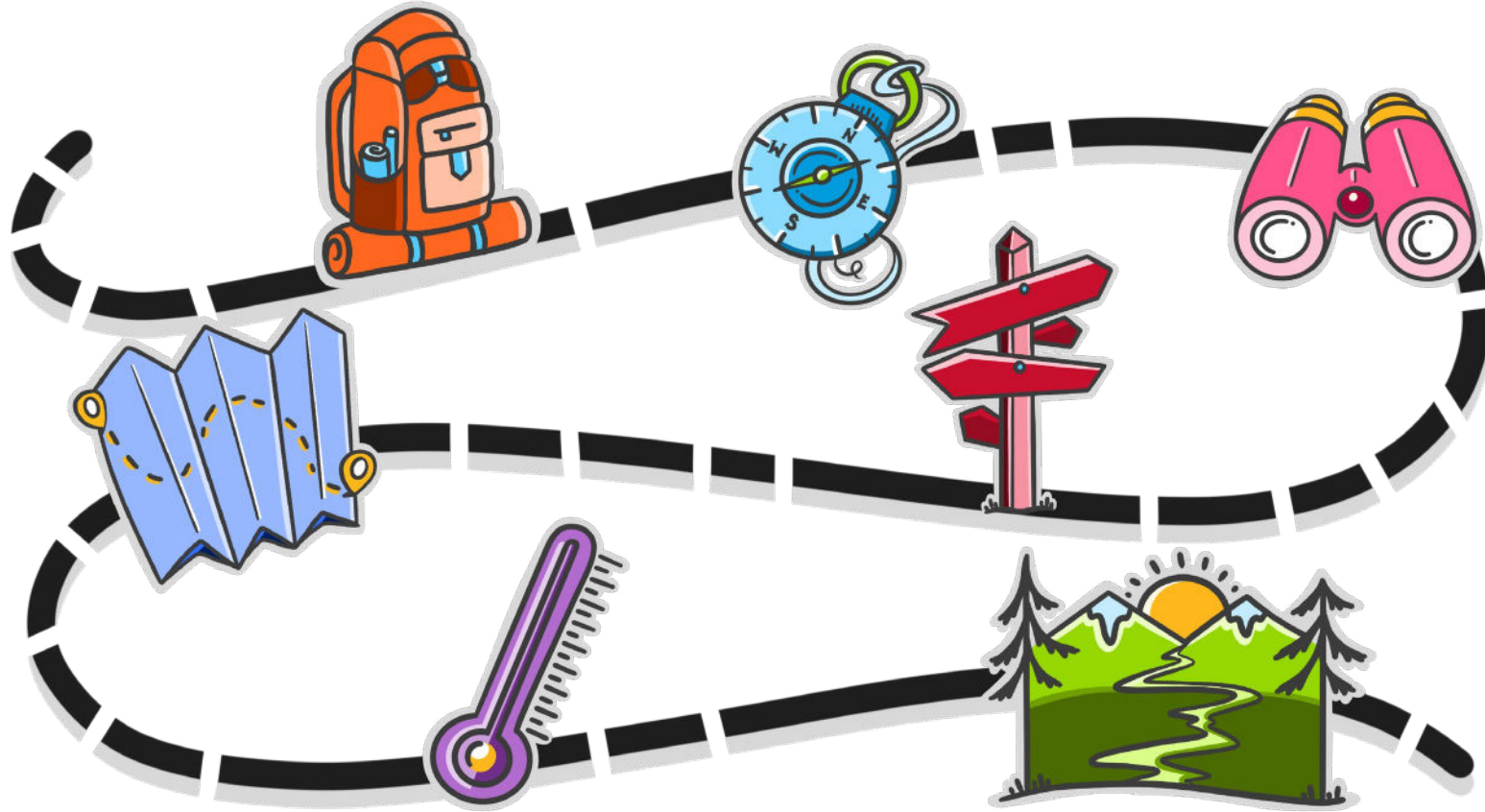# Mapping Your Journey into Liberatory Education Futures

We are on a journey toward the future of learning.

We have hopes and fears; we have plans and questions. We will face opportunities and challenges. This toolkit will help small teams of people discuss what might happen and what they want to happen and map their paths toward a more equitable and life-affirming future of learning.

This toolkit is meant for anyone who cares about the future of learning. It can help you:

» Deepen your educational equity efforts, including how to design a system that works for historically marginalized yet resilient learners

» Explore the idea of **liberatory education** and how it fits into your work, including how it might show up in classroom, community and system settings

» Bring future possibilities into your long-term plans, including strategic plans and systems change efforts

The effort to create a new future of learning will be filled with uncertainty. Each of us has a moral imperative to engage in it. The only way forward is together.
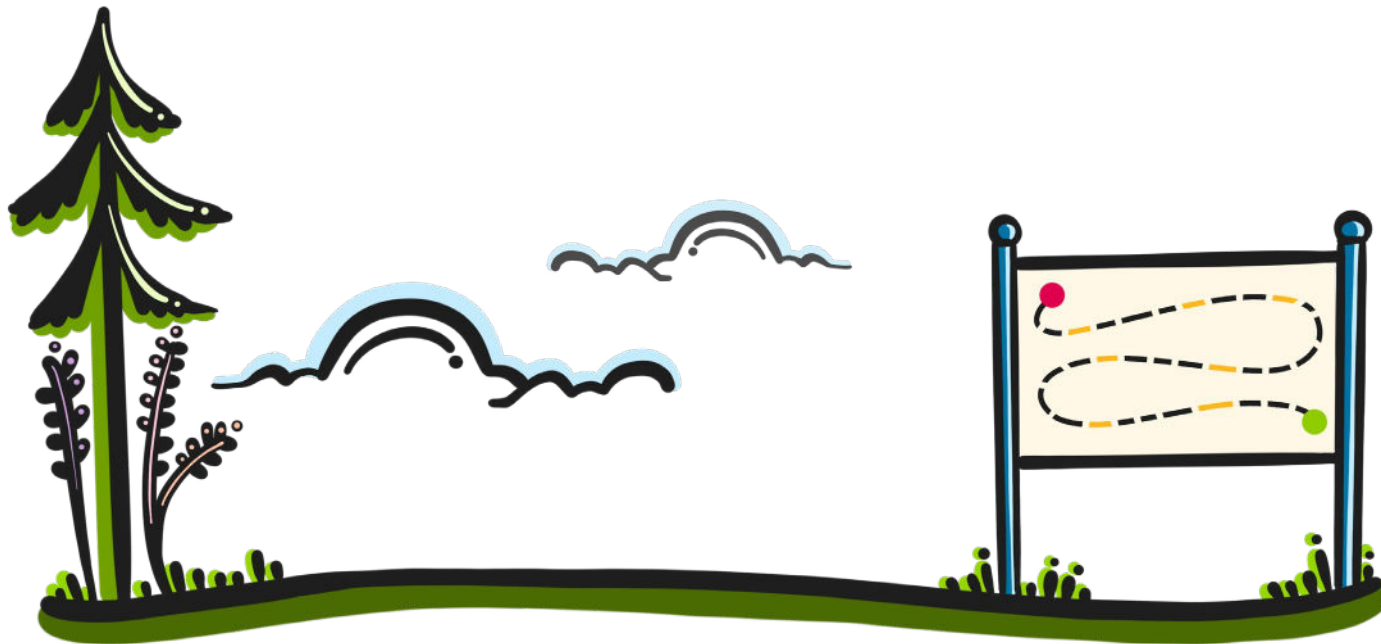
About This Toolkit

This toolkit is made up of seven activities. When you complete them in sequence, you will end up with insights about the future of liberatory education and ideas for action steps to help move toward your aspirations.

GATHERING YOUR GEAR
Get ready for the work ahead.

ORIENTING WITH YOUR TEAM
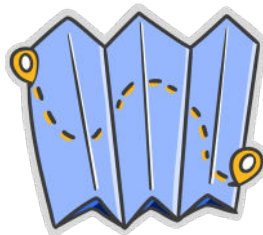Set the stage for the collaboration.

EXPLORING THE FUTURE LANDSCAPE
Review future scenarios for bright spots and challenges.

IDENTIFYING YOUR DESTINATION
Select an aspiration to guide your work.

MAPPING YOUR PATH
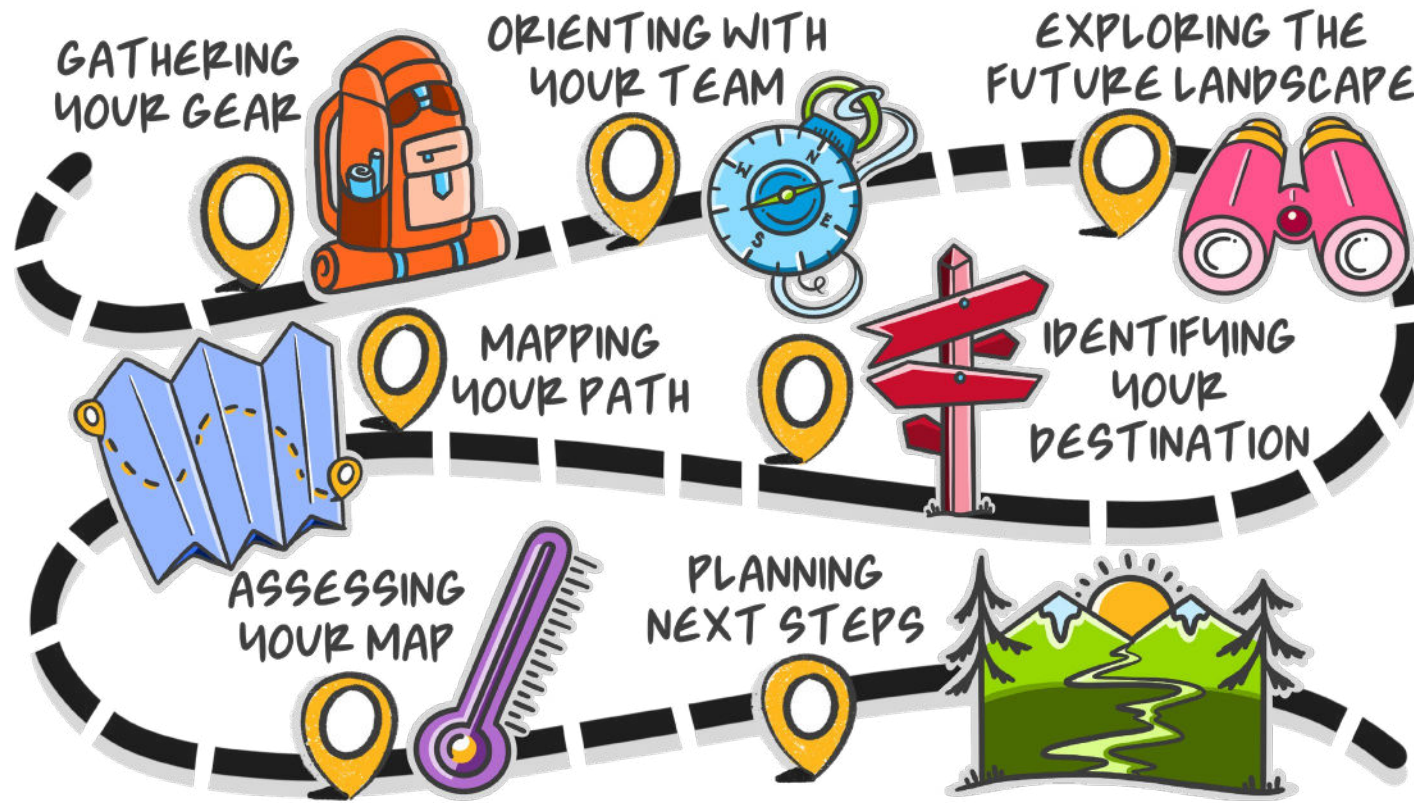Name action steps that will help achieve your aspiration.

ASSESSING YOUR MAP
Notice and discuss the possible impacts of the action steps.

PLANNING NEXT STEPS
Reflect on what comes next.

These activities are designed for groups of three to five people who are colleagues or who have a shared interest in the future of learning. A larger group can split up and work in smaller teams. Your group can complete all the activities, either at the same time or over the course of several days or weeks, or your group can complete only those activities that feel most relevant to you. The entire toolkit will take three to four hours to complete. This toolkit includes everything needed for in-person collaboration. A Google Slides version of this toolkit is also available to support digital collaboration.

See the **Acknowledgements section** for more details about who created this toolkit and how it came to be.

GATHERING YOUR GEAR

The purpose of this activity is to prepare for the journey ahead by identifying your team, deciding how you want to work together and completing brief pre-work.

GATHERING YOUR GEAR

15-30 Minutes (pre-work only)

MATERIALS

1. "**A Shift from Equity to Liberation**" by KnowledgeWorks

2. Optional: Entire *Imagining Liberatory Education Futures* forecast

3. "Group Norms" template (page 8) or a piece of chart paper titled "Group Norms"

4. Pens or markers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Gather a team of three to five people who will work together.

2. Decide when, where and how you want to work.

3. Agree to group norms and capture them on the **Group Norms** template or on a piece of chart paper. Select from the suggested norms (page 7) and/or create your own.

4. Individually complete pre-work to support your collaboration.

   a. Read "**A Shift from Equity to Liberation**" by KnowledgeWorks. Review more of the *Imagining Liberatory Education Futures* forecast if you wish.

   b. Consider your own identities and how they might inform how you engage with this toolkit and your colleagues. You can reflect on your identity as it relates to race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexuality, ability or any other aspect of who you are that feels relevant. Consider using a social identity mapping resource such as **Facing History and Ourselves' "Social Identity Wheel."**

GROUP NORMS

Make space and take space

Notice how much you and others are speaking. Make room for all voices and share your perspectives. Take think time and breaks that will support everyone's energy and participation.

Stay curious about yourself and others

Curiosity paves the way for learning. Notice when you feel resistance and when your team agrees and disagrees. Acknowledge when things get tense! These are all opportunities for developing deeper understanding of one another and your work.

Embrace your imagination

Before we can create something new, we need to be able to imagine it. Address today's challenges as needed and allow your thinking to move from what is real and possible today to what could be real and possible in the future.

Make this process your own

The timing, prompts and activity flows are suggestions based on experience with other groups. Only your team knows its goals and best collaboration practices. Work together to adapt the process in any way that ensures everyone can fully engage.
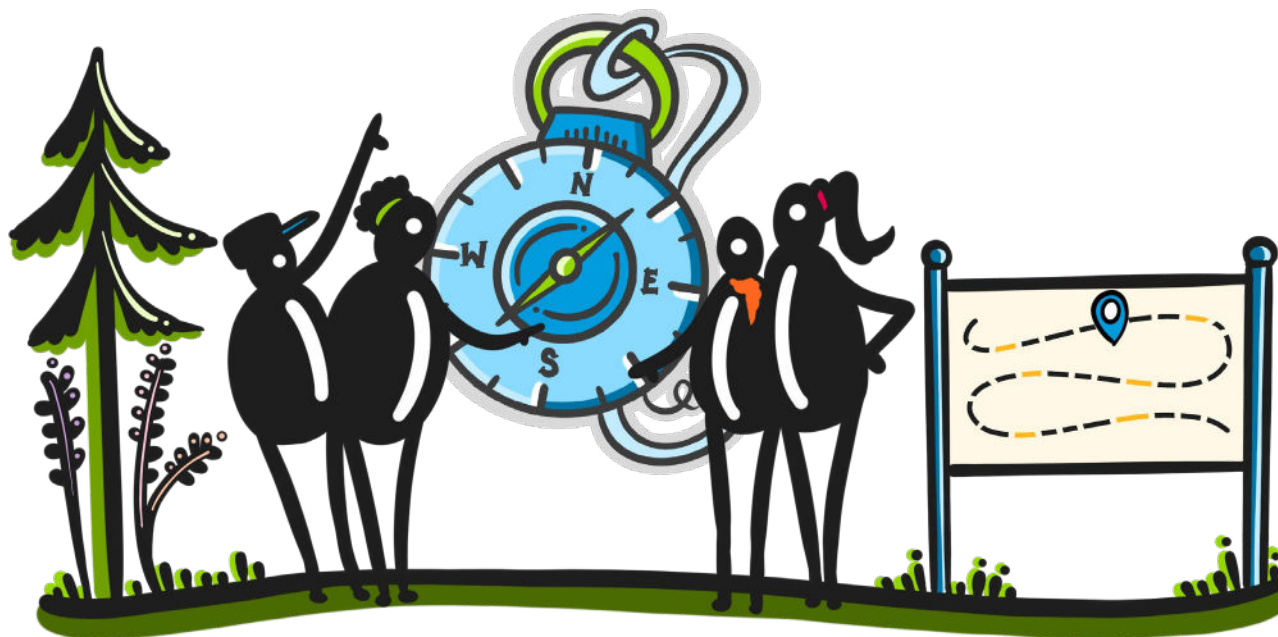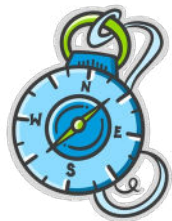
GROUP NORMS

ORIENTING WITH YOUR TEAM

The purpose of this activity is to build trust and shared understanding to set the stage for the team's collaboration.

ORIENTING WITH YOUR TEAM

25-35 Minutes

MATERIALS

1. Your outputs from the previous activity

   a. Group norms (page 8)

   b. Notes or reflections about your identity (page 6)

2. "Key Elements of Liberatory Education" template (page 12) or a piece of chart paper titled "Key Elements of Liberatory Education"

3. Pens or markers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Select a timekeeper and scribe. (1 minute)

2. Individually review the warm-up prompts below and consider your responses. (3-5 minutes)

   a. What everyday moment brings you joy?

   b. Which group norm do you want to focus on today?

   c. What stands out to you about the definition of liberatory education?

   d. What is one aspect of your identity that influences how you think about liberatory education?

      i. Why does that part of your identity matter to this conversation?

      ii. Share only what feels safe to share, attend to your group norms and stay aware of power dynamics in the group.

3. Share your responses, with each person sharing for 2-3 minutes. (10-15 minutes)

4. Drawing upon your conversation about what stands out about liberatory education, select the 3-5 elements that seem most important to your team. (10-15 minutes)

   a. Pull language directly from "**A Shift from Equity to Liberation**" or add your own thoughts about what a liberatory education system would be like.

   b. Capture these elements on the **Key Elements of Liberatory Education** template or chart paper so that you can refer to them throughout the process.

   c. You can use the example (page 11) to support your thinking.

KEY ELEMENTS OF LIBERATORY EDUCATION

- Is rooted in self-determination and the right to participate in shaping the world

- Prioritizes human potential, creativity and promise

- Combines the science of learning and human development with culturally responsive instruction

- Helps historically marginalized yet resilient students who are underserved engage in deeper learning
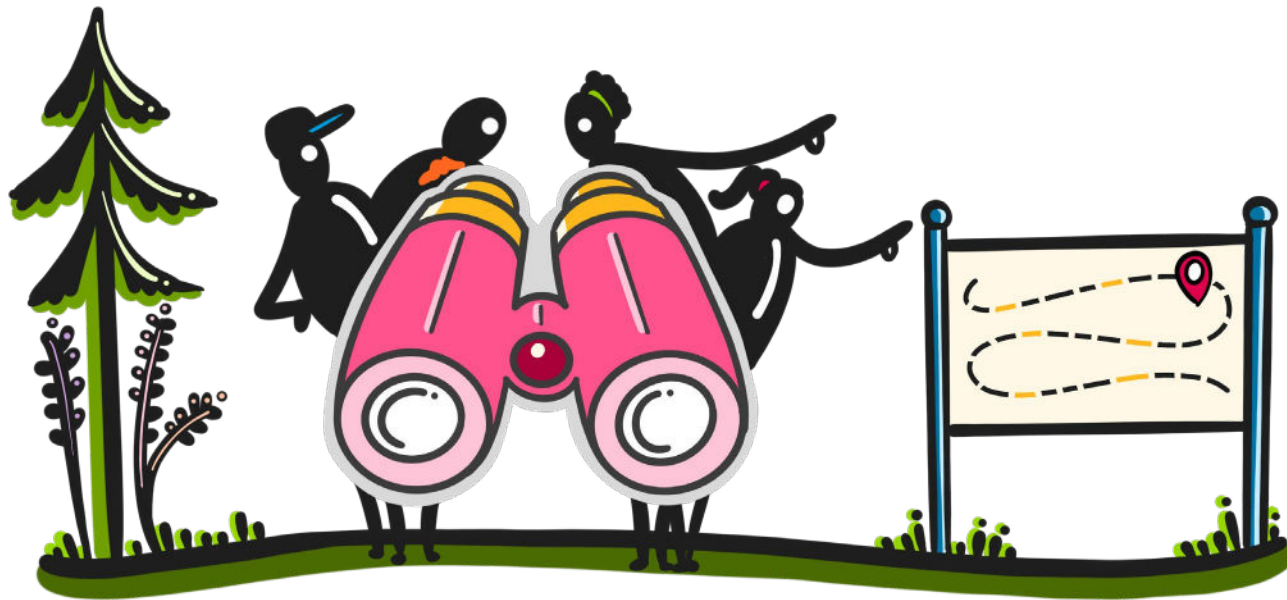
KEY ELEMENTS OF LIBERATORY EDUCATION

EXPLORING THE FUTURE LANDSCAPE

The purpose of this activity is to traverse the future by reviewing and discussing stories about what it could look like and to identify bright spots and challenges that the future might hold.

EXPLORING THE FUTURE LANDSCAPE

45-65 Minutes

MATERIALS

1. Your outputs from the previous activities

    a. Group Norms (page 8)

    b. Notes or reflections about your identity (page 6)

    c. Key elements of liberatory education (page 12)

2. Learner scenarios (page 15)

3. "Bright Spots and Challenges" template (page 17) or four pieces of chart paper titled "Scenario A," "Scenario B," "Scenario C" and "Scenario D"

4. Pens or markers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Individually read the learner scenarios on page 15. (10 minutes)

    a. The stories are inspired by longer scenarios from *Imagining Liberatory Education Futures*. They are set 20 years in the future.

    b. Each learner scenario illustrates what success for one student could look like, given the different ways the future could turn out. The student is Raquel Luschoe (she/her), a Black Indigenous adolescent.

    c. **Ask yourself:** Given this student's experiences, what challenges and bright spots for liberatory education might exist? Use your team's list of key elements of liberatory education to guide your reflection.

2. As a group, select at least two scenarios to discuss (you can discuss more, if you wish). Discuss possible challenges and bright spots for liberatory education that you notice or can infer from the stories. (30-50 minutes)

    a. Generate as many ideas as you can.

    b. Capture them on the **Bright Spots and Challenges** template or on the chart paper that corresponds to the scenario that you are discussing.

    c. When you feel ready, move to the next scenario.

    d. You can use the example (page 16) to support your thinking.

LEARNER SCENARIOS

Learner Scenario A

Raquel is co-facilitating a seminar on Indigenous medicinal practices with community elders and youth in her community's education liberation commons. The commons is a network of local agencies, services, learning resources, tutors, community elders and volunteers that come together to create vibrant learning environments and experiences and encourage social action. Raquel attends a competency-based public high school. It has an equity focus but, like many schools, it is stuck in old ways of thinking about learning and avoids difficult conversations about power and oppression. Students who try to spark those conversations are discouraged. The commons allows Raquel to explore her passions and culture; to connect deeply with herself and others; and to effect positive change in her community, which is how she defines success for herself. Success in school is based on demonstrated mastery of skills, some of which feel relevant to her and others not. Raquel is highly successful in both environments based on these measures.

Learner Scenario B

Raquel has begun her three-year term on her community's educational council with other youth, educators, community members and experts in health and governance. She and her peers have completed an action research project on sustainable forest fire and farming practices, alongside tribal and Black food sovereignty leaders. The council is reviewing the overall curriculum and is using that project as a case study. Members of the council disagree as they discuss how to change the curriculum, but they process conflict without eroding trust, as do most people in this multi-generational and multi-racial learning community. People's basic needs are met, so they have time to work together to meet their collective goals for the community. Raquel feels connected to and cared for by her neighbors, even those who are very different from her. She knows – from official measures and her own sense of growth – how much she is learning through projects and through the ways in which the community interacts and solves problems together.

Learner Scenario C

Raquel co-leads a youth-led learner group. The group hosts both in-person and digital gatherings focused on creating a world where people share power, find strength in differences and pursue social justice. Raquel has just helped plan a forum on race and environmental sustainability that used the Virtual Ancestor platform, an artificially intelligent elder that provides youth access to elder wisdom and support. For her work in the collective, Raquel defines success by her own sense of belonging and self-love and her ability to nurture belonging and self-love in others. She is thriving in this community that she has helped create. Raquel is still enrolled in, but is deeply disengaged from, her local public school, where students are under heavy digital and physical surveillance and interact mostly with instructional bots instead of peers or adult educators. Success in that environment is measured as compliance and passing standardized tests. According to those official measures, Raquel is an at-risk student who may not graduate from high school.

Learner Scenario D

Raquel is a star student in her artificial intelligence and data management programming career pathway. She started it four years ago when she became interested in technology and decided that she wanted to build wealth for her extended family, who have been denied opportunities for generations. Companies know that diverse workforces are more innovative, so they are recruiting her and promising mentorship from other Black women in the field. Some friends are matching with jobs via an app, but Raquel won a scholarship to work with a human counselor who uses sophisticated dashboards to help her develop her skills and find learning and work opportunities. She just tested out of a collaboration learning thread, which she pursued because predictive analytics showed that it was an area of growth for her and because other data showed that recent graduates were struggling with collaboration. Raquel is feeling supported and accomplished but often feels stressed, too. Fitting in is hard work, but she knows that it is worth it to be successful for herself and her family in the future.

Scenario: C

BRIGHT SPOTS

- Youth leadership

- Intergenerational belonging and self-love

- Digital and in-person focus; technology benefits the community

- Where school is lacking, another learning environment steps in to provide engagement and educational opportunity

CHALLENGES

- School does not provide support and leadership opportunities; Raquel has to find meaning elsewhere

- Forcing kids into environments that don't benefit them

- Surveillance/instructional bots — lack of trust is not conducive to learning or relationships

- Standardized testing measures are not aligned to "success"

Scenario:

BRIGHT SPOTS

CHALLENGES

Scenario:

BRIGHT SPOTS

CHALLENGES

CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

WHAT EMOTIONS ARE
YOU EXPERIENCING?

WHAT IS ON
YOUR MIND?

WHAT ARE YOU FEELING
IN YOUR BODY?

YOU DO NOT NEED TO SHARE, AND NOTHING
NEEDS TO CHANGE. SIMPLY NOTICE WHAT IS
TRUE FOR YOU. NOTICING THE THOUGHTS,
EMOTIONS AND PHYSICAL EXPERIENCES
THAT ARISE IN GROUPS CAN HELP US GROW
AND CAN LEAD TO BETTER COLLABORATION.

IDENTIFYING YOUR DESTINATION

The purpose of this activity is to reflect on your ideas about
the future and select an aspiration to guide your path forward.

IDENTIFYING YOUR DESTINATION

20 Minutes

MATERIALS

1. Your outputs from the previous activities

   a. Group norms (page 8)

   b. Notes or reflections about your identity (page 6)

   c. Key elements of liberatory education (page 12)

   d. Bright spots and challenges (page 17)

2. "Aspirations for the Future of Learning" template (page 23) or a piece of chart paper titled "Aspirations for the Future of Learning"

3. Pens or markers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. As a group, discuss your aspirations for the future of learning. (15 minutes)

   a. Given your conversations about liberatory education and what might be *possible* in the future of learning, what would you *hope* to see?

   b. List those aspirations on the **Aspirations for the Future of Learning** template or chart paper.

   c. You can use the example (page 22) to support your thinking.

2. Select one aspiration that you all agree is important and want to use in the next activities, revising it in any way you wish. Be curious about any disagreement that arises and consider others' perspectives as you decide which aspiration to select. Circle your final selection. (5 minutes)

ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

- Bodies and feelings are valued and cared for in education. Learning is embodied and in place.

- Education is more just and makes more justice in society.

- Students' cultural and linguistic identities are honored, not just acknowledged. Difference is an asset.

- People are working toward liberation by examining and challenging histories and reasons for oppressions.

- Play and creativity are central to learning.

- Youth are leaders in their own and their peers' learning journeys. Adults support instead of dictate.

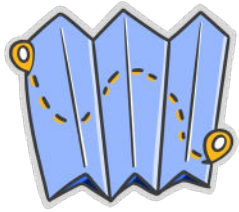- Education experiences radical, imaginative, cooperative decision-making.

ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

MAPPING YOUR PATH

The purpose of this activity is to identify actions that might need to happen to move toward your aspiration.

MAPPING YOUR PATH

20 Minutes

MATERIALS

1. Your outputs from the previous activities

   a. Group norms (page 8)

   b. Notes or reflections about your identity (page 6)

   c. Key elements of liberatory education (page 12)

   d. Bright spots and challenges (page 17)

   e. Final aspiration (page 23)

2. "Actions toward Aspiration" template (page 27) or a piece of chart paper that has your team's aspiration written at the top and is then divided into three columns labeled "Short (1-3 years)," "Mid (3-10 years)," and "Long (10+ years)"

3. Pens or markers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Write your aspiration at the top of the **Actions toward Aspiration** template or chart paper. (30 seconds)

2. As a group, discuss the short-, mid- and long-term actions that you and others might need to take to reach your aspiration. (20 minutes)

   a. Think about the bright spots and challenges that you identified in Exploring the Future Landscape. What actions would extend those bright spots or address those challenges? What short-, mid- and long-term actions might you and others need to take?

   b. Focus on generating as many ideas as possible at this stage, not on how you would make an action happen or who would carry it out.

   c. Be specific and bold. Even if an action seems far-fetched, capture it. You are not committing to doing anything right now.

   d. Try to identify actions in each timeframe.

3. You can use the example (page 26) to support your thinking.

ACTIONS TOWARD ASPIRATION

ASPIRATION: Bodies and feelings are valued and cared for in education. Learning is embodied and in place.

SHORT (1-3 YEARS)

- Integrate community organizing and the processing of healthy conflict into project-based learning.

- Create game spaces (in-person and digitally) for learners to learn about their and one another's identities in psychologically safe spaces.

- Make the histories of the places where learning happens a core part of learning.

MID (3-10 YEARS)

- Principals move beyond being building and administrative managers and transform to being community liaisons who bring new practices and resources from the community and share practices and resources with the community.

- Give more money to schools and districts for mental health, adding more counselors per student.

- Educators take a trauma-informed approach and understand neurodiversity so that they can offer many different opportunities to learn skills and information.

LONG (10+ YEARS)

- Base funding on local allocations for community-defined, quality education. How much does it really cost to do what the community wants?

- The U.S. Department of Education articulates embodiment programming as a priority area for funding (particularly in early grades).

ACTIONS TOWARD ASPIRATION
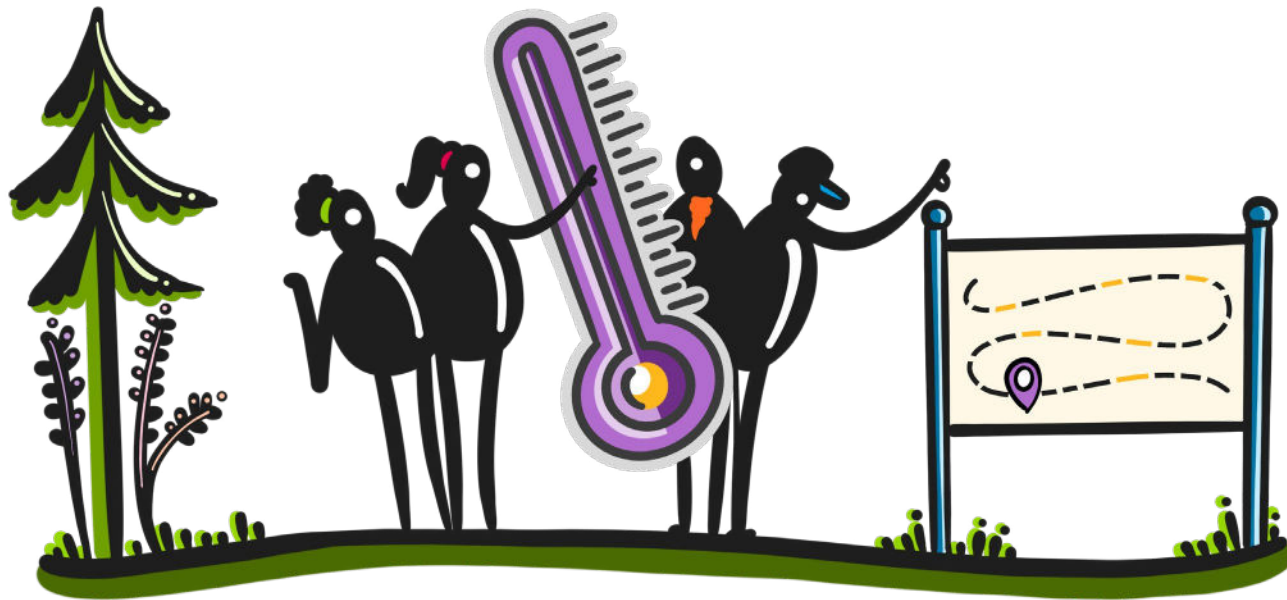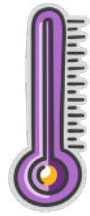
ASPIRATION:

SHORT (1-3 YEARS)	MID (3-10 YEARS)	LONG (10+ YEARS)

ASSESSING YOUR MAP

The purpose of this activity is to notice and discuss anticipated impacts of your group's possible action steps.

ASSESSING YOUR MAP

35 Minutes

MATERIALS

1. Your outputs from the previous activities

   a. Group norms (page 8)

   b. Notes or reflections about your identity (page 6)

   c. Key elements of liberatory education (page 12)

   d. Bright spots and challenges (page 17)

   e. Final aspiration (page 23)

   f. Short-, mid- and long-term actions (page 27)

2. One piece of chart paper, divided into four quadrants

   ° Tape the "Rose, Bud, Dirt, Thorn" template (page 31) in the center and extend the axes to the edges of the paper or label the quadrants "Rose," "Bud," "Dirt" and "Thorn" as shown in the template.

3. Sticky notes (10-15 per person), with each person using a different color if possible

4. Pens or markers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Review the "Rose, Bud, Dirt, Thorn" framework (page 30) and discuss it to clarify if necessary. (5 minutes)

2. Individually categorize the actions from the "Mapping Your Path" activity on the **Rose, Bud, Dirt or Thorn** template. (10 minutes)

   a. Review the actions from "Mapping Your Path," keeping these categories in mind.

   b. Write the actions that feel most important to you on your sticky notes.

   c. Place your sticky notes on the chart paper in the appropriate quadrant.

   d. You do not need to add an action in each quadrant.

   e. You will have the chance to discuss your and others' categorizations. Place the actions where they best fit to you right now.

   f. You can use the example (page 31) to support your thinking.

3. After everyone has placed their sticky notes, individually review the chart, noting similarities and differences and questions that arise. (5 minutes)

4. Using the prompts below, have a discussion focused on creating shared understanding. As your group sees fit, move stickies around. If desired, capture your discussion on a separate piece of chart paper. (15 minutes)

   a. Where do we notice agreement or disagreement as to how we categorized actions? What thought processes led us to categorize them in those ways?

   b. What questions do we still have about these actions?

   c. Which actions might we want to carry out or learn more about? Which actions might we want to revise or avoid?

ROSE

Is this action exploding my consciousness as a way to move toward our aspiration and closer to a more liberatory education system?

BUD

Is this action the seed of what could be a consciousness-exploding idea?
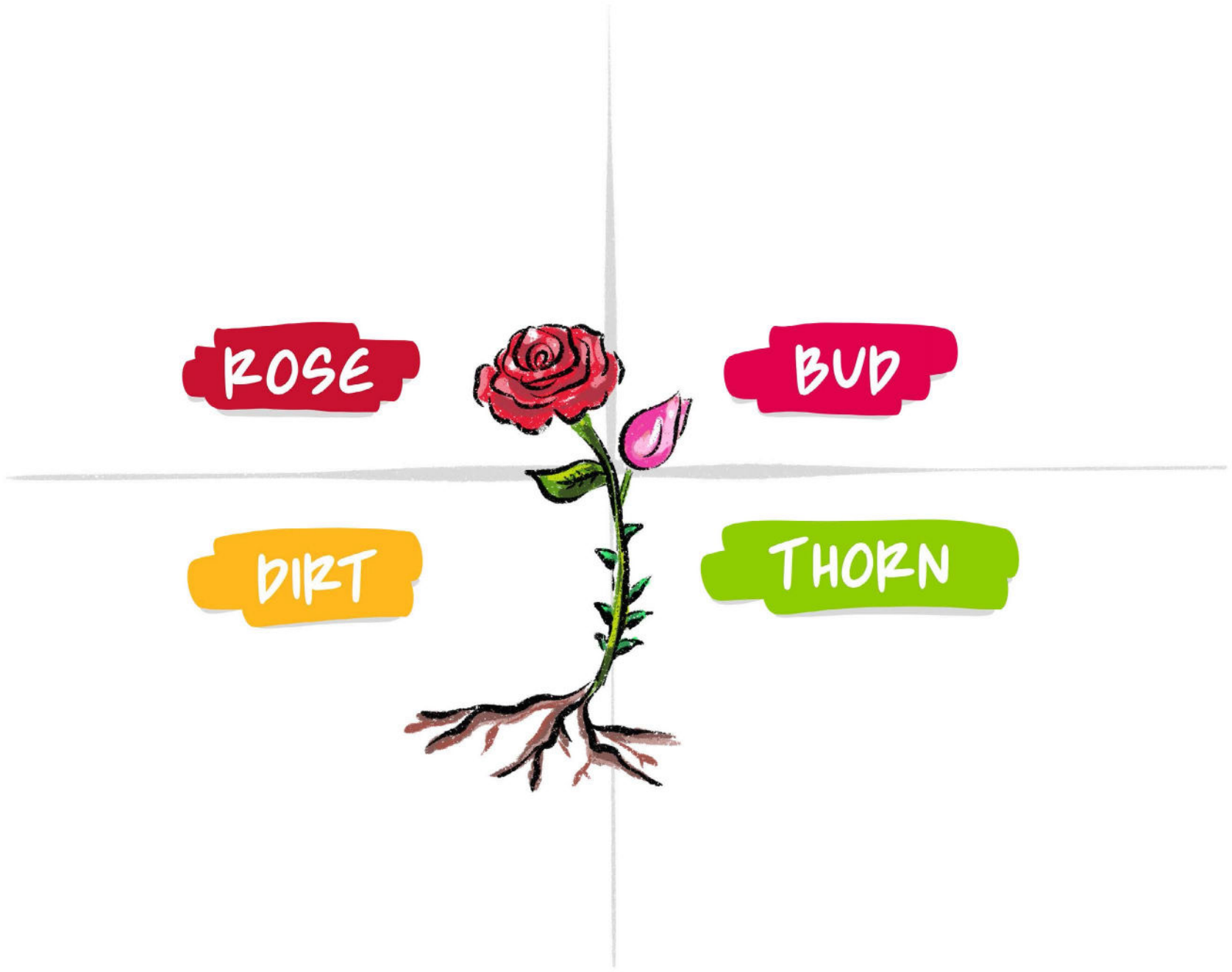
DIRT

Is this action extending what is already being done?

THORN

Could this action be harmful to people who have been historically marginalized by the education system or to the effort to realize our aspiration?

Make the histories of the places where learning happens a core part of learning.

Principals move beyond being building and administrative managers and transform to being community liaisons who bring new practices and resources from the community and share practices and resources with the community.

Create game spaces (in-person and digitally) for learners to learn about their and one another's identities in psychologically safe spaces.

Integrate community organizing and the processing of healthy conflict into project-based learning.

The U.S. Department of Education articulates embodiment programming as a priority area for funding (particularly in early grades).

ROSE

BUD

Integrate community organizing and the processing of healthy conflict into project-based learning.

DIRT

THORN

Educators take a trauma-informed approach and understand neurodiversity so that they can offer many different opportunities to learn skills and information.

Integrate community organizing and the processing of healthy conflict into project-based learning.

Create game spaces (in-person and digitally) for learners to learn about their and one another's identities in psychologically safe spaces.

Give more money to schools and districts for mental health, adding more counselors per student.

Principals move beyond being building and administrative managers and transform to being community liaisons who bring new practices and resources from the community and share practices and resources with the community.

ROSE

BUD

DIRT

THORN

CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

REFLECT ON A MOMENT OF STRUGGLE OR CHALLENGE THAT YOU EXPERIENCED DURING THIS PROCESS (E.G., YOU HAD YOUR IDEAS CHALLENGED, YOU WORRIED ABOUT SOMETHING YOU SAID, YOU FELT STUCK OR YOU FELT UNSURE OF WHETHER TO SPEAK).

WHAT DID YOU EXPERIENCE?

WHAT DID YOU DO?

REFLECT ON A MOMENT OF INSIGHT OR EXCITEMENT.

WHAT DID YOU EXPERIENCE?

WHAT DID YOU DO?

YOU DO NOT NEED TO SHARE, AND NOTHING NEEDS TO CHANGE. SIMPLY NOTICE WHAT IS TRUE FOR YOU. NOTICING THE THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS AND PHYSICAL EXPERIENCES THAT ARISE IN GROUPS CAN HELP US GROW AND CAN LEAD TO BETTER COLLABORATION.

PLANNING NEXT STEPS

The purpose of this activity is to internalize
learning and reflect on what comes next.

PLANNING NEXT STEPS

20-40 Minutes

MATERIALS

1. Your outputs from the previous activities

   a. Group norms (page 8)

   b. Notes or reflections about your identity (page 6)

   c. Key elements of liberatory education (page 12)

   d. Bright spots and challenges (page 17)

   e. Final aspiration (page 23)

   f. Short-, mid- and long-term actions (page 27)

   g. Rose, Bud, Dirt, Thorn chart with stickies (page 32)

2. One "Learn, Do, Connect, Reflect" template per person (page 36) or individual notetaking materials

3. Pens or markers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Capture top-level thoughts and reflections on the **Learn, Do, Connect, Reflect** template or use the prompts on the template and make notes on your own materials. (5-10 minutes)

   a. **LEARN:** What more do I need to know or what do I need to know more about to move forward?

   b. **DO:** What next steps can I commit to? What assets can I leverage?

   c. **CONNECT:** How might these steps make education futures more liberatory?

   d. **REFLECT:** How will I assess my own progress on learning and action? How will I hold myself accountable to what I have committed to learning and doing?

2. Debrief as a group, noting collective next steps. (10-20 minutes)

3. Close your work together with a final reflection. Ask each person to share one of the following: (5-10 minutes)

   a. What is one idea or action that you are excited to share or do?

   b. What is one moment from this process that energized you?

   c. What is a takeaway or lingering question that you have?

LEARN

WHAT MORE DO I NEED TO KNOW OR KNOW ABOUT TO MOVE FORWARD?

DO

WHAT NEXT STEPS CAN I COMMIT TO? WHAT ASSETS CAN I LEVERAGE?

CONNECT

HOW MIGHT THESE STEPS MAKE EDUCATION FUTURES MORE LIBERATORY?

REFLECT

HOW WILL I ASSESS MY OWN PROGRESS ON LEARNING AND ACTION? HOW WILL I HOLD MYSELF ACCOUNTABLE TO WHAT I HAVE COMMITTED TO LEARNING AND DOING?

Setting Out on the Journey

The journey toward a more equitable and life-affirming future of learning is not linear and is not the work of any one individual or group. Engage as many people as you can in conversations about what they hope to see and how we might get there. Those conversations can serve as the basis of connection and collaboration. They can also ground the collective effort to repair the harms that the education system has inflicted and to create a future of learning that works well for every learner and community. We will only chart the course toward a liberatory future of education if we imagine ways forward, together.

Acknowledgements

This toolkit was conceived and created collaboratively. Learn more about the process and the people involved below.

Creating This Toolkit: Process

KnowledgeWorks' *Imagining Liberatory Education Futures* forecast explores future scenarios in which every learner and community could determine their own path and participate in shaping the world. To help education changemakers move from possibility to action, KnowledgeWorks created this companion toolkit in partnership with equity x innovation lab and with input from education stakeholders.

This toolkit combines methods from the disciplines of strategic foresight and emancipatory R+D. Specifically, the toolkit is inspired by scenario planning and visioning methods from the field of strategic foresight and by Identity, Positionality, Ideology; Deliberate Development: Technological Surprise; and Equity Operationalized methods from emancipatory R+D. In an educational context, strategic foresight helps education leaders, influencers and innovators make sense of change and take informed action today.

Using principles rooted in ecosystemic design, an emancipatory approach to research and development supports the creation of a new slate of teaching and learning tools that will maximize discovery and growth for diverse learners and their educators.

KnowledgeWorks hosted three separate virtual workshops, two with external thought partners and one with KnowledgeWorks staff, to test the toolkit's usefulness and accessibility. During the workshops, participants engaged in collaborative sensemaking and idea generation around future possibilities and strategies for moving toward liberatory education futures. Afterwards, the authors used participants' feedback to improve the activities and selected a sample of participants' work to feature as examples throughout this toolkit. A Google Slides version of this toolkit that supports remote or digital collaboration is also available.

Creating This Toolkit: People

Colleagues and other education stakeholders supported the creation of this toolkit by co-designing the process, testing the process in workshops, offering feedback and reviewing its elements. Much gratitude is due to these individuals for their time, openness and courage in engaging with their own and others' liberatory education journeys.

Toolkit Authors

Katie King and Maria Crabtree of **KnowledgeWorks** wrote this toolkit and co-created the process with Temple Lovelace of **equity X innovation lab**.

Additional Contributors

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KnowledgeWorks

KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For more than 20 years, we've been partnering with states, communities and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence-based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we're creating the future of learning, together.

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