

Workshop 5

Creating Rich Learning Environments

In a rich learning environment, teachers recognize the central role of creativity and engage students in exploring ideas and issues. Skillful arts teachers create an atmosphere of mutual trust where students feel free to take risks and explore their own thoughts and feelings. Constructive criticism is the norm, and students benefit from the responses of others.

In a safe and creative learning environment, teachers:

- Instill personal confidence and respect for others
- Model and encourage constructive criticism
- Value artistic expression and individual opinions
- Provide opportunities for self-direction and leadership

Learning Goals

The goals of this workshop session are for you to:

- Explore the benefits and challenges of risk-taking in the classroom
- Develop activities in which students play significant roles in selecting material, auditioning, and preparing or rehearsing their work

Web Interactive

Try the Interactive feature “Focus On Critiquing Student Work.” Use it to analyze how both teachers and students can effectively critique student artwork. Alternatively, use it after you have watched the program to reinforce your understanding of the concept. You can find the Interactive on the workshop Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/hsarts/program5/.

Workshop Session (On Site)

Getting Ready (15 minutes)

Being creative involves exploring the unknown, taking risks, and being innovative. These challenges apply to teachers as well as students.

Discuss the following questions about risk-taking:

- What are the benefits of risk-taking in the arts for your students? For you?
- What are some concerns?
- What are some physical risks and psychological risks you ask students to take?

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.

Theatre: Joseph Mancuso and Andrea Arden [Monologues/Building Confidence]

- What techniques did Andrea use in Acting I to encourage students to take creative risks? In Acting II, how did Joe build on the foundation Andrea created?
- How do you encourage students to push beyond boundaries and take creative risks?

Dance: Mary Harding [Modern Dance Technique]

- What were the benefits to Mary's students of giving each other feedback?
- How do you nurture self-confidence and respect in your classroom?

Visual Art: Jon Murray [Art Department Community]

- Students in this segment are comfortable seeking feedback and setting their own priorities. In what ways do the teachers help foster these characteristics?
- What opportunities do your students have to get feedback from peers and faculty members?

Music: William Taylor [Vocal Improvisation]

- How does Will structure the improvisation lesson to build students' confidence and respect for each other? How does this benefit his students as singers?
- How do you help your students gain confidence in their own abilities?

Workshop Session (On Site), cont'd.

Activities and Discussion (45 minutes)

Expanding Boundaries and Taking Risks

Taking risks within the learning environment requires a willingness to:

- Think deeply about a subject or problem
- Share that thinking with others to hear their perspectives
- Listen to their critiques
- Build on those experiences toward a solution or solutions

The *Enrichment Activities Worksheet* on the following pages suggests ways to extend learning opportunities beyond standard practice, focusing on the pros and cons for students and teachers.

Facilitator: Be sure each participant has at least one chart related to his or her discipline.

Take notes on the risks and benefits of several of the enrichment activities, and share them with the group.

After several charts have been filled in, discuss the following:

- Which of the enrichment activities resemble things you are already doing in your classroom? Discuss with the group what the outcomes have been for students, and for you.
- Which enrichment activity seems the most challenging? Think about how you might modify it to integrate it into your own practice. Share your ideas with the group and get additional suggestions from your colleagues.

Enrichment Activities Worksheet

Choose a type of enrichment that interests you, and list some risks and benefits for teachers and students. Be prepared to discuss them with your colleagues.

Selection of Material

Most often the teacher selects the material for students to study, interpret, and/or perform.

What if students were asked to select some musical compositions and explain the rationale for their choices?

Risks for teachers and students: _____

Benefits for teachers and students _____

Auditions

Auditions typically progress with callbacks that involve fewer and fewer students, culminating in the posting of the cast list.

What if callbacks continued to involve all candidates?

Risks for teachers and students _____

Benefits for teachers and students _____

What if before auditions for the next project, the director discussed with each student the reasons why he/she was or was not previously cast?

Risks for teachers and students _____

Benefits for teachers and students _____

Enrichment Activities Worksheet, cont'd.

Rehearsals

Various ideas for blocking and interpretation are suggested and tried in a rehearsal, and eventually the director decides which ones to pursue and build upon.

What if the director explained the reasons for those choices?

Risks for teachers and students _____

Benefits for teachers and students _____

Choreography

Dances are choreographed by the teacher, or groups of dancers develop their own pieces.

What if students were given the responsibility of choreographing a dance with other student performers?

Risks for teachers and students _____

Benefits for teachers and students _____

Combined Productions

Arts students from different schools encounter each other at festivals or competitions. Members of honor choirs and bands are selected from several schools.

What if teachers from two schools collaborated on a dance or theatre production, working with a cast and crew made up of students from both schools?

Risks for teachers and students _____

Benefits for teachers and students _____

Enrichment Activities Worksheet, cont'd.

Jurying

The teacher or a local artist frequently selects student artworks for juried exhibitions. Beyond the established criteria, reasons are not given for special awards.

What if a group of students from two schools juried an exhibition of each other's works?

Risks for teachers and students _____

Benefits for teachers and students _____

What if explanations were given for the selection of best of show and 1st, 2nd, 3rd place awards?

Risks for teachers and students _____

Benefits for teachers and students _____

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework

In your journal, reflect on the learning environment you have created for your students. Write down three adjectives that describe how you would like students to feel as they enter your classroom. For example, “safe, stimulated, free to express themselves.” Then reflect on these questions:

- What specific elements of your classroom environment currently help your students feel this way?
- What elements are missing? What might you add?
- What obstacles are there to adding these elements?
- How might you overcome the obstacles?

Web Interactive

As a follow-up to the workshop session, try the Web Interactive “Focus On Critiquing Student Work.” Use it to analyze how both teachers and students can effectively critique student artwork. The Interactive can be found on the workshop Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/hsarts/program5/.



Program 5: Creating Rich Learning Environments

Theatre

SEGMENT 1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Joseph Mancuso
20 years teaching

Andrea Arden
16 years teaching

About the School

**Somerset County Vocational
Technical High School**
Bridgewater, NJ

Type:
Countywide performing arts program/
Vocational high school

Grades:
9-12

Students:
60 (24 Acting, 15 Musical Theatre, and
21 Dance)
Very mixed socio-economic status

About the Performing Arts Program

Faculty:
2 full-time and 9 part-time

Students:
60

Audition:
Students throughout the county audition
in March for acceptance in the following
academic year. Acceptance is based on
faculty assessment of two rounds of
auditions.

Facilities:
Above Average in the Area

- 600-seat performance hall
- Performance studio
- Three offices
- On-site and off-site storage
- 2 classroom spaces
- Expanded offices (under construction)
- Dressing rooms (under construction)
- Student locker space (under construction)

Required Courses:

- Acting major: Acting, Voice and Movement, Speech, Theatre History, Technical Theatre, Theatre Fundamentals, and Musical Vocals
- Musical Theatre major: Acting, Ballet, Jazz, Voice, Theatre History, Technical Theatre, and Theatre Fundamentals
- Dance major: Ballet, Jazz, Modern, Composition, Choreography, Dance History, and Technical Theatre

About the Featured Classes

Acting I:
Students explore concepts of self-awareness and communication and attempt to break down conventional notions of the actor's process.

Student Motivation:
High. Students exhibit a strong sense of purpose.

Student Level:
Novice, intermediate, and advanced

Typical Subsequent Courses:
This is a full program of study. Once completed, students who wish to remain in theatre after high school are encouraged to further their training in select BFA programs throughout the country. Those who wish to explore other careers are guided to appropriate college programs.

Student Motivation:
High

Skill Level:
Advanced

Acting II:
Students build the foundation on which to create a theatrically viable, free, and inspired actor.

In the Teacher's Words

What are the main skills that must be developed in Acting I before a student moves on to Acting II?

Joseph Mancuso: Students are expected to have a strong sense of self-awareness and maturity and a basic knowledge and application of the acting process.

Program 5: Creating Rich Learning Environments

Dance

SEGMENT 2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mary Harding

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 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

**Modern Dance Technique
Class (for dance majors):**

Students work on developing
alignment and musicality, key
building blocks in their development
as modern dancers.

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. The background of the
dance majors varies widely with
some having just started, while
others have been dancing for ten
years or more.

In the Teacher's Words***Why is alignment so
important in modern dance
class?***

*There are some basic alignment
difficulties that we all have. Often
in class we'll be moving along
and I can see that certain things
are not working. So I back up
and go back to some basic
alignment concepts.*

What is A.S.I.S.?

*ASIS is the Anterior Superior Iliac
Spine or the top front pelvic rim.*

Visual Art

SEGMENT 3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Jon Murray

26 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 graduation requirement (180 minutes of instruction per week for one year)

About the Visual Art Program

Faculty:
5 full-time

Students:
425

Facilities:
About Average in the Area

- 5 specialized art studios
- 1 art gallery/exhibition space
- 1 office
- 1 photo room

Required Courses:
Art Foundation

Elective Courses:
Drawing & Painting, Advanced Drawing & Painting, Sculpture, Introduction to Clay, Advanced Clay, Advanced Placement (AP) Art Studio, Introduction to Illustration, Advanced Illustration, and Senior Art Experience

About the Featured Class

Art History and Art Critique Clubs:

As the "club" designation implies, these are not formal entities. Students have formed these clubs, designed to either supplement or complement the curriculum, with the help of faculty and the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation.

In the Art History Club, students gather during lunch or after school for slide lectures, led by a teacher, on the historical development of visual art.

In the Art Critique Club, students gather on their own to share feedback with each other on their works-in-progress.

Student Motivation:
High

In the Teacher's Words

How long have the Art History and Art Critique clubs been around?

Last year a group of juniors realized that they needed to know more art history than they were getting in their studio classes. They came to me, and we decided to start an experimental club. I wanted to squeeze art history back into an already full week, and see if there was enough interest to revive Art History as an actual course in the curriculum. We had such a course in the 1980's, but it was squeezed out when Mamaroneck (like many other schools) increased its graduation requirements – supposedly to raise standards and make high school more rigorous.

About the School

East High School

Denver, CO

Type:

Urban/Comprehensive

Grades:

9-12

Students:

1,900

Very mixed socio-economic status

Arts Requirement:

None

About the Music Program

Faculty:

2 full-time (1 vocal and 1 instrumental)

Students:

142

Facilities:

Above Average in the Area

- 2 classrooms (instrumental and vocal)
- School auditorium

Required Courses:

None

Elective Vocal Music Courses:

Beginning Choir, Men's Ensemble, Seraphim, Honor Choir, Angelaires, Beginning Music Theory, AP Music Theory, and Voice

About the Featured Class

Seraphim/Women's Choir:

Students receive advanced-level training and musical experiences in all styles, to help them better appreciate and express themselves through vocal music.

Audition Requirements:

Students must demonstrate whether or not they have learned the necessary skills taught in Beginning Choir, such as music reading.

Student Motivation:

High. Most students are motivated by the desire to be in a high level choir rather than a beginning choir.

Student Level:

Intermediate

Typical Subsequent Courses:

Students who are motivated usually follow up on this experience by auditioning for Honor Choir and Angelaires.

In the Teacher's Words

What is the title of the Bobby McFerrin CD you listened to in class?

We listened to "Circlesong Three" from Bobby McFerrin's album "Circlesongs", which he describes as "completely improvised performance; every moment is free of preconceptions and is created anew."

Additional Resources

On the Web

General Sites

Cognition and Creation

<http://www.getty.edu/artsednet/>

Select: *Image Galleries and Exhibitions*, then *Student Art Galleries*

An interpretive exhibition of student artwork intended to help people understand the relationships between thinking and the creation of visual art

Bobby McFerrin Web site

<http://www.bobbymcferrin.com/>

An appealing site about the work of jazz vocalist Bobby McFerrin

School and Teacher Sites

Somerset County Vocational and Technical High School Performing Arts Dept.

http://www.scti.org/HighSchool/welcome_to_scvths.htm

Select: *performing arts at scvths*

Information on the performing arts program where Joseph Mancuso teaches

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 and Tom Kanthak teach

Mamaroneck High School Art Department

<http://www.mamkschools.org/mhs/>

Select: *Departments and Class Web Pages*, then *Art*

Web page for the visual art department where Jon Murray teaches, including student art gallery and description of course offerings

World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition

<http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/>

Select: *Exhibition* Search for: *Murray, Jon*

Jon Murray's submission for the World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition

East High School

<http://east.dpsk12.org/>

Web site for music teacher William Taylor's school

In Print

Kirby, Gary, & Goodpaster, Jeffery. *Thinking*. Prentice Hall, 3rd edition, 2001. ISBN: 0130923915

A widely used interdisciplinary undergraduate text that considers the processes at work in critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity

Thousand, Jaqueline, Nevin, Ann, & Villa, Richard. *Creativity and Collaborative Learning: The Practical Guide to Empowering Students and Teachers*. Nevin Brookes Publishing Company, 2002. ISBN: 1557665788

Shows how collaborative learning addresses challenges such as literacy, behavior issues, teacher success, and multiculturalism