

Building Arts-Based Social-Emotional Learning Practices Through Embodied Professional Learning: UW–Madison Community Arts Collaboratory’s Research Lab

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the preliminary findings and research agenda for the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Community Arts Collaboratory’s (Arts Collab) 2-year initiative supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. The research examined how arts-based, embodied professional learning can support school-based educators in developing and implementing social-emotional learning practices. The project focused on designing and facilitating a Professional Learning Community where eight educators engaged in experiential arts activities drawn from signature Arts Collab youth arts programs—Whoopensocker, Drum Power, and visual arts integration—to explore and support agency, identity, and belonging. Through collaborative artmaking, structured reflection, and intentional community-building, educators were encouraged to center joy, risk-taking, and vulnerability in their teaching. The research identifies key themes including the “fallacy of time,” balancing structure with joy, and the transformative power of becoming learners themselves. Preliminary findings suggest that embodied, arts-based professional learning enhances social-emotional learning instruction by humanizing pedagogy, fostering educator empathy, and creating safer, student-centered learning environments. This work contributes a replicable model for arts-based professional learning that integrates social-emotional learning into educational practice in meaningful and sustainable ways.

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Introduction

University of Wisconsin–Madison Community Arts Collaboratory Research Lab: Background and Previous Research

The University of Wisconsin (UW)–Madison Community Arts Collaboratory (Arts Collab) creates and supports research-based opportunities for youth and educators to grow as learners, to cultivate well-being, and to advocate for social change in and through the arts. The Arts Collab was founded by UW–Madison School of Education faculty Erica Halverson, Kate Corby, and Faisal Abdu’Allah, who shared a passion for arts programs focused on youth leadership and development and building research to demonstrate those outcomes. The Arts Collab is now co-directed by Erica Halverson and Yorel Lashley and managed by Stephanie Richards. The Arts Collab is housed in the office of Professional Learning and Community Education (PLACE), the outreach arm of the School of Education at UW–Madison. The Arts Collab extends the knowledge and research of UW faculty to support community goals in the spirit of the Wisconsin Idea, which holds that higher education should benefit communities in Wisconsin and beyond.

Arts Collab work includes two youth programs: Drum Power, which teaches life skills through West African, Afro-Cuban, and Afro-Brazilian drumming; and Whoopensocker, which supports literacy through creative writing and theatre. Past program partners included Performing Ourselves (dance) and FauHaus (visual arts). The Arts Collab works with community partners including the Madison Metropolitan School District and Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child Madison, providing access to students and teachers, and supporting systemic change and growth in the broader community. These partnerships expand our student reach and facilitate professional learning experiences for educators to share effective practices and new and ongoing research.

Two major areas of focus for the Arts Collab support social-emotional learning (SEL) skills and leverage arts practices and routines to allow those skills to be embedded, intentional and sustained in student work and experiences (Lashley, 2021; Rizutto, 2021). SEL “involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning, 2013, p. 4).

UW–Madison is an R1 university that supports the Arts Collab’s community-engaged research to understand how artmaking encourages youth participants, educators, and the

community to flourish. The Arts Collab Research Lab also supports the development of graduate and undergraduate student researchers by involving them in study design and implementation, data collection and analysis, and publication writing.

Overall Research Purpose

The Arts Collab Research Lab aims to understand (1) how SEL outcomes are made possible through participation in arts programming, and (2) how community arts outreach programs impact social-emotional learning outcomes for elementary students. We engage in multilevel research to explore (a) student and educator engagement in the visual and performing arts, especially as it impacts equity in learning; (b) ways to improve SEL outcomes; and (c) implementation and assessment strategies for sharing our findings to improve community practices.

National Endowment for the Arts Support

Our work was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Labs Program (NEA, 2024) on a renewable 2-year cycle until the grant was terminated by the current administration in May 2025. The Arts Collab Research Lab initially received NEA support in 2021 to implement a keystone study measuring arts SEL outcomes for students who participate in Arts Collab performing arts programs in schools. In 2023, we received a renewal to research how to design and facilitate professional learning for educators that centered the arts and SEL practices we use in our youth arts programs.

Student Outcomes (First Research Cycle Summary, 2021–2023)

Our first research cycle focused on articulating SEL-related outcomes of 3rd–5th grade students from socioeconomically diverse school communities linked to their participation in Arts Collab programming. Our research found that students develop a stronger sense of agency, identity and belonging through artmaking, reflected in their discussions and the artifacts they create (Bullington et al., 2025a). We are also developing a manuscript that examines students’ use of the term “fun” to describe their experiences with arts programming. This work suggests that “taking fun seriously” is key to effectively designing and assessing SEL experiences in the classroom (Bullington et al., 2025b).

The sections that follow present the research questions addressed in our second NEA research lab cycle, the goals and priorities those questions inspired, and the data, artifacts, and preliminary findings.

Current Study

Professional Learning and Educator Outcomes (Second Research Cycle, 2023–2025)

Our second research cycle focused on designing, facilitating, and analyzing a professional learning community (PLC) for school-based educators. In project Year 3, our team (see **Table 1**) designed and implemented the PLC, bringing together eight school-based educators to support them in integrating SEL and arts-based strategies into their teaching. Our early analyses indicate that teachers’ experiences with arts-based, embodied professional learning and reflection helped

them develop teaching practices focused on joy, care, and social-emotional well-being (Lashley & Nott, 2025). Our work aims to support broader partner school communities (staff, teachers, parents/families) as well as education scholars and practitioners in adopting new methods of facilitation and assessment. We are revising manuscripts from our first cycle of research and analyzing data from our second cycle. Both sets of activities will inform the development of our third cycle project scheduled to begin in July 2025, pending grant approval.

Table 1. Descriptions of the Researchers

Name	Researcher
Yorel	Principal Investigator. Dr. Yorel Lashley is director of programs in the Office of Professional Learning and Community Education at UW–Madison’s School of Education, affiliate faculty in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and co-director of practice, learning and research for the Center for Arts Education and Social and Emotional Learning. He is a developmental psychologist interested in self-efficacy and SEL in arts, academic and integrated environments as well as the founder/director of Drum Power , which uses learning West African traditional and Afro-Brazilian percussion to help young people develop and practice social-emotional skills discipline, community, and leadership. The program has supported more than 5,000 young people from New York City, Denver, and Madison, Wisconsin to date.
Erica	Principal Investigator. Erica Rosenfeld Halverson, a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at UW–Madison, draws on 25 years as a researcher and teaching artist to offer a blueprint for all classrooms where students and teachers can take risks, collaborate, and work creatively. She calls for a change in what counts as good teaching and learning, redefined by building learning environments with the arts at the center. She offers new models for learning in core subjects like literacy, math and social studies that embrace the social, cultural, and historical assets that kids at all grade levels bring to the classroom.
Stephanie	Project Manager. Stephanie Richards, MPH, is interested in the intersection of arts and well-being. She is a circus performer and producer with 7 years of experience teaching youth aerial silks.
Tracey	Project Assistant. Tracey Bullington is a former high school art teacher, artist and doctoral candidate at UW–Madison in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She studies literacy and the arts in K–12 classrooms.
Emily	Project Assistant. Emily Nott is a scholar, visual artist, educator, and doctoral student at UW–Madison. Her work focuses on out-of-school-time arts education and education justice.
Roey	Researcher. Roey Kafri is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction at UW–Madison. As a music educator, maker, and scholar, their research focuses on collaboration, self-awareness, and learning processes in maker education settings. They have a background in conducting, and improvisation, with a deep interest in how people create together. Their teaching experience includes undergraduate courses on maker education, emphasizing hands-on, collaborative, and reflective learning.

John	Researcher. John Samuels is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction with 20 years of experience in formal and informal learning spaces, including elementary and middle school teaching. As a research/practitioner, his interests include the normative integration of non-traditional pedagogical practices in K–12 classrooms, particularly in learning environments serving students from historically subjugated and restricted backgrounds.
Lindsey	Researcher. Lindsey Kourafas is an undergraduate student in Education Policy Studies at UW–Madison. She is interested in education equity through the arts and philosophy of teaching and learning. She has 8 years of teaching experience across STEM, music, and theatre youth extracurricular programs.

Professional Learning Community Participants

Our participant selection method was a blend of convenience and purposive sampling, relational work, and logistical alignment. We selected participants with connections to the UW Arts Collab programming who had shown commitment to SEL, an interest or curiosity for arts education, and a willingness to explore deeper partnership with the Arts Collab. Additionally, we recruited two teachers who had attended several Arts Collab and PLACE professional development workshops who indicated an interest in arts and SEL strategies. We were intentional in limiting our participant group size to six to 12 people to foster an environment for meaningful dialogue, personal and collective engagement, and reflective practice (see **Table 2** and **Appendix A: Detailed Descriptions of the Educator-Participants**).

Table 2. Descriptions of the Educator-Participants

Participants Roles	Teaching and Artmaking Experience
Participant A 7th grade science teacher	Teaching experience includes 3rd Grade Responsive Education for All Children (REACH) teacher. No experience teaching art or hosting artmaking, played the trombone elementary school through college. Still loves to play music. Musical theater in middle and high school. Danced ages 4–18. Enjoys collage.
Participant B Community school resource coordinator	Madison School & Community Recreation director, special education assistant, former AmeriCorps member with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Ran after-school arts clubs with various artists and organizations. Partnered with the Arts Collab to offer residencies. Violinist since age 9. Teaches violin lessons to beginner and intermediate students.
Participant C 3rd grade teacher	Sunday school teacher (3- and 4-year-olds), MSCR leader and assistant director. Worked with Whoopensocker for 8 years. Loves art projects and painting. Took music lessons as a child. Doesn't regularly practice but enjoys music.
Participant D 4th grade teacher	4K teacher. Hosted Whoopensocker in classroom for 2 years. Likes to sew and do arts and crafts projects with kids.
Participant E Community school resource coordinator	Special education assistant, MSCR site director, PTO president. No experience teaching art or hosting artmaking. Enjoys drawing and coloring.

Participant F 3rd grade teacher	Bilingual resource teacher, taught English as a second language and 2nd/3rd grade in Costa Rica. Worked with Whoopensocker for 8 years. Enjoys singing. Creates cross stitch designs.
Participant G 4th grade teacher	Full day teacher at Head Start, daycare owner/operator, teacher, director. Worked with Whoopensocker for 2 years and Drum Power for 13 years. Loves crafty projects, particularly knitting and crocheting. Loves cooking and feeding people as an art form.
Participant H 2nd grade teacher dual immersion program in Spanish	Middle School teacher, substitute teacher, taught teaching workshops for women and politicians from vulnerable low-income areas in urban areas in Peru. Attended Wisconsin Arts Integration Symposium twice. Learned to play the zampoña, the quena and the bass tuba in school. Learned crafts and created a workshop to sell products. Family of artisans. Plays instruments and sings with friends and family.

Design of the Professional Learning Community

Our team reached consensus that the best possible way to build and test a training paradigm based on Whoopensocker, Drum Power, and our visual arts SEL integrated practices is to build a PLC that centers those practices in an experiential way, followed by a cycle of intentional reflection on what it means to learn in and through the arts (Halverson, 2021). Having established this broader goal, the research questions for our research were the following:

- 1) What professional learning experiences would we design for school-based educators to incorporate arts-based activities for positive SEL outcomes?
- 2) How might the educators' plans and practice begin to change as a result of these experiences with arts and SEL integration and professional development/learning?

We set out to design a safer, supportive, and collaborative space for school-based educators to 1) reflect on their own practice; 2) experience UW Arts Collab artmaking and SEL routines, practices, and core values; and 3) reconsider, refine, and/or rebuild their own practices and routines based on those embodied learning experiences. To maximize the sense of community and sharing of knowledge, our research team participated in the sessions alongside the participating educators. We were careful to allow participants' learning and voice dictate how and when study team members participated.

One of our goals at the outset of our PLC was to establish the foundations to provide a safer space, a community where all would feel seen, heard, and valued. Deeb-Sossa et al. (2024) defined safer spaces as "areas where students show up as they are and express themselves without fear of being made uncomfortable because of their sex, cultural background, or other status" (p. 309). We acknowledge that no space can be completely "safe" from structural oppression, but we elevated making the space inclusive and safer for all as an ongoing collective endeavor. To establish the foundations necessary for the vulnerability, joy and discomfort of new learning to all coexist without feeling unsafe, we began by building a model for internal research lab meetings that centered those values. Although the lab's overarching priorities were set by the Principal Investigators, Dr. Yorel Lashley and Dr. Erica Halverson, facilitated by the Outreach Program Manager Stephanie Richards and coordinated by Graduate Project Assistants Tracey Bullington and Emily Nott, our full team contributed to shaping the goals, structure, professional

learning content, research methodology, and timelines. (See **Table 1** for descriptions of our research team.) Our team met for 7 weeks to co-create and plan the professional learning structure, content, and timeline to achieve the following outcomes:

- Strengthen educator SEL instructional capacity by providing low-stakes opportunities to experience arts-integrated SEL activities and instruction.
- Navigate the multiple requirements and constraints of teaching (school values, standards, time constraints) while keeping lessons aligned with core educator values and supporting creativity and agency.
- Build a supportive community among educators interested in arts-integrated work.
- Collect and document participants' experiences, reflections, conversations, and artifacts for analysis.
- Build a model for professional learning through arts-integrated SEL and make recommendations for other researchers and educators interested in forming similar communities.

Initial planning meetings included brainstorming a basic outline, followed by collaborative efforts from our full team to establish the structure, tools, and resources to achieve the outcomes above. We started with each desired outcome and unpacked the social, emotional, and environmental needs each required. We asked several questions including the ones below:

- What do we want each session to feel like, and what architecture will create that?
- What environment and material features contribute to a sense of community and safety?
- How can we support check-in routines to foster belonging and shared ownership of the space?
- How will we support educator-participants to deeply understand and experience arts-based routines for SEL development and youth leadership as experiential and embodied learning rather than didactic professional development?
- What logistical factors (e.g., providing meals, session timing) will best support the bodies, minds, and spirits of participants to be fully present?
- How do we incorporate all members of the research team to lead activities that maximize the use of our collective skills?
- How do we provide structure and still prioritize time for participant-educators to reflect, synthesize, ask questions and plan during each session to maximize their ability to implement what is learned and build momentum using new practices?
- What baseline level setting, including shared understanding, terminology, and community agreements, is needed to establish a safer space from Day One?
- How can we include active artmaking or embodied arts experiences in every session?

We designed six monthly 2.5-hour gatherings. The answers and subsequent plans for

addressing these questions led us to the following basic structure for each of the six sessions:

1. Eating & Intros/Check-in
2. Artmaking Activity – Modeling: Community agreements; lesson scaffolding; conceiving, representing, and sharing art
3. Break
4. Reflection Time – Individual, Small Group and Whole Group; observations about what was experienced and brainstorming planned/possible future applications
5. Closing – Share-out of Takeaways

Once we identified the participants, we were able to more thoroughly and intentionally design the PLC experience. As sessions progressed, we returned to the questions above to ensure a productive balance between participants' emerging needs and the objectives we initially set, adjusting our goals and structure when necessary.

Summary of Each Session

In this section, we provide a summary of each of the six professional learning community (PLC) sessions. Sessions occurred monthly between November 2023 and May 2024 during weekday evenings, for 2.5 hours per meeting. At least six of the eight participant-educators and between six and seven research team members attended each gathering. Sessions were held in a flexible classroom space at the Madison Youth Arts Center, a local community center dedicated to youth arts programming. We began each session with dinner provided from various local restaurants and intentionally began our meetings by eating and talking informally with one another.

The summaries below highlight the PLC's focus on experiential learning and the multimodal opportunities for artmaking that we prioritized in each session. We also share the ways that participants made sense of their learning in and through the arts by including examples of the reflections and discussions that consistently followed each artmaking experience. We anticipate that recounting this level of episodic detail provides useful methodological datapoints for fellow researchers and practitioners designing arts-based professional learning experiences.

Session 1

The first PLC session started with the task of co-creating community agreements to guide the group's weekly interactions (**Fig. 1**). We also defined and presented how community agreements function in the Collab programs. Next, we completed the research consent process. Principal investigators emphasized that PLC members were not required to participate in the research, and some participants asked questions about research



Figure 1. Participants Discuss Values

participation. Ultimately, all members chose to participate in the research and provided written consent.

The group then transitioned into a pair interview activity. Participants paired up to answer five prompts (e.g., What is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen?), sparking conversations that often flowed beyond the original questions.

Following the interviews, participants were invited to create fuzzy stick (pipe cleaner) representations of something they each shared during their interviews.¹ The activity concluded with a gallery walk, where the finished pieces were displayed on chairs as pedestals, accompanied by title cards and brief descriptions (**Fig. 2**).

Next, PLC members participated in a “Post-it brainstorm” activity which brought movement and energy to the second half of the evening. Participants received Post-its and responded to three prompts posted around the room related to identifying SEL in their lives and work. Participants then broke into small groups to organize and share out their colleagues’ contributions to questions like “What are your SEL goals for student development?” In the final activity of the session, participants charted their core teaching values. Each participant chose four cornerstones of their teaching philosophy and wrote those concepts on a compass handout. Participants shared their North Star values; the most common value selected across participants was “joy.”



Figure 2. Gallery Walk of Sculptures

Throughout Session 1 (and in all future sessions), Collab research team members participated in the activities alongside the teacher-participants, except when recording field notes, photos, and videos. Teacher-participants also took ongoing notes for themselves in a digital and analog journal called the reflection catcher that we returned to each month.

¹ We adapted the fuzzy stick representation activity from a guest lecture taught by Henry Cervantes, a teaching artist and visiting speaker in Erica Halverson’s class; we wish to thank and credit Cervantes here.

Session 2

The second, third, and fourth PLC sessions consisted of hands-on arts experiences followed by reflection and discussion to consider the relationship between arts and SEL as participant experience (feelings, noticing, and wonderings; Harvard, 2022) and to start scaffolding taking arts and SEL practices back to teaching and learning spaces.

Agency. In Session 2, we engaged in playwriting and performing activities while exploring the SEL competency of “agency,” defined as an ability to

positively contribute to our communities and have power over our own lives. Erica Halverson led this session, drawing from her arts program Whoopensocker. Participants began by outlining the Whoopensocker community agreements including “every idea is a good idea,” and “respect yourself and others” (**Fig. 3**). The group then participated in common Whoopensocker warm-up activities and interactive games where participants stretched, made themselves big and small, including Sushi (**Fig. 4**)—a sound and gesture-passing activity in a circle. These activities fostered laughter, loosened inhibitions, and encouraged collaboration and community. Erica shared that the warm-ups were sequenced to scaffold risk, a process that can empower students to engage creatively in the classroom. Following the warm-ups, participants engaged in a small-group scriptwriting session. Participants brainstormed imaginative characters, settings, and conflicts and created group stories. Each group of six participants performed their story with playful theatricality. Participants clapped, laughed, and cheered for one another.

The session concluded with structured reflection using a review frame journaling technique (Barry, 2014) inviting participants to list, draw, and analyze their experiences. Finally, participants shared their reflections and ideas aloud about how to apply their learning from the session to their own classrooms. Takeaways included the concepts of scaffolding risk, incorporating joy into learning, and leveraging agreements and routines to foster inclusion. Throughout, Erica modeled how to lead with energy, vulnerability, and intentionality, leaving participants inspired to adapt these practices to their own spaces.

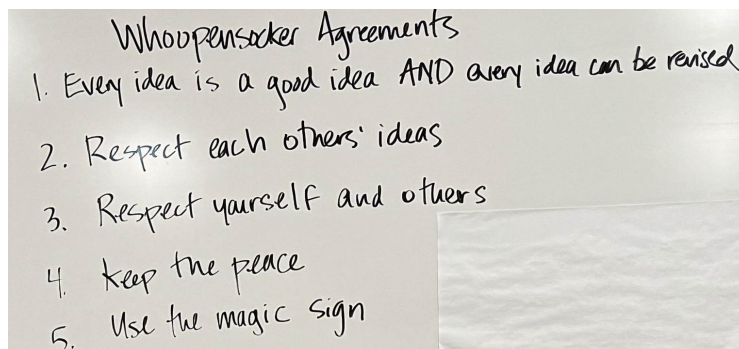


Figure 3. Whoopensocker Agreements



Figure 4. Participants play “Sushi”

Session 3

Identity. In Session 3 of the PLC, participants engaged in visual artmaking while exploring the SEL competency of “identity,” defined as a healthy and functional awareness of ourselves as individuals and as members of the communities we care about. Participants began by writing short phrases on Post-its in response to the prompt “What’s on your mind?” Tracey Bullington then led a series of visual art-based activities inspired by Lynda Barry’s (2014) approach to creative expression, emphasizing artmaking as an act of joy, bravery, and sincerity and challenging dismissive and judgmental frames of artistic skill. Participants created eyes-closed drawings of breakfast foods and the Statue of Liberty, laughing and sharing their imperfect creations. Next, Tracey provided a quick portrait drawing lesson inspired by artist Ivan Brunetti (2007), breaking down the process into simple steps with humor and encouragement. Participants applied these skills through a series of timed portrait drawings of themselves in various contexts: first as space explorers and then as royalty. Participants then drew portraits in pairs through a mirrored copycat drawing activity (**Figs. 5-6**). While one partner drew half of a portrait on the



Figures 5-6. Mirrored Copycat Partner Drawings

right side of large paper, a second partner mirrored the drawn lines on the left side to create a completed figure. The artmaking portion of the workshop culminated in a whole group collaborative face-drawing exercise, where participants passed drawings in a circle, each contributing to a shared creation. The finished pieces were displayed alongside the initial Post-it “captions”; participants found drawn facial expressions that matched the sentiments they had written at the beginning of the workshop and paired the words and drawings together (Fig. 7). Participants remarked on how much safer it felt to share a “heavy” or sad Post-it thought when it could be captioned to a goofy cartoon face. A reflective discussion followed using a “See, Think, Wonder” reflection sheet

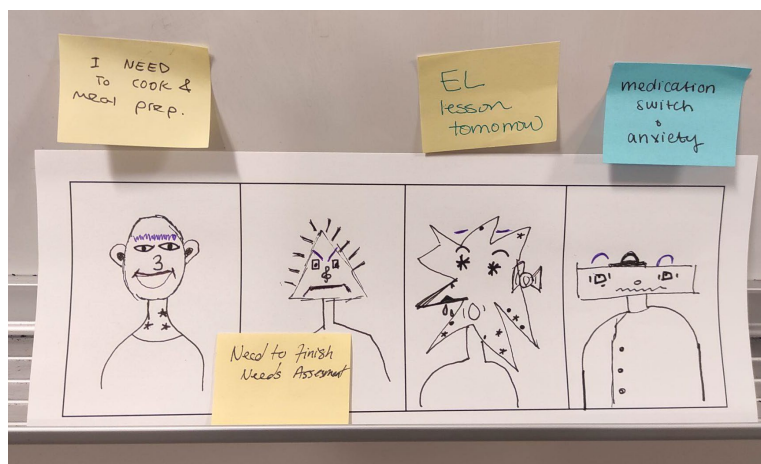


Figure 7. Collaborative Portrait Drawings

inspired by Project Zero (Harvard, 2022). Participants shared insights, noting the simplicity and accessibility of the activities and how scaffolding supported their confidence and creativity. The session concluded with a closing circle where participants shared their takeaways.

Session 4

Belonging. The fourth PLC session centered music making through West African Drumming and an exploration of the SEL competency of “belonging,” defined as loving connections to others that help us know that there is a special place just for us. The In Session 4 Yorel led activities and art-making informed by work with his arts organization Drum Power. This session brought a new level of emotional vulnerability among participants and facilitators, fostering deeper connections and reflections. Yorel provided generous time to share personal reflections during check-ins and check-outs, creating a deeper sense of intimacy and community. Emily led the group in a reflective check-in adapted from teaching artist Johnny Dorsey, asking participants to share how they were doing physically, intellectually, and emotionally, as well as what they needed. Her facilitation included a personal example to model openness.

Next, Yorel led the participants to gather around drums, which were arranged in a semicircle facing the classroom windows (**Fig. 8**). Yorel began the drumming session by introducing the Drum Power community agreements (Discipline, Community, and Leadership, **Fig. 9**); asking participants to share their experience with drums and about the things they like to do; and modeling care for each participant as we prepared to make music together. Participants then engaged in several activities, including call-and-response rhythms, group beats, and opportunities for individual leadership. Yorel emphasized scaffolding risk-taking by starting with simple rhythms and gradually increasing complexity, creating a supportive environment that encouraged exploration and confidence. The group used a “see, think, wonder” reflection sheet to document their experiences individually before participating in a group discussion. Participants noted the connections between drumming and SEL, including opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and the ability to process mistakes within a group. The reflective discussion also touched on the impact of slowing down, resisting urgency, and taking time to connect. Participants shared insights about how these practices could be applied in their



Figure 8. West African Drumming

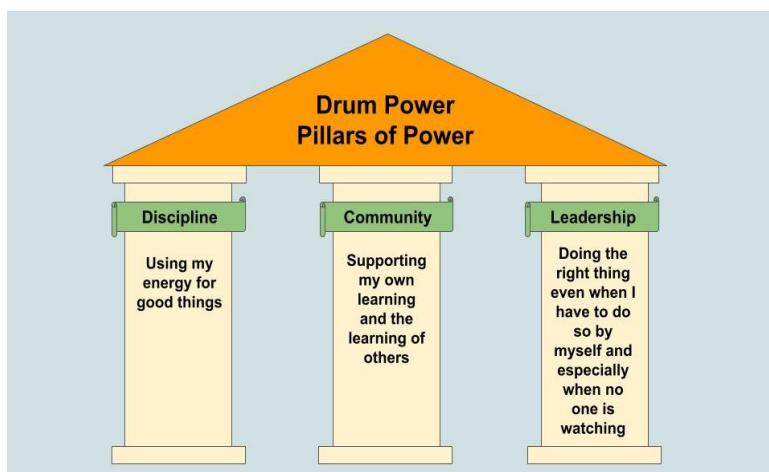


Figure 9. Drum Power Community Agreements

classrooms. The session concluded with a check-out, where participants shared takeaways and expressed gratitude. Highlights included reflections on the power of connection, the importance of making space for vulnerability, and the joy of learning alongside others. Caty expressed gratitude for the supportive community within the group, contrasting it with challenges they faced in their workplace. This moment underscored the emotional depth and impact of the session.

Session 5

In the final two sessions of the PLC series, participants developed plans to apply insights from previous PLC sessions to their educational contexts. We began Session 5 with a brief check-in, and then participants spent time creating community agreement posters facilitated by Yorel using the following prompt: What are the values that have bubbled up through this experience that you want to bring back to your classroom? Participants worked with colorful markers and represented their learning through both words and images (Fig. 10-11). The session continued with

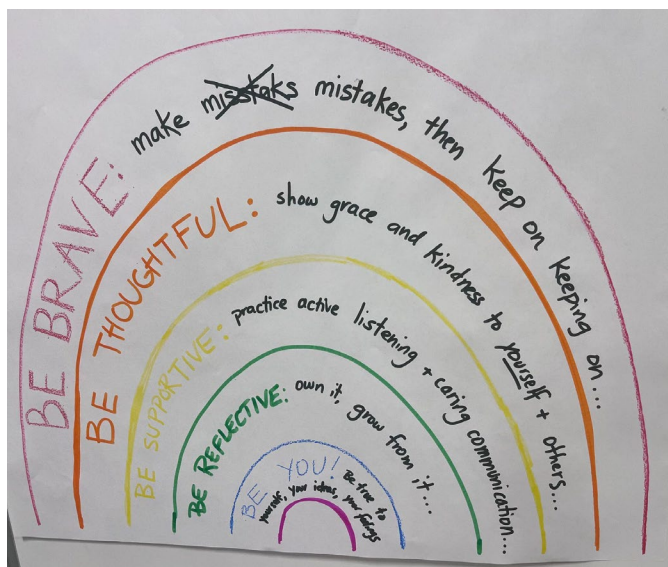


Figure 10. Participant Community Agreements

Tracey encouraging participants to consider how they could bring the ideas gathered during the PLC back to their classrooms. Stephanie created a video explaining a process of choosing a personal core value and a related theme selected from a data visualization to model modifying an activity used in her teaching context: an aerial circus arts class for children. She chose a theme from Session 1 “Seeing and hearing each other beyond the superficial” which connected to her North Star compass “expressing full self,” one of her core values. She explained how she modified an aerial arts activity to support deeper identity expression.

This video example helped frame the subsequent activity: participants were tasked with identifying a problem of practice and creating or modifying an existing activity inspired by their value compasses and PLC experiences to take back to their own school contexts. During partner work, participants dove into brainstorming and lesson design. For example, Carrie and Antonio focused on addressing perfectionism, a key takeaway from the visual art activities in Session 2. In the group sharing segment, participants showcased their partner work. Jennifer and Rebecca shared their efforts to reimagine the “turn and talk” strategy to enhance student engagement, reflecting on the balance between joy and control in the classroom. Emily highlighted the importance of self-care for educators to sustain their ability to bring joy into their teaching, which resonated with the group. The session ended with a check-out led by Emily, where participants shared one takeaway and one kind thing they planned to do for themselves. The reflective exercise provided a grounding and empowering conclusion to the session.

Session 6

The final PLC session featured reflection, creativity, and a celebration of the relationships and learning cultivated throughout the series. The session began with participants brainstorming opportunities for future learning. Stephanie suggested a variety of options for continued involvement, and individuals filled out a Google form to communicate their interest and availability for continuing to meet beyond the end of the PLC.

Next, participants walked around the classroom space and viewed data visualization posters created by the Collab team to represent the activities and themes of each of the previous sessions (see **Appendix B**). Participants took notes about the concepts and activities that they planned to use in the future. Then, participants represented these ideas on a zine page template designed by Tracey to prompt participant reflection about their PLC takeaways. Following the PLC, Tracey copied and bound together each participant's pages to create a collaborative zine that was mailed to all PLC members. During the second half of Session 6, Roey taught the group to make handmade booklets without adhesive or staples and guided participants in a "memory book" activity. Each participant created a book, which they passed quickly around the table for others to add to with words and drawings. The session concluded with a bonfire-themed check-out led by Yorel, where participants shared something they wanted to leave behind or "throw into the fire" and something they wanted to take with them, symbolizing renewal and growth. Emily added theatrical fire sound effects, contributing to the lighthearted but reflective atmosphere. The energy was warm and celebratory, marking a meaningful close to the PLC series.

Important Artifacts

In this section, we present key artifacts from the PLC used for session facilitation and reflection, arts-based teaching and learning, PLC documentation, and data analysis (see **Table 3**). The artifacts we describe below were created to 1) support participant reflection, learning and growth in the PLC and 2) collect data for future analysis to address our research questions. We focus on what these artifacts were and why they were designed or chosen, how they were used, and what was gained from their inclusion. Some artifacts were part of a singular activity (such as the zine) and some were part of regular reflection routines in the PLC (like the Harvard, 2022 Project Zero protocol or the reflection catchers).

We first discuss artifacts featuring participant observations and reflections, then shift to artifacts created for PLC facilitation, and lastly present artifacts designed primarily for data analysis in the section on Data Generation. Although each artifact was designed for a specific purpose, much of the data each artifact encapsulates can and will eventually be analyzed beyond the initially intended purposes. For example, participant reflections on an art activity may be analyzed for influence or connection to the artistic behaviors reflected in participant community agreements. However, in this section, we do not focus on specific findings. The later section on Cross-Cutting Themes will address preliminary outcomes and findings, and subjects of our current and future methodological data analysis.

Table 3. Summary of Professional Learning Sessions Activities and Artifacts

Session	Arts-Integrated Activity	SEL Goals, Themes, and Outcomes	Key Artifacts	Participants Present
1	Fuzzy stick representations	Self-expression; Confidence; Joy	Community agreements posters; Collaborative SEL brainstorming posters; Fuzzy stick sculptures; Compass worksheets; Individual reflection catchers	Seven participant-educators joined six Collab team members
2	Scriptwriting and performing	<i>Agency</i> ; Supporting others; Risk-taking	“Character,” “Setting,” and “Conflict” collaborative brainstorming posters; Collaborative scripts; Individual reflection catchers; Sushi game and scene video	Six participant-educators joined seven Collab team members
3	Portrait drawings	<i>Identity</i> ; Combating perfectionism; Safety	Eyes-closed drawings; Individual portrait drawings; Collaborative drawings; “See, Think, Wonder” reflection sheets; Individual reflection catchers	Seven participant-educators joined seven Collab team members
4	Drumming	<i>Belonging</i> ; Vulnerability; Leadership	“See, Think, Wonder” reflection sheets; Individual reflection catchers; Drumming activity video	Six participant-educators joined six Collab team members
5	PLC application and transfer	Creative problem-solving; Empathy	Community agreements posters; Partner lesson adaptation notes; Individual reflection catchers	Eight participant-educators joined six Collab team members
6	Takeaways and future opportunities	Commemorative reflection; Resilience	“Takeaways” pages for zine adaptation; Collaborative memory booklets; Individual reflection catchers	Six participant-educators joined seven Collab team members

Community Agreements

Community agreements were an important throughline across the six sessions of the PLC. Our goal was to include building community agreements as a foundational practice, allowing participants to co-construct the norms and expectations that would guide both their priorities as practitioners, and the routines for students and adults in their teaching environments. Some of the

key themes and values that emerged in community agreement discussions were respect, curiosity, and creating emotionally and psychologically safe(r) spaces (see **Fig. 10**). Exploring these themes guided the content and qualitative direction of the PLC. One focus of reflection and design of community agreements was the reality that such agreements often exist in learning environments as imposed, predetermined rules. However, the Drum Power and Whoopensocker agreements served as models to a) encourage collective responsibility and foster shared ownership over the learning space, and b) implement community agreement routines, practice, and work within the participants' respective classrooms. Building community agreements was intended to empower participants to articulate their needs, boundaries, and hopes for the sessions, and name and activate deeply held values such as respect, curiosity, and psychological safety. Collaborative work on shared values was also intended to help participants feel more comfortable taking risks, engaging in creative exploration, and navigating challenges without fear of judgment. Finally, activities and reflection were used to allow educators to feel the impact of these agreements in the ways that their students do.



Figure 11. Participant Community Agreement Poster

Through scaffolded activities, participants used the final session of the PLC to create community agreements for their own classroom spaces. The PLC agreements functioned as a living document, evolving in response to the needs of the group and reflecting the iterative nature of both learning and community building. In many cases, the agreements also became a reflective tool, prompting discussions about what it means to create equitable, human-centered learning environments where all voices are valued. By embedding community agreements into our sessions, we reinforced the idea that meaningful learning is relational and participatory. This practice illuminated how intentional structures for shared decision making can shift power dynamics, transform engagement, and cultivate deeper investment in both process and content.

Reflection Catchers

We designed a reflection catcher” template to elicit reflections from participants through responses to broad prompts (**Fig. 12**). Facilitators used the template across sessions to scaffold participants’ reflection on learning activities as a consistent routine, format and structure to support cognitive ease.

The prompts generally encouraged participants to think about their experiences, consider the potential application(s) of activities in their classrooms, and explore connections to SEL. Key areas of reflection were:

- Activity Experience – Comments and thoughts on the benefits and limitations of the session’s activities and consider the ideas, values, or emotions they engaged with during the process.
- Social-emotional learning – Reflections on how the activities supported or hindered the ways SEL was present throughout the experience.
- Classroom Application – Thoughts about how the session or activity might influence their teaching practice and how they might scaffold similar activities for their own students.

Figure 12. Reflection Catcher Template

The general notes section allowed participants to capture additional insights beyond the structured prompts. As presented in the section on Design, there was dedicated time for capturing reflections during each session, and participants could also take notes and record thoughts at any time.

Project Zero Reflections

Early design phase conversations helped the team determine the importance of consistently utilizing an open-ended reflection tool after each arts activity as a way to recognize and translate individual, activity-based experiences into SEL arts-based routines and pedagogy they might incorporate. Erica Halverson adapted the “See, Think, Wonder” tool from Harvard’s Project Zero to slightly more specific prompts: “Notice, Feel, Reminds me of” (Harvard, 2022). Another researcher, Emily Nott, created an ink-design version of these prompts with space for participants to write (Fig. 13). After the arts experience, participants reflected by responding to the “notice, feel, reminds me of” prompts. These artifacts helped participants recognize, interpret and internalize what

Figure 13. Project Zero Adapted Template

they experienced in each arts activity, and created space to shift from experiencing to analyzing and implementing—from making art to thinking about teaching and learning in and through the arts (Halverson, 2021). Overall, many participants also used the “wonder” section of the artifact to pose questions that often focused on implementation in their own spaces, and wonderings and possible barriers to taking arts and SEL practices back to their schools and students.

Final Reflection Zine

During the last session of the PLC, the study team invited participants to reflect on the overall experience and consider key takeaways in an arts-based way. Tracey Bullington, a study team member and artist/educator, uses comics and drawing in her pedagogy and research. She designed a final reflection zine participants could use to make meaningful connections between their experiences in the PLC and the elements they planned to bring back to their classrooms. Participants wrote, drew, and reflected on their two-page spread (Fig. 13), and then Tracey assembled the reflections into a single zine that we mailed to each participant—along with a message of gratitude—following the PLC. The zines allowed participants a final opportunity for meaning making through arts-based reflection and summarized the most important takeaways and experiences from the full arc of professional learning. Specific themes that arose in the zines will be discussed below and in future manuscripts.

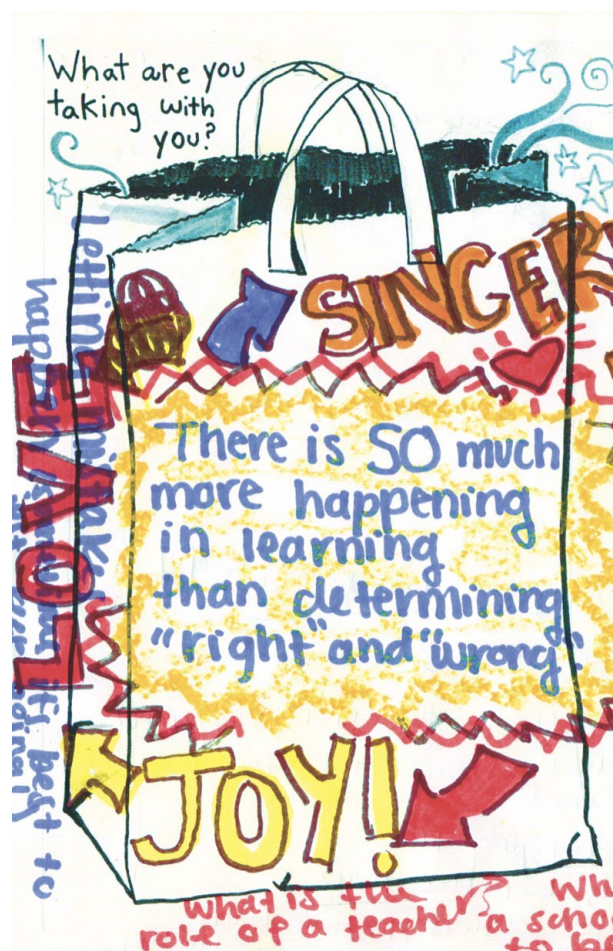


Figure 14. Image of a Participant’s Final Reflection Zine Page

Data Generation

Building on our discussion of participant-produced artifacts from the PLC, we now turn to a discussion of artifacts generated for specific purposes of facilitation or data analysis. In addition to the data visualizations and interviews described below, researchers also took photos, videos, and field notes at each session for data analysis.

Photos, Videos, Field Notes

During each session, one assigned researcher captured photos and videos, while another researcher took written field notes. Videos captured artmaking, participant reactions, discussions,

activities, and key moments. Photos were used to document artmaking artifacts, participant written reflections, as well as artmaking. Field notes further documented the PLC as it unfolded, noting facilitator actions as well as participant contributions.

Data Visualizations

Tracey Bullington created data visualizations for each artmaking session to capture initial themes that emerged from participant reflections and artifacts. The visualizations include participant quotes selected from the field notes, descriptions of activities, and descriptions of broad themes from the sessions curated by the study team. The data visualizations were designed as tools to help participant-educators understand PLC experiences, and to serve as PLC data artifacts for eventual data analysis. Facilitators then introduced the visualizations to the PLC (see description of Session 5 for details) to facilitate participant conversations about key PLC activities, key learnings from the process, and key practices they planned to implement. The data visualizations (see **Appendix B**) for each session summarize how multiple experiences collectively paint a fuller portrait for deeper consideration, discussion, and reflection.

Interviews

We conducted semi-structured, one-on-one Zoom interviews with each participant following the final (sixth) PLC session. This timing allowed for deep reflection on the overall experience, enabling participants to articulate both immediate takeaways and longer-term shifts in perspective. The individualized format fostered an open and conversational atmosphere, encouraging candid discussions about the participants' growth, challenges, and applications of their learning. Participants were asked to address the following questions:

1. What was this experience like for you? (follow-ups could include asking about whether they'd participated in professional learning before, how it was connected to the other stuff they did this year)
2. Talk me through one experience that really stood out to you?
3. How have these PLC meetings influenced your practice as an educator?
4. How has this experience affected the way you think about social-emotional learning and the arts as tools for your learning environments? (talk about either SEL or the arts or both!)
 - a. Talk me through something you've done differently in your classroom as a result of your participation. (If they haven't already)
5. What could we all do differently to make this experience more meaningful for educators?

Cross-Cutting Themes

The previous section presented both the key artifacts that participants created, as well as the data the study team planned and collected. Below, we introduce initial directions and themes that we intend to pursue for deeper theoretical framing, methodological analysis, and subsequent publications. We also share some preliminary findings. Because we collected so many different types of data, we plan to apply different methodological approaches to analyzing the various data

types and address multiple research questions. However, we still intend to extract overarching lessons on the broader implications, overall benefits and challenges for embodied professional learning.

Fallacy of Time

One of the most prevalent themes across arts artifacts dealt with the impact of arts and SEL routines and practices on conceptions of time. Yorel Lashley named this phenomenon “the fallacy of time.” We will discuss this concept briefly here and are working on an additional manuscript to consider this finding with more breadth and depth (Nott et al., 2025).

“The fallacy of time” first surfaced during the Drum Power week of the PLC. As an introductory connection and identity activity during the lesson in drumming technique, participants formed a circle and were asked to share their favorite pastimes/activities and any past drumming experience. The facilitator asked follow-up questions as each person shared, and the focused sharing moved around the circle without any limitations on time. After the activity, participants noted how time seemed to take a less directive role in the drumming experience. The facilitator explained that one of the goals was to provide an experience where each person’s sharing was prioritized above the time constraints that often undermine academic and social-emotional skill building and human connection. He referred to this idea as the “fallacy of time,” an idea originating from indigenous cultures challenging linear and Western conceptions of rigidity around time (Pranis, 2005).

In the final zine pages created by participants, seven out of 10 reflection pages contained images and words referencing the fallacy of time, suggesting that this idea resonated broadly and deeply with educators in the PLC. Participants wrote in their zines: “enjoy slowing time down,” “how can we free ourselves (a little) from time as the primary constraint?” and simply, “take the time.” Interpretations and implications of challenging the fallacy of time in the classroom were also visible in field notes from the session. One constraint to challenging the fallacy of time is that teaching and learning exist within and are shaped by oppressive systems (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2017; Stovall, 2018). These systems reflect a host of constraints on how people can move through time in traditional schools, including short periods, standardized testing, growing class sizes, and shrinking resources. This means that challenging the fallacy of time cannot be another directive placed on the shoulders of teachers alone, but must be supported by more broad, systemic changes in how we teach, learn, make, connect, and live. While this theme must be considered further and will be developed into a longer manuscript, we recognize here the beginning of something powerful. By encouraging educators to challenge the constraints and limitations of time through arts and SEL practice, we hope to invite in slower, more loving conceptions of time as an important and promising direction in pedagogy and praxis.

Balancing Structure and Fun in Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities are most effective when they balance structure with creativity, as this combination supports professional growth and mirrors effective teaching practices (Paniagua & Istance, 2018). A clear framework helps teachers stay focused while allowing room for experimentation. In our PLC workshops, sessions intentionally combined

structured discussions with hands-on activities. Because each session included conversations linking session activities to classroom practices and feedback forms, this structured approach supported teachers' ability to directly apply their learning in their classrooms. One teacher echoed this idea, sharing, "I loved the way it was sequenced. I'm gonna do it pretty much the same with my kids, but also with my colleagues."

Beyond structure, artistic SEL activities helped create a supportive space for risk-taking and collaboration. For example, in the Whoopensocker session, educators engaged in group performances and creative storytelling, beginning with shared agreements like "Every idea is a good idea" and "Respect yourself and others." One teacher reflected, "I'm not the most comfortable in a theater space, but it helped me think about students who might feel shy or disengaged and how I can encourage them."

To support educators' engagement with arts and SEL practices, reflection was a key component of the PLC. Paniagua and Istance (2018) emphasize that structured reflection "enhances teachers' ability to analyze and improve their teaching." One teacher described this process saying, "It gave me time to step back and think about what actually worked for my students, not just what I thought would work."

The engaging and playful activities made professional learning more memorable and motivating. One teacher shared, "When learning is joyful, it sticks. I've already tried some of these activities in my class because I knew my students would love them." Activities such as collaborative drawing exercises, theater-based storytelling, and movement games like the "Sushi" theater warm-up activity encouraged participation and low-stakes risk-taking.

Ultimately, balancing fun and structure in the PLC created meaningful and effective professional learning. The structured approach provided clear expectations and continuity, while fun activities promoted creativity, engagement, and confidence. As one teacher reflected, "The structure helped me feel more confident about trying new things, and the creative activities reminded me why I love teaching."

Embodied Learning, SEL Experiences, and Becoming Students

Often, children first encounter academic content in the classroom, while teachers are positioned as all-knowing experts or the sole source of knowledge (Hamdi, 2018). Embodied learning disrupts assumptions that students are empty vessels to passively receive knowledge by promoting a more holistic and agentic approach to engagement and the importance of socio-physical contexts in the learning process (Freire, 2017; Stolz, 2014). One important transformative experience for PLC participants was the opportunity to "become students" by engaging in artmaking from the perspective of novel learners. For example, Rachel noted that her experience with the Whoopensocker session helped her understand that student behaviors she had interpreted as disengagement could be forms of meaningful engagement that she had not yet recognized. The activities in this session resonated with her because although she had helped facilitate Whoopensocker at her school, engaging as a participant rather than a "supporter of participants" felt notably different, describing it as an "empathy-building experience." The PLC

provided space to seek and explore deeper understanding of the goals and mindsets that underlie key Arts Collab teaching and learning routines.

Additionally, several participants reflected on the pressure to complete every activity “correctly” and observed that their students experience a similar sense of anxiety and urgency. While participants initially felt discomfort when they did not achieve the “correct” outcome or the product they desired, this perspective shifted as the PLC progressed and they gained experience with new, process-focused forms and goals of artmaking. Participants acknowledged that their students experience this same pressure and that it’s important to facilitate student work that does not set perfection as the ideal outcome. For example, following the drumming activity (PLC Session 4), Hannah reflected on the challenge of receiving critical feedback as an educator, despite regularly offering critical feedback to her students herself. This realization allowed her to empathize with her students. These insights humanized the learning process and highlighted how dispositions can be shared by learners of different ages and educational backgrounds. The educators practiced self-awareness and de-centered perfectionism and self-judgment.

In Session 5, participants took part in an activity where they modified a lesson plan to focus on a specific SEL goal. Carrie and Antonio worked together to adapt the drawing activity from Session 3 of the PLC, extending it over multiple school days, and selected the SEL goal of addressing perfectionism. They posited that initially, students might feel frustrated by not getting the activity “right,” but over the following days, this attitude would fade. While developing the lesson, Carrie asked Antonio, “How do you know it’s gonna make a difference each week?” Antonio responded, “I think you will see frustration from the student who wants to be perfect. So you know that it’s bothering him ... keeping him out of his comfort zone.” In his interview, Antonio shared that he feels pressured to do things “the right way” on the first try. As an athlete, he emphasized the importance of developing technique over time, which contrasted with his experiences as an educator learning something new. Antonio used his experience in the PLC as a lens through which to understand how his own students might respond to unfamiliar new content.

Not only did participants have the opportunity to practice something new, but they gained insight into the cognitive and emotional states that new learning likely creates for their students. By cultivating learning environments that enable educators to step into the minds and experiences of the children they teach, we hope to foster a more student-centered, empathetic understanding of classroom learning.

Key Themes from Participant Interviews

Several key themes emerged from the post-PLC interviews, underscoring the impact of the PLC experiences over the course of the six gatherings. Teachers consistently highlighted the transformative nature of engaging with new pedagogical approaches, particularly in integrating arts-based and interdisciplinary methods into their instruction. They reflected on the ways these experiences reinforced the importance of fostering creativity, play, and experimentation in both their teaching and personal learning journeys. Many participants described a renewed sense of professional motivation and purpose, emphasizing how the PLC reignited their passion for

teaching and reaffirmed their instructional values. Additionally, they explored the intersection of SEL and community building, recognizing how creative practices fostered deeper student engagement and classroom cohesion.

The interviews also surfaced practical considerations for translating these ideas into diverse educational settings. Teachers shared both successes and challenges in adapting activities for different grade levels, subject areas, and school cultures. Some described shifts in their teaching philosophy, moving away from rigid, outcome-driven models toward more exploratory and student-centered approaches. Others discussed the need for greater institutional support to sustain these practices, particularly in schools with limited flexibility around curriculum design. Overall, the qualitative depth and range of these interviews offers valuable insight into not just what participants learned, but how they internalized and acted upon that learning in their own contexts, to shape instructional practices and professional identities in meaningful ways. That insight includes the emergence of “safety” as a major theme.

Creating a Safer Space for Learning

In our PLC, safety was not just about physical space—it was about creating an environment where teachers felt encouraged, supported, and free to take risks. One teacher captured this idea and experience: “I feel welcome and safe in this space.” Psychological safety in professional development allows educators to experiment with new approaches without fear of failure (Edmondson, 2019). One participant noted: “Community agreements helped create a sense of physical and emotional safety, especially when kids are trying out new things or engaging in creative activities.” However, this experience of safety was intentionally developed through community agreements and structured activities that mirrored the kinds of supportive environments teachers wanted for their students. It was the result of the combination of intentional priorities that generated structures, routines and requisite actions and non-actions. It was the result of selecting structures and activities while simultaneously making space for participant-educators to play directive roles in shaping and engaging the space. This aligns with findings from Paniagua and Istance (2018), who emphasize that professional learning is most effective when it models the types of classroom environments we want for students. By experiencing safety and risk-taking themselves, participants developed strategies to replicate these conditions in their own classrooms. In addition to a general sense of safety, three more specific threads emerged in participant artifacts, safe spaces to experience: vulnerability through creativity, relationship-derived trust, and being non-experts.

Vulnerability and Creativity

Creating safer spaces in the PLC also meant making space for vulnerability. In her interview, Jennifer emphasized the significance of “feelings-based outcomes” for students. She explained that when educators recognize safety as a key goal of learning, it creates a space where students can experience “hard feelings and emotional vulnerability”—outcomes that they may not otherwise achieve in the classroom. Several participants indicated that under normal circumstances, they likely would not have willingly engaged in the PLC activities. Nor had they participated in such activities in their past professional development. These experiences helped

them understand how their students might feel when asked to step outside of their comfort zones. One participant reflected: “Creating an environment where it’s safe to try made all the difference in helping me engage more deeply in the work.” This connects to excerpts from the zines (see **Fig. 14**), where participants mentioned/depicted the PLC as an SEL experience that fostered a sense of belonging, which directly impacts both teacher and student engagement.

Participants also experienced how taking risks in a safe space encouraged student growth. One participant noted: “Shared leadership between students and teachers creates a safe space to make mistakes and encourage questions.” Creating emotionally safe classrooms helps students develop confidence, collaboration skills, and self-awareness (CASEL, 2019). Through these experiences, participants gained practical insights into fostering safety and engagement in their classrooms.

Relationships and Trust

Beyond community agreements, safety was cultivated through relationships. Participants felt supported not just by facilitators, but by one another. One participant described this support as “[moving from] Kindness to engagement to leadership to safety.” This echoes Bryk and Schneider (2003), who found that trust among educators leads to stronger collaboration and a greater willingness to embrace change. When participants felt safe, they were more open to experimenting with new strategies, sharing ideas, and even making mistakes.

Participants shared that experiencing these conditions through the PLC left them with deeper understandings of how to create safer learning environments for their students. One teacher commented that “Allowing kids to feel safe, but also vulnerable at the same time, was something I wanted to take back to my classroom.”

Non-Experts

Several participants experienced a sense of safety by virtue of being non-experts in a particular art form, surrounded by other non-experts who also engaged in that art form for the first time. For example, Jennifer noted how the Drum Power session generated high engagement even though the content was entirely new to most participants; she “didn’t feel bad, or like [she] couldn’t participate.” Similarly, during the eyes-closed drawing activity, Rebecca explained how having all participants close their eyes leveled the playing field. She shared that this “took the pressure off,” regardless of whether someone considered themselves a “good” drawer.

The materials that participants used also contributed to feelings of safety. A moment that captured this occurred during the debrief at the end of Session 1, when Caty exclaimed, “No one’s an expert in pipe cleaners.” The combination of non-traditional arts materials and the process-focused activity fostered a sense of safety to explore a novel experience because they were chosen to “level the playing field.” The goal was expression and unlimited creativity rather than producing an externally determined good or valuable product.

Our hope is that these practices of vulnerability, creativity, relational work, and non-expertise will build on teachers’ abilities to create safer, supportive, and meaningful learning communities

with young people. We will apply a range of methodologies to the various types of data we collected to reach clearer findings around these themes.

Summary of Impact

Efforts to define student-focused social-emotional competencies and skills in the fields of SEL research and practice have vastly outpaced researched-based models for helping students understand, develop, and practice those skills (Lashley, 2021) and have also outpaced strategies for translating SEL into effective professional learning. Many scholars and practitioners still approach SEL using decontextualized, stand-alone lessons not embedded in approaches that allow students to hone those skills (Lashley, 2018). Further, professional learning models continue to promote non-embodied learning, a step removed from experiences that can tether those practices to the daily routines of teaching and learning (Halverson, 2021).

This research lab facilitated a PLC where participant-educators built arts-based tools for SEL skill development through embodied professional learning that exposed participants directly to the joy, collaboration, personal growth, and struggle their students experience. Participants also used their experiences to reflect on their own teaching and learning practices, expressing intent to bring components of the work back to their classrooms. The cycle of embodied pedagogy and arts-based reflection used in this PLC presents a multimodal model for professional learning, arts integration, and SEL skill development that could contribute to all three of those fields. The data we collected from participants illuminates their PLC experiences—centering joy, exposing perfectionism as the enemy of creativity and artistic expression, co-creating shared knowledge, and building and holding safe space to try novel things, make mistakes, and feel seen, heard and valued all the while.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Detailed Descriptions of the Educator-Participants

Name	Educator Role	Education Work Experience	Teaching Experience	Educational License(s)	Language(s)	Experience Teaching Art or Hosting Programming	Experience With Artmaking
Participant A	7th grade science teacher	3rd grade Responsive Education for All Children (REACH) teacher.	1.5 years	Science, Middle Childhood to Early Adolescent, ESL	English	N/A	Played the trombone elementary to college. Still loves to play music. Musical theater in middle and high school. Danced ages 4–18. Enjoys collage.
Participant B	Community school resource coordinator	Madison School & Community Recreation director, special education assistant, AmeriCorps member with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.	15 years	N/A	English Spanish	Ran after-school arts clubs with various artists and organizations. Partnered with the Arts Collab to offer residencies.	Violinist since age 9. Teaches violin lessons to beginner and intermediate students.
Participant C	3rd grade teacher	Sunday school teacher (3- and 4-year-olds), MSCR leader and assistant director.	13 years	General Ed (Grades 1–8), English 300	English	Worked with Whoopensocker for 8 years.	Loves art projects and painting. Took music lessons as a child. Doesn't regularly practice, but enjoys music.

BUILDING ARTS-BASED SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PRACTICES THROUGH EMBODIED LEARNING

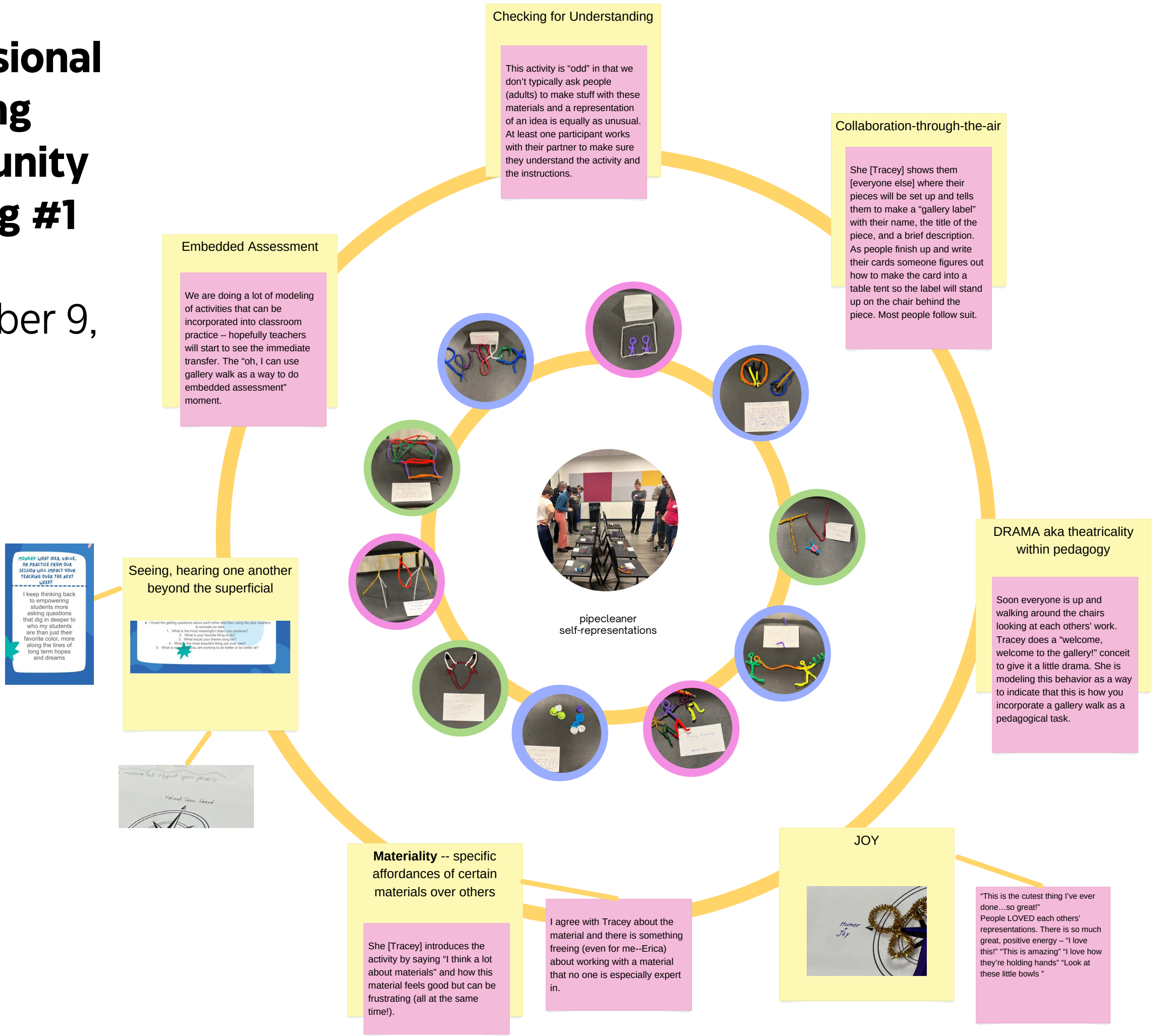
Participant D	4th grade teacher	4K teacher.	13 years	Early – Middle Childhood	English	n/a	Likes to sew and do arts and crafts projects with kids.
Participant E	Community school resource coordinator	Special education assistant, MSCR site director, PTO president.	10 years	N/A	Spanish English	n/a	Drawing and coloring.
Participant F	3rd grade teacher	Bilingual resource teacher, taught English as a second language and 2nd/3rd grade in Costa Rica.	15 years	Early childhood and Masters in bilingual ed	English Spanish	Worked with Whoopensocker for 8 years.	Enjoys singing. Creates cross stitch designs.
Participant G	4th grade teacher	Full day teacher at Head Start, daycare owner/operator, teacher, director.	30 years	Pre-K–6th grade and special education	English	Worked with Whoopensocker for 2 years and Drum Power for 13 years.	Loves crafty projects, particularly knitting and crocheting. Love cooking and feeding people as an art form.
Participant H	2nd grade teacher dual immersion program in Spanish	Middle School teaching, substitute teaching, taught teaching workshops for women and politicians from vulnerable low-income areas in urban areas in Peru.	4 years	Teacher license with stipulations	Spanish English	Attended Wisconsin Arts Integration Symposium twice.	Learned to play the zampoña, the quena, and the bass tuba in school. Learned crafts and created a workshop to sell products. Family of artisans. Plays instruments and sings with friends and family.

Appendix B: Data Visualization Summaries of Four Arts Activity Sessions

Professional Learning Community Meeting #1 – Fuzzy Sticks; 11/09/2023	(p. 30)
Professional Learning Community Meeting #2 – Whoopensocker; 01/22/2024	(p. 31)
Professional Learning Community Meeting #3 – Comics; 02/19/2024	(p. 32)
Professional Learning Community Meeting #4 – Drum Power; 03/18/2024	(p. 33)

Professional Learning Community Meeting #1

November 9, 2023



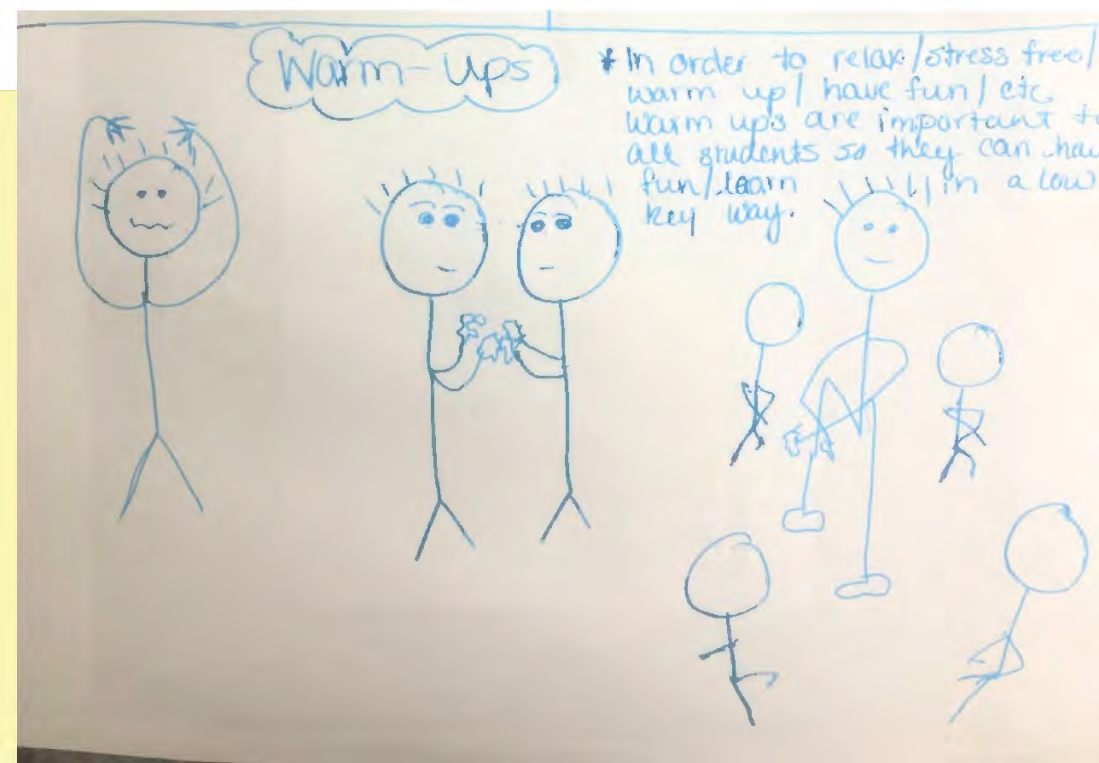
Professional Learning Community Meeting #2

Whoopensocker
January 22, 2024

JOY

"I am going to take sushi because it was joyful and I want put some more joy into my kids' day." - Rebecca

As we do our first round of stretches Erica prompts us to "walk like Frankenstein" and people make funny noises and look at one another, laughing



Shared Leadership (with/among Participants)

Next Erica invites Carrie to lead the next warm up. Carrie leads us in "Sushi", a repeating game that also has people laughing. When Carrie is called up to lead, people clap and cheer for her.

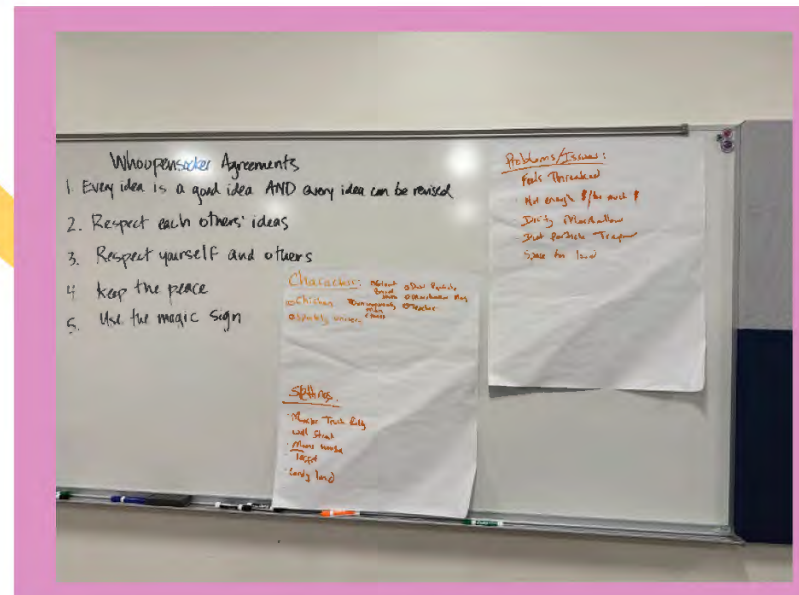
Risk Taking

Carrie "Thinking about scaffolding risks"

As part of the community agreements, Erica introduces "respect each others ideas". Rachel shares: "I think it creates a sense of safety, because it takes a level of bravery to share your ideas."

Scaffolding for risks!

Whoopensocker



Warmups!

- *Stretching (like Frankenstein)
- *Sushi game
- *Pass the sound & gesture
- *Pass the clap

Community Agreements

Writing and performing Stories

- *Whole group character brainstorm and story writing
- *Small group story writing and performance

Agency, Choice as Empowerment

Lindsey: "The show can't go on without the paper holder. Every role is important."

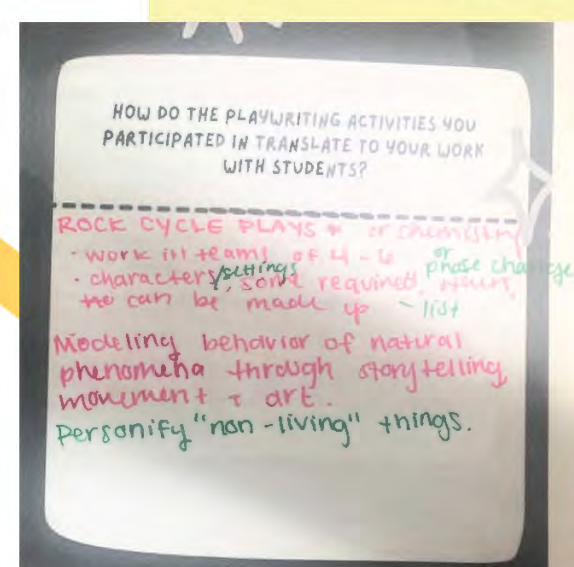
agency = choice
voice
action

Erica offers us options for how we can share the story, and offers choices for how people can participate for example narrating, holding the paper, acting things out. When people seem reticent she offers more choices until they respond to one positively.

Ivan says: "I like this as a way to teach Spanish, because one student can draw, one student can share aloud, everyone can do something. For example for me it is difficult to communicate my ideas, but I can perform." Erica calls out that there is a version of this where she leans into Ivan's expertise and does something explicitly bilingual.

Erica, "I had this acting teacher who always said 'commit to the gesture'."

Performativity: The Power of Acting Things Out

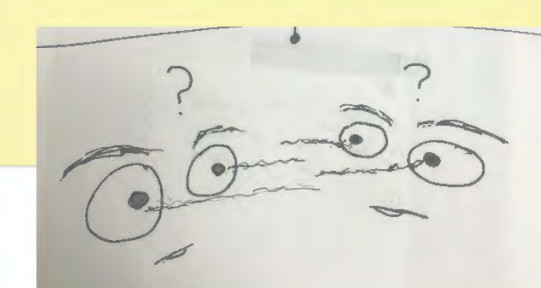


"I am going to think about personifying natural phenomena ... I am going to start to think about what it could mean to view [natural things] as living and how that changes our relationship with them" - Caty

Erica introduces "keep the peace" by having us build a force field all around us. People lift their arms to build a force field, make sound effects, laugh and smile as they observe one another making physical gestures and sounds. Erica shares the "why" of this practice - to make sure people feel comfortable with how contact looks in the space

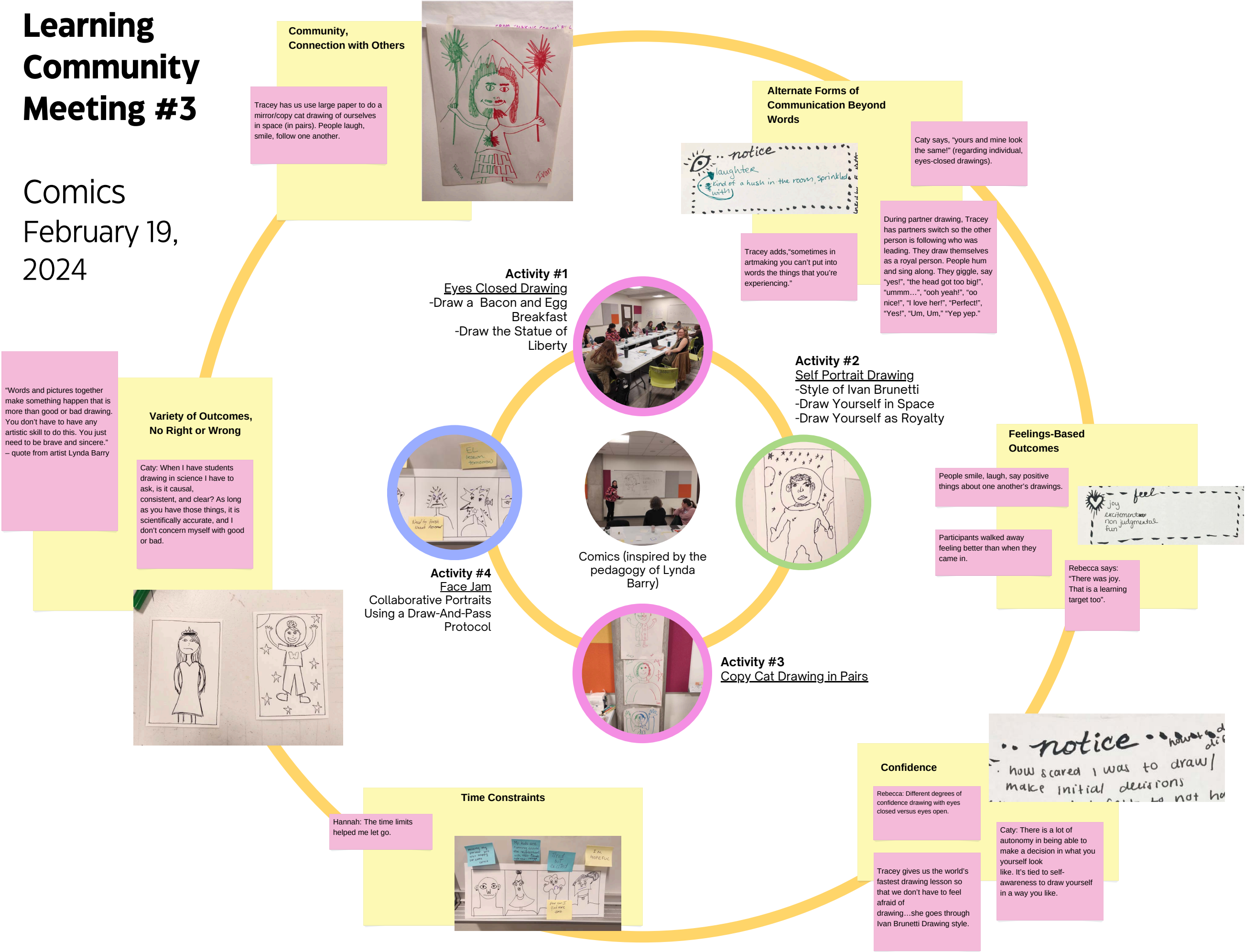
HUMOR as a Mode of Connection

People laugh and get into physical performances, flapping around like chickens, interacting with one another as characters, narrating and acting out their stories. Ivan and John play lonely chickens who go to wall street. The listening group laughs and responds raucously



Professional Learning Community Meeting #3

Comics
February 19,
2024



Professional Learning Community Meeting #4

Drum Power
March 18, 2024

