creative schools

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Visual Artist
Michael Abercromby

Teacher
Shonagh McKenzie

School
Merriwa Primary School

Year group
Year 5

In 2019, with support from the Department of Education and DLGSC, FORM partnered with 16 metropolitan and regional schools to deliver its Creative Schools program. FORM developed Creative Schools in partnership with *Culture, Creativity & Education* (CCE), an international foundation dedicated to unlocking the creativity of children and young people in and out of formal education, and *Hidden Giants*, an education consultancy agency supports schools to re-imagine their curriculum by placing 'disruptive', creative, and critical thinking at its heart.

Creative Schools Program aims to improve the learning outcomes of young Western Australians. It does so by activating creative learning strategies through the establishment of meaningful partnerships between teachers, creative (arts) practitioners and young people. The program is a valuable and imaginative addition to class and school strategies for raising attainment, improving well-being and supporting inclusion

Creative Schools engages with the participating school over a full academic year. In Term 1, the creative and teacher participate in an intensive Professional Development on Creative Learning. The program then partners each teacher with a creative practitioner to co-design and co-deliver these learning activities, which focus on a priority area of the curriculum as identified by the school and teacher (e.g. mathematics, HASS or science).

Teachers and Creatives co-facilitate a 90-minutes sessions for students on a weekly basis in Terms 2 and 3. Each class has access to 16 weeks (24 hours) of direct engagement of the creatives with the students. Two classes from each school were selected to participate, a total of 32 classes in 2019. Term 4 is an opportunity to reflect on the program and FORM's independent researcher, evaluates outcomes.

This document describes the activities and outcomes of the first term of delivery: Term 2 (over 8 weeks). It also includes reflections from school leaders, teachers and students.

ACADEMIC YEAR 2019

TERM 1

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ARTISTS AND TEACHERS

Observation and diagnosis of student engagement in the classroom. Planning time for teachers and artists

TERM 2

PROGRAM DELIVERY IN THE CLASSROOM

Creative Learning workshops per week for eight consecutive weeks

TERM 3

PROGRAM DELIVERY

Learning workshops per week for 8 consecutive weeks

TERM 4

REFLECTION AND EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

CURRICULUM
FOCUS

YEAR 5

We originally planned to focus on Numbers and Algebra, with the aim of having the students build some YouTube tutorial videos for the younger years at the school. Shonagh was interested in getting me to work on the students' understanding of fractions, removing it from a theoretical concept with no perceived real world application, to something which the students could identify in everyday life.

We ended up focusing on more holistic areas, identified in General Capabilities and Cross Curriculum Priorities and Health & Wellbeing. Our reasoning was that by making areas such as Personal and Social Capabilities and Critical and Creative Thinking more visible to the students, they would be able to identify them in themselves and others. Additionally we looked at the impact of trust and respect, and examples of creative thinking.
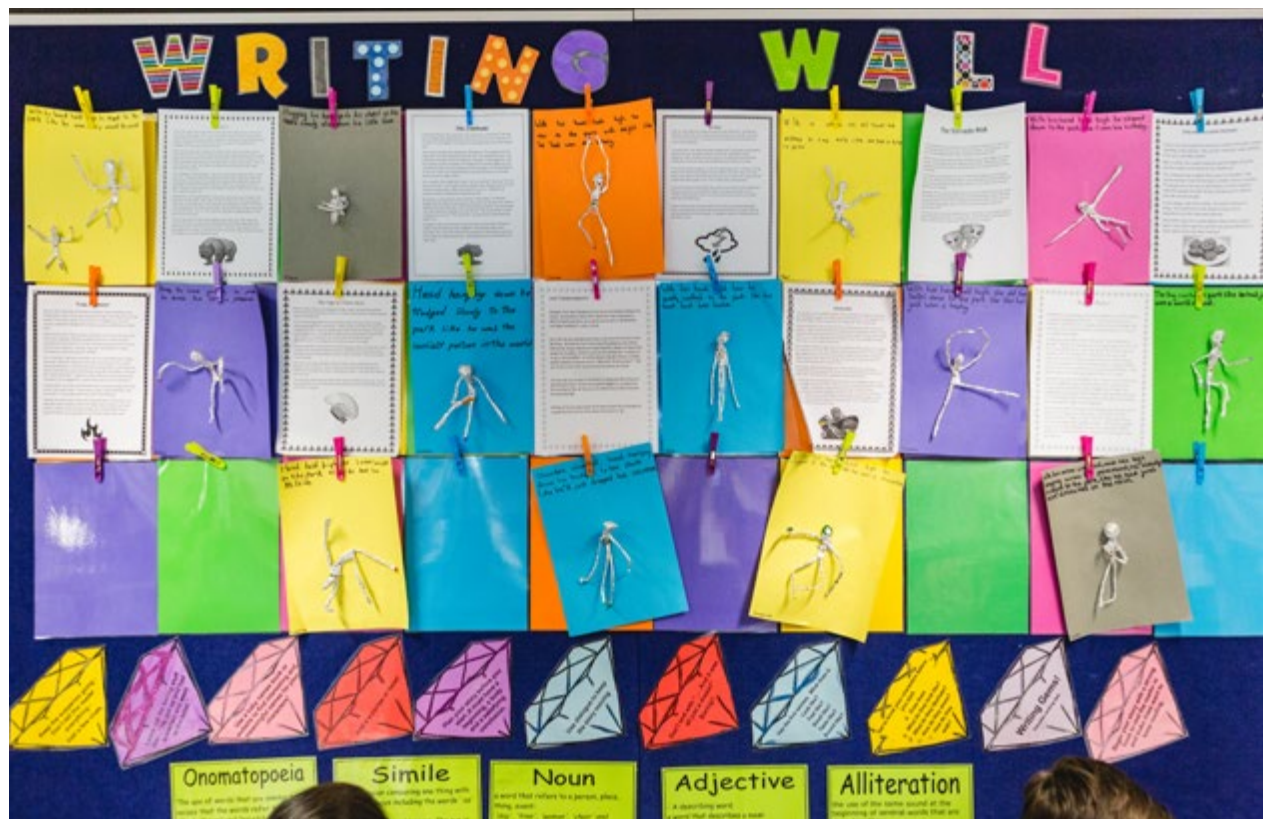
THE LEARNING
PROCESS

The teacher had identified that there was some difficulty in the class conceptualising the basic principle that a fraction represented a part of a whole. This meant that tasks like ordering on a number line were very difficult for a lot of the class. Based on this, I decided to focus particularly on them using fractions to represent real world scenarios. E.g. each student is 1/26th of the class.

I approached this by getting the students to communicate through fractions, and then by introducing music as a real world example of a way fractions are used. The aim was to get the students to see quicker notes were smaller fractions, and that fractions were used at all levels of music. (A song is broken into bars, which are broken into beats, which are broken into notes).

It was during these first three sessions that we realised we needed to pause the project and change our approach. This was what we discovered during these initial lessons:

- Collaborative group work was easily derailed by a popular minority

- Perseverance and resilience were big problems ("It's too hard")

- Energy levels were unpredictable given the timing of the session (right before lunch)

- Calming them down was more important than energising them for creative thinking

- They had no idea why I was here.

- Completion of tasks was very important for the class culture, even if it was a small task, and moving on too soon was detrimental to the majority.

- They did not have an embodied understanding of values, so how could they learn a whole new set of them?

We quickly realised they had no concept of what a value was, or even the ability to say a personal quality that was linked to behaviour rather than outcome: e.g. when asked what do you value in others, rather than saying kindness or honesty, students would write "They play fortnite well," or "Footy player" or "nice hair".

I started by changing the warm-up. We started looking at videos of the animal kingdom, to see creative habits used by animals in the wild. This was a massive success! It fulfilled the needs of the teacher as it got them seated and focused, calming them for the lesson ahead, and really entertained the students, as well as introducing them to areas of the animal kingdom they may not have been exposed to. The students loved it and were amazed by the incredible actions of intelligent animals. We incorporated collaboration with each warm up, as groups had to discuss and come up with which creative habit the animal was using the most. Seeing the creative habits from a non-academic point of view allowed the students to see how "natural" they were (a life skill!) and that we weren't just trying to teach another subject.

We used a bunch of techniques to explore values, starting with drawing links and brainstorming to drawing pictures, developing story boards and building some small performances.

We were able to slowly increase the level of autonomy as the collaboration became better, allowing us in the final weeks to let the students go to different areas of the classroom block and outside to rehearse little plays which demonstrated a value.

IMPACT OF LEARNING

By the end of our time we noticed these marked improvements:

- Students could identify the difference between a value and an activity, and even suggest the values that would be beneficial to working on an activity.

- Group work became easy, even when we chose the groups for the students to be in.

- Resilience in general went up, as a result of collaboration improving. Students persevered with exercises for longer and did not take critique as failure.

- A "value literacy" developed, allowing us to use the language of values and creative habits in both delivery and classroom management.

  - Eg. Excellent collaboration!

  - Are you being very disciplined at the moment?

  - You can go outside and rehearse if you prove your reliability in this next exercise.

- Creative thinking went up, as students were able to explain their reasoning more assertively, because they were more versed in the material.

- Trust developed in the classroom. I could trust the students, the students could trust me, and Shonagh and I could trust each other.

- A more open and engaged classroom needing less disciplinary action during sessions.

"There are a few kids who don't collaborate naturally. It's been great for them … a real stretch for them, but really good to develop collaboration skills." (Shonagh, Teacher)

"It's fun because we got to create plays and do lots of creative things." (Student)

"It's gonna be good next term. Michael is coming back next term."

"The group work is great now. This class wouldn't have been able to do this at first." (Michael, creative practitioner)

"They can recognise the creative habits now in different contexts, e.g. noticing it in the animal kingdom behaviours." (Michael, creative practitioner)

"What I've decided to do this year is let the students do something hands-on before writing … and I have noticed their writing is better if they do something hands-on first. The Creative Schools program has made me do this. When they do something with their hands first it really helps their writing. I've come to that from last year and integrated it into my Talk-for-Writing work and shared it with other teachers. It has made me realise I need to approach writing from a different way. They need to feel it first, through art or drama or something creative and hands-on before they can write." (Shonagh, Teacher)

"I'm now working with my fourth creative practitioner in the program. I've gained something from each of them, taken it in my stride. We are all evolving as teachers." (Shonagh, Teacher)
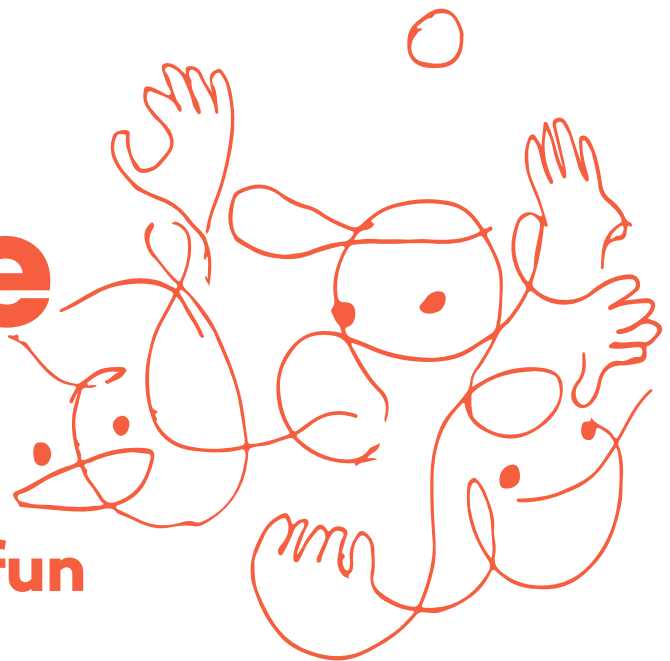
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