

Learning Tools and Teaching Strategies

"For many of us who've been teaching awhile this is instinctive," says Jeff Pridie, a member of the North & West Regional Arts Quality Teaching Network (QTN) and K-12 visual arts teacher in the Waterville Elysian Morrystown (WEM) school system in Waterville, MN. "I just do it automatically." Just what is it that Pridie does automatically? Designing learning tools for students and teaching strategies for himself as his students go about the work of drawing, painting or sculpting in the WEM studio arts class. What is difficult for Pridie is to take the tools and strategies apart, to consciously think about what exactly it is that he asks students to do (learning tools) and how he, as the teacher, works the spaces (teaching strategies) within the learning tools to make sure students are successful. Separating what students do and what teachers do and examining how the two work together to improve student achievement is exactly what the Arts Quality Teaching Networks (QTN) studied during the 2005-06 school year.

To support students in meeting the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in the Arts, arts educators must intentionally build incremental steps to work toward the learning goals set by the standards. Those intentional, incremental steps help *all* student achieve at high levels—not just those who appear to be artistically talented. Describing those incremental steps involves delineating the learning tools and teaching strategies, which allows them to be more easily modified and adapted by other arts educators for use in other arts areas and even for different grade levels.

Pridie describes one learning tool he uses in his studio arts class. "I have students journal—keep a process log so I can see how and what they're thinking. I tailor prompts for them to respond to throughout the creation process." Pridie reads all the journal entries. "I can't get to every student to speak to them every day, but I can read what they're writing and determine who's struggling and if, when and how I need to intervene." Pridie varies his teaching strategies according to the students' needs. He responds to some students in writing and others he conferences with orally. Some students he simply encourages to keep working, others he coaches himself, and still others he sends to conference with a peer who has worked through the same kind of frustration or solved a similar problem.

Pridie explains that his school is so small he can't offer separate drawing, painting and sculpting classes. Students in his studio arts class range from freshmen to seniors, but all of them are working through the creation process. (The 1997 Arts National Assessment of Educational Progress identified three arts processes—create, perform and respond.) The learning tools and teaching strategies Pridie uses must be broad enough to work for the different forms of the visual arts and the wide range of student development, but specific enough to support all students in achieving success. The logs, according to Pridie, ignite the process of thinking. "I don't tell my students what to do or how to solve a problem. I prompt their thinking. I'm not the total answer person in my classroom. My students learn to use each other." The process logs serve a second function—they are a bridge to developing the artist statements each student must write to accompany their finished work.

At the Arts State Council (the three regional QTN combined) meeting on April 4 and 5, 2006, over 70 Minnesota arts educators met to share the learning tools and teaching strategies they developed and the student work the tools generated in classrooms across the state. Pridie shared his process log tool with other visual arts educators as well as dance, literature, music, theater teachers. During the school year 2006-07 arts educators in the QTN continued to work on delineating learning tools and teaching strategies by modifying and adapting a selected sample of tools for use across arts areas and grade levels.