



Agency In Learning

Who can? You can...



Aim: To support all members of a learning community to explore where choice and agency exist in a shared learning space.

Included in the resources

- *I ASK U curriculum links*
- *Background information on agency*
- *Ideas for use*
- *Twenty-four agency choice cards*
- *Eight open choice agency cards*

Teaching resources that move [Beyond Conventional Wisdom](#). Our resources are designed to support student choice, voice and agency. The resources are ideal for all teaching styles, but particularly suited to inquiry (constructivist) teaching. Our aim is to move beyond conventional teaching tools, consultancy and training by creating tailored resources, strategies and training opportunities that enable teachers to implement supportive, differentiated, challenging and innovative learning experiences.



Interest

Prior knowledge connections : Providing frameworks for increasing student engagement through prior knowledge connections and interests.

Learners will have an opportunity to connect to prior knowledge and current interests by

- Reflecting on the choices, consequences and responsibilities of different actions
- Exploring how they can make informed choices that support themselves and others in a learning community.

I



Agency

Voice, Choice being response-abled: Developing scaffolds that support voice and choice in the learning process

Learners will have the opportunity to be actively involved in the decision making process by...

- Being involved in identifying and describing the sites of agency
- Identifying the responsibilities that are connected to choice and agency
- Acting as agents in their own learning

A



Skills

Processes and strategies: Skills, strategies and approaches to learning that support learners to engage in the learning process and learn how to learn. **Learners will know HOW to...**

- Identify and take action based on the choices available to them
- Reflect on the choices they made and what these choices made possible or hindered
- Actively test, reflect and explore how to be a learner

S



Knowledge

Knowledge and facts: Details, facts and knowledge related to an inquiry, discipline, topic or process. **Learners will KNOW ...**

- That some choices are open and available for action taking and are negotiable
- Some choices are not negotiable or open to action taking due to constraints that are connected to wider issues
- What choices in this learning community are open for action taking and agency
- What being response-abled can look, feel, sound and be like

K



U

Understanding

Concepts and enduring understandings:

Supporting learners' meaning making and enabling learning to become portable across disciplines, time and place. **Learners will be develop an UNDERSTANDING of one or more of the following**

- Agency is an action or intervention that produces a particular effect
- Agency enables people to engage, act and use learning in ways that are meaningful and relevant
- Having agency includes being aware of the consequences and responsibilities attached to choices and actions taken
- Agency depends on the availability of choices, options and ability to take action
- The avenues for agency are connected to the roles and power each person in a given community holds



AGENCY – Having the ability to choose, act and respond

Agency for learners is critical as it enables learners in a community to have the opportunity to engage, take ownership and reflect on the consequences of actions and how they impacted on self and others.

People who have agency have a say and an ability to act and bring about change that is meaningful, relevant and purposeful. Having agency allows one to adapt and change to relevant situations drawing on and using prior knowledge, creative thinking and currently held skills, in other words it makes it possible for one to have a sense of control and ownership, to participate, to see one's ideas and actions as valuable and useful, and have an impact on the outcome of one's own learning.

Agency in the classroom is a multilayered construct. So many things, such as a school's belief structure, the expectations from administration and other governing bodies and parents will impact the amount of agency that can be offered or made available to students. Cultural, social, historical and political settings, a teacher's particular beliefs and comfort zones, the students' ages and skill at being able to make informed choices are all going to impact on the type of opportunities for successful acts of agency.

Learning communities and learning opportunities all happen in political spaces. It is important to be aware of these influences when exploring how to successfully support all members in the learning community having agency.

By providing real opportunities for agency to students and being prepared for mistake making and the opportunities that this process can bring, teachers and other adult members of a learning community are helping to prepare effective and considerate decision makers of the future.

Agency, does not mean free-choice for students, or a dismissing of the teachers' responsibility in providing learning opportunities. Providing agency is about balancing requirements and needs with abilities and responsibilities.

To have agency means students are active agents in their own learning process, they can explore and make choices connected to the how, what, where, who, why and when of learning opportunities

HOW (Skills, strategies and processes)

- Adapt and retry tasks to make discoveries or clarify understandings
- Initiate experiments and research projects based on curriculum topics
- Identify personalised strategies and processes that help them engage, own, understand and apply learning
- Influence learning processes
- Use reflection strategies to turn mistakes into learning launch-pads
- Focus on reflective teaching, rather than prior instruction

WHAT (Content and knowledge)

- Use prior knowledge and personal interests as entry points into learning or to guide inquiry; Identify areas of need or interest
- Make curriculum visible to encourage connections and engagement
- Personalise learning based on prior knowledge and experiences

WHEN (Timing and routine choices)

- The which order of an inquiry process (reflect, think, act)
- Open choice in how to cycle through a set of learning tasks or only focus on tasks relevant to goal

WHERE (Learning Spaces- e.g. classrooms, sports gyms, playgrounds)

- Determine and define working environments
- Co-construct learning spaces and set ups for specific purposes and needs

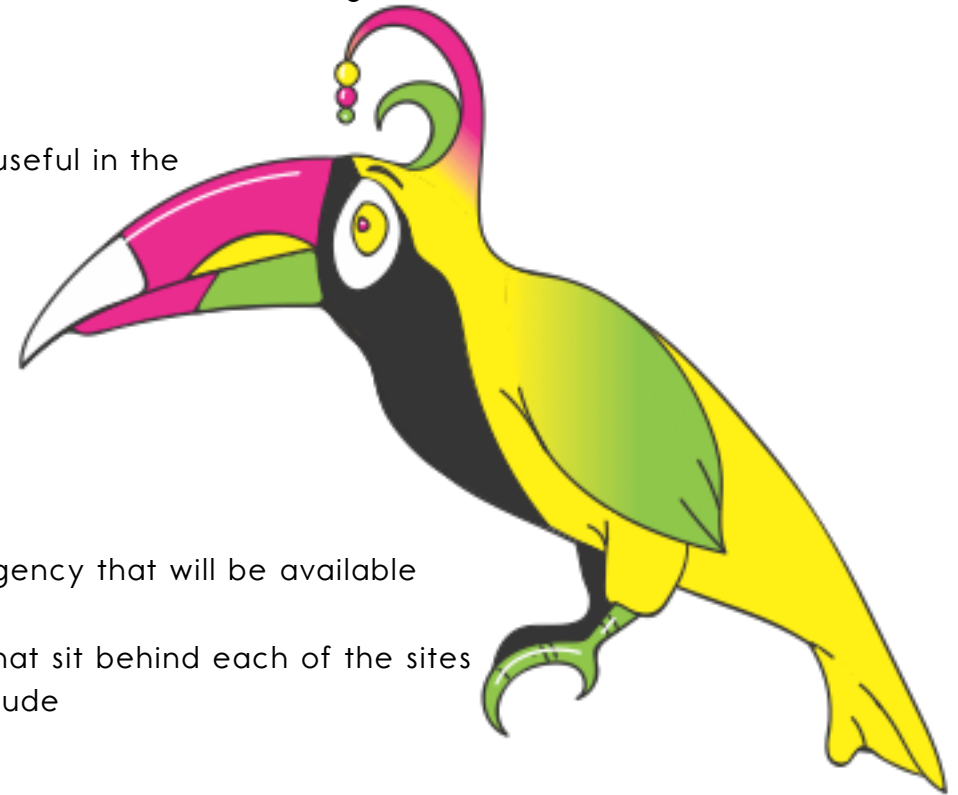


WHO (The individual and others in the learning community)

- Develop relationships with ideas and identities about self as a learner; Explore and name attitudes and mindsets that help or hinder self as learner
- Form learning partnerships and communities independently; Determine and define working communities
- Respect and be aware of others in the learning community
- Influence learning processes and groupings

WHY (The understandings of big ideas that enable learning to become useful in the real world)

- Engage with problems and possibilities and develop ownership of learning
- Explore the connections learning has with the real world and vice versa



IDEAS FOR USE

- As a class sort through the picture cards and identify the sites of agency that will be available for a given inquiry or lesson.
- As a class or in a small group or with individuals unpack the ideas that sit behind each of the sites of agency so that learners are response-abled. The ideas might include
 - FORM: What the choice could feel, look, sound, be like?
 - FUNCTION: how does this choice work?
 - CAUSATION: What does this choice make possible? What does it effect?
 - CHANGE: What changes might occur as a result of this choice?
 - PERSPECTIVE: How might people use this choice in different ways?
 - RESPONSIBILITY: What actions, responses or decisions does a learner need to be able to make to have this choice?
- Provide time and support for students to make the choices available to them.
- Build in reflection time to look back at what supported or hindered agency.
- There are eight cards at the back of the pack that classes, groups or individuals can add their own ideas to increase the sites of agency for learners

Providing sites of agency in the learning environment and community involves partnerships, but within all partnerships there are socially constructed power structures, thus being aware and being thoughtful of these power structures is critical to supporting successful opportunities for learners to engage, take ownership of and actively participate and co-construct learning spaces, tasks and communities. Power structures relate to how much choice, responsibility and accountability one has in a given community. The greater the power, the greater the choice but also the greater responsibility. One must have opportunities to practice making choices and then reflecting on the consequences choices and actions have on oneself and others, in order to learn how to manage greater responsibility. Looking at AGENCY through the DIG model can help uncover some of the subtleties that form its foundations and inform teacher choices in how they support or hinder sites of agency in a learning community.

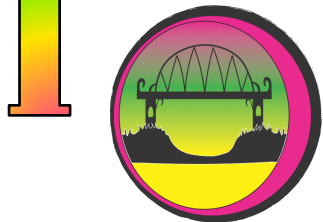
D Describe it... Details



Agency in the classroom looks like students having a voice and choice in HOW they learn, WHO they learn with, WHAT they learn, WHERE they learn and WHY they learn. The cards are tools that make visible some of the D level sites of agency that can exist in the class room.

However student agency does not mean a free-for-all in the classroom or learning space, rather it is about identifying and supporting points of action for students, so their involvement can have for them a positive impact on the outcome of learning tasks and experiences.

I It connects to... Infer

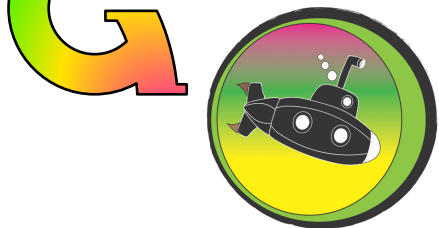


Sites of agency in the learning community and environment are connected to

- Teachers intent - Quality of choices
- Sites of agency- Prior knowledge, scaffolding and experience choice making
- Students being response-abled

More in-depth details on the following page

G Go deeper



Sites of agency in the learning community and environment are built upon the some of the following beliefs

- Ideas about learner capabilities
- Power, accountability and choice
- Values and trust

More in-depth details on the following page

I It connects to... Infer



Sites of agency in the learning community and environment are connected to

- Teachers intent - Quality of choices
- Sites of agency- Prior knowledge, scaffolding and experience choice making
- Students being response-abled

Intent: The most critical element in student agency is teacher intent.

Teachers need to ask themselves if they want students' act of agency to succeed. It is easy for adults and others with power over young people's lives to appear to be giving the young person the opportunity of choice, voice and agency. However, it can sometimes be about giving a set of choices that are unpleasant/unwelcome/unsafe or another set of choices that are infinitely worse. When the young person is reluctant to take up either choice it can be explained that they were unwilling to make use of the offered choices. While young people may not have the language to make this twisty option visible, they will feel that they have been 'worked' and trust will be diminished, making it unlikely that a good teacher/student relationship will develop. Agency will also be a casualty of such an environment. Intent on the teacher's part will greatly influence the results of operationalising student agency, and the benefits to all involved in the process

Scaffolding. If learners are to have success in engaging with personal agency there needs to be careful scaffolding on the part of the teacher.

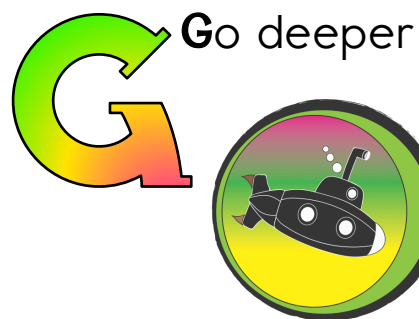
This scaffolding can be unobtrusive or made evident, whatever the case, scaffolding predicts a successful outcome for the learner and the teacher. It can be useful for teachers to remember when they were students and had an experience of being agents in their own learning experiences. What was happening at the time? How did that experience effect other future learning experiences? How would they describe the practices of the teacher who scaffolded the opportunity for these successful agentive experiences?

Student agency can be considered as occurring at sites of agency.

It is reasonable for teachers to be apprehensive of how student agency acts-out in the classroom. The many responsibilities teachers are answerable for include, curriculum; assessment; safety; discipline etc. When exploring the concept of student agency in the classroom looking for and at the sites of agency can make the actualising of this process daunting but well done it will be exciting and the unexpected outcomes that result more affirming of the teacher's efforts.

Student agency depends on students being able to respond and act in an informed and thoughtful manner.

Students who have authentic intentionally constructive experiences with agency and who have access to a carefully scaffolded sites of agency could be considered response-abled. To be able to respond (response-able) students have to had the opportunity to explore the possibilities that agency offers; have discussions about possible consequences; be aware that being agentive must include an awareness of the effects of their choices on others in the learning community; have experiences of inclusive and transparent collaboration; and feel this new territory they are stepping into has safety nets, visible limits and a trusted teacher to call on to check the taking up of possible risky next steps.



Sites of agency in the learning community and environment are built upon the some of the following beliefs

- Ideas about learner capabilities
- Power, accountability and choice
- Values and trust

Underlying the structures put in place to support student agency are a set of beliefs which include:

Students are not blank slates to be written on by the teacher, the teaching relationship is a socially collaborative one based on trust and negotiated transparency.

Students have the capacity to step into unknown territory if they are well supported and the space of what it is possible to know is a safe one, and their choices will lead them on a variety of paths that will be meaning-full and relevant to each student.

The opportunity for students to experience agency in their learning journey sits inside a culture of both traditional and modern power relationships including that of adult/child; race; gender; disadvantage, ethnicity; religion; heterosexuality and identity politics. Teachers committed to socially collaborating and providing sites of agency for students are taking on complex and generous work that is visionary, brave and perhaps the best expression of what teaching is really all about.

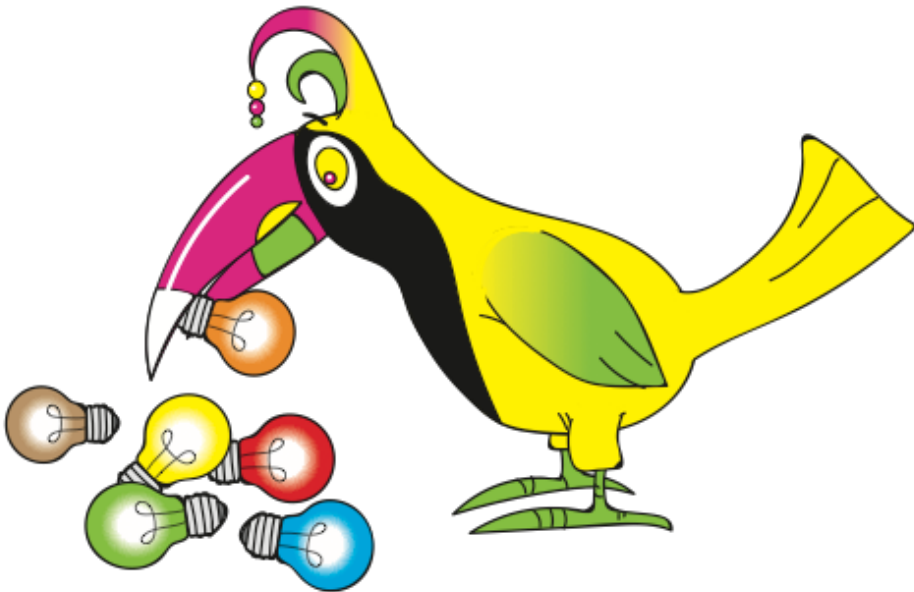
Convincing students to follow the teachers preferred goals leads to passive participation and a sense of being controlled, which in turn builds frustration and an experience of powerlessness. This approach to learning holds no agentic experience for the learner, and requires exhausting micro management from the teacher

Language and reflections are critical to the experience of agency. Bringing forward the opportunity for students to reflect on and talk about the HOW of their achievements in learning will reinforce their experiences of personal agency in their learning journey . Possible questions include: How were you able to do this? How did you notice this small, almost hidden, difference? How were you able to see and put words to this discovery you have made? How did you know what next steps to take in this inquiry? The language inquiring into the student's process reflects them as active agents, it has the student centred in the process, while as the teacher you stand in a position of 'being influential while 'not knowing' how the student has made this happen. It is worth noting that using these questions to bring forward the story of these HOW moments in learning will only be experienced by the learner as acts of agency when they have the opportunity to apply meaning to the HOW experiences. When students are offered the opportunity to re-view their actions in the learning journey it contributes to their experiences of personal agency.

There is a belief that if student agency is maximised the teacher runs the risk of losing control of the room and teacher/ student roles will become confused: A student having experiences of agency gives them a vibrant sense of participating in and the shaping of outcomes in their learning experiences. This experience of agency is not a threat to, or diminishing of ,the teacher's role as skilled facilitator , collaborator and trusted guide. It is a socially collaborative partnership where each person has a clear understanding of where their choices and responsibilities lie. Making visible to students what is and is not negotiable in the inquiry process provides a solid platform for both teacher and students to stand on and will contribute to the building of a trust based relationship.

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose which ideas you want
to explore

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose the best way for you
to listen to or think about ideas

AGENCY

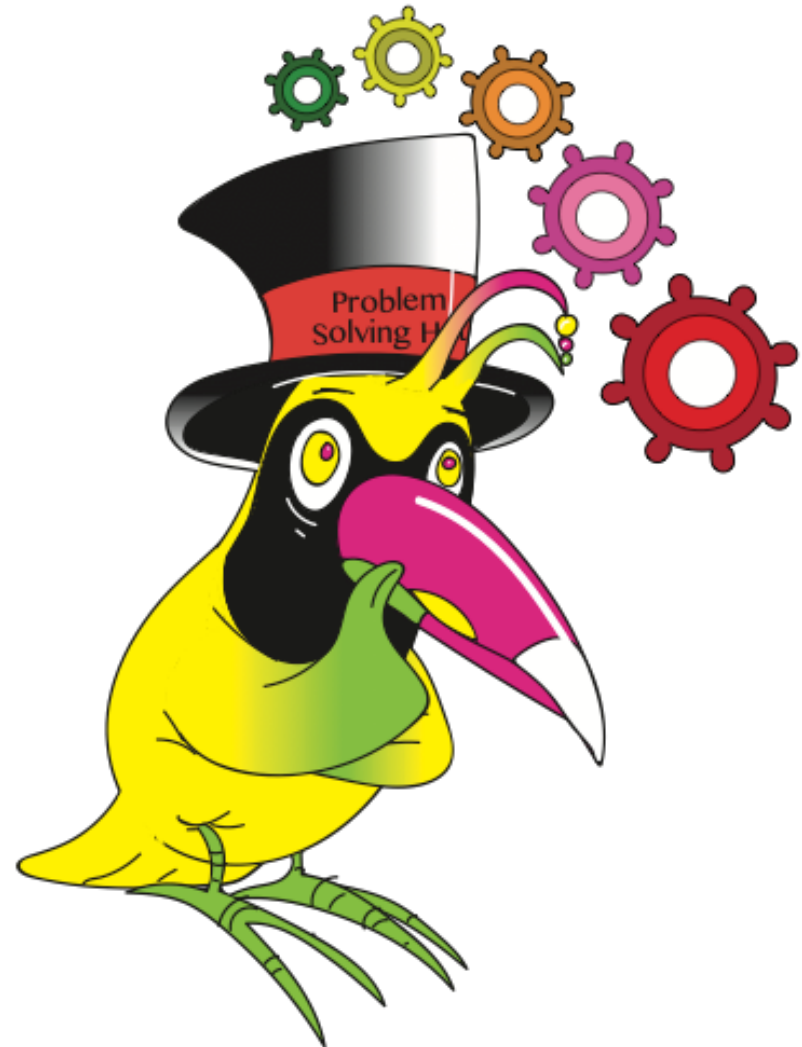
Who can? You can....



Choose how you will reflect
on the ideas you discovered

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose the problem-solving
strategy you want to use

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose if you want to share
ideas or just reflect
personally

AGENCY

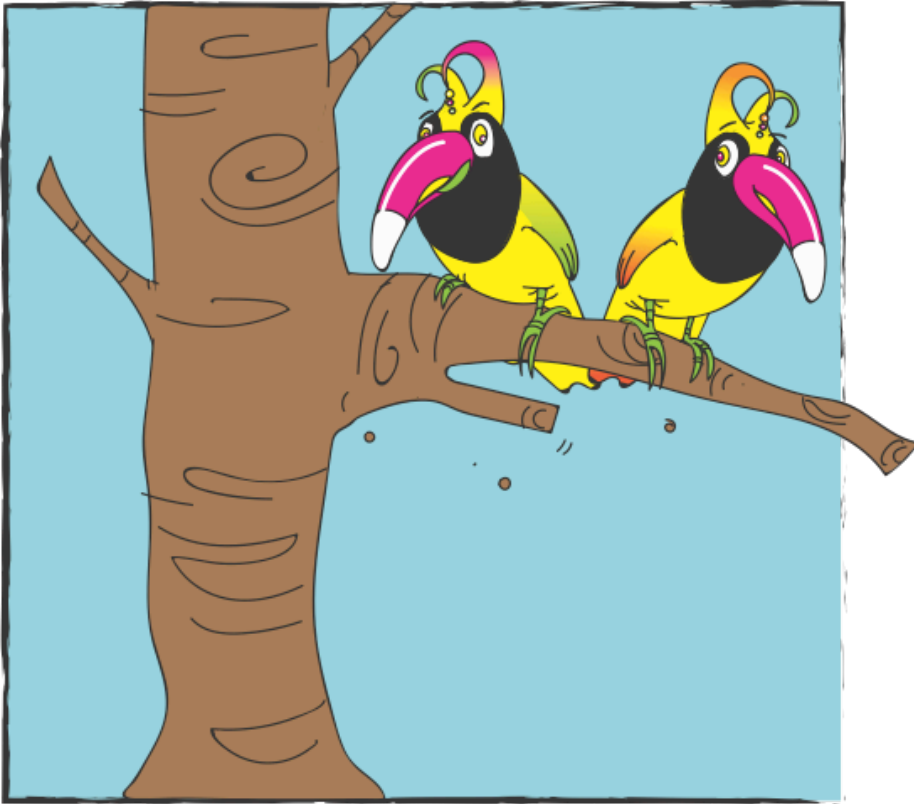
Who can? You can....



Choose if you want to be a
solo inquirer

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose to work in a pair

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose work in a small group

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose the way you would
like to organise your inquiry

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose who you think might
be a good support for you.

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose how you will test or
explore ideas

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose what goal you want
to work towards

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose where your best
learning space should be

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose how to organise your
learning space

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose how you will explore
an idea

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose the texts you want to
read

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose how you will record
or share ideas

AGENCY

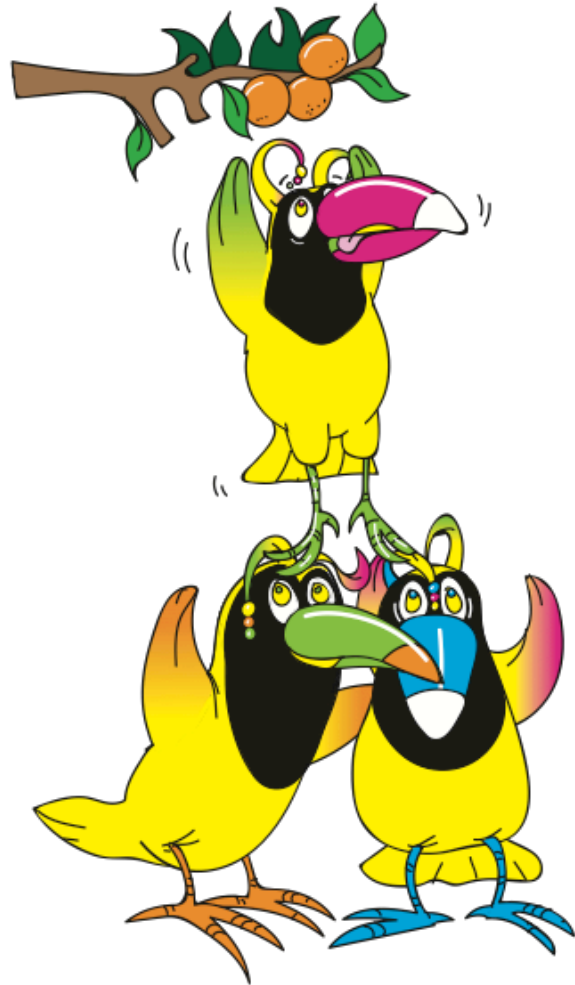
Who can? You can....



Choose what your own
comfort and discomfort zones
look like

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Explore and choose the best way for you and your group to work together

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose the tools you need or want to use to solve a problem

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



**Choose how you will position
yourself as a learner**

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



**Choose to be a quiet or an
active learner**

AGENCY

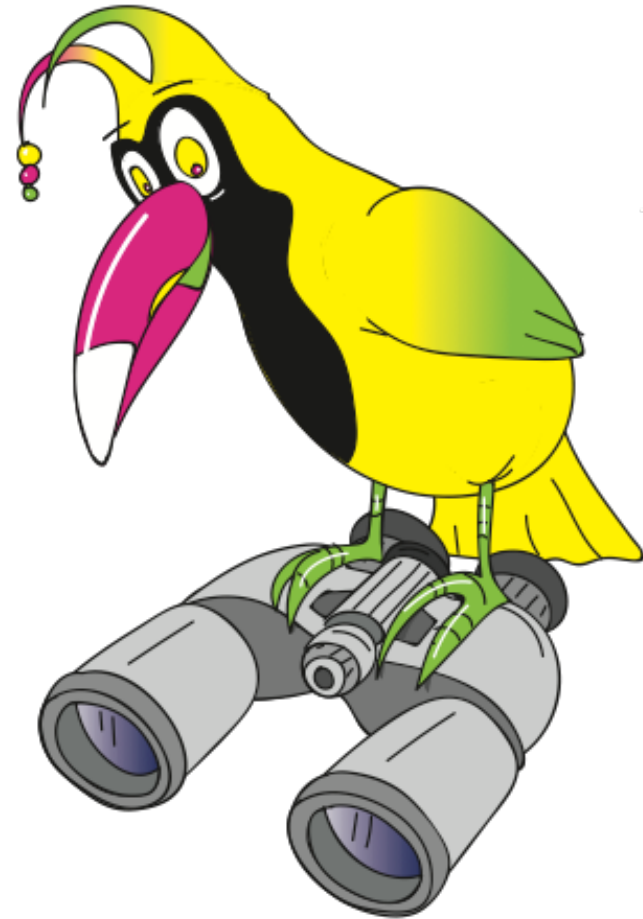
Who can? You can....



**Choose to be an
experimenter or reflector**

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose to observe or interact

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose how...

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose what...

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose when...

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose who...

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



Choose why...

AGENCY

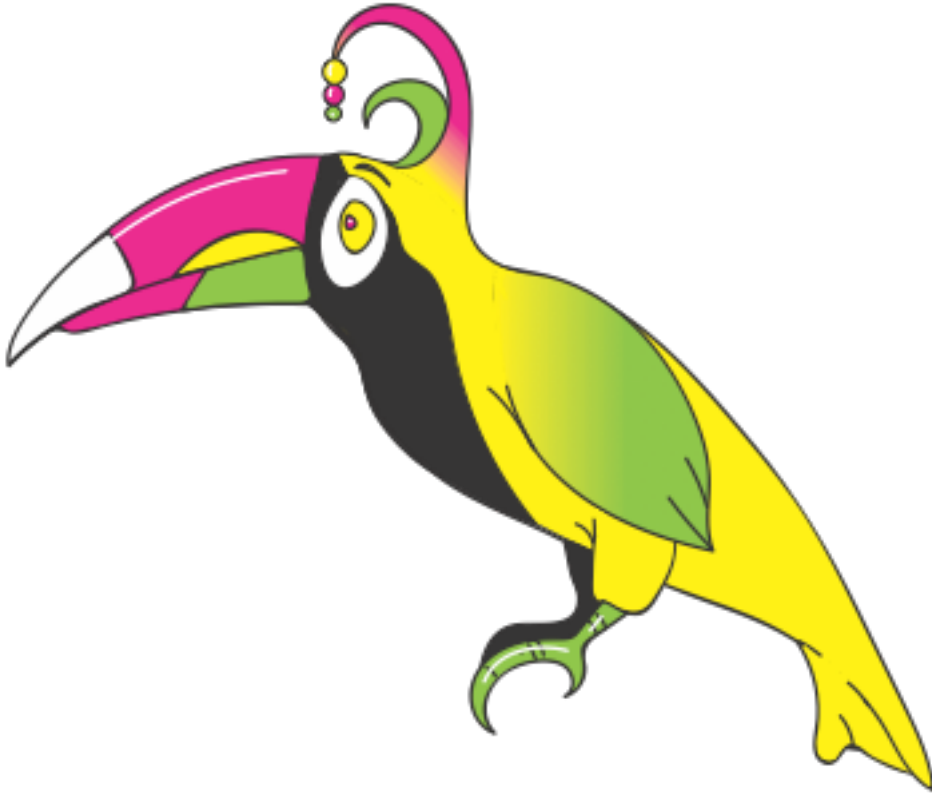
Who can? You can....



Choose where...

AGENCY

Who can? You can....

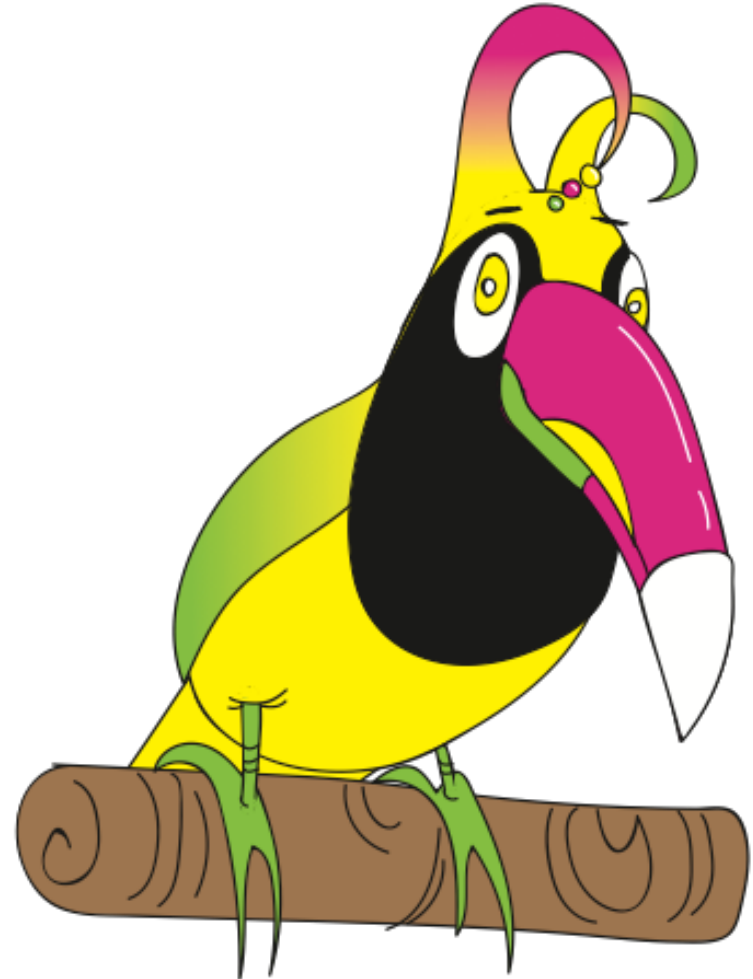


I can..

I will be response-able...

AGENCY

Who can? You can....



I can..

I will be response-able...