


Chapter 6

Counter–Melodies and Creativity: Filling the Gaps in a Rural Colorado School

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an introduction to the Pre-Texts method for integrating civics, innovation, and literacy. It draws on the experience of Lindsay Bobyak and Sophie Brown in using Pre-Texts with elementary students as part of Creative Roots Collective, which provides educational opportunities in rural Colorado. This chapter provides tangible strategies for elementary teachers and educators which can improve literacy and oracy outcomes for students and bridge the gap between the idealism and practicality of a creative, collaborative, and co-owned classroom experience. The chapter provides vignettes of the arts-based protocol in action and breaks down the component Pre-Texts activities. Finally, the authors look at positive changes in student behavior and provide guidance for integrating Pre-Texts into the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

The benefits of music and arts education are so widely evidenced (Hallam, 2015; Barton & Baguley, 2017; Lloyd, 2017; Creech et al., 2021 and Váradi, 2022) that our purpose here is not to convince the reader of the value of arts education. Neither is this chapter a polemic about how the arts have steadily been squeezed out of the public-school timetable and chronically under-resourced, despite 88% of Americans agreeing that arts education is a vital component of a well-rounded education (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021, p. 5). Our starting point is that arts are important for their own sake and for supporting students in their wider education. This chapter discusses *how* to take this conviction into the classroom and use the arts to support literacy and other core competencies.

This chapter reflects on music and arts provision in a rural Colorado school on a day when the school would usually be closed. Lindsay Bobyak is a musician and teaching artist based in the Glenwood Springs area. In 2020, she set up Creative Roots Collective and began providing free music education and literacy support at Cactus Valley Elementary in 2020. Lindsay uses Pre-Texts, an arts-integration protocol for engaging with written texts, to support literacy, creativity, and socio-emotional development among her students. Lindsay was trained in the Pre-Texts method as part of her training with the Global Leaders Institute, a year-long program for musicians which provides tools for socially impactful careers.

We share our experience of using the arts to inspire a love of reading in students. This chapter is intended as an introduction and practical guide for elementary school teachers on how the Pre-Texts method can be integrated into their routines. Pre-Texts is a curation of practices which facilitate the integration of literacy, civics, and creativity while tackling compulsory texts. Wherever reading is required, be it English, History, or Social Science, higher education or elementary school, the Pre-Texts protocol can be activated. As Doris Sommer, the curator and developer of the protocol might say, “Press play to teach anything” (2021, p. 73). We draw on our experience as Pre-Texts facilitators, connecting the Pre-Texts guidelines to our experiences with elementary-age students. We hope this chapter provides a practical guide to a set of tools which can improve student outcomes and make teachers’ lives easier. These are tangible strategies that bridge the gap between the idealism and practicality of a creative, collaborative, and co-owned classroom experience.

The exposition gives some context of Lindsay Bobyak’s work at Cactus Valley Elementary School in Silt, Colorado, and a theoretical introduction to the Pre-Texts protocol. The development section is structured around each step of the Pre-Texts process. We discuss the rationale for each part of the process, share vignettes of how Pre-Texts looks in action, and integrate relevant literature which supports the

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