

Teaching As Creative Process

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Creative Process Defined



Series of thoughts and actions



Results in change or innovation



Non-linear, ends and achievements are uncertain



New but not necessarily original: “Steal Like An Artist”



Process; not product-oriented; not “inspiration

Why Is Creativity Rare in Teaching?

- Emphasis on competency over innovation
- Desire to repeat results once competency has been achieved
- External forces
 - Accreditation/curricular requirements
 - Demands of workplace
 - Demands of graduate programs
- Workload: “just don’t have time”
- So we change the date on the syllabus and hit “send”

Twyla Tharp:
“The Creative
Habit: Learn It and
Use It For Life”

- Simon and Schuster, 2003
- Written with Mark Reiter
- 12 chapters outlining habits and routines for living creatively
- Focuses on purposeful and habitual activities, not waiting for creative accidents

Incorporating Creative Habits

In your own life



In your work

Performing

Teaching



In the lives and work of your students

Habit: "Rituals of Preparation"

- *"It's vital to establish some rituals—automatic but decisive patterns of behavior—at the beginning of the creative process, when you are most at peril of turning back, chickening out, giving up, or going the wrong way."* *Tharp/Reiter, p. 15*
- For Tharp, it is the cab ride to her morning workout
- How do you prepare to work? Is it purposeful? Repeatable? Habitual? Does it encourage concentration, self-awareness, openness?

My Rituals

- Morning Pages (from Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*, another great creative habit/process resource)
- Morning Reading (usually the Sunday NYT spread through the week)
- Daily Routines immediately upon arriving in the office
 - Brass Gym (Pat Sheridan/Sam Pilafian)
 - Drill of the Week (Chris Olka)
 - 20-Minute Warm-Up (Michael Davis)
 - Slurs and Scales (my own original routine)

Teaching Rituals

- Studio Technique Syllabus from Fall 2019 Semester incorporating Tharp's creative habits
- Require learning and mastery of same daily routines that I use in my own practice
- Spread over four assignments (weeks 1, 4, 7, and 10)
- *The purpose of this habit is to develop a series (or several series) of daily routine exercises that can be done easily and repetitively with an open mind and limited physical effort....Having one or more of these routines memorized and prepared will render unnecessary two of the most important decisions you have to make each day:*
 - 1. Should I practice today?*
 - 2. What should I start with?*

Habit: "Harness Your Memory"

- *Creativity is more about taking the facts, fictions, and feelings we store and finding new ways to connect them. What we're talking about here is metaphor....Metaphor is our vocabulary for connecting what we're experiencing now with what we have experienced before.*
Tharp, p. 64
- *Muscle memory is one of the more valuable forms of memory, especially to a performer. It's the notion that after diligent practice and repetition of certain physical movements, your body will remember those moves years, even decades, after you cease doing them.*
Tharp, p. 64

My Memory Harnessing

- Pattern-based practice (scales, arpeggios, etc)
- Efficiency-building practice (lip slurs, other flexibility)
 - This is also part of my running and skiing practices!
- Memorized passages of music
- Pattern-based improvisation
- Drill/Tactical Practice
 - Chaining
 - Slow to Fast

Teaching Memory Harnessing

- Weeks immediately following the Ritual assignments
- Spread over four assignments (weeks 2, 5, 8, and 11)
- *In music, we learn our basic patterns of both modal/tonal and atonal constructions in several ways. You will learn to identify them by sight in your music (Theory class), to “see” and “feel” them on the spatial surface of a keyboard instrument (Piano/Keyboard class), to hear them and sing them (Aural Skills class) and to combine all these skills in executing them on a non-spatial brass instrument (this section of the syllabus). We will also use these basic patterns, particularly in the Clarke studies, to build range, flexibility, intonation, and other skills of tone production as we continue the baseline work from the Daily Rituals.*

Habit: "Scratching"

- *I call it scratching. You know how you scratch away at a lottery ticket to see if you've won? That's what I'm doing when I begin a piece. I'm digging through everything to find something. It's like clawing at the side of a mountain to get a toehold, a grip, some sort of traction to keep moving upward and onward...*
- *...I'm often asked "Where do you get your ideas?" This happens to anyone who is willing to stand in front of an audience and talk about his or her work. The short answer is: everywhere. It's like asking "Where do you find the air you breathe?" Ideas are all around you. Tharp, p. 95*

My Scratching

- All of my Daily Rituals (note how each requires me to engage with my own or another's creativity)
- Direct imitation
- Improvisation
 - To other art forms (especially visual and literary)
 - Pauline Oliveros Text Scores
- Critical approaches to reading, viewing, listening
- Regular engagement with all art forms

Teaching Scratching

- Following Ritual and Memory—remove focus on the physical acts of playing before trying to engage creativity
- Spread over four assignments (weeks 3, 6, 9, and 12)
- Direct imitation/transcription
- Improvisation leading toward composition
- Engage with other art forms
- Direct engagement with pinnacles of creative problem-solving in composition
 - Pauline Oliveros: *Thirteen Changes*
 - J. S. Bach: *Suites for Solo Cello*

Getting started

- Be your own guinea pig
- Live and practice creatively to teach more creatively
- Lower your threshold for what you define as creative
- Understand the importance of habits, rituals, fundamental skills/muscle memory—you are preparing to be creative when you practice rudiments and scales!
- Find assignments that are simple, engaging, and fun-- your students don't have to write a symphony to be creative

My favorite creativity exercises

- Improvise a soundtrack to a video clip
- Improvise to a piece of art
 - www.thisartworkdoesnotexist.com
- Create an original exercise to work on a particular technical challenge
- Create an accompaniment track to your original exercise
- Improvise on a poem or other text (use the rhythm of the language)
- Add movement to an existing piece of music (don't call it dance)
- Add text or imagery to an existing piece of music
 - Poetry app
 - Search for images around title, character, idea

Questions?



Thank You!

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