



EMPOWERED
CREATIVES

Breakthrough Public Schools Glenville Campus Project Report

2025

empoweredcreativesproject@gmail.com
empoweredcreativesproject.com

Project Overview

Objective:

In partnership with Breakthrough Public Schools, Empowered Creatives (EC) developed a new Storytelling Through Music Workshop for students aged K-2 that focused on storytelling, literacy development, and agency. EC composed original music and illustrations to accompany and build on the story of “The Three Little Pigs.” In this workshop, students had the opportunity to make choices that changed the trajectory of the story.

In addition to the Storytelling Through Music Workshop, EC ran two pre-developed Graphic Score Workshops with 2nd grade students that focused on encouraging creativity and musical composition through visual art practices.

Mission Alignment:

Empowered Creatives is founded on the belief that everyone is innately creative and every story has value. We aim to unleash the power of the arts through accessible and personalized programming and reimagine what individual and collective artistic expression can look like.

Through the Storytelling Through Music Workshop, EC designed experiences that encouraged intentional choice-making, highlighted how subtle shifts in language can change meaning and emotional tone, and illuminated the interconnectedness of music, art, and storytelling. Each activity was built to help students recognize their own creative power and understand how their decisions shape artistic outcomes.

In the Graphic Score Workshop, EC emphasized that music can be created using tools and instincts that students already possess. By introducing students to the concept of “graphic composition,” students were given accessible and intuitive methods for creating their own musical compositions. This approach affirmed that musical expression is not limited to those with formal training; it is something everyone can explore, interpret, and create.

Partners:

Breakthrough Public Schools- Glenville Campus

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Identifying Specific Needs

The Storytelling Through Music Workshop was intentionally designed to support the literacy-building needs of the Kindergarten students. EC focused on developing a workshop that emphasized word choice and age-appropriate storytelling, aligning activities with the students' current reading level. By pulling directly from the Kindergarten curriculum, the workshop reinforced a familiar story while also expanding students' understanding of how specific language choices can shift meaning, tone, and the overall direction of a narrative. Additionally, EC highlighted the natural connections between language, music, and visual art. Through original music and illustrations that changed in response to student decisions, the workshop offered a multi-modal creative experience and fostered a tangible sense of agency and expression.

The Graphic Score Workshop was similarly adapted to meet the needs of younger learners. EC simplified language to support comprehension and adjusted the performance process to ensure that every student's score was played—an intentional choice that reinforced inclusion and validated each child's creativity.

To further support accessibility and creativity, EC expanded the available art materials. Additional supplies such as yarn, stickers, and foam cut-outs provided tactile, engaging options that helped students translate their musical ideas into visual form.

Service Provided

Internal Development Process: (See Appendix A)

Workshop Breakdowns:

The Storytelling Through Music Workshop centered around the story of “The Three Little Pigs,” drawn directly from the Kindergarten curriculum. EC identified several moments in the story where students could redirect the narrative, and created original music and illustrations to bring each alternate pathway to life. The workshop began with one EC teaching artist narrating the story as originally written, while three others performed the accompanying musical score. This first readthrough established the baseline plot, characters, and emotional tone. EC then revisited the story with an interactive activity. At key pivot points aligned with emotional beats in the plot, students were invited to choose one of three descriptive words. Each option represented a different narrative direction, and EC presented original artwork illustrating how the scene would change based on the students’ selections. For example, while the traditional story describes the wolf “lurking” in the forest, students could instead decide that he was “having a picnic” or “riding his bike.” Once all choices were made, EC performed the entire newly shaped story. This final read-through incorporated the students’ selected words, the corresponding illustrations and the musical variations. Each choice that the students made influenced not only the storyline but also the artistic and musical pathways taken, underscoring the impact of student creativity and agency.

The Graphic Score Workshop introduced students to the concept and practice of creating “graphic scores” - visual representations of music that use shapes, colors, and symbols instead of traditional notation. Graphic scores teach fundamental compositional techniques, encourage open-ended musical exploration, and invite tactile creativity without requiring any prior musical training. EC teaching artists demonstrated how various artistic elements - such as color, shape, and line - can be used to convey emotions, and thus act as instructions for musicians to play and perform. Students then designed and created their own visual scores using a range of artistic elements. Each student had the opportunity to present their score to the class, and EC artists performed each visual score using improvisatory methods on their instruments, inspired by the visual instructions of each student. Throughout the workshop, EC emphasized that music is innate in everyone, instilling the idea that you do not need formal training or knowledge of traditional compositional practice to engage in and even create music.

Outcomes and Impacts

Skills Gained:

Empowered Creatives was able to develop a completely new and unique workshop tailored to the needs of Breakthrough students. Focusing on elements of literacy-building and storytelling, and using a story pulled directly from the Kindergarten curriculum, EC was able to expand their offerings and develop a new project that will be utilized in future partnerships.

Breakthrough students were able to participate in workshops that encouraged creative thinking, tactile artmaking, and emphasized agency and decision making- as well as introduced them to a variety of instruments and original music. Students were able to craft a unique story, interact with familiar material in a new way, and create original pieces of musical composition and art.

Participant Feedback:

“I enjoyed the 100% engagement of the students that EC worked with. The students were smiling, dancing, moving and creating. I also enjoyed the way EC was intentional in designing their workshops to meet the needs of our students and stay true to their mission.”

“A short anecdote: I saw one of the 2nd grade participants carefully holding their graphic score as they lined up for the bus after school. I asked her how she liked the workshop and she smiled a very big smile. I asked her what she liked about the workshop and she said, “I made music!”

-Mike Spencer, Breakthrough Staff

“I feel brave”

-Breakthrough Student

Lessons Learned:

“Throughout this partnership and development process EC...

Further explored bespoke curriculum development.

In designing the Storytelling Through Music Workshop specifically for Breakthrough Schools, we deepened our capacity to develop a curriculum that is accessible, flexible, and specific to the population we are serving.

Widened scope of skills utilized within our internal team.

In addition to curriculum development, the Storytelling Through Music Workshop required original composition and illustrations. This process prompted our team to take a thoughtful inventory of the skills we already possessed which may not have been utilized in previous workshops. By leaning into these strengths, we discovered new skills we can bring to future programming. This experience broadened our understanding of our internal capacity and revealed areas where team members can take on expanded creative roles.

Reinforced need for flexible facilitation methods.

Working with young students highlighted the importance of adaptable facilitation strategies that respond to shifting levels of attention and developmental readiness. This included adjusting language complexity to ensure comprehension and incorporating attention-retaining methods such as visual and verbal cues as well as active breaks. These workshops reinforced that effective facilitation with early learners requires flexibility.

Reinforced the importance of opportunities for visible and tangible student agency.

The Storytelling Through Music Workshop demonstrated that students will respond and rise to the opportunity to be involved in decision-making processes. We learned the value of presenting a tangible outcome of their agency.

Appendix A:

Breakthrough Public Schools

