



# creative schools

SCOTCH COLLEGE

CASE STUDY — TERM 2 & 3

TERM 2

# creative schools

Creative Practitioner

**Michael Abercromby**  
(Theatre Maker, Director,  
Actor, Writer)

Teacher

**Jonathan Tay -**  
**Language Department**

School

**Scotch College**

Year group

**Year 10**



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 Creativity, Culture and 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 across two terms of delivery: Term 2 and 3 (over 16 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

## CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

### Propaganda and Advertising in an Indonesian Context

## CREATIVE HABITS

### Inquisitive, Imaginative

During term 2 I worked with the language department at Scotch College delivering a new unit designed to engage year 10 students with different cultures without an emphasis on language. It was in the second term of its delivery, having only been trialled once before in the previous term. It was exciting to be part of a new initiative and fantastic that Scotch was looking for input to deliver this new material.

An emphasis for the Head of Languages for that year was to bring back the concept of a “renaissance man”. A student that had a broad worldly understanding of other times and cultures outside the academics of language learning. It is an appealing idea and one that I think has a lot of merits. The unit appeared more like one you would see as an elective in your first year of a Bachelor of Arts rather than a year 10 language unit, and I was excited by the material being presented and the possibility to engage the students creatively with the material.

Although I had no concept of the Indonesian context, I was able to provide a unique perspective on advertising and propaganda, having been employed as a performer in various advertising campaigns throughout my acting career, and a thorough understanding of persuasive language.

As it is in its infancy, I was able to contribute some ideas to the unit taking into account the students' lived experience of this sort of media. This additional relevance will hopefully allow this unit to engage the students more thoroughly in the future as we witnessed it doing throughout the term. By the end of the term the students had a significantly greater understanding about the amount the media they consume is trying to position them, and the type of strategies and tactics used by media to try and do this. Additionally, they were introduced to how modern propaganda and advertising is embedded in the culture of social media, and how misinformation and “trolling” on social media can effect peoples points of view and if used precisely enough even influence elections.



## EARLY SPEED BUMPS & INCORPORATING TECHNOLOGY

This culture made it difficult at the beginning, adding to the usual dissention seen in Year 10 classes by outside teachers. After a few weeks, and the right material, this culture shifted to one that was at least open to the ideas, although I am curious as to what we could have achieved had we not had the early disruption to the term.

To add to this, when I asked the boys why they chose this unit when they seem so uninterested, the majority answer was something along the lines of: "so I don't have to do Indonesian". After speaking with the language department, we agreed that this was a big perceptual challenge to address. Framing the units as "what you're getting out of the class" as opposed to "what class you're getting out of", will be a big focus when offering these electives again.

At the start of my time with Scotch I was dismayed by the reliance on computers. I saw it as a hindrance rather than a help. I could not see how a free flowing and focused classroom could also have the boys locked behind a screen. The teacher I was working with explained how embedded they were with how the students worked, including how they delivered classroom material. I was also warned how much of a distraction they posed. So instead of pushing against the school and the boys I incorporated the technology into the lesson and found it was quite an asset in the long run, allowing us to do things with the assessments that would have otherwise been impossible.

I started by incorporating computers into the warm-up, having Wikipedia races of teams. You take two completely unconnected topics and using only Wikipedia links manoeuvre from your page to another group. The logic used and creative thinking was really great and the boys enjoyed it. They even creatively subverted the game by using quick find hotkeys to quickly isolate terms which would propel their search forwards. We also incorporated an online meme generator and iMovie software for the two assessments. What started as a perceived hinderance actually turned out to be a huge asset as we found ways to use the computer as a resource for the creative learning.

## IDENTIFYING RELEVANCE

Is television advertising relevant if you do not watch TV? What if you have all premium services and see almost no traditional advertising? Do you see it as an outdated media? Do you trust the news media if most of what you receive is identified as "click bait"? Can you receive propaganda if you don't follow politics? If you have lived understanding of targeted advertising algorithms, does that make you immune to the advert? Why were you targeted? How important is the idea of "trending" relevant to modern advertising and propaganda?

These are all the questions I asked myself coming into the course, and were justified when starting to engage the students. For a group of wealthy students in Gen Z who each had a smart phone in their pocket and a laptop that was required by the school to be used for work (and also continuously connected to a largely unrestricted internet), their experience of advertising is completely foreign to myself and the teacher. I am tail end Gen Y, yet I remember my teenage years sitting through about 8 minutes of television ad for every 30 minutes of television content. News was received through a limited amount of trusted sources, and only available in the mornings and at night unless you had a Foxtel subscription. Yet for these students, paid streaming services, 24 hour news cycles, and information through social media are the norms, changing the way they interact with advertising and propaganda.

To engage them with this material which had been hidden or changed from our traditional understanding, I decided to focus my attention on two things: Money and Memes.

## ADVERTISING

For the advertising project I focused largely on how much things cost. This may seem like a strange approach for this topic, but proved to be hugely beneficial for the boys' understanding of persuasive text. I think the material to them seemed a little theoretical and intangible. Was someone really putting that much energy into what music was being used? How much effort can go into a three word

slogan? After all, it's just an ad, it's not like it's a movie. These were all perceptions that I noticed in the class.

Using an ad campaign I had been involved in, (which I knew had a budget of around \$10 million dollars) I was able to break the ad down logistically, and explain in depth how even the condensation on a beverage was placed there by an art department specialist using a spray bottle filled with oil and water. By the end of this session I posed a question: if you are spending \$10 million dollars on a 30second ad, how much is an accident? The resounding answer and realisation from the students: Nothing.

After this session, I continuously brought the conversation back to money. For this demographic of students it is a real world qualifier of how much effort goes into something, and something the boys had a thorough understanding of. From there I regularly incorporated watching ads in the sessions, usually picking famously expensive ads, Super Bowl ads, and ads that had trended. Reminding them of the price tag attached reminded them that every element of the advert had been painstakingly chosen with the aim of selling something. After regularly touching base with the students about this, they were able to identify sophisticated techniques in advertising because they had developed a critical eye.

## MEMES AND FAKE NEWS

For the propaganda aspect of this unit, I wanted to build a simulated "troll farm" for the most recent Indonesian election. This introduced them to a number of cultural issues in Indonesia, including their prolific social media use and well documented problems with fake news, as well as an engagement with a recent political event. Using the example of the Internet Research Agency in Russia, which is a state department known to disseminate misinformation through memes and fake articles on social media with the aim of destabilising political conversations in the west, I suggested that we allow the boys to run a similar campaign for or against one of the Indonesian presidential candidates in the 2019 election.

Although we went through some initial teething problems, this proved a hugely useful adjustment to the assessment that was in place. Propaganda in the form of television media or Soviet Posters is seen as dated and has even been diluted in power through reappropriation by modern pop culture. By providing them a real world example of how meme culture was being used as propaganda allowed them to engage with the same subject matter, but in a form they were more familiar with.

Allowing the boys the opportunity to engage in an artform they understand (to an incredible degree of complexity might I add, as the symbology and language of meme culture is incredibly intricate, self-referential and can seem completely alien to those unfamiliar with it) proved a huge benefit. Using a series of well documented fake news articles from Indonesian media, they made some hilarious memes attacking the two presidential candidates as an example of modern day propaganda. Additionally these memes allowed for the use of humour and irreverence whilst putting forward a strong political message. This exercise gave them an understanding of modern propaganda, but also hopefully inoculated them somewhat to the misinformation they will be exposed to on social media platforms.

## REFLECTIONS FROM TEACHER AND STUDENTS

The teacher noticed a significant increase in engagement with the material during our sessions. He noticed "they definitely gained a better understanding of propaganda, (through) social media. It met the objective of the course." He hoped they would "be more critical of what they are shown. Being social media savvy." He was impressed with the amount of research I did with the material, going beyond what was covered in class and adding to the information pool.

The students really grasped the material I was covering and it was great to get this confirmed in the reflections. Below are some quotes from the students:

### What did you learn during Creative Schools?

"False advertising and fake news. We learnt about protecting ourselves from fake news in social media. Michael's humour has helped us find the lessons more interesting." (Student)

"I've learnt technical media skills from Michael. In Indonesia they get shown different stuff from us. You've got to learn about Indonesian so you can relate it to their culture if you want to sell stuff to them." (Student)

"Creativity is what you choose it to be." (Student)

## CONCLUSION

By working with the boys lived experience we had a great deal of success delivering this unit. We did still have engagement issues that developed as a result of the perception of the course and the disruption to the beginning of the term, but both the teacher and I agreed that the adjustments that we made really benefited the students and should hopefully remain as part of the unit in the future. Ultimately, working with the boys skill set and knowledge allowed them to access the material, which for this group could have seemed very distant from their lived experience. Explaining the finances behind the advertising industry added validity to the idea that everything was deliberate and allowed the boys to be more critical of creative choices in ads. Through the exploration of memes and fake news, the boys were able to get a thorough understanding of the function of propaganda in modern times, whilst engaging with the material in a medium they are familiar with.

"There is a lack of engagement in the subject. These students chose Propaganda and Advertising in Indonesia to get out of doing Indonesian as a subject." (Creative Practitioner)

"This class is particularly disengaged. Last Term's students were completely different. I don't know what I would have done if Michael wasn't here this term." (Teacher)

"The students engaged really well with some activities." (Teacher)

**"I was amazed at how well Michael got into understanding the Indonesian context. He found information even I didn't." (Teacher)**

"I've got lots of ideas from Michael. I can use them again next term. It has expanded my toolbox, especially if I get a class like this again. It has definitely given me more ideas." (Teacher)

"The kids got a lot more knowledge of Indonesia, e.g. about the election campaign. They got into it through fake news. They are getting a lot that I wouldn't have gotten them to through all of Michael's research." (Teacher)

"My main objective is getting them to think about persuasive techniques, seeing behind the scenes when watching the media ... information literacy. That objective was definitely met." (Teacher)

"It's great. It definitely helps our learning. He knows what he is talking about." (Student)

"He has taught me a lot about advertising." (Student)

**"It is great when he shows us the ads he is in." (Student)**

"It's different to other classes. It's more fun and more collaborative." (Student)

**"I have learnt a lot of creativity." (Student)**

"I have learnt how to make ads." (Student)

"I understand the cost of ads now." (Student)

"We've learnt about false advertising and fake news. We've learnt about protecting ourselves from fake news in social media." (Student)

**"Michael's humour has helped us find the lessons more interesting." (Student)**

"Michael is great. We've learnt how ads work. I've learned that it's really expensive to make an ad." (Student)

**"It's really helped us understand our assignments. I've learned what it takes to make a campaign." (Student)**

"I've learnt technical media skills from Michael. In Indonesia they get shown different stuff from us. You've got to learn about Indonesian so you can relate it to their culture so that you can sell stuff to them." (Student)

TERM 3

# creative schools

Creative Practitioner

**Michael Abercromby**  
(Theatre Maker, Director,  
Actor, Writer)

Teacher

**Jonathan Rugg**

School

**Scotch College**

Year group

**Year 10**





## CURRICULUM FOCUS

**HASS Skills/Intercultural Understanding**

## CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

**Technologies Process and Production Skills  
Visual Language**

## CONTEXT

In Term 3 I was working with Jonathan Rugg on a new unit about French Cinema. This new unit, along with some others for Indonesian and Spanish, were developed by the language department at Scotch College for students who did not want to continue learning a language. Language units are compulsory until the end of year 10, so these new units were designed to improve engagement with the language department for students not looking to continue language into year 11 and year 12. It is an opportunity for the students to learn about the culture of the country instead of learning the language.

Part of Jonathan Rugg's (Head of Languages) aim was to bring back a desire for the 'Renaissance man', a student who is well versed in many aspects of society and culture, and have a broader understanding of their place in the world. These units were in their first year of roll-out in 2019 and look more like a basic University first year Bachelor of Arts unit than an average Year 10 unit.

One of the major challenges facing this class is the compulsory nature of the units. As none of the students are continuing languages into Year 11, engagement was a particular focus for the project.

## WHAT WE DID

In Term 3 we built upon the approach taken in the unit itself and the planned projects were already in line with the creative habits of mind, as one of the main projects for the unit was creating an homage to *Les 400 Coups* in groups. Being a high school cohort which only had 3-4 contact hours per week, I didn't want to add anything additional. Instead the aim for my involvement was to better inform the planned creative exercise by providing a greater appreciation of film in general, in particular mid-20th century films. The thinking behind this was to provide a more holistic understanding of the elements that made up film, so that the students would leave the unit with a newfound appreciation for the art of cinema and be able to see the artistry behind older films in the cinematic canon instead of viewing them as simply "old and boring". We had a look at the logistic differences between digital and analogue film, hierarchy of decision making, the culture of homages in cinema, process of planning, as well as the opinions and processes of various modern directors about cinema. Of particular importance for me was passing on an appreciation of the sheer scale of film projects, the amount of money involved in making them and the number of people and planning that it took to create a film.

## HOW DID WE MAKE THE CURRICULUM COME ALIVE

The key phrase I kept coming back to was "engagement through relevance". Because of the compulsory nature of the course, and some of the boys' realisation that it was largely irrelevant to their academic future, it was important to make the content relevant to them. One of the biggest perceptions that came back in feedback was that the films were "old and boring". Of course for cinema buffs like myself and Jonathan, films like *Les 400 Coups* (a 1959 French New Wave drama film) are fantastic works of cinema and almost required viewing, so the focus became placing it in context in regards to cinema they were familiar with, and showing how the works of earlier filmmakers paved the way for newer works.

I introduced the boys to some seemingly unrelated footage of the making of *Star Wars* to see how older techniques paved the way for newer film techniques. This painstaking process of making and filming models gave an appreciation of just how much work went into mere minutes of film, allowing them to see how much planning went into film making. Essentially to show them that nothing was accidental and everything is

thought out before saying “action”.

I introduced a couple of montages of homages. One, a collection of homages from The Simpsons, another a collection of homages from famous films with their counterpoints next to it. This allowed the students to see how the homage exercise was not just a task with no meaning, instead it was an exercise in the highly derivative nature of cinema tradition. It demonstrated that the more you know, the more you can appreciate what you are watching.

The exercise I was most proud of was a comparison of analogue and digital film making. One realisation that Jonathan and I had, was the complete lack of awe that the boys had for the achievements of early cinema. We attributed this to the fact they have an HD video camera with gigabytes of storage on them at all times in their pockets. This has been their relationship with recording technology for their entire life; so trying to explain why it was challenging for these early film makers was very difficult to convey. I decided that a practical activity was the best way to demonstrate this. We had them make two 24 frame stop motion clips of a simple action, one using their phone (most used the burst mode function, achieving this in seconds) and the other using a disposable film camera. There was confusion amongst the students as they realised they couldn't check whether the image was immediately successful or not. The fact that they had to plan each shot individually, check the frame with a rudimentary viewfinder, trusting the camera's 'click' that the photo was taken, and ultimately that they would have to wait two weeks for the footage to come back to see what it looked like seemed to give them a much greater appreciation of what these early and mid-20th century film makers experienced. It demonstrated why shooting outside, shooting on moving vehicles and within the city would have been extremely difficult, and why these early artists are treated with reverence and awe, even if the films aren't as polished or snappy as they are today.

#### **HOW DID WE MAKE THE CREATIVE HABITS OF MIND COME ALIVE**

A lot of these elements were already part of the unit. A creative output which required discipline, imagination and collaboration were embedded in the planned project. I added to this by allowing some

practical elements to the roll out, and on reflection, more of these would have been beneficial for the boys understanding, as these practical elements kept them thoroughly engaged, and exposed them to the intricate planning required for filmmakers.

I really endeavoured to increase their inquisitive nature, by exposing them to trends, information, and behind the scenes footage of various films, so they could look at cinema differently, not just the films they were exposed to in this course. We ran some early exercises in IMDB (Internet Movie DataBase) to expose them to the “wikipedia of film” and a way of finding out more information if they wanted to.

I spent a great deal of time on films outside of their curriculum, including a demonstration of comparing WALL-E with There Will Be Blood to prepare them for their comparison essay. The aim of this was to relate this units content to the collective world of cinema. By exposing them to more than what was in the unit, and applying the tasks of assessment to other films outside their curriculum we encouraged them to be inquisitive. I was hoping they could take the lessons learned in comparing Les 400 Coups and Hugo and apply it to other films they watch.

#### **HOW DID WE ACTIVATE STUDENT VOICE AND LEARNER ADVOCACY**

Discussion was a key part, and I made a great effort to link the curriculum to their context and experiences rather than forcing them to come to our understanding. The tasks were designed to allow them freedom with their expression as they could choose what to homage and how to complete each task.

In reflection I would have liked to ask them more directly what they would like to know, rather than gleaning this from exercises.

## WHAT WAS THE IMPACT

### Students

Although some of the students had evidently decided not to engage in this class and remained unmoved, the curiosity amongst the majority was definitely lifted. For a new unit, and a new approach with a new class, the results were really promising. Particularly, the precise nature of planning and the amount of elements required to make a movie was really instilled in the students, and they started asking more and more in depth and complex questions about how films are made as the term went on.

### Teacher

From all accounts, the two assessments in the unit were achieved with a higher degree of competency and understanding. Jonathan confirmed that the average marks were higher than the previous terms cohort and the artistry in the film making was more precise. The practical elements were really useful and a lot of the greater understanding this group had gained was attributed to that. Also the more holistic approach, speaking about the practical rather than the academic seemed to have positive benefits. Jonathan also acknowledged that the perceived authority of a working artist in this field made the unit more real or concrete rather than academic and hypothetical.



### Creative Practitioner

If I had my time again I would have increased the amount of practical elements. It is always difficult coming into a new class, and that was compounded by the small amount of contact hours this unit had, but it was also important to reflect on what could have been improved. I was really proud of the practical exercises and glad there seemed to be a direct correlation between my involvement and the academic output. I definitely underestimated that my 'normal' is very interesting for non-creatives and it was humbling to be treated as an "expert", particularly as I view it as just my work.

### School

I think from the outside, it is obvious that these units are really beneficial, but the challenge is convincing the class of boys who see 'compulsory' as a negative. By having a creative involved, it seemed the content became more engaging for the students as we brought it closer to the boys own experience of cinema. I hope these courses can continue to add richness to their education.

## QUOTES

"I could maybe try a career in film." (Student)

"The interactive element was great!" (Student)

"It wasn't "school stuff" it was learning about cool stuff." (Student)

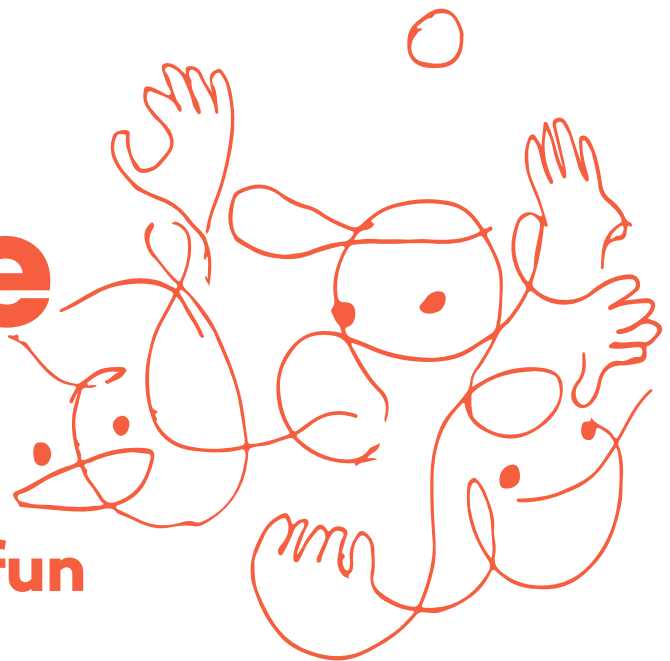
**"It was interesting to see film is not as simple as people think." (Student)**

"It was much more creative than most other subjects." (Student)

**FORM.** creative learning

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deep learning, hard fun



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