

passing
the

power

A classroom guidebook for
facilitating authentic creative
engagements in ALN settings.

passing the power

guidebook overview

passing the power is a conceptual guidebook containing a variety of facilitation approaches to help teachers plan and scaffold meaningful creative engagements with learners of all ages and abilities.

By providing teachers with these tools, we hope to explore how authentic creative expression may extend across diverse ALN contexts. This document includes a number of approaches that can be drawn upon to create environments that foster organic engagement with learners resulting in a variety of artistic outputs.

The following approaches outlined in this document provide guidance on managing interactions in creative contexts, from how to arrange a classroom and structuring activities, to reducing stimuli and attitudes towards success. To maximise the outcomes and the quality of these engagements, consideration must be given to the open nature of the practical implementation of the approaches, bearing in mind the physical and sensory abilities of each learner.

These approaches should be used to engage learners in creative expression in a way that invites discovery, collaboration and growth for everyone involved.

The purpose of this guidebook is:

- To maximise engagement of learners in creative contexts and beyond.
- To provide staff with the tools to scaffold meaningful opportunities for learners to express themselves creatively.
- To give guidance on how to interpret creative expression of the learners as part of an Assessment for Learning process.
- To build on existing ALN frameworks such as Routes For Learning to contribute to the support for teachers in their day to day environments.

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passing the power on facilitation vs teaching

Effective facilitation relies on the consideration of a variety of factors, before, during and even after interactions with learners. This will not come as any surprise to staff in school environments; good teaching practice also relies on the forethought of a myriad of variables. Therefore, the ideas and processes presented in this guidebook should be considered as an extension of existing teaching practice rather than replacing it. They should be utilised only when appropriate to enable authentic creative expression of learners, to meet certain outcomes that do not require specific inputs from staff, or academic outputs from learners.

This guidebook gives license to staff in ALN settings to alter and broaden the way in which interactions with learners are led and managed to maximise empowering engagements with results that extend beyond the creative experience.



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a call to action

We experience calls to action everyday. From stopping at traffic lights or following a recipe, to creating a username or clicking a LIKE button. They all ask something of us, and we either do it or we don't.

In ALN settings calls to action are utilised as prompts for assessment, a stimulus to which learners are to respond or react. In many art forms a call to action usually works through repeated call and response, like in music performance. But in these instances the focus of the interaction is the process of call and response itself, and the parameters that define it. These types of interactions also often explore the relationship of the performers taking part, where there is always a lead.

In a creative interaction where we wish to provide an opportunity for authentic creative expression, providing a call to action for the learner isn't effective. It restricts and limits expression, and our perception of it, within the context of the initial call. We are likely to compare and assess the response of the learner against our first move. A response to a call is measured only by its similarities or differences to it, not accepted as independently valid.

To allow for more authentic creative expression we must pass the power to the learner. Your role is to respond to them, giving them the opportunity to initiate the interactions. Depending on the physical and sensory ability, and even the mood of the learner, a 'call' could be as explicit as a forceful thrust of a paintbrush or as a subtle as permission of contact. When the learner provides a call to action this leads to increased engagement and the construction of more complex, diverse and authentic outputs.

With the learner leading the interaction, there are a variety of responses you can make to maintain the engagement with the learner in control. When these are executed appropriately, these engagements can be used as an opportunity for observing behaviours for assessment of communication skills and cognitive development, as outlined in assessment frameworks such as Routes for Learning.

An effective response in creative engagements is mirroring, reflecting back the action of a learner so they can **notice** their own control in the interaction. This might include developing the initial call of the learner by amplifying or extending the action, copying it with the use of props, and even using humour, which is genuine, honest and authentic.

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passing the power forget about failure

Any period of time set for structured learning requires a success criteria - a set of features learners are expected to demonstrate as evidence of understanding or achieving a learning intention. In less structured contexts where creative expression is core to the aim of the session, more authentic engagement can be reached with activities when the experience is not adumbrated by a success criteria. During these types of interactions, forget about failure. Sessions centred around creative expression work best when all behaviours and actions are acknowledged and accepted to be valid, regardless of ability.

Holding this mindset during creative activities requires us to resist the temptation to judge a learner's process or output (during, or as the result of a creative engagement) by our preconditioned standards of what is objectively 'good', and actively ignore our cultural biases. Don't define 'success' and 'failure' for any form of output as a result of an engagement; expected results lead to less diverse engagement and outputs.

This is not to say success criteria do not have a place in artistic contexts such as fine art or music. Skill development in mark making or playing a musical instrument requires the awareness of a specific learning intention just as there would in a lesson on number or nonfiction writing. But focused

interventions for the purpose of creative expression should be free of these expectations, allowing learners to focus on failure free explorations in whatever the chosen form, whether it be musical improvisation, free drawing, or play with numbers.



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interaction timing

All school settings follow a daily and weekly schedule that provides structure for lessons, breaks in the day, and the various personalised routines for learners that contribute to the formation of a reliable school timetable. Structured lessons often follow a standardised duration to provide time for teacher input, learner activities and plenaries to reinforce learning of the lesson. In structured learning environments giving each learner the same amount of time to complete activities can be helpful for Assessment for Learning purposes; tracking the progress of each learner to inform their personal goals within a set amount of time. However, a fixed duration for creative activities can often stifle authentic responses and expression.

Having a minimum and maximum time parameter for sessions that focus around creative expression can lead to fabricated and simulated interactions. If an interaction is forced beyond its natural end the learner will cease to provide an authentic response. If it is shut down too early (and abruptly) you may inhibit the full potential of the engagement and invalidate creative contributions from the learner. Consideration of this is especially important if the interaction is anticipated to run over the end of a lesson that has whole-class implications (such as a room change or a break time).

Putting this into practice is a reflexive technique and requires professional judgement to ensure the impact of staff is limited to indirect encouragement and does not influence the duration of the interaction of the learner, however long this lasts. Depending on the context of the activity this could vary from a couple of seconds to half an hour from learner to learner.

This approach focuses on the management of time the learner has to express themselves in open ended activities, and not to be confused with the use of time parameters as a creative restriction. If time is used as a controlled variable as a creative restriction this should be made clear to the learner before commencing the activity. This type of activity is usually productive with creative problem solving challenges and less so with freedom of expression/expressive interactions; temporal control over one's creative expression is vital for authentic engagement.

Note: If these are 1-1 interactions, utilising this approach also requires the planning of an activity to run parallel for learners not taking part; those yet to take part, or those that have already taken part.

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reducing channels

In school settings, the mechanics of any lesson is restricted by many factors, including time, number of staff, materials and space. Prior to the commencement of any artistic pursuit there are similar factors that need to be considered, barriers that could inhibit progress, or be exploited as parameters of experimental design. These are called creative constraints. They are the requirements and limitations we have to address in order to accomplish a goal and often play a special role as drivers of discovery and invention.

Boundless freedom isn't always helpful; sometimes it can be detrimental to engagement. As a facilitator of these creative engagements, controlling these creative constraints is a process of reducing channels, both involuntary (environmental stimuli) and voluntary (choice). This can range from limiting the number of colouring pencils on offer for drawing, to enforcing an eyes closed component when music making.

Everyone is sensitive to different types of sensory stimuli to differing degrees. People with ASD may have below or above average sensitivity to sensory processing. These traits are commonly referred to as hypersensitivity, which can lead to sensory overload, and hypo-sensitivity, which can lead to self-

stimulatory behaviours due to lack of sensory stimulation from the environment.

When reducing channels for creative interactions it is important to acknowledge the sensory abilities of the learner(s) in order to appropriately adapt the sensory focus of the activity. Reducing channels in this context can act as an extension of sensory regulation for the learner, leading to increased engagement and more authentic expression. Constraints aren't the boundaries of creativity, but the foundation of it.



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gamification

Gamification is the process of taking an activity or task and integrating game mechanics into it to motivate participation and engagement. It is the process of amplifying the effect of an existing, core experience by applying the motivational techniques that make games so engaging.

Gamification in education, or gamification in learning, is sometimes described using other terms: gameful thinking, game principles for education, motivation design, engagement design, etc. It is different from game-based learning in that it does not involve learners making their own games or playing commercially-made video games. It operates under the assumption that the kind of engagement that gamers experience with games can be translated to an educational context towards the goals of facilitating learning and influencing learner behaviour.

Gamification in learning involves incorporating game elements to motivate learners, many of which can be utilised for engagements focused around creative expression. Some of these elements* include narrative, immediate feedback, fun, scaffolded learning, social connection and 'player' control. When these elements are considered for the design of the parameters for a creative activity, you are providing learners with a motivation that acts as a stimulus in itself to engage in the creative process. With this in mind, it is

important not to provide too many 'stimuli' so as to over complicate the 'rules' of the interaction. Good games use simple rules. Simple rules allow for varied potential.

*Other game elements that aren't as effective for creative expression interactions include 'mastery' (e.g. levelling up) and 'progress indicators' - these create an incentive to reach a goal, which interactions focused around creative expression lack.



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ritual

Usually associated with religious and spiritual ceremony, rituals consist of a sequence of actions that can include (but not limited to) gestures, words, objects, performed in a sequestered place. Rituals are prescribed by the traditions of a community, including schools, and are different to habits that contribute to the daily routine.

The difference between a routine and a ritual is not necessarily the action, but the attitude behind the action. Routines are the repeatedly scheduled things that happen to help the school run efficiently, with rituals being the stylised expressions of values that construct a framework of meaning around an activity.

In creative engagements the use of ritual can be useful to make the session feel special for the learner and create anticipation. This could be done by providing a prompt that signals the start and end of the experience. For physical activities this could be as simple as taking shoes off at the side of the mat before starting the activity, or the use of bells to make a sound. Here, the symbolic function of a ritual is to relate learners through a tokenistic act to a social order and to deepen acceptance of the processes that will follow, i.e. the interaction.

As staff in school settings will be aware, an overdose of regularity can create a classroom where learning becomes too rote and unexciting. It's essential to find a clear balance between just right and too much. There is no prescribed length or method for a successful routine; it needs to be learner/class-specific based on the need and overall learner dynamics.



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