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# TEACHING EDUCATION IN THE ARTS: Fostering Creative Thinking

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**C**reative teaching in the arts is fraught with many challenges and hurdles. How can this be? The essence of an art form is creativity. Yet it is less problematic to teach about art than to teach individuals not only how to enhance their own aesthetic response, but also in the case of teacher education, the aesthetic awareness of their students.

Music is a "sound" experience, but in this age of video pizzazz, high tech graphics, and rapid-fire visual stimulation, it becomes more difficult to ask a student (of any age) merely to sit and listen to a piece of music. The teaching of perceptive listening is challenging in all its stages: planning, monitoring, and evaluating. But, the ability both to audiate (to hear internally without an external sound being present) and to

listen discriminately is critical to performing, describing, and enjoying music.

Our students, as well as the children they will soon be teaching, have been influenced by and integrated into this super-visual environment. So within teacher education courses, the goals include not only developing musical skills, but the assimilation of pedagogical strategies as well. Often neglected in the course structure are built-in opportunities for both critical and creative thinking. When class design allows and encourages composition, improvisation, and the creative use of iconic visual aids, students can not only begin to synthesize musical concepts by merging the abstract sound into their own personal experiences, they can also learn how to make this possible for the children they will be teaching.

Bright and colorful visuals, charts, games, manipulatives, puppets, and creative movement activities that incorporate cooperative learning and group sharing all serve to expand the

domains of experience in a way that is sensitive and responsive to the multi-learning styles of all the students. These related arts opportunities can demonstrate repetition, contrast, form, line, texture and other concepts which are common across the arts. Good visuals can be attention grabbers, appropriate objects for focus, and appealing iconic representations of structure and abstract emotional content. Most importantly, they allow a teacher to "see to hear" and to model this multi-sensory approach when designing future lessons.

As in any art form, the whole of music is so much greater than the sum of any of its parts. All students deserve to be given opportunities to be performers, describers, and creators of music. Prospective teachers must develop a heightened awareness for "expressing the inexpressible" in order fully to communicate and to stimulate both the cognitive and the aesthetic growth of their students. 🍎

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worked harder, nor learned more, in my life." From a supervisory vantage point we are also pleased. The students have gone far beyond developing a few new skills. They have proven themselves able to rise to real understanding. The actors, for example, seem less interested in the temporary solution ("How should I inflect this line?"), than in the big questions like ("What is it like to commit yourself to the life of a performing artist?"). One of our students floored us all by stopping a rehearsal cold to ask how we could justify the existence of our theater company in this time of tight resources and Sen. Helms-inspired public distrust. Once I

managed to get my heart started again, I spent the most interesting hour of my career. The passion of our working artists as they articulated and defended the role of the arts in relation to a community was inspiring. The obvious activity of the students' minds as they struggled to take in their mentor's viewpoints and/or keep up the challenge to elicit more information was education in the best sense.

Besides the mentor/protege relationships, artists also regularly attend classes as resource people, guest lecturers, or simply interested visitors. The activity of the company itself has become our main classroom example. Students are welcome guests at rehearsals, design

conferences, and in the offices where day-to-day operations are ongoing.

Being our first year it is too early to make final judgments, but our theater company, Classic Theater Works, has had a very successful season, winning much public acclaim. Less visible to the outsider, but crucial to us, our students have grown enormously from the mentor-based curriculum. We see constant evidence of deep understanding of our discipline and work of a much higher caliber than was possible a year ago.

*Editor's Note:* This article is a report of the work done by the author in fulfillment of a Summer Stipend Award during the summer of 1991.