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# Transitioning From Following to Making Your Own Path Through Critical and Creative Thinking

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TRANSITIONING FROM FOLLOWING TO MAKING YOUR OWN PATH THROUGH  
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

by

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©

SYNTHESIS\*  
MASTER OF ARTS  
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING  
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Abstract: In my experience Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) will work to open minds and help transition a person. It can take someone from a place of not being open to challenges and having a closed mindset to one of openness and allowance for ambiguity and new ideas. This paper shows the transitions I have made in my career by way of a tragic incident and the structure I hope to create in a new class focusing on the college freshman. Included is a sample of the CCT curriculum I hope to teach to this class- both more thorough, concrete plans as well as less fleshed out, quite abstract outlines. By facilitating a new way of thinking, viewing and going through transitions in my student's lives with the use of CCT I aim to help them to get through this upending time of their lives. My transition is parallel to the students in that we are both going to a new place in our lives. They will move on into the world as better thinkers and I hope to have less fear and more direction for the future as a teacher again.

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\* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

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### **I was enamored...**

As an art teacher I loved my vocation. I was born, as they say, to be a teacher until one very hot August day in 2007 when my world collapsed. I was transformed in a few minutes from an outgoing, happy person to a hysterical ball of tears on the floor in the hallway of the high school where I taught.

This is a journey and transition to get back to teaching. The subject has shifted, the format is new and challenging, and the age of the student has changed, but I am ready for it. After being lost for so many years and trying to fit back into my former self, I have come to the realization that I have transformed. As we change we must honor that change if we are to continue to be on the path of being our true selves. “Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear” (Palmer, 4). I hear myself telling me to be true to what I am supposed to be. My truest, happiest self is when I am teaching someone a new skill or idea. I have tried to go down a different path with the results being a dis-jointed, unhappy soul. I have fought hard and long to get to this point where I feel that I can be an effective teacher and a happier person.

### **Who I used to be...**

I began my career as an art educator at the high school level. I enjoyed the ability to have dialogue with my students and to have them create artwork that was meaningful and original, not simply copying a formula. I taught in a variety of situations including an upper-class suburban school and one that was more rural. I don't want to paint it as the perfect picture because like any job it did have its issues. As a teacher there is never enough time in the day to get everything done that requires your attention. Phone calls to parents, reports to finish, committees

to attend to, lunch duty, etc. but I was doing what I loved. I remember a colleague of mine always pushing me out the door so I would get home in time for my own children, “15 minutes to Woodridge,” he would urge. I was able to design new classes, write curriculum, and I was even able to procure a grant to start an all school art show with guest artists and an opening night that included entertainment and hors d’oeuvres. I was, in fact, changing lives of students; proof seen through student and parent reports. I was making a difference.

So what has led me to abandon my love of teaching art? I am scarred. I have physical and emotional scars that have been given to me by an incident that happened on that steamy August morning. Although I have had a few incidences in my class where there was a major disruption I was always able to talk the student down and restore peace. What I am about to discuss happened outside of my class, in the hall with students that I didn’t know.

I heard some yelling in the hallway. “Bitch, step off.” A muddled return was given so I marched into the hallway to see what was happening. With one look at the girl closest to me I could see she was ready to explode. I yelled back into the classroom for my pupil to hit the panic button. As I strode forward shouting over the crowd during passing period, “Ladies please,” the girl pulled a long slender object out and began to lunge for the other girl. I intercepted her arm just as it reached the neck of the second student. As I pulled her away she kept kicking towards the second girl, screaming about touching her stuff. I grabbed her from behind and locked her arms behind her back. She continued to kick. The second girl was taunting and teasing her and by now there was a ring of students around us. She broke free and with a snap, my shoulder was released from my body. I can remember shaking it trying to get it to reattach and still holding onto the first girl.

A relief came over me as a Math teacher walked through the circle of students. He paused to assess the situation and I yelled over the crowd for him to grab the second girl. He turned and pushed his cart out through the other side of the circle, he left me. He was gone and I was surrounded yet utterly alone.

Once I was able to pop my shoulder back in I was then used as a human fulcrum as she leaned back on me to free her feet to kick the goader. That moment when she kicked her legs up toward the other girl I could feel the earth spinning. I lost sight of the second girl and the other students as the ceiling with its fluorescent lights came in to view. I was falling backwards with my arms still entangled into the first girls'- we were going down together. As I fell I began to turn so she wouldn't land on me but instead she landed full force upon me against the shoulder that had just been damaged. I felt my neck and back pop. Could I move? The circle opened as we began to fall and finally the cavalry of Deans arrived and shooed all of the students away. The girl and I crawled to the wall. She immediately began to sob and curled into me as I sat behind her with my arms around her comforting the lost soul. This is how I did and do view her- as a lost soul. She didn't make the right decisions or see another path to getting her desired outcome. As so many I have seen, they are not taught to think and act according to what might be best for them and others, they simply react. This is one of the reasons I want to teach Critical and Creative Thinking, to enable students to have choices in their lives. I want to help them make the transition to thinkers and communicators that have the skills to move forward in society. In short, I ended up having anchors placed in my shoulder, a neck fusion and low back surgery amongst other issues. For many reasons, I can't go back to teaching in the high school level. Although I tried very hard, it simply is not meant to be. I will finally listen to my body as it warns me that I am not to be in that situation anymore. Through years of work, medication,

immersion and PTSD I am not giving up but rather giving myself over to a new experience, transitioning to a new path.

I found CCT by accident, or if you believe in fate, it was serendipity. I just happened to be buying a book at a local book store when I saw a Newsweek magazine with a cover of crayons on the shape of the U.S. I bought it, wanting to read about creativity in the U.S. school system, since at that point I was still planning on going back to the art classroom. I, at long last, had found what I wanted to study and learn. In taking the first few classes, I was hooked. I could see the applications to teaching in the classroom for when I got back there. At this point, I had already had my shoulder surgery and my neck fusion and I was awaiting my back surgery. I was in pain, but this gave me focus and hope for my future.

With this paper, and looking to the future, I am now looking to transition into a teacher with a different focus. Although I still love to teach art, the timing for me is just not right. I have given it many chances and it still is not where I need to be at this point in my life. Someday I may have the balance and courage in my life to face all that frightens me. But now I must move ahead and not wait for that to happen, although I do keep working towards it. I want to focus on how to make an effective difference in the transitioning lives of students from high school to college.

### **Transitioning into Critical and Creative Thinking**

My goal is to take the framework proposed in this paper and use it to teach a class in Critical and Creative Thinking at one of the local community colleges. Since I have always enjoyed and excelled at working with teenagers, I would like to focus on the freshman level to begin with. Knowing that a class in CCT will be helpful and essential for every person I do have plans to work at opening up the curriculum and projects to focus on a variety of students that the community college serves.

College freshman will be dealing with an enormous amount of transition in their life from becoming someone who is told what to do to someone who makes their own decisions in life. I believe in order to make this a meaningful transition they must have the abilities to think critically and creatively about current situations and their future. As it is an uncomfortable time in the lives of these students with so many changes manifesting, I hope to create a safe place for them to explore these transitions. A few of the transitions I hope to address are; the ways in which one examines the world for themselves, studying alternative points of view and creating their own point of view.

Everyone has the capability and capacity to be a critical and creative thinker. I have experienced some trials on my journey but I have been able to work through them to get to a place where I can work on matters in a critical and creative way. In having this capability I have enabled myself to have structured support in the ways in which I will make decisions and move forward to the future and I hope to give that to students as well.

In a society that has devalued the idea of thinking critically by teaching in an industrial, rote; “to the test” way, I believe that we can find a way to get our students to think again.



Students from an early age have been told they are not creative if they don't do a task a certain way but there are many domains that people can be creative in, not just the arts. There is creativity in everydayness but this has been devalued in society. I want to be the catalyst for allowing the students to believe in their abilities to think and behave in creative ways. One goal I have is to teach them how to not be inhibited by what they have been led to believe about their critical and creative thinking skills thus far. I want to transition them from non-believers to people who can believe again in their abilities.

Students tend, in many cases, to find the expectations of college being very different than those they had found in high school. The pace is quicker, self-reliance is greater and college professors "expect students to draw inferences, interpret results, analyze conflicting source documents, support arguments with evidence, solve complex problems that have no obvious answer, draw conclusions, offer explanations, conduct research and generally think deeply about what they are being taught" (Conley, 2007). In preparation for college, from the average high school, most will not have the foundation for these higher order thinking skills. Through the creation of a Critical and Creative Thinking Course, the students will be shown how to use a diverse set of skills in a variety of domains. For many high school students they have been "sleepwalking"(Conley, 2007) through classes trying to give the "right" answer not thinking about how or why they came to this conclusion.

In all high schools there should be more preparation for college bound students since more than 73% of students are going on to college, according to the National High School Center, but there is little hope of that happening quickly. There needs to be a focus on teaching areas such as problem-solving and interpretation, but that is not happening. Of the 73% that attend college up to ¼ of those students do not return after the first year (Dixon-Rayle, et al., 22). There are many

reasons for this, including financial, but according to the Dixon- Rayle and Chung study one of the main factors students point to is the feeling of “not mattering” to the college. They found that the 21<sup>st</sup> century students “are experiencing unique and demanding academic ...challenges” that are having them feeling worthless and self-conscious which “may directly affect students’ abilities to perform up to their academic capabilities” (Dixon, et al., 22).

Within the creation of a CCT course one of the main goals would be to create an invitational environment. This is an environment that would help orient the student to being more open and receptive to transitions. It would include physical spaces and ways in which we talk and interact with each other. When working with students on critical and creative thinking, there needs to be a trusting, open arena for them to explore and feel comfortable; a place for them to feel that they belong. The way in which students are addressed and allowed to express themselves openly has a large effect on how they will learn, share and retain information. In this class I will teach the students how to suspend judgment, think reflectively, participate, identify assumptions and work through a dialogue process that promotes understanding and sharing. Transitioning them from someone who may not feel that they belong to someone who feels empowered and has a voice. The why of teaching Critical and Creative thinking are many and varied. To narrow it down to a few ideas I want to give students the tools, mindset and capability to use good thinking. I hope to give them a structure to follow that will guide them in the many decisions they will make in the future. “If the goal of college-level general education is to prepare students for generative and productive civic, personal, and professional lives, then few things could be more crucial than the cultivation of critical and creative thinking” (Emanuel, 2012). My hope is to also create a disposition during this transitional time in their lives that will stay with them and they will use across other domains.

I see CCT as a recurring theme and way of exploring issues in their world, which they will surely encounter, so they can work through a variety of questions and problems. The 21<sup>st</sup> century student/worker will come across a plethora of unknowns as they traverse society. But enabling them to deal and work through these variations, they will be better equipped to handle change and growth. The ambiguity of life and ever changing evolving environments lead us to need a way to think through these circumstances. I envision the CCT ideas to be long-term, sustaining habits of mind that don't just teach a set of skills but rather emphasize a way "to teach thinking that stresses the dispositional as well as the abilities side of thinking" (Tishman, 38).

As found in Tishman, et. al. (41), there are at least five dispositions for good thinking that I would like to focus on in teaching critical and creative thinking;

1. To be curious and questioning
2. Think broadly and adventurously
3. To reason clearly and carefully
4. Organize one's thinking
5. Give thinking time

The goal of any institution should be to elevate the thinking of the student and encourage them to become a self-actualized person. In becoming this, they will know how their thinking works, how to make connections and to have a positive mindset for the obstacles they will surely face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. As Davis explains, when you become a self-actualized person you are "developing your talents to become what you are capable of becoming." (12) Critical and creative thinking along with metacognition can start as tools to foster the good thinking characteristics and later turn into dispositions that will be used throughout a life.

There are areas of the typical high school student's life that have impeded this from happening. Next I will examine what I find to be an area of concern for them and follow-up with some ways in which these can be addressed.

### Concerns for learners

One of the concerns I see is the current educational system focusing on "the test" to determine capabilities in thinking and educational practices. In my experience, the typical educational system that college freshman is coming from; they have been exposed to the rote learning method in much of their classwork. They are communicated certain facts and figures that they are expected to remember and regurgitate at a later time. Once this has been completed the information is most likely lost, since it did not become a part of their thinking but is just surface knowledge to recall. As Chaffee points out:

Most teachers in the disciplines view their primary responsibility to be 'covering' content- not encouraging students to think about and critically evaluate what they are learning. Students benefit from both of these efforts- having basic thinking abilities taught directly and explicitly and having these abilities reinforced across the curriculum...While students are typically able to absorb information, memorize facts and learn fixed procedures, they often experience profound difficulties in thinking critically and creatively about what they are learning. (Chaffee, 2)

There are a variety of issues in the education systems that prevent students from being accomplished learners. In my opinion, one of the overarching issues is the antiquated industrial

system of teaching and learning that is taking place in many school systems. There are many instances where the industrial model of schooling is inadequate for the type of learning that needs to be done in the 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. Unfortunately, “schools are choosing predictability and order over innovation and progress” (Smith, 119). The use of critical and creative thinking skills along with metacognitive strategies in the current education system will improve student learning, foster more unified teaching relationships and allow for the school to work together for higher standards in education. It is with this in mind that I hope to use this class to influence the lives of my students.

The students are transitioning from being told what information to keep hold of, to people who need to use that information to think about problems and solutions. I feel that they may not be prepared for this just yet as they are coming from the traditional high school experience. I hope to engage the student during this time of transition through a CCT course to help them along the way. As the writer and educator Hope has said, “When creativity development is a goal, our educational value system shifts from a focus on passing tests to a focus on developing and integrating capability and possibility” (Hope, 40).

In order to fully understand my philosophy and rationale in wanting to create and teach this course I believe knowing my definitions of critical and creative thinking will help explain.

### Creative Thinking

With many experts in the field, over a long span of time, creativity has been defined as; a trait, a degeneracy, something psychological, something only a visionary might have, a process, divine intervention, idea generation, idea integration, problem solving, problem generating, etc.. The list is long and varied, but I am choosing to “keep in mind the point that our thinking should be

served by definitions, not enslaved by them” (Chaffee, 3) and give the reader my own take on creative thinking. The principles of critical thinking focus on, “non-routine approaches to messy problems” (Tepper, 2011), flexible thinking, working through problems with ambiguity, combining thoughts and knowledge to create novel ideas and approaches. There is also divergent thinking and with all of this comes risk.

My personal definition: Creativity is the pursuit of fresh, novel and useful ideas that can be found in multiple domains across a broad spectrum of people and communicated to others possibly in new ways.

I believe that everyone can be creative in some form or fashion within any domain including the everydayness that we all experience. I want to share this insight with students who may have been taught to stifle themselves, so as to allow them to be creative in their lives. In his book *Creativity is Forever*, Gary Davis (p. 108, 2004) explains that even “simple exposure to the topic of creativity... can raise creativity consciousness (a common and important trait among creative people, p 87)- the single most important step in becoming a more creative individual.” The simple act of being around, working on, or with, creative people or ideas can increase your creativity which is what will happen in the course that I am proposing. Students will work with each other on creative tasks thus exposing them to the various creative and critical thinking skills that they each uniquely have and they will be able to share these with each other to produce an environment that is conducive to creative work and production. Davis also points out that, “Becoming involved in creative activities is guaranteed to increase one’s creativity consciousness and other creative personality characteristics, as well as strengthen some creative abilities and visibly increase creative productivity” (109). Within the classroom, we will be

working on creative tasks to enhance the creativity that the students already possess and work together to cultivate more.

I believe that there are many ways and tools to improve creative thinking- these will be shown and discussed in the curriculum section of this paper.

### Critical Thinking

As with creative thinking there are a variety of definitions that the experts have cultivated but for the purposes of this paper I will again just share with you my hybrid definition (compiled through Halpern, 2013, Ennis, 1993 and Paul, 1987) that I believe encompasses what needs to be addressed in the study of Critical Thinking at this level of education.

My working definition: The directed, purposeful, sustained and active process of conceptualizing/observing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing/evaluating and reflecting on information to use as a guide to create strategies to use in what to believe or do.

The critical thinker can examine, interpret, analyze, evaluate and decide on actions as well as explain why they have come to these decisions. Critical thinkers can also apply these skills to a variety of situations giving them the ability to “advance earlier thinking,” (Emanuel, 2012).

Critical thinkers believe that there can be many perspectives on the world and are open to seeing and investigating them. They also are active in their quest for knowledge, so they engage in questioning, analyzing and reflection while they look for facts and relevant information. In working on critical thinking skills the students will be empowered to transition from thinking as they have been told to do, to thinking for themselves.

The Critical Thinking standards that I will focus on, and that are considered by Paul and Elder (2006) from the Foundation for Critical Thinking to be the most necessary are:

Accuracy

Breadth

Relevance

Logic

Depth

Significance

Precision

Fairness

### Combining CCT

Many believe that critical and creative thinking are divergent thought processes that cannot be combined but I feel that the difference found in the two skill sets is what causes better quality thinking to occur. Creative thinking is about; flexibility, risk-taking and elaboration whereas critical thinking is more structured, focusing on clarity and accuracy. In the combination of the two we find structure, to help with decision making and problem solving as well as the question asking and finding.

In the process of using creative thinking I will teach the students to be flexible, playful and open. In this process they will find that there are sometimes not always “right” answers and they will have to be willing to live with the confusion and ambiguity this creates. They will have to allow for a change in the normal classroom structured thinking and know that it will get easier as they go along. Much of the process relies on a positive attitude and mindset in order to thrive in their thinking. The critical thinking structure will allow them to have a framework in which to consider the different ideas, processes and products that they will come into contact with.



## **Curriculum**

We all go through transitions in our lives and there are many ways of working through them. Many come with problems that we must solve and search for meaning in our life and work. My search for meaning has come through unfortunate circumstances but it doesn't have to be that way for everyone. The change could be a positive one such as students who are transitioning from high school to college. Many students have questions not only about their life now, but who they will or want to be, in the future. In this course, based on Critical and Creative Thinking skills, we will transition through each of our individual journeys through the use of communication.

The way I hope to have my class run is to give the students experiences and tools that can translate and transfer into other domains in their lives. In order for this to happen, they need to have experience using the tools and structures with real world problems. The problems they will use will not only come from prepared situations that I have created for them, I hope to encourage the students to bring issues and problems they are facing from the outside world into the classroom. In doing this, they will have a higher level of interest, investment and possibility for transfer of resources to their everyday life. Because students are in a place of transition in their lives, I feel that they will be amenable to trying new things that will help them with the changes. This will give them quite a few structures and techniques to work with as they make their way through college and beyond.

Through our use of communication in this CCT course we will find ways in which we can express ourselves through the arts, media, teams /work and in our personal selves.

Communication is a powerful tool not only to work with others but to help us find our inner

voice and be able to express it in some way. CCT will engage the student in sustained thinking, reflecting, and give them a framework for working through some of their communication needs. The following section shows some concrete examples that I will use in my classroom.

### Communication

The backbone of Critical and Creative Thinking is communication. With this in mind, we will begin the semester discussing and working on a variety of communication tools and skills. The first way we will be looking at communication in a critical and creative way is through the use of a CCT workbook/notebook that can be used in a variety of ways. One of the first open-ended problems the student will solve will be; how do I communicate using a previously published book as my media?

The process will begin by giving each student a previously published book with my intention to be old encyclopedias and the like (\*example on page 28) . Giving students each a book to be their workbook/notebook will give them the opportunity to turn a problem into a solution. The first task is to use the book every day as a writing instrument for assignments given throughout the course. The second messy problem is to alter the book in some way to show an expression of them-selves. There will be many questions that this problem asks including:

1. How does one transition this object from an antiquated store of knowledge into a new piece of knowledge?
2. As people how do we use old artifacts and make them useful again?
3. Who decides what is useful?
4. How do we dispose of objects we don't find needed or useful anymore?

5. How do we solve the problem of there not being adequate space to take notes/record information?
6. What type of learner are you?
  - a. How much space do you need for note taking/ doodling/ recording?
  - b. Does it need to be neat and organized with pockets and extra paper?
  - c. How will you highlight and review important information?

In posing these questions and this challenge to the students I am having them explore many things in creative and critical thinking from the beginning. They will explore a messy problem and try to realize ways in which to resolve it based on their style of learning. This is metacognition in that they are thinking about how they think, operate and solve certain problems and decide on the needs that they have. The workbook problem will have them deal with ambiguity, the balance between knowing what an object is typically used for and having to transform it into something new. I believe that tension will help them find some creativity within themselves and around themselves by working with others on a solution. Another variation of this project could be to change the book that they use. If they had to use a children's book or a book about World War II what would change? This could open up our dialogue to new ideas and questions they can ask themselves.

Another example of using communication in the CCT curriculum will be in exploring media literacy. According to the Center for Media Literacy it is "a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms- from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy." In order for students to make the transition from a person that

regurgitates information to someone who can analyze, think about, respond to and create information they need to have the tools to work with one of the largest influencers in their lives- the media. In all its forms, the media is in the lives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century student all day, every day. In this class students will be exposed to a variety of media to learn how they are being influenced by it (and how they can influence it). “Young people today receive nearly all of their information through popular culture- mass communication; yet schools do little to help them understand popular culture...if we do not learn to control the mass communication that dominates our world we should expect that it will (continue to) control us” (Worsnop, 2011). Students need to have the ability to analyze and communicate effectively in their media based society. In order to be effective in their transition from receptacles of facts and figures to transmitters of thoughts and ideas they need to learn to communicate in an effective way. They need to see communication as a tool for thoughts and ideas that are meaningful and not just to report what they have eaten or where they have been. To skillfully discern what is important to share and how to share that information is quite relevant in contemporary society. There is a need for a critical framework for discerning information and a need to be creative in sharing it. In this class they will begin with a look into what types of media are available and the ways in which we use them. We will explore such questions as:

1. Why particular messages are given to us?
2. In what ways are we given these messages?
3. Who is giving us these messages?
4. How do we perceive the messages?
5. When we receive the messages what are our reactions/actions/inactions?

## Media Unit

1. Types of information
  - a. Media (written and visual)
  - b. What is being replaced?
  - c. How is it being given to us?
2. Where is information located
  - a. Where are people looking?
  - b. Is it safe?
  - c. Who is giving out the information?
3. Personal Identity
  - a. How are we being portrayed on the internet?

This examination will include evaluating advertising and news in American society. This will encompass how messages are disseminated, perceived, and received by different segments of society and how we are all influenced every day by what is shown and told to us. A concrete example of this study will be to have students view a variety of consumer ad campaigns and to dissect them into ideas of purpose, product, values, audience and message. The class will work in groups and as a whole to critically think about the process and product of the ads. Students need the ability to search, find, scrutinize, evaluate and use information about the world around them using critical thinking and reasoning skills. The ability to be critical about the sources and information will be paramount to gathering useful and truthful information. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century time of information overload it is critical to have the skills to discern and be objective about the plethora of resources available. The college freshman has been transitioning from a creator/user of limited information to a user of vast information. They are moving from being someone who “posts” information and images to people who are looking for information to broaden their knowledge and help inform them. We must teach them to ask if what they are finding is usable.<sup>18</sup>

Looking deeper into sources and thinking about from whom and why information is given will be discussed.

The next focus of the communication arena will be on the production of interpreting and creating the written word. In this section students will learn how to critically analyze a piece of written work and to also create their own writings.

### **Critical and Creative Writing**

1. An exploration into how to examine a piece of writing.
  - a. Audience
  - b. Suspending judgment
  - c. Assumptions
  - d. Big picture
  - e. Relationships

These will be explored using the techniques found in *Writing for Power* by Peter Elbow. In it he helps the reader to examine the purpose behind a piece of writing. The piece to be worked on will be an article or piece of literature based on a contemporary theme related to the student's lives. In using a contemporary piece it will create greater interest and connection to the student thus heightening their desire to participate and learn.

2. Writing a narrative based on an inanimate object
  - a. Research a creative person
  - b. Tell their story from a new perspective, an inanimate object
  - c. Presentation to classmates from the "voice" of the inanimate object

The research portion of this assignment will enable us to discuss how we use tools and materials for research purposes- who to look to and what to trust. There will be intrinsic motivation since the student will choose which creative to study giving them more self-motivation and spurring the want to learn that I feel all students should have. A new perspective will have them creating a character that would be with their person through many life experiences and would be able to tell their story.

3. Creating a new ending to a story
  - a. Choose a well-known story
  - b. Create an alternative ending for it

In this exercise the student will take a story of their choosing and alter one

## **Exploring CCT**

Curriculum ideas to be incorporated into my class- This is not a complete list as this is a work in progress that will ebb and flow as the parameters become clearer.

1. **Understanding the creative process and persons-** Discovering the elements of creativity and critical thinking
  - A. Definitions of creativity and critical thinking
  - B. Who and where can it happen
  - C. Myths and projections
  - D. Blockers
2. **Cultural Differences-** Finding how our differences and similarities shape our thinking and behavior
  - A. Culture in the world
  - B. Culture in the US/society
  - C. Culture in the classroom
3. **Using creative strategies-** Creating frameworks in which to facilitate CCT usage in work and life
  - A. Application Creativity
  - B. Artistic Creativity
  - C. Techniques
    - I. Systems approach
      1. CPS- creative problem solving (Davis 125) (Mess finding, fact-finding, problem finding, idea-finding, solution-finding)
      2. Wallas Model- (Prep, Incubation, Illumination, Verification)
      3. Synetics-Transformation, perception change, perspective change
      4. Analogical/Metaphorical thinking- Association- and idea combining
        - a. Imagine you are a ...
        - b. SCAMPER
4. **Critical Thinking-** A look into the way yours and others thinking affects their actions
  - A. Finding Assumptions/ Analyzing Situations
    - I. Aware of your thinking (reflection)
    - II. Make thinking and reasoning more visible to others (advocacy)
    - III. Inquiry into others thinking and reasoning (inquiry)

incident that will change the outcome of the original story. They will have to make many decisions including setting, character development, motivation, storyboards, dialogue and rationale for the changes. Asking questions in preparation for action is a needed skill for those in the ambiguous world of the 21st century student/worker. How can one decision transform our trajectory in life?

There will be many projects, processes and tasks within this class I am proposing that will address the five dispositions for good thinking; the seven critical thinking standards, and the other plethora of ideas that CCT is based on.

Many of these topics and themes will manifest themselves into projects for the classroom. Although I may not be able to get to all of the topics up

- B. Mental Management/ Metacognition
    - i. Planning
    - ii. Monitoring
    - iii. Evaluation
  - C. Techniques
    - a. Brainstorming
    - b. Mind mapping
    - c. DeBono
    - d. Looking for inaccuracies in writing, web.
    - e. Exquisite corpse
    - f. System creation/dissection
5. **Communication**- The development of how we talk with each other with engagement into various tools to facilitate more effective processes
- A. Dialogue process (skillful discussion)
    - I. Definition (oral tradition, conversation, communication that is universal)
    - II. “Conversation with a center, not sides”
    - III. Container of dialogue- elements (listening, respecting, suspending and voicing)
  - B. Ideas for communication
    - i. Can we sustain a world that does not communicate?
    - ii. How do we communicate? Is it effective? Are we too distracted?
    - iii. Why do we need dialogue?
    - iv. Silence/reflection
  - C. Assumption, Feelings, Justification, Rational Thinking, Other’s Ideas, Conclusion, Goal
  - D. In information age
    - I. Not adversarial, Cooperative, New different structure?
    - II. Visual culture (text, pictures, etc...)
    - III. Make it strange, gaps in intention and reality, open/closed/random systems
6. **Others**- Synthesizing learned processes and exploring new ones
- A. Project Based Learning
  - B. Context
  - C. Socratic Circles



for consideration the broad elements I feel that are important to cover will be:

1. How to look at situations and suspend judgment
2. Look for bias/assumptions in any situation
3. To be open to new ideas
4. Reflection
5. Accept differences
6. Look for novelty
7. Open mindset
8. Looking at creativity myths/ blockers
9. Idea generation

Much of the teaching I will use in the classroom will be centered on the principles found in *The Thinking Classroom* (Tishman, 4):

Modeling

Explanation

Interaction

Feedback

When we model any behavior, we show the usage of it is important, and one of the correct ways of using it. In explicit explanation there is a dissemination of information that is clear and understandable through definition. Through interaction with the teacher and with each other the students get training in their own practices as well as valuable second or third party ways of thinking and usage of principles. Lastly, in feedback, there can be feedback from each other through critique, dialogue or self-reflection. There can be information from the teacher as well, to explicitly explain what the rationale for a grade or evaluation might be. Many of these will

overlap to enhance student learning and the hope to make these ideas and processes transfer to other areas of learning and everyday usage.

Although the exact format and curriculum of the may shift and be a work in progress, there is one element that will not be altered due to the importance of it. The class will run with a focus on an invitational environment being the building block for community and the sharing of ideas. As Hooks points out, “we learn best when there is an interactive relationship between student and teacher. As leaders and facilitators teachers must discover what the students know and what they need to know. This...happens only if teachers are willing to engage students beyond a surface level” (Hooks, 19). I hope to create a place for all of us to go through this journey of transitions together. By creating and continually working toward a class that invites the student to transition as they need to their journey can be less of a challenge and more of a celebration of being their new selves.

### **Summary and questions for the future**

As this is only a framework for a class and not a full syllabus there are many questions pending. I would have to know the amount of latitude in which a community college may let me create my class. I would want to work with the existing powers to align my curriculum with expectations while not altering my ideals for the standards I have. I would need to know if the curriculum would need to be tailored to fit a specific area of study or if, as I hope, it would be a stand-alone class. Even details such as the class meeting time, place and size will have an influence on what can be accomplished. A lecture hall will require alterations to the way in which certain projects will be accomplished where as a small, intimate room with group tables will facilitate different approaches. The amount of time and class size will also have an influence on the structure and facilitation of the projects to be investigated.

The idea of assessment will need to be addressed for the future of this class. Again I would have to have some information from the college before having a definitive structure for assessment but it would be based on critique, rubrics and self-assessment. With each assignment, clear and explicit instructions will be given in the form of a project sheet. I feel that having the expectations written out and discussed prior to a project being given eliminates the ambiguity that many find with open-ended problems. Assessment is a great extension to the learning process as one needs to evaluate what they have learned and reflect upon what can be gained from the work they have done. Reflecting on our learning and using metacognition to help us learn about our learning styles, triumphs and failures will enable us to transition to more thinking individuals. As a practitioner of CCT and a teacher, I feel that is important for me to also assess my teaching methods as well as my thoughts. I plan, as I have always done, to work along with<sub>24</sub>

my students in their transitional journey. In sharing my ideas and creations with the class they not only gain another perspective but they see the importance that I am giving to the process and they are more likely to work at a higher, more involved level. I will be creating learners who will use the process to better their thinking and creativity for more positive outcomes in future experiences.

I want my students to be able to evaluate, comprehend and analyze situations and thoughts of themselves and others in order to synthesize meanings. They should be able to create new thoughts and ideas so they may generate, explore, develop and apply new ideas and solutions to what they were reflecting over. I want them to be able to make the transition from a sponge that absorbs information to someone who can filter, reflect and decide on their own thoughts and ideas once they have used critical and creative thinking to make connections. I hope they will have learned to take the skills and ideas they have learned and apply those to other domains in their lives to help them make more reasoned and informed decisions in the future.

I am a better, more self-actualized person and teacher for having gone through this journey (although I don't recommend the violent way in which it began). I have transitioned from a good teacher who loves their students to a teacher that is invested in their future. The difference may not seem apparent but I am a more whole person who, in turn, will influence them to be more self-actualized and allow them to transition into the students, learners and people they will be for the rest of their lives.

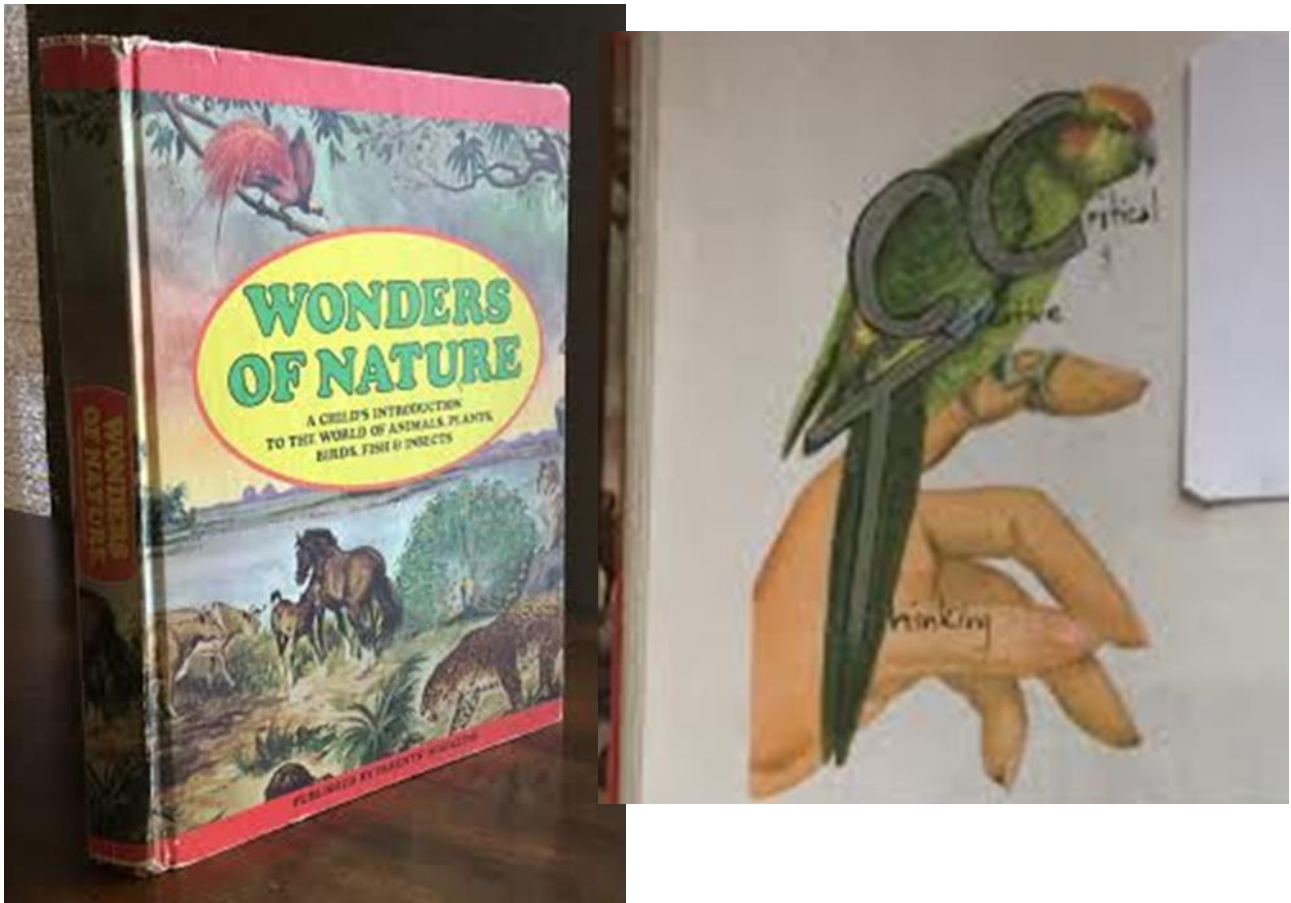
One final question I have for myself is, "Can I do this?" Is there a place in my heart for the college student? I have always been drawn to the high school aged student and I find my mind always drifting towards the thought of how would these lessons work for them. It may be that I am just used to the age group and a new one is unknown and a bit frightening but I think it is

more than that. So my final question to myself is, “Am I transitioning to the right place and helping the right students?”



“Leave it all behind...”  
Tighe-Hansen  
Encaustic Collage (Photo, paper, paint, wax)  
11” x 14”, 2015

In preparation for this transition in my life, from art teacher to CCT teacher, I wanted to honor and explore the feelings and emotions I had through the process with a piece of art. I chose to work in encaustice for a variety of reasons. First the process of layering the encaustic medium allowed to me to create depth to the piece responding to the layers of work I have had to go through to emerge from this place. Within each of the layers of wax I have been able to embed my thoughts, ideas and hopes for the future thus creating a psudo timeline from the background of the piece into the forground. I have included pieces of actual lesson plans and a photograph of the school where the incident took place. Many of the words convey the fear, anxiety and then relief I have felt in this process. I have not completely healed but this piece and my plans for the future in education have been a step towards final closure and a new beginning.



Example of Critical and Creative Thinking Workbook (p.18)

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