

Liberatory Education Tuning

by Ana De Almeida Amaral and Izadora McGawley

About the Authors

Ana De Almeida Amaral and Izadora McGawley created these resources as a part of their "Senior Project" at High Tech High Chula Vista. As sophomores, they co-founded the first Ethnic Studies course on their campus with one other student, Luz Victoria Simon Jasso. They taught and facilitated this faculty-approved elective from the time that they were 15 up until their high school graduation where they then passed it on to a new generation of leaders. Ana and Iza are proud Chicanas who believe that all students have the right to an empowering and liberating education. Together, they advocate for the use of liberatory education practices in every classroom, school, and beyond as a method to combat institutional racism.

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Liberatory Education: Overview

"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots." - M. Garvey

Our education system was designed to propagate and reproduce systemic injustice, acting as a force for socialization into white supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, and a violent political-economic status quo. When we look at how schools operate in society and how they impact individual students and communities, we find that we are in dire need of transformative change. On the interpersonal level, classroom level, school, district, and state level, and beyond, it is time to adopt a new way of educating our youth, one that centers equity, empowerment, liberation, and agency. As the Iroquois philosophy states, "In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

Liberatory Education promotes the connection between culture, identity, and empowerment within students and disrupts hegemonic, eurocentric norms. According to Ch. 3 of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, "Such practices help youth to connect their own experiences and actions to a larger history of working together toward social justice."

This work has many names that signify variations and components of L.E. Here are some examples:

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION	SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION	CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY
Focuses on celebrating diversity	Focuses on exposing the social political context that students experience	Focuses on improving the learning capacity of diverse students who have been marginalized educationally
Centers around creating positive social interactions across difference	Centers around raising students' consciousness about inequity in everyday social, environmental, economic, and political aspects of life	Centers around the affective & cognitive aspects of teaching and learning
Concerns itself with exposing privileged students to diverse literature, multiple perspectives, and inclusion in the curriculum as well as help students of color see themselves reflected.	Concerns itself with creating lenses to recognize and interrupt inequitable patterns and practices in society.	Concerns itself with building resilience and academic mindset by pushing back on dominant narratives about people of color.
Social Harmony	Critical Consciousness	Independent Learning

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L.E. Question Breakdown

We ask that each presenter prepares by reading the following question breakdown in order to complete the pre-work reflection. Use this to guide probing questions in the tuning protocol.

- 1. Who makes up the students & community I serve? Think: *Identity & Positionality***
 - a. Identity: How do they identify themselves? How does the world identify them? You?
 - b. Positionality: What is their/your relationship to power, privilege, and oppression?
 - c. Intersectionality is key. Think about race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, etc
- 2. What are their strengths? What are their struggles and needs?**
 - a. How are your students powerful already? What do they bring to the classroom?
 - i. Learn about deficit thinking in education. Combat it.
 - b. Struggles usually relate closely to positionality and can be used to understand needs.
 - i. Do they need justice? Locate particular issues/avenues for change.
 - ii. Do they need space for joy, community, and affirmation of lived experiences?
 - iii. Do they need to understand their privilege and their role as co-conspirator?
 - c. Uncovering these strengths, struggles and needs involves *listening closely* to students and their communities. It involves *building trust*. Don't be a savior and don't make quick assumptions. Do the work. **Return to this question often.**
- 3. How has this* impacted the students & community I serve, historically & today?**
 - a. "This" can be a project, topic, subject, relationship, structure, etc. We want to keep this tuning open so that you have a guide for developing liberating designs/outcomes in any and every aspect of education.
 - b. Always ask whether "this" has played a liberating or oppressive, empowering or disempowering role in your students lives and the lives of those in their community.
 - i. How does "this" connect to their strengths, struggles, and needs?
- 4. How can this* promote your students' strengths and sustain/uplift their identities?**
 - a. Learn about Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and apply it.
- 5. How can this* respond to the needs of your students & their community?**
 - a. Learn about Culturally Responsive and Disruptive Pedagogy and apply it.
- 6. How can this project/topic push students to think critically about their world & motivate them to make it better?**
 - a. How will this help them understand, criticize, and transform the status quo?
 - b. What tools, knowledge, skills, etc. do they need to feel empowered to create change?

Tuning Prep: PRE-WORKSHEET

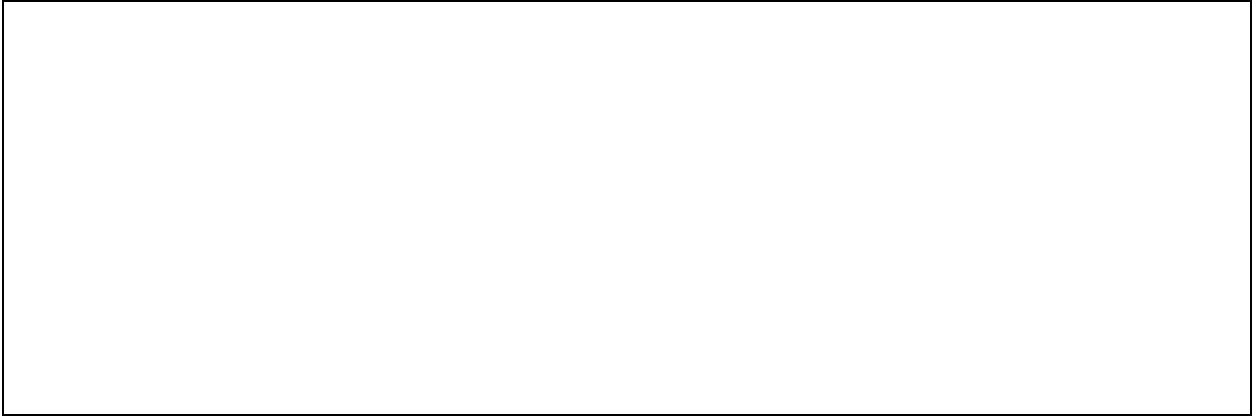
Please complete this worksheet to prepare for your project tuning!

Who makes up the students & community I serve? Think: *Identity & Positionality*

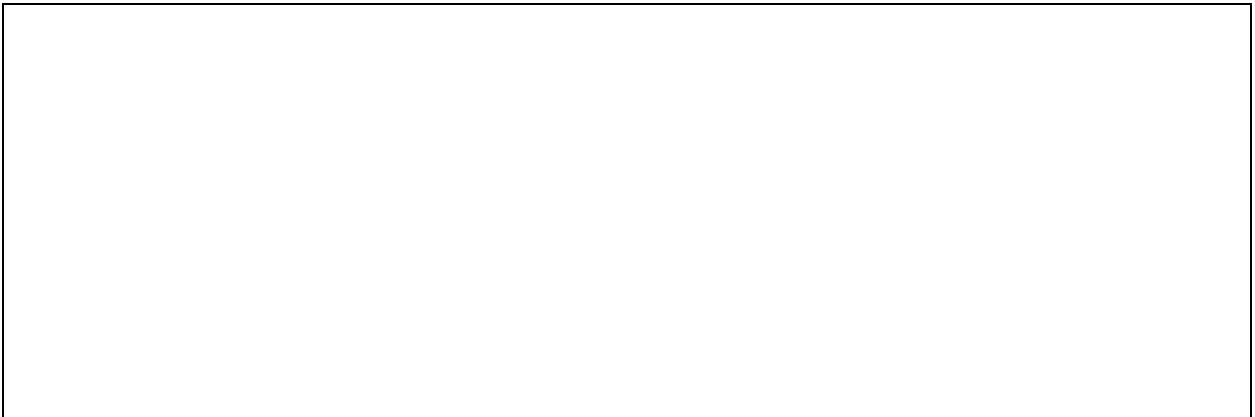
What are their strengths? What are their struggles and needs?

How has this* impacted the students & community I serve, historically & today?

How can this* promote your students' strengths and sustain/uplift their identities?



How can this* respond to the needs of your students & their community?



How can this push students to think critically about themselves and their world & push them to make it better?



*project, topic, subject, lesson, structure, relationship, etc.

Liberatory Education Tuning Protocol

by Ana De Almeida Amaral and Izadora McGawley

Commitments

1. Oppression exists and we must actively fight against it
2. The purpose of education is to disrupt, engage, and empower
3. Center liberation and responsibility not blame, guilt, or fragility

Norms

- Show love through your criticism
- Create a brave space
- Share the air

Protocol - To keep to the goals of L.E. and ensure equitable speaking times, please follow strictly.

1. **Commitments & Norms: 2 min** - Facilitator reviews commitments and norms
2. **Overview: 3 min** - Presenter describes what they are tuning and its themes generally
3. **Clarifying Questions: 3 min** - Group asks presenter questions to better understand the overview. These questions are not meant to give feedback, just for clarification.
4. **Liberatory Education Reflection: 10 min** - Presenter answers the questions below (adapted from Mike Brown, Executive Director of Freedom Fellows Institute).
 - a. Who makes up the students & community I serve? Think: *Identity & Positionality*
 - b. What are their strengths? What are their struggles and needs?
 - c. How has this* impacted the students & community I serve, historically & today?
 - d. How can this* promote your students' strengths and sustain/uplift their identities?
 - e. How can this* respond to the needs of your students & their community?
 - f. How can this* push students to think critically about themselves and their world & push them to make it better?
5. **Probing Questions: 6 min** - Group asks questions to push the presenter to think deeper about the Liberatory Education reflection. Reference the question breakdown!
6. **Discussion: 10 min** - Group gives celebrations and suggestions about how the presenter's work* answers each L.E. question. This is also the time for brainstorming new L.E.-specific ideas. Presenter limits input to clarifying questions and directing feedback.
7. **Response: 1 min** - Presenter responds to discussion and sets next steps in making their work* more liberating.
8. **Affirmation & Takeaway** - Each participant gives the presenter an affirmation and shares a takeaway from this tuning that they will incorporate into their own practice.

*project, topic, subject, lesson, structure, relationship, etc.

L.E. Commitments and Norms: Explained

Commitments

“Oppression exists and we must actively fight against it.” - In order to address the inequities that our students face, we must share this basic agreement. (See page 1, paragraph 1 for further explanation)

“The purpose of education is to disrupt, engage, and empower.” - We believe that the purpose of our work is to disrupt cultural and institutional norms that perpetuate inequality and disenfranchisement, to engage students of all backgrounds and demographics, and to guide students in thinking critically about our world so that they are empowered to change it.

“Center liberation and responsibility, not blame, guilt or fragility.” - When looking critically at our work as educators, we may feel like we failed to create the equitable and empowering environment we wished to have for our students. This tuning should center our moral and professional responsibility to use our classrooms to combat the disenfranchisement our institution perpetuates. This is a growth and action oriented process. Know when to call out and when to call in.

Norms

“Show love through your criticism.” - We must do everything that we can in order to make sure that we are combating white supremacy and injustice in our communities and we do this out of love. We care deeply and see that every individual can help us make our world better. We are respectful but are brave in calling out injustice. We are always pushing ourselves and others to grow.

“Create a brave space.” - In order to fulfill norm #1, we must set our insecurities aside. We have a growth mindset and do not fear controversy or making mistakes. We are brave enough to speak genuinely, listen, and challenge ideas. This is how change is made.

“Share the air.” - Adapted from a widely used norm, we believe that “share the air” has a larger fate to fulfill. In L.E., sharing the air means amplifying voices that have been silenced within both our society and tuning group in order to create a truly equitable conversation. Who is talking in your group? Who isn't? Why? This also means that we MUST follow the protocol. If we don't, we stray from our goal and take time away from our presenter. When we practice sharing the air in our tuning, we make a habit of promoting equity and diversity everywhere.

L.E. Examples

What does it look like in projects and practice?

Faces of Change: <http://bit.ly/rostrosdelcambio>

Interdisciplinary project by Marisol Franco, Laszlo Folks, Dalya Almansour

Essential Questions

1. How do we become meaningful agents of change in diverse communities?
2. What is the difference between gentrification and revitalization? Who decides?

Description

"Students will explore ways in which to address the needs of a variety of groups within our community. They will work with those different groups to brainstorm and implement community engagement projects." - Marisol Franco (From Digital Portfolio)

Migration Tales: <http://bit.ly/migrationtales>

Humanities project by Alexia Enriquez

Essential Questions

1. Why do humans migrate?
2. What are the causes and effects of migration?

Description

"Migration Tales is about the past exploration of new spaces and frontier on earth through human migration patterns. The project will take the students through the history of migration patterns and have them research the causes and effects of migration for both different communities and within their own family history. During the project, students will study and use mentor texts in order to support their writing and creation of a migration short story." - Alexia Enriquez (From project handout)

Who did it first?: <http://bit.ly/incasandcoding>

STEM practice by Kara Quinlan

Essential Question

1. Who are the underrepresented voices in STEM and what have they contributed?

Description

At the start of each year, Ms. Quinny builds her classroom culture by having her students paint portraits of a diverse group of scientists which are then hung on her walls. Throughout the year, each unit is introduced by sharing the contributions of an underrepresented group to the particular science field she will be teaching. Ex: the Incas' contributions to coding through the Quipu.

L.E. Resources

This tool is rooted in the growing body of work surrounding Ethnic Studies, and Culturally Responsive, Relevant, Sustaining, and/or Disruptive Pedagogy, and decolonization. As educators, we should be committed to developing our practice. Here are some of the resources that we were motivated by, please use them. We hope you continue to spread this work throughout your community.

Written

Abbie As Ally: An Argument for Culturally Disruptive Pedagogy - Timothy San Pedro

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies - Django Paris and H. Samy Alim

Lies My Teacher Told Me - James W. Loewen

A People's History of the United States - Howard Zinn

Pedagogy of the Oppressed - Paulo Freire

Filmed

Deeper Learning 2019 - Ana and Iza: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ye0PlpsKl0Q>

Precious Knowledge - Ari Palos

The Truth about the Confederacy in the United States - Jeff Robinson

Experiences

Deeper Learning 2019 Workshop: *Culture Killing: The Death of Marginalized Cultures in Educational Curriculum* - Mike Brown, Executive Director, Freedom Fellows Institute

Mentors

Mackenzie King: Humanities Teacher, High Tech High Chula Vista

Diana Cornejo-Sanchez: Director of Intern & Induction Programs, HTH Teacher Center

Michelle Sadrena Pledger: Ed. D, Center for Research on Equity and Innovation

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dedicated to Sara Islas; thank you for believing in us ♡