



# Connections to the Future

Illustrating Liberatory Education Artifacts

# What might the future of learning be like if education systems were unconstrained by systems and structures of oppression?

This question is central to KnowledgeWorks' forecast, [Imagining Liberatory Education Futures](#). Liberatory education systems would prioritize self-determination, human potential and the right to participate in shaping the world.

They would support learners in leading their own learning.<sup>1</sup> The forecast presents four possible futures of liberatory education futures to help people begin to imagine, and move toward, such education systems.

## Artifacts from the Future: Making the Intangible, Tangible

This publication seeks to make liberatory education futures more tangible by illustrating artifacts from the future. Artifacts from the future can be everyday objects, such as a picture, a piece of clothing or a sign; or they can represent specific, concrete details about the future.<sup>2</sup> As with any representation of future possibilities, they can help us consider what we want for the future and what we might wish to avoid.

In the same way that archaeologists uncover artifacts from the past and examine them for insights about the cultural and historical contexts in which those objects existed, futurists use artifacts from the future to help people visualize future worlds.

That can be a tall order. Answering the question of what we want for the future can be difficult. More specifically, many people find it hard to see themselves in liberatory education futures because those futures seem so different from today's education systems. Complicating that, the idea of liberatory education, while aspirational for many, can also be subjective since people can have very different perspectives on what it might mean. These considerations can make liberatory education futures feel both distant and intangible.

Being object-based, artifacts from the future help people interact with specific dimensions of the future. They help us see and feel how the changes that we are experiencing today could translate into new ways of doing things. Artifacts from the future help make future possibilities tangible and help make the future feel closer and less abstract.

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<sup>1</sup> *Imagining Liberatory Education Futures* draws on the work of [Raphael Randall](#) and [Zaretta Hammond](#) to describe liberatory education.

<sup>2</sup> Artifacts from the future represent a foresight methodology pioneered by the [Institute for the Future](#).

## About These Artifacts

The artifacts of the future featured in this publication originated from people representing different walks of life and different spaces in education. During a workshop, KnowledgeWorks facilitators asked them to create artifacts that could be found in a future in which liberatory education was the norm. Workshop participants were also asked to connect their artifacts to the [insights and implications](#) from *Imagining Liberatory Education Futures*, which are listed below.



### **Social Cohesion Is Critical for Transformation towards**

**Liberatory Education:** Developing social cohesion is a prerequisite for moving toward broader systemic transformation and enabling the rise of new systems and structures. Institutional responsiveness alone will not be sufficient to bring about liberatory education.



**There Is No One-Size-Fits-All Strategy:** Instead of relying on strategies for scaling liberatory education, education stakeholders will need to identify holistic, local strategies that are flexible short-term and capable of change over time.



**It's Not Either, Or; It's Both, And:** Education stakeholders must strike a balance between continuing to provide short-term relief while also working to transform education systems to be liberatory.



### **Liberatory Education Is Critical for a Healthy, Just**

**Democracy:** Liberatory education would help learners and educators see themselves as agents of change and develop skills in social analysis, political agency and social action necessary to participate fully.



**Narratives Hold Power:** Education stakeholders need to amplify more voices and create counter narratives about teaching, learning, knowledge and freedom. They also need to broaden perspectives about what education is aiming to achieve, how it will approach that charge and how education systems and learners will demonstrate success.



**Technologies Can Be Channeled for Liberation:** Digital technologies reflect the values of their creators and users and create and enable human behaviors. They should be considered as a means to specific ends.



### **What Happens in One System Will Impact Another:**

Systemic interconnection can be leveraged to expand – or to stymie – the pursuit of liberatory systems and structures across society.



**Liberatory Education Is Not a Zero-Sum Game:** While current education systems feed notions of scarcity by limiting and hoarding power and accruing very uneven benefit to learners, liberatory education systems would encourage the sharing of power and would confer broad benefits to each learner.



# Liberatory Education Artifacts from the Future

This section presents seven artifacts from liberatory education futures. Each artifact includes an illustration, along with a description of how it works, an explanation of how it connects to a few of the insights and implications above and a quote from a current student showing how this artifact might be received in the future.

These artifacts illustrate things that could exist in liberatory education futures. They do not aim to tell a cohesive story about a single future; rather, they seek to portray a range of possibilities to help make a variety of liberatory education futures more concrete.

## Using Liberatory Education Artifacts from the Future

As you explore each artifact, ask yourself:

- » Who might benefit from the artifact?
- » Who might be harmed?
- » What might the tradeoffs of the artifact be?
- » What other objects might come to fruition in response to the artifact?
- » What implications might the artifact present for you, your community and for education?
- » If you wanted this artifact from the future to exist, what might you do differently today?

# Power to the People

Power to the People is a design toolkit that increases voter turnout and civic engagement by making flexible, temporary co-designed spaces to celebrate democracy in communities every election day.

Designed to be applied by young people whose schools are used as voting places and the adults who support them, the approach celebrates voting's role in maintaining a healthy democracy and working toward justice. Power to the People also honors the stories of community members of many ages who have advocated for voting rights, taken political action or championed democracy.

Depending on what the young people who make a specific Power to the People place devise, interactive components can help voters and the people who accompany them to the polls interact with these stories and explore scenarios that could result from the decisions made at the polls. Community leaders, elders and activists might be present to interact directly with attendees. Given rules limiting activity at voting sites, Power to the People spaces pop up nearby – down the hall, in a parking lot or on a school playground. They are often colorful, festooned with red, white and blue streamers and bunting and also with the colors and patterns of the cultures with which the youth making them identify. They feel like community organizing meets block party.

Creating a Power to the People space engages young people with the democratic process, seeking to inspire them to feel ownership and to cast their votes when they come of age. Power to the People spaces also engage current voters by encouraging them to sample the experiences and insights that young people have curated. Some people who would not otherwise have voted, or who might not have done so in person or on voting day, turn up at the polls so that they can share in this community celebration of a



key democratic function and help spark young people’s continued interest in shaping their communities and the larger world.

The nonprofit organization that holds the approach has a mission of making education more liberatory by encouraging young people to participate in shaping their communities and the world. Young people who co-create Power to the People spaces receive badges and sometimes credits or extra credit for their efforts and are encouraged

to submit stories of impact. The nonprofit organization shares these stories to inspire more schools to join in the celebration of democracy. It also shares them to help advocate for ways to expand voter enfranchisement, such as lowering the voting age to sixteen so that youth develop informed voting practices while still in high school, making voting a national holiday and strengthening networks that provide free transportation to the polls.

## Connections to Liberatory Education Insights



### **Liberatory Education Is Critical for a Healthy, Just Democracy**

Power to the People aims to engage young people and educators in surfacing and exploring issues affecting their communities, celebrating the people who shape or have shaped their local communities and analyzing the impacts of the ballot. This approach strives to make the occasion of voting a true occasion — one that helps a healthy and just democracy flourish by fostering an informed citizenry. Voting is a rite of passage. Power to the People helps make it a meaningful one and helps young people learn that they do not have to wait for adulthood to engage with their communities and the people in them.



### **What Happens in One System Will Impact Another**

Power to the People recognizes that neither education nor voting sits in isolation. Their interconnections extend far beyond the use of some schools’ gyms as voting places. If democracy is not healthy and just, education will be increasingly embattled, with people of various persuasions attempting to impose their values on it. At the same time, education is critical to an informed and enlightened citizenry, which is in turn critical for an informed and healthy democracy. To the extent that education can become more liberatory, more people will come of age expecting to participate in healthy, just democracies and will be inclined to take it upon themselves to shape society for the better. Power to the People starts building the bridges between education and voting early so that young people grow up expecting to exercise their agency in the world.

## **YOUTH VOICES FROM THE FUTURE**

*“Before, many young people justified feeling powerless when thinking about politics. That turned into apathy for some and radicalization for others. Power to the People involved us in politics at a younger age, made us feel more powerful and ultimately led to our being more politically excited and mindful young adults.” – by Sam Plager*



## iLearn®

iLearn is a digital personalized wayfinding life coach and companion powered by machine learning.

Its primary user is known as its pal. iLearn helps pals learn how to learn by cultivating curiosity and information processing skills and habits. It also helps pals develop confidence and agency around these skills and habits, which are the building blocks to helping people connect with their creative natures and prioritizing human potential.

Pals can select their iLearn physical form to accommodate different developmental stages, needs and lifestyles. For example, iLearn can start as a plush toy for a toddler and then be inserted into a compatible bracelet during the preschool years, or it can take the form of a watch, earrings or glasses for teenagers and young adults. This shape-shifting ability allows iLearn to stay by its pal's side and nurture lifelong learning skills. As iLearn spends more and more time paired with its pal, it understands better and adapts to its pal's unique cultural and accessibility needs; thought processes; life changes; and emotional, mental and physical well-being preferences. When its pal asks a question, iLearn won't just provide an answer. Instead, it will support and nudge its pal until they find a satisfactory, evidence-based answer together.

An everyday interaction between a pal and its iLearn can go something like this: as Koffi, a 14-year-old boy, enjoys a steaming bowl of chili, he wonders about what gives chili its unique flavor. His iLearn, which is embedded in a necklace, asks about the taste and offers the five flavor groups as options. Koffi carefully explores with all his senses what is in his spoon and mouth and describes the chili as savory, warm and smoky. iLearn continues by encouraging Koffi to list the ingredients that he can recognize in his bowl. Finally, Koffi realizes that chili is a type of pepper. iLearn adds, "Chili" is a word with Nahuatl or Aztec origin, and the reason why you

couldn't easily see the pepper in the chili is because it is all mixed together, along with onions and garlic that are barely detectable except for the harmony of flavors they create together.”

To end this learning experience, iLearn asks Koffi if he would like to try chili peppers or maybe even cook some chili in the next month. If Koffi seems excited about these prospects, iLearn will try to coordinate related micro-learning experiences with Koffi's parents and nearby groups of interest (for example, a community garden that might be growing different types of peppers, a fundraising chili cook-off at the church or a museum with an exhibition on Aztec cuisine).

Additionally, iLearn provides around-the-clock self-care, mental health care and preventive care customized to each pal. The frequency,

privacy and language of the alerts and notifications about the state of, and recommendations for, the pals' well-being can be adjusted manually by the pal. It will also adapt automatically based on the responses from the pal. For example, if iLearn detects increasing levels of stress in its pal, it might suggest listening to previously liked, relaxing tunes instead of just notifying the pal about the stress levels, which could cause more stress.

iLearn is sold online. Pals who pay full price own their data as long as they continue to pay the monthly or yearly subscription for cloud storage. Some insurance companies and schools have negotiated discounts for their members and students in exchange for access to anonymized private data.

## Connections to Liberatory Education Insights

### **There Is No One-Size-Fits-All Strategy**

iLearn allows each pal or their caregiver to set their preferences related to data privacy, alerts and notifications, and learning experiences as a starting point. As time goes by, iLearn will process the data that it collects using data analytics and machine learning capabilities to adapt its features and learning and well-being nudges to each pal. In time, each iLearn device will aim to operate in a unique way that complements its pal.



### **Technologies Can Be Channeled for Liberation**

iLearn's personalized way of teaching through nudges and instigating curiosity fosters new learning behaviors that aim to support pals in becoming active learners through critical thinking. Several features are designed to incentivize pals to shape their own learning. Those features include access to vast sources of knowledge, coordination of connections between learning and well-being, and activities taking advantage of relationships with caregivers and interest-based groups to create meaningful learning opportunities.

## YOUTH VOICES FROM THE FUTURE

*“iLearn has made a huge difference in the life of my friend Raja. Whenever she has been too embarrassed to share something with her parents, iLearn has been there for her. However, I am afraid that she might be becoming very codependent on iLearn and gliding by. The parents' job is to instill values in their children and to do everything they can to make their child succeed in the world.”* – by Estralla Gomez-Silva





## EcoReclaimers

EcoReclaimers is a worldwide youth movement that employs the Scout method, a self-education system based in character training, to help participants become independent and active citizens.

This afterschool education program prioritizes practical and relevant activities that immerse participants in the natural environment as life-affirming partners to nature. In recent years, EcoReclaimers' U.S. chapter has identified ways in which participants' learning could be recognized in their official academic transcripts as elective, transdisciplinary or project-based credits. Many large school districts and state departments of education were resistant at first, but the increasing take-up of competency-based learning and other forms of student-centered learning helped set the stage for brokering successful agreements.

EcoReclaimers groups are not based on age, but instead on how familiar young people are with climate crisis issues and their interconnections with natural and social systems. The novices, Seedlings, focus on getting familiar with climate-related language and how the environment impacts people in different ways, such as an introduction to the climate crisis and climate justice. Buds go deeper into climate science and climate resilience. As Buds, they leverage organizational partnerships with different indigenous communities across the world to learn how those communities have developed profound symbiotic and sustainable relationships with their natural environments and to project impacts of the current climate crisis into the future, exploring plausible solutions. Flowers concentrate their efforts on turning their insights into action through advocacy and design work, which also covers exploring more complex challenges such as generational ecoanxiety and climate justice despair.

EcoReclaimers funding comes from a myriad of sources. Those sources include membership fees with dynamic pricing, grants from foundations, corporate sponsorships and contributions from individuals. Additionally, local fundraising activities exclusively fund local work.

EcoReclaimers' U.S. chapter sprouted in the Midwest with the support of women of color who had cofounded the U.S. Youth Climate Strike when they were young. Their support helped with the recruitment of Indigenous, Black and Hispanic participants, who are disproportionately impacted by environmental disasters and who might not otherwise have felt drawn to the Scout-like method or organization.

## Connections to Liberatory Education Insights



### **Social Cohesion Is Critical for Transformation towards Liberatory Education**

EcoReclaimers groups invite young people from different origins, races, gender identities and expressions, abilities, neurodiverse conditions, socioeconomic backgrounds and religions to come together around a bigger societal challenge: reclaiming a life-affirming and sustainable relationship with nature. The program also provides opportunities for participants to develop social analysis skills that help them realize their political agency through social action.



### **It's Not Either, Or; It's Both, And**

EcoReclaimers started as an out-of-school program to provide young people and their families with answers to their immediate needs: a safe place for kids while caregivers were working, access to the outdoors away from screens, an outlet for increasing climate anxiety and an opportunity to broaden their social connections. However, as it grew and established more partnerships with other organizations and with

organized groups such as indigenous communities, it created a worldwide movement. EcoReclaimers participants are now a flock of agents of change who are equipped to question and disrupt political and economic systems through advocacy and civic participation.



### **Liberatory Education Is Critical for a Healthy, Just Democracy**

What young people learn and practice through EcoReclaimers activities prepares them for active civic participation and in some cases already involves them. Flowers, the group with the most sophisticated understanding of climate challenges, become particularly adept at advocating for their own rights in relation to environmental issues. After they learn how to become effective ecological agents of change, they often display their systems thinking skills by going beyond EcoReclaimers to advocate for other interconnected social and economic issues that are meaningful to them.

## **YOUTH VOICES FROM THE FUTURE**

*“EcoReclaimers has cemented climate justice as being one of the most important issues of our time — if not the most important issue. By educating and empowering youth on climate justice, EcoReclaimers has created a generation of kids who will grow up to be lawyers, engineers, voters, CEOs and politicians who put the environment first.”* – by Sam Plager



## humani

A wearable device for education has been gaining in popularity. Originally called “holistic humanity actualizer” but now rebranded as “humani,” it helps youth who share interests and learning needs connect in real life.

humani started as a set of luxury fashion wearable devices – a colorful bracelet, a flexibly sized ring, a customizable pin – but it is also now being democratized as an app across an ecosystem of personal devices such as computers, phones and watches.

Users simply need to log in when they are in the mood to seek out education buddies. When set to transmit, the wearable broadcasts a learner’s self-created profile. It emits a noise of the user’s choosing when a match is found nearby. Then the matched learners meet up in person. They decide the depth of the exchange: it could be a one-time meetup to work through a sticky assignment or to explore a concept; or it could turn into ongoing, face-to-face peer learning.

Available to youth aged 15 through 19, humani is powered by artificial intelligence (AI) on the backend and patterned by people. It aims to foster liberatory education ecosystems that come together when youth want them, on youth’s terms. Youth decide what aspects of their identities they want to share via the device. They are not limited to the aspects of their identities that are readily apparent or to the data that have traditionally been collected by schools. The idea is for them to bring as much of their whole selves to learning as they choose and then to divulge which aspects of themselves they want to in any given transmission and educational exchange.

humani requires sophisticated encryption to keep youth’s identities safe. It also relies on blockchain-based distributed storage to log youth’s profile information, connections and what they choose to register in learning logs. An application programming interface

(API) lets schools or other learning organizations integrate data from learning exchanges when youth are willing for that to happen. Participation is always individual, on youth's terms. Older youth and caregivers of younger youth can set limits on the age ranges with whom the user can connect.

Despite those limits, some people – especially adults – worry about free-range youth seeking out their own learning experiences and meeting up with strangers. To counter those safety concerns, some community centers, libraries, YMCAs and museums host humani salons where younger youth can meet up in designated learning zones. These kinds of organizations – and some schools too –

have libraries of donated humani devices and/or personal devices preloaded with the humani app for learners who cannot afford to buy their own to check out on long-term loans.

People also worry that these devices, while designed to help youth bring their full selves to learning, promote environments that only reinforce users' biases and opinions. To help prevent them, the AI engine that powers humani periodically prompts learners to consider matches that have less overlap than their ideal settings.

humani may be high tech and look cool. But at its heart, it aims to bring youth together, heart-to-heart and head-to-head, for learning on their terms, for their reasons, in their places.

## Connections to Liberatory Education Insights



### Technologies Can Be Channeled for Liberation

humani is a smart, wearable device that helps youth connect in the ways they want. It is powered by AI, but it focuses on helping youth bring more of themselves to learning exchanges than school often encourages. humani invites youth to embrace their identities in their learning. It also invites them to partner with one another to engage in deep learning that meets their needs and helps them get better at driving their own learning.



### There Is No One-Size-Fits-All Strategy

humani helps learning scale without pretending that one approach or one set of learning experiences will be right for all learners or even for all learners in the same demographic. It is hyper-local, in that it uses sophisticated technologies to support

youth in meeting up with one another to learn where they live.

humani is also highly personalized, as it drives the creation of youth-driven, personalized learning ecosystems. Ultimately, youth choices drive humani; the AI simply powers it.

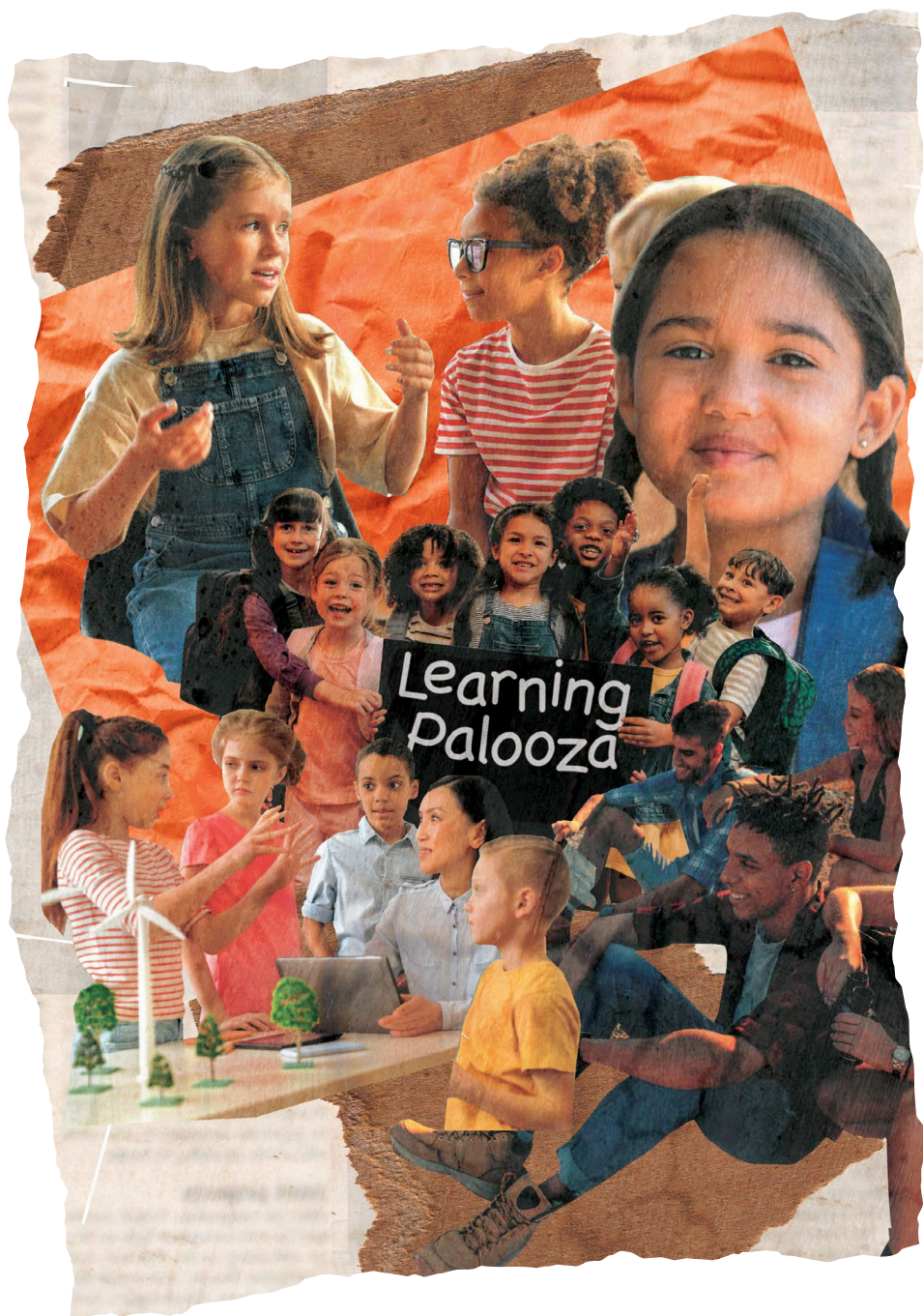


### Liberatory Education Is Not a Zero-Sum Game

If liberatory education requires a shift in power dynamics, humani shows how the hand has tipped to youth. The app and devices help them seek out the targeted peer support that they need to engage in learning. The community-based learning organizations that host humani salons and which loan personal devices and wearables recognize how they can help enable nimble, youth-centered learning ecosystems. humani and the supports that have sprouted around it attempt to make the benefits of youth-led learning widely available.

## YOUTH VOICES FROM THE FUTURE

*“A push for online learning was driving home-schooled students further and further away from in-person things. humani has helped them have face-to-face time with peers or even just a singular meet up.” – by Chanelle West*



## Learning Palooza

Once every four months, people in Youngsville gather to celebrate and publicly share examples of learning from across the community.

Learning Paloozas take place in a variety of locales that shift with the season. In the past, celebrations have been outside at Wean Park, inside at the Tyler History Museum, as well as at other locations throughout the city. The celebrations are always free, and participation and demonstrations of learning are entirely up to the discretion of each learner. The types of learning celebrated are not bound to what happens in school, and learners of all ages from across the community are encouraged to participate, as the celebrations seek to highlight all types of learning.

A Learning Palooza event has learners from kindergarten on showing off projects, assignments and other examples of learning experiences that they have found meaningful. Attendants will often see learners talking to attendants and other learners about the learning that they are celebrating. In previous Learning Paloozas, a group of high school students has shared about their experience starting a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in their high school, middle school students have relayed their experience of designing a “chill-out room” in their school where students can relax in a device-free environment, a group of elementary school students from schools across Youngsville has described their experience designing a new playground, a family that homeschools their four children has hosted a home garden show-and-tell, and adult learners have captured and compiled local elders’ stories to self-publish a community history book as a way of raising funds for community initiatives.

Learning Palooza is a true celebration by learners, for learners. They select the date and venue, recruit other learners and help organize volunteers. In some cases, helping to organize or volunteering

at Learning Palooza counts as part of a person's education. With learners being in charge of Learning Palooza, area schools have no control over what is in the celebration or what is presented. Rather than resist or seek to control the celebrations, schools have benefited from being willing to flex and share their power. In so doing, they no longer have to organize traditional open houses. Having become accustomed to the learner-driven nature of Learning Palooza, community members have changed their expectations of school events, no longer expecting them to be polished.

A Learning Palooza feels like a festival or party. While no two celebrations are exactly alike, they often include live music, free food and lots of interactivity. Hands-on learning exhibits might let

celebration goers try their hands at a self-directed activity. Learners might give talks about what learning means to them, describing how they have applied their learning in the real world or even advocating for broader changes in and beyond education.

People across Youngsville look forward to each celebration. Events often see attendance reach capacity as learners plan to attend with their friends and family. Even though the Learning Paloozas are well attended, their true measure of success has been to be integrated into the city's event calendar alongside the likes of free nights at the museum and free outdoor movie nights. They have also sparked a continuing dialogue about what learning and education systems could look like in the city.

## Connections to Liberatory Education Insights



### Narratives Hold Power

Learning Palooza seeks to create a narrative for the Youngsville community that learning of all types is valued and that knowledge comes from all sources instead of from an official outlet or source. Because it is a broad celebration of learning in which learners choose what they are celebrating, the types of learning being shown come from a wide swath of ever-evolving sources. Learners also create and own their narratives, as each Learning Palooza gives them a chance to tell others what is important to them or what sparks wonder for them. They get to tell their own learning stories, and Youngsville receives recognition as a place where liberatory education is cultivated and valued.



### Liberatory Education Is Not a Zero-Sum Game

Learning Palooza shows that a community pursuing liberatory education will reap broad benefits, not just benefits for specific populations. The celebration uplifts learning in all its forms. In so doing, it has driven change in the local school system. By expanding the sources of knowledge and types of learning experiences that are counted as education, many of which are culturally relevant and responsive and culturally situated, the celebrations have helped learners from all walks of life personalize their learning and exercise more agency than ever before.

## YOUTH VOICES FROM THE FUTURE

*“Learning Paloozas have helped students get familiar with presenting their ideas to a crowd. This has made presentations at school a lot easier and more comfortable for the students involved in Learning Paloozas. Every child has their own strengths, and those strengths deserve to be recognized. All strengths can be used in some capacity in a thriving society.”* – by Estralla Gomez-Silva



## Yrarbil

In response to rising political polarization, an increase in book bans and severe cuts in funding for its libraries, the Tri-County region's community members banded together to provide liberatory education a place to thrive. They worked with funders and donors who support freedom of speech initiatives to create Yrarbil.

Sometimes referred to as the “Banned Book Club” or “The Real Free Library,” Yrarbil is a privately funded library that is open to anyone in the community over the age of 18 and to younger people whose caregivers grant consent. As a private institution created and run by a group of concerned caregivers from the Tri-County region, Yrarbil can stock whatever materials it wishes. It is not threatened with having its funding stripped in the face of political or social pressures. Members and staff alike help curate the content of Yrarbil, suggesting topics, content and sources that might be part of its offerings. Yrarbil also represents a community space that is paradoxically run by a private organization, in which diverse groups of people can access and use resources and come together around a simple, shared idea that all knowledge is valuable. In addition, Yrarbil can revoke membership for those who do not comply with agreed behavioral norms.

On the surface, Yrarbil looks like a speakeasy library. The storefront is nondescript, save for a small sign and a locked door. There are no windows. Members check in with facial recognition that opens the door.

Inside they find a modern library setting: rows of books, computers, printers, comfortable seating and small rooms that can be used for meetings or studying. There is a maker space in the building, as well as a commercial kitchen and café that are used by a mix of library staff and high-school-aged learners, with the latter typically working there as part of their school experience.

There is also a shared office space from which different third-party social services organizations offer their supports directly to Yrarbil members on a rotating basis. Past supports have included personal health assessments and job placement consultation. Yrarbil's shared office space has also been used by mentoring matching services, tutoring services and out-of-school-time providers. However, what truly sets Yrarbil apart from other libraries in the area is that it offers banned books and other forms of banned content.

Inside the space, you see people of all ages, but lately there has been an uptick in high-school-aged learners. They have been using the materials in Yrarbil to help inform their senior project, which is

focused on the local history of Black steel mill workers and their role in unionizing. Many of the materials related to these topics were taken out of the local library system as part of the book bans in the 2020s.

Beyond the senior project, it is not uncommon to find youth tinkering in the maker space on projects such as video mapping on the side of city hall to highlight climate change statistics or discussing how they might use excess food to feed local families experiencing food insecurity. Yrarbil is a place where young people take ownership over what they are learning and find meaningful ways to connect their learning to a positive impact on their community.

## Connections to Liberatory Education Insights

### **It's Not Either, Or; It's Both, And**

Yrarbil was created to provide relief for the Tri-County community. It was, and still is, intended to be an oasis for people who want to explore their own histories, get connected with others, learn about and access public services, and more. As a result, Yrarbil has created a space where people are free to research, learn and meet up as they like, in effect creating a liberatory education culture and atmosphere.

### **Narratives Hold Power**

Yrarbil facilitates the reclamation and conservation of knowledge and stories in the face of forces that wish to present information from a dominant perspective. Yrarbil was created to challenge the notion that people, particularly young people, need protection from subject matter that

others, typically adults in power, deem as being harmful or do not value. Yrarbil offers such content to its patrons. In so doing, it has created a space for learning and social connection. It has also supported young people and adults in claiming their own narratives.

### **Liberatory Education Is Not a Zero-Sum Game**

Originally created to push back against book banning and public library closures and defunding bills, Yrarlib has provided wide benefits to the community. It has become more than a source for finding information; it has become a vehicle for bringing many people in the Tri-County region together. Librarians across the nation celebrate Yrarbil because it has increased access to knowledge, learning opportunities and services instead of hindering public libraries as some had initially feared.

## YOUTH VOICES FROM THE FUTURE

*"Could there be another way for us to access Yrarbil?" younger teens are asking. They say that their parents do not always seem to agree with their opinions and that it could be a problem for them even to try to access the library. Disagreeing with a parent or guardian should not be a reason why they cannot access a source like this simply because of their age."* – by Estralla Gomez-Silva





## Di-Net

Di-Net is a network of people who have survived the climate disasters and other major disruptions that have displaced entire communities in the U.S.

After many unfortunate examples of massive refugee exoduses in which people were forced to leave behind what and who they knew, a group of advocates created Di-Net. It is an informal but structured network of support that aims to recognize survivors' broken sense of place-based identity and to connect them with others who are grappling with and healing from similar struggles.

To become a Di-Net member, individuals need to submit a copy of a government-issued identity document to confirm that they used to reside in an area that was put under a state of emergency. The process can be done in-person, online, by text messages or by mail, and the individual gets a response in no more than ten business days. This response includes instructions on accessing the Di-Net community, along with other resources.

Members appreciate Di-Net's community because it creates opportunities and spaces (often digital and sometimes physical) for them to share their stories, reconnect with people from their hometowns, help others in similar positions and advocate for one another. While the resources available vary by region, they try to cover members' most pressing needs and provide members with support in accessing what they need to jumpstart their lives: food, housing, transportation, health, translation services, education, culture, employment, childcare and legal counseling. While ongoing services are mainly offered digitally and there is no permanent physical Di-Net location, temporary Di-Net offices in refugee settlements or emergency housing settings also help respond to immediate needs.

Di-Net takes pride in the ways in which members have self-organized to offer learning experiences to younger members. These

experiences tend to emerge locally or online and in response to a member's question or story. Since all members have a strong sense of nostalgia for the homes that they had to leave behind, culturally relevant practices are often used to connect learners to their individual cultural contexts. Social-emotional learning is another important educational process at Di-Net because it helps members process the traumatic disruptions that upended their lives and the resulting internal identity struggles, as well as other individual challenges.

Di-Net operates thanks to the support of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, AmeriCorps and philanthropic donations at the federal,

state and local levels. Volunteers who interact directly with members are approved by a members' council and are required to pass a series of courses to develop skills and practices to support individuals who have experienced trauma. Volunteers who do not want to take these courses are still welcome to assist with operational tasks for Di-Net or with building climate resiliency into at-risk regions with partner organizations. Members are also welcome to volunteer their time and effort at Di-Net when feasible. Members have helped expand Di-Net's efforts by partnering with schools, libraries and community groups in the receiving communities to coordinate smoother transitions rooted in dignity and belonging principles.

## Connections to Liberatory Education Insights



### **Social Cohesion Is Critical for Transformation towards Liberatory Education**

Di-Net could not exist without its members. Their willingness to connect across differences, to build authentic relationships based on mutual trust and to wrestle through brave but vulnerable interactions has made Di-Net successful in supporting displaced people. Members are willing to teach and learn from one another because their shared experience of displacement helps them value one another's humanity over judgements based on skin color, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, sexual preferences, age or religion.



### **What Happens in One System Will Impact Another**

Di-Net's services range from covering basic needs to providing learning experiences because it aims to offer systemic supports to its members. Its organizers believe that a whole-person approach delivers exponential results compared to targeted interventions. For example, it would be nearly impossible for displaced learners to focus if they lacked stability and security or for caregivers to apply for employment or government benefits if caring for their children was their full-time job and was all that they could handle at that moment.

## **YOUTH VOICES FROM THE FUTURE**

*"Di-Net offers a safe outlet for people to share their thoughts and feelings with others displaced by climate change events. Taking care of each other nurtures their sense of community."* – by Chanelle West

# Creating Your Own Artifacts

Creating your own artifacts from the future can help you keep imagining what liberatory education could look like in various contexts or from different people’s vantage points. Follow the instructions below.

This process is adapted from the one used in KnowledgeWorks’ liberatory education artifacts workshop. It draws upon the Institute for the Future’s Coursera course, “[Urgent Optimism: How to Turn Foresight into Action](#),” Nicolas Weidinger’s [guidance](#) on creating artifacts from the future; and the Situation Lab’s game, [The Thing from the Future](#).

1. Pick some dimension of liberatory education futures to bring to life using an artifact from the future. You might choose a scenario or an insight or implication from Imagining Liberatory Education Futures, or you might pick some specific aspect of liberatory education that feels meaningful to you.
2. Select a way to represent your artifact from the future. You could:
  - a. Draw an illustration
  - b. Write a description
  - c. Mockup a prototype using building toys or found objects
  - d. Use an artificial intelligence art platform such as Midjourney, DALL-E 2 or DiffusionBee to create a picture
3. Situate yourself in the aspect of liberatory education that you picked as a starting point in step one. Consider what it might look and feel like and what people might be doing.
4. Decide what kind of artifact from the future to represent. For example, you might select a public place, a celebration, an everyday activity, something used in a classroom, an assessment, a policy or an article of clothing.
5. Answer this prompt: In 20 years, there is [an item selected in step four] that exists in a liberatory education future. What is it?
6. Generate several ideas for items that could exist in 20 years. Go for quantity, not for perfection or depth.
7. Pick one idea to develop further.
8. Give that artifact from the future more shape by following the steps below.
  - a. Name your artifact from the future.
  - b. Identify who would use it. Also identify who created it – and why.
  - c. Consider what technology, policy or reality would make the artifact work or be necessary for it to function.
- d. List what problems the artifact would solve – and what problems it would create.
- e. Articulate how the artifact embodies the insight or implication that you chose and what other insights or implications it might convey.
- f. Identify what is similar to this artifact today.
- g. If useful and practical, share your artifact with someone else and reflect on their observations and questions.
- h. If you choose, revise the depiction of your artifact based on the refinements you have made as a result of following these steps.
9. Reflect on how the experience of developing an artifact from the future influenced your understanding of liberatory education. Repeat this process or revisit the ideas generated as necessary.

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## Authors

Maria Crabtree, Katherine Prince and Jason Swanson of KnowledgeWorks wrote this publication and co-created the artifact ideation process.

## Additional Contributors

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KnowledgeWorks hosted a workshop with education leaders, design thinkers, futurists and people from community-focused organizations to generate ideas for artifacts from liberatory education futures. The artifact concepts used in this publication were envisioned by the following individuals.

- » **Power to the People** was prototyped by Aditi Garg.
- » **iLearn®** was prototyped by Corey Cloyd, Todd Garvin and Heather Sass. The authors of this publication included additional details from a prototype developed by Aaron Roberts, Emily Flannery, Tammy Metcalf and Heather Townley.

- » **EcoReclaimers** was inspired by Tammy Metcalf, Heather Sass and David Staley.
- » **humani** was prototyped by Allison Curran, Rolando Fernando, Kevin Harrison and Colleen Keating-Crawford.
- » **Learning Palooza** was inspired by Colleen Keating-Crawford.
- » **Yrarbil** was inspired by David Staley and Andrew Marley.
- » **Di-Net** was inspired by Matt Williams.



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