**NOTES MARK RUNCO: “To Understand is to Create”**

Runco develops a definition of creativity which falls between Gardner’s restrictive focus on outstanding creative examples that achieve social acceptance (the “Great Man/Great Woman” perspective) and Zausner’s much more open definition (“everyday creativity” as an intrinsic human quality expressed in daily life). Runco calls this **“personal creativity**” defined as:

Knowledge creation that entails “an original interpretation of experience. This process is a creative one, at least when the resulting interpretations are both *original* and *effective*. . . .Of course, some interpretations are original only for the individual (and not for larger groups), in which case they represent what has been called *personal creativity*”(p 91).

He further refines the definition of personal creativity as entailing three elements: interpretation, discretion, and intentionality:

\* *Capacity for interpretation* is based on assimilating information (bringing new information into the cognitive system) and accommodation (changing the cognitive system by altering it to incorporate the new information). Runco describes this as individually unique and based on each person’s experiences and knowledge: “Interpretations are always individualistic. Every individual personally constructs them and can neither borrow them nor obtain them without mindful involvement and effortful processing of information. Because every individual constructs his or her own interpretations, they may differ from individual to individual, even if these persons have the same objective experience. Our knowledge does not perfectly represent the environment or even our own experience; it is instead a selective and biased view that is actively constructed as the individual processes information” (p 94)

\* *Discretion* is needed to know when original thinking is appropriate and when conforming is more suitable. Runco suggests that understanding conventions and fitting in is one part of social adjustment. He also points out that individuals make decisions about whether and when to invest in their creative potential. An investment might entail practicing, taking lessons, commitment of time, etc. All of these may come at a cost: “[t]here are opportunity costs; investing in one thing keeps you from investing time in something else. For creativity, there are often risks. It can be quite risky to invest in creative potential when the resulting creative talents may or may not lead to socially accepted ends” (p 96).

\* *Intentionality* involves values that may be passed on by families, teachers, and cultural groups which may also affect creative expression. “People often exercise discretion by selecting what is valuable. They will invest in skills because they view those skills as valuable. Parents and teachers will communicate values and the corresponding appropriate behaviors to children via socialization and even formal education. Indeed, this is the part of personal creativity that explains cultural differences. Each of us has the potential to be creative, but there are differences between individuals (reflecting motivation and decision making) and between various groups, including cultures (reflecting values)” (p 96).

Runco also raises the idea that personal creativity is a form of *“postconventional”* thinking which he compares with *preconventional* thinking (typical of children who do not yet understand rules and social boundaries) and *conventional* thinking (understanding and conforming to social expectations).

“Post-conventional reasoning characterizes the individual who understands conventions but still thinks for him or herself. . . . That is a kind of flexibility, which allows adaptability and creative solutions to problems. The terminology here is important: Post-conventional individuals take immediate context into account -- which is another way of saying that they exercise some discretion. In a sense, then, creativity results from the capacity to construct original interpretations, combined with the post-conventional discretion to explore and use those interpretations only when it is appropriate to do so” (p 98)

Runco argues that adults especially may need to develop *tactics and strategies* to encourage their creativity because, unlike children, they have over time developed routines and assumptions which are efficient but work against spontaneity and flexibility. Adults also may be constricted by their investments in their own skills and patterns of thought: “[t]he more the individual has at risk, the less open he or she will be open to change and alternatives” (p 101).

“Tactics can help adults compensate for these assumptions, inhibitions, routines, and long-term investments. In this context, tactics are tricks, procedures, and shortcuts that can refresh our originality or help us to adopt an approach to problem-solving that increases the likelihood of a creative result (Runco, 1999b). One of the most powerful tactics is that of shifting perspectives. A shift of perspective usually suggests different alternatives and forces the individual out of his or her routine. Perspectives can be shifted in many ways: talking to other people, moving to a different vantage point, changing the problem (by making it bigger, smaller, or altering the representation or medium), standing back, zooming in, turning the problem on its head, or putting it aside for a time, and so on (p 101).

Finally, Runco argues that the concept of “*personal creativity” provides a bridge* between everyday creativity and the view of socially accepted and validated creativity:

“Note that I am not dismissing eminent creativity. Indeed, one of the advantages of the theory of personal creativity is that it applies across the population, from the infant to the adult, from someone who “never produces anything original or useful” (Nicholls,1972/1983) to the unambiguously creative superstar. All of them rely on the same processes and mechanisms for their creativity. The creativity is simply expressed in different ways in the various groups (and perhaps expressed more or less regularly among some of them). Personal creativity does not just describe the original interpretations of experience constructed by individuals in a workaday situation. Eminent creators also have their insights in part because they are using interpretive, assimilatory processes to construct their dramatic world-shaking insights” (p 103)