



VAN FORUM NOTES

Creativity: The Vital Human Force

Dr. Berenice Bleedorn
Tuesday, February 13, 2007
Augsburg Park Library, Richfield MN

VAN Program Director, Sue Diekman, opened the forum by posing the following question to the group:

“When was the last time that you felt really creative?”

Responses included:

- I invented a new dessert
- When I designed a contract; I customized it with special language
- I created a graduation wrap for ALVA graduates
- I’m a graphic designer; yesterday I put together a brochure
- When I did my taxes last night
- I took my granddaughter to Axman (surplus store) to put together a project
- I found a dvd of Tai Chi for seniors
- I work for a bureaucracy and was delighted to be invited to be creative
- I figured out how to get down the mountain on skis without breaking a leg

Speaker Introduction

In her introduction, Diekman explained that, ten years ago, she took a class from Dr. Bee Bleedorn at St. Thomas University that had a lasting impact on Sue’s life and work. She noted in particular Bee’s advice to engage the “other side of the brain” whenever stumped by a vexing problem. Diekman said that she has relied on this technique for creative problem-solving ever since.

Dr. Bleedorn began her presentation by posing the following: “What is creativity? Who has it? What is it good for?” Long a champion of creativity in education, she said that she has witnessed many people who were changed by being introduced to the discipline of creativity.

Defining creativity

Bleadorn shared several definitions of creativity:

- Creativity is the experience of expressing and actualizing one’s individual identity in an integrated form in communion with oneself, with nature, and with other persons.
- Creativity is the encounter of the intensely human being with his world.
- Creativity is the capacity to develop.

She contrasted **convergent thinking** – where one correct answer is predetermined, with **divergent thinking**, wherein an unlimited number of alternatives solutions exist. Divergent thinking was the basis of the course on creative problem solving that Bee taught for many years.

Bleadorn led the group through a picture-completion drawing exercise to illustrate measurement of the cognitive factors of creativity. The cognitive factors include:

- Fluency – how many unique ideas did the person generate in the time period?
- Flexibility – how many categories were included in the person’s responses?
- Originality – how unique were the person’s responses?
- Elaboration – how much elaborating detail was added to the basic response?

Bleadorn believes that the standardized test scores, such as the IQ tests, do not reflect creativity in children, listing a number of traits that are as important as IQ: imagination, curiosity, sensitivity, awareness, independence of thought, risk taking, preference for complexity, tolerance for ambiguity, sense of humor, ability to visualize, persistence, resilience and energy.

On the topic of gifted and talented programs in the public schools, Bleedorn said that sadly these programs were the first to be cut when budgets tightened.

Bleadorn has been greatly influenced by the work of her mentor, Paul Torrance who emphasized the creative vital force of all people. Ignoring that can result in a society of people who cannot think.

A 3-D Model of the Intellect

Bleadorn described the work of J.P. Guilford, a contemporary of Paul Torrance, who conceived the intellect as a three-dimensional solid.

In Guilford's model, one dimension refers to the content of the mind as *visual, auditory, symbolic, semantic or behavioral*.

A second dimension refers to the products of the mind as *units, classes, relations, systems, transformations, and implications*.

The third dimension describes operations: *evaluation, convergent production, divergent production, memory, and cognition*.

Regarding the question of how to increase one's own capacity for creativity, Bleedorn suggested that one could join groups that rely on creativity, such as story-telling groups and provided these guidelines:

1. Practice the characteristics of a creative person
2. Resist the blocks to creativity
3. Watch for idea-killers

In response to a request for a good book about developing creativity, she suggested "How to think like Leonardo da Vinci" by Michael Gelb.

Bledorn closed with a favorite quote: "Excellence is possible if you can more than others think is wise."