work in this manner, rather I like to sit down and write a final draft all at the same time. I found, however, that the “chunk” method worked great, and I intend to try this method for large projects in the future.
## Final Project Timeline

I established key deadlines for this project as described in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Approximate Time Span</th>
<th>Actual Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review Literature and Pertinent Resources</td>
<td>Feb 7- March 1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Classes on Website Education and Design</td>
<td>March 4 -15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose and Upload Magazine Template/Determine Menu Items and Categories</td>
<td>March 18-22</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write and Edit Magazine Content</td>
<td>March 25-April 19</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and Feedback</td>
<td>March 25-April 15 (ongoing)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling, Incubation, Reflection</td>
<td>Feb 7 – April 17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Master’s Paper</td>
<td>Feb 7- April 28</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for Final Presentation</td>
<td>May 2 -May 9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Hours</td>
<td></td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section Four: Outcomes

The outcome of my efforts is a live magazine style website (www.daufuskieislandmagazine.com). It includes a section of pages with fixed content and a section that includes blog posts. This website is a creative project that will continue to grow long after I complete my graduate work. The Welcome Page (next page) on the website summarizes my intentions, identifies the target audience, and sets a “friendly” tone for the site.
Welcome

About Daufuskie Island Magazine

Hello Friend!

Whether you're a Daufuskie island resident, a wanna-be Islander, a visitor, or just plain curious about this island-with-a-funny-name, you've come to the right place.

Created by long-time resident Catherine Tillman, the purpose of Daufuskie Island Magazine is to honor Daufuskie's rich heritage, showcase its natural beauty, celebrate its residents, and strengthen our community's connections to each other and the "outside" world.

You'll find stories and information related to our history (ghosts and such), our critters (like our gators), our groceries (i.e. grits and other southern staples), and anything and everything that captures the amazing grace that is the gift of island living. And because we're home to plenty of colorful characters (one resident said 'you have to be one bubble off center to live on Daufuskie'), you'll find hard-to-believe but true stories that are guaranteed to make you grin.

For basic information about Daufuskie, check out the About Menu and the Resource section. If you're a part time or full-time resident, you'll find plenty of local links and contact information. If you're someone who is planning to visit Daufuskie, you'll find everything you need to know to enjoy your trip.

We'll be adding new content on a regular weekly basis, so please visit often, and be sure to sign up for our blog. We'd also love to hear from you, so feel free to contact us with your comments, feedback, suggestions. And if you've got a story or a song or something about Daufuskie to share, we'd love to consider your contribution!

Catherine Tillman
Full-time resident since 2004

*Painting of 'The Undertaker's House' by Lila Gatin
Fixed Content

The fixed content includes general information about the island including a synopsis of its history, information about the Daufuskie Island Comprehensive Plan, and information and links to places of interest in the surrounding area. It also includes maps and an Island Directory with links to relevant resources and another directory that can be printed and includes a comprehensive listing of important phone numbers. The website also includes a Community Calendar with a feature that allows different organizations to add their monthly events.

Figure 2 Fixed Content Menu with Sub-Categories Example
Blog Content

Another section of the website is populated with blog articles and includes categories related to art, history, nature, and island living with sub-categories under each of the major categories. I intend to continue to add content to the blog section on a regular basis. I will also encourage others in the community to contribute. For most blog posts, visitors are invited to leave comments, and I hope this will encourage the creative exchange of ideas and provide a platform for constructive community conversations.

Figure 5 Blog Menu with Sub-Categories Example
An Excursion to Nearby Cumberland Island

If you want to see what Daufuskie may have looked like prior to the presence of developers, take an easy two hour trip down I-95 and catch a ferry to our Georgia neighbor, Cumberland Island. Like Daufuskie, Cumberland is a barrier island accessible only by boat, but is over seven times bigger (360,000 acres compared to Daufuskie’s 5,000 acres).

When we stepped off the tiny Cumberland Island Church, she shared details about JFK’s wedding (where she was one of only 35 guests), as she stood on a bluff in the maritime forest looking out the white sand beach, she explained homemade remedies for chiggers and deer flies, when we finally arrived at Plum Orchards Mansion (now a Carnegie family home), she stopped herself short and played aousing Scottish tune on the piano in the parlor.

On the way back to the ferry at the end of the day, she slowed the van down to make sure we saw the homes in the marshes and the lookout that crossed the road right in front of us. We had finished off the day telling us how thankful she was that her high school sweetheart wasn’t, believe the former cheerleader and homecoming queen had been spending her days fighting forest fires and hanging Signs after island-wide yard sales. Here has been a life that others can only imagine. Oar shaped, Rene has certainly been a long bus ride after Cumberland Island. We were the lucky folks who got to spend an afternoon with one of the nation’s national treasures with this extraordinary Park Ranger. She is, in our opinion, a National Treasure herself.

"It was always geographically desirable," she told us. "Who wants to catch a ferry to go on a date?" and "I always wanted to marry someone named Way, so I say my name is Rene Now Way,"

Related posts:
1. Secret History of Mallows is Excellent Opportunity to Observe Nature (E.B.)
2. Kudzu I Have Accepted (E.B.)
3. The Mystery of Manna’s Grouse (E.B.)

Figure 6 Blog Post with Reply Box Example
Sidebar

The sidebar includes general information about Daufuskie, a box that randomly displays some of my favorite quotations, a box that allows readers to subscribe to the blog, and a list of recent posts. I have the ability to change the sidebar and add or change elements as necessary.

Contact Page and Invitation to Make Creative Contribution

On the Contact Page, readers are invited to ask questions, offer suggestions, and provide feedback. They are also encouraged to submit their creative contributions.

Figure 7 Example of Sidebar and Contact Page
Section Five: Key Learnings

I learned much about website development, community leadership, and blogging as a form of writing, but my greatest insights were related to my own creative process, and what I call the lessons of the three “P’s”: Plan, Persevere, and Personalize.

Plan

Key Insight: In order to complete creative projects, I need to create a flexible plan with a strong purpose and an inflexible deadline.

My strong purpose in this project was to deliver a product in a certain period of time so that I could complete my Master’s degree. While my implementation plan had to change because of unknown variables -- for example, the learning curve on website development was much larger than I originally anticipated -- my purpose was so clearly defined I was compelled to deliver no matter what. For this project, that involved changing my plans around and altering my schedule so I could get the project work completed.

My “ah-ha” insight is that I have many creative projects in my file cabinet that I have never completed because I have never given them a clear purpose with an inflexible deadline. In the future, I will be sure to clarify the purpose of any project, set an inflexible deadline, and know that my implementation plan may change, but my deadline will remain firm.

Persevere

Key insight: Perseverance is powerful.

Steve Jobs, one of the most creative geniuses of our time, said “I’m convinced that about half of what separates the successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance” Viticci, F. (2009, Nov). A Collection of Inspirational Steve Jobs Quotes About

Even though Jobs was referring to entrepreneurs, I believe his quote applies to almost any creative endeavor. When I started developing the website, it became clear very early in the process what a huge learning curve I would face in order to develop the bones of the website. I sat at my computer late into the night on many nights, wanting to quit, thinking I was crazy to have committed to this insane idea, and then I remembered what Steve Jobs said. I also recalled the work of Carol Dweck (2008) whose research taught me the value of a growth mindset over a fixed mindset. Based on my experience teaching growth mindset principles to a class of elementary school students, I knew (at least intellectually) that practice is what leads to mastery and that, as we learn something new, we are also developing new neural connections in our brains. Until I experienced the deep frustration and struggle involved in learning a new skill, I don’t think I fully realized the power of perseverance. I pushed through, and success did eventually follow. Now I have more compassion for the frustration my students experience as they learn new skills.

I also know that even if I start going down a path that leads to a dead end or seems to be off purpose and off track, that if I persevere and remain mindful, inevitably my meandering will lead to something that will benefit my life or my work somewhere down the line. In this project, I took a few “side trips” before I eventually landed on my final project idea. As it turns out, one of my original ideas, which was to offer classes in creative process and relate this to nature, is something I will pursue in the future; now I will have the benefit of introducing and promoting these classes on my new website!
Personalize

Key insight: Trusting myself leads to a more creative product and one that is more fun to create.

When I first decided to create an online community magazine for my Master’s project, I hesitated, concerned about how others on this small island might judge it and me. Nevertheless, I relied upon Ellen Langer’s advice (2006) to be self-referencing and not give undue weight to the opinions of others, and I decided to dive into this project “heart-first.” I was deliberately mindful, trusting my own judgment and including, whenever possible, my own personal touches on the website. I included categories that appealed to me, wrote content using my authentic voice, and included information that I thought would be important to include based on my personal experience. For example, I included a section in the sidebar that allows me to insert my favorite quotes, and I included a blog category called Health and Happiness. Rather than following someone else’s “formula for website success,” I made a deliberate effort to trust myself, not worrying too much about what others might think. In the end, I think the result was a more creative product.

The Role of Intuition in the Process

In the holistic model of creative problem solving proposed by Francisco & Burnett (2008), intuition is integrated with cognitive and affective skills throughout the entire CPS process, and equal weight is placed on intuitive aspects in every part the process. In my work on this project, the intuitive aspects were a critical part of my overall process.

For example, in exploring resources and information to support my project, I followed my intuition and selected books and writings that seemed to “feel” right but were not always a logical choice. When I followed my “gut,” it seemed one selection always led in some organic
way to the next work or author. I trusted this intuitive process for collecting information and discovered that simply taking the next step often resulted in surprising leads and relevant connections. I also found that when my intuitive choices seemingly strayed off topic, somehow these “mistakes” led to my consideration of intriguing ideas that led to creative breakthroughs and interesting combinations of concepts I may never had otherwise considered.

Finally, when I was struggling with writing this paper, I followed the intuitive process created by Laura Day (2009). As a result of an exercise to gain intuitive knowledge about the best way to approach this Master’s project paper, I woke up in the middle of the night with an image of a spider web. I knew right away that the answer to my dilemma about the paper was to relate the components of the paper to Wheatley’s metaphor of the web (Wheatley, 2006, p. 146). When I followed this intuitive hit, the creative floodgates opened, and the writing flowed easily from there.

**Keeping the Creative Fires Burning**

During my coursework in the Master’s program, one class assignment was to come up with a “big question” and then to write a paper based on our findings. My question explored ways in which creativity practitioners might enhance and sustain their creativity and creative thinking skills. Based on my research, I came up with a system called “Cre-Eight” which outlines eight practices to engage in to foster creativity in four areas: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (Tillman, 2013). I deliberately and mindfully engaged in all of these practices during the course of this project, and I found the exercises and advice to be nourishing and helpful. So, the adage proves true that the best way to learn something is to teach it; I might add, practice what you publish!
Reconnecting with My Passion

During the course of creating this project, I reconnected with my passion for inspiring others. When I went into the community to talk to people about the creative contributions they might make to the magazine in the future, I was delighted and surprised by their enthusiastic response. The local pest control man suggested that he could contribute a regular blog post called “Bug of the Month.” Another local wanted to give fishing reports on a weekly basis. A woman who has lived in the community over thirty years became excited because she has a room full of historical artifacts including newspaper articles, property deeds, photographs and other memorabilia, and believed the magazine was the perfect way to share her collection. I was energized by their enthusiasm and realized, upon reflection, that helping others connect to their passion is reconnecting me to my passion for inspiring others! With this insight, it is my intention, as I move forward, to solicit a wide variety of contributions in order to give voice to the diverse talents of all members of this community. I have learned through my experience in classrooms, in life coaching, and in community service, that when a person’s creative talents are recognized and encouraged, this is often the spark that gives people the courage to engage or reengage with their talents, and gives them the opportunity to experience the joy that comes from creating. And giving others joy, I realized, is the source of my joy!
Section Six: Conclusion

Introduction

After interviewing and studying the creative productions of 40 prestigious MacArthur Fellows, Shererjian (1990), made eight recommendations based on her findings. These included advice such as: find your talent, commit to it, don’t be afraid to risk or fail, get to know yourself, respect your culture, don’t go after quick solutions, and find courage by looking to something stronger than your vulnerable self. My personal experience validates these recommendations as valuable to my own creative process. The last recommendation, however, is the one that embodies my greatest learning from the Master’s project. Shererjian’s eighth and final recommendation is: “Then, finally, break free from the seductive pull of book learning and research and the million other preparatory steps that could delay for the entire span of a life, and immerse yourself in the doing” (p. 75).

I believe this concept, *immerse yourself in the doing*, is the key to my future success. It seems so simple, but it captures the essence of what I learned not only from this project, but essentially from the entire Creative Studies program. I know I can have all the intelligence, self-knowledge, know-how, and good intentions in the world, but if I do not deliberately *immerse myself in the doing*, I will not experience the creative renaissance that Ellen Langer (2006) so eloquently describes, nor will I ever reach the level of Torrance’s (1993) “Beyonders.”

Next Steps

I developed the website for this project with the intention to continue it after the completion of the course. I am committed to making the website a success, so I am building time into my calendar for activities related to its ongoing development and management. Specifically, my next steps are to continue to add content and to create a writing schedule to insure that I will add blog posts on a regular basis. I will also continue to sharpen my skills related to blogging
and social media marketing and other technical aspects related to website development.

Gathering information and content from the community will be an ongoing effort that should become easier once the website is established. I will develop a marketing plan so people will know the website is available, and I will learn about analytics so I can monitor activity.

In terms of what I plan to do with the rest of my life, I have made a commitment to my own “Creative Renaissance.” To that end, I will list all the creative projects I have in my physical file cabinets or in the file cabinets of my mind. Next I will prioritize them and put them on a creative projects list. Then I will tackle one project at a time; I will create a strong purpose and inflexible deadline for each project and then I will create a flexible plan to support that purpose. Then I will fully immerse myself in the “doing” of the project.

Finally, I will make a deliberate effort to stay connected to people from my cohort and friends I made at ICSC during the course of my studies. I know how important it is for me to be able to have stimulating conversations with people in my “creative family.” We have a common language and experience that cannot be duplicated, and I know it will be up to me to keep these strands of my “web” as strong as possible.
References


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