Creativity in the Classroom
An Innovative Approach to Integrate Arts Education
Sarah Gulish and Stefanie Elfstrom

Creativity in the Classroom: An Innovative Approach to Integrate Arts Education provides curricular ideas for enhancing creative work in the classroom through the lens of integrative arts. The authors, both Art and Music Educators, provide practical ways in which to engage in creative thinking and making that can be applied to a variety of educational settings. Their work stems from years in the classroom teaching an integrative arts course at a public school in the United States. Through exploring big ideas such as identity, expression, storytelling, impact, and reaction, students learn to engage in a variety of creative art forms and work with others to create work that is meaningful. Each unit or big idea of study includes an explanation of the philosophy behind the unit, an overview of project ideas, and sample student workbook pages. Assessment strategies are provided with sample rubrics for evaluating student work.
Creativity in the Classroom
TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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This book series is dedicated to the radical love and actions of Paulo Freire, Jesus “Pato” Gomez, and Joe L. Kincheloe.
Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy’s (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity – youth identity in particular – the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.
If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce – literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.
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To Brandon and Norris, may you never stop creating and telling stories.

– SG

To Kyle and Jackson, creating a life worth living is in your hands. Thank you for being mine.

– SE
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PREFACE

We met in the summer of 2012. After exchanging pleasantries, we began tackling this question: “How can we teach students to be more creative?” Specifically, we were seeking to understand how best to create a learning environment that encouraged risk-taking, experimentation, and celebrated the process of art and music making. As Stefanie was a new hire to our school, we were charged to co-teach an art and music course together. This required course at our high school was offered to all students, and was currently in need of an overhaul. Instead of focusing on the “appreciation” of art and music, we took a different approach. We decided to research, plan, test, and adjust in order to develop an approach to teaching creativity through the lens of integrative arts.

The uniqueness of the course we teach, *Art Music and Culture*, became apparent as we travelled the country sharing our views and approaches to creative learning. We have realized that many art and music classrooms in the United States are void of creative thinking and choice-based learning. In fact, most public school classrooms provide room for convergent thinking and alignment with state and national standards but do not offer spaces for divergent thinking and the development of 21st century skills. Collaborating, designing, and creating have offered our students the chance to identify skills outside the realm of traditional education and to pursue new realities.

The success of *Art Music and Culture* has led us here. We have shared our approach to integrative arts with many teachers of various disciplines and realized that there is much on *why* we should teach this way, but little regarding the *how* of teaching for creativity in an integrative setting. We hope that this text will provide teachers of many disciplines and age groups the tools to explore creativity in their classrooms and to encourage divergent thinking through a variety of mediums.

As teachers, we recognize that our students are constantly growing and changing. We, too, must grow and change in order to accommodate their evolving needs. This text serves as a starting point to many possibilities. It is our hope that you are able to use this book to develop ideas and make them work for your specific population of students. Or, that it will encourage you
to think creatively and try something new. Teaching in this way can be messy and unpredictable at times, but is ultimately rewarding in ways that cannot be expressed within the confines of this book. We hope you find the reward in facilitating creative work.

*Sarah Gulish and Stefanie Elfstrom*
INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND USE

The purpose of this text is to provide a framework for an integrative arts course centered on creativity using project-based instruction. Throughout the text, we offer big ideas that guide creative work through a variety of mediums in the arts. We also provide project examples that may be adapted for other target populations. You will notice that each section includes the purpose behind the big idea, our approach to creativity within that area, project ideas, and sample student pages. Please note that all student pages can be downloaded from https://tinyurl.com/n7trqs3 for the purpose of using in your classroom or copying.

The concepts and projects in this book are not limited to integrative arts courses as the high school level. We recognize that ours is a unique teaching situation and that every institution is different. However, we could imagine this book being of use in the following settings:

• Teachers of arts courses (visual arts, music, drama), could use this text to develop specific projects to enhance their current curriculum or to encourage integration with composite works of art.
• Teachers of non-arts courses could use this text to develop strategies for collaborative work and creativity within the realm of other subject matters.
• Professors could use this at the University level to encourage creativity in the classroom or to teach pre-service teachers how to develop and use projects centered on creativity.
• Community arts centers might benefit from the integrative project ideas.

We recognize that this text could also be used in a variety of ways beyond those that have been listed. We hope that these ideas are able to be applied in many new ways!

A NOTE ABOUT CREATIVITY

This text is not a book about research on creativity. Many before us have tackled this subject and continue to do so. Instead, this book offers applications for exploring individual and group creative capacities. We have found that all students we have taught using this approach (over 1,000!) have
proven time and time again that human beings are naturally creative and that all have the capacity for expressing their creativity in artistic expression. In highly performance and product driven fields, we have noticed that creative work often involves an emphasis on planning and process. Throughout the text, you will note that we divide student work and progress into these three categories: preparation, process, and product. We offer suggestions for assessment of creative work and provide sample pages for documenting the creative process.

A NOTE ABOUT TECHNOLOGY

When we first began teaching *Art Music and Culture*, we had limited access to technology in terms of computers, instruments, and materials. Throughout the years, this has changed. While we have been able to adjust projects to include more technology-based options the heart of our instruction has remained consistent. This book highlights project examples that can be both low-tech or high-tech. It is easy to imagine that quality creative work must involve advanced technology and the “perfect” learning environment. Having taught with limited resources, large class sizes, and an extremely diverse population of students, we have realized that teaching for creativity can occur in many ways. It is our hope that this text provides tools for you to use in your teaching environment, whatever the limitations and possibilities.
CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE

Developing Course Materials Centered on Creativity

DEFINING UNITS OF STUDY/BIG IDEAS

In the following chapters, we divide projects under the headings of:

- Identity
- Expression
- Storytelling
- Impact
- Reaction

In guiding students through creative work, we have found it beneficial to begin with the individual (Identity), move through various art forms and learn to analyze them (Expression), use newfound skills and multiple mediums to effectively convey a cohesive idea (Storytelling), demonstrate the power of the arts and creativity in raising awareness and promoting social change (Impact), and foster community involvement in the arts through the conception and execution of an individualized creative piece (Reaction).

UNIT OUTLINE

This is a broad overview of the unit outline presented in the following chapters. These units, or big ideas, guide the creative work that encompasses each idea. Below this sample outline, you will see a rationale and summary of project ideas that will be discussed in depth in later chapters. We also divide each project into the categories of “aural,” “visual,” and “composite.” In reality, these delineations are not always neat and are more fluid.

UNIT I: Identity

Purpose for students: Discover creative strengths and weaknesses. Work with a group to do something new. Express internal and external identity.

- Aural: Learn to play an instrument and cover a song
- Visual: Create an identity art piece with personal meaning
CHAPTER 1

UNIT II: Expression

Purpose for students: Explore ways in which the arts express ideas and emotion. Look at visual art with “new eyes.” Dissect multi-media works of arts. Find expressive examples throughout your day.

- Aural: Analyze music expression through multi-media works
- Visual: Analyze and critique artwork and create expressive pieces
- Composite: Explore movement, drama, and language

UNIT III: Storytelling

Purpose for students: Combine multiple means of expression to tell a story. Create a meaningful story that engages multiple senses. Collaborate with others to define and execute unique roles.

- Composite: Create a multi-media work combining sound design, film, and hand-crafted elements

UNIT IV: Impact

Purpose for students: Discuss the impact of the arts through protest art and music. View artwork from around the world. Listen to music with impact. Analyze your passions.

- Aural: Create a protest song with original lyrics and music
- Visual: Create a piece of protest art with intention
- Composite: Create a multi-media work of protest art/music

UNIT V: Reaction

Purpose for students: Design and create a culminating project utilizing creative strengths. Work as an individual or group to create an original piece.

- Aural/Visual/Composite: Design a unique project, execute project completion, and perform or display work in a public sphere.
LEARNING ABOUT YOUR POPULATION

Before you begin working on any of these projects, we recommend learning as much as you can about your population. In a classroom centered on creativity, students are often required to take risks and go beyond their comfort zone. Additionally, doing so in front of peers can be intimidating and unfamiliar. The more you know about your population, the better you will be able to individualize instruction and guide students to capitalize on their strengths and explore areas of perceived weakness.

In our teaching setting, we ask students to fill out an extensive questionnaire prior to assigning groups or beginning individual projects. In our questionnaire, we seek to know about students’ experiences with the arts both in and out of school and to know their general interests and understand their personality. We also find it critical to take each student’s questionnaire and follow up with them individually. We ask them questions about their answers, try to know them better as people, and make them feel comfortable and welcome in our classroom. This entire process takes a few days but is critical for setting up a positive classroom environment and helping students feel as comfortable as possible.

For many of these projects, you will notice possibilities for collaborative work. In many areas of the arts, creative work is highly collaborative and involves a diverse group of people with differing strengths and weaknesses. We recommend giving students both the option for choosing one or two group members and purposefully grouping them with others that will help balance the group. Students often learn to work with others whom they did not know prior to the class, and many times, form positive working relationships that continue throughout the course.

Here is a sample student profile questionnaire that could be used to obtain valuable background information.
CHAPTER 1

STUDENT PROFILE

Who are you as a creative person? In this class, many projects are accomplished within the context of a group. Please answer each question to the best of your ability. These answers will be used to develop diverse groups. The more information you provide, the better we will be able to match you!

Name: _______________________________________________________

Questions relating to visual arts:

• What is hanging on your bedroom walls?

• Who is your favorite visual artist?

• Describe one piece of artwork that you were most excited to bring home from a former art class:

• Describe a piece of artwork you couldn’t wait to trash:

• Have you ever been to an art museum? If so, elaborate!

Questions relating to performing arts:

• Do you play a musical instrument? If so, where/when do you play?

• What are your music listening habits? (When do you listen to music? How do you listen to music?)
• What is your favorite style of music to listen to? (If you have a favorite band, musical artist, write it below)

• Do you perform in any way other than music performance? (drama, dance, comedy, etc.) Please explain.

• Have you ever been to a concert? If so, describe the experience.

General Questions:
• What is your favorite subject in school?

• How do you spend most of your time outside of school (hobbies)?

• What positive traits will you bring to your group?

• What is one thing you struggle with when working in a group?

• If you could choose one person to work with in a group, from this class, who would it be?

• What do you hope to get out of this course?

• Is there anything else we should know about you?
ASSESSING WITH THE PROCESS IN MIND

Assessment of creativity is challenging. Students often feel confused as to why one project is seen as “better” or “more successful” than another. Assessment can either help drive productivity or make students feel as if they should not take challenges and risks. You may be in a situation in which you do not need to assign grades or assess students in a formal sense. Others may be in a situation in which grades are highly valued and the assignment of grades is scrutinized by administrators. We hope our approach to assessment may be valuable to you, no matter your situation. Assessing student work is beneficial for guiding the creative process and fair assessment is instrumental for assigning fair grades.

We try to approach assessment with the entire project process in mind. In doing so, we divide our grading into three equal parts: preparation, process, and product. By dividing the grading in this way, we are able to celebrate students for their ideas, work habits, and final products. In most cases, these three areas are not equal. That is ok! We want students to feel comfortable trying new things and being comfortable with failing and trying again.

Before beginning a project, we always share a final rubric with our students and explain the assessment process. We also have students participate in the final assessment of a project. They both assess themselves and their peers with whom they were working. Having seen and understood the broad goals of each project, students are better able to make project goals and reflect on their success in achieving these goals. They are also able to provide valuable information on their peers and the manner in which they collaborated to create their work.

GRADING CREATIVE WORK

In our school, we grade using a numerical and letter based system. We find that it is important to share our overarching concepts of differences between letter grades at the beginning of our course. The bullet points that correspond with each letter grade can be discussed and tweaked for each project. However, it is helpful for students to know the how and why behind assessment before they begin working on projects. Below is a sample rubric that outlines main ideas for each grade level.

Sample Master Rubric

An “A” Project:

• Total group cooperation (if working in a group); all members participated throughout the process from beginning to end
• Project goals are interpreted creatively; end result is not the “first thing that comes to mind”
• Overall project was well done and there is evidence of adequate preparation
• Student(s) took extra care to work out ideas, correct flaws, and achieve the best possible solutions to assignment; student(s) did not take easy way out and work is not careless or rushed.
• Student(s) gave effort far beyond the minimum required to complete project and showed pride in their work

A “B” Project:
• Mostly cooperative group; most members worked together for most of the time
• Project goals are interpreted creatively, but may have been the “first thing that came to mind”
• Overall project could have been rehearsed/polished more; there is evidence of preparation but the project is lacking in execution
• Student(s) attempted to correct flaws, and achieve the best possible solutions to assignment, but ended up taking the easy way out and the work is somewhat careless or rushed
• Student(s) put forth good effort and showed some pride in their work

A “C” Project:
• Group showed some cooperation, but some members were lacking participation
• Project goals are not interpreted creatively
• Overall project lacked preparation and was not well executed
• Student(s) took the easy way out, creating a careless or rushed work
• Student(s) needed to manage their time better and show more effort or pride in their work

A “D” Project:
• Group did not cooperate; only few members participated.
• Project demonstrates little to no concern for creativity
• Overall project lacked in preparation and student(s) were not prepared.
• Student(s) took the easy way out, creating a careless or rushed work
• Student(s) needed to manage their time better and show more effort or pride in their work
Creative individuals find inspiration in a variety of places. All of the makers, artists, and musicians we have invited into our classroom have confirmed the importance of connectivity and inspiration for developing new ideas and innovating. In the classroom, students may find inspiration from the work of other students. It is also important for students to look outside the classroom and draw inspiration from other fields, from nature, from human stories. There are countless places to find inspiration. In our course, we try to set aside time on a weekly basis to share inspiration with others in our community. We do this through the vehicle of the creative warm-up.

The creative warm-up is a short, 5-minute presentation by students and teachers to inspire, excite, and develop new ideas. In our course, we set aside time twice a week to begin our class with a creative warm-up. Students volunteer to present their warm-up and we spend a few minutes discussing their work and how it might apply to our class. What constitutes a creative warm-up? The possibilities are endless! Inspiring short form films, new inventions, articles, physical warm-ups, brain teasers, drawing exercises… these all provide opportunities for students to engage with material in a new way. It is exciting to watch students develop their own ideas for creative warm-ups and present them to the class. To introduce this concept we always provide an explanation sheet for students.

Sample Creative-Warmup Explanation Sheet

Creative Warm-ups: Unpacked

What inspires you? As an athlete, do you ever watch a professional game that makes you want to practice and be a better player?

What excites you? As a consumer, do you ever see a new product on the market that you can’t wait to get your hands on?

What makes you think? As a student, what classes or topics stay with you throughout the day and you can’t stop thinking about them?

This is the purpose of creative warm-ups: to inspire, excite, think.

How do we do that? 5 minute creative warm-ups should be demonstrations involving the arts that bring the class together for the purpose of creativity. Each student will complete a creative warm-up at some point during
the course. Your warm-up can be interactive or demonstrative in nature.

Some examples of past creative warm-ups are:

- physical warm-up involving mind/body connection
- mental warm-up using brain teasers
- explanation of a new app/technology
- current event review of a show/performance/artwork
- video of art-making
- student performance

If you are stumped with your creative warm-up, we’re here to help! Please talk to your teachers a few days in advance and we can develop a unique warm-up for you to present.

PULLING IT TOGETHER

Once you know your students, you have projected class purpose and goals, and you have set forth habits of creative thinking, it is time to start creating! In the following chapters, we offer the practical applications of the big ideas for arts integration: Identity, Expression, Impact, Storytelling, and Reaction. We begin with the investigation of the self through the lens of identity.