



Instructional Supervision as Dialogue: Utilizing the Conversation of Art to Promote the Art of Communication

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Abstract

The degree to which instructional supervisors encourage reflection by teachers is in large part a function of both the supervisor's and teacher's use of the art of conversation. The author juxtaposes the Concern Based Adoption Model theory for innovation with the Feldman Method for art criticism to support reflection as aesthetic. Reflection that is grounded in an arts-based methodology may embrace both the technical and aesthetic dimensions of teaching and supervision. The author concludes that utilizing the language of art may support reflection that attends to the needs of the teacher and the needs of the students.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, reflection, effective communication, Feldman method, arts-based methodology, concerns based adoption model

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The middle graders were active, engaged, and a bit loud. For anyone who has taught middle grades he/she might not be surprised. For the new teacher, the experience was exhausting. After the author observed the teacher in an eighth grade classroom, the teacher in the post observation conference noted with great frustration, “Experiences ... I have had all the experiences I can stand. What I really need is some time to think about what is happening.” Certainly this novice must have embodied what Dewey (1934) noted was potentially an educative experience but what was missing was the opportunity to reflect on that experience. It is in fact that opportunity to reflect that is central to building a capacity to grow and develop as a teacher (Reiman, 1999). In much the same way as a painter might step back and observe the object of his/her efforts to consider what was working and what needed more attention, the artful teacher too needs a way to “step back” to consider the possibilities. Artful dialogue and instructional supervision might be one way to invite a different kind of reflection that promotes artful instruction.

As one begins to imagine that teaching might be an artful practice when it is done best (Eisner, 1983; Barone, 2001; Sarason, 1999) then one is compelled to consider the possible mechanisms that might exist whereby teachers could reflect on their practice in order to consider to what degree that practice might indeed be artful. Artful instructional leaders who can guide teachers in the process of critique and reflection (Blumberg, 1989; Pajak, 2003) might be the *sine qua non* for creating artful teachers.

The author (Kelehear, 2008c) has written to the notion that technically sound instruction, a pedagogy that at a minimum attends to learning outcomes and a supportive classroom management, might be considered an essential craft for all teachers. Some teachers, however, can do more than “technically sound” pedagogy and are able to move to an artful practice that yields an aesthetic benefit, one that is both expressive and emotional (Heid, 2005; Smith, 1966;

Wang, 2001). Reflection as a method for making meaning out of the teaching experience remains an important part of instructional supervision (Glickman, 2002; Pajak, 2003; Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Sullivan and Glanz, 2005). Reflection as a method of making meaning out of experience remains an important part of art criticism (Feldman, 1995). So, as we bring reflection on teaching and criticism in art together we can in fact build a mechanism for instructional supervision rooted in artful dialogue. In fact, the output of artful instructional supervision is measured in the degree to which the intuitive, internal notions of what happened in the classroom can be brought out into the full light of external inspection and meaning making. Eisner (1998) has noted that knowing what is effective is important and certainly, to the connoisseur of that experience just knowing is enough. However, it is in the outward articulation and expression of what is known to be true or of value, what Eisner refers to as educational criticism, where reflecting through conversation about experiences moves our knowing in the abstract to understanding in the concrete. As such, reflection as conversation is central to making meaning out of the art of teaching.

A key to encouraging teachers to reflect, to engage in critique and aesthetic evaluations of teaching is to begin using the language of the discipline that is rooted in critique and aesthetics, art (Klein, 1999; Behar-Horenstein, 2004). In as much as the supervision of teaching becomes an artful practice, then some understanding of the language of art is in order. Artful instructional supervisors can begin to utilize reflection, as in art criticism (Feldman, 1995) and educational criticism (Eisner, 1998), as a mechanism for reflecting on teaching in a much broader, fundamentally different, and possibly more profound way than some methods currently provide.

Focusing specifically on how teachers and supervisors can reflect and discuss teaching behaviors, scholars have readily acknowledged the role that reflection and feedback can play in supporting teacher growth (Beebe & Masterson, 2000; Bennis, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 2002; Dewey, 1938; Glanz, 2002; Good & Brophy, 1997; Kelehear, 2002; Lambert, et al., 2003; Nolan & Hoover, 2004; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Schon, 1987; Sullivan & Glanz, 2005, 2006; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002; Woolfolk & Hoy, 2003; Zepeda, 2000). The manner in which supervisor and teacher talk to each other reflects the capacity of both parties to recognize that teaching is about supervisor and teacher as well as teacher and student. There is shared responsibility in the conversations about teaching. It is inward and it is outward. It is about me. It is about you. It is about us. And, most importantly, it is about the children. The relationship that emerges from the conversation can be beneficial to both the teacher and the supervisor. In other words, there is a bidirectional benefit (Kelehear, 2002; Reiman, 1999; Reiman & Theis-Sprinthall, 1993). However, in order to understand this bi-directionality, some consideration must be given to the nature of conversation and how it can move from concern about self to concern about others. The Concerns Based Adoption Model provides such a theoretical understanding.

Using the Concerns Based Adoption Model to Understand Innovation

For several years, emerging in large part from Fuller's (1969) original study published in the *American Educational Research Journal*, researchers in staff development have provided an important mechanism for framing and supporting organizational change through the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) (Hall & Loucks, 1978; Hord, et al., 1978; Hall & Rutherford, 1990). The stages of CBAM are Awareness, Information, Personal, Management, Consequence, Collaboration and Refocusing. This theory recognizes that when individuals come into contact

with innovations, they necessarily travel through the levels of concern (i.e., starting with awareness and moving up the scale) based heavily on how “new” the innovation is. If, for example, a principal assumes a new position in a new district in a new state, then that principal will frequently be unaware of all the expectations placed on him or her. In the state of South Carolina, for example, principals are assessed with the ADEPT instrument. If for a moment readers of this article can assume the role of a principal not from the state not having received training in this state, then they will be unaware of this instrument and it will function as an innovation. Simply put, the ADEPT instrument is new to the readers. Immediately the readers, if they were to be assessed with the ADEPT, will want more information, will want to know how it affects them, and will seek to begin managing the new instrument within their already busy lives. According the CBAM model, these steps will be necessary and in order. Moving to step four (management) is a typical place where individuals cease being concerned about the innovation because they “have it under control.” One of the goals for CBAM, however, is to support individuals’ continued movement up the scale toward consequence, collaboration, and refocusing [see Table 1].

Table 1
 Typical Expressions of Concern about an Innovation

Stage of Concern	Expression of Concern
6. Refocusing	I have some ideas about something that would work even better.
5. Collaboration	How can I relate what I am doing to what others are doing?
4. Consequence	How is my use affecting learners? How can I refine it to have more impact?
3. Management	I seem to be spending all my time getting materials ready.
2. Personal	How will using it affect me?

1. Informational	I would like to know more about it.
0. Awareness	I am not concerned about it.

A profoundly important distinction between the first four stages and the last three is that the focus of the individuals moves away from themselves and more toward the effect an innovation has on others. A recent example, quite possibly familiar to all involved in public schools, might be useful to help elucidate this point.

The recent legislation titled No Child Left Behind has certainly challenged many educators. When the Act came on the scene one of the Bush administration's first goals was to make everyone aware of the law. Immediately, principals in my supervision classes began seeking information and especially to seek what affect this new law might have on them. As it began to be clear that the act was going to impact them all, they quickly set out to understand how they would manage the new expectations within an already difficult set of circumstances. Quite interestingly, where information was lacking or absent, school leaders and teachers quickly began to "fill in" their own information, accurate or not! But as the principals began to understand how they might manage this innovation, called the "No Child Left Behind Act", many of them felt at ease and ceased giving the Act much attention beyond what they had to do based on central administration reporting demands. Done correctly, at least according to CBAM, after managing the innovation leaders would begin to ask important questions about the possible consequence that the Act might have on students in the schools. In other words, "Given that No Child Left Behind is with us, how might this act affect our children?" The major shift in energy moves from concern about self to concern about others. Additionally, one might begin asking questions such as, "How might our staff work together, or collaborate, to make the Act more appropriate or more powerful as a learning strategy?" Moreover, the final stage, not reached by

many, could be “Now that we understand No Child Left Behind, how could we reconsider, reconfigure or refocus the Act to make it better than it is?”

The theoretical model for understanding how people engage an innovation provided in CBAM provides key insights into what motivates people. Through the first four stages, the concern regarding something new is restricted to how that innovation is going to affect the person. Starting with “consequence,” the motivation regarding an innovation moves to a level of concern about the impact on others. In school settings, this movement is one from the teacher in the first four stages to the students in the last three stages. Or, in the case of an instructional leader, the concern begins with the leader then moves to the affect an innovation has on the teacher or students. Nevertheless, in whatever setting the CBAM theoretical construct emerges, there exists a profound shift after one understands how to manage an innovation. To ask teachers, for example, to embrace a new staff development initiative because of its potential for student achievement before accounting for how that innovation will affect teachers themselves is to miss the primary message in CBAM. Instructional leaders would do well to help teachers understand and manage the innovation and then begin considering with them the potential benefits for children and for learning. A similar shift in focus may also occur as instructional leaders utilize the language of art in discussing instruction with a teacher. The next section offers a brief introduction to the Feldman Method of art talk and is followed with an application of the model of discussing instruction with a teacher.

Using the Feldman Method to Talk About Art

Edmund Feldman, an art Professor for many years at the University of Georgia, has provided generations of artists with a paradigm for discussing art publicly, i.e., art criticism. His

four-step, (description, analysis, interpretation, judgment) approach offers students a specific process for undertaking aesthetics or critical theory.

When an observer engages an artwork using the Feldman Method (1995), that individual will first *describe* the piece. The goal in this step is to describe objectively what one sees. An essential part of this step is to delay any judgments, draw no conclusions. An observer might comment on the title, the name of the artist, the date, the medium, or the size. Additionally, the observer might comment as to whether the work is representational, abstract, or nonobjective?

The second step in the Feldman Method involves *analysis*. In the process of analysis, one begins to describe different elements of the art, like the use of color, or line, or value. Out of this step, the observer begins to engage the work more emotionally and intimately.

The third step in the Feldman Method calls for *interpretation*. The goal is to try to find meaning in what one sees. One might begin asking questions that seek to understand how observed features and qualities combine to create meaning. Or, what memories or feelings emerge from observing the work? What is the purpose of the artist's use of colors or objects or symbols? What do they mean?

The final step in the Feldman Method is for the observer to begin making *judgments* about the artwork. This step is the first one that calls for evaluation on the part of the observer. Two questions to be answered might be: "What was the artist trying to do?" and "Was the artist successful?" Equally important is the pursuit of the answer to this question: "How might the artist have been more successful?"

As a step toward becoming comfortable with the Feldman Method for discussing art, examine the artwork below by Joseph Norman (See Figure 1). After examining the piece, consider the possible applications of the Feldman Method in discussing the work. It is important

to note the shift in the discussion between the first and second steps where one describes and analyzes as opposed to the third and fourth steps where the observer begins to interpret and evaluate the work.

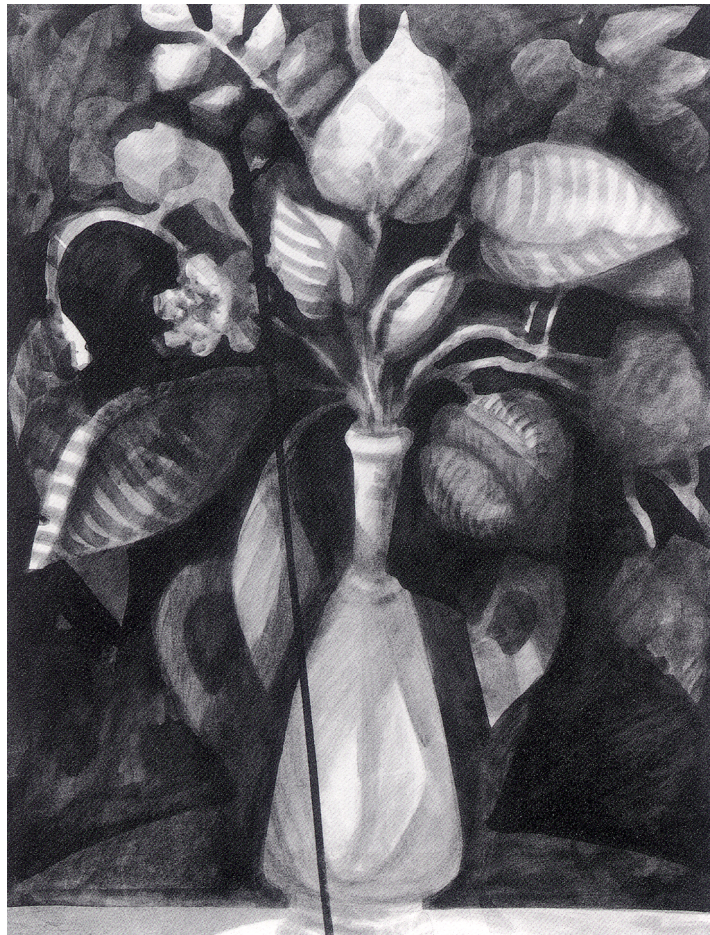
Figure 1:

Nocturnes for Heather, 1996

Ink wash on paper, 24 x 19 in.

Collection of the artist

Figure 1



The Feldman Method for Art Criticism

Step 1: Description

Goal is to describe objectively what you see; to delay judgment. List title; artist; date; medium; size. Is work representational, abstract, or nonobjective? Can you identify a subject? If not, are there objective “hints” about a subject? Describe how the elements are used.

A description might include: Joseph Norman, 1996; *Nocturnes for Heather*, 24 x 19 in.; Ink wash on paper; still life of a vase, with flowers and leaves, black and white with values of gray, values create forms, dark spaces create shapes of leaves, lighter spaces create positive space.

Step 2: Analysis

Goal is to describe behaviors of what you see. Describe how the elements above use the principles of design. And identify the feelings that the elements and principles engender.

The analysis might include: Create moodiness through use of dark and light, especially a sense of mystery. Joyfulness is also present. Forms and shapes create fullness. Negative and positive spaces work to remove some of the mystery.

Step 3: Interpretation

Goal is to find meaning in what you see. How do features and qualities that you have observed combine to create meaning? What does the work remind you of? Why?

What do you think the artist is trying to do? What is the intended use of the object? Are there symbols in the work? What do they mean?

One interpretation might be: Vase and flowers suggest feminine quality. The vegetation is full of life. There is music and dancing, emphasized by movement of vegetation. There

is emphasis on the female form, particularly in the notion of the vase. The vase holds the water that provides sustaining life to the dance of the flowers.

Step 4: Judgment

Goal: To evaluate what you see. Does the work have value through formal qualities (use of elements and principles of design)? Value through expression of emotion or feeling? Value through purpose? Are materials appropriate? How could it have been more successful? Who might value this work?

A possible judgment would include: The use of metaphor is powerful and appropriate. Movement, mystery, joy, symmetry and balance work together to build unity and wholeness, much as we might hope for in a new and exciting relationship. There is even the suggestion of fullness and color through the black and white shades suggesting that we remember to rely on the common, every-day occurrences to bring life and color to our relationships.

In the first two steps, the observer of the art is engaged in concrete and specific criticism of the art. In essence, then, the observer is coming to terms with the technical elements of the art. The third and fourth steps, however, begin to be more abstract and evaluative in nature. Instead of technical, the conversation begins to move into the aesthetic considerations of the art. Obviously, it is easier for an observer to complete the first two steps of the Feldman Method but it is necessary for the observer to engage in the final two steps in order to garner the full meaning of the art, especially as it affects him or her. The observer moves from seeing the art as an object “at a distance” to an object “being engaged and attended to” in meaningful ways.

Using Art Conversation to Talk About Teaching

If then an instructional leader begins to describe teaching behaviors as art, one can observe that the same movement from concern about self to concern about others also happens. To put it differently, initially the conversation focuses on the technical dimensions and afterwards addresses the aesthetic elements of the lesson. In the first two steps, the instructional supervisor observes the lesson in its technical dimensions. The observer describes and analyzes the lesson and these pieces are very important. In fact, without these two steps, and in particular learning outcomes and classroom management, being successful it is premature to consider other parts of the lesson. If, on the other hand, the supervisor describes and analyzes the lesson with a teacher, and they both feel comfortable with those steps, then they can begin discussing the instruction in qualitative or aesthetic ways. As in the description of the Feldman Method above, teachers and instructional leaders can readily engage in “describing” and “analyzing” a lesson but it is quite a different story to “interpret” and “evaluate” the lesson. The final two steps require the instructor and observer to attend more carefully to the feelings, the consequences and the subtleties of the lesson (Heid, 2005). But the final two steps are the essence of beginning to observe teaching as an art and supervision of such teaching as also an art. To ignore those steps is to continue reducing class observations to inspection and “fact finding” rather than enlarging the observation to the aesthetic possibilities of excellent teaching. Given the important role that all four steps play in promoting the art of teaching and the art of discussing teaching, it is instructive to observe how using the Feldman Method makes sense.

Table 2

Typical Expressions of Instructional Leaders Using Art Conversation

Level of Criticism	Expressions of Criticism
4. Evaluation	Was the lesson successful? In what ways might it have been improved?

	What recommendations might be useful to improve the next lesson?
3. Interpretation	How did the methodology affect students? How did the methodology interface with the subject matter? How did the lesson match or mismatch the learner needs and styles?
2. Analysis	Were the learning outcomes met? How did classroom management affect the attainment of the learner outcomes?
1. Description	Objectively, what do I see? Withhold evaluation of the lesson or teacher.

In the first two steps above, the teacher and the observer both consider the questions that begin to describe and analyze the lesson. Above all else, it is important to withhold judgments. In planning the lesson and in reflecting on the lesson afterwards, the instructor gives consideration to the mechanics of the lesson. In step one, *describe*, the teacher reflects on such things as age of students, size of class, time of day, previous learning. In step two, *analyze*, the teacher seeks primarily to answer two questions: “Were the learning outcomes met?” and “Did the classroom management support or impede the attainment of the learning outcomes?” Although there is a certain degree of evaluation at work here, the teacher does not evaluate the overall lesson, yet. Instead, in this step the teacher makes determinations on two specific elements of the lesson based on observable evidence.

In step three and four, however, a discernable shift occurs in the nature of the reflections. The teacher begins to move away from the technical dimensions of the lesson toward the aesthetic qualities of the lesson. In particular, the teacher begins to ask questions that seek to discover in what ways the lesson and instruction affected the students emotionally and personally. Also, the teacher reflects on her or his own emotional reaction to the lesson. In so doing, the teacher is attending to the fine-grained subtleties, the aesthetics, of the lesson that distinguish artistic teaching from merely good or adequate teaching. Instruction begins to be more than just the outputs of the lesson (i.e., the results on tests). Reflection on instruction begins

to be about test results and the impact of our actions on others. By using the art of conversation, the teacher and instructional supervisor begin encouraging high academic achievement and accountability on the part of students and teachers. The school culture begins to be one of high expectations. Additionally, the art of conversation encourages students and teachers to reflect on their actions and the possible impact on others. In the end, the art of conversation, as a component of seeing teaching and supervision as art, encourages high standards in academic achievement and civic behavior.

Putting the Art Talk to Work

Working with a group of eight instructional leaders, the author introduced the Feldman Method as a way to discuss art. The CBAM theoretical model recognizes that with any innovation, learners necessarily and sequentially move through the levels of awareness, information, personal and management. With this consideration in mind, the author made the instructional leaders *aware* of the Feldman Method as a way to observe and discuss art. Once made aware, the group quickly wanted to know more about the methodology, about Edmund Feldman, about art criticism, and about the familiarity of the methodology in art circles. The group discussed the stages or steps included in the methodology. This step required a great deal of concrete definitions, as one student remarked, to “get his mind around the notion.” They needed *information*.

The next “need” of the group was one that many teachers encounter as they introduce a concept to a group of students. A first year principal captured the group’s concern when she asked: “Why do we need to know this? Is there a test over the steps later?” As the leaders began to become comfortable with the idea of the Feldman Method, they then wanted to know how that knowledge was going to affect them *personally*. In response to their concern, the author

suggested that the Feldman Method might offer the group a methodology for discussing and describing observations of teaching. And most importantly for the leadership students, there would be no test but they would tape conversations, bring those tapes back to class, and then receive feedback from peers about the dialogues. The students seemed relieved by the absence of a test but stressed about taping. The next level of concern for them led naturally, and quickly, to the process of *managing* the assignment. Questions began: “When will we need to have this done?” and “Who will hear these tapes?” Having answered, or at least having responded to, their concerns the author quickly moved to have the students practice using the Feldman Method (i.e., the innovation in their lives) with an artwork by Joseph Norman.

The author presented an artwork by the lithograph artists Joseph Norman (See Figure 2) and led the students through the process of describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating. The author took special care in addressing the first two steps and thus delayed students’ rush to pass judgment on the piece. After completing the technical assessments of the art, the students then began to attend to the aesthetics of the art. In particular, they began to move figuratively closer to the work as they considered emotions they shared, affects they noticed, as well as considering the feelings the artist might have had and the possible affect the work might have had on him or her. And, as a closing exercise, the students began to make judgments about the work. They evaluated the artist’s success at conveying a message, at enlisting emotions, at stirring reflection. At the close of class, the author asked the leadership students to conduct four Feldman Method critiques before the next class. They were to write their reflections and share them with the class the following week.

A key goal for the author in asking the students to engage in four critiques was for them to participate in the private and public reflections that come with aesthetics and criticism, not

unlike an artist might undergo in a critique of a piece of art. Additionally, by asking the students to practice the innovation and talk about it the next week, the author sought to push the students past being uncomfortable with the innovation. At the beginning of class time for the remainder of the term, the author presented an artwork and asked the instructional leaders to apply the Feldman Method and they discussed the work.

Figure 2:

Waiting, Portrait of Jackie Robinson, 1999

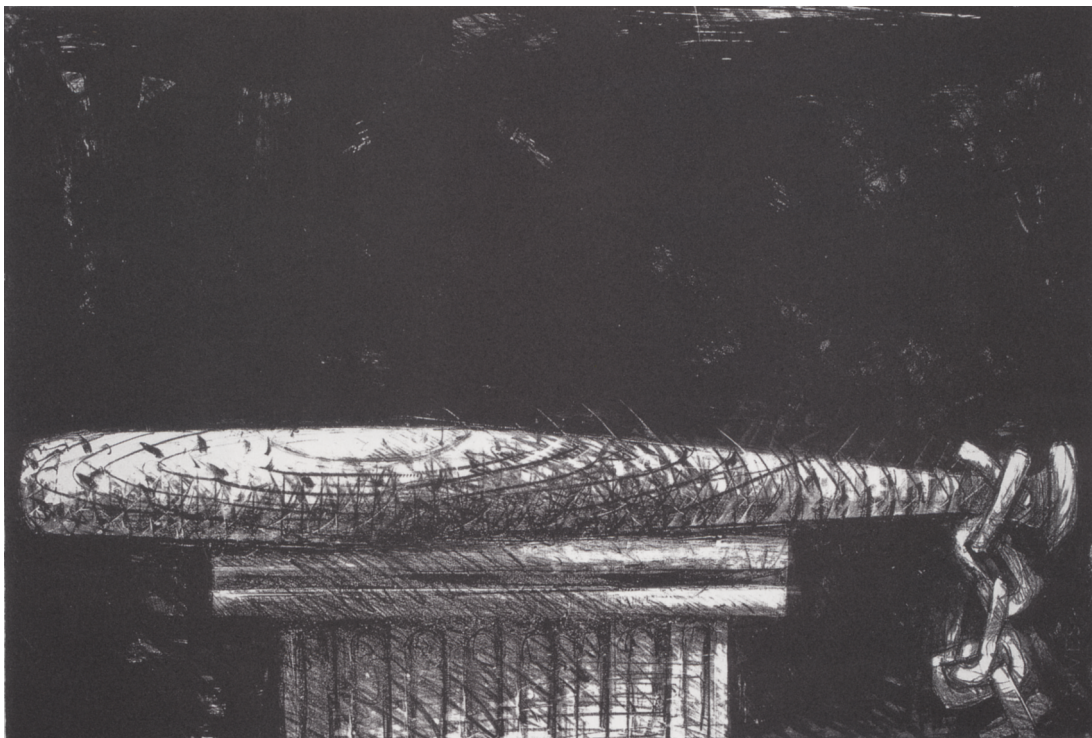
From the portfolio “Out at Home: Negro Baseball League, Volume 1”

Lithograph, 30 x 22 in.

Collection of the Albright-Knox Gallery,

Buffalo, New York

Figure 2



Considering the Benefits of Art Talk for Instructional Supervision

Applying the Feldman Method to artwork was new for the instructional leaders and that newness helped remind them of the power, intimidating power, of innovations. Applying the Feldman Method in teacher observations was also challenging, as it was innovation for them and for the teachers. But, having gone through the stages of concern in class, the instructional leaders had empathy for the feelings, needs, and anxieties of their teaching staffs.

In a second term, the author asked the same eight students to take their new knowledge of the Feldman Method and apply it to teacher observations. Using the chart above (See Table 2), the students began to be comfortable with the different steps in the method. In pre-observation conferences at their schools, they discussed with teachers the specific points for observation and the structure of the observation instrument. After each lesson, the observed teachers were asked to apply the Feldman Method as they reflected on their own lessons. In the post-observation conference, the instructional leader asked the teacher to lead the conference by moving through the Feldman Method. The instructional leader, after listening to the teacher, affirmed or re-directed the conversation. One of the instructional leaders came to class one week and remarked: "I cannot get my teacher to do the last two steps. All the teacher wants to know is if he passed or not! We just have nothing to talk about after we finish the technical part." Other participants also reflected similar concerns. In a culture of high stakes assessment, of both students and teachers, it is easy to lose sight of the aesthetics that impact learning and to reduce learning to the technical or immediately observable elements of a lesson. Toward the end of the term, several of the instructional leaders commented that their teachers, after they began to trust the leader's intentions, were becoming more comfortable with discussing the aesthetic steps (i.e., steps three and four) in the Feldman Method.

With each attempt to apply the Feldman Method to instructional supervision, the students became more comfortable applying the conversation of art in conferences. An especially exciting part of this growing confidence and in keeping with the CBAM stages of consequence, collaboration, and refocusing, the students began considering different approaches to using art language in observing teaching. As the students became comfortable with the innovation later in the term, the author and students began discussing the *consequence* the Feldman Method might have on student learning and teacher growth. Their concern moved from concern about self to concern about the innovation's impact on others. They also moved quickly to *collaborate* on possible alternatives to the standard format the author proposed. And finally, as a final project in the class, they were asked to *refocus* the Feldman Method and formulate a new format for critique so that they could make the assessment instrument meet the needs of teachers and students at their schools.

Introducing school leaders to the language of art, and in this case the Feldman Method, reminded the author and students that innovation can be overwhelming. In order to come to terms with innovation, school leaders must also recognize the teaching the CBAM theory offers. A particularly exciting connection for the participants and author, and an unanticipated one, was the link they made between concern for self and concern for other in both the CBAM and Feldman Method. The message was clear: when school leaders and teachers, in parallel fashion, begin attending to the art of teaching, then they necessarily begin to move beyond the important and necessary technical dimensions of teaching to the crucial and essential aesthetics considerations that make a classroom a place for academic achievement and personal development.

Conclusion

In a day of high stakes testing, it can be easy to seek success on testing as the final measure of successful schools and teaching. Indeed, high-test scores can often communicate important messages about student learning. But, if instructional supervision begins to reduce successful teaching solely to the scores on the test, then the practice in effect removes the human element of the schooling experience. If high stakes testing creates great test takers who have little or no concern for others, then schools begin to create selfish, maybe even narcissistic, students who care little for how their actions affect others. The only thing that matters is the Machiavellian reality where the ends justify the means. The results of the tests justify all else. But in considering the ends and the means through seeing the art of teaching and learning teachers may begin to cultivate standards and concern for others.

Based on this study that author suggests that the art of conversation may be a way to encourage teachers, students, and instructional supervisors to reflect on experiences, to expect high performances, and to consider the consequences of actions on others. There may indeed be other avenues to encourage such substantive reflection but the arts-based approach offered in this study might yet offer another way to think about matters differently. Maybe in the process we can learn “to see what we have learned not to notice (which) remains one of the most critical and difficult tasks of educational connoisseurs” (Eisner, 1998). And arts-based practices may offer a real chance for instructional leaders to be connoisseurs of effective instruction. Having thoughtful, bright teachers and students certainly is a goal worth pursuing and the art of conversation can be a small and important move in that direction.

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