

Token Response: A Memory by Eldon Katter



Token Response: Art Criticism and Aesthetics Game, by Mary Erickson and Eldon Katter
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Events happen in a real-time linear sequence from beginning to end, moment by moment, day by day, year after year. However, memory of events, over time, may become a more fluid account. So it is with my recollection of the chain of events in the 1970s and 80s that led to Crizmac's publication of *Token Response* in 1991.

While an exact sequence of events is fuzzy, the facts involving people and places are real, beginning with Laura Chapman's *Approaches to Art in Education*, my position as art teacher in the Lab School (or Early Learning Center) at Kutztown State College (later Kutztown University), and the basement office below the Sharadin Art Gallery that I shared with Mary Erickson in the Department of Art Education and Crafts. During our shared office hours, Mary and I began working on what we called *Participatory Response Activities* (National Art Education Conference, St. Louis, 1976), or in plain speak, ways to get young kids to understand and appreciate art. *Token Response* grew out of those discussions.

Previously, I had been walking the little kids up to the Sharadin Art Gallery to "look at art," often using suggestions Laura Chapman included in her textbook, such as scavenger hunts or worksheets. But I wanted something that I could use with youngsters who were not yet reading and writing. When I came up with the idea of "tokens" or "awards" that little kids could carry around the gallery and place on the floor beneath artworks, I shared it with Mary and we started kicking around thoughts about the educational benefits of other tokens. Initially I cut simple shapes from construction paper: a heart

for favorite, a house for what would go well in their home, a green rectangle representing money or most valuable, and a jagged shape for least favorite. (These were shapes that were easy and quick to cut out in large quantities.) (Also, the kids always wanted to keep the tokens.) The idea caught on, and one of the classroom teachers suggested I make tokens using the Ellison die cut machine in the Audio Visual Center. Perfect. A real time saver. Plus, we found a lot of other options for our token shapes - hand (craftsmanship), blue ribbon (best of show), alarm clock (long time to make), light bulb (good idea).

It was at about this stage in the evolution of improving questioning strategies, content, and assessment that two graduate student assistants and an article in *Studies in Art Education* by Michael Parsons played a part. Dennis Johnson was taking a graduate research course with Mary and came across Parsons' article on understanding art. He found the tokens worked perfectly with Parsons' concepts. I took this as a validation of our efforts. Around that same time, Terri Kriebel, a graduate assistant working with me in the lab school, who just happened to be a guitar player and singer/songwriter, wrote a song with lyrics for playing "Token Response." Kids loved it. As I recall, Terri sang the song at an opening meeting of the National Art Education Association's annual convention in New York.

Even before this, Mary and I were using Token Response, both separately and jointly, in teacher in-service presentations and at state art education conferences. By this time, we had also "invented/designed" a few other "art games" with component parts, which we were trying out in professional development settings and with different age level groups. I remember playing Token Response, using large art reproductions, with a group of senior citizens in a retirement community. We knew then that Token Response was worthy of wider distribution. So we invested in our own die cutter, mimeographed a booklet of "rules", purchased boxes, typed labels, and started an assembly line production of Token Response and other art games in my basement, using my three young daughters as child laborers.

All of our original work was done on electric typewriters, mimeograph and/or ditto machines. Mary and I formed a company called MELD (**M**ary Erickson **ELD**on Katter) and began selling our materials at workshops and presentations. We were basically selling stuff at cost as a service, not for profit. But the time involved soon became more than we could handle, so we approached Stevie Mack at Crizmac in Tucson, Arizona. She took over development and production of all our MELD materials, including Token Response, so we sent her the die cutter for continued production of the tokens.

Somewhere in this transitional phase, Mary relocated to Arizona, where she and Stevie worked on revisions of Token Response to make it more appealing to an even wider market. I continued to use Token Response in methodology classes throughout my teaching career.

Over the past 40 years, we have seen photographs of Token Response being used in classrooms and museums around the world. Now, on the Internet, you can find many adaptations and variations of Token Response. Yet I am always reminded of an array of tokens spread around gallery floors, the openness and vibrancy of discussions, the eagerness of the Lab School kids to see new exhibitions in the art gallery at Kutztown State College, the enthusiastic response of senior citizens in the retirement community in Allentown, and my three daughters cutting out all those paper tokens in my basement.