



Laura: Welcome to the Creatively Connected Podcast from Education Closet, connecting teachers and ideas one glue stick at a time. Here's your hosts and K12 ArtChat founders, Matt and Laura Grundler.

Matt: Hey everybody, this is Matt and Laura. And we have an amazing host today. I know I say that every week, but they are.

Laura: I know, I'm super excited about John, though.

Matt: I know. So welcome to the Creatively Connected Classroom. This is actually episode ten, which is crazy. So we have this host by the name of John Spencer. He is the co author of the book "Launch." It's called, "using design thinking to boost creativity and bring out the maker and every student." So welcome, John. And we just want to talk with you and kind of learn a little bit more about who you are, and maybe kind of how you found your path down this idea of design thinking and Launching into kids' creativity.

John: Yeah, so I started out as a middle school teacher. Right now I'm a college professor, but I taught seventh and eighth graders in a title one school in Phoenix, Arizona. And you know ... You seem surprised-

Laura: Because Matt's from Phoenix.

Matt: I'm from Phoenix as well.

John: Are you really?

Matt: I was in Paradise Valley.

John: Okay, I was in Maryville.

Matt: Oh, okay, all right. Little rival there, that's all right. My dad is quite synonymous with wrestling. He was a wrestling coach for a good 30, almost 30 years at Paradise Valley. Yeah, so he's, he's quite synonymous in Phoenix for his his legacy of coaching.

Laura: So that's why we were [crosstalk 00:02:04]-



John: That reaction, I was like you either like Phoenix or you don't like Phoenix.

Matt: No, no, I enjoyed ... I'm sorry, go ahead.

John: No, no worries. So, I taught in in Phoenix and, you know, had a really cool experience way back when I was an eighth grade student of a creative project where I truly got to own the whole learning, you know, where I got to ask the questions, I got to do the research, I got to come up with the concepts on my own, and ultimately, you know, share it with an audience. But even though that's why I wanted to be an eighth grade social studies teacher, I didn't teach that way at first.

John: And for me, it's a couple things. One was, I tried one time doing a project with really, really open parameters and open inquiry and a lot of just like, kind of do what you want, and it tanked. So I knew that structure actually matters. And the other thing is, so I had that one little failure. The other piece was, there was just a lot of fear, you know, how do you fit it into the standards? What if it's crazy, what will the people think, what will my peers think? Can you do this if you're a new teacher, all those, you know, what about the, you know, what if it takes too long? I mean, all those standard fears that teachers experience.

John: And so it was interesting, because the very first time I did a project with true student ownership I chose a low risk [inaudible 00:03:31], we did this documentary project. And it was during testing week. So there was no new content to teach, right? So I knew if other people were showing videos, they're showing "Cars," we can make our own documentary. And I kind of went through that process. And I leaned on design thinking, which was something I'd used way back when I worked in a nonprofit for program development.

John: So a lot of people who have design thinking experience, they've used it in engineering, or they've used it for-

Laura: Corporate.

John: Publishing, or some kind of art aspect. Not a lot of people come at it from like, program development. But we, as a nonprofit, used it to design programs, because it was so human centered and so empathy driven, right? So I just leaned on that as a, it was a framework I learned in



college, and I really use it for so much of my own personal creative work. And so I actually got into it, like I said, kind of using something from my own life experience with my students. And I found that it worked.

John: And from there it evolved, you know, at first we really didn't do much of the inquiry and research aspect. I think we've kind of initially jumped to click into that ideation piece. There were a lot of mistakes me along the way. Times where it was still too unstructured, times where it was too structured and it required every person to be in every phase at same time, it was just a long journey for the next ten years or so after that. So, that's kind of my background.

Matt: Wow.

Laura: That's pretty amazing.

Matt: Yeah I can think about times that I've, in the past three years, I've used, you know, used that through some of my teaching, especially with my middles to olders, and to use that empathy piece to use that, okay, understanding someone else, it's just so powerful. And I think about all the little tips and tricks that I've learned along the way just from testing those out with those grade levels. And you just, it's almost a good way to learn through failure, because you're learning how to work all the edges and how to-

Laura: I think it speaks to the art of teaching, right? You're constantly practicing and, and refining, and reflecting, and it's design thinking is not unlike good teaching, you know? And I think that that's a huge part of it. And I think you hit on something really important, John, is that the fear involved for teachers is real. And we need to talk about that, because I think there's a fear that like, what will parents think? What will administrators, you know, am I teaching this standard the way that it's intended by the district or the state or whatever? And how do you give permission to teachers to take that risk?

John: You know, it's one of those things that I've noticed is that, you know, I obviously can't be the person giving the teachers permission.

Laura: Right.



John: But what I say is that before you even get started with it, start small. And get the stakeholders involved. So I know there's a common thing that says, you know, it's you're better off asking forgiveness than asking permission. And you hear that phrase all the time. But sometimes that makes sense. But for me, personally, if you have an even slightly reasonable administrator, then saying to them, "I want to do a short term design thinking project, and I want to pilot it," right? They love the word pilot because it's a non committal word, right?

John: So you say you want to pilot this and something about the word pilot, it just works. And then once they're onboard, you kind of thing about it from their perspective, they want to know that you're still teaching the standards, they want to know that you're still doing what you're supposed to. So I would say, you tell them, "I want to pilot it," and then you tell them your rationale for why. Like, we're still going to teach the standards, there's evidence that it boosts student engagement, we know that if engagement's higher than potentially achievement levels will be higher, you know, and so on and so forth. And you kind of pitch it to them like that. With parents, I think, what I usually have tried to do is help them to see this is what is used all the time in the real world.

John: And so when they know that this is a process that's used in the real world, they get it. You know, when I talk to parents, and I say, "Well, you know, one of the pieces of this is we want kids to engage in project management. And if they own the entire process, through the design thinking process, they'll also learn this skill of project management," almost every parent I meet has some level of project management in their job. They'll nod their head and go, "Oh, yeah, I never learned in school. And I wish I had." And so there's a lot of that that goes on. In fact, you guys have been using design thinking, and when you explain the process to people outside of education, what is their typical reaction to it?

Matt: I think a lot of is kind of amazement and just kind of like, wow, you mean, kids can really get that or understand that? They're blown away. They're like, "Wow, that's really expanded thought, that's almost at a higher level than what you would think or give kids credit for."



- Laura: Yeah, I would agree. I know that, gosh, like two or three years ago Matt met, there was a family coming through his school. And it's really his story. But it was kind of a cool story. The furniture design-
- Matt: Yeah, I was putting up some bulletin boards getting ready for the new school year, and some parents were walking through. And one of my bulletin boards had to do with design thinking. And it was the process of design thinking. And these parents, they didn't have their kids with them. But they were just touring our school, and they stopped. And I overheard the conversation outside in the hallway. So I had to kind of jump out there. And lo and behold, this parent, well, actually, both of them, they own a furniture design company, that their job is to create furniture for classroom design. You know, not your typical desks and square desks and chairs-
- Laura: It's amazing flexible furniture.
- Matt: They have these things called a cloud tables where they're little like crescent shapes, that you can either clump them together in pods or you can break them up all individually. And it's just, I mean, the ideas that are just so amazing. And it led into a lesson I do with my fourth graders based on furniture design.
- Laura: And they use it their company.
- Matt: Oh, yeah. And that was the thing that the parents were just like, "You know, we use this in our everyday job," they design it out of need, based on all kinds of things. So it's really crazy.
- Laura: Yeah, that was a very, like real world. And then they've, they've been kind enough to speak to students and to share that this is very real world experience. So it's a neat lesson. So tell us why Launch versus design thinking, what is it about that the idea of "Launch" that makes it different or unique or more teacher friendly?
- John: Yeah. So you know, it's one of those things where I really think that there's a lot of, there's a couple variations of, I guess, what made "Launch" different than a lot of the design thinking models that were out there. AJ Juliani and I collaborated on this. And, you know, we had both



us variations of other models. And we like them. The D school model, the IDEO model, I don't know how you say it-

Laura: It's IDEO.

John: Yeah, I thought so. I was like, I don't know. And The one out of Harvard that the AJ had been using, and he'd gotten to know this guy Edward [Clapper 00:11:14], as well, who was a part of that design thinking institute there. There were a couple of things that we wanted to do a little differently. One was the starting place. So the D school will tell you always start with empathy. In my experience, the starting place for design can vary.

John: Sometimes it starts with looking at nature, sometimes it starts with a problem, sometimes it starts with something else. And in some cases, you actually begin with that place first. And then as you do your research, that's when you gain your empathy. So the empathy piece is still critical. But we found that, you know, sometimes giving students a situation or a problem, and then really asking them to gain empathy during the, I guess, the understanding the process or problem piece, that was where the empathy came in. Other times, they really started with a place of empathy, and that drew them in later.

John: And so some of it was that timing piece, we also wanted to make it really explicit that there was going to be a structured inquiry place that asked tons of questions.

Laura: Yes.

John: And definitely a research place. And again, some of the models, they imply that there's research, but I think it's really important the students not only learn design, but they learn R&D, right? They learned that there's research that fuels the design. In fact, in my experience, even if the research involves looking at other prototypes that are similar, that piece often spurs more creativity, not less. And I remember that being kind of a surprising a-ha moment for me was that my assumption would be that they would just kind of copy other designs, and that's not what happened.



- John: So we had some things that were different than, you know, [inaudible 00:12:56] student friendly, you know?
- Matt: No, absolutely.
- Laura: Yeah.
- Matt: Something that just jumped out at me when you said the R&D portion of that, you have a quote that says, "Research isn't about reading, it's about discovering," and I think that is, you know, it's not just about looking at numbers, but it's also just about finding it out and looking into it.
- Laura: Yeah. Can you expand on that a little bit? Because when I read that, and I remember that, I remember reading it a while back, and I thought, oh, I wonder how reading teachers feel about that? No, I just from an art standpoint, it made perfect sense to me, because we're so observational as artists. And so it's about the reading, but then it's about connecting the dots and the observation pieces. So I was just curious if there's more you can say about that.
- John: So I think ... I'm definitely not anti-reading.
- Laura: Right, right, yeah.
- John: I think there's kind of two components that I think of for researching, and one is this just geeking out, just a natural curiosity. Like, I'm going to geek out on stuff. And then the other piece is discovery, you know, you specifically look for something, find it and you just run with it. That I think is, that's research. And sometimes research is reading, but sometimes it's talking to an expert, sometimes it's very mathematical, it's doing a data analysis or a needs assessment or something like that.
- John: Sometimes it is very hands on. It's playing with materials and manipulating them, moving them around. It's it's observing nature, it's, there's all kinds of aspects that lead to great design in research and, and they're all over the place. And so I think it's important that we remember there's a big definition of research and if it goes beyond just an informational text.



- Laura: I'm having flashbacks to high school, and even middle school and thinking about you being a former social studies teacher, that's all I remember about research in school, was like, going to the library and pulling the card catalog ... Dates me. You know-
- John: It's okay, I no microfiche, right? I think I know [crosstalk 00:15:02]-
- Laura: Oh yeah, I know that too. And, you know, pulling that, and I remember thinking there's got to be more to research than just this. I always thought it was so boring. It just wasn't enough hands-on for me, personally. And I really think that just even hearing you say the data analysis, and those kinds of things, and even interviews, and talking to people, like, that is so much more of a well rounded perspective. And I think that that's something that we just need to consider as teachers, is giving that just totally well-rounded perspective, you know?
- John: Yeah, and the other piece I think is, you know, so that's an aspect of it. But then it's also letting them own kind of the questions they're asking. And the way that they organize their research. So, I tend to be, well, [inaudible 00:15:51] I like to doodle and sketch-
- Laura: Yes, we love it.
- John: I know, that's a real shocker. So, even working on my doctorate, I will not be the note card person. Or the binder person. Like, I will always have to [sketchnote 00:16:11]. That is how I'm gonna make sense out of information. And if you ask me to do it another way I'm gonna do it another way to make you happy. But I'm still gonna sketch note. So, and I think it's a little bit of that. Giving students the permission to find the information on their own, ask the questions, but organize it in a way that it's who they are.
- Matt: Yeah, I think as schools, they're stuck with the idea of, or the aspiration that the more kids that they get engaged in things makes it I guess better, makes it-
- Laura: The quality-
- Matt: The quality add's supposed to be, they're supposed to be, that's the high end goal. Oh, well we have all these kids that are engaged. And are



they really engaged? Or are they just kind of going through the motions of being engaged. One of your videos that just blew my mind was the thing about student empowerment. The empowerment versus student engagement. And I'd really like for you to kind of expand on that a little bit more. Because that was just, like, eye opening, brain exploding. Yeah. All those things.

John: So, I think ... I love the definition of engagement from Phillip Schlecty, who kind of viewed it as your attention and commitment. And being engaged is being fully committed to a task, and paying attention to it. But that still implies that it's on the teacher to engage the students, right? And so, there's this idea of ... There's still less student agency. And so, the way I kind of think of it is as a spectrum from one side to the other with compliance being no student agency, a mix of student and teacher agency kind of in the engagement side, and then strong student agency in the empowerment side. And there's a time and a place for both, right?

John: There's a time when I want students to be engaged in a task. And they might not be empowered, necessarily, but that's okay. You're doing the Socratic seminar, you're doing a skill practice. You're doing something and you want it highly engaging. But the goal should always be that we could then move to that place of empowerment where there's agency and ownership. Because that's the piece that's going to transfer to life outside of the classroom. When there is no classroom, and teacher and structure. So that's kind of how I think about it.

Matt: What's the phrase the, the long term transfer of learning-

Laura: Enduring understanding.

John: Enduring understanding.

Laura: Yeah. You've mentioned inquiry quite a few times. And it's the A, ask lots of questions, you know, something that as a teacher leader that I work on a lot with our teachers is the inquiry process. And I find for whatever reason, that's something our teachers just really have to continue to refine. Do you have any tips or tricks for both teachers asking questions, but then also students asking better questions?



John: Yeah, you know, so I think for me the two pieces that helped, we're ... I guess three, one was just practice it, right? You just need more time to ask questions. And, you know, I remember having a ... thinking that I was doing a really good job on this, and having a student teacher who just observed and he said, "Well, what do you want me to observe?" And so I said, "How about discourse and questions."

John: And I figured that discourse would be about like, 50 to 75% student discourse versus me. And that turned out to be pretty right. It was about 75% student talking to each other and not me. However, when it came to questions, it was like 95% my questions. They weren't in the process of asking questions, even when they were engaged in discourse. And even when they were talking, we were talking about stuff, but they weren't asking their own questions.

John: And that was a huge takeaway for me. So I started saying, we're going to spend more time on this, we're going to be explicit about the types of questions that exist because I taught ELL and gave them sentence stems for questions. And then the last part, that intangible part that's just so hard is getting them to not be afraid to ask questions, right? That there's nothing wrong with questions. [crosstalk 00:20:24] works well for developing inquiry? Because, I mean, you mentioned that you were working on that.

Laura: Well, I work with all the art teachers and I, I'm in the curriculum department. And I think one of the things ... And maybe it's because we come from an art place, but just even starting with essential questions when we're writing our units is the best place to start. And then bringing them back to the big idea. So when you're making art, and you have a big idea, like identity. Really working in small groups with teachers to say, "What questions would you like kids to hear?" As you said, I mean, we're here in Texas, where we have lots of English language learners.

Laura: And so those sentence stems are really powerful, and those kinds of things. But just building in that method for them is maybe a little foreign too because sometimes they want to just go to the making of art. And so the discovery around the research and those pieces is what we're trying to really pull them forward to do as the teachers. We're definitely in the midst of that process.



- Susan Riley: Hi there. It's Susan Riley from education closet. You know, John Spencer has been a favorite of mine ever since his book "Launch" came out, as you can hear, he's brilliant. And so in tune with what teaching is all about. Definitely check out his other book "Empower" for a great read on getting students to own their learning. And for more conversations like this, tune into our next K12 Art Chat on Thursday night at 8:30 p.m. central.
- John: The struggle that I've seen, I mean, as an outside observer who loves art is that I feel like it's really hit or miss with art teachers in terms of how much inquiry or discourse goes on about the artistic process [crosstalk 00:22:10]-
- Laura: Right.
- John: But then also we talk about empowerment in agency, it's really less common than I would hope it would be to have art teachers that give students a voice and choice in art. There's a lot of art projects that are they're gonna give the exact same-
- Laura: I talk about this all the time, John. It drives me nuts. [crosstalk 00:22:37]-
- John: I've seen a thousand of the single cactus silhouette with in the background [crosstalk 00:22:48]-
- Laura: Yes.
- John: Phoenix, right? And they're told to put the cactus right here. And they all look identical and, and I go, that's not the way artists think.
- Laura: Right.
- Matt: No.
- Laura: That's actually what we're hoping to fight against. I tell my teachers all the time, I'm like, "I don't want to see matching penguins in your hallway." You know, I want to see the kids make artistic choices, I want them to have value in the process of making ... the learning happens in the process. And I will tell you, so there's been a lot of, I would say, theoretical changes in art education over the years, more recently than



not. But just on a side note, I came from Art education-land, being taught this process called discipline based art education. And it was very skill based. And it was very step by step.

Laura: So there is a generation of teachers, and not all of that is bad, because they're there are some, some really good pieces inherent in DBAE, they have a lot of historical connections, a lot of vocabulary connections, a lot of cultural connections are tied into that process.

Laura: But the making of the art was much more step by step. So now we've transitioned to a place of like, we promote studio habits of mind from Project Zero out of Harvard, which is really thinking like an artist.

Laura: And so, giving kids the ability to envision their artwork, or understanding the art world around them and their world, and their community around them, those kinds of things. So I think that we're in the midst of an art education transformation right now. And I hope that our little chat, and Matt and I and this podcast can be helpful to that. But I could not agree with you more about the Saguaro cactus silhouette.

John: I think nobody is doing it outside of Arizona, it's a unique elementary art project. But I saw plenty of those.

Matt: It might be, you know, I think, as you were saying, teachers giving that time to the students and to almost kind of model those questions. I know myself personally ... I taught elementary for 13 years. But towards the last three, when my whole philosophy changed, I was kind of reminding the kids constantly, I'm like, "Okay, the question you should be asking is how can I make this better? Or what improvements can I make? Not is it good or is it okay."

Matt: And that became the mindset. And so those kids, you know, really started where they would get up, they would do a gallery walk and take a look at everybody's art, you know, in the mid process, and then all of a sudden, they were asking these questions of, "Oh, I notice," or, "I see," or, "I'm thinking about doing this," you know, "What do you think on that?" Not, "What do you think of my art? Oh my gosh, this is terrible. What do you think?" So, you're kind of like, loading that question almost.



Laura: Well, and as you get to an older grade level, they just want to know what I have to do to get the A. Or, you know, what do I have to do to pass on the rubric. That's so not what we want.

John: What do you want me to do? Not what do I want to do, what do you want to do? And that's just, it's crazy.

Laura: It goes back to what you were saying about student empowerment, we have to empower their voice, they have to learn that they have the artistic choice to express themselves in a meaningful way, to express their ideas. And, you know, it's a movement we're working on it.

John: Oh, gosh, yes. [inaudible 00:26:22] that's a good thing.

Laura: In one of the videos that we re watched today, you were talking about creating every day, which is funny, because on my Instagram, I always use the hashtag "create every day," because I really believe in that. I think that if you're not ... I went through a period of like, seven years when I was an administrator, a non arts administrator. Now, I'm an arts administrator. But when I was a campus level administrator, I didn't make art. And I didn't feel whole, I didn't feel like a whole person. So now I have this big push to try to get people to create every day. But I think the thing that I love most about what you said in that video was that it doesn't have to be tangible, necessarily.

Laura: That that creation could be just putting good out in the world and making a difference in somebody's day. And that spoke to my heart in a way that ... I just love that message. How did you I mean, how did you come up with that message, that video that ... It's just so important.

John: Thank you. I appreciate that. I had a moment where I was suddenly doing like, committee work, it wasn't, you know, they didn't want to do ... That wasn't actually accomplishing anything. And I was teaching, and so there was definitely the creative element of teaching that was valuable. I just remember having this conversation with somebody, a friend of mine and saying, "I feel like I'm not doing what I want to be doing. And I'm not doing what fuels me." And he said, you know, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "Well, what I really want to do is make art and make a difference." And so he's like, "You're making a difference, right? Are you making stuff too?"



- John: And I define art very broadly. I just want to point that out.
- Laura: I think we do too.
- John: You know, a coding project, or it could be writing, I love to write. I write almost every day. Or even little sketch videos. So I mean, I'm not talking painting or sculpting or anything like that. I've gotten into painting more recently.
- Laura: Digital painting or actual painting?
- John: Actual painting.
- Matt: Nice.
- John: [crosstalk 00:28:23] was really into it. And so we got some canvases. And I mean cheap ... And just started painting. And I did one, I'll do a few more, and actually did a couple. But yeah, I mean, basically, I was like, I really want to be doing that. And for me, it was giving myself the permission to be making something that wasn't for my classroom. And I think for some people making for their classroom is enough.
- John: But for me, just, I dry up from not making something outside the classroom. I just had this, like, I feel empty moment.
- Laura: I totally relate to that. I really, really do.
- John: [crosstalk 00:29:09] draw, and sketches, whatever else, you know? I need to get back to that. So I started getting back to that.
- Laura: So with your videos, they're really stellar, like, they're well done, they're your sketches. How do you make them? I mean, just from an arty standpoint-
- Matt: And me from a tech standpoint, I'm always curious on what people use to make, you know, their introduction videos, their whatever. And so I'm just always curious if you could expand a little bit more on like, how-
- John: So, my process is really, like more laborious than it should be. There are cool apps that do a lot of the animation stuff for you. I can't do digital drawing. So that's the first thing. I have to draw on a piece of paper. And



the other piece that's really bad is like, I can't draw on any kind of fancy paper. Because the moment it's fancy, I don't want to like screw up [crosstalk 00:30:10]-

Laura: Oh, we've gotta get you past that.

John: Always me drawing something on the back of a pile of recycle paper. The recycle paper, and it's just on the back, and then I just sketch something out on it. And then I scan it onto, what I've found works best is to scan it as a text, and not an image. And that gives it that really crisp black and white, because we don't have to ... It becomes easy visually. I'm realizing I'm probably being too detailed here.

Laura: No, I'm kind of loving it, just the fact that it's analog.

Matt: [inaudible 00:30:46] graphic design, so, I'm kind of nerding out on that.

John: So, what I do is I scan it, and I might use a Sharpie, I might use a pen, or I might use a pencil, and it gives me the variations on how heavy or thick lines are, but then what's cool is when it's scanned it just all turns out black, right? So, it doesn't matter. And then I just edit and move stuff around on Photoshop, and then I import those into iMovie and match it with the script, and that's my process.

Matt: That's cool.

Laura: That is cool. They look really professional. They're slick.

John: Thank you, I appreciate it. It's so funny, the other piece though is people, and I feel like this is true of almost all art. You probably get this yourself when you talk about artistic endeavors. People who don't do it always assume that it's faster, and then they get disappointed when you [crosstalk 00:31:42] find out how long ... And we have some abstract paintings in our house. And they're beautiful. And if you asked, "How long did that take?" It was days.

John: And some person who doesn't know that process, they go, "That looks like you can do it in an hour." But the intangible thing that you see, that you don't know what you're seeing is the time. Right?



- Laura: Oh yeah.
- Matt: Jackson Pollock is a great example. People always go, "Oh, dude, I could have done that in minutes." But they couldn't, right?
- John: No-
- Laura: There's no way they could do all those layers in minutes. It took him ... It was very laborious. People think that he just, "He just splattered it." No, he's walking around an entire canvas, all the way around it-
- John: Looking at it-
- Laura: Looking at it, and intently thinking about where to place the splatters. Yeah. The process.
- John: [inaudible 00:32:33] graphic design, right? I mean, it's the same thing where people are like, "Oh, it's just graphic design." They don't know that there's a theoretical foundation, they don't know that there's intentionality for every piece that you're doing. So like, I'll do a minute half or two minute video. And it'll take four hours from start to finish to create it. And people hear ... "How long did that take you?" And you say four hours, and you can just watch their face drop. Wow, you really wasted time.
- Matt: No, Laura and I have had many conversations like that. She's like, "Oh, my gosh, how long did that take you?" On a logo or something. And she's like, "How long did it take you?" It's like, oh, gosh, that was terrible.
- Laura: I'm an impatient person. And, like, I like to have something that I can start and walk away from. And so it dries, and I can be working on something else. With you guys that sit in front of the computers, I'm like, oh, I just can't do it. But to each his own, right?
- John: This is one of the things I would love to see change in schools, which is ... I don't think you have to do this all the time. But I think what I would love to see is that like, at least one time a year, I would love to see students at all levels work on a project that takes days and days and days.



Laura:

Yes.

John:

And really goes through the slow process, if only to realize that everything they're consuming took just hours and hours of prep, right? To go to a restaurant and realize that the chef didn't just cook it up easily, but that they spent forever designing the recipes there. To watch a movie and to know it took months to make. We went to the opera. And it sounds like ... To people who don't enjoy opera, it sounds crazy that they spend days and days and days rehearsing for a show, that's only going to be available for five days, right? But that's the beauty of it, right? They spend forever perfecting this thing. And then it's only there for five days. And it's beautiful for five days while it lasts. And that's it.

John:

And I think the more that happens, the more I think you get to appreciate the creative work around you. And I think that doesn't happen with kids who do tons of tiny short term projects, and never get a chance to realize that creative work takes a long time.

Matt:

Yeah, I love the term you used, which was critical consuming. And I know, you know, in one of your videos, you actually said the uncritical consuming and turning that into critical consuming plus creating ... I mean, I know myself, I've become kind of a classic movie person now. I used to not be. My wife is a really well viewed classic movie person.

Matt:

And so when I actually sat down and watched it from an art point of view, you know, with the camera angles, with the scripts that were written, it took a whole new level of respect for them. And not just go, it's just an old movie.

Laura:

Yeah, it's black and white. But I think for him, I don't think he would have been interested in if he hadn't had [inaudible 00:35:52] telling you about it beforehand.

John:

And having the interesting information, or even you know, I started the whole film club with my elementary kids after school. We met like, one day a week. And we ended up creating a film not, you know, a YouTube video it was an actual film where you had to think about all the aspects of art.



- Laura: And storyline. Pulling it all together, and all of that. It just takes tremendous amount of time. But I don't think we give kids that opportunity enough.
- John: No.
- Laura: It's true.
- John: No, I even think, I mean, you mentioned YouTube. I even feel like ... There's a YouTube channel that I love. It's called Nerd Writer.
- Laura: I have to check that out.
- John: It covers music, pop culture, Art, politics occasionally. One of the things I love is that they're just well crafted, right? So even stuff like that, even helping students to see like, the short form can be done really well. Like, it doesn't have to be a dude playing a video games [crosstalk 00:36:58].
- Laura: We have an 11 year old that would watch that all the time.
- Matt: Minecraft. Yeah.
- John: Yeah, I mean, I did a Lego stop animation. And I pulled up several really just amazing stop animations. And the kids were just so blown away. And then we did it. And they did one and they were like, "Oh, my gosh, this is just terrible." I'm like, well now you know how to process it. So how do you improve it now? And all of a sudden, they're like, "Oh, I know I can do this, I can do that, I can do ..." And then their first go at it versus their second go at it, even their first two their second was such huge improvements that it was like, you know, this is only one shot you know? I mean, so it was pretty [inaudible 00:37:42].
- Matt: You know, this is kind of on the same note about long projects, and bringing it back to something you said very beginning of our conversation. You mentioned that when you were in middle school you had a project that kind of clicked for you. And it made me, like I had vivid memories of Mrs. Harjo's class and the eighth grade. Because honestly, I think that that's when I decided I was going to be an artist.



Matt: We had a project, and she picked four kids for ... The Oklahoma City Arts Festival had a student installation, and they had picked our school to do this student installation. And she said, "Okay, these are the ... " talk about a design challenge. "Here's some chicken wire, and you've got these materials. And now you need to do an installation that's going to be seen at Arts Festival. And it's due in two weeks. Go."

Matt: Yeah, and it was ... but I will tell you, it's one of the most vivid memories I have at school. And I was so proud of myself and our group. And the fact that we created this sculpture that we were able to install next to all these professional artists, that kind of opportunity for an eighth grader is truly priceless. And the learning in that process. I don't think she knew she was doing design thinking or giving us a design challenge or anything. It was just, "You guys can do this, let's do it." But transformational for me. And I was kind of curious. I wanted to hear more about your story.

John: So, my story was I had this National History Day project. And I had had a teacher who encouraged me, you know, she knew that I cared about baseball, she knew that I cared about things going on in the world, kind of a social justice element a little bit there. And she knew that I just enjoyed history. So she invited me to be a part of this project. And it was, it was kind of co-curricular. You know, I had some time to work on it in the [inaudible 00:39:44]. I also did a lot of it out of school.

John: I just remember every part of the process, I got to own the process. And I loved it and I hated it at the same time, I loved the freedom. But I also kept going to her and saying, like, "Is this good enough?" And she would say, you know, "What do you think?"

John: I still remember, you know, coming up with my topic, and I had like, ten topics written down and, and I said, "Here are my ideas, which one should I do? And she said, "Well, which one do you think [crosstalk 00:40:18]." And I was like, "Crap, this is not gonna work." I came up with my research. And I said, you know, "How many sources do we need?" And she said, "Well, how many sources do you think someone needs before they become an expert?" And I was like, dang it. It was like talking to Yoda, right? You just knew you weren't [crosstalk 00:40:35] straight answers.



- John: And so I knew at this point, uh-oh, this is gonna be like, I have to own it. But it was so exciting, because, you know, I say that, but she was also consistently offering feedback. She was giving help, she was helping me find resources. A couple times she did do some kind of, you know, one on one tutoring on some skill that I didn't have where she had to show me. But it was always just enough help, right? It was always at that place of just enough help. And, yeah, it was a really powerful experience for me. And I don't think I, at that point, decided I wanted to become a teacher. In fact, I still would have told you at the time that I would be, you'd be crazy to be a middle school teacher.
- John: It was my moment of saying, "I love doing creative work. I love sharing my creative work. It's worth doing." So that really shaped me forever.
- Matt: That's awesome. So, you know, you talked about the process, you talked about feedback. I mean, what is your ... How do you feel some, like, you could give someone advice on how to include feedback in their making process?
- John: So I think there's a couple things. You mentioned, like the feedback carousel, right? Having them give feedback and this, I love that structure. There are these really short structures that work well, like the see, think, wonder or-
- Laura: Yay. We love artful thinking.
- Matt: All about that.
- John: Yeah, I mean, all of that. The critical friend structure I think works really well. Then self assessments, you know, having them self reflect, having them do self reflection surveys, which I found to be really helpful. Especially for some of the kids who struggled with verbal reasoning, they did really well with surveys as opposed to open ended questions, checklists. You know, where that work is kind of a diagnostics.
- John: So instead of giving them a rubric, you give them kind of a set of checklists, and they check off as a diagnostic where it is they're going. So those are all things that I found to be helpful. And what I love is that you can do this every part of the design process, right? So it's not just in the,



you know, you might naturally think, with "Launch," like, oh, he's gonna highlight and fix.

John: But actually, I think that the self and peer assessment is happening in every part of the journey.

Matt: Absolutely.

Laura: So much to chew on from this conversation. I'm still excited that you do see, think, wonder. Yay. I'm just curious. If you were going to impart wisdom to our listeners as a last shout out, what would it be? What would you tell our listeners?

John: I would just say, honestly, you know, keep doing what you're doing. You know, I think that art is always going to be what changes the world. It sounds a little cliché, but it is deeply powerful. But also we know that true art has to include voice and choice, right? It's the difference between a recipe and art. And so the more that that happens, the more that we we're ultimately empowering kids to be makers. And that's what we want to see.

Matt: Wow.

Laura: On that note ... That was wonderful. [crosstalk 00:43:49] a happy heart. Will you come talk to my teachers? Well, thank you.

Matt: Can't thank you enough, John, that was awesome.

John: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

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