



THE CREATIVE  
LEARNING  
PROJECT:

DEFINING THE  
NATIONAL GALLERY  
OF AUSTRALIA'S  
CREATIVE LEARNING  
APPROACH

# THE CREATIVE LEARNING PROJECT:

DEFINING THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA'S CREATIVE LEARNING APPROACH

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The National Gallery of Australia is proud to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples as the generational custodians of the land, waterways, and airways of Kamberri (Canberra). We thank the Ancestors, Elders and Community who have and continue to care for this Country.

As those who have a role in sharing the world's largest collection of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander art, we are grateful for the generosity and openness of artists in sharing stories and deep knowledge of their cultures. We are honoured to recognise the many Nations and language groups the artists belong to and understand the great privilege and responsibility of celebrating their works of art.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

→ This guide describes the outcomes of a collaborative 15-month research project between the University of Canberra (UC) and the National Gallery of Australia. Titled The Creative Learning Project it sought to co-create a tailored learning approach for the National Gallery underpinned by research.

A research team from the Faculty of Education at UC was contracted to drive the project to articulate, define and position the National Gallery's pedagogical approach in a national and international context.

The aim was to create a model that could be applied to the Gallery's education programs onsite, offsite and online. To achieve these aims the UC Research Team used co-design as a method to identify shared goals, develop guiding principles and

co-construct a pedagogical approach with the Gallery's Learning Team

*The Creative Learning Project* aligns with the aims of the National Cultural Policy (2023) and the key focus areas in the National Gallery's Corporate Plan: Collection, Connection, Distinct Identity and Capability (2024). *The Creative Learning Project* has resulted in the design and implementation of a new *Creative Learning Approach* for education programs at the Gallery.

LOOK OUT ↓  
FOR THESE  
COLOURED NOTES  
FOR QUOTES  
FROM THE  
ARTIST EDUCATORS

The National Gallery is Australia's leading visual arts institution in the nation's capital city, Canberra. The imposing brutalist building, designed by Col Madigan, opened in 1982. It is surrounded by sculpture gardens and parklands and is adjacent to the High Court of Australia and Lake Burley Griffin.

The National Gallery houses over 155,000 works, including the world's largest collection of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander art. The Gallery supports this collection with a dynamic program of exhibitions, national tours, and events that promote creative practice and lifelong learning across both physical and digital platforms.

The Gallery facilitates engagement with the National Collection and the arts to foster creative, confident and compassionate individuals who are equipped to contribute to reimagining and sustaining their communities and futures. These aspirations are clearly articulated on the Gallery's website:

“  
**Art is for all of us.**  
**It allows us to see**  
**the world in ways**  
**that expand our**  
**minds, provoke**  
**ideas, ignite our**  
**imagination.**  
**At the National**  
**Gallery we strive**  
**for cultural**  
**experiences that**  
**surprise, that**  
**disrupt convention,**  
**that deepen our**  
**understanding**  
**of the human**  
**condition and the**  
**world we live in.**”  
 National Gallery of Australia

In the Gallery, the Learning Team is responsible for developing and delivering programs for formal education audiences as well as informal learners, including children and families, young people, adults and people with access needs. Programs occur onsite, offsite and online. Each year, approximately 50,000 students engage in onsite learning experiences, with a large proportion attending through the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program. This initiative provides financial support, primarily for Years 5 and 6 students from around Australia to visit Canberra's national cultural institutions. Additional visits from people at all levels of education come from across the country. For many students, this may be their first and only visit to a major cultural institution.

Positive early encounters with art can shape students' perceptions of museums as inclusive, inspiring and welcoming spaces. The Gallery recognises that a meaningful visitor experience has the potential to foster

a lifelong connection to art and cultural engagement.

The National Gallery promotes learning that is exploratory, relational and deeply connected to creative inquiry. Its educational philosophy has been developed in line with contemporary arts pedagogy that has moved away from didactic models and direct engagement with representation. As museum educator Olga Hubard explains, genuine engagement with art involves cultivating attentiveness, openness and emotional responsiveness (2015). Similarly, philosopher John Armstrong distinguishes between providing information *about* a work of art and fostering opportunities for learners to develop a more personal, experiential *knowing* of the work (2000). These views underline, in a world where information and facts are widely available, the growing need for educational programs to connect with audiences in ways that are meaningful and context specific, and which seed lifelong engagement with the arts.

The Artist Educators delivering the Gallery's learning experiences come from a variety of creative arts practices including visual arts, music, drama and writing. They work at the intersection of pedagogy, creativity, cultural knowledge and public engagement. The skill set required of Artist Educators at the National Gallery is wide-ranging and they draw from multiple knowledge domains. As well as the visual arts and the creative arts more broadly, these include education, social engagement and cultural theory. They facilitate learning and foster inclusive, inquiry-led experiences that are responsive to the diverse needs of contemporary learners. Elizabeth Wood notes that effective museum educators are attuned to the individual needs of learners, their communities, and broader social realities (2023). To succeed at this, they need to be willing to embrace challenge, reflect critically on their practice, and remain committed to continuous improvement.

*The Creative Learning Project* emerged from the Gallery's desire to further develop its educational model to ensure it is responsive to its specific context: grounded in the cultural, geographic and social realities of Australia, and aligned with the distinctive character of the National Collection. *The Creative Learning Project* has built a cohesive, pedagogical approach that reflects the context of the Gallery within the Southern Hemisphere and responds meaningfully to local learners, communities and histories.

The National Gallery programs support audiences to develop meaningful connections with artworks through collective meaning-making (Hubard, 2015). Learners draw on their prior knowledge and lived experience, integrating new insights through direct engagement with art and the National Collection.

Curious

Resource

a

I am

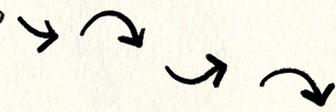
I am

a bridge

This guide

describes the involved processes and exciting outcomes that have led to the Gallery's tailored approach to learning and the development of a framework for designing and implementing a

Creative Learning Approach.



I am ...

present  
connector  
open

We are our best when we're

**HUMAN!**

when the learning lights US  
up, we

**CONNECT,**

we,

**RESPOND**

## 2. EXISTING LEARNING CONTEXT at the National Gallery

The Gallery's existing educational programs offer a wide range of **onsite, offsite and online** delivery designed for teachers, students and the public. These programs engage with First Nations, Australian and international art in the National Collection. The Learning Team and Artist Educators use the collection to create opportunities for the **co-construction of knowledge** through participatory, inquiry-led experiences. This approach positions learners as active meaning-makers and promotes **critical thinking, creativity and reflective practice.**

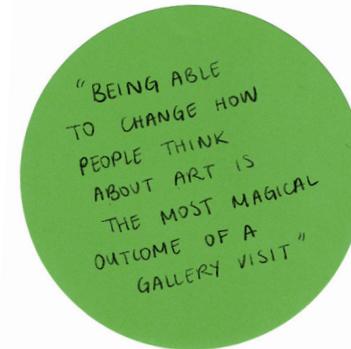
Since the Gallery first opened in 1982 there have been many significant changes in Australian culture, as well as evolving education frameworks and technologies. Combined, these developments create new and complex challenges for educators (Gannon et al, 2024). In particular, audiences can no longer be understood in general terms.

Visitor and student demographics are vastly different from the 1980s. Today, one in four school students speaks English as an additional language, trauma-affected backgrounds are more prevalent, and there is growing recognition and understanding of neurodiversity (ACARA, *Planning for Student Diversity*, nd).

The Covid lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 were extensive in Australia and had a significant impact on students and how they learn. Over the last decade, the value and necessity of meaningful engagement with Indigenous knowledges and culture has been belatedly recognised. The decolonisation of the curriculum and curatorial practices around First Nations art has had a profound impact on how art is taught and learned (McPherson and Onus, 2024; Andersen, nd). Galleries and museums have responded by committing to exhibitions and teaching strategies that are culturally responsive, respectful and grounded in genuine engagement with First Nations perspectives and peoples. This has required moving away from tokenistic inclusion or representation and toward practices that centre relationality, storytelling and connection to Country, concepts that are central to First Nations ways of knowing and being.

More than 10,000 students engage with the Gallery each year via online programs and offsite activities. These programs create a bridge that connects the gallery to the classroom (Coleman, 2011) to create active cultural spaces. By expanding the Gallery's reach to students and teachers in their own teaching spaces these programs ensure that geographical distance is not a barrier, and the collection is nationally accessible.

*Sharing the National Collection* is an offsite program that brings original works to regional Australia, accompanied by tailored education programs for local schools and communities. Online experiences and digital learning programs are structured to engage students and teachers in inclusive encounters that value dialogue, creative encounters and shared inquiry. In some cases, online programming even provides experiences that are not available in person—such as zooming in for closer



views or going behind the scenes to storage and conservation areas and artists' studios. These programs are designed to support diverse ways of learning and cultural perspectives, ensuring that the National Collection is accessible and resonant for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

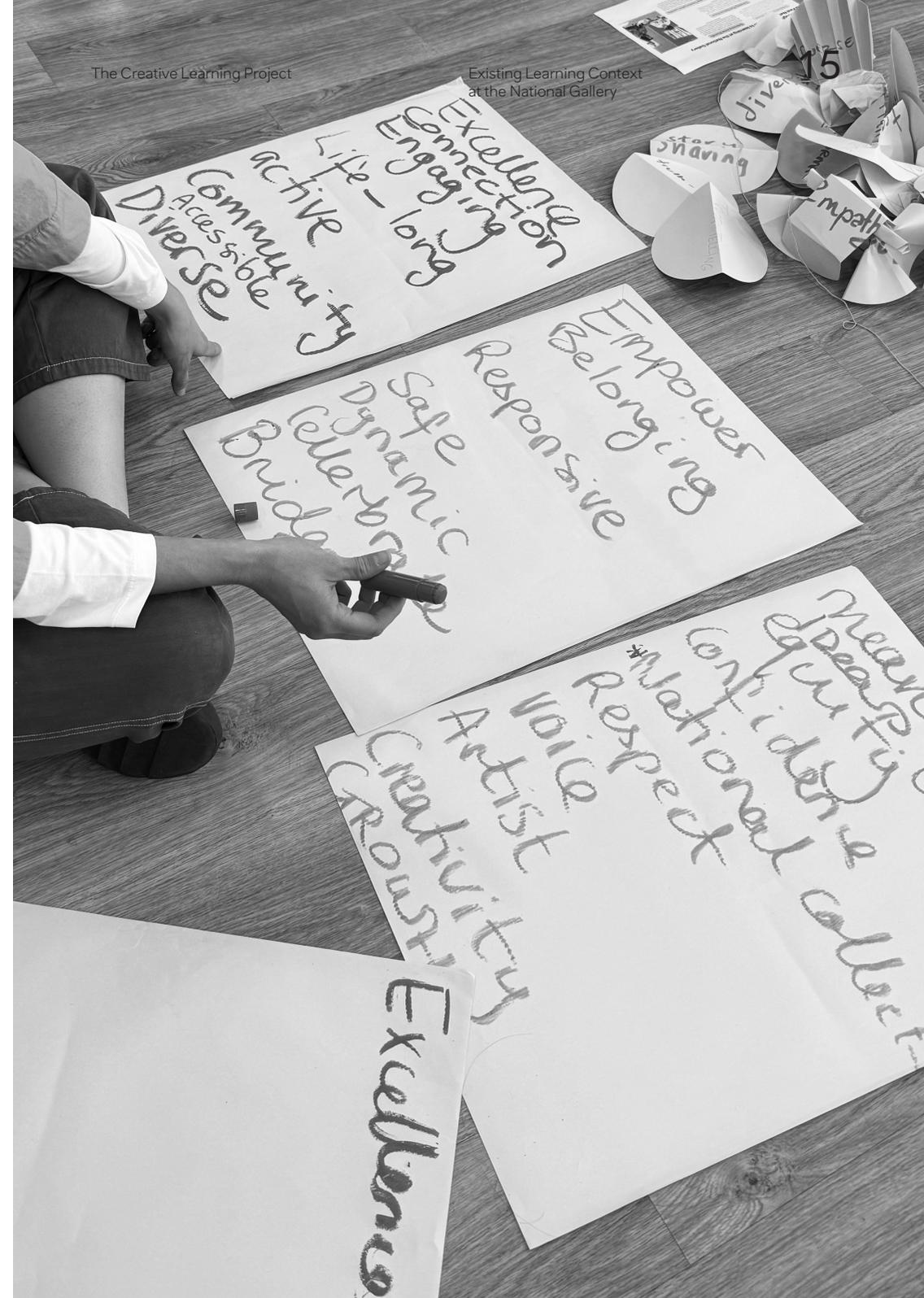
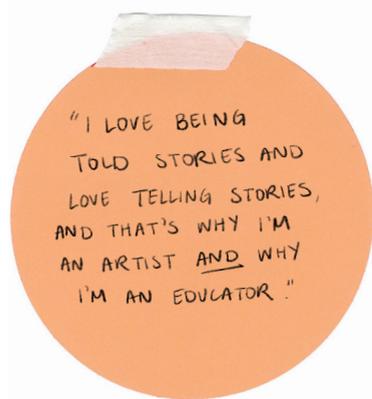
Learner experiences with and in the Gallery align with the aims of the Australian Curriculum. The Curriculum strongly endorses engagement with the arts and maintains that fostering cross-curricular connections deepens understandings of self, others, and the world—both real and imagined. It recognises that visual arts are uniquely able to shape ways of knowing, doing and being:

“ **Visual arts processes and practices provide insights into the impacts culture can have on ways of knowing, doing and being in Australia and the world. Investigating these impacts is integral for fostering students' ability to discern and understand the unique ways visual arts practice and process can be both related and distinct to learning about culture** (ACARA).

**Within this context, the role of Artist Educators in a gallery setting is complex, multidimensional and increasingly professionalised in response to growing educational and cultural expectations.**

Emily Pringle's research (2009) on the role of Artist Educators offers a useful model. Her framework titled *Meaning Making in the Gallery* reveals how the relationship between artistic practice and pedagogy shapes a distinctive mode of engagement that positions artists, learners, artworks and institutions in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship.

Diversity within the cohort of Artist Educators is essential as it brings a range of knowledges, experiences and perspectives as well as supporting inclusive pedagogies and reflecting student diversity. (*Disability Inclusion Action Plan, 2022; Gender Equity Action Plan, 2021*). Recognising this, the Gallery has actively engaged Artist Educators who can bring creative, cultural, and socially engaged practices to the role.



ARTIST EDUCATORS are ...

- acknowledge + honour with INHERIT the uncomfortable moments and hold that transformative space
- WELLNESS requires safety and accessibility.
- A student centred approach to strategies, building connections, moving through tempos, modes of learning responsibly. Empowering choices, listening to students needs and becoming bridges for an expansive learning.

BANK

- uncomfortable complicated
- new connected myself
- relaxed open
- interested knowledgable
- calm
- bring

I AM:

CURIOUS  
HUMAN  
AWARE

ARTIST EDUCATORS ARE:

FUN  
A BIT BORING  
INTERESTING  
STORYTELLERS  
CALMING

Artist educators are welcoming, inspiring, knowledgeable with activities & infrastructure about the activities.

ARTIST EDUCATORS ARE:

• knowledgable  
• curious  
• human  
• aware  
• fun  
• a bit boring  
• interesting  
• storytellers  
• calming

uncomfortable → acknowledge + honour in intern.

new → accessibility safety → complicated

connected → student centred myself → open

strategies → modes → knowledgable

tempo → relevance, questioning, self directed

interested → bridge, student's thinking, choice

explain → needs, pace, slowness

calm → Artist educators → boring

freedom → choices, open-ended, unlimited

Am I fostering collaboration so that students see the value in it?

more aware

Our practice is about understanding and collaboration at the core.

UNCOMFORTABLE

How can I be more transparent in my intentions while I maintain space for awe wonder surprise the unexpected

I am open,  
I am a listener  
I am curious

I am  
I imagine  
passionate  
curious.

We are passionate  
resonant and  
understanding  
creativity  
connecting as  
bridge or  
connection  
between art  
and the individual

Imaginative  
useful  
in the way  
we communicate  
define of experience

I am a bridge  
I am creative  
I am a collaborator

Human - Aware - passionate

We are passionate about being creative, long we are passionate about the importance of collaboration, we become a bridge.



Artist driven of in go



## ART THROUGH CULTURE

In the last several years the National Gallery has made a globally significant contribution to the way institutions engage staff and audiences with First Nations art. The Gallery's Art Through Culture principles align with the Australian Curriculum and provide a culturally proactive framework for engaging meaningfully with First Nations works of art. The development and implementation of the *Art Through Culture* principles have international influence, contributing to global conversations on ethical, inclusive and culturally respectful education practices.

Educators in schools and museums across Australia and many other countries are reflecting critically on how they have presented, interpreted and discussed First Nations art and cultures in the past, and their shortcomings in this area. This work has become increasingly urgent as scholars, artists and educators have made clear the necessity of a

decolonial framing in teaching about art made by both First Nations and non First Nations artists (Vandervliet and Uduma, 2023; Keenlyside, 2022; MacDonald, 2023; Corbet, 2024). As a result, institutions are beginning to address colonial histories and institutional biases and recognising and honouring the depth and diversity of First Nations knowledges.

For the National Gallery of Australia, there was a clear responsibility to demonstrate leadership and best practice in this area. The Gallery identified the need for a First Nations-led approach to guide Gallery visitors and educators to respectfully and appropriately engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art in the National Collection. The *Art Through Culture* principles were established through a First Nations-led research project, started in 2020 by former National Gallery staff members Krystal Hurst, Worimi people and Shane Nelson, Wiradjuri/Walgalu/Gumbaynggirr peoples and originally called *Art Ways* (Hurst, 2022).

Since 2021 the principles have been further developed by Lead First Nations Artist Educator Maggie Douglas, Kabi Kabi people and First Nations Learning Facilitator Noah Watson, Butchulla and Kuku-Yalanji peoples. The project was renamed *Art Through Culture* to emphasise

that audiences need to learn about the artists' culture to appreciate and understand First Nations art. (Douglas et al, 2024).

A key aspect of *Art Through Culture* is the rejection of colonial interpretations of First Nations art (MacDonald, 2023; Tolia-Kelly and Raymond, 2020). It resists extractive readings and instead invites considered, respectful and situated engagement. Rather than applying external frameworks, the principles embed First Nations ontologies and ways of being through the art itself. The Artist Educators centre the artist's intention behind the work by starting with the artist's own voice, using prompts such as written quotes, video interviews and photos. They then create a line of inquiry connecting with the students' own knowledges through creative experiences that prevent cultural appropriation.

## ART THROUGH CULTURE

### OUTLINES **(FIVE)** KEY PRINCIPLES:

#### - CENTRING FIRST NATIONS VOICES

We prioritise artist voices and intention in all aspects of our programs, shaping our delivery through their perspectives. We elevate the voices of First Nations curators, educators and communities to centre agency, strengthen representation and create understanding of valuable diverse perspectives.

#### - CELEBRATING LIVING CULTURES

We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as dynamic cultures. When programming, we specify artists, their Country and their practice in order to avoid generalisations. We collaborate with artistic and educational communities to foster deeper learning and understanding of culture.

#### - EMBRACING ARTIST DIVERSITY

We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as diverse and distinct, challenging stereotypes of what First Nations art is. Our programs elevate artists from across the continent, considering the importance of all practices, identities and themes.

#### - INSPIRING MEMORABLE MOMENTS

We foster moments of connection through story-sharing, reflection and innovative learning techniques in a safe environment. Audiences reflect on personal experiences, avoiding cultural appropriation by engaging their own senses and creating impactful experiences.

#### - SHAPING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

We elevate voices that challenge assumptions, build empathy and transform Western ways of thinking. We reshape misrepresentations of First Nations art, cultures, and history through meaningful learning experiences founded in truth-telling to disarm harmful and insensitive perspectives.

The principles of *Art Through Culture* are now positioned as central to all education and public programs at the Gallery. All Learning Team staff have been trained in the *Art Through Culture* approach and use it holistically. The *Art Through Culture* Terminology Guide

ensures best practice in all Learning programs. The process demonstrates how embedding First Nations knowledge systems and people into institutional practice can transform cultural learning and representation, both in Australia and globally (*Art Through Culture*, nd).



### 3. A CONTEXT-SPECIFIC APPROACH

*The Creative Learning Project* was initiated in response to a need to bring consistency and clarity to teaching and learning across the School Education Programs at the Gallery. The Learning Team had identified that its department's vision and approaches were not clearly defined and that this resulted in **inconsistencies across its various programs.**

Preliminary research demonstrated the value of employing participatory, inquiry-based and performative approaches to learning in art museums and galleries (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Pringle, 2019; Kai-Kee, 2020; Wood, 2023). It also confirmed that it would not be possible to import an existing approach from another institution. The initial survey of museum education practices across Australia and internationally revealed that a wide range of well-established approaches are in use. These include Object-Based Learning (Chatterjee,

2011), Visual Thinking Strategies (Housen and Yenawine, 2000), Slow Looking (Bown, 2020; Tishman, 2017), Activity-Based Learning (Kai-Kee et al, 2020), Harvard's Project Zero thinking routines (Howard, 1970) and Inquiry Learning (Dewey, 1934; Murdoch, 2015). Many of these strategies originate in the Northern Hemisphere, particularly Europe and North America, where museum education has historically been more formalised and widely recognised (Hein, 2002; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; Swigger, 2022).



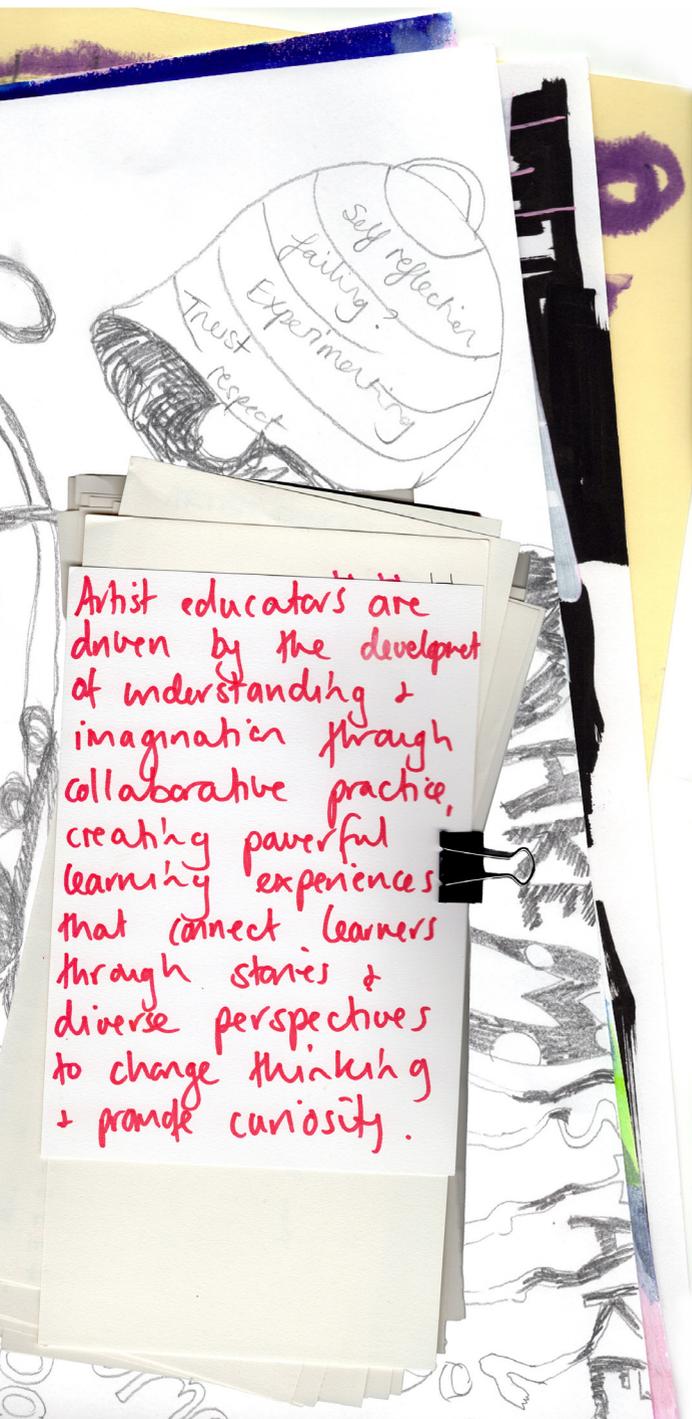
The Learning Team also identified the importance of understanding that the context of the gallery is different from the classroom and the new pedagogical approach would need to reflect these distinctions (Griffin and Paroissien, 2011). Unlike traditional classroom environments, galleries provide rich, multisensory experiences that invite open-ended inquiry and creative response. Creativity and art practices are central to the Gallery's existence so it was essential that any learning approach engage specifically with these processes. Engaging through creative learning offers insight into how meaning is constructed, challenged and reimagined by artists, and fosters deeper connections with the artworks and with broader cultural, historical and social ideas.

Another key consideration was to reach under-represented communities and to further remove

any barriers to participation with the Gallery and its programs. The Learning Team was also committed to ensuring that a wide range of voices, perspectives and experiences were reflected and valued in both content and delivery, onsite, offsite and online. In all these areas the idea that knowledge is not only transmitted but also generated in, and through, experience needed to be holistically addressed.

Learning from the experience of developing and implementing the *Art Through Culture* principles, the Team decided that a tailored approach was required. A new approach needed to be intentionally framed, clearly communicated, and thoughtfully and collaboratively developed. Most importantly it needed to be specific to the context, requirements and values of the Gallery.





#### 4. FACILITATING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The Creative Learning Project was initiated by the Learning Team at the Gallery in conjunction with the Research Team from the University of Canberra. Together, they embarked on a 15-month collaborative project that eschewed traditional top-down models of educational development to offer an inclusive and context-responsive framework for learning in the Gallery called the Creative Learning Approach (see section 8).

Developing the approach collectively ensured that it reflected a broad range of perspectives, experiences and expertise. Consequently, all stages of the project involved the many representatives from the National Gallery Learning Team including both Artist Educators and senior managers from the Learning Team.

The UC Research Team adopted a mixed-methods approach with data collection occurring throughout the project and conducted a comprehensive analysis of the data using coding and thematic analysis to gain insights into teaching and learning practices.



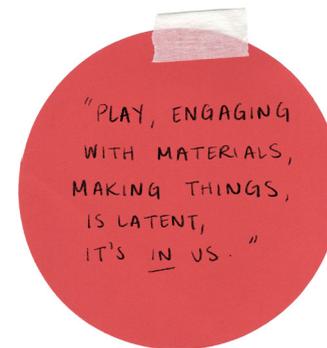
↘ ↙  
**The project was structured around a sequence of six co-designed workshops in which the participants worked together to generate knowledge through applied practice. The workshops included shared readings, group discussions, individual and collaborative artmaking, and the iterative development and testing of the Creative Learning Strategies (see section 7).**

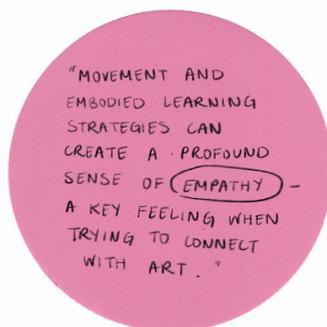
Through the workshops, the Learning Team explored alternatives to traditional lecture-based formats, didactic methods and generic creative responses such as drawing the artworks.

The *Creative Learning Project* employed a collaborative,

mixed-methods approach grounded in participatory and relational research methodologies through interviews, surveys and participant-led inquiry. The workshops were a form of Action Research, a collaborative, context-specific process aimed at improving educational practice through cycles of action, evaluation and reflection (Clark et al, 2020). Rooted in problem-solving, the process supported iterative change by allowing for ongoing revision and refinement.

The design of the workshops aligned with co-design methodologies, actively involving members of the Learning Team who brought expertise from both their creative practices and their program delivery experience. The ongoing data collection aimed to ensure the framework was grounded in lived experience and collaboratively authored. It sought to capture perspectives on current teaching practices, identify areas for development, and generate critical insights into the pedagogical needs and aspirations of the Learning Team.





The six day-long workshops were designed to be both professional development for the Learning Team and platforms for generating meaningful insights and data to inform the broader pedagogical approach. The themes of each workshop were carefully developed through a combination of early observational research and semi-structured interviews with the Learning Team. Introducing key readings before and during each workshop built a community of practice to support the development of an evidenced-based pedagogical framework.

In the workshops the Learning Team engaged with creative and collaborative techniques to guide insights that were strengthened and contextualised by scholarly research and reflection. The workshops built capacity to collaborate and fostered shared understandings and aims within the team. Importantly, they also generated tangible evidence that

could inform the project's broader pedagogical framework.

In addition to the workshops, the project design included a series of practice-based 'campaigns' in which members of the Learning Team tested the emerging pedagogical strategies in real-time. This approach to knowledge creation is described by Pringle: 'In my experience, creating open, generative, questioning environments where practitioners are empowered to ask questions explicitly, explore these through a process of enquiry and make the knowledge created through this process visible, creates a culture of possibility' (2019). This framing was supported through open, exploratory methods and reflective practices, contextualised by a shared community of practice and a series of readings that grounded each stage of the program.





## 5. DEFINING THE VISION

A guiding ambition of *The Creative Learning Project* has been to define an overarching vision for the Gallery's education and public programs. The Learning Team, which delivers both formal and informal learning, aspired to engage with the National Collection in ways that cultivate an inclusive and creative culture.

This aim is embedded in the Gallery's institutional practices and aligns with the broader strategic direction outlined in the Gallery's Corporate Plan. It also aligns closely with the Australian Curriculum's focus on social and environmental justice, as expressed through the cross-curriculum priorities, particularly Sustainability and the general capabilities of Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding. Through this integrated approach, the Gallery affirms its role as a civic institution committed to shaping a more just and inclusive future.

It was also important to the Learning Team that the Gallery was perceived as a site for cultivating empathy, curiosity and connection. The Team believes that by providing opportunities for audiences to engage with diverse art, artists, cultures, stories and ideas, the learning experiences can foster recognition of shared values and experiences. In its Corporate Plan the Gallery articulates its values including 'We are kind and inclusive, seeking diversity and prioritising access and safety' (National Gallery of Australia, 2024).

These larger concerns were embedded throughout the workshop series. In the final session the participants engaged with a range of key documents including the *National Cultural Policy* (Australian Government, 2023), the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019), the *National Gallery Corporate Plan* (2024), *The Commitments of the Learning Team* (see section 6), and the *Art Through Culture* principles (see section 2).

The National Gallery's Corporate Plan, in line with the National Cultural Policy, reflects the growing responsibility of public institutions to promote diversity, inclusion, environmental sustainability and ethical decision-making. Through critical engagement with these documents, the workshop participants worked to ensure alignment between their Vision statement and the national educational priorities, institutional values and First Nations protocols.

This alignment enhances the strategic coherence of the Gallery's education initiatives and affirms its commitment to fostering inclusive, creative and culturally respectful learning environments.

The resulting Vision statement guides the Learning Team in their engagement with students and people of all ages:



## THE VISION:

**We connect audiences with the National Collection to celebrate creative practice and provide opportunities to engage with art, artists, stories and ideas. We foster joy and creativity. We deepen understanding of ourselves, others and our world. We promote our responsibility to act with care and kindness for a sustainable and inclusive future.**



## 6. THE COMMITMENTS

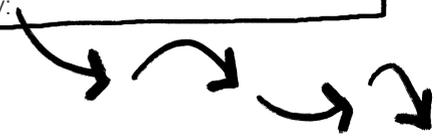
The evident impact of *Art Through Culture*, both on students and Artist Educators, led to the development of a **set of framing principles**. The Learning Team, whose work encompasses both formal and informal learning, had earlier begun to articulate a series of departmental commitments that sought to **guide their work** and the **audience experience**.

These commitments complemented the *Art Through Culture* principles (see section 2) which have been a major driver in changing the Gallery's pedagogical approach.

*The Creative Learning Project* created an opportunity to further develop and firmly position these commitments within the Gallery's programs.

However, the ideas behind the commitments and how they function as thematic scaffolding for programming in the Gallery had not been fully developed.

Through this project the Learning Team has developed and resolved *The Commitments* into a fully articulated set of principles that can sit alongside *Art Through Culture* and guide all learning programs in the Gallery:



## THE COMMITMENTS

### WE CENTRE RELATIONSHIPS:

- We understand relationships as a foundation for learning—working to build connection, community and belonging through respect, trust and understanding.
- We are committed to collaborative practice.
- We make decisions based on our capacity to sustain and give time to relationships.

### WE MEET LEARNERS WHERE THEY ARE AT:

- We welcome learners to be their authentic selves and are responsive to their needs.
- We work to understand and learn from the communities we are engaging with.
- We offer multiple entry points and platforms for audiences across Australia.

### WE FACILITATE MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES:

- We engage with diverse artists and works of art.
- We aim to foster safe, open, inclusive and accessible experiences.
- We facilitate opportunities to share and connect.

### WE RESPECT AGENCY:

- We give clear information, structure and options for learners to make informed choices.
- We provide the conditions to empower learners to participate and inquire.
- We have program frameworks to allow staff to make choices in their delivery.

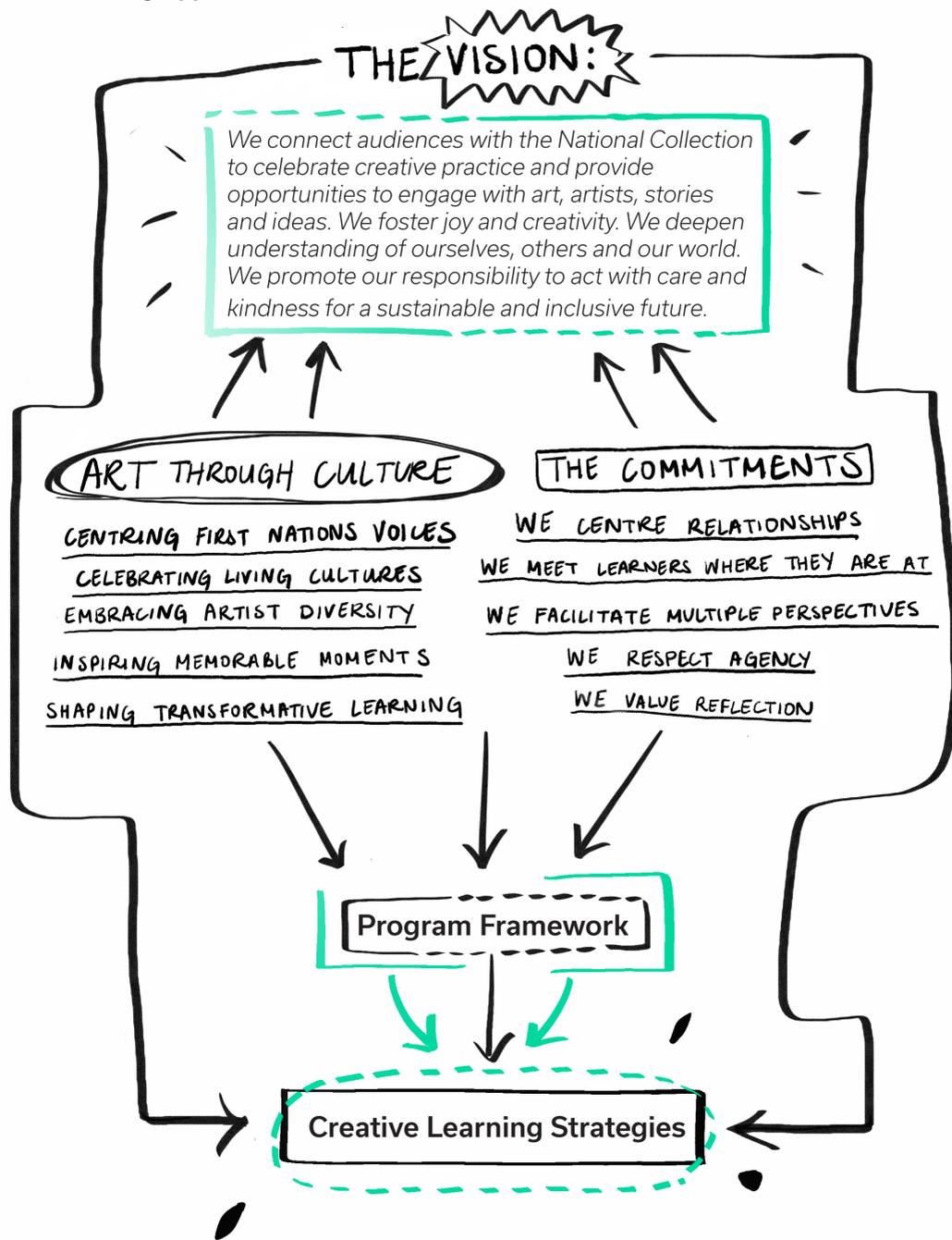
### WE VALUE REFLECTION:

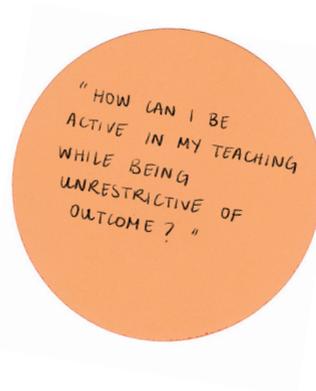
- We are disciplined about reflection.
- We reflect in programs to encourage deep thinking, embed our learning and make it visible.
- We work with a growth mindset in a community of practice to remain responsive, present and aware.

**The Commitments articulate shared values and intentions for inclusive, creative and audience-responsive programming. They provide a framework for all learning experiences, programs and activities developed by the Learning Team.**



Diagram: The Creative Learning Approach





## 7. THE CREATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

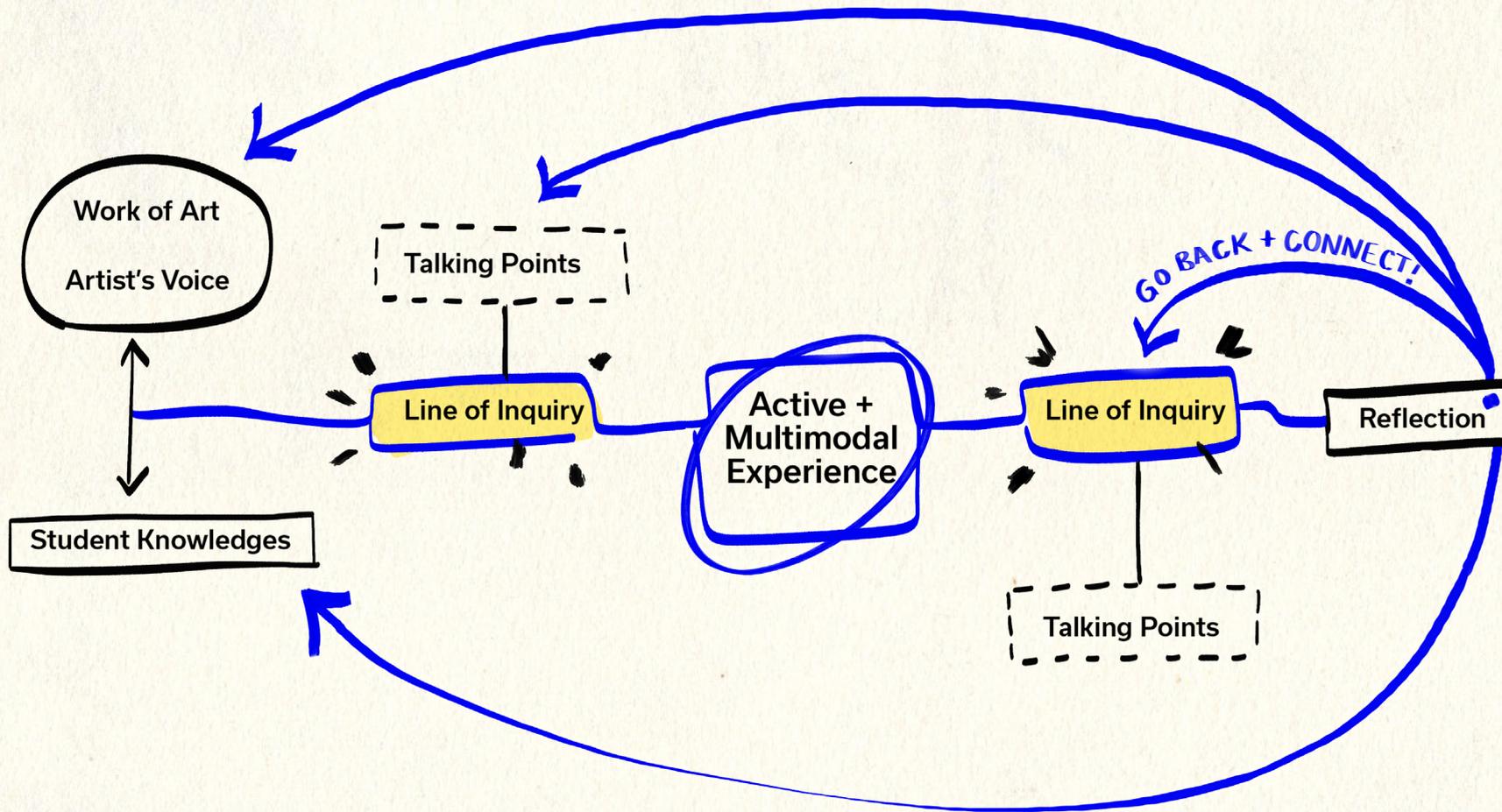
The *Creative Learning Approach* developed through *The Creative Learning Project* is supported by pedagogical strategies that, independently or in combination, form

- \* **Creative Learning Strategies.** *Creative Learning Strategies* are learning sequences that connect a **work of art**, the **voice of the artist** and **student knowledges** through **active** creative learning experiences. School learning programs consist of several *Creative Learning Strategies* that work together to consider an **overarching guiding inquiry**.

Grounded in contemporary pedagogical theory, the *Creative Learning Strategies* foster observation, analysis, and critical thinking (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Kai-Kee et al, 2020; Penfold, 2019) and move learners and teachers away from didactic delivery.

All the strategies engage with creative learning and creative processes. They are purposeful, designed with clear learning intentions, and support the development of higher-order thinking skills.

Diagram: Creative Learning Strategy planning tool



Varied *Creative Learning Strategies* are particularly important when working with diverse learners, as they provide multiple entry points to meaning-making and support a range of abilities and ways of learning. Multimodal and creative learning is central to inclusive education programs. Engaging visual, auditory, spatial and tactile modes of learning ensures access is not restricted to text-based or linear interpretation. This reflects both inclusive pedagogical principles and the inherently multimodal nature of contemporary art practice.

"LEARNING STRATEGIES  
ARE AN ARTISTIC FORM."

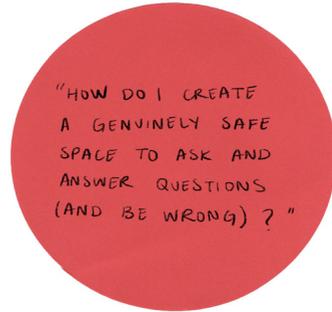
WE INVESTIGATE AND  
DISTIL A CONCEPT AND  
THEN TRANSLATE IT INTO  
A FORM FOR STUDENTS  
TO EXPRESS  
THEMSELVES."

### The key pedagogical strategies are:

- Inquiry ??
- Centring the voice of the artist
- Play
- Thinking with and through materials
- Embodied learning
- Reflection

These strategies can be used and combined to design a relevant *Creative Learning Strategy* for each specific learning program.





## INQUIRY

All *Creative Learning Strategies* are designed around a central **line of inquiry** which serves as the **connecting thread** between the artwork, the artist's voice, and the **student's prior knowledge** and **experience**. The intentional selection of this inquiry topic is critical. Artist Educators develop **Creative Learning Strategies** around this core theme and use talking points, not as a script, but to initiate conversation, reflection and discovery.

Inquiry-based teaching is grounded in the principle of thinking *with* children, rather than *for* them. It involves a relational and responsive pedagogy where educators and learners explore ideas together in ways that are open-ended and collaborative and support the co-construction of knowledge.

Effective inquiry educators engage in dialogue, embrace uncertainty, and co-construct knowledge alongside

students (Pelo and Carter, 2019; Murdoch, 2015). Rather than starting with predetermined answers, they follow the direction of the inquiry as it evolves, treating curiosity and lived experience as central to the learning process.



As Pelo and Carter describe:

When our course is set for **inquiry**, we will offer hypotheses then let them go, as new evidence compels new understandings and questions. Our thinking is fluid and spacious, imagination braided with observation, braided with metaphor, braided with lived experience. We move from questions to observations to hypotheses to further questions to revisions in thinking (2019, 44).

Inquiry-led engagement also aligns with the aims of the Australian Curriculum which highlights the value of critical and creative thinking. It supports the goal of fostering 'critical engagement with art works and practices [that] develop empathy and contribute to the lives of people, cultures and communities' (ACARA).

In a learning group, shared inquiry is understood as a process of co-constructing meaning through experience, conversation and reflection. Rather than separating shared inquiry from shared meaning-making, these are seen as interrelated components of a broader epistemological approach that values collaboration, criticality and embodied engagement.



In learning programs **INQUIRY** may look like:

*'There were a lot of women who were a part of the stolen generation that didn't get to do this ... I wanted to see baskets and necklaces revived.'*

**Lola Greeno, Pakana people**

First Nations Learning Facilitator, Noah shares that Lola Greeno's shell necklace is an example of a generational women's practice amongst the Pakana and other First Nations Communities in Lutruwita/Tasmania.

Noah invites the students to think about a skill that someone older has taught them. The group sits and visualises the teaching of these skills.  
*Where are they?  
 Who is with them?  
 What sounds can they hear?*

Noah asks the students to use their bodies to mime an action for the group that communicates this shared knowledge. A student mimes casting a fishing rod and says, *'I love the sound of a fishing reel. My dad taught me to fish.'*

Noah asks, *'Why is it important to share knowledge in this way? Why is it important for Lola Greeno to pass on her knowledge of this practice?'*

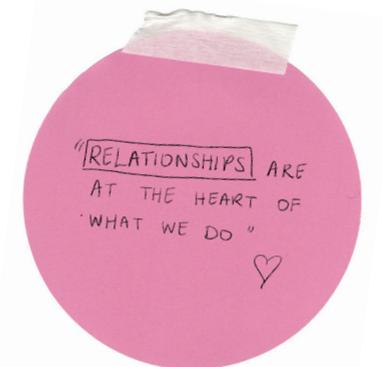
## CENTRING THE VOICE OF THE ARTIST

The artist's voice provides an **essential context** for Gallery learning programs. It anchors the experience in **lived perspectives** and **creative intention**, offering a meaningful entry point into the artwork. The educator uses the artist's voice alongside **targeted information** to deepen the context and **scaffold new insights** in the group.

While much of the literature on gallery education privileges the voices of the institution, the visitor or the object (for example from curatorial or art historical perspectives), there is often limited attention to the artist's voice. In contrast, the pedagogical model developed within the Gallery draws on the principles of *Art Thought Culture*. The model adopts a triadic structure that foregrounds the relationships between artist, artwork and learner to position learning as a relational and dynamic process where multiple

perspectives converge. Although the artist's voice is considered central, it exists in productive tension with those of the learners, educators and communities. This multiplicity opens guided interpretive space and supports inclusive, situated and evolving understandings that deepen engagement with both artworks and broader cultural contexts.

In this process, the judicious use of information becomes critical. The carefully curated talking points serve



as a through line between the artist's voice and the learner's experience. These are not scripted explanations, but intentional prompts designed to extend or support the understanding generated through dialogue and engagement. Hubard (2007) explains how identifying and introducing selective and intentional contextual or factual detail, which she calls 'productive information', enriches student engagement without overwhelming them. Productive information helps

deepen understanding by offering just enough insight to support interpretation, while still leaving space for learners' own perspectives and meaning-making to unfold through dialogic and creative engagement. This strategy avoids both didactic instruction and an unstructured reliance on self-generated meaning. Instead, it operates within a balanced model of facilitated inquiry.



In learning programs **CENTRING THE VOICE OF THE ARTIST** may look like:

*'I've painted people of significance who have had an influence on me, whether directly or indirectly, whether for good or for bad.'*

**Vincent Namatjira, Western Aranda people**

Artist Educator Andrew supports the students to reflect on the concept of a hero. 'What does the word "hero" mean to you? What do you think the saying "not all heroes wear capes" means? Who are some of your heroes?'. One student suggests, 'My dad', another offers, 'PJ Masks'.

Andrew asks, 'Why do you think it's important for Vincent Namatjira to paint people who have had an influence on him?'

A student replies, 'because it helps him remember why he likes them or doesn't like them'.

On small cards, Andrew invites students to write three words that describe the qualities of their heroes.

One by one, they place their words and pictures on the floor to make a collaborative poem.



# PLAY

**Multimodal creative play** offers a low-stakes, **inclusive** approach to learning. In the Gallery it is used as a powerful pedagogical strategy to foster artistic habits of mind across all ages. Play encourages **creativity, collaboration** and **critical engagement** without the pressure of producing polished outcomes, and it is inherently engaging and **joyful**.

In early childhood education, play is understood as *work* because it is recognised as a primary mode of learning. This perspective is echoed in the Australian Curriculum, where one of the key foci of the section The Arts is the development of practices and skills 'through play, imagination, experimentation and creative and critical thinking' (ACARA). In alignment with this, the Gallery's approach to arts education moves beyond formal analysis to embrace open-ended and dialogic encounters.

For many artists, play is integral to the creative process. It functions as a mode of investigation that enables experimentation, risk-taking and open-ended inquiry. Pringle highlights that artists' expertise includes 'active looking and questioning, alongside making' (2011, 3). She notes that playfulness and risk-taking are essential, as artmaking is necessarily uncertain and fluid. Play encourages learners to explore, take risks, and make meaning in dynamic and unpredictable ways, mirroring the very processes artists engage in daily.



In learning programs **PLAY** may look like:

**'Suddenly there's that water, that straight line, it's absolutely miraculous, its breathtaking to me, every time I see it.'**

**Rosalie Gascoigne**

Artist Educator Tess tells the students that Rosalie Gascoigne has used found materials to make a work that evokes the artist's experiences and memories of Lake George, a place that she loved. Tess asks if the students remember seeing Lake George on their way to Kamberri/ Canberra and invites them to share words that describe their experience. Together, they look at the work of art and offer new words that describe how the artist has represented Lake George.

Tess invites the students, working in small groups, to think of a place

in their community that is special to them. They describe the qualities of this place in conversation before choosing materials to represent this place in an installation on the gallery floor. Working together, they place the materials in various combinations, changing and moving them around as they consider different ideas and interpretations of their place. They imagine the sounds that they hear in this place and perform them for each other, using their voices and bodies.

At the end of the activity, one student reflects, *'every story has its own uniqueness'*.



## THINKING WITH AND THROUGH MATERIALS

The Learning Team uses materials as tools for making, and also as mediators of meaning. Materials are used to support students' connection to the artist's ideas and to invite the sharing of knowledge, experiences and stories in diverse, multimodal ways. The materials may be either tangible—such as paper, string, clay or fabric—or intangible, such as sound, music, light or gesture.

The concept of 'intelligent materials', drawn from early childhood education models such as The Reggio Emilia Approach, further supports this view. Educators and learners are encouraged to engage more critically with materials, and to acknowledge that materials shape not only what we create but also how we think and learn (Keyte-Hartland, 2024). Louisa Penfold also encourages consideration of how materials participate in learning experiences,

explaining how 'materials have the ability to support children in making new connections with themselves, others, and the ever-changing world around them' (2019).

Thinking with and through materials also resonates with new materialist perspectives which challenge human-centred models of learning. Instead, this approach emphasises the active role of materials in the production of knowledge.



From this viewpoint, all materials, including intangible ones, are seen as having agency and therefore the capacity to affect and be affected (Sojot, 2020). This strategy opens up learning experiences that are relational, affective and co-constituted by human and non-human forces. In the Gallery context, material thinking fosters deeper engagement by inviting learners to explore ideas beyond language or linear interpretation. This strategy fosters

pedagogical practices that are responsive and experimental, through which materials become catalysts for inquiry, empathy and imagination.

"IT'S IMPORTANT THAT STUDENTS HAVE AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE AS THEY WILL REMEMBER THE FEELING OF THE PROGRAM."



"IT IS AMAZING  
TO SEE HOW CREATIVE,  
PERSONAL AND VARIED  
STUDENT RESPONSES  
CAN COME FROM A  
SMALL SELECTION  
OF MATERIALS."

In learning programs **THINKING WITH & THROUGH MATERIALS** may look like:

*'My work explores the poetic resonance of materials and the different stories they evoke.'*

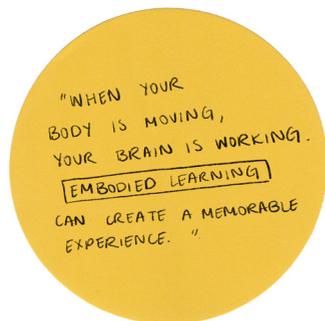
**Lauren Berkowitz**

Artist Educator Harriet shares that Lauren Berkowitz is interested in recycled objects because she feels they can help people remember stories that are important to them. Together, the group look at the installation *Bottles 1994* and consider the different stories the bottles in this work might tell.

Harriet invites the students to choose an object from her tray that they connect with. She prompts, *'Hold the object in your hands, play with it. Can you think of any stories from your own life that this object helps you to remember?'*

A student holds up a wooden bobbin and says, *'on long car trips, sometimes my little brother says he can see the whole world. The magnifying glass was already taken, so I'm using this as a kind of telescope.'*

Harriet helps the students to reflect on why we share stories. A student offers, *'We are all unique and have unique stories. We can learn from each other.'*



## EMBODIED LEARNING

Embodied learning is important in a gallery setting or online program because it transforms passive viewing into active, multisensory engagement, deepening both understanding and connection with art. Embodied learning encourages relational, rather than didactic, textural or visual experiences with art and activates curiosity and empathy in ways that static observation cannot.

The Arts section in the Australian Curriculum promotes embodied learning, explaining 'aesthetic knowledge is developed through embodied and critical engagement across cognitive, sensory and physical domains' (ACARA). Embodied learning integrates physical movement, sensory experience and emotional engagement as fundamental ways of understanding, exploring and making meaning. In Hooper-Greenhill's words, 'To

describe learning as 'performative' is to refer to learning as participative, where bodies, minds and emotions are actively engaged, and where the multiple processes of meaning-making occur almost without conscious will' (2007, 37). Embodied learning increases accessibility and impact as it is capable of supporting diverse ways of learning, younger or neurodivergent learners, and those for whom conventional verbal engagement may be limiting.



The aim is to move away from static, seated activities and instead explore more active, participatory forms of engagement that use the body as a learning tool.

This strategy also supports engagement with the larger site and recognises that the experiential qualities of cultural institutions can contribute a distinctive experience within the broader educational landscape (Rogoff et al, 2016).

Embodied learning engages with the spaces and environments around the artworks. As Brajčić and Kušević point out, Museums are performative and active spaces, not passive repositories of knowledge (2022). Embodied learning forefronts sensing, feeling and co-creating meaning.



In learning programs **EMBODIED LEARNING** may look like:

*'So, once you put two ordinary things together, they become something like a new language, a new image. It could be powerful and confronting.'*

#### Ah Xian

Artist Educator Harriet tells the students that Ah Xian created his work by combining traditional motifs from his Chinese heritage with the traditional bust form from European art traditions. In doing so, he says he has created 'a new language'.

Harriet encourages the students to think about the different languages humans use to communicate with one another. The students offer ideas including, 'body language', 'facial expressions', 'music' and 'dance'.

Reflecting on Ah Xian's practice, Harriet asks the students to think

about something that is important to them. She invites the students to devise a movement that represents this important thing. Working in pairs, the students share their movements and combine them to create a dance that tells a story. The students 'communicate' by copying and building upon each other's movements.

Harriet supports the students to understand how combining ideas can help us find new ways to communicate and make art, just like Ah Xian has done.

## REFLECTION

All the Gallery's learning programs include reflection. This occurs within the learning strategies but, in addition, each learning program ends with reflection. Reflection connects back to the line of inquiry to ensure that Artist Educators have met their learning intentions and to consolidate the learning journey in that program.

Reflection is a core component of both artistic practice and educational work. Brookfield recognised four lenses for reflection: the autobiographical (self), the student lens, the colleague lens, and the theoretical lens which includes literature and research (2017). Intentionally embedded reflection processes align with the aims of the arts in the Australian Curriculum and enable 'exploring, investigating, reflecting on and interpreting their own and others' works, cultures, worlds, ideas and contexts [to allow]

'students to learn in, through and about The Arts' (ACARA).

In the contemporary world, the importance of critical thinking and reflective capacity is increasingly recognised. The OECD's 2025 report on future skills identifies critical reflection as a key competency for navigating complexity, fostering empathy and responding to global challenges. In this context, reflective arts learning plays a powerful role in shaping thoughtful, adaptable and critically engaged citizens.

"VALUE REFLECTION,  
CONSOLIDATE IDEAS.  
PAUSE.  
TAKE TIME.  
CARE FOR EACH OTHER."



↓ ↓

In learning programs **REFLECTION** may look like:

*'We come from the oldest living culture on Earth, and hopefully ... people understand now that we're not going anywhere. We're still here.'*

**Daniel Boyd, Kudjla/Gangalu/Kuku-Yalanji/Jagara/Wangerriburra/Bandjalung peoples**

Artist Educator Noah tells the students that Daniel Boyd's work of art shares truths about Australia's colonial history and its impact on First Nations people. The group consider the title of the work, *Treasure Island*, and discuss how the artist aligns colonisation with the motives of piracy.

Noah prompts students to reflect, *'Who are the pirates of today?'* One student shares, *'Maybe we're all pirates. Like, we all take stuff from the land'*. Noah connects this idea to the relationship students have with the natural world, in particular, water sources.

Noah invites students to draw a body of water that is close to them—

emotionally or physically. He asks, *'What does your body of water have to resist against?'* The students draw their response to this provocation. One student shares, *'This is a lake in Nigeria where I'm from. There's lots of mining in Nigeria and this lake is really red and polluted'*. Another offers, *'Mine is a river outside of Goulburn. There are these introduced trees that are really bad for it, because they suck up too much water'*.

Noah supports the students to understand the meaning of the term resistance, *'Daniel Boyd's work speaks about First Nations resistance to colonialism and how, just like the rivers that you have drawn, First Nations cultures have not been defeated, they are ongoing'*.



## 8. THE CREATIVE LEARNING APPROACH

Through the *Creative Learning Project*, the Learning Team has defined the overarching goals of the department, refined *The Commitments* that frame their work and developed the *Creative Learning Approach* and the *Creative Learning Strategies* to guide their educational practice. The collaborative and scaffolded process allowed Artist Educators to test, refine and embed practices that respond directly to the needs and insights of both educators and learners.

The *Creative Learning Approach* recognises that knowledge is most effectively developed when learners actively construct understanding through experience, rather than receiving information passively (Dewey, 1934; Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978; McLeod, 2017). The *Creative Learning Approach* seeks to enable knowledge that arises from interaction, inquiry and reflection rather than an external explanation or the acquisition

of facts. Through implementing the *Creative Learning Approach*, the Gallery becomes a site of shared learning, creative exploration and critical engagement in both onsite, online and offsite delivery. The Learning Team is unified around an approach that creates memorable, embodied learning experiences and supports a deeper understanding of art, oneself, and the world.



## 9. ACHIEVEMENTS

→ This project has led to the development of a new **pedagogical model**, a ***Creative Learning Approach*** that is specifically tailored to the Gallery's audiences, institutional purpose, and national role.

The project offers a compelling case for co-creation and co-research as a methodology for developing educational strategies that are contextually relevant, meaningful and enduring. The participatory and sequenced workshops along with the 'campaigns' developed a unified pedagogical approach tailored to the Gallery's unique context. The workshops emphasised the importance of collaborative processes—such as co-creation, reflection and iteration—as central to building pedagogical depth, strengthening team cohesion and ensuring that programs remain

relevant and impactful over time.

By embedding the *Creative Learning Approach* across its programs for schools, the Gallery addresses its immediate educational aims and contributes to broader global conversations around evidence-based, innovative learning in museums and galleries. Most importantly, this work demonstrates that when cultural institutions centre collaboration, creativity and context, they can produce learning experiences that are not only impactful but deeply aligned with their mission, values and communities.

Dr Naomi Zouwer  
*Principle Researcher and Author*  
University of Canberra,  
Faculty of Education

Dr Olivia Hamilton  
*Author*  
RMIT University, School of  
Architecture and Urban Design

Nic Menser Hearn  
*Research Assistant*  
University of Canberra,  
Faculty of Education

Irha Ali  
*Research Assistant*  
University of Canberra,  
Faculty of Education

Georgia Close  
*Head of Learning,*  
National Gallery of Australia

Harriet Body  
*Creative Learning Programs  
Convenor,*  
National Gallery of Australia

Leanne Waterhouse  
*Education Manager,*  
National Gallery of Australia

Julia Mendel  
*Digital Learning and Outreach  
Manager,*  
National Gallery of Australia

Megan Carrigy  
*Public Programs Manager,*  
National Gallery of Australia

Maggie-Jean Douglas,  
Kabi Kabi people  
*First Nations Lead Artist Educator,*  
National Gallery of Australia

Noah Watson, Butchulla and  
Kuku-Yalanji peoples  
*First Nations Learning Facilitator,*  
National Gallery of Australia

National Gallery of Australia  
Learning Team:  
Tess Barker, Victoria Bennett,  
Adriane Boag, Emily Casey, Sophie  
Chiew, Ella Condon, Andrew Cox,  
Michelle Day, Remus Douglas, Isaac  
Dugdale, Christine Ghali, Ira Gold,  
Francesca Gould, Emma Hodges,  
Aurpan Kar, Mary Kendell, Margaret  
Kevin, Tamara Lawry, Vivien Lightfoot,  
Penelope Low, Sandy Ma, Dianne  
McClaughlin, Ivy Moore, Sam Osborn,  
Elizabeth Page, Sophie Pigram, Jen  
Proctor, Alexis Rickards, Annika  
Romeyne, Saskia Scott, Samantha  
Small, Charlotte Strong, Anne-Maree  
Turner, Ineka Voigt, Jodie Whalen,  
Lachie Wheeler, Ruby Wong.

Tori Dinardo  
*Graphic Designer*

Kay Campbell  
*Copyeditor*

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**Pgs 10, 15, 28, 32, 36, 47, 74:** Creative learning research workshop, National Gallery of Australia and University of Canberra, 2024-2025.

**Pg 18:** Students participating in an *Art Through Culture* program, engaging with Paul Girrawah House, Ngambri (Walgalu)/Wallaballoo (Ngunnawal)/Pajong (Gundungurra)/Wiradjuri (Erambie) peoples, *Yibaay Maliyan - Yukeembruk (Crow & Eagle Totems)*, 2024, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2025 © the artist.

**Pg 22:** Students experiencing Lindy Lee, *Ouroboros*, 2021-24, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, commissioned to celebrate the National Gallery's 40th anniversary in 2022, © Lindy Lee.

**Pg 25:** Student program, creative learning strategy, 2025.

**Pg 31:** Creative learning research workshop, engaging with Lindy Lee, *Ouroboros*, 2021-24, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, commissioned to celebrate the National Gallery's 40th anniversary in 2022, © Lindy Lee.

**Pg 49, 50, 70:** Students participating in an onsite *Art Through Culture* program, 2025.

**Pg 54:** Students participating in an online *Stories: Australian People and Places* program, 2025.

**Pg 56, 58, 59, 65:** Students participating in an onsite *Stories: Australian People and Places* program, 2025.

**Pg 61, 62:** Students participating in an onsite *Stories: People and Places* program, 2025. Lauren Berkowitz, *Bottles*, 1994, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, gift of the artist 2017. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program. © Lauren Berkowitz. Installation view, *Know My Name Global* exhibition, National Gallery of Australia, 2025.

**Pg 67:** Students participating in an onsite *Stories: Australian People and Places* program, 2025, engaging with Ah Xian, *China China bust 15*, 1999 and *China China bust 16*, 1999, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2000 and *China China bust 80*, 2004, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2009, © the artist.

THIS BUILDING  
IS SO BIG.  
IT HOUSES SO  
MANY STORIES.

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 UNIVERSITY OF  
CANBERRA