Creativity Instructional Matrix for Visual Art
by Raymond E. Veon

Matrix Key:

Code: S1 = Stage 1; S2 = Stage 2; S3 = Stage 3

R = Required O = Optional

Code Example: Example: S1.1**R**

Blue Blocks= Skill introduced   Yellow Blocks = Ongoing skill development

NOTE: The term "image" is often associated only with the visual image. However, to understand this model of creativity, an image is *any* sensation generated mentally. This means that sounds, the feeling of movement, smells, colors and shapes, or reproductions of what we've seen can all be referred to as an image. An image, then, can be a rhythm or melody heard by the "mind's ear," or the feeling of thrust, weight and balance felt by the "mind's body" as much as the vision of a butterfly seen by the "mind's eye." This is important because these sensory images are the starting point for the model of creativity that I am presenting. By generating, manipulating, or reframing sensory images mentally we go beyond the constraints of everyday categories and associations. Advertisers are masters at manipulating imagery – sound, dramatic, movement, and visual images - so that we associate certain images with what they want us to value.

Overview of the Creativity Instructional Matrix
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STAGE ONE

Stage One asks elementary teachers to introduce skills exploring the dynamic interplay between mental imagery (sounds, movement, and perceptions generated by the mind). For instance, in the museum, have you ever seen people glance quickly at contemporary art before spending the rest of their time reading the wall text? Confronted with the unfamiliar, people naturally look for a context, a frame of reference, to help them understand it. I've heard people question whether the work of John Cage is really music for the same reason. But just as a diamond can mean different things depending on the physical and social setting in which it is placed—for instance, think of the meanings a diamond might have when found in a Valentine's Day brooch, a wedding ring, a crown, a drill, or an exhibit in a courtroom trial—so too images change meaning depending on their context (see illustration 3). Therefore, the objectives in Stage One challenge students to

develop imaginative ideas through two fundamentally different strategies. The first strategy is image-based: students manipulate or generate images (whether sound, visual or based on the sensation of movement) until they come up with an unexpected result that cannot be easily labeled or categorized. The second strategy is context-based: by combining or dissecting the everyday labels and associations we use to categorize the sounds, sights and movements of life, students generate suggestive or unusual meanings that invite open-ended wonder. As shown by the behavior of people in museums, these strategies play on the mind's tendency to seek meaning when shown a hard-to-label image. Other examples of this tendency include Rorshawk tests, where people find imagery in abstract inkblots, and the Thematic Apperception Test, where people tell stories about uncaptioned photographs that reveal more about themselves than the "truth" of the picture.

This reverses the routine of everyday schooling. Teachers who want creative students need to encourage risk-taking and mental playfulness. Instead of acquiring knowledge by casting the meaning of symbols and the rules for combining them in mental cement, creativity teachers ask students to play with the building blocks of ideas—e.g. visual images, sounds, movements and the different frames of reference in which we place them. Multiple possibilities for combining such imagery and meaning become possible, none of which are necessarily privileged over the others until a student identifies one as worth pursuing.

STAGE TWO

Stage Two is the level at which students begin deploying their knowledge and skills in tandem as a coherent artistic language. Bodies of work at this level are marked by an emerging independence and a reflective, autonomous practice informed primarily by the field of visual art, but which may also rely heavily on other disciplines or concerns beyond the art world. Examples of these concerns range from issues of power and identity arising from the economic, social and political realms, to the formative contexts of family, peer-group, and classroom, and to works that employ intense feeling, fantasy, irony, parody and humor. The goal of Stage Two is to organize these divergent sources as an expressive language that gives voice to each student's stories and aesthetic aspirations.

Teachers who want creative students need to encourage a spirit of healthy skepticism and deep inquiry. In Stage Two, intermediate teachers help students see the musical, visual, and performance arts as meeting places in which different systems of thinking, hearing, seeing and experiencing come together. By questioning the systems of logic and value embedded in our visual and aural environment, in our behavior and inner psychological worlds, in cultural assumptions, and in socio-political frameworks, creators reveal points of tension and unity amidst the competing networks of meaning that surround us. When it comes to exploring and expressing these insights, creators of all ages are often unsure of what steps come next. They know that stepping out of the proverbial box means that the end-product and the process leading to it are initially unclear. Thus, like the first stage, Stage Two is envisioned as a form of open-ended research in which a creator shapes the creative process as it unfolds. The value for students is that they learn how to proceed in the face of not knowing and to discover what to do when easy, preexisting exemplars no longer help them chart the course forward.

In my experience, some arts teachers equate creativity only with brainstorming quick, random, whacky ideas. But I see the creative process as a long-term, complex process that orchestrates many cognitive and emotional skills. So, I encourage teachers to see creativity as interconnected and dialectical, characterized by ongoing reflection and critical thinking.

STAGE THREE

Finally, if creativity is "thinking outside of the box" then, in Stage Three, it is also building a new box within which to think. However, a better metaphor might be that at this stage creators assemble the unique elements of their artistic "genetic code" into strands of creative DNA. These strands will be unique for each creator and will combine to generate an on-going series of unique challenges and problems revolving around a creator's aspirations. In Stage Three, teachers help students transform the vague, precarious mental terrain that they have encountered in the artistic process into a creative stance. Having borrowed this term from Howard Gardner, I see the creative stance as being composed of five separate elements that blend together as a kind of creative DNA or unique, generative mindset. The elements of this mindset are: objectives that are unique to an individual; a personal rationale that provides the emotional motivation to navigate temporary failures and the courage for enduring the confusion of not knowing the next step; a personal viewpoint that sees problems, tensions, and connections where others do not or in unique ways; preferred working methods; and personal standards that are adequate to and reflect a creator's emerging vision.

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STAGE 1: IDEA-FORMATION SKILLS Stage 1 Assessment: Did you risk and reframe? The student…	K	1	2	3	4	5	6-8	9-12
S1.1 **R** Mentally recalls/produces visual images using art materials								
S1.2 O Follows prompts inherent in the character of art materials								
S1.3 **R** Generates multiple interpretations for an object or image								
S1.4 **R** Mentally manipulates images and meaning								
S1.5 **R** Improvises in response to unanticipated insights, deviations or teacher-imposed constraints that reframe experience								
S1.6 **R** Makes multiple representations of a single theme using varied media and approaches								
S1.7 **R** Mentally envisions what cannot be directly observed by depicting imaginary worlds, machines with mysterious functions, embodiments of mythical beings, intangible forces, values, etc								
S1.8 **R** Recognizes that interpretation relies on context (the implicit and explicit cues/clues that suggest how we should assign meaning to something); combines cues/clues from disparate contexts in an artwork to generate unusual meaning								
S1.9 **R** Uses strategies, such as those found in SCAMPER (Eberle, 1996), McKim (1980), Roukes (1984), to alter/generate visual images and how they are perceived. Example from Visual Art: Banksy								

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STAGE 2: CONCEPT FORMATION SKILLS Stage 2 Assessment: Did you question, intersect, and connect? Did you explore and exploit points of tension? The student…	K	1	2	3	4	5	6-8	9-12
S2.1 **R** Explains how changing an artwork's visual language changes its meaning; see Madden (2005)					🟦	🟨	🟨	🟨
S2.2 **R** Adapts/uses a visual language to connect one idea to other ideas using a range of strategies, such as metaphor, narrative, irony, appropriation, etc.; seeks/employs visual and conceptual patterns to make connections					🟦	🟨	🟨	🟨
S2.3 **R** Conducts ends/means analysis by: 　1.) S2.3.1 **R**: Identifying ambiguous, indeterminate, conceptually or emotionally dissonant topics as themes for artworks; 　2.) S2.3.2 **R**: Determining strategies and criteria for investigating them artistically.						🟦	🟨	🟨
S2.4 **R** Develops iterative mindset by consciously forming provisional answers, testing, revising, testing, etc.						🟦	🟨	🟨
S2.5 **R** Questions hierarchies of value and logic by critiquing and producing artworks.							🟦	🟨

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STAGE 3: CREATING SKILLS Stage 3 Assessment: How does this come out of your own creative stance—your personal, creative DNA? The Student…	K	1	2	3	4	5	6 -8	9-12
S3.1 **R** Reflects on portfolio and identifies patterns to revise or generate new work							🟦	🟨

S3.2 **R** Generates problems by:
 	
  1. S3.2.1 **R**: Setting personal objectives (themes/topics for investigation)
 	
  2. S3.2.2 **R**: Identifying personal standards (adapting/going beyond exemplars)
 	
  3. S3.2.3 **R**: Identifying personal rationale (interests/passions);
 	
  4. S3.2.4 **R**: Identifying preferred materials and working methods;
 	
  5. S3.2.5 **R**: Developing personal viewpoint/context for working (parameters based on beliefs, experiences, emotions, social awareness, personality traits, media, etc.)
							🟦	🟨