

Book Review

The Creative Seed

By Lilian Wissink, published 2013 by Exisle Publishing, New Zealand.

Interview with the Author

*By Rhonda Leece
Associate Director (Services)
University of New England.*

Abstract

Creativity is about expressing our individuality. It's our ability to use our imagination, to experiment and problem solve and ultimately to come up with valuable, innovative ideas in any area of life. The Creative Seed focuses on creativity within the realms of the arts, such as writing, painting, sculpting, crafts and performance. Research has shown a multitude of benefits for people who enjoy creative expression, such as increased emotional health, mental flexibility and social inclusion. Creativity in any domain, from the arts to science, is crucial in making valuable and wide-ranging contributions to our society.

Lilian Wissink, former Counsellor at UNE has just published a book, The Creative Seed: How to enrich your life through creativity.

This interview with the author examines how Lilian made the transition from a university counsellor to a published author and looks at the product of this transition, The Creative Seed.

Lilian Wissink, former Counsellor at UNE has just published a book, The Creative Seed: How to enrich your life through creativity. The following interview with Lilian explores how self awareness and a desire to recognise and embrace individual creativity took Lilian from university counsellor to author published author. In her own words, Lilian takes us on her creative journey.

Can you give a brief summary of what brought you to the place of being an author?

Just over a decade ago I became fascinated by the creative process. I was intrigued about how we can go from knowing very little about a particular creative area, such as painting, writing or performing and develop skills that we had not thought possible. This is what happened to me. I had always believed I wasn't the 'creative type'. Although I now realise that I was using my creativity in all sorts of ways, such as in my counselling, devising and running programs for students and staff at UNE, and also at home and in the garden. But I wanted to see if I could develop my creativity in unchartered areas, such as singing, drawing and painting. I started off tentatively, had lessons and was delighted to find with time, patience and a willingness to 'play' in these creative domains that I could accomplish creative goals that included singing in front of others and exhibiting and selling my art. I began to reflect on the creative journey and felt drawn to write with the hope of introducing others to this remarkable life experience.

What prompted you to write The Creative Seed?

I wanted to demystify the creative process. Many people believe that they are not creative or that it's too late for them to develop skills in a particular creative area. I wrote the book because I believe that creativity is open to everyone, and not just to a select few. We can all discover and stimulate a new exciting dimension in our lives, maybe one we haven't seriously thought about before. And I was keen to use my professional experience as a psychologist and link my knowledge to my relatively new love of creative expression.

What is the power of creativity?

Creativity is about expressing our individuality. It's our ability to use our imagination, to experiment and problem solve and ultimately to come up with valuable, innovative ideas in any area of life. *The Creative Seed* focuses on creativity within the realms of the arts, such as writing, painting, sculpting, crafts and performance. Research has shown a multitude of benefits for people who enjoy creative expression, such as increased emotional health, mental flexibility and social inclusion. Creativity in any domain, from the arts to science, is crucial in making valuable and wide-ranging contributions to our society.

Why/how do you think that nurturing the power of creativity is relevant to students in higher education?

Sometimes we can get bogged down in teaching students facts and imparting knowledge. Of course, this is an important aspect of tertiary education, but I believe we also need to teach students the nuts and bolts of the creative process. For example, how to think broadly and problem solve by looking at an issue from different angles and how to come up with innovative solutions. As time goes on I think more universities are providing courses in creative thinking and I recently read that one American university requires all new students to take a course in creative expression. The upshot is that students directly experience the nature of the creative process and thus learn skills that are transferrable to other subjects and life in general. This can range from finding the delight in experimentation and seeing mistakes as an opportunity to learn, or developing personal qualities such as perseverance and flexibility. These learnt skills and personal qualities equip our students to be well-rounded and highly effective within their professional and personal communities. And of course there are many other benefits of creative expression such as emotional, social and spiritual.

Many of our tertiary students already study in a specific creative area, such as art, music, theatre studies, design and architecture. Just like students in others disciplines, they struggle with common obstacles like frustration, procrastination and perfectionism. Unfortunately, sometimes students start to believe that because they are struggling with these challenges that they are not able or capable, but with insight into the creative process they can find strategies which will empower them to move forward.

A series of 'creative touchstones' summarises each chapter. These provide questions to guide the reader in self reflection- 'I wonder what you discovered in this chapter', did the exercises help you to recognise how life events and historical influences have impacted on how you experience your own creativity'; and tips on avoiding or addressing common hurdles such as procrastination and perfectionism as well as advice related to developing self care and mindfulness skills.

Tips for using *The Creative Seed* as a resource for practitioners?

On the website – www.thecreativeseed.com.au, there is a section especially written for teachers, mentors and counsellors that provides suggestions on how to use *The Creative Seed* with students. There is also a list of common questions from practitioners which I answer by connecting to the book as a resource.

The questions on the website will resonate with counsellors in higher education:

Can you recommend ways to boost self-esteem; I have a very bright student who has excelled over the past two years, but I'm worried about him. He seems to be driving himself very hard and has some unrealistic expectations of what he feels he should achieve; My students are great. I like them, but they are young and seem to be caught up with being at university for the first time. They seem quite distracted; So many people seem stressed these days, especially my students who are juggling families or work, alongside their studies.

Within the book there are numerous strategies that are well researched and validated and can be used individually or in a group setting. Topics include challenging the common myths of creativity,

acknowledging creative qualities and strengths, dealing with self-talk and stress, setting goals and learning how to navigate the *seed* process of acquiring **S**kills, **E**xperimenting, **E**valuating and **D**iscovering our unique gift of creativity. Each chapter has easy to follow exercises that can be used to assist the reader in gaining self-awareness and practical tools to help with the common challenges all creative people experience.

The website also has a light-hearted and insightful review by Annette Stevenson, Senior Counsellor at UNE that provides a practitioner's view to using *The Creative Seed* as a resource.

Annette's review highlights both the personal and professional uses of this book. She states,

As a psychologist/counsellor who has worked in the tertiary sector for many years, I was pleased to discover that the book has drawn on all of the therapeutic strategies that I introduce my student clients to – journaling, recognition of self-talk, development of insight and self-awareness, values clarification, creative problem solving, relaxation techniques, visualisations, goal-setting, and more. I can see myself directing many students towards this book – particularly post-graduate students embarking on large projects such as a research Masters or PhD – especially to address maladies such as the dreaded “writer’s block”. Then there are the students who procrastinate, have perfectionistic tendencies, or who have “imposter syndrome” and sabotage their studies. So many past clients’ journeys have no doubt contributed to the veracity of the examples in this book

(<http://thecreativeseed.com.au/teachers-mentors-counsellors/review-by-annette-stevenson/>)

Where can readers get a copy of your book?

The Creative Seed is available in all good bookshops and directly through the publisher – www.exislepublishing.com.au and www.exislepublishing.co.nz.

Lilian Wissink can be contacted via email: wissinklilian@yahoo.com.au.

Thank you Lilian for sharing your journey with me.