

All Parts of the Same Thing: Dispatches from the Creativity Everything Lab

ABSTRACT: We established the Creativity Everything lab at Ryerson University in 2018 as a place that would support and unlock “all kinds of creativity for all kinds of people.” In this article, we detail the transdisciplinary roots of our work and outline some of our activities and the thinking behind them. As a team of researchers developing projects and experiences that embrace a wide range of creators and creative practices, we are fashioning the lab to facilitate the actions of doing and making in a range of spheres: in everyday life, professional creative practice, and in learning and research. Three case studies – our ongoing efforts at supporting learning for students, a research project on platforms for creativity, and the community outreach of the 2019 Creativity Everything #FreeSchool – explore how teaching, research, events, and collaborations in multiple media intersect in a multifaceted system for relating to, and engaging with, creativity. Our studies suggest that creative practice as research helps people make connections that fuel curiosity and experimentation. We argue that engaging in multiple perspectives of the “everything” of creativity better equips our students, university, and public to reap its benefits and rewards.

KEYWORDS: creativity, creativity everything, #FreeSchool, higher education, pedagogy, creative practice, curiosity, experimentation

In 2016, the Canadian government launched “Creative Canada” with an unprecedented investment of \$1.9 billion over five years. This included welcome boosts to the budget of the Canada Council for the Arts, with particular programs to support Indigenous artists, as well as a forward-looking Digital Strategy Fund. The following year saw the launch of the “Creative Canada Policy Framework” website, which underlined a commitment to arts and culture, proposed a “modernization” of the Canada Music Fund, and suggested moves toward greater equity, diversity, and inclusion across the board as well as greater support for Indigenous creative culture (Canadian Heritage).

Much of this framework, though, was rooted in the language of the previous century, positioning the broadcasting and film industries as the primary agents of creative culture. The nods to individual and diverse creative people were welcome, but most of the policy framework seemed to think that creativity equals chunks of “Canadian content” that are successfully exported. Take away the nervous references to “digital” modes of distribution, and it was not very much different to the approach of fifty years earlier. “Creative

Canada” is an appealing phrase for what could be an expansive embrace of creativity as an activity that can be the key source of meaning in everyone’s lives. But that is not what they meant. Meanwhile, around the same time, Ryerson University was persuading one of us – David Gauntlett – to move from the United Kingdom to Canada to take up a Tier I Canada Research Chair in creativity. That eventually happened in 2018, and former doctoral student and colleague Mary Kay Culpepper joined soon after. We established the Creativity Everything lab at the university in the same year. The lab intends – in our informal slogan – to support and unlock “all kinds of creativity for all kinds of people.” The lab offers a range of activities through which students, faculty, and the community at large can rediscover the changes in outlook, possibilities, and identity that accrue to them by participating in the creative process. We predicate our work on the notion that the act of making things is essential to understanding creativity and identifying how it affects our lives. This perspective has helped us see that creativity is not only the lab’s reason for being; it is the reason for everything we do within its purview.

In this article, we discuss how the lab’s origins lay in frustration with the often rigid way in which academia regards creativity, a treatment we argue runs counter to its potential to prepare people for living in the present as well as in the future. We describe how Creativity Everything functions as a setting for its multidisciplinary researchers to explore the workings of creativity as we develop projects and experiences involving a wide range of creators and creative practices. In a trio of case studies, we relate how the facets of the lab – teaching, research, events, and collaborations – interweave in a platform for creativity that serves the broadest possible audiences of students, colleagues, and fellow citizens. In reviewing our creative practice-as-research mindset, we detail how it colours our teaching, our research, and dissemination in diverse media, our students’ learning outcomes, and how, in the process, creativity can stretch the boundaries of what universities can be and do.

A CONDUIT FOR CREATIVE TRUST

Now in its third year, the Creativity Everything lab serves the university and the public with a variety of teaching, online and video projects, collaborations, events, outreach, writings, and opportunities for making things. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from running in-person events from March 2020, of course, but we shifted quickly to a range of online activities as well as new mentoring and fellowship programs.¹ It also enabled us to start a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded project on how creative practitioners keep going in challenging times.² The lab forms a backdrop for the creative experiences of the people who work with and through it.

1 See “Creativity Everything,” <http://www.creativityeverything.ca>.

2 See “Reframing Creativity,” <https://www.reframingcreativity.com>.

The theories and principles behind the lab were cultivated over decades. Between us, we have many years of experience in creative organizations as well as the academy. Working with and for media and cultural organizations, we sought and supported creativity with our colleagues and audiences: the more music, magazines, or websites we made, the more we saw that it was the connections to others' creativity that enhanced our abilities to think and act creatively. As this developed into more formal academic research on creativity, we discovered a splintered prism. Although creativity is "a fundamentally human characteristic that is central to our well-being, our productivity and our prosperity," disciplines historically have fragmented its understanding (Jackson 1). Much early research was grounded in the discipline of psychology, where creativity has been a subject of ongoing study since the 1950s. However, it was (and is) undeniable that other fields – particularly those that pertain to the arts and humanities – offer invaluable theoretical approaches to understanding creativity's distinctive social and cultural facets and to fusing theory with creativity as lived experience.

We have stumbled, more or less, across insightful articles about the practices of creativity in journals from assorted humanities domains such as architecture (for example, Baker; Kreiner), archaeology (Dann and Joliet; Douny), performing arts (Beer and Hes; Harrison and Rouse; Tracy), and communication studies (McIntyre; Trotman). They are generally written in field-specific argots and published in journals and books aimed at those who already understand what they are saying. They therefore often fell shy of making a substantial interdisciplinary impact. The restrictiveness of academic fields in general effectively reinforced their differences. It sustained their divisions, setting a challenge to those who sought a broader vista of creativity. However, we find the most exciting thing about studying creativity – and expressing it – is the realization that it is inherently transdisciplinary. Our perspective was echoed by Beth Hennessey and Teresa Amabile in their examination of the facets of creativity research: "Only by using multiple lenses simultaneously, looking across levels, and thinking about creativity systematically, will we be able to unlock and use its secrets" (590).

For them and us, systems theories of creativity, which build on similar constructs in physics, allowed a way forward. Social psychologists devised these theories to speculate where creativity comes from and how it is perceived (for example, Csikszentmihalyi, "Society"; Csikszentmihalyi, "Systems"; Glaveanu, Glaveanu and Tanggaard; Montouri; Sawyer). They maintain that "creativity results from a complex system of interrelating and interacting factors" involving individuals, society, and culture (Kozbelt, Beghetto, and Runco 28). This made sense to us – after all, everyone who makes things does so in specific personal, social, and cultural contexts. Systems theories of creativity also reiterated some of the social and cultural arguments that we found useful in building our models. For example, more than a dozen years ago, as we were exploring the relationships between making and self-concept (Gauntlett, *Creative Explorations*), we drew upon strands of research that

helped us to understand, in different ways, how creativity influences identity (Culpepper and Gauntlett, "Amateur"). These strands incorporated the philosophy of science, sociological debates about how people order their social realities, and the limited advances in neuroscience on the consciousness of personal identity.

Simultaneously, we accessed readings from academics and creative practitioners who were interested in how creativity affects the lives of everyday people. Among them were nineteenth-century philosophers such as John Ruskin and William Morris, who saw creativity as a human quality of social value. Their aesthetic and utopian ideals can be seen to have presaged the contemporary crafts revival, the maker movement, and the positive intentions of social media, but not the assorted negative practices of social media companies, such as mass surveillance (Zuboff), devising algorithms that marginalize users on the basis of gender, race, and socio-economic status (Noble), and exploiting unpaid users for their experience and content creation (Sadowski).

FIVE GUIDING THINKERS

The work of many interdisciplinary thinkers has informed the ethos of Creativity Everything. We will discuss five key examples. First, from feminist critiques of research methodology, we took the point that both quantitative and qualitative methods are often problematic in the way they treat participants. People give up their valuable time to share experiences or feelings with the researcher, who says "thank you" and walks away to publish their findings in obscure journals in exchange for intellectual prestige. Participants typically only get a simulation of a real conversation, cannot really shape the research agenda, and have no agency in how the dialogue is framed (Gauntlett, *Video Critical*; Leavy and Harris; Reinharz). Avoiding these kinds of exploitation can be a set of knotty problems even for the most well-meaning researchers. They are not easily "solved," but we believe it is important that researchers should do their best to mitigate them. We seek to do this by enabling participants to have as much voice as possible, in a making and talking session that is designed to be a rewarding way to spend time, where they are able to shape what they do and how they do it, and bring in elements that may not have been part of our research agenda.

Second, we used the anthropologist Tim Ingold, who positioned making at the centre of creativity, developing individuals and cultures, reinforcing the notion that creativity is contextual: "I want to think of making ... as a process of growth. This is to place the maker from the outset as a participant in amongst a world of active materials. These materials are what [they have] to work with, and in the process of making [the person] 'joins forces' with them, bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesizing and distilling, in anticipation of what might emerge" ("Making" 21; emphasis in original; see also Ingold, "Textuality"). Third, we considered the radical philosopher Ivan Illich, who outlined the moral and ethical case for why people need to have

access to the resources and possibilities of creativity: “People need ... above all the freedom to make things among which they can live, to give shape to them according to their own tastes, and to put them to use in caring for and about others” (11). Fourth, the musicologist and composer Christopher Small envisioned music as a way of exploring, affirming, and celebrating human relationships. He coined the verb “musicking” to highlight music as something we do rather than a thing. Musicking happens through composing, performing, listening, practising, dancing, or any other act involved in the generation of music: “The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies” (Small 13). This insistence on creativity as something that people do – a process, not a product – was striking.

Fifth, we looked at Janelle Monáe, the musician, actor, and producer. She has spoken in several forthright, thoughtful interviews about the ways in which she has created her own path, starting by reflecting on her own identity, emotions, and concerns and then working outwards from this to “impact people and be helpful to others” (Sewell). Speaking about coming out as queer, Monáe says:

I knew that by being truthful through my art, people were gonna have questions, and I had to figure out a way to talk about it. And in having those talks with myself, I realized it was bigger than just me. There are millions of other folks who are looking for a community. And I just leaned into that. I leaned into the idea that if my own church won't accept me, I'm gonna create my own church. (Sewell, n.p.)

Helping a diverse range of people and voices to find ways to express themselves is central to Creativity Everything.

This bundle of ideas suggests ways in which we can bring people together in various formats to connect through making and, in the process, position creativity as a social verb, leveraging its potential to change people and societies. We have also looked to many other artists and other cultural producers for insight – how they kept going when projects went awry, the benefits of daily practice, and the contexts that guide their work. The diverse and growing group includes Canadian artists such as photographer and podcaster Jodianne Beckford, composer and dancer Kalaisan Kalaichelvan, music producer Vanese Smith, ceramic and performance artist Habiba El-Sayed, and portraitist and storyteller Alia Youssef. These different sources allowed us to tap what the anthropologist Eitan Wilf called “the ethnographic contexts of ‘creativity’” (398). More specifically, we examine the ways in which people who engage in creative processes talk about what they do, how they share with others, and the effect that making has on individual identity. We are also curious about the outcome of teaching and learning creativity with our students and whether what they learned through making things in our classes could propagate creativity in other areas of their lives.

Of course, all theories can be said to scaffold on what precedes them, and we are in effect constructing a bricolage of theory and applied knowledge. The term is fitting: “The etymological foundation of bricolage comes from a traditional French expression that denotes craftspeople who creatively use materials left over from other projects to construct new artifacts” (Rogers 1). Our bricolage led us toward a definition of creativity that would address the everyday activities of individuals – who draw, for instance, or make music, build things with Lego, or make YouTube videos – and the processes they follow to create things:

Everyday creativity refers to a process which brings together at least one active human mind, and the material or digital world, in the activity of making something. The activity has not been done in this way by this person (or these people) before. The process may arouse various emotions, such as excitement and frustration, but most especially a feeling of joy. When witnessing and appreciating the output, people may sense the presence of the maker, and recognise those feelings. (Gauntlett, *Making* 87)

This sketch is a little overcomplicated because it is trying to capture certain things missed in other definitions, while seeking to sidestep specific definitional traps that others have fallen into (Kampylis and Valtanen). Crucially, though, this definition highlights a human process that does involve the creation of things but that is about the exchange of emotion. This became foundational to our approach.

FROM THEORY TO REALITY

The inclusive nature of Creativity Everything forsakes siloed disciplines for an “everything” lens that is most interested in working with actual creative people. By this explanation, of course, we mean everyone: students, our partners in the lab, those who work in the creative industries, people we encounter locally, international networks, and anyone we can reach on the Internet. If Creativity Everything can be said to have a bias, it is toward actual creating because action informs perception, which in turn informs knowledge (Briscoe and Grush). It emphasizes learning from all kinds of real creators through listening, conversing, and making. It is, therefore, inclusive of media and people, regardless of background and orientation – although we take deliberate steps to give greater attention to equity-seeking and marginalized groups. Our baseline is pleasurable engagement taken seriously – that is, playing to learn about creativity – a duality that John Dewey found to be the optimal state of mind for learning.

Indeed, the lab is arguably more a mindset than a place (Culpepper and Gauntlett, “Making”). Creativity Everything surfaces in events, workshops, collaborations, and projects that engage the public as well as students. We want to offer everyone the invitation to step into a supportive, open-ended

space and experience how it feels to see oneself as a creative being. We want to stir in as much variation in activity and people as possible and not put a border around creativity. Ultimately, we want people to broaden their sense of themselves as creative, and we know that getting people to create is the most effective way of making that happen. Three recent projects from the lab illustrate this point. The first involves the curriculum design for a popular elective class at Ryerson University. The second is a research project that imagines inclusive new futures for makerspaces. The third is a community-based fortnight of workshops under the Creativity Everything banner. Beyond illustrating the tenets of Creativity Everything, these examples demonstrate our contention that theory is practice, making is thinking, and doing is researching.

CASE STUDY 1: SUPPORTING LEARNING

Action is the most straightforward way to bridge creativity theory and practice, and this principle is demonstrated clearly in the practice of teaching or, rather, supporting people in learning. It is, at its essence, a compelling way to test how well our theoretical scaffolding holds up to the rigours of actual human experience. Given our theoretical backgrounds, our classes centre on learners who make things in and for the course, and we consider ourselves learners as well. As noted in a note-to-self blog post, reflecting on what the distinctive point of a “teaching” session must be: “The only thing that gives any meaning and purpose to a taught course like this is the meaning-making and dialogues and relationships in the room. ... The *only* distinctive thing about the university course can be that we come to this place and have personal approaches to the matters in hand” (Gauntlett, “New Course”; emphasis in original). To put it another way, this relational model of teaching means that we are transparent about our interpretations of creativity, and work alongside students to come to new mutual understandings about what it means to make things now (Gauntlett, “Seeking”).

There are many routes within this mode of learning – all of which involve making – so students complete assignments like keeping creativity journals, making class presentations, talking with visiting speakers, and participating in workshops. The goal is to help them create multiple pathways of reflective learning, the kind that is most meaningful and personal in the long run. The prototypical course of this type is “Your Creative Self,” an elective available to students across the university. As the course description puts it, “[t]his course is about self-driven creativity – making media, making inspirations, and making a difference. Everything begins with creative individuals. We may move in and out of creative communities, and collaborative environments, but the one constant is your own creative self” (Gauntlett, “Your Creative Self”). Bringing this about required a mix of linked strategies that abandoned the classic lecture/assignment dyad in favour of a constructivist approach (for example, Dewey; Ingold, *Making*; Papert, *Mindstorms*) that focused on reflexive making.

For some, this direction will recall Matt Ratto's ongoing emphasis on the role of critical making – that is, engaging with tools and materials to facilitate new thinking, particularly about science and technology – in pedagogy (see also Ratto and Hertz).

To that end, homework in the form of readings and videos allowed students to cover established constructs of creativity; we discussed these briefly in each session. This decision freed class time for the more affecting business of reflective exercises in which students were encouraged to consider the origins of their ideas, questioning their motivations and rationales and, crucially, what compels them to create. Accordingly, each session included exercises that required the flexibility, fluency, and tolerance for ambiguity demanded of all creative action (Osborn). One blog post about the experience expressed it this way:

I do [the exercises] myself in class too, for the first time for me, as it is for [the students] – typically thinking “Oh, this is *hard!*” Of course, the reason I do it too is not because I think my responses are especially important but just because I want to be participating as well, alongside the students – we are all uncertain creators, finding our way, individually but also together. (Gauntlett, “Your Creative Self”; emphasis in original)

Each class also included short presentations from students about their own personal creative projects. To reinforce reflexivity, they were asked to describe in their presentations the creative challenges they faced and what they gleaned from meeting them. Because they pursued activities ranging from tap dancer to social media influencer to spoken word poet, the ideas and discoveries the students shared were often inspiring and sometimes moving. Post-class evaluations indicated that the students highly valued this part of the curriculum.

Three salient points from Ingold about making informed the content and construction of this course (*Making*). First, learning with creativity carries more impact than learning about creativity, second, our meanings and understandings about creativity are built by going forward with action, and, third, transformational (as opposed to documentary) learning carries with it the more significant potential for lasting change. These precepts also pertain to research, as the next section details.

CASE STUDY 2: MAKERSPACES PROJECT

Across Canada, makerspaces are reasonably common fixtures in cities, schools, public libraries, and occasional pop-up locations. They typically provide space and equipment – often in the form of 3-D printers, circuit boards, and vinyl cutters – as well as education and resources for children and adults who want to learn, create, design, and invent. The potential they offer in building imaginations, however, is inevitably constrained by

physical affordances of time, space, and money. Moreover, the cultures that are focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics of many makerspaces have prompted questions of equality, sustainability, and convertibility of skills that must be addressed to open them up to diverse users. The concept of “the makerspace mindset” suggests a way past those constrictions for groups to collaborate regardless of place, via such strategies as resource sharing and online sessions (Thestrup and Velicu). In turn, the makerspace mindset could realize its promise by leveraging “platforms for creativity” that can assist in strategizing how to equitably direct efforts toward a more expansive and sustainable society for creating (Gauntlett, *Making*; Gauntlett, *Media Studies*). We use the phrase “platforms for creativity” to indicate any kind of environment, event, tool, or toy, online, offline, or both, which invites people to step into a sphere of creativity that they would not otherwise have experienced. Our project aimed to explore these strategies in detail (Culpepper and Gauntlett, “Making”). We argued that educators and others who run makerspaces should consider “platforms for creativity” as integral to the makerspace mindset. Together, we contend, mindset and platforms can facilitate the development of more and better ways for all kinds of people to share in the individual and social benefits of making and sharing.

The lab began this project with an extensive review of inclusion/exclusion in western makerspaces, with particular emphasis on the numerous subtle and informal ways in which people not from the dominant demographic were often led to conclude that the space was not really for them (Payette). This was augmented with an examination of global makerspace cultures. Frustrated by the preponderance of male-dominated spaces, and irritated by the brown-and-grey “machine shop” aesthetic of many makerspaces, we were still interested in the ways in which makerspace users can connect with each other – to exchange ideas, learn from each other, and build ladders of inspiration – regardless of physical space. One educator called this “learning *glo-cally*” (Thestrup). In assessing how to square these interests, we investigated the theoretical underpinnings of the makerspace movement (Papert, “Situating”) and its current interpretations (Collins; Kim et al.; Peppler et al.). One of the most potentially transformative things to emerge from the makerspaces is the maker mindset: “[A] can-do attitude that can be summarized as ‘what can you do with what you know?’ It is an invitation to take ideas and turn them into various kinds of reality. It is a chance to share in communities of makers of all ages by sharing your work and expertise” (Dougherty 9).

That was the starting point for what Klaus Thestrup and Anca Velicu term the makerspace mindset – a pedagogical turn that emphasizes the potential for creating a culture for building creativity, equity, and collaboration while allowing for the ambiguities and benefits of bringing people together. Its most relevant characteristic is that the connections and understandings that happen in the makerspace are more important than the physical parameters of the

space itself. Accordingly, the makerspace mindset emphasizes characteristics such as playfulness, improvisation, and a tolerance of ambiguity over those of competition, rule following, and certitude. The change in perspective could hold open the possibility of increasing the diversity of makerspaces, combining learners of all ages and backgrounds, and making all kinds of things to explore their creative identities. After all, when people get together in person or virtually to make things, they forge shared understandings. Over time, these can extend past individual relationships to potentially contribute to local resilience, sustainability, and, perhaps in time, broad social change.

In our assessment, we argued that such a shift necessitates the structures offered by platforms for creativity. While many things can be said to be platforms – YouTube, for example, or fabric scraps and a glue gun, electronics kits, or even paper and crayons – it is crucial that any potential platform for creativity – online or offline – supports and nurtures people’s creativity. Importantly, platforms for creativity must also offer an invitation to join in, and opportunities to connect with others, a perception borne out by our research experiences (Culpepper and Gauntlett, “Inviting”). In our sessions, we ask people to make things; with the invitation to join in, everyone is acknowledged as a creator. Moreover, the things they make can be as simple or elaborate as people wish, which removes the spectre of competition and allows a group acknowledgement that everyone has something to express. As we conduct reflexive debriefs about the process of creating, these sessions invariably deliver insights on how groups and individuals relate to each other through making.

It is interesting to note that the makerspace mindset and platforms for creativity coexist to a degree in the Art Hives Network, a consortium of community-based arts entities across Canada and throughout the world (Timm-Bottos and Reilly). Art Hives frequently focus on art therapy, and their stated guidelines also promote the qualities of sharing, communication, and equity that we argue the most inclusive makerspaces and platforms encourage. Further, they aim “to build solidarity across geographic distances ... [to] create multiple opportunities for dialogue, skill sharing, and art making between people of differing socio-economic backgrounds, ages, cultures, and abilities” (Art Hives Network). Directed by Janis Timm-Bottos of Concordia University in Montreal, the organization emphasizes a research-practice continuum borne of inclusive, open-ended investigation and promotes creativity as a means for cultivating social change. In the context of the larger entity, each Art Hive represents a makerspace where many different kinds of people are welcome to explore ideas while creating art (and, in some places, gardens). Correspondingly, each holds the potential to be the tool for conviviality that Illich envisioned.

Creativity Everything shares many of the same goals as the Art Hives Network; our distinction is our emphasis on the experience of making a wide variety of things – some art focused, many not – as a necessary step toward empowering creativity. An example is described in the next case study.

CASE STUDY 3: COMMUNITY PROJECT

Toronto has a history of alternative and anarchist schools, arguably reaching an apogee with the Occupy movement in the wake of the protests over the 2010 G20 Toronto summit. Entities such as Anarchist U and the Free Skool were run by volunteers who facilitated open-to-everyone classes and discussion groups exploring political and social change (Doctorow; Kinch; Shantz). We were introduced to the “Free School” concept in 2011 when we were invited to run a book discussion and workshop for a separate Free School that the organizers hosted in their squat – an otherwise vacant mansion in the heart of London, United Kingdom (Gauntlett, “Origins”).

These Free Schools had much in common. Their classes, whether they were about economic activism or the social meaning of creativity, maintained a commitment to inclusivity, open-ended exercises, and a distinct preference toward learning through making. Informed by these experiences, we created the Creativity Everything #FreeSchool in the summer of 2019. Promoted as “[t]wo weeks of creative everything, open to everybody,” the #FreeSchool was advertised by assorted digital and physical means across Toronto and beyond (Gauntlett, “Creativity Everything”). We set up a diverse array of workshops, organized into three interconnected strands, Making, Discovery, and Process, although, of course, every session spoke in some way to making, discovery, and process. Some classes were headlined by particular activities such as drawing, fashion hacking, poetry writing, and graphic design, but each was – in different ways – about creative identity and thinking of oneself as a creative person. The sessions were led by the research team at Creativity Everything as well as Toronto-area artists and creative practitioners.

The Creativity Everything #FreeSchool was an immediate draw: more than one thousand people requested free tickets, and hundreds of people attended (Senra-François and Gauntlett). Most of them were not students but, simply, people curious to see what was happening, from a range of ages and backgrounds in our community. Aiming at this mixed cohort brought the Creativity Everything #FreeSchool closer to the roots of the original movement. Since we could hardly expect that everyone who came to the cartooning class, for instance, would be adept at drawing, we based our sessions on Seymour Papert’s brilliant insight that creative and/or learning experiences should have “low floors, high ceilings, and wide walls” (*Mindstorms; “Situating Constructionism”*; qtd. in Resnick and Silverman 2). This means that a learning experience should be easy to step into (low floor), that a project can begin simply but with the ability to become complex if warranted (high ceilings), and that any materials should allow many different kinds of people to make and do many different kinds of things (wide walls).

Two examples from the #FreeSchool illustrate this point. The graphic design class had people cut up textured papers to prototype the cover of an imagined book they would write about creativity, resulting in both spare and elaborate renditions. Similarly, those who attended the session on fashion

hacking brought in old clothes to revamp with actions as simple as changing a hem or as detailed as reshaping seams or adding contrasting fabric insertions. We documented the sessions in a video we produced for the Creativity Everything website.³ In scope and delivery, the assorted offerings of the Creativity Everything #FreeSchool earned positive feedback from the attendees. Based on the written comments we solicited at the end of every session, they said that they liked the variety, which encouraged them to think about creativity in different ways through different media, and they emphasized that the free classes enabled them to participate fully. These responses – along with several anecdotal ones received during and after the #FreeSchool and those captured in the video – seemed to confirm that we had indeed modelled a place that everyone was invited to step into as a creative being.

That summer's experience also allowed us a new test of eight principles for successful platforms for creativity, which were initially developed to describe effective online creative platforms but turned out to apply equally well to offline experiences (Gauntlett, "Internet"; Gauntlett, *Making*):

- Embrace "because we want to": At the #FreeSchool, we sought to go with the grain of what people already wanted to do and were interested in – while stirring in some challenge (which the participants also sought). They made and shared things they enjoyed and that they could tailor to their wishes. They could draw, design, and make what they wished; our suggestions were prompts, not prods.
- Set no limits on participation: As a platform, the #FreeSchool welcomed anyone who wanted to come along. Classes were spread over the course of two weeks, and at various hours including evenings, to make it easier to find an accommodating time. Moreover, as the sessions were free, the cost of materials and tuition was taken off the table.
- Celebrate participants, not the platform: The #FreeSchool classes were designed in a way to encourage people not just to make, but also to share, what they made with their tablemates and the rest of the people in the room. Through guided debriefs, the facilitators maintained the spotlight on individual and group creativity rather than the format of the class.
- Support storytelling: People connect when they tell stories and when the stories scaffold together – as they often did in the process of the #FreeSchool sessions – they build more significant meanings that can be understood by everyone in the room.
- Some gifts, some theatre, some recognition: The Creativity Everything #FreeSchool was in every respect a liminal experience. Its ephemerality accented the idea that the classes were a stage – for giving and receiving creative gifts, for performing creative identity, and for witnessing and applauding the contributions of others.

³ "Creativity Everything #FreeSchool," https://youtu.be/4eaJ_TWKMEI.

- Online to offline is a continuum: The classes were not mutually exclusive, a distinction that many #FreeSchool attendees instinctively understood. They spoke of learning new creative skills on YouTube and other digital platforms; at the same time, they often added that they appreciated the advantages of individual communication and group energy afforded by the in-person classes, while sharing the highlights with their friends and colleagues on social media.
- Reinvent learning: Following its antecedents, the #FreeSchool encouraged people to learn from each other and to pursue the subjects and lessons in which they were most interested. Similarly, there were, of course, no grades or prizes. Our emphasis was on learning and self-development through the process of doing and reflecting on creativity, not really on the physical product of any session.
- Foster genuine communities: The creativity engendered by the #FreeSchool encouraged a flowering of formal and informal partnerships and practices. For example, we met Camille Favreau because she was an eager participant in as many sessions as possible, frequently skipping out of her job in a financial corporation in order to explore her creativity at the #FreeSchool. Such was her enthusiasm that we invited her to run a workshop session within the #FreeSchool and later invited her to host and co-produce the Creativity Everything podcast (Favreau and Gauntlett). The #FreeSchool also helped to build collaboration with other Toronto organizations, such as CreateBeing and Artscape Launchpad and led to the biweekly drop-in creativity sessions offered by Creativity Everything throughout the year. Because we like things to be fresh and surprising, the #FreeSchool was never intended to be an annual event. Instead, we used its lessons in devising subsequent projects.

CONCLUSION

The Creativity Everything lab, then, exists to invite people in and to share ideas. Previously, we had assumed that the important activity was in writing and communicating about concepts and principles and getting those out into the world, regardless of the constraints of geography. That remains important, but the Canadian emphasis on locating research of any kind in a “lab” in which activities could be based turned out to be a blessing, kick-starting a fresh experiment in community and place making. The notion that everyone has creative potential is ordinary and obvious to us, and yet we are continually surprised to find many people who believe that they are not creative, and cannot be, because they were not born with it or because some teacher or authority figure thoughtlessly dismissed something that they had created. Even so, they understand the metaphor that creativity needs to be unlocked, when we get the chance to introduce it, because they know what that locking feels like.

We also often find that creativity is thought of as “arty” activities. Even when people are aware that the definition of the word reaches well beyond

that sphere in theory, as it were, they will still say that they are not creative because they are not good at painting. By highlighting the unlimited ways in which people do create, *Creativity Everything* spurs the conversation around the opportunities to develop creativity as a discrete skill in and of itself as well as the idea of creativity as a self-identity that you can step into. The case studies discussed here, encompassing practices in teaching and learning, research, and community engagement, illustrate different facets of our approach to knowledge building. As outlined above, creativity as an academic discipline has been dominated by psychologists eager to stamp it with the veneer of “scientific” certainty. We prefer to see creativity as a field of diverse practitioners, learning by doing, and as a place of active discovery. This is not because of a lack of commitment to rigour. On the contrary, it is because we want to understand creativity fully and properly that we are uninterested in superficial methodologies and seek instead a deep and respectful conversation about the real meanings of creativities, in all their forms.

Back in 1999, Nancy Cartwright, the philosopher of science with a background in advanced mathematics, published *The Dappled World*, which explains at the start: “This book supposes that, as appearances suggest, we live in a dappled world, a world rich in different things, with different natures, behaving in different ways. The laws that describe this world are a patchwork, not a pyramid” (1). This approach seeks to build understandings by listening to diverse voices rather than by trying to make everything all the same, and it commends deep listening over statistical averages. We also take from philosopher Richard Rorty the idea that the work of scholars committed to progress should be about the generation of new ideas, in playfully prodding the academy in any ways that might be fruitful rather than by seeking only to extend the long roll of flat description. With *Creativity Everything*, we find this can be done in many ways – through research, events, teaching and learning, community engagement, digital media, collaborations with diverse organizations, and our own experiences of making things – which are all parts of the same thing, with the mission to unlock creativities for all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supported by Social Science and Humanities Research Council Tier 1 Canada Research Chair Award 950-232037.

DAVID GAUNTLETT

Canada Research Chair in Creative Innovation and Leadership, School of Creative Industries, The Creative School, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Creativity: Seven Keys to Unlock Your Creative Self (forthcoming)

Making Is Connecting: The Social Power of Creativity, from Craft and Knitting to Digital Everything (2nd ed., 2018)

Making Media Studies: The Creativity Turn in Media and Communications Studies (2015)

Media Studies 2.0, and Other Battles around the Future of Media Research (2011)

MARY KAY CULPEPPER

PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, Creativity Everything Lab, School of Creative Industries, The Creative School, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

“‘Yeah, That’s What I Am Now’: Affordances, Action, and Creative Identity,” *The Palgrave Handbook of Creativity at Work* (ed. Lee Martin and Nick Wilson, 2018)

Big Questions in Creativity 2017: The Best Big Questions 2013–16 (edited with Cynthia Burnett and Paul D. Reali, 2017)

Big Questions in Creativity 2015: A Collection of First Works (edited with Cynthia Burnett, 2015)

Big Questions in Creativity 2014: A Collection of First Works (edited with Cynthia Burnett, 2014)

WORKS CITED

- Art Hives Network. “About.” 5 June 2020. <https://arthives.org/about>.
- Baker, Geoffrey H. *The Architecture of James Stirling and His Partners James Gowan and Michael Wilford: A Study of Architectural Creativity in the Twentieth Century*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Beer, Tanja, and Dominique Hes. “Sustainability in Production: Exploring Eco-Creativity within the Parameters of Conventional Theatre.” *Behind the Scenes: Journal of Theatre Production Practice* 1 (2017): 32–35.
- Briscoe, Robert and Rick Grush. “Action-Based Theories of Perception.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2017. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/action-perception/>.
- Canadian Heritage. “Creative Canada: Policy Framework.” 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/campaigns/creative-canada/CCCadreFramework-EN.pdf>.
- Cartwright, Nancy. *The Dappled World: A Study in the Boundaries of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Collins, Emma. “Unstitching Sustainability: (Re)Making Visceral Connections When Talking About Sustainability in Online, Community Makerspaces.” Paper presented at the Making Futures Conference, Plymouth, United Kingdom. 20 Sept. 2019. <https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/publications/unstitching-sustainability-remaking-visceral-connections-when-talk>.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. “Implications of a Systems Perspective on Creativity.” *Handbook of Creativity*. Ed. Robert J. Sternberg. New York: Cambridge UP, 1999. 313–35.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. “Society, Culture, and Person: A Systems View of Creativity.” *The Nature of Creativity: Contemporary Psychological Perspectives*. Ed. Robert J. Sternberg. New York: Cambridge UP, 1988. 325–39.

- Culpepper, Mary Kay, and David Gauntlett. "From Amateur to All-Business: Women on the Verge of Craft Entrepreneurship." *Craft Entrepreneurship*. Ed. Annette Naudin and Karen Patel. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. 143–60.
- Culpepper, Mary Kay, and David Gauntlett. "Inviting Everyday Creators to Make, Think, and Talk." *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 42 (2021): 100933. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2021.100933>.
- Culpepper, Mary Kay, and David Gauntlett. "Making and Learning Together: Where the Makerspace Mindset Meets Platforms for Creativity." *Global Studies of Childhood* 10.3 (2020): 264–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610620941868>.
- Dann, Robert J., and Etienne Jollet. "Looking for Trouble: Archeology, Art and Interdisciplinary Encounters." *The Senses and Society* 13.3 (2018): 299–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2018.1527596>.
- Dewey, John. *How We Think*. Boston: D.C. Heath, 1933.
- Doctorow, Cory L. "RIP Erik 'Possum Man' Stewart." *Boing Boing* 5 June 2012. <https://boingboing.net/2012/06/05/rip-erik-possum-man-stewa.html>.
- Dougherty, Dale. "The Maker Mindset." *Design, Make, Play: Growing the Next Generation of STEM Innovators*. Ed. Margaret Honey and David E. Kanter. New York: Routledge, 2013. 7–11.
- Douny, Laurence. *Living in a Landscape of Scarcity: Materiality and Cosmology in West Africa*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast, 2014.
- Favreau, Camille, and David Gauntlett, prod. "David Gauntlett and Camille Favreau: Why We're Making a Podcast." *Creativity Everything* 3 Mar. 2020. <http://www.creativityeverything.ca/david-gauntlett-camille-favreau-why-were-making-a-podcast-episode-0/>.
- Gauntlett, David. *Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007.
- Gauntlett, David. "Creativity Everything #FreeSchool." 1 May 2019. <http://www.creativityeverything.ca/freeschool/>.
- Gauntlett, David. "The Internet Is Ancient, Small Steps Are Important, and Four Other Theses About Making Things in a Digital World." *Creativity in the Digital Age*. Ed. Nelson Zagalo and Pedro Branco. London: Springer-Verlag, 2014. 17–33.
- Gauntlett, David. *Making Is Connecting: The Social Power of Creativity, from Craft and Knitting to Digital Everything*. 2nd ed. London: Polity, 2018.
- Gauntlett, David. *Media Studies 2.0, and Other Battles around the Future of Media Research*. London: Amazon Kindle, 2012.
- Gauntlett, David. "New Course Anxieties and Two Solutions." *David Gauntlett* 3 Aug. 2018. <https://davidgauntlett.com/digital-media/new-course-anxieties-and-two-solutions/>.
- Gauntlett, David. "Origins of the #FreeSchool." *David Gauntlett* 3 May 2019. <https://davidgauntlett.com/creativity/origins-of-the-freeschool/>.
- Gauntlett, David. "Seeking an Art-school Ethos for My Classroom." *David Gauntlett* 5 July 2019. <https://davidgauntlett.com/creativity/seeking-an-art-school-ethos-for-my-classroom/>.
- Gauntlett, David. *Video Critical: Children, the Environment and Media Power*. Luton: John Libbey Media, 1997.

- Gauntlett, David. "Your Creative Self Course – Hello Insights." *David Gauntlett* 9 Feb. 2019. <https://davidgauntlett.com/creativity/your-creative-self-course-hello-insights/>.
- Glăveanu, Vlad Petre. *Thinking through Creativity and Culture: Toward an Integrated Model*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017.
- Glăveanu, Vlad Petre, and Lene Tanggaard. "Creativity, Identity, and Representation: Towards a Socio-Cultural Theory of Creative Identity." *New Ideas in Psychology* 34 (2014): 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2014.02.002>.
- Harrison, Spencer H., and Elizabeth D. Rouse. "Let's Dance! Elastic Coordination in Creative Group Work: A Qualitative Study of Modern Dancers." *Academy of Management Journal* 57.5 (2014): 1256–83. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2012.0343>.
- Hennessey, Beth A., and Teresa M. Amabile. "Creativity." *Annual Review of Psychology* 61 (2010): 569–98. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100416>.
- Illich, Ivan. *Tools for Conviviality*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Ingold, Tim. *Making: Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Ingold, Tim. "The Textility of Making." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34.1 (2010): 91–102. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bep042>.
- Jackson, Norman. "Creativity in Higher Education: What's the Problem?" *Higher Education* 7 (2006): 1–11.
- Kampylis, Panagiotis G., and Juri Valtanen. "Redefining Creativity: Analyzing Definitions, Collocations, and Consequences." *Journal of Creative Behavior* 44.3 (2010): 191–214. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2162-6057.2010.tb01333.x>.
- Kim, Youngmoo E., Kareem Edouard, Katelyn Alderfer, and Brian K. Smith. *Making Culture: A National Study of Education Makerspaces*. Philadelphia: ExCITE Center, 2018. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336530623_Making_Culture_A_National_Study_of_Education_Makerspaces.
- Kinch, Megan. "Toronto's Free Schools, It Takes a Community." 20 Jan. 2013. <http://toronto.mediacoop.ca/story/torontos-free-schools/16025>.
- Kreiner, Kristian. "The Competition between Creativity and Legitimacy." *Architecture Competition: Project Design and the Building Process*. Ed. Ignaz Strebnel and Jan Silberberger. London: Routledge, 2017. 45–58.
- Kozbelt, Aaron, Ronald A. Beghetto, and Mark A. Runco. "Theories of Creativity." *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*. Ed. James C. Kaufman and Robert J. Sternberg. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. 20–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511763205.004>.
- Leavy, Patricia, and Anne Harris. *Contemporary Feminist Research from Theory to Practice*. New York: Guilford, 2018.
- McIntyre, Phillip. "Taking Creativity Seriously: Developing as a Researcher and Teacher of Songwriting." *Journal of Popular Music Education* 3.1 (2019): 67–85. https://doi.org/10.1386/jpme.3.1.67_1.
- Montuori, Alfonso. "Systems Approach." *Encyclopedia of Creativity*. Ed. Mark Runco and Steven Pritzker. San Diego: Academic P, 2011. 414–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-375038-9.00212-0>.
- Morris, William. *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*. Ed. Clive Wilmer. London: Penguin, 2004.

- Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York UP, 2018.
- Osborn, Alex F. *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Thinking*. New York: Scribner's, 1953.
- Papert, Seymour. *Mindstorms: Children, Computers, and Powerful Ideas*. New York: Basic Books, 1980.
- Papert, Seymour. "Situating Constructionism." *Constructionism*. Ed. Idit Harel and Seymour Papert. Norwood: Ablex, 1991. 1–11.
- Payette, Nicole. *Gender Inclusion in Makerspaces: Creativity Everything Working Paper*. Toronto: Ryerson U, 2019.
- Peppler, Kylie, Adam Maltese, Anna Keune, Stephanie Chang, and Lisa Regalla. *Open Portfolio Project: Survey of Makerspaces, Part I*. Research Brief 6, MakerEd Open Portfolio Project. Berkeley: Maker Education, 2015. http://makered.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/MakerEdOPP_RB6_Survey-of-Makerspaces-1_final.pdf.
- Ratto, Matt. "Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life." *The Information Society* 27.4 (2011): 252–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2011.583819>.
- Ratto, Matt, and Garnet Hertz. "Critical Making and Interdisciplinary Learning: Making As a Bridge between Art, Science, Engineering, and Social Interventions." *The Critical Makers Reader: (Un)learning Technology*. Ed. Loes Bogers and Letizia Chiappini. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2019. 17–28.
- Reinharz, Shulamit. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Resnick, Mitchel, and Brian Silverman. "Some Reflections on Designing Construction Kits for Kids." *Proceedings of Interaction Design and Children Conference*. New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2005. 117–22. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1109540.1109556>.
- Rogers, Matt. "Contextualizing Theories and Practices of Bricolage Research." *The Qualitative Report* 17.48 (2012): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1704>.
- Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979.
- Ruskin, John. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Dinah Birch. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Sadowski, Jathan. "When Data Is Capital: Datafication, Accumulation, and Extraction." *Big Data & Society* 6.1 (2019): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951718820549>.
- Sawyer, R. Keith. *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*. New York: Oxford UP, 2006.
- Senra-François, Rain, and David Gauntlett. "Creativity Everything #FreeSchool Exceeds All Expectations." *David Gauntlett* 7 June 2019. <https://davidgauntlett.com/creativity/creativity-everything-freeschool-exceeds-all-expectations/>.
- Sewell, Whembley. "Janelle Monáe: Living Out Loud." *them* 12 Apr. 2019. <https://www.them.us/story/janelle-monae-living-out-loud>.
- Shantz, Jeffery. "Spaces of Learning: The Anarchist Free Skool." *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education*. Ed. Robert H. Haworth. Oakland: PM P, 2012. 124–44.
- Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1998.

- Thestrup, Klaus. Personal communication. 24 Sept. 2019.
- Thestrup, Klaus, and Anca Velicu. "The Makerspace Is a Mindset." *MakeEY* 1 Apr. 2019. <https://makeyproject.wordpress.com/2019/01/04/the-makerspace-is-a-mindset/>.
- Timm-Bottos, Janis, and Rosemary C. Reilly. "Neighborhood Art Hives: Engaging Communities in Teaching and Learning." *Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Omobolade Delano-Oriaran, Marguerite W. Parks and Suzanne Fondrie. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2015. 179–84. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483346625.n34>.
- Tracy, Dale. "Cain and Culpability in Tony Kushner's Homebody/Kabul." *Modern Drama* 62.1 (2019): 94–110. <https://doi.org/10.3138/md.0822r>.
- Trotman, Dave. "Creativity as a Pastoral Concern." *Pastoral Care in Education* 37.1 (2019): 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2019.1569844>.
- Wilf, Eitan. "Semiotic Dimensions of Creativity." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 397–412. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102313-030020>.
- Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: Public Affairs, 2019.