

## **An Origin Story**

*By Liz Lerman*

I've been working on Thinking Grids for probably 25 years, if not more. It is one of those really simple structures that provides a constant pleasure, useful information, and is hard to teach and therefore hard to share. One of my earliest memories of trying to share a Thinking Grid was in a workshop in Minneapolis. I was working with artists who were going to be teaching in the public-school system as artists-in-residence. There were about 20 people there and I was very happy to have Sandy Augustin at my side because we had discussed this new tool and she was eager for me to try it. So, I had them draw the grid structure, lines running in two directions making the page fill with empty boxes. One axis held their ideas about their art form and how they intended to teach it. The other was about the school, the classroom, the bulletin boards...really anything that was in the educational environment they would be entering.

There was so much resistance. Finally, somebody said, "You know, why would I want to work inside the box? So much of what we love to do is outside the box." I was so exasperated. Couldn't they see how fantastic it was to get so many ideas so quickly? And I remember saying to them, "Okay, erase the lines and now let's do it again." And so, we began the effort to make Thinking Grids a possibility in their lives without the characteristic and ritualistic squares to hold both utilitarian and wild ideas.