



creative schools

**MERRIWA
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

CASE STUDY — TERM 2 & 3

TERM 2

creative schools

Performing Artist
Michael Abercromby

Teacher
Shonagh McKenzie

School
Merriwa Primary School

Year group
Year 5

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

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

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

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

This document describes the activities and outcomes across two terms of delivery: Term 2 and 3 (over 16 weeks). It also includes reflections from school leaders, teachers and students.

ACADEMIC YEAR 2019



TERM 1

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ARTISTS AND TEACHERS

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



TERM 2

PROGRAM DELIVERY IN THE CLASSROOM

Creative Learning workshops per week for eight consecutive weeks



TERM 3

PROGRAM DELIVERY

Learning workshops per week for 8 consecutive weeks



TERM 4

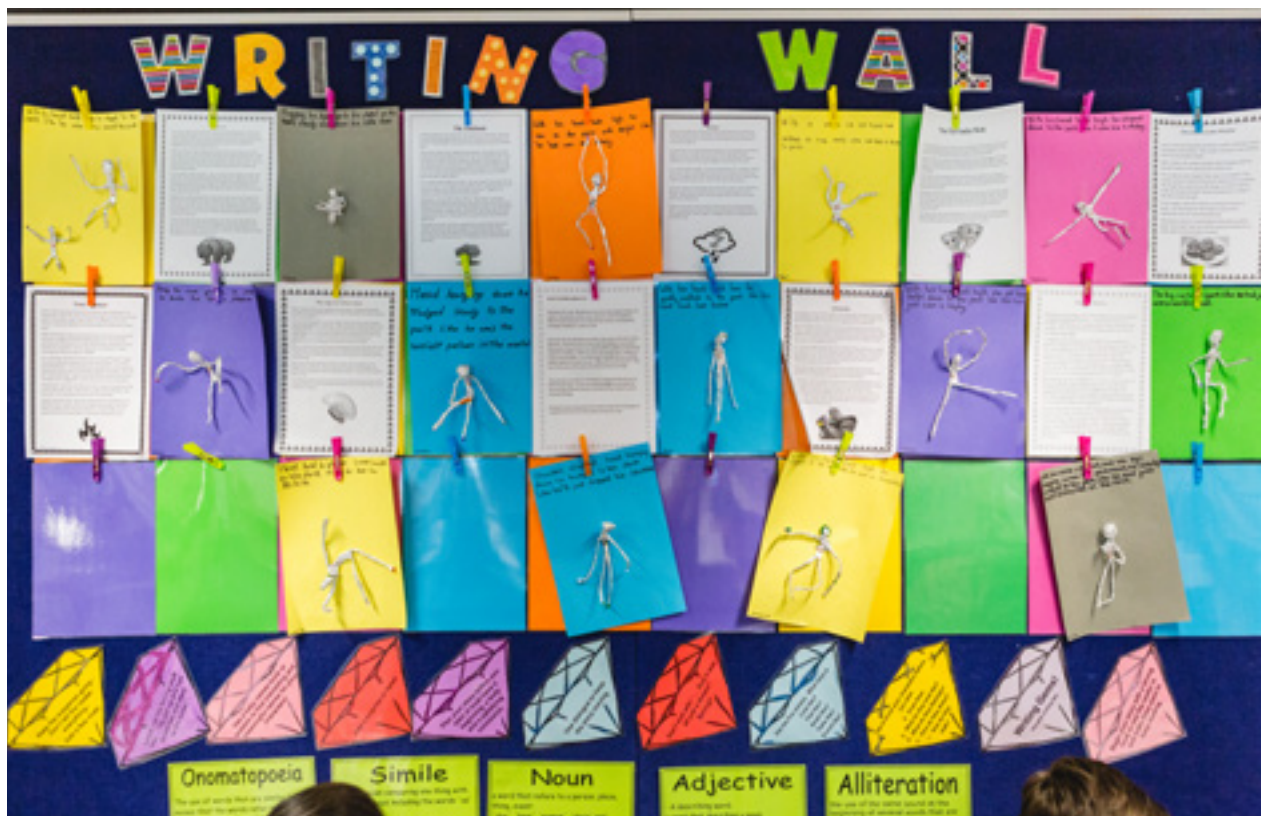
REFLECTION AND EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

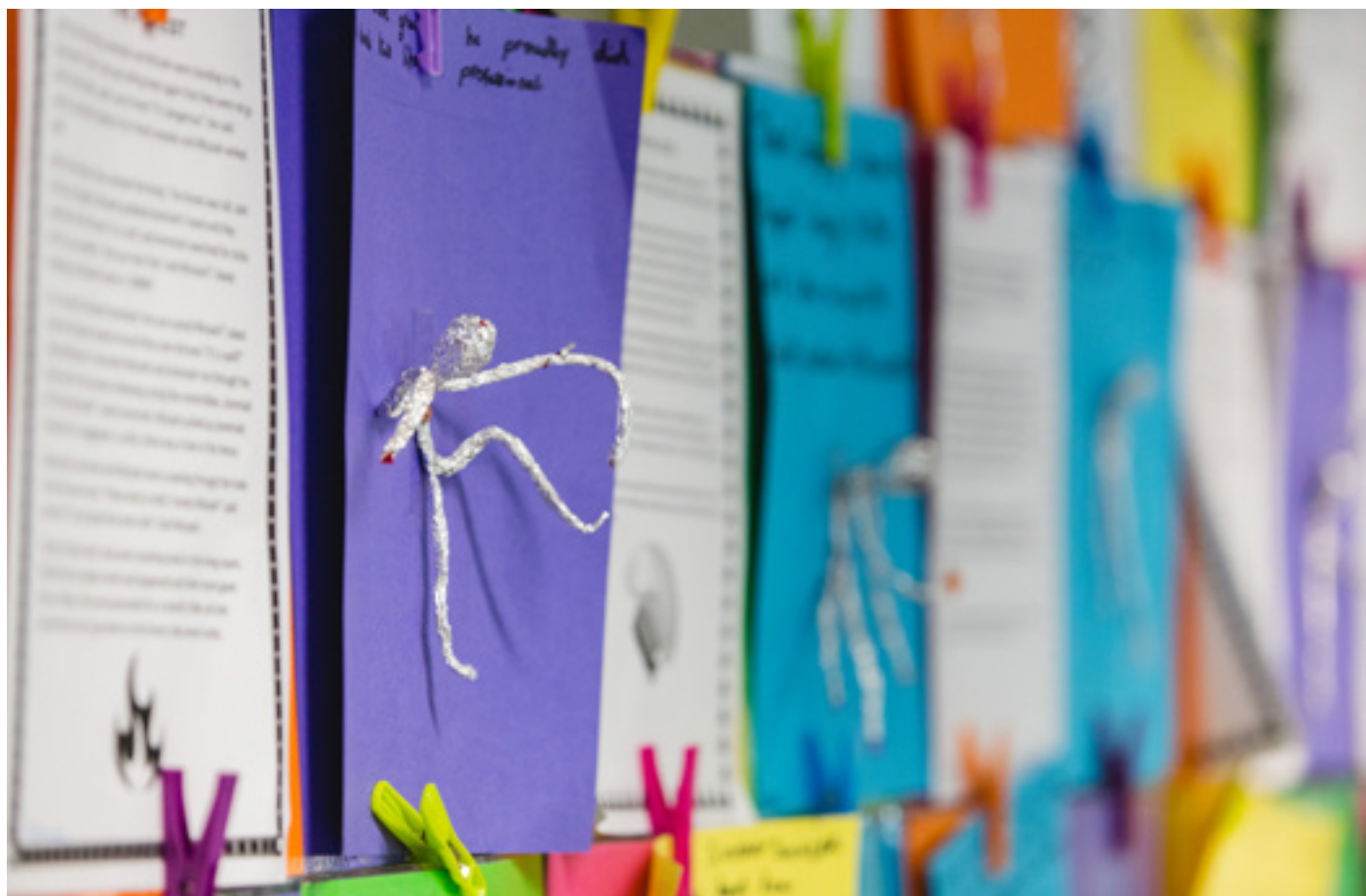
CURRICULUM FOCUS

YEAR 5

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

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





THE LEARNING PROCESS

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

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

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

- Collaborative group work was easily derailed by a popular minority
- Perseverance and resilience were big problems ("It's too hard")
- Energy levels were unpredictable given the timing of the session (right before lunch)
- Calming them down was more important than energising them for creative thinking
- They had no idea why I was here.
- Completion of tasks was very important for the class culture, even if it was a small task, and moving on too soon was detrimental to the majority.
- They did not have an embodied understanding of values, so how could they learn a whole new set of them?

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

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

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

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

IMPACT OF LEARNING

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

- Students could identify the difference between a value and an activity, and even suggest the values that would be beneficial to working on an activity.
- Group work became easy, even when we chose the groups for the students to be in.
- Resilience in general went up, as a result of collaboration improving. Students persevered with exercises for longer and did not take critique as failure.
- A “value literacy” developed, allowing us to use the language of values and creative habits in both delivery and classroom management.
 - Eg. Excellent collaboration!
 - Are you being very disciplined at the moment?
 - You can go outside and rehearse if you prove your reliability in this next exercise.
- Creative thinking went up, as students were able to explain their reasoning more assertively, because they were more versed in the material.
- Trust developed in the classroom. I could trust the students, the students could trust me, and Shonagh and I could trust each other.
- A more open and engaged classroom needing less disciplinary action during sessions.





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

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

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

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

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

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

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





TERM 3

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School
**Merriwa Primary
School**

Year group
Year 5

CURRICULUM FOCUS

The project started as a look into fractions, but became a project focusing on Media Arts, collaboration and managing projects under Technologies.

CROSS CURRICULUM LINKS

Technologies, Processes and Production Skills, Creating Literary Texts, Concepts of print and screen, Fractions and Decimals.

CONTEXT

This was my second term with Merriwa Primary School, and the fourth term over two years that Shonagh had been involved with the Creative Learning Program. The Creative Habits of Mind were evident in the classroom and Shonagh had implemented a lot of the methodology in teaching literacy very successfully, given some of the students had relatively low literacy skills. Our time together was aimed at expanding the creative learning habits into the area of numeracy.

This is a challenging school for teachers and practitioners given its low socio-economic standing, with a large amount of students experiencing socialisation and behavioural issues. The students are lovely and enthusiastic, but required additional support with their interpersonal and social skills. Consistency of attendance was another barrier for group work. These elements require a more considered approach to ensure there was enough time required to complete activities. Of particular interest to Shonagh was helping them reach the standard of self reliance and accountability that is expected of them when they move to middle school in just over a years time.

WHAT WE DID

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This was a reignition of a project we had planned to implement in Term 2, but we took a necessary detour from it to focus on positive values in learning and socialisation. Based on my discussions with Shonagh, we decided that a bigger project exercising collaboration, accountability and self reliance was important for their development, even if it meant the project collapsed.

The basic idea was transplanted from a discussion in Term 2 that we had with the students around a music video they had produced for book week. Using that experience as a learning tool, we wanted the students to develop a short youtube lesson to teach a lower year group about fractions, as it seemed that that both year groups really enjoyed their youtube celebrity status.

We started by reflecting on the music video we made and the steps needed to make it. From there they came up with a plan of how to prepare for a video shoot, and we agreed upon steps as a class. Then we spent some time trying to convert a passion of theirs into something that could become a lesson or relate to fractions in some way.

After the initial planning sessions we divided the students into groups of four, with a deliberate attempt to disrupt some of their usual patterns of socialisation. We provided them with steps which they had previously agreed upon as a class and then allowed them autonomy to complete them as they saw fit.





CURRICULUM

The specific curriculum activities took a side seat to the process, which is why I believe we shifted from our intended curriculum focus to Media Arts/Technologies. It really became a project about the collaboration and managing section of the technology curriculum. Because of the necessary focus on literacy and numeracy that this class needed, and some of the disruptive behaviour of certain students in the class, the self-driven nature of the project (which required self-direction and intense collaboration) was entirely new and quite disruptive for the students in a positive way.

Although it was evidently difficult for a lot of them, I was excited about their reflections, as they began to identify their own shortcomings in this area, and reflect on how their behaviour towards others either helped or hindered their group progress. It was a beneficial experience for them, as these skills will become more and more necessary as they progress through the education system. As a result the end product became less important for the project than the process of working “independently, or collaboratively when required, to plan, develop and communicate ideas and information for solutions” (taken from WAC Year 5 Curriculum).

CREATIVE HABITS

Collaboration was an integral part of the process, and probably the most difficult for the students. It was imbedded in the process and became a large part of our warm-ups and reflections.

A simple exercise: writing a goal for the day on a piece of paper relating to the project and then keeping it in your pocket. At the end of the day asking simply for a show of hands: Who achieved their goal? Who could have done better? Who did not achieve it at all? It became a way for students to reflect on their own behaviour simply and privately.

Persistence and discipline were a massive part of the project. As the end of term approached and the ideas had to be turned into product, there was a large amount of push back from the students as they realised that it was on them to actually take the next step. Excuses, idling and deliberate distracting began to creep in. This was part of the reason we wanted to do this project, as the persistence and resilience of the students was evidently lacking and we aimed to antagonise a little with this project to allow them to see the benefits of following through and having discipline. Ideas are great, but without persistence and discipline, they never become anything else. We continued our reflection into Term 4 to discuss with the students the benefits and challenges in relation to persistence and discipline.

STUDENT VOICES

We allowed them a lot of autonomy to choose their topics as long as they could explain how it related. On reflection, I should have consulted the students as to how they wanted to deliver their lesson, and have a separate brainstorm for term 3 about the project they want to do, rather than transplanting a project they had been keen on the previous term.

The project itself was largely based on the ideas from the students, although with more courage, I would have allowed more freedom in the process.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

TEACHER

The students realised the importance (and challenges) of planning and preparation. This was very disruptive for them, and I am excited to see their reflections on the process as I think this is where the real learning will become evident. Most of their learning is heavily guided with short term step by step turn around. This is an essential approach to bring them up to standard in areas of literacy and numeracy, but results in them becoming accustomed to being guided, and given few opportunities to take responsibility over their own output.

By embarking on this project, we both realised how little opportunity students are given to fail. This sounds like a negative, but is really a wonderful opportunity for students to see the benefits of discipline and persistence. Without an opportunity for things to collapse, this lesson can never be learnt, and if the teacher always comes to the rescue, a “learned helplessness” becomes the norm.

We realised even towards the end of the project our need to finish it for them so they had something to show at the end of the project, essentially undermining the purpose of doing it in the first place! This was an hilarious outcome for us, but taught us a great lesson about how ingrained the culture of protecting students from failure is, and how this culture is doing a disservice to the students we were preparing for future education.

After the term finished, we discussed the need for some sort of performing arts. They don't have a lot of opportunities to study drama or performance at the school, nor do they have a specialist drama teacher. This is where things like discipline and persistence can be explored in a safe, fun, supportive way and I hope it can be included in the future in some way.

CREATIVE

I learned to let go of the product and focus on the process. For a class like this, allowing the process to be the lesson was really necessary. The artist ego often pushes for results and it took a lot for me to let this go.

I also realised the importance of time, and allowing things to move at their own pace. Every school and every class has their own challenges and needs. In the future I want to spend more time tuning into these challenges and needs as I had done in the previous term. We have continued our reflection beyond the allocated time of the project for this very reason.

SCHOOL

The intended aim of the project was to have some cross pollination from Year 5's to Year 4's but given the focus of the project changed to process over product we will see whether the students want to share the lesson, or perhaps a reflection of the project with the Year 4s.

The music video at the start of the term was great fun and showed what was possible with the right amount of enthusiasm (and a little creative know-how). Often creative projects can seem impossible, but by engaging creatives I think it became obvious how possible things can become.

“I have learned how to collaborate and let others get ideas before I race ahead.” (Student)

“People come up with new ideas. It's easier because you're not working by yourself.” (Student)

“I was trying new things and some did not succeed but that's ok.” (Student)

“I was hesitant to try new things as I was scared but now I am happy to.” (Student)

“I have learned that sometimes I can improve.” (Student)

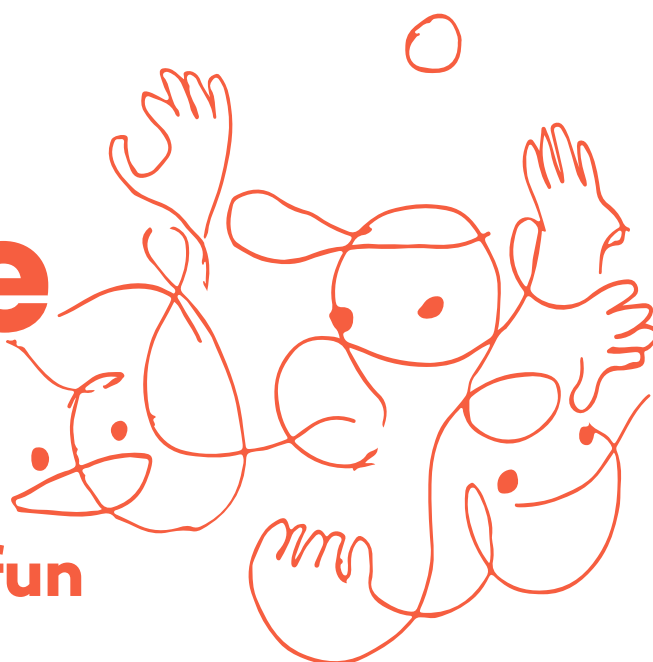
“You need to be persistent to achieve your goals.” (Student)

“I wish we had the courage to give them more opportunities to fail.” (Teacher)

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learning

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deep learning, hard fun



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