

NON-EVALUATIVE ARTS EXPERIENCES: CREATIVITY, CARE, AND CONNECTION FOR MENTAL HEALTH



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We can all benefit from the joy and connection promoted through creating and telling our stories in community through the arts. Non-evaluative, process-focused arts activities can be incorporated in any classroom, during afterschool activities, and guided by any educator, administrator, or staff member that works with students, if done with intention.



Consider these recommendations when guiding an arts learning experience with students to promote relationship-building, cultural identity development, and mental health and well-being:

- Build rapport with students with a [circle](#) or sharing activity before creating together, or use these activities in groups that have already built a sense of trust. [Module 1 of Oregon Classroom WISE](#) is focused on creating safe and supportive learning environments and provides additional ideas and resources.
- Provide students with multiple avenues for self-expression that increase comfort and accessibility. For instance:
 - Consider providing options for students to choose workspaces and the materials, music, movement choice or props they utilize.
 - Provide open-ended prompts that incorporate students' experiences and interests.
 - Allow students to opt into or out of sharing their work with a partner or the group, and provide options for students to respond individually, through activities such as journal entries.
 - The UDL guidelines from CAST provide [strategies to optimize student choice and autonomy](#).

- Reflect throughout the process. Provide opportunities for solo, partner, small group, and large group reflection and relationship building to promote the progression of students' conceptual understanding of what they have created, and how it connects to their funds of knowledge, different aspects of their identity, and their learning journey, as well as their social development. Make certain that partner or group activities are invitational rather than required.
- It's important to normalize emotions. Consider using a [feelings wheel](#) to help students identify how they are feeling throughout the process of making art as well as the experience of responding to art.
- Observe and share what details you notice in students' work and share open-ended prompts to seek more information. Avoid value statements and judgments about student work. The UDL Guidelines from CAST provide [strategies for feedback that promotes effort and persistence in students](#).



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