

This article is offered as a background paper to the #creativeHE collaborative inquiry 'Exploring Creative Ecologies'. It brings together three posts made by Darlene Chrissley and a short reflective commentary that tries to relate her ecological perspectives to the ecological framework proposed by Jackson (2016)

Darlene Chrissley

Biography



Darlene lives in Canada in the beautiful Dundas Valley. She is president and founder of Lifescapers. She's a writer, performer and master coach who aspires to be a creative force for good in the world. Over the past two decades she has worked with hundreds of individuals from all walks of life, in Canada and around the world. Her corporate clients come from health care, government, banking, media, IT and manufacturing. Private clients include entrepreneurs, artists and individuals committed to developing their potential and realizing their dreams. She brings creativity and imagination to learning design, with a focus on creating experiences that shift people's perceptions and behaviour. See more at: <http://darlenechrissley.com/about-me/#sthash.2mHsLai8.dpuf>

Ecology of a Creative Life version 1

<http://darlenechrissley.com/a-creative-life/the-ecology-of-a-creative-life/>

It has taken me fifty years to understand my own personal ecology; the conditions that best support me as a creative being. In the absence of this knowledge I have often felt ungrounded and unsure. Finding it has made me at once more stable and more free.

My ideal ecology balances four distinct quadrants: Introspection, Expedition, Integration and Exhibition. Over time I have adopted a set of creative practices that support me in each quadrant. When I make space for each one and move between them in an easy flow I am happy and productive and my work is original and meaningful.

1. Introspection: I require long periods of solitude during which time I let my mind wander. I daydream and imagine. I meditate. I free-write and collage and make sketches. I pose myself intriguing questions and do my best to answer them. I wonder and ponder life's tough questions. I stare at walls and lie in the backyard with my eyes closed listening to birdsong. I go for long walks and swim lengths and do nothing at all.

2. Expedition: I'm an explorer at heart and I love nothing better than to go "walkabout" through strange or familiar environments. I wander through used book stores and art galleries, eavesdrop on conversations in cafes, go to movies and plays and concerts and festivals of all kinds. I've volunteered at the Havelock Jamboree and canoed with Wild Women. I've chanted in sweat lodges, skinny dipped in Norwegian fiords, watched the sun rise and set from my perch inside the rim of the Grand Canyon, climbed rock faces and repelled back down again. On expedition I encounter the world, close up and personal. The goal of any expedition is that experience of being alive that Joseph Campbell said we are all looking for. I take a little black book with me when I go on expedition, and I write down what I see and hear and think and feel and wonder as I go.

3. Integration: I could easily spend my whole life in a back and forth between introspection and expedition. Between experiencing life and thinking about it. But I have learned that my greatest satisfaction comes from integrating my thoughts and experiences and giving them form in an artistic

medium, whether it be a blog or book or film or performance. When I come into the workshop and ask myself what I want to make of everything that I have seen and thought, an idea always begins to form in response. The philosopher Rollo May used to say that passion love form. That's been my own experience. The hard part is to get myself into the workshop.

4. **Exhibition:** The fourth stage of my process is exhibition. The time comes when I must take my new creation out of the workshop and present it to the world. I feel most vulnerable at this stage as I open myself and the work up to feedback. There is a mix of anticipation (I hope they like it.) and dread (What if they hate it?). A mix of pride (I made this.) and shame (It is not quite as wonderful as I hoped it would be.) I try not to be too attached; to remember that I am not my work. I focus on the work as contribution; something for others to encounter on their own expeditions.

My Creative Process:

Ecology of a Creative Life (Version 2)

Darlene Chrissley

<http://darlenechrissley.com/a-creative-life/the-ecology-of-a-creative-life/>

It has taken me many years to understand my own personal ecology; the conditions that best support me as a creative being. In the absence of this knowledge I have often felt ungrounded and unsure.

Finding it has made me at once more stable and more free. **My process has me continually cycling through four distinct spaces: The World, The Sitting Room, The Workshop and The Stage.** Over time I have adopted a set of practices that support me in each space. When I make time for each one and move between them in an easy flow I am happy and productive and my work is original and meaningful.

1. **The World:** I'm an explorer at heart and I love nothing better than to go "walkabout" through strange or familiar environments. I wander used book stores and art galleries, eavesdrop on conversations in cafes, go to movies and plays and concerts and festivals of all kinds. I've volunteered at the Havelock Jamboree and canoed with Wild Women. I've chanted in sweat lodges, skinny dipped in Norwegian fiords, watched the sun rise and set from my perch inside the rim of the Grand Canyon, climbed rock faces and repelled back down again. On expedition I encounter the world, close up and personal. The goal of any adventure is that experience of being alive that Joseph Campbell said we are all looking for. I take a little black book or Evernote on iphone and I write down what I see, hear, think and feel and wonder as I go.

2. **The Sitting Room:** I require long periods of solitude during which time I let my mind wander. I daydream and imagine. I meditate. I free-write and collage and make sketches. I pose myself intriguing questions and do my best to answer them. I wonder and ponder life's tough questions. I stare at walls and lie in the backyard with my eyes closed listening to birdsong. I go for long walks and swim lengths and do nothing at all.

3. **The Workshop:** I could easily spend my whole life in a back and forth between introspection and expedition. Between experiencing life and thinking about it. But I have learned that my greatest satisfaction comes from integrating my thoughts and experiences and giving them form in an artistic medium, whether it be a blog or book or film or performance. When I come into the workshop and ask myself what I want to make of everything that I have seen and thought, an idea always begins to form in response. The philosopher Rollo May used to say that passion love form. That's been my own experience. The hard part is to get myself into the workshop.

4. The Stage: The time comes when I must take my new creation out of the workshop and present it to the world. I feel most vulnerable as I open myself and the work up to feedback. There is a mix of anticipation (I hope they like it) and dread (What if they hate it?). A mix of pride (I made this) and shame (It is not quite as wonderful as I hoped it would be). I try not to be too attached; to remember that I am not my work. I focus on the work as contribution; something for others to encounter on their own expeditions.

This process is fundamental to my personal fulfillment, my work as an artist and the value I bring to my readers, my audience and my clients. - See more at: <http://darlenechrissley.com/a-creative-life/the-ecology-of-a-creative-life/#sthash.TA8M4PVB.z0efxtYf.dpuf>

Ecology of a Creative Life: Creative Process

<http://darlenechrissley.com/10-step-creative-process/#sthash.BJeXANas.dpuf>

Life is a creative art form. It takes creativity and imagination to create an original life and make a unique contribution to the world. Imagination is the source of everything that we create. It is also the capacity that allows us to see unrealized possibilities in what already exists. When we say we someone is creative, we mean that they have an active imagination, the tendency to follow their curiosity to see where it leads, and they have the ability to translate what they imagine into something that can be experienced with the senses.

The creative process is the discipline by which a new work is brought from the realm of imagination into the physical world.

The 10 Step Creative Process

1. Connect to your creative source

We are all creative beings. Creativity is our birthright, part of our essential nature. Deep inside us is a well of imagination just waiting to be tapped. Sometimes the well seems dry, or the rope that holds the bucket broken, or the bucket too small. But with regular creative practice it is possible to keep the well full and to draw from it at will. So pull out the paints, join the choir, start writing again, take up wood working, audition for a play. Visit a gallery, attend a concert, browse in a little out of the way antique shop or hardware store. Go for a long walk. Experiment with a new cookbook. Go into the workshop and start making a better mousetrap.

2. Pay attention to your inner yearnings

Take some time to listen to your inner voice. Take notes, draw pictures, make a collage to capture the words, images and feelings that arise as you listen to your deepest self. What do you love, what do you value, what do you dream about? Your deepest desires are important and worthy of being acted upon.

3. Explore the world around you with curiosity

Pay attention to your surroundings. Engage the world around you with curiosity and a sense of wonder. See familiar people and places with new eyes. Venture into new places and conversations you might have avoided in the past. Be open to what you might discover. Prepare to be surprised, delighted, and moved.

4. Notice what attracts your attention

Notice what attracts your attention, makes you curious, makes you laugh, tugs at you, sticks in your mind and refuses to go away. Follow what attracts you to see where it might lead. Capture words, images, sounds, smells, tastes, ideas, and feelings in a small notebook reserved just for this purpose.

5. Play with the symbols and images that arise

Inquire more deeply into your yearnings and attractions. Notice images and symbols that reoccur or seem to have energy or pull for you. Take the time to play with them. Paint them. Post them. Make up stories or songs about them. Don't just interpret them rationally. Play with the form and feel of them. Make up wild and possible and probable meanings.

6. Experiment with connections and combinations

Experiment with various connections and combinations between the events, images and symbols from your inner and outer life. Turn them upside down and sideways, shifting perspective. What sense are you starting to make out of things. What meaning are you starting to see? What truth are you starting to understand? What course of action is becoming clearer?

7. Notice the form that begins to emerge

Notice how the yearnings, attractions, symbols and images are starting to seek expression in your life. What new creative ideas are sprouting, what new creative projects are starting to formulate? Pay attention to the form that your creativity wants to take at this time. Doodle or mind map around the form as it starts to emerge.

8. Begin to intentionally craft the form

Your new creation will begin to take on a form of its own. Its shape will become clear, the work it will take to bring it to completion more evident. Commit to the form and to the process of making it real. Make plans. Take action.

9. Work with the tension between vision and reality

As you begin the work of crafting, a creative tension exists between the form you can imagine and the form that you can create. This can lead to frustration and discouragement. Or you can choose to draw energy from the tension and strengthen your commitment to the process. Don't be afraid to experiment and take risks. Pay attention to your results. Learn from failure.

10. Bring image and form together and celebrate completion

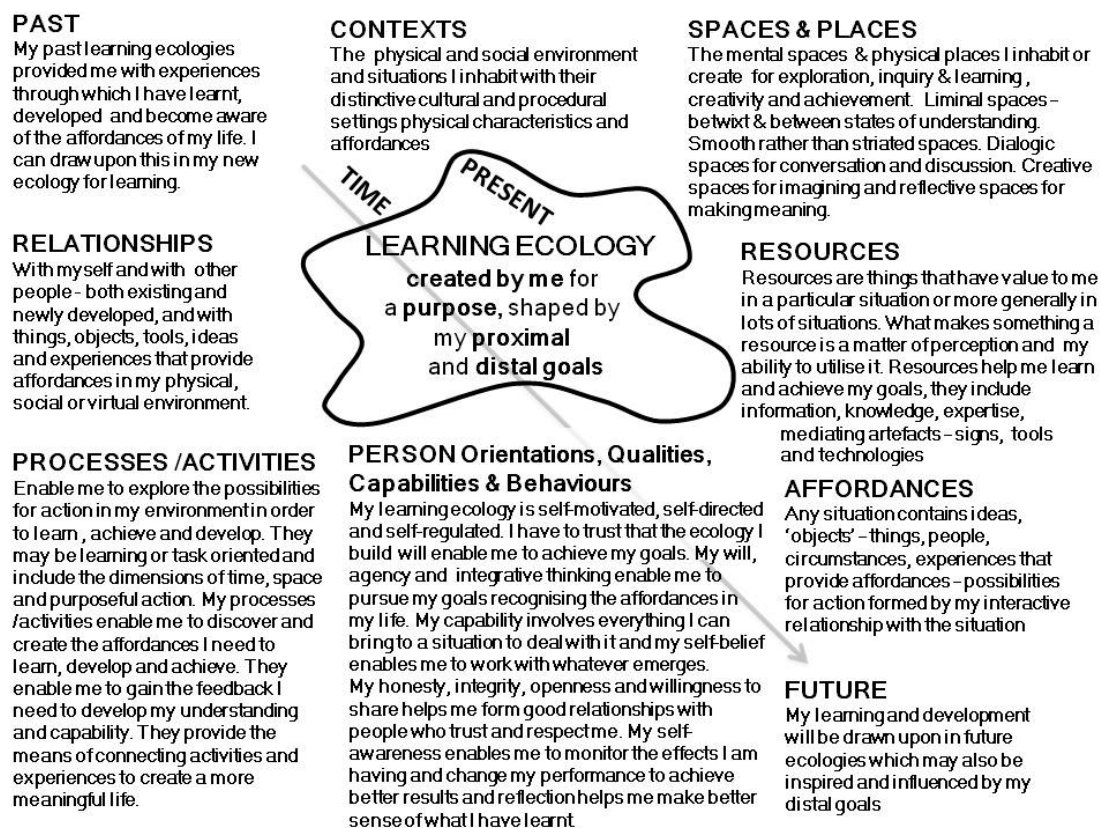
Gradually you will bridge the gap between the work that exists in your imagination and the one you are creating in the material world. You will create something real, a piece of original work. It can be tempting to judge the work wanting, and focus on the ways that it falls short of what you originally imagined. Focus instead on the satisfaction of having finished what you started, given form to what otherwise would not exist. You have contributed something of yourself to the world. Celebrate completion.

Applying the Framework of an Ecology for Learning

Norman Jackson

Darlene recognises the ecological nature of her own creative process and practices. She recognises that her thinking and actions are deeply connected to the physical environment she inhabits. In this commentary I try to relate her insights to the framework for a learning ecology that I have proposed (Jackson 2016 Figure 1 & 2).

Figure 1 Components of a learning ecology Jackson 2016.



In the first version of an Ecology of a Creative Life Darlene is talking about the ecology she creates, on the scale of her whole life, in order to achieve a purpose - to be creative. She describes her sequential *process* of creation - introspection, expedition, integration and exhibition, and the *activities* she engages in that enable her to be creative within a temporal framework. Her narrative reveals herself in an intimate relationship with her purpose and her environment. She creates spaces (solitude) to think - to imagine, day dream, ponder, meditate, to inquire and to integrate. She deliberately adopts the mindset of an explorer open to new possibilities and venturing into new experiences.

She engages in activities that do not directly relate to the production of creative outcomes. *'I stare at walls and lie in the backyard with my eyes closed listening to birdsong. I go for long walks and swim lengths and do nothing at all'. And activities that open up new possibilities [I go] "walkabout" through strange or familiar environments. I wander used book stores and art galleries, eavesdrop on conversations in cafes, go to movies and plays and concerts and festivals of all kinds....*

Figure 2 Applying the model of a learning ecology (Jackson 2016 and Figure 2) to Darlene Chrissie's explanation of the ecology of her creative life.



Darlene is also talking about particular *places* when she does these activities - rooms, backyard, places she walks, swimming pool, book stores, art galleries, cafes, concerts and wilderness. We get the impression that she views the whole world she inhabits as a resource - perhaps another way of looking at it is she is searching for affordances that she assumes are there in doing these things in the spaces and places she is doing them and waiting with 'watchful anticipation' for these affordances to emerge. As she wanders she records her experiences and what she notices and feels. *I take a little black book with me when I go on expedition, and I write down what I see and hear and think and feel and wonder as I go.* She is creating resources from her experiences that she will later draw upon.

When she is ready she puts herself into a space for engaging and enacting her creativity to produce something that is new to her. She calls this space the workshop. We can see that all the things she has done before contribute to these moments when she is ready to create. *My greatest satisfaction comes from integrating my thoughts and experiences and giving them form in an artistic medium, whether it be a blog or book or film or performance.* In this version of a creative ecology creativity emerges as the Darlene engages with her 'problem' in the medium she chooses to represent herself in a particular space having prepared herself through ever done or imagined prior to this point in time. Through her narrative Darlene reveals that she is in a relationship with her everyday world - with the things she has done in the spaces and places she has inhabited. All these things have meaning and they all have potential to help her generate the thoughts, ideas and feelings that will enable her to produce the creativity she is seeking. *When I come into the workshop and ask myself what I want to make of everything that I have seen and thought, an idea always begins to form in response.*

The final stage of Darlene's process is when she exhibits or shares what she has produced. There is little information about these spaces and places that feature but these also hold potential for creative action.

In the second version of an 'ecology of a creative life' Darlene emphasizes the spaces in her ecology. *My [creative] process has me continually cycling through four distinct spaces: The World, The Sitting Room, The Workshop and The Stage.* This reveals that for her there is a close link between place/space and the mental and physical processes that occur in these spaces/places.

In the third insight into her own ecology for creating Darlene engages with the psychological dimensions of her creative process. She tells us that we are all creative but certain behaviours and orientations are, in her view, more likely to result in creativity. We have to develop these aspects of ourselves to support us in creating our own creative ecologies.

Firstly, we must discover where our creative talents lie. Understand what we love and value and what we care about. She suggests that to be creative we need to be open to possibilities and to put ourselves into the zone of high potential where we can encounter and discover new things, ideas, people, experiences, feelings. We need to explore the world, engage with it with openness and curiosity. To be willing to venture into spaces and relationships that are new. We need to be able to notice things that are interesting, different that hold potential and we need to record or capture these things so that we can make use of them in the future. We also need to be playful and willing to experiment combining ideas and things in new ways and noticing what emerges and then developing new forms that emerge using them to inspire imagination and create visions of new possibilities. In this way we will bring new things into existence.

One final point Darlene makes is that it is the whole of her process that creates the sense of achievement and fulfilment not just the results emerging from her creativity. It is the whole ecology she creates in order to be creative together with the results that emerge from her ecology. 'This process is fundamental to my personal fulfillment, my work as an artist and the value [I create]. DC's description of the ecology she creates in order to lead a creative life is entirely consistent with Carl Rogers' ecological concept of personal creativity 'the emergence in action of a novel relational product growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his [her] life' (Rogers 1961/2004:350). Rogers' explains, 'The mainspring of creativity appears to be...man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities. By this I mean the directional trend which is evident in all organic and human life-the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature-the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, to the extent that such activation enhances the organism or the self.' Seen through this wonderful perspective the ecologies we create in order to create are also the means by which we expand, extend, develop, mature and express ourselves as we endeavour to achieve more of our potential.

Please offer your own interpretations and perspectives on the value of an ecological model of creativity by posting a message in the #creativeHE community
<https://plus.google.com/communities/110898703741307769041>

Sources:

Chrissley, D. (2016) Ecology of a Creative Life

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