

Creativity and CMP

What makes one house unique and more attractive than surrounding homes? Participants at this summer's CMP Workshop in Stevens Point offered answers such as craftsmanship, design, amenities, etc. The design and concept of a home comes from an architect's imagination. The architect uses his/her imagination to solve problems in an effort to produce something innovative and creative. Much like quality homes, quality music has a well-conceived structure (form and design). Consumers of music, homes, cars, etc, all look for innovative products that are unique and have excellent design that capture our imagination.

The Case For Creativity

Cultivating creativity in our students needs to be one of our top goals as educators. Why? As author Daniel Pink (2005) states in his book "A Whole New Mind" the world is changing at an unprecedented pace. "In short, we've progressed from a society of farmers (Agrarian Age) to a society of factory workers (Industrial Age) to a society of knowledge workers (Information Age). And now we're progressing yet again -- to a society of creators and empathizers, of pattern recognizers and meaning makers (Conceptual Age)" (p. 50). Pink makes the point that "knowledge is no longer enough; contextualizing and creatively using information is what matters" (p. 246). Why is this transition occurring? Pink suggests that it is being fed by "affluence (the abundance that characterizes Western life), technological progress (the automation of sever kinds of white-collar work), and globalization (certain types of knowledge work moving to Asia) (p. 50). In other words, "mere survival today depends on being able to do something that overseas knowledge workers can't do cheaper, that powerful computers can't do faster, and that satisfies one of the nonmaterial, transcendent desires of an abundant age" (p. 51). "In this 21st-century global economy, Wisconsin's competitive edge will be the talent it develops for innovation and entrepreneurship. In a fast-changing world where we are bombarded with more information that can be humanly processed, knowledge represents what can be known and creativity is the capacity to navigate the unknown" WI State Task Force (2009), p.10. Bottom line - music and the arts have a wonderful opportunity to develop creative thinking with our students. The key is to be intentional about it!!

What is the Creative Process?

"The first step is imagination, the capacity that we all have to see something in the mind's eye. Creativity is then using that imagination to solve problems – call it applied imagination. Then innovation is putting that creativity into practice as applied creativity" –Robinson (2006).

How Do WE Foster The Creative Process in Our Classrooms?

One truth I have learned is that good teaching doesn't just happen by chance or luck. Good teaching is very intentional. A slogan used by CMP is "teaching with intention". Our approach to the affective component to music is the same way. We don't hope and cross our fingers for an affective response. Rather, we plan a specific affective outcome and strategies to achieve this outcome. I believe the same is true for the creative process. We must be intentional about creative process and providing students the opportunity to reflect and explore creative thinking. The classroom environment needs to be safe and welcoming. It takes courage on the part of the student to share their imaginations and new ideas. Teamwork, community, and curiosity need to be in place for creativity to develop.

Looking For Examples?

At this summer's CMP Workshop we were treated to seven classroom demonstrations by master teachers. These teachers displayed many ways to teach creativity in your classroom. One such teacher was Mary Ann Zupan. We all had the pleasure of being members of Mary Ann's fifth grade general music class for her one hour demo. She created a safe and welcoming environment and then encouraged us to take risks in creating an accompaniment using percussion instruments to the music "Johnnie Comes Marching Home". As Mary Ann stated "In everything (creative teachers) model creativity and that is what cultivates that mindset in children. There are so many ways that we do that...Anything we can do to help our kids feel less vulnerable and able to take those risks" WI Task Force (2009) p.25.

We were also members of Dr. Glenn Hayes band for an hour. Dr. Hayes' demo had us explore Libby Larsen's "An Introduction to the Moon". After talking to the composer on Skype (wow!), Dr. Hayes had us form small groups to create music and movement to express poetry during the performance of the music. This piece will be performed by the 2009 WSMA High School Honors Band in October! The creativity that each group displayed was amazing.

My 8th Grade Band is currently working on a project called "ComMission Possible". This has been a three year project. The culminating event will be the composer, Samuel R. Hazo, conducting a piece that he composed for our band. Much of the process thus far has focused on creativity. As composer Hazo stated to the students in a recent phone interview "There is nothing more frightening than a blank piece of paper." The students have explored the concept of "creating" by composing melodies themselves and also considering ideas for the new composition. Sierra, a 7th grade flute player did research on Sun Prairie native, artist Georgia O'Keeffe and presented ideas for using O'Keeffe as inspiration for a new work. Mr. Hazo has used this idea and O'Keeffe's painting *Blue and Green Music* for the basis of the new work. It is powerful to see students participating in the creative process. The premier of this new work will be at the WMEA State Music Conference on Thursday, October 29 at 11:30 AM with the composer conducting.

We must be intentional about the creative process providing students the opportunity to engage their imaginations, think creatively and then apply their innovative ideas. "All students in Wisconsin can develop their creative capacities if they have access to rich learning opportunities in environments that nurture and support their creative development" WI Task Force (2009) p. 14. Learn more about creativity by attending a CMP Workshop and reading materials by Daniel Pink, Sir Ken Robinson, and "The Plan For Action" by the Wisconsin Task Force on Arts and Creativity in Education.

References:

Pink, Daniel (2005). *A Whole New Mind: Moving From the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*. New York: Riverhead Books Penguin Group.

Robinson, Sir Ken (2006). "Reading, Writing, and Creativity" *Business Week*, February 23, 2006, www.businessweek.com

Wisconsin Task Force on Arts and Creativity in Education (2009). "A Plan For Action". Booklet distributed by Lt. Gov Barbara Lawton, WI Dept. of Public Instruction and the WI Arts Board. www.creative.wisconsin.gov