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Inquiry into Creative and Innovative Processes: An Experiential, Whole-Person Approach to Teaching Creativity

Dorit Netzer¹ and Nancy Mangano Rowe¹

Abstract

This article highlights the transformative nature of an online master's level course titled, *Inquiry into Creative and Innovative Processes*. The authors emphasize the importance of whole-person, imaginative, and intuitive experiences in adult students' unique, scholarly development. They describe their process of adapting *intuitive inquiry*, a transpersonal research method, as a supportive structure for this online course on creativity. A creative and innovative approach to teaching in itself, the course facilitated a flexible learning container, where students were guided toward integrating their academic learning and personal discovery in embodied and deeply conscious ways. Examples of students' work and assessments demonstrated how they experienced meaningful and purposeful shifts in the ways they perceived and processed newly acquired knowledge. Students broadened and deepened their intuitive and rational ways of knowing in mindful, embodied, and creatively informed manner.

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Creative exploration, intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2011), and whole-person, transformative learning (e.g., Dirkx, 2001; Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda, 2005; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Yorks & Kasl, 2006) place much attention on the delicate balance of embodiment, intuition, imagination, and contemplative thought, in order to open learners to multiple ways of knowing and develop in them, experientially, the capacity for reflective awareness of self in relationship to a larger scope of being in the world.

The dance between inspiration and reason, logic and symbolic expression, expansive and structured ways of knowing provides a climate of flexibility, which stimulates new possibilities, poignant insight, and spiritual transformation. This reveals itself as increased self-awareness and feelings of interconnectedness and results in a shift in one's view of everyday existence and, often, movement toward social action. It is not surprising then that learning about creativity and innovation through an intuitive inquiry would facilitate transformative learning and validate multiple ways of knowing, which include and transcend academic knowledge.

This article describes how the authors adapted *intuitive inquiry*, a transpersonal research method (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2011), to support the development of a course, titled *Inquiry into Creative and Innovative Processes*, for a new, master's level specialization in creativity and innovation. This course blended scholarly reading, candid discussions, transpersonal inquiry, and creative activities, as key ingredients in our experiential, whole-person approach to transformative learning. It was designed to help students explore the complexity of the field of creativity and innovation and to encourage experiential awareness of the many ways creative people express themselves in their respective occupations. At the same time, we hoped that students would gain insight into their own creative process and its role in their learning, personal growth, and professional development.

We created a course that drew upon existing scholarship, yet promoted spontaneous discovery. Students were encouraged to work in an intuitive, multimodal fashion, as they bridged theory and practice in embodied and deeply conscious ways—an approach to transpersonal and transformative education, which has been shown to deepen students' engagement with and understanding of newly acquired knowledge, as well as facilitate spiritual transformation (e.g., Braud, 1998, 2006; Braud & Anderson, 1998; Cunningham, 2006; Dirkx et al., 2006; Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003; Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda, 2006; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Heron, 1999; Yorks & Kasl, 2006).

This course exemplifies transformational learning with adults who seek personal and spiritual meaning in their professional pursuits even within a course so heavily focused on research and scholarship. This requires that the learner “challenges

existing, taken-for-granted assumptions, notions, and meanings of what learning is all about” (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 126) and blends inner, subjective experiences with course material. Students transformed their understanding of learning as they opened to new ways of knowing, being with, and researching a topic. Their subjective experiences and meta-awareness of their learning processes were valued as much as rationale ways of knowing.

For the purpose of this article, the authors define whole-person, transformative learning as the process of experiencing meaningful and purposeful shifts in the ways learners perceive and process newly acquired knowledge and their own inner knowing, by developing and integrating new awareness on personal and transpersonal levels, which is mindful, intuitive, embodied, and creatively informed. We begin by describing our course and how we grounded its progression in intuitive inquiry’s five cycles of research, as well as in principles of whole-person, transformative learning. We then explore the ways in which the course offers a response to the *second-wave* developments in transformative learning theories—as manifested in more holistic, integrative, and integral approaches—as summarized by Gunnlaugson (2007, pp. 134–135). Finally, we provide excerpts from students’ work in the course to demonstrate how this course has fulfilled our intentions and continues to do so by providing the framework for teaching creative and innovative processes within an academic environment and toward professional applications of the outcomes of transpersonal education in people’s lives and work in the world.

Inquiry into Creative and Innovative Processes: The Course

The 6-week course, *Inquiry into Creative and Innovative Processes*, was developed as part of an online master’s level core curriculum for students who elect to specialize in *Creativity and Innovation in the Global Program* at (name of institution omitted for blind review). Students in this specialization come from many backgrounds: artists, business people, administrators, educators, and therapists. Most students express the desire to open more fully to their intuition and creative capacity as spiritually meaningful and wish to bring this new way of being into their work with others. The goals of the course aim to:

- provide a background in the theories, models, scholarship, and practices of creative and innovative processes, which can be integrated into existing knowledge and experience through the exposure to lives of creative people—some well known and others who are ordinary people creating extraordinary change in their communities through their ability to follow an idea and respond to an intrinsic need for change;
- help students to inquire into the nature of creativity, creative expression, and the creative process through self-exploration, personal interviews, and group discussions;

- provide a structure to help students use the cycles of intuitive inquiry to explore a question related to creative and innovative processes;
- facilitate personal and transpersonal change as well as philosophical and action-oriented development concerning daily applications of creative and innovative processes.

We felt that intuitive inquiry uniquely suited our desire to bridge theory with practice in ways that honor students' knowing through their body, intellect, intuition, imagination, and unique sense of purpose (also described by Yorks & Kasl, 2006, as *expressive ways of knowing*). It encouraged them to actively engage in all phases of learning: expressing interest in a topic of personal meaning; uncovering core beliefs about their topic; building upon existing viewpoints; exploring multiple ways to broaden and deepen their understanding of diverse sources of knowledge; and synthesize their learning, cognitively as well as creatively. Intuitive inquiry lent itself to this adaptation, by providing a structure for our course module on creativity and innovation in the arts, sciences, academia, business, spirituality, and social justice. The course culminated with a scholarly paper and a creative synthesis, which were integrative of the inquiry process and discovery, and reflected the transformative nature of the students' experience at large. Ultimately, we hoped that students would understand intuition and creativity as natural and transpersonal processes, which inspire and promote the articulation and manifestation of a personal philosophy of creativity in the workplace.

Intuitive Inquiry

The structure of intuitive inquiry is based on the constructivist paradigm, one of the tenets of which is that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). As a qualitative research method, intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2011) begins with the researcher's own experience (in the tradition of *heuristics*) and is bound to be transforming of all who contribute to the research: participants and researcher alike. It is a hermeneutical method that joins intuition with intellectual precision. Intuitive inquiry emphasizes that the research participants' perception of their own lived experience (*phenomena*) and the researcher's subjective, interpretive understanding (*hermeneutics*) of the data is valid as meaning-laden information. According to Anderson (2000), intuitive researchers explore topics often related to psychospiritual development. Students in the *Inquiry into Creative and Innovative Processes* course selected topics such as Creativity's Role in Healing, Creativity and Remembering My Forgotten Self, Creative Blocks and Creative Flow, Facilitating Creativity Through Mental Imaging, The Creative Process in Art and Education, The Role of Intuition in the Artistic Process, Fearing the Unknown, and Nature Inspired Creativity.

To sustain its credibility, intuitive inquiry requires that the researcher be rigorously aware of his or her internal processes (e.g., feelings and thoughts) and be open

to personal transformation in the process of engaging in the illumination of others' experiences. Authenticity (honoring one's own voice) and honesty about the discoveries, even when these contradict one's subjective perspective, are key to sustaining credibility in this qualitative approach. An inclusion of accurate, detailed descriptions of the data as well as the procedures of collecting and analyzing data allow the reader to evaluate the researcher's conclusions in an independent manner (Anderson, 2000, 2011).

Facilitation

We believe that intuitive knowing is not instinctual or automatic; it requires careful attention to thoughts and feelings that are often hidden from awareness. To help students hone their capacity for intuitive awareness and to facilitate creative discovery in our course, we provided opportunities for exposure to (a) various sources of inspiration (e.g., the natural world, the arts, dreams, spiritual practices); (b) different modes of reception (e.g., contemplation, embodiment, feelings, and sensations); and (c) diverse means of expression (e.g., visual, musical, authentic movement, and poetry). To truly yield to the mystery of the creative process, the course was structured as an open-ended journey—open to each student's unique path of inquiry and potential discovery—with the understanding that his or her inquiry is bound by the scope of the course, and thus emphasizing the process of discovery rather than its conclusions.

The complete course module was available to students in the beginning of the class, but they were asked to follow the weekly rhythm and structure provided in the online classroom, which was facilitated by one faculty mentor. The course was designed around discussion folders which (a) fostered the support of a cohort (ranging from 4 to 8 students, who may reside in many different countries around the world) in an asynchronous manner; (b) supported self-initiation and independence; and (c) provided the means to clearly communicate academic expectations with consideration of adult students' needs. A "spacious and collaborative learning environment" (Braud, 2006, p. 151) is central to participatory learning since "being supported by important others" (p. 151) is one of the key features in sustaining change of a transpersonal nature.

Students were able to respond to course activities with respect to their own environments and work conditions, in connection with the season they experienced in their own backyards, and with regard to their respective cultural backgrounds. Perhaps, they were able to remain tuned in to their inquiries because the classroom forum and facilitator's presence did not override their own inner rhythm. At the same time, however, students were able to witness and contribute to each other's inquiry process, while the faculty mentor modeled appropriate disclosure of internal processes and personal awareness, as well as provided supportive and probing responses to students' contributions, highlighting insights that enhanced the students' integration of scholarship and personal meaning.

The adaptation of intuitive inquiry's five cycles of progression helped in pacing students' assimilation of course readings (e.g., Amabile, 1989; Barron, Montuori, & Barron, 1997; Cohen, 2006; Fox, 2004; Ghiselin, 1952; Guber, 1989; Leun, Maddux, Galinksk, & Chiu, 2008; Loori, 2005; McNiff, 1998; Richards, 1996; Rikards, 1999; Rowe, 2009; Starko, 2005). In essence, students were involved in a modified and greatly condensed intuitive inquiry, balancing required reading with an ongoing focus on their own inquiry question. We wanted our course to inform in an engaging, relational manner. Our expertise as educators and expressive arts therapists taught us that merely speaking about creativity has little merit. Creativity is best understood through direct observation, intuitive awareness, and participation in creative processes, which serve to balance the linear progression of a scientific research (Palmer, 1998). To that end, our teaching method blended theories of creative process with theories of participatory learning (Dewey, 1938; Haring-Smith, 2006; Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990; MacRae-Campbell, 1988; Miller, 1998; Rogers, 1969, 1980; Rogers & Freidberg, 1993; Smith, 1997/2009), all within the structure of intuitive inquiry.

Purpose and Structure

Each of the first 5 weeks of the course correlated with one of the five cycles of intuitive inquiry in a successive manner. The following is a synopsis of each week's activities and their contribution to transformative learning:

1. *Week 1, Cycle 1:* During Week 1, students began their inquiry into creative and innovative processes, with a focus on self-awareness. In addition to reading about how creativity manifests in a variety of professions and disciplines, students participated in intuitive and creative activities, which facilitated receptivity to how intuition plays a role in their daily lives. Creative exploration through imaginal journeys helped them connect with a *felt sense* (Gendlin, 1981) for inner stirrings and uncertainties, and identify a question about creativity or innovation, which held significant, personal meaning, and which was sufficiently delimited in scope to become their intuitive inquiry topic for the course.
2. *Week 2, Cycle 2:* During this week, students uncovered core beliefs and identified existing knowledge and assumptions about their topics. This cycle is known in intuitive inquiry as identifying *preliminary lenses* (Anderson, 2000)—ways of seeing, which determine how we see and what we see, as our inner and outer worlds correspond. Students observed their past and present knowledge about their topics of inquiry from multiple angles, through creative exercises, such as mental imaging, authentic movement, reflective time in nature, and introspection. This process of finding meaning in life's experiences through one's relationship with self and others (e.g., Dirkx et al., 2006) is accomplished through identifying the sources of personal and cultural viewpoints, and articulating the purpose of and motivation behind the inquiry as a unique contribution

to the existing body of knowledge. At the same time, students were exposed to reading about models and theories of creativity and examined the personal and cultural ground from which these theories emerge, noticing which of the many readings evoked heartfelt resonance.

3. *Week 3, Cycle 3:* During this week, students deepened their understanding of creativity and creative processes by studying biographical accounts of creative people as a source of knowledge and inspiration. They engaged in a creative exploration or meditation, which inspired the questions for a semi-structured interview. In addition to conducting the interview, students solicited input from their peers. They identified many sources of *knowing* and different kinds of teachers (in books, school, daily life, the natural world, deceased ancestors, dreams, and other spiritual guidance), through (a) whole-body sensing and listening (e.g., Ferrer et al., 2005; Gunnlaugson, 2007); (b) conscious attention to synchronicities in everyday life (e.g., Dirx et al., 2006; Ferrer et al., 2005); (c) contemplative observation (e.g., Braud, 2006; Duerr et al., 2003); and (d) imaginal processes (e.g., Netzer, 2008; Yorks & Kasl, 2006).
4. *Week 4, Cycle 4:* During this week, students began to pay attention to how the understanding of their topic was shifting as a result of the cycles of inquiry they had undergone so far. They began to notice understandings that continued to hold true for them but also noticed new insights and awareness, based on their reading and their experiential learning. They processed the information gathered in the interview intuitively and analytically, as well as through transpersonal and creative processes, such as mediation, movement, poetics, attention to daydreams and night dreams, and visual expression (Netzer, 2008). They articulated this shift in awareness, which pertained not only to how their theoretical understanding expanded or had undergone a significant change, but also to how their practice or application of knowledge had been influenced by their intuitive and creative explorations. Students identified changes in their preliminary lenses, which often resulted in personal transformation—a new understanding about self in relationship to others, beyond the specific inquiry question.
5. *Week 5, Cycle 5:* During this week, students reevaluated all the sources of their knowledge (i.e., personal experience, the literature, interview data, intuitive and transpersonal insight, and creative expression). They reflected back on their own inquiry process and discoveries and compared them with what they have learned from the literature. This process resembles Cycle 5 of Intuitive Inquiry, in which the researcher circles the entire research process for the last time, reevaluates it as a whole, and reaches forward with new questions and ideas for further research (Anderson, 2000, 2011). During this week, students began to draft their final topic papers, due during Week 6, encircling the entire course experience and bringing closure to the process with understanding of the inquiry limits as well as potential implications for one's continued personal, academic, and professional paths.

6. *Week 6*: This week was reserved for presenting the final paper, engaging in a creative synthesis, articulating a philosophy of creativity in the workplace, and group closure.

Whole-Person, Transformative Learning, and Multimodal Inquiry

Ways of knowing complementary to intellectual acquisition of knowledge, such as creativity and intuition are naturally linked, as they are both sources of *unconditional knowing*—a state of consciousness in which the individual becomes the channel for the creative process as well as the observer of its patterns and messages (Epstein, 2004). With the desire to nurture whole-person, transformative learning, we were intrigued by the potential for encouraging our students to trust their own *experiential knowing*—“by becoming and being what [it] is to be known rather than remaining totally the outside spectator” (Maslow, 1966/1998, p. 82).

We emphasized, in our teaching, the importance of trusting *immediate knowing* (Fries & Nelson as cited in Ross, 1987)—which is commonly felt as wholeness, directness, doubtlessness, and, at times, although not always, intuitive understanding—unmediated by reason, nor masked or distorted by added qualifications, commentary, comparison to past, anticipation of the future, and judgment (Netzer, 2008). Immediate knowing mitigates and balances the more disjointed, highly emotional, self-critical and judgmental, shadowy and difficult-to-understand aspects of the inner self described by Dirkx et al. (2006). Finally, through the exposure to intuitive inquiry, we introduced students to the value of *sympathetic resonance* (Anderson, 2011), which entails validating interpretation of findings through one’s own and others’ heartfelt alignment with the inquiry outcomes.

A multimodal approach to inquiry is a path to knowledge, in which all human dimensions (e.g., ancient wisdom, feminine/masculine perspectives, body awareness, intuition, special states of consciousness, creative expression) are encouraged as valid, meaningful, and essential for personal and transpersonal transformation. It is inclusive of personal needs and interests as well as awareness of and consideration for a greater whole in various contexts of community and the world at large. For example, extracting personal meaning from text, as described by Anderson (2000) and Dirkx et al. (2006), is a form of deepening one’s connection with self and awareness of interconnection with others, honoring the intricate, often mystical ways in which the imaginal and actual interact.

The knowledge retrieved from embodied, spiritual awareness, where we do not have consciousness, but rather we *are* consciousness (Bergson, 1911/1991) is processed differently from intellectual acquisition of information. This embodied way of knowing both individualize knowledge and emphasize its connection to a greater whole, a deeper *knowing*. Emphasis on the creative process in adult education (as manifested in teaching methods and learners’ experiences) often awakens the student’s personal voice, ethical awareness, and inspiration for social action. When

students make personally transformative discoveries about the dynamics between their inner and outer worlds (Dirkx et al., 2006)—new learning, which is felt as timely and meaningful to their own human development—they are more likely to carry their experiential knowledge into future professional development. This results in transformative action on personal, institutional, and broader social levels (Anderson, 2001; Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998; Braud & Anderson, 1998; Dienske, 1985; Doran, 1986; Ferrer et al., 2006; Greenway, 1974; Netzer, 2008; Romanyshyn, 2007; Turner, 1983; Yorks & Kasl, 2006).

Finally, this inclusive approach to adult education naturally inspires multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary inquiry (Ferrer et al., 2006), as it highlights the interconnectedness among disciplines and the value of integrative scholarship (e.g., medicine and the arts; neuroscience and consciousness; psychology, feminism, and spirituality). Considering the diverse cohort of students in the Creativity and Innovation specialization, it was interesting to observe, especially in the case of numerous students' desire for a career change, how seemingly conflicting aspects of their lives, such as elementary education and creative expression, business and spiritual direction, or chemistry and healing through poetry, were not only reconciled but proved to be complementary and harmonizing to their personal and professional identities. It was evident that a cross-fertilization of this nature, as opposed to the more prevalent hyper-specialization of modern science, inspires the transcendence of intellectualism (i.e., mind-centered scholarship) and is more suited to the study of creativity, an aspect of human spirituality, as manifested in lived experience (Anderson, 2011; Dirkx et al., 2006; Duerr et al., 2003; Ferrer et al., 2005, 2006; Yorks & Kasl, 2006).

Anecdotal Records

It is natural for students to feel more comfortable with reading assignments and intellectual forms of research as means of academic study. Students are used to this as the mainstream way of attaining knowledge (Ferrer et al., 2006). However, we wanted our students to step into a field of *not knowing* and to experience what emerged out of the void. As in the revelatory, mystical traditions, we invited our students to be receptive to what they could not anticipate. In the language of the Sufi Ibn' Arabi, the mystic calls upon *autonomous imagination*, where dreams, fleeting images, and spontaneous visions arise, awakening the heart—the intuition, which expresses itself in symbolic language (Halligan, 2001).

We began our class with an activity, which was approached independently by each student. The intention of the activity was to facilitate a spontaneous and heartfelt choice of inquiry topic for each student. The written instructions we provided asked the students to center themselves and close their eyes so they could sense and feel the experience of *not knowing*.

Imagine what a place of *not knowing* feels like to you. This may be a place of silence, open space, or perhaps darkness or haze. Sense your body's language and what your

body says to you in this place of *not knowing*. Know that this is a safe place, a place to quietly wait for and welcome your intuitive knowing and creative discovery. Now, ask yourself, “What do I want to know about creativity and creative processes?” and allow your imaginal experience to unfold, without responding to the question, from what you already know. What do you see? What do you sense and feel? What is being revealed to you?

When you feel ready, breathe out once and open your eyes. Did a particular area of your life emerge in your consciousness during this meditation? Did you experience any questions forming as you sat quietly and allowed them to emerge? (Rowe & Netzer, 2008, p. 25)

In this exercise, as in all of our exercises, we asked the students to immediately follow their experience with self-reflective journaling and/or creative exploration, paying attention to the language of the body’s sensations, feelings, and the imagination and tune into the subtle ways in which the body and inner self communicate in a way that is not divorced from the original experience. We encouraged them *not* to make rational sense of their images until after they completed the exercises, but rather to record their experiences as though they were recording a dream. We asked them *not* to analyze their images or try to figure them out, but rather to see what emerged from their images in a somewhat poetic fashion. This was akin to working with the creative process for self-discovery and helped our students to begin to cultivate their intuitive relationship with the course material. It helped them to let go of controlling their study and asked them to dance between scholarship, intuition, and creativity. It helped them to follow what was emerging inside of them and brought them deeper into their felt sense and body sensation as a form of knowing.

In response to the opening activity, a student became aware that her body communicated that fear of the unknown is a block to creative engagement. She stated:

I noticed that my way into the unknown was marked by [a] distinct awareness of my physical, emotional, and psychological states. There were many sensations in my body, ones of discomfort, of being hyperaware, uneasy, and tense. I was mentally, physically, and emotionally in an active (and perhaps reactive) place. It seemed to me that this discomfort and sense of tension and conflict in my internal systems was blocking or limiting my ability to creatively engage. I wanted to enter this creative space of the unknown, full of potential and possibility, yet I was, instead, full of ideas, thoughts, feelings, and sensations that challenged relaxing into the unknown. . . . I allowed this to inform my inquiry. This was a familiar feeling and I was intrigued with the way this internal process extends out into my external processes. How I am engaging with my way of experiencing an event seems to affect the unfolding of the event itself. This was to be my point of entry into inquiry: How might our way of being with the experience of fearing the unknown influence our creativity, and how might engaging with creativity affect this experience as well as other fear-inducing experiences? (K. Cohen, personal communication, June 25, 2009)

As she continued to explore this awareness further, this student noticed the role of imagery in the emergence of her authentic voice, despite its dream-like enigmatic quality.

The imagery that came to me once I settled into a quieter, more receptive internal place further shaped the themes of this inquiry. I saw a succession of images—a tomato rising from the darkness of soil, a large hand coming to pick it, a narrow alleyway, a woman laying down with a white veil over her, a golden doorway opening up through which a butterfly fluttered in—that then landed in the crown of a clay piece I made [which I named] *The New Miss Liberty*. Reflecting in my journal on the message of these images, I came to understand them as (nonlinear) links in the process of transformation: Tomato from soil—growth, cultivation, rising from the *darkness*; Hand—will, choice, participation; Alley—the in between, transition, a tight space; Veiled woman—letting go, something passing, being laid to rest; Doorway—an opening, an invitation to walk through; Butterfly—transformation, new form, arriving at freedom. The New Miss Liberty—a symbol of exploring, discovering, and arriving at new lands, a woman of strength, freedom, and joy. (K. Cohen, personal communication, June 25, 2009)

As she began to link her forming inquiry topic with the nuances provided by the imagery, this student's preliminary lenses began to emerge. She noted that struggles, challenges, and other unpleasant sensations lead to fear and anxiety, whereas creative expression, such as dance, writing, and creative visualization had been a "saving grace," which she had always linked with release and gaining new understanding. This awareness concretized her inquiry topic, her desire to further explore how others related to the role of creative engagement in the experience of fear and anxiety.

Ensuing activities suggested, for example, that students step out of their immediate environment and spend time in nature—observing the cyclical elements of nature: noticing the creative way that the natural world is resilient, the cycles of regeneration. Other activities involved working with unfamiliar art media to symbolically stretch their existing knowledge of their topic, or look at their familiar surroundings in a new way, searching for meaning in something they took for granted. In Week 4, students were asked to design their own creative exploration to support the interpretive process of transforming their preliminary lenses. The following is an example of an activity designed by a student following her choice to immerse herself in a culture different from her own as a way of stepping out of familiar territory to stimulate intuitive insight regarding her inquiry question *Can Creativity Heal Self-Doubt?* She subsequently named the activity "a cultural bridge to new awareness" (S. Kofler, personal communication, January 28, 2009).

I chose to do my experiential activity in our Chinatown. I have never explored more of it than driving down the main street and wandering through a few shops on the main street.

... I began on the main street and wandered slowly, taking time to allow my senses to open and my mind to become quiet. I then came to the first alley. This alley was a long, bricked alley with a curved ceiling with only one lamp lighting the way at the midpoint. At the end, I could see sunshine lighting up a courtyard with benches and a small garden. It was lovely ... it felt as though I was being invited and drawn into a peaceful place. ... I just wanted to stay in this serene place for a while.



Figure 1. Untitled.

The next alley is the oldest one in Chinatown, called Fan Tan Alley. It is extremely narrow in places—barely room for two people to pass each other. . . . On entering one of the Chinese shops, I saw many products anticipating the Chinese New Year, which I realized is fast approaching. I saw the image of the Ox, and realized the coming year is the year of the Ox, which is my [astrological] sign. Then I remembered a dream I had about 1½ weeks ago. I selected a necklace with an Ox pendant and left the shop. I continued my wandering, but felt drawn to follow up on my dream with some creative work. . . . When I came home, I pulled out my drawing paper and colored pencils. In my dream, I was on a farm. There were rows of stables, and someone led me to one of them. I looked inside and saw a huge Ox. It was my Ox. I asked if it was OK and the person told me it was, but that it needed to stay in the stall. The gate was secured. I felt bad for the Ox; I felt that it should be free. When I woke up, I wondered if the dream was reflecting how tired I am . . . that the Ox in me doesn't feel free because of how fatigued I feel. But, I remembered thinking that I need to symbolically let the Ox out, somehow.

I divided my paper into four quadrants [see Figure 1]. I don't know why—I just did. The first picture I drew was of the Ox in its stable. I wrote the word “NO” all over the gate, to symbolize how, in the dream, this beautiful Ox was being kept behind the gate. In the next picture, I had repainted the gate a new color and was painting the word “YES” all over it. I then moved on to paint a third image in which I was putting a necklace of flowers around the Ox's neck, as my way of connecting with my animal that had

been kept locked away. I didn't know how to depict the final picture, so I left the work for a day.

The next night, I thought about different possible images. I imagined myself on the Ox's back, but that didn't resonate. I imagined myself standing next to the Ox, but that felt stiff like a photographic image. I decided [that] if I were going to put myself in the picture, I would take a photo of myself to have close by, on my camera screen, for easy reference. I looked at my face in the camera, then looked at the Ox, back and forth, and then realized I wanted to draw the faces together as one. This is how the fourth image came to be. (S. Kofler, personal communication, January 28, 2009)

In addition to her description of her experience and creative expression, this student further reflected on how the experience related to her inquiry about self-doubt and its transformation through creative processes:

I felt most comfortable in the alleys. . . . Self-doubt erects walls that make you feel trapped. The alleys all led to new openings. I was surrounded by history. Self-doubt is history. . . . Seeing the Chinese New Year products reminded me of my dream, which I had forgotten about. This particular store was the most cluttered, most overflowing of all of the shops I was in, yet out of all of that clutter and chaos came my connection with my dream. The symbol of the Ox is about strength, steady perseverance, hard work, fearlessness, trustworthiness, independence, and obstinacy. The Ox is not a particularly creative animal; its work tends to be the same, day in and day out. . . . What this says to me about the creative process and how creativity can heal self-doubt is what many of the readings talked about last week: artists spend years and years perfecting their skill. There is a lot of "uncreative" work involved in developing the skill that supports creativity. (S. Kofler, personal communication, January 28, 2009)

Creativity in the Workplace

In one of the last assignments, students were asked to articulate a philosophy statement for creativity in the workplace. We believe that their work in this course, which encouraged similar values to the ones they expressed in their response to this assignment, integrated with their life experience, made this application of learning possible. For example, a student, whose background was in business, believed that soliciting and valuing employees input, regardless of how it first appears, ultimately results in creative solutions. She said:

I believe any business can incorporate creativity into its business plan and daily management regardless of the type of business. I co-own a technology business with my husband and, in 25 years, we have always allowed for growth and changes, kept an open mind about how things could be done better, and tried to create an atmosphere where creativity was promoted and encouraged. Even when we have had record months or years, we didn't let things get stagnant. There was always change to our marketing strategies and the idea that something could be new and improved. We enlisted the

support of both management and employees with new ideas with equal vigor. . . . My belief is that creativity can be incorporated into the work tasks, goals of a business, workspaces, and even in the job descriptions of the employees . . . allowing them to feel free to express ideas, concepts, and concerns, and by truly listening to them, valuing and validating input. . . . Wrong answers, solutions that cost too much or don't fit the client's needs, and other so-called "dead ends" are often the trail that leads to a creative solution. (K. Snow, personal communication, June 23, 2009)

Another student emphasized a safe environment, clear communication, articulating common goals, and valuing the process as much as the outcome as inspirational of creativity in the workplace. She stated that:

In order to establish a creative working environment . . . there must a clear definition of what is valued by all who contribute to the organization. Having this common goal will inspire passion among those involved, and passion is the spark that ignites the creative process. In order for this process to be fostered, there must first be an acknowledgment that every person is innately creative. . . . There must be an effort to create an environment where it is safe to openly express a variety of ideas. . . . Just as each and every person is unique, so are the ideas that he or she brings to the table. This collaboration of individual expression will lead to limitless possibilities of growth. . . . It is also important to recognize the cycle of the creative process. This cycle includes ample time to incubate ideas, take action, reflect, and revise. . . . So often today, the focus is on production and quantity. In this effort to produce the most, we have a tendency to lose sight of the essence of what we are producing. . . . Hopefully, if there is an attunement to the essence, or vision of the organization, then the creative process of all who contribute will be recognized and satisfied. (H. Spitzig, personal communication, January 28, 2009)

Many students felt that their experience in the course helped them see how creativity is not limited to artistic endeavors; this sentiment is reflected in the following student's expanded views of creativity in the workplace:

My eyes have been opened to the creativity that is all around us, at work, home, sweeping by us like wind. Oftentimes, we miss this opportunity to see the creativity that is already around us, especially at work. By taking a deeper look at its presence in our daily lives we can bring a lot of joy back into the work we do. In my own professional life, I have seen that where I am most creative is in the activities that I am truly passionate about. These are the work paths that I know I am meant to follow. . . . I believe that all areas of work can be creative and it is through finding what brings creativity into your life that you, in fact, find your life's work. (J. Briggs, personal communication, January 27, 2010)

Creative Synthesis

During the final week of the course, students were invited to engage in a *creative synthesis*, a process described in heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) as a creative,

intuitive process, which is possible once understanding of one's original questions has been explicated. For our students, the creative synthesis was based on personal transformation during the course as a result of their intuitive inquiry and creative processes. This helped them to draw closure to the study and to integrate all that they had learned into their personal lives and professional pursuits. Students expressed an appreciation of the process and mentioned that it helped them to circle back to their original research question and, often, uncover yet another hidden dimension or deeply affirming their discovery and transformation. The following is a moving example of a creative synthesis from a student whose inquiry question was "How do expressive and creative arts affect healing in traumatized children?"

After working on this intuitive inquiry for some weeks, I set it aside so that the process could rest and incubate. It was during that time that I had a dream about the question I had originally asked—"How do expressive and creative arts affect healing in traumatized children?" In my dream, a host of children appeared and presented a heart for my examination. It was battered and torn along the edges from abuse; turned upside down from confusion and fear; stained from tears of hurt, guilt, and shame. . . . I was so filled with sadness to look at the heart, but I was soon presented another one. This one was clear and clean with no stains and felt strong and vibrant; it was turned around and in the right direction; the hole had been patched with love; the tear was "stitched up" with trust; a zipper had pulled the pieces back together and rebuilt the attachment; the edges were smooth and colored with plans for a future; the loose flap was buttoned down and secure; the deep color of the second heart resonated strength. This creative synthesis was the answer to my question: Helping hands mend broken hearts. When I awoke, I wrote a poem about the two hearts and made a visual representation of them [see Figure 2] to show the healing power of the creative and expressive arts in mending broken hearts. Maybe I knew this intuitively all along. (K. Snow, personal communication, June 21, 2009)

Students' Feedback

Now that we have taught the course several times, over the last 2 years, and have received extensive feedback from our students, we appreciate, even more deeply, the value of the participatory approach to education, experiential learning, and creative expression in higher education. Although, initially, students seem to be daunted by the invitation to rely on their intuition as much as on what they read in books and peer-reviewed journals—to engage in creative exercises, the outcome of which they could not predict—they have ultimately completed the course with a sense of awe at the transformative nature of intuitive inquiry. In the words of a student, whose inquiry topic was the adverse effect of current cutbacks in art education:

Being able to develop and perform my own experimental exercise reinforced for me the value of working with the creative process in innovative ways. . . . My perspective and how I viewed my research question changed from what was lacking to the multitude of



Figure 2. Mending hearts, a creative synthesis.

benefits that art education brings. . . . My lenses have shifted from being curious about students' motivation for going to school to showing that the sense of joy that arts bring makes education not simply about digesting information but about appreciating oneself and one's unique outlook on the world. This transformation, for me, is another example of how the creative process can be so inspiring. If techniques that were employed during this class were used in public school education, I believe students could approach tasks in new and stimulating ways that not only fostered learning but innovative thinking. (J. Briggs, personal communication, January 29, 2010)

The following is a statement, which exemplifies an increased ability to trust intuitive processes through self-observation:

I watched the process unfold, noticed where I was resistant, where I wanted to bypass, and then noticed how everything came together fluidly without a big conscious push. I am grateful that through this course I learned I can trust my intuitive process and the role of the incubation period. (S. O'Connell, personal communication, June 24, 2009)

Another student revisited her prior experience of scientific research, recapturing the joyful process of inquiry, without the narrow scope she has come to associate it with:

The inquiry process we studied put me in touch with the love and enthusiasm I typically experienced when I worked on scientific questions. However, in the context of a

psychological inquiry, I realized—through this process—that I tend to feel discomfort when researchers narrow down their hypotheses or ideas to a single factor (for example, inner motivation underlies the creative process) because so many factors, inner and outer, influence human behaviors and human thoughts. When it comes to studying humans or human questions, there is an undeniable richness in individual experiences and in people’s accounts. This is a source of information I value deeply. There is openness in approaching a question in this way, a lack of preconception, provided that the inquirer acts as an observer. This type of inquiry is not necessarily meant to prove a point, but rather to enlarge one’s perspective and to bring a wealth of viewpoints to a field. It is through discussion with creative people and by reading accounts of their lives that I expanded my perspective relative to creativity. The inquiry process allowed me to realize that creativity has its importance in many fields (artistic, scientific, political, social, economic, to name a few) and in many aspects of one’s life. (J. Renaud, personal communication, February 1, 2010)

Moreover, students commented that, through their intimate engagement with their topic of inquiry, examining core beliefs, interviewing others, and participating in class discussions about key concepts of creative and innovative processes, they had assimilated the course readings more fully and were drawn to expand their knowledge through additional library research. As stated by the following student:

The Inquiry into Creative and Innovative Processes course fully integrated all the transpersonal aspects of learning. From the first experience, I was emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and physically engaged. The way in which we were asked to introduce ourselves to the group was a creative exercise; I asked for and received a poem, used my intuition, and my tactile sense to listen to what a turquoise necklace had to tell me. From this moment, the work of the 6-week course flowed out in an innovative way, expanding my awareness of how [the] creative process can be accessed and utilized for inquiry. As we discovered a new approach to research, one that includes intuition and personal creative response, I noticed how intuitive inquiry is a more holistic way than straight academic research. The questions opened new avenues that deepened insight into questions that I have had for a long time. The conversation within the cohort was lively and diverse and contributed to [a] sense of community as we shared our different discoveries. (C. Coenen, personal communication, February 7, 2010)

Similarly, the correspondence of course activities and the assigned reading enabled the following student to both experience firsthand, and gain the expressive language to describe her appreciation for the creative process of intuitive inquiry:

Time and again, I was given the opportunity to learn that “to be receptive to creative insight, we relinquish our desire to achieve” (Olsen, 2002, p. 208). There was no perfect outcome at which to arrive. I simply had to allow the process to happen. . . . These two patterns of resistance and surrender created a cycle of creative flow (or non flow) and seemed to reflect Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda’s (2007) seasons of creativity, in fast

forward. Within a week or even in the space of an hour, I would move from the stagnancy and hibernation of winter to the fecund outpouring of spring's offerings, and summer's reaping. And, once all was expressed, fall's season would resume in the planting of new ideas or the reading of others' entries or articles. Flowing between the seasons several times throughout the whole of the 6-week course was a reminder that the experience of inquiry was a creative process in and of itself. And, as in many a creative process, the repetition of these patterns played a vital role in integrating different dimensions of the experience and of myself in it. (Y. Gautschi, personal communication, January 30, 2010)

The same student shared her gratitude for the course environment and group dynamics as essential to her deepening trust in her inner knowing:

It is only in hindsight that I recognize the necessity of this practice of inquiry to bring me to a place of embodied knowing; one in which I could hear and heed the whispers of my intuition, without apology. It would take laborious effort, and the steady support and encouragement of a cohort and professor, to get to this point. (Y. Gautschi, January 31, 2010)

Conclusion: Looking Back and Onward

Anecdotal records have demonstrated that our course has facilitated whole-person, transformative learning. Students provided detailed, descriptive accounts of how they broadened their knowledge of scholarly literature and experienced meaningful and purposeful inner shifts. They learned about creative and innovative processes and gained insight into a topic they were deeply connected with, as they embraced both rational and intuitive epistemologies.

The course included all components of the operational definition of transformative learning outlined by Duerr et al., in their 2003 *Survey of Transformative and Spiritual Dimensions in Higher Education*, which emphasized "reflective learning, the intuitive and imaginative process, and the ethical, spiritual, and/or contemplative dimension of education" (p. 177). Students in this course reported intellectual, emotional, and embodied transformation, which influenced core beliefs and convictions about the role of creativity in the dynamics between their inner and outer worlds. They drew on lived experience and expressive ways of knowing, as they explored how their learning impacted their relationship with the world around them (e.g., Anderson, 2000, 2011; Dirks et al., 2006; Duerr et al., 2003; Yorks & Kasl, 2006).

As we reflected back on the course and how it facilitated transformative learning, we began to consider the impact that the *structure* of intuitive inquiry had on the possibility of facilitating transformation. In retrospect, we felt that the carefully choreographed yet self-reflective process of intuitive inquiry was particularly well suited for bridging theory with practice in a research class designed to be holistic, participatory, and transformative. This process is inherently resonant with transformative learning. Intuitive inquirers hold multiple lenses simultaneously, explore topics in

numerous ways, and disclose their assumptions and beliefs about a topic with honesty, integrity, and authenticity. Because this class was structured using an intuitive-inquiry map, students were required to articulate what they knew about a topic and how they changed what they knew as a result of engaging with the topic through their immediate, intuitive understanding of self, as well as opening to the understanding of others (Anderson, 2000, 2011; Duerr et al., 2003). This structure provided students an organized container, while giving them permission to work outside of the box, to explore what intuitively attracted them. It provided fertile ground for transformation as students studied creativity from the “outside in” and from the “inside out” within the framework of the five intuitive inquiry cycles.

All in all, we believe that this course promoted interest in research and helped our students to follow their own impulses, within and beyond the academic environment. At the conclusion of the course, students were able to articulate what creativity in the workplace meant to them. They attributed some of the same qualities they experienced during the course—intellectually and creatively—such as the ability to hone one’s own interests, share them with others, and be encouraged to pursue them deeply, envisioning the ideal workplace environment they seek to create for themselves and provide others.

This 6-week online course, *Inquiry into Creative and Innovative Processes*, has now been tested over more than 2 years. The syllabus continues to evolve, as we learn about students’ need to balance assigned reading (which provides preliminary orientation to the fields of inquiry and creativity) with their own research of a particular area of interest and personal meaning. We have received positive feedback for the consistent requirement to engage with the weekly topics first creatively, and only then through formal inquiry, a task that is initially met with resistance and doubt for its efficacy. Finally, students have expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to pursue higher education in a way that weaves individualized study with the benefits of learning in a global community. It is, indeed, a model for adult education, which carries forth the delicate balance of intuitive, imaginative, and contemplative thought toward the promotion of personal, social, and global transformation.

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