

ORGANIC CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Teaching to Intuition in Academics and the Arts

Edited by Jane Piirto, Ph.D.



Preface: What Is Organic Creativity? xi
by Jane Piirto

Piirto introduces the book and recounts how she tried to reconcile the disconnect between the intuitive artistic process and the prevailing cognitive point of view, which led to the Five Core Attitudes, Seven I's, and General Practices for Creativity.

Part I: Organic Creativity in Academic Domains

Chapter 1: Naïveté, Imagination, and a Glimpse of the Sublime:
Organic Creativity in Teaching Literature 3
by Todd Kettler and Laila Sanguras

Kettler and Sanguras present a creative pedagogy of literature in a way that places primary emphasis on the creation of ideas and meaning through insight and imagination. The creative pedagogy of literature includes four points of emphasis: disciplined improvisation, focus on imagination, modeling and developing creative dispositions, and problem solving within the context of the literature curriculum.

Chapter 2: The Mess of Mathematics: Organic Creativity
in Teaching Advanced Mathematics 17
by Erin Daniels

Daniels presents ideas to break the rigid structure that occurs in too many math classrooms. Suggestions for enhancing creativity focus on the inclusion of risk-taking, incubation, motivation, imagery, and imagination. The chapter addresses the common misconceptions and pitfalls found in a math classroom that is inherently positioned to think “inside the box,” while proposing ways to break out of the norm.

Chapter 3: Thinking Outside the Blocks:
Organic Creativity in Teaching Social Studies 31
by Daniel Peppercorn

Peppercorn describes his 6 C's for engaging students in social studies: creativity, competition, comedy, camaraderie, connections, and chinós. Incorporating these elements into activities enables students to: (a) be imaginative, (b) take part in benign competitions, (c) feed off of everyone's use of humor, (d) display teamwork, (e) feel connected with their teacher, (f) try to win chinós (the classroom currency), and (g) connect history to current events and their own lives.

Chapter 4: Once Upon a Time, There Were No Acids:
Teaching Science Intuitively and Learning Science Creatively 45
by Keith S. Taber

Taber explains how doing science is inherently a creative process and argues that this needs to be reflected in science education itself. Too often, learners experience studying science as a passive process of being told other people's ideas. The best science teachers are not only creative in their teaching, but also find ways to allow students to experience learning as an imaginative process of knowledge creation.

Chapter 5: Beginning With the Totally Unexpected:
Organic Creativity in Teaching Physics.....59
by Kristin MacDowell and Rodney Michael

MacDowell and Michael discuss how students are often at a loss for how to approach the subject of physics. Reaching these students requires a flexible and creative methodology. As soon as the students realize that they can be creative in how they approach the subject, the door to learning starts to open for them. The successful classroom then turns into an organic synthesis with mentor and student both giving and gaining.

Chapter 6: Let the Beauty We Love Be What We Do:
Organic Creativity in Teaching World Languages75
by F. Christopher Reynolds

Reynolds defines the three creative intelligence capacities in French as (a) the capacity to create using French, (b) the capacity to respond to originality using French, and (c) the capacity to move beyond school into an authentic, original life enriched by Francophone culture. Reynolds explains how to enhance student creativity through a technique called “feeding back.” Feeding back includes a radical receptivity to the originality of another person.

Part II: Organic Creativity in the Arts

Chapter 7: Looking for Artistry 91
by Barry Oreck

Oreck recounts his lifelong investigation into the nature of creativity and artistry. Calling on his experiences as a dancer/choreographer and teacher and his research into the identification of talent in young people, he grapples with the questions of what makes certain people extraordinary and whether some of those qualities can be taught.

Chapter 8: Learning to Be a Cairn..... 105
by Jessica Nicoll

To make space for students’ creativity, teachers sometimes need to get out of the way even when students request more help. Nicoll examines students’ dance-making processes, in a range of settings, and recognizes that making space for students’ intuition and creativity can be one of the most challenging—and essential—tasks undertaken by any teacher.

**Chapter 9: Embracing Vulnerability:
Organic Creativity in Teaching Theatre** 119
by Jeremy Dubin

Dubin discusses the cultivation of a classroom atmosphere conducive to risk-taking and how the study of improvisation and exposure to classical texts—particularly Shakespeare—can facilitate exploration of intuition, instinct, and imagination.

**Chapter 10: Inside the TARDIS, Outside the Box: Organic
Creativity in Teaching Theatre and Improvisation**..... 133
by Tarik Davis

Davis becomes his childhood hero, Doctor Who, who taught him to use compassion, intuition, and improvisation inside the classroom. As a teaching artist in New York City, he aims to unlock the confidence his students will need to be their own free thinking, artistic selves, unafraid of making mistakes even though the systems that surround them are actively discouraging experimentation and plurality of ideas.

**Chapter 11: Tapping Into the Sounds of the Universe:
Organic Creativity in Music-Making and Songwriting** 147
by Sally dhruvá Stephenson

Stephenson shares her personal insights and inspires readers to take a leap into the uncharted waters of musical self-expression. She includes tips and strategies for songwriting, improvising music with others, integrating music into language arts and other lessons, and finding one's personal musical voice, regardless of self-perceptions of talent or training

**Chapter 12: I Channel a Child in Me:
Organic Creativity in Teaching Music** 161
by Branice McKenzie

McKenzie recalls her experience as a music teacher in the ArtsConnection program. She discusses music talent and the intuitive recognition of it from the point of view of children as well as their teachers.

**Chapter 13: The Magic of Writing: Organic Creativity
in Teaching Fiction Writing** 175
by Stephanie S. Tolan

Tolan indicates that what can be called “intuition” is a critical ingredient in creativity—what she prefers to call the “magic of writing.” Tolan believes that the craft necessary to good writing can be learned, but the magic needs only to be awakened, courted, honored, and listened to.

Chapter 14: Inviting Creative Writing:
Organic Creativity in Teaching Poetry Writing 187
by Carl Leggo

Leggo ruminates on a lifetime spent in classrooms as a student, teacher, and professor. He especially remembers too few experiences with creativity in school. He celebrates a love for language, for the wonder of the alphabet, and for the pleasures of intuition, imagination, and innovation. Leggo focuses on the pleasures of writing, challenging conventions, resisting reductive models, and reveling in the mystery of the writing process.

Chapter 15: On Ideas: Organic Creativity
in Teaching Visual Arts..... 201
by Charles Caldemeyer

Caldemeyer explores aspects of teaching the artistic process in painting classes and of unlocking the creative potential of students who have been habituated to disregard the power of their own expressions. The chapter gives specific examples of strategies to enable student growth, including the development of strong intuitive skills and an emphasis on self-knowledge.

Part III: Organic Creativity in the Teacher, the Classroom, and the School

Chapter 16: Cars on Blocks and Roadkills: Organic
Creativity in Teaching in the G/T Resource Room 219
by George W. Johnson

Johnson shares his 40 years of practices that inhibit or encourage creativity in the Appalachian gifted and talented classroom where creative innovation is a way of life for both parents and teachers. The chapter suggests both advocacy and strategies for creative thought and products. The author concludes that the single most important factor in the creative classroom is a teacher who asks, "Why?"

Chapter 17: Toward a More Holistic Approach to Teaching:
Organic Creativity in Teaching Educational Psychology 235
by Diane Montgomery

The ways in which theory is created and lived in practice is brought to life in Montgomery's story of the journey of a teacher-researcher. Making the unknown known by increasing awareness of things not seen, finding meaning, and communicating with heart takes center stage in the work of intuitive teaching and learning.

Chapter 18: Visceral Creativity: Organic Creativity
 in Teaching Arts/Dance Education 251
 by Celeste Snowber

Snowber explores the reclaiming of the body as a place to nourish creativity as a way of life. She connects dance and movement as an experiential way of learning through sensuous knowledge and focuses on four principles, including play, passion, physicality, and practice.

Chapter 19: The Mirror: Creativity as Seeing
 and Being Seen: Autoethnography of a Teacher..... 265
 by Jennifer L. Groman

Groman writes an autoethnographical integration of her own personal and professional creative work as a singer, songwriter, and explorer of creativity as it is used to frame and develop her teaching practice. Her chapter includes prose, lyrics, poetry, and visual art to show the construction of and shifting in her professional philosophy of teaching.

Chapter 20: The Missing Link: Teaching the
 Creative Problem Solving Process 283
 by Cyndi Burnett

Burnett explores the relationship between deliberate Creative Problem Solving models and the working practices of a performing artist. By examining the tensions and overlaps, she highlights the opportunities for students from many disciplines to expand their creative repertoire and understand creativity as both a mechanism to solve problems and a process of self-expression.

Chapter 21: That “Uh-Oh” Feeling: Organic Creativity
 in School Counseling 297
 by Maria Balotta

Balotta believes that organic creativity in her work results from heeding that “uh-oh” feeling, the intuitive messages heard from within that facilitate her access to ideas that already exist in the spiritual, unconscious world. To Balotta, the ideas feel natural, almost instantaneous, but she is convinced that they come out of a subconscious incubation process in which old experiences and knowledge combine to inspire on-the-spot decisions that lead to life-altering actions and interactions.

Chapter 22: Imagining School Communities:

Organic Creativity in Elementary School Administration..... 311
by Rebecca McElfresh

McElfresh describes her journey as a school leader who worked with faculty and staff to promote a culture of organic creativity within two public elementary schools. This narrative provides a description of specific activities designed to promote a creative culture through regular and programmed experiences as well as through experiences that arise organically from the needs of the students and the teachers at any given time.

Final Thoughts by Jane Piirto..... 321
Endnotes 323
References..... 337
About the Editor 348

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What follows are some relevant quotations from the authors about how they practice organic creativity.

- ✿ **Todd Kettler and Laila Sanguras in Chapter 1:** “We teach literature creatively in hopes that our students will catch even a momentary glimpse of the sublime—a brush with truth so pure that it takes one’s breath away. The glimpse of the sublime frames meaning deep within our intellect. The sublime is pursued with reason, found in imagination, and verified by intuition.”
- ✿ **Erin Daniels in Chapter 2:** “In the best of worlds, students would be given options in math class from the very beginning. Teachers would present different ways to solve problems, allow students to choose their best method, and then learn how to get to the solution in the way that best suited the individual. This path to the solution may also be something the students discover on their own, following their intuition. This should be the goal.”
- ✿ **Daniel Peppercorn in Chapter 3:** “Some of the more palpable forms of creativity are new exercises that link seemingly unrelated topics, lessons that give students an opportunity to be imaginative, discussions that are conducive to an exchange of fresh ideas and humor, and hands-on assignments that foster critical thinking, problem solving, creating, and presenting.”
- ✿ **Keith Taber in Chapter 4:** “Scientists often rely upon this kind of intuition or tacit knowledge in their work in science, and it no doubt operates in all areas of expertise. Scientists and teachers alike are only explicitly aware of some their knowledge, and often have to trust and follow their intuitions because they cannot rely on using logic when they are not actually aware of the basis for their judgments.”
- ✿ **Kristin MacDowell and Rodney Michael in Chapter 5:** “Throughout these experiments and projects, the students must use their intuition, visualization, imagery, and creative abilities to transform ideas into plans, then build actual devices using their plans . . . The creative thought process is encouraged, exercised, and celebrated from beginning to end.”
- ✿ **F. Christopher Reynolds in Chapter 6:** “Cultivating creativity through feeding back brings students’ passionate interests out into the open. Those passions provide inspiration to connect to like-minded others in the Francophone world. Intuition is the faithful guide to this path of the heart, and encouraging the students’ devotion to their intuitive inner knowing makes a world of difference.”

- ✧ **Barry Oreck in Chapter 7:** “Clearly *Artistry (A)* is deeply interconnected with creativity. It is almost impossible to imagine an aspect of artistry that would not be considered creative. *A* encompasses ways of being and learning, artistic attitudes and curiosity, appreciation of beauty and qualities of things, a need or drive for expression, an emotional connection. Perhaps the most accurate definition of *A* would be *access*: access to one’s inner voice, to the intuitive, subconscious, connected self.”
- ✧ **Jessica Nicoll in Chapter 8:** “Our instincts, impulses, and intuition are the most precious resources we have as artists, and our inner critic is what causes us to second-guess them and undermine ourselves. The trick is to keep ourselves from blocking them, to condition ourselves to recognize our instincts and immediately give them voice, before the critic has a chance to shut them down.”
- ✧ **Jeremy Dubin in Chapter 9:** “Once we have given ourselves permission to follow through on our intuition, then true artistic exploration can begin. With a safe environment around us, and an open channel to our intuition within us, it’s time to dig in and start working on some scenes; and in my experience the indisputably best tool available to developing actors is Shakespeare.”
- ✧ **Tarik Davis in Chapter 10:** “It’s about standing up against the system that keeps them mindlessly filling in the bubbles with a No. 2 pencil, being a statistic taking orders at McDonald’s, and not ever tapping into their own artistic souls. It’s about engendering a culture that champions creativity, curiosity, and intuition. I teach this culture.”
- ✧ **Sally dhruvá Stephenson in Chapter 11:** “There is a subtle difference between leading the musical line and following it, and the direction can shift back and forth seamlessly when players are sensitive to this dynamic and have established group trust. Intuition plays a big role in learning to relax into this conversation of listening and answering musically.”
- ✧ **Branice McKenzie in Chapter 12:** “I saw what one little song can do, and how it can transform a child’s spirit in the course of a 50-minute workshop. I literally saw children turn around and become changed, transformed . . . It’s a matter of spirit and it’s also a matter of the amazing learning and teaching potential that music has.”

- ✧ **Stephanie S. Tolan in Chapter 13:** “I have not only engaged in a purposeful exploration of the nonrational aspects of consciousness, I have actively worked to learn how to use my intuition more effectively not just in writing, but in the rest of my life as well. The exploration has become a spiritual journey as well as a way to increase my own creativity.”
- ✧ **Carl Leggo in Chapter 14:** “I am always seeking to attend to my writing as an intuitive process that is full of mystery, a process that I do not consciously determine or control. Instead, I remain open to the writing that emerges, listening constantly and carefully to the heart’s rhythms, to the possibilities of intuition. Therefore, my writing and I are always in flux, always changing.”
- ✧ **Charles Caldemeyer in Chapter 15:** “I ask students to just ‘follow their paint,’ meaning to let their intuition guide them from mark to mark, the previous step determining the next. This old abstract expressionist trick allows a student who is clearly on to something, but is not yet able to articulate it, the freedom to discover ways to express aspects of his or her life.”
- ✧ **George Johnson in Chapter 16:** “Here is an activity I have used to develop intuition. It requires a temporary suspension of disbelief, a type of naïveté that younger students are better at than sophisticated high school students. Take an artifact, something old with a history to it, and place it in the student’s hand.”
- ✧ **Diane Montgomery in Chapter 17:** “I place high value and importance on intuition as a mechanism to unite what sentiment and logic reveal to us. Graduate students who have studied these developmental areas separately often are relieved that their implicit theories are valuable to their practice in education or psychology—receiving the academic permission to trust intuition, insight, and imagination in practice.”
- ✧ **Celeste Snowber in Chapter 18:** “The body is the canvas for creativity. We paint with our hands, dance with our feet, sing with our breath, and sculpt with our palms. Our very beings are creative—we are made with the glorious impossible—ears that hear, flesh that remembers, pulse that regulates, and hair that protects. As the visceral imagination is opened up, the intuition is given muscles, and we can teach on our feet, and be informed by what has great capacity to guide us.”

- ✿ **Jennifer Groman in Chapter 19:** “I believe that organic creativity as a life practice transforms and deepens our understanding of ourselves and those around us. The creative products we generate as we work in this way act as a mirror, reflecting our transforming identity back to us and out to the world. The work is intuitive. The work changes us. It grows us.”
- ✿ **Cyndi Burnett in Chapter 20:** “I suddenly realized that intuition was wholly missing from the CPS process, and that I had been deliberately silencing one of the most important aspects of my natural, organic, and creative process! I immediately knew this was where I needed to focus my research.”
- ✿ **Maria Balotta in Chapter 21:** “The incubation period for creative solutions is frequently seconds long, but as I look back at my journey as a school counselor, I cannot think of any story where intuition did not play a significant role.”
- ✿ **Rebecca McElfresh in Chapter 22:** “Years of standardized practice lead both students and teachers to be limited in their capacity to take risks and to move into any activity that is open-ended in its possible outcomes. . . . Experiences with organic creativity open us to different ways of working in which we must, in a sense, find our own way as we begin to recognize and depend on our intuitive sensibilities. Therefore, initial guidance provides enough scaffolding for the organic nature of the work to unfold.”

Dear reader, my hope is that you open up to the insights in this book, are inspired, incubate, engage in improvisation, trust your intuition, free your imagination, and create an image.

Jane Piirto
2013