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## Filipino Conceptualizations of Creativity

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## Notes and Comments

### Filipino Conceptualizations of Creativity

CLARIBEL D. BARTOLOME

One part of a research project entitled "Creativity in Different Fields Among Young Adults" was to look into Filipino conceptualizations of creativity. There were forty-seven nominators from different fields, among whom were deans/directors, department chairmen, professors, guidance counselors, and advisers of student organizations who recommended 482 students with creative potential. A questionnaire asked them to indicate the reasons for their nominations and their own conceptualizations of the term "creativity." In cases where their responses were vague, clarification was sought through follow-up interviews.

The results of the questionnaire and interviews are summarized in three parts: Conceptual Definitions of Creativity, Characteristics of Creative Individuals and the Climate of Creative Development. Commonalities and differences in conceptualizations across fields of specializations are then discussed and summarized.

#### CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF CREATIVITY

From the forty-seven questionnaires one can see that Filipino concepts of creativity are as varied as those of authorities in the field.<sup>1</sup> The various definitions of creativity provide quite an array of some-

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1. E.P. Torrance "Creativity and Infinity," *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 4 (1971): 35-41; J.P. Guilford, *Personality* (New York: McGraw-Hill Books, Inc., 1959); A. Osborne, *Applied Imagination* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963); W. Gordon, *Synectics* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961); John G. Young, "What

what confusing and sometimes contradictory elements. At present no single definition of creativity has universal acceptance.<sup>2</sup> Rhodes set out to examine the literature to find a single definition of creativity.<sup>3</sup> Instead he found four categories of definitions: the creative personality, the creative process, creative products and the environment for creativity. This is also true of this investigation into Philippine concepts of creativity.

Although it was rather difficult to find a single definition of creativity among the nominators, the following elements of creativity emerged from the definitions they gave.

*Originality/Inventiveness.* Originality was found most central to the concept of creativity, and was the most pervasive dimension mentioned across all specialization groups. Most of the nominators see creativity as the capability to come up with new ideas, new approaches, new techniques, or new products. The expression of originality is seen as possible in almost any field or situation, e.g., a new technique for analyzing tissues in agriculture, a new way of solving a problem in science, a new way of reasoning, a new contribution to economic theory, a new computer program, a new recipe, a new approach to teaching, and many more.

*Flexibility.* In many cases, the definition of creativity in terms of the originality dimension overlaps with that of flexibility, in the sense that new ideas, approaches or products are seen as answers to problems where existing or stereotyped approaches no longer work or have become less efficient. Thus creativity is defined, for instance, as an impulse to rise above the ordinary approach towards solving problems, the use of alternative strategies and resources in times of emergency and crisis, the ability to shift the functions of objects, the ability to improvise on existing resources, and the openness of mind for new possibilities of doing things.

*Fluency.* Some nominators see creativity as the ease with which one can generate ideas and translate such ideas into forms easily understood and appreciated by others whether visual, numeric, or written. Creativity as fluency is also implied in the following definitions: ability to communicate the musical language of composers through one's

is Creativity?," *Journal of Creative Behavior* 19 (1985); C.M. Charles, *Individualizing Instruction*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: The CV Mosby Co. 1980); and George Wheeler-Brownlee, "Imagination: The Connection Enigma," *Journal of Creative Behavior* 19 (1985).

2. P.K. Welsh, "The Nurturance of Creative Behavior in Educational Environment: A Comprehensive Curriculum Approach" (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1980).

3. M. Rhodes, "An Analysis of Creativity," *Phi Delta Kappa* 42 (1961): 305-10, quoted in Charles, *Individualizing Instruction*.

medium of choice; ability to express one's ideas clearly and independently; having a good grasp of medium and language of visual, numeric, written, and verbal communication.

*Elaboration.* Of the four dimensions of creativity identified by Torrance,<sup>4</sup> elaboration is the least mentioned by the nominators in this survey. However, even if it is not explicitly stated, elaboration is often implied or intertwined with the dimensions of originality and flexibility. For instance, the creative ability of elaboration can be implied from the following definitions: ability to come up with forms quite distinct from the original; making new formulations out of existing ones through improvisation; and the ability to modify a prototype model.

*Creativity as function.* For many of the nominators, creativity must not stop at being just a concept or idea; it must be manifested in forms tangible to the senses which can be observed and tested. Furthermore, some nominators see such tangible manifestations of creativity as having a functional purpose aside from aesthetic satisfaction, e.g., they are made to alleviate a problem, for human comfort, or to contribute something to society without regard for personal gain.

*Creativity as individual expression.* Some of the nominators put emphasis on the individual nature of creativity as an extension/projection of the self. A musician, for instance, sees creativity as the ability of the artist to inject his own personal feelings and individual perceptions in his interpretation of another's creation. An educator adds that one very important thing about the creative process is that the creator is happy about and values what he has done. A physicist says that the creative product may have no functional value but is important to the individual undergoing such a process.

*Creativity as synthesis/integration.* Some of the definitions given seem to equate or at least combine creativity with intelligence and other cognitive functions. A psychologist sees it as a learned skill resulting from knowledge, intelligence, and evaluation, while an architect views it as the sum total of a person's life experiences in reaction to a stimulus at a particular time. This view is best expressed by a physicist who sees creativity as the ability to synthesize inputs from various sources and that its expression relates to the individual's emotional, physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual state. Sarnoff and Cole make these remarks:

At its most basic level, creativity is concerned with the process of personality growth and development, what May (1975) calls "spiritual creativity."

4. E.P. Torrance, "Creativity and Infinity."

In this realm persons create new aspects of themselves, new thought patterns, new emotional reactions, new physical actions, new forms of relating to people. All of these contribute to new states of being and personal growth. At another level, creativity is concerned with the invention and improvement of "things" including tools, concepts, artistic forms, symbolic systems and other products useful across the theoretical, artistic and practical disciplines. May has referred to this as the technological realm of creativity.<sup>5</sup>

These elements of creativity culled from the nominators' given definitions were found to be present across disciplines.

*Creativity as aesthetics.* In addition to functional value, nominators from the arts stress the aesthetic value of the creative product. Thus, the following definitions: ability to create and manipulate space for visual satisfaction; and ability to see and reproduce form, order, and beauty in anything one perceives.

*Creativity as spontaneity.* In line with Moreno's theory on creativity, some nominators from the arts put much value on the role of spontaneity in the creative process. This is implied in the following definitions: a spontaneous action of organizing elements in the environment to create a new thing; a spontaneous impulse to rise above the ordinary approach in solving problems.

In summary, it can be seen that even if situations and examples given by the nominators relate, as expected, to their respective fields, some common dimensions/elements of creativity are identified. The most central and pervading dimension is originality, followed by flexibility, fluency, and elaboration, in that order. Other elements that cut across disciplines are the following: the functional nature of creativity as a form of individual expression; and creativity as a synthetic integrative skill or function. Nominators from the arts also included the elements of aesthetics and spontaneity in their conceptualizations of creativity.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CREATIVE INDIVIDUALS

Among the perceptions of nominators of qualities that characterize creative individuals, some are mentioned more often than others and cut across the different fields of specialization.

5. David Sarnoff and Henry Cole, "Creativity and Personal Growth," *Journal of Creative Behavior* 17 (1983).

These are:

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
1. Original (innovative, divergent thinker)	41	87.23
2. Independent-minded (different, unconventional, non-conformist, unique, out of the ordinary)	30	68.83
3. Fluent (fast thinker, good grasp of medium, vibrant thought and speech patterns, can compose/convey message easily)	37	78.72
4. Committed and Dedicated (hardworking, conscientious, productive, creative, studious, intense)	24	51.06
5. Courageous (bold, adventurous, risk-taker, confident, fearless)	17	36.17
6. Flexible (broadminded, open mind, searches for several alternatives)	24	51.06

The characteristics/traits most often mentioned are in keeping with the definitions of creativity given by the nominators, most central to which is the dimension of originality. Independence of mind, some degree of nonconformity and unconventionality are called for if one has to come up with the novel ideas or products. Likewise, such manifestations can take place if the individual has enough courage and confidence to pursue a course of action that is different from what has already been tried and tested. The other characteristics mentioned relate to the dimensions of fluency and flexibility which, as discussed earlier, were also components of the definitions of creativity given by the nominators. One interesting trait that appeared across the different disciplines is that of commitment. Many nominators perceived the creative individual is dedicated to his field, is conscientious, hard-working, and productive.

The following set of characteristics are not mentioned as often as the first set but nevertheless appeared in several fields of specialization. These are:

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
7. Intelligent and has a good academic performance	15	31.91
8. Active in student organizations	10	21.28
9. Leadership qualities/initiative	14	29.79
10. Inquisitive and explorative	8	17.02
11. Resourceful	11	23.40
12. Involved in the arts	15	31.91
13. Patient and persistent	5	10.64
14. Sensitive to elements in the environment	11	23.40

Many nominators perceive creative individuals as also intelligent and, more often than not, doing well academically. Creative persons are also perceived as involved in both curricular and extra-curricular activities, often serving as leaders or active members in student organizations. The characteristic of resourcefulness is obviously akin to originality and flexibility, and that of patience to commitment and dedication. One interesting finding is that nominators from the social sciences and the natural/physical sciences mentioned that the creative individual in their fields is also involved in the arts such as dancing, painting, music, and writing. Creative individuals are also perceived by some nominators as inquisitive, explorative, and sensitive to elements in the environment. Other characteristics mentioned by one or two nominators are the following: has a sense of humor, is physically attractive, idealistic, disorderly, emotionally sensitive, "weird," and impractical. To some nominators, creativity is manifested by winning awards and competitions that require creativity, e.g., Urian Awards, Palanca Awards, fashion competitions, writing competitions, etc.

#### CLIMATES/SITUATIONS THAT DEVELOP CREATIVITY

As perceived by the nominators, creativity can be developed in almost any situation—whether real life, simulated, or in the realm of the abstract. More specifically, the following situations were mentioned:

1. Classes or course work that focus on creative work, e.g., fine arts, landscape, architecture, music, etc. obviously aim to develop creativity. Nevertheless, creativity is enhanced further by these courses as well as other courses through these activities: project-oriented assignments, theses presentations and reports, exercises that call for creative thinking/brainstorming, opportunities for observation and visualization, apprenticeship/practice work, holistic evaluation: from concept/idea to execution to product.
2. Extra-curricular activities, particularly leadership positions in student organizations where the individual is required to make decisions.
3. Real-life situations such as emergencies, problems, crises, where decisionmaking is involved.
4. Competitions such as song-writing contests, fashion design contests, etc.
5. Leisure activities.

Environments perceived by the nominators as conducive to the development of creativity are the following: to be free from work/other responsibilities; to be in the open, such as outdoors; to be equipped with the necessary materials such as paper, crayons, pens, etc. (e.g., ad agency room, a painter's studio, etc.); to be in an environment where divergent views and unusual answers are accepted and encouraged; and to be under a certain amount of pressure, such as deadlines to be met.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussions of creativity, one can see that the Filipino conceptualizations do not differ very much from what authorities in the field say about creativity.<sup>6</sup> Creativity, according to the nominators, consists of several important elements that run across different fields, the core of which is inventiveness or originality. What is considered creative varies greatly: a new way of solving a problem in science or mathematics, a new musical composition, a new computer program, a new recipe, new painting/poster, a video film production, a thesis/dissertation, a new contribution to economic theory, policy, methodology, a new way of fixing one's room, a new way of designing/choreographing fashion shows, unique artifacts, landscape architecture, a new dissecting set. Young found from his review of literature that creativity involves skills, "newness," and value.<sup>7</sup> "Newness" according to him implies being unique, the first of its kind; something that has never been done before; being statistically infrequent/ rare/unusual. Newness is novelty out of the ordinary; a change from the regular way of doing things, renovation, rejuvenation or regeneration.

The expression of originality/newness/uniqueness is seen as possible in almost any field or situation—be it in the arts/humanities, social sciences or natural/physical sciences.

Flexibility, a second dimension that runs across the fields, has something to do with alternative strategies and approaches to problem-

6. See for example, Torrance, "Creativity and Infinity"; P.J. Burgett, "On Creativity," *Journal of Creative Behavior* 16 (1982); Guilford, *Personality*; Osborne, *Applied Imagination*; Young, "What is Creativity?"; T.F. Wolfe "The Many Masks of Modern Art," *The Christian Science Monitor* 6 (1981); Beverly Baer, "The Rehabilitative Influences of Creative Experience," *Journal of Creative Behavior* 19 (1985); N.L. Gage and C. Berliner David, *Educational Psychology*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984); Charles, *Individualizing Instruction*; Brownlee, "Imagination"; and Victor Lowenfield and W. Labert Brittain, *Creative and Mental Growth*, 7th ed. (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1982).

7. Young, "What is Creativity?"



solving especially in times of emergency or crisis. It is seen in "the ability to shift functions of objects," "ability to improvise on existing resources" or "in the openness of the mind for new possibilities of doing things." Creative people tend to be flexible in the way they look at things. They see many different possibilities that usually do not come to mind at first.

A third dimension is that of fluency. Creative people seem to produce quantities of ideas and make numerous associations among them. These ideas are usually translated into forms which are understood and easily appreciated by others in visual, numeric or written language. Creativity here is defined as the "ability to communicate the musical language of composers through one's medium of choice" or "having a good grasp of medium and language of visual, numeric, written and verbal communication."

A fourth dimension, elaboration, seems to be intrinsically woven with the dimensions of originality and flexibility as applied in the following definitions: "ability to come out with forms quite distinct from the original" or "making new formulations out of existing ones through improvisation." Creative people tend to be very good at elaborating ideas. If you give them a bare outline of an idea, they can fill in all the details.

Creativity is also seen as function, e.g., the abstract idea must be manifested in solid, concrete forms which can be observed and tested. Aside from aesthetic satisfaction it must have a functional purpose such as alleviating a problem or contributing something to society, regardless of material rewards. McMullan and Stocking and Cogle share similar view in that creativity must be "externalized in the form and pattern in some transmittable media" and "must contribute to human life at large."<sup>8</sup>

Some nominators believe that creativity is an individual expression—an extension/projection of the self. It is reflected in the "ability of the artist to inject his own creation for individual satisfaction." The important thing is, the creator is happy about and values what he has done. It may not have much functional value but it is important to the individual undergoing such process. This concept of creativity may be seen as related to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the creator. Kuppuswamy says that creative behavior is an act of self-expression, a realization of something from within.<sup>9</sup> It arises

8. W.E. McMullan and J.R. Stocking, "Conceptualizing Creativity in Three Dimensions" *Journal of Creative Behavior* 12 (1978); Michael Cagle, "A General Abstract-Concrete Model of Creative Thinking," *Journal of Creative Behavior* 19 (1985).

9. Kuppuswamy, *Advanced Educational Psychology* (India, 1972).

in situations calling forth imagination, initiative, and originality. Burgett alleges that creativity is a function of growth and growth is a function of all human beings.<sup>10</sup> Since all human beings grow, all are creative. Baer affirms that creative expression represents a valuable coping mechanism for human beings.<sup>11</sup> Creative experiences often lead to new perceptual and attitudinal windows on the world and more fulfilling ways of confronting overwhelming circumstances. Adler says that an individual searches for new experiences to fulfill his desires for superiority and puts these together to create a self that is different from any other self and that describes his own peculiar style of life.<sup>12</sup> Maslow observes that every self-actualizing personality has a hierarchy of need priorities—physiological, safety, belongingness, love, self-esteem and self-actualization which lead to psychological health. Torrance acknowledges the fact that mental health is closely affiliated with creativity.

Creativity is sometimes also considered as a synthetic/integrative skill. It is a "learned skill resulting from knowledge, intelligence, and evaluation." It is seen as "the sum total of a person's life, experiences in reaction to a stimulus." It is the "ability to synthesize/combine inputs from various sources, such that its expression likewise relates to the person's total well-being.

Furthermore, from the artists' vantage point, creativity means aesthetics and spontaneity. In addition to the aesthetic value of the product, the creative act must come about spontaneously, e.g. creativity is defined as "a spontaneous action of organizing elements in the environment to create something unique." It is an impulse to rise above the ordinary approaches to problem solving." "It is the spontaneous ability to create and manipulate space for visual satisfaction." This point of view is shared by Moreno's spontaneity principles of creativity.

On the whole, the most central and pervading dimension of creativity across fields is originality followed by flexibility, fluency, and elaboration. Other elements include functional nature of creativity, creativity as a form of individual self expression, creativity as a synthetic/ integrative skill/ function, creativity as aesthetics and spontaneity.

10. P.J. Burgett, "On Creativity."

11. Baer, "Rehabilitative Influences."

12. Quoted in Ledford J. Bischof, *Interpreting Personality Theories*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970).