60 MINUTES

# Use Art for Multiple Interactions

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# Activity Rationale and Aims

## Aims

**01.**
Share perspectives through multiple modalities

**02.**
Develop robust understandings of key questions

## Activity Summary

In this activity, collaborators will identify a focal question (see "Example from the field" for example questions) and respond to it via writing, sculpting, and talking.

## Rationale

This activity helps collaborators use artistic representation as a form of expression. Engaging in artistic representation has the potential to prompt new reflections on focal questions. When developing understandings, it is important to consider multiple ways to respond to a focal question (Edwards et al., 1998). Asking questions is central to developing an understanding context, identity, and of dilemmas of practice.

Using multiple modalities (e.g. writing, drawing, oral narration) for communication is productive in developing research that can engage different kinds of collaborators and stakeholders (e.g. youth, teachers, parents). Collaborators and stakeholders may have differing preferences with regards to the modality of communication; offering a variety of opportunities to respond and/or engage with focal topics ensures accessibility and encourages deeper participation.

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# In Person Steps

1.  Articulate a focal question that will engage all collaborators. Consider prompts that engage emotion and can support the use of metaphor. For example:

    •   "Describe/depict your role as a teacher."

    •   "Depict/describe your feelings about being a care provider."

    •   "Describe/draw your community."

    •   "Describe/depict an object that represents your school.

2.  Ask collaborators to spend time writing ideas in response to the focal question.

3.  After adequate time has been provided to respond with writing, provide collaborators with colored play-doh (or modeling clay), asking them to now depict their response via 3D representation.

    •   Other modalities can be used, for example, painting, collage, or drawing, instead of play-doh or colored modeling clay. Collaborators could also respond by selecting a song, or a physical stance (body sculpture).

4.  After everyone has completed their artistic representation, have collaborators share what they created and what it means to them.

    •   Have one person take notes of key themes discussed by each person.

5.  After everyone has had a chance to share, discuss similarities and differences amongst the groups' responses. Discuss how both the similar and different interpretations strengthen the group.



## Modifications and Virtual Adaptations

•   Collaborators and facilitators can consider which medium works best for their context, such as drawing, painting, song, movement, collage.
•   If conducting this activity in a virtual environment, a storyboard activity with Google jamboard or drawings can be used instead of play- doh, and the facilitator can create a page for each collaborator. Alternatively, the facilitator can ask collaborators to find an object in their home/area they are working from that helps respond to the question and then engage in oral explanation/discussion.

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## Facilitator Preparation

**MATERIALS**

- Play-doh, modeling clay, or other forms of artistic representation. Note that it is recommended to provide colorful materials, to spark imagination and deepen symbolic representation

- Cardboard or paper plate to put sculpted objects on

- Writing materials including paper and pen

- Medium for note taking (a board, large sticky notes)

- Tool for taking pictures

- Audio or video recorders

## Facilitation Tips

- Document what is developed, written, and orally shared via photographs and audio/video recorders.
- The set up and framing of this activity is critical. As a facilitator, it is important to do the activity before and with those participating. Facilitators want to be sure not to frame it as an add on or warm-up. Engaging in multiple forms of representation and expression is critical to generating deep understanding.
- Time spent on making and reflecting will vary between projects and will be dependent on the number of collaborators. The aim is to create a context that is unhurried and in which participants feel a sense of spaciousness and invitation to be creative and engage in deep reflection.

## 1. Example from the field

In a collaboration between promotoras (community health workers) and university researchers, the team used clay modeling to support the development of promotoras' professional practices. In this context, the promotoras were working with a non-profit to cultivate community and backyard gardens (see Teeters & Jurow, 2018). The focal question that led to the use of this activity was: What is involved in the work of being a promotora? This question was important because through ethnographic work in the community and with the promotoras, the research team learned that the promotoras did not think that the full extent of their work was understood and appreciated in their organization. This activity provided the promotoras with a way to explore and depict

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# 1. Example from the field (continued)

the expansiveness of their practices.

After a written reflection on their work, the promotoras made clay representations of how they related to their work. For example, one promotora represented her work by depicting a tree sprouting two new trees. She explained that like the tree, a promotora has to first establish roots in the community. From these roots, she then spreads her work, cultivating new relationships. Another promotora depicted the physical work of putting in and tending gardens. The visual representations expanded upon the pro-motoras' written reflections and helped to

provide a deep and collective understanding to the complexity of their practices.

This is an activity that has also been used in university courses. Instructors have used this activity to introduce and explore focal content. For example, in a learning sciences class, students were asked to depict what learning means to them via clay modeling or drawing at the start of a semester and then again at the end of the semester. Analyzing their representations from the start of the semester and then again at the end of the semester provided a way for students to reflect on their own learning.

# 2. Example from the field

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## Commitments to Equity and Wellness

Engaging in imaginative and metaphorical representational practices provides collaborators with multiple modalities to explore the focal content. Artistic representation provides a mechanism for engagement and expression that does not rely only on written or oral language. This allows for collaborators to engage in activities across linguistic differences and provides access to participation for collaborators with diverse experiences with literacy and oral expression. As such, providing multiple opportunities of engagement and expression can support collaborators in feeling more comfortable, as they know they will have multiple opportunities to express themselves.

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# Additional Reading

Gordon, D., Meyer, & Rose, D. (2016). *Universal Design for Learning: theory and practice*. CAST Professional Publishing.

Vasudevan, L., Schultz, K., & Bateman, J. (2010). Rethinking composing in a digital age: Authoring literate identities through multimodal storytelling. *Written Communication*, 27(4), 442-468.

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# Works Cited

Edwards, C. P., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. E. (1998). *The hundred languages of children: The reggio emilia approach--advanced reflections* (2nd ed.). Ablex Pub. Corp.

Teeters, L. A., & Jurow, A. S. (2018). Generating equity-oriented partnerships: A framework for reflection and practice. J*ournal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 11(1), 27-37.

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