Creativity During Covid-19

*By: Cera Meintzer and Danielle Palli*

**Danielle’s First Lesson in Creativity…**

*Growing up, there were two camps in my first-grade art class, those who would become the future Georgia O’Keeffe’s, Leonardo da Vinci’s and Frank Lloyd Wright’s of the world … and me. These would-be painters, sculptures and architects were masters at putting pasta to paper and paper weaving intricate patterns worthy of the best refrigerators in the country. Meanwhile, I was accidentally gluing macaroni to my hair and never got the concept of coloring within the lines. But what I lacked in artistry, I made up for in other creative pursuits, like writing, making up pretend games and convincing my friends to play along, and choreographing the next off, off, off … OFF Broadway opening dance number. My lesson for a creative life? There are many ways to be creative.*

**Why Be Creative? (Finding Your Flow)**

Creativity can help you find your flow, which can, in turn, make you even *more* creative and give you a greater sense of wellbeing. The concept of “flow” comes from Positive Psychologist [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_flow_the_secret_to_happiness?language=en#t-828458). It is a state of being fully engaged in a purposeful task that is intrinsically rewarding for you. While it’s challenging and requires skill and concentration, it is also characterized as producing a sense of timelessness and serenity not unlike mindfulness or meditation. The flow state also releases “feel good” [neurotransmitters such as dopamine, endorphins and serotonin](https://snowbrains.com/the-brain-science-behind-flow-states/), giving you a happiness boost.

Finding that flow also makes us more adaptable and resilient. When we are stressed, we tend to view life through a narrow lens. This is built into our DNA to protect us from a threat (think running from a charging lion), where we only focus on that which will save us. Unfortunately, as humans, we have the unique ability to trigger that stress response with our thoughts. Creative pursuits [reduce our stress and are also linked to less depression and better overall mental health](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/320947#Improved-mental-health). When we are relaxed, we are better equipped to think more broadly, giving us better coping and [problem-solving abilities](https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2009/01/creativity).

*Tip:* When finding your flow, the key is matching your skills with the challenge. So, don’t be afraid to scale something back if it’s too difficult or dial it up if it’s too easy.

**Cera Shares the Second Lesson in Creativity…**

*Around the age of seven, I began to spend hours each day dancing in a large open space in my family’s walk-out basement. We had very large windows that acted as mirrors, and I would watch myself in them as I strung together move after move. Dancing and creating choreography was something I lived to do, and I would share my passion with anyone who was willing to watch. I consider myself a B+ dancer, not the best but not the worst. Some years later, I was accepted to university with a dance degree as my intended education. I watched my fellow dancers land spots in dance companies and as leading roles in school productions. I, myself, never did either of these, and while it did experience disappointment in those moments, what I really cared about was how dancing made me feel. The place that dancing took me was all I needed. In the end, I changed my degree and headed in another direction, but I have never stopped dancing or stringing movements together, especially in front of a good window. Now, I enjoy this with my kids*. *My lesson in a creative life?* *It doesn’t matter if you’re good at it.*

**Creativity is a State of Mind (and Not a Logical One).**

We tend to place ourselves and others in boxes with labels, and we fight hard to keep from escaping those boxes. We find comfort in defining ourselves and feel fear when those labels are challenged. At some point, we must challenge the labels we put on ourselves, such as ones that tell us we’re “not creative.” Change is not something humans take to well, and breaking free from a label can bring up much fear in a person leaving them feeling vulnerable. Awareness of this tendency can help us move through it (and, so can a good life coach).

There are doorways to creativity … play ... sleep ... movement … music, just to name a few. Creativity cannot be willed with the logical, intellectual mind. Rather, it arises through other states of mind. It’s easily compared to romantic love, the more actively you seek it, the more elusive it becomes. The more you try to grasp it, the less you can hold it. It’s an opening, a willingness to be inspired, and then take action. It helps to have a sense of wonder and what many philosophers call a beginner’s mind.

Creativity, and the varying paths to reach it, are unique for each person, much like finding a life-purpose. It’s not a one size fits all situation. It can be like a muscle, if you practice and work it, you can find it and return to it with more ease. Getting into that state has two important pieces: 1) Finding mediums that draw you in and 2) Discovering how to tap into your creative mindset. When you discover the mediums and mindsets that light you up (there’s that “flow” again), you have connected with your creativity. It takes exposure, exploration, and awareness.

**Some ways to be creative…**

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| Dancing (moving to music) | Lino-printing |
| Writing | Knitting |
| Inventing (even just ideas) | Crocheting |
| Rearranging a room and changing the décor | Photography |
| Cooking | Jewelry making |
| Photography  | Painting (canvas, rocks, paper, etc.)  |
| Carving | Calligraphy |
| Sewing | Card making |
| Drawing | Book making |
| Interior Design | Mosaics |
| Stained glass art | Acting |
| Batik dying | Make-up artistry  |
| Pottery | Digital design |

***Tip:***Two ways to trigger your creative side are through:

1. Movement: walking has been shown to [increase creativity by as much as 60%.](https://blocks.mvmm.nl/images/pdf/6072.pdf)

 2. Sleep. [REM is the part of sleep that helps us connect information and solve problems](https://www.pnas.org/content/106/25/10130).

**Questions to Consider…**

* How does creativity show up in your life?
* What do you believe about yourself and creativity?
* What holds you back from making that next creative leap?
* Who in your life inspires your creativity?
* Who in your life could be a creative teacher for you?
* Who might you inspire with your creativity?

Whether you find creativity through art, dance, music, technology, invention, writing or a myriad of other ways, find what has meaning for you that you enjoy doing. Kurt Vonnegut once wrote: “to practice any art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow.” Here’s to growth.