

PLIX Facilitation Techniques

We believe people learn best when they are working on projects they're passionate about, in collaboration with peers, in a playful environment that encourages experimentation. At the MIT Media Lab, we call this approach **creative learning**, and we apply this pedagogy in the design of all our PLIX kits and activities.

Facilitating creative learning experiences is less about *expertise* and *content knowledge* and more about cultivating an environment in which participants can tinker, mess around, and express themselves creatively. **The techniques and ideas below may help you cultivate your own creative learning facilitation practice.** Try implementing a few of these at a time, and be sure to take time to reflect on your practice after each workshop you facilitate.

Frame prompts to open up possibilities.

Great activity prompts leave room for and inspire patrons to bring in their own passions and playfulness. Invite patrons' ideas with open framing that encourages creativity, but not so open that they don't know where to begin. A theme like “enchanted garden” works well because it doesn't define an end product like “make a frog.” Always look for ways to widen the walls, lower the floor, and raise the ceiling on the range of what's possible.

Curate diverse, inspiring example projects

Show, don't tell by featuring a variety of approaches with example projects that provide a range of jumping-off points. Keep them readily available to inspire patrons to tinker with their own ideas. The best examples—both thoughtfully incomplete and not too complex—can also help with troubleshooting and questions. If anyone's stuck, refer them to your example or a peer's project. Avoid using step-by-step instructions. If you must use directions, highlight points where patrons can make a project uniquely their own.

Celebrate process and product.

Appreciate the learning journey. Reflect on how things are going via check-ins and share-outs with your patrons. When checking in, you may find a patron who is stuck: ask them clarifying questions about their ideas or process and give suggestions instead of directions. Allow for multiple pathways into and out of the activity, and make space for patrons to work at their own pace without feeling rushed.

Encourage peer learning.

Ask patrons to team up to help one another. This fosters a culture of support, alleviates some of the pressure on the facilitator, and opens opportunities for collaboration. Besides, teaching someone else is a great way to deepen one's own learning. Ask patrons to work with you and help you figure something out to model what this looks like in practice.

Don't touch the tools!

When a patron asks for help, let them maintain control of their project, materials, and tools. Instead of grabbing the tools yourself, ask questions or suggest possible next steps for the patron to implement themselves. If you do need to get your hands on their project to explain something, make sure to have the patron try that step again on their own.

Use accessible language.

Welcome your patrons with easy, approachable word choices. Essential technical terms can be introduced gently, related to a familiar, real-world context. Have relevant resources readily available for curious participants who want to dive deeper.

Give yourself time to grow.

Remember: Facilitation is a practice. Becoming a creative learning facilitator will be a continuous process of trying, reflecting, and iterating. Don't stress about being “good at it” right away. Try to spend at least 10 minutes for self-reflection after each workshop you facilitate.

Model curiosity and confidence.

Learn alongside the learners. Once your patrons are up and running, take a stab at the activity yourself. That way, you can not only model curiosity, but also invite patrons for their input. Ask questions out loud as you have them. Follow your patrons' lead. Show that you have weak spots too, but they don't get in your way. Embrace your mistakes. Creative learning can be messy. When something doesn't turn out quite right, take it in stride.

More at plix.media.mit.edu

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