

# The ArtsConnection Framework

Linking Learning the Arts to create Socially Just Environments

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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 has spent decades researching teaching practices that engage the arts and artistic practice as a socially just model to deepen student learning by engaging students as artists.

The ArtsConnection Framework shares the ABCs of liberatory and joyful learning as well as our research-based teaching approaches to create socially just learning environments that strengthen the diverse voices of NYC's children and youth, cultivating their arts and academic skills for success in a changing world.

# Our Goal



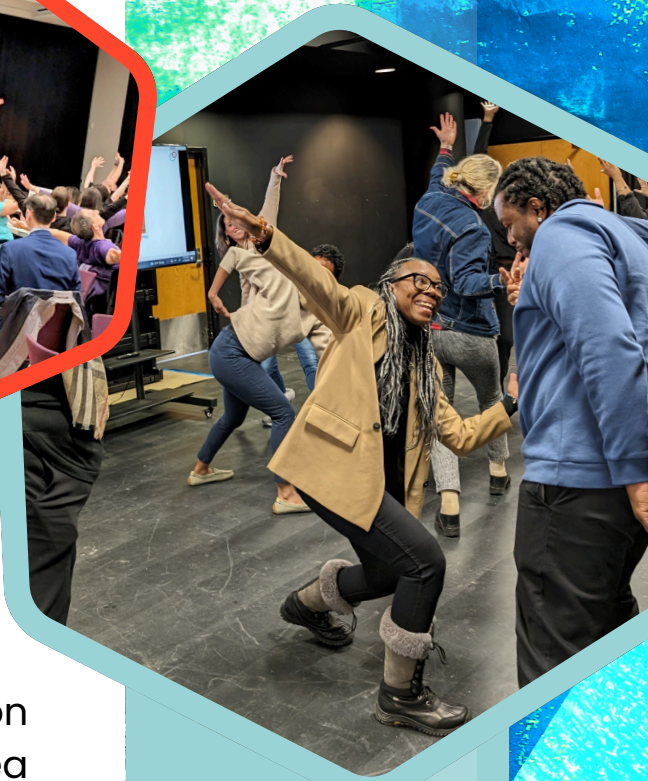
We have collaboratively developed this framework to create practices and systems so that all students, educators, and staff feel valued, supported, and are able to learn in tandem with the essential skills needed for the artform.

The ArtsConnection 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



The ArtsConnection 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. Research began in 2001. Framework Development began 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.

# ABCs of Socially Just Learning Environments

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These are the essential elements we feel must be present to create joyful and liberatory environments. They are the pieces we are aiming to achieve.



**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:

- 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.
- Learning is deepened through regular reflection
- There are accessible tools, and supports on hand.
- Students speak up for themselves and others.
- Class is full of energy, focus & joy!



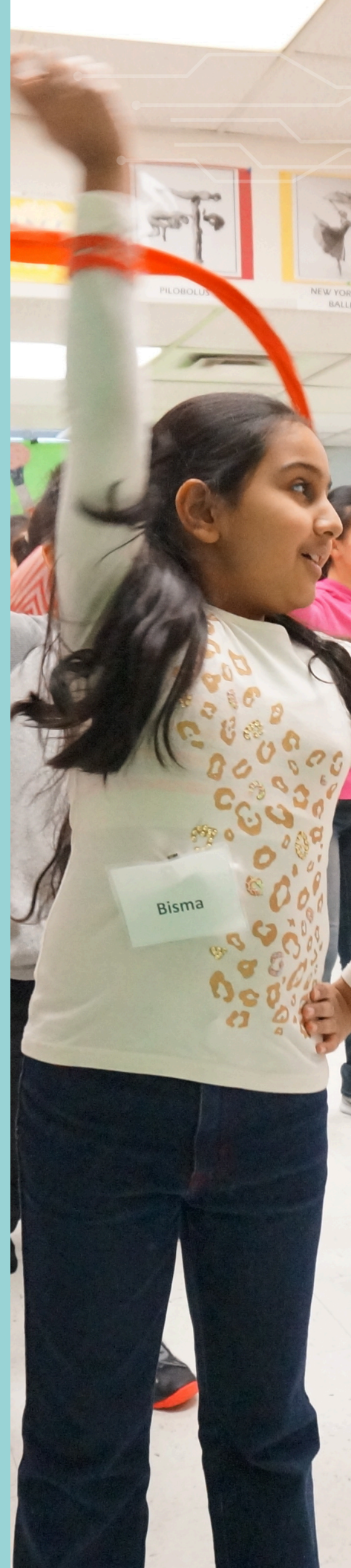


# Key Approaches

The following are our research based artistic practices and approaches that support creating socially just classrooms.

ArtsConnection has been implementing and researching educational practices since 2001 in deep partnership with artists, NYC Public Schools teachers, and administrators.

These approaches are how we transform teaching and learning through the arts.



# Practitioner Action Research

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Engage in an Action Research approach. This involves a mindset of ongoing curiosity and learning. This mirrors our creative learning loop approach that is engaged in the classroom as well.

Begin by articulating an inquiry question about your practice and/or student learning:

- What are you curious about?
- What will you try?
- How will you learn?

Implement a plan of action:

- How will you engage your question through your teaching?
- What did you try?
- Document what happens

Reflection

- How did it go?
- What did you learn?
- Feedback from peer community

Revise approaches and strategies:

- What would you do differently?
- How will you make revisions?

Repeat this process



# Follow the Joy lead with **Play**



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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Multisensory artistic expression deepens students' learning and application of skills. By engaging multiple means of content representation, knowledge expression, and learner engagement we create a space where all students belong. This aligns with Universal Design for Learning – supporting all students.

## Notice Describe & Ask

A cultural humility and language protocol 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. This process maps language onto student's artistic choices, building vocabulary, and artistic rigor.

# Working and Thinking as an Artist

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Activate artistic processes for students to explore how they like to work, learn, and express themselves. Artists... Explore & Discover, Create, Experiment, & Express, Share & Revise. Explicitly teaching the artistic process supports learning and agency by treating students as artists who are in charge of their own creative process.

## 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, traits and abilities as positive assets. With an asset-based approach, every community is valuable; every community member has strengths and potential. We as educators provide the supports and resources needed for everyone to learn, model cultural humility and therefore create an environment where students feel empowered to engage with agency.

# Creative Learning Loop

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In the Creative Learning Loop students engage in cyclical learning experience which aligns with the formative assessment and artistic process. Artists make choices, gather and provide feedback and use that feedback to revise their work. Engaging in the creative learning loop builds student voice, fosters ownership of learning and shifts the power in the classroom towards the students. The creative learning loops supports students to take agency of their learning.

## Collaborative Work

Collaborative work is authentic and leads to outcomes that could not be accomplished individually. Learners co-create works of art each bringing their own perspective and voice, leading to something bigger than you could do as an individual. 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. Collaborative work builds belonging.



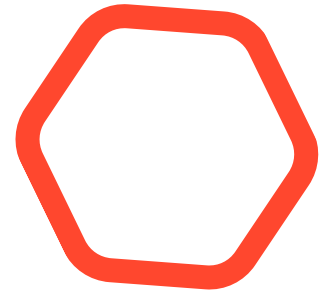
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