

# Support Creativity Now! Before It Is Too Late!

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Creativity research and development are thriving as never before. But I believe the field faces four daunting challenges that need to be addressed. Our time for addressing these challenges is running out. We need to support, encourage, and reward creativity—while we still can.

The first challenge is increasing emphasis across the world on standardized tests that emphasize rote memory and some analysis. The problem with people who are socialized to be very analytically smart—smart in the ways of IQ tests—is that, often, their upbringing emphasizes memory and analytical skills at the expense of creative skills. They simply have no incentive to be creative because there are no rewards for having creative ideas. I pointed this out more than 30 years ago. One ends up with students and then professionals who are analytically much smarter than they are creative, not because they cannot be creative, but rather because they never learned how.

Yet, creativity is more important than ever before. In the past, hyper-analytical individuals had trouble “making it” in the fields of research and development because they inadequately developed their creative skills. But today, they can bypass peer review and go on the Internet and social media. They have a voice. But the kind of voice that often most reverberates through social media seems to be the destructive one—the one that tears people, their ideas, and acts apart. Even leaders of countries have learned this lesson and used it. The risk is that we are producing a generation that will be good at critique and blame, but not so good at construction and creation. And this brings me to my second point.

Second, politicians have learned that, to be dictators, they do not have to follow the lead of Hitler

and Stalin. They can appeal through populism to people’s emotions—to their sense of grievance and, they think, just entitlement. The playbook of the new dictators, on all of our continents, is the same—lash out at imagined enemies and watch people feeling deprived lap it up. When people hear this kind of drivel, they often suspend their critical thinking and their creativity and allow themselves to be exploited by fraudulent national (or organizational) saviors. These leaders are negatively creative. It is not enough to develop creativity, something we all have been trying to do. Rather, we need to develop positive creativity—the kind of creativity that will help save the world rather than destroy it. How much time do we have? I don’t know. The world’s problems won’t wait for us to come to them. We have to use our creativity now to create a better world rather than letting negative creativity destroy the world we have.

The third problem is that people are becoming increasingly susceptible to joining mobs. After World War II, if people learned anything, it was of the danger of mobs instinctively doing whatever they want. The United States, as an example, has a history of mob oppression, especially against black people. A US politician in the State of Mississippi, living in a country that publicly hanged black people, recently joked that “If he [a cattle rancher] invited me to a public hanging, I’d be on the front row.” She apparently thought this was funny and the audience clapped loudly. She refused to apologize. She was re-elected. Kristallnacht in Germany could be just a memory were it not for the fact that anti-semitic mobs are still attacking Jewish individuals and synagogues. Mobs, which went out of fashion after World War II, are again appearing in many countries around the world.

Academics are far from immune: A British academic was recently mobbed—attacked viciously online by numerous other academics—for taking what, for the mobbers, was an unpopular scholarly position. The mobbers claimed that the academic's work was seriously flawed, without any supporting evidence at all. What incentive is there to be creative when mobbers, even academics, are just waiting to jump on those whose scholarly positions disagree with their own? A reaction of many scholars and others will be just to keep their heads down. Who wants to have to go into hiding for fear that they or their family will be attacked, not only online, but possibly physically? Thus, we cannot blame just the politicians. We as well have to blame ourselves. After all, who is it electing the politicians who advocate for mob rule?

The fourth problem is how to capitalize on the positive, wonderful uses of creativity being seen today, such as in medicine with new techniques for fighting diseases, in communications where we can talk to and collaborate with people internationally and cross-culturally in ways that were never possible before, and in the field of creativity itself, with researchers learning more and more about how to teach for creativity. We now know, better than ever, what we can do in classrooms to develop creative learners and thinkers. For example, we now know that creativity is not some kind of fixed, inborn trait, or really even a trait at all. It is in part a devel-

oped and developing ability, but also in part an attitude toward life—a willingness to defy the crowd, one's own former beliefs, and the world-view (or *Zeitgeist*) that most people accept without even being aware of it. How can we convince schools and organizations in general to put into practice what creativity researchers and developers have learned so that schooling reflects our current knowledge of learning and thinking, not the knowledge of centuries ago?

In sum, creativity is more important today than ever before. But we have to create an environment hospitable to its success. Standardized tests, populist politicians, mobs (including mobs of scholars), and lack of capitalization on creative ideas stand in our way. Will we let them? Or will we decide that creativity is so important that we must not only protect it, but do everything we can to encourage it? I hope we will decide on the latter. Climate change appears to be speeding up. Income disparities are creating resentment and hatred around the world. Pollution is causing millions of premature deaths. We cannot afford to be complacent. If we do not encourage creativity now, we may not even have later a world in which to be creative. If we do not care enough to encourage creativity for our peers and ourselves, please, let's at least do it for our children so that they may have the same dreams and opportunities we have been able to have.

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