

# CONNECTING CREATIVITY TO COPE WITH CURRENT CHALLENGES

*A review of selected practices to enhance creativity and cope with today's challenging world.*

Sunita Wadhawan

## **Abstract**

Creativity is often associated with art and literature because every poem is different from the other and no two works of art are alike, but creativity also expresses itself in unique ideas that may solve a mathematical problem or an architectural challenge or a political debate or a philosophical question. There is no end to creativity and one's imagination is the limit of one's creativity.

This paper explores the concept of creativity and delves deep into the Yoga shastras to prove that creativity can be developed and our way of thinking can be enhanced. It also discusses the process of creativity which begins from curiosity and leads to creative excellence. It concludes with, how inculcating creativity or rather fostering creativity at school level can help us go beyond higher order thinking and cognitive skills to reach a place of universal peace and harmony. Loss of creativity can turn us into super-efficient robots. Human potential is enhanced with creativity as a way of life.

## **Introduction**

While contemplating the sense and meaning of the word- creativity, Abel remarks, "Who does not know what creativity is? Who does not know the difference between creative and non-creative persons, processes, and products? Yet when it comes to spelling out what creativity really is, no one seems to know the answer any longer." – Günter Abel[1]

Creativity is intelligence having fun.(Albert Einstein) eureka' moments.It comes in when all the tried and tested methods are exhausted and a new way of thinking is needed. It seems that creativity is inborn. A unique attribute that helps us think differently.It is an abstract concept that we need to visualize and strengthen to get a grasp on. A lot of philosophers and researchers throughout the ages have tried to define creativity and help us understand its meaning. Even after dedicating their entire lives to the study of creativity many researchers still struggle with the definition of creativity. This can be attributed to the fact that creativity is a different concept to every individual and how they wish to utilize and conceptualize this concept through the creative process is entirely up to one's own individuality. [3]

Bohm and Peat speak of the problem of defining creativity, as follows, "Something relevant may be said about creativity, provided it is realized that whatever we say it is, there is also something more and something different."[2]

"Most western definitions limit creativity to higher intelligence." To try and understand the definition of creativity we must first understand the broad category that any definition falls under-

Sawyers lists two broad categories –

- “Sociocultural definition: Creativity is the generation of a product that is judged to be novel and also to be appropriate, useful, or valuable. [4]
- Individualist definition: Creativity is a new mental combination that is expressed in the world.” [5]

Cropley, explains the key elements of these two types of definitions quite nicely, “Creativity can... be defined as a social phenomenon that is facilitated by some social factors, and inhibited by others. One important social setting is the place of work, where an interaction between the person and the environment affects the process of innovation. Focusing on the individual person, creativity is defined as an aspect of thinking, as a personality constellation, and as an interaction between thinking, personal properties, and motivation. This interaction involves a number of paradoxes, in that apparently contradictory elements have to coexist for creativity to emerge.”[6]

When it comes to Indian thought, the word Pratibha seems to be the closest synonym to creativity in Sanskrit. Pratibha, also means Insight. Pratibhā (प्रतिभा (or “poetic intuition” as discussed in the puranas is an inborn impression (saṃskāra) inherited from previous births. Cirañjīva says, pratibhā which is assisted by śruta and abhyāsa brings forth poetry. Śruta means knowledge acquired from the instructions of those who are well-versed in different branches of knowledge. Abhyāsa means constant application or practice.[7]

As understood (*the seeds were sown in earlier life which are fructified in this life – in the Yoga sutra it is called the vipaka of the previous karmas*) by the above definitions, creativity or pratibha is beyond high intelligence. It is the inspiration that arises from beyond the conscious mind, so it can be inferred that creativity is not just a mental attribute it is also related to *the ( with practice one can sow the seed and reap the fruits in this life itself)* higher consciousness.

## Yoga and Creativity

Humans, unlike any other animals, have the unique ability (*it is dormant – awakening it is the mission*) of being self- aware. We are not restricted to the simplistic activities like eating, sleeping, and mating. Life is much more than this. Using our well-developed pre-frontal cortex leads us to admire our surroundings and get creative with our thinking process. Creativity is a strong force that can lead to marvellous ideas if used for the right cause. Each and every person has the potential to be creative and use this creativity for the betterment of themselves and those around them.

“Yet, all these factors depend primarily on how each person conceptualizes, defines and understands creativity.” [8] Creativity is the ‘journey of creativity’ begins as a process of a calm mind, and the mind when faced with challenges can deviate from the goal and lose its focus.

Silence the mind, to be more diverse in approach. When the mind is balanced within, it can think more creatively and develop a divergent thinking process – in which one problem has multiple solutions.

To enhance and strengthen our mind from self-doubt and to allow for optimal creativeness, innovation and balance, the best exercise and practise is – YOGA.

Yoga is the ancient art of mind exercise and control to help relax the mind and achieve balance. A high number of several randomized clinical trials have proven to show that yoga plays an important role to combat pain associated disability and mental health issues. Our mind is constantly plagued with multiple thoughts that are distracting. Yoga has been used to calm the mind and get rid of these thoughts to have a higher sense of self-awareness.

The Scientific studies in neurology state that right side of our brain deals with creativity, whereas the left side of the brain deals with logic and understanding. A perfect balance between the two can lead to tremendous creativity and productive work, which also benefits us with a healthier mind - proved in many scientific studies. [9]

“A balanced and quiet mental state is the soil for creativity that can be nurtured by continuous and regular practices of Yoga especially of its breathing and concentration techniques.” [10]

Willingness is the key factor in practising yoga for better mental health. When we are open minded and ready to receive and practise deep breathing techniques and yoga asanas we can achieve a flexibility of the mind which ultimately leads to a flexibility of the body. Another important contribution of yoga is in the field of self-motivation. Creating self-awareness through yoga and eliminating self-doubt builds in us a sense of motivation to achieve our maximum potential. (Secret is Mind the presence of intention, Eyes the focus of intention, Movement the action of intention, Breath the flow of intention).

“Yoga practices are geared each of the Panchkosha mentioned in the Taittiriya Upanishad believes in the concept of “Panchakosha” - or the five levels of human existence. A regular yoga trainee enhances the transformation of each kosha by channelizing their energies, which benefits every aspect of human dimensions, contributing to the betterment of society.”

The 195 Yoga Sutras of Maharishi Patañjali, Yoga Darshana have been known for the imparting a sense of balance and mindfulness which can enhance creativity and allow a person to deal with any wide range of obstacles that are inevitable in one’s life.

The three sutras from the PYS important to understand creativity are :

Yoga Sutras of Maharishi Patanjali-

- I. Tatodvandvaanabhighatah ||2.48|| (therefore, one is undisturbed by dualities not only restricted to asana pose )
- II. Rtambharatraprajna ||1.48 || (the consciousness is filled with truth)
- III. Sattvapurusaanyataakhyaatimaatrasya, Sarvabhaavaadhistaatrvtvamsarvajnatrtvamcall 3.50|| (Purity of being and pure being, the supremacy of all modes and understanding of all things)[10]

Yoga has the immense advantage of being a skill and treatment that is relatively cost-effective and can be practised anywhere and anytime, from the comfort of your being. It has been proven to be a great method of self-care, providing one with lifelong mind strength and skill. It leads to more efficiency, confidence and creativity in the work and private life. It is a useful practise that will only lead to tremendous benefit for oneself.

### **Education and Creativity**

“Logic can get you from A TO Z, imagination (in education) will get you everywhere” - Albert Einstein

Often times in our education system we hear the words holistic education. These words are used in the context to explain to students and parents that along with traditional education, creativity and imagination are other factors that can be used to benefit the education of the youth of our nation. “Whenever we create a window into a dark room, we allow a ray of light along with hope inside, the use of creative ability to solve any challenges in any field, is central to human cognitive processes.”[8]

Creativity is a useful tool in our everyday lives. It is essentially a dynamic thinking process with numerous elements involved. Imagination is another concept that is intricately entwined with the creative process. Creativity is the ability to create or form a new idea or concept using the underlying process of imagination.

“In today’s world its perhaps not a lack of creativity that adults suffer - it is lack of imagination.” While creativity deals with the real world and is confined to the laws of reality, imagination is quite the opposite and has no bounds. Imaginative thinking leads to thinking outside of the box which fuels our creative ideas in the real world. [8]

Imagination occupies a pivotal role in philosophy, going back to the times of Aristotle. [10] In recent times there has been an explosion of interest in the field of philosophy to analyze the importance of imagination in association with the mind, cognition, aesthetics, ethics, science and mathematics.

The education system in India which has dealt with rigid, structured work is now adapting yoga to balance and develop both hemispheres adding a touch of creativity as one of its aims to allow the youth to become more analytically competent and to generate new and creative ideas too. The education that we part to our children must include the ability to empower them to deal with difficulties and to arrive at respectable resolutions, but so far, the education system does not have an adequate means of assessment for the creative ability that is associated with this kind of higher order of thinking. [8]

“To be an outstanding leader like them, specialized knowledge alone does not suffice, but a broad vision and creativity are essential.”[8]

The top leaders of today’s world such as Steve Jobs have got the same education level as most of us can avail, but what sets them apart and has led to breakthrough products is often because of excellent creativity and a broad sense of vision. The development of these skills is what education needs to impart to the children.

In the views of Ahmed Hassan Hamdan , Ali Mahdi Kazim Piaget and Vygotsky - Development is the active process in which the child can observe and absorb information from the surrounding world. The creative thought process and imagination play a crucial role in the understanding and comprehension of this information from the surrounding world. The process of development is through many stages, each one being influenced by its predecessor. “According to the constructivist theory, Piaget asserted that children build rather than discover new ideas.” The building of ideas is what furthers a child’s development. [11]

“The development of creativity in children and adolescents has been entropic of continuous research in the field of education for more than fifty years. [12] The results of these researches have shown that the development of creativity in children has led to a significant increase in self- efficacy. This could be a step towards more breakthrough ideas from the future youth.

### **Challenges and Creativity**

Now that we understand creativity, we have come to realise that creativity is not only part of the arts and sciences, it is an integral part of our daily lives. It serves an important function in development at the individual and societal levels.

Sternberg points out, “At an individual level, creativity is relevant, for example, when one is solving problems on the job and in daily life. At a societal level, creativity can lead to new scientific findings, new movements in art, new inventions, and new social programs” [13]

In today’s challenging world we are faced with many obstacles that need to be overcome. To achieve our goal we need to implement the Creative Process –

G. Wallace in 1926 proposed the 4 stage process of creative thinking –(*Preparatory, Incubation, illumination, Verification. Parallel to yoga :* 1. *Abhyasa* 2. *Vairagya* 3. *Rtumbhara pragyna* 4. *Leading a yogic life*).

1. The preparatory stage – the formulation of the task and the initial attempts to solve it;
2. The incubation of the idea – a temporary abandonment of efforts to solve and switching to other questions;
3. Illumination – instant, intuitive penetration into the essence of the problem;
4. Verification – testing and (or) implementation of the solution. [9]

Health and Well-being is of utmost importance to each and every individual. Imbalance in our mental health can lead to imbalance in our physical health.

Many a times people suffering from depression can lose their way. One of the ways to try and battle this is to develop a creative outlet for your thoughts.

Famous writers like Heine, Rilke and Greene have stressed that writing helps them heal. American poet Sylvia Plath referred to ‘poetry as therapy’ and the English writer Virginia Woolf relied on her ‘art to keep [her] head sane’. [14]

Yoga is another outlet to help strengthen your mind and develop clear thought process for creative outcomes. It helps to calm the mind and battle mental illnesses.

In the corporate world today, creativity is a man's best friend. This creativity can be honed and developed using G.Wallace's four stages of creativity during our educational period. Introducing creativity as an active learning requirement can only benefit the students. Our education can help us choose the right path and show our creative aspects in the real world. When faced with problems such as low marks or loss of motivation and concentration to focus on studies we need to come up with creative ideas to learn the same skills. May be through animated video concepts, or learning through games. All these require us to be creative and innovative to achieve our goals.

Utilising our time seems to be another challenge during this quarantined state due to Covid-19. The four creative stages proposed by G. Wallace can help us get through this. Take some time to prepare yourself, list out all the tasks you want to accomplish. Be realistic about your task list, don't try to over achieve as that will only lead you to give up your goals. Be creative and come up with new ideas that you want to try out. Implementation of our ideas might be successful for the first few days before you give up or get bored, but remember to try and keep at it or switch to another idea that will make your tasks more interesting. The Illumination stage is the stage where you have developed your task as a habit, it comes naturally and you start to enjoy it. Now try to use this new idea or task as a skill to build on a larger project!

Focusing on the positives is a great way to bring out your creative side. In today's hard times unique ideas and innovations have come about to help us cope and make our lives better. All these ideas are stemmed from our individual creativity and consciousness.

Let us look at some of these fascinating examples of creativity –

1. In a rather selfish world, the coronavirus outbreak has brought in us a sense of brotherhood and humanity. It has led us to stand stronger together and face this challenge head on. Countries are help each other out with supplies and equipment.
2. Social Media has brought us together to take innovative steps to keep us entertained. Recently, many celebrities of India together made a music video. It was a collaboration unlike any we have seen till date. A truly innovative idea.
3. All around the world people have started to apply themselves to different activities that they may not have done before. Some have started cooking, some have started yoga, and many have found their creative side through the outlet of art.
4. Education is crucial to every student's life. Schools and colleges have come up with the concept of taking online classes through various video calling platforms. Since there is more free time on students' hands, there has been a rise in the number of online courses being taken by students in different subject areas. Coming out of this pandemic they will have broadened outlooks and unique skills.
5. People are reconnecting and bonding even more with their families than ever. Cooking meals together, having game nights, watching movies, and even doing chores together have reiterated the importance and support that a family can provide to one another.

6. The world outside has never been as calm and quiet before. The world is witnessing unique events – bird chirpings have become even more prominent in heavily concrete cities, other sea animals are being spotted at coasts that used to be busy with ships and activity, and the skies have never looked more brilliant and clearer. Nature is healing.

In conclusion, challenges are going to be there at every turn in our life, how we use our creative ability and consciousness to make a difference and overcome these challenges is up to us. Unique opportunities can give us the chance to show our creative side, as we can see during this pandemic. Self-love, mental strength and a creative perspective is what is going to get us through any difficult situation. Be creative, Be happy! as an anchor of your life.

### References -

- [1] Günter Abel, op. cit., pp. 17, 18
- [2] Quoted by Rob Pope, op. cit., p. 35
- [3] Ibid., p. 226
- [4] R.K. Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation* (2nd Ed.), Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 7
- [5] Ibid., p. 8
- [6] Arthur J. Cropley, "Definitions of Creativity", *Encyclopedia of Creativity* (Vol.1), Routledge, 1999, p. 511
- [7] *Shodhganga: The Kavyavilasa of CiranjivaBhattacharya (natyashastra)*
- [8] "Solving educational challenges with creativity" – SunitaWadhawan
- [9] Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Getzels, J. W. (1971). discovery oriented behavior and the originality of creative products: A study with an artist. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 19(1), 47-52. Vygotsky (2004) University of Chicago.
- [10] A review article on creativity and imagination - SunitaWadhawan
- [11] Ahmed Hassan Hemdan & Ali Mahdi Kazem (2019) Creativity Development of High-Achieving Students, *Creativity Research Journal*, 31:3, 296-308, DOI: [10.1080/10400419.2019.1641684](https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2019.1641684)
- [12] Kim, 2011; Smith & Carlsson, 1985; Torrance, 1968
- [13] Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Sternberg, R. J., & Lubart, T. I. (1999). The concept of creativity: Prospects and paradigms. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity* (pp. 3–15) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press
- [14] Elliot Samuel Paul & Scott Barry Kaufman, (2014), *The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays*, (Eds.) Oxford University Press.