



Creative Youth Development: What's in a Name? – Question Responses from Panelists

Follow-up webinar responses from Karen LaShelle, Executive Director, Creative Action, Austin, TX

How do you source and train your teaching artist staff?

Our hiring process begins with a standard resume and letter of interest screening, followed by an application workshop during which each candidate facilitates a short activity while the other candidates participate as students. This workshop gives us a better idea of how our candidates approach teaching, as most of them have a wealth of arts experience, but little to no teaching experience. Additionally, it helps us gauge their energy and willingness to play, to be flexible, and for some, to get out of their comfort zone and try something new.

Candidates include practicing artists in the Austin area, transplants to the city, new college grads. Additionally, we are lucky to hire at least ten new teaching artists every year just from word of mouth and recommendations from current staff.

About 40% of our 80+ teaching artists are new with our company every year. All new teaching artists first go through 20 hours of new hire orientation and training which focuses on basic classroom management skills, an understanding of social emotional learning, setting up their classroom culture, and developing an understanding of educational terms such as scaffolding, growth mindset, mindfulness, etc. All of this is layered with ongoing dialogue about power, privilege, and bias and how they inform our work across our communities of students.

Throughout the year, all teaching artists participate in a three-hour training every other Friday, totaling 45 hours of additional training. Each training module falls primarily into one of these five areas:

- youth development,
- arts-based skills,
- social emotional learning,
- inquiry-based education and
- social justice.

Within each training session, teaching artists have an opportunity to understand concepts, try out ideas, dialogue with their peers, and apply what they learn to their program. Because so many of our teaching artists come with high levels of artistic skills, we spend about 80% of our training time supporting their growth as facilitators, mentors, leaders, and thinkers who apply their arts knowledge

to the custom curriculum they create. Training sessions are led by our leadership team from different departments (approx 10 staff), most of whom are former teaching artists, and we empower veteran teaching artists to mentor their new peers.

Additionally, all Teaching Artists have a dedicated “Team Lead” who reviews their lesson plans, regularly observes their teaching, model teaches for them when needed and coaches throughout the year.

What are the essential attributes of a CYD teaching artist?

Because CYD centers on the life skills development of youth through creative experiences, we have found three essential qualities in a teaching artist that best set them up for success and longevity with our programs:

- 1) They demonstrate high levels of artistic rigor and dedication to their craft: our most tenured TA’s continue to learn and develop their own artistic skills when preparing their curriculum and teaching them to youth, and many of them stay active in the arts community in Austin.
- 2) They recognize how vital they are as role models and remain consistent in their respectful treatment of everyone involved in the program, youth and adults. Their behavior promotes trust and respect.
- 3) They appreciate and can articulate the co-learner environment. They ensure that their classroom spaces are built on valuing each young person for what they bring to the group and navigate the delicate balance of sharing power and supporting student autonomy as they move through each project.

How does Creative Action measure impact?

We have our own evaluation system measuring the growth of our students along a spectrum, specifically looking at their development as Creative Artists, Courageous Allies, Critical Thinkers and Confident Leaders. Beginning in the fall of 2017 we are implementing a new set of validated tools looking at MESH (Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits).

How is long term impact evaluated?

So far, we have not done a formal longitudinal study of our youth, however we are working towards this in the coming years.

Are the partnerships determined by the students' interest, or are the partners pre-selected by Creative Action?

Due to the amount of lead time to plan and develop relationships with programmatic partners, youth do not, at this time, choose the partners we work with. However, the themes, content, and stories explored all come from the youth, their experiences and their inquiries.

Does Creative Action work with counselors or social workers for youth who may be experiences deeper issues?

We do for select projects and use a referral network and process for programs with less direct interaction with counselors.

How long do participants typically engage and "stay" with the organization?

Elementary youth typically engage throughout most of their entire K-5 experience. Our Middle School youth tend to be involved for at least 2 of 3 years. Our High School youth sometimes come from the Middle School pool, and sometimes being in our High School program is their first engagement with the organization. Most youth who are in the High School program stay a minimum of two years and many participate for 3-4 years.

Are the majority of the youth you serve engaged in arts programs at their schools? If so, how do you differentiate what you're teaching them in your programs to what they are being taught in school arts programs?

We have a mix, however many of our youth do not participate at their schools, especially in theatre where it may be more competitive to get cast in a show. Our students typically come with a strong interest in learning an art form *and* learning how to use their skills in the community to advance social change. Our programs are different than school based art programs in a few ways: our focus on youth development beyond arts skill acquisition, and the amount of time our youth spend learning about the topics their art work explores and expresses. As one student said to me recently “in an art class you might learn how to shade a circle, or how to mix paint, but here we are thinking about *why* we are painting something and *what* we are painting--and the impact this art will have in the community.”

How is CYD practiced with younger age groups (6-10 years)?

Currently, the National conversation and research around CYD involves older youth, however in our elementary after school program at Creative Action we explicitly design programs that nurture the same qualities. Our elementary youth participate at their school campuses and attend 6-15 hours each week. In their classes they are working on exciting arts-based projects through which they are learning arts skills, learning how to work as a group, exploring culturally and socially relevant content, and supported by a trained professional teaching artist who is creative a safe and supportive learning environment.

Follow-up webinar responses from Nicole Amri, Program Director, SAY Sí, San Antonio, TX

How do you source and train your teaching artist staff? What are the essential attributes of a CYD teaching artist?

SAY Sí is a relatively small organization with a [staff](#) of 15 not including quarter/part-time alumni instructors who teach in our community-based programs. 8 program staff (teaching artists), 4 administrative staff, 2 support staff and 1 Artistic | Executive Director. Many of our teaching artists have been with us for many years; however, as our programs have grown we've had to develop more formal practices of job training. It's been a learning experience. Many of our practices for TA's follow how we "train" or prepare our students informally: project-based and on-the-job experiences; formally: probation-period where new TA is mentored by partner instructor and prioritizes observation, staff-curated learning meetings once a month, program planning annually that includes refreshers and professional development workshops and monthly program/TA check ins with A|E and Program Directors. We're also developing our practice of "studio visits" where each program is visited for a short amount of time weekly including student check-ins and teaching artist observations. What to look for in our teaching artists or "essential attributes" can be subjective but start with the culture of your organization. For us, we're looking for magical mentors. Practicing professional artists who are dedicated to our mission and core values. Unfortunately, you can't bottle that up and sell it but instead must grow and nurture it. From the time of interview through their nth year with us we're looking for certain things: dedication to their craft, respect for youth and the mentor role, commitment to the team, sense of humor, and an interest in social justice.

[Sample Job Description](#)

How is long term impact evaluated?

Overview of evaluation process:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1Jec19gO6NSU3V6VzhHVENpV0k/view>

Are the majority of these youth engaged in arts programs at their schools? If so, how do you differentiate what you're teaching them in your programs to what they are being taught in school arts programs?

Our on-site programs operate completely independently from schools. However, even in our in-school partnerships we don't necessarily mind the art program curriculum unless it's specifically asked for (which is rare). The reality is that we communicate that while our [community-based program](#) expands student artistic skills the majority of our work lies in social-emotional learning and connecting creative thinking with what the school or student population is not getting enough of. So what we do with each partner/school is ask who they want us to serve and what they need, then, we meet our students and ask them the same questions. We get to know them, what they like, what inspires them and we just experiment away while building some key competencies and a sense of community.

How is CYD practiced with younger age groups? (6-10 years)

See previous answer. While we try to listen to our younger students as they explore and discover themselves and the world around them, we rely on understanding their developmental stages. We do our SAY Sí thing while keeping in mind Waldorf Education, STEAM education, SEL skill-building and play!