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## At Lincoln Center Institute, Arts and the Art of Teaching

*Ralph Gardner Jr. on Effort to Get Teachers, Students to Think Like Artists*

By RALPH GARDNER JR.

I'd be lying if I claimed to know exactly what was going on during a visit to the Juilliard School on a recent afternoon, as ensembles of teachers from New York City schools and beyond crowded into 3-by-7-foot rectangles marked off by blue tape to create theatrical moments. Part of the reason for my ignorance is that I arrived in the middle of an all-day workshop at the Lincoln Center Institute, which helps develop the abilities of students and teachers by exposing them to the visual and performing arts.

"We're giving teachers skills to incorporate the arts into everyday practice," explained Russell Granet, the executive director of the institute, which has been around since 1975. We were watching a bunch of teachers lend support, both moral and structural, to one of their peers as she tried to fly, or at least make believe she was, as part of their tableau. "Our work is not about talent identification. It's about giving kids the skills to think like artists. That's what we're hearing from corporate America."

Mr. Granet said that what Fortune 500 companies are looking for these days is someone who works well with others and possesses grit and perseverance. "They're looking at the MFA as the new MBA."

One can only hope. My hunch is that if Boeing or McDonald's had to choose between a numbers cruncher and someone who draws daily sustenance from the Titians and Goyas at the Met, they'd go

for the numbers cruncher. But I suppose there's no reason why an outstanding employee couldn't embody a bit of both.

By the way, the Lincoln Center Institute—which also holds five-day introductory workshops and two- and three-day advanced sessions—isn't about bringing in arts teachers from around the city, the nation and the world and teaching them how to become better arts teachers; or to adding brio to teaching shop or high school drama. Lots of the participants teach subjects such as math and chemistry that, sadly, often aren't considered synonymous with "imaginative learning," the institute's academic approach, which focuses on perception and problem-solving skills.

Mr. Granet quoted Maxine Greene, the institute's philosopher-in-residence: "The arts allows people to see the world as if it could be otherwise." (I neglected to ask how one gets that gig, because if Ms. Greene ever quits I'd like to be considered for the job, or at least the title.)

Another aspect of the institute is that its seven full-time teaching artists divide the school year between working at New York City partner schools and pursuing their own crafts. "In the course of a week," Mr. Granet explained of Jean Taylor, a performer and teacher of clowning who was leading the theatrical-moment exercise, "she may go to three schools and have two days for her own art."

I'm available for that job, too.

It all sounded great and I was totally on board, even if I still had no firm grasp on how one applies the artistic temperament—and a process that includes noticing, questioning, making connections, identifying patterns and, my personal favorite, living with ambiguity—to quadratic equations.

Besides, lots of CEOs have grit and perseverance and work well with others without being particularly artistic. I suppose it's more about a willingness to be open to the unconventional and, perhaps most of all, not being afraid to have fun. "We don't give students enough opportunity to fail successfully," Mr. Granet said.

Dacia Washington, an actor and arts educator who was running the introductory five-day workshop, told me how she prepared some of her school-year students for a trip to the Greek and Roman galleries at the Met. It included studying ancient history, but also having the kids create physical tableaux and custom-make their own armor.

I suspect figuring out a way to fold the institute's philosophy and techniques into schools that may not be known for their creativity requires going beyond the literal application of principles to something larger—embracing a sort of license. That may take more than a little courage these days, with grades and rankings hanging over teachers and administrators' heads like swords of Damocles

Tamara Vassell, a math teacher from the Technology, Arts, and Sciences Studio school in the East Village who was participating in her fourth Lincoln Center Institute workshop, said that being exposed to the institute's art and artists—she'd just come from a performance of "Superman 2050"—made it easier to teach her students things such as acute angles.

"It's not just about the work of art," she explained. "It's about how to engage students in our classroom."

Jooly Kim, an arts administrator from South Korea who creates teaching plans for 6,000 teaching artists in her country's schools, said through an interpreter that attending the institute over the previous few days had been an eye opener. "Here, they don't tell you what to do; they tell you how to do it," she explained.

"She is surprised," her translator added. "During the workshop she learned there's no right answer. In the Korean system, there's only one right answer."

"Superman 2050" involved seven actors performing a full-blown play about the man of steel, who manages to remain faster than a speeding train and able to leap tall buildings at a single bound—with Lois Lane in his arms, no less—even though the entire show was performed on a 3-by-7-foot platform, similar to the restrictions placed on the teachers in the first workshop I visited.

Apparently, the exercises I'd observed were intended to engage the participants in creative problem solving in a confined space, even though they knew nothing about the play they were about to see. It was pulled off by the Theater Unspeakable troupe both brilliantly and amusingly.

"They didn't even know the piece is called 'Superman 2050,'" Mr. Granet said.

The teachers in the five-day workshop were actually attending "Superman" for the second time. Rather than being bored, as they feared, they said they were able to focus on details they'd missed at the first performance—such as what the actors who weren't talking at that moment were doing on stage.

"What are we noticing in a work of art?" asked Ms. Washington. "And what inroads are we providing for students to see them?"

Someone, perhaps it was Ms. Washington, answered her question by suggesting the teachers perform their favorite Superman poses.

Nobody leapt to the challenge. But the workshop still had a couple of days to go.

— [ralph.gardner@wsj.com](mailto:ralph.gardner@wsj.com)

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