Annotated Bibliography on Creativity: Suggestions for a Personal Reading List

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Introduction

I have always had an interest in creativity, but I started studying it seriously in approximately 2008. Throughout my study, I have found that taking a creative approach has helped me be a better professor, a better designer (in both the performing arts and in the domain of Instructional Technology), a better person of faith, a better parent, a better . . . . well, . . . um, . . . human being!

I have read over the last ten years a few books that weren’t about creativity directly, but they did offer me profound insights into concepts that were related to creativity, either loosely or directly. Three of those books that were quite influential were as follows:


I also have read a lot of academic research about creativity. For instance, the following book takes a more theoretical view of creativity and the extent to which creativity is the same in all disciplines, whether art, science, or business:


Since 2008, I also have read many books on creativity that are less academic and more designed for a generalized audience. The bibliography below consists exclusively of books that are not overly academic. For each book, I share a tidbit about its importance, my opinion of the book, or other factors that might help you decide whether or not it is a book that you want to read.

The Bibliography


I currently am reading this book, and I have only read the first five chapters. So far, though, I would describe it as a good entry-level book on the topic of creative myths. Each chapter in the book addresses a common myth about creativity. For instance, chapter 2 addresses the “Eureka Myth” which claims that creative ideas come to us in a flash of insight. Chapter 8 tackles the “Brainstorming Myth” in an effort to help readers understand that brainstorming is insufficient for bringing creative ideas to fruition.

In some ways, this was the book that started my strong desire to become more creative. The front cover of this book describes it as “a course in discovering and recovering your creative self.” In essence, each chapter in the book is a different “week” in the course, for a total of a twelve week course. In approximately the summer of 2008, I accepted the challenge of completing that course. Cameron’s strategies of “morning pages” (writing 3 pages long-hand every morning) and taking yourself on weekly “artist dates” became life-changing for me. I strongly recommend total immersion into this book and treating it as a “course” that you are taking.


Carson argues that there are several brainsets—the CREATE brainsets—that are useful for enhancing our creative powers. Those brainsets are as follows: Connecting, Reasoning, Envisioning, Absorbing, Transforming, Evaluating, and Streaming. The book contains a chapter on each of the brainsets. The book also offers practical advice for integrating each brainset into your attempts to be more creative. This book helped me identify my weakest brainset and provided strategies for strengthening that brainset. In the summer of 2012, I taught a graduate-level course on creativity; Carson was the textbook for that course. Students from a variety of disciplines—sociology, education, psychology, and corporate training—found the book to be useful.


Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced cheek-zent-me-hi) did an in-depth study of creative people, which he defines as those who have changed the memes (social genes) of our culture. He considers their lives—early years, later years, and their aging. He also considers the domain in which they were creative. The book culminates in lessons learned about how to enhance one’s own creativity. All 456 pages of this book (at least in the paperback version) are riveting toward developing a deeper understanding of what creative people do and why. This was one of the first books that I read on creativity, and it made me want to read more and more! It probably is more theoretical and goes deeper into nuances than other books in this list, but the depth helped me establish a solid foundation for understanding creative achievement.


Jonah Lehrer was found to have plagiarized parts of this book. So, a copy of it might actually be very hard to find. I bought my copy the day that it was released, before the plagiarism charges were alleged. In spite of the ethical breech within the book, this is a wonderful book about creativity, using examples from Bob Dylan to Pixar Animation.

This book is a relatively easy read, integrated with practical examples and “thought experiments.” This book can help you become less mechanistic in your thinking as you practice the art of “conceptual blending”—assembling unrelated ideas in order to discover new angles for thinking and understanding. The book also carefully defines creative thinkers in terms of their intentions, language patterns, and actions.


This book was my wife’s book that she brought into the marriage with her. It sat unread on our bookshelves for a few years before I picked it up in approximately 2001. This book contains lots of cartoon drawings, anecdotes, quotes from famous creative people, and so forth. It is entertaining to read, but it has plenty of information for rethinking your own approach toward creative inclinations.


I first fell in love with Ken Robinson’s ideas through his TED Talks. I strongly suggest checking out [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com) and watching his “How Schools Kill Creativity.” His book is an equal treat. Among other things, the book addresses the ill-considered view that propositional knowledge and logical analysis should dominate education. He questions the stock that society puts in IQ scores, and he challenges the assumption that “academic ability” (tightly defined) and the sciences should take precedence over the arts. The American educational system is too myopic, Robinson asserts. He offers fabulous insights on how to improve the state of affairs within education.


Battling perfectionism, failing quickly, learning a little from a lot, and learning a lot from a little are just a few of the lessons in Sims’ fantastic book. You will learn about comedian Chris Rock’s approach to prototyping comedy routines. You also will learn how playfulness, improvisation, and social interaction can help enhance your efforts to be creative. My graduate students currently are reading this book in one of my design courses. Those students range from having backgrounds in corporations and industry to being school teachers; they all agree that the lessons within the book are applicable in their domains.