

## **Lessons from a year of Making Creativity Visible**

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*Note to readers: This was adapted from remarks delivered at a special, teacher preview of the opening of our new Walter Wing. This extraordinary event, which welcomed back amazing educators who have engaged in professional development workshops and partnerships with the Columbus Museum of Art, event was made possible through the support of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.*

Fifteen years into the new millennium there seems to be a veritable mania for “creativity.” One of the oft-touted “4Cs” of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, creativity seems to be the answer to everything from personal well-being to global competitiveness. But where is creativity in our lives? Where is creativity in learning? For those of us trumpeting “creativity,” how do we know it when we see it? How do we foster it? How do we assess it in ways that are true to its value? How do we champion and celebrate the process and products of creativity in ways that encourage the creative abilities of all?

At the Columbus Museum of Art, we talk about creativity as the process of using imagination and critical thinking to generate new ideas that have value. Creativity is the ability to see things as if they could be different, and to take action based on that vision. It is what we need to realize change in our lives, in our communities, and in the world.

***So what does creativity look like, feel like, and sound in learning?  
How can we model, foster, and assess it in learning spaces?***

In October 2014, the CMA received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for the Making Creativity Visible initiative. This initiative is a responsive, collaborative exploration of these questions with museum educators at CMA and classroom teachers across central Ohio. In many ways, the Making Creativity Visible initiative is a more intensive and intentional extension of the work the CMA has been doing with educators for years. For example, with support from the Making Creativity Visible Initiative, we were recently able to welcome some very important members of our teacher community to a sneak peek of our new Columbus Museum of Art. These were teachers who had engaged with our Teaching for Creativity Institute, our Columbus City Schools Art Teacher professional development, our Creating to Learn PD collaboration with Nancy Pistone at the Ohio Department of Education, and other workshops and partnerships.

Through those experiences, these teachers looked with us both critically and imaginatively at their classrooms and beyond, and asked

***What are the conditions in which creativity thrives?*** Conditions like flexible use of time, classrooms that feel like studios, supportive and collaborative relationships, intentional language.

***What are the dispositions that support the creative process?*** Dispositions like persistence, experimentation, play, curiosity, wonder.

***What can I as a teacher do to support these conditions and dispositions? What can I do Monday and every day to foster creativity?***

These are not simple questions, and classrooms are not simple places. However, over the course of this past year of Making Creativity Visible, hundreds of teachers have helped us think more and better about them. Some have sat with us for hours, deconstructing their practice and letting us peek into their experiments with learners. Others, have believed with us that the field of learning in museums and the field of learning in schools hold lessons for one another, and experimented, imagined, and played with us. Others have questioned assumptions, imagined possibilities, articulated new visions, and dived into ambiguity with us. For all of these teachers we are so grateful. Together we are collaboratively forging an ecosystem for creativity for all children in central Ohio and beyond.

The Making Creativity Visible initiative continues to evolve. We are still learning about what it looks like to foster the conditions and dispositions that support creativity - and as life-long learners, we expect that we will always be exploring these questions. Nonetheless, there are some things we have learned so far that I want to share in the form of a call to action for all educators, whether you teach in a classroom, in a museum, or at a kitchen table.

The first one is simple. On our website's resource page you will find some of our tools for creative thinking. In particular, you'll find our revamped and evolving "Thinking Like an Artist" rubric for creativity and a couple of mini-posters we created for your classroom based on the questions and input of teachers over the past year. Try them out. Share them with teacher friends. Send us your feedback. Like all of our work, the tools we develop for teachers are designed to evolve.

Second, come see us soon. April 7-9, 2016, we will be hosting our Creativity Summit – a 3-day bonanza of all things creative. The 3rd day is educator-focused; we will kick off the day with a keynote address by Tony Wagner, the author and educator whose most recent book, *Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing our Kids for the Innovation Age* is a clarion call for creativity in learning. The other date to mark is the start of our next Teaching for Creativity Institute, June 14-17, 2016. This experience is one-half grad school, one-half summer camp, and will change your approach to teaching and learning.

Lastly, and most importantly, nurture your own creative self, and model your learning and creativity with your students. Be curious, and talk to your students about it. Be imaginative, and use that language with them. Tell them about the failures you are learning from. Experiment and take risks and let them know. Be curious, be a learner, practice creativity, and do all of that in front of your students. Of all the hundreds of hours that we have spent observing classrooms and talking with educators, one of the things that has been most consistent about classrooms in which creativity thrives is that the adults in those spaces are practicing the dispositions of creativity, and using that language with their students.

Every day, practice your imagination, and make your own creativity visible, audible, and felt in your classrooms and beyond.

When we come together, whether physically or virtually, we do so as a community of creativity, and for creativity. The more we practice our creativity and make it visible, the larger and deeper that community will grow, and the more contagious our creativity will be.