

## **Video #4 Entering the School-Guests and Hosts**

The Teaching Artist's role in a wide variety of school activities requires the knowledge of how best to interact. I find that in some situations, the artist plays the role of a "guest" in the school community, and in other situations the artist plays the role of a "host." An awareness of which role the artist must play, can make interactions with school staff and students efficient and effective. Here are some guiding thoughts for the artist.

### ***Guests***

The artist is usually not a full time employee of the school community. Until a long-term partnership established, the artist must navigate around the school culture as guest. Let's look at the qualities of a good guest, as it pertains to the work of AIE.

If you are a guest in someone's home, you want to make choices that disrupt the host's regular schedule as little as possible. You want to become part of their life, as much as possible. This requires a high level of flexibility. You must adapt to routines that are different from yours. You may need to eat new foods, or sleep on a hard mattress. This flexibility is always balanced with your ability to communicate your basic needs to your host. A good host will want to accommodate your specific needs whenever possible.

As a "guest" in a school community, you must conduct yourself in the same manner. Your presence in the school, already alters the routines of some faculty and staff. You want to minimize the ways in which your presence disrupts their schedule. So, you must arrive on time, prepared with all necessary materials and equipment. You must have a realistic agenda that fits the limitations of your meeting time. Teachers work under very precise schedules. Nothing makes them more uncomfortable than activities that interfere with their many obligations. Furthermore, you must know how your offerings can address the specific needs of the school. Teachers unfamiliar with integrated arts programming, often see the work of an artist-in-residence as an "extra" experience that takes time away from their contact with students. You must be prepared to articulate the ways that you will help them achieve their goals. Otherwise, it will be difficult for a school to designate time and resources toward your work. You are there to serve the school community.

In your role as a guest, you must be able to articulate your needs to the school community. These needs may be as basic as where to find the restroom and coffee, or may be as complex as scheduling a room for your use in a multi-week residency. You must know the "deal-breaking" conditions that will make your work possible, and you must be ready to be flexible on an array of other details.

A good guest is also prepared to weather the unforeseen events of an artist residency. Without the large view of the complex interworkings of a school, it is often difficult to understand why last minute changes are necessary. The teaching artist must be ready and willing to help solve problems that arise with scheduling, facilities, etc. Your ability to "work the problem" (as opposed to complain about the inconvenience) will endear you to school leaders and create an atmosphere that will lead to future work and long-term partnerships.

## *Hosts*

The artist plays the role of the host during the artistic/educational activities of the performance and/or residency workshops. As a host, you welcome the educators and students into your artistic “world.” Therefore, we should reflect on those things that make a good host.

If you are hosting visitors in your home, there are certain things that you may do to make your guests feel welcome, and at ease. You would prepare your home by clearing the clutter, putting new sheets on the bed, checking ahead of time if your guest has any dietary restrictions, and completing daily tasks so you can offer your undivided attention to the visitor. Upon entry into the house, you would show them where to find their room, the restroom etc. You would also give them a sense of the schedule of events and obligations that you have in the house that will affect their visit. If you are cooking food that is foreign to the guest, you would probably tell them the ingredients and perhaps share the history of the recipe as it pertains to your family or your heritage. This provides a safe, welcoming environment for your guest to take a risk of trying something new.

The activities of a good host apply to work of a teaching artist. Once you have settled into the work space and all of the logistical elements of your visit are complete, now comes the time for you invite educators and students into your “world.” If you have done appropriate planning, you will have already eliminated possible distractions in the school building (interruptions of school bells, scheduling questions, etc.). You want to make sure the room has ample space for them to do the artistic work. If you students are dancing, make sure that stacks of desks and chairs do not interfere with their movement. If you are working with clay, make sure that students can access a sink to wash off excess clay when their work is complete. You want to give them a sense of the activities that will occur within the given timeframe. This gives students and teachers a feeling of ease that they can know what to expect, and order in which to expect it. In most artist residencies, you do not have time to develop highly sophisticated artistic techniques that require long hours of study and practice. Therefore, you must choose the most important of these skills and techniques that can be taught in the limitations of the schedule, and will provide the biggest impact on the student work. By sharing the historical/cultural background of these techniques, you provide another way for students and educators to connect. Remember, they are trying something new in your workshop. They are taking a risk. Some might fear that they will not succeed. Others may be uncomfortable with certain movements or artistic materials. Others still may be unwilling to try something completely out of their experience. Some might have had a bad experience with this art form as a child that colors their impression of it as an adult. Some might have physical limitations that prohibit their participation. You must empathize with all of these individuals and try to create an environment that encourages them to participate. When they succeed at a small task, celebrate it! This will help them take the next step toward creating a new work of art.

In the array of tasks and skills needed by a successful teaching artist, the knowledge of their role in a given moment helps to clarify ambiguities and guide decisions. Now let us turn toward the practical elements of interacting with a school community.

## **Procedures for Entering the School**

An artist entering a school, for meetings, performances, and/or workshops must conduct themselves in a manner that projects an aura of confidence and professionalism. I will share some simple recommendations that apply to all situations, then list procedures that are specific to meetings, performances, and workshops. Not all schools have buses, and not all teaching artists travel to their work by car, so take what is useful to your situation, and ignore the rest.

### **In all cases...**

1. ***Pre-meeting Confirmation***-At least one day before a scheduled meeting, call to confirm the time with the school. This will ensure that nothing has changed from the expected schedule, and all participants will be prepared.
2. ***Parking***-Park your car in a designated parking area for visitors or faculty/staff. Make sure that your vehicle is parked far away from the location where students enter or depart the buses. Traffic laws regarding parked school buses are very specific and rigid. Cars cannot pass a parked school bus with flashing lights and/or the bus' "stop" sign. Bus drivers report violations directly to the police, therefore, if the artist is given directions by school staff to park their car in a place that exceeds the boundaries of the law, the artist is still responsible for the violation. This issue is VERY IMPORTANT, because it involves the safety of children. There are few better ways to discourage school representatives to hire an artist, than to, in some way, to jeopardize the safety of their students.
3. ***Sign In Procedures***- Upon entering a school, go directly to the main office. Introduce yourself and tell the school secretary the name of your contact person. The secretary will then instruct you on the particular security/sign-in procedures of their school. These procedures may include signing a guest book, making a name tag, wearing a visitor's pass, etc. All of these procedures must be followed to the letter. In our post 911 world, schools have become increasingly strict about monitoring all people who enter the school. Therefore, if you are walking down a hall toward your meeting room, and a teacher sees you without a visitor's badge, they may be obligated to escort you back to the main office to obtain the necessary badge.
4. ***Find Your Advocates***- When entering a school, an artist must quickly find the necessary information for interacting with faculty and students. The school secretary is often the first person that an artist meets. The secretary may or may not know all the information that the artist needs. Other key people in a school community that can help are the principal, assistant principals, contact people, custodians, parent volunteers, etc. The sooner that you make contact with these key people, the sooner you can find the meeting room, the restroom, performance area, the load-in location, and the coffee/tea/water, etc.
5. ***Look Good***- Artists should be dressed in a presentable, professional manner. This does not necessarily mean that you must wear suits and formal dresses. Artists often have unique styles of dress that add to their appeal to students. Make sure that you choose clothing that will project an aura of professionalism, as well as communicate your unique style as an artist. This is necessary because most of the teachers, administrators, and parents will not have extensive contact with the

- artist, and first impressions will play a large role in their image of the artist and their capacity to help students learn.
6. **Arrival Time**- Always plan extra travel time to allow a prompt arrival at the school. Artists who arrive late, out-of-breath, and worried reinforce negative stereotypes that artists cannot be punctual, cannot organize, cannot plan time, and have a disregard for institutions. All of these negative stereotypes exist in our culture, and we must work hard to dispel them in every situation.
  7. **Departure Time**-When possible, allow extra time before your departure for the next meeting. This will allow you to have post-meeting conversations with interested participants that could lead to future work, better planning, etc.
  8. **Equipment**-Be prepared with all necessary equipment and information to accomplish the goal of the meeting.
  9. **Thank you, Thank you, Thank you**- You must express your gratitude to school personnel who help you. You will quickly gain the respect of these people by thanking them, speaking clearly, and allowing time to work out the necessary arrangements for your visit. Remember, you are a guest in their building, so you must conduct yourself accordingly.

### **For meetings...**

1. Follow the above recommendations regarding all school contact.
2. **Handouts**- Bring copies of handouts for all participants and have 2-3 copies extra for additional attendees. Do not expect the school to copy your handouts for you, unless you have cleared this well in advance of the meeting.
3. **Technology**- If you plan on presenting information in the form of a powerpoint, a CD/DVD, web-based, etc. that require specific technologies, make sure that you have tested the equipment prior to the meeting. If you plan on using school equipment (computers, projectors, etc.), make sure to leave enough time to test the equipment in advance of the meeting. You will also need to make contact with school technology coordinators to make this happen.

### **For Performances...**

1. Follow the above recommendations regarding all school contact.
2. **Contract Information**-Prior to entrance into the school, you must have written confirmation of the time, place, number of students, grade levels, fees, and other contract-based information. A copy of this will facilitate all of your initial contact with the school.
3. **Loading In Equipment**-Find the school entrance closest to the performance space (auditorium, gym, cafeteria, etc.). Make sure that the presence of your vehicle does not interfere with bus activity. If needed, ask the custodian for a hand-truck or flatbed cart to move your equipment into place. Make sure to tell the custodian the time that you will need the cart for load out.
4. **Microphones and Sound System**-If you expect to use the school's microphone/amplification equipment, make sure to check this equipment before the day of the performance. The quality of school PA equipment varies widely from full professional systems, to portable podiums with one scratchy microphone. You must be confident that the available equipment matches the

- needs of your program- how many microphones do you need? Should they be professional, music/quality microphones? Is the PA system strong enough to carry your voice throughout the given performance space?
5. **Performance Schedule-** Double check the start and end times of your performance with school personnel. In most cases, the performance schedule is designed around a complex system of other schedules for the school community. A program that ends too early, or too late, can cause major difficulties for faculty and students. Precision is necessary in the timing of your performances.
  6. **Check emergency exits-** Your equipment cannot interfere with emergency procedures.

### **For workshops...**

1. Follow the above recommendations regarding all school contact.
2. **Contract Information-**Prior to entrance into the school, you must have written confirmation of the time, place, number of students, grade levels, fees, and other contract-based information. A copy of this will facilitate all of your initial contact with the school.
3. **Loading In Equipment** Find the school entrance closest to the workshop space (auditorium, gym, cafeteria, etc.). Make sure that the presence of your vehicle does not interfere with bus activity.
4. **Secure Location for Equipment-**If you plan on leaving equipment at the school (in the case of a multiple-day residency), confirm with the custodian and the administration that the room containing your equipment is secure until the time you return.
5. **Will Your Artwork Disturb Nearby Classrooms?-**If your workshop generates substantial amounts of sound, make sure that you are not in a location that will disturb other classes engaged in quiet activities (like taking tests!). You must ensure that your presence in the school only enhances the atmosphere of learning, and in no way (under your control) interferes with regular activities.
6. **Is the room appropriate for your activities?** Do you need chairs, desks, or open space? Do you need computers, tables, a sink? Make sure that the elements of the room match the needs of your activities (see room set up details under the Work of a Teaching Artist).
7. **Check emergency exits-** Your equipment cannot interfere with emergency procedures.
8. **A Teacher Must Be Present-**Confirm that a teacher or other school representative will be present during all of your workshops. This will ensure that students are monitored according to the law. This will also provide another adult observer in the unfortunate situation that an artist is accused of inappropriate behavior. This is always a part of school-day activities, although, sometimes after-school activities function without an additional teacher present. Check the regulations of your programs on this topic.
9. **Always have Adults Present-** Avoid situations that place you in a room alone with students. Workshops, concerts, meetings, etc. should always include school staff. Whenever possible, use faculty restrooms, not the student bathrooms. Though

this rule may exude a sense of paranoia, its application will eliminate unnecessary questions, and potential legal entanglements.

### **Additional Considerations**

1. ***Liability Insurance-*** Teaching artists should carry liability insurance coverage to protect them against any possible mishaps that can occur in an AIE residency. Students could be injured by tripping over the artist's equipment. Though some believe that school insurance policies cover this sort of accident, it often does not. Check with your insurance agent to make sure that you are covered for liability concerns in your school-based activities.
2. ***Intellectual Property-*** Artist residencies often involve the creation of new art work and curriculum materials. The nature of our work necessitates a wide variety of collaborative processes that generate these materials. In some cases, the resulting art work may have value above and beyond the limitations of the residency. You may want to share the resulting art work and curriculum with other schools as a promotional tool. You may want to make copies of art works for sale or other forms of distribution. You may want to post these materials on your web site. It is advisable you to consult your legal representative to develop a contract that clearly states your expectations in the realm of intellectual property (IT) ownership. Make sure that your agreement is detailed enough to cover the necessary issues, but brief enough to avoid overwhelming potential school clients. Large elaborate contracts can scare away some educators. If rightly worked, this clear agreement will help ensure strong relationships with schools that meet the needs of all project participants.