Visual Thinking Strategies: Year 1 Training

January 7-8, 2016

Presented by: Rosie Riordan
Coaches: Rosie Riordan and Louisa Hartigan
Day 1: Thursday

- 10:30 - Welcome and Introductions
- 10:45 – What is VTS? & VTS Discussion #1 (Louisa)
  
  *Reflect on one’s experience as a viewer*
- 11:20 - VTS in Action - *What does VTS teach?*
- 11:40 - VTS Discussion #2 (Debbie)
  
  *Breakdown components of VTS teaching method*
- 12:00 – Practice in Galleries
- 12:30 - Lunch
- 1:00 - Practicing in the Galleries (take a 10 minute break at mid-point)
- 3:00 - Reflect on Practice
  
  Assignment: Explain VTS to someone unfamiliar with it
  
  Review - *Jump!Starting Visual Literacy*
- Plus/Delta Chart
- 3:30pm - Adjourn
Welcome! Please introduce yourself....

1. Name, Institution, Location & Role
Goals for VTS Practicum

• Learn the basic Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) method
• Practice VTS with coaching
• Explore theoretical & empirical foundations of VTS
VTS was co-created by

Phil Yenawine  
former Director of Education,  
Museum of Modern Art, NY

Abigail Housen  
Cognitive Psychologist
I have focused on a single goal: enabling people to connect to art in ways that are meaningful, lasting, and pleasurable to them.

Part of the challenge for me was unlearning earlier teaching practices. I had to learn a new paradigm, one that put people ahead of art, one that focused on enabling not just engaging people. I had to step back from what I thought people should learn, to create a teaching/learning method that would help them realize their full potential at any given moment.
The most effective experiences ... give the learner repeated opportunity to construct meaning from different points of view, take place in an environment that supports looking in new and meaningful ways, and are inspired by rich, varied, and carefully chosen works of art.

- Abigail Housen
What is VTS?

– VTS is a discussion-based teaching and learning strategy used in museums around the world, and a pre K-8 (ages 4-14) viewing curriculum and professional development program for schools.

– Grounded in 30+ years of research and field-tested for 12+ years

– VTS is grounded in social development theory (Vygotsky), Bruner’s discovery learning, and research on perception and thought (Arnheim, Baldwin, Housen).
• What were your observations of what happened?
Video of Students using VTS

Courtesy of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston, MA) featuring 3rd grade students from a low-income neighboring school in Dorchester.

http://vimeo.com/9827533

With funding from the US Department of Education
What do you notice about these viewers?

How would you describe:

• What interests them?
• What they rely on to make sense of what they see?
VTS: Goals for Students

- To develop **flexible and rigorous thinking skills**, including observing, brainstorming, reasoning with evidence, speculating, cultivating a point of view, and revising.

- To strengthen **language and listening skills**, including willingness and ability to express oneself, respect for the views of others and ability to consider and debate possibilities.

- To develop **visual literacy skills** and personal connections to art, advancing one’s ability to find meaning in diverse and complex art.

- To nurture **problem solving** abilities, **curiosity** and **openness to the unfamiliar**.

- To **build self-respect, confidence** and willingness to participate in group thinking and discussion processes.
Growth

movement from one stage to the next

- looking at art, talking about art, thinking about the art
- facilitated, discussion-based classroom lessons
- VTS image set curriculum
Almost all students (and most adults) are at stage 1 or 2

Storytelling is a universal means of making meaning

Growth occurs through repeated experiences with looking
VTS Elements

Write ONE element per Sticky Note
Try to capture all elements of the image discussion.

Consider...
1. What did we need to begin this process?
2. What questions did we use?
3. What did the facilitator do?
4. What did individual participants do?
5. What did the group do?
VTS Elements

- **Art images** selected for the audience
- **Peer group**
- **Silent looking** *(Take a quiet moment to look at this picture...)*
- **3 Questions**
  - *What’s going on in this picture?*
  - *What do you see that makes you say that?*
  - *What more can you/we find?*
- **Listen** carefully to each comment
- **Point** to features described in the artwork throughout the discussion
- **Paraphrase** all comments, **Link**
- **Remain neutral**
- **Close by thanking the group**
VTS asks 3 Questions

After a moment of silent looking, ask:

— What’s going on in this picture?
  • In K-1 begin with “What do you see in this picture?

When an interpretive comment is made, follow up with:

— What do you SEE that makes you say that?
  • Use sparingly with k-1

Between comments, ask this frequently to the whole group, even when hands are raised:

— What more can we find?
VTS asks facilitators to:

- **Listen** carefully to each comment
- **Point** to features described in the artwork throughout the discussion
- **Paraphrase** and accept neutrally all comments. New vocabulary and proper sentence structure may be modeled
- **Link** related comments together to form connections and model building on the ideas of others
Welcome Back from Practice

1. What surprised you?
2. What are you working on in your practice?
3. Questions?

Trainer Workshop, Museum of Modern Art, NYC
Homework

- Explain VTS to someone unfamiliar with it.  
  Who is your intended audience?  
  teachers, a principal, museum director, etc.

- Optional -- Review Jump Starting Visual Literacy

- Reflection on the Day  
  +, delta
Check-in

What did you like about today?
What would you change?

+ Plus
I liked it!

Δ Delta
Please change this...
Day 2: Friday

10:30    Share homework
10:45    VTS Discussion - focus on paraphrasing (Rosie)
11:00    Paraphrasing activity
11:30    Practicing in Galleries
12:30    Lunch
1:15     Image Selection for VTS Discussions
2:00     Practicing in Galleries
         with 10 minute break
3:15     Reflecting on Next Steps (small groups)
         Evaluations & Farewells
3:30     Good Bye, Thank you!
Practicum Day 2
Sharing Homework:

Explain VTS to a friend OR an audience specific to your work. How did it go? What was challenging? What did you highlight?

Frye Art Museum, Seattle WA
Paraphrasing

I. What is there to consider when crafting an effective paraphrase?
II. What is required to paraphrase well?
Student Comment: “I think this might be a statue of an Egyptian, or Greek, or Roman god—because, you know, they were big on their gods. I mean, it wasn’t weird for them at all, like it might be weird for us today. I think they used it to pray, like an idol.”

Teacher Response: “So you are identifying a time period in ancient history that you think this statue or idol might have come from. And you think this might be a statue of a god that people might have prayed to, or worshipped, which was natural for them. What do you see that makes you say that this is a idol?”

Kelly Elementary School, October 3, 2013
Student Comment: “I think those sticks coming out from behind the painting are holding it up.”

Teacher Paraphrase: “Lucien is noticing these sticks or poles that seem to be holding up or supporting the painting, sort of like an artist’s easel. What more can we find?”

Kelly Elementary School, October 2, 2013
1. On your own . . .
   use the handout, read and then write a paraphrase.

2. Together, consider...
   
   • Discuss what is similar or different about your paraphrases.
   • How might different choices affect the discussion?

3. Then WRITE...
   a revised new paraphrase together
Guidelines for Assessing your Paraphrases

• Did you stay neutral?
• Did you understand the idea(s) contained in the comment?
• Did you convey the overall idea(s) that the student was trying to express as well as the particulars?
• Did you express only what the student said and not add your own ideas?
• Was your paraphrase as well-worded and succinct as you want it to be?
Housen’s 5 Stages of Aesthetic Development:

1. Accountive Viewers
2. Constructive Viewers
3. Classifying Viewers
4. Interpretive Viewers
5. Re-Creative Viewers

- No stage is “better”
- Stages can’t be “skipped”
- For information/knowledge to “stick,” the viewer must be ready for it; *it must genuinely be his or her question*
Stage I: Accountive

- Accountive viewers have an immediate response to what they see. They name objects and phenomena recognized from life experience. They may offer a spontaneous inventory of what is obvious to them.
- They see concretely: e.g., It’s a ball. These specific observations are often idiosyncratic, unique, or personal—they will find things that are recognizable to them but not necessarily to others.
- They often make meaning from an image relying directly on their senses and personal associations.
- They are storytellers and find narratives in the image—a person depicted is about to go to a party, for example—though this may or may not be intended by the artist or obvious to another viewer.
- Judgments are based on what they know and like.
- Emotions are identified, as viewers seem to enter the work of art and become part of the unfolding narrative.

“Ok, well there’s a man and he’s on the beach and there’s a seagull over here and he got, he has a cut over here and he just came from swimming cause he has water like that and there’s some grass and…”

And he’s thinking about what he should do over the weekend. And he’s thinking that he should look cool… And he’s thinking “Why don’t I have clothes?” “Where should I get clothes from?”… He’s really sad.
Stage II: Constructive

- Constructive viewers focus on building frameworks to make sense of what they see using the most logical and accessible tools: their own perceptions and judgments, their knowledge of the natural world, and the standards of their social, moral and conventional milieu.

- If a work of art does not look the way it is “supposed to”—if skill, technique, hard work, utility, and functionality do not conform to their expectations, or if the subject seems unacceptable—these viewers judge the work to be “weird” and/or lacking in value.

- They create narratives and explanations drawn from recognizable elements in the image.

- As comments on emotions begin to disappear, and the viewer distances herself from the work of art, other remarks may reveal an emergent interest in what art is, what an artist does and what the artist’s intentions are, as well as their own process of looking.

- A standard frequently mentioned is realism: this does or does not look as it would in the viewer’s world, often as a general reference to setting and space.

“Now I’m looking over here and it’s like, the work he did, it wasn’t like neat and it was like sort of blotchy and I came over here and seeing like that sort of thing... Ok, and then like...um..like the ground is mixed in colors, like it has a little blue here and that looks like a little weird.”

“I see a male figure at the beach. He looks forlorn, or contemplating something. His eyes are down, but I don’t know if he’s looking at something or if he’s just walking and thinking... The colors are not bright. They’re very muted...”
Let’s Practice!

El Anatsui at the Brooklyn Museum
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Grade 3: Lesson 1
Grade 8: Lesson 3
Grade 8: Lesson 12
Practicum Images
“Art affords an ideal environment for [fostering critical and creative thinking]. It provides an object of collective attention—something concrete for a classroom to observe and experience, provoking thoughts and feelings while at the same time generating simultaneous and distinctive meanings.”
Criteria for Image Selection

Outline of Basic Principles

• Strong narratives
• Familiar imagery given audience
• Accessible meanings given audience
• Ambiguity
• Subjects that interest given audience
• Diversity of media, style, period
• Sequenced to increase challenge
Each group will have several images.

I. Thinking about your selected audience, choose a sequence of 4 images.

I. Thinking about our Practicum group, choose another sequence of 4 images.
Let’s Practice!

El Anatsui at the Brooklyn Museum
Welcome Back from Practice

1. What surprised you?
2. What are you working on in your practice?
3. Questions?

Trainer Workshop, Museum of Modern Art, NYC
Pre-requisites for VTS Advanced Practicum

- Lead at least 10 sessions of VTS
- Keep reflection notes
- Video tape one VTS session for submission

Find upcoming dates at:

– http://vtshome.org/news-events/events
Online Resources

www.visualthinkingstrategies.org

www.vtsweb.org (image curriculum, FAQs, etc.)

• Log in and Password for 3 months:
  username: NelsonAtkins
  password: nelsonatkins

  available with subscription

NEW YORK TIMES Learning Network
Practical and inspirational, this is arts integration for the twenty-first century. Distinguished museum educator Philip Yenawine presents a persuasive argument for using the art discussion approach called Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to develop the sophisticated thinking skills required by the Common Core...

--Peggy Burchenal, Esther Stiles Eastman Curator of Education and Public Programs, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
Check-in

What did you like about today?
What would you change?

+ Plus
I liked it!

Δ Delta
Please change this...
Stage Theory

- Patterns of behavior that dominate during a period of time.
- Cannot be bypassed or rushed.
- Occur naturally in predictable sequences with transitions between.
- While vestiges of earlier stages may be retained or aspects of forthcoming stages emerge – a distinct pattern dominates.
- No stage is inherently better than another.

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