

Becoming a More Equitable Educator: Mindsets and Practices

Learning Circle Guide

Based on [P2PU's Learning Circles Facilitator Handbook](#)



TEACHING SYSTEMS LAB

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Learning Circle Guide	1
Welcome to the Learning Circle Guide	3
A note for working together during the COVID-19 pandemic	3
Learning Circle Logistics	5
Unit 0 & 1: Mindsets and Practices for Equity Teaching & Seeing and Valuing Individuals Through an Equity Lens	9
Suggested Week 1 Activities	9
Suggested Week 2 Activities	11
Unit 2: Seeing and Valuing Students Through Asset Framing	14
Suggested Week 1 Activities	14
Suggested Week 2 Activities	16
Unit 3: Seeing and Valuing Difference Through Challenging Conversations	18
Suggested Week 1 Activities	18
Suggested Week 2 Activities	20
Unit 4: Addressing Equity in a Community Context	22
Suggested Activities	22
Unit 5: The Lifelong Work of Equity Teaching	24
Suggested Week 1 Activities	24
Suggested Week 2 Activities	25
Appendix I: Social Media and Email Templates	28
Appendix II: Inviting Non-Learning Circle Members to Meetings	29

Welcome to the Learning Circle Guide

A note for working together during the COVID-19 pandemic

In several places, this guide encourages face to face meetups. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this is not advised. You may have to skip or modify some of the activities in your context. Consider meeting up virtually with colleagues or students using Google Hangouts, Discord, Zoom, WebEx, or your favorite video conferencing option.

Welcome to the Learning Circle Guide for the massively open online course (MOOC) *Becoming a More Equitable Educator: Mindsets and Practices!* We believe that the course is best explored with colleagues who understand your context, the students in your school, and the culture of your organization. This guide will provide resources for having discussions with colleagues who want to learn about equity teaching practices and mindsets together.

We think this guide can be used two ways.

This guide can be used among a small group of colleagues taking this course together in what is called a learning circle. The guide contains suggested meeting agendas, activities, and discussion questions that learning circle members can use to make their work in the course more collaborative. More details on learning circles below.

However, this guide can also be used to share learning with colleagues who are *not* enrolled in the course. Perhaps during the course you want to share and discuss videos, practice spaces, or readings with colleagues. This guide contains tips to help you. Or perhaps you decide to start an equity reading group. The activities, readings, and video discussions in the guide can also be adapted for that.

Either way, we encourage you to reach out to a small group who might be interested in taking this course with you. Talking about the course with even one or two colleagues who know your context will make this a more powerful learning experience, and help you start to build a change cohort in your organization.

What is a learning circle?

A learning circle is a facilitated, in-person study group for learners who are all registered in the course.

If you are the only educator taking the course in your school or organization, we still encourage you to find ways to share this work with colleagues. As you start the course,

consider who you might invite to join you, or how you might collaborate with colleagues in completing course assignments.

Why should you start or join a learning circle?

In previous courses, our learners found learning circles to be a powerful part of their experience:



Head of Academic Technology at a PreK-9 school Megan Haddadi says, “Learning circles [were] one of my favorite parts of this course. To be honest, learning online can feel really impersonal, but having that face-to-face connection with my colleagues on a weekly basis really made a difference for me.”



High school computer science teacher Douglas Kiang says, “When we realize that we’re really not alone in this, that we can work together and help make this a better place for all of us, that, I think for me, was the real power of the learning circle.”

These two former facilitators describe their learning circle experiences in [this video](#).

How should you reach out to colleagues?

We encourage you to invite your colleagues, professional learning networks, and community members to join you and form a learning circle! See [Appendix I](#) for ideas.

What is the Learning Circle Guide?

This guide is designed to support members of a learning circle as they plan and facilitate their study group throughout the course. As we go through, we’ll be referring to the person who organizes and leads a learning circle as the facilitator. For each week of the course, we’ve suggested activities and discussion topics that fit with the current unit’s content. We encourage you to revise or adapt the schedule as needed for your group’s needs.

For each unit we’ll provide:

- Suggested videos with discussion questions
- Suggested readings with discussion questions
- Activities or practices spaces to talk about together
- Ways to collaborate or give feedback on course assignments

We encourage your learning circle to interact with the course materials in the ways that seem most valuable and productive for your needs. For example, some learning circles may

decide that everyone will work on the course independently and then come together to discuss what they're learning. Other learning circles choose to work collaboratively on course activities and assignments during their meetings. They may use meeting times to watch videos or do readings together and then discuss them. **We hope you will choose an agenda for each unit that makes the most sense for your group.**

Learning Circle Logistics

As the Course Starts

As a facilitator, here are some things we recommend that you do before the course begins:

Gather your learning circle members

Learning circles work best with 4 to 10 members, but working with even one partner will enrich your experience.

- Consider inviting people to participate with an announcement during a staff meeting, emailing out invitations, or posting on social media.
- In [Appendix I](#) of this guide, we have provided some social media and email templates for inviting people in your networks to join a learning circle with you.

Answer key questions about logistics

We recommend you determine as many logistics as possible in advance through email or other digital communication so that you can spend the first meeting discussing content. As you and your learning circle answer these questions, try to be as flexible as possible. Some important questions to answer are:

When, where, for how long, and how frequently will you meet?

Do you plan to meet every week? When do you want to meet relative to assignment steps? To help you coordinate, see the course syllabus in edX for key dates.

What work will be done inside and outside of the learning circle?

Everyone in the learning circle should be registered for the course in order to access course materials. However, we know that educators are incredibly busy, and not everyone in your learning circle will have time to do everything every week. **Not all learners have to commit to the same amount of work.** In this guide, we'll offer ways to engage learning circle members during meetings regardless of how much

coursework they've done outside of the meeting. Make sure that members of your circle feel comfortable being as flexible as they need to be.

What resources will you need?

How will everyone see the course and Learning Circle Guide materials? Does the room have a projector? Will everyone use laptops/tablets/etc.? Will they have copies of this document, or will you make a slideshow with the meeting agenda? How will the table be set up? Ideally, everyone will be in a circle. Your role as facilitator is not to stand at the front of the room, lecture-style, but to be an equal member of the learning circle. What other supplies will you need? Will someone bring snacks?

Read through the guide

Read through this guide before the course begins so that you can get a good overview of the course and plan meetings accordingly.

Email reminders

A few days before the start of the course, email out a reminder. Be sure to convey that you are grateful for everyone's time and excited to begin this course!

"Some people in your learning circle will fall behind and may feel stressed or overwhelmed. Encourage them to come to your face-to-face gatherings even if they have fallen behind in their work, because everyone has something they can add to the group, and everyone can take some wisdom away from the group as well. It will help to have a backup plan for those who have fallen behind as well. Partner them with one another and encourage them to read the articles together or watch the videos during the learning circle time. In other words, help them get caught up, and assist their progress moving forward through the material."

- Megan, former learning circle facilitator

During the Course

Decide on meeting agendas

While this guide provides suggestions for how each learning circle meeting might run, you should customize the learning circle experience to your group. Do not feel pressured to try to cover all of the material that is offered. **We encourage you to spend the bulk of your time doing activities together as a group or discussing your progress with assignments steps.** Doing these activities and assignments together will make them more collaborative and enriching. Choose the activities that seem most exciting and relevant for your learning circle. It's okay to get off-track from the suggested agenda if you are engaged in a productive discussion.

In general we've found that an hour typically leaves space for 2-3 discussions or activities. We've provided a sample of what an agenda might look like given a one-hour meeting in the Learning Circle Logistics section. Keep in mind that the number of activities you choose may depend on whether participants are doing coursework (assignments, readings, videos, etc.) outside of the meeting time. If so, you may have time for three activities. If you are watching videos, or doing readings or assignments together, it may be fewer.

Sample Agenda

5 minutes	Welcome and check-in	Spend the first few minutes reviewing the previous meeting and any action taken since then.
25 minutes	Resource discussion: discuss a video, reading, and/or a practice space	Begin the discussion by asking the group for general thoughts and impressions. What was surprising about the resource? What would you like to know more about? What were two important takeaways? We will provide discussion questions as suggestions, but feel free to discuss what your group is most interested in.
25 minutes	Plan for or reflect on an assignment	We will provide guidelines for how to begin thinking about the assignments and how you might use your meeting to engage with the assignments as a group. If your learning circle has already completed work before the meeting, use this time to give each other feedback.
5 minutes	Reflection and closing	Spend the last five minutes sharing something positive about the meeting and what learners hope to change for the next meeting.

After each meeting, send a short summary email to all learners and a reminder about the next meeting.

If you find that our sample agenda or suggested discussion topics don't work for your group, **we encourage you to do as much or as little as best suits your group's needs.**

Keep Notes

Because the activities and assignments in this course build off of each other, we recommend that you collect your learning circle's work in a central location such as Dropbox, Google Drive, Padlet, or another alternative. Openness and iteration is such a large part of why we think this process is important, so we encourage you to document the group's thinking throughout the process by taking notes or summarizing key activities.

Invite Others to Meetings

Anyone, regardless of whether they are taking the course, can participate in many of the activities in this guide. Feel free to invite your colleagues, students, or community members to a meeting of your learning circle. In [Appendix II](#), we have provided sample text for inviting non-learning circle members to attend your meetings. When non-learning circle members attend your meetings, consider how you can make them feel welcome, even though they aren't taking the course.

Share Out!

We want to hear from you! Find us Twitter with [#TSLEquity](#) and [@MoocsTsl](#) to share how your experience in the learning circle is going. In past courses, learners have used the course hashtag to share photos of their learning circle at work, resources related to the course, thoughts on course content and more. Sharing out using social media will also allow people outside of the course to see the great work that you're doing!

Unit 0 & 1: Mindsets and Practices for Equity Teaching & Seeing and Valuing Individuals Through an Equity Lens

Units 0 and 1

Suggested Week 1 Activities

Look through these activities and consider which would be most useful for your group, given your time constraints and interests.

Video Discussion Questions

We recommend spending around 15-20 minutes on video discussion. That could mean talking in-depth about a single video, or spending a shorter time on multiple videos. Focus on whichever video(s) you think will be most compelling to the group.

Introduction to Educator Mindsets for Equity

- What are your initial thoughts about these mindsets? Does the language seem new or is this vocabulary you use in your school or context?
- To what extent are these issues (providing for individual needs, framing assets, talking about systemic inequality, and being context-centered) already topics of discussion in your context?
- What questions do you have so far?

Voices from the Field: Why Equity Matters

- What resonated with you from the reasons that educators shared for why working on equity issues is important to them? Were there any reasons that surprised you or are already topics of discussion in your context?
- Why does working on equity issues matter to you personally? To your students and your context?

Activities and Assignments

You can do these before your meeting and discuss how it went, what was most challenging, what was most exciting/interesting. Or you can do these collaboratively with Learning Circle members. We'll provide suggestions that will work for both paths.

Assignment: Why I'm Here

For more details, see the assignment description in the [course](#).

Think about your goals, motivations, strengths, and concerns for the course. What kind of community will support you in your learning? Choose at least one aspect to share with the group.

Activity: Building a Supportive Learning Community

1. Read the tips below from Unit 0 in the course about creating a supportive learning community.
 - **Be open to new ideas and perspectives.** *Doing equity work often requires us to “unlearn” things we’ve been taught, either explicitly (like in a teacher training program) or implicitly (through cultural expectations or norms). Curiosity, open-mindedness, and humility will serve you well on the journey of becoming a more equitable educator, as will a tolerance for uncertainty, non-closure, and discomfort.*
 - **Reject perfection and be prepared to make mistakes.** *We all have room to grow when it comes to tackling inequities in education — even experts in this topic! Give yourself space to be an imperfect learner. This means you may make mistakes. If that happens, try to receive any feedback from fellow learners graciously. Reflect on what happened, and if there’s any harm that needs to be repaired (because things said with good intentions can still cause harm). Be mindful of the emotions that come up for you. Then, allow yourself to “fail forward” by learning from the experience and trying a different approach next time.*
2. Have participants write down some notes:
 - What do you think you can bring to the learning circle to promote a supportive learning environment around equity issues?
 - What would you like to ask for from your fellow group members as you learn together?
3. Invite group members to share their thoughts, and then discuss together about what group norms or agreements you’d like to have for your group. As a group you may decide to capture these in writing.

Preparing for Unit 1 Assignment: Small Changes in Practice to Address Student Needs

For more details, see the assignment description in the [course](#).

In this assignment, you will be asked to try out an Equity Mindset by focusing on one student, and making a small change in your practice with their needs in mind. In this meeting, we recommend having the learning circle participants help each other think through this assignment. Here are some suggestions:

- Discuss which student they might focus on. Are there students who might represent a larger group of students you teach? Are there students who you are having a hard time connecting with academically?
- Once everyone has picked a student, talk or brainstorm individually about what you know about that student. What do they like? What motivates them in school? What barriers to success might they be facing in your class?
- Can members already think of something small to change that might help this student? Talk through ideas and questions with other learning circle participants.

Units 0 and 1

Suggested Week 2 Activities

We recommend choosing 2-3 of these activities, keeping in mind the schedule and preferences of your group.

Video Discussion Questions

Introduction to the Equity vs Equality Mindsets

- Based on this video (and other course materials), what do you understand to be the difference between the Equity and Equality Mindsets?
- Have you had a moment in your career when you've experienced a dilemma around equity or equality in a school or classroom? What decision did you make? Would you make the same decision today?

Voices from the Field: Equity Mindset in Practice

- *How do the teachers at Purdue Polytechnic High School (PPHS) use relationship building to address their students' academic needs?*
- *Are there currently opportunities to build relationships with students in your context? If so, when and where are they? If not, do you see any places in your context where you could start doing this? Either way, how could these relationships help you address individual needs?*
- *How was identity a factor in the way the PPHS teachers approached relationship building with students? What messages have you received about bringing your personal identity*

into your teaching? If this is something you've thought a lot about, what helped you get started?

Practice Space Discussion

Jeremy's Journal

We recommend doing the practice spaces outside the meetings and reserving time together to discuss. If you choose to do it with your group, plan to leave 35-50 minutes for participants to complete it.

Discussions Questions:

1. As you were going through the practice space, what did you notice and what details seemed most salient? How did you interpret what you noticed? Among the group, are there details that you noticed or interpreted differently?
2. Did you choose to have Jeremy take the quiz? Why or why not? (*Keep in mind there is no "right" answer. The point is to consider how your group is reasoning about decisions.*)
3. Do you think your reasons fall more in line with the Equity Mindset or the Equality Mindset?
4. What connections can you make between this conversation and issues you are facing in your classrooms or school?

Readings and Resources Discussion Questions

Resource: Minor, Cornelius. 2019 ["How Listening Can Help"](#). Heinemann Blog, January 28.

The Equity Mindset asks us to think about the individual needs of students. Cornelius Minor describes listening as a way to truly see students, and their needs, as individuals. In your group, discuss the blog post and videos, and consider:

- To what extent does Minor's concept of listening to students — especially in the context of classroom power dynamics — resonate with your experiences?
- Have there been times where you've felt like you've been able to successfully listen to students and understand their needs? What are some factors that make listening in this way more challenging?

Reflecting on the Unit 1 Assignment: Small Changes in Practice to Address Student Needs

In this assignment, you've been asked to consider the needs of a focal student, and plan a small update or modification to something in your practice, like a lesson, to address their needs. In this meeting, ask members to report back on their experiences. Here's some suggestions:

- Ask members to share their plans. What did they decide to change? How did they decide? Did anyone talk with their focal student to get ideas?
- If members tried out the change, ask them to share their experiences. How did it go? What, if any, feedback did they receive from students?
- Group members could provide more feedback to each other. If interest and schedules permit, members could plan to visit each other's classes and observe the small shifts in action!
- Based on the group's experience, the group could brainstorm a list of suggested "do's and don'ts" for other teachers that want to work with focal students.

Unit 2: Seeing and Valuing Students Through Asset Framing

Unit 2

Suggested Week 1 Activities

We recommend choosing 2-3 of these activities, keeping in mind the schedule and preferences of your group.

Video Discussion Questions

Introduction to the Asset vs Deficit Mindsets

- Based on this video (and other course materials), what do you understand asset-framing to be? Can you think of some real-life examples of deficit-framing?
- Finding a balance between the Asset and Deficit Mindsets can be difficult. Are there places in your school or organization where you see deficit-framing happening? What about asset-framing?

Readings and Resources Discussion Questions

Resource: Hammond, Zaretta. 2015. [Closing Learning Gaps through the Power of Culturally Responsive Teaching](#). Corwin Connect. February 24.

The Asset Mindset asks us to consider how we can use student strengths to scaffold student success. In this article, Hammond writes about the importance of building a “learning partnership” with students to help them take ownership of their learning.

- She writes about three essential components of a learning partnership: *rapport + alliance = cognitive insight*. What do you understand each of these phrases to mean? Do they seem relevant in the context of your work as an educator?
- What are some of the challenges you’ve experienced around these themes? Have you seen examples of educators who are especially skilled in any one of these areas?

Practice Space Discussion

Coach Wright

If you choose to do the practice space with your group, plan to leave 35-50 minutes to complete it.

Discussions Questions:

1. In the practice space, the student (Jeremy) wanders around the hallways against his school's rules. Do you think he should receive a disciplinary referral? (*Keep in mind there is no "right" answer. The point is to consider how your group is reasoning about teaching decisions.*)
2. What dilemmas do you face around asset- or deficit-framing students? Are there times when focusing on assets feels easy or logical? Are there times when it is more challenging?
3. In the practice space, we see examples of educators motivating Jeremy using his strengths (creative thinking, leadership, research and strategy in basketball, etc.). Is this something you've seen educators successfully do (yourself included)? What helped you do it?

Activities and Assignments

Thinking Through the Unit 2 Assignment: Roster Audit

For more details, see the assignment description in the [course](#).

As you've learned in this unit, using an Asset Mindset helps educators form learning partnerships with students so that students experience a meaningful and challenging curriculum. One important step in creating learning partnerships is being able to identify students' strengths. We recommend you use this first meeting to start thinking through your roster audit. Here are some suggestions:

- Talk with your group about how and when you think about student strengths. At what moments during the day do thoughts about student strengths come up? Have you ever tried to consider them in a systematized way?
- If members haven't started yet, they could take time to work individually on their roster audits.
- If members have worked on their roster audits, the group could reflect, in pairs or small groups, on what they noticed. Were there students for whom it was a struggle to name strengths? Which ones? Did they notice any patterns?

Unit 2

Suggested Week 2 Activities

We recommend choosing 2-3 of these activities, keeping in mind the schedule and preferences of your group.

Video Discussion Questions

Voices from the Field: Asset Framing in Practice

- *What techniques for asset framing did you see being used at Seminole High School? How do you think these practices are impacting how the students experience school?*
- *In your context, can you think of an example of students experiencing deficit framing? If so, what were the consequences on students' experience?*
- *In what ways do the staff in your context shine a light on students' strengths, talents, or positive qualities? How often does this happen? Are there some students or groups of students who are not receiving this kind of communication?*

Readings and Resources Discussion Questions

Resources: Lenz, Laura. 2016. [A Strength-Based Approach to Teaching English Learners](#). Cult of Pedagogy. September 11.

and

Dakota Wicohan. 2016. [Mni Sóta Maḵoḵe: The Dakota Homelands Curriculum](#). (Focus on the Instructor Overview of Content and Materials).

The Equity Mindset asks us to think about focusing on student strengths. Skim or quickly read both resources, and then discuss them.

- The Lenz article describes some ways of leveraging individual students' strengths. Which, if any, of these strategies resonated with you?
- The Mni Sóta Maḵoḵe (Dakota Homelands Curriculum) is an example of framing an entire community and culture in a strengths-based way, while still meeting local grade-level standards and benchmarks. Have you seen other examples where cultures or communities have been explicitly framed through their strengths in a learning environment? Was it within a school curriculum, or outside of it?
- In your practice, in what ways do you elevate either individual or cultural strengths with your students? Are there new ways you'd like to try to do this?

Activities and Assignments

Reflecting on the Unit 2 Assignment: Roster Audit

In this assignment, you worked on looking at the strengths of students in one class, and potentially learning more about them. In this meeting, we suggest asking members to report back on their experiences. Here are some suggestions:

- If participants had a chance to learn more about strengths, what did they try? How did it go? What, if any, feedback did they receive from their students?
- Did anyone try a whole-class exercise to learn about strengths? How did that go?
- Discuss or brainstorm: how can we take what we've learned and use it to build learning partnerships with our students? How can we use strengths to build rapport, or create an alliance where we can push students into stronger work?
- Are there any ideas about how to incorporate some of these strengths into daily lessons or curricula?

Unit 3: Seeing and Valuing Difference Through Challenging Conversations

Unit 3

Suggested Week 1 Activities

We recommend choosing 2-3 of these activities, keeping in mind the schedule and preferences of your group.

Video Discussion Questions

Introduction to the Aware vs Avoidant Mindsets

- What stood out to you in this video? Was there information or phrasing in the video that felt new to you? If so, what?
- Have you experienced a time when you spoke up on behalf of someone else (whether or not it was about a taboo topic)? What was that experience like for you?
- What questions do you have about your own school or organization around these topics?

Readings and Resources Discussion Questions

Resource: Ebarvia, Tricia. 2019. [How do we show up?](https://triciaebarvia.org) Triciaebarvia.org. May 16.

The Aware Mindset asks us to do three things: see and consider the dynamics of demographic identity (like race) in schools, talk about them, and take them into consideration when making decisions that impact students. Ebarvia's essay can help us think about each of these aspects.

- What kinds of experiences shaped Ebarvia's experiences of her own race? Which ones were positive experiences of identity? Which were negative?
- Ebarvia describes "hiding" parts of her racial identity to protect herself. At one point or another, we have all had the experience of hiding a part of ourselves to fit in. Can you recall a time where you felt like you got to be vibrantly yourself? What helped create that atmosphere?
- Ebarvia writes: "The more I think about it, the more I realize how much navigating White spaces as a person of color is about trust: Do I trust you with the parts of me that matter the most? Have you shown me that I can trust you?" How do you see this dynamic working with your own students and/or colleagues?

Activities and Assignments

Activity: Looking at a Resource: Office of Civil Rights. 2015. [Civil Rights Data Collection](#). U.S. Department of Education. *This database allows users to search by US public school and/or district to see student data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability and language classification, and social class (including categories like preschool enrollment, gifted and talented programs, discipline, etc.).*

The Aware Mindset asks us to do three things: see and consider the dynamics of demographics (like race) in schools, talk about them, and take them into consideration when making decisions that impact students.

- If you are in a US public school or district, search for your own district. Perhaps ask participants to bring their own laptops and give them time to look through the data.
- Come back together. Working as a group, brainstorm a list of questions that you have after looking at this data. Is there anyone in your group or school who could help you answer these questions?

Thinking Through the Unit 3 Assignment: Practicing Challenging Conversations

For more details, see the assignment description in the [course](#)

In this assignment you'll practice having a conversation about race, structural inequality, and other taboo topics with a colleague by asking them questions. We recommend you use this first meeting to get ready for your conversation. Here are some suggestions:

- Take some time to brainstorm potential questions, either individually or as a group. What are you most curious to find out? What, if any, questions seem particularly taboo? Which ones seem easiest, or most difficult to answer? Who within your school or organization could help you answer your questions?
- Consider if there are questions you want to dialogue about together as a group. "Taboo" conversations take practice; can you dig in right now together?
- If participants each want to have an individual conversation, they could partner up and practice their question with another participant.
- Perhaps there's a question the whole group decides they want to answer together. How might you go about it? What resources within your school could help you answer it? How about within your group itself?

Unit 3

Suggested Week 2 Activities

We recommend you choose 2-3 of these activities, considering the time you have and the preferences of your group.

Video Discussion Questions

Voices from the Field: Aware Mindset in Practice

- *What steps did the educators at Seminole High School take to build a more Aware culture? How did it change their practice?*
- *What would be the biggest challenges of taking action to build an Aware culture? What would be the biggest opportunities and benefits?*
- *To what extent are educators in your context talking about students, curriculum, and decisions and policies with an Aware mindset? If that happens a lot, what do you think enables that? If it happens infrequently, what do you think might contribute to that?*

Practice Space Discussion

Roster Justice

If you choose to do the practice space with your group, plan to leave 35-50 minutes to complete it.

Discussions Questions:

1. What did you notice when you looked at the rosters? Is it the same as what others noticed? (*Keep in mind there is no "right" answer. The point is to consider how your group is reasoning about teaching decisions.*)
2. How did you leave things with Mr. Holl? Did you accept his proposals?
3. Have you ever had a conversation like this? How did it go? What do you think were the factors that made it go well or poorly?
4. Are there factors in your context where demographic inequity might be impacted by something that seems otherwise unremarkable (like rosters)? What are they? What would it take for stakeholders at your school to pause and re-examine something as ordinary as a class roster?

Assignment

Reflecting on the Unit 3 Assignment: Challenging Conversations

In this assignment, you've been asked to practice having a conversation about race, structural inequality, and other taboo topics with a colleague. What, if anything, did your group learn?

- In pairs or as a whole group, ask participants to share their experiences. What did they try? How did it go?
- If they weren't able to have a conversation, what got in the way? If they were able to, what did they learn?
- Getting better at challenging conversations takes practice. Did anyone try an approach that worked particularly well? Was there anything you'd do differently next time?
- Based on what you learned, what might be some next steps? What is needed for dialogue, learning and action to continue?

Unit 4: Addressing Equity in a Community Context

Unit 4

Suggested Activities

Note: We are only recommending one week for Unit 4. We recommend you choose 2-3 of these activities, considering the time you have and the preferences of your group.

Video Discussion Questions

Voices from the Field: Context-Centered Mindset in Practice

- Based on this video (and other course materials), what do you understand the Context-centered Mindset to be? Can you think of some real-life examples of using the Context-neutral Mindset?
- What kind of language do educators in your context use when they talk about students' families and communities? Is it generally positive or negative? Why do you think that is?

Practice Space Discussion Questions

Layers

- What do you think was the purpose of the game? What information on the student cards was most/least helpful? Why?
- Have you ever designed a lesson or piece of instruction in response to student interests, context or needs?
- Are there ways that you could update something you're doing currently to be more centered on these issues?

Readings and Resources Discussion Questions

Resource: Van Der Valk, Adrienne. 2018. ["Families Are Such an Asset"](#) Teaching Tolerance, July 30.

Part of being context-centered is simply understanding students' context. In this article Liz Kleinrock talks about how she reaches out to parents and families.

- What has your experience been like engaging with families? What are the positives? What are the challenges?
- What kinds of strategies does Kleinrock use to build partnerships with families?

- Kleinrock talks about the experiences and “baggage” families might have coming into conversations with teachers. In your context, what kind of baggage do you think that might be? What opportunities are there in your context to find out more about your students’ families’ own experiences with school?

Assignment

The Unit 4 Assignment: Starting the Rebalancing Mindsets Project

For more details, see the assignment description in the [course](#).

In this unit, you’ll be starting work on your Rebalancing Mindsets Project by choosing a problem of practice and creating an asset map. Since we only recommend one week for this unit, perhaps check in ahead of time to see where people would like to focus. Here are some suggestions on how to work on this project with your learning circle:

Problem of Practice:

- Participants may decide they each want to each tackle a different problem of practice, or your group may decide to work on one problem together. Either way is fine! If you’re working as a group, take some time to brainstorm together about what mindsets might be out of balance in your school or context, and use consensus of voting to choose one to work on.
- If people are working individually, invite everyone to share their problem of practice with a partner and ask for feedback on their idea.
- Participants could take some time individually to write out or draw what wild success would look like if mindsets were balanced.

Asset Maps:

- An asset map is a visual representation of the valuable resources around you and how they connect to each other.
- Ask each learning circle member how they can be an asset to the group’s problem of practice or to any individual problems of practice. (The benefit of taking this course in a learning circle is that the people in the room can now become valuable assets.)
- Use the collective brainpower of the group to dive deeper into the group or an individual problem of practice. Brainstorm about assets in each of these categories: school values and beliefs, people (teachers, administrators, staff, students), community resources, and spaces. We recommend writing down each brainstorm idea on a sticky note, and then coming together to build the asset map on a wall or white board.
- Talk together about ways you could bring community resources in to help with your problem or practice. What kinds of knowledge, values, skills, people, spaces or funding might be accessible within the community?

- Reflect together: what was challenging and rewarding about creating asset maps? Among the maps in the group, were any assets surprising or unexpected? (You may choose to ask participants to create their maps before the meeting.)

Unit 5: The Lifelong Work of Equity Teaching

Unit 5

Suggested Week 1 Activities

We recommend you choose 2-3 of these activities, considering the time you have and the preferences of your group.

Video Discussion Questions

Voices from the Field: Taking on Equity

- *What steps are educators at Latitude High School taking to use a Context-centered mindset in their teaching?*
- To what extent do you think students in your context would say that their lives outside of school are connected to what they're doing inside the classroom? How do you think they feel about that connection? How could you learn more?

Readings and Resources Discussion Questions

Resources:

Choose ONE of these resources to read:

- Miller, Cody. 2019. [Being a Radical Pragmatist: Reflections on Introducing LGBTQ YA Lit to an ELA Department](#). English Leadership. February 2019. NCTE.
- Tania Anaissie, Victor Cary, David Clifford, Tom Malarkey, Susie Wise. ["Liberatory Design Cards: Your Toolkit to Design for Equity."](#)
- Minor, Cornelius. 2019. ["An Articulation Plan for Saying What You Really Mean."](#) Heinemann.

Once everyone has read their chosen resource, discuss the following points:

- Each of these resources lays out suggestions for creating more equitable schools. For each resource, describe the suggestions or approach they offer for moving towards equity.
- For whom might each of these resources be most helpful?
- Considering your problem of practice, which resource do you think would be the most helpful for you? What's a first step you could take in the near future to start trying out their advice?

The Unit 5 Assignment: Starting the Rebalancing Mindsets Project

For more details, see the assignment description in the [course](#).

The next step in the Rebalancing Mindsets Project is to invite colleagues into the conversation by sharing an activity from the course with them. This will take some logistic planning, so we recommend that your learning circle works together and, focusing on one problem of practice, shares an activity with colleagues.

Here are some suggestions on how to work on this project with your learning circle:

- Work together to choose an audience of colleagues, and an activity from the course that you think would help your school or context rebalance a mindset and move forward on your problem of practice.
- Consider: when and where might this happen? Who might be your allies on this project? Is there a chance to make this an opt-in, rather than required activity?
- Talk together about your goals: what would success look like? Also share concerns: are there ways you can support each other around these concerns?
- Capture your plan on paper: what role will different learning circle members play? What are the next steps? Who needs to do what to make this project happen?

Unit 5

Suggested Week 2 Activities

This last meeting is about celebrating and reflecting on the work you've done and planning for the future.

Video Discussion Questions

Advice for Becoming a More Equitable Educator

- *Was there any advice that particularly resonated with you? Was there any advice that seemed particularly relevant for your context?*
- *Now that you have completed this course, is there any advice you would give to someone starting out?*

Activities and Assignments

Reflect on the Rebalancing Mindsets Project

- Reflect together on the Rebalancing Mindsets Project, particularly sharing an activity with colleagues. What did you do? How did it go? To what extent did you achieve your goals? Is there anything you'd do differently next time?

I used to think, but now I think...

- In pairs, discuss how your own thinking has changed throughout the course. What did you think about equity and/or any of the mindsets before the course began? What do you think now? What caused a shift in your thinking?
- As a group, share highlights from the pair conversations.

Future work

Your work on your problem of practice should not end with this course! Take time to reflect as a group about what the future will look like.

- Considering your asset map and sharing project, what are some logical next steps?
- How will you continue to engage others?
- How will you include voices of students, families, or community members in your plan?
- How will you hold each other accountable for continuing the work that you started?

Share your learning!

Keep in mind that you can use the activities and resources in the course (and this Learning Circle Guide) to lead learning of your own.

- Readings and video discussions, practice spaces, and even some assignments can be done outside of the context of the course. Everything created by the Teaching Systems Lab is adaptable and shareable under our [Creative Commons license](#). Consider how you might adapt or share the content with students or colleagues!
- Many of the books on our booklist could work well for an equity book group with colleagues.

Consider the following accountability strategy:

- Have each member make a 6-month action plan by asking themselves what actions they plan on taking 1 month from now, 3 months from now, and 6 months from now. Then write these ideas down in the form of letters to your future self. Write down what progress you expect to have made, and what action step you plan to take. Write down something to encourage your future self to keep going.
- As the facilitator, collect these action plans. Mark the date in your calendar that is 1, 3, and 6 months away from the date of your meeting. On these days, plan to send out the letters to your learning circle members to remind them of the commitment they have made to themselves.

Celebration and Appreciation!

Congratulate and thank everyone in the room for their participation and contribution. Reflect on your work in the learning circle.

Appendix I: Social Media and Email Templates

TWITTER

I'm excited to enroll in MIT's free, online course: Becoming a More Equitable Educator: Mindsets and Practices to **learn about how to help all students thrive. Who wants to join me and** enroll today? <http://bit.ly/TSLEquityT> Course opens on March 24, 2020! #TSLEquity

FACEBOOK/LINKEDIN

I'm enrolling in a free, online course called Becoming a More Equitable Educator. It will explore mindsets and practices that help all students, especially underserved students, to thrive and feel valued. By the end, I hope to gain a better understanding of myself and students, new resources and exercises to draw on, and start working on a plan to advance equitable teaching in our school. Course opens March 24, 2020. Who wants to enroll in the course with me and join me in a learning circle discussion group? <http://bit.ly/TSLEquityE> #TSLEquity

EMAIL

Dear [Colleague],

I want to invite you to join me in a free online course for educators called *Becoming a More Equitable Educator: Mindsets and Practices*. This course is taught by professor Justin Reich of MIT and professor Rich Milner of Vanderbilt University. The course begins on March 24 and ends on May 28, 2020.

I would also like to invite you to be part of my learning circle for this course. A learning circle is a peer-facilitated, face-to-face study group for learners who are all registered in the course. As a learning circle, we will discuss materials and support each other's work in the course.

You can enroll in the course by clicking here: <http://bit.ly/TSLEquityE>.

Thanks in advance for considering this exciting way to learn and engage with fellow educators. I hope you join me!

Appendix II: Inviting Non-Learning Circle Members to Meetings

Here is sample text for messaging anyone who you think might want to visit a learning circle meeting.

Dear _____,

I have been taking an online course about exploring equity teaching practices as a pathway for transforming the school experience. I am taking this course in a learning circle, which is a group of registered learners who meet in person to discuss the course content and support each other.

I would like to invite you to join our next learning circle meeting on [Insert Date].

You do not have to register for the course or review course content in order to join our discussion. We would love for you to contribute your perspective based on your own experiences. However, if you would like to learn more about the course, visit the [Becoming a More Equitable Educator](#) edX page, or the [Teaching Systems Lab Twitter page](#), and follow [#TSLequity](#) hashtag. If you're interested, consider enrolling in the course to get access to videos, readings, and other activities we'll be looking at together.