



Using Collage and Gesture to
develop Distributed Leadership:

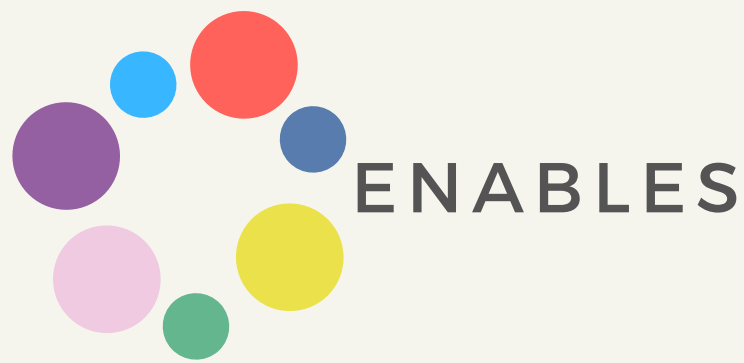
Insight into Participants' Experiences

ENABLES Erasmus + Project

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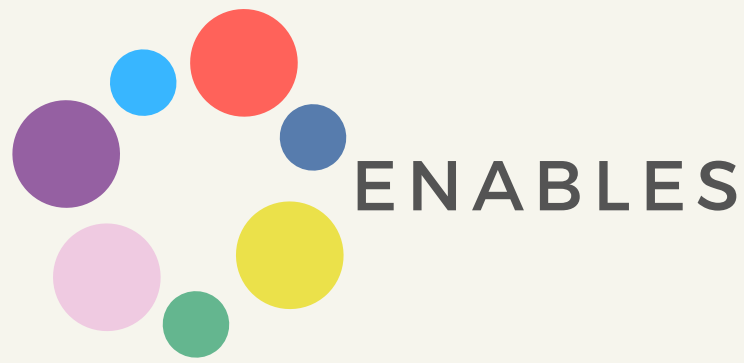
Purpose of this resource

The ENABLES project aims to increase and strengthen distributed leadership in schools by using innovative methods of arts-based and embodied methods of leadership development which were trialled as part of the ENABLES project. The UK ENABLES team used collage-creation and gesture response as the expressive activities in the online workshops.

The purpose of this guide is to share a series of experiences from three participants who engaged in the expressive activities in online workshops. These examples provide insight into what these participants feel they gained from creating a collage and responding using gesture to express how they lead change with others. From their accounts, these activities acted as a catalyst to open up as authentic and vulnerable leaders and deepen their understanding of themselves in their leadership activities.

We are sharing these examples as particularly powerful illustrations of how collage-creation and gesture response can be used to support the development of distributed leadership. We are not sharing these narratives as an ideal kind of collage or gesture response, nor are we offering them as a template for others to follow.

Participant's names used in this document are pseudonyms



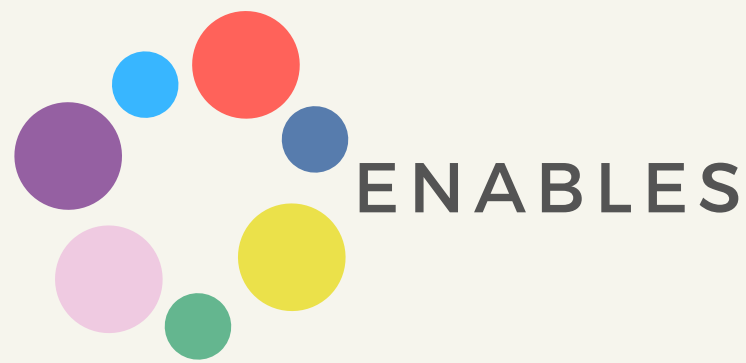
Expressive activities: an introduction

By expressive activities we mean the two activities which participants took part in during the workshop which was part of the action research trials. The activities were collage-creation and a gesture response activity.

Photos of all the collages created in the workshops, alongside a short description of the gesture responses, are available in the appendix of the Collage and Gesture: ARTs report which is available in the Research section of the ENABLES website.

For the collage, participants were free to select any materials they had to hand and invited to respond to the question “how do you lead change with others?”. No explicit instructions were given with regard to creating the collage. Some of the participants chose to draw their collage. Another created more of a 3D-structure using paper. Another still had created her collage before attending the workshop and shared the collage in the workshop as a Powerpoint slide.

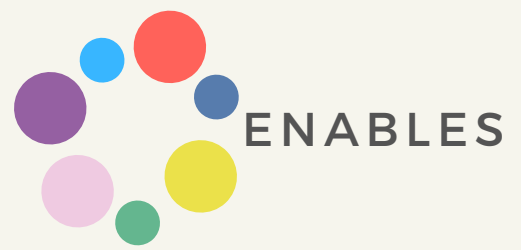
For the gesture response, participants were first led through a short body awareness activity and then the workshop facilitator modelled a gesture response to the question “how do you lead change with others?” Not all participants responded and some chose to stay behind their cameras. There was a level of discomfort for some participants with this activity, whereas all seemed willing to engage in collage-creation.



Participants' experiences of collage-creation and gesture response

What we offer here are illustrative examples, drawing from the accounts of three participants. These three examples have been chosen because they show how strongly expressive activities can affect participants in terms of learning about leading change with others.

All participants were provided with a stimulus question for both expressive activities: how do you lead change with others? They were invited to express their response to this question as a collage and as a gesture. We start with Sandra's experience, based on her expressive activities and what she shared with us and other participants in the workshop.



Sandra

expressing leading change
with others through
collage-creation and
gesture response

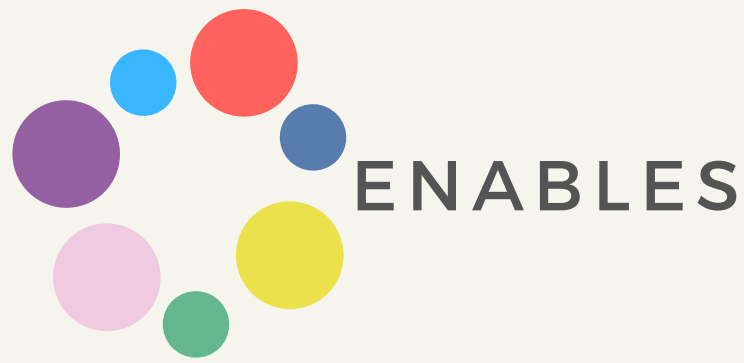


Sandra

Sandra has experience of leadership in the secondary school sector in England and is now working as a consultant. Her work is primarily with Masters students both here in the UK and internationally. She was known to the researcher and facilitator prior to the workshop.

Sandra entered into the spirit of the expressive activities with enthusiasm. Initially, she appeared more confident about creating a collage than doing the gesture response. Her collage consists of three sheets of paper positioned in a row, used as a canvas, with a series of images on each page. The overall impression of the collage is that it is uncluttered and quite simple. The main items used are coloured pipe cleaners, small soft-looking balls of differing sizes and colourful bows.





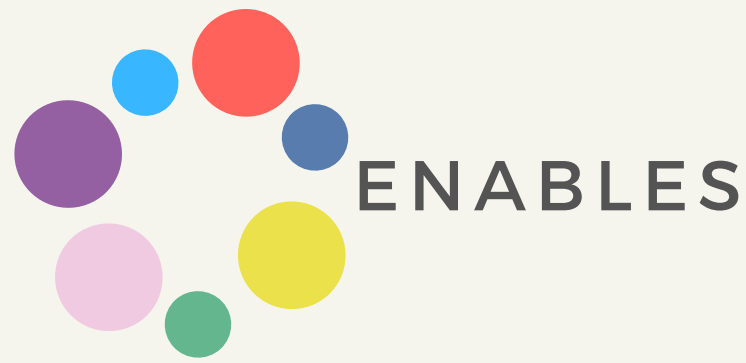
Sandra

There is an image on each sheet of paper; a starfish shape on the left, a circle in the middle and a shape with three strands emanating from a central point on the right. There are soft, coloured balls positioned elsewhere on the collage.

Sandra shares with others in the workshop that the left-hand image - the starfish shape - is the start of the process of leading change with others. Sandra is herself in the centre of that image; she has the idea of change in her head; she has some clarity over what it is going to look like. She is the slightly larger soft yellow ball. This part of the process involves consulting and creating connections. There are unexpected aspects which are pleasing and there are unexpected negatives. The unexpected negative is illustrated by the sparkly pink object - a bow - which is outside of the shape.

The image in the middle of the collage is when Sandra is connecting to a range of different people as part of the process of leading change with others. At this point, Sandra seems to be outside of the ring "now and then". She is putting in place some sort of activity to enable all those people to connect, through dialogue, through a shared goal. The sparkly blue object - a bow - is what might be unexpectedly pleasing or negative about this aspect of the process. The three balls at the bottom of the image are her "sources of support". She explains how the different colours indicate people either within or outsider her organisation.





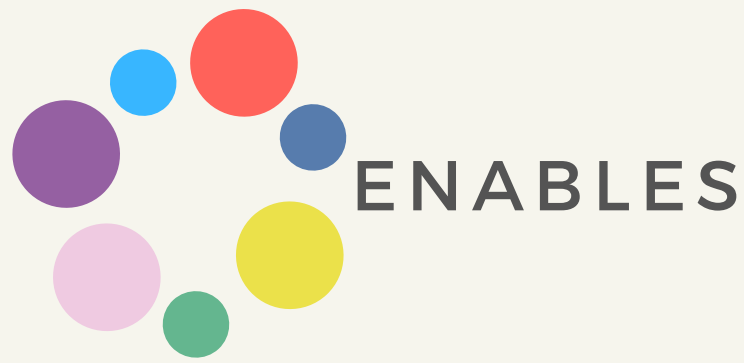
Sandra

The image on the right-hand side of the collage is the third stage of leading change with others. Sandra explains that there are five people who are a “collaborative group”; there is no connecting line between them but they are bonded and have a shared purpose. They are “totally on board and they’re influencing others”. With more time, Sandra says that she would have added something to show the rippling impact outwards that this group of people has. Her sources of support are still there.

Sandra explains that her collage is unfinished. She reflects on the collage, stating that it is all rather “idealistic and beautiful” and how lovely it would be if leading change with others was always like that. With more time she would have liked to have added a spanner, to represent a “spanner in the works”.

Sandra found it really useful to articulate her experience of leading change in collage-form; she liked the visual and physical aspects of the process. She shared that it was vital to be able to move things around. What she noticed was that the process had helped her to deepen her understanding of leading change with others; as she was sharing the meaning of her collage, she shifted from “the obvious to under the surface”.





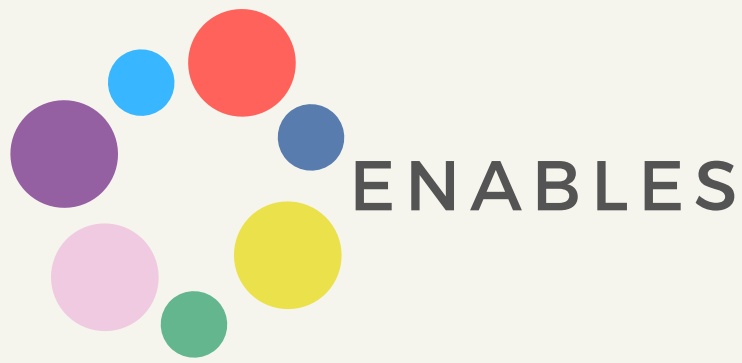
Sandra

Sandra explained:

“I certainly found it really helpful to express my experience of leading change in that creative way, because I think words can get in the way and I think, by having to express what you mean in a moving objects around and making sense of them was really good. You could refine your thinking by moving things around which was really helpful... Because I could see my thinking was getting clearer, it enabled me to access a deeper level of reflection... I started to delve into territory that I hadn't gone into before”

She wonders what she would have discovered if she had had more time.

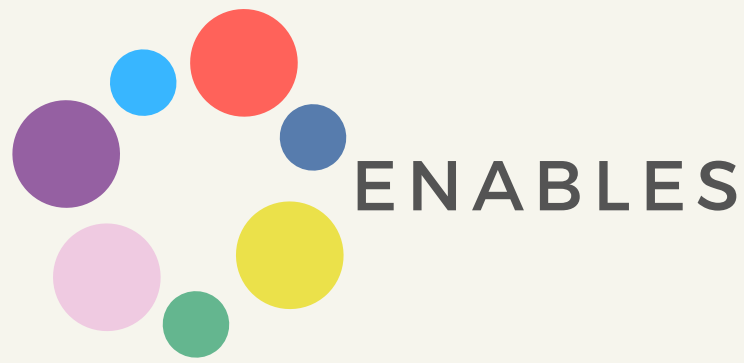




Sandra

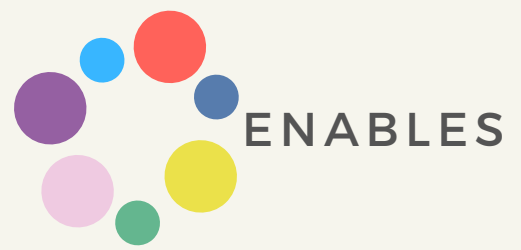
Sandra had a particularly strong response to the gesture activity, which surprised her as she had not been sure what to expect. Below is a description – by the researcher who observed this activity – of Sandra’s gesture response.

She stands up. Starting with her hands together over the bottom of her stomach, she spreads her arms outwards and, whilst holding them there, leans forward smiling to the left and then to the right. Then, still leaning forward, bending slightly to the right, she brings her hands into a praying gesture underneath and touching her chin. After that she stands straight, looking ahead, and opens her arms again. Then, leaning forward, bending slightly, this time to the left, she brings her hands into a praying gesture underneath and touching her chin – then moving forward slightly to the right, holding the same position. As before, after that, she stands straight, looking ahead, and opens her arms again, with an upward turning of her palms. Then, as before she leans forward, bending slightly, to the right this time, and brings her hands into a praying gesture underneath and touching her chin. And then returns to her seat.



Sandra

Immediately before the invitation to respond using gesture, Sandra participated in a short body awareness activity, which she found really useful in terms of helping her “get into the zone”. She appreciated the need for silence. Her gesture response felt really strong; it “arose from within”. She felt as if there was no other option but to express leading change in that way. She goes on to add that she has never experienced anything like this before and, on reflection, had felt quite moved. She describes it as “incredibly intimate” and says it was a privilege to watch others’ gestures, too. There is a real vulnerability being demonstrated here by Sandra – it felt “almost as if I was baring my soul” – and she describes watching others’ gestures almost as a way of seeing into their souls; “they were openly making their true selves bare”.



Maria

expressing leading change
with others through
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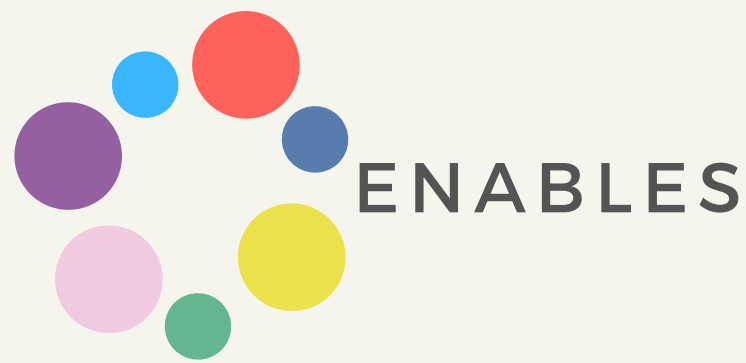


Maria

Maria has a secondary school teaching background and now works in the field of school improvement for a Local Authority. She is heavily involved in working with others in a coaching capacity. She was not known to the researcher and facilitator prior to the workshop.

Maria engaged enthusiastically with the collage-creation process and seemed to have collected a wide range of materials before the workshop to use for the activity. She used a picture frame for her collage, which she filled with a variety of items. At the base, she illustrated the ocean and waves. She explained that leadership is fluid and as a leader you have to deal with turbulence and crashing waves.



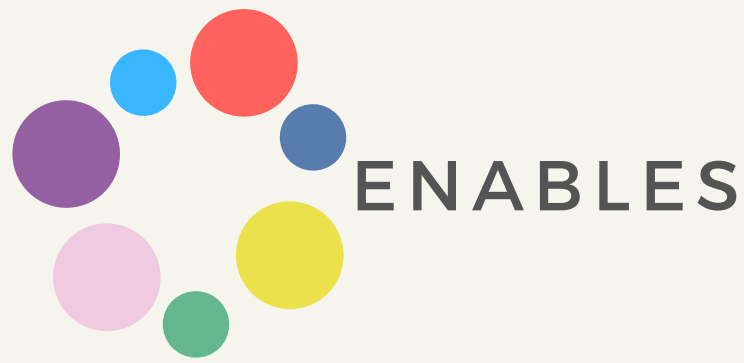


Maria

She then added a brown cloth element to symbolise a desert island. On the right, she added a cocktail umbrella - the umbrella of leadership - to pinpoint the destination - that is, where you are heading when you are leading change with others. She also adds in little diamonds and a pair of glasses, which she explains is the goal. The ribbon on the left encircles the groups of people she leads; the paperclips are the people in different groups she works with. There are several arrows going in two different directions; Maria explains that leadership goes two ways. The small pink hearts symbolise the importance of establishing relationships with others and the watch suggests that it can sometimes take time to forge those connections.

She has also added a funnel and an owl; she explains that it is important to funnel our thoughts and to use our wisdom when doing so. Maria also talks about how her role, when working with others, is to inspire and to ignite ideas which she symbolises with a small tealight candle. What is perhaps not immediately clear from the photo is that Maria has scattered glitter over her collage. This is a very important aspect of her collage as she explains that it is "fairy dust". She shared that what drives her in her job is her love of science, her love of learning and of the children. That is what she wants from the leaders she works with: "that little bit of magic". She also mentions fairy lights, which cannot be seen on the photo, and how they light up the journey to the main goal.



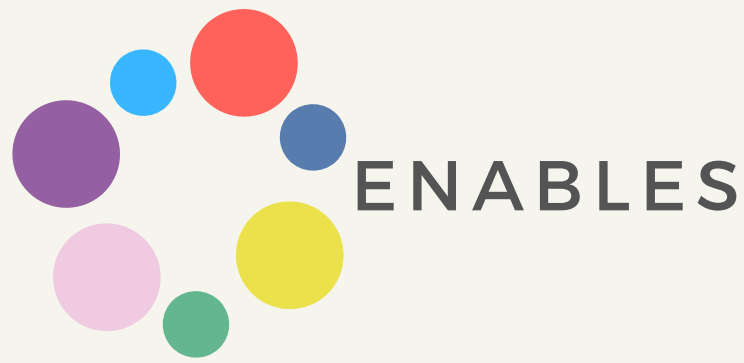


Maria

Maria was asked specifically about the significance of the frame. She explained how it is a frame for her thinking. When we dug deeper into this, she realised that she asks leaders to think outside of the box but then, eventually, you do have to narrow down your choices and decisions; “you’ve got to prioritise, you’ve got to choose things that are realistic and achievable”. And so the frame symbolises how you have to frame your thinking, frame your vision, frame your direction all within the frame of the “bigger picture” of education and society generally.

Narrating the collage-creation process was very powerful for Maria as it was by doing this that she really became aware of how she leads others; “this is how I work”. She adds: “I didn’t think I was a leader until I started talking about the collage... but it’s nearly everything I do. It’s really opened my eyes”. After the workshop she continued thinking about the collage and sent through a photo of an amended collage a few hours later. On that second collage, the water levels were higher and she had added a series of question marks and thought bubbles.

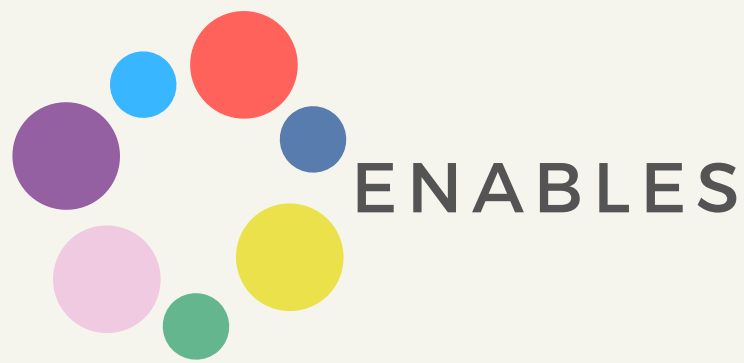




Maria

Below is a description of Maria's gesture response to the question about how she leads change with others.

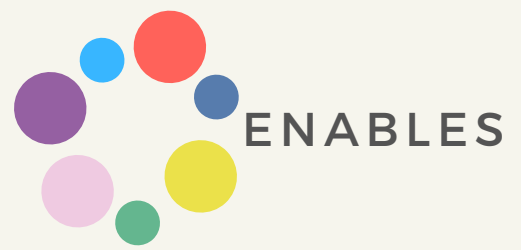
Maria had been sitting on the floor, so stands up and steps back. She then sits down again, glances over her shoulder and appears to be beckoning others. She shrugs her shoulders and indicates a certain look of doubt, uncertainty and/or intrigue. She gestures over to someone else to join, she looks back and seems a bit concerned or interested. She seems to be encouraging the other person, perhaps even pulling them along – is she holding their hand? She stands up again and seems to be walking away, perhaps with the other person? The gesture response seems to have ended and so the workshop facilitator steps in, but Maria continues with the activity for a few more seconds. It is a really detailed and expressive response.



Maria

Maria admits that she had been a bit worried about the gesture aspect of the workshop but, on reflection, she realises that she actually quite enjoyed it. She seems to have told herself not to be scared and to let go a bit. When we meet again a few weeks later, Maria shares with us how after the workshop she had continued thinking about the gesture activity. She had not really felt at the time of the workshop?? that it had helped her in any way. But she continued to reflect and her awareness of that activity seemed to have heightened. She explains how she “naturally went and sat beside someone and listened”. By stating this, she realises that “my style is to listen, and I’m more aware of that”. That image of her sitting down and listening came into her mind a few times in the weeks following the workshop, which had surprised her “because at the time I didn’t think it made any difference”. But she goes on to add: “but it must have done because subconsciously it’s there”.

Taking part in the workshop helped Maria strengthen her understanding of a number of things about her leadership, such as the way she places a priority on listening. It was a reminder of her tacit knowledge and the importance of sharing that with others.



Celia

expressing leading change
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Celia

When we met, Celia was just about to leave a leadership role in the Early Years sector with a view to going freelance in the autumn. She was known to the facilitator prior to the workshop.

Celia's collage uses a range of materials to express how she leads change with others. She narrates the meaning of the collage, explaining that the order she chooses is not significant. She starts top left with the Kelsey Montague postcard and explains how she is known for painting wings on walls. Celia explains how she likes helping people to 'fly'. She then mentions a caption which is not entirely clear on the collage photo, but which illustrates the importance of being grateful and appreciative of that which lifts you and lifts others.

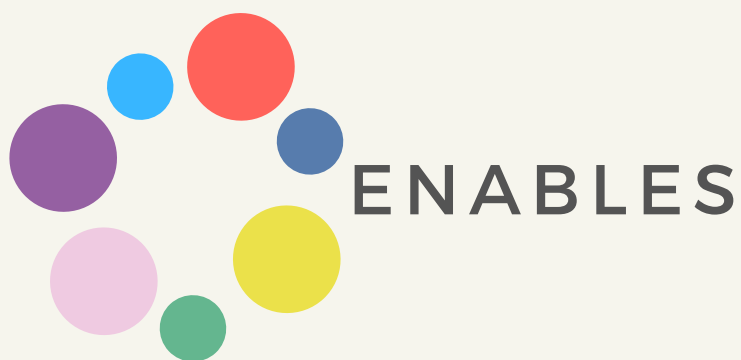


Celia

Celia has placed an egg timer on her collage which symbolises how children – especially in Early Years – are being rushed. Time is ticking by, but Celia would rather things were not rushed, that there was a pace and rhythm which allows things to flow, which allows children to just play and explore. There is a photo of the artist Ai Weiwei peering through his hands. Celia loves how he seems to be holding his eyes open; for her this symbolises the importance of seeing things for what they are, “seeing the truth rather than the bullsh*t”.

She has added what she calls some “glittery bits of bling” and confetti and some little hearts, to symbolise professional love. “Let’s have more love in education” she says. This links, too, to another element of her collage which is a snippet of paper with the words “joy (comfort & joy).” Joy is a central element for Celia; the joy of education, joy of learning, joy of children, joy of teaching and the joy of leading.



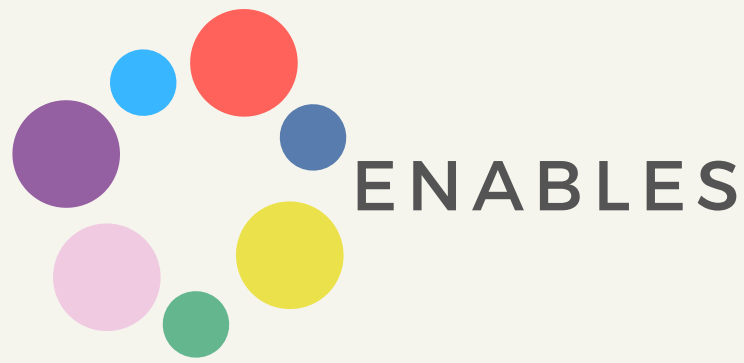


Celia

She has framed her collage with a string of pom poms. She does not say the word 'cheerleaders', but hints at the fact that the children in her care become the leaders of the future. She explains how this part of the collage had delayed her as it had got all tangled up and she had tried to untangle it. She adds "it's a mess, which is probably a metaphor in itself". She mentions in passing that the phrase "depth and fullness and life" is her passion but does not expand any further.

The word 'coast' is in capital letters and placed centrally on her collage. Celia admits that she had at first thought it said coach, which she was keen to add. She stayed with the word 'coast' for a while and realised that there is a lot of talk at the moment about children coasting. The final aspect of her collage that she speaks to is the Richard Tuttle quote "I Don't Know". Celia reflects how, as a headteacher, she had always felt that she "had to know and have the solutions and the answers". She goes on to share that it has been "quite a revelation to be comfortable in not knowing." She finishes by stating that it is by collaborating and networking that we get the answers.

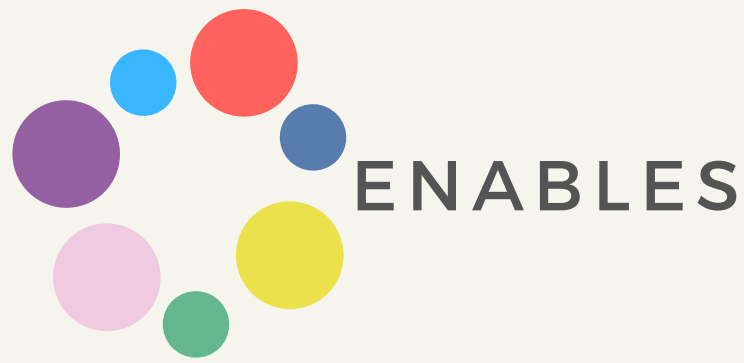
When we meet Celia again a few weeks after the workshop, she is keen to show us that her collage is still "up above my head" on the shelf behind her in her home office. She shares with us how she experienced the creative space we afforded her in the workshop as liberating and empowering. She adds how the collage made her happy because she was able to use items which hold memories for her.



Celia

Below is a description of Celia's gesture response. When observing Celia's gesture response, the researcher in our team felt quite moved and found it very powerful. She describes Celia's response as a "nurturing, holding gesture which also included the leaders as part of the whole".

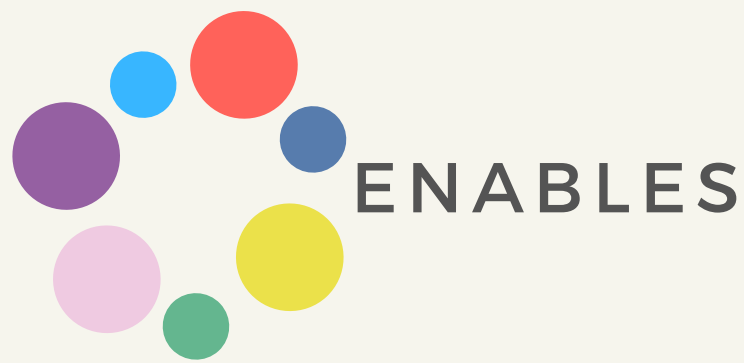
Celia sits back and starts to raise her hands up, showing both palms and with fingers apart. She opens up her hands and circles them around her face and slowly lowers them on both sides of her body, while continuing to look ahead. She then brings her hands together, with palms upwards, in front of her. She seems to offer her hands to others in the workshop by bringing her hands closer to her screen. She then brings her hands back towards herself, placing her crossed hands – palms inwards - in front of her heart.



Celia

When reflecting on the gesture response activity, Celia seems to have become aware of how embodied her experiences as a leader are. She adds: “all that I have learnt and lived and experienced so far is within me and has formed me into the leader I am now”. She was grateful for the safe, women-only space we created in the workshop where she felt able to express herself. She shares: “there is a theory that young children are the most creative, because they are the most free they can be”. She seems to be able to be creative and feel free in these expressive activities.

She explains that the workshop was “a catalyst to opening up how I saw myself as a leader, affirming rather than criticising what I saw... a catalyst to finding my authentic self as a leader”.

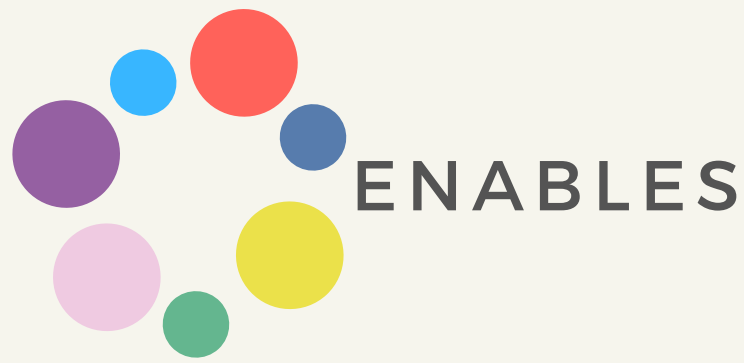


Concluding thoughts

Our aim here has been to offer examples from three participants who engaged in expressive activities - collage-creation and gesture response - as part of their involvement in ENABLES online workshops. We are not suggesting that their engagement was typical; indeed, participants engaged in very different ways.

What these three participants seem to have gained from engaging in these expressive activities is an opportunity to connect with themselves and others; to deepen their understanding of themselves as leaders and in some cases to start to recognise themselves as leaders. The workshop provided them with a safe space in which to share ideas about how they frame leadership. They surfaced and shared meaning about leading change with others and how that process can have unexpected and fluid dimensions.

It was an intimate space offering creative freedom and a chance to play and explore. One leader realised how embodied her experiences as a leader are; for others, there was heightened awareness of how leaders can influence and how important relationships are. This aesthetic workshop environment seems to have acted as a catalyst for these leaders to open up as authentic and vulnerable leaders, to see things as they really are and to be comfortable in not always knowing.



Further resources relating to collage and gesture

The Basics

Distributed leadership information document
Distributed leadership information audio
Arts-based embodied information document
Arts-based embodied information audio

Resources

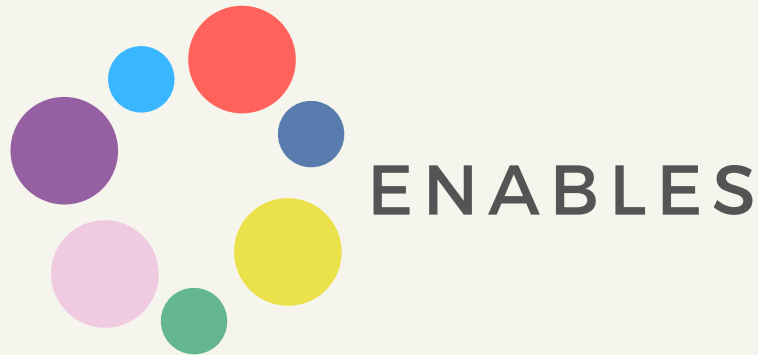
Collage activity illustrated audio guide
Gesture activity illustrated audio guide
Collage activity written guide
Gesture activity written guide
ARTs at a Glance document
Collage reflections video resource
Collage activity written guide for sceptics

Research

Collage and gesture: ARTs report

All available via the ENABLES website:

www.herts.ac.uk/study/schools-of-study/education/research/enables



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The publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein

Further information on the project is available here:
www.herts.ac.uk/study/schools-of-study/education/research/enables

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