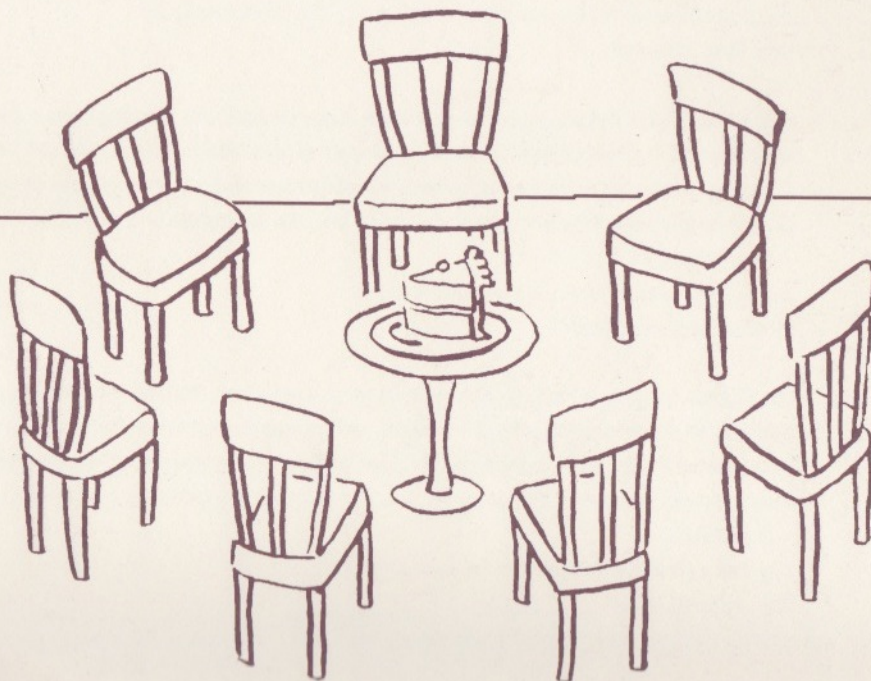


Liz Lerman's

CRITICAL RESPONSE PROCESSSM

A method for getting useful feedback on
anything you make, from dance to dessert



by Liz Lerman and John Borstel

FIRST EDITION

THE THREE ROLES

Here are some ideas for action and reflection in each of the three roles. In surveying all these options, try to remember that the Critical Response Process is not about getting it right or wrong. It's about making new discoveries in the artistic work, in your own statements and questions, and in what others have to say.

Artist

Responder

Facilitator

Preparing for the Process

... invested in continuing to work on the piece you are showing and open to the possibility that you might change it.

... thinking about what you want to learn related to where you are in the process of developing the work you are showing.

... in an open frame of mind about what you will hear.

... invested in the potential for the artist to do his/her best work.

... thinking ahead to how you will participate in the steps of the Process as you observe the presentation of the artist's work.

... considering what kind of preparation will be appropriate for this artist, taking time, if needed, to meet with the artist in advance.

... assuring that all understand the sequence of the steps and the concepts of the neutral question and permissioned opinion.

... checking to see if the artist would like a note-taker.

Step One: Statements of Meaning

... suspending the need to hear "this is the greatest thing I've ever seen."

... suspending the need to question the sincerity of positive comments.

... attending to your own internal reactions to the comments in terms of how they inform the steps to come:

- Are they answering the questions I have about the work?
- Are they suggesting that I need to probe deeper on any subject?
- Are they raising my sense of curiosity about something new?
- Are they reflecting a consensus reaction or a diverse response?

... making comments that add new perspectives to what has already been stated.

... limiting your response to one or two points when many responders are participating.

... if you have a strong opinion that you would eventually like to make, addressing a related aspect of the work in your step one statement.

... noting the meanings that others have found in the artwork, observing how those comments are expanding your own perception of the work.

... observing your own preferences and points of reference.

... encouraging a broad response with an opening that suggests many possible kinds of reactions (i.e. "What was stimulating, challenging, memorable, evocative, etc...")

... intervening when responders jump to negative opinions or suggestions, reminding them of the opportunities they will have later in the Process.

... drawing the group's attention to the variety of responses elicited.

Step Two: Artist Asks Questions

... building on the information you have heard in step one.

... refraining from long explanatory preambles.

... considering possibilities for two-part questions or general questions.

... ready to narrow questions down when they spill out in groups.

... ready to hear opinions, including negative ones, when they are in direct response to the question you have posed.

... keeping your answers honest and specific to the artist's question.

... expressing opinions, even negative ones, IF they are in response to the artist's question.

... listening carefully to the areas of interest and concern that are directed by the artist.

... staying interested in the conversation, even when it is about an aspect of the work about which you may not have a strong opinion.

... encouraging artists to limit their preambles to questions.

... encouraging the artist to phrase in more general or specific terms if the question isn't leading to a useful response.

... helping the artist refine very general questions, or sort through multiple questions that s/he may want to pose all at once.

... encouraging responders to respond to the question by being honest and specific, but staying on-topic with the question.

... intervening when responses to questions contain fixits (suggestions for changes).

THE THREE ROLES (CONTINUED)

Artist

Responder

Facilitator

Step Three: Responders Ask Neutral Questions

... attentive to possibilities and issues that may not be prominent in your current thinking.

... using the dialogue as an opportunity to advance your thinking about the work rather than to repeat what you already know.

... not working too hard to divine the opinion behind the question.

... framing a neutral question about the area of your opinion.

... considering options from general to specific and the possible merits of posing a more general question before a specific one.

... listening to the artist's response for indications that the opinion you have in mind may be either very valuable or irrelevant to the artist's concerns.

... curious about aspects of the work that aren't related to strong opinions (i.e., open to asking questions that are not opinion-driven.)

... reminding responders about the discipline of framing questions neutrally.

... discerning whether questions are neutral, and asking responders to rephrase neutrally when they are not.

... intervening to rephrase a question, or asking responder to refine question, when artist seems "stuck" in responding.

... intervening and refining the query if artist gives a long-winded "explanatory" response that sounds as though s/he is repeating information s/he has stated before.

Step Four: Permissioned Opinions

... listening to the content of permission requests as well as opinions.

... exercising the options of saying "yes" or "no" to a proposed opinion.

... considering how content of this and previous steps is informing your thinking about how you want to continue with the piece you are working on.

... always prefacing opinions by saying "I have an opinion about __ would you like to hear it?" and waiting until artist consents.

... indicating, in your request to the artist, if your opinion contains a suggestion or fixit.

... not loading the content of your opinion into the permission request.

... engaging the artist directly rather than dialoguing with other responders.

... reminding responders about the protocol of asking for the artist's consent to state a particular opinion.

... checking to see if artist wants to hear suggestions as well as opinions.

... asking responders to restate when their permission statements have the content of an opinion loaded into them.

... directing opinions to be stated to the artist, not as seconds or rebuttals to other responders.

... intervening when responders engage in a dialogue that does not include the artist or when they become sidetracked discussing something other than the artwork under consideration.

Wrap-up

... consolidating the most useful information you've heard.

... observing the quality of the contribution you and your fellow responders have made.

... asking the artist to say what his/her next steps are.

... checking to see if artist is open to hearing more from the responders outside the formal session.

... thanking all participants.

STEPS & SEQUENCE

Through its inner working, each step lays the groundwork for the one that follows.

STEP ONE Statements of meaning: Responders state what was exciting, compelling, meaningful, memorable, evocative.

- * Provides a range of specific information about how responders are experiencing the art work.
- * Draws attention to multiple ways of experiencing the work and diversity of aesthetic perspectives.
- * Establishes positive baseline for discussion, grounding conversation in what is working, what is effective.
- * Gets responders participating, artist listening.

PREPARING FOR STEP TWO...

Artists experience...

- * Confirmation of meaningful aspects of the work.
- * Deeper understanding of how and what the work is communicating.
- * A context for the questions they will pose in step 2.

Responders experience...

- * Range of context for their own reactions.
- * Effect of their responses on artist.
- * Practice talking and a warm-up for deeper dialogue.

STEP TWO Artist asks Questions: The artist poses questions. Responders answer.

- * Initiates two-way dialogue with artist being first to establish the scope of the conversation.
- * Allows artists to state where they are focusing energy or seeking solutions.
- * Indicates to responders what artist may not be thinking about.

PREPARING FOR STEP THREE...

Artists experience...

- * Investment of responders on the artists' terms.
- * Multiple perspectives from which to view their artistic dilemmas.

Responders experience...

- * Understanding of issues artist is addressing in refining work.
- * Sense of value attached to what they have to contribute.

STEP THREE Neutral Questions from Responders: Responders ask questions, phrased neutrally. Artist responds.

- * Broadens dialogue to aspects of the work about which responders are wondering or holding opinions, thus providing additional context.
- * Engages artist in articulating intentions, motivations, background thinking.
- * Engages responders in analyzing their opinions in order to phrase them as neutral questions.

PREPARING FOR STEP FOUR...

Artists experience...

- * A way to advance work by talking about it.
- * Chance to explore topic area of future opinions as a warm-up to hearing them.
- * Opportunity to inform the content of opinions in step 4.

Responders experience...

- * Opportunity to think through the content of their opinion and broach it in neutral terms.
- * Chance to hear background which might inform the expression of opinions in step 4.

STEP FOUR Responders ask permission of artist to express opinions about their work. If artist accepts, responders state opinions.

- * Affords artists a degree of control in what opinions they choose to hear.
- * Exposes full range of responders' experience.
- * Completes a dialogue on terms that both artist and responders have helped to establish.

FORMING NEUTRAL QUESTIONS

This chart is designed to suggest a process for forming and coaching neutral questions, a key concept in step three of the Critical Response Process. Keep in mind that not everyone will agree on whether or not a question is neutral or on the best neutral alternative to an opinionated question.

Opinionated Question	Embedded Opinion	Neutral Question
Why is the cake so dry?	The cake is so dry.	What kind of texture and consistency are you aiming for in this cake?
Why is the video so long?	The video is too long.	How are you thinking about time in relation to the viewer's experience?
How do you expect the reader to comprehend this passage?	The passage is incomprehensible.	How are you hoping the reader will experience this passage?
What made you put the entire cast in green costumes?	The green costumes don't work. OR There are too many green costumes.	What's the significance of the color green to your concept? OR Talk about your costuming choices.
Are the photos in the series intentionally banal?	The images are banal and therefore unsuccessful.	What kind of reaction are you hoping to elicit from a viewer?
Have you shown the text for the brochure to an editor yet?	The text needs editing.	Where are you in the process of developing the brochure?
Have you thought about getting an actor to read your poetry for you?	Your poems are good but your reading is bad.	What would you like to add to our experience of the poetry through your use of voice and gesture?
Why do you think you need to tell the moral of the story at the end?	The moral is obvious, you don't need to tell it.	Where do you want your listeners to be at the end of the story?
Why would you want to draw dead animals?	Dead animals are an unappealing subject.	What ideas do you want to convey through your choice of subject matter?
Do you really understand what this song is about?	Your interpretation of the song shows that you don't comprehend its meaning.	How did you prepare your interpretation of the song?
Why isn't your season programming offering more opportunities to emerging artists?	You aren't offering enough opportunities to emerging artists.	What is your curatorial vision and how does it inform your programming choices?
So, do you always chew gum when you dance?	Chewing gum is distracting or inappropriate while performing a dance.	What's the role of gum chewing in your performance? OR What attitude are you hoping to convey in your performance?

Liz Lerman's

CRITICAL RESPONSE PROCESS™

A method for getting useful feedback on
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Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process is a multi-step, group system for giving and receiving useful feedback on creative processes and artistic works-in-progress. Originated in the early 1990's by choreographer and MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellow Liz Lerman, the Process has been widely embraced by artists, educators, and administrators. It has been applied in such diverse contexts as choreography classes, post-performance discussions, actor/playwright collaborations, curatorial decision-making, and university level curriculum assessment. In addition to reflecting on the work at hand, the Critical Response Process affords artists a voice and a degree of control within the critique of their work while promoting dialogue with audiences, fellow artists, students, mentors, and other colleagues.

This book, *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process*, offers a detailed introduction to the Process, beginning with its three roles and four core steps. With particular emphasis on the role of the facilitator, this illustrated publication offers guidance on how artists and participants can get the most out of the Process and the opportunities it offers to ask questions, give answers, and voice opinions. A final chapter discusses adaptations and variations. Charts and annotated sample dialogues demonstrate the inner workings of the Process.

In supporting the creation of new work, we have found Liz's Lerman's Critical Response Process to be the best tool we've ever encountered in assisting individual artists at the most vulnerable stages of creation. The Process empowers artists and invests responders with real responsibility as audience members.

—James C. Nicola, Artistic Director

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New York, New York

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