



## The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #001: Defining Creativity

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**Amy Climer:** Welcome to the very first episode of the deliberate creative podcast. I'm your host Amy Climer and I'm so excited about this first episode. In today's episode we're going to talk about this question "What is creativity?" We'll look at how is it defined and what does it mean and how do we know if we're creative or not. For the last 15 years or so I've been teaching workshops to adults on creativity and helping them figure out how to be more creative whether that would be in personal life or work. Whatever context you're interested in. I often start workshops with this question I say "raise your hand if you think you're creative". If you're listening to this just think to yourself how would you answer that if I said are you creative, what would you say?

What has happened for me is I've been so surprised with the response that I've gotten when I am asking this in the workshops. If it's a small group and they're really excited to be there they all raise their hand "Yeah!" Usually the response is between 40% and 70% of the room will raise their hands believing that they're creative. And it's interesting to watch them respond as they process the question because some people just like shoot their hands up. They're like "Yeah, I'm creative! Of course" Other people are like "Well, kind of" and have the handshake going on and some people sort of look around, they raise their hand, and are like "I'm pretty the right answer is yes". But then I've actually seen people, this has happened more than once, where I saw somebody shove their hand under their butt, like sitting on their hand, like "Oh no, oh no I'm not creative". Almost like they're afraid that I was going to ask them to do something. That just surprises me because you know if you are to ask kindergarteners "Hey are you creative?" The response is going to be like "Yeah, let's go!" You know if you said can you sing? Can you dance? Can you draw? They're all going to say yes but then a shift happens around 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade usually, sometime in elementary school where we start changing our perception of ourselves and we really start doubting our creativity.

I want to share a story with you that was shared with me from a student of mine. That I think is really indicative of I guess, I guess it's just like a common story. That I think so many people have. It was about 10 years ago and I was teaching a fabric dying class. Yeah, I used to do a lot of art quilting and fabric dying, and I love teaching. And anyway so I'm in this class and it's the very



beginning and I'm teaching them the process of dying fabric which is super simple. You take powdered dye and water and you mix it together and you pour it on the fabric and ok there's a couple of more steps, but that's the gist of it, it's really easy. So I gave the directions to the group and I've said to everyone just like enunciation kind of the cough "Okay, now you have the directions to go it, have fun with it. You know you're all creative" I didn't think anything of it, and there's a woman at the far end of the table from me gets this panicked look on her face, and I look at her I said "What's the matter?" and she's shaking, she's like "I'm not creative". And I started laughing. I said "what do you mean? Of course you're creative" and now the whole class is looking at her and she goes on to tell us a story about a time when she was in elementary school, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade actually and the class was doing some sort of coloring and drawing activity and the teacher was walking around looking at everyone's work, and she gets through this woman, let's call her Elaine. As she gets to Elaine's desk and she looks down she's like "Hmpf, you can't even color inside the lines. You'll never be an artist" and this woman was actually in her 60s and she's telling us this story that happened over 50 years ago that she had embodied and believed so sincerely that it was still impacting her. In my class I've shared this story to probably thousands of people now. I've had so many people come up to me after workshops and say "I have the same story" or my story was just like Elaine's but mine happened at fourth grade or in 7<sup>th</sup> grade or... we get these messages when we were young, or younger that we're not creative, we're not imaginative or we're not an artist, we're not inventive. You know whatever it is and, not knowing any better, we believe it. We think that person has some knowledge or authority that we don't and we take that to heart.

Over time I've had many conversations one on one with people about their creativity. If I ask someone if they think they're creative, I'm particularly curious what their reason why. So often I ask someone, if they say they're not creative I'll say why, why do you think that? And so often their response is "Well, you know I can't really draw" Well ok if you learn nothing else from this podcast, please learn - creativity is not about your ability to draw. You could struggle with stick figures and be highly creative in other things. Drawing is one form of art. It's not about creativity, creativity is not necessarily about art. Art is you know, you probably do need to be creative and exhibit creativity in order to be a good artist, but you could be highly creative and really be a horrible drawer or horrible artist. They're two different skills. Alright, so let's talk about what is creativity, what are the definitions. In research, there's hundreds of definition out there and they're all intertwined and they're all sort of similar.

One of the things you should know about me is I'm a PhD student and I'm studying creativity so I can kind of geek out on the research but I'll try to not bore with that but I will give you one



definition that I think is fairly common in the research literature and we're going to break this down and talk about it because people sometimes struggle with this one.

The definition of creativity is "the generation of product, there's not only novel and imaginative but also useful and of good quality," and I'll put the reference for this one on the show notes. Alright, so let's talk about that creativity is the generation of product. Okay, so first of all think about product in the broadest sense you can. This could be a process, a concept, a theory, an idea, physical product, but it doesn't have to be physical product. They just had to put some noun in there. So think of it in a very broad sense. So the generation of product that's not only novel and imaginative... Most people when I share this definition they're like "Oh, imaginative, absolutely, that totally clicks" but the novel part, people often get hung up on that a little bit. Think of novel not in the sense of a novelty story with cheap knick-knacks in there that you really don't need. Novel in the sense of unique, different, or hasn't been done before, or at least hasn't been done in that exact way. That would be creative. Generation of product that is novel and imaginative but also useful and of good quality. So, useful, let's talk about that word first. Is art useful? Look around wherever you're at. Is there any art around you? Is there, you know paintings on the wall or are you walking downtown right now, is there public art somewhere. Art is all around us. Does it serve a purpose? Is it useful? I would say that it is and that it incites a response from us. It might be an emotional response or some sort of reaction to us. I believe that if art wasn't useful in some way it would not exist in every culture on the planet, but every culture has something that they do, we all create art, it's like this human, yeah, it's in every human culture which I think is kind of fascinating. So something that's useful in some way and it could be that it's just useful to the person creating it. It doesn't necessarily have to be useful to somebody else. Maybe that process of going through and creating that thing was useful.

And then finally the last part of definition is "of good quality." Does it have to be of good quality? Now this doesn't mean it has to be good it just means the quality is good. Which you could not like a piece of art for instance but it's still very well made like craftsmanship. So here's an example I was recently in a major office supply store and I'm wandering around and I see this end cap with display they had this product and I was like "Oh my Gosh! I love that this product exists now, and it was something that I had thought about, you know like over the years like oh why isn't this thing exist. So basically what it was is a stapler but instead of having a regular stapler over the top and bottom is connected, the stapler could disconnect and it only connected by a magnet and so that then let's say you're trying to make a booklet and you want to staple the center of the booklet and fold it in half and that's like the binding, you know you take an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper and you could then line the stapler up in the middle and staple



a couple of times and now you have your booklet. And I was like “this thing is brilliant!” Oh my gosh I was so excited and I know sort of geeky. Anyway, so I bought the product. It was only 5 dollars. So I get home and if this thing will work. It was kind of inexpensive. Before I even opened it I was thinking about this definition of creativity where this thing is definitely novel. This thing has probably existed but not for the consumer level. At least I’ve never seen anything like this before. It definitely was useful. I mean it served this need that I certainly had and I’m sure other people did too. So now the question was “is this any good?”. And sure enough I opened it up and worked quite well. I was pretty excited. I haven’t made a booklet yet but maybe soon. What if that thing had been a complete piece of junk and I go use it and the whole thing just falls apart. Well, so now we failed in this creative, making this creative thing because well now it doesn’t work, and we need it to work and for it to be actually creative. The execution is part of the creative process, that’s the definition of creativity.

If you absolutely hate that definition I am going to offer you another one it’s similar but a little bit simpler, and I heard this definition from Blair Miller, who is a creative problem solving facilitator and he is one of the owners of the company called FourSight which creates a thinking profile and I hope to have on a future episode. Anyway, he just says “Creativity is novelty that is valuable.” Pretty simple, so valuable kind of encompasses that useful, good quality component but in a little bit different way and again valuable is in the eye of the beholder. What is valuable to you? Obviously this is not about money but it has to be something that’s valuable to someone. Again, it could’ve been valuable just because of the process. Those are couple of definitions of creativity and absolutely remember it has nothing to do with your ability to draw, okay? That’s super important!

Now that we’ve talked about creativity, let’s also talk about innovation. Sometimes people refer to creativity as only the process of coming up with ideas and that innovation is the implementation of those ideas. In the research literature this group is referred to as the Idealist Theorists. On the other hand are the Action Theorists. This group believes that creativity is also about implementation. Meaning it’s not just the ideas, but it’s the implementation of those ideas that makes something or someone creative. In the definition of creativity that I shared a few minutes ago, implementation is implied. Creating something useful and of good quality means you have to get to the end of the product cycle. I agree with that approach for 2 reasons. 1) Ideas are a dime a dozen. Coming up with creative ideas tends to be the easy part. It’s the implementation that really sets someone apart. The Second Reason is that during the implementation process the idea inevitably changes. Through prototyping, refining, and testing the idea evolves and grows and this is part of the creative process. That implementation is



crucial to making creativity come alive. I agree with the action theorists. Because of this I find that I often use the terms innovation and creativity interchangeably. One definition of innovation that I found that seems to work well is “creativity with economic gain.” which would explain why innovation is a term used more often in the business and engineering fields, whereas creativity is the term used more in the humanities, arts, and education. Going forward in this podcast, I may use the terms interchangeably and I can ask guests what their definitions are and get their perspective. I would also love to hear your perspective. Visit the shownotes and add your comment there. The link is [climerconsulting.com/001](http://climerconsulting.com/001).

Alright, we’re just going to talk about two different types of creativity within those definitions. So one of them is evolutionary and other is revolutionary creativity. Let’s talk about revolutionary first. Revolutionary creativity is really the creation of something that revolutionizes the situation. I think one of my favorite examples is the Wright Brothers and their ability to create an airplane. It’s not that no one else thought of it. Actually when they were working on that there were other people also working on it at the same time and trying to be the first to create an airplane but getting it to work that was the revolutionary part. They were so successful. And actually their story and the process of how they went through that is highly creative and it was because of the collaboration they had with each other and the other people they’re working with that made it work. So that’s revolutionary creativity. Absolutely the airplane has changed human beings. It has changed the entire planet because now it so easy to get to places. So that’s revolutionary.

So evolutionary is when you’re just taking the next step or the next twist, it could be a progression. The stapler that I just shared, that would be an example of evolutionary creativity. The stapler’s not going to change the world but it’s going to change my little world, but it’s this useful tool. It’s taking something that already exist and just adding little twist on it. So that’s evolutionary creativity and I think it’s important to know that both of these are important, and I’ve had students where they’ve felt like it’s not creative unless it’s super huge. No, no, no. Sometimes it’s those simple changes. You know that stapler story that makes a big difference. I actually think that goes back to earlier when I was talking about so many people don’t believe they’re creative, and I think it’s because we put these pressures on ourselves that “Oh well you know I have to be the Wright brothers, I have to invent an airplane in order to be considered creative and I don’t do that on a regular basis I have no intention to do that.”

The reason it matters if people think they’re creative or not is because all these research shows that if you are, if you believe you’re creative you actually will produce more creative results, and



it's actually not the other way around, but the belief comes before the action. It's not that the action comes first and then you start believing in yourself. If you don't believe you're creative, if you can change that belief, you actually will start being more creative. So think about that.

Y'all we're coming to the end of this episode. Today we have explored this question "Are you creative?" and looked at the definition of creativity. Most important thing to remember about the definition is it's not about your ability to draw. All creativity is is novelty that's useful. We've looked a little bit at the similarities of creativity and innovation and how for the most part these come to use as synonyms. We'll often treat those as such in this podcast. We talked about evolutionary and revolutionary creativity and both are so important. You don't have to necessarily be the next Wright Brothers in order to make a difference. Small changes can have a big impact.

Thank you so much for listening to the very first episode of the Deliberate Creative Podcast. I want to invite you to send me an e-mail if you have any topic requests or questions about creativity, you want answered. My e-mail address is [amy@climerconsulting.com](mailto:amy@climerconsulting.com) That's spelled C-L-I-M-E-R Consulting dot com. I'll try to incorporate any questions in the future show and definitely give you a big shout out if I do. You can also send it for my newsletter to get more great content about creativity and innovation. Just go to [ClimerConsulting.com](http://ClimerConsulting.com) again that is C-L-I-M-E-R Consulting.com. The next episode we're going to talk about the three essential things you need to be creative.

Talk to you then. Thanks everyone!