

WORKSHEET 6

GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK:

Choreographer and educator Liz Lerman created this method of giving and receiving useful feedback to any artist, maker, etc. At the core of it is that the artist is at the control of the feedback session and that the responders give good feedback; the kind of feedback that makes you want to go back to work!

The critical response process enables a group of people to uncover their various aesthetic and performance values and, by being patient, apply them to a creative work-in-progress in a way that pushes the artist's thinking forward.

There are 3 roles: The Artist/performer showing work, a group of Responders and a Facilitator.

The Artist/performer

The artist's contribution is essential. Artists have to be at a point where they can discuss their work in a somewhat public environment. They also should be able to hear positive comments that are specific.

The Responders

Responders can be friends, public, peers or strangers, experts or novices. It is important that they sincerely want the artist to produce excellent work.

The Facilitator

The facilitator keeps the process on track, initiating and managing each step. The facilitator can have a variety of functions: translator, coaching the artist and/or policing the process.

The artist performs the piece that he/she wants feedback on. It can be long or short, and at any stage of development.

1 Lerman, L. & Borstel, J. (2003). Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process: A method for getting useful feedback on anything you make, from dance to dessert. Liz Lerman Dance exchange www.danceexchange.org. For further information about Critical Response Process, contact John Borstel at john@lizlerman.com

THE CRITICAL RESPONSE PROCESS ¹

The steps of the feedback process

Step 1: Statements of meaning

Responders state what was exciting, meaningful, memorable, challenging, compelling, evoking, unique, different, surprising, striking or touching. Meaning is at the heart of an artist's work and to start with meaning is to begin with the essence of the artistic act. It helps a lot to avoid starting your phrase with "I liked ..."

Step 2: Artist as questioner

This round is the first round of two rounds of questions and answers. It is important that the artist is interested in developing or wants to learn something about how their performance is received. The artist asks questions to the responders. Very general questions (e.g. "Well, what did you think?") and very specific questions (e.g. "How did it look when I lifted my arm?") may not give the sought answers. It is better to ask open questions rather than closed questions, which require just yes/no answers. Responders give their honest answers, keeping to the rule from Step 1 and keeping to the topic of the question.

Step 3: Neutral questions

Responders ask neutral questions about the work. The artist responds. Questions are neutral when they do not have an opinion couched in them. The questions can be informational or factual. If the Responder has an opinion, he/she forms this opinion into a neutral question. For instance: instead of saying "It is too fast", you can say "What made you choose this tempo?" Or instead of saying "It was boring", say "What does this piece express, and to what extent do you think you achieved that?"

Step 4: Opinion Time

Responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. The usual form is: "I have an opinion about ... Would you like to hear it?" The artist has the option to say no.

In a last round, the artist can be asked where the steps 1 – 4 have brought him/her.

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A Note on Fix-its:

Sometimes responders will want to offer 'fix-its' (suggestions for changes) during Step 4. Whether fix-its are appropriate depends on many factors, including the relationship between the artist and the responders, how advanced the work is in its development, and the artist's own style and preference. To manage these variables, facilitators can take a couple of measures at the beginning of this Process:

- Allow artists to state whether they welcome fix-its. If an artist says no, the facilitator may need to intervene in Step 4, guiding the responder who may still want to pose fix-its to frame the opinion that underlies the suggestion. If an artist says yes, responders in Step 4 who have fix-its should say, "I have an opinion that includes a suggestion about..."
- Acknowledge that the desire to get involved in the process of shaping work is natural and creative, but that artists may gain more if they follow a path to their own solutions. Encourage responders who immediately jump to ideas for changes to use steps of the Process to get at the issue that their fix-it is intended to address. This means mentally backing up through the Process before taking part in it – first formulating the opinion underlying their fix-it, and then framing a neutral question addressing the focus of the opinion.

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Optional further steps

What's Your Next Step?

After Step 4, artists talk about the next steps they are planning based on information gained through the Process.

Subject Matter Discussion

Sometimes a work will generate a vital discussion about an issue of social or aesthetic controversy. An added step to discuss the issue itself allows the artist to get additional useful information but avoids sidetracking the Process away from the art itself during the four core steps.

Working the Work

Sometimes a Critical Response session can move directly into 'labbing' (exploring) aspects of the work, with the participation of some or all of those participating in the Process.

¹ Lerman, L. & Borstel, J. (2003). Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process: A method for getting useful feedback on anything you make, from dance to dessert. Liz Lerman. For further information about Critical Response Process, contact John Borstel at john@lizlerman.com