

The ABCs of ArtsConnection

Agency, **B**elonging, **C**ultural Humility

A Joyful Arts Education Framework

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An abstract artwork on the left side of the page, featuring a vertical teal bar and a larger area of textured teal and blue washes, with some yellow and white at the bottom.

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Our Why



We live within and among intersecting systems of oppression, and as a result any educator, curriculum, teaching practice, and art form that is not intentionally uplifting historically marginalized communities, and dismantling systems and structures of oppression will continue to perpetuate them.

ArtsConnection as an organization is committed to consciously examine and interrupt systems of oppression in education and the arts. This framework is our tool to intentionally move with joy and art towards creating liberatory learning spaces & artistic practices.

We believe our Framework can be a model for innovative arts education and youth development, working to shift the parameters of arts education toward a more inclusive, equitable future.

Our Goal



We have collaboratively developed this framework to create practices and systems so that all students, educators, and staff feel valued, supported, and are able to learn in tandem with the essential skills needed for the artform.

Our framework is a way to hold our community accountable, and give us tools and resources to put our values into action and lead with our humanity.

Our framework focuses on **how** are you teaching the arts so you can:

- Create a culture that supports & includes everyone in the room
- Lead with humanity
- Follow the joy

Our Journey

This framework is built upon the work of many others before us – the idea of Liberated Learning comes from Paulo Freire, and we have learned from and been inspired by many others, including each other.

This framework has been collaboratively designed and generated by AC staff, artists, and young people both in-school & out of school and will continue to be revised and updated as we learn more. Development began formally in 2021, and has been revised and beta tested through numerous action research projects.

Working in this way is a continual ongoing process of learning, reflection, and revision. We have also aimed to engage our framework while developing it.



Essential Elements

These are the elements we feel must be present to create joyful and liberatory environments. They are the pieces we are aiming to achieve. Our Framework's A, B, Cs.



Agency



Belonging



Cultural Humility



Agency



Supports voice, and choice. Adults work in partnership with young people. Students have an active role in their learning and are making, creating, doing, sharing, and collaborating in ways that are meaningful to them.

Empowers students to increase individual or collective power by exposing the fallacies of "power over" and increasing our abilities to use "power with" and "power within."

Engage this by...

- Inviting students to take ownership of their artistic choices, experiences, and work process.
- Holding time & space for student voice, choice & joy.
- Centering and supporting each individual student's autonomy.
- Respecting for all & actively acknowledges the many layers of everyone's identities.
- Collaborating, & co-generating goals throughout the art making.
- Being flexible in practices and planning to respond to students requests, responses, & feedback.



Belonging



An intentionally designed space & community where everyone feels seen, included, valued, has a voice and the power to co-create the structures that shape the community. Fosters ideation and expression and aids in honoring differences while finding common ground.



Engage this by...

- Collaboratively building a community of respect, play, joy, and transparency.
- Inviting everyone to be their whole selves & embraces the intersections of their identities.
- Learning how you work, perspectives, interests, and identities and value the difference within the community.
- Focusing on co-generative, and collaborative environment & curriculum.
- Earning student, teacher & broader community partners trust, cultivating an environment that can lead to creativity and community.



Cultural Humility



A lifelong practice of critical self-reflection and learning from others in order to respect and honor different cultures. It involves cultural competency and sustainability while also acknowledging that we can never fully understand another's cultural experience. Requires an understanding of how power dynamics impact classroom interactions, disciplinary practices, and educational opportunities. Understanding that no culture is superior to another, it recognizes the shifting nature of intersecting identities and encourages us to listen with curiosity, reminds us of our limitations and to value diverse perspectives and experiences.

Engage this by...

- Being anti-racist, accessible, intersectional, and inclusive
- Recognizing students are not a monolith.
- Engaging in a process of life-long learning & critical self-reflection, including unlearning of own biases and assumptions.
- Planning and teaching culturally sustaining practices, and pedagogy.
- Identifying & challenging power imbalances.
- Holding institutions accountable.
- Respecting and valuing everyone's knowledge and experiences.
- Approaching with vulnerability, humility, awareness & uplift joy.

What does this look like?

A classroom where students feel empowered could look like:

- Students spend lots of time in circles or small groups.
- There are multiple ways for students to express their knowledge – verbal, visually, kinesthetically, written etc
- Students choose how they are learning, and have a say in what they are learning.
- There are conversations, mixed noise levels, and thoughtful check-ins with students about the noise.
- Students have flexible seating options, desks, floor, wobble stools, and standing.
- Feedback is provided by peers, teachers and self.
- Teachers ask lots of questions.
- There is a sense of community.
- Lots of reflection is occurring.
- There are accessible tools, and supports on hand.
- Students speak up for themselves and others.
- Class is full of energy, focus & joy!

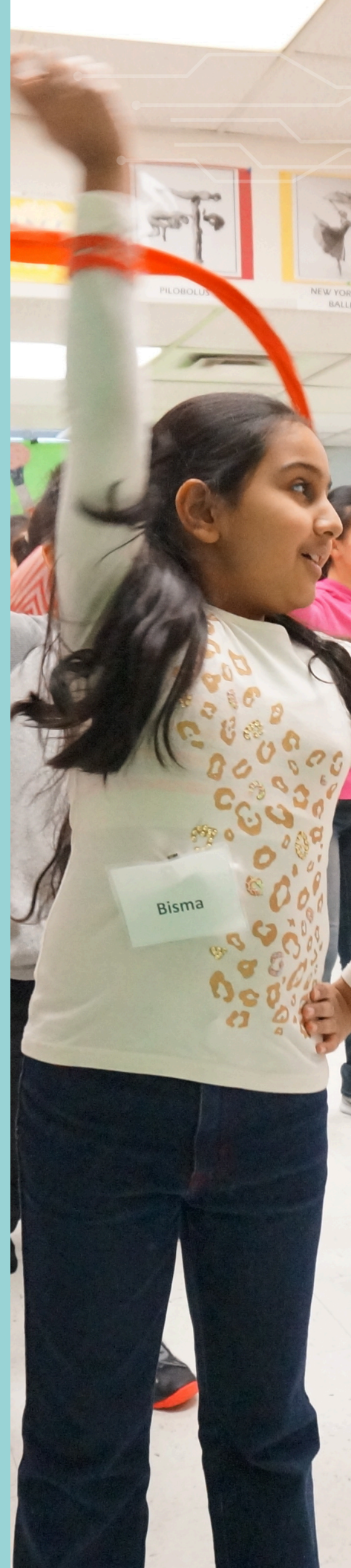


Key Approaches

The following are our research based artistic practices and approaches that support creating joyful and liberatory environments.

ArtsConnection has been implementing and researching educational practices over decades of deep partnership with artists, NYC Public Schools teachers, and administrators.

We have taken these approaches and applied them to create joyful and liberatory learning environments.



Follow the Joy

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Joy lives beyond having fun – it is a continued dedication to acknowledging and celebrating the beauty of and within ourselves, each other, and the world. Embodied with the resilience of true self, joy emerges through community, where individuals are encouraged to be themselves and connect profoundly with students and educators. Joy is rich, deep, and sustaining. Joy brings light, laughter, and passion – follow it & trust it.

Responsive Planning & Implementation

Educators approach planning & teaching with curiosity. In planning the focus is on culturally sustaining, decolonizing, and stigma-free practices & curriculums to interrupt systems of oppression. Intentionally creating accessible & inclusive plans for individual student's needs, while also holding space for class, and broader community's input. When teaching educators are responsive to students' interests, voices, state of being, needs, & joy. Cultivating the process of artmaking, space for creativity & artistic flow. A circular process of planning, preparation, observing, reflecting and listening and then revising the plan to respond to the community.

Multisensory Artistic Expression

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Embraces the Universal Design for Learning approach that all students, but especially diverse learners (Multilingual Learners and Student with Disabilities) benefit from; multiple means of content representation, knowledge expression, and learner engagement. Multisensory artistic expression also deepens students' learning and application of skills.

Notice Describe & Ask

A cultural humility and artistic practice that provides opportunities for educators and students to critically examine their assumptions, shift to an asset-based approach, and value student's knowledge and cultural backgrounds, by focusing on non-judgmental descriptive language practices.

Working and Thinking as an Artist

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Activate the arts processes for students to explore how they like to work, learn, and express themselves. Development of student's creative, intellectual, and emotional gifts are intertwined. Educators support learning by treating students as artists who are in charge of their own creative process, and observing how they work rather than evaluating the outcome, supporting students to grow and develop expression.

Asset Based

Educators and students are valued for what they are bringing and their strengths, rather than what they need to work on or lack. It views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets. With an asset-based approach, every community is valuable; every community has strengths and potential.

Creative Learning Loop

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Creative Learning Loop or the Artistic Process is when artists make choices, gather and provide feedback and use that feedback to revise their work. Students engage in cyclical learning experience which aligns with the formative assessment process as well as supporting students to take agency of their learning. Clear criteria in the arts grounds the feedback and revision. Engaging in the creative learning loop or artistic process builds student voice, fosters ownership of learning and shifts the power in the classroom towards the students.

Ensemble Work

Group work and collaboration are not synonymous – when you develop intentional ensembles – it fosters crucial skills like collaboration, communication, and shared responsibility, leading to a more engaging and supportive learning environment, and ultimately, better outcomes for students.

Contact Us

for Professional Learning Opportunities



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ArtsConnection

LINKING LEARNING AND THE ARTS