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CCT 693 Fall 2013
December 8, 2013
Project Report

**Action Research for an Original Approach to Meet a Common Need:
Building a School's Language and Culture of Creativity Through
a Creativity Celebration**

**Introduction: An Expedition into the Problem of Problems, Internal and External
Dialogue, and Reflection**

Confusion, doubt, anxiety, and a lack of clarity might have been used to describe my initial consideration of an action research project. (Of course, these may be words to describe the initial moments of many learning experiences.) Although I came to the class with some idea of the arenas I was interested in working in, as with other CCT courses I was confronted again with a choice about where to focus my attention. In addition, whereas exploration and subsequent decision concerning my focus for a final project in other classes could sometimes be lengthened over the course of the class (as long as it was in time for the final project to be completed), in this class I had to choose a particular area of focus sooner in the trajectory of the course. While the nature of the intervention may well have been changed after having done research, the problem it would address had to be clarified long before a couple of weeks before the end of the semester. In other words, the initial problem I encountered was determining a problem. I had a messy problem finding a messy problem.

To work within this situation, I attempted a variety of strategies and tried to apply certain kinds of thinking I have learned over the course of CCT, as well as in this course in particular. Drawing from prior courses, I applied metacognition in monitoring my feelings of anxiety—cognizant of my desire to finally find and choose a topic, I reminded myself to slow down and use all of the time I had. This, too, might be considered an act of applying optimism (hope) in the face of deadlines and doubt. I trusted in myself to find something I wanted to work on. Initially I attempted to determine the best choice through the creation of a decision-making rubric (which issue did I care about the most? what made sense for me at this point in my CCT work? what would be feasible for me to do in the given time? who would this project affect besides me? what kinds of resources might there be for this topic?). This process enabled me to narrow my ideas down to three: 1) improving an after school creativity club that I run, 2) putting together a show of my own art, or 3) developing a “language of thinking” workshop to present to my colleagues. As in other classes, I once again found myself choosing between projects that concerned my work as a teacher and a project that concerned my creativity outside of teaching.

Having received some support for all three of these through an initial conversation (an initial dialogue and reflection), I continued to be proactively positive and open-

minded about possibilities. However, I chose not to attempt another decision-making tool. Rather, I opted to give myself “time away” from very conscious work with the decision, and thought that this brief extension—withholding “closure”—might result in some kind of confluence approach, something that I was more interested in, something that felt right. Thus, in the middle of my wife’s first pottery show, I went for a walk to get a coffee, and on my way back from this physical and mental diversion—away from everything that could bother me but very happy that her success at the show had provided her with such fulfillment, encouragement, and validation—the concept of a creativity fair came to me. This allowed me to combine all three possible projects in that it involved sharing creative products and could possibly increase the creative thinking being done by students and faculty. (What’s more, showing my own creative products at such a show would even more directly incorporate the second project idea.) This idea felt “right” from the first moments I had it. Of course, a disposition of mindful doubt led me to question whether or not it was a good idea, so I simply wrote it down. Around this time, I was also introduced to the concepts of supportive listening and strategic personal planning (Taylor and Szteiter 148-54). Although I found the former more helpful than the latter, these also emphasized some of the thinking I was trying to do by incorporating a kind of planned divergent thinking and exploration, followed by an attempt to focus through reflection and organization.

While initially I thought this was all rather ironic (that I had a problem with defining a problem), I eventually learned that, in the context of the beginning of an action research process, the above-mentioned feelings and kinds of thinking actually make a lot of sense; or, rather, are quite necessary, indeed self-exemplifying. To explain, I consider this period of time—that in which I explored and worked through my options—as a significant part of my action research process for two reasons. First, this part of the process provided a means of finding the intrinsic motivation that I needed to carry myself through the rather arduous and painstaking action research process in a way that meaningful to me and meaningful in its quality of thought or outcome. (Here, mentioning also that the whole of the process hasn’t even been finished [but rather only planned for] is an indication of the kind of dedication and resilience I found I had to maintain in such an undertaking.) Equally significant, this first phase of the process displays many of the kinds of thinking needed in creative problem solving, of creativity itself. My use of metacognition to delay closure, to respond to anxiety with optimism, to apply judgment in my decision-making, to seek something original or an eloquent solution to my problem of problems, to follow the thought that I found intrinsically motivating, to take a kernel of an idea and elaborate on it, and then to remain open-minded in response to the findings of my research; all of these are indicative of the kinds of thinking that a creativity fair might encourage and engender. In short, the result of this first phase was not only determining the gist of a possible intervention, but also an intervention the aim of which was to help others to be able to navigate through exactly this kind of process (or problem) as well.

Inquiry / Illuminating the Background / Research

Although my several years of experience teaching at the school led me to assume that there was not enough explicit incorporation of creativity across the curriculum, and that even more seldom was a discussion of any language of thinking (outside of my own classes), it was determined that more inquiry and research needed to be done. With this general aim, I completed research in three phases (though they overlapped considerably in terms of chronological occurrence). The first of these consists of researching the role of creativity in education as well as the effectiveness of fairs that happen or happened in other places (outside of this particular school). Next, I conducted a series of interviews with those who had considerable experience with the current fairs that do happen at the school: National History Day (NHD), the science fair, and the Art and Technology fair that happens at the end of each year. To allow consideration of another segment of the school population, a student survey was conducted with two of my freshman English classes, with subsequent collection, organization, and analysis of the data provided. Finally, a couple of unplanned experiences occurred that were deemed suitable to consider as evidence. A general perusal of these sources reveals not only that creativity is an integral part of learning, but also that a gap would be filled by an intervention aimed at increasing understanding and practicing of creativity on the part of students and faculty.

Readings

Research was done in hopes of findings information about such interventions that have occurred elsewhere, but this revealed very few fairs that explicitly have to do with creativity. Only one creativity fair at another high school was found, and it occurred at Trenton Catholic Academy, bringing in students from six other surrounding private schools as well (Leslie 1). The fair was a contest in which students submitted projects in one of eight possible categories and competed with other students of the same grade. The school has one creativity fair moderator, but the entire fair is run by the school's chapter of the National Honor Society. Although in the newspaper article, Leslie cites Edward deBono as stating that "creativity is not a mystical talent, it is a skill that can be practiced and nurtured," there is no indication that the fair itself has an explicit goal, that its effectiveness is evaluated, or that the contest component encourages or impedes students. In addition, it is significant to note that no research about such fairs in public schools has been found yet.

Other fairs, such as *Chicago Ideas Week* and the *Nashville Creativity Summit* are for adults and focus on entrepreneurial skills and innovative ideas. These are fairs at which individuals attend talks and lectures, versus displaying their own creative endeavors. In this sense, although such fairs may result in attendees having learned something meaningful, it seems more feasible to incorporate a creativity celebration at which students are able to showcase their thinking and learn some language they may use to describe it. In addition, such a celebration might be more truncated to fit into the schedule of the high school schedule as well as the human and funding resources available. In light of these developments, other kinds of fairs were considered, particularly those conducted at the school already.

In addition, research was completed in seeking some justification for the significance of education throughout the school day, to support the belief that creative thinking is not only helpful but necessary in the learning process. In “Teaching Creativity: Where do We Go From Here” Clow et al begin with the statement, and subsequent question, that “in advertising, marketing, selling, and entrepreneurial ventures, creativity is important ingredient of success...But how do individuals learn to be creative?” (147). In response to this question, they compiled data about how creativity is taught in some secondary schools, concluding that: “creative techniques are being used and/or taught at the college level, with varying degrees of frequency and emphasis. There seems to be a need to delve further into exactly how these techniques are being used and taught. It is not clear to what extent creative methods are explained in detail, versus absorbed through a ‘learn by doing’ approach” (154). This study leads one to believe that there needs to be a more careful approach to teaching creativity be considered—one that is more explicit versus a “learn by doing” approach. While a creativity celebration might be considered less formal, and certainly a “learn by doing” activity, the emphasis on language as well as the evaluation processes described below are designed to allow for more explicit consideration of creative thinking.

With regards to a “language of thinking” and the concept of thinking dispositions, one can consider *The Thinking Classroom* by Tishman et al; however, to provide another, perhaps original, approach to justifying the emphasis on language, one can consider an article by Notar and Padgett that concerns the common idiom of “thinking outside the box.” Their ultimate conclusion is that “‘the box’...does not exist, so ‘thinking outside of the box’ is a flawed concept; simply THINKING will suffice. there is no need to clutter it with boxes and other concepts that are not anchored in reality” (296). In this sense, one sees that the language we use to describe our thinking matters in that it can also affect the thinking that we are doing. In other words, our language (or lack of it) can be a barrier or a boon. Having the language to describe our creative endeavors, then, would likely enable us to monitor and think about those processes in ways that enable growth and change.

A final significant reading enabled me to forge ahead with this intervention despite the fact that very few “creativity fairs” have been enacted in high schools (based on findings thus far). In their article on the use of technology fairs, Mettas and Constantinou make reference to science fairs, responding to a lack of research about technology fairs:

Science fair projects have long been used as a mechanism for promoting scientific skills with an emphasis on learning through “doing”. Identifying problems, formulating questions, making observations, proposing solutions, and interpreting data are necessary skills for students in school and throughout their lives. (80)

I cite this not because I am necessarily supporting science fairs (though I do), but because it reveals that others have supported the validity and possible effectiveness of additional kinds of fairs (in this case a technology fair) through what is perceived to be the success of science fairs. Although the interview completed at my school revealed shortcomings

in the school's science fair practices, this thinking can nonetheless be used to support the idea of having a creativity fair in hopes of getting students to practice the kinds of thinking associated with creativity.

Interviews

Several interviews were conducted with staff at the school who had varying degrees of expertise related to the fairs that already take place at the school. For the National History day Fair, the coordinator of the fair was interviewed; for the science fair a science teacher (not coordinator) was interviewed; and for the art show, the Art Department Head was interviewed. A great deal of information was gained from these interviews through the use of reflection afterwards. Many of these are reflected in the "Planning and Proposing" section below, but a brief summary of some key insights will be helpful here.

An interview with a science teacher who has her students participate in the science fair revealed that there has often been wasted time at the fair due to the judging process, leading me to move away from a competitive aspect and to consider measures to make the most of everyone's time during the celebration. In addition, issues concerning clean-up were discussed, as the science fair takes place during the school day and has to be completely finished before lunch. The response to this was to have a creativity celebration after school. Also, it was suggested I attempt to get other clubs involved to build a strong base of committed students, and this was in light of the fact that the science fair originally began with a small group of students, but grew into something that is mandatory for certain student groups.

The interview with the coordinator of National History Day led me to see a value in connecting a fair's purpose to the Common Core and what were referred to as "21st Century skills." Although this has not yet been done, it is included in the next steps for when approaching administration for approval—the approval of which it was suggested I obtain first (though I have not exactly chosen that route, as can be seen in the constituency building phases). Finally, it was inferred that students may need some degree of coaching on their projects. Though this could be done as a follow-up to the application process, or with accrued student groups prior to applying, specifics to address this issue have not been planned.

Finally, the interview with the current Art Department Head revealed the fine arts building's lobby as a good place to hold a show due to its visibility to outside populations, its size, and its ability to display the show over the course of several days. Also interesting was the fact that the school's art show is sponsored by a local bank, which makes sponsorship seem like a feasible possibility. Further discussion with this individual has led to an exciting development in that the idea of somehow incorporating a creativity celebration with the art show should be looked into more. This would provide a base of support for the intervention without undermining its effects. In fact, it would build on what is already in existence with the aim of helping it to be more effective.

Student Survey

Having done some research into how other fairs were conducted as well as how successful they have been, I wanted to obtain some kind of baseline assessment of the current state of creativity in the school according to the students themselves. While time did not allow for a school-wide survey, I was able to conduct a survey of two of my freshman classes, the specific results of which can be found in Appendix A, which also includes sections of reflection, inferences, and further inquiry. For the purposes of a brief overview, it is worth mentioning here a few of the more important insights gained through the survey:

- 1) Many students strongly associate originality or uniqueness as being at least a part of a definition of creativity (39 out of 59 responses).
- 2) Overall, students do not feel they are encouraged to be creative *throughout* the school day, as opposed to in one class or on one particular assignment. Only twelve students said they are encouraged to be creative throughout the school day.
- 3) Overwhelmingly, students said that there should be more creativity throughout the school day (45 out 59 responses).
- 4) Students feel that they are often asked to be original and to elaborate, but also feel that the school should emphasize more originality and risk-taking, with curiosity and flexibility following closely behind (see responses to questions numbers five and six on the survey).
- 5) Various quotes from students reveal certain attitudes about creativity that the design of the creativity fair should keep in mind and/or work to change. Some of these are in the table here:

Beliefs and attitude/s revealed	Quotes from Students
Quotes revealing an understanding of creativity as not integral or counter to the learning process.	<p>I don't feel that there should be more creativity in school. My reason is that school is a place of learning, not being very creative.</p> <p>Yes, just a little more because we still have to learn somehow. We could be more creative by decorating our homework.</p>
Quotes revealing that creativity is something that school works against, but which might result in greater learning and less disruption if activated.	<p>Yes, in most classes we keep creativity bottled up. It's the only thing on our mind which stops focus on learning, and we may feel unappreciated.</p> <p>Yes! We should be creative, in school. We express ourselves throughout our clothes (which we get in trouble for) but if we could do it throughout our work, it might be better.</p>
Quotes that reveal belief that creativity	I don't believe there should be more creativity in school. I believe this because not all kids are

is something one does or doesn't have and can be quantified	creative and maybe some kids don't want to be creative.
Quotes that reveal belief that creativity is necessary for or helpful in learning	<p>I believe there should be more creativity in my school because when you reach a certain level the creativity stops.</p> <p>Well yeah we should have art contest, paint splatter day, neon day, creative fest where we just have a blast being ourselves and having booths that express our feelings or our personality.</p> <p>There needs to be more creativity in students' school experience. Teachers need to be creative before a student can.</p>

As a result of reflecting on the above research, along with the development of an evaluation clock and the process of dialogue regarding said evaluation, it was determined that increasing both the language and the practice of creativity in the school's culture are both meaningful and necessary goals. It was determined that the creativity celebration as an intervention should have not three but two goals, each to be evaluated for effectiveness. A goal concerning the size of the intervention was determined less relevant to its success than the two goals finally chosen:

- 1) help students (and teachers) to learn about some basic language and dispositions of creativity
- 2) helps to create a culture of creativity to benefit the school's academic and social environment

It may seem that these goals are cyclically causal or perhaps symbiotic in nature, that they may aid one another, but to be certain of their being attained to any degree it was determined that two specific evaluations must be completed for each. These are described below.

Constituency Building Epicycle—Dialogue and Reflection

Over the course of the research discussed above, the constituency building process also began. These experiences might be categorized into two dialogue classifications: 1) dialogues in which the idea of a creativity celebration (or, up until recently, "fair") was explicitly mentioned, and 2) dialogues which occurred regarding creativity and thinking dispositions, but without mentioning this possible intervention.

In the first group, I include the interviews with those acquainted with the current fairs at the school as well as a few other colleagues with whom I spoke about my project. As mentioned in the research above, I interviewed a science teacher, the coordinator of the school's NHD activities, a former student who participated in the science and NHD

fairs, and the Art Department Head. In each of these conversations, I either began by introducing the reasoning for my research or I waited until this question was asked. The responses were positive across the board, but the only one which has resulted in what seems to hint at a commitment and a means of moving forward was that with the Art Department Head: a recent informal check-in with this individual led us to consider the possibility of combining the school's yearly art fair with the creativity celebration. This is certainly a dialogue worth continuing. In addition to the interviews, I also mentioned and discussed the creativity celebration with the members of Club Creative, which I run after school. This was not as successful a pitch, as the group showed little indication of committed interest. Finally, I mentioned (more briefly) my intervention to a couple other colleagues, who also responded positively to the concept. Ironically, the student group here seemed the least interested in the idea, hinting at the doubts mentioned later concerning the *actual* interest of students in such a celebration. Overall, subsequent reflection about these dialogues revealed not only specific components and traits that a creativity celebration might have, but also that there is a general sense that an intervention with these goals is needed (of course, *by whom* is another story).

In the second group, I include two specific examples: one concerning two of my freshman English classes and the other concerning a panel of interviewers. The former is the conducting of a survey with two of my classes as well as an initial foray into teaching some of the language of creativity to these classes through the means of a “junk activity” borrowed from a CCT course. In the junk activity, students are asked to build something, then to describe the product and process, receiving feedback from the teacher as he or she points out examples of elaboration, fluency, flexibility, and originality. This introduction to these terms in class revealed a great deal of intrinsic motivation to be creative on the part of the students. Subsequently these students took a survey (mentioned above as well) that asked them to declare their opinions about the state of creativity at the school, a task which might be deemed as a means of engaging this population in a dialogue that moves their thinking towards acknowledgment of the importance of creativity at school.

Another instance in which I may well have been building a constituency without actually mentioning a possible intervention was a recent job interview. Though the interview was not a success in terms of earning me the position, it allowed me a chance to describe my concern for the teaching of a language of thinking, of thinking dispositions, and of student-centered problem- and project-based learning across the curriculum. The result of this experience was that through a follow-up meeting to clarify reasons why I didn't get the position, the administrators said that they thought what I said about problem-solving was “good.” Although there are a variety of forces in the school that place restrictions on the feasibility of adhering to these practices (not the least of which are common assumptions among the adults about how to teach, the relationship of teacher and students, and so on), it is clear that a constituency is there to be had regarding actions that touch upon these ideas in ways that may be able to work around such restrictions. In short, this meeting might be considered the initial piece to my building this particular segment of my overall constituency.

Proposing & Planning Actions—Lessons from Reflection on Research

Although a great deal of the specifics of the intervention have yet to be determined (which makes sense given that a greater constituency should be engaged in this planning), a series of larger and perhaps more important issues can be discussed here, being that they are in large part the product of reflection on the research above. To avoid being redundant, I will do my best to reference the impetus from the research in a way that is brief and clear. These are not listed in order of importance, but rather might lead into the conceptualization of the event as described in the implementation section.

Size of the Intervention

While initially it was thought that the larger the size of the creativity celebration the better (in that it would therefore reach a larger amount of the school's population), this became an issue once I began being able to actually visualize the event itself with some more detail. Aware of the possibility that few or none of my colleagues would donate their time and energy (though not necessarily predicting this), the concept of a celebration of anything more than a few exhibitors became somewhat daunting. It was then determined that the size of the intervention may be significantly smaller, and that this could be done using the application process that was already deemed important. This was to allow for the completion of an initial test-run, which could ideally allow me and other organizers to work out the bugs before having a larger event. Likewise, having not yet built a considerable and committed constituency (especially a planning and organizing entity), it allowed me to feel a bit more confident that the celebration could actually happen with fewer people both running and exhibiting in it, providing motivation at an important point in the process.

Who Will Be Organizing and Running It

Regarding this matter, it was determined that a few student groups and some colleagues would be approached. While looking for information about similar fairs that have taken place elsewhere, a dearth of information about creativity fairs led me to consider other fairs, through which I found Nikirk's "Planning a Successful Tech Show." Although perhaps considered a truncated version, the number of actions that need to take place in order for a successful fair to happen is presumably impossible for someone to tackle by him or herself. As a result, this reading reaffirm the initial doubts I had about my ability to work alone in this. However, unlike at the beginning of the research, I realized that the population working on the fair could not be wholly students but a committed group of both student leaders and faculty members. Although it is best to have students work on as much of the implementation as possible, there are things which adults can provide as well, such as supervision, guidance, and even late bus passes.

The Nature of Participation in the Celebration—Encouraging Dialogue and Reflection about Creativity

Both student and faculty exhibitors will be asked to complete an application that introduces them to specific vocabulary, asks them to describe their product or project in general, and then asks them to discuss how their project displays one or more of the following: originality, elaboration, and flexibility. This application serves to provide

initial intro to these terms, a chance for any inappropriate projects to be rejected, a chance to limit the number of exhibitors if necessary, and asks the applicant to think through the process of participating. The last point here is included as a means for encouraging commitment through asking the applicant to plan out his or her participation.

Another component consists of a ticket to enter and a ticket to leave (or what might be headed with “Share what you’ve learned”). This will consist of one sheet of paper. On the way in to the fair, on the front side of the sheet, students are asked to write down their initial definition of; next, they turn the sheet over to be briefly introduced to the three terms listed above and provided the two goals of the fair. Finally, on their exit they write their revised definition of creativity based on their experience at the fair, on the other side. These are distributed at the entrance and collected at the exit. This sheet might also include small, perforated sections which can include a plus/delta and can be distributed to the students’ choice of exhibitors.

Thus, we have a third means of participation that involves the use and response according to the plus/delta feedback and encouragement form. Regardless of whether students and adults are exhibitors, they will be able to be involved in the creative process through providing this voluntary feedback at each exhibit. I imagine it might be possible to arrange for this feedback to be digital or online, but have yet to determine if this is so and how it would be done.

A final piece of interaction with ideas encountered at the fair might be considered the last component of the evaluation system to be used—a reflection completed some time after the fair asking students to state their opinions of what creativity is, how it is present at school, and whether the school needs it to be addressed and taught more often or more explicitly.

To Compete or Not to Compete?

As a result of somewhat lackluster descriptions of the use of rubrics and judging in interviews and other discussions, it has been determined that the celebration will not consist of any competitive component in its structure. Thus, there will not be only *one* winner. This is not imply that there is never any place for competition in creativity, but rather that this decision means the fair requires no judges being recruited *and* that the fair can help students to see creativity not quantitatively but qualitatively and in terms of the dispositions introduced.

In addition to this thinking, there is support for encouraging students to discuss their process instead of working to meet a rubric which might be restrictive. In her article on “Evaluating Creative Products,” Nancy Mitchell states that “if replication is the goal, checklists and rubrics are invaluable. However, their use is unlikely to encourage and pushing of the boundaries” (43). Instead, she argues, “students can be encouraged to reflect on their work and to discuss the process that resulted in their composition or interpretation.” Finally, she claims that, “Students who are given opportunities to give input regarding their own work will feel a sense of ownership over their work and will develop the skills necessary to embark on future creative ventures with a high level of

autonomy” (43). In light of this, a plus/delta response system and an application process that asks students to discuss their project and the thinking it has involved provides encouragement. Incorporating a quantification or judgment process would counteract this and feed student beliefs that one either is or isn’t creative, that creativity is not something we all have, and that it has no place in education where things ought to be “fair.”

Setting—Time and Place

In light of the information gathered through the interviews with people who have worked in past fairs, it was determined that having the fair after school would be the best time. This avoids the constraints of the school day’s schedule (such as having to clean up before lunch) that were mentioned in the interviews with both the NHD coordinator and a science teacher. This may also allow for set-up to take place during the last period of the day. Although this may result in lower attendance since the majority of students do leave at the end of the day, this might be seen as not a significant effect in the comparison because students would have to receive permission to attend during the school day. Likewise, students would not need permission from teachers to attend after school, and the celebration might be more likely to draw in otherwise passers-by on their way out.

In addition, in light of conversations participated in at the school’s restructuring committee, it was observed and inferred that although we champion the idea of students taking initiative, being proactive, and thinking for themselves, the degree to which many educators are comfortable with such practices during the actual school day—within classes where control and management are emphasized—is not as great as one would hope for. In light of this, a fair that promotes work that is truly student-centered might find a space within the school community but without the constraints of bells, stringent objectives, and more common and restrictive assessments: it is an after school educational experience.

One alternative to this could be if the celebration is in some way put on with the art show (a recent development), which takes place during the day. A drawback to this, however, is that students would not be able to stay with the projects for the duration of the exhibition time, which means that the person-to-person dialogue between exhibitor and audience might be lost. That said, the brief written plus/delta feedback system could provide a meaningful substitute.

The place of the creativity celebration is yet to be determined. The possibilities have been limited at this point to the rather large lobby of the fine arts building or one of the school’s four cafeterias. These are the settings of fairs that already occur. Other possibilities, depending on the size of the intervention, may be the “little theater” or the gym, though during after school hours the former is often used for drama club and the latter for athletics.

Parental Involvement

In response to an anecdote in Craven and Hogan's article concerning an overly zealous parent's involvement in a child's science fair project, it was deemed that parents would not be directly encouraged to participate in their child's work. In addition, keeping in mind Wintrol and Jerenic's article, "Rebels in the classroom: creativity and risk-taking in honors pedagogy," consideration of students' common desire to simply get the right answer, focus on pleasing the adults around them, and lack of confidence in risk-taking in response to these pressures, it may also be meaningful to encourage and emphasize that this work is a student's independent work.

That said, while parental efforts regarding the actual products or projects might be discouraged, the possibility certainly remains for parents to attend the celebration, particularly if it will take place after school and they often attend the art show at the end of the year. An additional option, if the celebration is done in conjunction with the school's art show, might be to have the displays up over an extended period of time, thus open to populations that do or can only come to the school during hours outside of the regular school day (such as school committee members, or parents of student athletes).

The Exhibitors

In addition to the size of the intervention, the make up of the population involved in exhibiting was altered. Although initially it was thought that the exhibitors would consist solely of students, it was later determined through dialogue and the results of the student survey that exhibitors should consist not only of students but also teachers, including myself. This was decided in consideration of the fact that the school's culture is not only made up of students, that teachers may likewise benefit from an introduction to some language used to describe creative thinking, and that students would benefit from seeing teachers model these kinds of thinking. It may even end up that teachers exhibit work about their own teaching, which would address one insightful student's comment that teachers need to be creative before students can.

Constituency Building Epicycle #2

In an attempt to continue building a constituency, I will be organizing my constituents initially into three groups: students, fellow teachers, and administration. Although the administration is the most important constituency for getting the project off the ground via approval, I will be building other constituencies first to provide a clear and convincing depiction of a project that not only already has widespread support among students and teachers, but also has been designed with their input. In this sense, I will then be approaching the administration with an intervention that is in fact no longer just mine but the product of two constituencies that are of great importance to the administration: students and teachers. Of course, given the opportunity, I would not let this order mentioned here preclude me from introducing some form of the idea to the administration earlier on if given the chance (if this was in fact the case, I might even limit some initial meeting to supportive listening around the topic of creative thinking in the school). In each of these constituency groups, one or more of the following tools from Taylor and Szteiter's *Taking Yourself Seriously* can be used: supportive listening (154), free-writing (89-90), and a five-stage dialogue process (70-75).

With regard to the student population, a few groups of students remain important in this part of the process. I will continue to discuss this idea with Club Creative, but will do so only after the club moves through what it decided would be its next phase: several weeks of making and building. In a sense, this is me reacting to supportive listening (a form of it) that was done during a previous dialogue process in which students described a desire to build and create before determining and working on a specific problem or project as a group. As a result, the group will be working with various mediums to create and build projects of their own design, then will be asked to describe the end product while the rest of the club asks questions about the creation process. The club deemed this to be a necessary next step based on the assumption that it would result in a sense of community and experience at cooperative efforts before undertaking anything larger that might be meant to affect the school as a whole. Following these four weeks of “building” activities (literally and metaphorically) I will try another dialogue process, providing a focus regarding our work, its meaning to us, and how we might spread awareness and practice of creative thinking around the school. Aware that the conversation might end up in another direction, and reluctant to have the club do anything it does not genuinely want to do, I am also keeping other student groups in mind.

Thus, in addition to that club, I will also discuss the idea with all three of my classes as class time allows, as well as through the work of a new (additional) task force in my junior class, dedicated to the explicit incorporation of creative thinking dispositions in our class. (The “task force” system, in which small groups of students are given a focus area to learn about and provide suggestions to the class about, is already in place, so this would need to involve recruiting particular students who may also be seen as possible leaders for the eventual intervention.) It may be feasible to engage my whole class in a dialogue process during a class session in a way that connects the objectives of the course with learning about and practicing creative thinking. We may consider, for example, how creative thinking enables us to provide commentary or criticism of a piece we read. This may also reveal another possible intervention or a possible alteration to the intervention described in this paper.

A third student group I will approach is the school’s chapter of the National Honors Society (NHS). In this case, I will actually begin by approaching the group’s advisor with an inquiry about the kinds of tasks the group usually takes on and why. With subsequent reflection, this will hopefully allow me to gather useful information and to build a connection with the current direction or interest of the group and its advisor. Likewise, it will enable me to consider how I want to frame the intervention when I introduce it. I may, for instance, begin by framing the intervention as an opportunity for the NHS members to complete their community service requirements, as well as an opportunity to serve as academic leaders in the school through their exhibition of projects. That said, I would also be willing to construct with the advisor an opportunity to have a dialogue process with the group members that touches upon ideas of creativity, how it is or isn’t practiced at the school, and what actions might be taken in light of responses. These students could then become creators of the intervention itself, along with faculty.

Approaching the faculty would be a second step in this approach. This may be a small meeting that consists of both the art department head, an art teacher who expressed interest, and the NHS advisor. Depending on the thoughts of these individuals, we could then send an invite to other faculty to see if anyone else would like to be involved in a discussion concerning creativity at the school and/or the development of some kind of creativity celebration. Because of the new educator evaluation system being put into place this year, I could even frame this as a chance for teachers to have meaningful discussions and collaboration with colleagues, and such meetings could serve as evidence for portfolios that will be checked later in the year.

I am unsure of how this will exactly play out, and a lot depends on how initial dialogues go (such as that done with Club Creative a couple months ago). However, I am disinclined to believe that a mere lack of interest or motivation in one group or meeting would be reason to let the project go—the problem of lack of creativity persists, and I believe that people are drawn inherently to opportunities to express themselves in ways they feel confident about. That said, I would continue to do personal reflection following these meetings and experiences (for me, this would consist of writing—the act in which I find my reflection most fruitful). At times when I may not be able to get a chunk of time or the motivation to do so, I can make use of the audio recording tool on my phone (I may even use this, with permission, during the dialogues). In this sense, I would be continuing the cycles and epicycles of the action research process—moving to and fro between interaction/dialogue and reflection that enables me to get the most out of these experiences, and allow me to carefully consider next steps in such a way that provides me the preparedness and resultant confidence to do so.

On that note, it is worth mentioning that I am reluctant to approach administration without having built a clear constituency among a reasonably sized student group (NHS or Key Club, for instance) and without having obtained a group of committed colleagues, but once this is done, I will contact the main office in an attempt to arrange a formal meeting time. An alternative to this will be to email the principal directly, which I have done in the past. I will aim to give to the principal and associate principal a brief presentation that states the goals of the intervention, their alignment to Common Core and accreditation initiatives, an abbreviated implementation description of the intervention, a hypothetical anecdote of an attendee, and a description of my committed constituency up to that point.

Further along in the process, having attained some degree of approval by the administration, I may then return to present to and build my colleague constituency, such as those in the English department (who I can access through the department meetings) as well as those on the Restructuring committee (if the project is given time to do so). In fact, only this past Saturday I signed up for a subcommittee of the Restructuring committee concerned with “school climate,” and I can also include this group as a possible constituency once the group gets started with meetings. It is at this point that a clear depiction of the implementation of the creativity celebration might be most helpful.

Implementation

As it may be essential in building a constituency, as well as developing the intervention itself, it is sensible to provide a basic sketch of a timeline of the creativity celebration. Although it might be beneficial to provide first-person hypothetical narratives of attendees, exhibitors, and organizers, the following will be a third-person description of the series of events that will make up the celebration. Obviously, significant changes might occur, depending on what developments occur as a constituency is developed more.

To begin, exhibitors will store their projects in Room R220 or the Red English office during the day, then be given permission to leave fifth period early to set up (if not possible then the set-up time will need to be moved to after school). Depending on how the set-up time is designed, the exhibits may be ready to show as soon as 2:10 or 2:15 in the afternoon, and the celebration would be ready to receive its attendees. Those attending but not exhibiting will be greeted at the entrance door by students who distribute and briefly explain the entrance ticket/sheet. These students would take a moment by the entrance to jot down a definition of creativity and to read through the brief text on the sheet. Here, they will be greeted again by students or an adult who may answer question and/or guide students towards the projects.

From this point, attendees will be able to peruse the tables of exhibits (perhaps a map of the exhibits will be provided as well). At exhibits of interest, attendees can interact with the exhibitors, asking questions about process and maybe providing small slips of paper with plus/delta responses on them. In this exchange, exhibitors will have a chance to not only describe their products or projects, but also their processes and plans. Attendees may leave when they want, but will be prompted upon reaching to exit to provide another, revised definition of “creativity” based on their experience/s at the celebration. Approximately forty-five minutes to an hour later, clean up will begin. Exhibitors might be awarded a certificate of some kind and asked to submit a reflection of their experiences, including any suggestions for the next creativity celebration.

Evaluation

To discuss the evaluation that is currently being considered to determine the success of this intervention, it makes sense to first state again the two goals as well as the initial evaluation process depicted by initial attempts to use the evaluation clock. Doing this will help to provide clarity in the reasoning for the evaluation processes currently being advocated.

Engaging and struggling amidst the initial completion of the evaluation clock resulted in clarification of the intervention’s goals. A rather nebulous idea to provide a means for students to learn about and display knowledge of creativity became more focused on the concept of somehow introducing and encouraging students to use language to describe some of the common traits and thinking dispositions associated with creativity. The result of this was a goal that explicitly addresses the learning of some of this language as well as a goal that considers contributing to an overall culture of creativity in the school:

- 1) help students (and teachers) to learn about some basic language and dispositions of creativity
- 2) helps to create a culture of creativity to benefit the school's academic and social environment

Originally, the evaluation of the intervention consisted of having a particular population of students (consisting of attendees, exhibitors, and those who did neither) read and describe the dispositions used in a given creative project. This would be done before and then after the fair, with a comparison being done of the number of times students correctly use the terms originality, elaboration, and flexibility to describe the thinking done in the given description.

However, the goals and population exhibiting have been adjusted, and it is acknowledged that the use of three particular words does not necessarily indicate an increase in creativity in the school, though they can increase students' ability to describe thinking processes and perhaps exercise metacognition. It was determined that evaluation would need to address some part of the population a longer length of time after the celebration, indicating or not a cultural change. Also, faculty is now included in the exhibitor population (not to mention the "culture" of the school) and needs to be considered in the evaluation. As a result, the current evaluation system being considered is as follows.

To evaluate regarding goal number one, students will write a definition of "creativity" upon entering the celebration. Then they will be introduced to the three terms mentioned above. Upon leaving the fair, students will again be asked to define "creativity," keeping in mind their experience at the celebration. These two definitions will be compared to determine whether students showed an increase in their use of the three terms as well if there was an overall increase in their elaboration in students' answers.

To evaluate regarding goal number two, a population of students and faculty will be determined including both participants and non-participants, and a survey will be conducted before the celebration and then several months afterwards. This survey will ask participants to state whether they attended the celebration, whether they feel creativity is encouraged and practiced in the school consistently, and what elements of their school experience seem to encourage such creativity.

Of course, as with the intervention itself, these evaluation plans might need to be altered. It may be the case that the second evaluation is simply not feasible, or that the results from the first evaluation leads one to consider the possibility of doing another celebration more frequently than annually. Regardless, adjustments can be made.

Doubts/Concerns

A variety of doubts remain regarding this project, despite the occasional glimmer of hope. As I am encouraged to consider my own thoughts and feelings, I am led to

see that a good majority of my doubts may simply be derived from my own reluctance to see the celebration as a possibility—I have not been in charge of such an event before. While I have held publication festivals with my individual classes for five years, these have been limited to my own classes and even take place within my classroom during a specific period of the day. While this may open up the possibility of shrinking the fair down as an experiment to conduct within my classes, I assume that this would not enable reaching out to the whole school. That said, on the other hand, I have some trepidation concerning the size of the project if it is opened up to the whole school (yet this is also based on the assumption that a large population would be interested), the logistics of the celebration, the quality of the products, and the ability of the intervention to accomplish its aims.

Size:

- Will I be able to maintain the degree of control and safety that I am in my classroom?
- Will I be able to recruit other adults to help in this? Will they be committed?
- Will I be able to recruit a sizeable number of students and adults to exhibit their work? Will the exhibiting population be committed?
- If the creativity celebration is done in conjunction with the yearly art show, where would it take place? What venue would provide the amount of space that would fit the needs of both the art show and a creativity celebration?

Logistics:

- What supervision will be needed? How will safety and a reasonable degree of order be maintained?
- What will the minute-by-minute agenda be?

Quality and Effectiveness:

- In what ways could I ensure that the fair will be an experience of equal quality for all who participate and attend?
- How will I be able to improve upon the first celebration as I prepare for the second?
- If the first celebration does not go as well as hoped, will there be another chance or will I have to reconsider my approach to accomplishing my goals altogether?

To address some of these concerns, I am planning the “Next Steps” below as well as continued self-management of fears and frustrations. Of course, a sense of doubt may never be completely done away with (not necessarily a bad thing, as it can also be seen as open-mindedness), but negative actions and thoughts based on that doubt can be combatted with optimism and reminding myself to frame the undertaking of the intervention as an experiment of sorts, a process in which even “failure” is in fact movement towards a goal, is meaningful and purposeful. In this sense, I can see the project as a continuation of a work in progress rather than the perennial “finish line,” which often brings about other fears and anxieties.

Next Steps

Although the research clearly reveals that a fair of this sort requires a rather daunting amount of work, particularly in the details of its organization, a series of some of the more significant next steps can be highlighted. These items fall into four categories:

A. Research to be done to continue building illuminating background, to influence the design of celebration, and to make the reasoning for celebration better supported and specific (and tailored to current trends of public schools):

1. Gather and incorporate additional writings on teaching of creativity.
2. Continue to gather information about other creativity fairs in other places.
3. Read and make connections to the Common Core documents as well as upcoming PARCC testing.

B. Documents to be written in conjunction with, or drafted for review by, committed constituencies:

1. Statement of purpose, to be included on all documents regarding the celebration
2. Necessary sheets: application; simple plus/delta sheet (small sheets of paper?); evaluative tool for entrance and exit; survey for extended time after celebration
3. If successful in initial constituency building with admin, presentation to larger audience, such as the Restructuring committee

C. Documents/presentations to be used in the building of further constituencies:

1. Description of how fair will go for participant, attendee, and those running it
2. Presentation to / discussion with administrators

D. Dialogues to set up and have:

1. Build a constituency with a population of workers: Have dialogues with Art Department Head and art teachers; Have dialogue with NHS advisor; Continue dialogue with Club Creative members
2. Initial dialogue with administrator/s, present idea, ask for time to present to Restructuring Committee

Reflection / Conclusion

In an initial writing about the action research process, written at the beginning of this course, I described the then upcoming process as one that “takes on a dance-like quality, revisiting sections of the floor but always making progress. Insofar as each of us thinks differently throughout the process, the process itself becomes a footprint of our thinking, of who we are.” I concluded with what might be considered a slight burst of candor: “And, I have to say, thank goodness it is!” Here, too, I would like to end with a statement that displays what I believe to be the effective balance between creative and critical thinking that action research requires, that the problems of the world require us to

apply—a fitting bit of thoughtful humor. Although there are only a couple projects in the whole of my academic career that I have finished but have not been very proud of, I nonetheless find it appropriate here to declare that my passion (as found through the beginning phases) for this idea has been *the* difference during periods of frustration with my progress. I find now that as a result of calling upon that passion in the face of the somewhat dizzying cycles and epicycles through an ocean of information and ideas has resulted in a meaningful sense of accomplishment. In this sense, even without having actually enacted the intervention yet, I am proud of the work I have done, and I am led to believe that—as is hopefully revealed to all who attend the creativity celebration when it does happen—that such pride is a result of having determined the direction of my passion and of having followed it in a thoughtful and focused, yet open-minded, manner. It is this velocity, I think now, that allows not only for a footprint of thinking (which might be made by any mental endeavor) but an exploratory path that is undoubtedly my own: my project is my journey and that journey is me.

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Appendix A—Compilation of Data from Student Survey

Given October 2013 to two Honors Freshman English Courses.

These were my own courses, so had been introduced to the concept of thinking dispositions as well as specific terms: flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration.

Per 4 = 29 students

Per 5 = 30 students

Each question followed by compilation of data:

1. How do you define “creativity”?

Here, I will compile the contents of the responses. In this sense, there will be more tallies than responses, as one response may incorporate a variety of aspects in its definition.

Comment or phrase used in definition	Number of times same or similar comment appeared	Insights / Lessons
An art of some kind	3	Predominantly, students associated creativity with being unique, original, or “out of the box.” Quite far behind this sentiment were the concepts of imagination and self-expression (eight mentions each). Since all students did provide some answer to this question, I am led to believe that they have some familiarity with the term. I wonder, though, if the association with originality and uniqueness is the result of having been somehow “taught” this definition, or if it comes from a cumulative observation of context in which the term is used, or if it has anything to do with students’ concern for being unique while being accepted by their peers (of great importance in high school!)—in other words, being what they term a “leader” vs a “follower.” I find these terms relevant because they were used frequently in relation to the novel we’re reading (<i>A Separate Peace</i>), to such an extent that it was a noticeable pattern. Students had an inclination to see the characters
Unique, original, “out of the box,” different from normal	39	
Ability to extend an idea; to communicate an idea	3	
How you put things together	1	
Use of one’s mind/what mind comes up with/use of imagination	8	
Being unafraid of one’s own ideas; going out of comfort zone	2	
Being open-minded, looking at all possibilities	4	
A way to express feelings/oneself/ideas	8	
Design	1	

Varies person to person	1	as followers and leaders.
Elaboration of thoughts; elaboration to make something better	3	<p>The common acceptance of high school as a time to “find oneself” and to create an identity, leads me to wonder if this may be an impetus for understanding “creativity” mostly in this way. Many times, even if a student included another phrase or concept in their definition, originality or a synonym was also included.</p> <p>In this sense, if one is to assume that high school is a time to find oneself, and creativity is a descriptor for being unique and different (i.e. <i>one</i> self), then emphasis on creativity (chances to be creative) would be an important part of the high school experience. This is a bit of conjecture and exploration, though. What other questions might I ask in order to determine the roots of student’s understanding of creativity?</p> <p>NOTES: Important to keep in mind the possibility of my misconstruing a student’s meaning. Although I grouped some phrases together, they may have not been intended for such a classification. In addition, students do sometimes use words in ways that are not suitable to their definition/s. That said, the option for developing a definition versus choosing one from a list led to some interesting responses along with the overwhelming presence of originality.</p> <p>I wonder, what thoughts and feelings do students have when they’re told their work or thinking is creative? And what about when they hear these words used to describe another student’s thinking but not their own?</p> <p>Is it originality in product? in thought? in kinds of thinking? within certain domains?</p>
Building/making/creating something	5	
Posing a question	1	
Mind and heart	1	
All the things that get pushed aside in your mind!	1	

2. How often do you feel or think you are encouraged to be creative in school?

Descriptor of frequency	Number of times same or similar	Insights / Lessons

	comment appeared	
Never	0	Although students were not given specific language to choose from, a few observations and insights may be drawn from these results. A possible observation to be made from these particular results is that they are initially seem fairly disparate and varied. However, it is worth noting that 26 in total said that they are barely asked or only asked in one class to be creative throughout the school day, which is a significant number. In addition, 11 students stated that it depended on the work being done (projects are more often associated with creativity), and one may consider this as indicative that quite often these students are not asked to be creative in classes.
Barely/not often	16	
Sometimes	9	
One class	10	
Several times or classes a day	12	
Depends on the work being done (e.g. projects versus worksheet)	11	

3. Are there times or places in school when you feel you are encouraged or able to be more creative than others? If so, when/where are these times/places?

Where?	# of mentions	Insights, Notes, Comments, Questions
English class	26	Despite the possible bias of having students take the survey in English class and knowing that I would read them, the fact that student names were not included on the surveys should lessen this possibility. It would have been helpful to be able to determine which English class in particular students were referring to, and also why they thought this was the case. This information might be helpful in supporting the idea that creative thinking needs to be explicitly addressed and used to a greater extent across the curriculum, as opposed to in only one or two classes. That said, it is worth noting that there were students who felt that creativity was used in math and health class, for instance, indicating that some variety in understanding what creativity is might exist or that certain students' inclination (intelligences) determine where they actually feel or believe they are being creative. Nonetheless, the idea of a creativity fair can provide a means for students to be creative in a context that is outside of the bounds of a classroom, divided
Clubs	5	
History class	4	
When teachers put in the effort to be different	1	
Art class	8	
At home	1	
Science class	1	
Chinese	1	
Freedom in assignments	1	
Band	2	
Making a story	1	
Memoirs	1	
Projects	9	
Discussion	1	
Electives	1	
Lunch/outside	1	
Spanish	3	
Math	1	
Health	1	
Sports	1	

		curriculum, and the preconceptions or assumptions associated with such contexts. In other words, the spirit of the fair can be brought back into the classrooms, versus vice versa.
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4. Do you believe there should be more creativity in your school experience? If so, in what ways? If not, why?

Yes	45	Comments of Interest
No	7	I don't feel that there should be more creativity in school. My reason is that school is a place of learning, not being very creative.
		I don't believe there should be more creativity in school. I believe this because not all kids are creative and maybe some kids don't want to be creative.
		I believe there should be more creativity in my school because when you reach a certain level the creativity stops.
		Yes, in most classes we keep creativity bottled up. It's the only thing on our mind which stops focus on learning, and we may feel unappreciated.
		I believe no. This is because with too much creativity things can get out of control. But with just enough things work.
		Yes! We should be creative, in school. We express ourselves throughout our clothes (which we get in trouble for) but if we could do it throughout our work, it might be better.
		I don't think so because all the teachers tell us to be creative.
		Yes I do believe there should be more creativity. I think every class should be taught like Mr Erickson's class.
		Well yeah we should have art contest, paint splatter day, neon day, creative fest where we just have a blast being ourselves and having booths that express our feelings or our personality.
		I don't know because I haven't been at a school with creativity in every assignment.
		Yes, just a little more because we still have to learn somehow. We could be more creative by decorating our homework.
		There needs to be more creativity in students' school experience. Teachers need to be creative before a student can.

5. a. Below are some thinking habits associated with creativity or creative projects. Circle the one you that you think your school encourages **most** and then explain how it encourages it.

Habit	# of times circled	
originality	18	What might have been more interesting about these results is the number of times students wrote that this is what they are asked or told to do. They are asked and told to be original in their thinking, and to
flexibility	6	
elaboration	13	
risk-taking	9	

curiosity	11	elaborate on answers, and to ask questions. In other words, no answers showed that teachers explicitly address HOW to do these things; rather it is just expected that students know and will or won't do them as asked.
fluency	7	

6. Of the habits listed above that you did **not** circle, which one do you believe should be encouraged more? Why? In what ways?

Habit	# of times stated	
originality	14	Although risk-taking is clearly important in creativity, I am not sure how it could be appropriately emphasized in this particular intervention, especially since the administration might have doubts about how that kind of thinking might manifest itself in students' projects.
flexibility	9	
elaboration	3	
risk-taking	17	
curiosity	11	
fluency	1	