

Workshop 6

Fostering Genuine Communication

Creating art is about taking an idea and finding a way to express it to an audience. Throughout the creative process, the role of communication is key. Artists need to develop their ideas, describe their work, and give and get feedback.

To foster genuine communication, teachers:

- Nurture artistic expression
- Talk with and listen to students
- Encourage student interaction and collaboration

Learning Goals

The goals of this workshop session are for you to:

- Identify communication challenges associated with each arts discipline
- Develop activities that nurture students' communication skills at each stage in the artistic process—creating, performing, and responding

Workshop Session (On Site)

Getting Ready (15 minutes)

The Language of Collaboration

Rodin's sculpture "The Thinker" is a well-known symbol of inquiry. The lone stoic figure depicts thinking as a solitary creative process. But many artistic and scientific creations emerge from the joint thinking, emotional connections, shared struggles, and passionate conversations common in collaborative relationships.

What special communication challenges arise in each discipline—dance, music, theatre, and visual art?

Read the question below that corresponds to your discipline, and try to formulate an answer for the group. As you discuss your answers, share some ways you help students acquire the communication skills they need.

Dance

Dancers and choreographers move and talk while rehearsing. But during a performance, the dancers interact and adjust to each other without speaking.

- What are some ways they communicate while onstage?

Music

During an orchestral concert, the musicians individually create sounds that blend into music.

- How do they communicate in order to play as an ensemble?

Theatre

The development and performance of a play requires the combined efforts of a director, actors, designers, and technicians.

- How do all these people meld into a company that shares a common vision of the playwright's intent?

Visual Art

Several artists work together designing and painting a mural.

- How do they agree on a style and employ their varying skills to create the unified picture?

Watching the Program (60 Minutes)

The information sheets found at the end of this chapter provide helpful background on the schools, arts programs, and individual classes featured in each segment.

Consider the following questions as you watch the program. You may stop the video after each segment to discuss the questions with your colleagues.

Dance: Mary Harding and Jennifer Rice Brandt [Improvising from Poetry and Sign Language]

- How and why is the subject of communication incorporated into this project?
- How do you help your students find creative ideas from unexpected sources?

Workshop Session (On Site), cont'd.

Visual Art: Jan Wilson [Commercial Design Class]

- How does Jan provide opportunities for students to practice their communication skills throughout this project?
- How do you enable students to communicate their own ideas through their artwork?

Theatre: John Fredricksen [Directing Fables]

- What communication challenges do John's students face in this project, and how does he prepare them to meet those challenges?
- How do you encourage interaction and collaboration among your students?

Music: Janice Hunton [Descriptive Praise]

- Discuss your reaction to the "descriptive praise" technique Janice uses with her students. What drawbacks are there, if any, to this method of teaching communication skills?
- How do you encourage positive, constructive communication among your students?

Activities and Discussion (45 minutes)

Thinking Made Public

In the arts, an important mode of communication is dialogue that makes thinking public. Throughout the creative process, students deepen their thinking about artistic choices by talking with teachers, interacting with other students, and reflecting on an audience's response.

Supportive teachers encourage students to:

- Discuss their approaches to solving a problem
- Explain their rationale
- Defend their work

When students have to explain and support their ideas, that is, to make their thinking public, they are challenged to re-examine their own reasoning and clarify their own intent. When and how do you encourage students to artistically express their own ideas, examine different perspectives, and refine and defend their choices?

On the worksheet titled *Ways of Making Thinking Public* (found on the following pages):

1. Identify typical challenges students face at each stage of the artistic process.
2. Fill in examples of how you might nurture students' artistic communication and 'public thinking' in your own discipline.

Use the descriptions provided as sample ideas to start your thinking.

After completing the worksheet, discuss the following questions.

- Thinking about the three stages of the artistic process—creating, performing, and responding—where is effective communication most difficult for your students?
- Are strong communication skills more or less important at any one or the other of these three stages? Why or why not?

Ways of Making Thinking Public

At each stage, fill in ways you foster genuine communication that makes student thinking public.

<p>Making Thinking Public at the</p> <p>Conception Stage</p> <p><i>Typical challenges at this stage involve:</i></p> <p>Trouble getting started or getting an initial idea</p> <p>Unfamiliarity with materials or vocabulary</p> <p>Not knowing the people you're working with</p> <p><i>Other challenges you can think of:</i></p>	<p>Dance Activity</p> <hr/> <p>Sample Music Activity A choir teacher wants to help four students create and perform an original composition. Since they have not worked together before, he encourages the students to sit down and talk about their ideas for the piece. As they discuss style, key signature, and dynamics, he encourages them to demonstrate their ideas by singing. The conversation intensifies as they explain and argue for their individual approaches. Eventually, the teacher helps them decide on a few possibilities, which they will explore at their next meeting.</p> <p>Another Music Activity</p> <hr/> <p>Theatre Activity</p> <hr/> <p>Visual Art Activity</p>
<p>Making Thinking Public at the</p> <p>Research/ Rehearsal Stage</p> <p><i>Typical challenges at this stage might involve:</i></p> <p>Uneven participation among group members</p> <p>Difficulty reaching consensus</p>	<p>Sample Dance Activity A couple of students want to enhance the emotional impact of the dance they are developing. Their teacher suggests they select several different pieces of music and experiment with them during rehearsal to determine how each affects their movements. To gauge an audience's response, the teacher asks a few students to watch the different versions and talk with her and the dancers about their emotional reaction. Subsequently, the dancers decide on the music they will use, and continue with rehearsals.</p> <p>Another Dance Activity</p> <hr/> <p>Music Activity</p>

Ways of Making Thinking Public

<p><i>Other challenges:</i></p>	<p>Theatre Activity</p>
	<p>Visual Art Activity</p>
<p>Making Thinking Public at the</p> <p>Performance Stage</p> <p><i>Typical challenges at this stage might involve:</i></p> <p>Deciding how to present work</p> <p>Asking for feedback, once the work is complete</p> <p><i>Other challenges:</i></p>	<p>Dance Activity</p>
	<p>Music Activity</p>
	<p>Sample Theatre Activity</p> <p>A week away from opening, the theatre teacher invites a small group of people to watch a run-through of the play. Afterwards, she facilitates a discussion with the audience, asking them how they responded and why. The students listen and take notes. The next day at rehearsal, the teacher and students talk about the varying reactions and work to make some changes that will more clearly communicate their intentions to the audience.</p> <p>Another Theatre Activity</p>
	<p>Sample Visual Art Activity</p> <p>An art class has created an exhibition of their work. A couple of the class members overhear a conversation by some students who are puzzled about the pieces on display. In class the next day, the students and their teacher talk about possible reasons for the unexpected response. They conclude that the order in which the artworks are presented could be improved. The teacher suggests they rearrange some of the objects, but the class cannot decide between two different approaches. So they conduct an experiment. They change the display and some class members talk to several viewers about their response. The next day, they rearrange the exhibit and collect feedback. Comparing and validating the responses, the students and teacher decide on an exhibit design that includes the strongest elements of both arrangements.</p> <p>Another Visual Art Activity</p>

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework

In your journal, describe a recent instance in which you observed two students having a meaningful conversation about their artistic work.

- What was the context of the conversation?
- Why was it meaningful? How was it initiated? What was the outcome?
- What can you do to make these types of conversations more common?

Dance

SEGMENT 1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mary Harding

14 years teaching

Jennifer Rice Brandt

11 years teaching

About the School

Arts High School

Perpich Center for Arts Education
Golden Valley, MN

Type:

Statewide residential program/
Arts-focused public high school

Grades:

11-12

Students:

300

Very mixed socio-economic status

Majors:

Dance, Literary Arts, Media Arts, Music,
Theatre, and Visual Art

About the Dance Program

Faculty:

2 full-time

Students:

20-30 dance majors + 75 non-majors

Facilities:

Above Average in the Area

- 1 large studio
- 2 locker rooms
- 120-seat black box theatre

Focus:

Modern dance-based ensemble program
that welcomes dancers with developed
talent as well as potential

Required Courses:

Ballet Technique, Composition,
Improvisation, Dance History, Dance
Criticism, Career Explorations, Anatomy
and Somatics, Music for Dance,
Repertory, Guest Artist Residency,
Conditioning, Yoga, and Jazz

Elective Courses:

Modern Dance, Arts Improvisation, Arts
and Ideas, Moving Anatomy, Viewpoints
in Dance and Theatre, and Drumming

Audition

Movement class, interview, and an arts-
oriented assignment. Prior to the
audition, each student is sent a list of 5
words and asked to bring in a new,
original artwork related to those words.
Dancers must present a short solo in any
style.

About the Featured Class

**Body Image/Sign Language
Project (for dance majors):**

Students participate in a series of
classes that combine sign language
and elements of abstraction to
generate movement material for
choreography.

Student Motivation:

Mixed. Some dancers lose their
motivation when they work on more
abstract dances. Others lose their
motivation as they realize that this is
not the field for them.

Student Level:

Mixed. Student backgrounds vary
widely. Some have just started their
dance education, while others have
been dancing for ten years or more.

In the Teacher's Words

***How do you and Jennifer
find time to plan and teach
together?***

*Mary Harding: Jennifer and I
have time during August planning
sessions to get the big ideas
worked out. Then it is catch as
catch can once we start teaching.
The actual teaching schedule is
fairly simple since the academic
teachers teach in the morning
and the arts classes take place in
the afternoon. This schedule
frees us to go into each other's
classrooms for projects like this.*

Visual Art

SEGMENT 2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Jan Wilson

27 years teaching

About the School

Nottingham High School
Hamilton, NJ

Type:
Suburban/Comprehensive

Grades:
9-12

Students:
1,450
Very mixed socio-economic status

Arts Requirement:

New Jersey has a 5-credit (one full year) graduation requirement in Visual Art, Music, Dance, or Theatre

About the Visual Art Program

Faculty:
2 full-time

Students:
220

Facilities:
Below Average in Area

- 1 full-time art studio
- 1 shared studio space

Required Courses:

Art Fundamentals or Advanced Fundamentals (first-year students working at an accelerated pace)

Elective Courses:

Drawing & Painting I, Advanced Drawing & Painting II, Sculpture & Ceramics, Mixed Media, Commercial Design & Illustration, and Honors Studio

About the Featured Class

Commercial Design & Illustration:

Students explore media, techniques, and motivation for creating art that responds to a specific market in this career-oriented course. This course challenges them to respond consistently to a commercial purpose.

Preparations/Prerequisites:

Eligible students are juniors or seniors who have completed Art Fundamentals and a minimum of at least one other visual art course. Many of the students are considering careers in art.

Typical Subsequent Courses:

Students are free to take any other offerings of the program including the Honors Studio, which is open only to seniors.

In the Teacher's Words

What are the goals of a commercial design class? How is it different from a traditional visual art class?

The course explores techniques for creative problem-solving work that responds to the needs of an outside source (client), rather than from within the students themselves. Unlike other courses, where students create original works, appreciate the work of others, or seek answers about the creative process as artists, the students in this class examine how their art is designed to persuade/modify culture, and they identify career opportunities in a variety of fields.

Theatre

SEGMENT 3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

John Fredricksen

27 years teaching

About the School

Mamaroneck High School
Mamaroneck, NY

Type:
Suburban/Comprehensive

Grades:
9-12

Students:
1,400
Middle/High socio-economic status

Arts Requirement:

New York has a 1-credit art or music requirement (180 minutes of instruction per week for one year)

About the Performing Arts Program

Faculty:
3

Students:
245

Facilities:

- Well Above Average in Area
- 220-seat proscenium theatre
 - Control Booth
 - Lighting board + lighting instruments
 - Sound mixer
 - 2 classrooms - including a music room
 - Office for our official business

Required Courses:

The Performing Arts Curriculum Experience (PACE)

PACE 1 – Introduction to the performing arts (theatre, dance, and music), full-year course, mostly filled with freshmen

PACE 2 – Beginning technique in theatre, dance, and music, full-year course, mostly filled with sophomores

PACE 3 – Advanced performing arts (theatre, dance, and music), full-year course, mostly filled with juniors

PACE 4 – Theatre, dance or music concentration, full-year course, seniors only

About the Featured Class

The Performing Arts

Curriculum Experience (PACE):

Students elect to take this curricular program, which offers them four progressive years of study in theatre, dance, and music as well as extra-curricular performance and production projects. Students study across the performing arts out of a belief that performers learn better when they learn all of the performing arts. For example, actors learn better if they are experienced in dance (learn to use their body) and music (learn to use their voice) and vice versa.

PACE 3, comprised mostly of juniors, is devoted to teaching students how to take the techniques learned in PACE 2 and expand on them to find their individual “voices” as artists.

Student Motivation:

High. Students seek to share their individual voice and to do good working productions.

Student Level:

Intermediate/Advanced

In the Teacher’s Words

Why is theatre important for young people?

When kids start to learn about character and characterization, and when they start to put themselves into another character or into another person’s shoes, they are able to see the world through more perspectives than just their own. And that’s really neat. Because when kids can understand how other people feel, then they can understand how they feel themselves. And then compromises can happen. This sort of communication, and understanding about the complexities of communication, is important for any kind of life skill.

The Art of **TEACHING** the Arts

Program 6: Fostering Genuine Communication **Music**

SEGMENT 4 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Janice Hunton
14 years teaching

About the School

Arts High School
Perpich Center for Arts Education
Golden Valley, MN

Type:
Statewide residential program/
Arts-focused public high school

Grades:
11-12

Students:
300
Very mixed socio-economic status

Majors:
Dance, Literary Arts, Media Arts, Music,
Theatre, and Visual Art

About the Music Program

Faculty:
5 (2 full-time, 3 part-time)

Students:
75-80

Facilities:
Above Average in the Area

- Performance hall
- 2 music classrooms
- Choir rehearsal room
- 10-station keyboard/midi lab
- 14 soundproofed rehearsal rooms
- Recording studio
- Sound booth with 3 isolation rooms

Audition:
Admission involves both academic and
artistic evaluation.

Required Courses:
Participation in four seminar classes per
year including Electronic Music, Theory,
Interdisciplinary Studies, World Music,
Composition, History, Technique,
Improvisation, Vocal Performance, and
the Role of Music in Culture. Students
also must participate in four ensembles
and one Interim class lasting three
weeks.

Elective Courses:
Music Theory, Guitar Theory,
Composition, Improvisation, Electronic
Music, Music History, European Music,
American Music (Blues), World Music,
Music Business, Career Investigations,
Architecture and Music, Music
Ensembles, and Choir

About the Featured Class

Vocal Performance Seminar:
Voice students explore techniques
in using their voice, develop an ear
for vocal color, and build critical
awareness skills through practice
with self- and peer-critique.

Preparations/Prerequisites:
None. Students sign up for this
course based on their interest.

Student Motivation:
High

Student Level:
Mixed

In the Teacher's Words

***What do you like about
using the "descriptive
praise" technique?***

*If people are just out there saying
"great job!" students aren't going
to believe it. Descriptive praise
leaves the evaluation up to the
person who's doing the
performing. One of my students
said, "You're just hearing facts
and then you can make your own
judgements based on the facts
that you're hearing."*

Additional Resources

On the Web

General Sites

A Basic Dictionary of American Sign Language Terms

<http://www.masterstech-home.com/ASLDict.html>
A dictionary with both animated and text definitions

School and Teacher Sites

Arts High School Dance Department, Perpich Center for Arts Education

<http://www.pcae.k12.mn.us/school/ahs.html>
Select: *Program Areas*, then *Dance*
Information on the dance department where Mary Harding teaches

Nottingham High School

<http://www.hamilton.k12.nj.us/secondary/north1/>
Web site for visual art teacher Jan Wilson's school

Mamaroneck High School Performing Arts Curriculum Experience (PACE)

<http://www.mamkschools.org/mhs/>
Web site for the department that includes John Fredricksen's theatre program

Arts High School Music Department, Perpich Center for Arts Education

<http://www.pcae.k12.mn.us/school/ahs.html>
Select: *Program Areas*, then *Music*
Information on the music department where Janice Hunton teaches

In Print

Cooper, Pamela J., & Simonds, Cheri J. *Communication for the Classroom Teacher*, 7th edition. Publisher: Allyn & Bacon, 2003. ISBN: 0-205-35955-8

Explores a wide range of classroom communication issues, including listening skills, verbal and nonverbal communication, instructional strategies, ethical considerations, and racism/sexism in the classroom

Faber, Adele, & Mazlish, Elaine. *How To Talk So Kids Can Learn*. Scribner, 1995. ISBN: 0684813335

Book from which Janice Hunton drew the model for "descriptive praise." Uses cartoon illustrations to show innovative ways to solve common problems such as coping with children's negative feelings, setting limits, alternatives to punishment, and resolving conflicts

Ginott, Haim, Ginott, Alice, & Goddard, Wallace. *Between Parent and Child: The Bestselling Classic That Revolutionized Parent-Child Communication*. Three Rivers Press, revised 2003. ISBN: 0609809881

Offers advice on how to develop empathetic yet disciplined child-rearing skills that place an emphasis on good communication

Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. Ballantine Books, 2002. ISBN: 0345418786

A look at societal pressures on adolescent girls

Shandler, Sara. *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self*. Perennial, 1999. ISBN: 0060952970

The compilation of essays, poems, and true-grit commentary from which Mary Harding drew the poem she used to inspire student choreographers

Smith, Wilma F., Gottesman, Barbara, & Edmundson, Phyllis J. *Constructing a Language of Collaboration*. Institute for Educational Inquiry, 1997.

Ideas for constructing a language of collaboration among school colleagues

Thorson, Sue Ann. *Listening to Students: Reflections on Secondary Classroom Management*. Allyn & Bacon, 2003. ISBN: 0-321-06397-X

Addresses classroom management techniques, including communication with students and communities, issues of diversity, and classroom environmental issues

Notes
