

## **Five Realms of Creativity: Examples from 25 years of social work/ social justice activism.**

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**Presenters: Si Transken, Assistant Professor, UNBC; Cathy Denby, Counsellor in the the First Nations Center of UNBC; Anita Vaillincourt, Assistant Professor, UNBC, and Barb Waterfall, Assistant Professor, Wilfred Laurier.** Some aspects of our work could be considered under the title of ‘autoethnography’. In a book by Bochner and Ellis (2002) in a section titled ‘Wounded Storytellers: Vulnerability, Identity, and Narrative’ Flemons, Green, Bochner, Gale, and Richardson discuss what it means to be living in a story and discussing that ever shifting and evolving story. They point out that this type of ‘autoethnography’ locates us to be both courageous and afraid. Holt (2003) summarizes autoethnography as a process of writing which complexly connects personal and cultural dynamics and phenomena. Autoethnography or performance ethnography have overlaps in their intentions with First Nations ways of doing research. For example, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) in her book Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples emphasizes that there are twenty-five ‘projects’ or themes we must consider and attempt to engage with as we do our scholarship. Although university settings are tempted to forget (or dismiss) multiple ways of knowing Chamberlin (2000), and others, remind us of how large the array of modes are through which knowledge can be explicated, displayed and shared:

Every culture has eyes and ears, as it were, and the woven and beaded belts and blankets, the carved and painted trays, the poles, doors, veranda posts, canes and sticks, masks, hats, and chests that are variously part of many oral performances among Aboriginal peoples, especially those central to sacred or secular traditions... these forms of writing are often just as important as the stories and songs. Every culture not only sees things but also reads them, whether in the stars or in the sand, whether spelled out by alphabet or animal, whether communicated across natural or supernatural boundaries... (138)

Chamberlin could be defining the potential role of ‘arts-researchers’. In her poem, ‘Ka-Nata’, Maracle (2000) says “All of life begins/ becomes and ends with story./ Academic theories/ are but the leaky summations/ of human stories.” (107). Many ‘ordinary’ people have been saturated with statistics, charts, graphs and negative (and/ or boringly displayed or presented) data about health issues. Most health care, educational, or community professionals cannot claim ignorance about some of the struggles faced. **What may be a weak spot** in formal and grassroots/ popular education has been the exposure to, and opportunities for, soulful creative complex **dissemination and integration**. Arts-research and expressive arts ‘education’ are open spaces of/for integration of our wholeness. These are themes we will be exploring in this session.

**Si Transken, Phd, RSW, MA Candidate:** Si will summarize the literature on creativity as it relates to social work/ social activism. She will then link that material to Turner's (1999) five realms of creativity and social work. Si will discuss interdisciplinary practice/praxis/research/teaching from her 25 years of experiences with social change. Finally, she will explore how the CHEERR project that is being undertaken in northern BC applies these insights about creativity. The acronym CHEERR stands for: Creativity for Health, Education, Empowerment, Research and Resiliency and it involves a network of activists/ social workers/ creators from a variety of northern communities which are in the catchment area of UNBC (Prince George, Fort St. John, Quesnel, Terrace, Prince Rupert). In each of these communities we hope to identify and network with the artists (and we use this term to refer to painters, poets, story tellers, crafts workers, etc.) and to engage them in producing material which communicates the theme of 'resilience and health'. For example we hope to discover a latticework of poems, stories, paintings, photography which tells the viewer/ listener about how people in those communities have experienced/ resisted/ healed from/ made wholesome choices in regards to smoking, drinking, cancer, obesity, diabetes, etc. Our task as a research/ facilitating team is to inspire, encourage, document or 'capture' the material created in each geographic area - and to celebrate and circulate the success stories. Our belief is that people in each of these communities have found dynamic ways to live their lives in balance and we would like to highlight those accomplishments and stories. We are interested in discovering that resiliency on the level of the individual, the family, the organization or the community. We are interested in how creativity assists the discovery and maintenance of resiliency.

**Cathy Denby, MSW Candidate:** Cathy will discuss cultural studies and creativity/ the arts as research techniques. A great deal of research has emerged in recent years which displays the losses, weaknesses and failures of northerners in regards to health – we would like to find and promote some portion of the other sides of those stories. Also, we believe that by asking the people in each of those communities to use their grassroots voices and their unique artistic/ creative expressions to tell these resiliency stories the listeners in similar communities (from Prince George to Fort St. John, for example) and in their own communities will listen more carefully and, possibly, make better choices for themselves, their families, their organizations, their communities. People in the larger Canadian context also will find the results of this research relevant to their own day to day behaviors and options.

**Anita Vaillencourt, MSW:** Women are usually thought of as the core of the informal health care 'base' in that they are still disproportionately the ones who nurture their children, provide the meals for their families, make decisions about medications/ nutritional supplements/ best practices in regards to health. They are still usually the ones in the household who are the most influential in regards to how other family members make choices in regards to smoking, drinking, calorie/ food choices, exercise, etc. Also, women are the ones who continue to put themselves last when there are health concerns of their own that might be addressed (for example if there is no childcare available to them they may put off having their pap smears or getting the medical care they may need for a chronic condition). Cultural Studies encourages a 'bricolage' approach. This means bringing information from every site possible and through every mode possible which might help us understand (and thus change for the better) a human context or condition.

**Barbara Waterfall, Ph. D. Candidate:** Barb will present the results of her doctoral thesis project which has been an auto-ethnography of her past teaching practices as a Native social work educator. The study which comprises a comparative analysis of curricula and pedagogical practices that she employed for one particular course prior to her embarking on her Ph.D. journey with that of a new decolonizing approach that she developed which is based upon her Indigenous teachings of the "Tree of Life." She will speak to how her past practices in Native social work education started from the standpoint that colonial imposition and interference are inevitable realities. As such, she assumed that the task of Native social work education was to teach students how to work within the confines of the dominant neo-colonial politic which in essence meant that students were to become "puppets for the system". Having as a Ph. D. student been informed by anti-colonial, Indigenous feminist and Indigenous cultural resiliency theories Barb revamped and developed a working decolonizing model for her students. Students were encouraged to develop innovative/decolonizing approaches to Native program development and practice which was rooted outside of the colonial box. Barb's Native students were very enthusiastic about this new approach to the course. One student, a community Elder stated that "this is the way that we need to go." Many insights and lessons were learned by Barb daring to dream an anti-colonial future. Barb will speak to some of these lessons that she learned as a means of contributing to further decolonizing objectives. Barb is an Indigenous traditionalist and a ceremonialist. She will conclude her presentation by hand drumming and singing offering uplifting energy and renewed resiliency.

## Five Realms of Creativity: Examples from 25 years of social justice activism<sup>1</sup>.

Mullaly (1997) , one of Canada's most famous social workers, says:

...to be effective as structural social workers we need a political analysis that distinguishes the causes and consequences of social problems. We need a vision of a humanized society to give us direction in our efforts. We need knowledge to enable us to work effectively both inside and outside of our social agencies. We need to have harmony between our political beliefs and our personal lives. And we need a commitment to carry out the difficult task of social transformation. Structural social work is more than a technique or a practice modality. It is a way of life. (p. 203)

To live that kind of life and be that kind of social worker – creativity is a vital resource and adhesive to pull it all together. Wyman (2004) , a dance history professor, cultural critic, writer and board member of UNESCO would add:

Simply put, physical health is a necessity for life, but culture, the arts, our expressive heritage, are reasons for living, catalysts of our imaginations and prompters of our dreams. If we hope to make a full life, and to live that life in decency, freshness of curiosity and freedom of spirit, we must always remain open to the offerings of the defiant imagination. (10)

For as long as a hundred years there's been an implicit and explicit debate about whether social work is a hard science or an art guided by spirit, intuition and love (Camilleri, 1999; Scott, 2004). At this time the capitalist/corporatist/ techno-worshipping world is trying to force us to be only a science – and one often controlled by unethical forces.

The sciences have their roles, obviously, to play in understanding and responding to human discomforts. Art, artfulness, and creativity (in all their many manifestations) have at least an *equal* role to play. Turner (1999), summarizing the literature on creativity and social work, suggests there are five creativity realms that professional social workers should understand and engage with/within. The five realms frequently intersect. A particular event or activity could often be discussed as somehow linking with one or all of the five realms. These five realms and the description Turner offers are:

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<sup>1</sup> I thank the many social justice activists who have shared their successes and failures with me. Being in possession of some of those insights and techniques constitute the closest I'll ever get to being wealthy. I thank the clients and students who have also developed my skills and comprehensions. Dr. Rob Budde has also contributed to some of the text and comments in this paper in that he is the primary investigator in the grant proposal called 'CHEERS' which much of this

- A. Creative expression: Creativity as a tool in therapeutic intervention, including writing, painting, and music.
- B. Creative presentation of self by the social worker: Creativity is evident in the social worker's style, which includes use of metaphor, spontaneity, flexibility, and risk-taking.
- C. Creative conceptualization – direct practice level: Creativity leads to the identification of innovative solutions to clients' problems by encouraging the generation of alternatives.
- D. Creative conceptualization – community practice level: Creativity facilitates the identification of what needs to change at a structural level (problem finding) and innovative methods to bring about the desired changes.
- E. Creative cosmology: Creativity holds a central place in a paradigm that sees the world as neither al-chaotic nor strictly deterministic. Clients and workers creatively engage in interactions that hold potential for various outcomes. (92)

How can we encourage our students, our peers, our selves to live our fullest creative potential? That is one of the main questions and challenges which I struggle with every day.

As a creative educator and practitioner/ activist my intentions here are to identify and pass on useful theory and insight. In this essay I am re-viewing my twenty-five years of social justice activism. I have been involved with the social work profession for most of those years (as a college student, an undergraduate, a registered social worker, and then an assistant professor for the last eight years). Elsewhere I have written about creativity and teaching (Transken, 2005e, 2004a, 2004c, 2002b). In addition to having experience as a private practitioner specializing in women's issues I've been an employee or volunteer in the following contexts: immigrant settlement, acute care sexual assault treatment, eating disorders, workers compensation, anti-racism speakers series coordinator, researcher in women's organizations and anti-racist organizations (Transken, 1998a, 1998b, 1994a, 1994b), community organizer, conference organizer.

In an effort to summarize what I have learned/am learning, exploring and witnessing with my students, peers, and community comrades I will speak to each of Turner's five realms and briefly apply her creativity concepts to practice examples. While doing that I intend to integrate insights from cultural studies, autoethnographic bricolage, and performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003; hooks, 1984, 1994, Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg, 1992; Saukko, 2003; Transken, 2005c, 2005e, 2004a, 2003). Also, I will be integrating some of the most dynamic theory and literature I have been able to find on the theme of creativity (from various

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material is drawn from. Most significantly I thank Ken Belford for all that he does to make it possible for me to do things like this paper and this conference. I also thank him for his everyday celebration of creativity and unconventionality!

disciplines). My intentions overall in this paper are to demonstrate how very relevant creativity is – especially in these conservative backlash downsizing times and especially in northern contexts such as those I live/d and practice/d in. Before I elaborate on Turner’s concepts and their applied practice in social work a brief overview of ‘creativity’ and ‘creative people’ is in order.

### **Creativity and creative people**

When I look through the yearly applications to our BSW or MSW programs I am always hoping to see signs of creative thinking and creative living. My favorite students are the ones who have advanced empathy at an individual level – and who are able to empathetically imagine themselves as executive directors, let’s say, of competing organizations. Being able to imaginatively throw ourselves into the mindset of our funders or the politicians who control us is a useful skill. Empathy, in social work, is often discussed in regards to how we feel/see/hear/ know our way into our clients worlds (i.e. clinical empathy). Empathy can be taken to multiple levels (sociological, herstorical/historical, political, etc). That requires a robust imagination. That requires general and generative creativity. A dynamic imagination can help us prophesize the future. If we can creatively imagine certain trends continuing – and then ponder the outcomes – we can then intervene in those trajectories on behalf of our causes, individual clients, our organizations. My belief is that all humans were born with a huge range for creative comprehension, expression and activity. Unfortunately, as we become older we often become more creatively retarded. We become more obedient to the structures, definitions, expectations, and rules around us. In a capitalist patriarchal racist world this is dangerous. Social workers without creative imagination are more likely to be the handmaidens and flunkies of dominant oppressive structures. A certain kind of courage too is required of us if we are to let our imaginations radically explore and respond to the world around us. I have a button I wear on my backpack which says, “I think, therefore, I’m dangerous!”. This button is one of my favorite possessions.

Florida (2002), in his now famous book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, defines creativity as, “not the same as intelligence; involving the ability to synthesize; requires self-assurance and the ability to take risks.” (p. 31). Creative ethos, he says, often “...marks a strong departure from the conformist ethos of the past.

Creative work in fact is often downright subversive and unsettling even to the creator”. (p. 31) Creativity, he continues, ‘...flourishes best in a unique kind of social environment: one that is stable enough to allow continuity of effort, yet diverse and broad-minded enough to nourish creativity in its subversive forms.’” (p. 35) He elaborates on this group of creative people in society who are successful and dynamic – and who are becoming a leading force in society.

What all of these people have in common is a strong desire for organizations and environments that let them be creative – that value their input, challenge them, have mechanisms for mobilizing resources around ideas and are receptive to both small changes and the occasional big idea. Companies and places that can provide this kind of environment, regardless of size, will have an edge in attracting, managing and motivating creative talent. The same companies and places will also tend to enjoy a flow of innovation, reaping competitive advantage in the short run and evolutionary advantage in the long run. (p. 40)

Florida adds:

...members of the Creative Class invest heavily in cultivating and nurturing their own creativity, recognizing what labor economists have long known: Investments in their education and skill development are the most effective and highest-return investment they can make. It is in their own and society’s interest to ensure that companies, regions and the nation do the same. (p. 319)

Florida also says that, “Unlike traditional factors of production such as land or capital, creativity cannot be passed down from generation to generation. It has to be constantly fermented and reproduced in the firms, places and societies that use it. Furthermore, we are playing on a constantly changing field.” (p. 318) Doesn’t his next comment sound like some of the best activity in the social work profession: “Practice without process becomes unmanageable, but process without practice damps out the creativity required for innovation: the two sides exist in perpetual tension. Only the most sophisticated and aware organizations are able to balance these countervailing forces in ways that lead to sustained creativity and long-run growth.” (Florida, 2002, p. 41)

*The Ingenuity Gap: Can we solve the problems of the future?* is a book suggesting that all kinds of crisis and waste happen because people aren’t able to creatively engage in interdisciplinary and complex thinking. Homer-Dixon (2000) makes compelling arguments. He says we have become a divided world where specialists don’t know how to think on their feet and see the big picture. He also points out that more decisions need to be

made at a faster pace and that technology has sometimes gotten away from human sensitivities and goals. Applying his ideas to the social work field: when the SARS crisis happened – how were social workers able to cope? As we are in agencies or communities where the federal or provincial government suddenly cuts our funding by 30% or 40% - how quickly do we figure out how to respond? In British Columbia the provincial government cut 100% of the funding for 37 women's resource centers in one swoop. What responses might have been more effective in resisting that action? How are social workers and social justice activists using their creativity right now at the micro/mezzo/macro levels?

Homer-Dixon (2000) says this about institutions and it relates, I believe, to universities and social work programs and to interagency conflicts:

Deeply embedded boundaries between disciplines can hinder creative cross-disciplinary cooperation, and such boundaries are reinforced by a host of institutions and practices, from the traditional division of universities into departments to research funding agencies and scholarly journals that look skeptically on interdisciplinary work. Even within a given discipline or field of study, researchers may be so divided into competing camps, promoting alternative scientific theories, that envy and antagonism get in the way of creativity and cumulation (p. 259)

Creative social workers should be able to imagine and reach through these boundaries which are frequently used to divide and conquer vulnerable populations. Creative people look for ways to form coalitions of solidarity and strategic intervention.

Developing networks of solidarity would mean being able to analyze and respond to shared oppressions and shared potentials. One of the conclusions Homer-Dixon (2000) forwards is:

If we want to close the ingenuity gaps that we face in our fast-changing world, we need to recognize that each gap actually represents us with two distinct problems represented by two 'sides' of the gap: there's the problem of rising requirement for ingenuity, and then there's the problem of supplying that ingenuity. Solutions to the ingenuity gap can involve either reducing the requirement for ingenuity or increasing its supply (or both). But for some reason we tend to think first – and sometimes almost exclusively – about increasing supply. It seems that we would rather look for after-the-fact solutions to the difficult problems we face than prevent our problems from becoming so difficult in the first place. (p. 397)

The profession of social work is faced with demands for ingenuity. We should be increasing our supply of creative practitioners who can multitask, multi-gaze, be polyvocal, imaginative, and interdisciplinary – and effectively subversive.

Cropley (2003), a psychology professor, has written twenty books on creativity. His most recent book is titled *Creativity in Education and Learning*. According to Cropley's decades of research there are three aspects of what creativity actually is that **everyone agrees upon**. These are: **novelty** (a creative product, course of action or idea necessarily departs from the family; **effectiveness** (it works, in the sense that it achieves some end – this may be aesthetic, artistic or spiritual, but may also be material such as winning or making a profit); **ethicality** (the term 'creative' is not usually used to describe selfish or destructive behavior, crimes, warmongering and the like). (p. 6) Further summarizing the literature Cropley identifies a 'paradoxical personality' which research suggests is the profile of a creative person. The most creative people have 'paradoxical personalities' which are characterized by seven polarities. These are:

- . openness combined with drive to close incomplete gestalts;
- . acceptance of fantasy combined with maintenance of a strong sense of reality;
- . critical and destructive attitudes together with constructive problem solving;
- . cool neutrality combined with passionate engagement;
- . self-centeredness coexisting with altruism;
- . self-criticism and self-doubt together with self-confidence;
- . tension and concentration side by side with relaxedness. (p. 71)

In my twenty-five years of social activism and social work experience I have witnessed the most astute among us demonstrating this 'paradoxical personality'.

Creative social workers, it might be said, are comfortable with being constantly uncomfortable or at ease with being perpetually in the problematic. As a bi-sexual person I also noted that the cluster of traits Cropley calls the paradoxical personality could also be imagined as 'the bisexual personality' in that some of those places on his continuums have been defined as masculine and feminine. Camilleri (1999) states that the cultures of academia/social work could also be thought of as falling on that continuum: "A reading of these two worldviews is that they represent two distinctive 'voices'. The mainly 'masculine' culture of the academic world relies on a world that is 'rational, reasonable and abstract'. The world of practice is



mainly a ‘feminine’ one in which ‘knowing, caring and doing’ are bounded up with each other in a complex interaction.” (p. 32). These traits could also be thought of as falling along continuums of ‘adult’ (strong sense of reality) and ‘child’ (acceptance of fantasy). Adding some Jungian insights into it all, I’ve often encouraged students to try and find and be with their inner child; their inner other gendered person; their inner shadow and their inner saint, etc. As I’ve introduced this concept of the paradoxical personality to students in my courses this last year I have seen the lights go on in their minds and I’ve witnessed many dynamic conversations.

Cropley (2003) offers us this chart to think our way through ‘creative processes, traits and motives in the phases of production of novelty’ (p. 73)

Phase	Process	Result	Motivation	Personality	Feelings
Preparation	-identifying problems -setting goals -convergent thinking	-initial activity -general knowledge -special knowledge	-problem-solving drive (intrinsic) -hope of gain (extrinsic)	-critical attitude -optimism	-dissatisfaction
Information	-perceiving -learning -remembering -convergent thinking	-focused special knowledge -rich supply of cognitive elements	-curiosity -preference for complexity -willingness to work hard -hope of gain	-knowledgeability -willingness to judge and select	-interest -curiosity
Incubation	-divergent thinking -making associations -bisociating -building networks	-configurations	-freedom from constraints -tolerance for ambiguity	-relaxedness -acceptance of fantasy -non-conformity -adventurousness	-determination -fascination
Illumination	-recognizing a promising new configuration	-novel configuration	-intuition -reduction of tension	-sensitivity -openness -flexibility	-excitement
Verification	-checking relevance and effectiveness of novel configuration	-appropriate solution displaying relevance and effectiveness	-desire for closure -desire to achieve quality	-hard-nosed sense of reality -self-criticism	-satisfaction -pride in oneself
Communication	-achieving closure -gaining feedback	-workable product capable of being made known to others	-desire for recognition (intrinsic) -desire for acclaim or	-self-confidence -autonomy -courage of one’s convictions	-anticipation -hope -fear

			reward (extrinsic)		
Validation	-judging relevance and effectiveness	-product acclaimed by relevant judge (e.g. teacher)	-desire for acclaim -mastery drive	-toughness -flexibility	-elation

Cropley’s chart seems like a useful map to walk ourselves through while ongoingly checking in with our own creative potentials but also as a way to reach students about how they can assess their own social work practices and praxis.

A final cluster of ideas I’ll borrow from Cropley’s book is a plan for assessing and fostering creativity in higher education. Building again on other scholars Cropley summarizes ideas from Candy, Crebert and O’Leary (1994) and says the creative learner has:

- . an inquiring mind characterized by a love of learning, curiosity, a critical spirit and a self-monitoring of their own learning;
- . helicopter vision involving mastery of a particular field paired with broad vision and a sense of interconnectedness of different fields;
- . information literacy including skill in locating, retrieving, decoding (from different sources, such as words, charts or diagrams), evaluating, managing and using information;
- . learning skills focused on ‘deep’ learning (deduction of general principles underlying specific knowledge that can be applied in novel situations not just situations identical to the one in which the learning occurred; deep learning is contrasted with ‘surface’ learning that consists essentially of acquisition of facts);
- . a sense of ‘personal urgency’ deriving from a favorable self-concept, self-organizing skills and a positive attitude to learning (p. 163)

**All of these things about creativity suggest that we should be focusing on teaching ourselves HOW to think not just WHAT to think.** This could be thought of as ‘process knowledge’ rather than ‘content knowledge’. Process knowledge gives us a **way** to think and content knowledge tends to be information that we can learn by rote. Learning how to learn – and how to do that all of the time and all through our careers is the goal. Great social workers and social activists like Jane Adams (1910, 1930), Emma Goldman (1983, 1977, 1969), Bridget Moran (1998, 1994, 1992, 1988) and Dorothy Livesay (1998, 1991, 1977) used their journals, diaries, books, and pamphlets to process knowledge, to theorize. They used their writing to process what was going on in each phase of their creativity. They explored the results along the way, the motivations they had for what they were doing. They documented their feelings and continued

asking themselves questions about process and outcomes. I believe these memorable thinkers and activists were paradoxical personalities continually learning how to learn.

Collier (1993) , in his book *Social Work with Rural Peoples* suggests that creative thinking and practice is similar to a generalist approach to social work and that it is the necessary approach for rural communities.

The generalist approaches each problem or issue by estimating the possibility of solution from many vantage points. The generalist considers problem-solving on many levels, across a spectrum of conceptual and practical approaches, and pursues any avenue that may be productive. It is not a specific approach, like casework with its theoretical base. The generalist enters each situation ready to tackle an individual problem, a neighborhood issue or a political contest. Generalist consider it proper to select whichever approach will produce the best result and may engage in all of them. (35)

I agree with Collier's points but would add that creative generalists are more successful in their social work activities in any geopolitical context (i.e. it is **more** relevant in a rural context but it is also relevant in any context). Mullaly (1997) also advocates for a generalist approach and states that only this generalist approach will help us always see the intersectionality of oppressions and strategies for resistance. (105) Collier's and Mullaly's generalist creatively makes the personal into the political and vice versa. Mullaly also identifies how vital it is for us to make connections between / among organizations and resistance groups. Further, he encourages us to make alliances outside of social work (with unions, professional associations, alternative organizations) (Mullaly, 1997, pp. 187 – 204). I interpret this suggestion from Mullaly to also include forming alliances with First Nations groups, ethnocultural/racialized groups and poetry/ performance/ 'activism' groups.

In the next sections of this paper I experiment briefly and more directly with defining and applying Turner's five realms of creativity and social work.

## **INTEGRATING CREATIVITY THEORY WITH TURNER'S FIVE REALMS**

**1. Creative expression: Creativity as a tool in therapeutic intervention, including writing, painting, and music.**

In many ways this is the realm everyone can most quickly understand. When we use expressive arts therapy with clients we are engaged in this realm. Dance, singing, carving, weaving, quilting might all be in this category. These are activities I have always encouraged my clients and students to explore. These are techniques that I bring into the classroom in fairly everyday ways. I also bring these techniques into the work I do with individuals in groups – small moments of creative expression can even be added to board meetings or other organizational moments that are usually thought of as ‘serious and sober contexts’ where only Roberts Rules of order should be directing our engagements with each other. Journaling and poetry are part of my own daily self-care regimes and I build these tasks into my course outlines. Page (1999) and many others (Cameron, 2003; Graveline, 2004; Schneider, 2003) emphasize the significance of ongoingly ‘cleaning our own closets’ or ‘shadows’ and this has implications through all the spheres of our work as activists (i.e. if our own issues aren’t relatively in balance we can’t work effectively as community organizers, as advocates, etc.). Burnout is an ongoing concern (Transken, 2004a, 2000a, 1997a) and using our creativity is one way to lesson our risk of burnout.

Creative expression is a powerful resource for all of us if we learn how to call upon it. This is especially so for some groups/ individuals who have had their authenticity/ spirituality/ identity attacked such as First Nations groups or sexual minorities. Anderson (2000) and others (Smith Tuhawai, 1999) have produced a wealth of scholarship documenting the array of ways that creative individual (and group and community expression) have brought about major positive change. Social work could be said to have a herstory of using adult literacy classes (story telling and creative writing), theatre and dance programs, art appreciation classes that goes back as far as to the Hull House Settlement Movements in Chicago in 1889 and to the Vancouver Community House in 1918 (Adams, 1910, 1930; Scott, 2004, p. 22).

## **2. Creative presentation of self by the social worker: Creativity is evident in the social worker’s style, which includes use of metaphor, spontaneity, flexibility, and risk-taking.**

Examples of this second realm are somewhat more difficult to describe than the first realm. Metaphor helps us comprehend and cross ethnocultural divides. Metaphors are conceptual schemes that we imagine

and then test out in our interactions with the world. Arges and Delaney (1996) remind us that “A metaphor is simply a name or descriptive term applied to an object to which it is not literally applicable” (p. 3) They discuss the metaphors of social work as a profession responding to the ‘disease model’ of the world (and our task is to cure the illnesses of poverty, oppression, etc.) or the ‘ecology model’ of the world (where our task is to help flows or systems integrate more effectively or wholesomely. Creative social workers listen for the metaphors that are being expressed and responded to (by the individual, group, community, or nation). We can then, possibly, conjure and insert different metaphors and/or problematized the metaphors in use. For example, when an agency says ‘we are all a family here’ and then forgets to talk about whether that is a traditional hierarchal family with women doing the work at the bottom and the men doing the decision making and control mongering at the top – then we might want to make that into a visible ‘metaphor’ that could be changed.

I know that I have had students and clients tell me they admire my spontaneity, flexibility and risk-taking. I use metaphor because I am interested in creative writing and because I read a great deal of fiction. Metaphor and imaginative dialogue open up possibilities. The whole Narrative Therapy movement could be connected to this realm of creativity.

Sometimes in social work this involves stretching or breaking agency rules and doing so in ways that won't be ‘caught’. Said differently: these are ways to do something extra for a client and yet not get administratively punished for doing so. In one agency I worked in the clients often felt a great deal of shame for even walking through our doors. When the phone rang I always knew it might be someone making that first traumatizing outreach effort. When I picked up the phone if there was a pause after my ‘hello...’ I would tell the caller that they didn't have to give me their true name and I wouldn't ask for identification. Before the caller had said one word I would tell them my thoughts about confidentiality and protecting people's sense of privacy in a small town. As a result of this practice, eventually I had many files for ‘Diane’ and I simply numbered them and clients would laughingly tell me they were ‘Diane #14’ etc. when they called to make their next appointment. Unfortunately, as a dimension of

managerial control/ budget 'efficiency' and 'accountability' that agency eventually insisted that all clients show identification and that all clients data be entered into the computer. I could no longer 'get away' with having too many Diane files but for a time I used 'spontaneity, flexibility, and risk-taking' as a way to open up space for clients.

Fook (1999) makes links regarding reflectivity in education and practice with this concept of Turner's and the previous discussion about creativity. After discussing some specific case examples Fook summarizes three clusters of attributes she admires in the 'critically reflective process' and she reminds us of their significance to our profession. She applies the word 'creative' in this context:

First, the ability to acknowledge and appreciate the influence of self (personal reactions – behavioral and emotional, interpretations, social and cultural background, personal history or experience) in determining and changing a situation is paramount. Second, the recognition of personally held, often hidden or unconscious assumptions, and their role in influencing a situation, is also crucial. Third, a sense of responsibility, of agency, an appreciation of how each player can act upon a situation, is evident. Coupled with this is an ability to interweave action, to engage in a process of inductive and creative thinking, so that specific personal experiences act as a springboard to broaden understanding. Lastly to question, to tolerate uncertainty, and to utilize this as a catalyst for active change... (p. 200)

Creativity is involved in all those levels of thinking and practicing. Our imagination is required to meaningfully weave our way through each of those dimensions of reflective practice.

### **3. Creative conceptualization – direct practice level: Creativity leads to the identification of innovative solutions to clients' problems by encouraging the generation of alternatives.**

Reassessing agency hours might fit into this realm. In one agency I worked in the creation of flex time for my hours meant that I could see clients in the evenings or weekends. This scheduling was far less disruptive to their lives. Some of them did not have to take time away from work or school – and as importantly they did not have to explain to a boss, teacher or anyone else where they were going during 9-5 hours. Similarly, some clients were offered the chance to discuss their issues with me through long distance phone calls. That meant they didn't have to travel or have as hard a time arranging child care. In northern communities this is a very important option to provide because, for example, there may be only

one bus every day going into town/ going back to their village. And some clients might not have the funds to pay for those bus trips so the phone option was useful.

In a household where people were fighting about kitchen duties recommending that they do something radical like use only paper plates, discard their one big fridge and replace it with three small lockable ones, and organize their shelves with locks too – this could be an odd alternative to family dinners but if peace could find some openings in the household then this could be an innovative solution. Gender and class issues can sometimes be broken down and innovative solutions can be found. In a household where people have been uncomfortable with traditional roles helping them realize the true pliability of human conduct – and celebrating that could open up entirely new ways to live lives.

In the appendix of this paper is a brief script for a performance piece that I have written and performed in public contexts. It is meant to be a summary of various kinds of oppressions that are inflicted on vulnerable populations. It's an imaginary dialogue between a volunteer recruiter for a large organization and the array of rejections she/ her organization makes of alternative ways to live/ be/ respond. The volunteer recruiter is so arrogant that she doesn't even recognize how she is hurting the feelings and dignity of those very people/ groups she is claiming to care about. This script and its use (as part of the 'entertainment' at fundraisers and orientations of new students, etc.) is an example of 'direct practice' creativity in this third realm. The script could be shared with an individual client as a way to anchor a conversation about oppression – and solidarity among those who are hurt by oppression. The script is also used as a forum for public education. My process of writing it and performing it could be defined as belonging in realms one and two of the creative process.

#### **4. Creative conceptualization – community practice level: Creativity facilitates the identification of what needs to change at a structural level (problem finding) and innovative methods to bring about the desired changes.**

Elsewhere I have written about this level of creativity (Transken, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). Creatively examining how gendered assumptions have shaped various social structures and then imaginatively trying to deconstruct those sexist organizations/ structures has been an important aspect of social work. For

example, for a long time, accessing financial support from the state was linked to whether or not you had a ‘man’s shoes under your bed’. Creative community activists have helped disassemble these sexist assumptions (i.e. that if you have sex with a man he should therefore pay for all your living expenses and assume financial responsibility for your children, etc.). These activists have imagined a world where who you slept with or what your genitals looked like had nothing to do with your right to an income as a full-time careworker and/or a person with no income.

Linking social work issues to women’s organizations/ feminist activism has always seemed so obvious to me as to be embarrassing to state out loud. Yet, I’ve had many startling moments when social work peers did not see the feminist perspective. Gilroy explains this pattern:

Once we began to apply our rapidly increasing knowledge about women’s oppression, however, we began to encounter enormous obstacles to doing social work in ways that are compatible with feminist awareness. We discovered that social workers, women and men alike, often feel threatened by feminism and the broader women’s movement. In the view of many of our students and colleagues, feminist analysis of major social problems, feminist critiques of professional practice, and feminist ways of fostering personal and social change are marginal rather than central to the practice of social work. (p. 53)

In my career as a social work professor I have been told that things like organizing a national conference for the *Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women* (CRIA-W) or publishing with them (Transken, 1995) had ‘nothing to do with social work’ although the papers being presented were on topics such as incest, rape, wife assault, etc. Publishing in books such as *Care and Consequences* (an essay on sexual assault centers and their funding (Transken, 2000a)) also has nothing to do with social work according to some social work peers. These moments of realization – of noting how far we are divided – in our world view have been painful and frightening for me. Nonetheless, these networks also give me strength, fortification, and they assist me to be effective in my analysis of oppression. Those creative networks also diversify ‘my psychic portfolio’. Feminist scholarly and grassroots networks (entirely outside of social work) fortify my identity and ideology: as do my connections in Sociology programs/ journals/ networks and in anti-racist/ First Nations networks.



Returning to the ideas forwarded earlier about the paradoxical personality – it certainly is a requirement in such a contradictory world as social work teaching and practice. Baines (2003) says this about the challenges of maintaining our structural analysis and vision:

The challenge for left-of-centre social workers and others concerned with justice-directed social work practice is to develop, teach, and practice social work in a way that reflects race, class, and gender as a dynamic, contestatory but seamless whole that simultaneously resonates with the actual, depoliticizing, backlash conditions in which social workers and their clients work and struggle. (p. 46)

Similarly, making diverse and creative networks within the women's movement involves imagination and a particular type of kindness. In a community I lived in there had been conflict between various women's organizations. These conflicts had largely been caused because of funding cuts. It is a classic technique used by oppressors to divide and conquer those they want to oppress. We organized a 'feminist of the year' award and had a family picnic that the whole city was invited to. This event where the goal was to 'play and frolic' all day at the beach brought out the media and dozens of people who usually wouldn't have come to a feminist event. It also brought women from various sites in the community to the event and this helped heal some rifts. The event was video taped and that has become a teaching resource that I can share with students.

In the community I am in now we have an event scheduled for this fall. There will be many activists from many organizations involved but the funds raised will be shared by five organizations. The title of the event speaks volumes: 'Women's Awesome Creativity Kiosk' (WACK!). We will sell the traditional things to raise money at this event (food, crafts, art) but we will also be selling coupons for two hour time slots of people's skills. So we have bookkeepers, computer repair people, lawyers, mechanics, carpenters, etc. who will donate a 2-hour coupon and this will be auctioned off. This WACK event will bring people into the activity who are not usually in any way connected to 'feminist community development'. Men will have a role to play in this event in that they are going to do much of the set up and carework for the event and they will be some of the people selling their time on behalf of the cause. There will be a charge

at the door and there will be poets, story tellers and other artistic presentation on the stage all night. More than twenty women have already consented to sing and/or read their poetry, stories, and prose on stage.

Memory and the creative reworking of memory in story, song, film or drama can be intensely personal, yet it requires a shared form of representation, and is mediated by the collective resources of language, sounds, images and personal action. It's meanings inhere in this mediation, enabling not only the communication of experience between self and other, but also between past and present (Negus and Pickering, 2004, p. 36).

Therefore, the audience experiences their creativity while hearing/ being with the performances. The performers are making and remaking a sense of 'us' as a community through their individual artistic expression and through the collaborative construction of this evening. The total of the evening is more than the parts added up individually. Even the process of organizing it has already had multiple benefits in that we are organizing as a collective (the five organizations) in a way that has never happened before in this town. The explicit 'manners or etiquette' we've also declared are that the organizing work itself must be fun, light-hearted, hassle free, and whatever the outcome we will accept it with a playful attitude. This first WACK event might become an annual event where we gather not in response to grief (the Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> mourning ceremonies) and not in response to anger (the frequent media blitzes we do in response to some new budget cutback or horrible abuse of women/ a specific woman) but in sincere embracement and affection for each other.

Another community example: at one time I was working as an immigrant settlement worker while also being involved with a women's organization. The multicultural organization didn't yet have a feminist consciousness or a preparedness to admit that violence and oppression was going on in their communities. The organization was largely run by men in their fifties and sixties and women who saw their roles as 'handmaiden' workers. The women's center was largely run by white Anglophone middle class women in their thirties. I had the good fortune to be an initiator and activist with the new organization (Transken, 1998a, 1998b, 1997b, 1994a, 1994b). It did significant social change and advocacy work for ten years and addressed that 'space in the middle' between the two organizations. Eventually both of these older organizations absorbed the work and orientations that the new organization was attending to. Thus the

new/third organization accomplished itself out of a reason for existing. Those ten years of activism and social change were filled with creative moments and creative decision making by people trying to be with their paradoxical personalities.

While also working as an immigrant settlement worker I realized with my professional peers that one of the hardest struggles for newcomers to northern Ontario at the time was to find affordable decent housing. With a team of others we applied for more than a million dollars to create a whole housing complex. This was one of the most exciting and successful 'creative' endeavors I've ever participated in. There's something astonishing and soul-fortifying about being part of a group who selects a piece of land and then witnesses and guides the construction of a multi-unit set of buildings. Dozens of families are living in those units and I can feel proud of having been the social worker who with the teachers, social justice activists and others who dreamed that project into existence. Creativity in Turner's fourth realm tries to imagine a world where various configurations of melanin, facial features, spiritual practices, etc. do not limit your choices, rights or opportunities.

**5. Creative cosmology: Creativity holds a central place in a paradigm that sees the world as neither all-chaotic nor strictly deterministic. Clients and workers creatively engage in interactions that hold potential for various outcomes.**

I interpret this to mean, among other things, that we not see the world as all racist/ classist/ sexist, etc. nor that we see the world as all fair, respectful, honest, etc. As Foucault has taught us: where there is power there is resistance. And among resistance groups there are also people/ contexts which are oppressive. Among feminists there are classist or racist moments/ behaviors/ choices. Among anti-racist activists there are sexist moments, etc. Recognizing both the horror and glory that are inside all our hearts helps me imagine a world view that accepts limits but dreams of radical change.

Some types of Eurocentric knowledge are frontal lobe oriented (versus holistically oriented). Poetry or music, for example, often bring the 'facts' of a situation into elegant - and unforgettable - contact with all the other dimensions and ways of knowing. Banks (1998), a researcher and a creative writer, suggests that there are many ways to collect and share information. She says:

...facts don't always tell the truth, or a truth worth worrying about, and the truth in a good story - its resonance with our felt experience...sometimes must use imaginary facts. The emotional texture of experience often is what interests me - the consequences of the facts in the lives of actual persons. When I want to evoke the emotional texture of a human experience for an audience I find the canons of social science aren't very productive...I've been trained to make my academic research oriented to the factual, but my telling the story of that research is often disturbingly vacuous, because it lacks the traditional qualities of good storytelling, qualities like plot development...Character...My interest right now is to bring the two areas of questioning and doubt -- factual reporting and fictional storytelling -- into alignment, to see how my own streams of writing can be made to flow together... (11-12).

Poetry / creative writing (and story telling, quilting, carving...) are accessible formats through which experience, wisdom and guidance can be realized, expressed, captured, and shared. Recognizing and honoring these various ways of knowing is a component of being with Turners 'creative cosmology'. Expressions of 'knowledge' can be manifested in many formats.

Elsewhere I have written about the self-publishing circles I've been involved in and how they link to performance ethnography and other issues/ practices (2005a, 2005b, 2002). I will add here that producing these books is a complex activity. The 'products' of these circles also speak for themselves (Transken, 2003, 2002c, 2001, 2000b, 2000c). It involves each member of the circle finding their own creative voice, cultivating the courage to share it, producing the text, commenting with the other writers, having input into the actual design and layout of the book, participating in finding the money for printing and publication, getting involved in the distribution and promotion of the 'product', doing public readings from the material, etc. As Negus and Pickering (2004) say about this creative production process:

...we must recognize that due to the organization of modern production it has become increasingly impossible to produce a cultural artifact alone without the intervention, assistance, guidance, collaboration or hindrance of other people. Capitalist production is inherently social, as Marx elaborated in relation to the political economy of manufacturing in general. (p. 55)

Building on the work of Bourdieu, Negus and Pickering add that these self-publishing circles are engaged in "...legitimation struggles – competitive battles to impose, and to make stick as legitimate, definitions of what is artistic" (87). And, "In the contemporary world the field of power is primarily, but not exclusively, shaped by the competition, collusion and tensions between government/state institutions

and private capital/commercial interests”. (p. 86) Almost one-hundred people have been involved over the last seven years in producing these books (authors, artists, photographers, printers, people who wrote quotes for the back, etc.). I have read at over 80 events – and each of those authors decides who/ where/ how often s/he will read. These events have raised thousands and thousands of dollars – dollars we did not have to ask any of the levels of government to give to us as ‘special needs groups’ or ‘special interest groups’. These are dollars we have control over in regards to spending and priorities. One author has read at over 300 events all across British Columbia. We have spoken then to thousands of people and we have distributed more than 6,000 texts! These books will circulate out there in our communities and make a difference in regards to how many many people imagine themselves, their communities, their concerns – and their entitlements.

Where our creativity as social workers/ activists is invited in here in special ways is that we are asking previously unpublished or differently published (i.e. some of the authors have published in other contexts but not in these grassroots forums before) to take control of the whole domain from the initial imagining of the text/process/ performance to the actual manifestation of that. Relationships are developed differently with the book that emerges, with each other, with social justice organizations which host our performances and buy or receive donated copies of our products, etc. The launching of these books and the reading at events also give us another moment in which we might be linking with the mainstream media to get our imaginative wishes for the world, our community, our causes into the living rooms of everyone.

### ***CHEERRs project as one integrated example***

Now that I have summarized the immediately relevant literature on creativity and given some discussion to Turner’s five realms I am going to trust the creative intelligence of the readers of this essay and directly quote from the recent \$217,000 grant application submitted to SSHRC. Although I am a co-investigator, the process of writing this grant involved five of us from various disciplines. Implementing

it (if we are eventually blessed enough to receive the grant) will involve hundreds of people and three years of creativity in all the realms Turner describes. Using -- investing -- the best creative energies of all of those people will produce some dynamic results which will have consequence for years to come.

Creative writing (and story telling, performance, etc.) are accessible formats through which experience, wisdom and guidance can be realized, expressed, and shared. Expressions of 'knowledge' can be manifested in many formats. Art is a method to reach and connect people over ideas and important knowledge. This knowledge is of themselves and can affect powerful changes in people's lives.

The CHEERR Project organizers are artist-researchers who want to facilitate the production of creative writing in the process of health education and personal healing. As writers, editors, and dramatists, we want to take the artistic knowledge we hold and use it to collect and create with a broader focus and a community-based agenda.

This truly interdisciplinary project will involve artists (primarily creative writers), academics and 'organic intellectuals' (grassroots leaders, Elders, Women's Organizations and networks) from each community and from the disciplines of Social Work, English (Creative writing), Nursing, History, First Nations Studies, Women's Studies, and Education (especially popular education and adult literacy). The foundation of the project involves the performance/sharing of creative writing and other art forms created on themes of health and healing in Northern BC communities. The writing will be read/performed by traveling established artists and by local untrained citizens. Workshops and collective sharing will facilitate the expression of experience in new and creative ways. Our hope is that at the end of this three years of reaching out and cycling back into each community to share and listen, we will be able to produce the following pedagogical resources: 1. a web page that displays all the learning, the contacts of people who want to continue engaging on these topics, and community resources in each geographical area; 2. a book of poems, stories, testimony, art; 3. A video documentary of the whole three years, both the readings and other meeting interactions; 4. a script of a play/ performance piece (somewhat like *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Laramie Project*, or *Spare Change* which are collages of text from people who experienced vulnerability, trauma, healing, and resiliency). Also, we hope to have enhanced the community capacity in each town (through word of mouth and collective memory people may pass on what they have learned). We hope to have strengthened the capacity of students and teachers in each community to validate and use the knowledge created in their own ongoing community enrichment campaigns. Further, the tools (text, video, web resources) which emerge will be available for future teachers, community nurses, and activists. We hope to have enhanced an array of people's comfort with talking about these issues (HIV/AIDs, FAS, breast cancer, prostate cancer, obesity, abortion, clinical depression, schizophrenia, for example, are often very taboo topics to disclose about in small communities). There is the possibility for whole groups of people to discover new ways of thinking about their bodies, health, and specific coping mechanisms in the north through writing and storytelling. The whole experience will enlarge and deepen the knowledge of the students who are hired to do the outreach: the social work BSW students who do their social work practicums the MSW students research practicums, the First Nation Studies/English graduate students, and the researcher-artists themselves. Through their travels, the artist-researchers will be both sharing and collecting; we will be reading our work as well as eliciting and listening to the writing of community members. Workshops and writing guidance will encourage and deepen the impact the creative experience will have on the participants. One of the novel aspects of the CHEERR project is that it will be transdisciplinary and engage in a continual

feedback loop from scholars in health sciences and rural realities to the wider community of writers/ artists to the scholars and back to the community of writers/ artists and back again and again.

**Detailed Description:** This project relies on wisdom from a variety of sources so we will site some of those experts in the various fields and map out those fields. The central ones that we will mesh through out our arts-research are Creative Writing (English Program), First Nations perspectives, Interdisciplinarity, Expressive Arts, Northern realities, Health promotion (versus the medication of sickness), and Women's Studies. Our intention in the Creativity for Health, Education, Empowerment, Resiliency and Research (CHEERR) project is to network with a variety of northern communities which are in the catchment area of UNBC (Prince George, Fort St. John, Quesnel, Terrace, and Prince Rupert being the largest communities). In each of these communities we hope to identify and network with the artists (and we use this term to refer primarily to poets and story tellers but also to performers, crafts workers, etc.) and to engage them in producing material which communicates the theme of 'resilience and health'. For example, we hope to discover a pastiche of poems, stories, and other art which tells the viewer/ listener about how people in those communities have experienced, resisted, and healed from smoking, drinking, cancer, obesity, diabetes, and other health issues. Each community will be invited to have one event (an evening, day, or two days) in each of the three years of the grant period of displaying/ performing their creativity. Our task as a research/ facilitating team is to inspire, encourage, document or 'capture' the material created in each geographic area. Preceding the event will be opportunities for workshops and one-on-one contact with the artists and artist-researchers. The CHEERR team will be available for ongoing phone or email consults/mentoring. Our belief is that people in each of these communities have found dynamic ways to live their lives in balance and we would like to celebrate and highlight those accomplishments and stories. Much has been written about how northern communities do have high rates of drug abuse, depression, violence, smoking, obesity, etc. – but obviously there are always those who find their strength, fortitude, and best practices. We are interested in discovering that resiliency on the level of the individual, the family, the organization or the community....

...These events will be promoted and facilitated by several cooperating organizations: UNBC Arts Council, The Central Interior Regional Arts Council, Canadian Rural and Remote Health Association, Northern Women's Health Initiatives, and Greg Halselth's Research North. There will be extensive promotion of the event both as a cultural event and as a unique opportunity for health education.

This first year of the CHEERR project will have a great deal of guidance built into it because of the leadership of the First Nations Counseling Center, Faculty advisers from the First Nations Program and the First Nations social work interns who will be doing so much of the day-to-day of organizing. First Nations culture tends to be quite interdisciplinary in its way. We are excited to work with that perspective. Working both in the larger centers and in the smaller, more isolated First Nations communities, we hope to facilitate the expression of unique aboriginal health concerns such as they have never been expressed before. We hope that the sharing of health and healing issues through art contributes to a larger cultural healing process.

Year two: We will continue outreaching, networking, advertising and bringing back to each circle of creators and each geographical location the work that is emerging elsewhere and in their own communities. We will do this through email, a web page, phone contacts, and on site contacts. During the summer we will arrange meetings and poetry or story telling evenings in each community so that we can update people on what has been produced so far and to deepen the trust and enthusiasm in each area. As some arts-research material or 'data' emerges we will see which topics have not been touched on and invoke material on those themes as is appropriate. For example, if by mid-term of year two there are no stories or poems about breast cancer and recovery then we will actively focus on agencies,

individuals, activists from those locations and meet with them in a one-on-one way (as is appropriate) to see who they would recommend to produce that material.

Year three: In the final months of the CHEERR project we hope to bring everything together in a way that is both 'final and complete' and entirely open to new insights, input, information and change. This would involve the summarization and analysis of the collecting work and, more importantly perhaps, the return of the completed work to the communities that originated them. The final anthology, the video/performance, and the web resources will record the writing created and presented over the course of the three years. It will comprise a wealth of knowledge, creativity, and empowerment. We would hope the dynamics created by CHEERR would continue on in various ways in the communities and in the lives of the people we touched. We would also be looking to publish the material and make it available to much wider audiences (presenting at conferences across Canada and the US; publish the book in a format that is widely accessible; advertise the web page through a variety of email lists).

...The training of graduate students will be an essential mandate of the CHEER project. . Each graduate student will receive experience in the area(s) that will further their knowledge and understanding of their field(s). In addition, they will learn how to work as part of an interdisciplinary team. We require six research assistants to help organize the events, work in the field, and participate in the preparation of the media (manuscript preparation and filming) involved in recording the events. Organizing work will involve extensive networking with local artistic and health organizations, contact with established artists, event preparation and advertising. Graduate students will be heavily involved in the collection, editing, and preparation of the anthology for publishing. They will also be involved in liaison with the film crew and in the logistics of the documentary shoot. Depending on the crew, this involvement may include training in film technique. Each student will be trained and supervised and mentored by a collaborator who is affiliated with a university and by the principal applicants. Six graduate students will be hired at UNBC, two from first Nations Studies, two from English, and two from Social Work.

Additionally, we hope to organize social work internship placements (300 hours in 3<sup>rd</sup> year, 400 hours in 4<sup>th</sup> year, 500 hours in 5<sup>th</sup> year) through which students may further their skills in community development through the arts. We are especially motivated to find students who are interested in doing their placements in the smaller communities – and ideally we'd like to find social work students who will do their placements for CHEERR in their home communities. This would also 'upgrade' community capacity in those communities in that their 'artist' social workers will be remaining in those communities long after this project has concluded. Given that both Dr. Transken and Dr. Wint are social work professors these students will receive excellent supervision and professional development doing dynamic interdisciplinary work. Our intention is to also be available to supervise/ offer placements to the students in UNBC's First Nations degree program as well. This experience will complement the academic training of each of these students. Thus, each student will benefit by participating in the project and learning from their immediate supervisor and mentor as well as all members of the CHEER team.

### **Creative social workers in process**

In my twenty-five years of activism and practice of social work I've had the good fortune of witnessing many creative moments, people, outcomes. These people have sought novel solutions to problems. They've been effective and ethical. I haven't always had the conceptual tools to -- step by



step -- walk my way through the process of thinking about (and thus living more effectively with) creativity. Recognizing ‘the paradoxical personality’ certainly empowers a practitioner to get comfortable with being uncomfortable and with being able to hold multiple contradictions in their hearts and heads at the same time (and to invite that in others). Part of my task as a teacher/ mentor is to guide and encourage people (groups, organizations) through their own ‘phases’ in creativity engagement in regards to various obstacles in their paths. These phases are: preparation, information, incubation, illumination, verification, communication, and validation. Those phases can be going on simultaneously for various obstacles and on various levels (i.e the individual level, the group level, etc.). Humans are magnificently complex creatures. My moral stance is that all of us are bursting with urgencies, curiosities, appetites for deep learning – but sometimes the patriarchal capitalist world blocks our recognition or entitlements to these dimensions of our humanity. We become mute, dull, and passive because the obedience demanded in public school systems and anonymous administrative structures have taught us to be that way. We accept the status quo and dull ourselves down to fit the mediocre. All of us have paradoxical personalities inside us – but many of us have had those ‘limbs’ of our possibility stunted or crippled. In various ways and in various locations creative practitioners and creative academics can help people understand these dimensions of creativity and live them in a more authentic way. **Trusting my own creativity and celebrating the creativity of others is a radical practice.** It is not without consequence to be prepared to go against the status quo ways of thinking and doing – but the risk and energy output have, so far, proven worth it to me. All of this pondering about creativity is that much more necessary, I believe, in northern and rural contexts where resources are fewer and services are decreasing under the present abandonments by the federal and provincial governments of their responsibilities to vulnerable citizens. I close this paper with a brief performance piece script which I have acted on stage with a young First Nations woman at a Jezabels (UNBC Women’s Center) fundraising event. My co-performer read this as part of her first time on stage and as part of her social work practicum. She later told me it was one of the most memorable experiences of

he professional life. More than 200 people witnessed our performance and \$1,700 was raised that night. 100 copies of this performance piece script were distributed to the community. Those documents are floating around out there even now...

## ELEGANT BRUTALITY

We'd like to invite you into our organization.  
As what?

As a Diversity spokesperson.  
What is involved in that?

First you have to pay a \$300 membership fee; \$200 a year after that for life.  
What do I get for that?

You get to do menial volunteer work with us.  
Why would I want to do that?

So that you can authentically express yourself, make a difference, be a passionate advocate for your causes.  
That's fucking marvelous!

We'd prefer that you don't swear, that you enunciate properly, subdue your feelings and thoughts.  
I feel uncomfortable.

Let's eat, drink, be merry, and reminisce about the good old days.  
Where's the food?

We've planned an event at an expensive restaurant twenty miles from here.  
I don't have bus money or a car.

You can catch a ride in the back seat, you could walk the roads, you could try harder.  
My feet are sore & I'm very hungry.

What took you so long; you're always behind schedule.  
I was carrying other survivors on my back.

Here we serve on schedule: beef, pork, potatoes, very white bread, butter on everything.  
I don't have \$40. for the dinner, plus I'm a vegan.

We'll let you wash dishes for your dinner, eat dry toast while you educate and entertain us about your causes.  
I'm already tired.

We know that people like you have a hard time keeping up with real professional standards.  
I'm lonely here.

We know that people like you have a hard time fitting in.  
I think I want to leave.

We've always known people like you are quitters, unreliable, uncommitted.  
For twenty years I've been on every committee, group, march for Diversity.

If only you'd make a sincere effort to do the right thing.  
My wages are so low; so much overtime; no benefits; I've so little left to give away.

We've always known that people like you are ungrateful for all we've done for you.  
I want to put my coat on and leave.

Why can't you just participate, dress like the rest of us, accept the limits of reality?  
I didn't understand what you were offering and taking.

You need to take another course, another degree, another credential and then you'll be ready to participate.  
I've always known how to hurt, what a lie looks like, how duplicity stinks.

For another five years, two hundred thousand in lost wages and tuitions we could help you begin to arrive.  
I don't understand why that's necessary.

People like you are always moody, exaggerating, making things up but we try to be patient with you.  
I can't trust you because you slither the rules, you slip away, you stand on my tongue.

Why can't you dance, smile, make charming small talk?  
I am afraid.

People like you don't have a sense of humour; you're always over reacting.  
You've killed my friends, my neighbors, my heritage – I have to go buy bandaids.

Why are you so selfish, so insensitive – always talking about yourself?  
My voice is the sound of my comrades, kindreds, life.

Why can't you footnote that, produce statistics, publish journal articles to prove your point; quote the famous forefathers and foremothers?  
I need to go home now.

Why do you have to be so disruptive, uncooperative, insensitive to our needs?  
I must go home now.

While you're there would you recruit a few more people to be on our committees, boards, and volunteer groups?

Si, Feb. 15, 2005

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