



THE LEADING LEARNERS' PEDAGOGY

a-never-final toolkit towards
(un) learning practices
for educators

— Fabiola Camuti

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LEADING LEARNERS DEFINITION: the importance of research

Through extensive research and practical exploration aimed at revolutionizing the outdated framework of the current educational system, the ArtEZ Professorship in Art Education as Critical Tactics has rigorously examined novel, sustainable practices. These practices hold the potential to pave the way for the establishment of a more resilient and ecologically sound institution.

One pivotal area of focus, led by Professor Jeroen Lutters and Dr. Fabiola Camuti, challenges the conventional, hierarchical teacher-student dynamic in favor of an alternative pedagogical approach to learning. Through various studies and seminars, they have proposed a transition from the traditional teacher role to that of a Leading Learner. This transformation has been effectively implemented across multiple ArtEZ programs, yielding positive outcomes for the entire learning community. This toolkit aims to introduce the Leading Learner concept and provides key terms to facilitate its experimentation within your educational practice.

The Leading Learner pedagogy is rooted in the concept of educators being lifelong learners themselves. Leading Learners become integral members of a learning community, embarking on a collective journey of continuous growth. They take on leadership roles, drawing from their experiences to guide fellow learners while remaining receptive to learning from those very experiences.

Central to the Leading Learner pedagogy is the emphasis on issue-based learning, commencing each course with a research question. Every Leading Learner, responsible for guiding

the community, brings their unique interests to the sessions, leveraging these interests to fuel exploration and research. They serve as guiding figures, nurturing critical thinking and identity development, striving to create a co-creative, empowering, and self-determinative space for knowledge and awareness to flourish.

1. THE LEADING LEARNER' MODEL: an (Unfinished) Lexicon

The Leading Learners pedagogical model is not a rigid framework but rather a dynamic concept. It evolves based on the personal experiences and requirements of those engaged in the educational process, remaining open to adaptations. This toolkit presents an initial model outlining the principles of Leading Learners pedagogy. These principles serve as a valuable tool for initiating transformations in your educational practice or as indicators to assess the degree to which your approach embraces horizontal and non-hierarchical strategies.



2. THE PEDAGOGICAL TRIANGLE

Awareness: Connecting to your past

Recognizing our history and the path that has brought us to our current position is the initial stride toward fostering fairness in our interactions with those before us. In an educational setting, it is of paramount importance to acknowledge the journey that has led us to our current position. The well-known adage, “it does not matter how you got here; what matters is that you are here now,” doesn’t hold significant weight within an educational context striving to challenge its hierarchical nature. It should, instead, be articulated as follows: “what matters most is who you are and the journey that has brought you here; this is why you are the one leading this learning process.”

Tip: Leverage your personal biography and integrate your own history into this context. Consider sharing your narrative, whether it comprises privileges or challenges, as it has contributed to shaping you into the educator you are today.

Responsibility: working on the present

Upon recognizing our past, we can assume responsibility for our present actions, moving beyond passive contemplation of guilt or insecurities. One of the most common misconceptions regarding non-hierarchical educational strategies pertains to the perceived absence of roles and clarity. Roles hold paramount significance within an educational context, and each role carries a corresponding responsibility. To be more precise, it implies a “response-ability,” as articulated by the new materialist scholar Karen Barad. This concept underscores the necessity of reaffirming the agency that empowers us to take, at times, challenging decisions; to assume

ownership of the guidance process, and to hold ourselves accountable for our choices, capabilities, and actions.

Tip: Reflect upon the following questions: How do you intend to utilize your opportunities within the role of educator? How can this connection be established with pertinent societal concerns? In what manner does your positioning, along with your personal narrative, influence your approach to guiding learners?

Vulnerability: opening up to the future

The conventional role of the ‘teacher’ inherently embodies a hierarchical structure. It operates on the assumption that someone in the room possesses knowledge while others do not. Certainly, educators possess more knowledge and experience, but they have also had the opportunity and resources to acquire them. So, why should this even be a question? Another prevalent tendency is the need to perpetually project an image of having complete control over the situation. What happens when we permit ourselves to be vulnerable and attempt to relinquish these inclinations? Leadership within a learning context—and beyond—should revolve around principles of openness and transparency. This encompasses being receptive to the unknown and the potential for learning, perhaps even from one of the learners. Additionally, it entails being transparent about the challenges, struggles, and, naturally, the moments of achievement.

Tip: Endeavor to identify a similar challenge shared with your learner(s). This can be personal, methodological, or linked to a specific subject matter. Utilize this shared challenge as a foundation for constructing a didactical framework for the day.

3. OTHER PRINCIPLES

Inspiration

Rather than assuming the role of an authority figure, Leading Learners act as sources of inspiration. This is why cultivating curiosity and deriving pleasure from their own work and field is pivotal in building trust-based relationships. Consequently, initiating an educational context with one's research questions serves as an inspirational starting point. By integrating their research journey, Leading Learners not only invite questions and critiques but also spark enthusiasm and interest in new investigations.

Tip: Foster opportunities for group exchange and feedback, and actively involve yourself and your research within the process.

Demonstration

The “show, don't tell” principle is a well-known technique often used in the creative writing field. It is an indication to not provide only a detailed descriptions of facts and events and to rather give the reader the possibility to learn about characters and circumstances through emotions and sensory details aimed at stimulating imagination and visualisation. Also in an educational context, Leading Learners can transport the learners into the midst of the learning process, not by telling and explaining them what is there to learn, but rather showing them how, for better and for worse, and in different ways, the learning can happen.

Tip: This approach is possible when educators allow themselves to reveal their own ongoing learning journey. Share what you are currently engaged in and what you are still learning, creating a dynamic and relatable educational experience.

Critical

The “critical” principle highlights the importance of critical thinking and discerning the difference between equity and equality. Equality treats everyone uniformly, while equity recognizes diverse needs and provides resources accordingly.

Leading Learners encourage critical analysis of situations using an equity and equality perspective. This involves questioning assumptions, challenging biases, and considering social and historical contexts.

By fostering critical thinking on equity and equality, Leading Learners empower students to advocate for fairness and justice, contributing to a more inclusive society.

Tip: Foster Critical Discussions

Encourage students to engage in discussions that explore equity and equality-related topics. Create a safe space for them to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and analyze real-world issues, promoting critical thinking and empathy.

Commitment

Commitment is a cornerstone principle that guides educators and learners alike in their pursuit of lifelong learning. Leading Learners understand that commitment extends beyond mere participation; it encompasses a deep dedication to the process of learning and the shared journey within the classroom community. Commitment involves taking ownership of one's education and actively contributing to the community's growth.

Commitment is the glue that binds the community together, ensuring that every learner embarks on a transformative educational trajectory.

Embracing Lifelong Learning: Leading Learners lead by showcasing their unwavering commitment to continuous personal and professional growth, emphasizing that learning is an ongoing journey.

Active Participation: Leading Learners actively engage in classroom activities, discussions, and projects, motivating others through their dedication.

Tip: Encourage your students to maintain reflection journals. These journals serve as a tool for self-assessment, personal growth, and active engagement in the learning process.

Nonconformist

This principle places a strong emphasis on challenging traditional norms, encouraging students to think critically and fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Leading Learners empower students to question established conventions, beliefs, and societal norms. They create a classroom atmosphere where critical thinking is not only encouraged but celebrated. Through open discussions and thought-provoking activities, students are encouraged to challenge assumptions, broaden their horizons, and explore a diverse array of perspectives and experiences.

Non-conformist education goes hand in hand with celebrating diversity. It ensures that every student's unique identity, background, and viewpoint are not only respected but valued as an essential part of the learning process.

This approach not only enriches students' education but also equips them to navigate a complex and ever-evolving world with open minds and empathetic hearts.

Tip: Create a weekly "Norm-Breaking Assignment." Have students identify a conventional belief or practice related to the subject matter and present an alternative perspective or solution.

Compassion

This principle emphasizes the importance of empathy, kindness, and understanding in the learning process.

Leading Learners prioritize creating a nurturing classroom environment where students feel valued and supported. They cultivate a classroom environment characterized by mutual support and encouragement. They create a safe space where learners feel empowered to take risks and explore new ideas.

Leading Learners set a compassionate example, teaching students not only the subject matter but also the importance of empathy and caring for others. They understand that education extends beyond academics to shape responsible, compassionate citizens.

In the face of challenges and setbacks, Leading Learners remain steadfast in their commitment to learning. They encourage their fellow learners to persevere, emphasizing that setbacks are opportunities for growth.

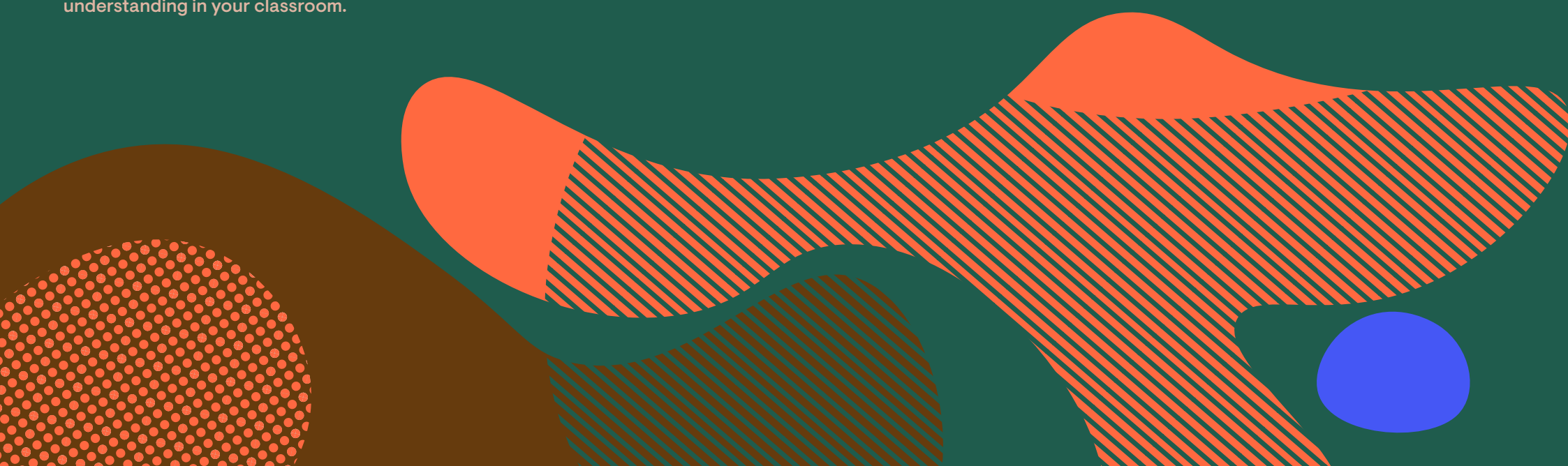
Tip: Implement a “Compassion Circle” exercise where students take turns sharing their challenges and setbacks. Encourage classmates to respond with supportive and empathetic feedback, fostering a culture of kindness, resilience, and understanding in your classroom.

Contact

This principle emphasizes the power of direct engagement and interaction in the learning process.

Leading Learners believe in active, experiential learning. They design lessons that encourage students to explore, experiment, and directly engage with the subject matter. Leading Learners facilitate connections between classroom concepts and real-life experiences. They bring in guest speakers, organize field trips, or utilize technology to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Contact isn't limited to student-teacher interactions; it extends to peer collaboration. Leading Learners promote group work, discussions, and projects that encourage students to learn from each other through shared experiences. Through the “Contact” principle, educators empower students to apply what they learn in meaningful ways, fostering a deeper understanding and long-lasting knowledge retention.

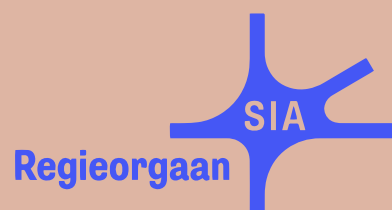
Tip: Implement a “Peer-Led Learning Day” where students take turns teaching a lesson or leading a discussion related to the topic. This not only encourages active peer collaboration but also enhances students' understanding as they engage in teaching each other.



This toolkit has been created in collaboration with the Learners and Leading Learners of the Artisteducator in Theatre, the Artisteducator in Theatre & Media programs, and the Art education as Critical Tactics Professorship of ArtEZ University of the Arts. It has been developed within the postdoctoral research project *Decolonizing Education: from Teachers to Leading Learners*. This research has been co-financed by the Taskforce for Applied Research SIA (Regieorgaan SIA), part of the Dutch Research Council (NWO). This publication was made possible by ArtEZ Studium Generale.

AeCT

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The present confronts us with major social, societal, political and climatic issues. Changes are needed to leave a safe, fair and livable world for future generations. The arts are more important than ever. When we look at the world around us from an artistic, creative perspective, we learn to see where the pain and the beauty lie, where the opportunity is, and where we can think again. But are the educational institutions in which artists and art educators are trained still suitable for the new systems, questions and relationships that we need to be prepared for the future? What will the Art School of the Future look like? How will it smell, taste, feel? In the Future Art School series we collect examples and challenging experiments that make us think about art education in the future.