

## Considerations for Feedback in Creative Aging Sessions

Talking about artwork and giving and receiving feedback is part of an artist's process. What separates artmaking from passive entertainment activities is the opportunity for the participant to grow as an artist — this must include the opportunity to think deeply about their own work and process, and hear others' responses. In creative aging classes, the creative process is supported by providing feedback opportunities in a safe environment where the artist feels supported in their efforts and growth.

Studio classes in all artistic mediums often include critical feedback during the learning process that may be harsh and negative. Contrary to this approach, feedback in older adult learning environments is supportive and aids in the development of the older adult artist and their work. This does not mean the work is not discussed seriously – it should be. However, it is up to the teaching artist to make sure there are protocols in place to protect the artist and that feedback is provided in a safe, positive, and respectful manner.

Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process is a widely-recognized method that nurtures the development of artistic works in-progress through a four-step, facilitated dialogue between artists, peers, and audiences. Lerman's protocol is one way to assist older adult students in providing feedback to one another, but teaching artists can also create their own protocols for student feedback and conversation. Some ideas to assist in developing feedback processes for the older adult learning environment are:

1. **Ask the students how they want to give and receive feedback.**
  - What is important to them?
  - Do they wish to hear criticism?
  - Do they want opinions or suggestions?
2. **Agree to the terms of the feedback process as a class.**
  - How and when is feedback used in the class? (i.e. small groups, pairs, or whole groups)
  - What manner of feedback is supported or what types are not?
  - Should the process remain the same each time or shift with various projects?
3. **Model providing feedback** in a way you feel it will be supportive and comfortable with your students.

4. **Create a common language with one another.**
  - Will students use the word 'like' when responding to artwork? And if so, how will the teaching artist facilitate helping them unpacking what is 'liked' and why?
  - How can the teaching artist encourage the use of descriptive language that identifies what they see, feel or are reminded of? Is the vocabulary of the artform used?
  - How might the process uncover key learning concepts, skills, or successes?
5. **Have a "safe" word** that the artist can use if they have had enough feedback or are feeling uncomfortable.
6. **Encourage the use of affirmative statements** or observations:
  - I liked...
  - I noticed...
  - I wondered....

**Questions to consider when Identifying how the feedback process shows up in your creative aging class:**

1. When do you provide opportunities for feedback between the students in your classes?  
In what ways?
2. Do you include a time to share out, provide feedback and discuss artwork in every class?
3. How do you handle the moments when – despite having safe sharing protocols in place – feelings are hurt or tensions surface? How do you dissipate tension and move the lesson forward?
4. How can you encourage your students to provide supportive feedback outside of the structure of an organized feedback session?