

Tips for Healing-Informed Arts Education Initiatives: IMPLEMENTATION

During the 2019-2020 school year, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture) partnered with Los Angeles County Office of Child Protection (OCP), Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH), and Arts for Healing and Justice Network* (AHJN) to implement healing-informed arts education activities within select public schools. This joint initiative, *Creative Wellbeing: Arts, Schools, and Resilience*, is a starting point for establishing school cultures grounded in healing-informed care by providing arts-based student instruction, professional development, and community building activities.

Harder+Company Community Research joined the partnership as the evaluation team to capture the impact and lessons learned through implementation of the initiative during the pilot phase. This guide describes best practices for evaluating healing-informed arts education initiatives, specifically those delivered through online technologies.

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*Formerly known as Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network (AIYN)



Background

Implementing an innovative healing-informed arts education initiative within a multi-layered system like the K-12 public education system, can be complex. Doing so in an entirely virtual environment creates additional unique challenges.

Partners must consider a range of programming aspects to ensure successful implementation of virtual healing-informed arts programming. Some considerations should be addressed at the onset of initiative planning while others should be considered during the implementation phase.

In March 2020, just as the in-person *Creative Wellbeing* activities were about to kick off, the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding public health emergency led to the rapid closure of schools and the suspension of direct services in all school districts across Los Angeles County. This included those scheduled to take place as part of *Creative Wellbeing*. In response to these shifts, the Department of Arts and Culture worked closely with their partners to find ways to pivot the project's in-person service delivery to online and virtual engagements.

Drawing on this unique experience, *Creative Wellbeing* provides a valuable opportunity to discover promising practices associated with developing and implementing a healing-informed arts education initiative, across participant types, within a virtual environment. The following guide takes a deeper dive into what we learned throughout *Creative Wellbeing* with a focus on how to address implementation challenges associated with virtual program delivery. The guide is organized as follows:

- 1 Building Effective Partnerships.** Promising practices and lessons learned associated with establishing trusting and effective partnerships for a trans-disciplinary arts initiative.
- 2 Promising Practices - General.** Promising practices in program implementation that apply generally across populations.
- 3 Promising Practices - Youth and Families.** Promising practices in program implementation that are unique to engaging youth and families in healing-informed arts education initiatives.
- 4 Promising Practices - Educators.** Promising practices in program implementation that are unique to engaging educators in healing-informed arts education initiatives.



Building Effective Partnerships

Authentic and trusting partnerships lay the foundation for an initiative like *Creative Wellbeing* with multiple partners that each has its own mission and bureaucracy. In order for a program to be successful and effective, trust and communicative relationships among partners is critical. Without trust or communication, implementation may fail or not be sustained. The following are promising practices that surfaced throughout *Creative Wellbeing's* implementation and should be considered when developing effective partnerships.

Set clear expectations between partners.

Partnerships are most effective when there is a common understanding and consensus between all parties. When collaborating with multiple organizations, agencies, or institutions, ensure there is a shared understanding of what is expected of each partner at the beginning of the engagement. This includes establishing a shared understanding of key constructs, project outcomes, and how each partner is expected to contribute along the way. If needed, consider using consensus-building activities with partners to confirm alignment across key areas. *Creative Wellbeing* put in place MOUs and contracts with partners at the onset of the project to clearly delineate some of these aspects.



Establish clear channels of communication.

To promote shared understanding among partners, have designated times for all partners to check in on a regular basis. These designated meetings will allow partners to reflect on the implementation process and adjust the initiative activities or approach as needed. For each meeting, use an agenda to guide the conversation and explicitly highlight the goals and objectives of the meeting. During these meetings, it is helpful to have a designated notetaker to track decisions and action items.



Leverage each partner's expertise and experiences.

In a trans-disciplinary partnership, each partner brings their own expertise and experience to the table. During the formative stages of initiative planning, draw on this expertise and experience to inform the design and implementation of initiative activities. For *Creative Wellbeing*, this meant adapting AHJN's existing programming to be delivered in a school-based setting with an added focus on mental health.



Have tough conversations early on. In order to promote transparency and collaboration, consider having partners engage in a *pre-mortem* discussion. A pre-mortem discussion is an opportunity to discuss all the challenges that the initiative could encounter and create a prevention plan to navigate around them. The benefit of a pre-mortem activity is that everyone has a voice in the discussion and is able to voice their concerns to the group early on. For the *Creative Wellbeing* initiative, this included a conversation about intellectual property and how artistic content could and could not be shared. For a meaningful partnership between funders and contractors or grantees, this can mean exploring relationships of power between institutions and, possibly, individuals. Lastly, engage partners in explicit conversations about cultural competency and implicit bias to establish a common understanding of how the project will address and promote equity through the design and implementation of activities. While conversations on challenging topics like these can be uncomfortable, open discussion of challenging topics promotes transparency and trust among partners.

Identify a champion. If working with large, complex organizations (including government agencies), navigating procedures and processes can be challenging for an external partner. When working with school districts, identify a person within the district who has some decision-making power and can shepherd the implementation along. This person can serve as a conduit between the implementation team(s) and the school district to ease any challenges and contribute to successful implementation. For *Creative Wellbeing*, the Pasadena Unified School District champion was critical for the successful implementation of *Creative Wellbeing* educator professional development sessions and the implementation of healing-informed arts activities at local congregate care sites.



Recruiting participants. When recruiting schools to participate in programming, be clear about the goals, timing, and benefits of participation. It may be helpful to create a handout that addresses these areas and can be easily communicated to district or school administrators. It may also be useful to provide a general support stipend in contracts with partner schools in order to cover costs such as teachers' professional development time, materials, or substitute teachers. This will reduce the burden on schools associated with initiative activities and allow programming to be responsive to schools' needs.



Promising Practices: General

Creative Wellbeing delivered healing-informed arts education activities through workshops of varying content and length with students, parents, and teachers. Across the various activities, promising practices emerged that can be applied across the different activities and populations. These promising practices should be considered when planning the sessions, delivering the sessions, and as a follow up to the sessions.

Planning the session

Culturally responsive programming.

Healing-Centered Arts Instruction is an approach to arts education aimed at the holistic restoration of an individual's well-being, recognizing the profound impact of trauma on individuals. This approach advances strengths-based care and moves away from deficit-based mental health models. It seeks to promote resilience and healing from traumatic experiences and environments, in culturally grounded contexts that view healing as the restoration of identity, shared experience, community and a sense of belonging. Ensure those who deliver and guide the programming are racially diverse and that content is culturally relevant. Programming is most effective when responsive and applicable to the needs of participants. If there are participants that speak a language other than English, consider including an interpreter or provide resources in multiple languages.

Lastly, be intentional about defining cultural-relevancy for each program activity. Cultural-relevancy should always be top of mind and included in the framing of each activity as it is an important aspect of the healing-informed framework.

For culturally-relevant education and arts education resources, see the last page of this document.



Timing of sessions. Try to limit each session to 60 to 90 minutes and build in short breaks so participants don't feel like they miss something if they step away. If possible, try experimenting with 30-minute sessions.



Technical assistance. If delivering programming through a virtual platform, consider offering technical assistance before or after sessions, and on an ongoing basis, to ensure participants can access the content, use the technology, and know how to engage in activities.



Offer a breadth of activities. Consider providing a variety of activities during sessions that vary in terms of length, complexity, and needed materials. To help transition into different activities, try to incorporate transitional activities like stretching or breathing exercises. Additionally, include breaks or activities when participants can turn off their screens for a period of time. If hosting a series of sessions with the same participants, offer activities or prompts that participants can do on their own in between sessions.



Create a safe space to engage.

Purposely design sessions to take a graduated approach to engagement. The first activity should be easy and light. The next activity should require a bit more engagement and the final activity should require critical thinking and reflection. This graduated design builds safety and trust among participants in a strategic and mindful way.



Orient participants to the sessions. Consider hosting orientation sessions with participants to explain the purpose of the activities (e.g., workshops, session), how the content will be delivered, and who will deliver the programming. This is helpful for communicating the intent of the programming and builds trust between facilitators and participants. If an orientation session is not feasible, provide participants with a handout that explains the purpose and goals of the workshops, how to sign up, and the background of the facilitators.

Send participants the materials

beforehand. Before the session begins, make sure to send the participants the needed materials for the session (e.g., technology links, workbook, and agenda). If possible, mail the participants the needed materials along with a snack or another small token of appreciation. Consider providing wrapped items that you can all unwrap and use together during the session.



Communicate, communicate, communicate. It is critical for facilitators to communicate their plan and approach with fellow co-facilitators to ensure a seamless delivery. Before the session, facilitators should meet to plan the sessions together, establish roles, rehearse the sessions and technology, and make adjustments to the material as needed.



During the session

Break the ice with participants. At the beginning of the session have participants introduce themselves and respond to an icebreaker, a discussion question, or activity. One example is to ask participants “What’s on your mind?” This question allows participants to share any feelings or tensions that may inhibit them from fully participating in the session. This intentional transition activity will ease participants into the session and build trust with the group. If using an online platform, consider posting a question in the chat box that participants respond to.



Encourage active participation.

Continuously pose questions to participants, encourage participants to share, and incorporate interactive activities into sessions that everyone can participate in. Many of the *Creative Wellbeing* sessions followed the scaffolding model (i.e., [I Do WE Do YOU Do](#)), where instructors 1) explain the activity; 2) provide tips or suggestions to help participants learn; 3) demonstrate the activity; 4) provide time for participants to do the activity; 5) lead a reflection on the successes and challenges of the activity. In addition, to accommodate participants’ different learning styles, the *Creative Wellbeing* sessions provided various modes of activities (verbal, chat, drawings, and writing). This allowed for participants to be engaged in different ways throughout the session.

Leverage Zoom functionality. If using Zoom or another online platform, incorporate the many functions (breakout rooms, whiteboard, etc.) into the session to create an in-person like atmosphere. The functions, especially the breakout rooms, are great for facilitating discussions and promote networking among participants. If possible, include a facilitator in each breakout room to guide and monitor the discussion. With the chat feature, you can ask participants to respond to questions in the chat at various points throughout the session. We recommend having a different person who is not actively leading the session to monitor and engage in the chat.



Set participants up for success. In the beginning of each session share the agenda so participants know what to expect during the session. If needed, send preparation materials to participants beforehand. At the beginning of the session, review housekeeping rules associated with the virtual platform, such as video on/off parameters and muting/unmuting. As participants join the session or during individual activities, consider playing soft music to immerse participants into the session or activity.



Start with community agreements. To connect people together, establish community agreements at the beginning of a session. The community agreements will frame how participants and facilitators expect to interact with each other during the session. Community agreements foster trust among the group and lay the foundation for a safe space to engage in the activities. To incorporate participants more in the process, the facilitator can set-up a shared document for participants to add their own community agreements in real-time.



Check out with participants. Especially in a virtual engagement world, it is important to “check out” with participants to assist in closure and transition from the session into the rest of the day. Checking out with participants wraps up a session and creates space for participants to mentally shift to their next task. Examples of check out questions used in *Creative Wellbeing* include: “What is one thing you liked/learned/loved about today’s session?” “What is one thing you learned in today’s session that you will take and implement with your students?”



Ask for ongoing feedback. Throughout the session and during check out, pose reflective questions to participants about the content such as: “What did you like about the session/activity?” “What could have been done differently?” This will help build trust between the participants and instructor. In addition, it helps to gauge what the participants are enjoying and not enjoying about the session in real-time. To gather feedback, you can also incorporate polls or open-ended questions for participants answer in the chat box during the session. If the group is large, it may be helpful to have participants to debrief in smaller groups.



After the session

Facilitator debrief. In addition to facilitators meeting before the session, we also recommend that they host a debrief session at the end of an activity or session to explore the successes and challenges of a session and how to make adjustments in the future.



Participant feedback. Though it can be challenging to collect data from participants after the session has ended, we encourage using a survey to capture participants’ feedback. Consider carving out time at the end of the session to have participants complete a survey. If using Zoom, paste the survey link in the chat box at the end of the session. We also recommend following up with participants after the session to encourage survey participation.



Resource sharing. If not provided during the session, consider sending participants resources discussed during the session or resources that complement the session content. In addition to the resources, it is helpful for participants to have all of the session’s materials (e.g., agenda, slide deck, video link, and survey) in one place. If agendas are sent via email, the agendas can include hyperlinks to resources and activities.



Promising Practices: Youth & Families

In addition to universal promising practices, it is critical to consider the needs of your specific participant populations and tailor the implementation approach to resonate with them. For *Creative Wellbeing*, this was essential for the youth and family programming. The following promising practices highlight how to best deliver engaging healing-informed arts education activities in a virtual environment to youth and families, based on *Creative Wellbeing* experiences.

Facilitator wellbeing. Activity facilitators are a key vehicle for delivering effective healing-informed arts education instruction. It is critical that the adult facilitators engage in self-care and ground themselves before each session they lead so that they are better able to provide supportive and non-judgmental responses/encouragement to young people, in a trauma-informed and healing-informed manner.

Give youth time to adjust to the virtual delivery format.

It may take awhile for youth to adjust to the virtual learning format, especially platforms like Zoom. Interacting online involves more focus and additional time to process non-verbal cues, compared to in-person interactions. During sessions, instructors can encourage youth to turn on their cameras to promote participation and engagement.



Provide youth with opportunities to connect with instructors.

Adults can provide youth with support and guidance, especially during stressful times. In order to build connection with youth, instructors can incorporate one-on-one conversations outside the sessions to build rapport and trust in a safe place.



Keep activities simple. Since youth tend to have a shorter attention span compared to adults, you will need to simplify activities and exercises in a virtual environment. When explaining activities to youth make sure to quickly get to the purpose. It is also important to have patience with youth when working on a new activity. Consider introducing simple concepts first and work to scaffold more complexity over time.



Meet families where they are.

Due to competing priorities, families may have a difficult time engaging in arts education programs. Consider working directly with school districts to ask caregivers what they need and the best way to deliver the content (e.g., virtual vs in person). Another option is to build family programming into existing activities such as back to school night or PTA meetings, even when those events are online. Lastly, it is important to understand that children will likely be present during sessions for parents. Therefore programming that engages the whole family can be more effective than programming only for parents.

Engage the caregivers of younger students. For caregivers to have a better sense of the programs their children are participating in, instructors may consider hosting an introductory session to orient them to the programming/technology and discuss how they can help their children participate. In addition to the introductory session, if the sessions allow, incorporate activities that caregivers can participate in.

Provide self-care strategies for youth. Art can be an escape for youth during stressful times. During the sessions make sure that youth are able to focus on a new activity that can challenge them. Additionally, provide youth with self-care strategies during sessions that can be easily used outside the session, such as breathing or meditation.

Consider affinity groups for families.

Families may have different needs and goals for the sessions. To provide additional support for different types of households (e.g., single parent families, extended families, bilingual families, same-sex parent families, adoptive/foster families), sessions can be strategically geared towards specific contexts where families can share their experiences and offer advice to other participants.



Encourage youth to collaborate with each other.

Healing-informed arts activities present opportunities for youth to work together and connect during the sessions. Examples of group activities include games, discussions, or a team project. This opportunity to connect will help youth build protective factors through increased confidence, reasoning skills, and networking opportunities – all critical for healthy social emotional development.



Promising Practices: Educators

Lastly, *Creative Wellbeing* engaged educators in healing-informed arts education activities as a first step toward establishing school cultures grounded in healing-informed care and as a mechanism to address the social and emotional needs of young people. The following highlight promising practices specific to educators that promote educator participation in healing-informed arts activities and assist in the transfer of learning of activities to the classroom..

Allow time for questions.

For professional development or capacity building sessions for educators, leave space for questions and discussion about how to apply what they learn in their classrooms with their students.



Debrief activities with educators. Following healing-informed art activities, facilitators can promote integration of learning by taking a moment to debrief the activity with educators. This time allows educators to explore how the activity made them feel and have a discussion about how it can be incorporated into their existing curriculum. It's important that facilitators be prepared to offer alternative ways the activity could be adjusted to different populations such as various age groups, languages, and contexts.



Build on first-hand experience. The *Creative Wellbeing* sessions included activities that could be beneficial for both educators and young people. By experiencing and recognizing one's emotional response to the art activities, educators can better incorporate the activities into their classroom – in a healing-informed way. Recognizing one's own emotional response is an important part of healing and, over time, may help educators recognize implicit biases and develop a deeper understanding about how implicit biases may shape their response. This process also allows for personal reflection and transformation.

Incentivize educator participation. Teachers may find it hard to participate in arts programming that is beyond their typical requirements due to the many other competing priorities and responsibilities. To promote participation consider offering healing-informed arts education initiative activities as paid professional development opportunities or incorporate the programming into existing professional development options.



Provide a forum for educators to network.

Both during and following sessions, provide educators the opportunity to network with each other. Creating a network of support is critical for the transfer of learning and increases the likelihood that the strategies learned are retained and implemented, rather than forgotten about or deprioritized.



Culturally-Relevant Education and Arts Education Resources

Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom: A Resource Guide for Educators

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/addressing_race_and_trauma_in_the_classroom_educators.pdf

American Enterprise Institute: How social and emotional learning can succeed

<https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/how-social-and-emotional-learning-can-succeed/>

Avoiding Racial Equity Detours

<http://www.edchange.org/publications/Avoiding-Racial-Equity-Detours-Gorski.pdf>

CA Department of Education: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ee/culturallsustainingped.asp>

CASEL: SEL as a lever for equity and excellence

<https://casel.org/lever-for-equity/>

CASEL: Towards Transformative Social Emotional Learning-Using an Equity Lens

https://measuringSEL.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Framework_EquitySummary-.pdf

Common Beliefs Survey: Teaching Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students

<https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/common-beliefs-survey-teaching-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-students/>

Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/critical-practices-for-antibias-education>

Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Arts Teaching and Learning in Action Strategies that Increase Student Engagement and Achievement

https://ccsesaarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CCSESA_CulturallyResp_18_Web_5_2_18.pdf

Flexibility, listening without judgment critical to support educators of color

<https://www.educationdive.com/news/flexibility-listening-without-judgment-critical-to-support-educators-of-co/579181/>

Focal Students: Equity in the Classroom Webinar - December 19, 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vu7yXUvMoqc&feature=youtu.be>

George Floyd, Racism and Law Enforcement (in English and en Español)

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/george-floyd-racism-and-law-enforcement-in-english-and-en>

If we aren't addressing racism, we aren't addressing trauma

<https://inservice.ascd.org/if-we-arent-addressing-racism-we-arent-addressing-trauma/>

KQED/Mindshift: How to Develop Culturally Responsive Teaching for Distance Learning

<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/55941/how-to-develop-culturally-responsive-teaching-for-distance-learning?fbclid=IwAR3DaFlueatPn7akzkkRx94N4akc2KbFHF7wNLNpv0j2nz8BbSvdmyjdSsY>

Leading through the Portal to Claim our Humanity

<https://medium.com/national-equity-project/leading-through-the-portal-to-claim-our-humanity-bf33490ef76c>

Making Families Feel Welcome

https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/making-families-feel-welcome/#tab__1

Mindful Reflection Process for Developing Culturally Responsive Practices

<https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/mindful-reflection-process-for-developing-culturally-responsive-practices/>

Reunite, Renew and Thrive: SEL Roadmap for Reopening School

<https://casel.org/reopening-with-sel/>

SEL Discussion Series for Parents and Caregivers

<https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/sel-discussion-series-for-parents-and-caregivers-english/>

Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine Mental Health Resources For Adolescents and Young Adults

<https://www.adolescenthealth.org/Resources/Clinical-Care-Resources/Mental-Health/Mental-Health-Resources-For-Adolesc.aspx>

Culturally-Relevant Education and Arts Education Resources

Strategies for Teaching Fearless SEL for Societal Change

<https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/strategies-for-teaching-fearless-sel-for-societal-change/>

Teaching Tolerance: Culturally Sensitive Communication

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/critical-practices-for-antibias-education/family-and-community-engagement>

The Aspen Institute: Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A Call to Action

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/pursuing-social-and-emotional-development-through-a-racial-equity-lens-a-call-to-action/>

Turnaround for Children: Stress and the Brain

https://turnaroundusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Stress-and-the-Brain_Turnaround-for-Children-032420.pdf

Youth Participatory Action Research YPAR Hub

<http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/>