

THE CREATIVE JOURNEYS OF FILIPINO SOCIAL WORKERS IN PROGRAM AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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In an effort to understand the phenomenon of creativity in the Philippine context, this study seeks to highlight how social work practitioners themselves interpret creativity in their everyday lives. With the social work agency as context, the phenomenological inquiry focuses on the meanings which they attach to, or which they have of, creativity. Ten social workers specializing in program and policy development provide metaphorical themes and definitions of how they see themselves, their contributions, and the work that they do as creative. The creative journeys of social workers open the possibility for a Filipino notion of creativity and suggest the need for systematic theorizing in this area.

Key words: creativity, social work practice, phenomenology, program development, policy development, Filipino social work

Introduction

In Issue (2013) of this journal, the study on creativity of Filipino social workers analyzed the implications of its findings to governance establishing inter alia the absence of literature on the topic prior to this study, at least in the Philippine context (Nicolas, 2012; 2013) and more so in program and policy development. However, in other contexts, some studies have discussed the importance of creativity in macro-level social work (Nissen, 1997), generalist social work practice (Turner, 2002) and the relation of art and creative community practice to social change (Schubert, 2012). These three studies, together with the study being discussed (Nicolas, 2012; 2013) and one forthcoming (Nicolas, in process), are the only known studies (written in English) to have attempted at theorizing on creativity

in social work practice (as of time of publication). The creative journeys (Weisman, 1990) in this study show how, through retrospection of their experiences, participants are actually co-researchers in explicating the meaning of creativity in program and policy development.

Defining creativity is as hard a task as defining social work. Understanding how they work together is a doubly difficult feat. In an effort to understand the phenomenon of creativity in the Philippine context, this study seeks to highlight how social work practitioners themselves interpret creativity in their everyday lives. The inquiry focuses on the meanings which they attach to, or which they have of, creativity. The meanings of creativity may be formed through their everyday lived experiences, particularly in the context of the social work agency which are all part of the social workers' world expressed through the stories told of their 'here and now.'

The interaction of the social worker with the social work agency provides the context for the social worker to describe the conditions experienced in the organization. On the basis of his or her experiences, the social worker may develop ideas or concepts on how the organization appears to him or her and on how the organization impresses conditions and situations that shape the meanings that the social worker attaches to or has of creativity. The social worker's formation of meanings may also be derived from the various relationships and interactions inside and outside the social work agency, such as with clients and co-workers. Since the social work profession is reflective, the social worker's experiences in practice provide a rich description of creativity as a phenomenon in his or her professional practice.

For both contexts, the social worker may be involved in purposive transformation of the situation, the relationship of even the products and knowledge base in the work place. The social worker may not in everyday life consider this as creative, but if his or her experiences are put in context, those experiences will enable him or her to provide meanings of creativity – if indeed they are lived experiences of creativity. Thus, this study describes the phenomenon of creativity through the meanings expressed by the social workers involved in its making. Understanding these meanings based on the different context of their world provides answers to the research question, "What meanings do social workers involved in policy and program development give to creativity?"

Methodology

Using the phenomenological approach, this exploratory study looks into the participating social workers' perspectives on creativity as well as their process of developing the meanings they attach to creativity. As Schutz (1945) notes, meaning is "not a quality inherent to certain experiences emerging within our stream of consciousness but the result of an interpretation of a past experience looked at the present now with a reflective attitude" (p.535). Through reflection and self-awareness, the social worker may communicate through experience to show present representation of the meanings of creativity, seeing the relation of who they are and how they act (van Manen, 2014). This study therefore explores how participants interpret their actions in the *social world* and the ways individuals give meaning to *social phenomena*, using qualitative techniques in data gathering.

To draw out from the respondent social workers the meanings of creativity which they have associated with their practice of their profession or have derived from their everyday experiences in the workplace, the study utilized several methods, such as observation of actual practice, reflective exercises and in-depth interviews. As shown by previous studies on hermeneutic phenomenology, the use of reflective exercises facilitates the building of narratives or stories that help researchers to identify themes and sub-themes (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; van Manen, 2014). Reflective exercises were developed for gathering initial data on the creative works that the participants have been involved in.

While the aim of the exercises was to capture the terminologies used in vivo by the social workers in writing the narrative, they also provided the researcher with the opportunity to compare the written data with the text of the interviews (Wilson, 2002). This comparison increases the dependability of the data gathered (Huberman & Miles, 1998) and the 'faithfulness to the participants' constructs' (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). The responses from the reflective exercises were compared with those from the in-depth interviews to form a composite referred to here as 'creative journeys.'

The Creative Journeys of Social Workers

The themes later identified in this study are better understood by relating them to the personal meanings attached by social workers to creativity. These personal meanings, though may be verbally expressed,

are better illustrated through the experiences and stories of the social workers. For the purpose of this article, seven of the ten creative journeys of social workers were selected focusing on responses relevant to policy and program development.

Creativity as a ‘Secret Weapon’

Social Worker B finds policy research work innovative because it always offers something new to work on and does not follow any formula. She is given freedom to develop research proposals and considers the ‘nature of the job’ as a factor in being creative, or as she says, “*Talagang nasa klase ng trabaho yung creativity.*” For her, being able to create something from the beginning is an important aspect of creativity, “*Dito kasi yun ang maganda dito, ikaw talaga, sayo talaga magsisimula.*” (That is what’s nice in this Unit, everything will start from you.)

From her experience, Social Worker B says that creativity is like figuring out how to make ‘square wheels’ roll. More importantly, she considers creativity to be a secret weapon:

...pinakatatagu-tago mong armas na kailangan mo na talagang ilabas. Hindi mo naman siya agad-agad nailalabas kung hindi mo kinailangan eh. Kapag hindi siya hiningi ng panahon, ng opportunity, hindi mo agad siya makikitang lumalabas sa iyo.

(It is your secret weapon that you would not reveal if not needed. If the situation does not ask for it, if there is no opportunity, you will not see that weapon come out of you.)

So for Social Worker B, creativity is a secret weapon used only in situations which may be beyond one’s control. The secret weapon here is finding a solution in times of need, in reconfiguring elements to respond to ‘unforeseen blocks.’ She defines creativity as that which *makes a difficult job easier, so that one will not notice the work anymore.* She also says that verbal reinforcements are like triggers – when others notice her work to be creative, she becomes aware that she is creative.

To summarize Social Worker B’s concepts of creativity: *Creativity is both found in the person and seen in the work of the person. A person does not notice that he or she is creative until others point it out. Creativity is like a secret weapon. Once used, creativity enhances work or makes a difficult job easier. In social work, creativity is seen in research, coordination and collaboration and in*

unique ways of dealing with clients. Specifically, creativity is seen in putting things together to reconfigure something.

Creativity is “Discovering Life.”

According to Social Worker H, creativity is something that one cannot learn from books. Her travels developed her skills in handling people. That is why she considers supervision as her contribution to the profession and as an area where she is truly creative. She prefers a more open style of supervision that gives space both to her and to her staff, “... *ayoko ng one on one supervision. Ako kasi self propelling din ako -- ganun din ang training ko sa staff ko. I know what I need and what I like.*” She adds that, if she will have time to write, she would like to document the ‘supervisory styles’ she has used for specific people.

In her Unit, she chooses good writers and shares some insights on how to keep them: “You can keep your good staff *basta maganda rin yung management and supervision. Kahit na mahirap ang trabaho, kaya yan eh, basta maganda ang relationship – may support, walang fault finding, may training kahit mababa ang sweldo...*” (You can keep your good staff through good management and supervision. Even if the job is difficult, it can be done, as long as there is a good working relationship – with proper support, no fault finding and provision of the needed training, even though the salary is low.)

Social Worker H considers a project concerning children as the height of her career. For her, the whole process of project management, its structure and its components such as pilot testing and designing a system, are all-creative:

“Pero ang maganda kasi doon, we are developing the systems at the same time, we’re learning. Kung ano yung naisip namin na ito yung best, tina-try. Kaya yun ang maganda sa pilot testing, work in progress. Meron siyang blueprint kung бага. I-execute mo pero kung nakita mo siya na hindi applicable, madali mo siyang ayusin.”

(What is nice about it is that we are developing the systems at the same time, we’re learning. Whatever we conceptualize as best, we try it out. That is the beauty of pilot testing, work in progress, it is like having a blue print. You execute it, but if you discover that it is not applicable, then it’s easy for you to fix it.)

She further adds that project-based practice is creative because of the leeway given to decide on what activities to implement:

“Yun yung maganda dun kasi parang we were given the leeway to strategize, how to execute the plans. We develop the manuals, tsaka iba pang systems.”

(That’s the beauty in it, that we were given the leeway to strategize, how to execute the plans. We develop the manuals and the other systems.)

So it is in the creation of the blueprint and in the execution of that blueprint that pilot testing is found to be creative. Creativity is also seen in the production of manuals which documents lessons from the project experience.

She says creativity “makes one go on, to discover life and to explore.” She does not want to be “stuck with what is written in the books,” or else she says the social worker will become stagnant. This is the very reason why she identified project management, specifically pilot testing, as another creative part of her practice. Here, social work practitioners are allowed to design projects and, if they fail, they will re-design them.

So for Social Worker H, *the meaning of creativity is being able to explore, to discover life. Creativity enables the social worker to propel the program or the office out of a difficult situation. Without creativity, “we will be run by events.” So the real meaning of creativity for her is finding life, for the clients and for herself. It is having a win-win solution to a problem. Being creative in social work is an adventure.*

Creativity is “Giving One’s Best,” Being an “All-around Worker”

Social Worker L has conviction that social work is creative; and that a social worker needs to be an “all-around” worker, and sees every client and every situation as unique. She now accepts policy development as a creative way to help others, *“Natanggap ko na rin na isang aspeto ng social work ay gumagawa ng mga policy. At nakakatulong ka, ah nagagawa mo yung propesyon mo sa pamamagitan ng pagsusulat. Matagal ko yun, matagal ko...tinanggap yun.”* (I have finally accepted that policy development is one aspect of social work where you can help others, practice your profession by means of writing. It took me time to accept that fact.)

Social Worker L shares the struggle of their Unit to have some policy recommendations approved and how they developed strategies to overcome resistance to their proposed changes.

One such strategy was the use of the right words in policy formulation, which they employed when they were couching their recommendations on the financial empowerment of senior citizens – e.g., stressing the role of the elderly in sharing their wisdom to the community, providing honoraria to consultants which would not be in conflict with existing labor laws on the employment of the elderly.

Another strategy was pushing smaller but manageable suggestions or, as Social Worker L calls it, “chop-chop.” She relates, “*Chinop-chop po namin yung recommendations assessment. Dahan-dahan namin pong ano nilalagay sa lagi naming comments, sa mga polisiya, isinasama.* Surprisingly, the comments get through the layers of filtering and also get approved.”

Social Worker L also leads an initiative of social workers to start creative means of advocacy, such as organizing the solo parents in their organization to get the attention of management. With this strategy, they learn to deal with the dynamics and politics within an organization.

Social Worker L emphasizes the need for creativity in the social work profession and the awareness of this creativity:

Conscious ka na creativity ‘to. Importante yun na maging creative ka lalo na yung propesyon namin na talagang helping profession. Tao yan, nakasandal din sa ‘yo kung paano mo ili-link yung mga resources, o mga bagay-bagay. Kaya kailangan creative ka talaga.

(The social worker is conscious that this is creativity. It is important that you be creative especially in our profession that is truly a helping profession. These are human lives and they are depending on how you can link them to resources. That is why you really need to be creative.)

To summarize Social Worker L’s views, *Creativity is found to have meaning if closely linked with thinking of innovative ways of helping people, consistent with the principle of uniqueness of the clients. Creativity of the social worker is seen in not being limited or boxed in by existing programs but in always finding means to help the client, or giving one’s best for the client’s welfare.*

Creativity is “Pushing the Work to the End”

Social Worker C introduced the concept of “nurturance of creativity.” For one, she mentions that the nurturing of creativity really belongs to the

academe. She thought that the scholarship cohort experiment be replicated among social work students, to nurture creativity in doing social work.

Social Worker C also considers social work as a good breeding ground for creativity. She reflects further that creativity in social work can be shaped earlier, even as a child. She tells of Ms. M., her role model, as an example of nurturing service by being exposed to the father's advocacy work.

Social Worker C's early practice experiences in the refugee camps helped her form the insight that competence and excellence are needed for one to become creative. That is why she views creativity as something that a social worker must strive for to avoid being "programmatic," i.e., "boxed-in." In the hospital setting, she learned that social work is creative because, even though you do the same work every day, the practitioner is not limited. She sees creativity as having new solutions to problems. In project based endeavors, the feeling of creation comes with completing a process, from design to implementation until "you see it to its completion," "you build, you finish."

In program development, she sees creativity as "an opportunity to begin with a clean slate, to look at things through a new perspective." Also, she sees policy advocacy as a blend of creativity and social work. She refers to writing as an instrument for social work practice, particularly policy advocacy: "I think at most it's really advocating for the people, *yung* fighting for the people, whether its policy or program. Creativity is... pushing the work to the end."

Social Worker C has the notion that social work is going up against "giants" and that the social worker sometimes does not know the "real enemy." In trafficking, for example, the problem is global in scope and that is why the fight must be brought to the international arena. According to her, it is at this level and "in terms of numbers" that "giants" are created:

So papaano ka makikipaglaban if you don't know. If you fight trafficking but you don't know sino ang kalaban mo...kailangan kasi mag-create ng giant eh. You need to create a giant all the time and it's in terms of numbers, in terms of skill. Kasi nga when you fight, malalaki ang kalaban. It's trafficking, it's street children. talagang it will defy the strategy, it will defy everything. Malaki siya...As a social worker, it is really moving in an environment na mahirap - mahirap ang trabaho, maliit ang resources mo, maliit yung tao mo and malaki yung kalaban mo. That's how I see it.

(So how will you fight trafficking if you do not know your enemy? You need to create a giant all the time in terms of numbers and skills. When you fight, the enemy is trafficking, it's street children. It will defy everything, because the enemy is big. The social worker is in a difficult position – the work is hard, resources are limited, and your people are small in number while your enemy is big.)

Social Worker C says that social work is a good breeding ground for creative people. Just like writers, social workers see and are able to speak of the human condition needed in policy advocacy.

So she sees *creativity as creating a giant to be able to fight for the people*. (The giant referred to here is the development of an advocacy, a formidable program or intervention that will respond to a bigger social issue.) *Creativity is not only about the creation but also about the person who created it. It involves both the process and the creation (product). It is the capacity to create. Creativity is self emptying, always going back to zero; to die every day so that one can see outside of the self and be able to create for others. Creativity is pushing the work to the end.*

Creativity is “Responding to Multidimensional Concerns”

In her first job as community organizer, Social Worker E remembers being able to thrive in a non-threatening environment. She likens social work, specifically program development, to the elements and details of an artwork:

Una dapat yung kung iri-relate ko siya sa art, yung mga lines, yung mga curves...ganun din pagnagsi-shape ka or nagdi-develop ka ng isang program. You have to ensure na maayos siya. Hindi siya yung half cooked o half (baked) na project para talaga maging akma siya sa need ng client, maging responsive siya sa needs ng client.

(First, if I will relate it to art, the lines, the curves for a pattern, you shape or develop a program in the same manner. You have to ensure that everything is in order, not half cooked or half baked and that the project matches the needs of the clients, that it is responsive.)

She continues by saying that the social worker, particularly in pilot testing and manual writing, is like an artist in the way the details of

the work are carefully done. “*Dapat keen ka sa nitty-gritty ng dini-develop mong project or kahit manual man yang sinusulat mo, dapat maging ganun ka kapulido sa gagawin mo.*” (You must be keen on the nitty-gritty of the project you are developing, or even the manual you are writing; the work must be crafted well.) She applies this to pilot-testing and manual writing.

Social Worker E emphasizes the social worker’s mandate to develop innovative products and stresses further the need for creativity in social work practice:

Kailangan mo talagang maging creative sa lahat ng gagawin mo as a social worker. Sa social work practice kailangan maging creative kasi nga ang daming concerns. Yung social work profession kasi parang hindi siya confined sa isang concern. Ang dami niyang pinapakialaman.

(There is really a need to be creative in everything that a social worker does. In social work practice, there is a need to be creative due to the variety of concerns. The social work profession is not limited to just one concern. It concerns itself with many matters.)

Being creative, Social Worker E explains, requires the social worker not to be content with the existing programs because the demands change over time. One example is how program development becomes responsive to the emerging demands of direct practice.

Social Worker E says that a social worker can never be creative by simply doing the usual way of managing a case. She opposes the use of “generic social work case management” to deal with cases of “victim-survivors” of violence against women (VAW) or gender-based violence. Instead, she promotes the gender responsive case management.

One thing Social Worker E considers truly creative was her experience in training men from a totally different culture in gender sensitivity without having to offend them. “*Kaya yung creativity even sa mga SLEs [structured learning exercises], inaaral ko talaga even yung kultura nila. Kailangan wala akong masasagasaan kapag ginawa ko yung ganitong SLE. In-ensure ko na wala akong masasagasaang kultura nila, na ‘di ko sila mao-offend.*” (I exercised creativity even in the SLEs. I studied their culture carefully so that the SLEs were culturally appropriate and no one would get offended.)

Here, Social Worker E gives an idea of the social worker being “culturally creative.” She also considers the creation of the manual on gender

sensitive case management as one of her creative contributions. For her, creativity is seen also in the responsiveness and adaptability of the program at the local government level. When creativity is employed, the program becomes easy to market or immediately institutionalized or adapted.

To summarize Social Worker E's views on creativity: *Creativity is seen as thinking out of the box or not being content with what is presented in front of you. Creativity also entails going beyond the task given you. Creativity is like art where the social worker ensures attention to the details and the nitty-gritty of the program – i.e., “pulido.” More meaning is found in using creativity in personal relationships. Creativity also ensures the responsiveness and adaptability of a program. Creativity is necessary because of the varied multidimensional concerns of social work.*

Creativity is “Making the Complicated Simple”

Early socialization to service made Social Worker G think that she is in this kind of work not by choice but because social work brought her there. Her exposure to direct service with inmates and parolees developed in her the conviction that there must be a blending of crafting and delivering a program.

She emphasizes that a social worker's job is in 'giving birth,' but the job of 'child rearing' is even more crucial. She also shares that even if one is wearing a very expensive dress that does not fit well, the dress still would not look nice on the person wearing it. She uses these analogies to argue that, even if a program is well crafted, it will not be effective if it is not delivered well. It is in program implementation that the program fit occurs, through the creativity of the social workers implementing the program. The lessons learned from these adjustments are picked up in program development for re-design. Program development is, after all, dependent on what is happening on the ground.

In developing guidelines for implementation, she says, “You don't go always by the book. The book should only be there as your guide. It's not the 'Be all and end all' of the program.” She adds, “How do you make an available program fit to the people? That's creativity.”

Social Worker G shares further that “how to keep stakeholders interested in the program will need creativity.” She illustrates that, in a therapeutic community, introducing mechanisms motivates the clients to stay and to maintain their attendance. Her own experience was in introducing the revitalization of the volunteer program for parolees,

expanding the list of community volunteers to include professionals who could help the parolees. Social Worker G stresses that, after all, there is no other place that the parolee will return to but to his/her community.

She also explains that a program can be enhanced through research. She shares, for example, that the original concept of one program was based on the idea of their project head. With constant consultation, Social Worker G put together the ideas from the focus group discussions to develop the program framework. Later on, she became the focal person in coming up with the program manual, a guidebook that explains the program framework.

For Social Worker G, similar to Social Worker E and Social Worker I, creativity has more meaning if it is applied to one's own life. Social Worker G says, "I don't think I could survive this long if I were not creative." Her ultimate meaning of creativity is when it enables a person to survive. Similar to Social Worker E's view, Social Worker G considers being a mother as creative, i.e., the concept of "creative parenting." It is in applying creativity to different life skills that one is able to survive. So whether applied to work or to life in general, Social Worker G defines creativity as: *"the ability to find the right strategies, right solutions, right mechanisms or styles, with less time and less resources."* *Creativity is really making complicated things simple.*

Creativity is "Initiating Change"

While Social Worker K was able to set up an agency, she has devoted her life to her present Unit after her marriage. Within the same Unit, she shifts assignments from direct practice to program development. In learning the ropes, she developed the attitude of being innovative all of the time. She reiterates that their Unit is the think tank of the Department. She boasts that their Unit is the place where "everything gets cooked" and that it is where innovation takes place.

Being an acting head, she is now able to look at things from a different perspective. Following the stages in program development, it is in pilot testing that concepts are applied in the community. Social Worker K's attitude is that there would be times that pilot testing will fail but this must not discourage the social worker. For her, it is in the awareness of potential failure that the social worker must learn to take risks; and that is the beauty of being able to redesign. (Social Worker H who is already a Unit head shares

the same view.) She stresses that one purpose of the agency is to enable social workers to be true catalysts, real initiators of change. To achieve this, it is imperative that social workers have that attitude of being creative.

Aside from technical preparation, Social Worker K shares her insights on the importance or self-awareness, of constant reflection in order to assess one's status as a social worker. She says,

Kung alam ng social worker yung konsepto ng social work as a profession, as a subject or kung anumang level, dapat you dig deeper. Kasi ayaw na natin na makilala na taga-abot lang during disaster. You go beyond that. Ang gusto natin ay maging catalyst, maging initiator ng change. Hindi lang magi-initiate, kailangan may follow through ng entire process ng cycle.

Self awareness will lead the social workers to reflect on how they can be a real initiator of change.

Social Worker K says social work is a venue to really understand life. The social worker must “solidify” as a person and reflect or assess every day what kind of a social worker s/he has become, and what s/he has done to change the lives of others. Creativity is seen as being able say that one has “contributed a little of this onto that.” Social Worker K relates creativity to having a “true heart for service.”

Kasi naniniwala ako na, kung meron ka talagang tunay na paglilingkod, as I understand and I appreciate social work, andun lagi ang puso, andun lagi ang kagustuhan mo, and you have to be creative...Sabi nga, sa wala, sa kawalan, meron kang magagawa.

(I believe that the true meaning of service, as I understand and appreciate social work, is setting your heart, your desire to help others all the time. You have to be creative. As they say, you can build something out of nothing.)

The main thought is that, *if the social worker is not innovative, then s/he cannot be responsive. The social worker must reflect about the profession and should be self aware. Creativity is having the heart for service and for initiating change.*

Finding the Meanings

The responses pertaining to creativity are varied throughout the interviews yielding varied kinds of statements on creativity culled from the

transcriptions. First, there are direct definitions and meanings of creativity provided by the social workers. Second, there are other direct responses to questions relating to creativity, such as what the social workers consider as creative, Filipino and English words they associate with creativity, and their views on the importance of creativity. Other statements are analogies and insights on creativity that the social workers mentioned. These responses and statements are put together into clusters of themes which answer the first research question of this study: What meanings do social workers give to creativity in policy and program development?

Defining Creativity

Each of the participants has attempted to provide several definitions of creativity during the interviews. Shown below are the most common definitions given.

TABLE 1 Definition of creativity by social workers in policy and program development	
Social Worker B	<i>Creativity makes a difficult job easier; one will not notice the work anymore.</i>
Social Worker F	<i>Creativity is being different from the regular thing; it involves adding a little something to make it more interesting or more convenient.</i>
Social Worker H	<i>Creativity is an ability to offer a win-win solution to a problem that would actually benefit the client; it is the ability to exhaust all possible resources and the ability to sell an idea that the implementer will adapt.</i>
Social Worker I	<i>Creativity is doing something out of the ordinary; it is putting your heart and mind into it, not just using the mind but a balance of heart and mind.</i>
Social Worker L	<i>Creativity is being an all-around social worker.</i>
Social Worker C	<i>Creativity is the capacity to create; creativity involves the creation, the person who created it and the process of creation.</i>
Social Worker E	<i>Creativity is thinking out of the box; creativity is not being contented with what is presented in front of you; it entails doing something beyond the task given you.</i>
Social Worker G	<i>Creativity is the ability to find the right strategies, right solutions, right mechanisms or styles, with less time and less resources. Creativity is being able to make complicated things simple.</i>

TABLE 1 Definition of creativity by social workers in policy and program development	
Social Worker J	<i>Creativity is always doing things in a more substantial way.</i>
Social Worker K	<i>Creativity is the need to be innovative always; creativity is the willingness to take risks, and not to be boxed in.</i>

The above definitions suggest some common themes; one definition offers elements by which the meanings can be grouped. The definition provided by Social Worker C above defines creativity as involving not only the “creation” but also the “person who created it” and the “process of creation.” This is also true for the most common definitions given such as “thinking out of the box” which may point to the person who thinks differently, the product which is “different from the ordinary,” or the process where one thinks or works beyond what is expected.

Other themes from the social workers’ insights also show the same cluster of themes. For instance, “unique” may refer to the person, the output, or the process from which the contribution was arrived at. It may refer to “not losing oneself in the system,” “not being one with the crowd,” “not boxed in by existing programs,” “doing things out of the ordinary” or “something created with a personal touch.” In short, to the social workers, creativity means “being different” whether this refers to the person, the product or the process.

Personal Creativity

There are several concepts mentioned in the meanings related to personal creativity. First, there are meanings that point to creativity as applied in everyday life or related to survival. Second, there are Filipino traits mentioned related to creativity. Fourth, there is a discussion on the relation of self awareness to creativity and the ‘true heart’ of service. Fifth, the concept of ‘holding back’ or ‘self restraint’ is mentioned in at least three interviews which has some implication on whether a person has the choice to be creative or not.

Creativity in Everyday Life

Creativity is seen as attached to living itself. If creativity is applied at work, it is because it is also applied in practical matters of life, such as survival or parenting. There are several terms that were introduced based on the interviews, such as *cultural creativity*, *relational creativity*, *parental creativity* and even *professional creativity* which can be related to other terms introduced in existing literature, such as Gardner's (1993) *social creativity* (see also Domingues, 2000; Montuori, 1999) and Miztal's (2007) *civic creativity*. As some participants say, it is when social workers are able to relate creativity to their personal lives that they find it most meaningful. Even inside the organization, an individual may apply skills in everyday survival and this the social workers consider as creative.

Self-awareness and Creativity

For some participants, meanings of creativity are formed during self-reflection. In the process, the person develops self-awareness – knowing and maximizing one's capacity as a social worker and one's willingness to take risks.

A Filipino Notion of Creativity

The responses of the social workers also reveal interesting Filipino illustrations and analogies. There are certain terms that may be used as a basis for a Filipino conception of creativity in relation to social work. Terms such as *paglalapat ng bago at luma* (the fusion of the old and new) and *pulido* (masterfully crafted) have potential for the creation of a Filipino framework on creativity.

These Filipino terms point to the personal meanings of creativity at the individual and the organizational levels of analysis. Shown in the table below of Filipino words is a grouping of words that describe the person, the product or the process – an indication that the Filipino social worker looks at one's self, one's contribution and the process by which the contribution was produced as all forms of creativity.

katangian ng tao (Person)	Malikhain, Maabilidad, Madiskarte; Palaisip, mapagtanong, hindi takot mag-fail; mapanlikha; malikhaing isip; nakikipag-usap ka; mayaman ka sa resources; lagi kang meron maishi-share; Pag creative ka, laging may sagot dun sa tanong; Koboy; Sa factory - productive; Di nakokontento; Malikhain; natatawanan ang problema; kaya i-endure; kaya tumayo nang hindi natitinag; kilala ang sarili; may kakayahang mag-cope; discernment kung alin ang fit; alam kung saan nakatayo; alam kung paano patatakbuhan ang buhay; Malikhain; mahusay; maparaan
katangian ng produkto o Bagay (Product)	Maganda, Magayon, Mas mahusay sa pinagmulan; Makulay, Masaya Kakaiba, Mabusisi Marami; Bago; bebenta; click na click; simple pero rock; parang 3-in-1; Kapaki-pakinabang, Katanggap-tanggap, Tumutugon sa pangangailangan
Ginagawa (Process)	Paglalapad (ng bago at luma); Pagandahin ang isang bagay

Another concept mentioned by at least three social workers is 'holding back' or 'restraining the self.' It may be related to the Filipino value of "*pakikiramdam*" in personal relations (Enriquez in Pe-Pua, 1995). As the social workers share, it is a survival strategy in a bureaucracy. Another implication of 'holding back' is the possibility for a person to choose to be creative or not.

The other side of the coin implies that creativity is determined by the judgment of others or by the environment, sometimes referred to as the 'press.' Here, individual creativity is judged in two ways. First, others may look at the person as possessing the trait of being creative and thus judge him or her to be creative (Boehm, 1961; Gelfand, 1988; Rapoport, 1968; Siporin, 1988; Turner, 1999). The other one is related to the systems view of creativity where a certain *field* or the gatekeepers of a certain *domain*, such as the social work profession, judge a certain work as creative (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi and Gardner, 1994). The members of the *field* may be senior officers in the organization, members of the NGO communities, funding agencies, the academe, etc. In this sense, it is the product or the contribution that is being judged to be creative, but then the person who created the product is also referred to as creative.

However, consistent with Gray and Webb (2008), some participating social workers saw creativity in the work itself.

Conclusion

Creativity, knowingly or unknowingly, is found in everyday life experiences of social workers. Creativity inheres in the way Filipinos view practice. That is, a creative social worker goes beyond the ordinary in order to best serve the interest of the service users. In Philippine practice context, social welfare officers in the area of program and policy development are considered the *think tank* of the organization. The practice gaps identified, through research, evaluation, and consultation with multi-level stakeholders lead to the formulation and testing of new social technology. Creativity therefore is essential for good practice. Program and policy development practitioners consider themselves and the product of what they do as creative. More than this, the participating social workers find the work that they do, whether direct or indirect practice, as creative and part of the creative process. As such, social work is considered a nurturing ground for creativity. The nature of collaboration consistent with the move towards convergence of different agencies involved in social development and poverty alleviation in the Philippines also shows the milieu in which social workers are able to become creative.

Terms introduced in the interviews such as *cultural creativity*, *relational creativity*, *parental creativity* and even *professional creativity* point to ways creativity is experienced in practice. These, together with the Filipino words associated with creativity, not only open the possibility for a Filipino notion of creativity but more so for a broader systematic theorizing in social work practice.

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