

**Synopses by Nicole Pietrantonio and Devon Wootten**

**Nicole Pietrantonio**

The biggest "aha" moment I had during our CDLTI this semester is when I realized that creativity isn't just something restricted to "the arts" – it permeates all of our classrooms, offices, and communities. When we think more broadly about creativity we see that what we are doing in the fine arts – which is essentially teaching students how to solve problems and work with failure – are necessary skills to *everyone's* learning and is necessary in all teaching environments. This way of thinking more broadly about creativity is particularly useful in the liberal arts setting – how can our pedagogy in the fine arts help students see that the skills they learn in the studio or on the stage have the potential to translate into every aspect of their lives? These ideas have inspired me to include more meta discussions and readings about creativity into my classroom. Our CDLTI also equipped me with new tools to talk about the value of creativity and to advocate for the importance of the fine arts on our campus and in our community.

This is my third CDLTI at Whitman College and it was by far my favorite. Not only was the topic particularly pertinent to me and my teaching (and close to my heart as a practicing artist), but I had the opportunity to work with absolutely wonderful colleagues. The dynamic of our group is important to discuss - we purposely selected a group of non-tenured, junior faculty. This created a climate in which we could all openly share our success and failures in teaching, be vulnerable with one another, and encourage each other to take risks in our classrooms. Each individual brought stories, experiences, and ideas about their teaching that helped all of us see our own classrooms in new ways. I don't think there is enough conversation on our campus about the arts and most importantly about creativity.

This semester I have already incorporated new ideas, readings, and classroom management techniques into my pedagogy that I learned from my peers in our CDLTI. For example, in our group we discussed the value of grades in encouraging creativity and asked ourselves what would happen if we made some assignments ungraded? I tried an ungraded assignment for the Dia de Los Muertos wood cut project with my Beginning and Advanced Printmaking classes. The students were required instead to keep a "process blog" on Tumblr that documented their creative journey - from initial concepts and sketches, to carving, printing, and the final public steamroller event. We used this as a tool for reflection and I received positive feedback from the students about this approach to our project. Many said that they had actually forgotten that the project was ungraded and worked just as hard on it.

**Devon Wootten**

This workshop explored the pedagogy of creativity. Each week we discussed a set of readings chosen by one of the group members. At the beginning of this workshop, I had a

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relatively narrow conception of what “creativity” entailed. To be honest, I considered “creativity” to consist exclusively of what one might term “artistic” creativity – i.e., poems, dance, music, or visual art. Ultimately, the biggest success of this workshop was a reconceptualization of creativity itself. Rather than consider creativity to be exclusively “artistic,” I now consider understand it much more broadly. To be creative is to make novel connections and this broader definition has the benefit of including any and all disciplines. This workshop was successful insofar as I now understand creativity to be present – and necessary – in every academic endeavor. I co-wrote this CDLTI proposal because I wanted to include more “creative” projects (i.e., poems, music, visual art) into my Encounters classes. However, given my more expansive understanding of creativity, I plan to frame every analytic paper as a creative exercise. I think my students will be more engaged when they understand their academic progress as an expression of their creativity.

### **Participant Responses**

#### **Justin Lincoln**

a) This CDLTI was quite successful on a meta-level. In a sense this was a creative inquiry into creative inquiry itself. Part of its success came to the fore in the way that it re-centered my course goals. As much as I am teaching my students about “New Genres” or “Technology”, I am also trying to develop their creative capacities. It was re-assuring and challenging to be able to compare notes with other faculty in the creative arts. In many ways, of a handful of CDLTIs that I have been involved with, this one was the nearest and dearest to my heart.

b) This semester I started talking with my classes about creativity very explicitly. Because of the ongoing nature of the CDLTI I was encouraged to re-visit that same explicit subject with my students on multiple occasions. I particularly stressed an idea of combinatory creativity... which posits a notion that creativity is often a matter of making new and novel connections between disparate ideas, materials, people, and situations.

c) My only concern was the difficulty of coordinating the groups varied schedules. Devon and Nicole did a wonderful job in terms of coordinating meeting times with the group.

#### **Kisha Schlegel**

a) The workshop enacted cross-disciplinary teaching and learning. Each meeting fostered a collaborative, on-going discussion about what it means to teach creativity—and while many discussions were theoretical (i.e. questioning the role of structured assignments, or how we grade creativity while fostering students to take risks), we also shared in-class activities, assessment techniques, and teaching tips specific to our disciplines. This CDLTI allowed us to translate some of these ideas into practices that would work in our

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individual classrooms and/or allowed us to question how we might achieve similar goals in our classroom.

b) At this point, I am most excited by the collection of techniques, classroom activities and pedagogical frameworks I have to consider. From encouraging students to take creative risks to developing a more varied set of generative writing prompts, I plan to use these ideas to revise my fall course offerings. I also felt empowered, supported, and challenged by this group, and will continue to connect with their expertise and feedback as I continue to develop current and new courses.

c) The workshop was elegantly designed and organized; each participant led a specific workshop, allowing us to focus on a distinct aspect of creative pedagogy that was of individual interest. And yet, this focus most often served as a prompt for wider discussions and concerns. We would begin with one topic only to edge into a related one, eventually winding our way toward a new discovery. Each conversation revealed some new aspect of a larger discussion about what it means to teach the arts in effective *and* creative ways.

### **Paul Luongo**

a) By having each member of the group bring in their own readings and lead a session, we each focused on a facet of teaching creativity that was relatively unique to each person's respective field of study. Because of idiosyncrasies within each of our fields, I found certain constants to our approach (and the reasons for those constants), as well as independent elements. The structure of this workshop ideally suited reflection and growth in my own personal approach.

For me, there was an unexpected outgrowth of this workshop. The college curriculum can tend to compartmentalize areas of creative activity, both theoretically and physically (literally separating people into different buildings); this suggests that those areas of activity are mutually exclusive. I enjoyed the opportunity to get to know my colleagues better and think about future collaborative possibilities between our creative mediums.

b) Each member of this course approaches the concepts of creativity differently as dependent on her/his discipline and primary creative medium. For me, with music performance, I found that this workshop helped me to nuance the distinctions between being creative and be re-creative. That is to say that classical music performance can succumb to performance expectations from historical research. A dogma arises that suggests notions of correct and incorrect performance. As such, the performer becomes a re-creator instead of an active agent making creative choices. To counteract this trend, I plan to alter the pedagogical framework of a portion of my orchestra rehearsals. We will perform works multiple times in succession, with the expectation that we must collectively make different creative decisions in each performance--the goal is that the performer will interact with the work as an active agent, altering the artistic product, as opposed to being a passive agent, preserving a mythical notion of the correct work.

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As well, I plan to make adjustments to my grading methodology in performance courses. I am going to construct a rubric whereby I will grade the perceived effort in making creative choices as opposed to the success of the choices themselves. In our conversations, we grappled with the necessity of failure in a truly creative act--a component of creativity that can be stifled by the preoccupation with a grade attached to the result of that failure.

c) I did not have any significant concerns. The expected commitment level was appropriate and kept me engaged while not overtaking other teaching priorities during the semester.

### **Jessica Cerullo**

a) This CDLTI was successful in broadening my ideas about the relationship of structure to freedom within the creative process. As well as to more fully consider the role of the teacher as guide, as opposed to that of instructor. Many of our CDLTI discussions presented an opportunity for me to discuss current challenges that were taking place in my classes. Our discussion and thought experiments suggested new points of view, or even actions, that I could take in an effort to engage students in an effective way. I learned of strong points of cross-over within theater and dance and can imagine teaching a course with Renee Archibald. Additionally, I would like to take this opportunity to say that it is my first time as a participant in a CDLTI group and, for the first time since my arrival at Whitman, I found myself in a community of colleagues.

b) During one of our meetings we discussed the challenge of teaching students to develop their own artistic practice and to value failure. Inspired by our inquiry, I anticipate creating weekly time sheets and contracts for the students in my performance-based classes in an effort to make visible their work ethic and the guidelines of rehearsing with their classmates. I also have acquired some new readings that I believe will support student understanding of what it means to be in a class that offers creative interpretation of assignments.

c) I have no concerns about the organization of this workshop other than to say that I believe the spaciousness of it contributed largely to its success. The constellation of participants formed a natural balance, with some of us taking on the task of rooting the conversation in the readings and others of us acting as consummate tangent-takers.

### **Rene Archibald**

a/b) The meetings have given me much to think about in terms of increasing the rigor of my students' creative pursuits, as well as motivating my students towards identifying their own goals and desires for their creative work. This group has encouraged me to continue to question discipline-specificity in the arts. It has me reimagining my

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composition course, or collaborating towards a new multi-disciplinary course, or a merging of courses such as Dance Composition and The Solo Performer (taught by Jessica Cerullo). The workshop came at a good time for me as I question the two distinct tracks that my department chair anticipates for Theatre and Dance and work to build the Dance Program.

c) The workshop was successful from many perspectives. We were able to discuss theories on creativity and value in failure, rigor and methodologies in grading and feedback, as well as share strategies for student reflection and course closure. I have no concerns about how the workshop was led, and in fact found the group was very organic, open, and willing to dig.