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Recast the Class

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Recast the Class
by
Keira O. Grant

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2021

Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

Recast the Class

This project outlines how to incorporate education into the classroom. Through the personal reflection of the author's formal academic and professional experiences it is determined that creativity is an integral part of education. In this inward reflection, the need to incorporate creativity into the classroom is presented. The project also highlights the significance of speaking with students, parents and educators to gain insight on their perspective regarding the classroom. Also highlighted in this project is classroom design, curriculum design and ways to teach in differentiated classrooms. The classroom is a microcosm of the school and is the epicenter of student learning.



Signature

May 4, 2021

Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creativity and Change Leadership

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Dates of Approval:

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Dr. Susan Keller- Mathers
Associate Professor
International Center for Studies in Creativity

May 4, 2021.



Keira O. Grant
Student

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SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Purpose and Description of Project

Students should not have to choose between creativity and their academic studies. Both are equally important and can promote student growth across academic domains. As we progress in our formal education, there is less recognition of the importance of creative knowledge in the classroom. Creative ability can be displayed as problem-solving, diverging and converging ideas, and using affective skills to find novel solutions. Students aren't often challenged to think creatively. Instead, they are asked to focus on the many topics that are tested. This demand only requires students to regurgitate information rather than digesting it. In contrast, creativity promotes a deeper thinking on incubating while utilizing their creative problem-solving and thinking skills.

A design of a classroom that focuses on teaching for a test is a classroom with many limitations and constraints put on the students' learning. Classrooms that are not designed for teaching creativity may have shorter class periods. It may not be enough time for students to incubate on ideas and learned concepts completely. When teachers are forced to adjust lessons to fit a short amount of time, this negatively impacts them because their classroom experience limits their learning experience. Every student's creative process is different, so it's important to highlight this in curriculum design to create learning opportunities for all.

By incorporating creativity in the classroom, we encourage divergent and convergent thinking, excitement, research, incubation, and problem-solving. When we omit creativity in our classrooms, students often become narrow thinkers. There are so many opportunities missed to expand on students researching and presenting topics.

This project will focus on my reflections of teaching for creativity, teaching in diverse classrooms, and classroom instruction. Creativity is the responsibility of both the educator and the students when we incorporate it in the classroom.

Rationale for Selection

The classroom is the epicenter of the school and where students spend most of their time. This project is rooted in my personal experiences as a student, an educator, and my joy for learning. As a young student, I read on a higher grade level than in my current grade and would often finish work quickly. This caused boredom, and eventually, I displayed unfavorable behaviors in class, such as being too talkative and sometimes disrupting other students. My goal wasn't to display these adverse behaviors but to continue the conversation, whether it was on a topic in class or a thought in my mind. I always enjoyed the dialogue. A number of my teachers needed to implement constraints on me to be able to serve other students. This was displayed when I was asked to complete tasks such as coloring or reading the dictionary to remain quiet. These tasks did not extend my learning or engage me academically. If my former instructors were more creative in their approach to the entire classroom, students, no matter their skill level, would not feel limited in their education as I sometimes did.

In diverse classrooms, it's critical to meet all students' needs and encourage them to learn, ask questions, and take the initiative in their education. This can be achieved by incorporating additional activities for students who may finish work early. We may also look to modify students' work to reflect their academic level. Additionally, academically below grade level students should be provided with resources to further develop their skills. It is noted that making these changes in the classroom may require extra preparation by the teacher; however, if these classroom dynamics are predicted, we can create a fruitful experience for all students.

In the past, I have had the opportunity to contribute to various classrooms as a teacher's aide, education specialist, admissions advisor, and English as a new language tutor. Many, if not all, classrooms are differentiated or have students of varying academic levels. It is the role of the educator to recognize the potential in all their students and find ways for their students to grow and meet individualized educational goals. This is best achieved by teaching for creativity. When we allow students to take responsibility for their own learning, we get them involved and interested. Coupling education and creativity is an experience that births life-long learners.

SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE & RESOURCES

Introduction

The following Literature has been researched and used to support the goal that creativity is essential for education. This investigation includes the research of the Torrance Incubation Model, the SAVI approach to learning, and instruction for diverse classrooms.

Annotated Bibliography on Creativity in Education

The literary item that catalyzed this research is *The Creative Classroom: Innovative Teaching for the 21st Century* by Keith Sawyer. This book helped to articulate emotions regarding the classroom. Through many conversations with other educators, parents, students, and community members, it was decided to read Literature that would help describe the creative classroom and what that looks like from the teaching perspective.

Sawyer, K., (2019). *The Creative Classroom: Innovative teaching for 21st-century learners*.

Teachers College Press.

Sawyer coins the term “instructionism” and describes this as a type of school model. This is displayed when teachers disseminate information and students retain it to later regurgitate on a test. There is little to no room to explore topics, deepen, or continue the learning. Sawyer reports on how problematic this is for students. When we don’t encourage them to problem solve, engage, and incubate, students don’t refine these skills. This becomes an issue for students as they transition to working adults. Many employers seek candidates to problem- solve and be innovative. These skills are predicted to not have been practiced in educational settings. If

students are not getting this type of training in school, educators may not be priming them for success beyond the classroom.

This book also highlights the importance of community. It's not just the students and the teachers that need to subscribe to creative teaching, but it's the school administrators, districts, parents, funders, and the entire community. Everyone needs to be on board for this to work. A school is a reflection of the community. When we display how creativity positively impacts our youth, it is believed that community members would open up to the idea of creativity woven into education.

Meier, D. (2000). *The accelerated learning handbook*. McGraw-Hill.

Educators may argue that it's the student's job to learn but, what if the student is unfocused? What if the information is not presented in a way that caters to their learning style? What if the student is simply uninterested? The classroom is a constant ebb and flow between receiving and learning information. The *Accelerated Learning Handbook* outlines the SAVI approach, which is somatic, auditory, visual, and intellectual learning. (Meier 2000). When we incorporate our senses into learning, it becomes a total body experience, and we are likely to be more engaged. We are able to better communicate with the uninterested or unfocused students as we try different approaches to learning. This book is beneficial for teachers as it raises their awareness regarding diverse classrooms. This may also tie into the physical classroom design to highlight more engagement throughout class time.

Torrance, E.P., Safter, H.T., (1990). *The incubation model of teaching: Getting beyond the aha!*
Bearly Limited.

Torrance and Safter begin this book with the common “Characteristics of Great Teachers.” Great teachers understand the value of teaching for creativity to help bring about a positive change in their students. This may look like a formerly uninterested student, now interested in taking the initiative in their learning. The authors discuss the “Suprarational aspects of creative thinking in three stages: heightening anticipation, deepening expectations and going beyond- keep it going.” (Torrance & Safter 1990). Lessons should be designed to capture your audience’s attention, keep it, and then encourage them to continue learning outside of the classroom. Torrance and Safter also highlight the importance of incubation. Allowing students time to digest information and ask questions, can help tap into one’s own creative abilities. This approach gives the learner the opportunity to elaborate on ideas and deepen their learning experience.

Tomlinson, C. (2017). *How to differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms.*
ASCD.

In every classroom, we find an array of students. Teachers are challenged to tap into each student’s academic potential to foster success and growth. Some students who are measured at having lower academic abilities in comparison to their classmates may feel stultified in the classroom. This might be due to information not being translated to their skill level. Tomlinson reports on how educators can tailor their lessons to fit the needs of all their students, even those who may be below grade level, accelerated, or somewhere in between. Classrooms geared towards “effective learning” display students who feel welcomed. There is respect among all

participants; students feel safe, there is an excitement for growth and student success (Tomlinson 2017).

Conclusions

Creative approaches to lesson planning, and teaching for differentiated classrooms, allow for students to develop holistically and use their creative skills in all areas of their education. Creativity is domain-general, and its techniques can be used in all subject areas. If creativity skills are practiced, students will find success in the classroom and in preparation for upcoming challenges both academically and professionally. The classroom should not be confined to a room in a building but, seen as omnipresent.

SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN

Evaluation Plan

The outlined below shows the evaluation plan for instructional outcomes for this project. This clearly displays specific actions needed to successfully integrate creativity in classroom design. It is important to outline the specific tasks to be completed by teachers that can change the dynamics of their classroom.

Table 1

Goal 1: Creating a Classroom that Teaches Using Creative Problem-solving Concepts

Strategy/ Activity	Instructional outcome	Results	Responsible personnel	Resources
Divergent & Convergent Thinking	Students are allowed to brainstorm either in a group or independently facilitated by the instructor.	Students can clearly identify the lesson objectives and express these objectives in their own words.	Teacher, Teacher Aide	Use existing brainstorming models such as stick 'em up brainstorming and brainwriting to help students diverge.
Inquiry-Based lessons	Students to ask questions in class. Lessons that allow for students to incubate on concepts.	Students are able to produce questions to help deepen their learning of the topics outlined in the objectives.	Teacher, Teacher Aide, Student	Torrance Incubation Model (TIM).

Table 2***Goal 2: Accommodations for Differentiated Classrooms***

Strategy/ Activity	Instructional outcome	Results	Responsible personnel	Resources
Setting the stage, heightening the anticipation, and extending the learning.	Students are introduced to new topics through capturing their attention, deepening their learning, and expanding their learning outside of the classroom	Students are about to display knowledge of the topics and relate this knowledge to other topics.	Teacher, Teacher Aide	Torrance Incubation Model

Project Timeline

My current educational goal is to obtain a Master of Science degree in Creativity and Change Leadership in the spring of 2021. This project serves as partial completion for that goal. Table 1 outlines my goals for teaching creativity in this project.

Table 3***Project Direction and Action Steps***

Project Direction	Action	Deadline	Hours to Complete	Support Needed
Sections I-III	Attend Master's Project Orientation and Overview Zoom Session	January 4, 2021	2 hours	Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
	Ideation of master's project topic, theme, and direction	January 31, 2021	15 Hours	
	Convergence of project direction/ attend whole class zoom	February 1, 2021	4 Hours	Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers

	Research on Literature supporting masters project ideas	February 10, 2021	15 Hours	Zawadi Books, Frank E. Merriweather Jr. Library
	Submission of Concept Paper	February 15, 2021		Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
	Attend whole class zoom	February 25, 2021	2 Hours	
	Documentation of personal student reflections	March 8, 2021	5 Hours	
	Sensing Gaps between personal reflection and Literature researched for master's project	March 15, 2021	20 Hours	Conversations with various educators
	Informal Conversations with Educators	Ongoing		Stephanie Lee M.S. Ed., Makeda R. Johnson M.S. Ed., Deborah Davis M.S. Ed., Kayla Moore, Dr. Gerard Puccio, Dr. Orin Davis, and Pierre Michel
	Informal Conversations with community members	Ongoing		
	Informal Conversations with students	Ongoing		
	Submit Sections I-III to feedback partners	March 18, 2021	10 hours	Makeda R. Johnson, M.S. Ed., Aime Mukendi Jr., Rachel Voelke-Kuhlmann
	Submission of Sections I-III	March 18, 2021	2 Hours	Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
	Submission of Sections I-III	March 22, 2021		Dr. Susan Keller Mathers
Sections IV-VI	Analyzing	April 5, 2021	10 Hours	

	results			
	Submission of Sections IV-VI	April 19, 2021		Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
	Submit Sections IV-VI to feedback partners	April 19, 2021	10Hours	Makeda R. Johnson, M.S. Ed., Aime Mukendi Jr., Rachel Voelkle-Kuhlmann, Deborah Davis, M.S. Ed.
	Revision and Feedback implementation to master's project	May 2, 2021	6 Hours	
	Submission of entire master's Project	May 3, 2021		Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
Presentation of Findings	Project Submission to Digital Commons	May 9, 2021		Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
	Project Presentation	May 13, 2021		Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers and students in CRS 690
	Implementation of project findings	Ongoing		
	Degree Conferral for Master of Science in Change and Creativity Leadership	May 15, 2021		

Plan to Achieve Goals and Outcomes

By displaying positive aspects of teaching for creativity we can begin the conversation on how this approach positively impacts students. Additionally, we also begin to identify ways educators can teach creativity in diverse classrooms. The goals of this project were explored through literature, informal conversations, and personal and shared experiences. This collection of information has helped to frame this masters project.

SECTION FOUR: MY EXPERIENCES AS A STUDENT AND AN EDUCATOR

My personal academic and professional educational experiences are important to help identify the aspects of the classroom that I felt worked and didn't. Although this is only one perspective, it serves as insight from the eyes of a student. Taking an introspective look at the classroom, highlights curriculum design in motion. It was important to document my experiences as they have evolved into the reasons why I want to change the classroom. It was equally important to document the experience of others to gain further insights surrounding education. The descriptions below include these experiences.

Table 4

Formal Educational Experiences

Institution	Institution Type	Grade Level	Location
Charlotte's Webb Pre-School Center	Private	Pre-School	Buffalo, NY
Stanley M. Makowski E.C.C. BPS #99	Buffalo Public Schools	Pre-Kindergarten-Third	Buffalo, NY
St. John's Christian Academy	Private	Fourth and Fifth	Buffalo, NY
Tapestry Charter School	Charter School	Sixth- Eighth	Buffalo, NY
Hutchinson Central Technical High School BPS #304	Buffalo Public Schools	Ninth – Twelfth	Buffalo, NY
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University	Universities of North Carolina System (UNC)	2011-2015	Greensboro, NC
State University of New York College at Buffalo	State University of New York System (SUNY)	2020-2021	Buffalo, NY

Pre-School At Charlotte's Webb Pre-School Center

I was first introduced to education at Charlotte's Webb Pre-School Center located in Buffalo, NY. This was a privately owned center for youth ages sixth months to three-years old

where they could safely stay while their parents were at work and learn basic skills before entering Pre- Kindergarten.

Pre-School

As far as I can remember, I attended to Pre-School at Charlotte's Webb Pre-School Center; my teacher was Mrs. Thompson. Pre-School was meant to be more of a babysitting option however, the director, Mrs. Thompson made it feel more like school although, I didn't know that at the time. I remember we sang songs about the days of the weeks, months, the weather and numbers. We played outside, painted, and colored. As a child I didn't sleep much. During nap time while the other children were sleeping, I was up reading with Mrs. Thompson. At home, my mother read a lot to me and this carried over into my academic studies. As an adult, I have been able to connect with Mrs. Thompson and she was delighted to learn that my love for reading had only grown. I always loved that Mrs. Thompson helped to develop my love for reading and learning, and this is something I carried with me throughout my academic career.

Grades Pre-Kindergarten- Third Grade At Stanley M. Makowski. E.C.C. Buffalo Public School #99

Stanley M. Makowski Early Childhood Center is a public school located in Buffalo, NY. Here, I was formally introduced to education and attended grades pre-kindergarten through third grade. At this institution I was provided with basic skills needed for elementary school, simultaneously developing my socioemotional skills.

Pre-Kindergarten

In September of 1997 I began my formal education at Stanley M. Makowski Early Childhood Center, Buffalo Public School #99. I remember being extremely excited the entire

summer before, telling everyone that I would be attending “real school.” My teacher was Mrs. Parker. She was tall and I remember her having a huge smile on her face every morning. Because of the prep work I did in Pre-School, I entered Pre-K already having a base in reading, writing, and math. I made a lot of friends and I remember being the classroom leader and being able to help my friends. As I reflect on this time, I believe Mrs. Parker saw my leadership skills early on and began to cultivate them in the classroom. My last interaction with Mrs. Parker was when I graduated from college in 2015. She had remained close with my cousin who also taught at Makowski and often asked for updates. She was happy to learn that I had successfully finished my undergraduate studies. I know as educators we won’t always be able to track our students, but it was nice having Mrs. Parker interested in my progression.

Kindergarten

My parents placed me in a mixed grade room so that my younger brother Kevin, (who was in Pre-K) could be in the same class. In this particular classroom there were a lot of siblings. For weeks, Kevin would cry as he missed being home with our mom. Eventually he stopped crying and began to like school. I loved being in class with my brother as it felt like an extension of home. I felt this is another time when my leadership skills emerged as I was one of the older students and could set examples for the younger ones. My teacher at this time was Ms. Lonergan. In Kindergarten, I began to explore my physical surroundings by using resources in the classroom. Kevin and I would find various items and build anything we imagined; we were always creative this way. This school year, I was also introduced to the reading station, which I loved. School seemed to be really easy, and I enjoyed it. What I remember most about Ms. Lonergan was that she let me explore and just be me. I was so interested in everything and nothing in the classroom was off limits.

This was also the school year I witnessed my sister Candace, graduate from City Honors High School. We drove her to Burlington, NC where she began attending Elon University. I was impressed by the school and began to see education as a long-term commitment. Per my parent's intentions, college was set in mind at five, and I wanted to go.

First Grade

On the first day of school, I remember my teacher telling us that there wouldn't be anymore "nap time". First grade was challenging, but I liked it. My co-teachers were Mrs. Till & Mrs. Polizzi. My teachers encouraged us to try new things and to be open. Being open was not easy for me. In one exercise, we were asked to try chocolate from Hershey's. As I picked up the cookies and cream chunk I hesitated. I remember Mrs. Till saying "Just try it. It's okay if you don't like it." This was important to me because 'trying' this new candy bar was helping to raise my tolerance for ambiguity. In this scenario, I liked the candy bar, and it's one of my favorite chocolates today. We were also introduced to the Terranova Test, or as we called it, the "The Big Bad Test." For months, we studied and studied, and I hated it. This was when I started to feel like school wasn't so much fun after all. I remember being in a breakout group with Mrs. Polizzi and she made our test prep into a game. I was thankful for that because she redirected my feelings towards the test. To my knowledge, the class performed well. What has remained with me the most from that school year, was taking something that was required and making it presentable to the target audience. No one in class wanted to take that test, but our instructors helped to change our perspectives.

Second Grade

Second Grade was very different from first grade. One major difference was my teacher Mrs. Hyatt never turned on all the lights. Our classroom always had this certain ambiance about it, and everyone was very calm. She also let us take naps if we needed it, we had a choice. I still didn't sleep much, but I did learn to better identify when my body needed rest. She focused a lot on our feelings and emotional growth. I believe this was important to learn, as I was becoming a leader exercising emotional intelligence. I remember during a spelling session I kept misspelling the word 'because' and I felt like a failure because I was used to getting all the words right. I confided in Mrs. Hyatt about this, and she said that it's okay not to know something and that the important thing is that I try to understand the word and learn to spell it. Mrs. Hyatt's class was also very hands on. We had classroom pets and plants, and we all took turns learning to care for them. This fostered a sense of community and responsibility. I think Mrs. Hyatt taught my class a lot of lessons without traditionally teaching us these lessons. We learned about friendship, teams, community, partners, our emotions, and ultimately ourselves. These lessons have continued to resonate throughout my life.

Third Grade

Third grade began with the terrifying attack of September 11, 2001. I honestly didn't understand what was going on, but I knew something terrible had happened. My teacher, Ms. Mullen turned the news on and in the following days led grade level discussions about what happened, our understanding around it, and how we might move forward. I appreciated this in a teacher because she not only raised the importance of informing ourselves but also talking about our feelings. She was also able to bridge gaps to make sure we made real connections in class. Ms. Mullen's class was connected to the courtyard. As long as the weather permitted, we had

class outside. I enjoyed class outside because it was different. Ms. Mullen found many ways to get information to us.

Third grade ended my time at Makowski as the school did not exceed the third grade at that time. At this point, my educational experiences had been pleasurable, and my teachers provided opportunities to explore, learn and grow, while laying academic foundations. I was intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

Grades Fourth Through Fifth Grade At St. John's Christian Academy

In the fourth grade, I transferred to St. John's Christian Academy in Buffalo, NY. This private institution was birthed from St. John's Baptist Church, also located in Buffalo, NY. This school existed to provide education to students who also practiced the Christian faith.

Fourth Grade

Transferring to a new school was a challenge for me and I did not accept this change well. At my new school, I had to wear a uniform, pray, read the bible, and attend chorus practice all on top of my other studies. I was raised in a Christian household, so religion wasn't foreign to me; but it was my first time seeing it introduced in my formal education. In public school, my experience was that religion was separate. My teacher was Mrs. Leftwich. At first, I really liked her. As the school year progressed, I began to get the feeling that she was tired of us. There was a classmate of mine who was extremely aggressive. He would throw tantrums, flip over the desks, and throw things and it was scary as I had not previously experienced this. I also had a classmate that had what I would describe now as having a developmental disorder. Both students, weren't always accommodated and this often disrupted the flow of the classroom. My turning point in this school year was in religion class. While discussing the creation story, we

learned that the bible describes how God made everything from nothing. First there was light and then waters, and eventually everything else. I raised my hand in class and said, “Oh, this is just like the big bang theory!” Furious, my teacher told me “no,” that the big bang theory was “made up” and that we are “never to mix religion and science”. I felt differently and continued to voice my opinion. I was scolded because I had a different line of thinking. This made me not only feel boxed but muted; as if my ideas would never be accepted in this class. Throughout the school year I began to struggle with wanting to participate in class and overall caring about school.

This same school year my sister Candace graduated from Elon University. I have now seen her graduate twice and it gave me hope that there was something to look forward to past fourth grade. Although, I had an unexpected school year, I was looking forward to fifth grade.

Fifth Grade

Fifth grade did not meet my expectations as it wasn't much different than 4th grade. My Teacher Mr. Blasingame also gave me the impression that he didn't like kids. As a now adult, I realize that certain life situations can spill into our work-life but, we have to be conscientious of the effect we have on others. Once during a science presentation, I was conducting a solo lab experiment in front of the class. Prior to the presentation I read the lab, gathered materials and felt confident completing the steps. While presenting, I read each step, and everything seemed to be going smoothly. The very last step I somehow missed in my preparation. I was supposed to complete the lab in advance and make observations for a week. I realized this during my presentation. Mr. Blasingame yelled at me and told the class “this is what happens when you are underprepared for class and don't know what you are doing.” He asked me to clean up my “mess” and sit down. Mortified, I sat down and held back tears. I knew that I did prepare, there

was just an oversight of the last step. I put my head down and I simply did not care anymore to be in school.

During this school year I never felt challenged in my work so I would talk to the other students which was often seen as disruptive. When I finished work early, I was tasked to remember bible verses or write definitions in the dictionary. The one bright spot in this year was working with our Teacher's Aide Ms. Burrell. She noticed that I wasn't being challenged and created break out groups for us based on academic level. I enjoyed working with her and that helped me get through the school year. My parents did notice how unhappy I was and decided that St. John's was no longer a good fit for me (I'm not sure if it ever was).

Fourth and fifth grade were probably my worst years. I'm thankful that I didn't have more experiences like this. The memories I have, helped to shape me as an educator. There are many practices demonstrated from these school years that I would not repeat as they are viewed as unfavorable.

Grades Sixth Through Eighth At Tapestry Charter School

In the sixth grade I transferred to Tapestry Charter school in Buffalo, NY. This charter school focused on community aspects of a school and how we are all a "crew". Here I completed my requirements for middle school.

Sixth Grade

The idea of a new experience, teachers and classmates excited me. The summer before, I was able to meet my teacher, Carol, and discussed what I liked about school. I felt there was already a difference. My main teachers were Carol and Jason, and I loved how hands on their classroom and lessons were. We had class outside, completed projects, and each student had

their own pacing books for reading and writing, allowing students to work at their own level and speed. Carol challenged me to read 7th and 8th grade books and Jason introduced me to how “cool” science was. This school also offered additional classes called “specials”. I had the opportunity to participate in the following electives: dance, art, music, knitting, and fashion design. Tapestry wanted us to branch out and explore our interests and become open to new ideas. This shift in education resurfaced feelings I had while at Makowski and I absolutely loved school again.

Seventh And Eighth Grade

For the rest of middle school, I had a similar experience to sixth grade. My teachers began to group us based on academic needs and I really benefited from this tailored experience. By the end of eighth grade, I completed some of my ninth grade requirements for science and Spanish.

In the spring of 2007, I participated in the entrance exam for Hutchinson Central Technical High School, which was my first-choice school. I passed the entrance exam, and was accepted. Jason helped to cultivate my love for science, and I knew I wanted to be at a school where this was the focus. Excited, I graduated eighth grade prepared for new beginnings at Tech.

High School At Hutchinson Central Technical High School

In the ninth grade I transferred to Hutchinson Central Technical High School, a public school in Buffalo, NY. Hutch Tech focuses on preparing high school students for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. Here, I majored in Biochemistry Technology and completed satisfactory requirements for a New York State Regents Diploma in June of 2011.

High School

Many people I've talked to about high school have told me that they didn't enjoy it, but that wasn't my experience. I loved Hutch Tech and they helped further my interest in science. As a biochemistry major my coursework was heavily based in the sciences: Biology, Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Physics, AP Bio and Chemistry. I found myself taking the conversation home to the dinner table and telling my family about all that I've learned. My teachers did have to teach so we could pass the regents exams however, I always felt they had time for questions, and we went over information far beyond the regents. In high school I also joined the swim, cheer and volleyball teams, band, and student council (junior and senior year). At Tech it wasn't enough just to be "smart," we were challenged to be well-rounded in academics and extracurricular activities. Although my focus was education, my teachers encouraged us to continue to branch out and be open. By graduation, I knew that I wanted to continue to study in a STEM field and I was excited to go to college.

In late April of my senior year, I decided that I would attend North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University for Chemical Engineering.

Bachelor Of Science Work At North Carolina Agricultural And Technical State University

I matriculated to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, NC in the fall of 2011. North Carolina A&T is a historically black university founded in 189 it is a school in the Universities of North Carolina (UNC) system. This university is known for producing the most African American engineers. Originally, I entered into the engineering field but found that I didn't enjoy it. With the guidance of my advisors, I changed

my major and completed coursework in Sports Science and Fitness Management with a concentration in Leisure Studies. In the Fall semester of 2015, I graduated Magna Cum Laude.

Bachelor of Science Degree

I believe my experiences at A&T took all my previous experiences and amplified them. I studied kinesiology in the Sports Science and Fitness Management department. It was a small department that felt like family. The person who impacted me most was my advisor Dr. Ankomah. He often spoke on our school being a “village” and how everyone contributed to student success. It took me a while to understand this concept, but he wanted me to realize that at a school we all have different roles that can make the school stronger or weaker. It’s not enough for the “teachers to teach, and the students learn”. He spoke on how the students should be energized throughout the school, in class, in the café, on the yard, at football games and in the academic support rooms. He said, “when the students do well, we all do well, and that’s how we continue the legacy of the school.” Honestly, I didn’t understand that lesson at that time, I wasn’t even sure why a man towards the end of his career cared at all. In the fall semester of 2013, I received a 4.0. I was the only student in my concentration to do so. For whatever reason, I didn’t attend the department ceremony for the 4.0 students. Later that day, I received a called from Dr. Ankomah and he asked me why I didn’t attend. He said he went there to support me and was so happy to have had at least one person to make the 4.0 list that semester. I told him I didn’t see why he was so upset, or why it mattered if I showed up or not. He plainly told me that it was bigger than me. This was a celebration for our community, department, and university. This is where I began to learn the concept that what happens in the classroom, impacts the students, which impacts the school, and ultimately the community.

North Carolina A&T State University is not only one of the best historically black colleges and universities, but it fosters hope to students of color to excel in the fields of STEAM and Education. I believe these accomplishments, began with the hard work of students like me, and the care and attention of instructors such as Dr. Ankomah.

Masters Of Science Work At The State University Of New York College At Buffalo

The State University of New York College at Buffalo is a public institution in Buffalo, NY. This university is the birthplace for the International Center for Studies in Creativity.

Master of Science Degree

I wanted a master's degree that would allow me to be flexible in my career. A degree in creativity allows me to do so. As a student in the Creativity and Change Leadership program I have learned concepts and frameworks that I not only will be able to use in the classroom but in my personal life as well. The professors in this program, have never isolated my ideas or demand that I follow one direction in my thinking. I have received guidance from the department to make sure I am on track with my studies. Navigating graduate school comes with its challenges however, I have found great support in my department.

I am excited to be able to integrate creativity in the classroom and help students reach their goals. I am thankful for this journey and the new experiences to come.

Teaching Experiences

In my adult life, I next describe my experiences as a teacher's aide, education specialist, admissions advisor and tutor. It has been a rewarding experience to serve students in these different roles. Holding on to my experiences, fuels my interactions with my students.

Table 5***Professional Educational Experiences***

Employer	Title	Grade	Location
Stanley G. Falk School	Teacher's Aide	Third-Seventh	Buffalo, NY
Buffalo Urban League	Education Specialist	Nineth- Twelfth	Buffalo, NY
University at Buffalo Educational Opportunity Center	Admissions Advisor	Higher Education	Buffalo, NY
Houghton College at Buffalo	Tutor/ Academic Support	Higher Education	Buffalo, NY

Teacher's Aide At Stanley G. Falk School

The Stanley G. Falk School is a specialized day program for students with special learning and emotional needs, located in Buffalo, NY. I began my professional journey in education here in a fourth-grade classroom. During my time here I also assisted in the breakfast program and participated in summer school as a Physical Education teacher.

Teacher's Aide

The very first time I set foot in a classroom as an educator was at the Stanley G. Falk School (Buffalo, NY). I was in a fourth-grade classroom as a teacher's aide. As a young, new college graduate I was so eager to dive in and began implementing all the things I learned, but I soon found out there was so much more learning to do. At Falk, I really began to blossom as an educator, and my teachers, were the students. At this school I started to see factors that negatively impact education. I saw students who lacked basic needs at home such as food and safety. I also saw students who had a hard time focusing because of outside situations. I had to

learn to help students navigate these challenges so they can excel in their studies. It was challenging at first, because I didn't always know how to help. In the beginning of my second year at the school, I began to work in the breakfast line, and I had direct interaction with every student. I learned every name, I knew who didn't like grape jelly, or only liked milk. I could tell when the students didn't get enough sleep, or when they were excited to tell me about something good that happened at home. I became a better educator by establishing these relationships.

The students also taught me that things don't have to be perfect. Throughout the classroom we completed various art assignments. I would make an example and make sure it was symmetrical, and as perfect as possible. I found myself expecting my students to color neater or cut with more precision, but I realized that I was only halting their creative process. The things I loved about the classroom, mostly having creative autonomy, I wasn't offering to my students. I began to accept the most beautifully oddly shaped art projects and I couldn't have been prouder of. I learned that it wasn't about being perfect, but about the experience, and the process.

Education Specialist At The Buffalo Urban League

The Buffalo Urban League is located in Buffalo, NY. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing equity, and equality through education, housing and financial wealth for citizen in the Western New York area. I directly worked in the In-School Youth department under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which assisted high school aged students with securing employment, obtaining drivers permit and licenses, and resume writing. This department catered to registered participants that were below the poverty line. Our focus was to advocate for students in need, to ensure they graduated from high school, and to provide them with a scholarship to continue their academic studies.

Education Specialist

My time at the Buffalo Urban League was brief, but powerful. As an Education Specialist, I was granted the opportunity to work with high school students from various schools through our in-school youth department. We conducted after school activities, Summer Youth Employment Program, Youth Employment Program, and the Advantage Grant. While working with these high school students I saw first-hand the importance of preparing our young adults for various avenues after graduating high school. Prior to this experience, I felt all students should go to a traditional college. However, at the Urban League I helped students not only to graduate but to gain scholarships for college, enter into trade programs, and the workforce. I believe this experience to be valuable because it helped me to see the different needs of students and how to best guide them to success.

Admissions Advisor At The University At Buffalo Educational Opportunity Center

The Educational Opportunity Center is a non-profit organization that provides non-traditional higher education located in Buffalo, NY. When founded, the center's focus was to help community members obtain their High School Equivalency Diploma, and certifications in the healthcare field such as certified nursing assistant and central sterilization technician. Along with providing free tuition for their students, they also operate the ATTAIN lab. This computer lab is open to the public and offers technology classes, also free of charge.

Admissions Advisor

At the University at Buffalo Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) my role in admissions was to recruit and begin the admissions process for prospective students. This required me to have a heavy presence in the community and to foster relationships with community leaders, schools, administrators and various organizations. Prospective students would meet with me and tell me about their dreams and aspirations, and I would help them to see how EOC could fit to help them achieve their goals. I enjoyed helping students to use visionary thinking to chart out their academic and professional plans. Although I loved working with EOC students, one major downfall I saw in this program was there was no overall plan for life after EOC. This concerned me because I often wondered what happened to students when they left the program. I did my best to raise these concerns to the school's administration but my vision for the program and the potential I saw did not align with the directors and other staff.

With all my previous experience in the classroom, working with students, and as a student myself, it made me want to make a difference in education. I realize that this change will take more than me but I can start the work. I'm thankful for all my academic and professional experiences because they have shaped me into a better educator, and student.

SECTION FIVE: INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND EDUCATORS

In my journey to recast the class I was able to converse with many members in my local community. These informal conversations were held, with students, parents, educators, administrators, deans, retired educators, my peers, clergy and various community leaders. Throughout these conversations I have gathered that the classroom is a microcosm of the school and ultimately a reflection of the community it's in. Below are brief descriptions of some of those conversations that I found most informative.

Conversations with a Student

This was a conversation with an English as a new language student. She voiced her experiences in the classroom and how she struggled with the English Language when she first arrived in America. She said that one of the things that helped her learn was she had teachers who were patient with her. As teachers we want students to be at a certain point, but they might not be. It's the job of the educator to meet students where they are and work with them while they achieve milestones.

Conversations with Parents

Parent one discussed classroom instruction and lesson design. He highlighted why he thought teachers should give homework. His response was that he would have an issue if his child(ren) came home and never had homework. Although he's aware that this is the teaching style of some schools, he is not in favor of it. He believed that homework helps students to hone in on research skills and prepare them for solving problems in the "real world." Further debating this topic, it was realized that for the class to function properly, parents should be involved in

their child's learning. This also opens up for collaboration of new ideas. If parents want "homework" but it's not the teacher's preference, possibly the teacher can assign different types of work that would require students to perform tasks in and outside of the classroom.

Parent two expressed that student success does not solely fall on the responsibility of the teacher but on the parent(s) and the community members as well. She mentioned how she was often involved in her daughter's classroom. It wasn't to be a helicopter parent but to be able to reinforce the lessons her child learned at school. The parent also mentioned that the community should promote education and encourage children to do their best in school. She said one way we could possibly do this is to discuss education in everyday conversations. We should ask students how their studies are going and sense gaps regarding their needs.

Parent three fully believed that education starts at home. He thought classrooms should be designed where students can explore and dig deeper into topics. He stated that if parents were educated on basic school topics they could begin working on those topics at home. Although he is not a teacher, he felt too much responsibility was placed on the educators. A classroom where parents, teachers and students are all responsible for learning and success is ideal.

Conversation with Educators

While discussing role of participants in a classroom, and educator at the higher education level stated that students are responsible for their own learning. Teachers should not spoon feed students, however if intrinsically motivated, students will show a desire for learning. In his academic experiences as a student, this was the expectation set forth by his instructors. He also spoke on that it's the students' job to make inquiries and gain an understanding of topics they are unclear of. Although, a sound approach to teaching, this may not work for all students. Teachers

who are not flexible in their teaching styles my experience pushback from students. Learning needs to be the responsibility of both teachers and students.

One path for students is to attend college once they complete their K-12 studies. In a conversation with a higher education professor, he spoke on what we can do to prepare students for college. He mentioned that many students are used to being spoon feed information and are not challenged or encouraged to form their own ideas. He liked the idea of bringing creativity into the classroom. I introduced him to the creative problem-solving method and other creativity tools. He was eager to learn how to implement these ideas into his classrooms. This was an important conversation because the benefits of bringing creativity into the classroom were clearly expressed. Continuing to have conversations like these with educators can help to bring more creativity in the classroom.

A high school English teacher discussed her desire to do interactive projects with her students but not have the school funding for it. She mentioned having to regularly pull from her personal funds to support the needs of her classroom. Sadly, this isn't an isolated situation. Often times teachers don't have the resources they need to be affective in the classroom. The desire to do more in the classroom exists but sometimes resources are needed to bring our creative ideas into fruition.

Conclusion

Canvassing the community helped to gain a clear perspective of education in the classroom. Conversations that helped to highlight the essence of this project were listed. As we continue the conversation of integrating creativity into all subject areas, we will need the support of the community. It is not simply enough for the teachers and students see creativity as essential, but the community must also be engaged.

SECTION SIX: KEY LEARNINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Professional Insights And Opportunities For Reform

Reflecting on personal experiences allows for an introspective look into education. The ability to recall this journey as a student is powerful and clear. Educators who integrated creative principles into their classrooms, whether they realized it or not, created an environment where students were able to expand their learning. The descriptions of personal reflections serve as the foundation for what we would like to see, and not see in an educator.

The desire to have student and parent engagement in the class is a clear theme among the informal conversations. Canvassing the community proved to be essential to gain further insight. When we collect the experiences of others, we find the common need for creativity in the classroom.

Personal Insights And Opportunities For Reform

I will continue to listen to my voice and expand my view of what others have to say. In my role as an educator, it is essential to remain cognizant of these reflections from both myself and others, so that I do not repeat actions that do not bring creativity in the classroom. I plan to regularly obtain feedback from students, parents and other community members as we face challenges. It is also important that I continually assess the needs of my students and that I remain flexible in my classroom and curriculum design.

The classroom is the epicenter of the school and what I do as an educator is a reflection of that. Creating space for creativity in classrooms will help students to understand the power of their natural creative abilities as I recast class.

Vision

At the end of this journey, I see the restructured classroom designed as an entire school that models teaching for creativity in all subject areas. I would love to further develop the idea of the classroom and teach other educators how to apply these principles in their classroom. I want to share my experiences, and stories and collect theirs too. It is my hope that students are greatly impacted by creativity in the classroom and share their gifts across all domains in their lives.

Conclusion

Uncovering one's creative potential is lifechanging, and we begin to see it in every part of our lives. As children, we spend a considerable amount of time in school. Our classrooms need to teach for creativity as we prepare students for the next grade, college, or the next part in their life. As we cultivate these skills in our youth, we find that they have favorable academic experiences and can extend their learning past the physical classroom. As we nurture a student in this way, we preserve their creative skills. This will come full circle as they continue to share this knowledge with the next generation, and so on. This cycle only continues as people continually see the value in teaching for creativity. Integrating creativity in the classroom is the legacy of every educator and student.

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