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Matthew Worwood:

Hello everyone. My name is Dr. Matthew Werwood.

Cyndi Burnett:

And my name is Dr. Cindy Burnett.

Matthew Worwood:

This is the fueling creativity in education. Podcast.

Cyndi Burnett:

On this podcast, we'll be talking about various creativity topics and how they relate to the fields of education.

Matthew Worwood:

We'll be talking with scholars, educators, and resident experts about their work, challenges they face, and exploring new perspectives of creativity.

Cyndi Burnett:

All with a goal to help fuel a more rich and informed discussion that provides teachers, administrators, and emerging scholars with the information they need to infuse creativity into teaching and learning.

Matthew Worwood:

So let's begin. Welcome back to our double espresso episode with Dr. James Kaufman. In the first part of our interview, we explored the various creativity topics related somewhat to the book. But if we confess, we got a little bit sidetracked with our conversation around artificial intelligence. So in the second part of our interview, we're going to dig a lot more further into the concept of the creative advantage and other concepts that James highlights in his book.

Cyndi Burnett:

So James, in your new book, *The Creativity Advantage*, you unpack a new model that explores five areas self, insight, healing, connection, drive, and legacy. So we want to tap into each of these a

little bit with you, but before we do, I want to know what led you to develop this model.

James Kaufman:

In the past, I've done different consulting, working with school systems or organizations or things like that. And it would tend to be the same pattern, where there would be one person who was really excited about creativity, and I would be brought in and I would meet people and we would begin stuff and invariably and sometimes it would be a year, sometimes it would be three years, but that person would eventually leave. And then I would never hear from that organization, school district, whatever again. And I realized creativity researchers aren't always great at talking about why people should care. We assume it's important because we care about it and because most people say they do. I mean, I remember years ago I was giving a job talk and somebody in the audience who didn't like me asked something to the effect of, well, we know that if you were to get a grant and study reading or motivation, it would do all of these things. But if you were to get a grant, be able to study creativity, what would that do? What would be the point? And I totally flubbed the question, didn't get the job because it was something I'd never really thought about having to bend creativity as being important. And it got me thinking. I did a paper with Marie Thorgiard where we just looked, do we look at creativity as predicting other stuff? And it turns out, no, we really don't. Most studies either see how is creativity related to another construct or what predicts creativity? There's very little on what does creativity predict? And if we look at what's out there, there's a bunch of stuff on things like creativity and GPA or creativity and work performance, and there's a link. But the problem, I mean, being really honest is it's not a super convincing link. I mean, it's there, but if you want your kid to get better grades or to do better on the SATS, your first thought or second thought or 15th thought is not going to be, I need to make sure my kids create. So if I had a kid and I wanted to, okay, I do have a kid, if I wanted my kids to do better in school, there's no hypothetical children I need to think about, I would not be thinking, I must get them to be more creative. I mean, in part, I can't get them to do anything as it you know, that would be when, okay, well, I would try to get them to be more conscientious or work on their study skills or whatever. I wrote a target article for Matrik Karwski's journal. Creativity Theory, Applications and Research. It's just a great online journal. And there were a bunch of responses, and it was interesting because there were some responses that pointed out, well, Big C is there. And that's absolutely true. I mean, nobody argues, what's the point of creative genius?

Matthew Worwood:

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James Kaufman:

That's not something nobody's ever had to defend genius. And Dean Simonton wrote kind of a beautiful response where he pointed this out, and no pro C, you know, talking about, well, the people who are creative at their jobs, people tend not to doubt that too much, although, conversely, even that people push back against. There's more of an anti creativity bias than one might think. I don't think it's profound. But, like, while I was writing the book, I read a fantastic study where they analyzed these speeches that the CEOs would give to their shareholders. And they found that whenever they would talk about things like innovation or change or creativity, long term profits would go up. But over the next month, the shareholders would drop. This would dump the stock. So we say we want creativity usually except for that one person during the job talk. But do we want it? Do we even know what it is? I mean, there's been all these studies about do people know what creativity is? And often they will use teachers and usually to be like, AHA, teachers don't know what creativity is, but it's not like anybody is any better. And in general, I'm not a big fan of studies that try to make teachers look bad because almost every teacher I've ever encountered with my boys has been great in busting their butt and trying real hard and caring about creativity. That came up. But a lot of times when we say we

want creativity, we mean we want a little bit of creativity within what we already know, or we want somebody to creatively figure out how to do exactly what I tell them cheaper and faster. So I began thinking, well, what are the good other benefits of creativity? And I've been very interested in the mental health issue in part kind of the Maya Copa, because about oh, Lord, over 20 years ago, I did a study called the Sylvia Plath Effect. It was a little tiny, it wasn't tiny it was historiometrics of a ton of people. But it was just looking, oh, among famous writers, look, female poets are more likely to show signs of mental illness compared to other writers. And it kind of got blown out of proportion and it will probably still be the main thing people would ever associate with me, which is kind of depressing. But I began noticing the flip side then, okay, well, you have the work of James Pennebaker and his colleagues who talk about the writing cure and how the narrative has all this power to do all this physical and psychological health benefits. There's a whole line of research that I still think it's brilliant. It started out of Ellen Winter's lab, where at first it was just, well, does art therapy work? And yes, it does. Tracing is not as good as drawing. But then they're like, okay, well, let's see which is better. Is it better if you draw something that is expressing yourself? And usually they would make somebody feel sad or angry. So either have them draw about these feelings or just draw something fun that makes you happy. And as I was reading the article, I'm like, oh, well, of course expressing inventing will do better and that's more know therapy. You should go and spill your guts. Nope, it turns out art helps because it makes you feel good. And then Jen Drake has done all of these great studies showing that distraction is kind of I mean, if you think about mean, maybe the world has always been a big trash can fire. It probably has been. I mean, we were burning witches at the stake and we were doing all sorts of horrible things in the past, but certainly today it seems like whenever you turn on the news, there is something else that is just horrible. So yeah, if you do something where you make a little drawing, you write something, you play a little music, yeah, it makes you feel better and you're not thinking about the world being a trash can fire and you feel better about life for a few minutes. And you know what, that's okay. And I can't actually working with Jen on some more stuff, exploring this.

Matthew Worwood:

James, I have to come in here when I was reading that section and I hope you either can tell me now I don't have to worry or your future work is going to tell me I don't have to worry. But I couldn't help but think that my younger son is always drawing and I think he's drawing as a distraction. And I know that you had written that kind

of like drawing seems to have more of an impact than writing per se, but my elder son is always writing and they seem to do it as a distraction. So I found myself all night wondering, what are they trying to distract themselves from in the house? I mean, is it me? Is it what the conversations my wife and I are having? But I did go away wondering. I thought he was like maybe showing signs of gifted and talentedness, but now I'm kind of worrying that actually he's showing signs of needing to distract himself from a chaotic Whirlwind environment or he's.

James Kaufman:

Showing signs of outstanding emotional regulation and being in touch with whenever he's feeling something that is not good and making himself feel better. I mean, the thing that I wonder is how much is the creativity? How much is the distraction? So my boys are more likely to play in their phones than to draw or write. And part of me wants to know and part of me doesn't like, well, is that healthy? Is that good for them? Is it not good for them?

Cyndi Burnett:

Speaking of the healing chapter, which is what you're referring to, I really liked the piece on emotional equilibrium. And what I particularly loved, again, your humor everyday blas begging to be overcome because it wasn't just about trauma, but it was also about those small moments where you're just having a bad day. And it made me reflect on the teachers who listen to our podcast to like how can they, James, use creativity to overcome those flaws that are begging to be overcome?

James Kaufman:

I think there's a number of ways, certainly doing a creative activity that you enjoy, even briefly distracts you. It's enjoyable. But beyond that, I also think, for example, and I'm touching on some of the other chapters, if you're creative with people, I mean, co creation can be very powerful. I know that you've had Vlad Glavinu on and he does masterful work with this, but being creative together can connect you. I mean, seeing creative work makes you feel connected. Jeff Smith and the museum effect, where when you're in an art museum, you just feel like you're a citizen of the world. And one of the things that I found very, very compelling as I was going through all this stuff, sometimes we can feel the blas because we don't see the bigger picture. We don't necessarily see, why am I doing this? What's the point? And I got really into a lot of Robert Lifton's ideas who talked about this idea of symbolic immortality. I mean, all of us are going to die. About five years ago, I had a heart attack while I was

changing planes. And it's not a coincidence that started me thinking about this stuff. But if we know we're going to die, how do we cope with that? How does that not go from daily blahs to existential devastation? And it's not just creativity. Obviously. It's not like creativity is the only solution. There are many ways people handle this. One way is kids. It can be biological kids in terms of kind of that very specific, my genetic material, but also in general, mentoring, caring for kids, nurturing, teaching them, all of that is passing your values, your ideas, your thoughts, your beliefs. Some people turn to religion and spirituality. Some people turn to the idea of nature, the planet Earth, or just the idea of things that have always been there. And then there's creativity at the big sea level. It's obvious. I mean, we still know the name William Shakespeare. He's been dead for many, many years. We still know all of these past creators, artists, scientists, inventors, all these people who've lived on. But it's not just Big C. It can be what is sometimes called a hero project where you're pro C, but you're working on a larger thing. I mean, if you think about it, just if you drive down the center of where you live on the main street, you'll see all sorts of buildings, and you have the architect who designed it. You have the people who actually built it. There are so many people who we may not remember, but whose contributions are still impactful. There are so many people who the average person doesn't know them, but people in the field do. I mean, as we were talking about on *The First Child of Espresso*, I believe all of us love theater. There are a lot of musical theater people who everybody knows. So Stephen Sondheim passed away recently. He's going to be remembered by I mean, maybe not the average person, but by many, many people, but there are so many other theater people who will be remembered. I mean, Salma Stretta was an actor who passed away last year. I had the good fortune of knowing him for many years. And his name may not mean anything, but when they filmed *Sweeney Todd* with Angela Lansbury. He played Pirelli. And anybody who's seen that video of *Sweeney Todd* has known his work. If you've listened to the original Broadway cast of *Avita*, he was in the show. So it's that being part of something. But even beyond that, creativity can be this legacy that lives on. The example that I give probably too much at this point is my Grandma Blanche later in life got into painting. I have no idea if she was good or not. I'm not good at that. Think probably she was not incredible, but she painted pretty flowers, and I was close to her. And after she passed away, I got two of the nice paintings of flowers, and they are hanging in my living room. It's nice like I see it. And would I love these paintings if I picked them up at a thrift store? No. It is that connection, but it's that way, where a memoir, scrapbooking, family recipes, there are all these

things that we can pass on no matter what our creativity level is where our loved ones will care.

Matthew Worwood:

I love that James and I remember speaking a little bit about that and sharing the story of my grandfather, who had a sense of purpose after he discovered his painting and to a certain extent, his painting skills after he retired from his work. He was a coal miner. Now, what I do want to do is kind of bring this into the classroom environment a little bit and talk a little bit around insight, know, coherence, and this idea of kind of reflecting on your past. And when I was reading this section of the book, I found myself making a connection to some of my students at the University of Connecticut, particularly the first year students, who are trying to find out what concentration they should be doing in our major. And I think a lot of educators probably can relate to I don't know what I want to do. I don't know what degree I want to pursue. I don't know what school I want to go to. And to a certain extent, there's this feeling of not always knowing your future. But in that chapter, the idea of kind of reflecting and identifying meaning, finding meaning of what you're doing, made me think about helping students find meaning in their everyday activities that they might do in a classroom environment or the everyday activities that bring them joy outside the classroom environment and maybe focus a little bit more on the short term, making sure that they're kind of like pursuing a degree or pursuing an experience that allows them to continue to engage in these activities that bring them joy. So I was making that connection, but I kind of haven't got to the point where I kind of would know how I might facilitate that aspect in a classroom environment. And so I wanted to kind of share that with you and see if you had any advice for educators who might want to try and help students in a similar situation identify meaning in what they're doing with their everyday activities? Because of course, I'm now going off with a tangent. Some of the activities we're getting them to do in a traditional K through twelve setting. They might not necessarily find meaning in what they're doing and there might be.

James Kaufman:

A disconnect reflect, write about, think about if you want to have them more looking forward, think about different possibilities of a career. What do they want both from the end goal but also the process? What are they willing to do? How does that dovetail with their interests, with their passions? Because certainly when I teach Yukon students there's a very wide range where some people are majoring in something they are passionate about and they're doing it

because they love it. And you have a lot of people who are pursuing something because it will get them a job and it will make them money and that's totally understandable too. Some of the work that I really like is by Michael Pratt and he calls it work orientation. But I don't want that to scare off people who aren't in business because I think it applies to almost anything where the idea is why do people have the job they have? But I think you could swap that out for a lot of things. There's one that he calls job and that's one of those I need money and so I work. So job orientation is basically well, I have this job and I need to make money but at the student level that's well, I am going to class because that is what I have to do. I want to get good grades because that's why I'm going to class. It's a very direct path. There's career orientation which is more about advancement and that's more the kids who want to do well for advancement purposes. So I want to get into the honors class, I want to get into the AP classes because I have my heart set on this college and I know I'll need the extracurriculars, et cetera, et cetera. There's calling or service and that's where you feel that passion about what you want to do. It's not necessarily the process of doing it, but the goal so that's the students who volunteer at the animal shelter on weekends or who are trying to work on saving the environment and get the school to reduce the carbon emissions the actual activities may not be enjoyable but they believe in this deeply. There's kinship in the workforce that the reason why I like my job or tolerate my job is I like the people I work with. I think that's an awful lot of students they like being around their fellow students and that's the main draw of school. You have craftsmanship in the workforce that's I want to improve, refine my skills, get better and that's the one I think you will see a little less of in the classroom. But certainly there are the students who want to improve and get better that are not worried at all about grades. I think that in the classroom, that might blend a little bit with some other stuff. And then there's passion that's I love, the actual stuff that I do. I think this is also related ultimately to identity. Who do we see that we are? Who do we want to be? I think all of this stuff, it ties into motivation, identity, coherence. And again, like a lot of this stuff, it's not just creativity, but it certainly is very interwoven with it.

Cyndi Burnett:

Thanks, James. So we need to wrap up, unfortunately. I think we could talk with you all day. I know I could talk to you all day about this book because I have so many questions still. But I do want to come to the question that we ask all of our guests. And you have answered this question before, but I'd really like you to answer this question

in the context of your book, *The Creativity Advantage*. So what are three tips that you would give educators to bring creativity into the classroom based on what you've discovered in writing this book?

James Kaufman:

When I was writing the first part, which was in my mind kind of like a little mini Creativity 101, it ended up being much more thematically linked than I really thought it would be. And I realized the connective thing that linked all my theories, in a sense, is trying to expand what we think of as creativity. So not in the way of like in *The Incredibles*, where the mom says everybody's special and then Dash says, that means nobody is. I don't mean everybody's creative, yay. But rather we don't recognize an awful lot of creativity, whether it's because somebody's creative in a weird domain, whether it's because somebody doesn't understand or acknowledge the concept of mini C, whether it's somebody is creative in a way that isn't obviously original. It's still creative and it still counts. It's why one of my little pet peeves is when popular articles or books use creativity and genius interchangeably, they're not the same. We aren't geniuses. Not everybody can be a genius. You can't just tap into your inner genius, that's kind of crap. But all of us can be creative. All of us can tap into our inner creator. That would be one thing. Another thing would be to recognize that although we have so many of these kind of stereotypes of the mad genius, creativity, and mental illness, or just creative kids being a pain in the ass, which honestly, they can be, it is actually much more associated with positive mental health than negative mental health. And when we're talking in the classroom, little C, mini C, you don't really find that negative stuff. And that seeing creativity as not necessarily just the outcome or the end goal, but also the benefit of the process, the positive personal things that come when somebody's creative. And the third would be connected to the first two in a sense that even when things are so often prescriptive or constrained or you must teach this material on this day in this way, there are still these small little ways of being creative within the box. That's why I hate the thinking outside the box, because thinking within the box is so much harder and yet so much more important in many ways. And being creative in these small little ways that still reach the end goal and can go under the radar of any administrators who don't like it, it's still possible and it's still worth it.

Matthew Worwood:

Well, James, thank you so much for coming back to the *Fueling Creativity in Education* podcast. It's been a pleasure to have you here, and hopefully we'll have you again on the show, possibly next

year. For teachers out there, I do want to do a plug for the creativity advantage because I thought it was a great book. Cindy's referenced the humor that you've added to the book as well, James, but I thought you did a really good balance between kind of sharing the knowledge that exists from the academic field of creativity, but then also offering that kind of Creativity 101 approach as well, particularly in the first part of the book. So I think it's a great book for teachers who are enjoying this show but haven't had the opportunity to dig deeper into the field of creativity. Because quite often in the podcast we talk a lot about for example, we mentioned Mini C and Little C and things like that, which you kind of elaborate a lot more in the book as well. So a huge plug to the book. I think it's fantastic. And as always, if you've got any questions for myself, James, Cindy, please reach out to us on questions@fuelingcreativitypodcast.com. My name's Matthew Warwood.

Cyndi Burnett:

And my name is Dr. Cindy Burnett. This podcast was produced by Matthew Warwood and Cindy Burnett. The episode was sponsored by Curiosity to create.