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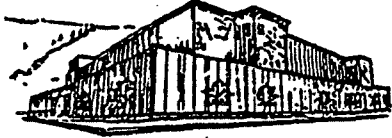
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**THE CREATIVE PROCESS
AND THE
BEGINNER'S MIND**

A Study and Reflection on Teaching Practices for the Creative Arts

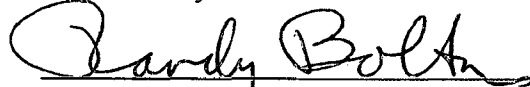
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Carol L. Bruderer
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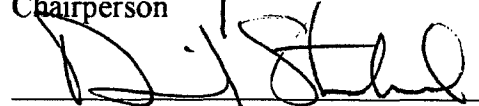
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
In Fine Arts
Integrated Arts and Education
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August, 2001

Approved by



Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

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Date

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Bruderer, Carol L. M.A. August, 2001 Integrated Arts and Education

The Creative Process and The Beginner's Mind (Total pages 32)

Chair: Dr. Randy Bolton 

This is a review of author's graduate experiences and how they affected her educational philosophy and teaching style. The assessment paper reviews the final creative project which was taking a class at the Archie Bray Foundation in beginning pottery. She then would create lesson plans and create activities with clay for her students. The paper ends with the changes she would make in next year's lessons and the significance of the project to the author.

The Booklet details the author's educational philosophy about Beginner's Mind and the Creative Process in Teaching. In the Profile of Development poetry and prose about her experiences and the development of the booklet are included. With the background of researching the literature, she lays out her areas of critical concern for teachers working with creative projects in the elementary classroom.

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ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

Restatement of the Proposal

My proposal for the final creative project was to take a class in an area new to me in the arts. Then I would follow up with lessons in the same area for my fourth graders. The faculty response to this proposal was a suggestion to make a guidebook to teachers of beginners in the creative arts. I was encouraged to read Centering by M.C. Richards and Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind by Shunryu Suzuki. I was then asked to teach a course at the Creative Pulse in 2002 dealing with the issues and techniques of teaching beginners in the arts or any discipline. Besides being delighted with the opportunity to share ideas that are important to me with other teacher-students, it has given me a platform for publicly voicing my ideas. This was a focusing part of the assignment that gave me added purpose and direction..

Initially, beginning this booklet was difficult for me. I have later realized it was because I thought a research paper was required of me. I had been doing a great deal of deeply personal pieces in the Creative Pulse and this was quite different. I started many times in different directions and finally decided on a basic analytical approach with creations interwoven. After my presentation and defense, the faculty recommended I cut out most of the analytical research section and enhance the section on my ideas. This gave me new energy and validation to rewrite the booklet.

My Pottery Class at the Archie Bray Foundation

I was asked to footprint my experience with taking a beginner's class at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena. As a center for pottery and ceramic arts, it is well known. I had not done much with clay in the past and felt compelled to take advantage of the Center while still living in Helena. The class was taught by a young graduate intern who was studying there at the Bray. The class was ten weeks and held on Wednesday evenings from 7:00-10:00 PM. There were about six other people in the class--some of whom had taken classes before.

I was apprehensive that first class. I liked the casual environment and the teacher was pleasant and non-judgmental. The first class, though, we discussed all the rules, learned terms, toured the facility, learned about the kiln schedule, etc. We only had about 20 minutes to play with the clay. I vividly felt that frustrated anticipation my students felt when they were ready to "DO" something and not just "Talk" about it.

In the ensuing weeks I went between enjoyment/release and fatigue/exasperation. I found the clay more difficult to handle, quick to dry-out, crack, and crumble. We started with pinch pots. The ease of the manipulation was offset for me by the primitive product. I was watching other class members, comparing, judging my simple pieces.

Next we did coils. These were more familiar and somewhat fun to build with. One of my favorite pieces (THE HIVE or TURBAN) I enjoyed, though, again I thought it was pretty rudimentary. I was frustrated with the necessity of scoring where the coil

attached to itself. Being sure pieces were hollow was also constraining. I more naturally worked from a solid piece of clay.

Slab work was more fascinating to me. I loved the texture you could get from the canvas on either side of the press. I repeatedly tried to “drape” it in almost an abstract tepee shape with an open, fold-back entry. My first piece broke. “Too much stress without support,” my teacher pointed out. I tried again in one of the last weeks. Even though it was too late to be glazed, the white bisque is actually more appropriate.

One of the key issues for me was with the lengthy three or four step process of greenware to kiln to glaze to kiln. So many problems could occur and your pieces could break or the glaze could turn out totally different than you expected. I realize now there is a definite CRAFT to pottery of any kind. Experience plays a monumental part. I had ideas for projects that I could never get off the ground because I didn’t know what to do to actualize my mental image. I felt the clay controlled me far more than I did it.

However, there was one piece (THE BOWING TUBE or THE GESTURING ORIFICE)

I was especially pleased with the combination of textures and color on the outer glaze.

The scored black threads criss-crossing the undulating tube were actually the result of planned effort

I loved my Celadon green piece (THE BROKEN UNICORN HORN). I was delighted with the evolution of it from a cone shape that I slanted and added chunks to. I saw a horse with armor, a broken medieval lance.

The last several weeks were on the wheel. That piece of machinery I found intriguing, almost magical, but terribly frustrating. Again I was embarrassed and judgmental of my work. I went home several evenings VERY discouraged. Only later when I read Centering did I feel a bit of reprieve when M.C. Richards admitted, “It took me seven years before I could, with certainty, center any given piece of clay.” I had been a collector of pottery for so many years I guess I expected too much of myself and my work.

A final aspect of the class was whether the end product was utilitarian or sculptural art or both. I wanted utilitarian pieces to use but, except for a piece that disappeared in its first firing, I always made what I considered ceramic art pieces. I think I was constantly looking for a creative experience like the ones I had in the Creative Pulse. I wanted to do more than make a coffee cup. However, I have realized this beginner’s class was teaching more of the “craft” of pottery. There was no follow up beyond catching a glimpse of your classmate’s work before they took it home. The classmates who built well-crafted pieces were reinforced and admired by the other members. The teacher was complimentary to everyone. There was no discussion of how you felt about the piece or what it meant to you.

Clay Activities with My Students

A few weeks after the Bray class ended, I did a clay project with my fourth grade

students. I began by talking about the class I'd taken and showing them some of my pieces. My purpose was to show them that it didn't have to be fancy or professional looking. We talked a little about the moisture level of the clay and if they wanted their pieces fired or just painted after they had dried.

They were very excited when I handed them a lump of clay. I had purposely not talked much before they had a chance to "do." We talked, as they played, about coils or snakes (as they called them) and pinch pots. I told them they could make anything they wanted. They could also just manipulate and explore it. We spent an hour that first day making, redoing, pounding, pinching, coiling, wetting. I anticipated many would be done but only one student was finished. So I rearranged my schedule the next day so they could have another hour. Before we put the clay away, I gave each a zip-lock bag and a wet paper towel to keep the clay moist (a trick I learned from a ceramics friend). Then we proceeded to clean our tables. I had opted to not cover them with anything because it might stick to the clay. The fine clay dust was hard to get rid of but we were finally saved by the janitor. He used a cleaner and a cloth to take the coating off the tables.

The next day they continued working but were more frustrated with the clay drying out. I got them some cardboard pieces for their projects to dry on and everyone but one finished something. There were many bowls, a couple of interesting heads with coil hair, a miniature tea cup, a patched tea pot, and various other shapes.

The next Monday many painted their objects with acrylic paint that adhered fairly

well. About six opted to send their projects to the high school kiln. The pieces sat on the back table for display but a handful were never claimed to be taken home. To me, this showed a lack of personal investment in the project. I felt like I wanted this experience to be pretty “wide-open.” I thought I was going to get creative results. In general, there was not much originality.

At this point, I’d like to interject a comment from my faculty committee about using the Eastern mind when looking at products. An alternative way to look at the dried, falling apart clay pieces was to have a funeral, smash it to bits, or write a poem about it. Use it as an opportunity to create from. When I look back on what I did with my students, I/we were disappointed so we left it and moved on to another subject. I want to think more about my need for a creative product to be “presentable.” I can see there are many other possible directions to go with the “unpresentable” pieces project.

Changes I Would Make with this Project

After writing this booklet, I would do this project differently in the future. First, I would do more tactile experiencing as a group, discussing what our fingers could feel and writing the words on the board. Maybe even start with a smaller piece of clay and have water available for each table’s experimentation. That way, they would have a “fresh” hunk of clay to do a project with. I would not give them as big a chunk as I did. The

dried or soggy clay from the experimentation could always be recycled for another day. This way they could experiment using a more manageable size chunk and move on with a fresh piece to create a project to be saved.

I would talk about the difference between “utilitarian and sculptural” pieces, then have everyone experiment with a bowl, a cup, a plate, etc. I would follow with a group processing time to discuss what they noticed about the clay and how it felt to try to make something. At this point, they may even have ideas that would alter my plans for the remainder of the clay projects. I would try them with the group or allow the individual student to try it.

For the next piece of clay, I would give them the parameter that it had to be a sculptural piece. It didn't have to look realistic or like anything someone could name but it couldn't be utilitarian. Then I would let those dry and have everyone paint them with acrylics. I think the firing process is too drawn out for most kids to have it be productive, especially as a beginner.

Then I would request they title their pieces and we would have a gallery around the room where each one would talk about his/her piece. The focus would not be on the technique or expertise but on what it meant to them. I might be more specific by saying, “If your piece could talk, what would it tell us?”

Finally, I would give them an opportunity to exhibit their pieces in the library for other grades and classrooms to see. Then I would plan to spend at least an additional

hour with a piece of clay. This time the directive would be, “Make a piece that tells us something about you.” I would be very curious to see if these would even be more creative because of extended experience and input from other students.

In general, I think my students thoroughly enjoyed their “clay experience.” I think we were all disappointed in the final projects that were not painted because they fell apart easily. Those painted or fired once, went home very quickly. It was also very messy and required a great deal of cleanup before we could go on to other activities. Next time I would consult with a friend who teaches high school ceramics and ask how she fosters such incredible creativity in her students. I think time spent together would be very productive now that I have some hands-on experience. I have to also remember creative success requires times of creative failure.

Significance

In the first draft of my booklet, I put the musings in the appendix. After my presentation and faculty feedback, I realized I was trying to write a research paper in Western analytical style with a few of my ideas mixed in. In my past college experience, quotes from “the experts” was valued more than my personal ideas. Ironically, the feedback I got from all three professors on my committee was “less quotes and more of

your ideas and creations. Put your musings in the body of the booklet, not the appendix.”

What evolved from these comments was rather intriguing to me. I had a chance, again, to feel the impact a teacher can have on a student. When given the license to truly come from “beginner’s mind”, I distilled a poem that is very moving to me personally and an assignment I may propose for next summer’s Creative Pulse teachers. The poem was a great celebration and culmination of my graduate program.

I have been able to see how far I’ve come and how more open and self-confident I am. It has prompted me to think about asking the principal if I can present some of this to my faculty out at school. This booklet has brought me to focus on my plans for the coming school year. I’m already planning more poetry, further extensions of my “day-book” idea from last year, and personal presentations for getting acquainted at the beginning of the year. I’m also going to consult with Phoebe Toland and work in abstract art with my students.

I’ve also grown to trust myself and what’s in my beginner’s mind. That is a powerful accomplishment for me and anybody.

THE BOOKLET

THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND THE BEGINNER'S MIND

A Study and Reflection on Teaching Practices for the Creative Arts

EDUCATIONAL MIND

I teach fourth grade in a public school in Helena, Montana. Two years ago I was a “specialist” in gifted education for the district. I’m now in the trenches. Many of my student’s families want only “readin’, ‘ritin’, and ‘rithmetic.” Sometimes they home school when they don’t get it. Sometimes they complain to the Assistant Superintendent. One set of parents is afraid of such words as “magic” or “witch” so they monitor what stories can be read aloud to their son.

Yet, I also have notes from a parent thanking me because her son has never loved reading until this year in my class. One student wrote me about which of her paintings she really liked and why. One set of parents appreciated how many times I had their child do presentations in front of the class.

This graduate project has brought me to consciously reflect on my teaching this past year. I’ve looked at my beliefs about education, my teaching and actualizing it in a public school setting. For me, this year has been more than the first year of teaching a new grade. In the distant past I had a private preschool for movement and arts for ten

years. The last six years in public education, I taught in our district's gifted program where I had to teach beyond the box--that was the purpose of the program. Last September I stepped into the "regular" classroom arena and had to decide to follow in line or buck the flow. Some of the times I jumped through hoops but most of the time I tried to open the box.

Through the school year I have made choices of activities to have my students involved in. I based my choice initially from curriculum guidelines but how I accomplished these goals was led by my experience and intuition. I also tried to observe and listen to my twenty-seven students. I think it is important at this point to state my personal educational philosophy because it drives my choice of activities within my classroom.

First, I believe personal discovery voiced within an open community has a priority over fact acquisition. An example is having students write a story and then read it to the class. I loved M.C. Richards words for when knowledge is a product we consume and store, "All we need are good closets" (Richards, p. 15) When you first write a story from your personal experience, you need a lot more than closets. And you don't have only one "correct" answer to fill in the blank. How much is the knowledge of what goes in that blank meaningful to your life now or as an adult? Some knowledge acquisition is valuable but not only memorizing it. Fact memorization is easier for a teacher to correct in a test but it minimizes a student's having to think. A one-sided education emphasizing only facts

and memorization is in drastic need of creative imagination. (Richards, p. 17)

In her book The Artist's Way, Julia Cameron warns "...we live in a culture that is toxic to art." (Cameron, p. 207) Consequently, all the more reason for us to include the arts in our curriculum. In our own Helena school system we lost our Arts Plus Program last school year. What a deficit in our system. We still have one artist in residence who spends four hours with a few of our classes per year. I don't think this is enough. Several years ago I wrote a small grant to help our fifth grades get an artist in video and media arts. We were only able to do this because our principal matched the money the Montana Arts Council gave us. Budget cuts make even these types of projects more and more difficult to accomplish.

However, I'm planning to consult with Phoebe Toland, a local Helena artist and past artist in residence at our school. I hope to study abstract art personally with her and then create activities for my students. I also hope to use these experiences as part of the course I teach with the Creative Pulse in Summer 2002.

BEGINNER'S MIND

The concept of beginner's mind branches with dual possibilities as part of the creative process. My first conception of being a beginner is portrayed in the following poem I wrote about my first art class when I was forty-two years old. Here beginner's mind is timid, somewhat fearful of the new experience. Even the images of the poem seem

simple and flatter in expression than some of my more recent work. This was only opening the door a crack but at least I did approach the door.

A New Beginning

I drove the two hour drive to Dillon by myself. My first step of breaking away, of finding myself. It was one of the few times he didn't drive me to my destination....

I walked into the room
knowing no one
cement floor
ugly, bleak, cold
This is where I will
make art?
What am I doing here?
I don't belong
The circle, introductions
I'm the only preschool teacher
I'M NOT AN ARTIST

I love color
my mother is an artist
She can paint. I can't
Four year olds and I play with paint
I'M NOT AN ARTIST
Run for the door -
Look down
Avoid

"Just make your mark"
Don't think
"We all are artists"

What I draw is pitiful, scrawny, pathetic
even ugly
What, again,
is it you want me to do?

Enter beginner
Scared, intimidated, shy

“Let what’s in you
guide your mark making”

Soul scribbles
out of proportion
in non complimentary colors
They come from me
for the first time

However, after reading Suzuki, I think beginner’s mind is much more than a timid first try at something. Beginner’s mind is an open, inwardly-looking state where you put your brain in neutral so your soul can speak. Another way of saying this is to “center” yourself, as M.C. Richards discusses in her book of the same name. As the pot rises from the centered clay, so, too, our creations grow from the focused, centered soul. Coming to balance within yourself is beginner’s mind. It is not a question of technique but of meaning. In many ways a beginner’s mind is searching for understanding instead of defending what one is already sure of.

The concept of Beginner’s Mind, because it flows out of Zen thought, is contrary to a great deal of traditional Western thought. Being is valued over doing. Intuition and looking within is sought more than logic or reason. So a beginner’s mind is blank but open and “mindful” in concentration. This mind set is one of the best ways to access the Creative FLOW--inner imagination, even unconscious ideas manifested in day-dreams.

PROFILE OF PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

In beginning this booklet I struggled because I thought a thesis paper would have to be an analytical one. Maybe I tried too hard to understand the readings and what I thought was expected by my professors. Zen teachings say when you quit trying to understand (control), understanding will come to you. I had to finally go through several personal activities to get to a point of understanding.

An activity I instinctively did was gather all my projects and notebooks from the Creative Pulse Program. As I looked over them, remembering some of the presentations and experiences, I just let the ideas flow on the computer without the hampering of mechanics or “does this make sense?” When I truly tried to write from “beginner’s mind,” feeling free to pull from within my mind and soul, a different booklet took form, and the following poem emerged.

Pulsating Memories

Huge notebooks
stuffed open
Paper visuals of pain
of hope
Cloth strips bind my throat
my words, my love
Loosened, ripped, I burst free

Me
Pot-like, heavy, dark,
wide across the middle
Pasted poem pieces rearranged

Weed water-er
Boomwhacker praising the plastic essence
Rebel before the School Board

Gritty castle turrets, meticulous dribble
MY foot drags a path from realm to realm

Body sluggish moves
longing to dance
tentative embarrassment
Lunge, Warrior Queen Slash! Gash!
delicate seed beads
iridescent flow from ear to neck

Mozart echos in ribbons and yarns
weaving turquoise, blue-black, plum
chenille, mohair, feathers
flying ends and beginnings
patterns emerge as symphonic tones intertwine

Wretched tears flood my reflective time
words scratch out the betrayal
how could I still care?

Life-trodden paper path
Toes dip into paint-filled pans
Humble feet
Twitching unnoticed in the night
Colors speak
soles smear
my life thread is drawn
Optimistic purple footprints ascend the tree trunk

Fluid blue dress
Ginger Rogers meets Isadora Duncan
tap shoes echo on tiny feet
barefoot now
Alone
I move boldly
the music a wellspring of solace

Eyes closed
Spontaneous flowing Inward choreography

Fabric mandala
Swirling centering
Streams of my life
feeding my heart
simultaneously rising from it
Corduroy kitchen bridal satin
velvet stars,
sheer river waters beaded blue
Silver spearhead
blood and death dangle in loops
Ambered leaves floating
on a gauze Mother stream

Drums
I can not find your heart beat

Write, scrawl
cathedral crosses
puncture my psyche
hideous flashes of agony and rage
agitated pacing outside
the bar
walking off the church stench

“Fuck you!!”
the pages scream
do I know her?
pathetic thing
in a scene without a happy ending

Wet, cold grey ball of clay
Solid
Crystal-ball-like in my palm
Huge angry chunks
tear a hollow
water flowers
joy

spill
filling the space

Fired clay piece
Broken smooth
gather round my dreams
scoop up the pennies with both hands
embrace it all

I then wrote from this same beginner's mind about taking a pottery class at Archie Bray and my subsequent activities with my students.

Musings Upon My Process at the Archie Bray

I see from my musings of the past two years how the beginner's mind, the teacher, and the student interact. I so often feel like the beginner and it's OK--even good. I look now at the teacher activities, the questions, the environment, what opened those doors for me as the student.

Every activity I remembered was an opening for me. Maybe my part was being open, willing to risk, go out there and I did find it from within myself most of the time. My class at the Bray was almost anti-climatic. I learned techniques and the teacher was young and not controlling--very open but not inspiring. I made pots and sculptures. Nothing was very utilitarian. Looking back on it, it was somewhat empty compared to my Creative Pulse experiences. Why? What was the difference? Possibly the experienced creative soul of the teachers I've been privileged to work with. They went beyond the

craft, beyond the technique. What I felt about the piece or project was of greater importance—what did it mean to me and my journey. We never discussed our pieces or really shared them. Most of the other students made bowls, birdhouses and wreaths. I made a pinch pot, ragged and rough. A unicorn-like sculpture that rocked and broke it's tip. I still need to sit down and listen to what it's saying to me. I made a rock hard ribbon glazed purple that I gave to my best friend. I loved the flow of the rigidity. It was hard to explain to her "what it was." After the first attempt breaking in the kiln, my second abstract tepee with burlap texture was bisque fired but too late to be glazed before class ended. It's very white a lot like the canvas of a new tepee like my husband bought a few months before we separated. It should probably stay white.

When I worked with my fourth graders I did much the same as my Bray teacher. I gave them clay and told them they could make anything they wanted. There were some creative projects but most were utilitarian bowls or cups. I had showed them my primitive work before they started. I think it served as an opening, it made it safer for them to begin. The clay itself was hard for some to work with. It dried so easily and crumbled and broke. Just about everyone finished something. I was frustrated. I didn't know where to go from here. This was a very flat project—not very rich in depth or imagination. What made the difference? I think the (not even guidance) the sparking, the opening, the inspiring. I could have focused on sculpture pieces and not utilitarian pieces. We could have had a "forced" writing period. I could have had them let their

piece speak. We could have simply shared them and talked about them. As it was, some of the pieces stayed on a back table in my classroom and never went home. There was not enough self-investment. Yet, not everyone is going to open and respond to clay. I'm not sure that I did. I also gave them other creative activities from performing plays from ancient fire myths to creating a special journal they filled with images, colors, smells, textures they liked. I didn't go as far as I could have with that either. I think I see a pattern in myself of sometimes not creating a situation for closure. They never finished those journals. Oh well, maybe they can write in them when ever they want. And they probably won't.

My experience on the potter's wheel was quite frustrating. I had watched a potter, obviously seasoned, making bowls while class was going on. As I watched the way he cupped the clay in the center, I was mesmerized, it was comforting. I wanted to put something in my two hands and hold it safe and nested. I never once centered my clay by myself. I think I have centered in dance, poetry, even personal performances.

My coiled hive rising spiraling, multicolored, hollow what do you hold. A childlike possibility of using a coil snake to make something that stands. A church spire, an upside down cyclone love the smooth, organic feel of it. It fits my hand. I run my finger along its ridges. I can grasp it easily. Mountain-like. Mountain-like A mountain reaching the heights. A circular Mayan temple to the gods? Walk the ridges to the top and fly off.

Small blue speckled pot with scalloped edges and branches on its side. The scalloped depths enhanced with purple so subtle it's hardly noticed. It fits within my two cupped hands like a geode. Narrowing depth within, What could you hold? My heart. A few flowers. A sip of water. Maybe tea. I like curves and withdraw from straight sides and rigid square angles. Some of the beauty of pottery for me lies in the soft line and curve of the rock hard fired piece.

I still much prefer poetry and movement.

THE TEACHER, THE STUDENT, AND THE CREATIVE EXPERIENCE

I almost hesitate to even structure this section. I don't like to try to tell someone else what to do, especially when it comes to creativity. However, I felt this booklet demanded I take a position and voice what I actually do in my classroom and what I've found works for me. The reader can use only those that fit. You could find others that are more important to you. This is a starting point, but within the framework of my educational philosophy with the focused yet open beginner's mind, I propose the following as essentials each teacher consider in preparing a creative experience for his/her students.

Practice an art form yourself. Richards believes that it should be a training requirement for all teachers. (Richards, p. 22) From my reading, my teaching, and graduate work, I have found having my own time to write poetry, to journal, to paint, and to try a new class has actually helped me as well as my students. Often, I will write poetry

when I give them time to do the same. I have a clearer personal sense of some of the struggles they may have with the assignment. They know that I value what I ask them to do. They love to hear from me in this unique forum. I always read it after they have done the assignment so they don't feel encouraged to mimic me.

Know you are an ARTIST . You do not have to paint million dollar paintings to be an artist. You and your students are intuitively creative and passionate about some sort of creative expression. Consequently, you are an artist. I have come across this quote in several sources and I feel Martha Graham makes a point about our individual unique artistry:

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.”(Cameron, p. 75)

Fill your creative well-spring. I need to regularly replenish my creative reserves as well as allow for the cycling I believe the creative process goes through. Personally, I have a need to be periodically either in quiet reflection or walking in nature. Plant and animal life are very connected to my soul and well-being. I get creative nourishment when I'm in the mountains.

In turn, allow for this same rejuvenation time in your students. Give them time to just “think” or “day dream.” Maybe a chance to be in reflection outside. I know it's very

hard to not see them “doing” something or producing something but work with yourself. This is valuable time. Maybe they need to read poetry, draw, look at paintings, some of it may be an exploration for them to discover what nurtures their creativity before they can do it. And they will need guidance as we all do.

Create a personal creative space or studio. This should be where you can be messy, play, and/or experiment on a consistent basis. Even if it’s just an old table or a corner of a room. Claim it and make it your own with pictures or objects and the medium you want to create with. Let your students create the same. This year I had students make a “day book,” the cover of which they collaged with favorite photos and pictures from various magazines. They did a lot with interacting between image and word. Sometimes interacting with image to image. This was not a studio but it was a special place unique to them. They also made their own sketch book out of blank paper that they drew in while I read aloud or in their free time.

Reward risk taking. Give a high grade for personal risk in trying something very novel, scary, maybe even embarrassing. Allow room for creative failure. Give extra scratch paper for experimenting. The first time my students tried oil pastels, I encouraged them to try drawing boldly, timidly, smear, blend, detail, sketchy--a variety of ways to see what the oil pastels would do. It’s also OK to try an idea and throw it away if it didn’t work.

Allow for creative dormancy. In her book, The Creative Fire, Clarissa Pinkola Estes retells several myths that typify the creative cycle. Just as Persephone must go to the lower darkness of Hades, so our creative powers lie dormant to rise again. Not only is there a cycle but the quiet dark times are essential to incubating ideas. There may be darkness or even chaos before ideas are born. Respect this in yourself as artist and teacher and in your students when they're in process. Don't rush to give your students an answer when they come to you with "I don't know what to write about or draw." It's OK to have "wondering" time.

Create a safe space for ideas. Between teacher and student as well as student to student we should agree to create a safe space with room for input but not judgements of good or bad. There should be a "no put-downs" atmosphere within the class. For imaginative ideas to grow, I believe, the students need to feel safe to expose their ideas. This is sensitive stuff, sometimes, and someone speaking their truth deserves respect.

I try to model this early in the year when my students first read a paragraph to the class. I try to give them nonjudgmental feedback. I then open it to things the other students liked about the writing. They also do peer editing before they present to the class. In this format, suggestions from students can be considered by the author before the final draft.

Guide or inspire with questions posed or parameters set. Sometimes my inclination is to tell the students to just do anything they want. This is probably in reaction

to seeing teachers hand out the pattern so the students all make everything alike. I think an open-ended question will guide or inspire. Examples: “What would your sculpture tell us if it could talk?” “Have your mobile show us who you are.”

Give lots of opportunity for flow. Often repeating the art form but varying the assignment gives the students a chance to build on their discoveries and/or failures. I’ve found often more creative products occur when there is more time repeated with the art form. An example is making more than one clay project with several different purposes or guidelines.

Give the artist an audience to witness their work. This can be in partners, small group, or entire class. Interaction and reflection add depth to the pieces. It gives the students a purpose for their efforts. You prepare differently when you know others will be listening to what you say or show.

Give feedback (evaluation) and dialogue with the students. This step is difficult for me because I don’t like to grade creative work. But this part of the process is critical. I found it was very important to me as a graduate student to get feedback from my professors. As a teacher, keep in mind that each product or presentation is only part of the much longer journey of the person and be sure it is not ..“evaluated apart from its maker, the one whose vision it represents”(Richards, p. 25). In other words, don’t grade the piece of pottery or the painting without asking the student who created it what and how they were trying to accomplish it.

In summary, I've made these observations. Not all students will be inspired by the same question. Not all students will be original or creative every time. No teacher is on the mark every time. Sometimes there are wonderful accidents. Since creativity is such a personal experience, many times you will have to follow your own intuition at the time with that particular student. Risk, begin, and trust your inner artist.

APPENDIX

Poems from good woman: by lucille clifton (pg. 170, 141)

there is a girl inside.
she is randy as a wolf.
she will not walk away
and leave these bones
to an old woman.

she is a green tree
in a forest of kindling.
she is a green girl
in a used poet.

she has waited
patient as a nun
for the second coming,
when she can break through gray hairs
into blossom

and her lovers will harvest
honey and thyme
and the woods will be wild
with the damn wonder of it.

i am not done yet

as possible as yeast
as imminent as bread
a collection of safe habits
a collection of cares
less certain than I seem
more certain than I was
a changed changer
i continue to continue
where I have been
most of my lives is
where i'm going

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