LIBERATORY DESIGN

your toolkit to design for equity

version 1.0

What is this card deck?

This deck is your handy toolkit to practice Liberatory Design. It includes 3 sections:

1. Liberatory Design Process

We've adapted the design thinking process to include steps that we believe are essential to practice design for liberation.

2. Liberatory Design Mindsets

To practice Liberatory Design authentically, it is important to carry certain mindsets in all the work you do.

3. Liberatory Design "Do Now"s

These hacks are small actions you can take now to start practicing Liberatory Design.

*This card deck is the result of a collaboration between the Stanford d.school's K12Lab and The National Equity Project.
Tania Anaissie, Victor Cary, David Clifford, Tom Malarkey, Susie Wise

1.

LIBERATORY DESIGN PROCESS

Liberatory Design Process

The Liberatory Design Process is adapted from the Stanford d.school's design thinking process.

We've adapted the original framework to create the opportunity for designers to NOTICE + REFLECT on what they are bringing to a design thinking challenge.

Noticing and reflecting through the process allows designers to redesign themselves as equity-centered. These new designers emerge self-aware of their identity, beliefs, biases and values. They are able to make authentic connections between who they are and who they're designing with. They co-create and co-construct a new paradigm of design, one that is diverse, inclusive and equitable.

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NOTICE

NOTICE

What?

The NOTICE phase helps designers develop social-emotional awareness before entering any context. This phase is about practicing self-awareness of one's own identity, values, emotions, biases, assumptions and situatedness.

Noticing what one brings to any context allows for authentic user-centered design, not "you"-centered design.

Key Questions to Ask

Identity: Who am I/we? Who are our users?

Power: How are we respectively situated (relative to opportunity, institutional power)?

Context: What is our situation, our equity challenge?

Partnership: Given the above, how can we create a partnership that is liberating for all in the process?

EMPATHIZE

EMPATHIZE

What?

The EMPATHIZE phase of the process is focused on understanding the experiences, emotions and motivations of others. Designers use specific empathy methods to learn more about the needs of the users for whom they are designing.

Key Questions to Ask

How does my identity and role in this project affect how and what people share with me?

How do I maintain awareness of my biases and challenge them in order to see this community more authentically?

What do people in this community identify as their needs?

How do systemic oppression and/or privilege affect this community, and how does that relate to this project?

DEFINE

DEFINE

What?

The DEFINE phase of the process is focused on developing a point of view about the needs of the community. It is especially important in this phase to work alongside community members. In this phase, you search for patterns or insights from your interviews that reveal deeper needs of the community. Using what you've distilled from the conversations, you narrow the project focus.

It is important to notice and reflect on what comprises the team of "We" when creating "How might we..." problem statements.

Key Questions to Ask

How can we insure we are reaching a point of view that is authentic and not distorted by biases?

What is the larger ecosystem in which our project focus lives? What influences it?

IDEATE

IDEATE

What?

The IDEATE phase of the process is focused on generating as many inclusive solutions to a problem as possible. Once many solutions have been generated, the team selects the top ideas and moves them forward to prototyping.

Key Questions to Ask

How can we ensure we have designed for optimal collaboration and have invited multiple perspectives?

How can we create an environment that encourages people to share ideas without fear of judgment and also maintains an awareness of biases?

PROTOTYPE

PROTOTYPE

What?

The PROTOTYPE phase involves iterative development of tangible artifacts or experiences intended to elicit feedback and answer specific questions about a concept.

In this phase, we Build to Think. Building out an idea raises new questions and pushes the team to refine ideas.

Key Questions to Ask

What assumptions are we making that we want tested in this prototype?

How can we quickly build a representation of our idea that does not require a lot of explanation?

TEST

TEST

What?

The TEST phase of the process is focused on getting specific feedback on our prototype, checking our assumptions, and learning how to improve our design. It is important to remember during this phase that prototypes are imperfect and feedback is a gift.

Key Questions to Ask

How are we creating the right environment so that it is truly safe to fail?

Have we included all the voices and identities necessary into the room to receive feedback?

REFLECT

REFLECT

What?

The REFLECT phase of the process is ongoing and transparent throughout the design thinking process. It allows you and your team the time reflect on your actions, emotions, insights and impact as designers and humans. It is called an “Equity Pause” by EquityXDesign. It is a time to share our learning and see what we can do better* next time.

*To make it more inclusive, equitable and aesthetic.

Key Questions to Ask

What evidence do I have that I am becoming more self aware and self correcting as an equity leader using Liberatory Design?

How is my emotional state affecting how I show up with my team? How can I share or release those emotions with my team?

2.

LIBERATORY DESIGN MINDSETS

Liberatory Design Mindsets

The Liberatory Design Mindsets are evolutions of the design mindsets commonly used at the Stanford d.school.

They have been enhanced with the explicit intention of building Liberatory Design leaders through a collaboration between the National Equity Project and the Stanford d.school's K12 Lab.

The goal is to develop the Liberatory Design muscles held within us all. As we build our own muscles, it allows others who work with us to develop the equity-centered creative agency to solve their own problems in community with others.

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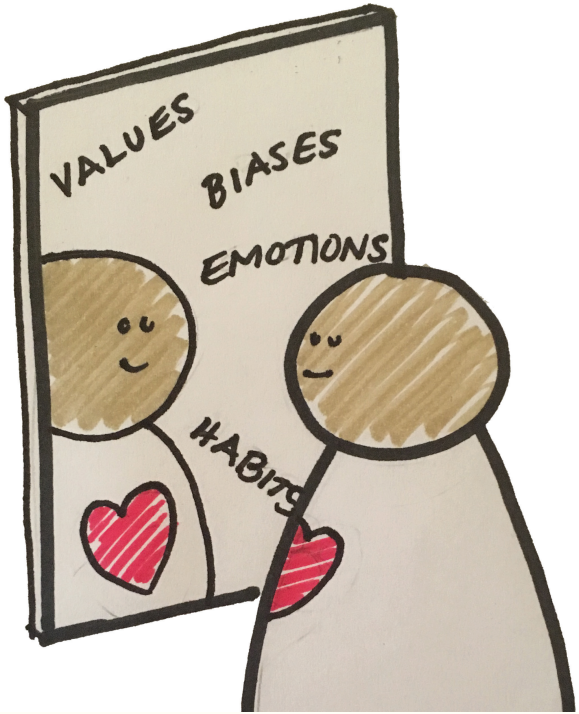


Practice Self-Awareness

We design from who we are. So we need a clear "mirror" to better see how who we are shapes what we see, how we relate, and how we design.

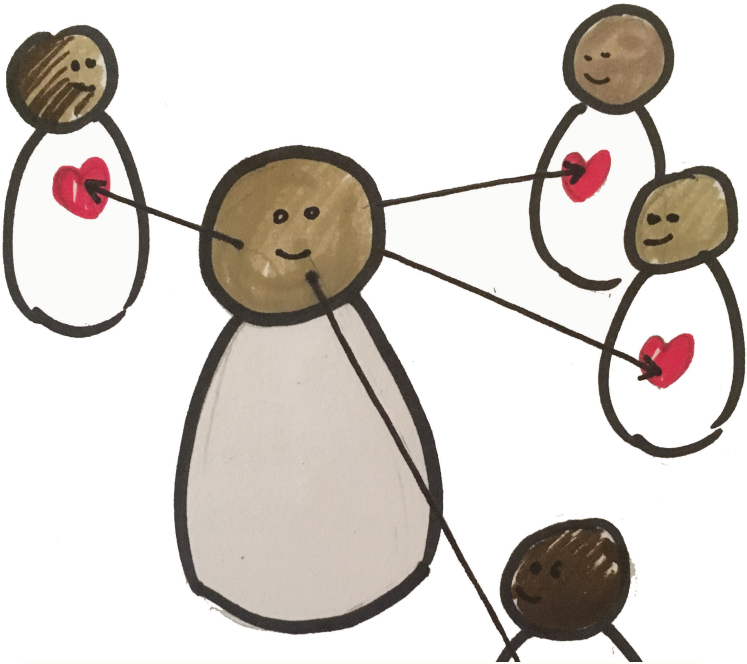
Practice Self-Awareness

Why?

Liberatory Design requires we minimize the harmful effects of our blind spots and maximize the potential for non-oppressive partnerships. Liberatory Design has the potential to change us to the extent we work with humility, curiosity and courage.

How

- Ask yourself, “How am I positioned (relative to privilege and/or oppression) in all aspects of my identities (e.g. race, class, gender, language)?”
- Ask yourself, “How might these identities impact people and our process?”
- Surface what you don’t know. Ask yourself, “What is unfamiliar to me here?”
- Challenge your assumptions.
- Expand your equity consciousness by seeking out new information about privilege and oppression.



Focus on Human Values

Seek as many ways as possible to get to know your end users including immersion, observation, and co-design.

Focus on Human Values

Why?

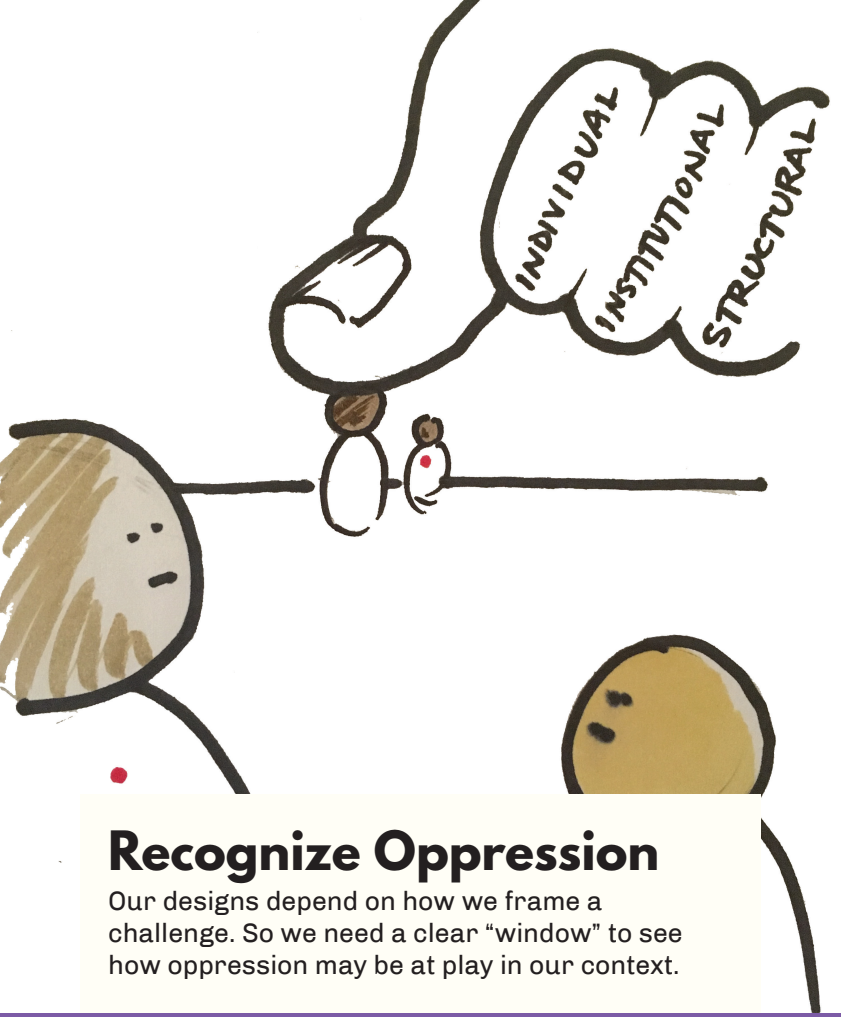
In order to create change that empowers communities from the inside-out, we must place users at the center of all our work. They are the experts on the challenges that face their community.

To do this as designers, we must invest in getting to know the community and honor the stories they share with us.

In addition, we must honor human values on our own design teams and make time for emotions.

How

- Listen from a place of love. Be humble and acknowledge that you are not the expert.
- Honor the stories, experiences, and emotions people share with you.
- Stay connected to the community in all phases of the project.
- Engage in collective sense-making.



Recognize Oppression

Our designs depend on how we frame a challenge. So we need a clear “window” to see how oppression may be at play in our context.

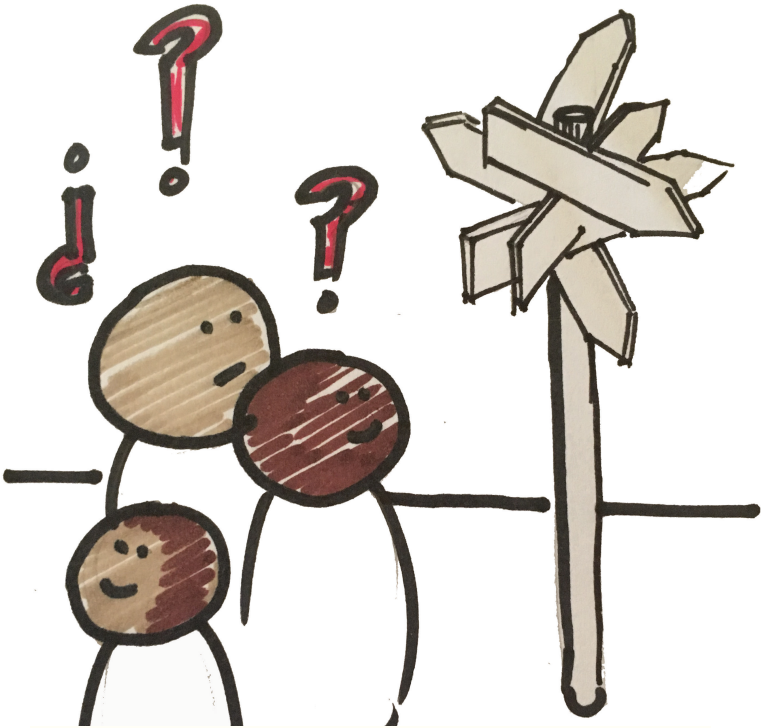
Recognize Oppression

Why?

The people we are designing with and the challenges they face do not sit in a vacuum. If we are able to see root causes and systemic inequities more clearly, our design work has the potential to address deeper needs. Our design process should build our capacity to recognize oppression at play at individual, institutional, and structural levels.

How

- Ask, “What identity-related patterns and inequities are we seeing in this context?”
- Ask, “What barriers are in the way of achieving equitable outcomes?”
- Ask, “What might be some unintended consequences of our designs?”
- Ask, “What is this community’s experience with ‘design’ and how does that affect how we do this work?”
- Ask, “How are relationships and power differentials affecting the truth that is told here?”



Embrace Complexity

When the going gets messy, stay open to possibility. Powerful design emerges from the mess, not from avoiding it.

Embrace Complexity

Why?

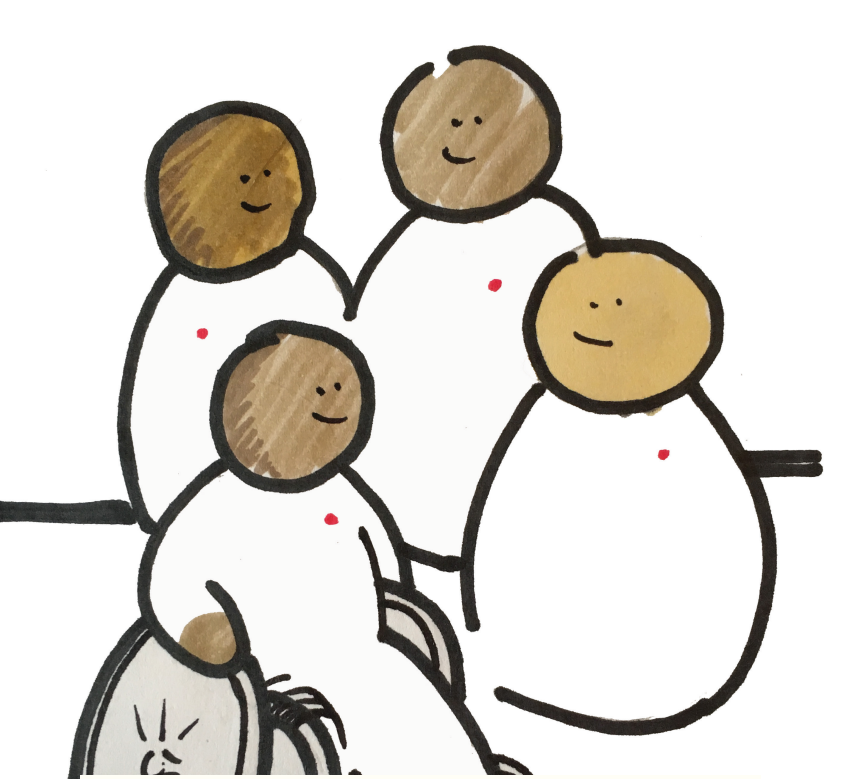
Equity challenges, by their nature, are complex, and moments of ambiguity are common when using the design process.

While it can be uncomfortable not knowing what's next or not having a clear answer, jumping to a solution out of discomfort risks defaulting to comfortable or reproductive practices.

Wading through the complexity and ambiguity of this kind of work with patience will allow you to develop more innovative and equitable outcomes.

How

- Acknowledge the confusion and discomfort of the uncertainty present in your work.
- Find ways to care for the team and yourself as you wade through the uncertainty.
- Welcome diversity of discourse even when it can feel complicating.



Seek Liberatory Collaboration

Recognize differences in power and identity. Design “with” instead of “for.”

Seek Liberatory Collaboration

Why?

Design work is fraught with power and identity dynamics (e.g. designer as expert, who's generally situated with advantage). To fully realize the liberatory potential of a design process, both for the people we are designing with and for the designer, it's critical to reframe the relationship as one of partnership.

How

- Actively seek diverse identities and skill sets as you build your team.
- Acknowledge and build from the strengths, stories, and skills of each other.
- Set conditions for collective learning, risk-taking, and action.
- When framing the question, "How Might We...?" ensure the "We" is diverse and inclusive.

Build Relational Trust

Intentionally invest in relationships, especially across difference. Honor stories and listen for emotions.

Build Relational Trust

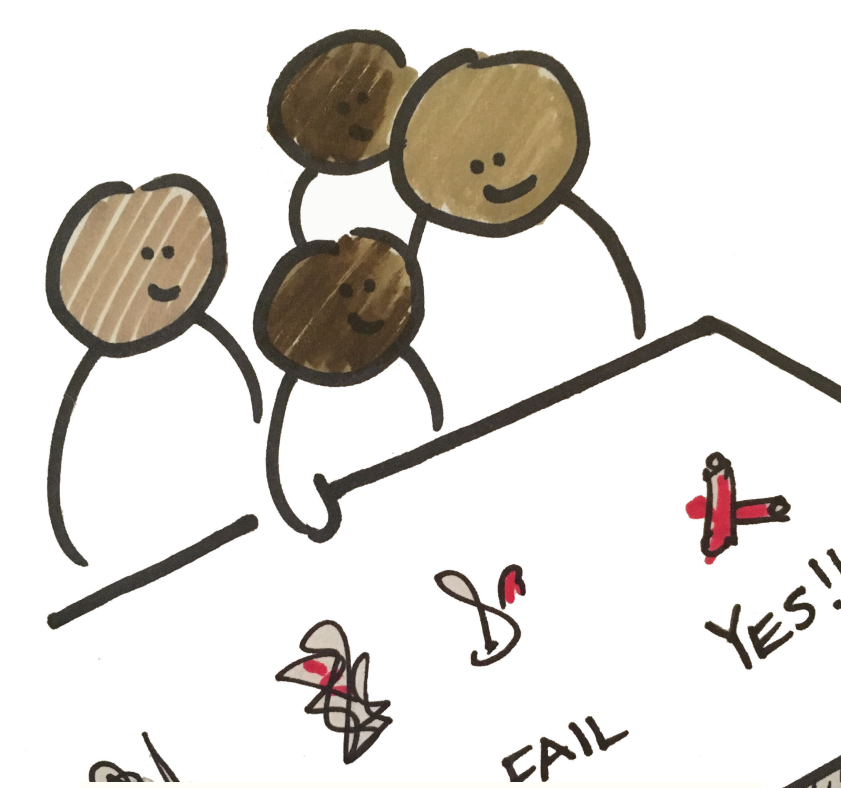
Why?

Relational trust is the glue in equity-centered design work. When working across difference on difficult challenges, teams must invest in developing emotional trust in order to authentically collaborate.

If we are comfortable identifying and processing emotions with our team, we create opportunities for healing and prevent distortion of our work.

How

- Enable personal connections through pair-shares (people share what matters to them).
- Make time and space for people to bring forward their fuller selves and identities.
- Emphasize the importance of non-judgmental listening.
- Hold space for community to reflect, express and process thoughts and emotions.
- Create culture that invites dialogue.



Bias Towards Experimentation

The complexity of oppression requires courageous action. Build to think and learn.

Bias Towards Experimentation

Why?

Oppression thrives on risk-averse behavior. It's important to fail fast. Small changes can have large effects - AND hacking oppression requires longshots. Liberatory Design is an ever-evolving craft that is never "done."

How

- Co-design safe-to-fail experiments to learn more.
- Build trust through experiments increasing in scale or risk over time.
- Build agency and capacity in the community through co-designed and implemented experiments.
- Balance quick action with thoughtful reflection.
- Choose a direction, not a single or final solution.

Share, Don't Sell

Practice transparency of process and non-attachment to ideas.

Share, Don't Sell

Why?

When sharing your work, find ways to invite people in instead of trying to convince them of value. When you share your work humbly, it invites feedback and questions that could advance your work. In addition, it widens your circle of collaborators and invites those people to co-design with you.

Conversely, if we focus on selling or convincing, we are losing opportunities to refine our work and incorporate new perspectives.

How

- Be transparent about the team's process, mindsets, shared goals, expectations and co-constructed narratives.
- Share as an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Earn trust through actions and not just words.

3.

LIBERATORY DESIGN "DO NOW"s

Liberatory Design “Do Now”s

The Liberatory Design “DO NOW”s are designed to get you going on your Liberatory Design leadership practice. Think of them as ways to get started right away and to earn some quick wins on your team.

These cards were adopted from the School Retool’s Quick Win Cards and adapted by the National Equity Project and the Stanford d.school’s K12 Lab. They are meant to be used with the Liberatory Design Process and Mindsets.

Tania Anaissie, Victor Cary, David Clifford, Tom Malarkey, Susie Wise

Shadow a Student

Shadow a Student

Why?

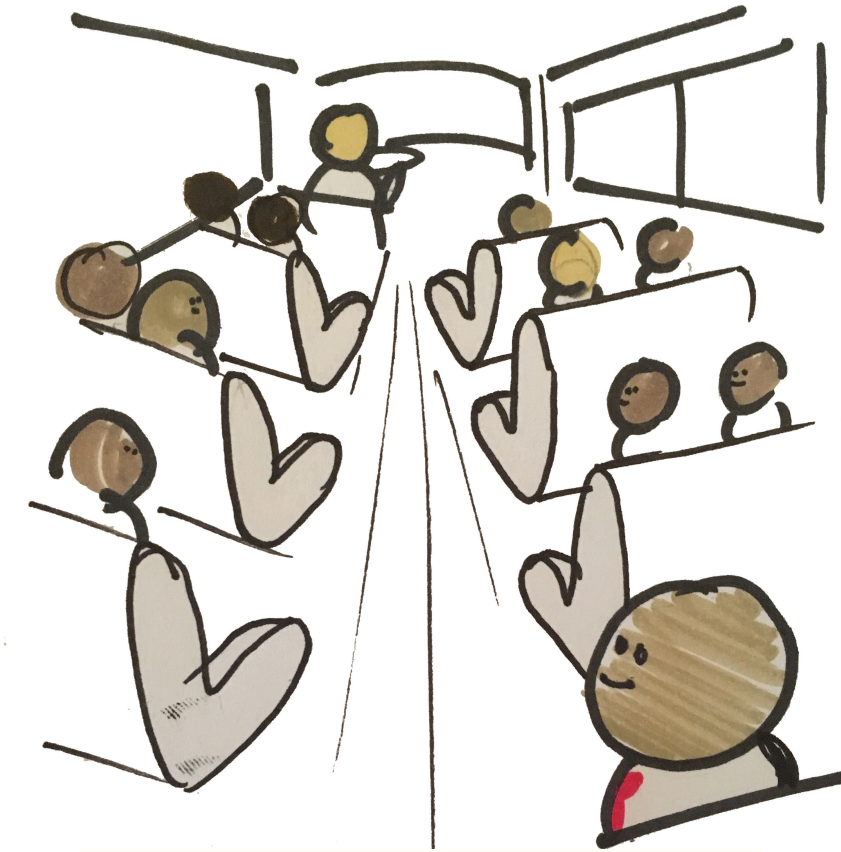
Gain deep empathy for the student experience and see your school from a different vantage point.

How

- PREWORK: Practice self-awareness, particularly around power dynamics. Think about how to choose a student so that they don't feel othered. Create learning goals for yourself for the day.

1. Choose a student and schedule a day to shadow them.
2. Document your observations throughout the day.
3. At the end of the day, reflect on your observations. Focus on both what you saw and what you personally felt.
4. Identify opportunities for change.

Shadow a Student toolkit available at www.shadowastudent.org



Ride the Bus

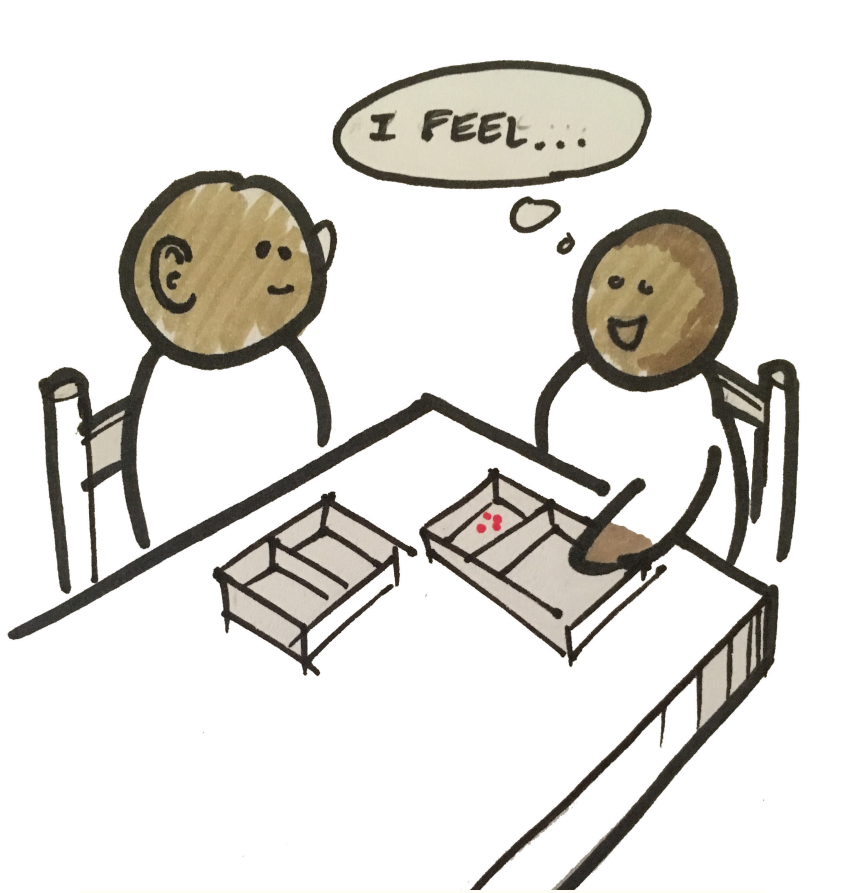
Ride the Bus

Why?

Riding the bus with students who live in different neighborhoods can offer moments to create deeper empathy for your students and the broader context of their lives.

How

1. Choose a region or neighborhood (not a student, to prevent othering) from where some of your students travel.
2. Get to the neighborhood and start the morning at the bus stop.
3. Ride the bus with the students and get a sense of what it's like. Think about how your presence might affect their behavior.
4. Reflect on your observations and personal experience. What behaviors did you see and what might this say about the student experience?
5. Challenge assumptions and identify opportunities for change.



Take a Teacher to Lunch

Take a Teacher to Lunch

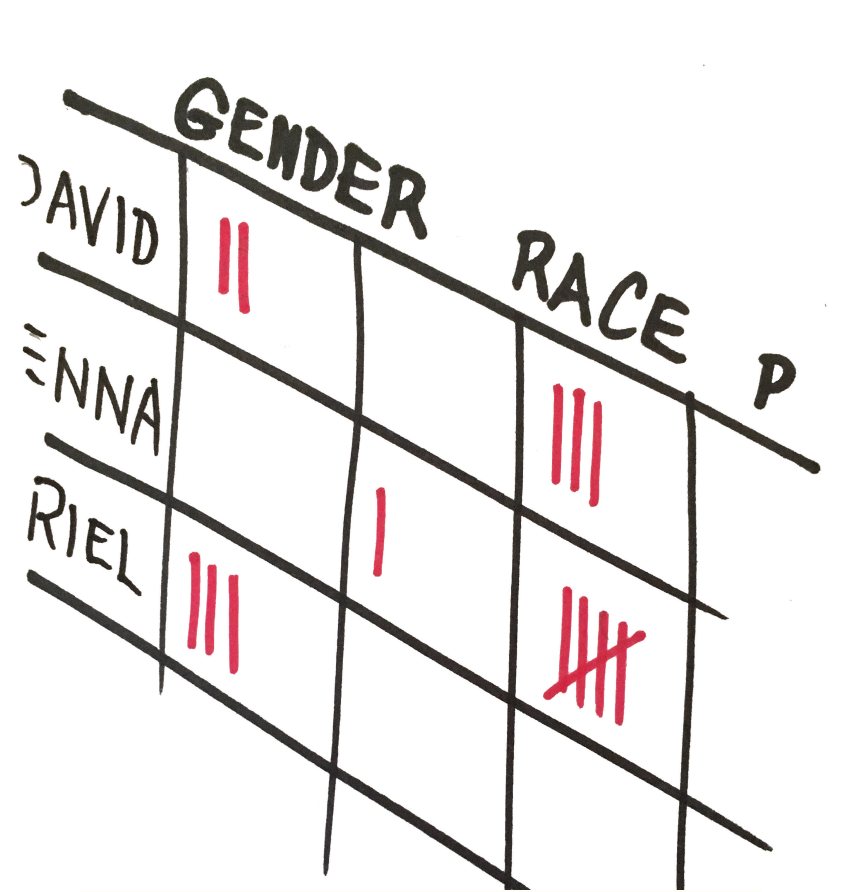
Why?

Let us not underestimate the power of relationships in doing deep work. Taking time to more deeply know some of your colleagues can lead to new learnings and partnerships.

How

- PREWORK: Practice self-awareness, particularly around power dynamics. Think about how to choose a teacher so that they don't feel othered or feel suspect as to why you are asking them to lunch.

1. Identify a teacher you do not have a strong relationship with and first reflect on why this may be.
2. Invite the teacher to lunch with you.
3. Focus on listening. What is their experience like in your school? What are their hopes and dreams — in and outside of the school context?
4. Reflect on what you heard. Did you hear anything unexpected? What opportunities are there for change?



Track the Talk

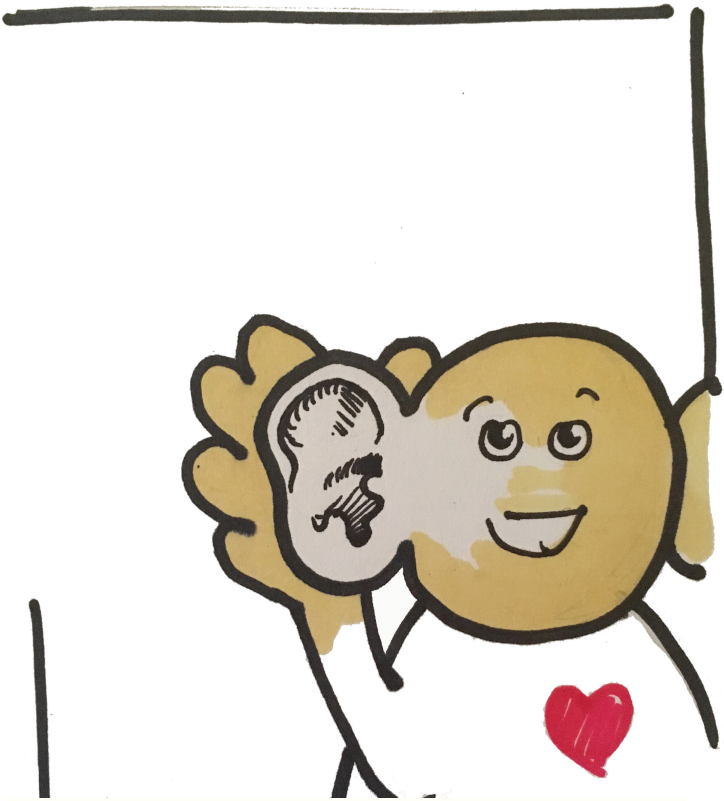
Track the Talk

Why?

Sometimes, taking a quick tally can reveal things we didn't see before or give us a chance to ask ourselves, "why?"

How

1. Take a scribe roll or ask a colleague to tally who speaks in the meeting.
2. Add a mark next to their name each time they speak in the group.
3. After the meeting, review the count. Are there any imbalances? Why do you think certain people are comfortable sharing or not? Does this reflect a pattern?



Listen Closely

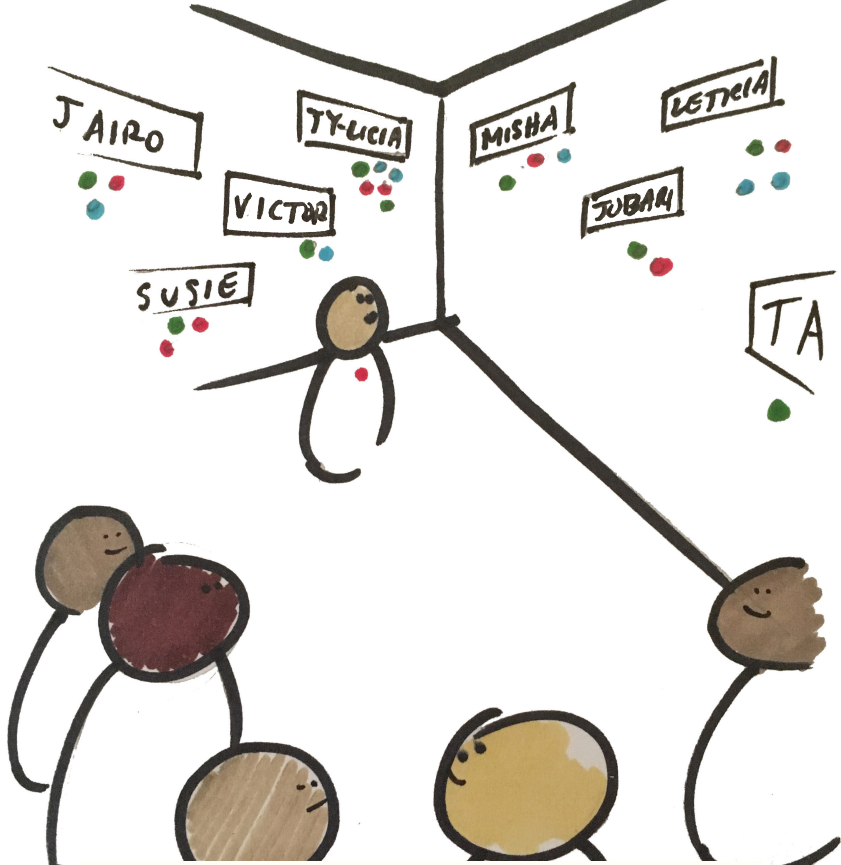
Listen Closely

Why?

Intentionally taking an observer lens can help reveal patterns previously missed or reshape how we view our offerings.

How

1. Pick a day and commit to listen for race and equity notions across the day.
2. Think about what spaces you want to explore within the school context.
3. As you move through the day, keep a journal and write down what you hear and see.
4. Consider taking on this practice with a buddy and debrief your findings together at the end of the day. Did you see any patterns? Anything unexpected?



Map the Student Safety Net

Map the Student Safety Net

Why?

Identify students that are slipping through the cracks.

How

1. During a staff or grad meeting, hang the names of all students up on a wall.
2. Give adults a set of stickers.
3. Have everyone silently walk around the room and add stickers next to student names they have a personal connection with.
4. Notice which students have no or few stickers next to their names.
5. Brainstorm ways to reach the students who do not have a personal connection with an adult at your school.

Credits + an Invitation

Thank you, team!

Thank you to the wonderful people who put love, brain power, and intention into the making of this card deck (alphabetically):

Tania Anaissie (Content + Visual Design)
Victor Cary (Content)
David Clifford (Content + Illustrations)
Tom Malarkey (Content)
Susie Wise (Content)

We Want to Hear From You

This card deck is a work in progress. This is our first prototype of it, and we'd love to hear your feedback! What do you like about it? What do you wish was different about it? Any new ideas? Do you use it at work? Why or why not?

Email us at liberatorydesign@gmail.com

NATIONAL EQUITY PROJECT

d.K12 LAB NETWORK