



Circumstantial Creativity: A Pandemic Paradigm Shift?

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The World Health Organization characterized COVID-19 as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, followed by the US declaring a national emergency, closing all school buildings for the remainder of the academic year. As difficult as world-wide lockdowns have been, they may have opened the door to a boom in creative expression. Kapoor and Kauffman [1] note heightened showcasing of creativity during the pandemic. In this piece, I focus on personal and observed behaviors, increased demonstration of creativity during the COVID-19 pandemic, and present examples of such creativity. Henricksen et al. [2] present a literature review citing the lack of international common ground to infuse creativity in classrooms. Is the pandemic the bridge from imagination to creativity to classroom practice ala Vygotsky [3]? Henricksen et al. [2] indicate the need for research, policy, and practice. The pandemic has changed the way we teach, learn, interact, and communicate, as educators around the world, learn technology on the fly to be able to present material to their students, converse with students' families, and to provide meaningful learning situations that vary greatly from school-to-school. Kapoor and Kaufmann [1] suggest that engaging in creative acts provides some sense of control, while Helzer and Kim (2019) also consider the possibility that the practice of engaging in creativity for well-being can lead to long-term changes in stress responses. Beghetto [4] sees crisis as a catalyst for creative and innovative outcomes. We have all learned from and with one another with creativity evident in all aspects of lives. Where will schools be on this creativity spectrum in a post-pandemic world? Will we make a paradigm shift to be more interactive, creative, and engaging for our students?

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1. Introduction

The World Health Organization characterized COVID-19 as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. By then, Italy had suffered over a thousand deaths a day. Declaring a national emergency, the US closed all school buildings for the remainder of the 2020 academic year. As difficult as the world-wide lockdowns have been, these times of isolation and home confinement may have opened the door to a boom in creative expression. Kapoor and Kauffman [1] noted heightened showcasing of creativity during the pandemic. There has been no end to the creative problem solving during this pandemic, which leads to numerous possibilities for post-pandemic teaching and learning.

In this piece, I explore how the pandemic has changed our level of creativity and creative problem-solving. How can we manifest that learned creativity in post-pandemic education? I focus on personal and observed behaviors of increased demonstration of creativity during the COVID-19 pandemic and present examples of how such creativity may cause a paradigm shift in post-pandemic schooling. I began looking for the increased areas of creative problem-solving globally, in my personal personal activities, and in my professional life. I explored where these overlapped, reflective of current research about creativity, dealing with stress, and the impact of the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Creativity During the Pandemic

In the early days of the lockdowns, there was a shortage of masks in the US. I turned to social media and found a plethora of directions to make homemade protection, one using rubber bands and puppy pads. I sent for a package of each, and with my stapler, made a supply for my husband and myself. During our last joint trip to the grocery store, we laughed at a Corona Beer display, until our carefree attitude abruptly changed when we reached the bathroom tissue, paper towel, and cleaning good isles. The shelves were empty. The seriousness of the situation was quickly becoming a reality.

We have witnessed personal and global examples of creativity through problem-solving, for instance how to stop the spread of the virus, to creative masks, (from surgical, to actual photos of the wearer's face), to memes and cartoons posted and reshared on social media. Grocery stores reported shortages of cake mixes and other baking goods, as those in lockdown began cooking and baking in record numbers. We



have seen musicians, frustrated by staying home and unable to create music with others, turn their efforts into Zoomed concerts conducted for world-wide audiences. World sports organizations played to non-human attendees in stadiums populated by cardboard cutout “fans” with canned music, cheering, and applause piped in over audio systems. There has been no shortage of people’s clever displays of their inventions.

2.2. Research About Creativity

My own creativity increased in the area of cooking and crafting, inspired by photos and recipes (seen on Facebook) and I made dozens of gnomes for holiday gifts, made from materials I already had at home. I shared humor from memes and cartoons on social media, sharing some of my own. I planted a small vegetable garden, utilizing YouTube and other web sites as I personalized Vygotsky’s *More Knowledgeable Other* (MKO) in my *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) [3], as I met with successes, some epic failures, and opportunities to make adjustments. I learned new recipes from friends in Italy, making it necessary to make metric conversions.

Vygotsky [3] indicated that creativity stems from imagination. Beghetto [4] states that crisis can serve as a catalyst for creative and innovative outcomes. He contends that creative confidence, results continue to move toward a creative goal, fed by a certain level of risk taking. During the pandemic, the risks may have been induced by fear, boredom, or necessity.

I thought of one of my teacher candidates’ favorite stress relief/creativity lesson from my emerging literacy course. About midterm, where we are examining the art in children’s picture books. Children’s author/illustrator, Eric Carle always inspires us to be creative, as my pre-service explore his books with focusing on the collage of his illustrations. Then we make paper, and finally create a future book cover ala Carle’s style. This series of activities is usually listed as the best class time, both creative and relaxing, both surprising to them. This experience in my own teaching, coupled with the incredible demonstrations I have seen the pandemic creativity gives credence to the notion that creative expression can provide a means to flexibility and offer some stress relief, thus strengthening overall well-being [5].

3. Creativity as a Stress Relief

Helzer and Kim [8] consider the possibility that engaging in creativity for well-being can lead to long-term changes in stress responses. This certainly has held true for me throughout my life, but the pandemic felt different. I cooked more, because I was teaching from home, and didn’t feel as rushed in preparing evening meals, making room for more experimentation. I was curious to try new recipes viewed on social media and shared by friends. An afternoon of making pasta for the first time was exhausting, but exhilarating and delicious.

3.2. Creative Problem Solving

Kapoor and Kaufmann [1] have suggested that engaging in creative acts may provide some sense of control over unforeseen and unsettling circumstances, such as the pandemic and changes that have resulted. My personal sense of coping with the pandemic isolations and gaining some control resulted in my creation of a blog, [ReaDing Rhinoceros Resources](#) for children (ages 5-10) and their families, who were home due to the pandemic [5]. This blog became the basis of an international conference presentation [6] and a teaching video series [7].

Since learning five new platforms for meetings and teaching, (such as TEAMS), Zoom became the tool of social gatherings and our first Zoom cocktail party. We repurposed worn patio chairs with a quick trip to the lumberyard, fully masked, from directions found on Pinterest. Through trial and error, we spaced the wood, stained, and attached it to the old frames. The garden was cared for and productive, with lots of zucchini flowers for lunches, while cherry and grape tomatoes grew from slices I planted from a grocery delivery, an idea found on YouTube. These videos became my MKO [3]. We even made a beverage similar to limoncello from the huge crop from our kumquat tree.

MKO [3] also offered discovery of new ways for my students to be more actively engaged in my on-line courses. As I learned something they could use, I was eager to share. Personally, I took an introductory drawing class, researched information on where to plant the seeds I was able to purchase on-line, practiced Italian from new websites, and found books to read for enjoyment. These all helped me establish a balance of work, home, and recreation within our isolation.



3.3 Inspirations from others

Since I teach children's literature, I was attracted to postings on Facebook by Stephanie Trilling [9], of her redesigned children's book covers. One was *The Little Engine That Carried PPE*, *The Very Hungry Coronavirus*, and *Goodnight, Zoom*. These inspired me for the blog, with designing masks for famous artwork and my own, *Strega Nona Meets her Mask*.



Figure 1. *Strega Nona Meets her Match*. D. L. Marciano 2020

4. Conclusions

Untold learning, exploring, discovery, negotiating on-line shopping and grocery pick-up vs. delivery, social distancing and balancing work, health issues and safety, have all become part of the adjustment made by people across the globe in use of time, space, and materials. The pandemic has offered a wider and very diverse learning environment for everyone. Creativity has been utilized in all manners and forms, in the new ZPD [3].

The pandemic has changed the way we teach, learn, interact, and communicate, as educators around the world learned technology on the fly, to be able to present material to their students, converse with students' families, and to provide meaningful learning situations that vary greatly from school-to-school. We have all learned from and with one another and this pandemic has sparked creativity in all aspects of life. Is this the bridge from imagination to creativity to classroom practice [3]?

Where will schools be on this creativity spectrum in post-pandemic education? Can and will we make a paradigm shift to be more interactive, creative, and engaging for our students? Henricksen et al. [2] present a literature review citing the lack of international common ground to infuse creativity in classrooms. They have indicated that too often, creativity is seen through a subjective lens, with the concept of "creativity" being unclear and uncertain. This results in innovative practices as suspect and not considered "real learning". Henricksen et al. [2] also have indicated the need for research, policy, and practice of the infusion of creativity in our classrooms at an international level.

Maybe this is the time to build those international bridges regarding the role of and the infusion of creativity in our post-pandemic classrooms. How, after such a creative time in our teaching, can we return to the same old ways? The circumstantial creativity of the pandemic has the possibilities of stimulating a paradigm shift in post-pandemic teaching. Are we ready? Let's hope so.

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