



Arts for transformative education

A guide for teachers from the
UNESCO Associated Schools Network

Benjamin Bolden, Sean Corcoran, Tiina Kukkonen, Jeffrey Newberry, Nathan Rickey

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Guiding teachers to transform learning through the arts

The arts offer tremendous potential for enriching, enlivening and propelling learning that transforms individuals and communities. Arts learning fuels transformative education that helps increase students' capacity and motivation to build a more peaceful and sustainable world. However, to fully realize that potential, teachers must mindfully structure and support educational experiences to optimize what students will take away from them.

This guide invites teachers to harness the transformative power of the arts through the research-informed Arts for Transformative Education model. This thinking tool for teachers was developed by analysing data from more than 600 teachers across 39 countries in the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet). The model identifies four dimensions of arts learning experiences: Context, actions, relevance and outcomes.

The model also recognizes special affordances associated with the arts that can enhance learning experiences. 'Arts assets' are situated within or across the learning dimensions. Arts assets hold the power to provoke transformation.

This publication provides:

- 12 'learning experience descriptions' illustrating how the Arts for Transformative Education model works in real-world learning.
- 12 'learning experience snapshots' providing shorter additional examples.
- 'Guidelines for teachers' outlining a step-by-step process for activating arts learning to empower transformative education.



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Foreword

We are all inspired and empowered by arts. They have the power to captivate, challenge and transform each and every one of us in profound ways that last a lifetime. Arts provide a unique and valuable agency for everyone to express their emotions, thoughts, feelings and experiences. That is why it is essential to integrate them into education. Arts education can enhance learning and unlock creativity, foster critical thinking, empathy, and socio-emotional skills. It is key to help promote pluralism, respect for cultural diversity, and a sense of belonging to a global human community.

As the only United Nations agency with a core mandate in education and culture, UNESCO has a deep commitment to arts education and strives to apply it as a major lever for human development. The role of teachers is central in shaping and delivering quality and transformative arts education, and they must be fully supported in this endeavor. This was firmly highlighted during the global consultation process on crafting UNESCO's new Framework on Culture and Arts Education.

This new guide for teachers will help further enrich this debate on arts education by providing a tool and step-by-step guidance for understanding, planning, and supporting transformative arts learning experiences. It aims to build a better understanding of transformative education and the immense potential of arts learning to enable it.

I would like to extend a special tribute to all teachers who contributed to this research-informed publication, to the UNESCO Chair in Arts and Learning, Dr. Ben Bolden, for the invitation to jointly explore the nexus of arts learning and transformative education, and to the Canadian National Commission of UNESCO for their generous support and collaboration.

This innovative guide highlights the crucial role of UNESCO's Associate Schools as a laboratory of ideas for educational quality and transformative learning. Recognized for its pioneering role, the network celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2023 with sustained commitment of students and teachers in 12,000 schools around the world to promote peace, human rights, intercultural understanding, and sustainable development.

I believe this guide will be a valuable resource for educators who are committed to creating transformative learning experiences for their students. By integrating the arts into education, we can help to empower a generation of learners who are creative, compassionate, and committed to taking action for a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.



Stefania Giannini

UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education

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Heartfelt thanks also go out to the many ASPnet teachers worldwide who contributed to this publication by sharing and describing their inspiring arts learning experiences, participating in the global survey, and offering their expertise and insights in interviews with the research team.

This publication was made possible thanks to the generous contribution of CCUNESCO.



Teacher perspective:

'What I appreciate the most about this type of project is that it is born from a personal interest, so everyone is free and feels motivated to delve deeper, create and give their best.'

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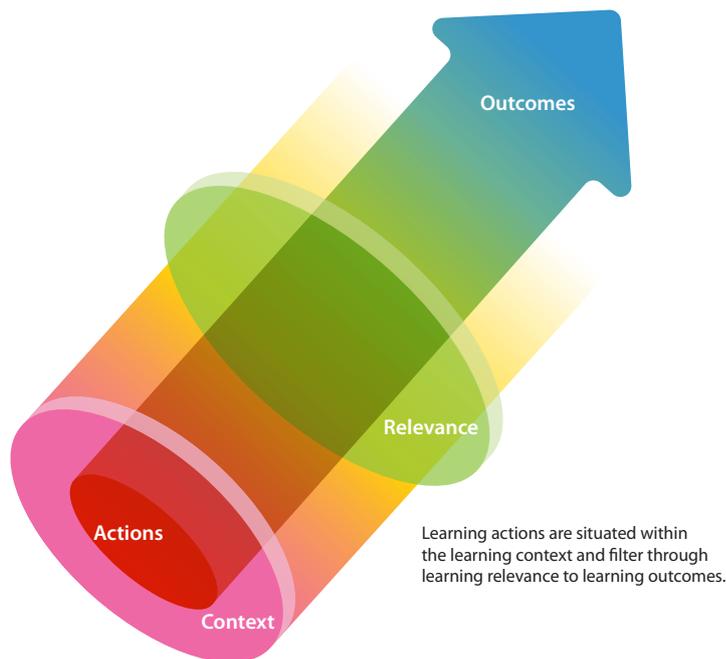
Executive summary

Arts for transformative education

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has a vision of transformative education that is based on increasing learners' capacities and motivating them to build a more peaceful and sustainable world.

The arts offer tremendous potential for enriching, enlivening and propelling learning that transforms individuals and communities. However, to fully realize that potential, teachers must mindfully structure and support educational experiences to optimize what students will take away from them. This guide invites teachers to harness the transformative power of the arts.

The research-informed *Arts for Transformative Education* model, a thinking tool for teachers, is at the heart of this guide. The model was developed by analysing data from more than 600 teachers across 39 countries in the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet).¹ The model identifies four dimensions of arts learning experiences:



The model also recognizes special affordances associated with the arts that can enhance learning experiences. 'Arts assets' are situated within or across the learning dimensions. Arts assets hold the power to provoke transformation.

The 12 'learning experience descriptions' in this guide illustrate how the *Arts for Transformative Education* model works in real-world learning. Further into the guide, 12 'learning experience snapshots' provide shorter additional examples. The final section, 'Guidelines for teachers', outlines a step-by-step process for activating arts learning to empower transformative education.



Teacher perspective:

'I believe that students come to value artmaking as a way to imagine otherwise. The creative process asks us to move beyond what we see around us, what we witness or see in the physical environment, and imagine other possibilities. In the best case scenario, students imagine better worlds and maybe, through imagining better worlds, maybe they start to create one.'

¹ Countries represented: Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Congo, Costa Rica, Czechia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Kenya, Lebanon, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of), Nigeria, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

What is transformative education?

“Transformative education” involves co-created teaching and learning that recognizes and valorises the dignity and diversity of learners in educational settings, eliminates all barriers to their learning and motivates and empowers them to reflect critically, become agents of change and protagonists of their own future, enabling informed decision-making and actions at the individual, community, local, national, regional and global levels, including through approaches such as global citizenship education, education for sustainable development and human rights education, among others, that support the building of peaceful, just, inclusive, equal, equitable, healthy and sustainable societies.

– UNESCO (2023), Revised 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

UNESCO’s concept of transformative education unites education initiatives that advance peace, support human rights and promote sustainable development (UNESCO, 2023). Transformative education addresses Target 4.7 of the United Nations Agenda 2030 by encompassing global citizenship education, education for sustainable development, heritage education, education for health and well-being, and other focused education priorities. Transformative education recognizes that the issues addressed by these topics are interconnected and mutually reinforcing (UNESCO, 2022a). Crucially, UNESCO asserts that transformative education must be ‘grounded in human rights and based on principles of non-discrimination, social justice, respect for life, human dignity and cultural diversity. It must encompass an ethic of care, reciprocity, and solidarity’ (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021).

Transformative education involves teaching and learning – inside and outside schools and over lifetimes – that inspire and empower people of all ages with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to fully develop their human potential (UNESCO, 2022b). At the 2022 Transforming Education Summit, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres presented a vision statement on transforming education. He explained:

A truly transformative education should build on what communities, families, parents, and children treasure most, and respond to local, national, and global needs, cultures, and capacities. It should promote the holistic development of all learners throughout their lives, supporting them to realize their aspirations and to contribute to their families, communities, and societies.

– Report on the 2022 Transforming Education Summit

Target 4.7 of the United Nations Agenda 2030

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

**'Making art... helps them
realize innate potential!'**
Teacher perspective

UNESCO's 'Future of Education' initiative addresses the vital need to reimagine knowledge, education and learning in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty and precarity. This global initiative gathered input from diverse experts and stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, students and parents (TakingITGlobal, 2021). The report *Reimagining our Futures Together* was an important outcome of the initiative. The report highlights the foundational role of education in transforming human societies, connecting us to the world and to each other, exposing us to new possibilities, and building our capacities for dialogue and action (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021).



Teacher perspective:

'Arts education is not only about technique and aesthetics; it's about contemporary issues and actual problems of the world today. I think this is why the SDGs and art go well together.'

How can the arts support transformative education?

The arts – including music, drama, dance, visual arts, literary arts, media arts, digital arts, circus arts and more – have tremendous potential to support transformative education.

To be transformative, education needs to spark deep learning that engages both cognitive and social-emotional processes (UNESCO, 2022a). It needs to provoke the internal conflict and discomfort that is needed to change thinking and trigger action (Gustavo and Barth, 2020). When education is transformative, learners experience a significant shift in their thought patterns, which affects their feelings and influences their actions (O’Sullivan, 2003). The arts, with their capacity to activate both cognition and emotion, are powerfully positioned to fuel transformative learning. Arts learning can integrate head, hand and heart.

The arts can also support transformative education by connecting students to profoundly human mechanisms for learning and communicating. Archaeological evidence – for example, fragments of a 43,000 year-old Neanderthal flute – shows that the roots of artistic practice stretch deep into the past (Kunej and Turk, 2000). Humans are, in an essential way, an artistic species. For countless years, we have turned to the arts to explore our deepest humanity and highest spiritual aspirations (O’Farrell and Bolden, 2020). Today, the arts continue to help us imagine and negotiate possible solutions as we address current and emerging challenges. In a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty and precarity, arts education can invite humanistic approaches to being, contributing and flourishing as transformed citizens of the future.



Teacher Perspective:

‘We must add the fun that the field of the arts allows; it allows them moments of joy and sharing!’



What does research tell us?

UNESCO's idea of transformative education is based on increasing learners' capacities and motivating them to build a more peaceful and sustainable world (UNESCO, 2016). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) suggest a specific path forward towards the sustainable development of our communities and planet.

Arts learning can directly support sustainable development in multiple ways. For example:

- Research compellingly shows that engagement with the arts advances learners' good health and well-being (Fancourt and Finn, 2019) (SDG 3).
- The arts are essential for learners to experience quality education (Korea R. Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2010) (SDG 4) because arts experiences can improve learner engagement as well as social, emotional and academic outcomes (Bowen and Kisida, 2019).
- The arts can promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 14) by framing relationships or issues in ways that strengthen empathy and open minds to new perspectives and possibilities for transformation (Shank and Schirch, 2008).
- Arts learning can increase knowledge and raise awareness of sustainability issues, thanks to the powerful capacity of the arts to grab and hold our attention. Further, the arts offer a flexible path to understanding; they can complement scientific explanations with alternative ways to communicate meaning (Bruner, 1979).

Overall, arts learning supports sustainable development by helping students acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they will need to understand and address sustainability challenges. For example, arts experiences can enhance learners' knowledge, recognition and valuing of diverse cultures and peoples (Bolden and O'Farrell, 2020). Through engagement with the arts, learners can build critical-thinking skills (Lampert, 2006), as well as their capacity for self-regulation, self-expression and communication (Farrington et al., 2019). Arts experiences can nurture agency (Isabirye, 2021), along with values and attitudes such as empathy (Goldstein and Winner, 2012) and appreciation of diversity and inclusion (Ferrer-Fons et al., 2022).



Teacher perspective:

'The best part is when you see a student over a couple of years... You see the development process of their skills, whether it's drawing or painting – whatever – but also that beautiful transformation of a person.'

An invitation to teachers

Arts learning has much to offer. But to fully experience the benefits, learners need teachers. In dedicated arts learning contexts, or when using the arts to support other curricular outcomes, teachers have a crucial role in maximizing the potential of learning in and through the arts. This guide invites teachers to design and support learning experiences that unlock potential.

Teachers are best-positioned to decide how arts learning can contribute to sustainability goals most meaningfully within their own changing contexts. It might be through a focus on physical and/or mental health and well-being, climate action, social justice and reconciliation, responsible consumption, intercultural understanding, social cohesion, democracy and/or conflict resolution. It is up to teachers to choose and enact the pedagogical approaches that promote deep and lasting personal development. Guided by their teachers, students can experience the arts in ways that help them gain social and emotional skills, enhanced well-being, and the creative capacities necessary to cope with current and future challenges and opportunities.

It is teachers who activate arts learning to empower transformative education.



Teacher perspective:

'Often, kids are terrified to be vulnerable and creative. So, that's something that I carefully try to give everyone – all my students. The chance to dip their toes in.'



How this guide was developed

Developing this guide began with an analysis of recently published UNESCO policy documents to identify and distil the organization's key goals and priorities for education. The research team created a first draft of the Arts for Transformative Education model to theoretically categorize the findings.

Next, the researchers examined more than 50 examples of arts learning experiences submitted from around the world by UNESCO ASPnet teachers. This global network of educational institutions (of all levels) serves as a laboratory of ideas dedicated to transformative education for global citizenship, sustainable development and intercultural understanding. The research team analysed these arts learning examples and conducted a scoping review of arts education research literature to further develop the model.

Finally, a survey was designed and interviews were conducted with arts teachers across the globe. Quotations from these interviews – teachers' perspectives – are featured throughout the guide. Input from more than 600 teachers from 39 countries was used to refine the *Arts for Transformative Education* model to the final version presented in this guide.

Due to the nature of the data, which did not include observations of the example learning experiences, this guide does not focus on the words and actions of teachers. Instead, it focuses on the structures that the teachers put in place and the resulting student actions that show the transformative power of arts learning experiences.



Teacher perspective:

'I think you have to bring the arts to kids by way of something that's close to them.'



How to use this guide

This document offers guidance, suggestions and concrete examples of classroom practices that can engage learners in and through the arts. In the following section, the Arts for Transformative Education model is presented as a thinking tool to help with the design and support of transformative arts learning experiences across arts learning contexts.

The subsequent 'learning experience descriptions' serve two purposes. First, they illustrate in detail how the *Arts for Transformative Education* model can function in real-world learning projects. Second, they offer examples of specific transformative arts learning experiences that teachers may wish to adapt and try out with their own students.

Next, the 'Learning Experience Snapshots' provide additional, shorter project examples that teachers may wish to try.

Finally, the 'Guidelines for teachers' section outlines a detailed step-by-step process that teachers can use to design and support transformative arts learning experiences.

Teachers carry out their work within education systems and are accountable to those systems and their associated curricular and pedagogical expectations. Accordingly, this guide is not offered prescriptively, but as a resource that teachers can access to the extent that it helps meet their needs. The *Arts for Transformative Education* model provides an outline of transformative arts education. It is up to teachers and learners to determine how best to apply it within their own lives and contexts.



Teacher perspective:

'Arts learning is...laughter, joy, anger... emotions at work.'

The Arts for Transformative Education model: A thinking tool for teachers

The *Arts for Transformative Education* model was developed by analysing UNESCO policy documents, arts education practices from ASPnet schools around the world, and international survey responses from more than 600 teachers in 39 countries. The model is offered to teachers and other education stakeholders as a thinking tool for understanding, planning, and guiding transformative arts learning experiences.

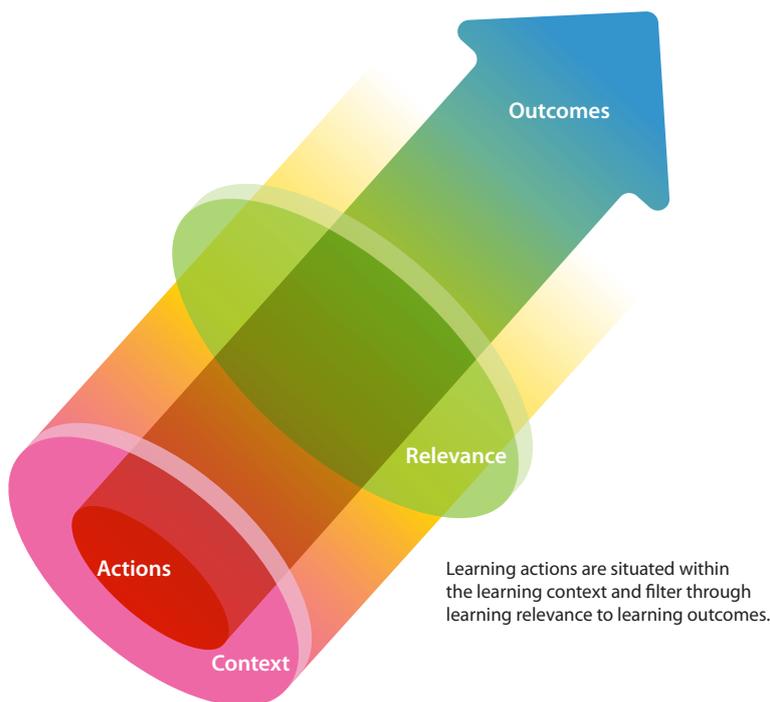
A learning ecology perspective

A learning ecology perspective recognizes the multiple layered elements of learning environments (Barron, 2006). An arts learning ecosystem is complex; it involves diverse learners and teachers and all their interactions with art and each other and everyone and everything else that influences their work. The *Arts for Transformative Education* model does not account for all that is involved in an arts learning ecosystem. Instead, it identifies four dimensions that, together, serve as a simple framework for thinking about arts learning:

- **Learning actions** (opportunities to develop and apply knowledge, skills, values and attitudes)
- **Learning context** (environmental factors and teaching approaches)
- **Learning relevance** (meaningfulness in learners' lives)
- **Learning outcomes** (knowledge, skills, values and attitudes)

Figure 1

Visual representation of the *Arts for Transformative Education* model



Teacher perspective:

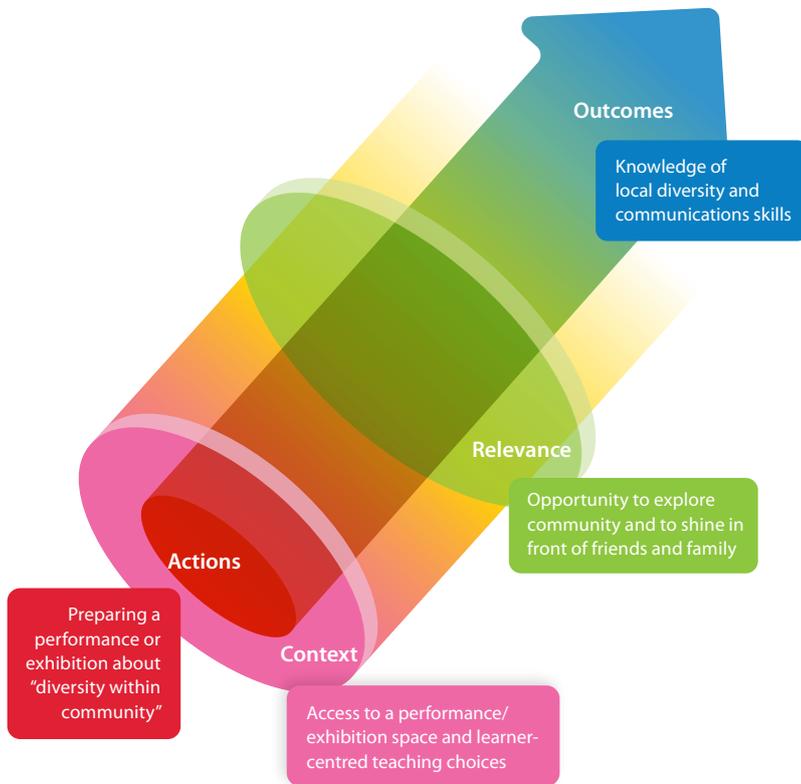
'You have to create trust in the room, where awareness, reflection and dialogue are a part of that space.'

How the model works

An arts learning ecosystem involves students taking part in activities (e.g. preparing a performance or exhibition about 'diversity within community'). Student actions are influenced by factors within the learning context (e.g. access to materials and a performance space, and/or learner-centred teaching choices). The actions are fueled by relevance to students' lives (e.g. the opportunity to explore their own community, to shine in front of friends and family, and/or to communicate what they have learned and want to express). The actions lead to learning outcomes (e.g. knowledge of local diversity and communication skills).

Figure 2

Example set of learning actions, context, relevance and outcomes



Teacher perspective:

'I've seen adults moved to tears by children's artwork... they too have experienced a shift in thinking. Busy parents expect to come in and out quickly, but many slow down, linger and say they've been inspired.'

Learning actions

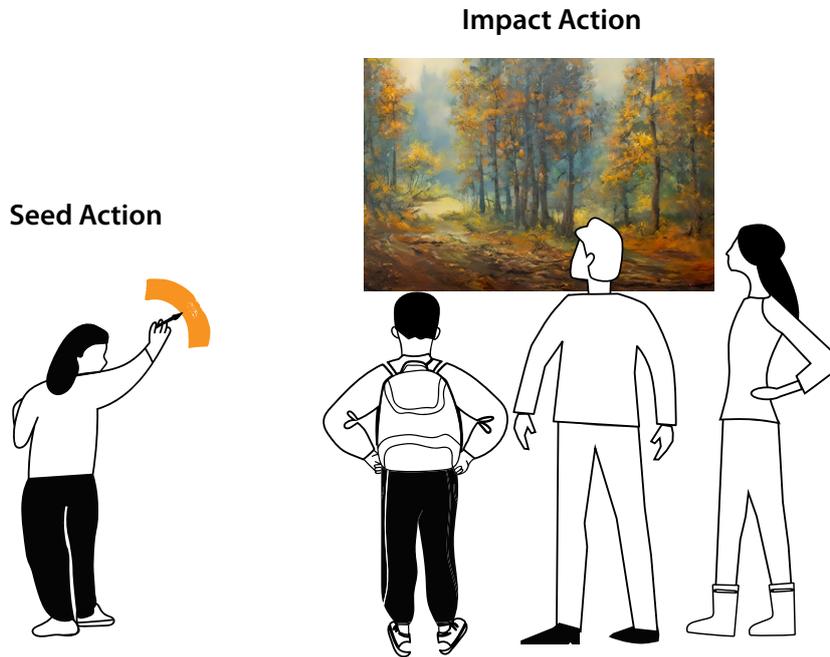
Learning actions provide opportunities for students to develop and apply knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Actions happen at individual, community and global levels and range in complexity. They may be as simple as students independently rehearsing dance gestures or as complex as a group of students performing in a collaboration involving multiple communities to raise funds for an environmental conservation project.

As another example, in visual arts, a relatively simple learning action could be commenting on a peer's sketch, while a complex action could be organizing a multi-school mural painting project that welcomes newcomers to a community. Large-scale learning actions will always comprise smaller learning actions. For instance, putting on a concert involves learning how to play instruments, composing (or choosing) and rehearsing repertoire, exploring the meanings represented within the musical selections, performing for an audience, and so on.

Little actions, or seed actions, can grow into bigger ones. Seed actions can prepare the learner to eventually take more impactful action. For example, practising a musical riff can prepare a student to perform in a concert that might influence a community audience; the seed action of practising the riff is a part of creating that final impression on the world beyond the school. Other seed actions, such as practising dance moves or brushstrokes, can lead to the more impactful actions of performing in a musical or exhibiting a painting, thereby influencing a wider audience. Sometimes learning actions can be both seed and impact actions. For example, creating songs and performing them in class may be viewed as seed actions because they prepare learners for future compositions and performances. But those actions may also be impactful by provoking change within learners themselves and/or within the classroom community.

Figure 3

Visual representation of the relationship between seed and impact actions



The arts, like other areas of learning, involve many seed actions. Thanks to the communicative power of the arts, arts learning offers particular potential for impact actions at individual, community and even global levels.

Learning context

A learning context consists of all the factors that influence learning. Factors may include the materials, tools and technologies that students can access; the physical or digital spaces where the learning happens; and the selected teaching approaches and structures that influence how the learners feel included, recognized and valued within the learning community. Teachers can influence the learning context through the resources they introduce, the environments they curate, and the relationships they cultivate (Damşa et al., 2019). In an arts learning context, teachers might help ensure the accessibility of materials, such as paper for painting or musical instruments for playing. Teachers might strive to create a physical space where students have enough light to work and are comfortable. Teachers might work to reduce hierarchical structures by making art alongside their students and recognizing students (not just teachers) as experts (Freire, 1970).

Learning relevance

Learning relevance refers to the meaningfulness of learning actions and outcomes within students' lives. Learning relevance addresses coherence between student experiences at school and those they have out in the world. To achieve learning relevance, teachers must examine how learning experiences connect to students' natural, political, economic and cultural contexts. Learning experiences are relevant when students actively participate in ways that connect to their own narratives (Freire, 1970). For example, learning print-making skills can have direct relevance for a learner who wants to make and sell art at a local market or make posters for a community event. Learning relevance can also be less obvious: a learner rehearsing a role in a play may gain insight into how people experience and respond emotionally in different



Teacher perspective:

'Artmaking often stirs more questions.'

situations. This insight could prove useful for young people processing their own emotional responses, or those of peers or family or community members.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that students develop and take away from learning experiences. Outcomes can be both intentional and unintentional – planned and emergent. Ideally, teachers will create spaces for learners to reflect on their learning experiences, and will help learners identify and celebrate the learning outcomes that result.

There are often reciprocal relationships between learning actions and outcomes. For example, the learning actions of imagining and creating help to develop imagination and creativity skills. Those skills can then be applied elsewhere in learners' lives. Often, tracing the relationships between actions and outcomes is complicated. Practising and rehearsing can involve numerous subactions, such as experimenting, learning from mistakes, and persevering. Together, the actions and subactions can lead to unexpected and important outcomes, such as improved self-regulation, self-knowledge, resilience or even all of these.

It is crucial to recognize that arts learning outcomes are not always positive. Arts learning experiences can also lead to negative outcomes, such as diminished self-confidence or disrespectful attitudes towards certain artistic expressions. Arts experiences can raise students to spectacular heights but can also bring them crashing down. Teachers have a responsibility to carefully prepare and curate learning experiences and help learners negotiate and understand them in ways that eventually lead to positive learning outcomes.

Bringing the dimensions together: Transformative learning experiences

Learning experiences include all four dimensions of learning: Learning actions are influenced by factors within the learning context. The impact of the actions is fuelled by learning relevance. The actions lead to learning outcomes.

Learning experiences can be transformative in multiple ways:

- They can transform the knowledge students hold by adding to it or reconfiguring it.
- They can add or hone skills.
- They can establish or shift values and attitudes – especially when the experiences involve emotion.

Learning experiences are transformative when they cultivate the knowledge, skills, values, or attitudes within learners that encourage or enable them to transform their lives and communities.

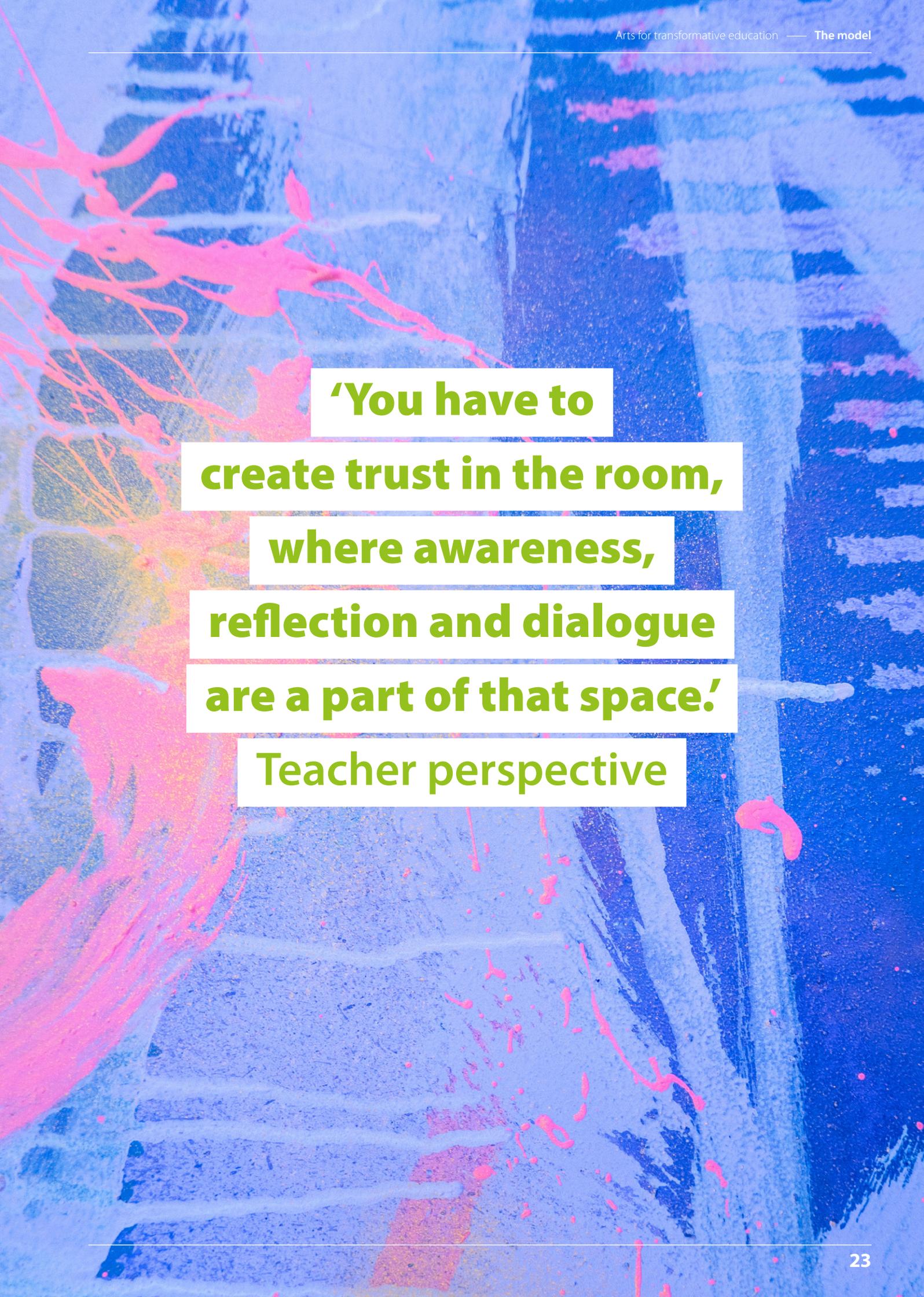
Arts learning experiences are sites of tremendous potential. However, meaningful learning and beneficial outcomes are not guaranteed. To fully realize the potential of learning in and through the arts, teachers must mindfully and intentionally structure and support experiences to optimize what students take away from them. Careful consideration of learning actions, context, relevance and outcomes can help teachers and students successfully activate the arts for positive transformative education.



Teacher perspective:

'It's not that kind of rigid sitting environment.'

'Making art puts their knowledge into action.'



**'You have to
create trust in the room,
where awareness,
reflection and dialogue
are a part of that space.'**

Teacher perspective

Arts assets

Arts learning can support unique or heightened experiences. Both teachers and students can benefit from the powerful affordances that the arts provide. The term 'arts assets' is introduced here to refer to the special things that can happen or be present within an arts learning experience. These affordances are not entirely unique to the arts, but are closely associated with them.

Consider the following examples:

- Arts learning can help people say what they want to say when words alone are not enough.
- Arts learning can help people see and explore new possibilities.
- Arts learning can allow people to process experiences, ideas, information and stories through cognitive, embodied and emotional (head, hand and heart) exploration and response.

Arts assets are sometimes inherent to arts learning experiences, but they can also be intentionally activated or enhanced. Arts assets can be found within and/or across the various dimensions of learning: actions, context, relevance and outcomes (see Table 1). They can support and enrich transformative learning.

Table 1

Example arts assets within each dimension of learning

Learning dimension	Example	Arts asset	Explanation
Learning actions	Preparing a performance or exhibit and presenting it to raise awareness	Arts learning can enable multi-faceted meaning-making and communicating.	Students can negotiate and make personal meaning of a topic by engaging with or creating art that tells related stories. Presenting the artwork to an audience then allows students to powerfully communicate their understanding, expressing and inviting emotional responses to important personal, local and global issues.
Learning context	Learner-centred	Arts learning can encourage and celebrate unique learner interests and abilities.	Students can develop their personal potential by choosing performance/exhibition materials and/or taking on roles that match who they are, what they want to know more about and what they have to offer.
Learning relevance	Learning actions focused on an issue significant to students and/or their community	Arts learning can result in artistic practices and products that have real-world value.	When doing artistic work, students' thoughts, voices, expressions and selves can be seen, acknowledged and valued in real-world settings.
Learning outcomes	Self-regulation and communication skills	Arts learning can cultivate perseverance and self-discipline.	Arts learning often has very clear and tangible goals (e.g. presentation readiness) and rewards (e.g. appreciation from family and community) that can draw students in and increase follow-through.

Arts asset examples

In the development of this guide, arts assets were identified across arts learning experiences. Through this analysis, some important ideas became clear. The identified arts assets were linked to self-exploration, self-expression, communication and personal growth, as well as connecting with others, building understanding and taking action.

Consider these specific arts asset examples. Arts learning can:

- Help people process emotion
- Help people recognize and value their own and others' cultures and traditions
- Provide opportunities for people's thoughts, voices, expressions and selves to be seen, acknowledged and valued
- Offer different entry points and ways of communicating in difficult conversations
- Build confidence, adaptability and resilience
- Connect people through shared expressions and experiences
- Support intimate exploration of complex topics
- Provide a space for people to challenge systems and enact change

Learning experience descriptions

The collection of arts learning experiences featured in the following pages illustrates the *Arts for Transformative Education* model in action. These examples, submitted by ASPnet teachers from across the globe, discuss a variety of approaches to teaching and learning in the arts. The featured experiences represent different arts disciplines and world regions. Each highlights how particular arts assets were active within the learning experience.

While the projects described are not transferable to all learning and teaching contexts, different features will resonate with diverse teachers and students, and can be adapted to their own circumstances. Each description includes a list of reflective questions to help teachers think about how these activities could be modified to suit their own students and settings.

The descriptions that follow were influenced by the researchers' backgrounds as teachers, artists and arts educators. The researchers focused their analyses on what they perceived as valuable and significant. No direct conversations about the experiences took place with the learners or teachers; the descriptions are based only on researcher perceptions of information received from the teachers.

The learning experience descriptions are organized by art form and include dance, music, visual art, drama and creative writing.



Teacher perspective:

'The best part is when you see a student over a couple of years... You see the development process of their skills, whether it's drawing or painting – whatever – but also that beautiful transformation of a person.'

Argentina: La Danza

©María Elena Anillo

Students dance from home to celebrate International Dance Day during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Help people explore relationships between themselves and their environment.
- Connect people through shared experiences and expressions.
- Connect people to their own or others' cultural heritage.
- Help people process emotions.

Learning actions

In Argentina, students of the Escuela de Danzas Aída V. Mastrazzi choreographed, rehearsed, performed and recorded short dance pieces (Escuela Aida Mastrazzi, 2020). They then compiled the pieces in a video created for International Dance Day in 2020. Through dance, the students defied COVID-19 and the associated circumstances that required them to dance alone at home. The [video](#) is available to watch online.

Learning actions occurred at individual, community and global levels. At the individual level, while in isolation, students choreographed and performed solo dances in a variety of styles, including traditional Argentine dance, modern dance and ballet. They used their living areas as inspiration, exploring ways of using space and movement, and often physically interacted with the walls and windows around them. Sometimes, a student's living environment became a duet partner in the dance. Students responded to physical surfaces, confined settings and weather. Through their art, the students explored what it meant to experience pandemic restrictions and how to (symbolically) dance beyond their confinement and isolation.

At a community level, the students collaborated with each other to present the work in a video compilation. They used one piece of music to unite all the dancers' movements and combined the solo works into a single narrative. Some of the dancers also cautiously brought their dance out into local communities: They performed at parks and other public spaces, in front of open windows, and on rooftops.

The students acted at a global level by posting the video online and offering it to the international community as an artistic reflection on, and response to, the impacts of COVID-19. It could also be viewed as a rallying symbol of defiance.

Learning context

The project took advantage of natural, built and virtual learning sites. Dancers interacted with nature (e.g. when performing outside during a rainstorm). Built sites, such as bedrooms, featured prominently in this video, reflecting pandemic-imposed isolation. The students chose the spaces where they felt safe to be and to dance. Virtual spaces were re-imagined through creative and skilled video editing techniques; multiple angles and repeated movements were overlaid, creating the impression of the dancers dancing with themselves. Collaborating through contributions to the video project offered students the chance to feel included together despite their physical separation.

The learning experience centred students by inviting them to independently create, perform and video their contributions. Students chose the style and content of the dance segments they performed, allowing them to express their own artistic visions.

Learning relevance

The relevance of the experience was apparent in the personally meaningful dance styles and gestures the students chose to display. The student-created choreography enabled students to connect their learning to their own interests and heritage. By posting the video online, the dancers' work could be seen and acknowledged much more broadly. By dancing in physical and virtual public spaces, their artistic practice could be enjoyed and celebrated by local and global communities.

This project was also highly relevant for students because it was centred on their experiences of isolation during the pandemic. The project invited students to reflect on their emotions and struggles. It also addressed mental health and well-being; performing their dance pieces offered students a cathartic release of pandemic-induced anxiety.

Learning outcomes

The students built skills of self-expression and communication as they shared their feelings and stories through dance. Weaving the solo dances together gave students the opportunity to develop empathy; the activity set them up to compare their own experiences with the artistic expressions of their peers.

As a result of their isolation, students also had the chance to learn new ways to choreograph and perform dance. They



Dance students videoed their own performances to contribute to a dance compilation video created in collaboration with their classmates.

found solutions to problems associated with limited space. For example, the dancers were required to fit their choreography into a stationary camera frame. By necessity, they found innovative ways to create visually interesting dance while working with physical constraints.

The project also offered students the chance to advance their knowledge of self and identity. By creatively expressing how they felt during the pandemic, the students could gain insight into their values while in crisis. They could also intimately explore how they exist in their environment and how their environment affects their daily lives. Finally, the experience offered the dancers the opportunity to develop resilience by using reflection and artistic expression to help cope with mental health challenges.

Reflective questions

- 1 Students in this experience responded to their physical environment through dance. In what ways does the physical environment impact your students' learning? How could you invite students to incorporate the physical environment into their artistic expressions?
- 2 The dancers expressed and processed emotions of anxiety, restlessness and isolation during a COVID-19 lockdown. In what ways do your students process emotion through artistic expression? How can you help them explore emotion through art?

Portugal: The chromosome dance

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Enable embodied exploration of abstract ideas.

Learning actions

Students at the Escola Secundária de Loulé showed their strengthened understanding of biology using dance (Pereira, 2019). The students connected physically with a natural process that takes place on such a small scale that it can be difficult to picture and understand. They playfully embodied chromosomes in the mitotic phase and used their bodies to model the movements of cellular structures. As students choreographed and rehearsed the dance, they collaborated with each other to refine a cohesive finished product. Each student performed a role to represent chromosome movements. Their work integrated elements of dance, physical education and biology.

Learning context

Creative collaboration was important to make this experience work. Working together allowed students to construct deeper understandings through social interaction. They added to their own learning by drawing on the contributions and perspectives of others. In terms of the physical learning environment, this experience represented a rethinking of learning sites. The learning actions took place in a gymnasium and swimming pool. Each of these contrasting spaces introduced a unique sensory experience to the dance. Both welcomed playfulness, as students incorporated items found in each space (e.g. pool noodles, scarves) into the performance.

Learning relevance

This learning experience was relevant to the learners' lives because it provided an opportunity to show and develop their scientific understandings in fun and playful ways beyond traditional science learning spaces. They were able to experience scientific learning in spaces that were familiar to them, but that they may not have considered as educational sites.

Learning outcomes

This experience addressed arts learning outcomes such as self-regulation and collaboration skills, while also enhancing students' biology knowledge. Transforming a biological process into dance required students to develop a strong understanding of that process. The students had the chance to increase their understanding of the topic by making art about it. The experience provided students a unique opportunity to gain an embodied perspective of a key biological process that cannot be seen without a microscope.

Reflective questions

- 1 How could you use the arts to support learning in other subjects?
- 2 How can changing the setting of a performance affect students' learning experiences?
- 3 How could you support your students in choreographing a dance that represents something they are learning about? How could you use this approach to similarly support student-centred creativity in other arts disciplines?
- 4 How might you support productive and creative collaboration among students?
- 5 How can you welcome play in your teaching? What value, if any, might playfulness bring to your students' learning?

United Arab Emirates: Light for hope



Grade 10 students created a dance video to highlight the importance of mask wearing and handwashing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: Asian International School, Ruwais, Abu Dhabi (2020). Hum Haar Nahi Maanenge Dance. YouTube. [Online Video]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S61kpJWT3UY> (Accessed on 8 February 2022).

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Enable immediate action – students can apply their learning right away, taking action through artistic work.
- Connect people through shared experiences and expressions.
- Connect people to their own and others' cultural heritage.

Learning actions

In Abu Dhabi, students from the Asian International Private School Ruwais (Western Zone) created a dance to raise awareness of the fight against COVID-19 (Asian International School, Ruwais, 2020). The students individually videoed their part of the dance in their homes. Recordings were edited into a single video, highlighting each student's contribution. Through dance, the students emphasized the importance of mask wearing and handwashing for keeping themselves and their communities safe. The students conveyed their gratitude to front-line health care workers risking their lives to save others. The dance concluded with a message of hope: Students held candles to symbolize the promise of better days to come when people work together against COVID-19. The [video](#) is available online.

This learning experience involved students creating, rehearsing and collaborating remotely with their teacher and peers to coordinate choreography, lighting and props. Through the medium and the message, students explored new ways of being in the world (Biesta, 2022). They communicated a clear message that masking and handwashing were highly important parts of personal hygiene during the pandemic. Affirming their commitment to these routines and raising awareness of them, students addressed public and personal health challenges affecting both their local and global communities. The medium of this learning experience re-imagined traditional live dance performances in a world changed by COVID-19, engaging students in a new way of creating and presenting dance. This project provided an opportunity for the students to make informed decisions about raising awareness of health issues at individual and community levels, while developing a sense of belonging to and engaging with a global community.

Learning context

Environmental and pedagogical factors supported students' learning. The teacher worked with students to develop individualized choreography that highlighted their unique expressions through dance. The environment provoked a rethinking of where arts learning can take place; rather than learning in a traditional classroom setting, students learned from inside their homes. Finally, the global pandemic actually created the environment for this work to happen, inviting students to develop a sense of responsibility for supporting safety within their local and global communities. Limiting the spread of COVID-19 necessitated action by all community members. This context created an opportunity for students to identify and take action in service of a sustainable society.

Learning relevance

At the time it took place, this learning experience was extremely relevant to students' lives outside school. The pandemic, an inherently global issue, had real impacts on students' communities and lives, such as the unprecedented shift to remote learning. With such a strong connection to these impacts, this project was deeply rooted in students' lived experiences. Importantly, the final edited video distributed the spotlight equally among students, as the focus of the video shifted from one to another. Within the choreography, each student had the opportunity to contribute cultural and social dance references that were personally meaningful. This experience provided students with a heightened opportunity to be seen and to publicly shine as a collective and as individuals.

Learning outcomes

One key learning outcome of this experience was a sense of belonging and responsibility to a global community. In their dance, the students expressed gratitude for health care workers, demonstrating a growing appreciation for others in their local and global communities. Through voicing their gratitude publicly, students had the chance to build their understanding of the value of sustainable development, but also the chance to act in response to a global crisis.

The experience also addressed other learning outcomes: Students engaged with public health guidelines and developed an artistic way to raise awareness about them. By

highlighting the importance of masking and handwashing, students developed their own, age-appropriate health knowledge and played a direct role in local and global risk reduction efforts. The students' message of hope at the end of the video supported a resilient response to the challenges of the pandemic both within themselves and their audience.

This learning experience powerfully centred student capacity to transform themselves and to support societal transformation. Students were provided with the opportunity to learn about living safe and socially-responsible lives during the pandemic by creating art. The activity enabled students to take immediate action to cope with the situation.

Reflective questions

- 1 Limiting the spread of COVID-19 necessitates action by all members of society, including children. How might you leverage the arts to support students taking action related to other global issues (e.g. climate change, food insecurity)?
- 2 In this learning experience, students took action to address COVID-19 by raising awareness, expressing gratitude for front-line health care workers and affirming their commitment to life-saving hygiene routines. How else can students take action?
- 3 If you prepared a dance with your students, how could you share it with others to maximize its impact and allow students to publicly shine? With whom might you share it?
- 4 This learning experience fostered a sense of gratitude to community members. In what other ways might you cultivate students' feelings of gratitude?
- 5 What other global issues could you teach students about through dance or other art forms? How could you cultivate their sense of social responsibility and connectedness to a global community in relation to that issue?
- 6 What local issues or stories in students' communities might be effectively explored through dance or other art forms?
- 7 How can student agency be supported in developing a dance video like the one described here? How could you centre students' voices in the creative process?

Canada: *Ancient and Forever*



Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Help people see and explore who they are and who they want to be.
- Connect people to their own and others' cultural heritage.
- Offer different entry points and ways of communicating in difficult conversations.
- Provide opportunities for students to be seen, acknowledged and valued.

Learning actions

In Eskasoni First Nation, Nova Scotia, Canada, students and teachers of Allison Bernard Memorial High School collaborated with professional musicians to perform, record and make a video of the song *Ancient and Forever* (Allison Bernard Memorial High School, 2020). Nova Scotia musical artist J.P. Cormier wrote the song as a celebration of First Nations culture and perseverance on Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island). The [video](#) is available online.

Performing and creating a video of the song *Ancient and Forever* gave students and teachers a significant opportunity to work with the community outside their school. Together with local professional musicians, they acted to address the social challenge of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. The video places Indigenous and settler cultural expressions side by side, showing differences and similarities. It displays Indigenous drumming, dancing, singing, regalia and construction of living spaces alongside Cape Breton step dance, Scottish Highland dancing and traditional instruments of the British Isles and Maritime provinces, such as the fiddle, banjo, tin whistle and bagpipes. The musicians sing in English, French, Gaelic and Mi'kmaq.

A particularly powerful moment in the video focuses on an Indigenous youth singing in front of a residential school memorial. This part highlights how crucial it is to acknowledge the widespread abuse of Indigenous children in these institutions, where authorities worked to systematically erase Indigenous cultures and languages in Canada.



Above and opposite page: Students and teachers collaborated with professional musicians to perform, record and make a video of the song.

This project shows how arts learning can bring forth powerful opportunities for students to explore who they are, who they want to be and how they want to relate to the world around them. Through this song and the video, the students, teachers and community members expressed their individual identities and connections to their cultural heritage. Working together, they synthesized diverse cultural references to communicate a complex representation of the island where they live, its history and its people.

Learning context

This learning experience included performers from a variety of cultural backgrounds and of different ages in a collaborative learning environment. Notably, teachers and local artists made music alongside the students, showcasing the tight-knit community. The project highlighted professionalism in the arts; student work was supported by professional recording equipment and the technical expertise of local musicians. Still, the project clearly prioritized learner contributions and expressions. Students' individual artistic and cultural offerings, as well as the physical spaces where they chose to be filmed, were included in the video. The learning experience did not appear to take place in a school building at all, but rather in alternative cultural, community and outdoor spaces.

Learning relevance

The learning experience appeared highly relevant to students. The physical landscape of the island setting supports the video narrative, as the performers sing, play instruments and dance before a backdrop of ocean views, wetlands, forests, farms and snow-covered hills, fields and shrubland.

The focus of the performance was the place the students called home, the people who lived there and their interwoven stories. In addition, students had the chance to meaningfully engage with their local arts community. Further, thanks to the polished video production, the project offered students

a brilliant opportunity to be seen and acknowledged, and to publicly shine.

Learning outcomes

The performance provided opportunities for students to develop collaboration and communication skills. Meanwhile, the content focus supported intercultural understanding and enhanced appreciation of diversity and heritage. Perhaps the most significant learning outcome was that students had the chance to develop intimate knowledge of acting to address a social challenge – specifically, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

Reflective questions

- 1 What are some artistic expressions connected to cultural heritage that your students might enjoy sharing in a performance or art exhibit?
- 2 What social issues important to your context could students address through artistic work?
- 3 Are there local artists and/or culture bearers who might be willing to collaborate with your students? What kind of artistic projects would work well in your community?



The project addresses the social challenge of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

Indonesia: Trash hack project – *Let's Change for the World*



The song project provided an opportunity for students to influence others to help make the world a better place. Source p. 36 and 37: SMP Labschool Kebayoran, Jakarta, Indonesia. *Let's Change for the World*. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Clr_srVpEU4 (Accessed on 8 February 2022).

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Provide a brave space (Arao and Clemens, 2013) for students to challenge systems and enact change.
- Encourage and celebrate learners' unique interests and abilities.

Learning actions

In Indonesia, five students from SMP Labschool Kebayoran collaborated to write, record and make a video of their original song, *Let's Change for the World* (SMP Labschool Kebayoran, 2020). The song has the following dedication:

'This song is dedicated to you all for our better future, composed with love.'

The [video](#) is available online.

The performance features three students who are singing, rapping and playing hand percussion instruments. Two other students are playing keyboard and guitar. The music was composed and mixed by Dityo, who played guitar, and the lyrics were written collaboratively by the student group. The students identified a meaningful issue (sustainable consumption) and expressed their feelings about it through music. Editing and refining provided the students with the opportunity to make informed judgments as their creative process unfolded.

The video switches between performance footage and footage of the students as they create a dramatic narrative. Through performance, dramatic sequences and protest-style signage, the students connect to each other and their viewers. Their storytelling invites an emotional response from viewers and raises awareness of important issues.

This project illustrates immediate learning at the individual and school level, and the YouTube video brings the learning to the global community. At the individual level, students had the opportunity to learn from mistakes as they experimented

and rehearsed their respective musical parts. The final result is a refined music video with purposeful and effective visuals. Through the dramatic elements of the video (protest signs, demonstrating a water bottle filling station and recycling), the students explored and modelled ways to be in the world (Biesta, 2022).

Posting the video brought the learning to a global level. The students created a brave space (Arao and Clemens, 2013) through their music – a space where people can feel supported in acting and interacting authentically in difficult circumstances and conversations. The students challenged norms and raised awareness about the importance of taking care of the planet. They demonstrated actionable ways for young people to support sustainable consumption (e.g. by repurposing single-use items to give them a second life).

Learning context

The video shows the students performing in their classroom and moving through the school in a way that suggests a sense of comfort, belonging and ownership over their school spaces. The learning experience was well supported, with instruments, microphones and likely a digital video and audio workstation.

At the end of the video, the credits explain that this project was completely learner-led. All students had the opportunity to contribute in multiple rich and meaningful ways and to showcase their skills. They brought unique artistic expressions to the project through singing, playing, rapping, acting and audio mixing. The breadth of skill and the confidence displayed in the video suggest the students were working and learning in a safe space where trusting relationships with teachers, peers and self were supported.



Learning relevance

The learning experience was relevant to the students because it provided an opportunity to channel their efforts towards a universally meaningful goal: influencing others to help make the world a better place. Collaborating on a song that comments on issues students care about is powerfully relevant. On an individual level, students likely appreciated the opportunity to build relationships and community with like-minded peers. In addition, the experience was relevant to the students' personal lives because it allowed them to be seen and to shine in front of teachers, peers and others who watch the video.

Learning outcomes

The students' communication and self-expression skills are evident in the songwriting, the video staging and the narrative. The collaborative nature of this project suggests the development of interpersonal and relationship skills. The refined and sophisticated vocal and instrumental arrangement indicates the development of self-discipline, as well as constructive self-criticism and self-assessment as students prepared the performance. There is also evidence of growing prowess in musical outcomes associated with the technical elements of singing, rapping, and playing various instruments. This creative learning experience also shows the students' deepening understanding of environment and community activism, and how these issues relate to their own lives.

Reflective questions

- 1 If teaching an art form other than music, what student-led project would combine creativity and education for sustainable development?
- 2 Thinking of your own teaching, which prompts, provocations and/or physical configurations have provided students with rich opportunities for social-emotional development in a collaborative setting?
- 3 The idea of a 'brave space' (Arao and Clemens, 2013) is associated with learning that not only involves risk, but also adopting new ways of doing and seeing things despite the accompanying discomfort. What arts learning prompts, provocations or projects might propel this kind of learning?
- 4 Transgressive Education for Sustainable Development (also called 'T-learning') is about empowering students to dismantle 'lock-ins' (decisions based on previously determined approaches without consideration of the current context) to influence broader social change (T-learning, 2023). For example, students might work to replace a school's decorative gardens with gardens featuring native plant species. What might T-learning look like in an arts context?

Armenia: Singing online during COVID-19 confinement

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Connect people through shared experiences and expressions.

Learning actions

In Armenia, during the COVID-19 pandemic, six students from Yerevan 'Heratsi' High School virtually collaborated to create a video of a musical performance and post it online (Yerevan Heratsi High School, 2020). All the students videoed themselves performing alone in their own homes. Five of them sang in two-part harmony and created a rhythmic accompaniment with clapping and cup tapping. One played a chordal accompaniment on the piano. They performed *The Cup Song (When I'm Gone)* that was made famous in the 2012 Hollywood film *Pitch Perfect*.

The students creatively adapted the song in a few ways to make it their own. They modified the lyrics after '*I sure would like some sweet company*', adding '*but it's better to stay six feet away*'. They also inserted an excerpt of an Armenian song – with rhythmic clapping accompaniment – in the middle of *The Cup Song* to create a mash-up.

This learning experience involved actions at the individual, community and global levels. At the individual level, students rehearsed their parts and performed the songs, experimenting and taking risks with their own interpretations and modifications. In doing so, they explored and expressed personal understandings and feelings related to *The Cup Song's* theme of 'being apart'.

At the community level, the students connected to each other as they planned and performed the musical performance, collaborating to make the performance uniquely their own. By posting the video, the students connected to a larger community of friends and family. Exploring the lyrics and expressive musical gestures within both songs offered students the opportunity to connect to the songwriters and others who have sung and listened to the songs.

The students also acted at a global level by posting the video online, using their music to raise awareness about limiting social contact during the pandemic. They also expressed some of the loss they felt as a result.

In response to local and global health-related challenges caused by the pandemic, the students made informed decisions to be safe during this learning experience. While remaining socially-distanced, the students nevertheless found a way to meaningfully connect and work together towards a shared goal. They were physically safe, but still managed to benefit their mental health by making music together.

Learning context

The learning environment and the pedagogical approach supported this experience. First, the project's structure included all students as active and valued members of the collaborative learning community. Their voices were heard, literally! All students had opportunities to contribute unique musical expressions to the performance.

Second, the experience was learner-centred, with students active in all parts of the performance, from developing ideas to finalizing the video. The students appeared to be involved in selecting songs, deciding how they would sing and play, writing original lyrics, and making the decision to combine the songs into a mash-up.

Third, the learning happened outside a traditional school context – in students' homes and in a virtual learning space – to protect students' physical health by maintaining social distancing during the pandemic. Finally, even though the students were physically apart, the learning experience was nurtured by a powerful sense of community.

Learning relevance

The learning materials in this experience were meaningful in students' lives. *The Cup Song (When I'm Gone)*, with lyrics about missing loved ones, was a good choice to resonate powerfully with the students' experience of missing social contact within the COVID-19 context. The learning materials also included an Armenian song, relating to the students' cultural lives. Posting the performance online provided students the opportunity to be seen, to publicly shine, and to draw family, community and others into their experiences. The learning experience connected the students' worlds in and outside school.

Learning outcomes

As a result of this experience, each student had the opportunity to learn self-regulation and self-discipline by practising their performance until it was ready to be recorded and shared with their peers. They had the chance to learn collaboration skills by working together towards a meaningful goal. The students had opportunities to develop creative and problem-solving skills as they grappled with challenges, such as how to musically combine the two songs and how to sync the individual videos together. They had the chance to learn about the interconnectedness of different countries and populations as they, living in Armenia, resonated with the sentiments expressed in the American *Cup Song*. The students developed communication and expressive skills, as evidenced by their poignant modification of the lyrics to share their sense of lost human contact. They had the opportunity to learn about their own emotions by making art about them. They had the chance to learn how to use music to explore shared experiences and expressions, and to connect to self, to others and to the world.

Reflective questions

- 1 The students' singing addressed their experiences of missing social contact with friends and loved ones. What shared experiences would be meaningful for your students to address alone or collaboratively through art?
- 2 The students shaped this performance to make it uniquely their own. If you were to support students in preparing artwork for sharing with others, what strategies could you use to help or encourage them to make it uniquely their own?
- 3 This arts learning experience addressed the sustainability focus of health and well-being. What sustainability focuses would be meaningful for your students to address?
- 4 The students shared their performance by posting a video online. What other ways of publicly sharing artworks could make sense for your students?

Uganda: From broken glass to ceramics glaze



Working with clay, the students created diverse ceramic pieces, ultimately coating and protecting them with a glaze they made from recycled glass.

Source for photos on p. 40 and 41: UNESCO ASPnet (2020). UNESCO Associated Schools 4 Climate Documentary. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkoXX4m9wR8> (Accessed on 8 February 2022).

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Invite students to engage in problem-solving and develop problem-solving skills.
- Support student exploration of and relationship with physical environments.

Learning actions

In Uganda, a fine arts teacher at Immaculate Heart School worked with his secondary students to create a glaze for ceramics from locally abundant discarded glass (UNESCO ASPnet, 2020). Together, they took action to address the problem of potentially dangerous broken glass littered throughout their community and degrading the local environment. The class made the decision to collect the glass and repurpose it. They researched making ceramics and working safely with glass. They experimented to find safe and effective processes for crushing the glass into powder, they determined the appropriate temperatures for melting the glass, and they discovered methods to transfer colour from the glass to ceramic artworks. Working with clay, the students created diverse ceramic pieces, ultimately coating and protecting them with the glaze they had made from recycled glass.

Learning context

In this learning context, physical safety was a key consideration because working with crushed glass is inherently dangerous. The teacher ensured that, when working with the powdered glass, the students wore personal protective equipment – gloves to protect their hands and nose and mouth coverings to reduce the risk of breathing in glass particles. But the learning environment and pedagogy still permitted exploration and risk-taking when the students experimented and refined their glaze-making techniques. The pedagogical approach ensured that artmaking materials were in place by empowering students to produce the materials themselves.



Learning relevance

Making the glaze had evident relevance to the students' lives. The initiative directly addressed the problem of broken glass in their community. It also provided students with an experiential understanding of how discarded materials around them could be recycled and repurposed in valuable ways.

Learning outcomes

The experience powerfully supported important learning outcomes. The activity gave students a very direct experience with problem-solving. The initiative involved addressing the broken glass littered throughout the community and determining how to make a ceramic glaze. Additionally, there were subproblems, such as how to work with glass safely and how to work effectively with the glaze once it was made. The students had the opportunity to develop collaboration skills as they worked with each other and their teacher to solve these problems. And, of course, producing the ceramic pieces gave students rich opportunities to exercise and develop imagination, creativity and associated technical arts skills.

Reflective questions

- 1 How might your students make use of recycled or repurposed materials in their artworks?
- 2 What problems do your students find and work to solve as they engage with art? As their teacher, how do you help them find meaningful problems to tackle?
- 3 What safety considerations are significant in the art learning experiences that you support?
- 4 In what ways does or might your students' artmaking interact with their local physical environment?



Top left: In this learning context, physical safety was a key consideration because working with crushed glass is dangerous.

Top right: The teacher ensured that, when working with the powdered glass, the students wore personal protective equipment.

Bottom right: When crushing the glass, students wore mouth coverings to reduce the risk of breathing in glass particles.

Mexico: I am art

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Pre-primary students engaged in empathy-developing painting tasks.

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Nurture empathy and appreciation of diverse abilities.

Learning actions

In Mexico, pre-primary students at the Jardín De Niños de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano engaged in two empathy-developing painting tasks (Jardín De Niños Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, 2020). The first involved students holding paint brushes in their mouths and making paint marks on a large paper. A roll of brown paper was taped around overturned tables, creating an upright painting surface that students could stand in front of and paint on using the brushes held in their mouths. Students routinely bent down to dip their brushes in shared paint palettes laid out on chairs, then moved to the collective paper to create their marks. Many of the students experimented with lines, dots, colours and other expressive marks.

The second painting activity involved students working in pairs. The partners were seated across from each other at small tables, with one partner blindfolded. Each table had a piece of paper, a water cup, a paintbrush and a paint palette. The blindfolded partner was tasked with creating a painting on paper, while the other partner observed and helped. In both activities, the teacher circulated and asked the students questions to prompt reflection on their work as they painted.

During the painting activities, students acted in ways that contributed to the safety, happiness and well-being of everyone in the class. While painting with brushes held in their mouths on a shared surface, the students appeared calm and respectful of each other's space. They dipped their brushes in paint and painted within their assigned areas on the paper without

dispute. Many were smiling and giggling as they moved back and forth between the paint palettes and paper. Although the process of painting with a brush in one's mouth might have been frustrating for some, the young children showed exceptional emotional regulation throughout the activity.

In the other painting activity, several non-blindfolded students assisted their blindfolded partners by guiding their hands or holding up the paint palettes. Recognizing the challenges associated with vision loss, the students were apparently compelled to ease and assist their partners' painting processes, demonstrating empathy and understanding for others' experiences.

Learning context

The classroom set-up and access to materials contributed to the students' engagement and ability to take part. Colourful furniture and organizing bins and shelves stocked with various materials could be seen around the classroom. There was more than enough floor space to rearrange the furniture to suit the activity at hand. For the painting activities, there were enough paints, brushes and palettes for the students to share, as well as access to water for cleaning up.

The children's calm and joyful demeanours suggested a positive social atmosphere. They seemed willing to take risks and show vulnerability, indicating a high level of trust among students and between the students and their teacher. The teacher consistently engaged the students in conversation during the activities, without getting in the way of their work or directing it. The thoughtful set-up of the materials and open-ended structure for each activity further supported the effectiveness of the environment for children's artmaking.

Learning relevance

Through this experience, students had the chance to develop their understanding and appreciation of diverse abilities and experiences of those within and beyond their own

communities. On an individual level, they had the opportunity to connect with their emotions, as they encountered both the frustrations of painting in a different way and the positive feelings associated with helping others.

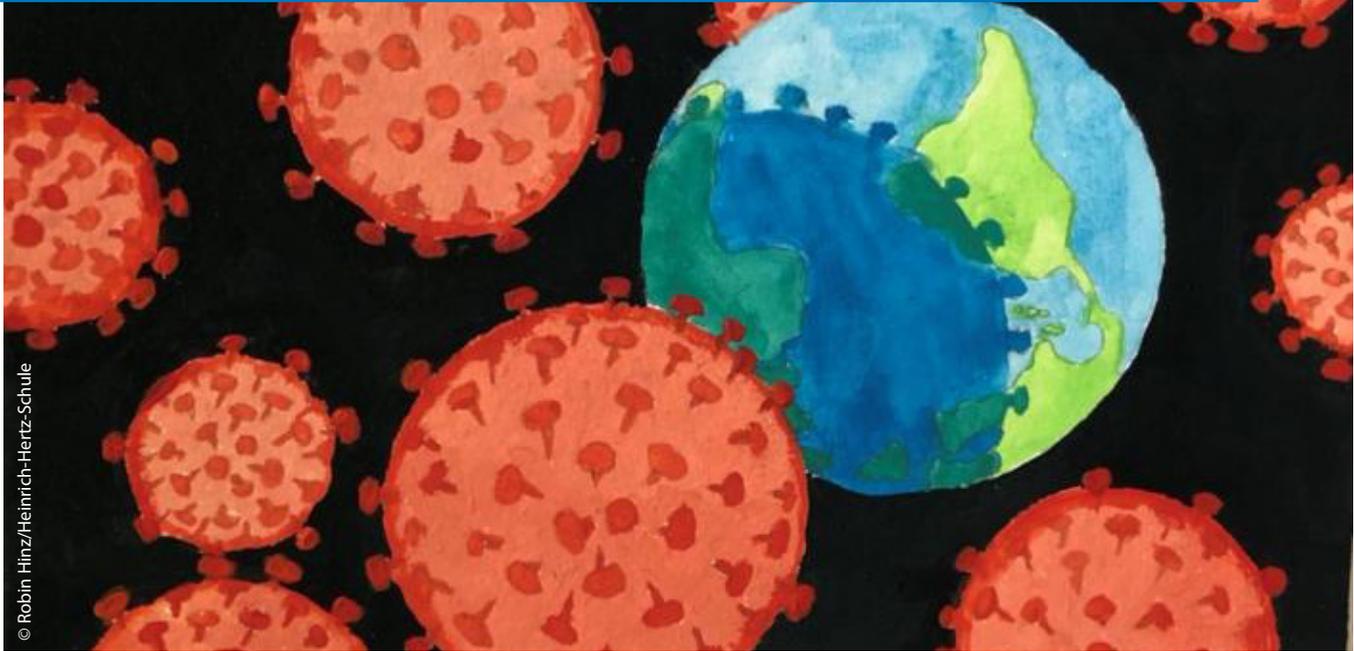
Learning outcomes

Several learning outcomes may have resulted from this learning experience. Working with different coloured paints and brushes in new ways could develop students' artistic technical skills and knowledge (e.g. colour mixing, paint application). As students explored using different senses (e.g. sight, touch, sound) and body parts (e.g. mouths, hands) to create paintings, they were invited to develop an appreciation of diverse abilities, including their own. The children's collective experience of painting with their mouths, while sharing paint materials and surfaces, likely fostered collaboration skills, as well as a sense of social solidarity and understanding of each other's needs. This could help them become more empathetic global citizens.

Reflective questions

- 1 What prompting questions might you ask students before, during and after these activities to encourage reflection about empathy, respect and diversity?
- 2 What other classroom materials (e.g. storybooks, toys, visuals) or guests (e.g. artists, health practitioners, family or community members) could you bring into the classroom to support young students' understanding of these ideas?
- 3 What other art forms and artmaking activities might be used to explore these themes?
- 4 How might you support the full participation of students with diverse learning and/or physical abilities in visual art activities?

Germany: A picture a day keeps COVID-19 away!



© Robin Hinz/Heinrich-Hertz-Schule

In this student artwork the earth is surrounded by particles that cast a dark shadow on its surface, suggesting that the virus is about to take over human life.

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Enable complex communication.

Learning actions

In Hamburg, Germany, students at Heinrich-Hertz School created mixed media visual artworks in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Heinrich-Hertz-Schule Hamburg, 2020).

In this learning experience, the students expressed personal responses to the pandemic by creating visual artworks rich in symbolic meaning. The example student artworks all contained images of virus particles, which became symbolic of the coronavirus across worldwide media. Each student's positioning of the particles suggests careful thought about the message they meant for their artwork to convey. Some of the artworks, for example, place the particles in a looming position. In one image, the earth is surrounded by particles that cast a dark shadow on its surface, suggesting that the virus is about to take over human life. The other image shows the particles in the top portion of an hourglass, threatening to fall on a family's home at any moment.

Other images convey a more confrontational message, depending on the viewer's interpretation. One artwork contains the German words '*Der Kampf hat begonnen*', meaning, '*The fight has begun*'. The 'fight' in question could signify a number of things, such as the human fight against the virus itself or fights developing among people, fuelled by messages in the media (as suggested by the news images in the artwork). Another artwork depicts a health care worker, hands on hips, facing an enlarged virus particle head on. The figure does not appear frightened, but rather empowered. The effect is much like that in the famous *Fearless Girl* statue by Kristen Visbal, depicting a small girl with her hands on her hips and her chin up as she faces the *Charging Bull* statue (by Arturo Di Modica).

In each example mentioned above, the student artist made informed decisions about the direction of their work. They all engaged in critical thinking about circumstances influenced by COVID-19 to communicate their intended messages to viewers.

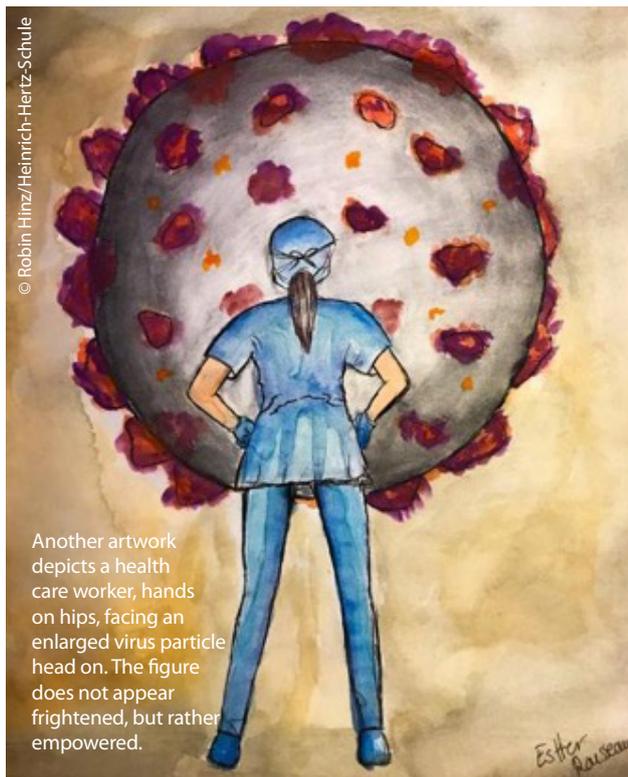
Learning context

COVID-19 threatened the health and well-being of people worldwide, as countless individuals were hospitalized or forced into isolation, where they were separated from their friends and loved ones for extended periods of time. In many places, schools were closed intermittently over a nearly two-year period. Even with vaccine and masking recommendations (or sometimes requirements) in place, many people remained concerned for their health and safety.

Although it is unclear whether these images were made at home or in school, the students had the opportunity to voice their ideas and navigate their feelings about the pandemic through art. The learning environment was open to and supportive of students' diverse perspectives, expressions and contributions.

Learning relevance

This project allowed students to explore and communicate their perspectives on a theme that was relevant to their lived experiences and to the global community. At the individual level, each student was affected by the pandemic in different ways. The messages in the students' artworks are reflective of things they had seen, felt, thought about and/or experienced. In addition, the pandemic was a global phenomenon, affecting people all over the world. Many people, regardless of their geographic location, could now examine these artworks



This image contains the German words 'Der Kampf hat begonnen', meaning 'The fight has begun'. The 'fight' could signify the human fight against the virus itself, or fights developing among people, fuelled by messages in the media (as suggested by the news images featured in the artwork).

and find something of relevance to their own knowledge and experience. The students were connecting, via their art, to people everywhere.

Learning outcomes

Through this work, the students had the opportunity to develop and show complex communication and critical thinking skills. These artworks are also beautiful products that show exemplary application of artistic knowledge and skills. Learning outcomes demonstrated include the ability to include existing imagery effectively (i.e. apply existing works in a different context to give them new meaning) and to apply the elements and principles of design (e.g. colour, value, balance, proportion, etc.) using a variety of media (e.g. paint, graphite, collage materials) and tools (e.g. pencils, paintbrushes, pens). On an emotional level, students had the chance to develop a sense of belonging and responsibility to a global community by addressing a worldwide concern through art.

Reflective questions

- 1 The students in this project communicated messages related to the shared global experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. What other issues of shared importance (global, national or local) might your students explore through art?
- 2 These students showed their ability to think symbolically and apply technical skills in painting and drawing. For what age group(s) might this project be appropriate? How could you adapt this type of project to suit different age groups and/or art forms?
- 3 Students used recognizable imagery from the media and existing artworks to help communicate their messages. How might you support students in doing so while still respecting the cultural, intellectual and financial rights of the original creators?
- 4 What locally significant symbols or imagery exist in your context that might be leveraged to communicate meaning in visual artworks?

Kenya and Finland: International art collaboration



© Sari Muhonen/Viikki Teacher Training School

Students in Kenya and Finland connected to brainstorm ideas for creating art projects using waste materials generated in their schools.

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Connect people through shared experiences and expressions.
- Enable immediate action – students can apply their learning right away, taking action through artistic work.

Learning actions

Students and teachers at Rusinga Schools (Nairobi, Kenya) and Viikki Teacher Training School (University of Helsinki, Finland) collaborated across continents on an environmentally-conscious art project inspired by the many plastic cups, plates and containers being thrown away at their schools (Muhonen, 2022).

Twenty students in Kenya and 24 students in Finland, aged 10 to 11, connected through an online platform called Jamboard to brainstorm ideas and find meaningful problems to solve. The children set themselves the goal of creating art projects using waste materials at hand. They worked together to discover what could be done with the plastic waste generated in their schools, thus addressing the environmental challenge of sustainable consumption. They developed questions such as: *What art has been made from trash previously? What areas of the school need beautification?* In group meetings, with each group including students from both Kenya and Finland, the students shared and critiqued ideas and artwork, offering feedback to each other.

The Finnish students used plastic cups to create decorative flowerpots and installation pieces suspended from the ceiling. The Kenyan students painted a mural in a school common area, using plastic food containers to hold paint and brushes and to serve as colour mixing palettes.

Learning context

Environmental factors figured prominently in this learning experience. The students focused their artmaking on beautifying their school spaces. Also, waste was a problem within their school environment – all the plastic cups, plates and containers being thrown away – and it inspired the artmaking. The learning context also included both schools, with the students exploring artmaking possibilities in both spaces together.

The teachers supported the experience by setting up and facilitating the virtual collaboration, broadening their students' learning community. They invited learner contributions and perspectives by encouraging students to share ideas and offer feedback to their peers. The teachers guided the project with a learner-led approach, encouraging the students to define their own goals and identify ways to achieve them. The teachers promoted exploratory learning, urging the students to inquire, innovate, create, evaluate, collaborate and discuss. They supported the students' artmaking by putting resources in place, such as paint and brushes. The teachers invited student expressions and imagination through the artworks the students created.

Learning relevance

The learning experience had strong potential to be particularly meaningful to students because they set their own goals. Also, the project involved beautifying their own schools and addressing the plastic waste issue that the students themselves had recognized as problematic. The experience also had powerful potential for relevance because it connected the students to interactions, relationships, and the sharing of ideas and art with people their own age but outside their school – in fact, in a different country and continent entirely. This provided the chance for students to compare their lived experiences with those of others their age.

Learning outcomes

The students had the opportunity to apply and develop collaboration, communication and problem-solving skills as they worked together to make art while also addressing the plastic waste issue. Students learned about the responsible use of materials and about minimizing waste. Teachers reported that the students learned to look at trash differently. They learned to use unexpected materials to beautify their physical environment. They also had the chance to develop virtual meeting skills. And of course, they had the opportunity to apply and develop imagination and creative skills in the artworks they produced.

Finally, students had the opportunity to develop intercultural understanding by working with students from another culture. Teachers observed that the students learned about similarities between their different cultures. The connections helped students understand how diverse countries and cultures are still connected and often face similar issues. The students had the opportunity to acquire a sense of belonging and responsibility to the global community.

Reflective questions

- 1 What meaningful collaboration opportunities beyond the classroom could you set up for students (e.g. with teachers, students and/or artists in other schools, communities, regions or countries)?
- 2 How could you help your students and their collaborators focus their artwork on a topic that is mutually meaningful and relevant?
- 3 What can be exchanged in artistic collaborations? In this example, ideas and feedback were shared back and forth. How could the collaboration go further? How might the collaborators actually co-produce or co-create artworks?

Lebanon: *My childhood, a stolen right*



Students worked together, under the supervision of their Drama coach and Language teachers, to create and perform a play about children's rights entitled.

@ Makassed Abi Bakr Al Siddeeq (ABS) Cambridge International School

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Support intimate exploration of complex topics.
- Enable students to explore diverse identities and possible selves.
- Raise awareness about important issues.

Learning actions

In Lebanon, sixth grade students at Makassed ABS Cambridge International School worked together, supervised by their drama coach and language teachers, to create and perform a play entitled *My Childhood, a Stolen Right* (Mahfouz, 2020). The play addressed the misery of children who are deprived of basic rights, such as the rights to play, access quality medical care, receive a proper education and live in a safe country. The play ended with the school choir singing a song about hope, diversity and equity.

During this learning experience, students addressed the social challenge of ensuring basic human rights for all. As they prepared and rehearsed their performance, they learned how children lose basic rights and they applied that knowledge in creating the play and its characters.

Working with their peers and teachers, the students had many opportunities to connect with each other. But the young actors also had the chance to connect with children they did not know as they imagined what it was like to be the children they portrayed in the drama. The students experimented and took risks as they explored their characters and how best to embody them within the situations depicted on stage. While doing so, they could vicariously explore others' experiences and ways of being in the world (Biesta, 2022), but also different aspects of themselves.

The students prepared and rehearsed continuously for three months. Through the performance, they expressed their feelings and invited emotional responses from audiences.

They represented ideas symbolically (e.g. by wearing chains to signify a lack of freedom). Through creating, rehearsing and performing the drama, the students had the opportunity to better understand and to communicate their understanding of what it means (and how it feels) to have or to lack basic human rights.

Learning context

In this learning experience, the teachers centred their students by encouraging them to lead the creation of the characters and the play. Learner contributions, perspectives and expressions were welcomed during the development of the play's content, characters, costumes, movements and staging. Opportunities within the learning experience were differentiated; students could take on different roles within and in support of the performance. This approach enabled all students to feel a sense of contributing meaningfully to the production, which supported their feelings of ownership and responsibility.

This action-oriented learning experience focused on raising awareness about human rights through artistic representation and performance. It was highly collaborative, with students and teachers working together on the production, and the long hours of preparation and rehearsal likely strengthened students' sense of community.

The attention to detail in the costumes, acting and staging suggests the teachers emphasized professionalism and defined artmaking as serious work. The experience was supported with resources to help the students achieve professional results, including a quality performance space, lighting, make-up and sound equipment. This artistic work had everything necessary to enable heightened sensory experiences for the students involved in the production as well as for the audience.

Learning relevance

The learning experience was relevant to students' lives because the topic it addressed – children's rights – focused

on people their own age. The project also offered relevance because working on a shared task for an extended period often supports the development of meaningful relationships; students had the opportunity to make and extend friendships. The performance itself provided a chance to draw in and connect with family and community. Students could be seen, acknowledged for their contributions, and publicly shine.

Learning outcomes

Thanks to this experience, students had the chance to change and make change happen. They could change themselves by engaging with the content, learning about children's rights and developing new attitudes or perspectives. They could then perhaps change others by expressively sharing what they had learned. The students had powerful opportunities to develop empathy and emotional understandings as they considered the nuances of the characters' lived experiences. The students also had the chance to develop communication skills as they shared the stories and underlying messages with the audience. Moreover, they had the chance to develop imagination and creative skills as they brought the characters to life on stage, along with self-regulation, self-discipline and technical theatre skills as they prepared and rehearsed.

Reflective questions

- 1 What other topics would be meaningful for your students to address in drama activities?
- 2 What individual abilities, interests and identities do your students have that they could explore in a dramatic production?
- 3 What are some different roles that your students might take on to contribute to a dramatic production?
- 4 Which individuals or groups have had experiences that would be valuable for your students to think and learn about? In what ways could students develop empathy as they learn about those people's stories?



Japan: Exploring the world through haiku poems

Arts Assets

Arts learning can:

- Help students explore ways of being in and with the world (Biesta, 2022).
- Connect people to their own and others' cultural heritage.

Learning actions

In Koto City, Japan, teachers at Yanagawa Elementary School dedicate time every week for composing haiku poems (Sawada, 2020). This poetic form is short (three lines) and originated in Japan.

Students engage in reflecting, processing and presenting actions as they read, write and recite haiku poems. Reflection occurs when students contemplate existing haiku poems during regular poetry meetings and apply that analysis to create their own pieces. Working with haiku poetry offers the opportunity to explore feelings and to work out ways of being in the world (Biesta, 2022). Process actions include students writing haiku poems based on close observation of their world and making judgments about how to express their feelings in poetic ways. Finally, presenting actions include preparing the haiku poems for displays throughout the school and local area in beautiful calligraphy, where the work can be celebrated by friends, family and community. Students also enter haiku competitions, publish collections of haiku poems and recite their haiku poems.

Learning context

The Yanagawa Elementary School area is historically associated with Matsuo Basho, a famous seventeenth century poet in Japan and haiku master. The school takes advantage of this cultural connection to promote and celebrate haiku composition within the school.

The teachers support the students by encouraging their engagement with aesthetic and heightened sensory experiences. They motivate students by proudly displaying their poetry around the school and larger community, by hosting haiku competitions and encouraging students to enter and by framing haiku as an important art form.

Learning relevance

Engaging with haiku poetry offers a relevant learning experience to students because it provides them with an opportunity to reflect on and express feelings about aspects of their lives that are significant to them. Further, when students enter haiku competitions or have their work published, it allows them to be celebrated in their school and local community.

Learning outcomes

Through studying haiku masters, students can appreciate the tradition of haiku and its importance to their community and to Japanese culture more broadly. They also have the chance to learn how haiku has influenced other poetry forms around the world.

Through practising haiku composition regularly, students can develop critical thinking skills. They are invited to think deeply about the environment, their lived experiences and how they impact the world around them in their daily lives. The minimalist nature of haiku gives students the chance to distil their thoughts into evocative and powerful poetry.

Presenting their haiku poems at school may increase students' sense of belonging within the learning community. Competitions and public displays also allow them to receive recognition for their work. Students are introduced to the value of writing haiku poems as a practice in daily life and its potential for helping them explore and express emotions.

Reflective questions

- 1 How can you bring student art into your own community? Who and where are your local partners who can make this happen?
- 2 How can you encourage students to engage in regular arts practice? (Are there ways to make it accessible? How might you help students to be mindful?)
- 3 What value, if any, does competition offer your learning environment?
- 4 Reflection and observation are important elements of haiku poetry. How do these elements exist in your learning environments?
- 5 Which local or global issues could your students address through haiku composition (or other art forms)?

**'I keep on giving them
that possibility to
express themselves.'
Teacher perspective**

Learning experience snapshots

In 2022, the research team surveyed and interviewed teachers from across the globe about their experiences teaching the arts. Teachers were asked to provide specific examples of arts learning structures or projects they used to support transformative education. A few snapshots of those learning experiences are provided here.

World Food Day

A school in **Bhutan** marked the occasion of World Food Day by staging a short, student-written play about the importance of food. The school also hosted an inter-class poster competition based on the United Nations theme for that year. Students made pledges about how they would act to reduce environmental effects resulting from food production. They recognized how, as students and citizens, they play a role in sustainable food consumption. The posters were displayed in a gallery format so that all students were able to appreciate the artwork made by other classes. Students also offered artistic feedback on each other's poster designs based on the knowledge gained in their lessons (e.g. colour theory).

Sculptures to raise awareness of the climate emergency

Students in **Canada** created in situ sculptures in response to the global climate emergency. First, they informed themselves about the issues (pollution, overconsumption, melting ice, deforestation, etc.). Next, each student chose an issue that was personally meaningful and created a sculpture to address it. Finally, students identified a space where they would exhibit their work in situ so as to reach as many viewers as possible (e.g. a sculpture addressing overconsumption might be exhibited at the entrance to a shopping mall). They considered the people affected by the climate issue and those causing the problem. Students learned that there are multiple climate issues. They explored the potential of art to leverage communication, engage viewers and, above all, raise awareness.

Peacemaker songs

At a time of armed conflict in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, students and educators formed a choir to promote peace. The choir addressed political actors through a programme of song and dance entitled *Heureux les artisans et princes de la paix* (Happy are the Architects and Princes of Peace). The choir performed at the seat of the National Assembly in Kinshasa and at a variety of peacebuilding events. The students worked as a tight-knit community of musicians, drawn together by their mutual commitment to the work.

The teacher reported that through the rehearsal process, the students developed self-discipline and respect for professionalism. The teacher observed that a powerful sense of togetherness and solidarity developed among students as they collaborated for this cause. Further, the learning experience enabled the students to see how art can draw attention to important societal issues.

Developing empathy through podcast creation

A teacher in **Costa Rica** worked with students to produce podcasts. Students chose one problematic global issue (e.g. war, climate change, violent extremism, racism, migration) and then created a story about it for the podcast. The students tried out voice acting to help the characters in their stories seem real. The teacher observed that by investigating true stories about people suffering, the students developed empathy and the capacity to connect with people who experience realities different from their own.

A concert of peace, love and joy

Eighty primary and secondary students in **Mexico** prepared a free concert to celebrate International United Nations Day 2019. The concert was presented to promote music as the international language of peace, inspiration and creativity, to raise awareness of sustainability and caring for the environment, and to advocate for the acceptance of differences among cultures and traditions.

The oceans scream for help

Students at a seaside school in **Portugal** explored human impacts on marine species and promoted the protection of marine life through an elaborate puppet performance. The students created puppets representing endangered marine species. They wrote dramatic monologues explaining threats to the species' survival and encouraging audiences to take action to prevent the extinction of these animals. The students created the puppets and sets with reusable materials. They published a [video](#) of the performance.

The teacher reported that, through this work, the children learned creative thinking and problem-solving skills. This development was evident in their thinking about novel ways to create puppets and sets. They applied their artistic abilities to bring their puppets to life as recognizable ocean animals. The project invited the students to think critically about issues related to ocean pollution and marine habitats. By taking the viewpoint of ocean animals, students had the opportunity to develop empathy for non-human life. Performing the monologues, which included expressing imagined emotions that the animals might experience, supported students in feeling the impact of human-caused environmental damage. They were also given the chance to learn how to communicate effectively through drama and to intimately experience how art can be used to advocate for societal change.

Peace trees

Students in the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** engaged in a collaboration of five schools on a 'Cities of Peace' project. They took part in a series of interrelated activities that enabled them to explore emotive issues through artistic processes. They learned about the history of their own city and of Hiroshima, Japan. They wrote poems that were displayed on 'peace trees'. They explored the themes of conflict and reconciliation through the medium of Noh Theatre (a form of Japanese classical dance-drama). Finally, they designed and created a Japanese peace garden. The teacher reported that, through these activities, the students learned to work collaboratively. The work gave them a sense of achievement and pride and increased their intercultural understanding and empathy.

A certain dandelion

Students in **Poland** created and performed a drama called *The Sad and at the Same Time Cheerful Story of a Certain Dandelion (Taraxacum Pienicum)*. The performance featured a local plant species in danger of extinction. Students learned about protecting this plant and then created a script, set design and music. The show was then performed with various casts across the country between 2010 and 2019.

The teacher reported that students learned about the importance of caring for the environment. Students also learned to write a script, to create music and multimedia scenography, and to use theatrical lighting. Lastly, the teacher highlighted that students learned to work collaboratively, take responsibility for a common project and cooperate with institutions.

Building belonging through drama performance.

At a primary school in **Costa Rica**, fifth-grade students wrote their own short stories and poems as part of the Spanish language programme. They then transformed these works into theatrical performances. Students had the choice to either make puppets for their characters or act out the characters themselves. They created sets, rehearsed and then performed their plays for an audience of younger children about to make the transition from preschool to primary school. After the performance, the fifth-grade students shared more about their process with the young audience and received feedback from the preschool teachers.

The performance day was special for all students because they shared ideas about the characters and plays, ate snacks together and developed friendships. The teacher explained that this activity served to break down age barriers and reduce bullying. It also helped the older students develop empathy for their younger counterparts. The teacher reported that, when these younger children entered the primary school the following year, they were less afraid because they already had 'veteran' friends there. The older students helped the younger ones locate different resources (e.g. offices, bathrooms, library) and protected them at recess. The teacher added that this activity resulted in a general sense of belonging in the school because of the network of relationships that developed between older and younger students.

Rumba

After UNESCO recognized the rumba as an example of intangible cultural heritage (traditions or living expressions passed on from ancestors), students in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** appeared on national television to promote the dance. The teacher explained that, because dancing was among the students' most practised cultural activities, the performance gave them a sense of pride and feeling of belonging to the international community.

Addressing social issues with drama

Students in **Greece** created short films addressing environmental issues, bullying in schools, justice and world peace. They also produced and uploaded videos of ancient and contemporary plays related to current events. The teacher reported that students benefited by learning to collaborate, exchange ideas and support each other, and that relationships between students and teachers improved while behaviour problems diminished.

No poverty

Seventh-grade students in **Austria** began a visual arts project by realizing they wanted to identify problems occurring outside their school and work to address them from inside the school. They decided that the 'no poverty' SDG was the most important for them, their school and their community. Working together, they created boxes made of clay, plastic and upcycled material to collect coins from other students. For example, one was a globe, positioned in the school library, and another was an abstract form. The students went through classrooms, collecting coins in the boxes they made. The plan was to smash them afterwards to get the money out and donate it to a non-government organization that supports refugee teenagers. The project gave students the chance to take direct action towards achieving a sustainable development goal.



Guidelines for teachers

The *Arts for Transformative Education* model provides teachers with a thinking tool for understanding, designing and supporting transformative arts learning experiences. Whether engaging students with the arts in dedicated arts learning contexts or in support of other curricula, the following guidelines suggest how to work with the model to plan, activate and enrich learning.

In laying out these guidelines, each learning dimension was considered from the perspective of both transformative education and arts learning. The guide's understanding of transformative education was informed by UNESCO policy documents,² while its understanding of arts learning was informed by an arts education literature review and by the research team's analysis of teacher-contributed arts learning project descriptions, teacher survey responses and teacher interviews. Reviewing the transformative education and arts learning perspectives side by side reveals considerable overlap between them; they are highly similar, which shows the potential for arts learning to support transformative education.

Note: Teachers can begin planning with consideration of *any* of the dimensions (actions, context, relevance or outcomes). They do not have to follow the order of dimensions proposed here, and it is quite likely that they will move back and forth between them.



Teacher perspective:

'My planning tends to be a little messy. Ideas come at different times, from all over the place! There is a lot of shaping and changing and throwing things out before I come up with a plan that feels right.'



2 See, for example, International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*. Paris: UNESCO; UNESCO (2016). *Global Citizens for Sustainable Development: A guide for teachers*. Paris: UNESCO; UNESCO (2022). *Draft Recommendation concerning Education for Global Citizenship, Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development*. Paris: UNESCO; UNESCO (2022). *The concept of sustainability and its contribution towards quality transformative education*. Paris: UNESCO; UNESCO (2021). *Teaching and learning with living heritage*. Paris: UNESCO; *The concept of sustainability and its contribution towards quality transformative education*. Paris: UNESCO; The International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (2017.) *Transformative pedagogy for peace-building*. Addis Ababa: UNESCO-IICBA.



Survey results

Survey results from over 600 teachers in 39 countries

Process actions rated as most meaningful to students' learning and development:

1. creating
2. imagining
3. collaborating

Reflecting actions rated as most meaningful to students' learning and development:

1. appreciating existing artworks
2. making art about something to understand it and yourself better
3. exploring/working out ways of being in the world

Presenting/sharing actions rated as most meaningful to students' learning and development:

1. communicating/storytelling
2. expressing feelings
3. raising awareness



Teacher perspective:

'To talk, to think about things, to maybe see something new. Those three things are very important in art teaching.'

Steps to develop a transformative arts education experience

1 Identify the **actions** students will take. Consult Table 2 for guidance.

- What will learners be doing?
- Consider actions associated with transformative education and arts learning.

Table 2

Learning actions checklist

Learning actions <i>(Opportunities to develop and apply knowledge, skills, values and attitudes)</i>	
Transformative education	Arts learning
<input type="checkbox"/> making informed decisions <input type="checkbox"/> accessing and critiquing knowledge/information <input type="checkbox"/> producing and applying knowledge/information <input type="checkbox"/> connecting to others <input type="checkbox"/> working with others <input type="checkbox"/> connecting to nature <input type="checkbox"/> acting at individual, community and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world <input type="checkbox"/> addressing social, economic and environmental challenges, such as these: <input type="checkbox"/> conflicts <input type="checkbox"/> poverty <input type="checkbox"/> gender inequality <input type="checkbox"/> violent extremism <input type="checkbox"/> climate change <input type="checkbox"/> environmental degradation <input type="checkbox"/> natural resource management <input type="checkbox"/> loss of biodiversity <input type="checkbox"/> disaster risk reduction <input type="checkbox"/> unsustainable consumption <input type="checkbox"/> health and well-being	<p>Process actions</p> <input type="checkbox"/> imagining <input type="checkbox"/> creating <input type="checkbox"/> finding meaningful problems <input type="checkbox"/> practising/rehearsing <input type="checkbox"/> experimenting/risk-taking <input type="checkbox"/> observing closely <input type="checkbox"/> working for sustained periods <input type="checkbox"/> persevering <input type="checkbox"/> collaborating <input type="checkbox"/> working with the outside community
	<p>Reflecting actions</p> <input type="checkbox"/> appreciating existing artworks) <input type="checkbox"/> analysing/responding to art <input type="checkbox"/> making art about something to understand it and yourself better <input type="checkbox"/> exploring/working out ways of being in the world (Biesta, 2022) <input type="checkbox"/> exploring multiple perspectives <input type="checkbox"/> exploring feelings <input type="checkbox"/> defining and setting goals <input type="checkbox"/> learning from mistakes/failing <input type="checkbox"/> reflecting on process <input type="checkbox"/> making informed judgments
	<p>Presenting/sharing actions</p> <input type="checkbox"/> performing/presenting <input type="checkbox"/> 'making special': using arts to make events special or heightened <input type="checkbox"/> communicating/storytelling <input type="checkbox"/> representing symbolically <input type="checkbox"/> celebrating heritage/culture <input type="checkbox"/> expressing feelings <input type="checkbox"/> expressing identity/self <input type="checkbox"/> raising awareness <input type="checkbox"/> inviting emotional responses



Survey results

Contextual factors rated by teachers as the most meaningful with respect to students' learning and development:

1. Students develop trusting relationships with teachers and peers.
2. Student interests are centred.
3. Student contributions, perspectives and expressions are invited.



Teacher perspective:

'Let them take the reins. Hold their hands, but let them take the reins.'

'The pupils learn to know and to know each other.'

2 Identify the learning **context** that you, as teacher, will work to put in place.

- How will learners and learning be supported? Consult Table 3 for guidance.
- Consider environmental factors and teaching approaches associated with transformative education and arts learning.

Table 3

Learning context checklist

Learning context (Environmental factors and teaching approaches)	
Transformative education	Arts learning
<input type="checkbox"/> Learners are included as active and valued members of the learning community.	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners' interests, perspectives and expressions are centred.
<input type="checkbox"/> Learners' political, social and cultural rights are supported.	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners experience arts spaces as special sites of safety, comfort and belonging.
<input type="checkbox"/> Learners feel safe.	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners experience a sense of community.
<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion, equity, diversity and well-being are supported.	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners develop trusting relationships with teachers and peers.
<input type="checkbox"/> Required resources are available.	<input type="checkbox"/> Resources/materials are available.
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning sites (natural, built or virtual) suit contexts.	<input type="checkbox"/> Differentiation supports accessibility.
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning occurs throughout the lifespan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners have independence and agency.
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning occurs in varied cultural and social spaces.	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners have responsibilities.
<input type="checkbox"/> The assessment approach reflects learning goals.	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners are considered experts (not just the teacher).
<input type="checkbox"/> The assessment approach promotes growth.	<input type="checkbox"/> The teacher makes art alongside the learners.
<input type="checkbox"/> The learning is set up to be the following:	<input type="checkbox"/> The teacher models enthusiasm for the arts.
<input type="checkbox"/> learner-centred/learner-led	<input type="checkbox"/> Artmaking is understood as serious work.
<input type="checkbox"/> exploratory	<input type="checkbox"/> Heightened sensory (aesthetic) experiences are featured.
<input type="checkbox"/> action-oriented	<input type="checkbox"/> Intergenerational engagement is welcomed.
<input type="checkbox"/> collaborative	<input type="checkbox"/> Playfulness is welcomed.
<input type="checkbox"/> accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> Risk-taking is encouraged; students know that it's okay to fail.



Survey results

Relevance considerations rated by teachers as the most meaningful to students' learning and development:

1. Mental health is supported.
2. Learners see the arts as connected to who they are and how they want to be.
3. Learners see the arts as a meaningful lifelong pursuit.



Teacher perspective:

'Arts education is a powerful vessel for social commentary and social change.'

'I try to create a safe atmosphere for risk-taking and sharing. Up front, I state that there is no such thing as a bad idea.'

3 Identify how the learning will have **relevance** to learners' lives outside school.

- What topics, themes or experiences will the arts learning address, and how are those things meaningful to your students?
- How will the learning connect to students' lives? Consult Table 4 for guidance.
- Consider relevance in association with transformative education and arts learning.

Table 4

Learning relevance checklist

Learning relevance <i>(Meaningfulness to learners' lives)</i>	
Transformative education	Arts learning
<input type="checkbox"/> There is coherence between the students' experiences in and out of school. <input type="checkbox"/> Learning is relevant in terms of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> pedagogy <input type="checkbox"/> learning materials <input type="checkbox"/> environment <input type="checkbox"/> Learning is relevant to learners' lived experiences from these perspectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> ecological <input type="checkbox"/> political <input type="checkbox"/> economic <input type="checkbox"/> cultural 	<input type="checkbox"/> Meaningful relationships develop. <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health is supported. <input type="checkbox"/> Learners experience intrinsic motivation. <input type="checkbox"/> The arts draw in family and community. <input type="checkbox"/> Learners have opportunities to publicly shine. <input type="checkbox"/> Learners have opportunities to be seen and/or acknowledged. <input type="checkbox"/> Learners have opportunities to engage with the arts community outside school. <input type="checkbox"/> Learners see the arts as connected to who they are and how they want to be. <input type="checkbox"/> Learners see the arts as a meaningful lifelong pursuit as, or alongside, paid work.



Survey results

Outcomes rated by teachers as the most meaningful to students' learning and development:

1. imagination and creative skills
2. critical thinking and problem-solving skills
3. appreciation of diversity/multiple perspectives



Teacher perspective:

'A lot of kids are scared to do things that are hard, and learning to play a musical instrument is not an easy thing. No matter who you are, it's going to take some work, right? And, in the structure of my classes, they're kind of forced to put the time in, and a lot of them come away seeing the benefit of that.'

4 Identify targeted **learning** outcomes.

- How will the learning be focused to develop specific knowledge, skills, values and attitudes? Consult Table 5 for guidance.
- Consider outcomes associated with transformative education and arts learning.

Table 5

Learning outcomes checklist

Learning outcomes (Knowledge, skills, values and attitudes)	
Transformative education	Arts learning
<input type="checkbox"/> increased capacity to change and make change happen with goals such as these: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a more peaceful and inclusive world (global citizenship education) <input type="checkbox"/> environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society (education for sustainable development) 	<input type="checkbox"/> imagination and creative skills
<input type="checkbox"/> problem-solving skills	<input type="checkbox"/> critical thinking and problem-solving skills
<input type="checkbox"/> critical thinking skills	<input type="checkbox"/> self-regulation and self-discipline skills (self-criticism, self-assessment)
<input type="checkbox"/> collaboration skills	<input type="checkbox"/> knowledge of self/identity
<input type="checkbox"/> communication skills	<input type="checkbox"/> confidence and resilience
<input type="checkbox"/> empathy	<input type="checkbox"/> collaboration and relationship skills
<input type="checkbox"/> self-awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> communication skills
<input type="checkbox"/> intercultural understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> increased understanding of something through making or appreciating art about it
<input type="checkbox"/> understanding the interconnectedness of different countries and populations	<input type="checkbox"/> appreciation of diversity/multiple perspectives
<input type="checkbox"/> a sense of belonging and responsibility to the global community	<input type="checkbox"/> knowledge of emotions (empathy)
<input type="checkbox"/> respect for human rights, democracy and diversity	<input type="checkbox"/> technical arts skills
<input type="checkbox"/> an inclusive attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> knowledge and appreciation of art and artists
<input type="checkbox"/> scientific, digital and humanistic literacies	<input type="checkbox"/> knowledge and appreciation of heritage/culture
<input type="checkbox"/> sustainability knowledge related to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> action to address climate change <input type="checkbox"/> protection for biodiversity <input type="checkbox"/> disaster risk reduction <input type="checkbox"/> sustainable consumption <input type="checkbox"/> poverty eradication <input type="checkbox"/> health and well-being 	<input type="checkbox"/> (long-term) arts participation
	<input type="checkbox"/> arts entrepreneurship



Teacher perspective:

‘The development of a climate of cooperation and communication between teachers and students inspires us, heals us, calms us and unites us.’

‘The topic of poverty was kind of close to their own experience because a lot of them have refugee backgrounds or diasporic poverty experiences.’

5 Identify any **arts assets** that could be activated or highlighted to enhance the learning.

- Often arts assets *are not* planned, but emerge as significant when learners engage in arts activities. Remain observant so you can support and celebrate arts assets as these added benefits reveal themselves.
- What can you do in your planning and facilitating of arts learning to help students experience the power and potential of arts assets?
- Consider how you and your learners might activate particular arts assets. Consult Table 6 for guidance.

Table 6

Arts assets checklist

Sample arts assets
Arts learning can:
<input type="checkbox"/> enable exploration and empowerment of diverse identities and possible selves
<input type="checkbox"/> help people process emotion
<input type="checkbox"/> help people say what they want or need to say when words alone are not enough
<input type="checkbox"/> provide opportunities for learners’ thoughts, voices, expressions and selves to be seen, acknowledged and valued
<input type="checkbox"/> enable multifaceted communicating and storytelling
<input type="checkbox"/> offer different entry points and ways of communicating in difficult conversations
<input type="checkbox"/> nurture intrinsic motivation
<input type="checkbox"/> support emotional regulation
<input type="checkbox"/> connect people through shared experiences and expressions
<input type="checkbox"/> connect people to community and cultural heritage
<input type="checkbox"/> nurture inclusion by recognizing and valuing cultures and identities
<input type="checkbox"/> enable embodied exploration of abstract ideas
<input type="checkbox"/> support intimate exploration of complex topics
<input type="checkbox"/> integrate the head, hand and heart
<input type="checkbox"/> open minds
<input type="checkbox"/> encourage new ways of seeing
<input type="checkbox"/> help people explore ways of being in the world (Biesta, 2022)
<input type="checkbox"/> help people imagine new possibilities
<input type="checkbox"/> result in artistic products and practices that have real value outside the learning context
<input type="checkbox"/> provide a ‘brave space’ (Arao and Clemens, 2013) for people to challenge systems and enact change
Note: This is only a partial list of arts assets. There are many, many more.



Teacher perspective:

'It allows kids to express themselves in a new way that other subjects don't allow.'

'Children's art holds the potential to open hearts and shift thinking.'

6 Assess the learning experience periodically as it unfolds with the following checklist.

Table 7

Progress checklist

Actions	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners are taking or working towards actions associated with transformative education. <input type="checkbox"/> Learners are taking or working towards actions associated with arts learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> process actions <input type="checkbox"/> reflecting actions <input type="checkbox"/> presenting/sharing actions
Context	<input type="checkbox"/> Learners are supported by environmental factors and pedagogical approaches associated with transformative education. <input type="checkbox"/> Learners are supported by environmental factors and pedagogical approaches associated with arts learning.
Relevance	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning is contextualized by relevance factors associated with transformative education. <input type="checkbox"/> Learning is contextualized by relevance factors associated with arts learning.
Outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning outcomes associated with transformative education are in progress or have been achieved. <input type="checkbox"/> Learning outcomes associated with arts learning are in progress or have been achieved.
Arts Assets	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted arts assets are activated. <input type="checkbox"/> Emergent arts assets are identified, supported and celebrated.

Note: It is highly valuable to actively include learners in this assessment process!

'I believe students who engage in artmaking learn to value beauty in the world around them, and that helps them develop a sense of inner peace and wellness. Not only will they recognize beauty going forward... I believe most students will actively seek it!'

Teacher perspective

Closing words

This guide presents and explains the Arts for Transformative Education model – a thinking tool for understanding, planning and supporting transformative arts learning experiences. It also describes a curated collection of arts learning activities and projects from across the globe that may serve as inspiration for arts learning experiences suited to your own context.

The next steps are yours. What arts actions are best suited to your students? How will you shape the learning context to help them thrive? How will you ensure the learning experiences are relevant to students' lives? What learning outcomes will you target? What arts assets will emerge?

The arts hold tremendous power and potential. Arts learning can help students acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to understand and take action for better lives, better communities and a better world. This guide invites you, the teacher, to harness that power and realize that potential through transformative arts learning experiences.



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Arts for transformative education

A guide for teachers from the UNESCO Associated Schools Network

UNESCO's vision of transformative education involves building learners' capacities and empowering them to take action for a more peaceful and sustainable world. The arts offer tremendous potential for supporting learning that transforms individuals and communities. To fully realize that potential, teachers need to structure and support educational experiences that optimize what students will take away from them.

This guide presents the research-informed *Arts for Transformative Education* model, a pioneering approach and thinking tool for teachers. The model was developed from data provided by over 600 teachers of the UNESCO Associated Schools network from 39 countries.

The publication presents *Learning Experience Descriptions and Snapshots* illustrating how the model functions in real-world projects from around the globe, as well as *Guidelines for Teachers* outlining a step-by-step process for activating arts learning to empower transformative education.

