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Teaching to Mobilize Creative Experience

Sarah Thomas[1] **& Jillian Harpster**[2]

Abstract

What does it take to teach creatively? To amplify creativity and teacher agency in schools, this qualitative study operationalized Csikszentmihalyi's creative process, observed essential teaching dispositions for leading a creative classroom, informed curricular design process, and ultimately argued for creativity's centrality in education. A research circle involved recent University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduates, now in-service Secondary English teachers, electing to meet for one year. Their desire to research and professionally dialogue came from a perceived lack of creative self-identification, a need for complex and informed understanding of creativity's nature and process, and additional ways to address creativity's de-emphasis within their curriculum. Participants had periodic conversations in which they reviewed research literature, analyzed existing curriculum to observe opportunities for creative experience, and were encouraged toward curricular experimentation, revision, and implementation. After engaging informally, participants were invited to advance the work toward local and national presentation toward eventual publication. The facilitating professor and one participating early career teacher advanced the work to those final levels. This article reflects their culminating work.

Key Words: creativity, professional development, narrative inquiry, educational reform

1.0 Overview

In *A Room of One's Own,* Virginia Woolf (1929) correlated the creation of physical space for intellectual work with a sense of creative abundance, personal liberation, and power. Creating this kind of space within a teacher's professional development and, by extension, her classroom, required privileging two kinds of transformative sites within this research study: a professional development space, which involved a revisited coffee shop for early career teacher research circle meetings, and our classroom spaces re-envisioned and impacted by growth informed by the professional development site. Observing these places as sanctuaries requiring attentive care (Dewey, 1934) was vital. Such contexts hold a professional's integrity as valued and boundless--a deliberate counter-cultural move in response to school climates where teacher professionalism is compromised by high stakes testing overemphasis.

Through its operation, the study acknowledged inhibitors to the creative process for early career teachers: insufficient teacher education program support post-graduation, lacking authentic professional development models reinforced by site-based professional development dissatisfaction, and the persistent political call for innovation without providing professional space to deeply study, understand, and value creativity in schools. Space to examine scholarly research and practices, experience post-graduation support from the university's teacher education program, and stimulate curricular innovation aimed to operationalize *educative mentoring.* This kind of mentoring "focus[es] on a reform-minded teaching in which mentors will help new teachers develop the relevant dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for this kind of work, in addition to carrying out the everyday process of teaching." (Feiman-Nemser 2009, 29).

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[1] University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1400 R St, Lincoln, NE 68588, USA. sarah.thomas@unl.edu/402-770-8162.
[2] University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1400 R St, Lincoln, NE 68588, USA.

Significantly, *educative mentoring* exceeds helping new teachers merely acclimate to their school contexts; it offers space to operate as "transformative intellectuals." (Giroux, 1988) The quality of professional development support and climate impacts job satisfaction, teacher leadership and efficacy, and though many variables inform high attrition rates among early career teachers, this qualitative study addressed the need for attentive, stimulating spaces to amplify creativity and agency in teaching and learning.

Through engaging Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) creative process, participants sought enhanced understanding of creativity's nature and process and realization of creative self-identification. For if a teacher does not identify as creative, how can she expect to teach for creativity? These discoveries, in turn, influenced how the participants viewed and approached classroom practices, as illustrated in the remaining early career teacher's research narrative. Theoretical frameworks informed two essential research study objectives: to address greater teacher induction needs through extending the university's supportive reach, and to foster deeper understanding of creativity within self and classroom from dispositional and design standpoints toward innovative educational experiences.

1.1 The Teacher Induction Objective

Teacher education programs miss opportunities to support early career graduates and rely too heavily upon state and school districts to bear induction responsibilities—a negative variable within the attrition crisis. (Assuncao Flores, 2006; Berliner, 2001; McCann, 2005; Strong, 2009). Professional development opportunities at district levels routinely emphasize institutional and procedural knowledge in discontinuous episodes. Within a high-stakes testing climate, these experiences often emphasize quick fixes in service of raising test scores and thus, fear, stress, and accusation are prevalent intonations reducing professional integrity, autonomy, and satisfaction. Mounting research underscores job satisfaction is hampered by institutional restrictions to autonomy (in which creativity can thrive) and a limited sense of self-efficacy impacted by the data-driven high stakes testing climate (e.g. Apple, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Day, 2004; Gardner, 2004; Greene, 2008; Hansen, 2011; Hargreaves, 2001, 2002; Macintyre Latta, 2007; Noddings, 2010; Nussbaum, 2012; Ravitch, 2011). And yet, internationally ubiquitous calls for innovation—the creative process end stage—resound at disconnected political levels. This irony of professional reduction while calling for innovative expansion informed the need to study creativity long term.

Educative mentoring (Feinman-Nemser, 2009) cultivates a disposition of inquiry, focusing attention on student thinking and understanding, and fostering disciplined talk about problems of practice." (17) Quarterly research circle meetings conducted over one year animated *educative mentoring* criteria. Concomitantly, Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) recursive creative process involving preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation, and elaboration allowed participants to embody and actualize creativity. Living out a professional development experience as a creative process aimed for classroom transferability. Within the research circle process, the creative stages involved…

Preparation: facilitating professor-selected readings, individually written reflections preliminarily defining creativity and illustrating a most creative personal experience in or out of school

Incubation: written reflections engaged in the "preparation" stage, field notes from classroom observations and illuminating research literature moments, on-going curricular examination for ways to enhance creative experience, and reflection space between coffee shop dialogue meetings

Insight: Surfacing understandings occurring in several places over time--epiphanies occurring in coffee shop dialogues, then documented in facilitating professor's meeting notes. The research circle was then tasked with translating these discoveries into curricular planning and facilitation.

Evaluation: After deeply engaging the preparation, incubation, and insight stages within informal research circles for one year, the professional development experience opened to more formalized reflection and writing for another two years. Researchers continued to engage the first three creative stages together while continuing curriculum development and reflection. Further, they sought meta-understanding: What did we learn through these three deeply engaged stages? How did we and our curriculum practices change?

Elaboration: Within this final stage, the researchers continued inventing and revising curriculum, meeting periodically, presenting at national and international conferences, and writing about the meta-experience toward publication.

2.0 Mobilizing Creative Experience in the Classroom: Dispositional Understandings

Through researching creativity and reflecting upon classroom practices, the following themes surfaced--dispositional understandings informing practices.

A creative teacher understands….

1) Substantial study of creativity's properties and process is foundational to creative practice
2) Close and active perception instigate authentic inquiry and creative exploration
3) Conceiving of time differently—as immersive, spiraling, and recursive—is necessary
4) The learning environment matters greatly: aesthetically, relationally, emotionally, intellectually, and motivationally
5) Flexible, adaptive thinking through problem-posing learning is crucial for innovation
6) Prioritizing creativity challenges social injustices

2.1 Deep Study of Creativity's Properties and Process is Foundational to Creative Practice

This piece precedes other dispositions, as it's impossible to teach intentionally without an informed knowledge base. According to Robinson's (2015) a key recommendation for changing school climates toward creative pedagogy involves creating space for expert teachers to engage "Strategic innovation [involving]…care, a safeguarding of what is known to work while being prepared to explore new approaches in a responsible way."(234) To embrace and centralize an historically and currently marginalized thinking process like creativity, the profession cannot seek quick fixes and shallow research literature to support them—a common educational reform pitfall. To truly transform education in this way requires commitment to a long-term process. This process involves meaningful reflection and dialogue encouraging self-identification, rigorous reading featuring leading scholars like Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, Ken Robinson, Jerome Bruner, John Dewey, etc. to create a substantial base upon which to build outstanding practices. That's not to say more pragmatic sources illustrating creative practices in the classroom are diminished; however, the tendency to seek quick, easy answers in less scholarly research literature before reading derivative sources is great and often dissatisfying, even insulting to professional educators' abilities. Creativity study should be substantial and elongated, where research serves as catalyst and sticking place, opening vistas for creative design. The effect bolsters confidence in self as designer and in the design itself; it also provides a lens for design reflection.

2.2 Close and Active Perception Instigate Authentic Inquiry and Creative Exploration

Creatively effective teachers operate through active perception and inquiry, then scaffold opportunities for expansive exploration. To move from ordinary to extraordinary vision and understanding, the act of perception or poet W.S Merwin's (Merrill, 2005**)** *noticing* occurs in which the content frequently presents itself to both teachers and students as problem-posing or dissatisfying because of its ironic, paradoxical, and/or unexpected nature eliciting a destabilizing response. Further, Mitchell (1984) suggests considering "telling" case, which makes "particular circumstances surrounding a case […] serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent" (239), is more productive to consider than "typical" cases.

To see in new ways, to make the unapparent apparent, one must be destabilized to incite a puzzling response, for "without a good dose of curiosity, wonder, and interest in what things are like and in how they work, it is difficult to recognize an interesting problem. Openness to experience, a fluid attention that constantly processes events in the environment, is a great advantage for recognizing potential novelty." (Csikszentmihalyi, 53). The keen observer puzzles and assembles, affording a host of options in mining material and manipulating its properties toward an inventive whole. The creative goal is to derive new vision and open subsequent new pathways in one's thinking and understanding. The dynamic form is everything in the creative process, and if this is set in motion, original departures from the viewed can emerge.

2.3 Conceiving of Time Differently—As Immersive, Spiraling, and Recursive—is Necessary

Conceiving of time differently is crucial. Engaging a gradual, multi-layered process toward a novel result and new vision takes time. The creative process is often partially realized in the classroom because of insufficient time devoted to…

Determining intrinsically motivating, unique topic interests with students. Getting to know students is a practice widely supported and understood to be best for students and learning. However, in the current school culture, little time is allotted for community building and exploration of interests individually or communally. However, to encourage students to pursue passion areas, yet invite them to "deprive their thinking of its normal course," there must be time during which to learn about the individual, as well as his/her thinking habits.

Reading deeply and widely to inform substantial topic knowledge and writing capability. As previously stated, this practice of preparation should be fully engaged by the educator regarding the research surrounding creativity as an entity, but it is also a practice the educator can then model for students. Knowing what one knows and recognizing or ferreting out areas of unknown within one's thinking and informing those areas through further reading and reflective writing is a habit students and educators alike would do well to realize. This habit, though, can only be developed across time.

Affording frequent and authentic collaborative experience to generate incubation and insights. There is much research supporting privacy and solitude as fertile ground for creativity. However, innovators like Steve Wozniak ("The Rise of the New Groupthink") have illustrated the importance of generative, stimulating collaborative spaces as catalysts for further, more individual exploration and creation. Using others as lenses through which to see a new things with which we have too much comfort or familiarity, or to reveal things we have not seen before, moves one from incubation, puzzling over something on one's own, to new insight outside oneself and, perhaps, even imposes external evaluation of the thing

Failing, all legitimately creative work involves failure and re-routing toward new potentials. Failure, it should be said, is clearly not an end or a goal, though it should not be feared; It is part of a process. Failure is a natural and necessary part of exploration and discovery. Part of the evaluation phase, acceptance of possible and probably failure allows students and practitioners a like time and space to explore possibilities, recognizing when a path or route is unproductive or not as beneficial as another path or route. The space and time needed for this authentic, candid, recursive self-evaluation and recognition or acceptance of failure without anxiety has been circumvented by the current high stakes testing climate and, as a result, has stunted student ability to actively and authentically engage the creative process.

Experience genuine authorship and memorable accomplishment through unique results. One may suggest there are inherent contradictions between genuine authorship and authentic collaboration when the two are juxtaposed. Yet, as noted above, there is need for both community and autonomy within the creative process. Because our experiences are individualized, so, too, must our creative outcomes be. Though it may be more efficient to guide students or teachers in more heavy-handed ways, true creativity is marked in true authorship.

Embodying creative self-identification. Teacher and student buy-in takes time and recurring creative process immersion to gain self-identification confidence, to refute the sense of "otherness" ("I'm not creative!"). Self-identification is imperative to model and engage in creative practice with students in ongoing and authentic ways. Reaching self-identification requires time, action, reflection, and authentic cultivation. Embodying what it means to be creative is ongoing vs. episodic—a lived identity.

2.4 The Learning Environment Matters Greatly: Spatially, Relationally, Emotionally, Intellectually, And Motivationally

Educative experience, a "growth-inducing [episode] that grants the capacity for having even richer experiences in the future" (Barone 22) is dependent upon a host of environmental features. To foster a conducive atmosphere, teachers must authenticate the priority by performing and valuing the creative process themselves. This valuing is evidenced through the following demonstrations:

Spatial stimulation: French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard (1994), contemplated creating optimal experience, particularly the role our environments play to afford *grandeur*. Toward this aim, he privileges two kinds of space: the *intimate* and the *immense,* for their intersectionality encourage maximum growth. "Grandeur progresses in the world in proportion to the deepening of intimacy…..[for] "whenever space is a value—and there is no greater value than intimacy—it has magnifying properties."

(202) In correlation, when we honor teachers enough to create intimate, sustained professional development spaces, a magnification of their professional worlds—and their ability to see possibility and agency therein (a kind of *vastness* Bachelard speaks of) can follow.

The classroom space should convey and celebrate the atypical. When students enter and observe the unexpected in productively stimulating, transporting, curiosity-inducing ways, and the creative nurture begins. Student-created visual representations in classroom spaces are more convincing than depictions of a teacher's preferences, identity, values. The space should communicate students are valued as creators through a gallery-like feel.

Relation: Teachers who successfully ignite and sustain the creative process communicate an asset vs. deficit perception of student capacity and potential. They understand students' funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti) provide a richly abundant basis on which to build knowledge and new ways of viewing a subject. They trust their students will take creative leaps with them and communicate eagerness to explore a subject together in novel ways. In addition to believing in students' potential and trusting—assuming-- they are capable of innovative thinking; a creative teacher will go to varied and continuous lengths to understand each student as a distinct and multi-dimensional human. Such efforts will not simply occur within the first week of school; they must be on-going, genuine, and meaningfully connected to the curriculum.

Emotion: Joy, humor, and intrigue stimulate creative environments. A playfully curious spirit willing to take risk is contagious. Teachers can't effectively lead a creative process without a level of emotional levity and inclination toward delighting in the human experience—especially when it is messy. Levity creates a tone of possibility needed for students to take imaginative leaps; humor can powerfully reduce affective filters, encouraging all to "let down their guards"—an essential open stance toward any kind of learning and particularly for the creative process.

Intellect: Creative expression can be more rigorous than analysis—the privileged and overly exposed thinking process in secondary education. Whereas analysis is likened to dissecting a frog, examining its parts to form an empirically evidenced understanding, creativity requires both deconstruction and construction, as analysis across the five recursive stages (preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation, and elaboration) is present. While making the extra move toward construction, taking the existing and transforming it in original discovery, students achieve authorship with their learning. Indeed, if the entire creative process runs its full recursive course students will think across Bloom's Taxonomy, as they strive toward the pinnacle: innovation. The creative teacher will have the research base to frame experiences so that students understand why and how a learning endeavor is worthy of authentic investment. Making visible how the creative process works and what gains students will make by performing it is an essential instructional leadership responsibility. Its essential teachers avoid presenting creative experiences as merely fun and formless; or, equally problematic, as merely an afterthought, an add on busying project effecting little learning value. This attitude devalues and misrepresents true creative learning experience. Instead, the creative process woven as a thread throughout a course experience and as a movement toward course culmination honors the intellect.

Motivation: Through on-going inquiry and adjustments reinforcing generative classroom dynamics, teachers can cultivate a catalyzing environment. Motivating classroom climates involve (a) immersion in a set of problematic issues and related content which arouses curiosity; (b) incubation of ideas just below the threshold of consciousness through heightened noticing; (c) movement toward insight/moments of peculiar intensity through an attempt to design for and hold a synthesized vision from the chaos; (d) evaluation of insight's nature whereupon; and (e) elaboration ensues—a long process of executing the creative inspiration (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, pp. 79-80). Within this process, students are invited into a genuinely puzzling and intriguing prospect, draw from their existing funds of knowledge, develop needed competencies to advance toward uncharted territory as learners, and gain understanding that serves them in future pursuits—fertile ground for a Deweyan educational experience.

Motivating creative assignments should cast forward into the student's world and encourage renegotiation of how she views her world. Dewey concurs with this student relevancy feature observing, "No matter how useful [a product] is for special and limited ends, it will not be useful in the ultimate degree-that of contributing directly and liberally to an expanding and enriched life" (27). If student (and teacher) fails to reach new understanding that contributes to enlarged conception of the world, a true creative experience has not occurred.

When students are able to apply their existing funds of knowledge to a curiosity-driven exploration and interface those experiences with meaningful, purposeful course content, intrinsic motivation can occur. This kind of climate encourages obsessive pursuit toward new insights, toward transformational vision and outcome. This kind of immersion does not occur when learning experiences are too bounded or pre-conceived by the teacher. To be intrinsically motivated, students must consistently exercise a valued voice that initiates and sustains the creative learning environment. Authentic motivation to create occurs when students' perceptions are activated and allow room for exploration in related and new territory.

2.5 Flexible, adaptive thinking through problem-posing learning is crucial for innovation

Creative teachers are flexible thinkers and value originality in their own work and students.' Naturally, then, creative teachers must embrace cognitive and emotional dissonance resulting from moments of insight or elaboration. Cognitive and emotional dissonance is necessary for yielding the new. This is often one of the greatest challenges in teaching creatively: embracing varied forms of dissonance resulting from traversing necessarily ambiguous terrain while learning. Additionally, both teachers and students have long term institutional reinforcement that "finding the right answer" is preferable to muddled states, where realizing complex understandings are valued above information ascertainment. Though the idea of creativity as the pursuit of the novel or unique is trite, there is truth in it. In order to plan for creativity, we must encourage students to think differently about themselves, the curriculum, and how it attaches or lives within their world. The problem posed, then, must discourage approaching the problem in an expected or typical fashion. Knowing this, the creative teacher confidently celebrates productive tensions within a learning process as part of our human craving for discovery, for the desire to author ourselves originally into existence. This valuing requires informed eagerness and confidence to approach the problem in a novel way and embark on unfamiliar adventures. Reinforcing current brain research, resisting comfortable classroom routines allows students to forge unrealized neural pathways essential to innovation.

In *The Arts and the Creation of Mind,* Eisner observed, "There are several impediments to artistry in teaching. One is habit nurtured by comfortable routine" (56). The current "Learning model is in the process of turning schools into 'antiseptic environment[s]' that produce adults who are wholly unprepared to exhibit the flexibility, creativity, and collaborative skills required to thrive in today's world" (Sawyer). Sadly, many students know how to "do school," which means true learning is subordinated if not occluded as grade motivation and achievement predominate. Classically conditioned through long term extrinsic reinforcement in school, students find themselves unprepared to be flexible thinkers—an essential learning disposition for immersing in and realizing the creative thinking required for innovation. The job of teachers, then, is to create "learning environments in which students can go beyond themselves and do what they do not yet know how to do" by creating spaces for them "to play, yet within the constraints of the school environment" (Sawyer 2006).

2.5 Prioritizing Creativity Challenges Social Injustices

High stakes testing legislation has most negatively impacted under-resourced communities. "The creativity, curiosity, and sense of wonder that make students such a joy to teach have been stripped from students' experience at school, particularly in low-income schools desperate to raise test scores." (Minkel 2014). Due to punitive government policies amplifying fear, paranoia, and obsession over standardized test scores, lower socioeconomic urban schools are especially impacted and dissuaded to prioritize creative learning experiences. In *Seeking Spatial Justice,* Edward Soja examines *unjust geographies* characterized by *distributional inequalities.*

Distributions manifest visibly and institutionally. Current testing environments exacerbate distributional inequalities, as students from minority and low-income backgrounds are more likely to be tracked into remediated or support classes. These classes are even less likely to engage students in creative learning even as, arguably, these students could most benefit from the elongated, authentic learning encouraged by creative curricular design. The geography of the classroom, then, becomes an extension of the injustice of the outside world, even as schools are meant to produce opportunity and equal access.

However, if students in certain tracks—notably tracks known to be whitewashed and higher SES—are encouraged to be curious, creative, producers and authors while other students—those traditionally disenfranchised in society—are encouraged to be ever responding, never authoring their own learning, recipients of that which they are subjected to, education is systematically reproduce injustice.

We remain deeply concerned about how distributions are inequitable pedagogically—that school demographics indicate distributional inequalities in terms of creative opportunities in teaching and learning.

Similarly, teachers in lower level or support courses are often subjected to scripted curriculum. "Best practice," as professionally understood by the teacher, gives way to efficient practice, which is often not best for any of the parties involved. This superimposition is a symptom of a larger problem—teachers are being d-professionalized in large scale, alarming ways. Creative curriculum and creative curricular design are both cause and effect of best practice; and yet, many practitioners are inhibited by top-down mandates and writ large changes which do not allow for individualized instruction, authentic engagement, or flexible scheduling, which may encourage or support either or both of the prior. Creativity in education, then, becomes a social justice issue not only for students, but for teachers as well. Teachers, like other professionals, should be deferred to in their area of expertise. As teachers leave the occupation in droves, it is worth asking what can be done to encourage good teachers to stay in the craft. We suggest here that professional autonomy and room for/encouragement of creative curricular design is one answer.

2.6 Teacher Inquiry: Recursive Questions a Teacher Asks Across Creative Phases

Preparation: In what ways do I identify as creative and perform creative processes? Am I positioned as a creative process participant alongside students? How will students see/understand me "walking the talk?"

How have I honored the funds of knowledge students bring to the learning process? Are their voices involved as co-creators of the learning experience, or is my voice and vision too dominant?

Incubation: Have I spent enough time building a sense of relevance, purpose, intrigue, and safety in self-expression around the subject to elicit student buy-in? Do students have enough ***time*** to deeply engage all phases of the creative process and realize fully elaborated, innovative products?

Insight: How do I know the curriculum has achieved balance of boundedness and openness—where students have learned new knowledge and are applying it in meaningful, varied, and distinctive ways? How are student encouraged to dwell in spaces of peculiar intensity? How are they encouraged to reflect and think metacognitively about these moments?

Evaluation: Have students reviewed and discussed enough exemplars to gain a sense of what counts for quality? By extension, have we determined, as a class, what counts--how their final creative product will be evaluated, making sure to give direction but not a formula?

Elaboration: How are students able to "publish" and celebrate their products in authentic ways?
How is this work invited to inform upcoming thinking/work? How are students invited to cast forward as we move beyond this unit?

Overall, to enact the creative process requires teacher commitment to research and continuously reflect, to gain substantial knowledge of students and subject, and to notice and closely perceive classroom dynamics. These competencies, in turn, allow teachers to offer meaningful feedback and open opportunities for atypical exploration of a subject. These competencies allow teachers to act responsively to situate students as innovators rather than reproducers of course content. The following section frames the subsequent teacher narrative illustrating creative teaching dispositions and curricular design.

3.0 Narrative Inquiry as Self-Study Research Methodology

More literature concerns itself with the lives of teachers—a "narrative turn" (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Valuing self-study through narrative inquiry is gaining currency in educational reform research, as the single scholar-practitioner's voice examining professional experiences promotes reflection, discernment, and empowerment to enact professional identity and agency. "[Teaching] exists in the midst of experience, conflicting and often hostile boundaries, and between what we know from research and what we understand from practice. Self-study of practice invites researchers to embrace the hectic and fragmented territory of practice as the space for study."(Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). Self-study through narrative inquiry empowers teachers to challenge externalized mandates, the educational fixes impoverishing teaching and learning due to data-driven outcomes (Clandinin and Connelly 2001; Day, 2004; Hargreaves, 2001, 2002; Noddings, 2004; Rose, 2009).

Ultimately, consciousness of one's role as professional builds autonomy and resiliency as narratives articulate complexities involved in teaching effectively and produce awareness sustained by educative mentoring. Such work stands a greater chance of yielding enduring vs. fleeting professional growth outcomes. (Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, 2008). Self-study and narrative inquiry research involved three investigative domains in this study. First, extensive literature review built understanding of creativity and informed innovative curricular design processes. Secondly, field notes documented research and instructional insights informing curriculum development and narrative reflection. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2001; Attride-Stirling, 2012) illustrated emergent themes about dispositional qualities and creative teaching practices. Within the following narrative, one of the study's participating early career teachers exemplified her understanding of creativity's definitional, dispositional, and design properties within a mainstreamed composition class for high school juniors.

3.1 Centralizing Creativity in an 11th Grade Composition Class: Jillian's Narrative

Implementing Csikszentmihalyi's creativity stages in curricular planning and instruction, teachers embody creativity—a prerequisite for realizing growth in their practices. If the teacher does not genuinely identify as creative, how can he/she convincingly draw it forth in students? Czikszentmihalyi's *preparation* stage lends itself to curricular planning and design, but true reflective practice based in scholarship also includes *incubation*, *insight*, *evaluation*, and *elaboration*. These stages are ongoing, non-linear, and imperative within creative curricular design. Currently a sixth year teacher at Lincoln North Star High School–a culturally, racially, and socio-economically diverse environment—I value the school's wide-ranging diversities. Sixty percent of our student body is of minority status and our free and reduced lunch students represent half of the student body. Though this diversity is not present in every classroom, my experiences with regular level and remediated or support courses courses do reflect this diversity.

Addressing how my first two years had to precede my capacity to design for creativity is necessary. Like most teachers, my first year was survival-oriented. Though I gained confidence in my own instruction and curricular development, my first few years involved undeveloped season of *evaluation*, as I truly had yet to develop much of my own curriculum and, thus, did not have a lot to evaluate. I had not been teaching long enough to be able to fully and authentically assess curriculum. My curricular designs reflected drafts or were inherited from other teachers. I considered the benefits and drawbacks of each lesson and contemplated lesson improvement, but I was only beginning to take ownership of my curriculum and my classroom in ways that eluded me my first year. By year three I began to design my own curriculum and truly felt professional autonomy, I was able to evaluate and thus grow my practice.

Understanding of myself is also important to note here. I have always been goal-oriented and organized. Having fallen into the confining understanding of myself as left-brained, predictable and anything but creative, the research circle focused on creativity and its place in the English education classroom was challenging for me. I was confronted with research and theory that complicated my shallow understanding of creativity as an entity and as an identifier. Many of the researchers and theorists we read made the argument that creativity was inherent in humans, and it could also be developed and groomed with intentionality. This opened me to new and different thinking in regard to who I was as a creative being and how I conceptualized creativity within my classroom and for my students. The adage, "You steer where you stare" proved true for me; the more I studied creativity and focused on broadening my understanding of it, the more I was able to see myself as creative and, as a direct result, the more intentionally I planned for creativity in my classroom.

In conjunction with our second year of study, which corresponded with my third year of teaching, I was ready to *elaborate* or develop my curricular designs beyond tweaking. There were lessons to extend and philosophy to invite into my classroom, revealing to students my rationale and exhibited the intentionality I was finding more and more central to enacting creativity. It is worth noting that this elaboration was only available because I had a base from which to extend my thinking. There was nothing from which to elaborate in my first two years of teaching. In year three, with a rich context of literature and research guiding my planning, teaching was no longer about getting through the 50 minutes or even making each lesson mine—It was about meeting my students' needs, privileging diverse thinking, and establishing how each lesson promoted rigor over busyness. However, even as these advances seemed to be happening quickly, I did need time and space to incubate; new curriculum required continued reading of creativity scholarship—time to play with new and developing ideas and understandings, and time to reflect on my past practice.

My curricular designs became comparatively abundant, and I was more purposeful about each aspect or step of my curriculum, rather than focusing more explicitly on assessment as the curricular space to which creativity is relegated.

My "telling case" (Mitchell, 1984) came about in the fall of 2013 while I was teaching American Literature and Composition for the third consecutive year. This was the course I felt most comfortable designing. This design confidence and yearning to create came from a place of reflection and metacognition I couldn't derive in courses taught for intermittent semesters. Creativity development requires habituation. I had to establish a practice and build confidence through the trial and error process of implementing new classroom material before I could transfer my design understanding to other courses—courses where I had less experience or time to evaluate or elaborate my practice.

In the fall of 2013, during year two of our creativity research work, I designed a narrative writing assignment while reading *Perks of Being a Wallflower* in American Literature and Composition. As part of the preparation stage, I considered how students might more authentically connect to the text. I wanted to activate their prior experiences to inform their current understandings as a way of encouraging more enduring learning. After two years teaching juniors and learning how to care for students, informed by my knowledge of their needs alongside teaching the text and its nuances, I had a moment of insight. Rereading *Perks of Being a Wallflower* with a foundation from which to *elaborate* (three years of teaching this course) allowed me to think about the text and assessment paralleling with the text in new ways.

Perks of Being a Wallflower is a powerful coming-of-age story, and I wanted the students to feel powerful alongside the protagonist, Charlie, and his narrative. While developing this unit, through much *incubation,* I considered of multiple options for foci and assessment. Casting back to my own high school experience, I recalled music's importance as an outlet and place of solace in frustrating times. As part of this stage of the process, I read and researched adolescence, music therapy for Alzheimer's and amnesia patients, and the significant effects of music on the brain and our memories. Drawing from past experiences and current information, all of which came into chorus over a period of time and much rumination, importantly informed the project's development.

After deliberation and several discarded essay prompts, I decided students would write the soundtrack of their lives involving five songs of personal importance. Previously, I had successfully used music to engage students, but after *evaluating* use of music as a medium for connecting to literature and brain research, I approached music as a medium through which students could write their own stories. Composing reflective narratives would operate alongside the *Perks of Being a Wallflower* because the text focuses heavily on music as a communication and self-reflection vehicle during adolescence. Students could choose one of those songs and analyze it for literary devices and propose a meaning for the song, then share that meaning with the class. Then they would write 7-10 pages of narrative, reflecting on poignant adolescent moments and explaining how identifying music helped with coping and understanding themselves. I hoped this self-directed and reflective assignment would encourage true educative experience as they storied their emerging understanding of self and life through music to realize new visions of self in relation to their world.

As noted, the development of this assignment revealed an extended moment of insight for me. Not only did I feel the air vibrating as I wrote the assignment (and my exemplar for the assignment), but when I modeled the assignment and we brainstormed together, I could see the students connecting. They were excited about paralleling their life experiences with their music, especially in light of the research we'd read and Charlie's music-informed narrative. They wanted to talk about the project—with peers and with me. Similarly, though many students had never written a lengthy paper and were initially intimidated, they wrote without much cajoling. Because they felt passionately about the music they used to self-soothe, they felt a certain authorship with this assignment that propelled self-advocacy. I felt this educative authorship was even more important for my students as many felt/feel disenfranchised by the education system rather than encouraged and fed by it. The intimidation I noted my students feeling initially is important. They were used to writing five page persuasive essays and supporting their ideas with research much like the research we'd read about the brain's connection to music during adolescence. After reading the research articles on music and memory, students assumed a research-based assignment would follow. However, I didn't want the assignment to be expected—and it wasn't. Because it wasn't what students expected, initially many were adverse to the length, to the narrative format of the assignment, to the change of pace.

They were unsure as to how they would function as author in this new and more intimate, vulnerable form. Yet it was the unfamiliar assignment aspects—the length of the assignment, the extended time over which we would work on the project, and the narrative format—that encouraged movement beyond the known toward inhabiting a space of insight as they became aware of themselves and their strengths as writers.

As students wrote, they were eager to have me read their work and the music they chose. This constituted a period of *evaluation* for me as a teacher and designer. As I read and discussed their music and experiences, I was able to this how this assignment was working and how the students' pieces were evolving. They knew and felt power over their own experiences—and therefore the present assignment—and wrote memories and reflections first for themselves, then for me-that I might read them and appreciate them and share them in future classes, perhaps for years to come. This sharing was an authentic form of publication for them, which was powerful to see as their teacher.

American Literature students are typical juniors—not gifted nor remediated. They often are perceived as "less than" because of their lacking gifted or honors status. Because they are mainstreamed students, when I attempt more creative or self-regulated lesson plans, colleagues often warn me against affording too much autonomy or expecting too much from them. I have found, though, that all of these students can—and many will—meet and surpass expectations when given a space for exploration and creation. Coming to this understanding and experiencing students' abilities throughout this assignment (as well as in class discussions, through other assignments, etc.) continues to offer an extended moment of *insight* for me as a teacher. In ways, this moment of insight echoes for me because there are implicit suggestions in educational institutions that these students re incapable of producing high level creative work. The experience of designing this experience with them and witnessing engagement changed forever the way I design curriculum for "regular juniors."

Junior year is also a year of assessment in the United States. Juniors in high school take a battery of state tests as well as college admittance tests. Teaching within this testing environment can be frustrating. Through the research circles Dr. Thomas organized and enacting creative curricular design, I was able to feel validated as a professional and autonomous as a designer within the sometimes restrictive environment created by an expectation of extensive test preparation during instructional time, testing schedules, and assessment expectations within my building and district. Further, the literature, philosophy, and conversations entertained heightened my awareness of classroom dynamics and allowed me to name the dynamics to assist with informed creative instruction. Because I have the foundational scholarship to name observances in my classroom relevant to creative processes, I am able to notice—and therefore bear witness to—authentic student learning, solidifying the purposefulness and significance of my practice.

Through the professional development process, I am aware creativity involves embodying progressive and recursive stages. There is an organic quality to creative design stemming from understanding self and classroom. The teacher must "know thyself" and her students, as well as the research. These understandings provide the infrastructure for creative classroom learning. Students must then feel part of the classroom community, and teachers must encourage this belonging by honoring each student's selfhood through all stages of design and implementation and by inviting students to engage in the creative process alongside the teacher. When students feel whole through experiencing space to author their own learning, learning which privileges their experiences, they are likely to engage with assignments. In these moments of peculiar intensity—when students' past experiences are validated in the classroom as a cornerstone on which we build our understanding of current problematic issues—they experience education.

When teachers provide these spaces and witness authentic learning, they are inspired to continue providing openings through creative design and instruction. Like Newton's first law suggests, objects in motion tend to stay in motion unless acted upon by an outside force. We, as educators, are the object catalysts. When we design for creative experience, we set learning in motion. If we continue to privilege this type of design and assessment, our students will continue to learn in genuine ways. This said, four years after this curricular unit was implemented, there are many things I would change or adjust. Czikszentmihalyi's creative stages are a practice, and I am forever evaluating my design, allowing for elaboration, taking time to let new ideas or considerations incubate, and preparing the unit—or other units influenced by this experience and research—anew. This works as set me—as creator, designer, and teacher—into motion. I need only continue to practice this work, a refining process without end.

4.0 Conclusions / Implications

The preceding narrative revealed creative practice requires fascination with problem-solving, suspending and navigating through ambiguous learning terrain toward a revelatory end. These active properties are imperative for experiencing moments of peculiar intensity—opportunities that open curiosity, the unexpected, and innovative experimentation. Embedded in a teacher's creative process is knowing and valuing students' funds of knowledge. Without a genuine and dimensional knowledge of students, teachers cannot access essential background knowledge and experience; thus, teachers are disabled in posing authentic, motivational problems and explorations with students. Similarly, deep subject matter knowledge is vital to investigate texts in ways that open conversation and curriculum to the creative process and student receptivity of that process. If a student does not feel relationally and intellectually cared for in the classroom space, she likely will not take the risks necessary for innovative work—the end goal of the creative process-- to occur. In retrospect, I would involve more on-going self-assessment and reflection during the writing process.

More deliberate and periodic self-reflection about students' creative process can level the vertical power structure between teachers and students while enhancing students' metacognitive and evaluative abilities. As a result I disrupted—or at least did not fully encourage—one of the stages within students' creative process. Continuing to research, reflect, and design curriculum with the crucial autonomy needed to advance creativity in the classroom allowed the observance of this oversight. Though the preparation, incubation, and insights stages, were given their due, withholding the evaluation and elaboration stages from students will be addressed in the future to promote metacognition and ownership. Perhaps that is the true takeaway here: creativity is a process, a practice, and on-going engagement. It requires extensive research to understand it, time, a change in paradigm, and intentionality. Given our unique journeys through this process and the accents placed on Csikszentmihalyi theoretical framework, we cannot give an easy distillation and presume it will work for others. The *process* is what worked, and it is a reflective look at the process we offered here.

Though the call for creativity's presence in American education is recurring, the pathway toward understanding its complexity, cultivating teachers' and students' disposition toward valuing and enacting it through intelligent curricular design remains elusive, often reduced to scholarly exhortations and political platitudes. As data-driven assessment regimes compel rigid curricular design and instruction exemplifying Freire's (1970) Banking Model, educators are positioned to challenge these dictates or succumb to them: two professionally exhausting alternatives. Though no teaching process offers a panacea, enacting Csikszentmihalyi's creative process is one tangible way to inform creative curricular design with scholarship. Crucially, creative vision requires teacher autonomy in finding and reading research that speaks to the individual.

In order for teachers to truly function as scholar-practitioners and experience praxis in their professional lives, scholarship and research must interface with planning and instruction, and teachers should be empowered to seek out self-fulfilling, enduring professional development, for "If we want students to innovate, collaborate, and solve real-world problems, we need to make it possible for teachers to do those same things." (Minkel 2014). To value teachers' professionalism and foster creative practice, "Educators must have intimate experience with embodied teaching/learning practices in order to foster like experiences in their students." (Macintyre Latta et al. 29) Honoring teachers' professionalism through creative immersion promoted long term, embodied learning within an inquiry-driven and supportive professional development space. Professional development facilitating creative process aims to restore teachers' rightful role as creators and underscores the university's critical role within early career teacher induction/retention. Equally critical is the opportunity for students of all backgrounds and capabilities to meaningfully habituate the creative process. For without habituated opportunity, how can teachers and students embrace identities as innovators?

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