DAS Theatre Feedback Method
(> former DasArts Feedback Method)

Feedback is a core activity for all the players in the DAS Theatre Master programme – students, staff and external advisors. In individual exchanges people can opt for an informal conversation, an interview or some other strategy. Collective feedback has to deal with many different views of the work, which somehow all need to be articulated and exchanged within one session. The latter becomes very important when dealing with hybrid, cross-disciplinary artistic practices which are often met in the context of the contemporary performing arts.

About the Method

Hybrid, cross-disciplinary artistic practices are often hard to be defined and their product to be discussed; DAS Theatre is an educational institution which brings these artistic practices in the foreground of today's art discourse, also by implementing this feedback method. Together with the philosopher Karim Benammar, DAS Theatre first defined the major obstacles which, in a collective setting, often prevent critical exchanges from having a stimulating learning effect.

The central aims for the feedback situations are: to empower the artist who is getting feedback on his or her work, to go beyond the pronouncement of judgments, to allow fundamental criticism, to create a sense of (self-) discipline for the sake of precision and clarity, and, last but not least, to increase the enjoyment of giving and receiving feedback.

Read an interview (see appendix ) of Barbara van Lindt, former managing director of DAS Theatre, on the DAS Theatre feedback method.

Playing Rules:
(further in the document)

A Film about Feedback

The growing interest in the method was reason for making a DVD. Recordings of feedback sessions interspersed with an introduction by Bennamar, performance clips, and short interviews with advisors, students and staff, present a clear picture of the method that is applied at DAS Theatre.
This film is a collaboration between DAS Theatre (previous: DasArts), Master Film and Sub-Pacific Films/Jack Faber who studied at the Master Film of the AHK.
Watch the film here

Contact:

For any more information about the workshops, requests and/or order of the DVD, please contact John Meijerink by mail at: john.meijerink@ahk.nl.
More info
Feedback Method Playing Rules

English version:

1. There is a 'moderator', a 'presenter' (the artist presenting his or her work) and a feedback group. The moderator must be strict: he can cut short on your feedback in case time is running out or when you don't respect the rules of the game. He archives the feedback by writing summaries of what is said on A3 sheets of paper. The presenter cannot speak most of the time: in the feedback session most of the work is done by you, members of the feedback group.

2. The presenter first gives a short introduction to the project and asks one or two questions to the audience (10') and then gives his presentation (20')

3. An hour of feedback follows, in which we can choose to play some of the following formats:
   * ONE-ON-ONE: the presenter leaves the space, the feedbackers ventilate their first impressions, one on one (5')
   * AFFIRMATIVE FEEDBACK: feedbackers give affirmative feedback by using one single sentence that is structured according to the following formula: "what worked for me was..." (10')
   * PERSPECTIVES: feedbackers use one single sentence that is structured according to the following formula: "as a ... i need ..." (the perspectives you choose can be very diverse and even fictional: "as a woman/politician/dancer/programmer/visitor from mars/social activist/etcetera") (10')
   * OPEN QUESTIONS: feedbackers pose questions which cannot be answered with a "yes" or a "no".
     the presenter doesn't answer these questions. (10')
   * OPEN DISCUSSION: the presenter participates in this discussion, which can be based on whatever is said previously. (10')
   * CONCEPT REFLECTION: on small post-it papers, feedbackers write some concepts which for them relate to the presentation.
     the presenter hangs these on an A3 sheet of paper, closer by or further away from the word 'work'. hereby he demonstrates the hierarchy of importance: which concepts, according to his own view, relate to the piece, which don't?
     the moderator then picks out two concepts and asks the presenter why they are important or unimportant for him. (10')
   * GOSSIP ROUND: feedbackers freely gossip about the presentation while the presenter is present.
     they talk about him in the third person.
     he himself cannot intervene. (10')
   * TIPS & TRICKS: here every feedbacker can share his specific knowledge and experience with the presenter by giving tips and tricks. (10')
   * PERSONAL LETTER: here a feedbacker can express comments he didn't want to share with the rest of the group. (10') (or afterwards of course, by e-mail)

4. to exclude unnecessary repetitions of the same comments, a feedbacker says "plus 1" when he agrees with the comments made by others.

5. the whole session (including the presentation) only lasts one hour and a half

6. it is much fun! and productive!
Nederlandstalig versie:

1. er is een 'moderator', een 'presenter' (de student) en een feedbackgroep.
2. de 'presenter' begint met zijn presentatie in te leiden (10') en geeft daarna zijn presentatie (20')

3. hierop volgt één uur feedback, waarbij gebruik kan worden gemaakt van enkele vd volgende spelformats:
   * ONE-ON-ONE: de 'presenter' verlaat de ruimte, de feedbackers ventileren de 1e commentaren in groepjes van 2. (5')
   * AFFIRMATIEVE FEEDBACK: feedbackers zeggen telkens één enkele zin die begint met "wat voor mij werkte was..." (10')
   * PERSPECTIEVEN: feedbackers zeggen telkens één enkele zin met de volgende formule: "Als een ... heb ik nood aan ...") (10')
   * OPEN VRAGEN: feedbackers stellen vragen die niet kunnen worden beantwoord met 'ja' of 'nee'. presenter antwoordt niet. (10')
   * OPEN DISCUSSIE: hier neemt de presenter aan deel. discussie kan op basis van wat eerder werd gezegd (10')
   * CONCEPT REFLECTIE: feedbackers schrijven op post-itjes enkele concepten die zij met de presentatie in verband brengen, de presenter hangt deze op een A3 blad, verder af of dichter bij het woord 'work', om de orde van belangrijkheid aan te geven (10')
   * RODDELRONDE: feedbackers roddelen over de presentatie en over de presenter in de 3e persoon, terwijl die aanwezig is maar niet mag reageren. (10')
   * TIPS & TRICKS: elke feedbacker kan hier vanuit zijn specifieke achtergrond inhoudelijke, technische, ... tips en tricks kwijt. (10')
   * PERSOONLIJKE BRIEF: hier kan een feedbacker commentaar in kwijt die hij of zij niet wilde delen met de groep (10')

4. de moderator schrijft alles op op A3 bladen en houdt de tijd en de spelregels strak in het oog
5. om onnodige herhaling uit te sluiten, zegt een feedbacker "plus 1" wanneer iemand iets zegt waar hij of zij mee akkoord gaat
6. het geheel duurt niet meer dan anderhalf uur
“Feedback needs to be like a desire, something that you long for. It ought to be useful to the next steps in your process,” says Barbara van Lindt, Director of DasArts, articulating her vision. “The level of feedback should go beyond superficial judgments such as ‘I like’ or ‘I don’t like.’” It was this need that led DasArts, together with the students, to develop a new method of providing feedback.

For the last two years, the master’s programme has been a laboratory in which DasArts has experimented with different feedback formats. Philosopher Karim Bennamar and performance artist Siegmar Zacharias were invited to give workshops. Bennamar introduced two new elements to feedback: a diversity of formats and a clear structure. “We threw ourselves in at the deep end,” explains Van Lindt. “By trying things out, and evaluating them with the students and Bennamar, we devised a method that works – especially within collective feedback settings.”

Questions on the table
One of the most important changes introduced by Bennamar is that the student receiving feedback is also partly responsible for deciding what it should be about. Before the session even begins, he determines what it is that he wishes to receive comments on. Say Van Lindt: “We’re working towards a culture in which the person who makes the presentation also dares to lay his questions upon the table. Instead of placing a shield in front of his work, and himself, the creator invites his colleagues to react.

“**We devised a method that works – especially within collective feedback settings.**”

If there are things that you’re still grappling with, and your material reveals it, the session can be especially informative and productive.”

Van Lindt singles out one of the most striking aspects of the method: the person presenting their work barely speaks to the person giving feedback. There are a few
moments when the maker is briefly engaged, but the focus is on reception. "The creators get the last word and, in this, they often let you know they are grateful. They roll up their sheets and take them home. They really feel that they have been given something that will help them to develop their work further. There's no overwhelming jumble of superficial judgments breaking over them like a tsunami." Another interesting element that Van Lindt touches upon is that the fact that the sessions are often determined by a time factor; some formats, for example, take just five minutes. She describes it as a constraint that activates, because participants are forced to formulate precisely. "Sometimes you think: 'wow, that's interesting', and then you have to stop. Of course, that's frustrating, but then I point out the corridors of our building, and the oceans of time that you have after the feedback session, in which to continue the discussion."

"They really feel that they have been given something that will help them to develop their work further."

As often with the introduction of new formats and changes, there was also some resistance amongst the students in 2011. The first obstacle was that the formats came from a world that was not the art world. Bennamar is a philosopher, but he also works for companies and managers from the commercial sector. According to Van Lindt, many artists have a healthy and unhealthy resistance to this. Another point was the idea of freedom versus structure. A much-heard comment was: 'why can't I just say what I think?!' Students saw this as a limitation on the conceptual level. "But it wasn't long before all the possibilities of the model became clear and the benefits obvious. Meanwhile, we've become so experienced that we can play with the formats and adjust them according to the stage that the work is at. It's therefore a rigid system but, at the same time, not," reflects Van Lindt.

The DVD, the workshop
Very early on, when the teachers and students at DasArts were still struggling with the formats, there was a realisation that an urge for a new culture of feedback also existed amongst colleagues in the cultural world, and in the education sector. Requests to attend the sessions gradually increased. This was occasionally allowed, but couldn’t happen all the time. The growing interest in the method was reason for making a DVD. Recordings of feedback sessions interspersed with an introduction by Bennamar, performance clips, and short interviews with advisors, students and staff, present a clear picture of the method that is applied at DasArts.

Van Lindt: "The DVD is now distributed in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands and, mainly because of this, we've already received a large number of requests to introduce the method. For example, we gave a workshop in Brussels during the Working Title Platform organised by Workspace Brussels. This festival focuses on showing and discussing 'work in progress'. We gave an introduction and led feedback sessions for each presentation. The development of the method has been a labour of love that we’d like to share. We also train our students to moderate the sessions and to learn the method. Several performing arts schools in Switzerland recently commissioned a former student of ours to lead a number of feedback sessions. We are, of course, primarily a master’s course, so each individual inquiry to attend a feedback workshop is carefully considered."

"We've just completed a number of feedback sessions and they were incredibly powerful."

Incredibly powerful
The DVD can also be used, according to Van Lindt, as a tool by anyone who wishes to organise feedback sessions, although it isn’t a proper instruction film: "you have to be prepared to just throw yourself into the deep and to learn as you go along," she adds. “For us, the development of this method was imperative if we were to realise our training goals. It was a very educational process and one that was worth investing a lot of time in – absolutely. There are so many development opportunities. We've just completed a number of feedback sessions and they were incredibly powerful."