

Alysia Lee - Radical Creativity Transcript

- Hello, hello, hello. My name is Alysia Lee, and I am so thrilled to join you today from my home, on the ancestral lands of the Piscataway Conoy, otherwise known as Baltimore city. I'm joining you here from my home office and also, I wanna give it a short visual description for those that would need that. And I am a pecan-browened skin woman, with big curly hair, black curly hair. And behind me, you'll see a piano to the one side of me, and a book to the other side. And I'm wearing a black top, with lots of geometric bright colors, and shapes and patterns. I am excited to talk to you today about one of my favorite things to talk about, and that is the revolution, that's right. I love to talk about the power of art education to propel us towards a better-transformed society, that is more inclusive, and more equitable for everyone, that's right. So, Viva la revolución. I'm gonna share with you this graphic, and this is from one of my favorite Instagram artists, and his name is Baba Yaga Biscuits. And in this piece of art, he tells us that, "Every civilization that has ever been, was just made up. Don't believe anyone who says it can't happen, a better world is possible." And when I think about the incredible words of Baba, it calls to mind my fundamental beliefs about the power of creativity and imagination. We as arts educators, and arts integration educators, and specialists, we are dealing with the fundamental building blocks that create transformation in our society. It's really interesting that Lucille Clifton, one of my favorite, favorite poets, she reminds us that, "We cannot create what we cannot imagine." And so when we know that to be true, okay, when we know that to be true, we know and understand that the power of creativity, the power of the creative process, the power of taking an idea and transforming it to a product, right. Those are the building blocks for innovation, revolution, for change, social transformation, for our cities and for our towns. Now, the other piece is about blooms and it's so important for us to remember, is that blooms taxonomy tells us that to create, is the highest order of thinking. And so, when we have all of these extra pieces in classrooms, these extra goals outside of just arts actions, right. Great teachers have extra goals, social-emotional learning, culturally responsive practices, anti-racist and anti-biased practice, right. When we're putting these things also through the sieve of our pedagogy, we have found, at Sister Cities Girl Choir, the out-of-school time music education program that I founded in 2012. We have found that the creative process, allowing students to create and respond musically for us, in our space, but also in other spaces, in a dance way, with theater, with visual arts, with media arts, right. Allowing students to respond to the world around them, using creativity, and the arts, is an incredible way for them to synthesize all that they know. An incredible way for them to build connections and belonging with those around them, an incredible way for them to explore various cultures and build empathy. And an incredible way for them to get closer to their own culture and person, their own identity, for them to understand themselves and their communities even deeper. So we present to you the idea, this term that we are using, to describe that work which is Radical Creativity. Now, what makes it radical? What makes it radical, Angela Davis says, it's radical if it's at the root, and that's right. So returning power, redistributing the power in your classroom back to the students, is the radical part, right. Allowing their voices to guide the

learning is the radical portion, and then of course, the creativity is what we do as artists, right. Making things out of ideas. So I'm gonna ask you to think about, what is the role of creativity in culturally relevant pedagogy? And that's what we've been developing, and I will share some of our findings and reflections. And by our, I mean my incredible team at Sister Cities Girl Choir. I founded Sister Cities Girl Choir in 2012, with about \$5,000 in the bank, and 12 young people. And within a year, we had over 250 young people in our program and a full staff. And we have never stopped yearning to learn, to be reflective, right. To use the creative process as a way, right, of understanding our own pedagogy, and elevating our pedagogy, in addition to elevating the work of the young people around us. And I'd like to present the map that we've been using to do that work. This is the Maryland Creative Process Map. And it's Maryland, because teaching artists, and arts educators, and arts integration folks, and school system specialists, and working artists, all were convened to look at how we could operationalize the fine arts standards. Just like many states around the country, Maryland in 2017, was adopting new fine arts standards, the new national core standards as their very own. And we were noticing then, that those standards center the creative process. And so, teachers were asking for a model to be able to do that, to operationalize these standards. And the creative process map you see here is what was created. So this lives in Maryland, at the Maryland State Department of Education, but it also lives at the Maryland State Arts Council. And it's often used as a tool to help arts organizations think about ways that they can share their creative process with their community. It's used at the State Department of Education to think about pedagogy, but also as a way to think about working collectively, and collaboratively as adults. So it's a really wonderful tool and I'm happy to talk you through it. So we start right here in front of our heart, right. And why in front of our heart? We start here because this is where the juice is, this is where the relevant questions that we have about life and living, and our experiences lie, they lie right here in that soul place. And so, we start with a big idea, and a big idea is usually a question that we have about something that's really important to us. Yeah, a question. Then we take that idea and we create something artistic, we respond artistically to that question. And now we have a draft, and I'm doing the same little emotions that you see on the icon there. We have a draft, right, and that draft is that explore pace, which is the second step of the creative process map, is that now we're exploring the idea in an artistic form. Maybe we're creating a movement phrase, maybe we're composing a descending melody. Yes. Maybe we are writing a monologue, right, to share our story, to respond to our big idea question. Then we elevate our work, and how we elevate it is just important that we elevate it, right. The first draft of something is not done, it's not finished, we elevate it in community. Sure, teacher feedback is a fundamental part of elevating student work, but so is peer feedback. And most importantly, is developing your students as self assessors. Now, when those three powers combine, our work begins to elevate, and we have opportunity to assess our work. Now, how do we assess the work, right? To decide whether it's ready to present or not. We look at two things. Number one, is this the core pulled up elevation of my artistic work? Am I working at my full potential artistically? Yes. And pulling down, is this the depth of information I hope to explore about my big idea? Have I been able to wring that idea out, and really explore it as deeply as I anticipated? if that's not the case, it's flimsy, and you can pull in

either direction to add some tautness, but when it's nice and taut, you're ready to fly. And it's time to present, And we present our work out to the world, and the world is folks we care about. So that might be our small classroom community, It might be a few core friends, It might be friends and family, at a after-school, out of school-time event. it might be putting it online, and sharing it with the global universe, yeah. So we share back out our work, back out to the world but we don't share without taking the time after that sharing to reflect, that's right. Eric Booth tells us that, when we don't reflect, the learning dissipates. And so, in knowing that this reflection is what propels us forward, and often gives us new questions to take into a new, fresh, big idea. So we've been using this map in Maryland and we've also been using the map at Sister Cities. We started using the map first to look at existing repertoire. So having our students unpack the repertoire they were studying, that was written by someone else, to unpack what might this composer's big idea be? What are they exploring? And we use it as a way to also elevate our students' understanding of how we would define success for the piece. We use it as a way to, kind of, center the musical skills that we were learning in the piece, through that sieve of the big idea, everything was being pulled there. Well, we wanted to elevate our work, and so in 2018, we threw out a gauntlet. A new art strategy goal, that by 2024, half, 50% percent of our repertoire would be repertoire created, that means written, by the purple community of Sister Cities Girl Choir. So that's the youth, the staff, the families of Sister Cities. And I'm excited to share that we were able to meet that goal early, yeah, we were able to meet the goal early. In 2020, of the 18 pieces of repertoire that we performed, nine of them were our original works. One of them was original work written by me, right. Because this is our whole community staff, teachers, right, students, families, siblings, parents, aunts, right. Really creating opportunities for us to create as a community. I invite you to explore, in my digital swag bag, one of the pieces from our song cycle, "When I Sing." And to start off with the first piece, "Home," which is an incredible song about home and belonging, written collaboratively by a group of girls from the choir. Now, I'd like to share what we've noticed about creativity. What have we noticed as the impact, from the shift in our pedagogy? And the list is pretty long, it's exciting too. Number one, around communication, we've noticed that our students are communicating. They're not just thinking about their thinking, so that's that metacognition, but they're talking about how they're thinking, not just what, right. Well, this is how I usually approach a problem, or, "Oh, I need a minute because in my brain likes to take a minute to rest before it shares out information." Or, "Oh, I know that I like to pounce and jump." So how can we work collaboratively with that, all of those different styles of learning and thinking. Reflection, our students are begging to reflect and enjoying the process of reflecting and thinking of it as a wheel that turns them, and spurs them to their next step creatively. There's tons of social-emotional learning competence happening, from students building empathy, from students working collaboratively as teammates, we're seeing tons of that, inclusive representation. Not to say that we don't think about inclusive representation, but we're finding that when the ideas that we're exploring in class, are the ideas that come from students. It's very easy then just to involve folks from their communities in our artistic process. And so, that representation, that inclusive representation that we were maybe, before trying to artificially implant, is now authentically there, which is really exciting, Critical thinking. Our

students are aware that they are orienting their brains as artists. And what that means for us, is that they are critical thinkers, and creative thinkers. Dynamic assessments. It has been very simple to weave in and out of this process, tons of formative assessment, ooh, yes. That assess is not just the artistic actions, but the process itself, right. So how are you modeling SEL competence? Where are you seeing your students model SEL competence in their work? How are you seeing the culturally-responsive goals that you have for your lesson? How are you seeing them show up in the work? Are students getting that message? Are students assessing students on their critical thinking? Has been a part of the way that we think about assessments. And also students asking for assessment, because they understand that teacher feedback, peer review and assessment, and self assessment. When they see those assessments, they know that that's a time for them to be able to elevate their work, based off of the feedback provided. So teach students, literally, being like, "Can we stop here and just assess? I think we need to just stop here and pull out the rubrics and assess the work, so we know in which direction, and how to move the work forward. That's great, sounds good to me. Aesthetic repertoires. Being able to shift our aestheticism to understand different realms of repertoires, right. So understanding hip hop music has a different aestheticism than country music, but they also have this common core, and connection as American music forms. Integrating other content, In theater, in the improv theater world, we used to have a phrase that says, "Speaking at the top of your intelligence," right. And when you speak at the top of your intelligence, it means that you show up on stage with all the information that you know, right. And so, what we we found is that this process allows students to do the same. Show up with all the knowledge you have. So yes, show up with your science knowledge, and your math class, and what you're learning in ELA, yeah, show up with all of that. Some information about geography and history, show up with all that information, but also show up with all of your informal learning. Show up with the cultural wisdom that you have, show up with what you observed this weekend hanging out with your cousin at your grandma's house. Yeah, hanging out on the stoop for two hours, you're gonna learn some things. Well, what did you learn? Bring it to class, yes. So there's a way to show up, and the totality of who you are is just enough, and is more than enough. And then finally, onto collaboration. Voice and agency through is the roof, students are able to make tons of choice, and they're able to make their voices heard. And they're learning how to balance that collaboratively, which is really exciting. So, that gets me next to these collaborative learning structures. So many of our collaborative learning structures think, pair, share, you know, round about the circle, all of those things. So many of them are from the art world, they're from music forms, they're from dance forms. And so, using those same formats to build new work, has been really exciting to see students collaborating in those ways, those authentic ways. And the last tO community exchange. So community exchange means, not just community outreach, that's a one way direction, but having some type of reciprocation. So we find that we're showing up to perform for communities, and there's not an opportunity for us just to, kind of, stand and park, and bark at folks at a senior center for instance. Instead, we have a lot of skills that we're developing amongst our students and staff, where we could have them actively participate in the music making. So that may look like a songwriting workshop for two hours, conclude after a performance. But it also may look like, just inviting them to sing along, it may

look like building some Bobby McFaren style song circles with folks. It may look like just having dialogue, right. Our students are really gaining a lot of skills in dialogue and conversation, about musical influences from the participants there, right. But there's some type of exchange that happens. We have something to share, and so does every person in our audience, and how can we have an exchange. That's where transformation lies, especially inter-generationally, so excited to see that. And finally, building relationships. We as art teachers, we really know our students, right, we do, because we spend time with them over the course of career, especially at the elementary level, right. It's like, I'm gonna teach you music from kindergarten, through fifth grade, right, or visual art. And so, we really do feel that sense. And a lot of times, I do hear a lot of arts integration teachers talking about the same kind of sense when they open up the creative box, that Pandora's box in their classroom, of creativity, they feel like they understand their students even more, and we have found the same thing. We have learned so much about the lived experiences of our students, and they've learned so much about us. It's become a place of safety and bravery, that surpasses our expectations, the expectations we had prior. We are really proud of the work of these young artists, and it inspires us to continue to elevate our pedagogy, to continue to use the creative practice and the creative process here, to elevate our work, to explore new ideas, right. To assess the quality of our teaching. Of course, it's also inspired us to create on our own, to share our ideas, musically, or artistically. ♪ it doesn't have to be like this ♪ ♪ It doesn't have to be like this ♪ ♪ It doesn't have to be like this ♪ ♪ I'm here to tell you ♪ ♪ It doesn't have to be like this ♪ ♪ Today another world is possible ♪ ♪ Today another world is possible ♪ ♪ It doesn't have to be like this ♪ Snap with me. ♪ It doesn't have to be like this ♪ ♪ It doesn't have to be you like this ♪ ♪ It doesn't have to be like this ♪ ♪ Because today another world is possible ♪ ♪ Today another world is possible ♪ So I hope that hearing a little bit about this, and about our work, please do explore some of the videos and performance. Hear these students, hear their voices, they have a lot to say about the world around them. And they have a lot to say about the future that they want to see. Radical Creativity. Thanks so much.