



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #094: Four Levels of Creativity with Daniel Cape

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Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 94. Today, I am talking with Daniel Cape about the four levels of creativity. Daniel and I met a few years ago at a conference for the Association for Experiential Education. I was presenting a workshop on creativity and he attended my workshop and we got to know each other after that. A couple of years later, he was in the process of writing a book about experiential education in creativity and he asked me to write a chapter about Creative Problem Solving. The book is called [From Experience to Creativity: The Experiential Educator's Incomplete Guide to Creativity](#). If you are an experiential educator and you are interested in being more creative or more deliberate about fostering creativity in your students, then I highly recommend the book. It has some valuable information and great ideas in it.

When I say experiential educator, what I am talking about is someone who is teaching others through experience by developing experiential activities or an experience in itself to help teach other people something, whether that is anything from an academic topic or more life skills like team building, leadership, conflict resolution. It does not matter the topic, but if you are interested in the methodology of teaching through experience, then you are an experiential educator.

If that is your jam, if that is what you usually get excited about, then I highly recommend the book. The chapter that I wrote comes with a free workbook of resources to help you be more creative. You can download those as well. You can find the links to the book and other resources that Daniel talks about in the show notes. The show notes you can find at www.climerconsulting.com/094.

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Today, Daniel and I are talking about the four levels of creativity. As far as I know, this concept was introduced by Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the 1990s. Dr. Csikszentmihalyi introduced this concept of two types of creativity that he called Big-C and Little-C creativity. That concept was later built upon by other researchers and Daniel explains the four levels that have emerged. The whole purpose of this is understanding those levels as a tool to be more creative and having the awareness of like where you are within your own creative development and where you want to get to. I think you are going to enjoy this episode. I think you will get a lot out of it. Here is Daniel.

Daniel, welcome to The Deliberate Creative podcast. It is great to have you here.

Daniel Cape: Thanks, Amy. It is good to be here.

Amy Climer: Can you start off and tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Daniel Cape: Absolutely. Right now, I am working on my PhD in Psychology with a focus in creativity studies at Saybrook University. My background is in experiential education; so working at camps and project-based learning schools and independence transition homes for young adults and things like that.

Amy Climer: Very cool. And you have also written a book?

Daniel Cape: Yeah, I just wrote my book [From Experience to Creativity: The Experiential Educator's Incomplete Guide to Creativity](#). It addresses how experiential education relates to creativity and I try to identify some of the points where we are already being creative in experiential education. I think it is needed that we need to bring more creativity, as you say, deliberately into experiential education.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. And it is a great book. Obviously, I have read it since I have a chapter in it.

Daniel Cape: Absolutely. You contributed to it with Creative Problem Solving.

Amy Climer: It was a really fun process to do that with you.

Daniel Cape: Great. You were a huge help.

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Amy Climer: Today, we are going to talk about experiential education and the levels of creativity. Actually, the levels of creativity apply to anyone, but we are going to focus in on experiential educators, right?

Daniel Cape: Right.

Amy Climer: To start off, can you give us an overview of what do you mean by levels of creativity?

Meaning of Levels of Creativity [05:03]

Daniel Cape: There are different levels of creativity from the novice getting into a new pursuit to, at the biggest level, someone like in experiential education, Kurt Hahn, who has made an impact not only in education, but in other fields as well. I like to talk about the different levels of creativity because it puts into context what people are doing and why it is creative.

Amy Climer: Before we dive into those levels, can you define what do you mean by creativity?

What is Creativity? [05:34]

Daniel Cape: Most people or most researchers define creativity as being something that is new and useful or something that is novel and has an application.

Amy Climer: So it is not just about the idea, it has to actually be useful and valuable and be applicable.

Daniel Cape: Right. For example, when I was a kid, I used to like to take apart my remote control cars and all my other toys and I would like to see what is inside of them and then I would try to make my own contraptions. One night when I was playing around with all these different parts, I was messing around with some wires and a battery and one of the little light bulbs from a remote control car or something. I think there was a mortar involved in it and I connected them all and the mortar and the light bulb came on at the exact same time.

It was just like that metaphorical light bulb came on and I had a great idea. I remember I was probably like nine or ten years old, ran into my mom's room excited. And I connected the



mortar and the battery and the light bulb and they all came on at the same time and I was like, “Look mom, it’s a flashlight for blind people.”

I think talking about the different levels of creativity helps people understand why there is and why there is not creative. When I tell people that creativity is something that has to be new and useful, people always wonder why does it have to be useful. I think that is why the four levels of creativity helps to explain that.

Amy Climer: And then your example with the flashlight, actually, maybe that was not so useful.

Daniel Cape: Right. It was not useful. Obviously, blind people do not need flashlights, but at the first level of creativity, which is Mini-C creativity, is very subjective. The only person that can place value or meaning on that experience is the individual having that experience. In the context of experiential education, we do a great job of introducing people to new experiences or new avenues and we do it in a safe environment. That is really important. Now we are talking about Mini-C creativity.

Four Levels of Creativity

1. Mini-C [07:49]

Mini-C creativity is where a lot of people get phobias or they have those negative experiences where someone says like a drawing is not good enough or they will never be an artist and that is traumatic. And as you know, some of those traumas can last a lifetime because people think they are not good enough in one pursuit or another.

One way of looking at Mini-C creativity comes from I think it was Beghetto & Kaufman. They provided the Goldilocks Principle of how to encourage people or support people at the Mini-C level. If you think of Goldilocks, you do not want to give too much praise to somebody. For example, let’s say I am an experiential educator and I am providing a new experience for somebody to try to lead a group. Let’s say they do a pretty terrible job, which is fine. They are new to it, they have never done it before, it is expected. If I give feedback like, “Wow, you did an amazing job! You were a great leader. You were destined to be a leader,” then I am going to give that person a false sense of hope. And so when they try to move to the next level of creativity or



higher levels of creativity, they are not going to find success like they expected. They are going to find frustration.

On the other end of the spectrum, you do not want to give negative criticism to people. Let's say I am facilitating a backpacking trip and someone tries to cook dinner for the first time. They mess it up, they burn our macaroni and cheese and I provide them feedback like maybe you should not ever cook again. Maybe you are not meant to be a good cook. Even though it was that person's first time trying to cook in the outdoors, that negative criticism is just going to shut them off from not only cooking outdoors in the future, but from trying new things.

For an example, let's say I am an experiential educator and I am at a project-based learning school and a kid tries to learn about rocks for the first time. They do this project where they are researching rocks and they are going out and they are talking to geologists. And they come back and I realize that they are missing some pieces, maybe they missed a few steps in the process or something like that. The proper way, the just right way to help promote or enable people in the Mini-C level is to give them praise for their efforts and for trying, then maybe provide them guidance on where to go in the future.

The Mini-C level, for me, is one of the more important ones. I think the Mini-C and the Little-C are the most important once. For me, one thing I try to do at the Mini-C level – I teach caricatures to kids and I have two rules and one rule is for them to respect everybody's pace and their unique artwork and things like that and the second rule is they have to make a lot of mistakes. Because they are doing it for the first time, it is not going to be perfect, it does not matter if it has no aesthetic quality to it. I just want these kids to feel like they can try something new in a safe environment where they are not going to be judged and they are not going to be turned off from future pursuits like that.

Amy Climer: I love that. I love those rules that you provide. It is like yeah, you got to make mistakes and then also respect each other.

Daniel Cape: Absolutely. Because there has to be a safe environment too if you are trying something creative because someone is trying something for the first time that they had never done before or that has never been done before, they are going to fail. Celebrate it. Embrace it.



Amy Climer: Exactly. That is how you learn. So Mini-C is really about our own personal expression and like trying things new. And when we think of new and useful, it might not be new and useful to the world, but it is new and useful to the individual that is doing it.

Daniel Cape: Right. Going back to my flashlight example, Mini-C is an example of how it is creative. I was being creative at the Mini-C level. My mom's reaction to it I just remember her kind of laughing at it when I said a flashlight for blind people. I remember I laughed, maybe it was just saying it out loud, but what did not happen was my mom did not provide any criticism. She did not say that is a silly idea, ridiculous idea. She did not provide any judgment, she just kind of laughed at it and then I went on my way and I tried it again.

Amy Climer: Nice. You got some good encouragement.

Daniel Cape: Yeah, definitely. That would be the only level where the flashlight for blind people was creative. Moving to the next level, why was it not creative? Because it was not useful.

Amy Climer: Let's talk about that next level. What is it called?

2. Little-C [12:54]

Daniel Cape: The next level is Little-C, but the next level is also called Everyday Creativity. This is super important, I believe. Because everyone is creative, everyone has creative abilities and these are things that we do on an everyday basis. But the problem is that people do not recognize that as being creative. They do not acknowledge their own creativity and so as a result, people do not celebrate being creative.

Some examples of Mini-C creativity are let's say you are an experiential educators and you are on a backpacking trip and you realize that you forgot a certain ingredient in one of the meals that you are going to make. You cannot just not eat, so you have to adapt. You have to make changes and you have to figure out a new and useful way that you are still going to be able to eat. We do these things on a daily basis. If you hit an unexpected detour on the way to work, if you have a scheduling issue where your kids have to be at soccer practice at the same time that you have a business meeting. We are all creative and we all have these abilities to solve these problems. Everyday creativity is more about adaptation.

One thing I tell people to demonstrate everyday creativity, I am also a caricature artist and so I hear people say all the time, "I wish I could draw. I can only draw stick figures." What I say to

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those people is, “There is somebody out there who only draws stick figures and they only draw them of people’s families and then those families put them on the back of their cars. The person only drawing stick figures is probably making pretty good money only drawing stick figures.” It is not about artistic talent, it is not about some special gift, it is what we can do. It is what we are all capable of. Everyday creativity is crucial.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. It sounds like this every day or the Little-C creativity is, generally, something that we already have some experience in. Like that example of the backpacking trip where you are trying to make a dinner or a meal without an ingredient, but you already have experience cooking outside or even cooking, period, and you are used to adjusting and so you are just like, “Okay, how do I handle this?”

Daniel Cape: Absolutely. People do not realize they are doing it. We make those decisions every day. Do we leave five minutes early and take care of something that we need to, do we leave on time? It is that choice that we have as human beings and that ability to adapt to the situation and just make those decisions that might turn out great, they might fail. But we do it, but we just do not recognize it and celebrate it.

Amy Climer: Awesome! Basically, you are saying everyone is creative.

Daniel Cape: Yes, absolutely! Everybody is creative. Here is another way I look at it too; imagine somebody that you knew or a family member or a friend came up to you and they said, “I’m stupid. I have no intelligence at all.” Would you accept that? Probably not. No. It is not just a polite thing to say that yes, you are intelligent, it is the truth. Because we all have our own intelligence and our level of intelligence and we are all intelligent in our own way. Creativity is the same way. I hear people say all the time like, “I’m not creative. I’m no Picasso.” I am not Picasso either, but we are still all creative.

Amy Climer: Absolutely. I think like one thing we miss sometime is that if you take that Picasso example, he spent tens of thousands of hours developing his craft, developing his skill as an artist and yeah, probably if we spent that much time on any one thing we would get really good.

Daniel Cape: Right. Exactly.

Amy Climer: All right, we have Mini-C and then Little-C, and then what is the third one?



3. Pro-C [16:41]

Daniel Cape: The next one is Pro-C and it is also called Professional Creativity. These are the people that have typically been in their field for about ten years or ten thousand hours and they are able to provide something new, obviously, new and useful to the field. For experiential education, one place to find these people are the Karl Rohnke Creativity Award recipients. Because they have been acknowledged for being in the field and then they have seen something different, something that can be improved or something that is done differently and so they took a chance on that. And maybe the field does not accept it, maybe the clients do not accept it, but it worked out. And because they were able to take that risk and challenged themselves, they were able to provide something creative for the field.

Pro-C creativity is also important. If you would had asked me a month ago, I would had probably said that was not. But I started thinking about it in the last few weeks and Pro-C creators are the ones who move the field forward. They are the people who do not become complacent. After ten years when you finally understand your field, instead of becoming complacent, they work to change it and improve it and manipulate it and see what else they can include in it.

These people are also mentors to the future generations because they are visionaries, they are able to take challenges and risks and they are not playing it safe. They are trying to come up with better solutions for how to make their work more effective for participants.

Amy Climer: Nice. I also think of the Pro-C people as they are the ones who are writing books or presenting at conferences. They have some ideas that they are trying to share with the field.

Daniel Cape: Absolutely. That is a great way of looking at it too because, like you said, they are contributing to the field.

Amy Climer: Awesome! And then we have one more. What is the final level?

4. Big-C [18:42]

Daniel Cape: The last one is Big-C or Imminent Creativity. These are like the one percent. These are the people that make an impact in their field, but also it crosses over into other fields. They also make an impact over time. An example for experiential education would be Kurt Hahn. He developed an educational system with Outward Bound and some of his other schools that



looked at education differently. It challenged the students and it really challenged the norm or challenged our assumptions about learning and also training and development.

With Outward Bound, they put you in realistic situations and they push you to fail and they push you to try new things and get outside your comfort zones. Those ideas have transferred over into other fields. They use that in therapeutic situations and they use it in business development. And so a lot of Kurt Hahn's philosophies, even though he started them around World War II, they are still going strong today and people are still building on those.

Amy Climer: He has long since passed away and yet decades later, we are still using his philosophies and recognizing the work that he did.

Daniel Cape: Right. People like that made an impact, like I said, across time. Like you said, he's passed away and here we are talking about him right now.

Amy Climer: He did not even know what a podcast was because it did not exist then.

Daniel Cape: Yeah.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. All right, we have Mini-C, Little-C, Pro-C and Big-C.

Daniel Cape: Right. Those are the four different levels. The crazy thing is that most people judge themselves at the Big-C level, but then people get discouraged from creativity at the Mini-C level and then people ignore everything in between. People go off their assumptions -- which is a barrier to creativity -- about in order to be creative, I have to be an artist or it has to be a certain gift or there just has to be something special about me, otherwise, I am not creative. But when we start to acknowledge everyday creativity and we start to identify the Pro-C creative people that we work within our field, whether it is in business or psychology or education or anything, you start to see people differently and you start to see yourself differently and you start to see how you are creative.

When you start to identify those, it is kind of like when you are buying a new car and I want to buy a red truck. Once I get that in my head, after that, I see red trucks everywhere. I really think that creativity can be the same way. When you start to identify how you are creative and the



people that you work with are creative, you are going to start to see those in everyday activities they do and then it just blossoms from there.

Amy Climer: I love that point that you made that we judge ourselves on Big-C creativity, but then we...

Daniel Cape: Yeah, we judge ourselves on Big-C creativity, but then we get distracted from creativity at the Mini-C.

Amy Climer: It has made me think of this class I taught. Gosh, it has probably been 10 or 15 years ago. I was teaching this fabric dyeing class. Fabric dyeing is super simple. You basically mix water and powder and a chemical or two and you pour it on the fabric. I give the directions to the class -- there are only like eight people in the room -- and I sort of nonchalantly just said, "You all, have fun. Go do it. You are all creative."

This woman on the other side of the room who was probably about 60, her eyes got really big and she kind of had this panic look on her face. And I was like, "Oh my gosh! What's the matter?" And she said, "Oh, I am not creative." Of course, now the whole class is looking at her and I was like, "What do you mean you're not creative?" She went on to tell us this story of being in second grade doing a coloring exercise and the teacher came around and looked at her work and was like, "Oh, you'll never be an artist. You can't even color inside the lines."

This woman was 60 and she still remembered that. I could just see this feeling like she felt that so deeply as she is telling this story that her whole life like, basically, this little comment about Mini-C creativity and she had let it impact her. And probably she is judging her skills based on all these amazing artists that she is seeing. I have told that story many times and I have heard so many people come to me and say, "I have that same story. I have a story just like that."

Daniel Cape: I just got chills when you said that. Creativity is a trauma just like anything else. Some people have a bad relationship and they have trust issues or people are afraid of spiders or something like that. Creativity is the same way. It is just like there is so much judgment and so much risk that is involved with it. Once you understand it and then you are fine with failure and you learn from failure and you start to see things differently, then yeah, you start to see those Mini-C opportunities differently. That is a great example.



Amy Climer: What advice do you have for people listening? They take in this concept of these four levels, now what?

Daniel Cape: With Mini-C level, for yourself, just be open to try something new. Invite yourself to fail. I love being new at stuff. I like that nervous mentality where I can just do ridiculous things. It does not matter because there are no expectations. Embrace that when you are new at something. Or if you are working with someone else and they try something new, think about the words you use or the feedback that you provide.

Sometimes adding judgment, whether it is good or bad, it can also have negative side effects. For example, I presented an idea of mine to somebody at AEE. My idea was I wanted to go to a conference and just be the antagonist and question everything. I was going to be a jerk. I told this to the person at AEE and he is like, "Do it." There was no judgment, there was no thinking about it and it was just like the most empowering thing ever. And like we are going to do something similar, but the end result is completely different from that original idea and is better. But if he had put any judgment on that, it might have cut me off completely. At the Mini-C level, just empower people. Give them the resources and the time and the support and understanding.

Amy Climer: That is an interesting example because if you say that like hey, I want to go to a conference and just be a jerk, basically, it is so easy for someone's response to be like, "Whoa, what? That is a horrible idea. Why would you do that?" But actually, if they start digging in a little bit like what do you mean or why would you want to do that, and start digging in, then they can look at your goal is actually very positive and is there a way to like just adjust that a little bit, and then you get this really great end result.

Daniel Cape: Yeah, definitely. That is a good way of looking at it. It is not the original idea, it is where you end up at.

Amy Climer: Yeah. So if you can kind of like riff on that a little bit and you get to that end result.

Daniel Cape: Yeah, absolutely.

Amy Climer: So just keep an open mind both when you are listening and then also when you are sharing the ideas.



Daniel Cape: Yeah, just letting go of judgment. That is the thing. Just for yourself and other people.

Amy Climer: Absolutely. One thing I like to do on the podcast is end every episode with a weekly challenge. Something that listeners can do this week to apply something that you talked about. What might be a weekly challenge you would give listeners?

Weekly Challenge [26:46]

Daniel Cape: I would think a great weekly challenge is see if you can identify everyday creativity in yourself, but then see if you can identify in somebody else also. We talk about positive feedback and how it is better than negative feedback. I think we should give creative feedback as well. One thing I do when I am working with my students -- I will just go back to the caricature example -- when I teach them caricatures, I give them two pens, I give them two different color markers, they get to choose it. And then when I have them draw, I do not give them any instruction on which color to use. Some kids will use different colors, some kids will use a monotone. If I see a kid doing something that is deviating from my instructions, but still effective, I congratulate them. I am like, "Wow, great job! I love that you are using different colors."

Or if I am with a group and I am asking people's opinions and just one kid raises his hand about a certain idea, like that is the one vote out of ten, I congratulate that kid because that kid just took a chance, he took a risk and went against the crowd. I would recommend to people look for that, those every day creative accomplishments in yourself and others and acknowledge them in others and say, "Wow, that was a really creative task! That was great. I liked it."

Amy Climer: That is awesome and so simple, really easy to do if you can remember to do it.

Daniel Cape: Absolutely.

Amy Climer: Daniel, if people want to learn more about you and your work, where can they go?

Daniel Cape: They can visit my website www.experiencetocreativity.com.

Amy Climer: Awesome! And they can find your book there?



Daniel Cape: Yeah, absolutely. I have got the [buy my book and my cards](#) so I have some EPIC Cards as well and there is a tab you can buy those. If you want to go to the bottom of the page, you can sign up for an email list and I will send people a free copy of the introduction and the preface to the book where they can find a link to it.

Amy Climer: Awesome! Great way to test out the book.

Daniel Cape: Yeah, definitely.

Amy Climer: Cool. Awesome! Thank you so much for being on the show, Daniel.

Daniel Cape: Great. Thank you, Amy.

Amy Climer: Thank you, Daniel, for sharing your insights and ideas. Awesome conversation. You all, check out the book. You could find the book, the link to Daniel's website and more resources on the show notes. The show notes page is at www.climerconsulting.com/094.

If you have not left a review for The Deliberate Creative podcast, please head on over to [iTunes](#) or [Google Play](#) and leave a review. Love getting that feedback from you. As always, please share this podcast with others that you think might be interested in learning about the levels of creativity or about deliberate creativity in general.

Thank you so much for listening today. You all, have a wonderful creative week. Bye.