

Dialogue And Inquiry

There are two main approaches to the introduction of aesthetics into classrooms. One is the *information-oriented approach*, in which students are informed of aesthetic concepts and theories. Delivery of information is usually straightforward, through statements, lists, definitions and explanations of concepts taken from the literature of aesthetics. There are two advantages to this approach: it's an efficient way of transmitting important ideas to students; and it provides students with useful categories for thinking about and evaluating art. A fictional example of a teacher talking with a high school class will illustrate the information-oriented approach:

"Today we are going to learn about an important theory of art. A theory of art, as you may recall from our last class, is a way of classifying objects as art, and it can direct attention to vital features of artworks. While we will learn about other theories in future classes, the one I'll talk about today has been very important to the development and understanding of modern Western art. The theory is called *Formalism* (write on board). One of the philosophers closely associated with *Formalism* is *Clive Bell* (write on board). We can define *Formalism* as a theory of art which emphasizes visual and compositional qualities, and the aesthetic experiences that accompany their perception (write definition on board). For *Bell*, 'Significant Form' (write term on board) was more important than subject matter in a work of art..."

rely on theories they have learned to guide their perceptions and provide standards for their judgments.¹

Possible disadvantages of the information-oriented approach include: teacher-talk can dominate the classroom environment; students can become passive rather than active learners; it may be difficult for the teacher to tell if students are grasping the material; students may accept the information in an uncritical way.

An alternative route to the introduction of aesthetics is the *issue-centered approach*, in which students are asked to confront problems in art before they are introduced to related aesthetic theories. Here's how the same material introduced in the last example might be introduced using the issue-centered approach:

"Today we are going to discuss some of the features of art works that make them distinctive. (Teacher directs attention to Manigault's painting, *The Rocket* [pictured on the cover].) Describe what you see when you look at this painting. Sean? Okay, fireworks. Can you describe the painting in more detail? Anyone. Good: thick paint, heavy outlines, bright scarlet tracers curving upward against a dark nighttime sky, small horizontal brushstrokes of many colors indicating water below, and what appears to be three figures in a boat, perhaps people watching the fireworks. LaTonya said it doesn't look quite like real fireworks. Many of you agree; it's more abstract, more of an impression. Can anyone describe the feelings this painting evokes? Festive; exciting; like a celebration; lots of movement; noisy! What is it about this painting that is exciting? Some of you are saying it's the colors, the lines, and all the spots of light sort of dancing about. How important would you say these visual qualities are to your response to the painting? You're saying they are very important. Do you think these visual qualities are as important to our response as is the subject matter? Anna thinks so; Erica is not sure...she thinks the subject matter and the visual qualities can't be separated so easily. Do you think that visual qualities are important to all works of art? Most of you say yes. But Luis has reminded us of the conceptual art we studied last month. (Students discuss this for a minute.) We have two important issues before us..."

to all works of art; the second is that visual elements may or may not be more important than subject matter or theme in evoking a response to a work of art. Before we address these issues further, let's consider for a moment a theory of art called Formalism, which provides us with possible resolutions. You'll have to decide for yourselves...

An issue-centered approach to teaching aesthetics uses the students' points of reference to help outline the characteristic features of a concept or key points of an issue. Students are encouraged to apply their own perceptive abilities, and to draw on their own experiences with art, value and belief systems, and imaginative and rational aptitudes. Following a period of teacher-guided student exploration, relevant concepts drawn from aesthetic literature could be introduced, if desired, helping to illuminate, extend, and consolidate issues and ideas further. Following the simple dialogue above, the teacher could lead students in a critical assessment of Formalism, and return to the two issues that had been identified in order to seek some resolutions.

There are possible disadvantages to the issue-centered approach: the process takes longer, so it may be difficult to cover planned material in class; and students may not answer questions as well as the teacher had hoped. Teachers must be willing and able to "think on their feet" in order to direct discussions along lines that are keeping with their goals.

Issue-centered aesthetic inquiry does not always have theory-learning as its desired conclusion; indeed, the desired educational outcomes are associated as much with process as product. One goal of this approach is to develop in students not just a knowledge base for confronting problems of art in the future, but the confidence and determination to rely upon their own abilities in working toward personally satisfying solutions. In the context of issue-centered lessons in aesthetics, *an inquiry model of teaching and learning* is characterized by participation, questioning, analysis, investigation, discovery, testing ideas through their applications, and the tolerance, open-minded exploration and acceptance of alternatives. This form of inquiry is well suited to aesthetics, since questions in aesthetics seldom have absolute answers.

Sometimes issues can be pursued in class without a specific theoretical end-in-view; thinking deeply about art is the primary educational goal. To put it another way, there isn't an aesthetician at the end of every aesthetics rainbow. This sort of teaching requires that educators be willing to accept planned uncertainty as an educational principle. Planned uncertainty means that questions, problems and issues are purposefully introduced to students in order to promote inquiry, without predetermined answers, solutions or conclusions in view.

A simple but effective example of this sort of teaching would be to ask students the question "How would you define a 'masterpiece' of art?" Block the students' rush for the dictionary, or at least don't let students accept the dictionary definition on faith. Set students to work on a definition, on coming up with arguments to support their definition, on finding and describing exemplars of the concept "masterpiece" as well as examples of art works that are not masterpieces. Controversies may arise that ought to be addressed, like whether or not "masterpiece" is gender discriminatory, or the extent to which the concept applies only to Western "high" art.² The teacher's job is to keep students on task, to push them beyond simple answers, and to synthesize their thoughts at the end. Perhaps during a subsequent class, student views and expert opinions could be compared, contrasted and critiqued in order to reinforce and add sophistication to the results of the initial inquiry.

CLASSROOM DIALOGUE

Dialogue, especially in the form of class discussion, has been advocated by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children and many educational researchers and practitioners as one of the most effective means of engaging in inquiry.³ Advantages are many: it encourages participation by all students; more advanced students can model thinking skills for others; it ensures that students will be working at an appropriate level since their own dialogue determines that level; it adds to the teacher's flexibility in assisting individuals, small groups, or an entire class; it helps the teacher to evaluate the students' comprehension of course material; it encourages the application of knowledge; and, since children become active learners, it helps to create enough interest and

motivation to sustain a learning encounter, and perhaps even encourage self-motivation for art learning in general. Another important and unique feature of classroom dialogue, as described by Resnick and Klopfer, is "that students can scaffold complicated performances for each other. Each one does part of the task and, by working cooperatively, students can arrive at solutions that one student could not manage alone."⁴ By listening to and building on the articulated thoughts of others in class, students will have the opportunity to hear multiple perspectives, and to analyze, clarify, and improve their own ideas. "But most important of all," Resnick and Klopfer continue, "the social setting may let students know that all the elements of critical thought — interpretation, questioning, trying possibilities, demanding rational justifications — are socially valued. The social setting may help to shape a disposition to engage in thinking."⁵

Argument

Often the term "argument" is associated with dialogue. It is important that students, teachers, parents and administrators understand that argument in this context refers to thoughtful discussions of ideas and issues in which participants attempt to provide each other with coherent and persuasive reasons to support their statements and claims. It is definitely not a name-calling, finger-pointing quarrel!

James L. Christian has described two types of interactive dialogue.⁶ *Adversary dialogue* requires participants to clarify and defend their ideas by having one person challenge or attempt to disprove another's claims. Potentially, both parties benefit from the quest for truth; if an argument can be shown to be weak or invalid, everyone can learn from the realization. *Supportive dialogue* requires participants to work together on problems, openly sharing their unique insights as well as admitting mistakes. The goal is to develop and critique ideas for mutual gain through a process of cooperative inquiry.

Forms of adversary dialogue should be used with discretion in classroom settings. Students who tend to be competitive can easily misconstrue the goal of adversary dialogue, and set out to "win" an argument by "defeating" an opponent. This can lead to inappropriate behaviors and damage to self-esteem. Classroom

debates can be fun, if an atmosphere of cordialness prevails, if students are made to listen, think-through and summarize each point of view, and if it is clear from the outset that winning and losing are concepts inapplicable to this learning process.

Playing "devil's advocate" is another adversarial technique that should be used with discretion. When teachers assume this role, they are purposefully and artificially championing a point of view which they know to be contrary to the prevailing views of their students, in order to stimulate argument. In so doing, teachers are also assuming the risk that their students will misunderstand their intentions and take the teachers' statements at face value. Even if students are aware that the teacher is playing devil's advocate, they may still harbor doubts about the teacher's sincerity in future dialogues. Generally, teachers are on safer ground when engaged in supportive dialogue with their students.

Nine Strategies

Most teachers have spent years figuring out ways to get students *not* to talk; how might teachers go about getting students to talk in educationally constructive ways? Here are nine strategies that have been successfully employed:

1. Form small groups.

Organize students in a variety of groupings throughout the year. Small groups can give students a sense of independence from the teacher's direct authority, and students will often talk with three or four of their peers even if they shy away from speaking before an entire class. Sometimes it is beneficial to keep the same group together for several class periods, so that students will have the advantage of continuity as they develop their ideas. New projects usually call for new groups, in order to diversify the mix of ideas and personalities. Sometimes students should be allowed to form their own groups, sometimes groups should be formed in random order, and sometimes groups should be assembled by the teacher. Much depends on the personality of the class; teachers should be aware of cliques, of who has a dominant personality, who tends to be quiet and retiring, and so forth. Students should be grouped, and assigned roles in groups, so that everyone has an equal opportunity to play a significant part in the proceedings. Every occasion for dialogue

does not warrant forming small groups, but this can be a motivating and constructive educational strategy.

2. Prepare the students.

Make students responsible for some sort of preparatory work. Give them an appropriate reading assignment, have them clip articles from the newspaper, get them to conduct interviews of friends and family, or to complete a studio project whose problem or theme is related to the aesthetic topic that will be discussed. One art teacher has reported that she routinely has students independently write responses to questions in class just prior to class discussions. She claims that, by allowing for a quiet period of reflection and writing, students are better prepared to articulate their ideas once the dialogue begins, and their comments tend to be more thoughtful.⁷ It might also be a good idea to have students write immediately after a class discussion, when the ideas stirred up are still fresh and hot.

3. Create interest and encourage creativity.

Just because some aesthetic literature is dreary doesn't mean that aesthetics in art education must be. Listen to the students, watch their responses to different situations, and try to make learning enjoyable. A highly publicized art event ("Ming vase stolen from museum!"), fictional scenario or real-life story can capture the attention and hold the interest of student and teacher alike.

When small groups form to work on a problem, encourage them to be creative when they report back to the entire class. Having students create informational posters, or role-play characters in a story are strategies preferred by some teachers. One Junior-high school art teacher, Elizabeth Katz, outfitted her students with Sherlock Holmes-style deerstalker caps and meerschaum pipes (sans tobacco), and set them on the trail of researching and reporting art theft and forgery cases.

4. Be clear and keep on task.

It is the teacher's responsibility to clearly identify and maintain focus upon a primary topic. Students should not be left wondering about the goal of the lesson or the expectations of the teacher. Providing examples, illustrations, and "what ifs" can help clarify and direct student thinking. So can summarizing ideas and using effective questioning strategies, topics addressed later in this

Often, a related topic will emerge from a class discussion that veers from the original topic. Usually the best course of action is for the teacher to acknowledge the new topic, make a note to return to it if time allows, and to redirect the dialogue back on course. Occasionally the topic is of such importance and urgency, or has the potential to shed such significant light on the original topic, that it is the original topic that should be set aside and returned to later.

Marilyn Stewart of Kutztown University, in professional development workshops on teaching aesthetics, has advocated the use of a "Big Question Chart" in classrooms. A bulletin board might be devoted to the chart. Each time a philosophical question about art arises during class discussions, critiques, studio or other activities, it is jotted down on a card and pinned to the board. Later, questions can be compared, categorized and discussed in detail. This is an effective technique for acknowledging, preserving, and using student ideas.⁸

5. Using students' ideas.

In order to encourage active participation and deeper levels of thinking, it is essential that students' ideas be made central to class proceedings. Teachers should yield some of their authority (i.e., knowledge and informed opinion) on a subject in order to give students the opportunity to think through an issue and articulate their thoughts and feelings.

Praise students' efforts without declaring their responses right or wrong. "That's a very interesting point, Ashwin," or "Kelly may be on the right track; what do the rest of you think?", are responses that acknowledge the student's thoughts and encourage further thinking. Eventually, teachers will need to reach closure on a topic, but declaring a right answer too soon prevents possible alternative solutions from emerging, and discourages further critical thought on the subject at hand.

It is not always easy to deal with responses that are way off base, or that reflect narrow attitudes. Simply pronouncing them wrong might discourage further discussion. These responses should be acknowledged, provided they are sincerely offered. "That's a perspective we haven't considered before, Taylor, thank you. Let's hear some other points of view."

Terry Barrett, on the Art Education faculty at The Ohio State University, has spent many hours with K-12 students and teachers as a critic-in-the-schools. He has concluded, as others have, that a community of inquiry is one of the best environments for opening minds and correcting misconceptions.

In discussions in a group, wonderful things can happen between individuals when they engage each other about works of art that cannot come about when viewing art individually. The group can construct a broader range of meaning than can an individual, and groups tend to be self-correcting about interpretations that are too far removed from the work to be convincing. Groups can widen dogmatic, idiosyncratic views about art — whether the work is a soft pastoral landscape or the more incendiary photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe — as well as about life.⁹

Encourage the use of one student's ideas in subsequent responses by other students. "Su Ling's comment was good, and I think we should explore it further" is one way of introducing this strategy. Another is, "Maria's comment was very similar to Lindsey's, wasn't it? Can someone tell us what idea they hold in common?" Or, "Let's assume for a moment that Jesse is right. What, then, do you think the curator's decision should be?"

6. Encourage ownership of ideas.

Since the rightness of answers to questions in aesthetics is usually determined by strength of argument rather than a presentation of facts, students should be encouraged to take responsibility — what some call "ownership" — for their ideas. This means that students should try to develop their thoughts fully, to explain, clarify, refine and defend them to others in class. Students should be encouraged to ask questions of one another during class discussions, and the teacher should probe for more complete thoughts, trying to help students improve their own positions. For instance:

"I think I understand what you mean, Josh. Could you give us an example?"

"You've told us that you think the artist is the best source of interpretation for a work of art, Kevin. But who or what should we

turn to if the artist left no record of what the work is supposed to mean?"

Sometimes a child is unable to answer probing questions right away. Don't keep the student on the spot indefinitely. Refer the question to the class as a whole. Often, students are just not used to being asked follow-up questions to their responses. Teachers should use this technique early and consistently to get their students used to it.

Matthew Lipman has recommended a technique for use with his Philosophy for Children programs. When a student asserts some idea, the gist of that idea is noted on the board, and the student's name is written next to it. This helps students and the teacher remember what has been said in class, and it credits students with their ideas. Later, those ideas can be analyzed, revised, or synthesized.¹⁰

Usually, the evolution of an idea is so gradual that students may not recognize changes in their own thinking. There is no need to point this change out, other than to say something like, "This has been a good class, as usual! I think we've come a long way." Some students, perhaps because of past teasing or put-downs, are reticent to admit that they've altered their position on an issue, for fear of "losing face." It is important for students to understand that changing their minds is okay, that it's not an admission of being wrong or stupid, but rather it's a sign of intelligence and growth. Teachers should model this attitude, with remarks like, "I used to think so-and-so about artists, but I later learned that wasn't always true," and, "something I heard recently really made me think, and I still haven't made up my mind about it. Maybe we can think about it together." A community of inquiry should be thoughtful of the feelings of others. Everyone should be eager to celebrate the major and minor breakthroughs in dialogue and the development of ideas.

7. Summarize and synthesize.

Issues in aesthetics are often complex, and that complexity can be amplified by the active dialogue of a classroom full of students with diverse backgrounds and opinions. Two steps should be taken to keep ideas from getting hopelessly tangled.

The first step is for the teacher to *periodically* summarize discussions. This can be done by restating what one student has said,

and by grouping the statements of several students. For example:

"If I'm hearing you correctly, Nisha, you think that museums are important because they make it possible for lots of people, over time, to see works of art firsthand."

Or, "Several of you think that beauty is the most important quality that a work of art can possess, while a few of you think that beauty is to be valued, but there can be good works of art that are not beautiful. Have I represented your ideas fairly?"

By periodically summarizing in this way, teachers can clarify key ideas and refocus the discussion.

A second step teachers should take is to *conclude* dialogues by summarizing and synthesizing ideas. It is important to bring the class to an identifiable conclusion, so that students will have a clear picture of what has transpired and what decisions have been reached. A conclusion usually does not need to take the form of a consensus, unless future action, say, the theme of a studio project, depends upon overall agreement. What is most important is a fair representation of ideas that have emerged in class, not just dominant ideas, but varied and contrasting perspectives as well. These key ideas should be organized and written down for all to see and remember. Students can be encouraged to participate by identifying clusters of ideas that seem to be in agreement. The teacher should also ask the students if their ideas have been appropriately represented in the summary and synthesis. A teacher might conclude with the observation, "It appears as though we have three distinct points of view applied to this issue. Each of these has elements that are more or less controversial, and all of them have merit in the way they provide a rational basis for decision-making."

Following the summary and synthesis, the teacher may wish to introduce what selected aestheticians say on the subject. Teachers and students alike may be surprised and delighted that their conclusions sound remarkably like those of the experts! Indeed, teachers should look for and point out such similarities, in order to add credence to what the students have, through mutual effort, discovered. Expert opinion should not be used to prove students' conclusions are erroneous; rather, they should be offered as alternative points of view worthy of serious consideration. It might even be interesting to present two contrasting expert opinions, and have the class analyze, compare and critique them; then,

repeat the exercise, but comparing student and expert opinions.

Generally, the "alternative point of view" rule should apply to teachers' opinions as well. Students will often want to know what *you* think about an issue, and there is no reason why the teacher's views should not be aired, provided that the students have sincerely asked for them. But they should be couched in terms that do not belittle contrasting perspectives. For example, this phrase might be inserted: "That is what I think about the issue, but I have heard some interesting points today that may change my mind when I think about them further."

8. Maintain order

It's thrilling to hear a flurry of responses to a question all at once, because it indicates a high degree of student interest. But it's important to be able to actually listen to each response, and this means one person speaks at a time. Some teachers prefer to be the gatekeeper for all classroom discussion. This approach is characterized by students being required to raise their hands and be recognized before speaking. Discussions are usually charted as teacher-student-teacher-student-teacher, etc.

Other teachers are comfortable with discussions that proceed more in this fashion: teacher-student-student-student-teacher. Students are allowed to talk to and question one another directly, without the teacher's intervention. The teacher's primary roles are to introduce the topic, interject comments and questions to direct and refine thinking, and summarize and synthesize. Students must be willing and able to demonstrate decorum in the proceedings.

Nearly every class has a cut-up and nearly everyone has a sense of humor. If occasionally a witty remark graces the discussion, for goodness sake, just laugh along with everybody else. But when a student persists with unwarranted levity, it can be disruptive. One technique the teacher can use is to treat such remarks as though they were seriously offered. "Do you really mean that?", or, "Can you explain how that relates to the issue?", are questions that indicate to students that the teacher is serious about learning.

Under no circumstances should hostility be allowed to build during class discussions. The teacher might remark that such passion toward art is admirable, but remind students that the issues transcend the confines of the class; many art experts have agreed to disagree on similar topics. Everyone should be allowed to speak and



be heard in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperative cumulative learning.

9. Practice.

The best way for a teacher to master classroom dialogue is to practice it. If the teacher is not used to leading discussions, he or she should first try it by leading a brief session at the beginning of a class. That way, if things go well, there will be time to pursue the topic, but if it's a little awkward, the teacher can ease into a related, more familiar type of activity. Then, try again the next time, until both teacher and students are accustomed to the process of classroom dialogue. Practicing art critical inquiry with tangible works of art is also good preparation for aesthetic dialogue, which can be more abstract.

Many are the teachers who have tried to introduce inquiry through lecture and discussion, only to be met with the heartfelt outcry, "When are we going to do art?" Almost always, this query is from students who have come to equate art class with studio production exclusively, an equation often shared by parents and school administrators. By starting "art talk" with students in the earliest grades, gradually moving older students toward broader based conceptions of art which include aesthetics, criticism, multicultural art history, and studio, and by communicating about the expanded goals and methods of their courses, art teachers will find their efforts are increasingly rewarded with new enthusiasm, respect and support for their programs.

AESTHETIC DIALOGUE AND STUDENT DIVERSITY

More than ever before people are recognizing that today's classrooms are filled with students possessing widely diverse aptitudes, attitudes and abilities. Teachers are challenged to be sensitive to culturally-based social habits and learning styles which affect how students behave toward the teacher and their peers. Some students may tend to avoid eye contact, others maintain stoic silence, still others may seem to wander or wait before getting to the point. Such behaviors should not automatically be interpreted as shortcomings, but accepted as different ways of meeting the challenge to learn.

Values and customs of students' families will have a

significant impact on classroom behavior. Cultural diversity may account for the reticence of some students to question time-honored concepts and theories of art, or to engage in active dialogue with others. Some students are brought up not to question authority; others may think of schooling as only the mastery of skills and acquisition of knowledge already possessed by teachers. Verbal-analytic modes of discourse may not be in keeping with the educational traditions or habits of communication among certain cultural groups. "Teachers must accommodate not just individual learning styles," observed one educational researcher, "but cultural learning behaviors too."¹¹

Preparing for aesthetic inquiry through dialogue requires that teachers be flexible, and sensitive to the individual traits and cultural backgrounds represented among students. Teachers can familiarize themselves with the populations they serve by sharing notes with other experienced teachers and administrators, talking with families and members of the community, and by asking a librarian to help identify resources about local history and demographics. By using several modes of instruction, teachers can improve their chances of reaching every student. Alternative assignments can be given to draw on each student's strengths. For instance, students who may not be comfortable or articulate when speaking before a class might be able to demonstrate what they know through a two or three-dimensional visualization.

A significant part of school populations consists of students with exceptional needs who have been mainstreamed into regular classrooms. These students have been evaluated by a team of physicians, psychologists, teachers, administrators, and parents who establish an educational program based on each child's needs and abilities. Art teachers are rarely part of the team, although it is not uncommon for these children to be mainstreamed into art classes. It is important that the evaluation team understand the nature of the art program, so that they can make appropriate decisions as they structure the child's curriculum. If their assumption is that art class consists of free-wheeling psychomotor activities, their decisions might be different than if they know the program variously involves studio problem solving, reading, writing, and classroom dialogue. In any event, it behooves the art educator to find out the nature of each student's needs and abilities, and adjust plans and expectations accordingly, so that all students can benefit from the art program. Often, students with special needs will do well in art class even if they have difficulty in other courses.

Very little research has been undertaken to address the special needs of mainstreamed students in a discipline-based art program, although there is literature available which suggests physical and curricular modifications for studio art classes. Some researchers, including Robert Slavin, David Johnson, and Roger Johnson have suggested a general educational approach which may be applicable to a range of art activities involving critical and aesthetic inquiry. Called *cooperative learning*, the approach consists of mixed, small groups of students working together to accomplish a goal, and requires verbal interaction, an equitable distribution of and accountability for roles and tasks, and the application of appropriate interpersonal skills which are introduced and reinforced by the teacher. While specific applications may vary depending on the type and level of a student's abilities, this approach helps to ensure that everyone is an active learner.

*When learning situations are structured cooperatively, and handicapped and non-handicapped students work together in the same learning groups, then they interact in positive ways, feel supported and encouraged to achieve, gain an understanding of each other's perspectives, build a differentiated and realistic view of each other, accept themselves as their peers accept them, feel academically successful, and develop a positive relationship with each other.*¹²

Some specific strategies include: limiting distribution of materials to a group so students must share; assigning interdependent group roles, such as recorder, summarizer, visual aids preparator, and exhibitor; requiring that all group members have a role in class presentations; and staggering the assignment of tasks to group members so that one task must be completed before moving to the next. Students with specific learning disabilities who may have difficulty reading or writing may make oral presentations, or be provided with audio tapes for listening and recording. Students who are developmentally behind their peers-by-age, and who have difficulty with the abstract concepts involved in an aesthetic dialogue, can be asked to talk about some of the more basic elements affecting a problem, such as the forms, colors, and subject matter of a work of art, or reporting where and when an event occurred or an artist lived and worked.¹³

Since students in any class will have varied social skills,

setting some ground rules can help students shape their behaviors during dialogue. Here are six rules which have been used in cooperative learning situations by Johnson, Johnson, Warring, and Maruyama.¹⁴ They might be posted in the classroom somewhere, as a reminder that these are appropriate behaviors for all students engaged in dialogue.

1. I am critical of ideas, not people.
2. I remember that we are all in this together.
3. I encourage everyone to participate.
4. I listen to everyone's ideas even if I do not agree.
5. I ask someone to restate what was said if I do not understand.
6. I try to understand all sides of an issue.

Among students with special needs should be counted the gifted and talented. Although such students are usually identified by art programs on the basis of studio abilities, sometimes children may exhibit aptitudes for other types of art inquiry which are well above average. A healthy artworld depends upon a host of individuals — not just artists, but also historians, critics, educators, aestheticians, patrons, connoisseurs, and others functioning inter-actively; only some of these roles require extraordinary artistic skill. Gifted students should be especially challenged to think about art and to actively participate in classroom dialogue, thereby adding new dimensions to everyone's understanding of art.

QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

Central to the act of guiding dialogic inquiry is asking questions. Fortunately, quite a bit has been written on the subject in the field of general education, and Hamblen and others have contributed to the topic in art education literature.¹⁵ It may be worthwhile to review selected questioning strategies that are particularly useful to aesthetic dialogue in classrooms.

1. **Ask one, clear question at a time.** This sounds so simple, but it actually is one of the greatest challenges a teacher can face. Getting the question clear means making it comprehensible to the students. Consider these three versions of essentially the same question:

a) "Would you explicate, please, class, keeping in mind the implications of Wimsatt and Beardsley's treatise on the problematics of artistic intentionality, the critical passage in this review that attempts to interpret the painting, *Oh Agony*, from the artist's perspective?"

b) "How does the critic feel about the artist's intention in this review? Does he refer to it all?"

c) "Do you think that the critic has made good use of the artist's point of view when interpreting the painting, *Oh, Agony*?"

In the first example, the questioner is assuming that students have a fairly sophisticated vocabulary and intimate knowledge of Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay, "The Intentional Fallacy".¹⁶ Students will also be challenged to identify the gist of the question from among the maze of phrases. All in all, the tone reflects an attitude of self-conscious scholarship inappropriate for K-12 education. The title of the painting could easily apply to this question.

In example (b), students must interpret what is meant by the word "feel" in the question. Does it mean "what is the critic's opinion of the artist's views?" Perhaps the questioner wants the students to speculate as to the critic's emotional response to the artist's views. Or maybe students should try to figure out the extent to which the critic considers the artist's intention important to his understanding of the work of art. The word "feel" is often casually used by art educators. Unless used carefully it can effectively obscure the intent of a question.

It should be noted that example (b) contains two questions, not one. A correct response could be, simply, "yes." Ask one question at a time.

Example (c) is the clearest of the three. It does not digress, it does not use perplexing language, its reference to one aspect of the critic's review is obvious, and its objective is straightforwardly presented.

Even though it is preferable to enter a class overprepared rather than underprepared, the fact is that a teacher may only be able to ask students one prepared question. The second and subsequent

questions will usually be determined by a combination of the lesson's goals and the content of the student's responses. The teacher must therefore be determined to acknowledge and utilize student responses, and at the same time steer the discussion in an appropriate direction through the use of one, clear question at a time.

2. Wait for a response. It's strange how a quiet moment during a class discussion can be as uncomfortable as a pause in dinner conversation with a blind date. Frantic, teachers ask themselves, "have I made myself clear? Is the question over their heads? Are they totally bored? Is this the harbinger of a student rebellion?" Sometimes a few seconds later, a hand will go up; the students just needed a little time to think! "Wait time" is fundamental to classroom questioning strategies.

Waiting can promote deeper levels of thinking. If a student has been asked a probing question, he or she should be given a chance to think and respond before the teacher refers the question to another student. When questioning one student or a whole class, if five to ten seconds have elapsed and no response seems forthcoming, the teacher may ask, "do you need a little more time to think about the question?" or "do you need me to rephrase the question?" Do not be too quick to abandon the initial question. It was important enough to ask in the first place, wasn't it?

3. Ask open-ended and follow-up questions. An open-ended question is one which requires an interpretation or elaboration of an idea. Its opposite is a question which can be answered with yes or no. Framing every question as open-ended is difficult and unnecessary. An effective substitute is the use of a pair of questions, the first being a yes-or-no question, the second being a request for elaboration. Here's an example of each type of question; the information garnered from students will be essentially the same.

Open-ended question: How has the artist symbolized patriotism in this painting?

Yes-or-no/Request for elaboration: Has the artist symbolized patriotism in this painting? Which elements in this picture represent that idea?

Each of the approaches exemplified above encourages a variety of possible responses.

1. Using art theories as grounds for critical judgments is suggested by Edmund Burke Feldman, *Becoming Human Through Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970).
2. In a famous essay, Linda Nochlin argued that there have been "no great women artists" not for lack of genius but because of elitist, dominant social institutions that at best have failed to encourage and at worst have forbidden the creation and acceptance of art by women, as well as by other social groups. See her "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" in *Woman in Sexist Society*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 344-366. Extending Nochlin's argument, Anita Silvers has called for the reformation of artistic canons that are used to identify great art. See her "Has Her(oin)e's Time Now Come?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48:4 (Fall 1990), pp. 365-379.

For a range of opinions, see Avis Berman, "What Makes a Masterpiece?" *Art News* (March 1980), pp. 128-132. See also Louis Arnaud Reid, "Greatness," in *A Modern Book of Eschetics*, ed. Melvin Rader (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 481-485.

For a historical perspective on "masterpieces," see Edward Cahn, *Masterpieces: Chapters on the History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). Also see Marcia Muellder Eaton, *Aesthetics and the Good Life* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1989), pp. 37-42. The concept of a masterpiece has its roots in medieval Europe, when an artisan had to demonstrate competence in order to join a guild. A properly crafted piece would qualify an apprentice to assume the status of master.

3. See Maathew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); David W. Ecker, "Analyzing Children's Talk About Art," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 7:1 (1973), pp. 58-73; Mary Erickson, "Teaching Aesthetics K-12," in *Research Readings for Discipline-Based Art Education*, ed. Stephen Mark Dobbs (Reston: National Art Education Association, 1988), pp. 148-161.

4. Lauren B. Resnick and Leopold E. Klopfner, "Toward the Thinking Curriculum: An Overview," in *Toward the Thinking Curriculum: Current Cognitive Research*, 1989 Yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, pp. 1-18. (Quote p. 8)

5. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

6. James L. Christian, *Philosophy: An Introduction to the Art of Wondering* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986).

7. This valuable strategy was provided by Dr. Sandra Kay Mirms, art specialist at Learning Unlimited/Ecole Francaise in Columbus, Ohio.

8. Marilyn Stewart, "Suggestions for Teaching Aesthetics," a handout distributed at her session titled "Teaching Aesthetics: Public Art Issues and Philosophical Inquiry," March 22, 1991, National Art Education Association convention, Atlanta.

9. Terry Barrett, "Talking About Art," *Ohio State University Arts Advocate* 10:3 (Spring 1990), p. 5.

10. From a demonstration by Matthew Lipman, director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, June 1988, during a planning meeting at The Ohio State University to establish the content and method of an art education preservice course for teaching aesthetics.

11. Dorothy Heard, "How Do Teachers Identify Multicultural and Cross-cultural Pedagogical Phenomena In and Out of Art Classrooms?" *Educational Review* 42:3 (1990), pp. 303-318. (Quote p. 306.)

12. David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, "Mainstreaming and Cooperative Learning Strategies," *Exceptional Children* 52:6 (1986), pp. 553-561. (Quote p. 556.) For more on cooperative learning, see Joanne W. Putnam, John E. Rynders, Roger T. Johnson and David W. Johnson, "Collaborative Skill Instruction for Promoting Positive Interactions Between Mentally Handicapped and Nonhandicapped Children," *Exceptional Children* 55:6 (1989), pp. 550-557.

13. I am indebted to Susan W. Witten, an arts-for-the-handicapped educational consultant for the Ohio Department of Education, for her assistance in preparing the section on mainstreaming.

14. David W. Johnson, Roger T. Johnson, Douglas Warring, and