

BUILDING

Creative *Capital*

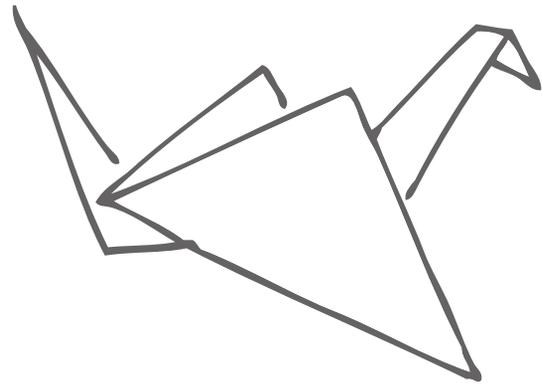
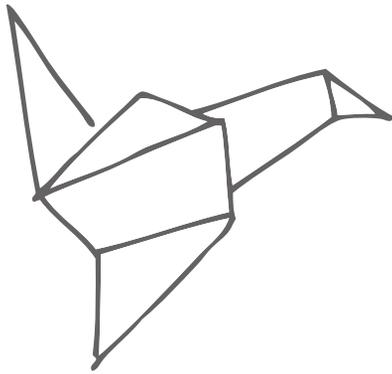
By Dr. Dennie Palmer Wolf and Dr. Steven Holochwost



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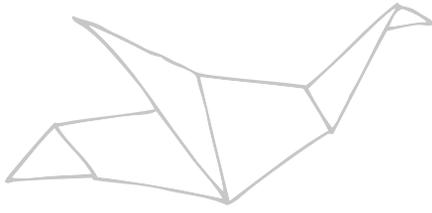
GO ENGAGE





Frequently our clients — organizations, communities, or metropolitan regions — ask WolfBrown to help them measure the impact of what they do. Drawing on new understandings of creativity, as well as a number of WolfBrown projects, Dr. Dennie Palmer Wolf and Dr. Steven Holochwost suggest that a focus on building creative capital is a powerful way to think about planning for, executing, and measuring the impact of the arts and culture. By way of example, they examine how this framework has informed and energized one of the most active sectors of WolfBrown's work: arts and cultural education.

We are grateful to our colleagues at Big Thought in Dallas, Texas where much of the research underlying this work has been conducted. It has also been enriched by our work with Community MusicWorks in Providence, RI, DreamYard in the Bronx, NY, and The Right Brain Initiative in Portland, OR.



WHAT COUNTS AS CREATIVE CAPITAL?

Think about the commissioning of a new work, “Moby Dick,” by the Dallas Opera Company and all the activity it generates: reading and turning the novel into a libretto, designing the production, hiring and rehearsing, promotion, deciding how to reach schools and families, critics reviewing, audience members thinking and talking about power and revenge in the days afterwards. This all counts as creative capital.

But creative capital is built and has an impact beyond ticketed and formal venues:

- Citizens and artists sculpting countless mighty trees killed in Galveston’s floods, turning devastation into heritage. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112215656>. Accessed August 25, 2009.
- Young people who grew up participating in a community arts organization, Pros Arts Studio, in the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods in Chicago, urging their peers to create memorials, rather than seek revenge, when several young people were killed in drive-by shootings.
- Villagers in Northwestern Peru instituting ongoing patrols to protect the remains of the Moche civilization from looters who feed the international black market’s appetite for rare pre-Inca antiquities. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/13/opinion/13atwood.html>. Accessed October 13, 2009.

I. Introduction: What about the Impact of the Arts and Culture?

Over the last several years, we’ve noticed a fundamental shift in the number and nature of inquiries about how to conceptualize, measure, and report on the impacts of arts and cultural programs:

- Funders urging grantees to think more holistically about cultural systems, by including parks, festivals, schools, and libraries
- Local and regional arts agencies searching for better ways to assess their progress on cultural plans
- Orchestras, theaters, and dance companies seeking to understand how their programs affect – or even transform – what audiences think and feel
- Partners in arts education initiatives wanting to know what differences their concerted efforts are making for families and youth.

As different as these challenges are, they all speak to a growing restlessness with the current ways in which we frame and capture the impacts of the arts and culture on our lives. Rising ticket sales are one measure of a theater’s success, but what do they help us understand about whether audiences come to see the world differently? Is economic impact the best indicator of creative vitality? Should we also be asking whether the community art centers, libraries, and parks can stabilize and sustain urban neighborhoods? Do increasing hours of arts instruction or rising reading scores in arts-rich schools adequately portray the effects of creative learning on children’s lives? In all the cases mentioned above, as well as on college campuses,¹ in city planning discussions,² and in 21st century workplaces, policy makers, civic leaders, educators, and funders are all looking for new ways to understand what the arts and culture – and the acts of imagination they engender – mean to people and to places. In response, we propose thinking about the impact of the arts and culture in terms of developing the creative capital of individuals, organizations, and communities.

Creative capital is the network of understandings, values, activities, and relationships that individuals, organizations, and communities develop when they share what earlier generations have imagined and when they, in turn, generate and pass on what they imagine.

¹ Tepper, Steven J. (2006). Taking the measure of the creative campus. (Analysis). Peer Review. Volume 8 Issue 2.

² Coletta, Carol. Fostering creative cities. CEO’s for Cities. http://www.ceosforcities.org/work/fostering_the_creative_city. Accessed October 15, 2009.

This definition builds squarely on what many colleagues have stressed about the powerful role of the arts and culture in community development and well-being that goes beyond economic impact, developing renown, or attracting creative professionals.³ In addition, it is a critique of frameworks that focus wholly on the adult present. Children and families, teachers and students, mentors and role models matter in the development of creative capital.

Our current frameworks do not address the creative development of young people or families' and communities' capacity to support that development. Until we plan for, contribute to, and measure that development, we presume the creativity of coming generations without ever investing in it.

II. Re-thinking Creativity as Creative Capital

We have long thought about the arts and culture as celebrating and fostering zenith acts of invention: altarpieces, ballets, chorales, and cathedrals. Our institutions, programs, and conceptions of effectiveness are all deeply dyed by our assumptions about creativity as what allows extraordinarily gifted individuals to work in extraordinary ways to produce extraordinary results: Madame Curie alone in her lab at night, Van Gogh reeling under a starry night sky, or Coleridge visited by dreams. But more recent research yields an understanding of creativity that is both more democratic and more developmental.

- **Basic to well-being:** Even in the most adverse circumstances – migrant camps, hospital wards, even prison and internment camps – people seek meaning, sustain themselves and those they love by sharing traditions, and craft handsome objects from the scraps of life. Imagining what might be – a different future – as compared to dwelling only in what is, is key to resilience: the capacity to recover from severe difficulties.

Creativity is equally important to the vitality of communities. For example, there is a relationship between the level of cultural engagement in a community and the degree of social connection among neighbors, expressed in their willingness to take action on behalf of the common good. Neighborhoods richest in cultural organizations are also the most stable, economically diverse, and integrated regions within cities. In one major city, during the 1980s and 1990s, the odds that a neighborhood would revitalize were highly related

UNDOING THE UNBEARABLE

An upcoming exhibition at the Renwick Gallery in Washington, DC, features the art of *gaman*, a Japanese term that means "to bear the seemingly unbearable with dignity and patience." While imprisoned during WW II, Japanese and Nisei internees used scraps of materials found in their barren camp surroundings to create furniture, toys and games, musical instruments, personal ornaments, and gifts that were vital for daily life, creating a sense of creature comforts and crafting the means for emotional and spiritual survival. The *gaman* exhibit is provocative: Clearly, creative capital is an orientation, more than access to well-stocked studios or galleries.

- So how do communities develop those kinds of values and activities?
- What should be funded?
- Built?
- Acknowledged?
- Nurtured?

³ Jackson, María-Rosario and Herranz, Joaquin. (2002). Culture counts in communities: A framework for measurement. Chicago, IL. The Urban Institute;

Jackson, María Rosario, Kabwasa Green, Florence, Herranz, Joaquin. (2006). Cultural vitality in communities: Interpretation and indicators. <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=311392>. Accessed August 24, 2009.

to the presence of cultural resources. Even among the most at-risk neighborhoods, those with many cultural organizations within one-half mile were three to four times more likely to see their poverty decline and population increase as those with few such groups.⁴

- **Life-long:** Most of our legends of creative geniuses feature the brightly burning talents of early and middle adulthood. But research tells us otherwise. Between the ages of 2 and 5 virtually all children invent hundreds of expressive languages: the grammar of their native language, drawing, music, imaginative play, and number systems.⁵ Many adults who are far from being professional artists conduct or sing in choirs, build furniture, weld, and quilt. In diverse arenas (e.g., writing for Wikipedia, the crowd-sourcing of solutions to technical challenges,⁶ the Van Cliburn competition for amateurs, and photo websites like Flickr and Shutterbug) there is strong evidence that there is much more creativity “out there” than we currently acknowledge or harness.

As growing numbers of individuals live longer and healthier lives, it is also clear that engagement in creative activities (either for the first time or as a mentor to others) can and does occur throughout the lifespan.

Evidence for this abounds: think about the growing number of roles for older dancers (e.g. in the work of choreographers like Liz Lerman), the advent of “cobweb” orchestras where seniors take up where they left off in middle or high school, or programs that provide stipends for elders who are willing to pass on their crafts skills to young apprentices.

- **Dynamic, not fixed:** While earlier accounts of creativity focus on innate gifts and rare talents unachievable by ordinary humans, many contemporary accounts stress that major components of creativity can be learned. For example, research on innovation in workplaces stresses that the majority of workers, given supportive conditions, can think out of the box, generating inventions that streamline, improve, and even innovate.⁷ Similarly, we are growing clearer on the role of opportunity and effort (as well as individual gifts) in the development and emergence of creativity. For example, in his recent book, *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell stresses the combined role of circumstances (birth date, location, family values, etc.) and hard work (10,000 hours of practice in a chosen field) – rather than raw talent alone – in the emergence of extraordinary accomplishment.⁸

⁴ Stern, Mark & Seifert, Susan. (2008). From creative economy to creative society. Social Impact of the Arts Project, University of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, PA.

⁵ Edwards, Carolyn, Gandini, Lella, & Forman, George. (1993). *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education*. Ablex Publishing: Westport, CT.

⁶ Crowd-sourcing refers to the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call for solutions. In other words, it is the application of Open Source principles to fields outside of software.

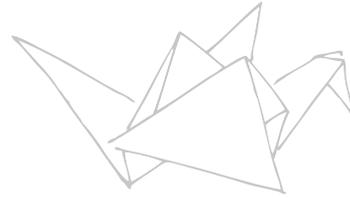
⁷ Amabile, Teresa M., Barsade, Sigal G., Mueller, Jennifer S. and. Straw, Barry M. “Affect and Creativity at Work.” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 50, No. 3 (September 2005): 367-403;

Amabile, Teresa M., Schatzel, Elizabeth A., Moneta, Giovanni B., and Kramer, Giovanni B. “Leader Behaviors and the Work Environment for Creativity: Perceived Leader Support.” *Leadership Quarterly* 15, No. 1 (February 2004): 5-32;

Liu, Eric & Noppe-Brandon, Scott. (2009). *Imagination First: Unlocking the Power of Possibility*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishers;

Sanders, Elizabeth. (2006). “Scaffolds for Building Everyday Creativity” in *Design for Effective Communications: Creating Contexts for Clarity and Meaning*. Jorge Frascara (Ed.) Allworth Press, New York.

⁸ Gladwell, Malcolm. (2008). *Outliers*. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company.



- **Systemic:** As the scale of creative endeavors has expanded in the last century we are, more than ever, face to face with the collaborative and communal aspects of creativity. Think about the recent example of 47 scientists from 10 countries collaborating over fifteen years on assembling bone fragments into the skeleton of Ardi, our earliest known ancestor who lived 4.4 million years ago. It should remind us to ask, “What was it about Florence in the 15th century, Baghdad in the 12th century, New Orleans at the turn of the 20th century, or Silicon Valley in the 1980s that yielded legendary spikes in creativity? What was it about the confluence of different cultures, the sense of opportunity, infrastructure, or technology that sparked ingenuity? What are the implications for building vibrant neighborhoods or creative cities?”⁹ Framing creativity in this way makes it clear that imagination and the investment in making extraordinary things can be embodied by families, organizations, or places – not just individuals.

III. Designing for Creative Capital

New design principles follow from thinking about the arts and culture, not only as the celebration of extraordinary individuals, but as a means of building the creative capital of large numbers of people, organizations, and communities. Suddenly it becomes crucial to design for:

- **Active participation:** If creative capital is not a luxury but rather is vital to personal and community well-being, then the traditional emphasis on consumption (e.g., attending, viewing, appreciating, and listening to what docents say) needs to give way to many more opportunities to produce and participate actively. The authorship, creation, and curation evident in new media are not just artifacts of new technologies, but expressions of a will to take part, engage, and leave a legacy.¹⁰

Consider how museums are evolving. The new Center for Creative Connections at the Dallas Museum of Art invites visitors to make, curate, and comment on works. The Bronx Museum of Art asks borough residents to contribute their personal artifacts (snapshots, albums, posters, and even clothing) to exhibits on the origins of hip-hop music, dance, and design, creating an open archive that the community shapes. But formal venues cannot be the only sites for participation. In Chicago, residents are celebrating the 100th anniversary of Daniel Burnham’s bold plan for the city by contributing photos and text messages to an evolving virtual map that describes how the century-old blueprint has evolved into a contemporary urban region.¹¹ In the South Bronx, DreamYard, an arts education provider, has built its new center into the ground floor of new mixed-income housing.

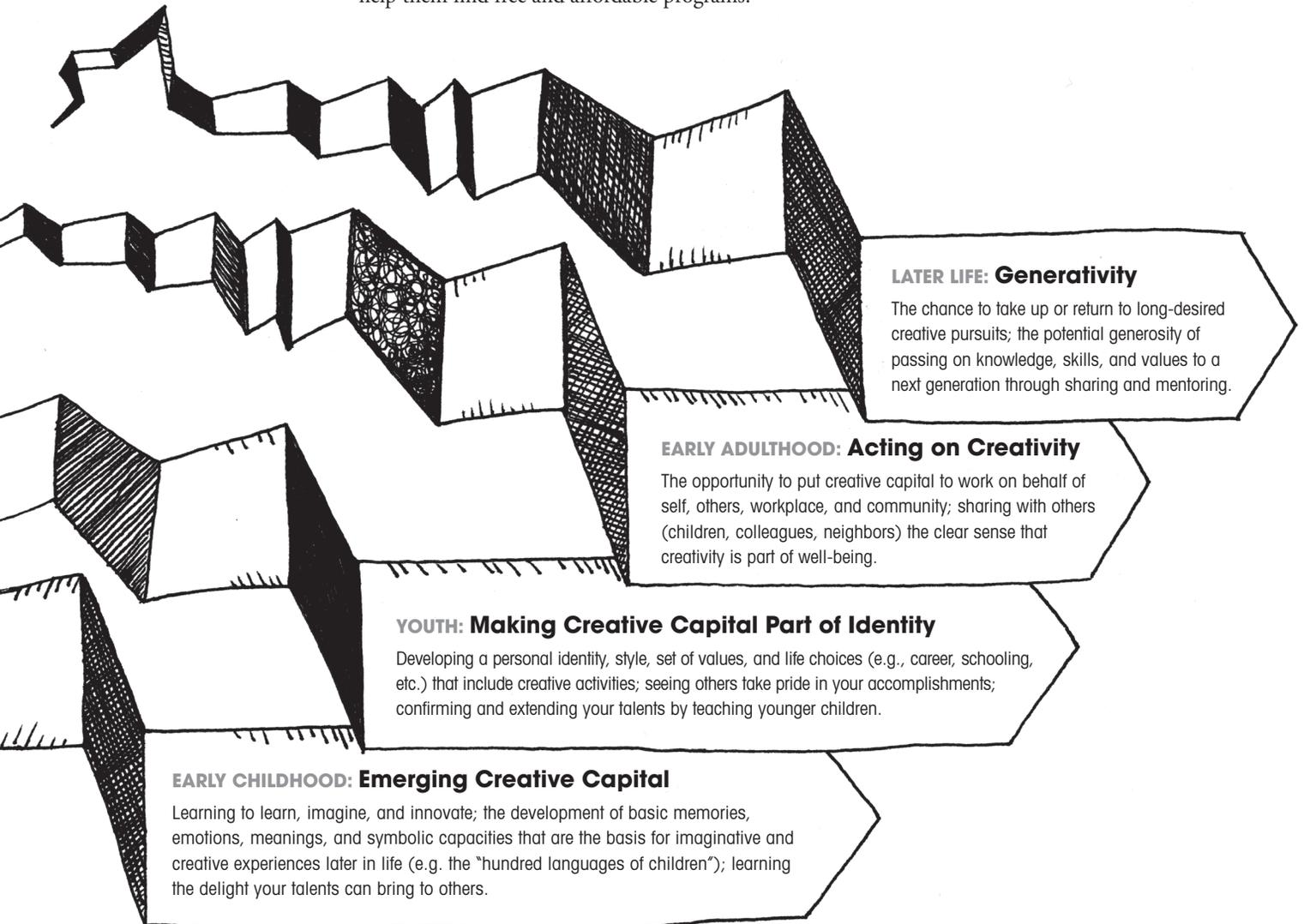
- **Life-long engagement and sharing:** If our creative capital can develop life-long, then there is every reason to program cradle to grave. In fact, that impulse would build on a growing body of findings that early, active participation in the arts builds long-term engagement. Arts education is not just about fourth grade trips to the museum to see Indian-made baskets – rather, it is about stipends for elders to pass those traditions on. What if organizations and communities tested their creative investments by asking, “What do we do that matters to people all along this age continuum?”

⁹ Coletta, Carol. Fostering creative cities. CEO’s for Cities. http://www.ceosforcities.org/work/fostering_the_creative_city. Accessed October 15, 2009.

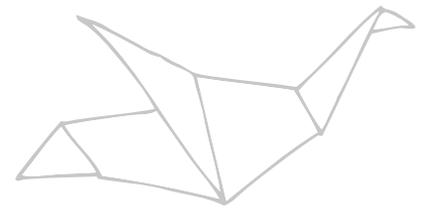
¹⁰ Brown, Alan. (2006). “An Architecture of Value.” *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader*, Vol. 17, No. 1; Tepper, Steven J. and Ivey, William (Eds.). (2007). *Engaging Art: The Next Great Revolution in America’s Cultural Life*. New York: Routledge.

¹¹ <http://burnhamplan100.uchicago.edu/>

- **Developing pathways:** If creative capital is a widely human capacity, and if many more people can imagine and innovate than we once believed, we have to support the sustained development of talent beyond cursory exposure. Venezuela's national youth orchestra, El Sistema, is an excellent example of a fostering environment for musical accomplishment premised on the conviction that any student who attends and works hard can achieve musical proficiency at a high level over time. Part of what makes it remarkable is that it is a "corridor" that nurtures young musicians from the time they first take up an instrument in a children's orchestra to young adulthood.
- **Building the infrastructure:** Creative capital flourishes not just because individuals are talented but because social and civic infrastructures value and support it. Think about jazz in the Marsalis family, draftsmanship among the Wyeths, design in 20th century Scandinavia, or technology in Silicon Valley. We need to better understand, value, and build the elements that comprise such supportive architectures. Young people interviewed in major cities across the country know it is about a thousand small assists: middle and high schools that provide successive courses in the arts, bus routes or free bikes that allow them to travel to after school programs of their choice, paying apprenticeships in the arts and creative industries in place of fast food stations, and web portals that help them find free and affordable programs.



"I go to a regular public high school where one course in art is all that is required. So you can get by with carrying lumber for tech crew on a play. I don't want to downgrade that but I say you have to learn to make something. So I would tell the principal to graduate you have to create something. I don't care what – song lyrics, a small machine, bring a car back from the dead, translate a poem into English, or some new way of using cell phones for doing good. Not just like some cheesy new way of lacing sneakers. Something big."



IV. Reconsidering Impact: The Case of Arts Education

One major consequence of adopting a creative capital framework would be to reframe arts education as the work of developing creative capital. Seen in that light, we should also reframe how we think about the impacts we plan for, invest in, and measure.

• **Impact 1: Is there a system of opportunities to develop creative capital?** Far too many communities currently invest in elementary level arts education, plus a chain of highly visible magnet schools for the visual and performing arts to build creative capital in the arts. Many efforts to improve this pattern seek only to multiply offerings and raise the numbers of children served. This is vital, but insufficient, if the goal is to stop ignoring or wasting talent. If a community were really poised to develop creative capital it would grow:

» *Pathways:* This is a system of linked K–16 opportunities, equitably available throughout a community.

» *Complementary opportunities:* This includes integrating and connecting school-based and out-of-school learning. Young people need both the structured learning opportunities that schools know how to provide as well as the less structured, more in-depth, or individualized learning that out-of-school organizations can offer.¹²

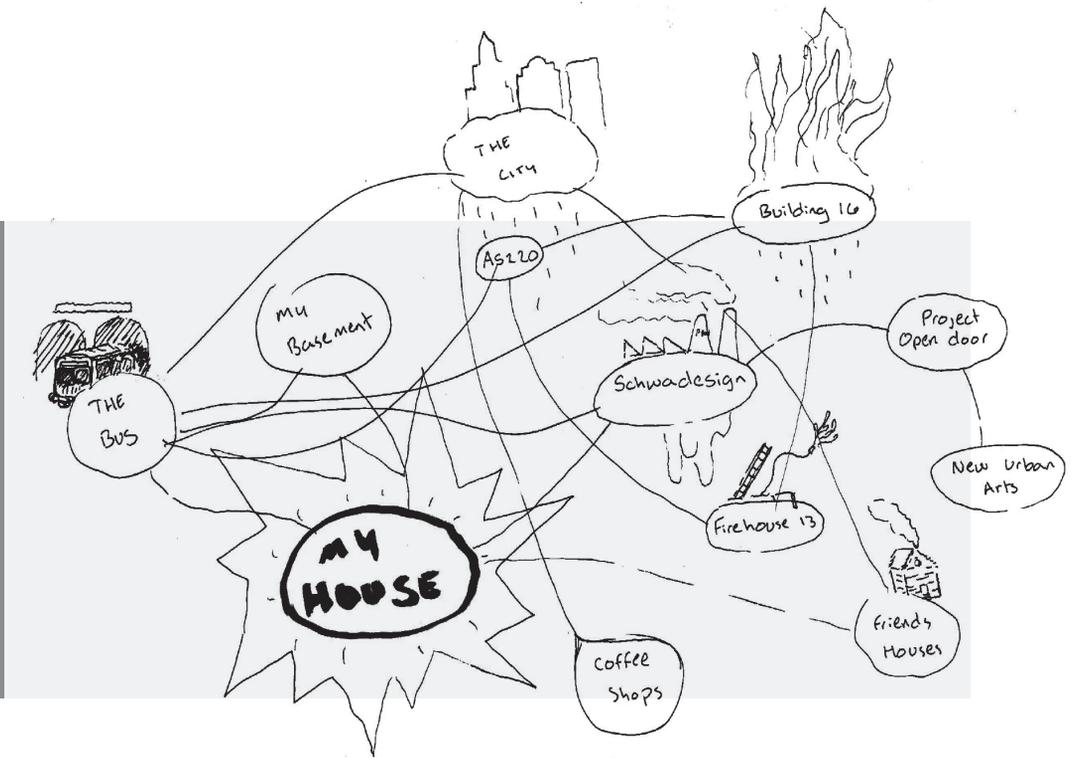
¹² Gordon, Edmund W., Beatrice L. Bridgall and Aundra Saa Meroe (Eds.) (2004). *Supplementary Education: The Hidden Curriculum of High Academic Achievement*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., <http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com>;

"A New Day for Learning: A Report from the Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force." C.S. Mott Foundation, January 2007. <http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/ANewDayforLearning.pdf>;

Rothman, Robert, Ed. (2007). *City Schools: How Districts and Communities Can Create Smart Education Systems*. Harvard Education Press. <http://www.hepg.org/hepg/Book/68>.

A YOUNG ARTIST DRAWS HIS CITY (PROVIDENCE, RI) AS A NETWORK OF RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT HIS CREATIVE LEARNING:

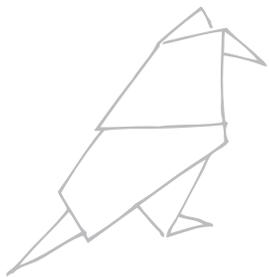
School and after school programs (AS220, New Urban Arts, Project Open Door), an internship (at Schwa Design), informal community-based sites that allow young people to hang out (The Firehouse, coffee shops), as well as the human (brother) and built infrastructure (busses) that enable his creativity.



» *Supportive infrastructure:* This means designing infrastructure and programs with attention to maximum use. It includes factors such as reliable and safe public transportation, locations that families trust, advance and public information that allows poor and moderate-income families to save up for tuition and to plan time and transport, and programs that serve children of different ages or multiple generations so that family members can all participate.

• **Impact 2: Is there a network of human relationships that develop creative capital?**¹³ Systems for building creative capital require much more than facilities or even widely available and linked programs. They depend on human capacity. But too often, that boils down to counting the numbers of certified arts teachers or artists in schools. What we really need is an enriched set of indicators including:

- » *Families:* New research suggests that family history and values around creativity are highly predictive of how young people invest their resources. Investing in families' capacities is key: jobs in cultural institutions, take-home activities, and forums where families can learn from one another about building their children's pathways of engagement.
- » *Out-of-school mentors and teachers:* But many children who want creative learning come from families who have not had those opportunities. Communities have to invent a corps of adults who will mentor and teach. Think about rent-exchanges for working artists who will take apprentices, studios built into mixed-use, mixed-income housing, and after-school programs where seniors can share their creative skills.
- » *Role models:* Older brothers and sisters, young uncles and aunts, cousins, and neighbors play a huge role in drawing children into creative activities. But in most neighborhoods and communities, there are only a handful of jobs or internships to support this naturally-occurring system of mentorship. We need to create these opportunities and track their effects in neighborhoods.



¹³ These observations draw heavily on our collaboration with Big Thought in Dallas, TX where the program designers have made a major investment in developing a multi-level creative workforce.

• **Impact 3: To what extent are young people developing creative capital?** Currently we gauge the impact of arts education by looking at rising applications to public schools that feature the arts, enrollment in available courses and programs, prizes and awards, applications to post-secondary programs in the arts, etc. We also look at correlations to test scores, graduation rates, and percent of college-going students. But we need an enriched set of indicators that look at:

- » *The quality of creative work:* Ask young people to present a recent creative activity (band piece, drawing, animated film). How good is it? Now ask the young person to tell the story of how that work evolved. What does it show about their capacity to generate ideas, collaborate, and respond to critique?
- » *Spillover:* Ask young people to write a diary of the previous day (activities, durations, partners, etc.). Examine the role that creative activities play in their lives. Where did they choose to use their own free time and resources to engage in creative activities (e.g., playing cello with a friend, rehearsing at home with younger siblings for a step performance, creating a family photo album to send to an aunt in Nigeria)?
- » *Giveback:* Ask young people if they use their creativity to give back to their social networks and communities. For example, how often is a young musician practicing with younger students, taking her violin to the hospital to play for an older relative, or participating in a panel discussion about why the citywide orchestra program should be restored?¹⁴

Conclusion

In a rapidly changing, complex world, communities need to be resilient and adaptable in order to invent new possibilities and solve stubborn problems such as pollution, job creation, transportation, and affordable housing. To accomplish these goals, we need people who can imagine, adapt, invent, and re-think old ways. This will only occur when we expand arts education into a wider and connected system for developing creative capital. But to do this, we need to:

- Re-think our fundamental views of creativity in ways that are both more democratic and more developmental;
- Design and implement programs that nurture the development of creative capital long before adulthood; and
- Re-frame the impacts we seek to tell us whether we are learning to develop young people's creative capital. This is an investment that will repay and sustain all of us, as another young person reminds us:

After all, we are the people who are going to be making your movies, setting up your websites, designing your cars, and all around saving you from the harshness of the world.

¹⁴ This enriched set of indicators was developed through an 18-month participatory evaluation with the staff, students, and board of Community MusicWorks.

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