



**BROOKLYN LAB
CHARTER SCHOOL**

Back to School

LEARNER IDENTITY & AGENCY GUIDEBOOK

This Guidebook unpacks how to develop student identity and agency to provide more equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students. It aggregates the leading research, thinking, and strategies from experts in sociology, psychology, special education, educational equity, social justice, and student-centered education to support educators in this work.



Version 1: August 24, 2020



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Education Sociologist | Educator | Author



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Dezudio

Foreword:

We're currently battling two viruses in America. COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc on our daily lives, our children's education, and how we define normal. But we have also been living with another insidious virus, one that began more than 400 years ago when enslaved Africans were first [sold to American colonists in 1619](#). Though we no longer practice slavery, this virus has permeated our minds, attitudes, systems, and structures causing systemic oppression and ongoing racial injustice. It has deeply seeded our biases, the design of our education system, and how we view the students we serve. As a result, this virus has profound effects on how our children develop their identity and sense of agency as human beings.

This project brought together people and organizations with experience and expertise in enacting change. We have an opportunity in this time of crisis to change the mental model we have of learners and what education is, so that we can evolve ourselves and our institutions to raise youth that know themselves and the awesome impact they can have on the world.

Endless gratitude to our partners that joined in this project and the wisdom they have shared on the following pages. I hope this inspires all of us to think beyond tech, tools, and timetables, and to focus on developing lifelong learning and a global view of the world within our youth.

Yours in service,
Chris Liang-Vergara

Founder & Partner
World Class Education

This will be the most challenging school year we have ever faced. Yet, it's an opportunity to do things differently. This moment—during an international pandemic, ongoing systemic racism, and an economic downturn—is a chance to reimagine the power dynamics of education and intentionally design schools that affirm and develop students' authentic identities, personalize learning, and cultivate agency.

Together with partners from across the country, we're building a Guidebook that outlines the leading research, resources, and strategies to provide the building blocks to deliver school environments that are identity affirming, student-driven, culturally competent, equity focused, and aligned with scholar interests and passions.

We anchored this work with the question:

What would it look like if Brooklyn LAB students developed their identity and agency to shift the locus of control and successfully navigate complex life and learning transitions?

Complex life and learning transitions can include shifts in learning environments, COVID-19 stresses or health concerns, and challenges outside of school.



Executive Summary

At Brooklyn LAB, we're building the capacity of schools to deliver more equitable outcomes for students through the explicit development of identity and agency. As students prepare to do school differently within a "new normal"—either in-person, hybrid, or virtual—there is a unique opportunity to shift the locus of control in schools and empower students to discover and affirm their authentic selves and develop more agency to become leaders and agents of change. This is a moment of upheaval and uncertainty; however, it's also a chance to help students learn how to navigate obstacles and personal challenges—skills that will set them up for success in school and beyond.

The Learner Identity and Agency Guidebook positions identity as an authentic understanding of one's self:

- **Who am I?**
- **What does it mean to be me?**
- **Is who I am aligned to my true purpose, passions, beliefs, and values?**

Together with [expert partners](#) from across the country, we organized a series of conversations to understand the best ways to build the school environments that develop student identity and agency. We've documented our learning in the Learner Identity and Agency Guidebook.

Our Partners:

Center for Black Educator Development,
Seton Montessori Institute,
Equity x Innovation Lab,
Q.E.D. Foundation, Dr. Anindya Kundu,
National Center for Learning Disabilities,
World Class Education, and Dezudio.



Defining Identity and Agency

Cultivating a student's authentic identity means helping them align talents and potential with their social and academic roles so they may find their place in the world. It also recognizes that when you have multiple, interdependent dimensions of oppression, it creates a new unique identity that you must think about, pay attention to, and design for.

We need to create spaces for new identities to flourish. This requires educators to understand the context of students' lives, including the real challenges and obstacles they face due to circumstances, historical oppression, systemic racism, and/or socioeconomic background. It means understanding and knowing students as individuals, connecting from an assets-based mindset that identifies and grows strengths and passions, developing cultural competence, and balancing social-emotional and academic learning. It is an essential building block towards developing agency.

This Guidebook defines agency as a person's capacity to leverage resources to navigate obstacles and create positive change in their learning and life. Agency allows students the freedom and opportunity to drive their own learning; investigate their interests; reaffirm their identities; and grow self-motivation, curiosity, and the ability to overcome challenges to excel in college, career, and life.



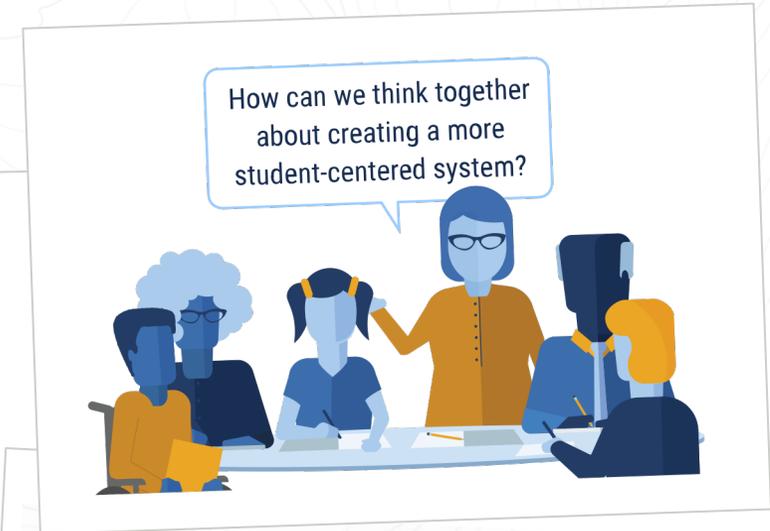
What's in the Learner Identity and Agency Guidebook?

This Guidebook represents a set of professional learning resources that will help educators and schools create learning environments that build identity and agency.

The Guidebook provides expert advice, research, and resources on the issues that matter most to identity and agency, including the power dynamics of self-determination, equity and oppression, the “less-ism” bias, character and curiosity development, teacher diversity, and how youth and adults co-create learning. It offers concrete principles and strategies (that, at times, might be counter-intuitive) to develop the identities and agency of students and families.



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NCLD



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C.Q.E.D.

DR. ANINDYA KUNDU
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About Us | Brooklyn LAB



Brooklyn LAB was co-founded in 2013 by Erin Mote and Eric Tucker with the mission to eliminate the achievement gap by preparing scholars with the academic foundation, digital literacy, and leadership skills necessary to succeed in college and professional life. Brooklyn LAB is dedicated to serving the highest need students, regardless of their academic level, English language proficiency, or disability. Meeting the needs of these students has continued to be our focus as we reimagine what the return to school will look like in the fall of 2020.



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PROCESS



Our Process | Questions

“How might we” questions encourage the exploration of creative solutions by fostering a culture of non-judgmental collaboration. It is important to bring a variety of ideas to the table for stakeholders to consider and respond to, so that we can move together toward well-considered solutions that prepare us to respond to rapidly evolving circumstances.

- How might we **build student agency to personalize each student’s learning experience** so they can be more of themselves and uniquely contribute back to society?
- How might we best facilitate a student-centered approach that allows **students to work with adults to co-create the learning experience?**
- How might we best teach students self-advocacy and self-determination skills, while addressing **power inequities in the classroom and society as a whole?**
- How might we lay the groundwork for **long-term change** so that educational systems may provide an **equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students?**
- How might we use Montessori methods to **move the locus of control from instructors to students**, so that students can become more independent and self-actualized?
- How might we **increase the opportunities for youth to organize** to redesign an inequitable program, policy, practice, or space in their schools or communities?



Our Process | Steps

Brooklyn LAB has a rich history of using design thinking to anchor its core approach to teaching and learning. LAB pioneered an approach of using user-centered, agile school design to ensure that its approach and preparation reflects adolescent and family voice, benefits from youth experience and concerns, and creates a learning experience that meets youth needs.

In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, Brooklyn LAB again applies this approach to a wide range of challenges that are necessary to ensure that school communities are safe, healthy, and thriving. LAB has run four “Design Charrettes” with leading experts in their fields to help apply their best thinking to school facilities, scheduling, trauma-informed practices, and now identity and agency.

A Design Charette leverages a knowledgeable group of people to collaborate around a shared problem to offer suggestions and professional experience with the intent of making the final outcome better. Our experts worked with communication designers to develop presentations that capture their fundamental principles and strategies for identity and agency development.



Our Process | Design Teams



The **Center for Black Educator Development** addresses educational inequities to improve academic and social outcomes for all students through increased teacher diversity. It is led by Founder and CEO Sharif El-Mekki.

Character LAB

Character Lab (CLAB) is a non-profit that connects researchers with educators to create greater knowledge about the conditions that lead to social, emotional, academic, and physical well-being for young people. The founder and CEO of CLAB is Angela Duckworth, the author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* and a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania.



eXi is a research lab that believes that the education system must be redesigned for all students, which can only be done at the intersection of equity and innovation. Its chief disruptor is Dr. Temple Lovelace, an associate professor of special education at Duquesne University whose research interests include social justice and equity through a disability inquiry lens.



The **National Center for Learning Disabilities** (NCLD) works to ensure students that with disabilities fully benefit from initiatives aiming to personalize learning for all students. It is led by Director Ace Parsi.



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Our Process | Design Teams



Q.E.D. Foundation is an organization of adults and youth working together to create and sustain student-centered learning communities. It is led by Executive Director Kim Carter.



The **Seton Montessori Institute** is a teacher preparation institute that has graduated thousands of qualified and caring educators in the Montessori teaching method. The Institute is led by Anna Perry, EdM, an expert on Montessori education, school leadership and administration, child development, and the Montessori philosophy.

DR. ANINDYA KUNDU
Education Sociologist | Educator | Author

Dr. Anindya Kundu has a Ph.D. in sociology of education from NYU and currently serves as a senior fellow at The City University of New York (CUNY). He has written the book, **[The Power of Student Agency: Looking Beyond Grit to Close the Opportunity Gap](#)**. He's also given a popular TED Talk on "[The Opportunity Gap in Public Education—and How to Close It.](#)"



World Class Education collaborates with others to spread the joy of learning around the world. It is led by its Founder and Partner Chris Liang-Vergara.

Dezudio

Dezudio is an interaction and information design consultancy that creates communications, products, and services that inform decision-making, inspire action, and drive positive behaviors.



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Brooklyn LAB as a
CASE STUDY



What Challenges Will Students Face?

Physical and mental health and safety: Schools must identify and address the stresses and trauma that students have experienced over the last 6 months and will continue to face this coming year. For example, students may face health and safety challenges that impact concentration, feel isolated from family and friends, or not feel safe in their homes.

Disengagement and retention: Student engagement is critical throughout the return-to-school process. Engagement looks different during remote learning. Teachers and students' lack of familiarity with remote learning may result in insufficient instruction by teachers and low motivation from students. A lack of access to infrastructure (connectivity, devices, quiet learning spaces) can create barriers. Students may become disengaged and unmotivated due to falling behind and be at risk of dropping out.

Increased economic pressure: The economic downturn's impact on livelihoods increases the risk that students and families have to focus on immediate priorities, including housing and food. Some students might look to find jobs instead of focusing on their education.

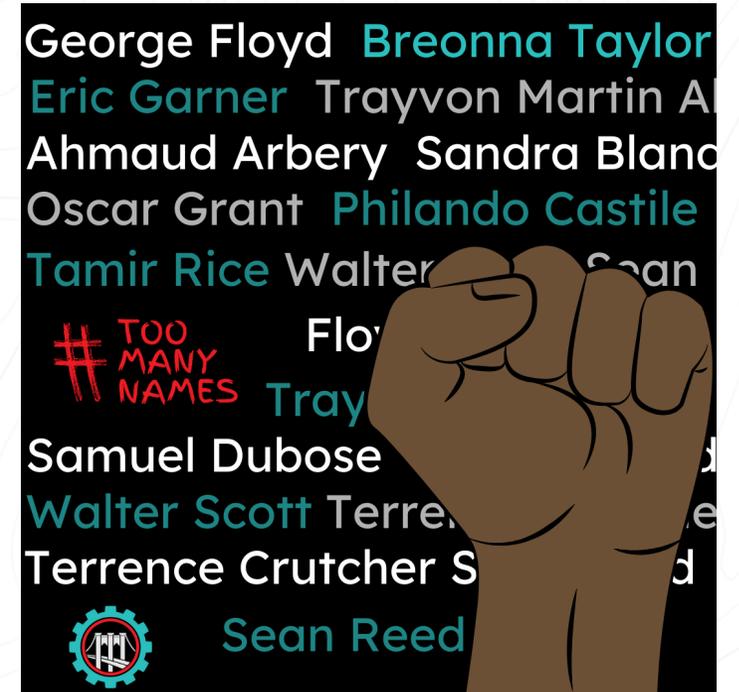


Confronting Racism as a School Community

At Brooklyn LAB, we believe education must provide all students equitable access to meaningful opportunities for learning and thriving. In the words of Dr. Bettina Love, author of *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*: **“When schools reopen, they could be spaces of justice, high expectations, creativity, and processing the collective trauma of COVID-19.”**

To achieve this vision, we must work together to listen to and understand students who are made most vulnerable by our education system and collaborate to transform ourselves and our education system to be anti-racist and anti-ableist.

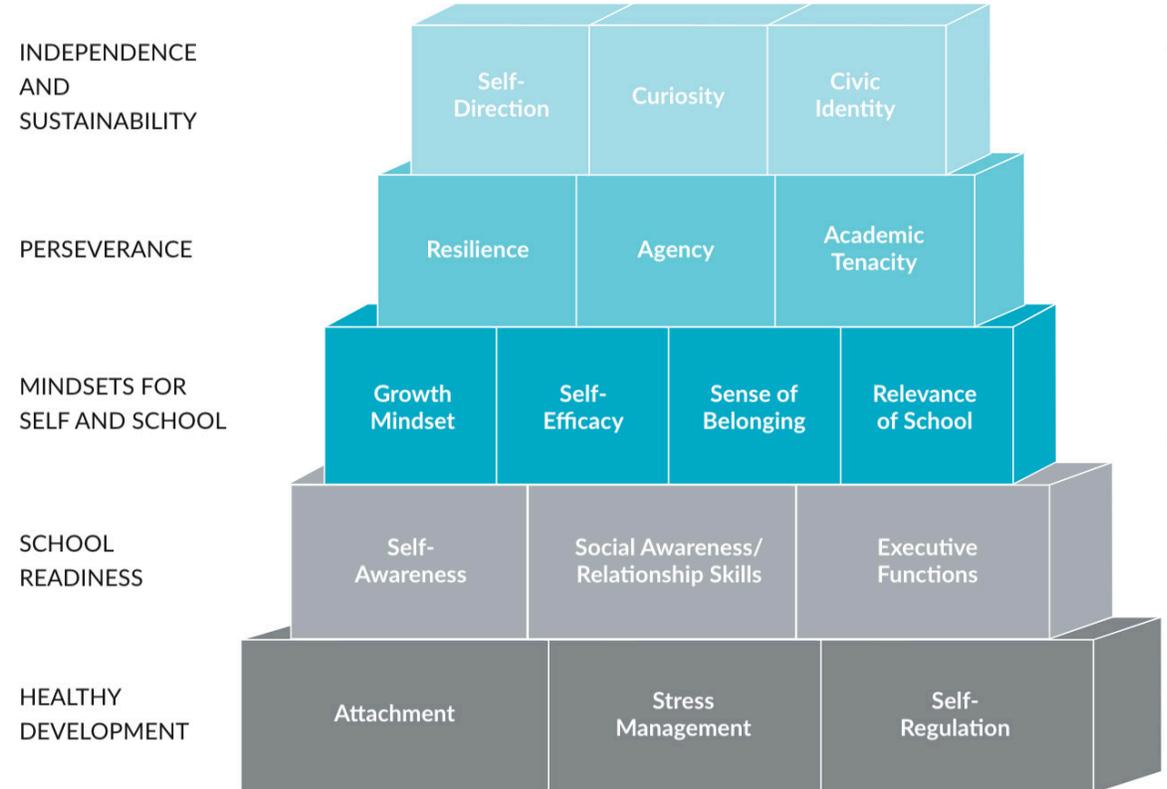
The work of meeting the needs of all students begins with a willingness to reflect on and take action against systems of bias, ableism, and white supremacy. It continues when we take a strengths-based approach to all of our students by asking how we can create the systems and learning environments that reflect everyone. We strengthen this approach by committing to justice and designing systems that plan for variability based on the lived experiences of those who are most deeply impacted.



Cultivating Student Strengths

Turnaround for Children’s “Building Blocks for Learning” is a framework for the development of strengths and competencies children need to succeed in school and beyond. It brings together developmental needs with academic mindsets and skills.

Each block represents a set of evidence-based skills and mindsets that have been proven by research to strongly correlate to—and even predict—academic achievement. It is important to note that aspects of identity (self-awareness, social awareness, self-efficacy, etc.) are foundational to agency. Moving into high levels of agency without identity work first can put students at risk of reinforcing negative perceptions of themselves in a downward spiral.



Learn more about Turnaround for Children’s Building Blocks at <https://turnaroundusa.org/what-we-do/tools/building-blocks/>



Thank you.

As a laboratory school, part of our mission is to advance solutions and share tools that other schools can utilize. No school has the time or resources to do this alone. These resources are part of our effort to learn from others and share aspects of our approach.

We are better together!



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See It to Be It: The Importance of Teacher Diversity



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Executive Summary

We predict that, with COVID-19, teacher diversity will be deprioritized by states, districts, and schools. But now is the time to double down on those efforts, not shy away from them. **Having a culturally aware, culturally responsive, culturally informed teacher workforce who understands and is attuned to the experiences of their most vulnerable students is more critical now than ever.** These educators will be far less likely to overlook or underestimate the impact of racial biases and institutional racism on students' outcomes.

Culturally responsive practices are part of an educational justice platform that yields accelerated student outcomes for all students, particularly Black students. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, there is more on the line in terms of educational justice and equitable access for our most vulnerable students than ever before. Schools should prioritize pre-service and in-service professional learning to ensure that teachers are fully prepared to teach the changing student body and in potentially amorphous contexts.



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We Shouldn't Have to Say This

The Importance of Black Educators

Research has identified a number of ways in which schools and students benefit from the presence of teachers of color. In particular, teachers of color have been shown to:

1. Promote **higher expectations** for students of color;
2. Contribute to positive academic & non-academic outcomes for students of color, such as **reduced absenteeism, increased admission to gifted programs, and lower dropout rates**;
3. Minimize chances that students of color are **subjected to discipline that removes them from school**;
4. Lead to positive long-term outcomes for students of color, like a **decreased probability of dropping out in high school** and an **increased likelihood to aspire to enroll in a four-year college**;
5. **Mitigate implicit bias** in all students (i.e. preconceived attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect people's understanding and decisions);
6. **Improve school climate** for all students; and
7. **Reduce teacher turnover** in hard-to-staff schools.



From "[Patching the Leaky Pipeline: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color in Pennsylvania.](#)"

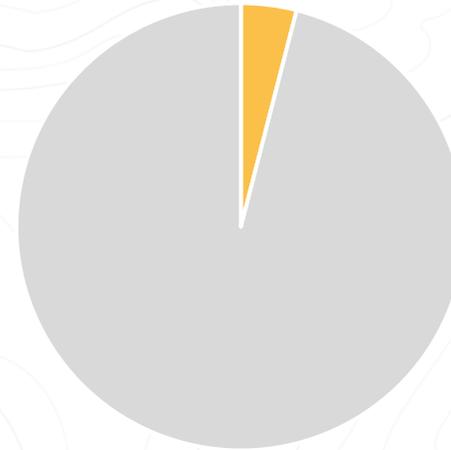


We Shouldn't Have to Say This

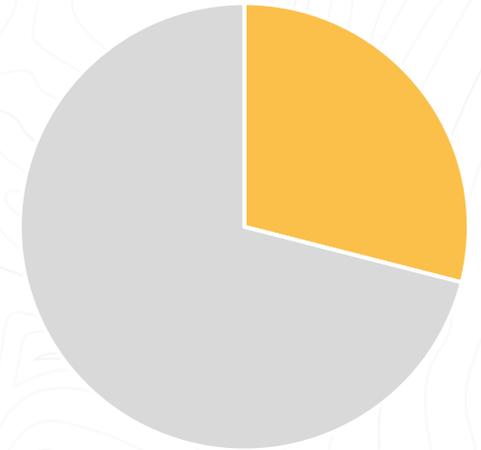
Representation Impacts Student Outcomes

Black teachers make up only 7% of the nation's teaching workforce. Black students don't see teachers that look like them, and teaching as a profession isn't a pathway that is encouraged or upheld as something they should aspire to. **Increasing teacher diversity is central to addressing inequities, and to improving academic and social outcomes for all students.**

We need to make current teachers great teachers who are culturally competent and responsive. And, we need to build the pipeline for Black teachers.



In Pennsylvania, where CBED is based, teachers of color represent only **4% of the total teacher workforce...**



...while students of color make up **29% of the student population.**

From [U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 2011-12.](#)



Foundations of Work

The Center's mission is to ensure that there will be equity in the recruiting, training, hiring, and retention of quality educators who reflect the cultural background and share common socio-political interests of the students they serve.

There are four main inroads to impact social justice through education.



Pathways to Teaching.

Recruit talented Black men and women to advance justice by pursuing a career in education.



Professional Learning.

Help all educators—and especially Black educators—to excel by offering insights, practices, experiences, opportunities, and targeted training with a focus of practice and feedback.



Culturally Informed Pedagogy.

Develop and promote culturally affirming, responsive, and sustaining curriculum and materials that are sourced in diverse perspectives on student learning, teacher practices, and school leadership and culture.



Policy Changes.

Advocate for local, state, and federal interventions necessary for greater educational equity, teacher diversity, and transformational pedagogy.



Advancing Teacher Diversity

Professional Learning Outcomes

Through one-on-one coaching, workshops, and mentoring, educators need to develop the following competencies.

ACHIEVEMENT

What are the skills and competencies I need to meet that are aligned to my work and role (e.g., test scores, work performance)?

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

What is my history and my current experience? What is the history and current experience of those around me?

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

What is structural inequality and oppression? How have I and others contributed to it?

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

How do I act as an individual and as part of a collective to enact social justice for those who have experienced structural inequality and oppression?

HEALING PRACTICES

How do I bring restoration to those who have been oppressed, even when I have contributed to the oppression? How do I pursue and receive my own healing?



Culturally Responsive Educators (CRE)

Ten Competencies

As a collective, all educators need to develop these competencies for culturally responsive teaching and learning—not only Black educators.

The development of students' identity and agency can only occur if our approach as educators shifts.



1. ***Reflect on one's cultural lens***
2. ***Recognize and redress bias in the system***
3. ***Draw on students' culture to share curriculum and instruction***
4. ***Bring real-world issues into the classroom and understand the global interconnectedness of curriculum***
5. ***Model high expectations for all students***
6. ***Promote respect for students' differences***
7. ***Collaborate with families and the local community***
8. ***Communicate in linguistically and culturally responsive ways***
9. ***Respect the integrity of cultural knowledge students bring with them into the classroom***
10. ***Understand the tenets/nuance of microaggression(s) and the impact on diverse learners***



Thank you.

The Center for Black Educator Development (CBED) was launched in June of 2019 by educator and former U.S. Department of Education Principal Ambassador Sharif El-Mekki. CBED is revolutionizing education by dramatically increasing the number of Black educators so that low-income Black and other disenfranchised students can reap the full benefits of a quality public education. CBED's mission is to ensure that there will be equity in the recruiting, training, hiring, and retention of quality educators who reflect the cultural background and share common socio-political interests of the students they serve.

Learn more about our work and continue the discussion by visiting us at <https://www.thecenterblacked.org>.



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Identity, Agency, and the Montessori Method



Executive Summary

Montessori classroom environments are based on a dynamic blend of freedom and structure. Children are encouraged to choose their activities from among a wide variety of prepared materials in a carefully planned and structured environment. The emphasis is on cultivating awareness, independence, and responsibility in a multi-age community. From the cosmos down to the individual child, the scaffolds of the Montessori approach encourage an exploration of how we live within the world.

Fostering identity and agency are foundational to the Montessori approach, and its principles can be relied on by schools that aim to move the locus of control from instructors to students, so that students can become more independent and self-actualized.



Fostering Identity and Agency | Principles

The Montessori philosophy is grounded in ideas that foster the development of independent children who have a strong sense of self-actualization and understand who they are as individuals and their role in the broader world. Aspects of this way of thinking and learning that serve to foster the cultivation of identity and agency among students include:



Mixed-age groups.

Mixing ages requires a teacher to see each student as an individual, and peers become one another's guides.



Learner-driven exploration.

Students cultivate agency through doing and lead the process of inquiry that frames what they learn.



Independence situated within interdependence.

The activities and approach teaches responsibility for self and respect for others and the world around us.



Practical life and civic responsibility.

Blurring the lines between school, home, and society helps students recognize that their identities and responsibilities carry across those domains.



Mixed-Age Groups

At a Montessori School...

Students are grouped across three-year timeframes, and the teacher serves those same students for the entire time.

Why it Matters

It creates a longer-term commitment between teachers and students.

Teachers become authentically invested in kids' progress, and they see each student as an individual rather than part of a cohort.

Seeing what the older students are doing helps younger students know what to strive for. The older students take on a responsibility of modeling positive behaviors for the younger students.

When a new students come into the classroom, there is a more natural social enculturation process, versus the rules and guidelines having to be conveyed by the teacher as an authority figure. Classrooms are filled with authentic peer social dynamics and natural consequences.



Takeaways for Non-Montessori Schools

- Mixing ages requires a teacher to see each student as an individual, and peers become one another's guides.
- Many schools may be considering, for the first time, setting up advisories of students for SEL and could consider mixed-age groups.
- Even though kids in classrooms may be moving as a cohort, teachers should press themselves to see individual needs versus seeing the students based on the labels ascribed to them.
- Create spaces and scaffolding where groups of students can work through and resolve issues independently—without directives or verdicts coming from adults.



Learner-Driven Exploration

At a Montessori School...

The space is carefully arranged with objects and resources that invite interaction. Students have the freedom to choose what to work on, and can dig into a work as deeply and for as long as they choose. Attention is paid to the individual student (rather than the cohort or the label) and to what they need to learn and grow.

Why it Matters

Students gravitate toward what they need or what sparks genuine interest, and can engage at their own individual pace.

The freedom to explore builds autonomy and confidence, and fosters excitement over areas of passion that are discovered.

Being empowered to find answers to their own questions frees students from a reliance on adults to give them the information they need.



Takeaways for Non-Montessori Schools

- Schools can adopt project-based learning, where the project is meaningfully defined by the student.
- Scaffolding can help students uncover opportunities for interesting and meaningful projects.
- Actively seek opportunities to support students with small group or one-on-one interaction and instruction.



Independence Situated within Interdependence

At a Montessori School...

Children are given the freedom and independence to navigate through the day as they so choose, and those activities are structured in a way that emphasizes respect and responsibility, and acknowledges the learning community's interdependence.

Why it Matters

Children learn to show respect to themselves, others, and the world around them. They learn that, as long as you show respect, you have freedom within the world around you.

It lays the foundation for functioning in a democratic society that balances freedom, order, and equality.

Children develop practical knowledge of how to help themselves and others.



Takeaways for Non-Montessori Schools

- In the time of a pandemic, schools can work to build a culture that values helping oneself and helping those around you (e.g., taking care of mental health, wearing a mask to protect yourself and others).
- As students define and explore projects, facilitate discussion to help them explore how their efforts might impact others—both positively and negatively.



Practical Life and Civic Responsibility

At a Montessori School...

Through activities related to practical life or everyday living, children master self-care and independence. These activities include food preparation and cooking, cleaning and organizing, and environmental care.

Why it Matters

Children become oriented to the realities of the world around them and develop a sense of personal responsibility.

Children experience the value of grace and courtesy when helping themselves and helping others.

When kids become more self-directed and independent, they develop a sense of agency that can help them thrive and also help their parents feel less overwhelmed.



Takeaways for Non-Montessori Schools

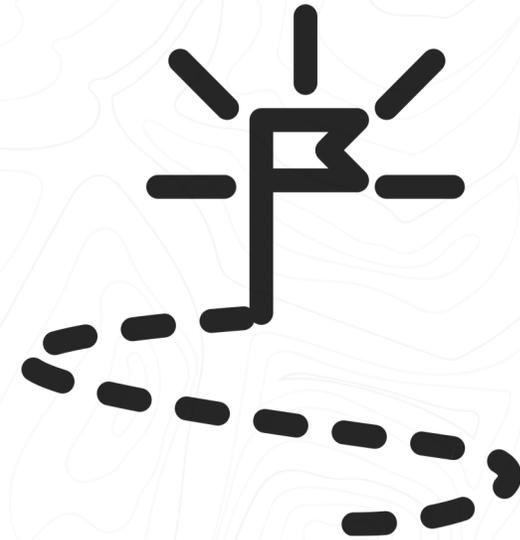
- Take advantage of hybrid and remote instruction to integrate practical life learning. For example, household chores can be integrated with traditional homework. Lessons on home economics can leverage tools and activities within the home.
- Find ways to relate everyday life skills to math, science, and language arts.
- Provide students with project-based work to address civic and social needs or happenings in the world.



Putting Principles into Practice | Authenticity

While the value of Montessori principles in education are widely agreed upon, it's easy to implement the principles in an unauthentic fashion. The deeper and more meaningful the application, the deeper and more the meaningful results. A one-hour weekly meeting among students of different ages will have different outcomes than meaningfully co-constructed learning experiences.

Traditional school structures don't facilitate this way of thinking and learning, in respects ranging from the physical arrangement of the classrooms to curricula to student schedules. Seeking opportunities to implement these principles authentically—where their true values can be realized—requires tremendous commitment and reconsideration of what takes place between a student and an educator. This moment of forced transformation due to the COVID-19 crisis might be a great time to find ways to put principles of identity- and agency-building into practice in ways that will meaningfully affect the way students learn and live.



Thank you.

Seton Montessori Institute is a professional school and research organization that prepares new educators and provides continuing education to Montessori professionals in the United States and throughout the world.

Learn more about our work and continue the discussion by visiting us at <http://setonmontessori.org/>.



Education Uncontained: Unleashing Identity Development and Youth Agency

 equity x
innovation lab



Executive Summary

By providing opportunities for youth to **organize and redesign inequitable programs, policies, practices, or spaces** in their schools or communities, students and teachers can, together, change our schools for the better. This type of youth activation for education transformation, facilitated by **teacher-powered, student-led, real-world projects**, can help students feel represented and foster agency.

If students **see themselves as agents of change**, and are **equipped with the tools, processes, and mindsets to make change happen**, they can disrupt structural injustice and bring about long-lasting systemic change. In the process, they can learn to **harness their own capabilities to work through and around the obstacles and barriers** that stand between themselves and their goals.

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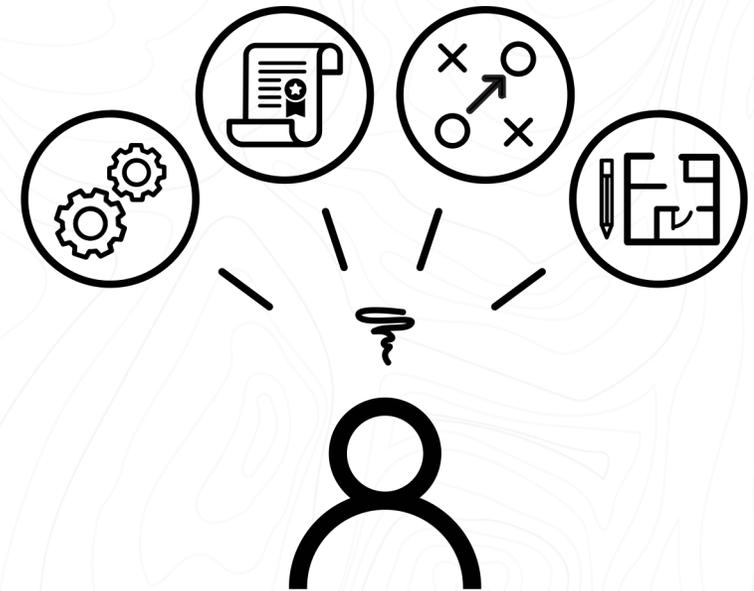


Identity and Agency

The current global pandemic, protests in response to racial violence, and the economic downturn only serve to highlight an issue that we've long ignored: school as we know it was not designed for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, with and without disabilities.

At this critical point in time, schools have the unique opportunity to acknowledge and incorporate the activism happening outside of school walls (much of which is youth-led). We can channel this energy and engagement, and use it as a springboard to foster identity and agency development as students return to school.

Our schools can **create the space for youth agency** by encouraging students and educators to recognize the power of youth as change agents. By engaging them in a process that invites them to critically consider their surroundings—and to redesign inequitable programs, policies, practices, or space in their schools or communities—we can help students **cultivate their identities as engaged and capable citizens** who believe in their own ability to work for positive change.



Critical Citizenship

Foundational to work in building identity and agency is critical citizenship. Critical citizenship is founded in critical pedagogy and allows for a type of learning that starts from a place of providing students with the ability to engage students in a critical dialogue so they **understand who they are, the history of what has occurred** (oppression), and **how they can take action** so they don't reproduce harms done in the past.

Students are able to explore what it means to be a critical citizen and expand and deepen their participation in a just world. As informed members of their school and communities, students can engage in critical thinking and justice-orientated action as a pathway for agency.

Through this critical analysis, teachers and students work together to understand the larger world, their role in promoting equity, and how the classroom can be a place for advancing justice.

Freire, 1968; Giroux; 2010



Education Uncontained | Key Attributes

The **Education Uncontained model for education transformation** brings youth organizing into schools and provides the resources for youth to have a representative voice in how education happens, especially in our most vulnerable educational environments.

Education that is uncontained has the following characteristics:

- It is **open-walled**; students are encouraged to learn outside of the real and perceived walls of traditional education.
- It is **centered on justice and equity**, designing solutions for problems that are personal, local, and immediate and contextualized to the community.
- It **improves student-teacher relationships**, using the classroom as the base (but not the only place) for academic and leadership development.
- It **facilitates empowerment**, providing opportunities for youth and teachers to organize and transform their education and surroundings—together.
- It promotes **intersectionality**, allowing for a multi-axis exploration of the oppressed identities that educators and students inhabit and can use as the lever for an emancipatory approach to education.



Education Uncontained | Model

In this model, **teacher-powered, student-led, real-world projects** can help students feel represented and foster agency.

Teacher-Powered
Teachers create space for agency through activism

LEARNING EXCHANGE

Engaging in youth and teacher development around issues of equity, relationships, school structures, and activism

Youth-Led
Students take ownership over an initiative that changes their circumstances

EXPLORATION & DESIGN

Using design strategies and innovation methods to design and prototype a project identified and defined by students

IMPLEMENTATION

Piloting, then rolling out and promoting the project



Education Uncontained | Sample Projects



#CodingForTheCulture

Racial & Gender Justice

Duquesne Elementary School hosted a girl-led coding program for the community. Students were taught coding during the week and held classes on Saturdays for children and adults in their community.



412 Food Change

Food Justice

Andrew Street High School is the first public school that launched a food truck business. Youth purchased and renovated a food truck in order to improve school lunch and eradicate food insecurity in the Homestead area of southwestern Pennsylvania.



BROOKLYN LAB
CHARTER SCHOOL



equity x
innovation lab



DR. ANINDYA KUNDU
Education Sociologist | Educator | Author



Character LAB

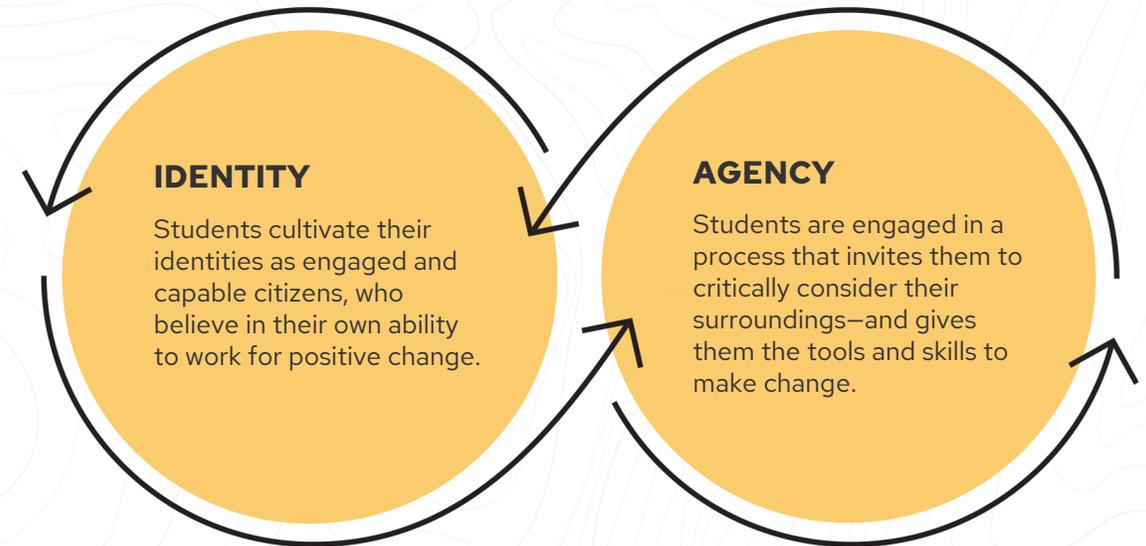
Building Identity and Fostering Agency

Among the many benefits of the Education Uncontained approach is its effectiveness at building identity and fostering agency among and educators that participated.

How are these reciprocal goals accomplished?

Building Identity: The student can not experience authentic change and growth without explicit, intentional work on identity. Students and educators must directly consider and begin to re-build how students see themselves as a people who can be change agents or leaders.

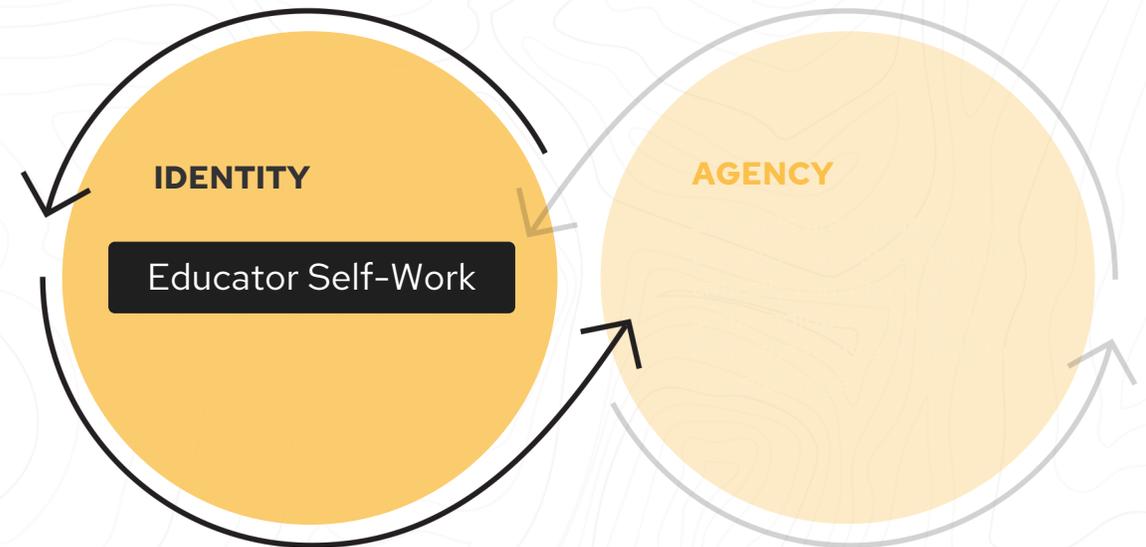
Fostering Agency: Educators organize an environment so that young people can engage in activism, and start to think critically about how their spaces could be different and better.



Identity-Building Best Practices | Self-Work

For best results, educators should...

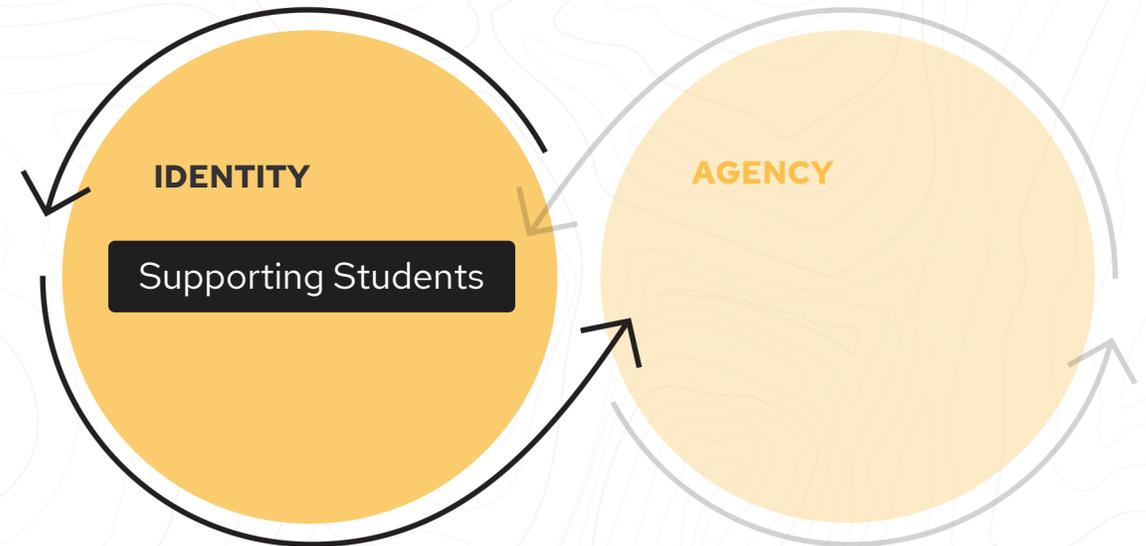
- Do their own work related to identity development.
- Come to the space vulnerable, so students can also come vulnerable.
- Take a human/empathetic view of their students; think critically about how they view their students and work toward whole-student perspective, acknowledging their identities and what they bring with them every day.
- Recognize that, even in homogenous places, there is still identity development work to be done (recognition of and advocacy for a variety of identities).
- Become cognizant of the lenses through which they view the world; consider how to deploy the tools already in use, but better by shifting the lens depending on the student's identity (example: Universal Design for Learning with a race and gender lens).
- Have mastery of the content, allowing for differentiation of how learning happens across students/contexts.



Identity-Building Best Practices | Supporting Students

For best results, educators should...

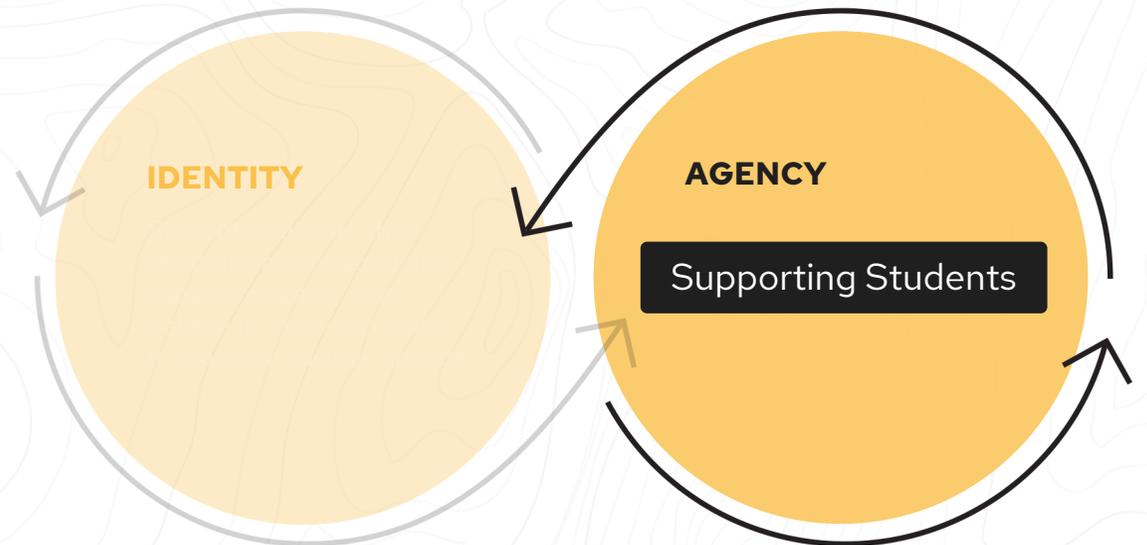
- Provide opportunities for youth to explore multiple areas of their identity, at their own pace.
- Plan for a supportive, empathetic arc to this discovery. Include school counselors and other supportive professionals in the planning and delivery of activities that may uncover traumatic experiences. Plan enough time for students to discover, explore, and engage in restorative work.
- Deepen the complexity of identity development—taking into account identity development in their roles associated with their family, their school, and their community.
- Incorporate the exploration of identity across educational spaces—collaborate with other educators so that this work is comprehensive and reflects a deep commitment from educators to students.



Agency-Building Best Practices | Student Work

For best results, educators should...

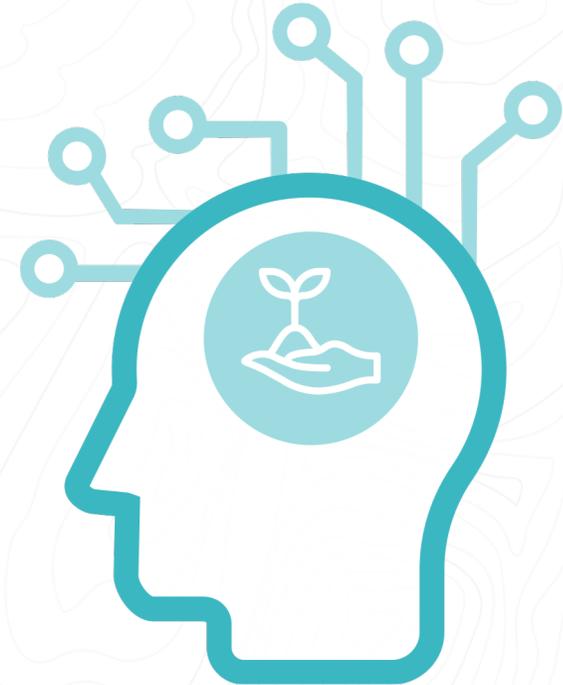
- Co-construct norms with young people (agency is about young folks feeling like they have ownership and representation).
- Design opportunities for teachers and young people to do the work together (give them the tools and go along with them).
- Believe that young people can be leaders—modeling for students how agency can happen through acting on behalf of others.
- Be actively removing barriers—using their power and privilege for change in schools and communities.
- Foster persistence in activism—encouraging youth to look at obstacles and barriers as steps in the process to liberation.
- Look for opportunities to create space for youth agency every day and in the context of core curriculum; provide a culturally responsive curriculum with local, regional, and national examples of activism built into lesson plans. (Example: How can youth agency and organizing happen in science?)



Necessary Mindsets

To provide space for youth agency and to help them cultivate their unique identities, the members of the school community must share these common beliefs:

- That the school is a place to foster positive youth identity.
- That educators and students can be co-conspirators in the education transformation movement.
- That “real-world” means the student’s real world as they conceptualize it.
- That policies and systems can be redesigned by students to reflect the needs of a changing student population.



Thank you.

eXi is a **research lab** finding evidence for the future of learning; a **design studio** where educators learn, practice, fail, and grow; a **learning community** of diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise; an **incubator** for leading edge solutions; and a **method** for harnessing the tools and techniques of innovation to achieve greater equity. eXi believes that the system must be redesigned for all students and that this can only be done at the intersection of equity and innovation.

Learn more about our work and continue the discussion by visiting us at <https://www.equityxinnovation.com>.

 equity x
innovation lab



Identity and Agency in Learner-Centered Education

Q. E. D.



Executive Summary

Without the freedom to investigate their own interests in school, students might struggle to remain fully engaged and motivated. Standard curricula can prevent students from deep learning that fosters the development of their sense of identity, agency, and self-motivation—which will be useful throughout their lives.

We can facilitate a learner-centered approach that positions students to work with adults as co-creators in designing their learning experience. The **learner-centered approach** is made responsive to the individual learner's needs and strengths, and requires educators to be attentive and responsive to each student as an individual. This section describes sample tools and procedures used in a learner-centered approach, including a **Learner Sketch Tool** to understand students' learning strengths and challenges, a co-created **Learning Profile**, and other activities that help students **reflect on, advocate for, and showcase** their own learning.

 Q. E. D.



What is Learner-Centered Education?

“By personalized, we mean that the **learning experience is made responsive** to the learner's individual needs and strengths.”

– Education Reimagined, [Practitioner's Lexicon](#)

“Recognizing that emotion is an integral component of all learning, facilitators of student-centered learning seek to personalize an optimal mix of **risk-taking, disequilibrium, accomplishment, and confidence** in each individual student. By **intentionally modeling and coaching empathy, cultivating relationships with and among learners, and establishing a culture of partnership, trust, and support**, learner facilitators move past merely controlling behaviors to cultivating motivations and inspiring engagement.”

–Kim Carter, [“Behavior Management Tools Might Not Be Best for Student-Centered Learning”](#))



Supporting Learner-Centered Education

Transformational Change Model

While most schools recognize the need for a shift to a learner-centered approach, not all change is created equal. QED's Transformational Change Model looks at 23 indicators of learning environments across three different strata of change:

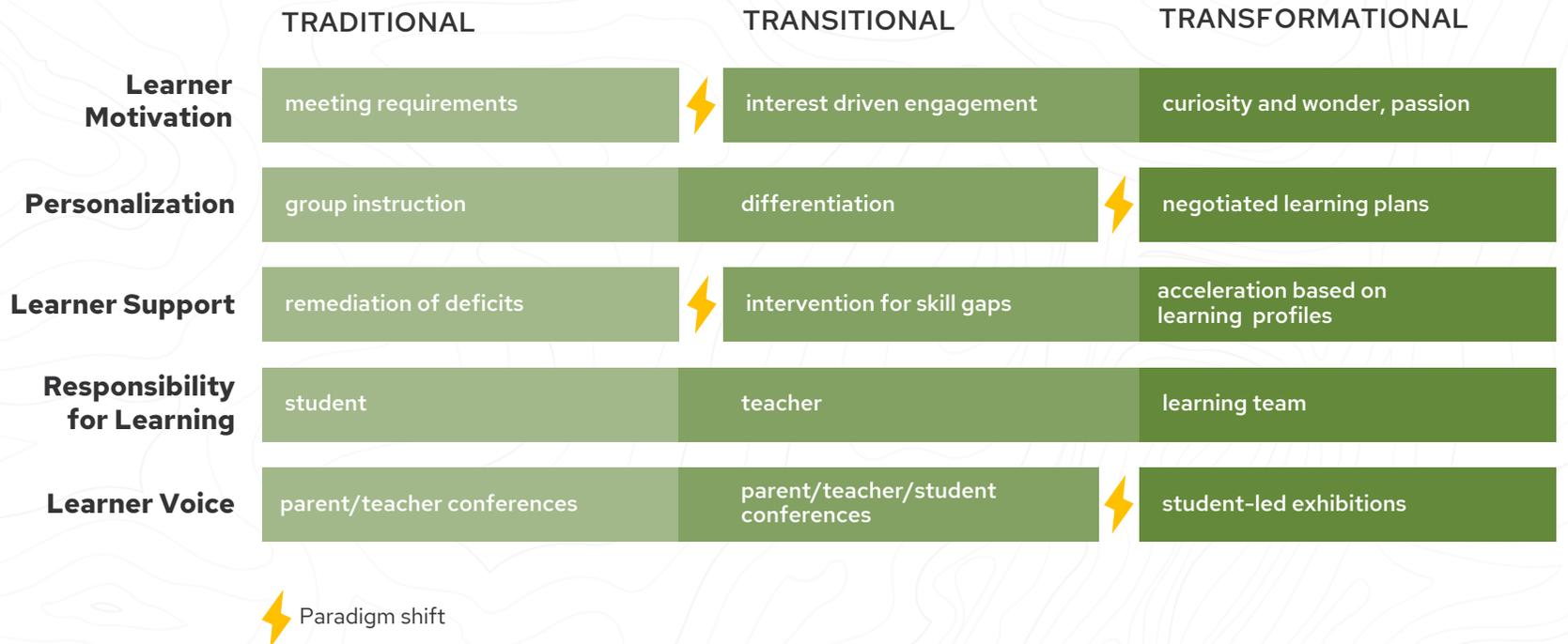
Traditional: Change is about making improvements to current practices, effectively maintaining the status quo.

Transitional: Change aims to change current practices to improve outcomes, with tangential impact on the status quo.

Transformational: Change aims to impact not only practices but also outcomes, disrupting the status quo.

The five sample indicators listed here are especially relevant to identity and agency.

[QED Foundation](#)



Supporting Learner-Centered Education

Student Views of Agency

The Free Speech Rubric is an assessment tool **developed by students** used to evaluate the conditions of the learning environment through the lens of governmental structures. This tool was created as a means of exploring student agency in action and critiquing certain educational paradigms.

What kind of government would represent your learning environment?

	DICTATORSHIP	NATIONALIST MONARCHY	SOCIALIST REGIME	REPUBLIC	DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
Expression	Opinions and viewpoints are discouraged and even reprimanded if unpopular.	Opinions and viewpoints are allowed as long as they don't inconvenience the administration or student body.	Opinions and viewpoints are generally allowed, so long as they don't criticize the school.	Opinions and viewpoints are encouraged in private conversation, and generally permitted in open discussion.	Opinions and viewpoints are encouraged both in private conversation and in open discussion.
Media	No form of media is provided to the student body, and attempts to provide such recourses are reprimanded.	Any media produced by students is monitored closely and/or censored by administration without permission or notification of students.	Media is regulated by staff, and potentially offensive or unpopular viewpoints are censored.	Media is uncensored as long as it is not offensive.	Media is uncensored, and all viewpoints are permitted as long as they do not violate the rights of others.
Assembly	The students are not allowed to peaceably assemble without express permission.	The right to assemble is a "privilege" and can be revoked on the whim of faculty.	The right to assembly after school and during free time is generally allowed without conditions.	The right to assembly is given to students at times where it does not interrupt the learning process.	The right to assembly is given to students out of class and at appropriate times <u>unconditionally</u> .
Petition	No process for redress of grievances is provided to the students.	The process of redress of grievances is un-established.	The process of redress of grievances exists, but is not enforced, and changes are rarely made.	The process of redress of grievances is established, and complaints are taken into due consideration.	The process of redress of grievances is a ready and available tool for students to help make change in their school.
Governance	No student governance structure is allowed.	Student governance has no real ability to affect change.	Student governance exists, but it is more about making "suggestions" and fund-raising rather than policy changing.	Student governance has the ability to create policies, but the principle has ultimate veto power.	Students' policies go to a staff senate for approval. If passed, the policy becomes law.



Supporting Learner-Centered Education

Essential Attitudes for Educators

- A commitment to knowing every learner well—to caring about the success of each child as if he or she were our own;
- A commitment to focusing on assets, staying curious, and uncovering, discovering, and recovering the gifts and talents of every individual;
- Recognizing that habits and dispositions—social emotional skills—live at the heart of learning; they're not non-cognitive, and they're not add-ons; they are part and parcel of how learning takes place and many of our most vulnerable learners are vulnerable simply because of our refusal to attend to that reality; and
- Assessing to understand learners, not simply to measure what we're looking for.

– Kim Carter, ["We Are All Good Learners"](#)

Know every learner
Focus on assets
Stay curious
Care for each child
Assess to understand
Acknowledge that
social-emotional skills
are central to learning



Sample Tools for Learner-Centered Education

End of Day Reflections

At MC² Charter School, students are expected to write daily End of Day Reflections (EODs) as part of their English credit, and must maintain an 80% or better submission rate. All members of their learning team can read and respond to students' EODs.

At first, we ask them to simply write something. Then, we encourage them to write to communicate about something that matters to them—to complain, to advocate, to negotiate, to challenge, to celebrate. For many of our students this is the first time—ever—that they have written something to say what's on their mind to an adult, and for almost all, it's the first time adults have taken seriously what they've had to say.

EOD Reflections are important because they cultivate students' use of voice, and encourage positive relationship building with educators.

COMPLAIN

NEGOTIATE

ADVOCATE

CHALLENGE

CELEBRATE



Sample Tools for Learner-Centered Education

Building a Learning Profile

“The very first thing we do to begin meeting the needs of our children/young adults is explore with them who they are as learners and begin to build their learning profile. From their **enrollment interview**—where we ask them to describe their **strengths, challenges, interests, and aspirations**—into their first learning experience... we dig past labels. We get curious about each learner’s variability; we engage them in **activities and games, explore their affinities, and scaffold their first academic inquiry around an area of personal interest.**”

The **Learner Sketch Tool**, outlined on the following slides, is a foundational element of their learning profile and one that they’ll revisit regularly.

“As with adjustable seats, **personalization** requires giving learners the tools, coupled with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions, to manage themselves and their learning environments.”

—Todd Rose



Tools for Learner-Centered Education

Learner Sketch Tool

The Learner Sketch Tool is based on the QED's Neurodevelopmental Framework for Learning, organized around the mental processes of learning, such as attention, memory, and language. We call it the Learner Sketch because **we continually emphasize how readily they can reshape the picture of themselves** based on strategies, contexts, and motivation, similar to Todd Rose's three principles of the individuality (The End of Average, 2016). It is designed to engage students and provide information that is immediately practical and useful, increasing successes and empowering students to be advocates of their own learning.

 [Get more information](#) on the Learner Sketch Tool, or [try it out for yourself](#).



Learner takes survey

Learner receives their "learner sketch"

Learner creates and shares plan based on suggested strategies

Teacher completes same survey as students

Teacher receives individual profiles and aggregate data from group of students

Teacher reviews and develops strategies

Tools for Learner-Centered Education

Habits Rubrics

At MC² Charter School, students progress in mastery of 18 habits in order to become lifelong learners. These habits have concrete indicators and criteria that are delineated in levels of a rubric ranging from “Emerging” to “Life-Long.” Relying on explicit habits that are pervasive, coached, and assessed is a way for students to develop their own agency.

All lifelong learning habits are relevant to fostering identity and agency, but educators interested in both might pay particular attention to Ownership, Self-Direction, Curiosity & Wonder, Global Citizenship, Problem Solving, and Communication.

MC ² Habits					
	Emerging	Progressing	Proficient	Exemplary	Life-Long
Planning and Follow Through	Unable to identify what needs to be done	Identifies what needs to be done	Focuses on getting the job done	Develops plans and tools to ensure work will get done	Follows through on work and completes documentation
Effort	Puts forth very little effort	Puts forth effort			
Initiative	Does not have strategies for beginning work	Waits to be told			
Setting Goals	Does not recognize the importance of goals	Prefer to be told			
Perseverance	Avoids challenging work	Attempts			

MC ² Habits					
	Emerging	Progressing	Proficient	Exemplary	Life-Long
Asking for Help	Doesn't ask for help; doesn't accept help	Accepts help, but wants helper to decide how to help	Asks for help when needed, but wants helper to decide how to help	Recognizes need for help on own terms, but does not advocate for self	Seeks out help from experts; seeks help on own terms; knows what he/she needs and advocates for self
Investment in Learning	Demonstrates little investment	Demonstrates investment			
Responsibility for Learning	Believes teacher is responsible for learning; does not feel accountable	Believes learning is his/her responsibility	Prefer to be told		
Choice of Learning Projects and Challenges	Chooses projects that are perceived to be easy and don't relate to learning goals	Chooses projects that are challenging and relate to learning goals	Chooses projects that are challenging and relate to learning goals	Chooses projects that are challenging and relate to learning goals	Chooses projects that are challenging and relate to learning goals
Intrinsic Rewards	Chooses not to engage in learning, regardless of external or intrinsic rewards	Engages in learning for its own sake	Engages in learning for its own sake	Engages in learning for its own sake	Engages in learning for its own sake

Habits of Being					
	Emerging	Progressing	Proficient	Exemplary	Life-Long
Value of Knowledge	Is uninterested in new things; is bored in and out of school	Is interested in ideas in one or a few areas; is bored by things outside of his/her own interests	Loves learning in one or a few areas; can find some interest in other areas	Finds interest in many different areas	Values knowledge for its own sake; loves learning new things; finds interest in everything
Question Making	Does not ask or form questions	Can use other people's questions to seek answers but does not form or ask his/her own questions	Uses other people's questions and forms his/her own questions in school	Forms new and original questions in school; begins to form questions outside of school	Constantly considers new and original questions about the world around him/her; actively seeks answers
Openness to New Ideas	Dismisses ideas that are unfamiliar or that contradict student's own experiences	Is open to some unfamiliar or contradictory ideas	Considers unfamiliar or contradictory ideas with an open mind	Considers unfamiliar or contradictory ideas with an open mind; compares and contrasts different viewpoints	Seeks out and explores new and contradictory ideas
Connection Making	Does not see a connection between topics	Begins to see connections between topics	Sees connections between topics	Sees connections between topics and begins to make connections to own life	Sees and looks for connections between topics; can find a way to connect any topic to his/her own life
Comfort with Complexity	Shuts down when questions can't be answered easily	Attempts to work through complex ideas, but gets frustrated easily	May get frustrated by complexity, but does not give up completely	Is comfortable with a complex challenge	Is inspired and excited by unanswered questions and complexity

MC² Habits	Ownership, Community, Self-Direction
Habits of Being	Collaboration, Character, Quality Work, Curiosity & Wonder, Global Citizenship
Habits of Mind	Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Decision Making, Information, Technology, Management, Organization, Leadership, Problem Solving, Communication

[Download the Habit Rubrics to learn more.](#)



Tools for Learner-Centered Education

Exhibition of Learning

A **competency-based system** allows learners to work with educators and mentors to design personally meaningful work that meets curriculum standards. Students follow paths of inquiry that they own and design—they ask questions, get answers, and learn traditional skills along the way.

Students are coached in how to communicate learning through projects, portfolios, presentations, or other appropriate methods. Students then participate in quarterly **Exhibitions of Learning** that are open to the community.

They present what they have learned, and their families participate in the conversation about their future learning. When students graduate, each student must give a final exhibition to defend why they deserve a diploma at an event called [Graduation Gateway](#).



Thank you.

Q.E.D. Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing training, coaching, strategic consulting, and tools and resources in support of competency-based learning systems and practices, knowledge of learners and learning, student agency and equity, community collaboration, and democratic practices in education. Our vision is of communities where each individual is empowered to use his or her unique voice effectively and with integrity in co-creating our public world. Our mission is to create, inspire, cultivate, and sustain cultures of transformational learning where we are all learners, learning changes lives, learning needs to happen in different ways, and learning empowers us.

Learn more about our work and continue the discussion by visiting us at <https://www.qedfoundation.org>.



The Power of Student Agency to Combat Educational Inequity

DR. ANINDYA KUNDU

Education Sociologist | Educator | Author



Executive Summary

Agency refers to a person's capacity to leverage resources to navigate obstacles and create positive change in their life (Kundu, 2020). Agency goes beyond grit by considering how students navigate structural obstacles that effort alone cannot overcome. Students and educators can harness the power of agency to personalize learning and nurture identity in the classroom. This presentation will explain how agency can work in an educational setting and provide examples and resources to learn more and implement these ideas at Brooklyn LAB.

DR. ANINDYA KUNDU

Education Sociologist | Educator | Author



Identity and Agency

Opportunities to high-quality education in the United States are not evenly distributed, particularly when it comes to race and socio-economic status.

The global coronavirus pandemic and national reckoning with systemic racism have exacerbated these inequities, disproportionately affecting Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) students and educators. We know that grit—passion and perseverance towards long-term goals—is considered a key to student achievement, particularly among marginalized populations.

And yet, grit cannot overcome structural barriers—such as food or housing insecurity, or now, technology gaps. For example, 12 million students don't have internet access during this pandemic. We must also acknowledge a student's contexts, including the real obstacles in their lives that stem from their circumstances, but also who they are as individuals.

How might we **build student agency to personalize each student's learning experience** so they can be more of themselves and therefore uniquely contribute back to society?



Student Agency

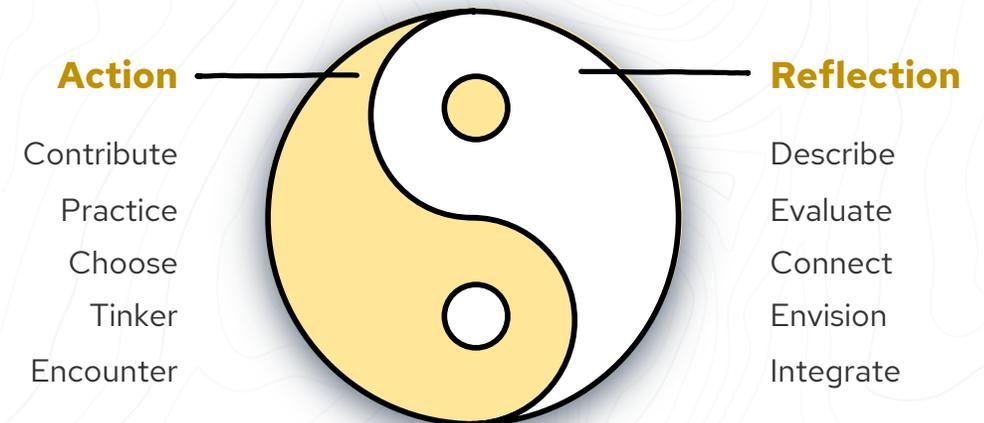
Agency is a person's capacity to leverage resources to navigate obstacles and create positive change in their life (Kundu, 2020).

- Students may be confronting personal, structural, or institutional obstacles while trying to learn.
- Students need social and cultural resources to help them navigate these obstacles and improve their circumstances.
- Education offers a platform to provide these resources to students so they can be successful.

Student agency focuses on what students have, and how we can build up on these strengths and resources, rather than on their deficits. It stems from a fundamental belief in all students and their potential as learners and being open to that potential manifesting in plural ways. The goal of fostering a culture of student agency at school is to individualize learning.

HOW AGENCY WORKS

Agency has components of action and reflection, but to get there requires thinking holistically about a student's lived experiences and existing competencies.



Kundu, 2020



Personalized Learning

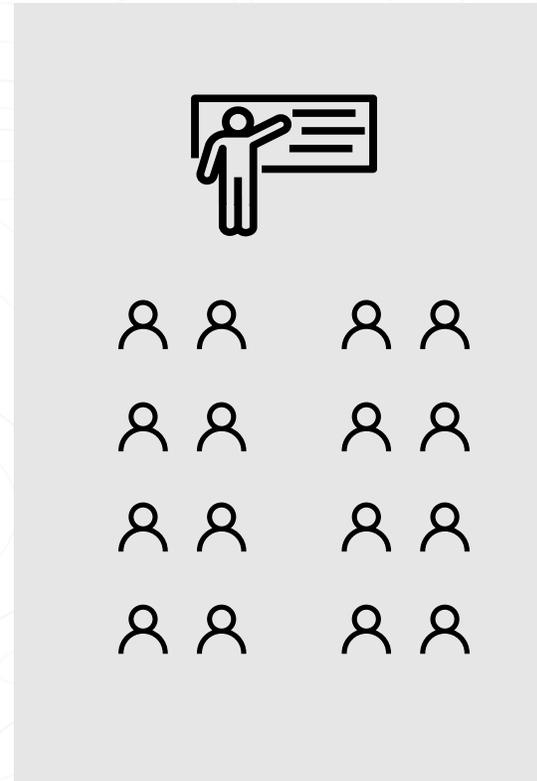
Personalized learning is an educational approach that is tailored to each individual student's needs and interests. And, ideally, also their cultural background. In contrast to a traditional classroom in which a teacher fills students with knowledge, a personalized learning classroom experience is led by students and guided by a teacher through activities like collaborative projects and peer feedback.

Personalized learning is valuable when it has two attributes:

- 1. Challenge-driven:** Meeting each student where they are and scaffolding the learning experience so they know what to do next. Even in big groups, learning can be individualized to each student, often with the help of software.
- 2. Interest-based:** The human component of learning. When a teacher understands who their student is and what their interests are, they can work to connect those interests to the broader goal of the learning.

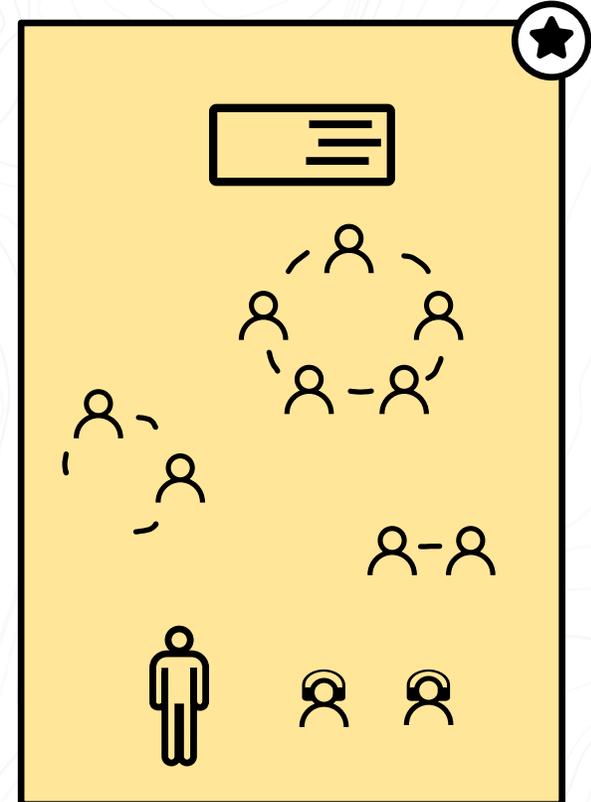
Traditional Classroom Model

Students as empty vessels, teacher as expert



Personalized Learning Classroom Model

Student-led, teacher as guide

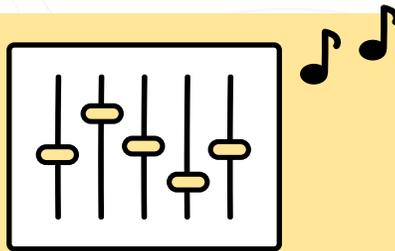


Student Agency

Stories of Exceptional Students: J-Stud



J-Stud,* a tenth-grader from a single-parent household with multiple IEPs, spent his time in the back of the classroom scribbling in his notebook. His frustrated teacher discovered pages and pages of rap lyrics, **demonstrating literacy and comprehension skills**.



Through culturally-competent teaching, J-Stud's teacher **connected classroom learning to his personal goals** by offering to connect him with a friend who owned a recording studio if he did his homework. He recorded a song and received a standing ovation from his classmates celebrating his achievement.



J-Stud accepted an offer to intern at the recording studio, where he **discovered a new interest in bookkeeping and accounting** with no prior interest in mathematics. He earned his degree and **used his network** to get a job at a bank. Today J-Stud is a managing director at a major financial institution, but he still lives in the neighborhood where he grew up to serve as an example to young people.

* Research alias and emcee identity

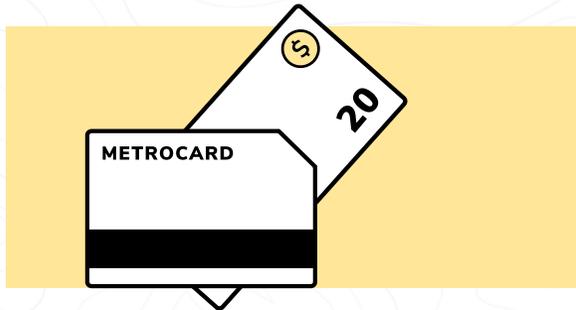


Student Agency

Stories of Exceptional Students: Vanessa



Vanessa* had to move around a lot as a kid and was raised by her extended family because her mother had a heroin addiction. **At 15, she had to drop out of school** and had a son of her own.



After the birth of her son, Vanessa found a program called Vocational Foundation that gave her \$20 biweekly, a MetroCard and her first experiences with a computer. **These simple resources helped her get her GED.** Then, she began suffering from serious kidney failure, which was made more serious because she was born with only one kidney.



Vanessa spent 10 years on dialysis waiting for a successful transplant. After that, her mentors at community college had kept in touch, and she was able to attend college in an honors program. **With the help of her network,** she received her bachelor's degree from an elite women's college at 36, setting an incredible example for her son.

* Research alias



BROOKLYN LAB
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BLACK EDUCATOR
DEVELOPMENT



SETON
MONTESSORI
INSTITUTE



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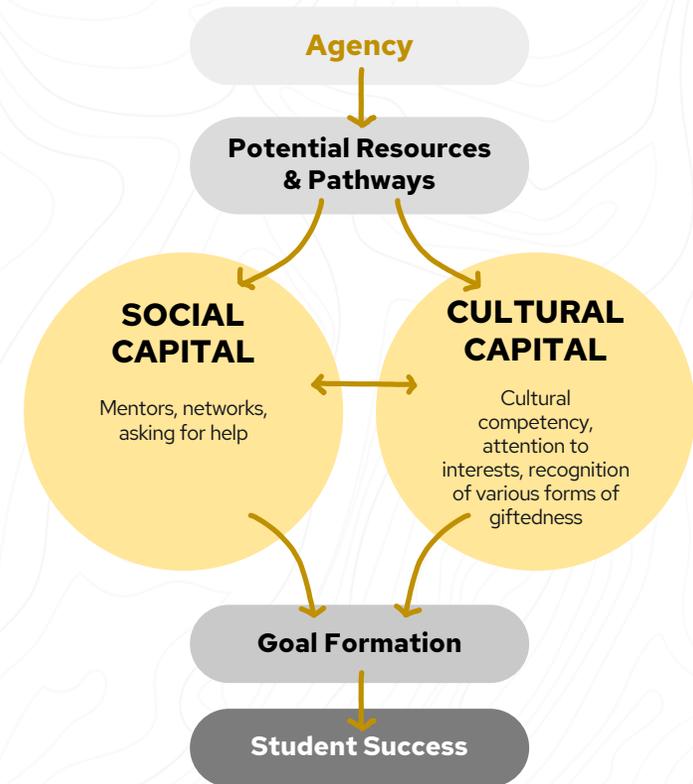
Character LAB

Potential Resources and Pathways

Social and Cultural Capital

Social capital includes supports like mentors, networks, and help-seeking behavior. Educators can help students to build their own networks in classroom settings through collaboration, providing feedback, and presenting to one another. Educators can support students, particularly from underprivileged backgrounds, by encouraging them to ask for help and proactively approach adults in authority positions for conversation without getting in trouble.

Cultural capital refers to resources like culturally competent mentors and teachers who understand and affirm a student's background and identity. It can also take the form of recognition and attention to hidden forms of giftedness, such as making English classes more relevant to a student's interests by encouraging self-expression through rap lyrics or poetry.

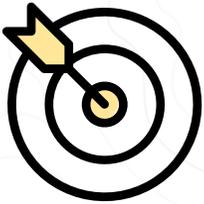


Kundu, 2018



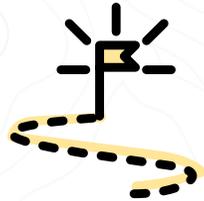
Supporting Student Agency | Three Pillars

All three pillars of classroom agency are rooted in research and backed by decades of scholarship. The goal of classroom agency is to let students be in the driver's seat of their education so that they can have the tools needed to excel in college and in their careers.



Goal Setting

Are students setting and achieving their own goals? Are there short-term wins for them built-in?



Autonomy

Do students and teachers feel a sense of autonomy? Do they get to determine the standards to which they will be held?



Accountability

Is there a culture that is warm but demanding? Are students meeting the shared and agreed-upon standards?



Supporting Student Agency

Case Study: Medgar Evers College Preparatory School

The Medgar Evers College Preparatory School in Brooklyn, New York began a journey towards student agency and individualized learning over ten years ago. They are a Title 1 high school; all of their students qualify for free and reduced lunch and 90 percent of their students are BIPOC. Included below is a list of some of the strategies and tactics they used in demonstrating their commitment to student agency and individualized learning.

- Extend the school day for students with larger needs, where parents may benefit from extra care.
- Keep students together in cohorts to establish consistency and longevity of relationships.
- Forge relationships with colleges and universities where students can learn from mentors that believe in them and show them how education applies to their life. For example, classes on magazine production, machine shop, structural racism, and gender in popular culture.
- Show positive examples of individuals, households, and schools that have been able to make change, that show how education is relevant in the lives of students.



Principal Michael Wiltshire created a unified teaching force to encourage growth and academic excellence.



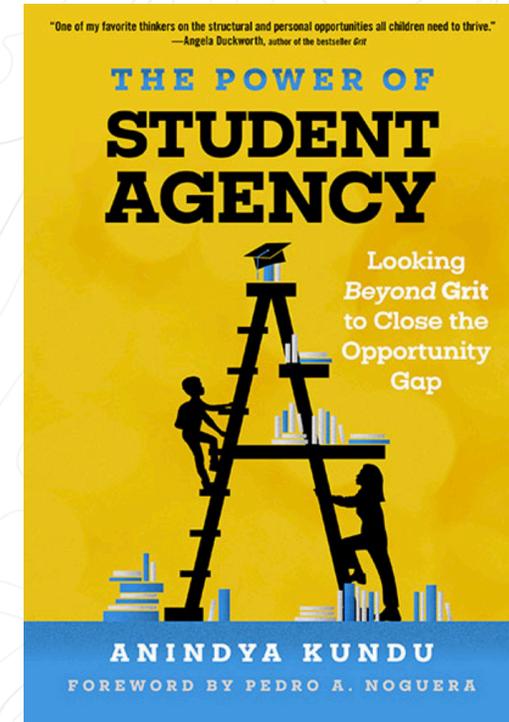
Thank you.

Dr. Anindya Kundu is an education sociologist, an award-winning educator, and an author. He researches how people can succeed despite various challenges. He is currently a Senior Fellow at The City University of New York (CUNY).

Learn more about student agency in Dr. Kundu's new book *The Power of Student Agency: Looking Beyond Grit to Close the Opportunity Gap* (2020, Teachers College Press) with a foreword by Dr. Pedro Noguera.

DR. ANINDYA KUNDU

Education Sociologist | Educator | Author



Empowering Learners with Disabilities to Advocate for Themselves



Executive Summary

Students with disabilities have been historically marginalized in education, but this moment of redesigning school for COVID-19 presents an opportunity to redesign our education system for all students. Teaching students **self-advocacy and self-determination skills** can set them up for greater success in the classroom and their future lives. At the same time, educational systems should evolve to be equitable for all students, so that the onus of equity is not solely put upon student self-advocacy.

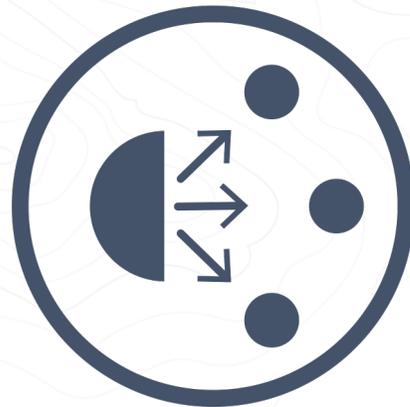
To achieve equity for students with disabilities, we need to **teach students these important self-advocacy and self-determination skills, while addressing power inequities in the classroom and society as a whole.** We also need to **lay the groundwork for long-term change** so that educational systems may provide an equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students.



Power Structures and Self-Advocacy

Systemic inequality disadvantages children in the classroom. **It is impossible to teach self-advocacy and self-determination without recognizing power hierarchy and inequity in the classroom.**

Most special education research is conducted from within embedded systems of power and the materials don't generally address power and inequity.



For advocacy to be successful, it must be a reciprocal, proactive engagement from the students, the educators, and the institution.

KEY LEVERS

How can a student who comes from a position without privilege learn to advocate for themselves to a person who has privilege?

How can we change systems of power to be more equitable, involve mutual respect, and allow for advocacy as a collaborative/collective effort rather than just those in less powerful positions petitioning those in power?



Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

Self-advocacy skills include understanding yourself, your rights, and your needs and communicating that understanding—leading to self-determination.



Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

Self-determination capacities build upon self-advocacy to include goal-setting, problem solving, and making choices in your self-interest. It empowers students to take charge of their own lives.



Everyone Has a Role to Play

See the following resources for opportunities to encourage student self-advocacy by role:

[Students](#)

[Families](#)

[Employer and Community Partners](#)

[Teachers](#)

[School Counselors](#)

[School Leaders](#)

[Higher Education Faculty](#)

[Higher Education Leaders](#)

[State and Federal Policymakers](#)

NOT ENCOURAGING STUDENT SELF-ADVOCACY

What students need is...



ENCOURAGING SELF-ADVOCACY

How can we think together about creating a more student-centered system?



Empowering Learners to Advocate

Guiding Principles



Make the implicit, explicit.

Be aware of and teach students the historic and cultural context around disability, race, structures of power, and their rights.



Provide opportunities to practice.

Students cannot learn self-advocacy through reading about it—they must have opportunities to practice it.



Affirm and validate diverse identities.

This creates a climate of cultural inclusivity for students.



Encourage respectful questioning.

Recognize the inherently hierarchical aspect of the student/teacher relationship: develop strategies to allow for “respectful questioning” on both sides.



Agents of Their Own Success

Strategies to Empower Students

Make self-advocacy skills and self-determination critical priorities in personalized learning systems.

- Identity Formation: Begin the school year with explicit instruction and a civics curricula that teaches students the history of race, disability, etc.
- Help students envision a future world and their role in it.

Ensure that personalized learning opportunities are designed to maximize engagement of all students, regardless of disability status.

- Apply the [Guidelines of Universal Design for Learning](#) to lesson plans and school design.

Provide students tangible opportunities and experiences to practice self-advocacy skills and self-determination in personalized learning.

- Give students tangible, real-world experiences to explore these topics.
- Allow learners to go into the field and explore history and different environments.

Read more in NCLD's publication "[Agents of Their Own Success: Self-Advocacy Skills and Self-Determination for Students With Disabilities in the Era of Personalized Learning.](#)"



Thank you.

Since 1977, the National Center for Learning Disabilities has been improving the lives of the 1 in 5 children and adults nationwide with learning and attention issues by empowering parents and young adults, transforming schools, and advocating for equal rights and opportunities.

Learn more about our work and continue the discussion by visiting us at <https://www.nclld.org>.



Building Identity and Agency Through Character

Character LAB



Executive Summary

The current pandemic and the multitude of challenges that students, teachers, and schools are navigating have put a renewed focus on social-emotional learning. We know from research that **character is important and it is malleable**, but scientific insights that guide us in how to develop character in kids can be hard to find.

Character Lab provides research-based resources to help teachers support their students as they cultivate strengths of character. In this section, we introduce three relevant strengths: **purpose, curiosity, and self-control**. We provide previews of associated Tips and Activities that can be used to develop these strengths, giving students pathways into a stronger sense of identity and agency.

Working to cultivate strengths along each dimension of character—strengths of heart, mind, and will—can help **foster students' sense of agency** and ultimately shift their identity, or **how they see themselves in relation to the world**.

Character LAB



Defining Character

We define character as everything we do to help other people as well as ourselves.

As an organizing principle, we separate character strengths into three dimensions: strengths of heart, mind, and will.

Working to cultivate strengths along each dimension of character can help foster students' sense of agency and ultimately shift their identity—or how they see themselves in relation to the world.



Strengths of heart

- Interpersonal
- Help us relate to other people in positive ways
- Examples: gratitude, kindness



Strengths of mind

- Intellectual
- Help us wonder, reason, and create
- Examples: curiosity, creativity



Strengths of will

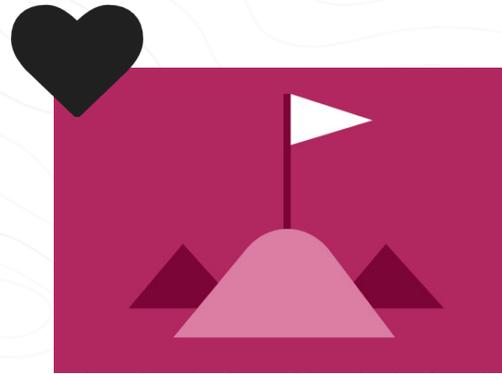
- Intrapersonal
- Help us achieve our goals
- Examples: grit, self-control



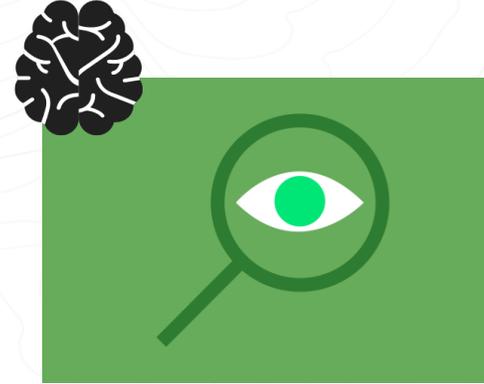
Research-Based Practices for Building Character

Over time, we have developed a series of “Playbooks” that document research-based practices to help students cultivate strengths of heart, mind, and will.

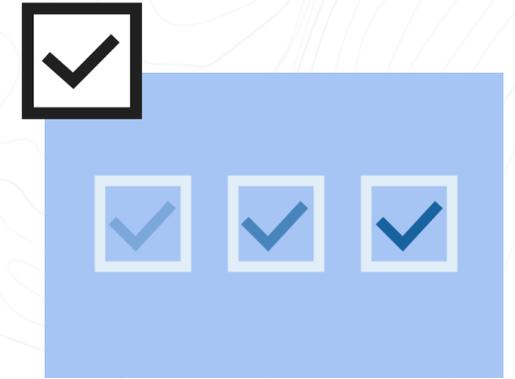
No single Playbook speaks directly or exclusively to agency or identity, but many are relevant. The Playbooks for strengths of Purpose, Curiosity, and Self-Control can help create a critical framework from which questions of identity and agency can be explored.



Purpose



Curiosity



Self-Control

For each of these strengths, we'll share an overview along with practical tips and an example activity to demonstrate how—through direct exploration and instruction—educators can help children cultivate character.



Purpose | Overview

Purpose is a commitment to making a meaningful contribution to the world. It is considered a strength of heart. - **Heather Malin and William Damon**

Why Does Purpose Matter?

Having a purpose is good for both you and the world. It drives you to make positive contributions in line with your own interests and strengths. And this pursuit gives your life direction and forward momentum; it motivates and guides your short-term goals and daily activities.

Pulse Check

Reflect on how you've engaged with the world this past week. How many of these things are true?

- I look for ways to have positive effects on others' lives.
- I often reflect on my life goals and the type of person I want to be.
- When I plan out my day, I consider how my activities connect to what I want to accomplish with my life.
- I often think about what I can offer the world, taking into account what the world needs as well as my personal strengths and interests.

Encouraging Purpose in Others

Model it. Engage in activities that connect to your own purpose, such as meaningful work, volunteering, or creating art—and invite young people to participate with you. Talk about your goals and why they are important to you.

Celebrate it. Praise and support actions that serve a larger purpose and point out connections between activities and long-term goals.

Enable it. Encourage young people to talk about their values and the kind of person they want to be. What do they want to contribute to the world? No matter their age, children can be helpful to others.



Purpose | Tips

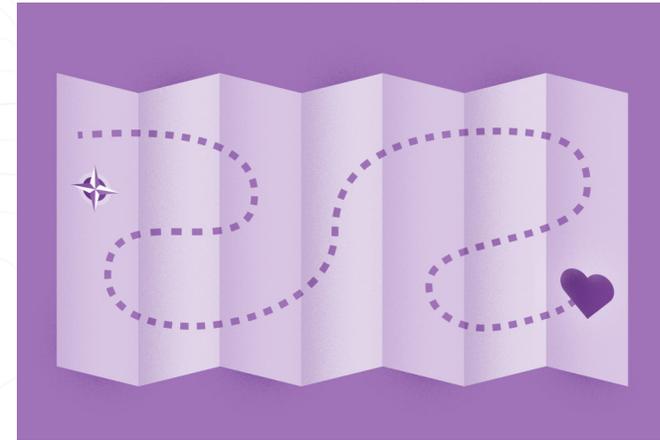
Tips are 60 seconds of actionable advice.



Letting Kids Drive

Why doing leads to learning
- by **Angela Duckworth**

When kids take on responsibility through project-based learning, they bring their full energy and attention to their work.



Know Thyself

Your values are your compass
- by **Angela Duckworth**

When you affirm a core personal value, you broaden your perspective: instead of focusing on inadequacies, you switch to a wide-angle view that includes your resources and opportunities.



Curiosity | Overview

Curiosity is wanting to know more. It is considered a strength of mind. – by **Angela Duckworth**

Why Does Curiosity Matter?

When you're curious about something, you process it deeply, rather than superficially. You also voluntarily spend more time learning about things that spark your curiosity. As a result, you more readily remember what you learn. In general, people who are more curious are happier and better liked.



Pulse Check

Reflect on how you've engaged with the world this past week.

How many of these things are true?

- I got so absorbed in learning that I lost track of time.
- I talked to someone who gave me a new idea or changed my mind.
- I took the initiative to learn more about one of my interests.
- When I didn't know the answer to a question, I couldn't rest until I figured it out.
- I explored a completely new idea or topic—just for the fun of it.

Encouraging Curiosity in Others

Model it. Cheerfully admit that you don't know what you don't know: However you enjoy exploring your personal interests—books, podcasts, documentaries—share what you like.

Celebrate it. Praise question-asking: "What a great question! I love the ideas it's sparking!" Show admiration for wrong answers: "No, that's not right. Explain to me how you're thinking about this!" Build on curiosity expressed as statements: "I bet that if we use all our pencils, we can build a skyscraper!" "That's cool, let's see how we can do that!"

Enable it. Make room for curiosity: When planning an activity, factor in time for questions. Establish an end-of-day ritual to share one thing each person learned that they didn't know before.



Curiosity | Tips

Tips are 60 seconds of actionable advice.



Harnessing Curiosity

Curate what you can't control
- by Daniel Willingham

Recognize that curiosity can't be controlled directly because it isn't influenced by long-term learning goals, but you can offer more tempting targets. Help kids find them and model the behavior by creating a similar resource yourself.



How to Benefit from Boredom

Why you get bored and what to do about it
- by Angela Duckworth

Boredom occurs when we are unwilling or unable to engage our attention in meaningful activities. Help kids detect a pattern and move towards engagement by making a list of "so boring" and "so awesome" activities.



Curiosity | Activity

Build Connections for Classrooms

How long does it take?

30 Minutes

How do I do it?

Lead your students to understand how their existing interests relate to the content they learn in school by using this scripted activity.

How does it work?

This activity taps into students' intrinsic curiosity and motivation. What's more, it encourages curiosity to flourish in class.



BUILD CONNECTIONS

Name _____

Connect school topics to personal interests in your daily life.

① What are your interests, hobbies, and personal goals?

② What topics have you learned about in class recently?

③ Brainstorm connections. Draw lines between any interests in column ① and topics in column ② that you think are connected.

④ Develop a connection by filling in this sentence:

_____ *interest from ①* and _____ *topic from ②*
are connected because _____

⑤ Think more about your connection by filling in this sentence:

_____ *topic from ④* could be important to
my life because _____

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DR. ANINDYA KUNDU
Education Sociologist | Educator | Author



National
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Self-Control | Overview

Self-control is doing what's best in the long-run despite short-term temptations. It is considered a strength of will. – by **Angela Duckworth**

Why Does Self-Control Matter?

Sometimes, what makes you happy right now isn't good for you in the long run. For instance, junk food tastes great but isn't healthy. Self-control powerfully predicts academic and professional achievement, physical and emotional well-being, positive social relationships, and financial security.

Pulse Check

Reflect on how your day is going. How many of these things are true?

- I got to work right away, rather than procrastinating.
- Instead of getting distracted while working, I stayed focused.
- Because I planned ahead, I was prepared for what I needed to do.
- I didn't do things I knew I'd later regret.

Encouraging Curiosity in Others

Model it. Resolve to accomplish a goal of personal significance, then talk about obstacles and your plans to overcome them. Emphasize strategies you've found that work especially well for you, such as taking the stairs as opposed to the elevator.

Celebrate it. Praise children for waiting patiently. Notice when they plan ahead. Appreciate ingenuity in navigating self-control dilemmas, such as keeping their phone in a different room to avoid distraction.

Enable it. Establish family rules, like no cell phones at mealtimes. Create quiet, distraction-free areas for study and work. Keep fruit on the kitchen counter and hide junk food on a high shelf.



Self-Control | Tips

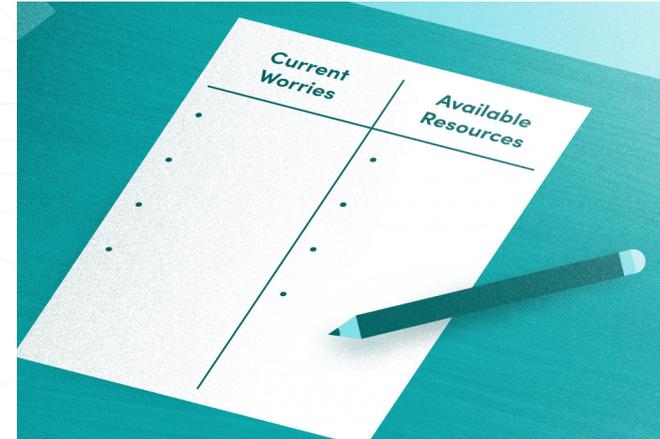
Tips are 60 seconds of actionable advice.



Let Teens Sleep In

The benefits of later school start times
- by Angela Duckworth

A recent Rand report concluded that starting both middle and high school classes no earlier than 8:30 a.m. would translate into \$8.6 billion in economic gains within two years of change.



Environments, Past and Present

How stress influences future behavior
- by Angela Duckworth

Longitudinal research shows when adolescents are exposed to increased stress due to adversity (called "Allostatic Load"), they feel anxious and overwhelmed, which in turn predicts more impulsive behavior. How can this be undone?



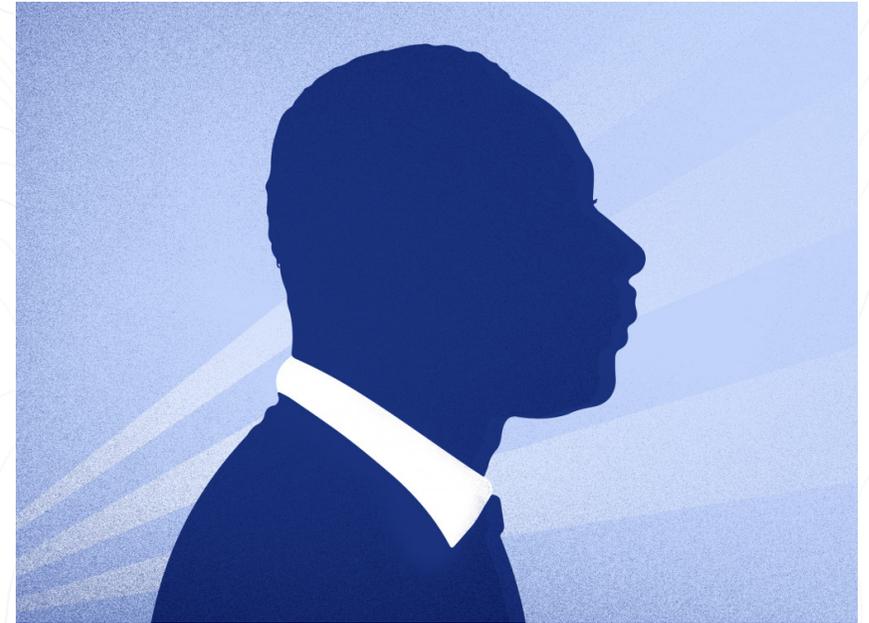
Agency for Self, Agency for Others

“In the wake of the brutal killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, the very fabric of this country seems to be fraying—revealing rifts, injustice, and anger decades and centuries in the making.

In these darkest of times, I have found it helpful to reflect on my values, sitting down and writing about what I hold most important and why. Research shows that this simple activity has many benefits, including orienting our attention to the needs of people around us.

Character is not only what you believe but what you do: **action rooted in the values you hold most dear, for the good of others, not just yourself.”**

– Angela Duckworth, *Founder and CEO of Character Lab*
[“Facing the Future”](#)



“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.



Thank you.

Character Lab's mission is to advance scientific insights that help kids thrive. By connecting researchers with educators, Character Lab seeks to create greater knowledge about the conditions that lead to social, emotional, academic, and physical well-being for young people throughout the country. More than 50 researchers and schools representing more than 100,000 students work with Character Lab to generate scientific insights about the success and well-being of kids. Character Lab aims to have a representative sample of students in the country, with an emphasis on promoting the voice of underrepresented students.

Access all thirteen Playbooks, sign up for the Tip of the Week, and learn more about Character Lab at <https://www.characterlab.org/>.

Character LAB



Acknowledgments

Brooklyn LAB would like to thank the following people who have generously contributed their time, expertise, creativity, and guidance to the Learner Identity and Agency Guidebook:

Center for Black Educator Development

Sharif El-Mekki, Founder/CEO
Makael Burrell, Lead Instructional Coach
Victoria Harrison, Operations Manager
Dr. Kelli Seaton, Chief Learning Officer
Shayna Terrell, Director of Pipeline Programming
Nadirah Sulayman, Social Emotional Learning
Ansharaye Hines, Teacher

Seton Montessori Institute

Anna P. Perry, Executive Director

Equity x Innovation Lab

Dr. Temple Lovelace, Chief Disruptor,
Associate Professor of Special Education at
Duquesne University
JoVonne Tabb, Fellow
Sam Utley, Fellow

Q. E. D. Foundation

Kim Carter, Executive Director

Dr. Anindya Kundu

National Center for Learning Disabilities

Ace Parsi, Director of Innovation
Lindsay E. Jones, President and CEO
Meghan Whittaker, Esq.
Director of Policy & Advocacy
Sheldon H. Horowitz, Ed.D. Senior Advisor,
Strategic Innovation, Research & Insights

Character Lab

Angela Duckworth, Founder/CEO
Sean Talamas, Executive Director
Elliot Luscombe,
Director of Strategic Partnerships

World Class Education

Chris Liang-Vergara, Founder/Partner
Danny Kelleher, Content & Big Ideas Writer
Jade Heberer, Copy Editor & Project Coordinator

Dezudio

Ashley Deal, Partner
Raelynn O'Leary, Partner
Klaus Bellon, Designer
Christi Danner, Intern
Hannah Kim, Intern
Hannah Koenig, Intern
Tessa Samuelson, Intern

Friends of Brooklyn Lab Charter Schools

Eva Diemel
Sarah Pactor, Senior Project Associate

InnovateEDU

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Erin Mote, Executive Director

Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools

Zahida Aminy, Middle School Director
Aaron Daly, Chief Operating Officer
Sheryl Gomez, Chief Financial Officer
Shawn Harris, Dean of Culture
Kelly King, Partnerships Manager
Cecile Kidd, Bursar
Harcourt Lucius, Director of College Success
Bb Ntsakey, Director, Academics
Greg Rodriguez, High School Director
Eric Tucker, Co-Founder and Executive Director

