

**Dancing in the Creators' Footsteps: Linking creativity and our life as
Christian artists – Dr Debbie Bright**
preceded by *Called to Create* (written and performed by Lucy Jarasius)

Called to Create

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That's my name

That's what I'm called to...

Excuse me I beg

your pardon

Did you call me a pest?

Did you say I was nothing more than a pest?!

I'll have you know

I'm way more than APEST way

more than an

Apostolic

Prophetic

Evangelistic

Shepherding

Teaching intercessor reactivating God-culture

(aka the Kingdom Come)!

Digest that!

I have to live with it EVERY day

It's like a covenant

Something akin to a marriage Yes,

there are vows involved...

(insert giggle) I often regret the things I say... have to eat my words...

But

I can't help it

I can't stop it

I can't suppress it

I can't hold it

down

It's like verbal ad nauseum rising in my throat

It's like...

a bagged caterwaul wailing for out

FAR OUT

It's like a fountain fermenting to flow freely

It's like a simmering sauce in my bones smoldering to have my say about
things beyond my understanding, far from my feeble frame

Framing my references through a transubstantiated theology that blows my
mind to the liberating smithereens that form my being inform my being,
transform my being
un-norm my mind's thinking from the preconceived notions of the greener
pastures and the wider oceans that my heart covets... my gut loves it... but my
spirit warns it
of some simple seminal significances that contribute to the big picture
to the WAY out there
where the constellations swirl in the space
between my ears

A-whispering of
Godly
Apostolic apertures
Prophetic precincts
Evangelistic environs
where the sheep may lie down beside the still waters
waiting to be stirred by the Word, The One who loves them most
The Good Shepherd, the Unshuttable Door to the people...
next door to the homeless, unroofed by the winds of corporate
greed to the naked, disrobed in the eye of the perfect
couturier's storm to the poor in spirit and hungry in soul

the Window of Heaven to
the world of the creatures
and cycles of nature
groaning for the restoration of habitat ..if
only I could get into the habit of fixing that!

I can?!

The time is here, at last it's come
The time I thought would come at last
At last has come
... to the some who choose to be the last parts of a total that is
more than the sum!
A synergistic completion, a spirited solution
A God-partnering story of sentness, rebirth and revolution
divinely inspired, divinely mandated, divinely potentialled
when humanity was dust-breath created

I'm here here I
stand with iPad
in hand
portal to the spirit of the age, the inscape of time

mirror to mimetic mayhem, perpetually reinventing scenes from primal humanity's
crime Stop
And
Cease
Resist and
Earnestly
Desist
... re-image the apple by fruitfulness in the Spirit

No more excuses
No more pardons to beg It's
time to mobilise time to
FORGE the way ahead
the new heavens and the new earth aWAYt

@new_uniVERSE
That's my name
That's what I'm called to... crEATe

(And just for the record in case
you're hard of hearing or
doubting of heart
be assured and strangely comforted that the future is in God's hands
and in it you have a part
Yes, you, too, can be WAY more than APEST!)

Thank you, Lucy. Lucy has just presented a brilliant example of her creative work. This was a finished work, but, before Lucy created it, she very likely experienced the things that I discuss in the following paper.

Dancing in the Creator's footsteps: Linking creativity theory and our life as Christian Artists

Today I want to introduce you to the model of creativity that I developed during my PhD studies; *The Bright Creative Life*. I have already published the theoretical base of *The Bright Creative Life*¹. So, instead of talking about that today, I am going to give you brief explanations and then lead you in some practical exercises that involve writing things down and sharing some of your ideas with others. In this way, I hope you might understand better how this approach could be relevant to you in your life.

For these exercises, I need you to form small groups of just 4 or 5 people and have paper and pen ready.

During this presentation, I will often give examples from my own study. I also give examples from Maori art, since Maori are the indigenous people of my country, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Introduction

In terms of ontology and epistemology, *The Bright Creative Life* emerges from a feminist participatory approach informed by Indigenous Peoples' worldviews (FP-I). The *Bright Creative Life* reveals a broader understanding of the everyday lived experience of creative individuals.

I developed this approach as a result of my PhD study alongside nine other solo female art-makers from various age groups, ethnicities and art-making areas in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a dance-maker, I was one of the participants, as well as being the researcher and facilitator of the reflective practice in art-making of the other nine women. These nine women were all living and working in their art in the region where I live. I was the only dancer in the group. For the study, each art-maker undertook several months of art-making in her own area and then I met with her three times to help her reflect on what she had been doing and learning. I wished to help each woman to think about and learn from what she had been doing. But I also wanted to gain insights concerning creativity and the lived experiences of these women; one of the outcomes was the model I named *The Bright Creative Life*. *The Bright Creative Life* includes *preferring, practising, gathering, selecting, finding quiet spaces, laying creative work aside, and ritual, prayer and meditation*.

Of course, we all need to focus in a special way to produce a particular art work, such as a dance. However, *The Bright Creative Life* highlights the fact that **we are creative people all of the time**, and our creativity is interwoven with the whole of our life, not just during the time we spend actually creating a work. This model acknowledges that the whole of our life as Christians is important and relevant to us as creative people. Therefore, it includes our spirituality, our prayer life, and our use of time, as well as all the other aspects of working creatively. Since we know that our God is Creator, we can seek His ideas on what creativity is. I believe that my model reflects how God views creativity.

So, let's look more closely at the model of *The Bright Creative Life*. Today, I am using both words and pictures because I want to show that creativity cannot be explained through words alone. The non-rational, the non-verbal and what I call the non-verbalisable (something that cannot be put into words at all) are important in our lives, particularly if we know God, our Creator. Sometimes we need to act out our thoughts first, maybe through dance, music or drawing. Sometimes we need to pray, to listen to God and to sense what He is telling us. Then we might be able to find words to describe what we know. So, in the exercises today, you may need to act out your answers to my questions before you can find the words to talk to the others in your group.

First of all, I present the model as a box with words scattered (Diagram 1). In the spaces between the words, we can imagine all the many parts of our life that are part of our own creativity, yet that we cannot express in words. These spaces will include our relationships, responsibilities and our many everyday activities.

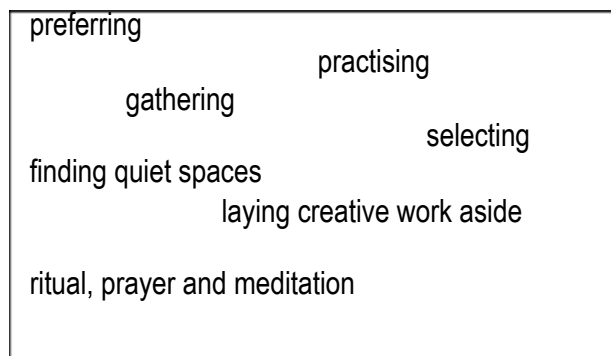


Diagram 1: The Bright Creative Life

As I mentioned before, the creative lived experience of an individual can be described in terms of seven groups of actions: *preferring*, *practising*, *gathering*, *selecting*, *finding quiet spaces*, *laying creative work aside* and *ritual, prayer and meditation*. By placing ritual, prayer and meditation last, I am not signaling that it is of least importance but that this aspect is vital and undergirds all the other things.

As creative people, we understand that creativity is interwoven with spirituality, culture and other areas of lived experience. However, [and experienced English speakers may understand this], by using titles that are verbs, or action words, expressed in the continuous tense, I indicate both the ongoing nature of the creative processes for creative individuals and the interweaving of their creative activities with other aspects of their daily lived experience.

Preferring



Photograph 1: Preferring: Debbie Bright; ICDF Conference; Grimes Photography Dallas, Texas, USA

The first feature of the lived experience of a creative individual is that she/he often has a preference for a particular genre, style or area of expertise. So we may prefer a particular genre, but we may have a preference even within this genre. Thus, one Māori weaver may prefer to work with very fine threads and a particular range of colours, while another may prefer to use less traditional approaches to finish and neatness. One dancer may prefer to work within the genre of contemporary dance while another may prefer ballet or hip-hop. A creative individual may even have a preference within a particular style or genre. For instance, a dance-maker may prefer to work with live music, or without any music, using shapes and motion from nature or in the style of a particular historical genre. A dance-maker may also prefer to draw material from her/his immersion in spiritual, cultural or ecological worlds; she/he may wish to communicate these concerns in order to bring about political or attitude changes, enrich audience members, or influence atmosphere, mood or spiritual climate.

Practical Exercise

Questions: What is the area of dance (or other form of art including writing) that you prefer to work in right now?

Has that changed over your life time?

Write down your answers and then share with your small group [5 mins]

Practising



Photograph 2: Practising at Beersheva in Israel, Jerusalem Prayer Watch 2012: Debbie Bright; Lucy Jarasius photographer

Practising: the daily hard work of gaining skills—the unseen factor that enables an individual to produce creative works, ideas and solutions. Such work habits are evident in the life of a Māori poi dancer who practices her poi even while having a conversation with others or waiting for a kettle to boil, or an architect or painter who fills notebooks with drawings and design ideas, an engineer who jots calculations and drawings on scraps of paper while riding on a bus, a writer who writes for a certain number of hours each day, or a dancer who appears to be dancing even while sleeping. The practice arising out of these work habits builds up the skill of the individual. Thus, practising is a vital element of creative process.

Practical Exercise

List the ways you practise/ work at your area of dance/ arts. If your area is spontaneous dance, what do you do to practice? Talk to your group about your practising.

Gathering



*Photograph 3: **Gathering:** Debbie Bright, on the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, Jerusalem Prayer Watch 2012; Lindy Bravo photographer*

When encouraged to talk about their lives, many creative individuals (including those in my study) mention that gathering is an everyday part of their lived experience. Thus, a dance-maker might note that her gathering includes resources such as fibres, plants, feathers, fabrics, concepts, shapes, textures, colours, music, sounds, words, and/or movement ideas. Some creative people gather their ideas into shelves, drawers, particular rooms or video clips, while others organise drawings, photographs, verbal ideas and phrases or samples of materials into books or journals. Some designate particular forms of gathering to particular spaces or journals. Others view such recording as a heritage for their children. For some creative individuals, the everyday world provides many sources for gathering. For others, gathering takes place as they visit particular shops, exhibitions or events.

As a dance-maker, I gather many items such as pictures, drawings, poems, concepts, words or movement ideas, seen or danced. I may see such movement ideas in my everyday life through other people, animals, plants, trees, wind, fire, water or inanimate objects such as bicycles or cars. I may notice movements that occur through the whole body or individual body parts, or as gestures, shapes or pathways made in and through space. I may also get movement ideas from interactions between living beings and inanimate objects such as watching a dog chase and fetch a ball or a child lift a spoonful of food from plate to mouth.

Practical Exercise

What do you collect? Music? Songs? Movement ideas? Things you hear people say?
Current issues?

Talk to your group about **one** thing you have seen or done recently that has inspired you or got you thinking about how you could use it in a creative project.

Selecting



*Photograph 4: **Selecting:** Debbie Bright dancing 'Faithful' in her church;
Kelly Mitchell photographer*

Selecting concerns choosing particular items or ideas that you think are useful to your particular creative project. While creative individuals may talk of gathering many items, often with no particular art-making project in mind, they also appear to have a more direct approach to selecting materials, ideas or concepts for a specific creative project. At least three different approaches may be taken in the individual choices of such selecting:

- a combination of rational and intuitive senses;
- the intuitive sense alone; or
- making individual choices but seeking feedback and confirmation from a knowledgeable and respected other.

The following are examples of selecting from the experiences of three different women who participated in my study (Bright, 2013b).

The first example concerns a photographer. This woman maintains that she experiences tension between the intuitive and rational, between gathering and selecting items, and

photographic techniques for specific projects. She views her gathering as instinctive, but switches to what she calls product-focused cognitive conceptual frameworks when arranging materials for a photograph and the technical practicalities of managing a camera and the photographs.

Secondly, a quilt-maker speaks only of her intuitive sense of what looks and feels right. Such an intuitive sense may have been built on extensive experience of the particular field of quilt-making. Any cognitive learning has been 'absorbed' into the collection of aesthetic and practical elements of the preferred genre, style or area of expertise. Decisions concerning selection appear to be made without the individual being aware of any cognitive effort.

Finally, a Māori photographer maintains that she employs non-rational, non-verbal and non-verbalisable senses as she selects particular photographs for an exhibition. However, she also seeks advice from a knowledgeable and respected elder from her culture. This art-maker attempts to explain how and why she has selected particular photographs but says that she notices how a figure or scene in a photograph 'speaks' to her. However, she does not make her decisions alone. She seeks out a knowledgeable elder to view her photographs, hear how she plans to display them and then give feedback and permission concerning her desire to display photographs of particular respected old people, some of whom have already died.

Practical Exercise

Can you think of a time when you changed something in your creative work; maybe you changed some of the choreography in a dance or you re-worked a piece of writing and made changes? Talk briefly to your group about it.

Finding quiet spaces



*Photograph 5: Finding quiet spaces: A beach in New Zealand;
Debbie Bright photographer*

The fifth aspect of creative process, finding quiet spaces, is mentioned by numerous writers. Many creative individuals are busy people with many responsibilities apart from their creative work. Thus, in my study, the other women and I negotiated times and places to meet for conversations, and managed postponements and interruptions within conversations and our many activities, responsibilities and commitments. We agreed that we all needed to be creative about how and when we could undertake our art-making (Bright, 2013b).

Some creative people find that they work best at night, even at 2 am, when it is quiet and there are no interruptions. Others find that once they are in a specific place their creativity is stimulated. This space may be in a special outdoor place or in a designated room such as a workshop, study, darkroom or dance or sound studio. This empty space could be a blank canvas for a painter, or a composer simply sitting down at a piano to see what happens.

The art-makers in my study also spoke of this quiet space as an area in which they could develop and complete their creative work. They expressed the need for the solitude provided by such spaces. It was in their quiet space that they were able to reflect on how to achieve particular creative solutions. As a dance-maker, I also find that I work best when I have time alone in the quiet of a dance studio. This quiet space allows me room to dance and to write and draw in my journal, and also to speak my thoughts aloud.

This idea of finding quiet spaces does not appear to be part of the creative processes of western theorists like Balkin (1990), Csikszentmihalyi (1996) or Gardner (1993, 2004, 2006). Perhaps these theorists studied artists who had designated times and spaces for their creative activities in ways that are not possible for many creative people, particularly women with family responsibilities. In this case, an FP-I worldview highlights a broader approach to creative process.

Practical Exercise

When and where do you work best on your creative projects? Do you need a special place or time? Do you need quiet to focus or have music playing? Do you need to be alone or with others? Do you need to be alone in a room or at your computer? Talk briefly to your group about your quiet space.

Laying Creative Work Aside



Photograph 6: Laying Creative Work Aside: Debbie Bright; the Island of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland, 2015; Martyn Offord photographer

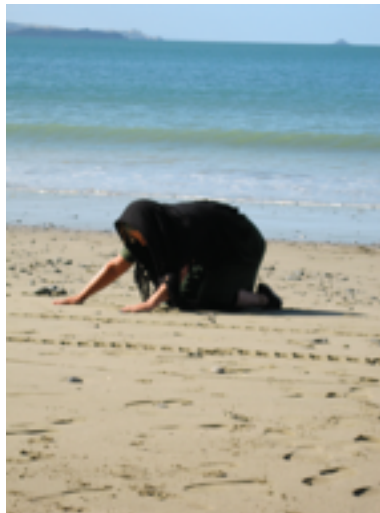
For many artists, including dancers, a resting time appears to be a necessary pause in the flow of creativity. Tharp (2006) asserts that the creative person will make better progress if she/he allows space for refreshment and reflection in order that new revelation and creative solutions to problems may emerge. However, for some artists this act of laying creative work aside is also viewed as a spiritual element of the art-making.

In my dance-making, I have a sense of when it is time to stop trying to develop a dance work, to allow my subconscious mind and spirit to keep working on current physical and/or conceptual problems, to pray, meditate and reflect on what I am trying to do.

Practical Exercise

Do you agree with the idea of laying creative work aside? Have you found that, if you are struggling to create something or feeling tired, then, if you leave the work for a while, you quickly find solutions to your problems when you come back to the work? Do you find you need to leave the work for a particular length of time? A few hours? A day? A week? Till you are in bed at night? Talk briefly about your experiences.

Ritual, Prayer and Meditation



*Photograph 7: Ritual, prayer and meditation; Debbie Bright;
Orere Point, New Zealand, 2014, Natalie Dowd photographer²*

The final area of creative process concerns the performance of ritual, prayer and/or meditation prior to and during periods of art-making.

Most of the participants in my study spoke specifically in terms of exercises such as prayer or spiritual rituals. The rituals included cultural customs, such as the customs of flax gathering or seeking a name, whakapapa (genealogy) and whakatauki (proverb) for a particular artwork, as well as individual habits such as taking a particular route, eating particular foods, walking in circles, or prayer. Dreams, visions, cultural understandings and prayers were, at times, mentioned together as pertaining to the spiritual *and* the

creative. In my dance-making, I generally engage in physical warm-up exercises, lying motionless on the floor and walking around the dance studio several times, and praying as I prepare physically, emotionally, spiritually and creatively.

For us Christians, this area is vitally important and a natural part of what we do. We seek to dance in the footsteps of our Creator. Therefore, we pray to God, our creator, the One we worship. We pray for those who will see our work, and ask for God to use us in His redeeming work.

Practical Exercise

In your small group, pray together. Briefly tell each other of any areas for which you would like prayer (one sentence, one request). This prayer may be about a difficult situation in your dance group, a piece of creative work that you are finding hard to complete, a particular performance or presentation that you are working towards now.

The importance of The Bright Creative Life

There are at least five ways in which this particular approach contributes to knowledge in the area of creativity:

1. *The Bright Creative Life* arises out of an FP-I worldview and celebrates the breadth and richness of feminist, participatory, indigenous and non-western understandings while embracing any western expressions of creativity any and creative process deemed useful, particularly in development of dance or other art works.
2. The gaps in the approach acknowledge that the lived experience of any creative person includes relationships, responsibilities and activities that may be influenced by areas such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic and/or geographic positioning.
3. *The Bright Creative Life* was developed by a dance-maker/dance researcher and has been found to be useful for dance-makers and dance researchers.
4. *The Bright Creative Life* was developed as a result of a study among a group of women from a wide range of art-making areas and, therefore, can be seen as an approach that is developed by a dancer but is useful for people from a range of art-making areas.

5. *The Bright Creative Life* has emerged from the art-making community, yet is relevant for creative people from any area in life.
6. The model was developed by a Christian dancer looking for new ways to study the world, as a Christian. This approach is useful for both Christians and non-Christians.

In this paper, I have presented a very brief outline of an FP-I worldview and *The Bright Creative Life*. But the focus of this paper has been on practical applications of the approach, rather than the theoretical underpinnings. Finally, I identified five ways in which *The Bright Creative Life* contributes to knowledge in the area of creativity and of Christian scholarship.

Notes

1 The approach called *The Bright Creative Life* is described in detail in Bright, D. A. (2014) *Te Auahatanga me te ara auaha Creativity and Creative Process*, 2nd edition. Hamilton New Zealand: D A Bright.

Also in *Te auahatanga me te ara auaha: The Bright Creative Life in Dance Research Aotearoa* [Online Journal], 2, 2014, 52-80.

2 The dance was performed as part of Beachcombers: Orere Point Community Beach Dance Project 2014. Directors: Dr Linda Ashley and Dance Incorporated; Contributors: Jane Carter and Natalia Dowd.; funded by Auckland Council Creative Communities Grant.

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- ⁱ The term *worldview*, as used here, can be understood as similar to *paradigm*
- ⁱⁱ Ethical permission for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of The University of Waikato.
- ⁱⁱⁱ While *whakapapa* can be similar to the English term *genealogy*, in this case, it is used to mean *the conceptual forebears*.
- ^{iv} Because Māori are the Indigenous Peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori language and understandings are often evident in sub-titles and content within this paper.
- ^v The brief definitions in this paragraph are summaries of descriptions given in Bright (2013a). For fuller descriptions of all of the areas in this paragraph, see Bright (2013a, pp. 8–15).
- ^{vi} Here I speak of feminism, in general, but I frequently also refer to feminisms, because there are numerous forms of feminism.
- ^{vii} A participatory worldview has emerged from a marginalised area of western scholarship and participatory understandings have been affirmed by writers from both feminist and Indigenous Peoples' worldviews.
- ^{viii} The term fundamental beliefs, as used here, can be understood as similar to ontology.
- ^{ix} Kaupapa Māori, as used in this paper, refers to Māori worldviews and particularly their outworking in educational contexts.
- ^x Kana & Tamatea (2006, p. 18).
- ^{xi} Embodied knowing is knowing in and through the body and is a result of all previous and current influences of such areas as personal history, culture, gender, sexuality and beliefs, and the social, physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual and spiritual (see Bright, 2013a, for a fuller description).
- ^{xii} Culture, spirituality, embodied knowing and creativity were all viewed as relevant and important to me as a dancer and also to the other art-makers in the study and, therefore, are also clearly evident in *The Bright Creative Life*.
- ^{xiii} Reason & Bradbury (2001).
- ^{xiv} Ibid. (2001, p. 8).
- ^{xv} Park (2001, p. 85).
- ^{xvi} For descriptions of each of the ways of knowing found in the literature of each worldview, see Bright (2013a, pp. 19–33).
- ^{xvii} For fuller descriptions of values see Bright (2013a, pp. 34-35)
- ^{xviii} For fuller descriptions of the nature of power, see Bright (2013a, pp. 36-38)
- ^{xix} Csikszentmihalyi (1996) proposes both “Big C” as the eminent individual and “little c” as generally creative people. However, in his writing, Csikszentmihalyi appears to focus mainly on “Big C” individuals.
- ^{xx} The views of Janesick and Tharp are particularly relevant to this paper, since both are women who are engaged in dance. Nevertheless, Tharp’s approach echoes dominant western views of individual innovation and development of a creative product and is based on western institutionally based training.
- ^{xxi} Lifting the spirits implies that a sense of positivity is encouraged spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, in the perception of belongingness and other areas.
- ^{xxii} There are some western writers, most of whom are women, who emphasise such areas.
- ^{xxiii} Questions addressed by western writers include what is creativity, how is the term creativity understood, where is creativity, who can be deemed as creative and how is creativity learned and expressed?
- ^{xxiv} It must also be noted that Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) examples of creative individuals are almost solely drawn from western culture. Such an approach indicates that colonisation, oppression and marginalisation are at work in this context. Gardner’s (1993) inclusion of Gandhi as a culture- changing individual stands out as one of the few non-western individuals mentioned in such a context. However, it must be noted that Gardner’s (1993) work concerns his (at that time) seven intelligences rather than creativity per se. A similar understanding of inclusivity can be found in dance where perception of creativity in dance can vary across cultures and social contexts; there may be both similarities and differences from one culture to another (Morris, 2005).

^{xxv} On the other hand, like numerous other western writers, Gardner emphasises the need for an end product as measurable evidence of creativity.

^{xxvi} It must be noted that, in the work of prominent western writers, the examples given of people and their creative process are almost all male, and westerners or non-westerners who work in the west. ^{xxvii} This four-phase process is often referred to by researchers in various fields as Wallas' creative process. However, Wallas' original creative process was comprised of five phases (Wallas, 1926).

^{xxviii} Dance-making is also viewed by some theorists as a metaphor for the processes of academic research

^{xxix} In this case, I am referring to the generations of teachers teaching others; these others in turn become teachers of the next generation. This understanding was explained to me by one of the participants in my study who identifies herself as Māori. This art-maker explained only with use of

gestures and drawn circles. I understood completely what she meant but have found it extraordinarily difficult to explain using words in English.

^{xxx} Trance dance is also known as ecstatic dance.

^{xxxi} Tharp (2006) expresses the area of practice with particular richness. However, numerous other writers also discuss the importance of hard work as a background to the development of creative work.