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THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

CENTERPIECE

FOCUS ON: EDUCATION

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BUILDING BRIDGES

BY DANIEL RENNER

As the cultural and political climate of our country shifts in reaction to current events, so does the climate and relationships in our public schools. Funding agencies and communities are requiring different models and even different goals from arts education programs than what was standard just a few years ago. This has forced many theatres to a re-evaluate the nature of their mission and their strategies for making best use of their resources. How, with smaller grants and changing priorities, does an arts education program serve the needs of the school and remain true to its artistic goals? What is the most effective means of reaching students to create a cultural awareness of and desire for the arts? How do we advocate for the inclusion of the theatre arts in an educational climate that has become test-bound and results oriented?

The days of offering up enhancement or enrichment activities without creating a context or answering the needs of the schools are waning. A different kind of advocacy and marketing is required. One of the growing trends is for arts education instructors to provide the teachers themselves with training in the artistic process by the sharing of techniques and theatrical exercises that can be directly applied to the classroom and state standards. By creating new formats for instruction that incorporate the essence of what we do, teachers and students begin to become more engaged in a forum that is both dynamic and creative.

Lynn Hoare, the executive and artistic director of Theatre Action Project in Austin, TX, who has written about the need for all of us to understand the role we serve in public schools, has outlined steps that will help us better understand the environments and expectations that surround our programs and teaching artists. Whether your programs are based in the teaching of the art form or in using the arts to create forums for social and cultural exploration, her “tips” for working effectively and respectfully in the schools are of value to all of us.

Margaret Salvante McCann, education director for the Roundabout Theatre in New York City, has provided a synopsis of her *Framework for Theatrical Teaching*. Developed in collaboration with artists and teachers, the framework outlines a scripted approach to nurturing teachers who incorporate theatrical concepts into the learning process, the ultimate goal being to create teachers who actively engage in the artistry of teaching. In this approach, the commonalities of both teaching and theatre are examined and translated into a new kind of learning environment.

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SERVICE THROUGH UNDERSTANDING

BY LYNN HOARE

We are fortunate to work at a time when an overwhelming number of theatres have education departments or programs. Within these programs, we have traditionally provided support to the field of theatre: educating students and teachers about theatre, bringing live theatre to schools, building future audience members and training potential actors, directors, designers and technicians. I would argue that when we reach out to the schools through training teachers or working with students, we are also in a position of **service** to the world of education. Through this service, we have the potential to change the school climate, to affect the students we work with, to energize the teachers and to be re-educated continually by the populations with whom we work. However, we are at a challenging period in the history of the educational system, when taking the time to understand the relevance and validity of theatre in the curriculum is easily sacrificed to the goal of test preparation. Especially at this time in our country and in our schools, what theatres can offer through our services is desperately needed and could be relied upon to meet the diverse responsibilities of teachers and schools. However, to be of service effectively, we must understand the demands within the schools and be willing to change possibly our goals to be relevant within this specific environment. It is essential to develop a **mutual understanding** between theatre-outreach programs and schools in order for our services to be effective, applicable and necessary within the school curriculum.

Mutual Understanding: knowledge, sympathetic and awareness, mutual comprehension (*Webster's New World Dictionary*)

Some years ago I worked primarily as a drama specialist, visiting various schools and using creative drama as a tool to develop self-awareness, teamwork, confidence and creative expression. During this time, I was employed by various private schools. I was younger then, and, though not new to the field, I was inexperienced in "selling" the methodology — explaining the underpinnings and describing the goals and type of work I wanted to lead with children.

At Brighton School (a fictionalized name), the children were wonderful and the administrative staff was very supportive. I worked with the students long enough to develop relationships and to move from creative drama exercises to in-depth story dramatization. We worked with a story based on Anansi the Spider, the popular African trickster, for some weeks, and the staff asked me if the students could share it with their parents. I felt it was appropriate, since the students were incredibly invested in the story and really enjoyed their characterizations. A short time later, I had a large crowd of proud parents,

grandparents, neighborhood friends and siblings gathered, eagerly awaiting each child's performance. On "stage," I had 13 young children (ages 5-8) running around chaotically in plastic animal noses. I narrated the story as they responded in organic, freeform play. No one said much following the "play," as they called it, or the "sharing," as I preferred it be known. I was disappointed in myself, wishing I had done better, but I realized that the creative drama-based work I had focused on had not translated in this more performative setting. I was not invited back to teach at this school the following year. I can only guess that it was as a result of this "play," which I had never intended to create as a "play," but which parents and staff had felt was unimpressive and un-theatrical.

In afterthought, I realized that the core of the problem was that I had not clearly defined my expectations and the goals of my work, and I had not asked the school to be specific about what they wanted out of my sessions with the students. We did not have agreement or mutual understanding. We had not decided on shared goals. I realized that the school wanted a performance, and I was delivering a creative drama experience that met the goals I felt were important. Though I can't say I changed my pitch immediately following this incident, over time I did learn how to explain the work better and how to find communities that supported my goals.

When we enter a collaboration or service-oriented situation, we must have a mutual understanding of the demands and responsibilities of each party involved and an awareness of what each brings to the experience. Otherwise, we are in danger of leaving and feeling unsatisfied — looking for missed connections that would have generated more passion and wondering why our audience doesn't understand the power of theatre in the classroom. How do we align expectations? How do we create mutual understanding? We must first thoroughly examine the world of the school environment in which we plan to work, and be willing to change our goals based on audience needs. Though we can share general tips for developing mutual understanding (I have included some on pages 3-4), the questions also demand an examination of how we are in service to our educational institutions.

Service: work done or duty performed for another or others, an act giving assistance or advantage to another.

How can we best be of service at a time when schools desperately need us, need something outside the world of testing and assessment? In this time when our government strives to have a "No Child Left Behind" policy, many students will be left behind unless the arts are included in the curriculum.

President Bush's initiative (No Child Left Behind) requires

"...States to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students. These systems must be based on challenging state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8 and annual statewide progress objectives.... School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective action and restructuring measures aimed at getting them back on course to meet state standards." (No Child Left Behind, U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea/exec-summ.html)

How to find time for arts in a school, a district, a state, a country so focused on testing that the teachers are under incredible pressure to spend every moment in skill building with students? How can we argue the validity of the arts when minds are focused on test scores and the funding restrictions that often result when scores are not as high as demanded? One way to validate our services is to examine carefully state standards for the arts. If we are able to claim that we are helping schools to meet skill levels they are already under pressure to prove their students have met, we will become necessary in the eyes of administrations and districts. We must constantly strive to develop an understanding of the power that we have to offer, and find ways to make our service indispensable to the schools.

According to the National Association of Psychologists, thousands of children stay home from school every day because they are afraid of being bullied. Theatre Action Project, an interactive theatre company in Austin, TX, which addresses social issues in the schools, uses this information to support an interactive theatre program on bullying (The Courage to Stand). If this program helps to create a classroom atmosphere that doesn't tolerate bullying, then the program is improving test scores — because more students will show up for school. This program is focused on a relevant social concern. Across the country, many theatre-outreach programs also address the art and skill of theatre. Whatever the program focus (and some tie these goals together), we must work toward alliances or collaborations with our schools. We must actively meet classroom needs, offer kindness, demonstrate usefulness, know our duty and prove our relevance; all elements of "service." And we must remember what lies at the core of our service: "an act giving assistance or advantage to another" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*). We give students an advantage — whether through the opportunity to access the arts or the experience of using the arts to problem-solve issues. We give teachers assistance and support. Not only must we be able to argue clearly that our programming can make a difference in current concerns within any school, at times we must be willing to alter our agenda in order to best offer assistance and advantage. If we are to continue to be of service to educational institutions, we must continually mold, form, shape, manipulate and reinvent ourselves to meet the needs of those in

the grind of the system. If we are rigid about what we believe students need to be learning through our theatrical outreach programs, we may not truly be of service to the classrooms with which we wish to work. In addition to being willing to change our objectives, it is necessary to understand the pressures that schools face. Their focus is often mandated at a district, state or federal level. If we cannot meet their needs, they will not be able to justify including our services within their curriculum.

In a Theatre Action Project school residency just last week, a teacher bemoaned that our state of Texas had cancelled recess for all students in favor of "exercise." Though in the moment I blamed a focus on testing (especially prevalent here in Texas), I discovered later that the state legislature had cancelled recess and instituted mandatory "physical activity" due to the overwhelming increase in child obesity and Adult Type II Diabetes in children. Shock, disgust and incredulousness: all of these feelings passed over my face in the moment of hearing that recess had been cancelled. I realized later how much more important our programming in the schools becomes in light of losing recess. The teacher with whom I was speaking said, "It's like they have cancelled social skills" — and, I would add, teambuilding, creativity, confidence, tolerance and leadership. They have cancelled play. As theatre artists, we know how to reinstate play, along with social skills, teambuilding, creativity, confidence, tolerance and leadership. It may be that this is the central offering we bring in our theatre outreach programming: a focus on developing the whole person (though sometimes through the lens of building skills and meeting state standards!).

Through our service, we can lead — lead the students, the teachers, the parents and the school administration. We can lead our audiences to new understandings, new realizations. Through our service, we must provide sustenance at a time when focus is not on play, building character or exploring relationships. To continue to be relevant in our service demands mutual understanding: an understanding of the context of the schools and the pressures and responsibilities they are currently facing, and an understanding of the diversity of what we offer — personal development that they may not have time to focus on, skill building and the opportunity to satisfy the diverse learning styles of students. Understanding is necessary for true service, but both are key components to making our work in the schools necessary, useful and mutually beneficial.

Tips for working with teachers to develop mutual understanding and to offer assistance or advantage through our service.

To develop mutual understanding:

- ❖ Spend time researching the school, the district and the specific teachers you will work with: visit, interview and observe the relationships between teachers and students, between faculty and administration. What are the goals at this particular school? What is the focus for the year?

- ❖ Learn the state standards in the arts for the grade levels with which you will work. Understand how your programming can meet these standards. Know how to tie your services into specific levels and skills so that you can demonstrate that you are helping teachers meet the standards.
- ❖ Teach in-service sessions at the school so that teachers have an understanding of what to expect and excitement about what you can offer.
- ❖ Build a mutually beneficial relationship: you are learning from them — not just delivering information — how can you rely on their knowledge?
- ❖ Ask questions and more questions. Find out what is hardest for teachers to address in their curriculum, or what social skills they feel are useful for students to work on at this point in the year. Continually ask for feedback from the teachers.
- ❖ Find the easiest way to communicate with them — is it evening phone calls? Is it email? Is it person-to-person immediately before or after the session? Is it meeting during the teacher's planning time?
- ❖ Find teachers who are open to and interested in a different mode of teaching and learning and who want to try something new in their classroom.

To really be of service:

- ❖ Spend enough time in the classroom so that you can clearly see and tell teachers and school administrators how your experiences are important and relevant in this classroom.
- ❖ Offer credit: is there a way to work with the district or a local university to offer the teachers credit for the time they will spend?
- ❖ Work in depth with one school or with chosen/nominated teachers from a variety of schools.

- ❖ Include the teachers or administration in your planning and goal setting. If they are included on this level, they will have more ownership, will find the work more relevant and will be able to offer information that will inform the goals you set.
- ❖ Work with the principal or someone in administration. Set objectives at this level. Ask for help in targeting partnering teachers. Set up a plan for a multiyear project.
- ❖ Show that you are meeting the state standards in the arts. Share this responsibility with the teachers.
- ❖ Get involved for the long haul: adopt a specific school or classroom or target a neighborhood/community and plan to work with them regularly over time.
- ❖ Offer free sessions at your sponsored school.
- ❖ Make the work accessible through timing, planning ahead, offering techniques and tips that are most relevant or useful (discovered through many conversations!).
- ❖ Be flexible: the daily schedule at schools is often rigid, until broken by necessity. Teachers constantly have different demands on their day, and your service is only one of these. If you know you are involved for the long term, it is easier to be flexible.
- ❖ Prep them, teach them, work with them in the classroom and support them in as many different ways as you can find.
- ❖ Offer different levels of learning (beginning, intermediate, advanced) so the teachers stay engaged and can keep coming back for more.

Working with a school over a significant period of time can be extremely rewarding if there is a mutual understanding of needs, expectations and responsibilities. With mutual understanding, we can prove our services to be indispensable to the schools. Why not work toward an educational system in which the arts, particularly theatre outreach programs, are deemed a necessary and regular component of all classroom curricula?

— Lynn Hoare is the executive and artistic director of the Theatre Action Project in Austin, TX. She can be reached at lynn@theatreactionproject.org.

IMPORTANT LINKS TO FIND CORE STANDARDS FOR YOUR STATE

To find a comprehensive description of the arts standards in every state, visit the Arts Education Partnership website, at www.aep-arts.org. Click on their main site, then in the "Most Requested Items" section, click on 2002–2003 State Arts Education Policy Database. To find the core standards in any state, visit the U.S. Department of Education website at www.ed.gov and click on the "Resources" section, then, under "State Resources," click on "More" for links to each State Education Department. Core standards can be found on your state's Education Department website.

FRAMEWORK FOR THEATRICAL TEACHING

BY MARGARET SALVANTE McCANN

This framework begins with the premise that the primary purpose of theatre is to inspire its audiences to formulate their own understandings of life's universal themes — in short, to make meaning of the world. It is this notion — that the creative process inherent in the making and viewing of theatre is a fundamental characteristic of learning — with which the framework embarks on its line of inquiry.

Roundabout's Framework for Theatrical Teaching recognizes education as a distinct art form that is remarkably aligned with theatre. Teachers are viewed as writers, directors and performers of learning scenarios. Their classrooms become artistic forums where the universal themes of human experience are explored and new understandings of the world are constructed in a multisensory learning environment. With this construct, learning becomes an interactive performance, and teachers are given a process with which to rehearse and refine their practice.

<u>Theatre Element</u>	<u>Connecting Principle</u>	<u>Teaching Element</u>
Theme	Avenue of Inquiry	Subject Topic/Aim
Plot	Structure of Events	Lesson Plan
Characters	Multi-Intelligent Beings	Teachers and Students
Presence	Kinesthetic/Body Language	Teaching Behavior
Language	Verbal Conveyance	Instruction
Music/Spectacle	Aural and Visual Stimuli	Classroom Setting

OUTLINE FOR ROUNDABOUT'S THEATRICAL TEACHING PRACTICUM

A Framework for the Development of Effective Teaching Performance

Essential Question (Aim): What does theatrical teaching look like?

- ❖ **Objectives:** To develop an understanding of a theatrical vocabulary for teaching practice; essential characteristics of effective teaching; and the practice of making artistic choices to construct a creative learning environment.
- ❖ **Outcomes:** Students will assess their own teaching and that of their colleagues on the context of the performance criteria they develop; and begin to construct and define a personal approach to teaching that is in line with the unique character of each participant's own artistic expression.

Scene One: Baseline Assessment

Setting: The environment is calm and promotes reflection. A sign-in table is placed opposite the entrance. The table is

covered with a warm-colored cloth. A small vase of flowers, a sign-in sheet and a row of nametags are placed on top. The nametags are individualized with fonts that reflect the lyrical effect of the name. Images of teachers at work are posted around the workshop space. A buffet of breakfast breads, fruit, coffee, juice and water is set. Notepads and pens are placed on tables to delineate individual workstations. The lighting is warm. Calm music that is not too melodic or rhythmic plays at a low volume level.

At Rise: Teachers begin to enter the room. Workshop facilitators who are dressed in professional attire greet them. They are attentive and pleasant and exude an air of confidence and reassurance. After the teachers are asked to sign in and take their individualized nametag, they are each given an instruction postcard and are invited to find some refreshment and a quiet place to work on the assignment outlined on the card. The postcard reads as follows:

Good morning! Please help yourself to some refreshments and find a quiet place to reflect on the following questions:

- ❖ Why have I chosen to be a teacher? (What do I most want for my students to get out of the time they spend in my classroom?)
- ❖ What aspects of my practice (or potential) am I most proud of? How do I get (or expect to get) the best result?
- ❖ Which of the obstacles that I face on an average school day am I most frustrated by and why? (Or what do I anticipate to be my greatest obstacles)
- ❖ What do I hope to get out of this seminar?

Please write an essay to share your response on the journal sheet provided.

Scene Synopsis: As teachers begin to reflect on the questions, workshop facilitators move about the space, keeping back from teachers that are engaged and helping those with questions get on task. As the essay writing is completed, workshop facilitators collect the baseline essays and ask the teachers to find a seat in the mock classroom space that has been set up in another area. Once there, they are asked to reflect on the atmosphere of the learning environment and how it was established. This discussion sets up the premise that teaching is theatrical in nature.

Scene Two: A Theatrical Paradigm for Teaching

Participants will:

- ❖ list and define the essential characteristics of effective teaching;
- ❖ apply a theatrical vocabulary for teaching practice;
- ❖ practice making artistic choices to construct creative learning environments;
- ❖ assess their own teaching and that of their colleagues in the context of theatrical performance criteria they develop; and
- ❖ begin to actualize a personal approach to teaching that is in line with the unique character of their own artistic expression.

At Rise: The workshop space is set as a typical classroom. Tables and chairs are arranged in a traditional chalk-talk format, with five rows of six desks each facing the front of the room. A self-portrait of Vincent van Gogh is displayed and the following is written large enough for all to read: "AIM: How are an artist's choices governed by his/her artistic purpose?"

Inciting Incident:

1. Students are asked to reflect on the self-portraits displayed at the front of the room.

Focus Questions: What does this artist want you to know about him/herself? How do you know? What choices made by the artist convey that meaning to you? What do you imagine the teaching style of this artist would be like? How do you know?

2. Workshop participants are given a box of crayons and a piece of construction paper. They are asked to draw an image that conveys their own teaching identity. The instructor circulates around the classroom coaching students to find creative solutions to the assigned challenge. When a majority of students have completed their drawing, the instructor asks for a volunteer to share.
3. Students are introduced to the aim of the workshop and asked to break down the self-portrait lesson in the context of theatrical teaching.

Focus Questions: What was the *plot* or story of my lesson? What was my *theme* or essential question? What kind of *language* did I use to give instructions? What was the pace, timbre, and volume of the activity in the room? What was the *musicality* of it? What was the *visual aesthetic* of the space? How did I use *spectacle* to advance the learning? If we suppose that this lesson is my self-portrait, what did it tell you about my teaching? What did my behavior say about the *character* of my artistry?

Rising Action:

1. Parameters for the mock classroom forum — including protocols for observation and critique — are established.
2. Volunteer participants take turns demonstrating 10-minute lessons while the others play their students.
3. After each demonstration, the teaching performance is processed in relation to the teacher's self-portrait.

Focus Questions: How can the aesthetic choices in the self-portrait be seen in the teaching? How is the purpose, conveyed by the self-portrait, also conveyed in the teaching?

Moment of Truth: What Have We Learned?

Focus Questions: Where is the common ground between theatre artists and teachers? How is teaching theatrical? How did the learning environment we established address the elements of theatrical teaching? What did we as teachers and students hear, see, feel, say, do, and think?

Resolution/Follow-Up:

- ❖ Rubrics that outline theatrical teaching criteria are distributed and participants are asked to complete a quick self-assessment of their own practice.
- ❖ Second journal entry is completed and discussed around the following focus questions: What do we want for our students to get out of the time they spend in our classrooms? How do

we get results? What are our obstacles? What do we hope to get out of this seminar?

Scene Three: Modeling Theatrical Process

Synopsis: A professional theatre director demonstrates rehearsal process by staging a scene with workshop participants. Participants are then asked to reflect on the common characteristics between directors and teachers as creators of learning environments and facilitators of learning. This scenario is repeated with a professional playwright and a professional actor.

Scene Four: Lesson Planning

Synopsis: Participants are asked to construct a lesson — on any topic — that includes elements of theatrical teaching. Side coaching is provided and participants are asked to share their work for discussion at various intervals throughout the process.

Scene Five: Mock Classrooms

Synopsis: Lessons are “performed” in the context of a mock classroom. Participants reflect together on the effectiveness of the instructional strategies employed. Lessons are stopped midstream, reviewed and replayed to “rehearse” effective employment of the various instructional practices being explored. A final round of rubrics and journals is completed. One-on-one assessment conferences are held to help each individual actualize the strengths and weaknesses of their own practice and a follow-up learning plan is established. (*Editor's Note: The learning plans follow on the subsequent pages.*)

— *Developed by Margaret Salvante McCann, education director at the Roundabout Theatre Company, in collaboration with artists, teachers and the education staff at the Roundabout. Margaret Salvante McCann can be reached via email at margies@roundabouttheatre.org.*

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DEFINITIONS FOR THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THEATRE AND TEACHING

ELEMENTS	CHARACTERISTICS	DEFINITION IN CONTEXT OF THEATRE PRACTICE	DEFINITION IN CONTEXT OF TEACHING PRACTICE
Theme	Essential question	What the play investigates	The unit aim
	Context	The given circumstances	The content topic
Plot	Form	Structure of events in time and space	Lesson plan
	Exposition	Conveyance of given circumstances	Prior knowledge
	Inciting incident	Moment of engagement	Motivation
	Rising action	Sequence of actions and reactions	Development
	Moment of truth	New understandings are realized	Summary
	Resolution	New understandings are articulated	Follow-up
Character	Delineation/ Archetype	Status, social role and personality of characters in the play	Status, social role and personality of Individuals in the classroom
	Psychology (objective/ intention)	What the characters want as indicated by their behavior	What the students want as indicated by their behavior
	Rapport/Relationship	Nature of interaction between characters	Nature of interaction between teachers and students (classroom management)
	Physical life	Body language	Body language
	Emotional life	Conveyance of feelings	Effect of extenuating circumstances on students and the nature of teachers empathy
	Point of view	Perspective or opinion of characters	Perspective/opinion of teachers and students
Presence	Timing, focus, movement, energy	The quality of an actor's presence on stage	The quality of a teacher's or student's presence in the classroom
Language	Syntax	The way a character phrases speech	The way the teacher phrases instruction
	Thought	The ideas conveyed by dialogue	The ideas conveyed by instruction
Music	Pitch, timbre, rhythm, pace, volume, melody.	The quality of aural conveyance of meaning from stage to audience.	The quality of aural conveyance between teachers and students: the musical arc of the lesson.
Spectacle	Color, texture, shape, space, temperature, imagery	The quality of visual conveyance of meaning from stage to audience	The quality of visual stimulation or instructional support available in the classroom.
Professionalism	Discipline, attendance, collaboration, preparation, continuing development	The quality of commitment to craft	The quality of commitment to craft
Artistry	Passion for inquiry, command of technique	The extent to which aesthetic choices are governed by an artistic purpose	The extent to which aesthetic choices are governed by an instructional purpose

INDICATORS FOR MASTERFUL APPLICATION OF THEATRICAL TEACHING

CRITERIA	CHARACTERISTICS	TARGET PERFORMANCE INDICATOR
Theme	Essential question	A juicy question worth deep investigation
	Context	Topic is appropriate to learning objectives and developmental level of students
Plot	Form	The learning journey can be clearly followed
	Inciting incident	Grabs attention of learners in a way that is relative to aim
	Exposition	Prior knowledge of students is solicited
	Rising action	Each activity builds on the understanding developed by the previous (scaffolding)
	Moment of truth	Learning is crystallized and made visible
	Resolution	Learning is summarized and followed through to the next topic
Character	Delineation/Archetype	Personality/status connects with students and promotes learning
	Psychology	Objective of the lesson is clear to the learners
	Rapport/Relationship	Demeanor promotes learning
	Physical life	Gesture and movement in sync with teaching objective
	Emotional life	Honest, caring and stable
	Point of view	Opinion/perspective on the teaching objective is evident
Presence	Timing, focus, movement, energy, style	Varied and appropriate to the learning objective — choices promote learning
Language	Syntax	Asks probing questions, re-articulates discoveries, models effective speech and vocabulary
	Thought	Clarity in instructions and conclusions
Music	Pitch, timbre, rhythm, pace, volume, melody	Varied and appropriate to the learning objective — choices promote learning
Spectacle	Color, texture, shape, space, temperature, imagery	Varied and appropriate to the learning objective — choices promote learning
Professionalism	Discipline, attendance, collaboration, preparation, continuing development	High level of commitment to promoting effective learning is evident in preparation and presentation.
Artistry	Passion for inquiry, command of technique	Artistic purpose is evident — originality and a continued investigation of effective choices can be seen