



World Goodwill Seminar 2022 London

In Search of a New Culture: Perspectives on Human Flourishing

Jan Karlin

Thank you so much for your wonderful introduction and thank you to the Lucis Trust for your invitation to participate in the webinar today or tonight, wherever you may be. I am speaking with you from Hanoi Vietnam, my twelfth visit in the last seventeen years, including producing the largest cultural exchange in history between the USA and Vietnam, with support from the US Department of State. My husband and I are the first American artistic advisors to Vietnam. We feel fortunate to have the opportunity to assist Vietnam's cultural life, as well as engage deeply with the country we fought but now has become our other home. Our experiences throughout Vietnam and the other Asian countries in Southeast Asia, have been rich and multi-faceted. We know much about each country's cuisines, their history, their educational systems, traditional and contemporary arts, and their religious practises. In the case of getting to know the teachings of Confucius, one cannot understand him without a thorough knowledge of the many unique Asian cultures that he influenced.

Similar to learning about the teachings of Confucius, one must learn about and experience creativity. Creativity is at the root of human achievement; although most often experience it through the arts, creativity touches every area of our lives. In a 2010 survey by IBM, 1500 chief executives, from 60 countries, and 33 industries, said that creativity is the most essential skill for navigating an increasingly complex world. Even earlier, in March 2006, UNESCO brought together 1200 people in delegations from 96 countries, for the first worldwide arts education conference, with the message of encouraging creative worldwide active engagement. Our greatest innovators agree about the importance of creativity. Long ago, in a 1996 Wired interview, the late Steve Jobs explained: *Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it. They just saw something, it seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesise new things. The broader one's understanding of the human experience, the better design we will have.*

Creativity is defined as the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules or patterns, and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, originality or imagination.

Creativity is currently the buzzword in offices or on campuses, in academic courses and in arts institution boardrooms. We all know that creativity is the root of scientific studies, beautiful artworks, trips to Mars, and Hollywood blockbusters. However, the situation today is we have blurred the lines between art and entertainment, both of which rely on creativity as their inspiration. The late Dr Peter Arnott, at Tufts University, stressed in one of my classes that art makes you think, and entertainment keeps you from thinking. We need both. However today we are very confused about the difference between art and entertainment. How do we develop the discernment necessary to encourage and experience creativity and recognise what is entertainment?

Marketing has been a major factor taking one away from artistic experiences that are more thoughtful, take more work by the participant, and may be challenging to understand. The public with little arts education is very confused about the difference between art and entertainment, and probably no longer cares. As we look for 21st century skills and solutions, this apathy has resulted in a declining ability to identify the quality of creative ideas that are driven by more than profit. How do we develop creativity skills? It is difficult in an environment that stresses the bottom line and graduation rates. Rarely these days does the curriculum include study of the arts or creative thinkers in science. We study the results but not the process. The result is that we have blurred the line between art and entertainment. What is the difference between watching a Hollywood blockbuster that on repeat-viewing gives us the same thrills hearing our favourite soundtrack and special effects in Star Wars, compared to an orchestral concert where contemporary work by composer Elliott Carter will inspire interpretations by many conductors and musicians, with the audience curious to hear repeat performance?

A creative thinker in any field is concerned with new ideas, not copying old ideas. However, creative people need inspiration and thorough knowledge of their field as the cornerstone of their creative process. A creative person pushes the envelope, tries new things and figures out their own personal puzzle. Picasso sketched daily to find solutions for his paintings; Beethoven explored different solutions through piano sonatas and string quartets; and Monet painted the same cathedral in Rouen numerous times, to capture every shade of light. They all needed extensive technique to build their creative skills. A shared trait of creative people is curiosity and interest in new ideas. Since Lucis Trust encourages the practise of meditation, we can draw an analogy between meditation with how one develops new skills overtime. When learning to meditate, at the beginning we are concerned with how we sit, whether our meditation has religious element, and how long we can focus. As our practise develops, it becomes easier overtime. After trying to sit for five minutes at the beginning, we suddenly are aware that 20 minutes is passed and one hour meditation is possible. As with all challenges in life practise makes better, not perfect, and we constantly strive to improve.

I am not an expert on either meditation or Confucius. After travel to Asia over the past 20 years, I do know that Asian countries should not be lumped together or

assumed to be similar in anyway. Vietnam was occupied by China for over 1000 years and later colonised by France and Japan. Scars from the American war, as it is known here, still remain. The Confucian emphasis on family and learning is deeply ingrained in its culture, but over the years developed Vietnamese characteristics expressed in its language, arts, and religions. We are fortunate to have good friends in Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand and especially Vietnam. In many discussions, our friends are proud of what they learned from Confucius. It is now expressed alongside the 21st century embrace of many religions and family dynamics that, for example, today acknowledge women in forums.

Since Confucius taught that one of the greatest joys in life was a visit from foreign friends, we have seen this demonstrated in the generosity, enthusiasm of our many friends, especially in Vietnam and Japan. We are often asked if we have experienced any animosity from the wars, and in fact we have never been subject to anything less than enthusiasm for our visits. Two thirds of the Vietnamese population is under age thirty, so the war is in the past and they have moved on as a modern society. One of my favourite stories I would like to share with you, comes from a visit we made to the home of two repatriated visual artists from Paris, to learn to make a very special lunch of Chả Cá translated as turmeric fish, which was purposely created to allow the Vietnamese an opportunity to gather to cook while planning anti-French activities during the war, since the French loved anything about this dish. Despite the French not allowing Vietnamese gatherings, this was an exception. Since the Vietnamese language is rarely spoken by foreigners due to its acknowledged difficulty, the French did not know what was being said, and overtime felt that observing the cooking of Chả Cá was a big treat.

At the end of the meal, the elderly artist has been looked at us, after consuming a lot of beer and homemade wine, and said "you know, I was a soldier in the American war". My husband and I looked at each other and whispered "here comes". The artist continued "and I am so happy to have you in our home". He proceeded to get up and serve us a five-year aged banana cognac that encouraged us to continue the afternoon together as friends. Our colleagues have taught us about Confucianism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoism, and other religions observed in each of the Asian countries. Forgiveness and reconciliation are central to these religions, especially with their experiences of horrific 20th century wars. We have enjoyed learning the characteristics of each country. It is a journey that is ongoing and very rich; our performances and cultural exchanges have been successful because of our efforts to get inside each culture, such as learning and performing old and new music from their old from their own cultures. We have learned many history books, poems and learned about each country's arts. The deeper one explores, the richer the experience.

Learning about the background of the culture, arts, and history of a country, deepens one's experiences. When our friends look at us and say that we knew each

other in a past life, we know that the reference is a compliment to us. When learning about creativity, doing one's homework allows you to go deeper and understand how the creative process works. I'm currently reading Walter Isaacson's biography of Leonardo DaVinci, an incredible exposition of one of humanity's most creative minds. Mr Isaacson's other biographies of Steve Jobs, Jennifer Doudna, and Albert Einstein also clearly show the process of creativity. I highly recommend all of his books. Creative thought is encouraged by ongoing exploration of oneself, as well as investigating accomplishments in all professions, as well as one's own. We cannot develop new ideas without studying and experiencing the achievements of creative people giving us a basis for new exploration and inspiration.

The word creativity comes from creator, one who creates something such as composers, playwrights scientists, inventors, visual artists, choreographers, writers, and poets. Musicians, actors and dancers, and many others are recreators, who interpret creative achievements by others. Human flourishing happens when artistic and scientific creators have freedom of expression, combined with opportunities to disseminate their accomplishments. Composers need orchestras to play their music, playwrights need actors, scientists need well equipped laboratories, and all creative people need support systems. It is a challenge today, with limited education and funding resources, to inspire creative thinking and innovation and find solutions to society's challenges today. It is complicated to find a solution as we look towards inclusiveness and addressing global problems. As my book describes examples of successful initiatives in ways to begin, it is important to take small steps that reflect one's community and interests. I do not judge whether something is art or entertainment, as this is each individual's opinion. However, I hope that better education can teach people to discern the difference between art and entertainment, to make informed choices.

To teach creativity, we must focus on realignment of the curriculum for every age group. My book *What's Next?* describes successful programmes for different age groups. Students need to study creative people and be inspired by their creativity. To develop discernment, young people should understand the difference between terms such as *clever* and *creative* through examples. Youth need to learn that self-expression through social media, such as Instagram, is not necessarily created, but most often marketing and self-promotion. Buzz words today need new definitions for words such as *creatives*, *innovation*, and *cleverness*. Imagination and inspiration leads to exploration, so it is important to study the past and develop your personal heroes for inspiration; not to imitate, but rather to study and perfect one's technique. The way forward to creativity is a path that will enrich our lives and teach us about ourselves and the world we live in.

In the process of encouraging creative education, we will learn to distinguish between art and entertainment. It is not important to attach labels to creativity, but to understand the characteristics of art that makes you think, and entertainment

that keeps you from thinking. In this way we will have a chance to enhance our lives with new discoveries about ourselves and our world.

Thank you, I look forward to taking your questions and comments, and thank you again for the opportunity to address you today.