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?
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making Thinking Public at the</th>
<th>Dance Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception Stage</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Typical challenges at this stage involve:</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trouble getting started or getting an initial idea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unfamiliarity with materials or vocabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not knowing the people you’re working with</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Other challenges you can think of:</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sample Music Activity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Another Music Activity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Making Thinking Public at the</th>
<th>Visual Art Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research/Rehearsal Stage</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Typical challenges at this stage might involve:</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneven participation among group members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty reaching consensus</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sample Dance Activity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Another Dance Activity</strong></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making Thinking Public at the</th>
<th>Theatre Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception Stage</strong></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making Thinking Public at the</th>
<th>Music Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research/Rehearsal Stage</strong></td>
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</table>
## Ways of Making Thinking Public

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other challenges:</th>
<th>Theatre Activity</th>
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### Making Thinking Public at the Performance Stage

**Typical challenges at this stage might involve:**

- Deciding how to present work
- Asking for feedback, once the work is complete

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other challenges:</th>
<th>Dance Activity</th>
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### Sample Theatre Activity

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.

### Another Theatre Activity

### Sample Visual Art Activity

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.

### Another Visual Art Activity
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?
**About the School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arts High School</th>
<th>Grades: 11-12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perpich Center for Arts Education</td>
<td>Majors: Dance, Literary Arts, Media Arts, Music, Theatre, and Visual Art</td>
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<tr>
<td>Golden Valley, MN</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Students:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide residential program/Arts-focused public high school</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very mixed socio-economic status</td>
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</table>

**About the Dance Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty: 2 full-time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students: 20-30 dance majors + 75 non-majors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities: Above Average in the Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 large studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 locker rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120-seat black box theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus: Modern dance-based ensemble program that welcomes dancers with developed talent as well as potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elective Courses: Modern Dance, Arts Improvisation, Arts and Ideas, Moving Anatomy, Viewpoints in Dance and Theatre, and Drumming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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</table>

**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.
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.
Program 6: Fostering Genuine Communication
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 the Arts

Program 6: Fostering Genuine Communication

Music

SEGMENT 4 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Janice Hunton
14 years teaching

About the School

| Arts High School | Grades: 11-12 |
| Perpich Center for Arts Education | Majors: Dance, Literary Arts, Media Arts, Music, Theatre, and Visual Art |
| Golden Valley, MN | |
| **Type:** Statewide residential program/ Arts-focused public high school |

| Students: 75-80 |
| **Students:** 300 |
| Very mixed socio-economic status |

About the Music Program

| Faculty: 5 (2 full-time, 3 part-time) |
| **Students:** 75-80 |

| Facilities: Above Average in the Area |
| **Facilities:** |
| • 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. |
| **Audition:** |

| 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. |
| **Required Courses:** |

| **Elective Courses:** |

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.pacea.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 Fredrickson’s theatre program

Arts High School Music Department, Perpich Center for Arts Education
http://www.pacea.k12.mn.us/school/ahs.html
Select: Program Areas, then Music
Information on the music department where Janice Hunton teaches

In Print

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

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

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

A look at societal pressures on adolescent girls

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

Ideas for constructing a language of collaboration among school colleagues

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