

# Te Auahatanga me te Ara Auaha Creativity and Creative Process: The Bright Creative Life

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## Abstract

Discussions on creativity available in the English language are dominated by western theorists and western philosophical understandings. These understandings emphasise individuality, innovation, the rational, and the necessity of a creative product. However, feminist, non-western and indigenous theorists assert the importance of culture, community and the non-rational, such as the spiritual, and place less emphasis on creative products. A Feminist Participatory approach informed by Indigenous Peoples' worldviews (FP-I) provides a lens through which creativity may be viewed with an appreciation of the wider lived experience of the creative person. For a dance practitioner or researcher, this wider lived experience may include rational and scientifically verifiable elements, but also non-rational elements of relationship, community, culture, spirituality and the natural world. The Bright Creative Life approach arises out of such a worldview and includes preferring, practising, gathering, selecting, finding quiet spaces, laying creative work aside, and ritual, prayer and meditation.

## Introduction

Emerging from a feminist participatory approach informed by Indigenous Peoples' worldviews<sup>i</sup> (FP-I), *The Bright Creative Life* brings a broader understanding of the lived experience of creative individuals. I developed this approach as a result of my study alongside nine other solo female art-makers from various age groups, ethnicities and art-making areas in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a dance-maker, I was one of the participants, as well as being researcher and facilitator of the reflective practice in art-making of the other nine women. For the study, each art-maker undertook several months of art-making in her own area and then I met with her three times to help her reflect on what she had been doing and learning, and so that I could gain insights concerning the lived experiences of these art-makers in such areas as creativity; one of the outcomes was *The Bright Creative Life*<sup>ii</sup>.

In *The Bright Creative Life*, I acknowledge the focus required for production of an artwork, such as a dance, but see this focus as being interwoven with the

lived experience of the art-maker. Thus, *The Bright Creative Life* includes preferring, practising, gathering, selecting, finding quiet spaces, laying creative work aside, and ritual, prayer and meditation.

In the first half of this paper, I establish the theoretical basis, the *whakapapa*,<sup>iii</sup> of *The Bright Creative Life*. To this end, I briefly introduce the key elements of an FP-I worldview and then focus on creativity and creative process, including understandings presented by existing theorists and also new understandings arising from my own study based within an FP-I framework. Discussing only currently existing literature in the English language, I present overviews of indigenous (particularly Māori), feminist, non-western and traditional western understandings of creativity and creative process.<sup>iv</sup> I then outline key elements of an FP-I approach to creativity and creative process and describe the main aspects of *The Bright Creative Life*. Finally, I identify five ways in which *The Bright Creative Life* contributes to knowledge in the area of creativity.

## **He Raranga Mātauranga: Tā te kaikōkiri mana wahine, tā te hunga whai pānga, me tā te tangata whenua titiro ki te ao**

### **An interwoven knowing: Feminist, participatory and indigenous peoples' worldviews (FP-I)**

Feminist and participatory worldviews can be described in brief terms.<sup>v</sup> Feminism, in general, focuses on the marginalised, women or men, whatever their area of marginalization.<sup>vi</sup> A participatory worldview concerns people working alongside each other and, together, seeking change; in terms of research, this means researching 'with' rather than researching 'on' other people.<sup>vii</sup> However, Indigenous Peoples' worldviews are less easily summarised. Descriptions of Indigenous Peoples and their fundamental beliefs<sup>viii</sup> can be found on the United Nations and World Council of Indigenous Peoples websites. Because my study was based in Aotearoa New Zealand and half of the participants in the study identified themselves as Māori (indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand), it was vital to not only provide general descriptions of Indigenous Peoples and their worldviews, but also to identify some of the key areas in *kaupapa Māori*<sup>ix</sup> such as *mana whenua* (having power associated with possession of traditional lands), *whakapapa* (genealogical ties), *whānau* (relations by blood or common cause), *whānaungatanga* (understanding of relatedness), *ahi kā* ("the lighting of fires and the presence of people at home"<sup>x</sup>), *kanohi ki te kanohi* (face-to-face contact), *kanohi kitea* (the seen face) and *rangatiratanga* (relative autonomy and self-determination). From

the websites describing Indigenous Peoples in general, and from kaupapa Māori knowledge in particular, it is clear that Indigenous Peoples' fundamental beliefs assume that culture, spirituality, embodied knowing<sup>xi</sup> and creativity are interwoven and inseparable in life.<sup>xii</sup>

### ***FP-I fundamental beliefs***

In a research context, feminist, participatory and Indigenous Peoples' worldviews have certain fundamental beliefs in common, and each of the three informs and enriches an FP-I worldview. All aim for reflection and action, which lead to the realisation of emancipation, human flourishing, spiritual wellbeing, different ways of being together as humans, and guidance and inspiration for practice.<sup>xiii</sup> In addition, feminist, participatory and Indigenous Peoples worldviews hold that knowledge and being cannot be separated and, therefore, that humans are embodied, or bodymind, beings rather than beings whose minds can be separated from their bodies. Finally, all three perspectives believe in the connectedness of human beings in community with each other. Hence, feminist, participatory and indigenous worldviews hold fundamental beliefs that may form a “co-creative dance”<sup>xiv</sup> which is a “dance of relating”<sup>xv</sup>.

### ***FP-I Ways of Knowing***

Traditional western approaches to ways of knowing (epistemology) foreground the rational and verbalisable (in words, symbols or numbers). However, a study of the literature of feminisms, participatory theorists and Indigenous Peoples reveals that there are at least 17 different ways of knowing, some of which are evident in more than one worldview and some unique to a particular worldview. Ways of knowing evident in feminist writing include silence, received, subjective, procedural and constructed knowledge, collaborative, embodied knowing, and cultural, spiritual and writing as ways of knowing.<sup>xvi</sup> Ways of knowing identified in the literature of participatory research include experiential, presentational, propositional, practical, representational, relational and reflective knowing. Finally, in Indigenous Peoples' worldviews, knowing is viewed holistically as an interweaving of the cultural, spiritual and embodied, and including such areas as creation, relatedness, beliefs, the Land, colonisation, uniqueness and respect for elders. Thus, the ways of knowing in an FP-I worldview are comprised of all of the ways of knowing of feminist, participatory and Indigenous Peoples' worldviews, both those

in common and those unique to the component worldviews; an interweaving of a broad range of ways of knowing is the result.

### ***FP-I and values***

Whereas an interwoven FP-I worldview reveals a wide range of ways of knowing, some overlapping and some unique, the interweaving of values between feminist, participatory and Indigenous Peoples' worldviews reveals certain important areas of commonality; all value justice and the worth of individuals. However, each of the three worldviews has particular areas of focus. For example, feminisms value change (political, social, educational or otherwise) that address injustices and marginalisation of people, whatever the reason or area of marginalisation. A participatory worldview values whatever is intrinsically worthwhile in the human condition, as an end in itself, and takes action (political or otherwise) to promote human potential. Indigenous Peoples' worldviews value Indigenous Peoples in particular, and therefore, emphasise such areas as decolonisation, identity, and access to land and resources.<sup>xvii</sup> Thus, an FP-I worldview strongly embraces both the mutual values of justice and individual worth and the unique and particular values of each of the component worldviews.

### ***FP-I and the nature of power***

Since an FP-I worldview is an interweaving of the lenses of the component worldviews, then, once again, both common and unique foci are embraced. All three worldviews highlight dominance and the use or misuse of power.<sup>xviii</sup> However, each worldview has particular areas of focus. Feminisms address the areas of dominance of white, wealthy males, and marginalisation of women and men of non-dominant cultures, non-white women and men, white women, lower socio-economic groups, non-western nationalities and varying sexualities. A participatory worldview addresses such areas as dominance of researcher over researched, and injustice and marginalisation, wherever found within the context of participatory action research. Finally, Indigenous Peoples' worldviews address the dominance of powerful, wealthy, colonising cultures, and the colonising and marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples.

### ***FP-I and areas of change sought***

The areas of change sought in feminist, participatory and Indigenous Peoples' worldviews can be intuited from the above sections. Because all three worldviews place value on individual's and group's rights to flourish—albeit each foregrounds particular individuals and groups—then each seeks change (politically or in other ways) to achieve such goals as emancipation, self-determination, identity, opportunities and the right to 'be'. Thus, feminisms seek change through personal, social and political action, often through consciousness-raising. Both feminist and participatory worldviews seek change through the removal of hierarchy in relationships between researcher and researched, and personal change for both researcher and participant, including the possibility that the participant becomes an agent of change. Indigenous Peoples' worldviews seek change in areas such as self-determination, recognition by selves and others of the validity and dynamic of indigenous ways of being, and personal, political and group action. In common with feminist and participatory worldviews, Indigenous Peoples' worldviews also address the need for change in the dynamics of research: hierarchy determined by indigenous understandings and the research participant as an agent of change. Thus, an FP-I worldview interweaves both the points of commonality between the three contributing worldviews—including political action and changes sought in the dynamics of research—and the unique foci of each worldview.

## **Te auahatanga me te ara auaha Creativity and creative process**

### ***Creativity***

There is much discussion in western writing concerning the nature of creativity. Most western researchers appear to emphasise rational/cognitive, product-based and problem-solving approaches to creativity (Balkin, 1990; Boden, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gardner, 1993, 2004, 2006; Kaufman & Baer, 2005; Sternberg, 1999). Key elements discussed often include domain, field and the individual person, or person, process and product (Balkin, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Kaufman & Baer, 2005). On the other hand, creativity is also understood by some western theorists to be a complexity of interactive relationships between people, process, products and social and cultural contexts, including a community of experts who judge the value of a creative product (for example, Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Kaufman & Baer, 2005; Lubart, 1999; Sternberg, 1999).

Creativity may be evident in the actions of an eminent individual (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), or expressed by many people as they go about their lives (Runco, 2004).<sup>xix</sup> Many western writers also emphasise individuality, identification of a small number of people viewed as creative, institutional training and innovation (for example, Boden, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gardner, 1993, 2004, 2006; Kaufman & Baer, 2005; Sternberg, 1999, 2005). Indigenous and non-western writers tend to agree that creativity involves complexity of interactive relationships and the presence of the intuitive, and place less emphasis on the individual, and the final product and its value (Lubart, 1999; Smith, 1999). Similarly, feminist qualitative research writer and dance educator Valerie Janesick (2001) believes that creativity is ineffective without the use of intuition, since “intuition is the seed...of the creative act” (p. 539). Likewise, choreographer Twyla Tharp (2006) offers a broader view of creativity and the creative lifestyle. Tharp maintains: “Creativity is more about taking the facts, fictions, and feelings we store away and finding new ways to connect them”(p. 14).<sup>xx</sup> Nevertheless, while elements of the non-rational are evident in western writing, particularly in the creative and performing arts, in non-western cultures, creativity per se appears to be predominantly related to non-rational elements including spirituality, intuition and a state of personal fulfillment (Lubart, 1999; Smith, 1999).

Further, in many non-western cultures, creativity is more often viewed in terms of identification with and affirmation of a particular culture (Lubart, 1999; Smith, 1999). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), an indigenous (Māori) academic of Aotearoa New Zealand, addresses the question of creating and creativity from an indigenous perspective:

... creating is about transcending the basic survival mode through using a resource or capability which every indigenous community has retained throughout colonization—the ability to create and be creative. ... creating is not just about the artistic endeavours of individuals but about the spirit of creating which indigenous communities have exercised over thousands of years. Imagination enables people to rise above their own circumstances, to dream new visions and to hold onto old ones. It fosters inventions and discoveries, facilitates simple improvements to people’s lives and uplifts our spirits. Creating is not the exclusive domain of the rich nor of the technologically superior, but of the imaginative. Creating is about channeling collective creativity in order to produce solutions to indigenous problems. Every

indigenous community has considered and come up with various innovative solutions to problems. That was before colonialism. Throughout the period of colonization indigenous peoples survived because of their imaginative spirit, their ability to adapt and think around a problem. (p. 158)

Smith's description of creativity embraces several aspects important to indigenous, non-western and marginalised people. Indigenous approaches often focus on access to creative endeavours that have traditionally been available without western-style institutional training. Such an approach emphasises affirmation of existing and future cultural vision and identity, the importance of others within the community/culture, community problem-solving, and collective expressions of creativity (Puketapu-Hetet, 1989; Smith, 1999). While an indigenous understanding of creativity often emphasises replication and affirmation of existing art forms and designs, individual innovation is also encouraged (Lubart, 1999; Puketapu-Hetet, 1989). However, rather than the individual rationality of a western approach, indigenous and non-western writers emphasise the psychic and spiritual, and the need to transcend basic human survival by lifting the spirits of others.<sup>xxi</sup> Furthermore, while meditation and/or ritual are seldom mentioned in western writing on creativity,<sup>xxii</sup> these spiritual activities often precede and/or accompany creative activities for people in indigenous and non-western cultures. Because indigenous and non-western views of creativity have centred on the non-rational and spiritual, cognitive questions of western research do not appear to have been considered relevant.<sup>xxiii</sup> Yet, legitimate questions have been asked concerning cultural/creative domination by writers from and on behalf of indigenous and non-western cultures (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Smith, 1999).

Finally, there are arguments relating to the centrality of a creative product as evidence of creativity in western research—whether the product is a physical item, a solution to a problem or the personality of the creator. Lubart (1999) notes: “An important feature of Western creativity seems to be its relationship to an observable product” (p. 339). While the need for a creative product may be questioned, western society often only recognises and rewards tangible products in terms of funding and grants (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gardner, 1993, 2006; Kaufman & Baer, 2005). In contrast, in indigenous and non-western cultures, creativity is often associated with psychic and spiritual realms and with personal fulfilment, rather than with specific products.

## An FP-I approach to creativity

An FP-I approach, by definition, favours feminist, participatory and indigenous understandings of creativity and, in so doing, places emphasis on non-western and indigenous perspectives. Thus, an FP-I approach implies that creativity is based within and serves community, culture and all of the relationships, spirituality, customs and geography pertaining to the community and/or culture. An FP-I approach also implies that there is space for creativity as a community activity or process *and* individual or group development of creative products. From available English language writing, an extensive list can be made of descriptions and functions of creativity within indigenous and non-western cultures. These functions and descriptions focus around community benefit, including the celebration of life implied when creativity lifts the spirits of the participating people. While a number of definitions and descriptions of creativity and characteristics of creative people have been debated among western researchers, these debates may or may not be viewed as relevant to indigenous and non-western peoples. The traditional western focus on the rational is not shared by indigenous, non-western and some western writers, including those promoting a participatory worldview; rather, non-rational areas such as community relationships, spirituality, intuition, meditation and ritual are emphasised.

In the creative and performing arts, creativity is seen as integral (Barbour, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2011; Barrett & Bolt, 2009; Bresler, 2007; Bright, 2013b; Kaufman & Baer, 2005; Tharp, 2006, etc). However, creativity is also important in many other areas of life. For example, Bradford Keeney (2009) maintains that creativity is vital for effective therapy:

... “creativity”—rather than theory, method, technique, or research—is what awakens transformative therapy ... Creativity encourages inspired presence rather than stale imitation. It embraces the process of developing something new, uncommon, unique. Not simply “new for new’s sake”, but tailor-made both to fit and help liberate the immediate circumstances. (p. 1)

As a dance-maker raised and educated in a western context and as an advocate of an FP-I worldview, I am encouraged by seeing that earlier understandings of creativity have been challenged in more recent western writing. For example, by emphasising that all people have some ability to be creative and that the quality of creativity will differ from person to person and culture to



culture, Enid Zimmerman (2005) challenges Csikszentmihalyi's view that only the small number of people who make significant changes to their culture can be considered creative.<sup>xxiv</sup> Similarly, western educator Howard Gardner (2006) challenges the focus on individuality, emphasising the importance and relevance of small and large group creativity; Gardner gives examples from science, computing and business innovation.<sup>xxv</sup> Theatre educator R. Keith Sawyer (2005) provides an example of creativity that is not solely dependent on a product: "In product creativity, the creative process ends when the creative product is complete and fixed, whereas in acting, the creative process continues through performance and constitutes the creative product—it has no existence apart from the creative process of performance" (p. 47). Hence, in an FP-I approach, the richness of western, non-western and indigenous perspectives on creativity are interwoven to provide a broader and richer understanding of the lived experience of a creative person.

### ***Creative process***

Although some western writers have clearly identified and described a distinct process, such a clear process is often seen as irrelevant or too prescribed by writers in non-western and Indigenous Peoples' contexts (at least among those writers whose work has been written, or translated, in English). As discussed above, an FP-I worldview includes and values the understandings of feminist, participatory and Indigenous Peoples' worldviews, including the rational and distinctive processes taught and modelled in western educational institutions. Moreover, the clearly defined processes described by some western writers are relevant to certain elements of *The Bright Creative Life*. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I present a general description of creative process, followed by summaries of the understandings of two prominent western theorists: Balkin (1990) and Csikszentmihalyi (1996).

Creative process generally refers to a series of steps or phases that are followed either deliberately or intuitively by a creative person (or team) in the development of a completed work, idea or design. Creative process, as a series of activities, has been explored by numerous writers in relation to numerous disciplines, including the creative and performing arts.<sup>xxvi</sup> Nevertheless, it must be noted that, in general, English language-based writing is a product of western philosophical understandings. There are many approaches to creative process, the terms used are often specific to the field concerned, and there can be numerous

variations within a field (particularly in fields outside of the creative and performing arts). While seen as important in such areas as western psychology, education, management, engineering, information technology, and creative and performing arts, it is unclear, from available English language-based writing, whether generalised rationally based creative processes are viewed as relevant to any indigenous or non-western peoples. Hence, in this section, I briefly outline the similar creative processes described by western writers Balkin (1990) and Csikszentmihalyi (1996). Both men view their approaches as being applicable to any area of creativity for the development of a specific creative product.

Composer and arts educator Balkin (1990) describes a commonly accepted four-phase creative process: *preparation*, *incubation*, *illumination* and *verification*.<sup>xxvii</sup> During *preparation*, the creative person obtains information and resources for the creative task ahead. *Incubation* refers to a period of reflection in which the individual allows the concepts and creative ideas to develop within both the conscious and the unconscious mind. *Illumination* is the “eureka or ‘aha’ moment” of the process during which a new creative idea or solution presents itself (Balkin, 1990, p. 38). *Verification* is the phase during which the creative individual tests the ideas to decide whether or not they will work and then begins again if they do not. Having identified a four-phase process, Balkin adds a fifth phase which he identifies as the phase of the ‘*re*’ factor, since it is during this phase that the creative person must re-think, reconsider, replace, refine, redo, reaffirm, reprocess, rewrite, and re-conceptualise. While the creative individual may decide that an idea is not workable, Balkin maintains that it is important to view all work as positive, rather than seeing experimental responses as right or wrong—as mistakes. ‘Mistakes’ can lead to discoveries. Balkin’s creative process has been linked to various approaches to choreographic process in dance-making.<sup>xxviii</sup> Like Balkin’s process, choreography is generally focused on development of an end product. While Balkin allows that a creative product could be a completed piece of work, he maintains that it could also be the personality itself or the solution to a problem.

Drawing on Wallas’ (1926) work, psychologist and educationist Csikszentmihalyi (1996) describes a five-phase approach to creative process: *preparation*, *incubation*, *insight*, *evaluation* and *elaboration*. During the *preparation* phase, the creative person becomes immersed in a set of problematic or curious issues. The *incubation* phase refers to a time when the creative person considers many ideas. Csikszentmihalyi maintains that a linear and logical pathway

is followed if the creative person is intending to solve a problem consciously. However, if the creative individual spends time reflecting, then unusual and unexpected solutions may emerge. The *insight* phase is when the ‘aha’ or ‘eureka’ moment of the solution or new idea takes place. During the *evaluation* phase, a decision is made on whether to develop the idea further or reject it and start again. This can be a very demanding phase as the creative person considers such issues as the understandings of her/his domain or field and the views of her/his peers; these understandings and views will determine whether the idea is new and likely to be challenging to those peers or even rejected by them. Finally, the phase of *elaboration* is often a lengthy period of refining and adding all the required detail to the creative idea. Csikszentmihalyi notes that, while a linear approach can be taken for development of new ideas and solutions, a creative person will often develop fresh insights and creative solutions through a fluid approach that involves frequent ‘revisiting’ of earlier phases. Thus, Csikszentmihalyi’s evaluation phase appears to resemble Balkin’s fifth “re” phase. Four- or five-phase creative processes like Balkin’s and Csikszentmihalyi’s have been used successfully in a range of teaching and learning environments, such as creative and performing arts, often in relation to flow.

In summary, I have noted that both Balkin and Csikszentmihalyi focus strongly on an endpoint, a creative product, as the aim of a creative process. Similarly, some writers in the creative and performing arts have identified variations within specific areas and yet viewed the end product as important, while others have placed emphasis on the processes of creativity without the necessity for an end product. Many creative artists have also confirmed that their processes are similar to Balkin’s phases. However, the complex nature of creativity has increasingly been recognised by researchers and, as a result, more fluid approaches to creative process are often taken. An example of a more fluid approach could be when practitioners of similar and/or different art-making areas collaborate for specific art-making projects.

### ***Creativity, Creative Process, Spirituality and Culture***

For indigenous and non-western cultures and for many art-makers, whatever their culture, creative process is influenced by the interweaving of spirituality, culture and the area(s) of creative endeavour or art-making. Spirituality and creativity cannot be viewed as separate concepts for many indigenous peoples, those of non-western cultures, and art-makers. Such an interweaving of spirituality and

creativity may mean that creative process includes such areas as prayer, religious observance and respect for ancestors. In many cultures, strict religious protocols must be learned and observed as part of the training and performance of traditional dance forms (for example, Indian Sattriya Dance). Respect for ancestors may be observed as respect for the whakapapa<sup>xxix</sup> of teachers of that dance, or expressed in and through the dance itself. Trance dance,<sup>xxx</sup> during which the dancer may improvise or perform set choreography as she/he enters a trance state, is practiced in western and non-western situations in the context of religious experience and expression.

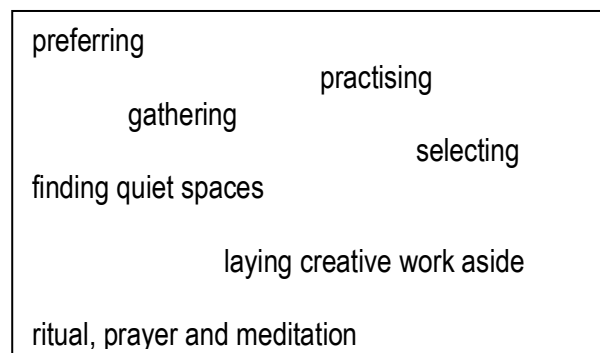
While basing their work on traditional styles, it is possible that individual dancers may undertake creative processes, including Balkin's five phases, when they are developing their own choreography (Bright, 2010). However, in such contexts as those mentioned above, individuals and groups are likely to value spiritual, cultural, social and technical elements of particular dances rather than individual creative processes such as Balkin's (Bright, 2010).

Thus, creative process in both indigenous and western art-making forms is influenced by culture, spirituality, the use of new movements and techniques and whether an area of art-making is based on performance or improvisation. While Balkin's approach to creative process may be embedded in many creative areas, such influences may blur the possibility of a clearly defined creative process.

## The Bright Creative Life

An FP-I worldview and its multiple ways of knowing provide insights into a broader understanding of creativity and creative processes. An FP-I approach means that my understandings are not limited to the rational/cognitive product-based and problem-solving approaches (propositional knowing) discussed by western theorists. Instead, I am also able to draw on non-rational, non-verbal and non-verbalisable elements of ways of knowing such as cultural, embodied, experiential, practical, presentational and spiritual. Through the lens of an FP-I worldview, I am able to view creativity as being about how creative people live all of their lives, rather than simply how they create a particular work such as a dance. *The Bright Creative Life* is an expression of the lived experience of a creative person and is a culmination of findings based on all of the above sections and also my study of reflective practice in art-making among ten female solo art-makers of various ethnicities, ages and art-making areas.

I present the following discussion on *The Bright Creative Life* through both words and images; in this way, I signal that understanding of creativity and creative processes cannot be achieved through words alone. Inclusion of the non-rational, non-verbal and non-verbalisable ways of knowing acknowledges that many creative people may employ these ways of knowing *prior* to being able to articulate aspects of creative processes. Indeed, an art-maker may find that she is unable to articulate such aspects as creative process *except* through cultural, embodied, experiential, practical, presentational or spiritual ways of knowing. Therefore, the discussion of the following sections includes both verbal and non-verbal elements.



I have chosen to present this model visually as a box containing scattered words, rather than as a more imaginative form drawn from nature, such as a tree or flower. My reason for this choice is to show that, while the elements of creative process are present, the spaces can be filled with the wide range of other relationships, responsibilities and activities experienced by a creative person. According to *The Bright Creative Life*, the creative lived experience of an individual can be described in terms of seven groups of actions: *preferring*, *practising*, *gathering*, *selecting*, *finding quiet spaces*, *laying creative work aside* and *ritual, prayer and meditation*. By placing ritual, prayer and meditation last, I signal not that this is the least important area but that this aspect undergirds the rest. As discussed above, many creative people understand that creativity is interwoven with spirituality, culture and other areas of lived experience. In addition, by using titles that are verbs, or action words, expressed in the continuous tense, I indicate both the ongoing nature of the creative processes for creative individuals and the interweaving of their creative endeavours with other aspects of their daily lived experience.

## **Preferring**



**Photograph 1: Preferring: Debbie Bright; Grimes Photography Dallas, Texas, USA**

The first feature of the lived experience of a creative individual is that she/he often has a preference for a particular genre, style or area of expertise. Indeed, skills and preferences can be specific to a particular domain within a wider field. Thus, one Māori weaver may prefer to work with very fine threads and a particular range of colours, while another may prefer to use less traditional approaches to finish and neatness. One dancer may prefer to work within the genre of contemporary dance while another may prefer ballet or hip-hop. A creative individual may even have a preference within a particular style or genre. For instance, a dance-maker may prefer to work with live music, or without any music, using shapes and motion from nature or in the style of a particular historical genre. A dance-maker may also prefer to draw material from her/his immersion in spiritual, cultural or ecological worlds; she/he may wish to communicate these concerns in order to bring about political or attitude changes, enrich audience members, or influence atmosphere, mood or spiritual climate.

The element of preferring can be related to the western concept of microdomains (Kaufman & Baer, 2005). Microdomains are specialised sub-groups within a specific domain of art-making; all of the domains together comprise the field of creative endeavour. Diversities are required within microdomains in terms of intelligence, motivation, knowledge and skills and a specific discipline-fostering environment. The various attributes and approaches required for microdomains mean that creative process becomes complex and varied and, therefore, may not conform to the stages of a process such as Balkin's, described above. Hence, while creative individuals may be able to clearly articulate their microdomain preferences, their interweaving of rational, intuitive, non-verbal and non-verbalisable ways of knowing during their creative processes provide some insight into the complexity of this and the following areas.

### ***Practising***



**Photograph 2: Practising: Debbie Bright; Lucy Jarasius**

Practising—the daily hard work of gaining skills—is generally the unseen factor that enables an individual to produce creative works, ideas and solutions. As Twyla Tharp maintains, “Creativity is a habit, and the best creativity is a result of good

work habits” (2006, p. 7).<sup>xxxi</sup> Such work habits are evident in the life of a poi dancer who practises even while participating in a conversation or waiting for a kettle to boil, an architect or painter who fills notebooks with drawings and design ideas, an engineer who jots calculations and drawings on scraps of paper while riding on a bus, a writer who writes for a certain number of hours each day, or a dancer who appears to be dancing even while sleeping. The practice arising out of these work habits builds up the skill of the individual. Again, Tharp (2009):

It takes skill to bring something you’ve imagined into the world: to use words to create believable lives, to select the colors and textures of paint to represent a haystack at sunset, to combine ingredients to make a flavorful dish. No one is born with that skill. It is developed through exercise, through repetition, through a blend of learning and reflection that’s both painstaking and rewarding. (p. 9)

Thus, practising is a vital element of creative process.

### ***Gathering***



**Photograph 3: Gathering: Debbie Bright; Lindy Bravo**



When encouraged to talk about their lives, many creative individuals (including those in my study) may mention that gathering is an everyday part of their lived experience. Thus, a dance-maker might note that her gathering includes resources such as fibres, plants, feathers, fabrics, concepts, shapes, textures, colours, music, sounds, words, and/or movement ideas. Some creative people gather their ideas into shelves, drawers, particular rooms or video clips, while others organise drawings, photographs, verbal ideas and phrases or samples of materials into books or journals. Some designate particular forms of gathering to particular spaces or journals. Others view such recording as a heritage for their children. For some creative individuals, the everyday world provides many sources for gathering. For others, gathering takes place as they visit particular shops, exhibitions or events. As Tharp (2006) notes: “Everything is raw material. Everything is relevant. Everything is usable. Everything feeds my creativity” (p. 10). Tharp gathers her ideas into boxes labelled with the name of each project (either current or future idea).

As a dance-maker, I gather many items such as pictures, drawings, poems, concepts, words or movement ideas, witnessed or danced. Such movement ideas may be witnessed in my everyday life through other people, animals, plants, trees, wind, fire, water or inanimate objects such as bicycles or cars. I may notice movements that occur through the whole body or individual body parts, or as gestures, shapes or pathways made in and through space. I may also gain movement ideas from interactions between living beings and inanimate objects such as watching a dog chase and fetch a ball or a child lift a spoonful of food from plate to mouth.

## Selecting



**Photograph 4: Selecting: Debbie Bright; Grimes Photography Dallas, Texas, USA**

Selecting concerns the separation of particular items or ideas that are seen as useful to a specific creative project. Twyla Tharp (2006) maintains that selecting requires judgement as well as observation. Thus, while creative individuals may talk of gathering many items, often with no particular art-making project in mind, they also appear to have a more direct approach to selecting materials, ideas or concepts for a specific creative project. At least three different approaches may be taken in the individual choices of such selecting:

- through a combination of rational and intuitive senses;
- through the intuitive sense alone; or
- making individual choices but seeking feedback and confirmation from a knowledgeable and respected other.

The following are examples of selecting from the experiences of three different women who participated in my study (Bright, 2013b).

The first example concerns a photographer. This woman maintains that she experiences tension between the intuitive and rational, between gathering and selecting items, and photographic techniques for specific projects. She views her gathering as instinctive, but switches to what she calls product-focused cognitive conceptual frameworks when arranging materials for a photograph and the technical practicalities of managing a camera and the photographs.

Secondly, a quilt-maker speaks only of her intuitive sense of what looks and feels right. Such an intuitive sense may have been built on extensive experience of the particular field of quilt-making. Any cognitive learning has been 'absorbed' into the fund of aesthetic and practical elements of the preferred genre, style or area of expertise. Decisions concerning selection appear to be made without the individual being aware of any cognitive effort.

Finally, a photographer who identifies herself as Māori maintains that she employs non-rational, non-verbal and non-verbalisable senses as she selects particular photographs for an exhibition. However, she also seeks advice from a knowledgeable and respected other, an elder from her culture. This art-maker attempts to explain how and why she has selected particular photographs but says that she notices how a figure or scene in a photograph 'speaks' to her. However, she does not make her decisions alone. She seeks out a knowledgeable elder to view her photographs, hear how she plans to display them and then give feedback and permission concerning her desire to display photographs of particular respected old people, some of whom have already died.

### ***Finding quiet spaces***



**Photograph 5: Finding quiet spaces; Debbie Bright photographer**

The fifth aspect of creative process, finding quiet spaces, is mentioned by numerous writers. Many creative individuals are busy people with many responsibilities apart from their creative work. Thus, in my study, the other women and I negotiated times and places to meet for conversations, and managed postponements and interruptions within conversations and our many activities, responsibilities and commitments. We agreed that we all needed to be creative about how and when we could undertake our art-making (Bright, 2013b).

Some creative people find that they work best at night, even at 2 am, when it is quiet and there are no interruptions. Others find that once they are in a specific place their creativity is stimulated. This space may be in a special outdoor place or in a designated room such as a workshop, study, darkroom or dance or sound studio. Tharp (2006) writes at length of her need to be in her “white room” in order for new dance ideas to emerge. Tharp’s white room is a dance studio in Manhattan, New York. When she needs to choreograph a new dance work, Tharp begins forming her ideas in this space before her dancers arrive:

To some people, this empty room symbolizes something profound, mysterious, and terrifying; the task of starting with nothing and working your way toward creating something whole and beautiful and satisfying. (Tharp, 2006, p. 5)

Tharp compares her arrival in the dance studio with a writer beginning the day with a blank page, a painter with a blank canvas or a composer sitting down at a piano to begin a new work. However, being confronted by the blankness of such quiet spaces can be uncomfortable for the creative individual. Tharp notes:

Some people find this moment—the moment before creativity begin—so painful that they simply cannot deal with it ... They procrastinate. (2006, pp. 5-6)

Nevertheless, the art-makers in my study also spoke of this quiet space as an area in which they could develop and complete their creative work. They expressed the need for the solitude provided by such spaces. It was in their quiet space that they were able to reflect on how to achieve particular creative solutions. As a dance-maker, I also find that I work best when I have time alone in the quiet of a dance studio. This quiet space allows me room to dance and to write and draw in my journal, and also to speak my thoughts aloud.

This idea of finding quiet spaces does not appear to be part of the creative processes of western theorists like Balkin (1990), Csikszentmihalyi (1996) or Gardner (1993, 2004, 2006). Perhaps these theorists studied artists who had designated times and spaces for their creative activities in ways that are not possible for many creative people, particularly women with family responsibilities. In this case, an FP-I worldview highlights a broader approach to creative process.

### ***Laying creative work aside***



**Photograph 6: Laying creative work aside: Debbie Bright photographer**

While the previous element appears to be unique to an FP-I approach to creative process, the aspect of *laying creative work aside* can be aligned somewhat with creative processes such as those of Balkin (1990) and Csikszentmihalyi (1996). Laying creative work aside could be similar to Balkin's *incubation* and 're' stages or Csikszentmihalyi's *elaboration* phase. For many artists, including dancers, the resting time appears to be a necessary pause in the flow of creativity. Tharp (2006) asserts that the creative person will make better progress if she/he allows space for refreshment and reflection in order that new revelation and creative solutions to problems may emerge. However, for some artists this act of laying creative work aside is also viewed as spiritual.

In my dance-making, I have a sense of when it is time to stop trying to develop a dancework, to allow my subconscious mind and spirit to keep working on current physical and/or conceptual problems, to pray, meditate and reflect on what exactly it is that I am trying to do. This latter aspect leads very clearly into the final element of *The Bright Creative Life*.

## ***Ritual, prayer and meditation***



**Photograph 7: Ritual, prayer and meditation; Debbie Bright; Lucy Jarasius**

The final area of creative process concerns the performance of ritual, prayer and/or meditation prior to and during periods of art-making. Twyla Tharp (2006) considers ritual essential:

It is 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. (p. 15)

Most of the participants in my study spoke specifically in terms of exercises such as prayer or spiritual rituals. The rituals included cultural customs, such as the customs of flax gathering or seeking a name, whakapapa (genealogy) and whakatauki (proverb) for a particular artwork, as well as individual habits such as taking a particular route, eating particular foods, walking in circles, or prayer. Dreams, visions, cultural understandings and prayers were, at times, mentioned together as pertaining to the spiritual *and* the creative. In my dance-making, I generally engage in physical warm-up exercises, lying motionless on the floor and

walking around the dance studio several times and praying as I prepare physically, emotionally, spiritually and creatively.

## The importance of The Bright Creative Life

There are at least five ways in which this particular approach contributes to knowledge in the area of creativity:

1. *The Bright Creative Life* arises out of an FP-I worldview and celebrates the breadth and richness of feminist, participatory, indigenous and non-western understandings while embracing any western expressions of creativity and creative process deemed useful, particularly in development of dance or any other art works.
2. The gaps in the approach acknowledge that the lived experience of any creative person includes relationships, responsibilities and activities that may be influenced by areas such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic and/or geographic positioning.
3. *The Bright Creative Life* was developed by a dance-maker/dance researcher and has been found to be useful for dance-makers and dance researchers.
4. *The Bright Creative Life* was developed as a result of a study among a group of women from a wide range of art-making areas and, therefore, can be seen as an approach that is developed by a dancer but is useful for people from a range of art-making areas.
5. *The Bright Creative Life* has emerged from the art-making community, yet is relevant for creative people from any area in life.

In this paper, I have presented an outline of an FP-I worldview, key understandings of creativity and creative process and *The Bright Creative Life*, an approach that interweaves all of the above together with the findings of my study involving ten female solo art-makers of varying ethnicities, ages and art-making areas. Finally, I identified five ways in which *The Bright Creative Life* contributes to knowledge in the area of creativity.

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<sup>i</sup> The term *worldview*, as used here, can be understood as similar to *paradigm*

<sup>ii</sup> Ethical permission for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of The University of Waikato.

<sup>iii</sup> While *whakapapa* can be similar to the English term *genealogy*, in this case, it is used to mean *the conceptual forebears*.

<sup>iv</sup> Because Māori are the Indigenous Peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori language and understandings are often evident in sub-titles and content within this paper.

<sup>v</sup> The brief definitions in this paragraph are summaries of descriptions given in Bright (2013a). For fuller descriptions of all of the areas in this paragraph, see Bright (2013a, pp. 8-15).

<sup>vi</sup> Here I speak of feminism, in general, but I frequently also refer to feminisms, because there are numerous forms of feminism.

<sup>vii</sup> A participatory worldview has emerged from a marginalised area of western scholarship and participatory understandings have been affirmed by writers from both feminist and Indigenous Peoples' worldviews.

<sup>viii</sup> The term fundamental beliefs, as used here, can be understood as similar to ontology.

<sup>ix</sup> Kaupapa Māori, as used in this paper, refers to Māori worldviews and particularly their outworking in educational contexts.

<sup>x</sup> Kana & Tamatea (2006, p. 18).

<sup>xi</sup> Embodied knowing is knowing in and through the body and is a result of all previous and current influences of such areas as personal history, culture, gender, sexuality and beliefs, and the social, physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual and spiritual (see Bright, 2013a, for a fuller description).

<sup>xii</sup> Culture, spirituality, embodied knowing and creativity were all viewed as relevant and important to me as a dancer and also to the other art-makers in the study and, therefore, are also clearly evident in *The Bright Creative Life*.

<sup>xiii</sup> Reason & Bradbury (2001).

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid. (2001, p. 8).

<sup>xv</sup> Park (2001, p. 85).

<sup>xvi</sup> For descriptions of each of the ways of knowing found in the literature of each worldview, see Bright (2013a, pp. 19-33).

<sup>xvii</sup> For fuller descriptions of values see Bright (2013a, pp. 34-35)

<sup>xviii</sup> For fuller descriptions of the nature of power, see Bright (2013a, pp. 36-38)

<sup>xix</sup> Csikszentmihalyi (1996) proposes both "Big C" as the eminent individual and "little c" as generally creative people. However, in his writing, Csikszentmihalyi appears to focus mainly on "Big C" individuals.

<sup>xx</sup> The views of Janesick and Tharp are particularly relevant to this paper, since both are women who are engaged in dance. Nevertheless, Tharp's approach echoes dominant western views of individual innovation and development of a creative product and is based on western institutionally based training.

<sup>xxi</sup> Lifting the spirits implies that a sense of positivity is encouraged spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, in the perception of belongingness and other areas.

<sup>xxii</sup> There are some western writers, most of whom are women, who emphasise such areas.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Questions addressed by western writers include what is creativity, how is the term creativity understood, where is creativity, who can be deemed as creative and how is creativity learned and expressed?

<sup>xxiv</sup> It must also be noted that Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) examples of creative individuals are almost solely drawn from western culture. Such an approach indicates that colonisation, oppression and marginalisation are at work in this context. Gardner's (1993) inclusion of Gandhi as a culture-changing individual stands out as one of the few non-western individuals mentioned in such a context. However, it must be noted that Gardner's (1993) work concerns his (at that time) seven intelligences rather than creativity per se.

A similar understanding of inclusivity can be found in dance where perception of creativity in dance can vary across cultures and social contexts; there may be both similarities and differences from one culture to another (Morris, 2005).

<sup>xxv</sup> On the other hand, like numerous other western writers, Gardner emphasises the need for an end product as measurable evidence of creativity.

<sup>xxvi</sup> It must be noted that, in the work of prominent western writers, the examples given of people and their creative process are almost all male, and westerners or non-westerners who work in the west.

<sup>xxvii</sup> This four-phase process is often referred to by researchers in various fields as Wallas' creative process. However, Wallas' original creative process was comprised of five phases (Wallas, 1926).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Dance-making is also viewed by some theorists as a metaphor for the processes of academic research

<sup>xxix</sup> In this case, I am referring to the generations of teachers teaching others; these others in turn become teachers of the next generation. This understanding was explained to me by one of the participants in my study who identifies herself as Māori. This art-maker explained only with use of

gestures and drawn circles. I understood completely what she meant but have found it extraordinarily difficult to explain using words in English.

<sup>xxx</sup> Trance dance is also known as ecstatic dance.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Tharp (2006) expresses the area of practice with particular richness. However, numerous other writers also discuss the importance of hard work as a background to the development of creative work.