



## Case Study 11

# ENABLES: European Arts-Based Development of Distributed Leadership and Innovation in Schools

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*The ENABLES project's aims were to: strengthen the collaborative and distributed leadership of innovation in schools; explore how arts-based and embodied approaches might support leadership development; and develop and disseminate innovative methods of arts-based and embodied leadership development.*

### What led you to this project?

Distributed leadership is both an idea about what leadership is and a process in which more people practice and share leadership. It proposes that leadership is a collective phenomenon that arises from the ongoing and complex interactions between all those involved in a group or organisation.

Arts-based and embodied methods are often missing in more traditional forms of leadership development and training. Our proposal was that they have the potential to develop capabilities for distributed leadership. The ENABLES project therefore set out to explore the extent to which arts-based and embodied methods can strengthen capabilities for distributed leadership in schools. We were hoping to find evidence of such methods helping to activate reflection, enhance awareness, generate new thinking and broaden out perspectives, all of which are needed to develop capabilities for distributed leadership.

### How were creative approaches used?

The five ENABLES project partners used a range of different arts-based and embodied approaches in their Action Research Trials. The idea was to develop, trial and reflect on the use of new approaches to promote and strengthen distributed leadership capabilities. The arts-based and embodied approaches used by the ENABLES partners were: collage and gesture (UK team); drama and improvisation (Latvia); visual imagery (Finland); narrative expression (Romania); vignettes and Design Thinking (Austria). For example, participants in the UK workshops (held online) were asked to express how they experience leading change by creating a collage (an arts-based method) and responding using gesture (an embodied approach). Participants used materials they had selected

themselves to create a collage; the gesture response offered a form of non-verbal communication in which movements of the hands or face, for example, communicated particular messages. Both of these expressive activities enabled participants to express a response to the question: how do you lead change with others? The online workshop was video-recorded so that we could capture the expressive activities themselves as well as participants' responses to - and reflections on - their own and other participants' activities.

### Why did you take this approach?

A review of the literature shows that arts-based and embodied approaches can support leadership development, but the review highlighted a need for much more evidence on the influence of using such methods on leadership practice. The Action Research Trials undertaken by all five ENABLES partners therefore sought to explore how such methods might activate reflection, develop relational sensitivity and awareness of self and others, and other distributed leadership capabilities. We wanted to explore the extent to which arts-based and embodied approaches can help reshape collaborative learning and encourage different ways of relating to and thinking about leadership.

### What impact(s) or outcomes has using creative approaches had on the project?

The potential for nurturing the development of distributed leadership through the use of arts-based and embodied approaches was evident. We collected a rich range of data, which comprise video recordings of the online workshop including the gesture responses, photos of collages, participants' written reflections and researcher observations. A particularly strong theme emerging from the data relates to how such methods can activate reflection, greater awareness as well as new thinking and perspectives amongst participants (in this case positional and non-positional school leaders, and students). The analytical approach was especially focussed on establishing the extent to which participants reported a change, i.e. a change in terms of new awareness and learning. As far as strengthening their capacity for distributed leadership was concerned, participants developed capabilities such as relational sensitivity, appreciation of leadership as an emergent, relational process,

greater self-awareness and self-reflection skills, openness to new solutions and perspectives, and identity development. They developed these capabilities through

- the arts-based and embodied activities,
- the interactions with other participants, and
- by experiencing the session as a safe space.

### Any brief reflections?

The project offered the ENABLES partners the space to collaborate with others and to learn not only about the potential of arts-based and embodied methods to support leadership development, but also how they can be used with students and colleagues beyond the immediate scope of the project.

### Additional or further reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2gKHZN1cgg> This 5-minute video is one of the resources we created for the ENABLES website. It shows the range of collages created by participants in the ENABLES (UK) online workshops. The video illustrates how arts-based and embodied activities, in this case collage, can be used to support the development of collaborative, distributed leadership in schools.

Woods, P. A., Culshaw, S., Smith, K., Jarvis, J., Payne, H., & Roberts, A. (2023) 'Nurturing change: Processes and outcomes of workshops using collage and gesture to foster aesthetic qualities and capabilities for distributed leadership.' *Professional Development in Education*. 49(4) pp. 600-619.

Woods, P.A., Culshaw, S., Jarvis, J., Payne, H., Roberts, A. and Smith, K. (2021). *Developing Distributed Leadership through Arts-based and Embodied Methods: An Evaluation of the UK Action Research Trials of Collage and Gesture Response*. The European Arts-Based Development of Distributed Leadership and Innovation in Schools (ENABLES) project, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, UK: Centre for Educational Leadership, School of Education, University of Hertfordshire. Available at: [https://www.herts.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/340913/4.B.1\\_Collage-and-gesture\\_ARTs-report.pdf](https://www.herts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/340913/4.B.1_Collage-and-gesture_ARTs-report.pdf)