

Research Focus

Creativity

I teach creativity and innovation as the production of meaning. My area of specialization is in work-based-learning approaches to professional creative practices. My funded research program (\$1.6M/3yr.) is for the design and integration of an online deep learning application of assisted creativity using artificial intelligence. My research focuses on developing a general theory of creativity based on a formal grounded theory of productionism that demonstrates how creativity originates in the knowledge processes of affective inquiry most readily observed in artistic production. The concept is grounded in a longitudinal practitioner inquiry of production-driven pedagogies of professional language artists. My teaching philosophy is informed by my research agenda that learning is a matrix of creative processes and teaching is the production of that matrix. My approach to learning and teaching demystifies knowledge acquisition as meaning-making by showing how the professional creative practices of storytelling and storymaking externalize knowledge production's fundamental process ontologies of feeling, seeing and saying.

Research

Theoretical Frame

There are two philosophical cornerstones that frame my research. The first is Whitehead's original (1929) definition of creativity as *the production of novelty*. The second is Susanne Langer's (1967) epistemological theory of *presentational abstraction* that demonstrates how creative process is the felt knowledge of meaning. The two frames fit within the Aristotlean-Vichian tradition of artistic-affective inquiry modernized by Marshall McLuhan (1988) and Northrop Frye (1981), and most recently revitalized by Brian Massumi's affect theory (1995) and Antonio Damasio's somatic-marker hypothesis (1994).

Methodological Axis

I use practitioner inquiry (Schön, 1983) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) methodologies to develop theories of creative pedagogy (Aleinikov, 2013) that leverage the tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) of creative professionals. The substantive areas of my research are my two fields of professional practice: language arts teaching and documentary filmmaking. My research examines two main questions grounded in these practices.

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Empirical Data

The data is generated using an original work-based-learning model I designed to teach writing's creative processes to school age students (6-U1) by introducing them to documentary production techniques of visual storytelling. The project began at the request of supervising teachers and school principals' who wanted me to design digital approaches to language arts learning that incorporated my professional technological and artistic knowledges. Over time a fund of best case practices led to a definable method that has now been taught to approximately 300 students aged 12 – 45 in the following contexts:

- urban, urban alternative and rural schools
- professional and pre-professional training seminars
- summer camps and extra-curricular programs
- English and French
- as little as 24 hours and as much as 2 years

Reflective Practicum

Based on my success teaching the method I was hired by the National Film Board of Canada to design a process prototype for youth-directed documentary film production. The films I produced at the NFB were released as a feature-length documentary entitled *SALT*.

The *SALT* project enacted a unique cluster of professional practices. The four students were hired as directors by the NFB and granted authorial control. They remain the youngest directors contracted in the institution's 80-year history. I was hired to teach them how to do it and was responsible for final product delivery. I had the unique perspective of facilitating a lesson design in media literacy from classroom inception through creative development, professional production and international distribution.

The film went on to win audience and jury awards for excellence and innovation at major festivals, positive reviews and significant mainstream media attention. It is among the select NFB films available for online viewing. Due to *SALT*'s multiple narrative structure that incorporates a *making-of* filmmaker perspective, a substantial part of the processual data is immediately accessible to teachers and researchers. Since *Salt* I have made several more films with many emerging filmmakers employing the same basic method.

Basis of Research

My Master's thesis analyzed *SALT* as a case study in the creative processes of language arts production and argued that metaphors are constructs of affect designed to generate empathetic identification and language arts' production processes is affective inquiry. My PhD thesis proposed a basis of research for the teaching and evaluation of creativity by studying a concept of critical feeling to show how the method exosomatizes language

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art's process ontology that forms the affective data of emotional situations into semblances of the felt experiences.

In addition to teaching filmmaking's basic art and craft, the method provides a professionally recognized, work-based-learning model for researching

- (1) art as productive knowledge,
- (2) writing as storymaking,
- (3) creativity as the production of meaning
- (4) the creative process as the presentational abstraction of affective data.

Research Questions

1. How can creativity be fostered through affective inquiry as storytelling in the English language arts?
2. How can the creative processes of documentary filmmaking offer a practical model of affective inquiry as storytelling in the English language arts?

The questions emerged from my experience teaching and producing youth-directed documentary films that served as a reflective practicum. The project demonstrated how film's synaesthetic production technologies of scripting, shooting and editing augment storytelling's fundamental creative processes of empathetic identification as an externalization of affective bricolage I call storymaking.

Grounded Concepts

My PhD thesis answered the questions by identifying three core concepts of creative process knowledge. Each core concept substantiates a fundamental principle of an established theory of creativity by pairing it with an analagous professional practice and a comparative basic social process. The concepts are formalized by showing how they fit in a basic belief system of artistic knowledge.

Radical Creativity

Radical creativity is paired with the professional term flash and the basic social process called flash of intuition. It is formalized as art's ambient ontological processes as the ontoepistemic assumption of *divergence* as in a way of being to know of the dynamic processes by which reality comes to be. This ontological processual experience of *being to know* enacts a dynamic creative tension of catch and allow. It substantiates Vico's principle of verum factum and Sandra Luft's conceptualization of Vico's theory of poetic logic as the "ontological creativity" of human beingness that makes it so readily adaptable to its changing environment.

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Affective Inquiry

Affective inquiry is paired with the professional term *moment* and the basic social process of *empathetic identification*. It is formalized as art's ambient epistemological processes as the epigenetic assumption of *emergence*, as in a way of knowing to be of the relational dynamics of affective data in between the felt experience of knower, knowers, subject, subjects and knower/s as subject/s. This epistemological processual experience of *knowing to be* enacts a dynamic creative tension of be and see. It substantiates Damasio's principle of the *as-if body loop* and Massumi's conceptualization of Damasio's "feeling of what happens" as affective inquiry's creative process knowledge of self-production.

Critical Feeling

Critical feeling is paired with the professional term voice and the basic social process of show and tell. It is formalized as art's ambient methodological processes as the ontomethodic assumption of convergence as in a way of doing to be of the recreational dynamics of presentational voice emerging from the material of actual experiences of the knower/s subject/s as it is affirmed. This methodological processual experience of doing to be enacts a dynamic creative tension of look and listen. It substantiates Langer's principle of presentational abstraction in Langer's theory of creative process as the "dynamic matrix of life" that provides a biological basis of how art produces knowledge using "symbolic or symbolically transformed ambient[s], with endosomatic and exosomatic dimensions" produced from creative processes of acts, actions and activities generated from responding to and recognizing environmental situations.

Grounded Theory

Productionism is my theory to demonstrate how art's process knowledge of *coming into being* makes meaning from experiential acts of self-production. It involves three ambient experiences of creativity's dynamic processes that correspond to ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions distinguished by what feeling does to experience to make it clear and present within an ambient dynamic. The dynamic processes of feeling experience that Langer's act concept identifies, generate ambients of creative activity that produce categories of perceptual reality. The ambients form as affective reenactments of an emotion to the point they are perceived as divergence, emergence and convergence. It begins by responding to an impulse that is recognized intuitively, imaginatively, and presentationally. The ambients's perceptual forms flow along a dynamic process reality of being possible, to being actual, to being presentable, to being projectible.

All three reality experiences exist within each ambient. The *inbetweenness* of: potential possibilizing more potential; eventfulness actualizing more events; semblance presenting more semblances. Documentary's substantive example of the open *inbetweenness* of creativity's affective experiencing are the flashes, moments, and voices that emerge while scripting, shooting and editing. What makes documentary's storymaking model so effective in teaching creativity is that it emulates the processual flow of the creative

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advance in that flashes are more frequent during scripting; shooting is designed to produce moments; and editing is conducive to responding to the voices that emerge from the material.

Current Findings

Creativity can be fostered through affective inquiry as storytelling in the English language arts by distinguishing storytelling, as art's process knowledge of distribution, from storymaking, as art's process knowledge of production. The easiest way to do this is by understanding that when you are reading you are telling yourself a story. When you are writing, you are making your self a story. The story is a sandwich of possibility made from the clear and present feelings produced from the affective inquiry of your self and the selves of others. The possibility is ultimately, radically, and always humanity.

The creative processes of documentary filmmaking offer a practical model of affective inquiry as storytelling in the English language arts by exposing storymaking's affective edge between being and knowing and immersing the inquirer in a process ontology of artistic expression that exosomatizes creativity's basic social processes of self-production.

Documentary's production phase sequence of scripting intuition, recording imagination and assembling affirmation is a biomimetic externalization of creativity's basic social processes of feeling, seeing and saying. As a teachable model of creativity's dynamic processes of affective inquiry documentary promotes responsible criticality in language arts learning by remaining within a paradigm of artistic knowledge that replicates knowledge production's natural phase sequence of creative perception precedent to critical reflection. By distinguishing storymaking, from storytelling, documentary redefines writing from reading by clearly delineating the productive participant from the receptive spectator and illustrates the fundamental differences in the structural dynamics of Langer's concept of symbolic projection as what art does, and presentational abstraction, as how art is made.