



# SHIFTING POWER IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

CENTERING BLACK AND LATINX EDUCATORS IN  
RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY

FEBRUARY 2022





# **SHIFTING POWER IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**CENTERING BLACK AND LATINX EDUCATORS IN  
RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY**

**FEBRUARY 2022**





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the course of 18 months and primarily surrounding the 2020–2021 school year, a community of educators and researchers came together to challenge and reorient power dynamics inherent in educational research. This initiative, Shifting Power in Educational Research and Development (“Shifting Power”), was a collaboration between Remake Learning, a regional educational network and connector in southwestern Pennsylvania, and the University of Pittsburgh School of Education.

The central work of the initiative was to recruit and pair 20 Black and Latinx educators with 20 researchers. The pairs were tasked with independently designing and completing research projects driven by the educators’ curiosities and challenges stemming from their learning spaces. A framework for emancipatory research and development was introduced and revisited throughout the initiative. Financial support was provided for research materials and expenses. Simultaneously, the cohort convened monthly for inspiration, connection, learning, and problem-solving.

This case study presents the participants’ experiences, lessons, reflections, and outcomes. The report is organized into five sections, beginning with an orientation to the core issues motivating this work. Next, specific information about the team’s process and program is described. The following section details five essential lessons learned (five “agents” for shifting power), enhanced by personal stories and reflections of several participants. Challenges and barriers are discussed, followed by a list of all research projects completed by the educator-research pairs. The case study concludes by commenting on the observed shifts in power and situating them within the context of what we hope to see from here. It is our hope that others will use the lessons we have learned to shift power in their own ways and in their own spaces.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is our story, and thus the report cannot be separated from the people who took part in this important initiative. It has been a fulfilling journey, full of new learning and growth. As we write this, it is our intention to call the participants' voices and experiences onto the page. It has been an incredibly humanizing and impactful experience, and we would not be engaging in the practice of shifting power if we did not open, here at the beginning, with an acknowledgement of all who participated and shared their talents. Thank you to all who participated in this work.

## Leadership and Design Team

### **Allyce Pinchback-Johnson**

*Co-Principal Investigator*

Remake Learning and Pinchback Consulting

### **Medina Jackson**

*Equity Lead and Facilitator*

University of Pittsburgh, Office of Child Development

### **Anneliese Martinez**

*Producer*

Remake Learning and a.martinez.enterprises

### **Valerie Kinloch**

*Co-Principal Investigator*

University of Pittsburgh, School of Education

### **Lori Delale-O'Connor**

*Research Lead*

University of Pittsburgh, School of Education

### **Meredith Bortz**

*Communications Lead*

Bortz Consulting

### **Fatima Brunson**

*Research Team*

University of Pittsburgh, School of Education

### **DaVonna Graham Shannon**

*Research Team*

University of Pittsburgh, School of Education

### **Chelsea Jiminez**

*Research Team*

University of Pittsburgh, School of Education

## Educator Participants

### **Eduardo Alfonso Fajardo**

Pittsburgh Public Schools

### **Lisa Marie Benavides**

Homewood Children's Village;  
Equus Workforce Solutions

### **Candace Burgess**

Pittsburgh Festival Opera

### **Alesha Clinton**

Propel Schools

### **Amil Nyerere Thomas Cook**

Propel Schools; Community Forge

### **Alonna Cuffe**

Propel Schools;  
KIPP NJ Schools

### **Delana Flowers**

Independent Teaching Artist;  
Pittsburgh Public Schools

### **David Hairston**

Pittsburgh Public Schools

### **Shaasia Jackson**

Pittsburgh Public Schools

### **Malimi Joram Kazi**

Provident Charter School

### **Cynthia "Muffy" Mendoza**

Pittsburgh Brown Mamas

### **Jason Orr**

Propel Schools

### **Lisa Pickett**

Pittsburgh Public Schools

### **John Robertson**

Pittsburgh Public Schools

### **Andre Samuel**

The Citizen Science Lab

### **Sister IAsia Thomas**

Pittsburgh Public Schools;  
Children's Windows to Africa

### **Ginger Thompkins**

Pittsburgh Public Schools

### **Stacy Tweedy**

Nazareth Prep

### **Judith Williams-Wright**

Propel Schools

### **Deshanna Melinda Wisniewski**

Hampton Township School District

## Research Participants

**June Ahn**

University of California, Irvine,  
School of Education

**Laura Aldrete**

Trying Together

**Eleanor Anderson**

University of Pittsburgh, School of  
Education

**Christina Marie Ashwind**

Chatham University

**Kayla Booth**

University of Pittsburgh, School of  
Computing and Information;  
University of Texas, Austin

**Amanda Brown Cross**

University of Pittsburgh, Office of  
Child Development

**M. Beatrice Dias**

Carnegie Mellon University;  
University of Pittsburgh, School of  
Education

**Kimberly Kris Floyd**

West Virginia University, College of  
Education and Human Services

**Caitlin Forbes Spear**

University of Pittsburgh, Office of  
Child Development

**Sarah Hamilton**

Independent Researcher

**Josie Innamorato**

Allegheny Intermediate Unit;  
Berkeley, The Goldman School

**Shamya Karumbaiah**

University of Pennsylvania, Penn  
Center for Learning Analytics

**Kristina N. LaVenia**

Bowling Green State University,  
School of Educational Foundations,  
Leadership & Policy

**Channing L. Moreland**

University of Pittsburgh, School of  
Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

**Rachel Robertson**

University of Pittsburgh, School of  
Education

**Candice C. Robinson**

University of Pittsburgh, School of  
Social Work; University of North  
Carolina, Wilmington, Sociology

**Edward Elkanah Scott Sr.**

Slippery Rock University of  
Pennsylvania, School of Business

**Sarah Selmer**

West Virginia University, College of  
Education and Human Services

**Jean-Jacques Ngor Sene**

Chatham University, School of Arts,  
Science & Business

**April Warren-Grice**

Liberated Genius, LLC

## Special Thanks

We extend special thanks to Dr. Temple Lovelace for sharing the emancipatory research and development framework and to Dr. Vajra Watson for bringing portraiture into our work.

Thank you to Meredith Bortz who authored this report after listening to and organizing the many ideas, reflections, and contributions of the design team and participant cohort.

Finally, as a team, we are indebted to our co-principal investigators, Dean Valerie Kinloch and Allyce Pinchback-Johnson, whose leadership empowered us all and grounded our equity- and justice-centered work in deed, not just in words.

This report was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the foundation.

---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>01</b>	<b>Background and Goals</b>	<b>7</b>
	The Issue	7
	Inspiration for a New Initiative	12
<b>02</b>	<b>Our Work</b>	<b>13</b>
	Context	15
	Design, Recruitment and Launch	16
	Emancipatory Framework and Other Tools	19
	Research Partnerships and Implementation	21
<b>03</b>	<b>Shifting Power Agents</b>	<b>24</b>
	Create a Humanized and Safe Learning Space	25
	Center, Listen to, and Trust Black and Latinx Educators	31
	Create a Supportive “Yes” Environment	36
	Lead with Authenticity and Model Shifts	41
	Spark Changes	45
<b>04</b>	<b>Challenges and Barriers</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>05</b>	<b>Educator–Researcher Pair Projects</b>	<b>55</b>
	Research on Culturally Sustaining STEAM	55
	Research on Educator Development and Lenses for Practice	58
	Research on Culturally Sustaining Curricula	59
	Research on Student Engagement	62
	Research on Liberatory Practice	65
<b>06</b>	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>72</b>
	Our Shared Understandings of Equity, Justice, and Transformative Research	72
	Themes and Takeaways from Community Cohort Meetings	73

# BACKGROUND AND GOALS

”

*I dream a world where man  
No other man will scorn,  
Where love will bless the earth  
And peace its paths adorn  
I dream a world where all  
Will know sweet freedom's way,  
Where greed no longer saps the soul  
Nor avarice blights our day.  
A world I dream where black or white,  
Whatever race you be,  
Will share the bounties of the earth  
And every man is free,  
Where wretchedness will hang its head  
And joy, like a pearl,  
Attends the needs of all mankind-  
Of such I dream, my world!*

— LANGSTON HUGHES, “I DREAM A WORLD”

## THE ISSUE

Power, as taken up in educational research conducted by [Drs. Valerie Kinloch](#) and [Lori Delale-O'Connor](#), speaks to levels of (dis)engagement that assert authority and/or control over others (*i.e., people, communities, ideas, practices*) and within systems (*i.e., schools, universities, industry, other infrastructures*), often in highly unfair,



unequal, and inequitable ways. Thereby, power structures, power dynamics, and codes of power can inhibit progress toward a truly equitable and just educational system. Relatedly, [Drs. T. Elon Dancy, Leigh Patel, Sabina Vaught, and many other scholars](#) have also examined higher education's origins within white supremacy and capitalist structures, being that many of these institutions were established for white, elite, property-owning men. As education practitioners and researchers, we must critically examine and confront those structures and practices that seek to preserve power imbalances and, therefore, ultimately work against justice and liberation.

## Transactional Research

Educational research and development (R&D) is typically designed and conducted in a manner that insufficiently values—or worse, even takes away from—the very students and schools who should deeply benefit from study and impact. As educational researchers examine schools in search of what really works and as product and service providers develop solutions, schools—particularly in urban districts that serve high proportions of Students of Color—are often the focus of educational research. However, educators in these schools typically have little say in the research agenda. Generally, there tends to be less prestige and less regard for the perspectives that education practitioners hold; thus, many researchers often lead the process and determine the research questions.

In addition, the learnings and promising practices that emerge from this research do not always make their way back to impact these schools and communities. Researchers often come in to observe and gather data, and then leave with the learnings. This kind of transactional research does not always translate into practice or impact. The process of research is typically centered on the researchers such that the researchers develop the questions, seek school sites to study, then do the research, and ultimately leave with the findings. The power balance scale is tipped toward the academic, the researcher, and the institution. As a result, schools and students do not benefit to the extent they should from the very research they're asked to support.

[Chicago Beyond](#) cites [Angela Odums-Young](#) as using the effective imagery of a dinner party to describe the power shift needed in communities: ***“We as researchers get funded to be hosts. But in truth, the community should be the hosts, we are the guests” (p. 16).*** The same is true in schools.





*Rather than a partnership of equals, there is a legacy of researcher “brains” and community “brawn”. In many communities, the remembered history is that when the community and research institution interact, the institution benefits.*

— *Chicago Beyond* in “Why Am I Always Being Researched” (pg. 15)

## Underrepresentation

Another issue is that **many Black and Latinx educators are underrepresented in schools**, and where they do exist in number, they tend to be undervalued for their perspectives and expertise. Schools and the education field at large have overwhelmingly failed to develop, recruit, and retain diverse educator talent. In the state of Pennsylvania where this initiative took place, **roughly 36% of students are People of Color** while **94% of teachers identify as white** (Research for Action, 2020). In fact, the **number of Students of Color in the state is six times greater than the number of Teachers of Color** (Research for Action, 2020). Educator diversity and representation affect everything from how students experience the learning environment, to how teachers approach pedagogy and instruction, to how schools make decisions, and to how challenges are perceived, prioritized, and addressed. Additionally, the number of Students of Color also affects the types of research questions that are asked and pursued, and the types that are not even given consideration.

The lack of diverse talent representation as well as the inherent biases we all carry and the practice of transactional research described above, point to the reality that educational research and development most often reflects white perspectives and experiences. Educators of Color rarely have opportunities to lead or drive research. Their curiosities, lived experiences, and expertise are highly under-valued and under-cultivated. This creates quite a void in the systems that bring about educational research and development.

## Academic Culture and Practices

Lastly, institutions of higher education and academia operate in a white supremacy culture that values productivity and rigor above all else. A set of interconnected academic and research practices are continued for their scientific basis and long-standing traditions, but in doing so they exclude an incredible wealth of knowledge that lives outside the doors of academia. Institutions of higher education and academic research value productivity, formality and distance, “hard” science, and anonymous data. Researchers—the vast majority of whom are white—develop their careers in a focused area of study and are trained to design research questions with a narrow line of inquiry. There is also a lack of diversity in the field of education research. Whiteness defines the culture of academia, and all those who enter are socialized and trained to adopt these methods that distance the researcher from the research.



”

*Right or wrong, research can drive decisions. If we do not address the power dynamic in the creation of research, at best, we are driving decision-making from partial truths. At worst, we are generating inaccurate information that ultimately does more harm than good in communities. This is why we must care about how research is created.*

— *Chicago Beyond* in “Why Am I Always Being Researched” (pg. 6)



*Research practices that reimagine and reconfigure the relationship between the researcher and the researched are fertile ground for this query. Far too often, the rituals of data collection and analysis—objectifying subjects, renaming participants and places, the coding and categorizing process, and then taking credit for someone else’s stories—replicate patterns of oppression and mirepresentation. Thus, research is not devoid of racist tendencies. Often, it is its perpetrator.*

— **VAJRA WATSON**

“LIBERATING METHODOLOGIES” (P. 71) IN COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH, EDITED BY NATALIA DEEB-SOSSA

# INSPIRATION FOR A NEW INITIATIVE

With these connected issues in mind, a new initiative was envisioned. We asked the questions:

- 1. What would happen if we centered the voices of Black and Latinx educators – including their unique experiences, points of view, challenges, and curiosities—in research?*
- 2. How might power be shifted?*
- 3. How might the products of this research be different?*

In posing these questions, we believed that creating space for Black and Latinx educator voices in the R&D process would improve the clarity of evidence and relevance of solutions. We proposed that when evidence of what works and for whom is made accessible, reflects the local context, and is aligned with the specific interests and needs of the students being served, it would be much more likely to be put to use and positively impact those students.



---

# OUR WORK

In the spring of 2020, a leadership and design team of nine came together to plan the launch of **Shifting Power in Educational Research and Development**. The initiative, which would come to be known fondly by the participants as **Shifting Power**, has been a collaborative initiative between Remake Learning and the University of Pittsburgh School of Education—and made possible with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The purpose of the initiative was *to design, pilot, and learn from an equity-based R&D process that positions Black and Latinx educators as leaders and experts, for the benefit of the Black and Latinx students they serve*. The essential work was to create a deeply place-based, emancipatory R&D infrastructure that centered these educators and students, with researchers working to support them. Together we aspired to define a model for inclusive and empowering educational research-practice partnerships.

In summary, our pilot took shape as follows. We recruited and then paired 20 Black and Latinx educators with 20 educational researchers across institutions. Together, these educator and researcher teams would go on to co-develop and implement research projects in the educators' learning spaces, with an intentional focus on centering the educators, their curiosities, and motivations. By centering them and providing connections, resources, and a platform, we aimed to empower these educators with the tools and confidence to continue leading research in their own learning spaces, and to actively shift power structures in educational research.

In this section, we describe the context, design and approach to implementation, an essential framework and other tools, and the research processes that together comprise our work. In a later section of the report, we dig more deeply into significant elements that contributed to successful outcomes.





# CONTEXT

It is important to comment on how the context in which the initiative took place affected our work. Centering on the 2020–2021 school year, ***we worked to shift power during a global pandemic***—a time when design team members and participants alike shared concerns for the health and safety of themselves and their students, and a time of prolonged stress, constant change, and work-from-home life. In some opportune ways, the pandemic provided an opportunity to take an approach that ran in contrast to the norm. ***During this time, it was more important than ever to treat people with love and care, and to give space to be human above all else.*** This need aligned perfectly with the inclusive and radically supportive approach that we intended to take.

***Wellness was centered throughout the initiative***, as the team encouraged people to take care of themselves. The reality of working during a pandemic also meant that all ten of our cohort sessions took place online. ***Most research pairs also met exclusively online, though several did eventually meet in-person.*** Additionally, the pandemic impacted the learning environments in which pairs pursued their research. In 2020–2021, school districts in the greater Pittsburgh area practiced a combination of in-person, hybrid, and virtual instruction, with the largest district operating remotely from September 2020 through April 2021. All of these factors and dynamics are part of the story of how Shifting Power was implemented.

A second piece of context to document is that of the initiative’s leadership. Shifting Power was a joint initiative of [University of Pittsburgh School of Education](#) and [Remake Learning](#), two partner organizations based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The University of Pittsburgh is a nationally recognized public research institution of higher education, and the School of Education is highly ranked and regarded especially for its focus on urban education. In 2017, [Dr. Valerie Kinloch](#) was appointed Renée and Richard Goldman Dean and Professor of the school. Since then, she has been making her mark as a leader. In 2018, the school developed a bold mission–vision to “innovate and agitate” and “disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures” among other things. In the wake of George Floyd’s murder in May 2020, Dean Kinloch founded and launched the PittEd Justice Collective to actively engage faculty, staff, students, and community members in the active work of antiracism.

Remake Learning was also an essential partner. Remake Learning is an open network of interconnected people and organisation working to ignite engaging, relevant, and equitable learning for youth across southwestern Pennsylvania. It has vast top-roots as well as grass-roots connections across the region, and it has long worked with out-of-school-time providers as well as school systems. The backgrounds and capacities of both organizations—one situated in higher education and one situated in the community—would all prove to be important as we designed our outreach.



# DESIGN, RECRUITMENT AND LAUNCH

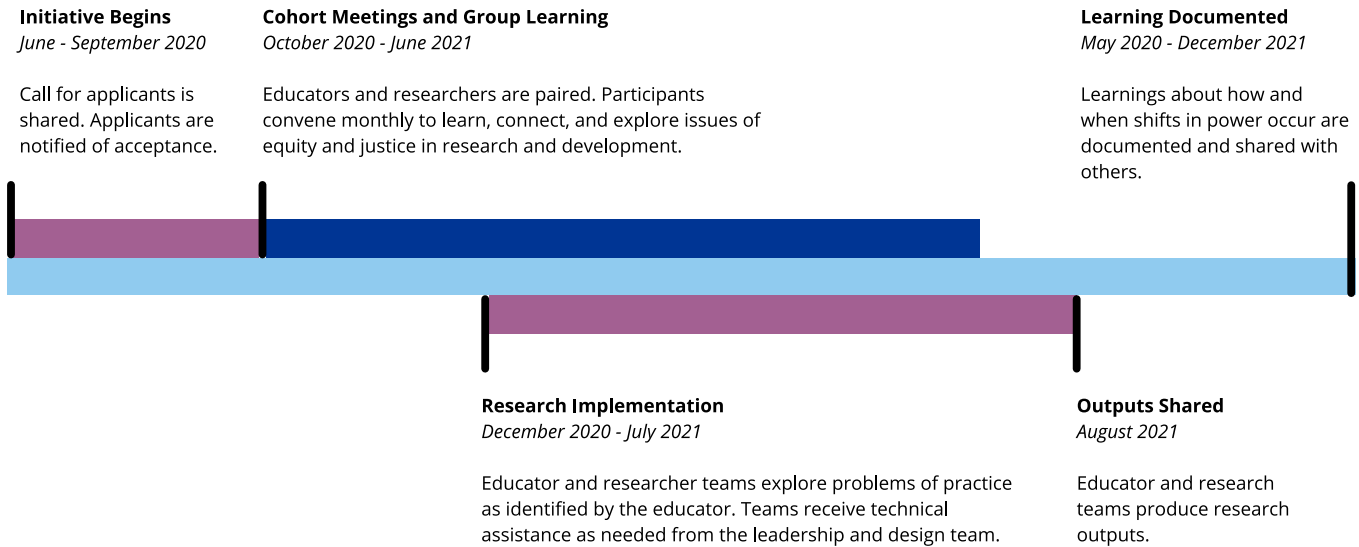
In June 2020, the team put out the call for educators and researchers to apply. ***The solicitation made clear the initiative's goals and expectations for participants, and grounded the work in the need to center the experiences, curiosities, and perspectives of Black and Latinx educators in educational research.*** In total, 57 educators and 26 researchers applied. Initially we saw less interest from researchers, and thus additional targeted outreach was conducted to expand the applicant pool.

Shortly later in August, a cohort of 40 individuals was selected. The 20 educators included 13 classroom teachers, three out-of-school time educators, two teaching artists, one administrator with teaching responsibilities, and one homeschooling parent. All 20 educators had direct instructional responsibilities and worked within the greater Pittsburgh region. Seventeen of the accepted educators self-identified themselves as Black, two as Latino/Hispanic, and one as South African. The 20 researchers also represented a diversity of backgrounds, with 16 holding research or faculty positions at an institution of higher education and four working as independent researchers or as staff at nonacademic research organizations. Application data indicates that ten researchers identify as white, five as Black, two as Asian, two as multiracial, and one as Latino/Hispanic.

Educators and researchers were paired based on the research topics in which they expressed interest and/or had experience, as well as some consideration for technical and methodological skills, personalities, and context. ***In the true spirit of Shifting Power, educators were compensated with a \$5000 stipend (taxable income), while researchers were asked to participate pro bono and as part of their commitment to learning and participating in emancipatory work.***

## + OUR TIMELINE

---



***The cohort of 40 met monthly from September 2020 through June 2021.*** Each cohort meeting followed a similar structure: opening, reminder of community practices, collective grounding, the introduction to or deeper exploration of frameworks or other inspiration as tools for the pairs' thinking and research, logistics and updates about expectations and assignments, space to process and connect as pairs and/or in small groups, and closing.

In the fall, participants were also encouraged to attend and learn from several virtual presentations offered as part of the PittEd Justice Collective, including a conversation between [Dean Kinloch](#) and [Dr. April Baker-Bell](#), entitled, "From Linguistic Racism to Linguistic Justice and Liberation," and a presentation by [Dr. Bettina Love](#), entitled, "We Want To Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and The Pursuit of Educational Freedom."



# EMANCIPATORY FRAMEWORK AND OTHER TOOLS

Dr. Temple Lovelace's Emancipatory Research and Development (ERD) framework was presented and revisited as a core tool for pushing participants' thinking and shaping research. Separate from the Shifting Power work, *Dr. Lovelace developed the framework as a means to examine how we design, develop, and evaluate educational technology, especially those that are created for historically marginalized students.* [Lovelace \(2020\)](#) poses several critical questions that the Shifting Power cohort took up as our own to consider. These include:

- "What could be realized if power (and resources) shifted from these large corporations to educators and community members to create the tools and curricula we need in schools?"
- What happens if we decide what counts as evidence, what is rigorous, and what products end up in front of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students and their educators?
- What solutions, created through advanced research & development, have the potential to solve the wicked problems that are pervasive in our society?
- What are the rich cultural traditions that reflect the ingenuity & intelligence needed to withstand generations of oppression? How can they be used to create relevant solutions?"

Lovelace (2020) states, *"Traditional R&D has determined whose epistemologies count and it often excludes the knowledge of historically marginalized people. Using their cultural experiences, histories, and knowledge as the foundation for the creation of culturally relevant innovations, ERD provides a structured process that centers this knowledge and them as a critical co-designers that can produce and validate leading edge educational technology"*.

*The ERD framework invites researchers to adopt a seven-step process that begins with situating, ideating, and validating.* These early stages require the researchers to fully explore the impact of current and historical oppression, and to spend time generating and comparing a number of concepts, practices, and processes first before diving into a research study about the efficacy of a specific practice or product. The process is very much place-based and co-constructed, with the researcher and educator engaged in collaborative research together.

## + EMANCIPATORY R&D

"... is a liberatory research & development model that advances the intellectual, social, emotional, and civic empowerment of students, educators, and the larger community."

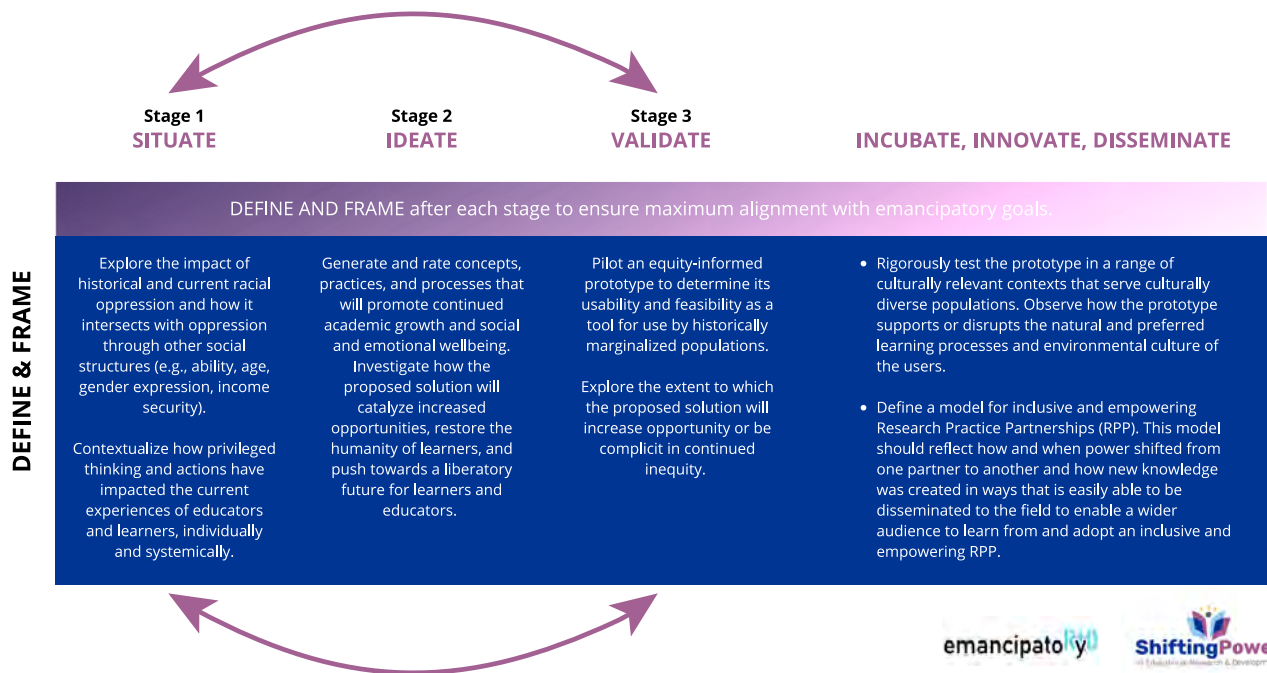
"Using the cultural experience, histories, and knowledge of historically marginalized people as the foundation for the creation of culturally relevant innovations, ERD provides a structured process that centers this knowledge as a critical aspect of the infrastructure that produces and validates leading edge educational technology."

equity X innovation lab, 2020

- Targeted research *with* historically marginalized populations
- Purposeful alignment to the needs of the target population and the oppression experienced by members of those populations

emancipatory<sup>R+D</sup>

## + EMANCIPATORY R&D ADAPTED FOR SHIFTING POWER



**With the ERD framework in place, our Shifting Power team began to layer on additional concepts and dialogue.** Definitions of equity, justice, and transformational R&D were co-developed by **Dean Valerie Kinloch** and the leadership and design team. These were then shared with the cohort for discussion (see Appendix for definitions in full). Additionally, **the group gained inspiration from poetry, meditations, and lightning talks in which participating educators and researchers shared knowledge and expertise with their peers.**

## + SHAPING CHANGE

---

### Equity

- **Access** to the right resources at the right moment
- **Targeting resources** based on individual students' needs and circumstances
- An **intentional effort** to acknowledge, address, and dismantle historical and present-day injustices that negatively impact *how* and *what* people learn within schools *and how* people survive and thrive within society at large
- A commitment to providing access to **financial, instructional, and material resources** and high-quality opportunities

### Justice

- **Tangible action**, or required outcome, of equity
- Not only acts of fairness, but practices that produce **participatory, anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and healing experiences**
- Structuring opportunities that are grounded in **worth, dignity, and humanization**
- Living in a free state in which acts of harm, damage, and the conditions of inequity and inequality have been both **repaired and alleviated**

### Transformative Research

- Multiple, interconnected, and **critical ways** of being, knowing, experiencing, exploring, and questioning the world.
- Guided by an unwavering commitment to **dismantling all forms of inequities, inequalities, and injustices**
- Centers **freedom dreaming and freedom learning**, joy, hopefulness, and humanizing engagements and inquiries
- Purposefully **"shifts power"** through critical, unconventional, and non-hierarchical approaches

---

## RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Once the ERD framework and definitions were shared, research pairs were encouraged to develop their research ideas. **Project plans were submitted in December 2020.** As plans were reviewed, the team followed up as appropriate to ensure that the focus of each project was being driven by the educator, with the researcher serving as technical assistance provider, mentor, and collaborator.

Further, **small learning communities were formed based on similar research project interests and guided by an assigned facilitator, to encourage additional relationship**

**building and provide greater access to support.** To further lean in to the spirit of centering Black and Latinx educators, the five learning communities were named after diverse Black female writers and advocates.

Leaning on the educators' practical experiences and the researchers' technical experiences, the pairs collaborated to examine research questions relevant to the educators' learning space(s). **The goal was to position educators to lead and solve their own problems of practice with the technical support of their research partner and the place-based, emancipatory R&D infrastructure.** This required researchers to lean in and be as supportive as possible to their educator partner, while being careful not to take control of the project.



## + SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

---



## + ROLES FOR TEAM AND PARTICIPANTS

### Educators

- Surface a research question or problem of practice to be explored in the learning space with the technical support of a researcher
- Receive support, affirmation, and validation in a cohort built on the values of equity, justice, and liberation
- Lead a research project in collaboration with a researcher

### Researchers

- Provide technical assistance (e.g. research methods/design, subject matter expertise, access to institution-based resources where applicable, IRB support) to support the educator in addressing their research question or problem of practice
- Grow capacity as an antiracist researcher committed to justice, equity, and liberation
- Relinquish power in the research space to the educator in support of improving educational outcomes for Black and Brown children centering the perspectives of those most affected

### Small Learning Communities and Facilitators

- Serve as an additional mechanism for community building and capacity building
- Provide tailored support and attention to research pairs

### Leadership and Design Team

- Oversee the project, ensuring that goals, expectations, and timelines are met
- Host monthly learning and work sessions for the cohort
- Connect research pairs to resources

*Rooted in equity and justice, our goal is to shift power dynamics inherent in many research and development infrastructures.*

Research pairs were asked to develop and submit their research plans in early December 2020. ***After receiving feedback and approval to move forward, they worked together to implement their research throughout the spring and summer of 2021, putting into practice their chosen methodologies, collecting data, and identifying findings.*** Methodologies ranged and included literature reviews, qualitative data collection (e.g., interviews, focus groups), text/product analysis, and more. ***Several pairs encountered challenges that required them to assess and redesign their research mid-stream.*** Some pairs worked together seamlessly, while others were challenged by unequal commitments and multiple job changes that interrupted their ability to fully collaborate. In the end, 17 of the 20 research pairs produced a final research output.

In this section, we have described our approach and process. ***We have attempted to outline the design and implementation of this initiative in a way that others can understand and hopefully learn from.*** That being said, the real learning is shared in the following section in which we reflect on and unpack five essential agents of change that contributed to shifts in power. These vehicles represent the meaningful lessons in terms of how organizations and collectives can shift power in an organized way.



---

# SHIFTING POWER AGENTS

Several themes emerged that might be considered as shifting power “agents” or vehicles for this work. These are not definitive or rigid, as elements of one dovetail with another. It is also important to keep in mind that each context may demand a different set of agents.

The five agents in our case were to:

- 1. Create a humanized and safe learning space that enables participants to show up as their full selves.*
- 2. Center, listen to, and trust Black and Latinx educators and their expertise at every stage.*
- 3. Create a supportive “yes” environment that responds to participants’ needs and wants.*
- 4. Assemble a leadership team who will set the tone and model shifts in power.*
- 5. Spark changes in mindsets, behavior, and practice, then let the power shifts happen.*





## CREATE A HUMANIZED AND SAFE LEARNING SPACE

**Agent #1: Create a humanized and safe learning space that enables participants to show up as their full selves.**

The leadership and design team always knew that community building would be an essential element of the program design. That being said, we didn't foresee just how impactful—and in fact, transformative—the learning space would become for the participating educators and researchers, as well as even for the design team. In reflections during and after a year of work together, **several participants described the space as “spiritual” and “life-giving”**—high compliments and testaments to the impact that a humanized and affirming learning space can have on individuals. It was in large part so impactful because it was so different from the norm.

*The humanized learning space created as part of the Shifting Power initiative can be understood in three elements: (1) meeting facilitation rooted in empathy, (2) use of grounding practices to nurture mental and physical well-being, and (3) cultural authenticity and arts integration.*

## MEETING FACILITATION ROOTED IN EMPATHY

Monthly cohort meetings operated and felt quite different from your average meeting or convening. Simply put, meetings felt alive. We were limited to online connection due to the pandemic, and knew that we were asking participants to engage with us during a time when they were carrying extra anxieties and burdens. **While we all felt our work together was important, we said time and again that the health and well-being of all those involved was more important.** This radical empathy and human-centered environment operated in stark contrast to so many controlled spaces during the pandemic in which participants were required to continue working and showing up as usual, with little concern for restoration.

Each month, we began with a review of our community practices (shown below). **These community practices were designed to give cohort members permission to release themselves of what they might perceive to be professional expectations.** Cohort members were encouraged to determine for themselves what they needed and to take care of themselves. In practice, this looked like everyone deciding for themselves if and when to have their computer camera on and encouraging folks to offer a comment while cooking dinner for their children, for example.

### + OUR COMMUNITY PRACTICES

- 1. We use this space together equitably.**  
We recognize power dynamics in speaking and listening.
- 2. We speak our truth.**
- 3. We give our attention and participate as fully and as best as we can.**
- 4. We strive to understand multiple perspectives.**  
No one knows everything. Together we know a lot.
- 5. We are willing to be disturbed.**  
Learning and change come from confusion. There is a difference between comfort and safety. We welcome learning and growth.
- 6. We critique ideas and concepts, not people.**  
We ask questions to advance understanding instead of making assumptions.
- 7. We recognize when each of us needs space for emotion and breathing.**
- 8. We honor confidentiality within the group.**  
The stories that are shared here, unless explicit permission is given by the person sharing. The lessons that are learned here may leave here.
- 9. We humanize learning spaces.**
  - If you need to turn off your camera, then please do so.
  - If you need to attend to a child, elder, pet or yourself, then please do so.
  - If you are uncomfortable or struggling for whatever reason and need flexibility, then please let us know and we will work with you.
  - Above all – our work together is important, but your health and well-being are more important.

Facilitation rooted in empathy also emerged through a decision to operate with flexible agendas. Again, the initiative design team decided to act upon a belief that the well-being of the group was more important than whatever content was planned for that session. **Moments were prioritized when cohort members were captivated by an insight or when additional time was needed to reflect on a difficult topic.** Cohort meetings were responsive to meet the needs of the group.

## GROUNDING PRACTICES

Every cohort session began with an opportunity to ground ourselves. **Equity consultant Medina Jackson, also known as IMedina, consistently led us through meditations, breathing exercises, and poetry readings to get our heads in the right space.** These grounding practices allowed cohort members to leave behind things that were not serving them, and to come focused and full into the session. These exercises helped to center ourselves for the work we were about to do.

One example of a grounding practice is one that Ms. Jackson titled “I AM.” Inspired by the Lovecraft Country character **Hippolyta Freeman** who names and reclaims parts of herself lost to racism and sexism, Jackson **encouraged the cohort to become aware of and draw upon all parts of themselves in this work of shifting power.** She stated to the group, “In doing positive racial identity work and creating liberated spaces, it requires me to share as much of who I am as possible.” She went on to say, “I want to invite us to sit in this affirmation of I AM—internally, inside of us, with a sense of wonder. Because we bring our I AM as full-bodied people. We bring that humanity to the work that we do whether we’re conscious of it or not.” Just following this invitation, Ms. Jackson read a poem by **Elandria Williams**, entitled “We Are Worthy” which is presented on the following page.

Research team member **Dr. Fatima Bruson** described these practices in this way: “We literally focused on being within our bodies: highlighting any tensions and addressing any blocks that people carried into the learning space. The grounding exercises also helped to transition and pause, which is not something many of us are practiced in doing.” Grounding practices often touched on the theme of a given session—such as joy or power—and thus prepared participants’ minds and bodies. **These practices aimed to develop not just the intellect, but also the heart, and create an experiential feeling in the body.**

# WE ARE WORTHY

— ELANDRIA WILLIAMS

*We are worthy  
Not because of what we produce  
But because of who we are  
We are divine bodies of light and darkness  
You are not worthy because of what you offer,  
not because of what is in your mind, not for the  
support you give others, not for what you give at  
all We are worthy and are whole just because  
In this great turning, in this great pandemic, in  
this radical readjustment and alignment  
We are not disposable, we are needed, we are the  
very people that have withstood everything that  
has been thrown at us as a people and as Maya  
Angelou would say  
Still I Rise  
We arise from the pain  
We rise from the grief  
We arise from the limits people place on us and  
the limits we place on ourselves  
We rise to be the children and the ancestors  
We rise to be our true selves  
Our true selves in relationship to our families and  
communities  
Recognizing our liberating and whole selves  
Honoring them and others as we strive for  
abundant communities, abundant lives,  
abundant relationships, and abundant values  
and cultural manifestations  
We are worthiness personified I, you, and we  
are worthy and deserve a life where we are not  
always fighting for our existence Imagine what  
we could create if we were not always in the  
struggle  
Imagine what we could envision if we could just  
be let to just go there  
So tired of always having to resist, to fight,  
demanding, pushing  
To everyone that has the courage, the power, the  
ability to co-create what we want and need while*

*rooting in what we can't lose and who we are  
You are the visionary  
You are the hope  
You are our ancestors dreams  
No you might not ever end up on some list  
somewhere  
But you are on a list in someone's heart and mind  
And if it's in how you move in the world so people  
can see by example  
You are the embodiment of what we need  
Thanks to all that are the embodiment  
The embodiment not of productivity but the  
embodiment of radical love, care and sanctuary  
It's time  
Embodiment time  
Embodiment  
Living ones values out loud  
Let me everyday live my values out loud  
Let us everyday live our values out loud  
Embodying our values  
Not the productivity quotient  
Beyond productivity  
Past productivity  
True embodiment  
Life*



# CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY AND ARTS INTEGRATION

Lastly, the team made sure to create a space of authenticity that worked to affirm cohort members’ Blackness and Brownness and invite them to show up as their full selves. Music written and performed by Black and Latinx artists—including *Beyoncé*, *Aretha Franklin*, *Héctor Lavoe*, *Janelle Monáe*, *Tobe Nwigwe*, and so many others—was used to open our sessions and welcome members into the space, transition between agenda segments, and close out our time together. Spoken word poetry was used to reach hearts and minds, always speaking directly to the joy, pain, and perspectives of Black and Latinx youth and educators. **Art was consistently used to create connection, as well as safety and inclusion.** One educator, *Jason Orr*, called the sessions “nurturing” and “even therapeutic.” Further, with encouragement to share their research findings in whatever format best suited their research and their intended audiences, we saw cultural authenticity and arts integration show up in the research pairs’ outputs as well.

In summary, we took the opportunity to do something different: to be tender during an exhausting pandemic; to be slow and patient; to be radically empathetic. **This program design element proved to create a humanized and safe learning space where cohort members could show up as their full selves.** Even in a fully virtual environment, the meeting facilitation, grounding practices, and emphasis on cultural authenticity created a welcoming space for learning and connection.

X		X		X		X
	X		X		X	
X		X		X		X
	X		X		X	

# THROUGH THEIR EYES: EDUCATOR AMIL COOK AND RESEARCHER DR. KAYLA BOOTH



**Amil Nyerere Thomas Cook**  
Educator, Propel Schools and  
#HipHopEd



**Kayla Booth**  
Asst. Professor, University of  
Pittsburgh, School of Computing  
and Information

Classroom teacher, community worker, and hip hop enthusiast [Amil Nyerere Thomas Cook](#) grew up in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. His parents, a white mother and African American father, met during the Civil Rights Movement, and thus social justice was a big part of how Mr. Cook was raised. In a presentation to the cohort, he described his diverse neighborhood and school as a “dope place to grow up.” Around 1995, he and some peers from his neighborhood enrolled in Boston Latin School, a prestigious, exam-based public high school—the same year that the school’s racial quota was removed. Amil recounts, “It was a charged racial time. I’m paying attention to everything. Hip hop is speaking my language. That’s a big part of my identity.” Today, hip hop is still a big part of Mr. Cook’s life. In addition to teaching computer science and graphic design at a Pittsburgh area public school, he co-hosts the EPND (Extraordinary People Next Door) Podcast with fellow educator Jasor Orr and is active in the #HipHopEd Twitter community which he co-founded.

Reflecting on hip hop culture, [Mr. Cook](#) shared, “Nas and these [other] artists, they really spoke to me and let me know I can keep my linguistic style; I can be how I am in my community, and still be intellectual. And experiences like this [Shifting Power] also let me know, like okay this is supposed to be the pinnacle of intellectualism. But they’re still missing the boat. They don’t know about Julius Nyerere. They don’t know about the African struggle. So they’re missing a lot of pieces too, and they’re ignorant and they’ve got an elitism about it. So I’m breaking any door I can in to make sure I bring real talk to our people, opportunity, culture, media. I just love bringing our culture. We don’t got to step back because I come into your space. We gotta bring our authentic selves, how we talk, how we think. That’s what I try to be about.”

**As part of the Shifting Power initiative, Mr. Cook was paired with computer and information science researcher Kayla Booth.** [Dr. Booth](#) is also the director of iSchool Inclusion Institute (i3), an undergraduate research and leadership program. Together they share an interest in the use of technology to engage and educate youth. For their collaborative research project, they are examining ways that youth use technology in prosocial ways in their lives and their communities. The central question they pursued—and continue to pursue—is, “To what extent do existing policies and programs support student agency in using technology as a tool for liberation?”

When asked to summarize what Shifting Power feels like, [Mr. Cook](#) responded ***“It’s stepping into the fullness of who I am. Being brave. Knowing that I’m going to come against opposition but there’s support; there’s love; there’s this tradition of humanity to uphold and to continue working towards; and knowing that there’s love out there, even in these challenging times. There’s love in education; there’s love in academia. That’s what the real true purpose of civil society is to enhance and improve who we all are.”*** In this single reflection, [Mr. Cook](#) raised the importance of love, community, humanity, and showing up fully as ourselves.

To the same question, [Dr. Booth](#) first pointed out the stark contrast between the question’s focus on feelings and the typical expectations in the space of academia. ***She then went on to describe Shifting Power as “breathing life into the possibilities of what research, collaboration, and meaningful interactions can look and feel like. It’s moving beyond a reality [in higher education] that can feel really hard and isolating. It feels like breathing life into and imagining possibilities beyond what I experience day to day.”*** This sentiment echoes what others have shared regarding a sincere appreciation for the human-centered and highly empathetic collaborative space, especially as it contrasts to the norms of education and academia.



## CENTER BLACK AND LATINX EDUCATORS

**Agent #2: Center, listen to, and trust Black and Latinx educators and their expertise at every stage.**

What would it look like to center Black and Latinx educators and their expertise in a research initiative? This was a driving question that inspired the partner organizations to establish the Shifting Power initiative. ***Black and Latinx educators are rarely centered in educational research and improvement.*** Intersectionality is at work, as they are dually impacted by the fact that educators in the United States are rarely engaged and trained as research leaders, and that the perspectives of Black and Latinx educators are invited to an even lesser extent. ***Two primary pillars shaped our team's ability to initiate shifts in power, those being: (1) an unapologetic focus on Black and Latinx backgrounds, and (2) a commitment to valuing multiple ways of knowing and to challenging notions of expertise.***

### UNAPOLOGETIC FOCUS ON BLACK AND LATINX BACKGROUNDS

The initiative was designed from the start with a laser focus on centering Black and Latinx educators. This demographic was selected for two localized reasons. First, specific to the greater Pittsburgh area, ***there is a pressing need to support Black and Latinx communities given documented***



**inequalities in health, education, and employment outcomes** (see [Howell et al., 2019](#)). Additionally, the **University of Pittsburgh's School of Education** has an explicit commitment to increasing the number of Black and Latinx educational researchers in the field and within the institution. Looking beyond the local context, we know from research that Black and Latinx educators are underrepresented in schools and there is a long history of their views being undervalued.

As part of centering and supporting these Black and Latinx educators, it was made clear in recruitment materials that researchers seeking to participate needed to have at least a baseline level of racial literacy and awareness—so as to not require programming that catered to their “catch up” learning. Monthly cohort meetings also centered Black and Latinx experiences through the use of music, poetry, and meditations, all created and led by diverse Black and Latinx artists.

## VALUING MULTIPLE KNOWLEDGES AND CHALLENGING NOTIONS OF EXPERTISE

The initiative was designed from an epistemological stance that knowing and generating knowledge is not singular, not to be narrowly defined, and not “owned” by any one culture or cultural tradition. Knowledge is also not restricted to the written form. It is instead co-constructed, interactional, and experiential. Knowledge must be decolonized.

We practiced the valuing of multiple knowledges, lived experiences, and all sources of expertise in many ways. **Participants were encouraged to tell their stories, ask questions of one another and to lead what we called “lightning sessions” where they shared their experiences and expertise about a particular topic.** Educators endeavored to solve their own problems of practice with the technical support of their partner and developed a place-based, emancipatory R&D infrastructure. Upon first presenting **Dr. Lovelace’s** ERD framework, the cohort was given space to reflect. One research partner summarized her initial understanding as follows: “Emancipatory R&D puts the researcher in a position of servant; in service to the expertise of the practitioner, and practitioner as knower.”

We also aimed to decolonize teaching and learning modalities. **We focused on people who are often marginalized within education spaces by bringing them into the center of our work.** We highlighted methodologies coming from within Black queer feminism. We dedicated time as a cohort to consider questions such as, “What are the new sources of evidence and rigor that can be created through your project?” and prompts that pushed participants to stand in their power and articulate their own dreams for the world. Lastly, we practiced what we preached by compensating the educators. We hope that this conveyed that we not only valued their knowledge, but also their time.



”

*When we view living in the european mode only as a problem to solved, we rely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious. But as we come in touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes.*

— AUDRE LORDE

“POETRY IS NOT A LUXURY” IN SISTER OUTSIDER, P.37



# THROUGH THEIR EYES: EDUCATOR SISTER IASIA THOMAS AND RESEARCHER DR. APRIL WARREN-GRICE



**Sister IASIA Thomas**  
Educator and Equity Practitioner,  
Pittsburgh Public Schools



**April Warren-Grice**  
Researcher, Liberated Genius

Sister IASIA Thomas wears many hats and brings multiple perspectives to education. Born in South Africa, her family escaped Apartheid in 1981 and today she resides and works in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She leads equity work at Pittsburgh Public Schools, including a program called Promise of Sisterhood which aims to unify continental African sisters with African American sisters in the district. Additionally, she is director of creative and cultural programs for Children’s Windows to Africa which serves children living in public housing, and she is currently a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education.

For the purposes of *Shifting Power—Sister I*, as she is known by community, friends and colleagues—was paired with Dr. April Warren-Grice, founder and CEO of *Liberated Genius*, an educational consulting company focused on equity, access, and wellness. A resident of St. Louis, Missouri, she is also a research associate at the *University of Pittsburgh*. As a researcher and consultant, Dr. Warren-Grice helps educators and leaders “transform oppressive school systems into liberated educational spaces.”

*These two represent what it means to center Black and African identities, in terms of culture, gender, ethnicity, and power, as well as what it means to value epistemic diversity.* Their work also reflects the diversity that exists with Blackness and Black pedagogy (pedagogies). As part of their introductions and early meetings getting to know one another, the pair grounded their research interests in personal journeys and backgrounds. Dr. Warren-Grice invested time and energy into getting to know Sister I and spent time with the girls in the Promise of Sisterhood program—an effort that importantly established a relationship of mutuality and allyship, which ultimately led to a friendship and sisterhood in which they could lean on and support one another.

Landing on the need to “reimagine equity to include globally Diasporic scholarship with an emphasis on African centeredness,” Sister I remarked: “It took years of study and personal evolution to meet this moment... and the fellowship provides the most ideal and balanced opportunity to realize this goal.” ***The initiative’s support and encouragement to be fully themselves freed both individuals, and especially Sister I, to set the research agenda as their own.*** This experience runs in contrast to Sister I’s experiences in which “the plurality of knowledge” and her ideas and perspectives about education and equity—grounded in African educational philosophy and more generally a global perspective—are not always understood.

As the two research partners began their work, they realized that “Afrocentric education is an expression of equity.” Reflecting back, Dr. Warren-Grice said, “The more we talked we realized... that the equity focus is usually on Black Americans, born here in the US, and white students. And when you look at the ESL program, their focus is generally on language acquisition. And so for Black African migrant girls, their culture isn’t taken into consideration when thinking about equity, and then even with English as a Second Language (ESL), there’s no culture taken into consideration either. So they fall into a gap; no-one is talking about them; they’re not even in sight.” Sister I added: “That’s right, and I started to think very deeply about what possibilities there are when there’s a more inclusive and expansive way of looking at equity, and how when there’s practitioner experiences and research that come together, that the possibilities and responsibilities of evolving equity are essential.” She continued, “I have to remind myself that equity is on a continuum. It’s born one way with a specific history attached to it in the city. But there’s some growing and reconciling work that enables us to advocate at a deeper level.” The pair reached the consensus that this research project would focus on continental African girls, specifically.

Reflecting further on Pittsburgh’s history and mindset rooted in a racial binary only, Sister I shared, “I started to think about what it means when a continental African, such as myself spends a lot of years... building solidarity with Black people, and how important that was to my evolution and purpose. But I am at a place now where I am interested in what it looks like in the reverse: when there’s more unification, more collaboration, more solidarity, more strength building, more power building together... Many people are satisfied with talking about equity in a Black and white way, ... but I don’t want to affirm that way anymore.”



## CREATE A SUPPORTIVE “YES” ENVIRONMENT

**Agent #3: Create a supportive “yes” environment that responds to participants’ needs and wants.**

In our conversations with cohort members, it became clear that many educators typically operate in a “no” environment, meaning an environment where rules are rigid and resources are limited. *The educators with whom we worked are familiar with being denied access to materials beyond the standard provisions.* They do not often have opportunities to prototype or experiment. *In contrast, the co-principal investigators and the facilitators were determined to cultivate an environment that was the opposite—to be a “yes” environment.* Supporting participants meant getting them the resources they needed to test their research questions, and proactively working to remove barriers. It also required the team to create a freeing work environment based on flexibility and trust. *In practice, the team created a “yes” environment in two primary ways: (1) financial and capacity-building resources, and (2) flexibility and trust.*



## RESOURCES

The leadership and design team made every effort to say “yes” to research teams’ requests, especially when the requests aligned with our definitions of equity, justice, and transformative research and development. When it came time for research teams to submit their project proposals, again and again the design team encouraged them to consider and ask for what they wanted and needed to deliver on their visions. **Educators are so used to working within limited budget constraints, and so this was difficult for some.** We encouraged them to think not only of materials, but to consider professional contracted services and other items that would help them produce robust and meaningful research outputs. Resources requested by research pairs included expenses such as materials and supplies (e.g., voice recorder, handouts, classroom manipulatives), books, multimedia tools and services (e.g., studio time, videography), stipends for focus group and interview participants, and transcription tools and services.

In addition to resources with a monetary cost, the team recognized the value of making connections and sharing knowledge with participants. As one example, School of Education team members worked with university colleagues to provide library access for participants needing access to academic journals and reference materials. The team also provided a list of relevant books and materials regarding educational equity and justice, as curated by the PittEd Justice Collective and Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. Additionally, the team gathered a list of recommendations for local multimedia contractors (naming as many Black and Latinx-led companies as possible) and transcription services. Finally, members of the team used their social capital to open doors and make connections to various individuals, to the extent helpful for educators and their research interests.

Regarding resources, if a team asked, with few exceptions approval was given. This practice is necessary if we truly are to keep equity in sight as the goal. **Not everyone needs the same thing, but we do need to be generous and proactive in providing support and removing barriers.** Educators—and especially Black and Latinx educators—may need continuous encouragement to identify and ask for resources, being that they are used to operating in a “no” environment.

## FLEXIBILITY AND TRUST

Perhaps even more important than a “yes” budget” were the “yes” frameworks in action. **Flexibility and support took priority over rigid expectations.** With intention, we said “yes” to educator decision-making, “yes” to flexible deadlines, and “yes” to defining research and outputs in non-traditional manners.

**The team again and again put into practice the belief that while our work together matters, the cohort members and their humanity matters more.** Justice requires liberation, and thus we brought freeing practices into the work. We worked diligently to create an expansive learning and

work environment, as compared to a restrictive and limiting one. ***“There were expectations, but not hard and fast,”*** said **Anneliese Martinez**, a design team member. “This, of course, was challenging for some people looking for a checklist to follow, or unaccustomed to having this kind of power and agency. In doing this, we created an empowering environment where educators really were in the drivers seats throughout.”

One of the essential places where flexibility showed up was in what participants could produce. The only firm requirements of research outputs were that they had to **(1) stem from the educator’s ideas and a problem of practice**, and **(2) result from a methodology in the educator’s learning space sometime between January and June 2021**. The actual output, however, was up to the educator and researcher pair to shape. A paper for submission to an academic journal was one stated option, but not the only one. ***Participants were encouraged to consider what would be most accessible and meaningful in terms of actual impact on their students and others like them, and thus outputs such as technologies, curricula, best practice lists, processes, artistic expressions of process and data, and reflections were all offered as options.*** Research pairs had full autonomy to decide.

As the deadline neared for research outputs, the team made it clear to the participating educators and researchers that it was more important that research be relevant and meaningful than perfect. The team offered to work through issues together with pairs, scheduling conversations as requested to help trouble-shoot. The goal was that pairs would produce something they would feel proud of and that makes a contribution. Multiple pairs expressed appreciation for the flexibility and permission to consider what felt right to them in terms of purpose, as opposed to having rigid requirements placed upon them.

# THROUGH THEIR EYES: EDUCATOR JUDY WILLIAMS- WRIGHT AND RESEARCHER DR. ELEANOR ANDERSON



**Judy Williams-Wright**  
Educator, Propel Schools



**Eleanor Anderson**  
Researcher, University of  
Pittsburgh, School of Education

Educator [Judy Williams-Wright](#) and her research partner [Dr. Eleanor Anderson](#) have made a powerful team. Together they have worked to explore [Ms. Williams-Wright's](#) research interest on building relationships and repairing harm between school staff, high school scholars, and their families. ***This interest was inspired by what she observed to be a lack of widespread trusting relationships between staff and families, as well as challenges stemming from the stark difference in the racial make-up of the student body and teaching staff.*** The pair wrote in their final paper, "Due to implicit bias and a lack of cultural knowledge and skills, Braddock Hills' white teachers may have difficulty understanding students' motivations (e.g. developmental processes, mental health challenges, etc.) and generally developing trusting authentic relationships with their students and their students' families."

[Ms. Williams-Wright](#) and [Dr. Anderson](#) developed a plan for their research. First, they would engage [Ms. Williams-Wright's](#) crew, a group of students who have looped with her for multiple school years, as co-investigators to develop a set of discussion questions. They would then use the questions to conduct a set of interviews and focus groups with students and families. Finally, they planned to develop a professional development session for the teaching staff in which students would act out or otherwise be involved in communicating the student and family feedback in an approachable and impactful way, as a means of working towards improved understanding and relationships.

Initially the team only requested feedback in the way of support and guidance, and did not have any specific budgetary requests. Through additional conversation, the leadership and design team encouraged them to consider compensation for student and family participants, meals to host families and make them comfortable during focus groups, and perhaps even production support. The research team was encouraged to not be shy, and to ask for what they needed to be successful in conducting the research they wanted to do.

As the deadline approached for submitting research outputs, the two reached out with concerns. They were on to something really solid, and they wanted to keep working together beyond the Shifting Power initiative timeline. However, in the short term they were concerned about what they could produce by the deadline. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) process had been slow and it took [Ms. Williams-Wright](#) a while to complete all the necessary trainings. [Dr. Anderson](#) pointed out that "IRB is built for longer research cycles, and the timeline is slow." ***The research team's plan to engage students as active participants in developing the interview questions added additional consideration in the IRB process that further slowed the process.*** The other factor grounded in reality was that Judy was far along in her pregnancy and the project would not be able to be completed before her maternity leave began.

With these concerns raised, ***the design team assured them that project deadlines and requirements in the short-term were not as important as their bigger vision for the work together.*** The team could have pressed for the research pair to speed up and produce something concrete within the requirements, however doing so might jeopardize the quality of and potential for their work. As such, the team was intentional in advocating for "yes" and creating flexibility around the research project submissions, knowing that these requirements shouldn't inhibit the bigger impact they're working towards.

In a paper the two submitted as part of the Shifting Power initiative, [Dr. Anderson](#) shared this about their partnership and planned next steps. "Through our collaboration we were able to commit to one another to pursue this project in the right way, at the right pace, for the right reasons—because of what it could offer for the families of Braddock Hills HS—rather than rushing to meet arbitrary deadlines. Our relationship is also already bearing fruit in other realms as Judy is planning to serve as a guest speaker in one of my classes. I am looking forward to seeing what we can do together going forward!" Further, [Ms. Williams-Wright](#) concluded, ***"In all honesty I am not ready for this experience to end. This has given me that fire I need to be intentional about bettering the educational ecosystem I am a part of."***







## LEAD WITH AUTHENTICITY AND MODEL SHIFTS

### **Agent #4: Assemble a leadership team who will set the tone and model shifts in power.**

Being in a Black professional space led by Black women was inspirational and even “spiritual” for many participants. They even described their evenings spent together as “life-giving.” That’s a pretty significant statement given that the cohort convened in an entirely virtual space on a monthly basis for ten months. The fact is, a professional space created by Black and Brown people for Black and Brown people within K-12 and higher education institutions is uncommon. **In our experience, the initiative’s leadership operated as an agent for shifting power in at least three ways: (1) Diversity functioned as an asset, (2) Behaviors that we hoped to see among participants were modeled, and (3) Positionality and institutional leadership amplified impact.** Together these elements worked together to set the tone and openly invite cohort members to be, think, and do differently.

## LEADERSHIP TEAM AND AUTHENTICITY

The nine-member project team was composed of primarily Black and Latinx women representing a mix of practitioners and researchers, much like the cohort itself. These women included a higher education administrator, faculty member, and three postdoctoral and graduate students; a teaching artist and equity consultant; and three organizational consultants with varied experience in K-12, postsecondary, and community education settings. The initiative was led by two co-principal investigators (co-PI's), one a higher education administrator and one a practitioner. In an interview, **Dean Kinloch** described the uniqueness of having a co-PI who operates outside of the academic institution. She said, "Having someone who is an educator, a community-based person as a co-PI is a beautiful thing that doesn't usually happen. It's especially beautiful to have that person as a co-PI and not as a consultant."

This diversity in backgrounds and the primarily Black and Latinx make-up of the team functioned as an asset to the program design and implementation. ***Black and Latinx lived experiences and perspectives were not only shared, but were highly valued and instrumental in shaping the initiative.*** Ultimately, what was most impactful about the leadership team was how everyone showed up with authenticity and vulnerability, and these qualities only grew over time as individuals received affirmation from their peers and the cohort community.

***One team member described the experience and chain of impact in this way: "I felt that by everyone showing up authentically and fully as themselves, a sense of collective safety was created. Because every one of us on the facilitation team had been doing our own personal work to engage and build authentic relationships, that team dynamic was reflected in the collective facilitation of the project and community space with the cohort. Speaking for myself, the time with the facilitation team let me know that I am welcome in this space, which allowed me to be more authentically expansive and courageous in what I shared in the cohort space."*** This practice of the leadership team worked to make participants feel a uniquely wonderful level of safety and freedom to fully show up as themselves.

## EMPOWERMENT AND MODELING NECESSARY SHIFTS

Shifting Power's co-principal investigators modeled transfers in power, both as part of the initiative's operations and beyond. Shared leadership was not written as a guiding principle from the start, and yet it was clearly an essential component and mechanism for transferring power. The co-PI's consistently demonstrated trust in one another and in the full team to design, present, coach, and support. Titles were not emphasized, and egos were absent. All team members were encouraged to step forward into various responsibilities, whether that be facilitating a small learning community or representing the team on a conference panel, as examples. Additionally, the co-PI's demonstrated a willingness to be iterative—to try different things, learn along the way, and respond in the moment to changes needed. Counter to the pressure of perfectionism, this level of flexibility and trust in team

members contributed to a sense of safety, which ultimately welcomed everyone to take risks and show up fully.

Educators were also invited and encouraged to add their voices to each cohort session. ***Lightning talks gave a handful of educators an opportunity to present to their peers, while informal opportunities were created many times for educators to add their perspectives and ideas.*** Cohort members were especially impacted by guest speaker **Dr. Vajra Watson's** presentation, in which she called out whiteness and directly centered racial awareness as part of her discussion about portraiture. Educators and researchers alike reflected later about how impactful it was to see this real life example of a white researcher centering equity and justice, and placing herself in the work. It was observed to be an example of practicing what we teach.

Throughout, leadership attempted to model the behaviors that we expected to see in the educator-researcher pairs. ***As the team modeled these behaviors, it was our hope that participants would too with the ultimate outcome being educators modeling those behaviors in their classrooms.***

## POSITIONALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

It was important that one of the two co-PI's was **Dr. Valerie Kinloch**, Renée and Richard Goldman Dean and Professor of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. ***We recognize that most academic departments and colleges do not provide the support and "cover" for justice-oriented efforts that clearly and unapologetically center Black and Brown individuals.*** **Dean Kinloch** called us all into a space of doing better and being better in the relentless pursuit of educational equity, justice, and transformative research.

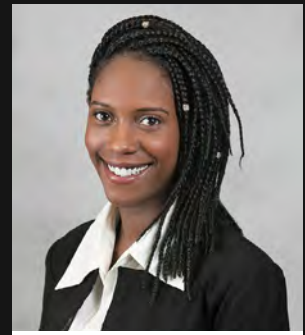
Deeply inspired by poet **June Jordan**, **Dean Kinloch** often recited a poem of Jordan's that concludes, "We are the ones we have been waiting for." ***It can not be overstated how freeing and empowering it is for folks when an institutional leader steps forward with a righteous vision and calls people to come along with her.*** We recognize that many educators and researchers operate in institutions where the opposite is true, where they may fear ostracization or other consequences for challenging the status quo. Having someone at the helm with not only social capital but positional authority and influence was instrumental. As research team member **DaVonna Graham** stated, "Many of the reasons that we were able to structure Shifting Power in the ways that we did were largely due to who **Dean Kinloch** is as a leader and individual. Her commitment to this work is reflected in her actively pushing on equity and justice."

***Participating educators and researchers told us their ability to speak freely and share stories felt transformational for them.*** They expressed gratitude and appreciation to each other as they allowed themselves to be vulnerable by sharing their stories centered in equity and justice.

# THROUGH THEIR EYES: EDUCATOR MUFFY MENDOZA AND RESEARCHER DR. FATIMA BRUNSON



**Muffy Mendoza**  
Educator, Brown Mamas and  
Homeschooling Parent



**Fatima Brunson**  
Researcher, University of  
Pittsburgh, School of Education

Muffy Mendoza is a mom of three children, a homeschooling parent, and founder of [Brown Mamas](#), an organization that connects Black women and elevates the collective Black mothering experience and narrative. She and her husband chose to homeschool out of a desire to facilitate curiosity, intrinsic motivation, and a genuine love of learning in her children. Ms. Mendoza’s research partner, [Dr. Fatima Brunson](#), is currently a postdoctoral scholar in the [University of Pittsburgh School of Education](#). Together their research focuses on better understanding the circumstances and experiences that lead Black families to homeschool.

Near the end of the initiative, [Ms. Mendoza](#) and [Dr. Brunson](#) reflected with design team member [Anneliese Martinez](#) about the experience of participating in Shifting Power. [Ms. Mendoza](#) spoke first of all to the importance of validation. She shared this: “I do feel like Shifting Power is going to change some things—even if it’s not on a mass level, just in terms of the people who are participating being able to validate their own experiences and ideas. You know, that validation means a lot because then you don’t have to be validated by the systems you work in or live in or play in or school in.” She continued, “You now have an internal validation that what you believe matters, and that the work that has either been your heart work or head work is valid! And I think that in and of itself is a reason to do more stuff like this. Because the more you allow people the opportunity to prove to themselves that their ideas and their work is valuable and meaningful, the more concrete they can be in standing in their purpose.”

The pair also spoke about the importance of relationships, collaboration, and synergy. [Dr. Brunson](#) shared, “When power has been shifted to the appropriate places, meaning power is shared.... it’s synergy; it’s heart; it’s experiential.” She described the Shifting Power space as an “inspiration hub,” meaning an electric place of creativity and ideas, as well as affirmation. She said, “Just look at the chat and how we all explode within the chat because there’s so many inspirational ideas flowing.” Both design team meetings and monthly cohort meetings emphasized the value of all ideas and perspectives, regardless of positional authority.

Finally, [Ms. Mendoza](#) and [Dr. Brunson](#) commented on the liberatory impact of defining research being less prescriptively and being open to more creative and artistic expression of ideas and findings. “Shifting Power has made it so I can bust open my ideas of what I think research is supposed to be. ... Research is [typically] writing, and all the things that lead up to your writing. But Shifting Power is whatever the educators want it to be. All of our outcomes are going to be centering the needs of homeschooling parents” said Dr. Brunson. And that’s how it should be.



## SPARK CHANGES

### **Agent #5: Spark changes in mindsets, behavior, and practice, then let the power shifts happen.**

As we look back on this initiative, we ask ourselves: When and how did power shifts occur? The short answer is that power shifted gradually and over time, or as researcher Bea Dias offered, “it happened at the speed of trust!” As relationships developed and as emancipatory frameworks were introduced and revisited, we observed evidence of educators stepping into their own power. Slowly educators began to feel more confident about the research project they had co-constructed with their partner, and researchers began to step back as supportive agents. ***We trace these shifts to three related mechanisms: (1) opportunities to take ownership and practice, (2) the requirements of collaboration, and (3) expanded awareness and comfort with human-centered epistemology and methodologies.***

<sup>1</sup> The phrase “speed of trust” was coined by Stephen M. R. Covey in regards to trust, leadership, and culture.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE OWNERSHIP AND PRACTICE

In the beginning, we asked researchers to make the conscious decision to freely contribute time and expertise to their educator partner's problem of practice. They were also asked to consciously relinquish power, operating less as the expert and stepping back as a supportive consultant with skills to lend to the project. That being said, it wasn't until mid-way through the school year in December and January that we first observed indicators of power shifts happening.

Research pairs had just submitted their research project plans, and small learning communities were organized for pairs to tell others about their plans. During the sessions, many researchers deferred and allowed their educator partner to share a description of their research plans. Some educators stumbled in this situation, and it proved to be largely an act of translation.

Then over time, ***as the trust and relationships grew, the educators became more comfortable with research language and the pairs began to better understand one another.*** As ambiguity with the research methods faded, not only were the pairs more comfortable with one another, but the problems of practice and research questions became more clear as well. Educators also became more able to clearly describe what they needed next as far as implementation. ***The process of creating opportunities for participants to express ideas, to present and share, and to answer clarifying questions helped educators take ownership and develop confidence in themselves as researchers with a point of view and expertise to contribute.***

## REQUIREMENTS OF COLLABORATION

From the researchers' perspective, the terms of this initiative were very different from their typical ways of working. These projects were highly targeted to one specific educator and their learning space, not a more general research question that could be pursued in any number of settings. When the pair hit roadblocks (as all pairs did), they had to collectively decide how to problem solve, make changes, and proceed. It is much more difficult to make a joint decision and a decision tied to a specific educator and learning environment, as compared to having the flexibility to pivot and move on to a different subject (i.e., another school or district). ***This collaboration requirement initiated a mindset shift for the participating researchers who typically operate in a hyper-productivity space and are even encouraged to publish alone as part of what it takes to ascend in their careers.*** The requirements of the initiative in some way tied their hands and forced researchers to adapt alongside and in communication and collaboration with their partner.

One researcher, **Dr. April Warren-Grice** reflected on some of the benefits and impact of collaboration: "The work with Sister I, it really shifted the power here. I was a Dr. that has done research, but I really didn't need to know it all. We switched back and forth on who was expected to take the lead. I knew there were parts I should be able to lead, but I realized that when I did that, we would get stuck. If you

want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. ***Working together made the thought process more robust.***

## OPENING MINDS TO HUMAN-CENTERED EPISTEMOLOGIES AND METHODS

In the spring of 2021, Dr. Vajra Watson was invited as a guest speaker. She engaged the cohort in a workshop on portraiture, a research methodology that encourages the researcher to include themselves and their subjects' names and multi-dimensional stories in the work, as opposed to removing oneself and operating with total anonymity. "Let us consider this evening that research can actually connect us," said Dr. Watson. "The soul of research can be transformational, healing, spiritual."

Dr. Watson's talk built on what the cohort had already been asked to consider from Dr. Lovelace's ERD framework, especially the Identity (relation to self), Positionality (relation to others), Ideology (relation to the work) (I.P.I.). ***"Equity starts with autobiography,"*** shared Dr. Watson. Participants were encouraged to look at research differently: not as a transactional practice, but as a human-centered practice.

This particular session, which also invited participants to think deeply about matters of racial identity and positionality, was extremely impactful for participants. From a methods perspective, we saw a shift in participants' awareness of what research could be, as well as what researcher training programs could look like. There were a lot of lightbulb moments, to put it simply. ***"Now I can see myself there" was the new mindset for a number of educators.*** Even for researchers who had previously known about and even used portraiture or other qualitative methods, there was a growth in confidence and renewed assurance about the merit of these approaches. Researcher participant Bea Dias reflected, "It shifted my mindset about what research could look like and it humanized research in a beautiful way. It made it more accessible and meaningful. If you are in a research position you research to publish, but this shift really moves it to humanizing the process and questioning your purpose grounded in the values of equity and justice."

A beautiful outcome of the initiative was hearing several participants reflect on new understandings about their place in educational research. ***We witnessed feelings of empowerment and validation. As definitions were broadened, more individuals began seeing themselves in research and academia.*** This requires mention again of the absolute need for safety. Safety begets bolstered confidence, which enables meaningful research; and meaningful research creates change.



# THROUGH THEIR EYES: EDUCATOR DELANA FLOWERS AND RESEARCHER DR. RACHEL ROBERTSON



**Delana Flowers**  
Teaching Artist and Educator,  
Pittsburgh Public Schools



**Rachel Robertson**  
Researcher, University of  
Pittsburgh, School of Education

**Delana Flowers** is a self-described teaching artist who does “99 things.” Among them, she is an actress, vocalist, writer, model, and teacher. She is an education advocate at the [Pittsburgh Festival Opera](#), and actively leads several programs for children in schools and in her church community. **Ms. Flowers** was paired with **Dr. Rachel Robertson**, an associate professor on faculty at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. **Dr. Robertson’s** research primarily focuses on students and young adults with disabilities who express behaviors that tend to challenge school staff and caregivers, and on identifying positive, proactive ways of improving those behaviors.

As the two research partners were getting to know one another and exploring their mutual interests, a serendipitous thing happened: **Ms. Flowers** received a job offer to become a long-term substitute in a regional support classroom serving children with special needs. As such, their research collaboration emerged as something that would prove to support **Ms. Flowers** in this new role. **Ms. Flowers** shared, “There aren’t a lot of spaces to talk about what happens in a classroom with children with special needs. It’s a really interesting intersection of education and behavior, curriculum, race and disability. How do all these things intersect, what should we expect, and how should we best navigate that?” The special education environment was new to her, and having **Dr. Robertson** as a partner to process with and explore interventions was a real plus.

**Dr. Robertson** described their work together as “organic,” which is largely the opposite of how research typically unfolds. She said, “As a researcher, a lot of the work I’ve done with teachers and schools does not feel very organic at all. A lot of the time, honestly, it’s me being like, ‘Hey, I have this research project I want to do. Would you be interested?’ Then I come in and do it, and sometimes I think it’s not the best for them and it feels forced in a way. But with Delana, we moved slowly ... and our conversations often came back to what culturally responsive and antiracist pedagogy look like for students with fairly significant disabilities.”

**Ms. Flowers** ultimately tried various ways of introducing culturally responsive and identity-affirming practices into the existing curriculum, including for example a song and dance she created to accompany the book “Hair Love.” This very specific focus that arose organically also pushed on the partners’ individual ideas about what is research. At one point, **Ms. Flowers** realized the project could be qualitative. She said, “It was an absolute relief to me to [learn] that we don’t have to come up with a pie chart or a graph with numbers... How do you quantify an experience like that? I don’t think you can. It took me a minute to realize that this can be qualitative. In light of that, our finished product will turn into more of a sharing of experience or a guide for others who find themselves in a classroom like this.”

Throughout this experience, the two learned from one another and worked as partners. **Dr. Robertson** has been blown away by how well the students have reacted to Delana’s lessons, and she has found it very gratifying to be in a position of supporting a practitioner on the ground. The arrangement benefited Delana in providing her a sounding board and thought partner. When a particular lesson didn’t go well, Delana was able to talk through the experience and bounce ideas off of **Dr. Robertson**. **Ms. Flowers** said, “It was nice to be able to share those experiences with someone.” She also said, “Rachel brought up some things I hadn’t thought about, and hopefully I did the same for her.” It was a real partnership, made stronger by mutual respect and different experiences and expertise.

Summing up their collaboration, **Dr. Robertson** said, “I know we’ve made kind of slow and steady progress, but I think it’s how we do it authentically and how we connect. And I think that probably the outcome has been and is going to be much greater because of the time we’re taking and thinking things through.”



...to the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union...  
...the capture of Berlin...  
...Additional Declaration by the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union...  
...refusal of Japan to surrender...  
...atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki...  
...August 15, 1945...  
...total victory in Asia...  
...war crimes tribunals...  
...German and Japanese leaders...

---

# CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Of course, this successful initiative was not without challenges and difficulties. Some of these relate to the natural ways of things, some relate to intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics, and some relate to institutional barriers.

## RECRUITING RESEARCHERS

Early in the process as we put out the call for applications, we saw relatively less interest from researchers. Most of the concern rested with the lack of funding provided to researchers. While research expenses would be covered, it was made clear that researchers were expected to engage without compensation as supportive collaborators, as well as learners. As part of shifting power, ***the intention was that researchers would benefit in other ways such as growth in racial awareness and ability to put into practice emancipatory tools and methods.*** This did not attract everyone. One staff member of a research organization stated, "... even if researcher time was paid for, (our organization) is very expensive. Although researchers would probably have interest, I did not see a way we could participate, and when I ran it past our directors they concurred."

Beyond the lack of compensation, we heard explicit concern from others researchers about the tone of the initiative. One researcher who chose not to apply communicated this feedback: "The language feels somewhat confrontational and defined by the researcher deficit: 'educational research is typically driven by the needs and objectives of (largely White) researchers who bring their questions, gather data, and leave with the learnings.' This is not a very nuanced framing of what is a genuine issue, and faculty who would want to work on these issues by and large don't think they work in this way, arguably."

## LIFE EVENTS INCLUDING JOB CHANGES

Life happens. Multiple research pairs had to weather various personal and professional changes that took attention away from their research or that required them to adapt their research plan. Some managed to work through these successfully, and others struggled. Examples of these changes include job changes within and across organizations, cross-country moves, and personal health and family developments. **Research requires a level of stability and predictability, and all of these personal and professional changes created challenges to work through.** Job changes proved to be especially challenging in the case of educators, because it also meant that they lost access to a specific learning environment and set of students. Working through a pandemic with remote learning requirements further complicated things.

## RETENTION

Retention proved to be a challenge, assumedly based on organizational demands as well as life events in some cases (as mentioned above). **Retention seemed to be more of an issue for researchers than educators.** One researcher resigned fairly early on in the initiative. We also had cases where a few researchers seemed to disappear, or appeared to be less engaged as the research went on. It is not clear if these resignations were grounded in pressures to produce and publish (especially for untenured faculty), a lack of organization around the pair's research project, or something else. One researcher was encouraged to reconsider participation in the initiative when it became clear this person was not fully relinquishing control of the research project's direction to the educator.

## IRB AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Sometime around November, the design team explained the IRB process to participants and made every effort to assist teams





through the process. Researchers employed at institutions of higher education would need to go through the process at their institutions. Some school districts have their own research office and IRB process to participate in as well. The process caused hiccups and delayed the time when some teams could begin their research in earnest. Some pairs also had to revisit the IRB process after they decided to change the specific methodologies of their research.

Another institutional barrier to consider is that of district and school administration. ***As educators began to share their full plans, some administrators communicated hesitancy.*** In other cases, educators struggled to get the necessary attention or responsiveness from administrators in order to keep pushing their research plan forward along the planned timeline. It is in fact a challenge that district and school administration may not always be receptive to research plans that aim to identify and call out challenges within the learning environment.

## INTERNALIZED NOTIONS ABOUT PRODUCTIVITY

For many participants, and especially for researchers, we observed an internalized sense of needing to produce, write, and publish. We attribute this to tenure expectations and real incentives built into institutions of K-12 and higher education in this country, but also to a culture of white supremacy that places emphasis on career ascension. So many of us have adopted notions that emphasize productivity over humanity. Some participants needed more support than others around self-worth and the value of their personal contributions. ***The impact of encouraging words and regular reminders to keep our concepts of equity, justice, and transformative research in focus went a long way.***



## RELATIONSHIP SYNERGY

It's fair to state that some of the 20 research pairs gelled more than others. Some clearly had chemistry from the start. ***Some connections started slow, but through continued collaboration trust was developed and relationships were strengthened.*** Some partners had more in common with one another in terms of overlapping research interests, while others had to work a bit harder to identify a research approach that centered the educator's inquiry interests while still being within the realm of what the researcher was prepared to support. Some pairs worked very closely together, whereas others had an understanding of distinct roles and worked a bit more independently or asynchronously.

As a design team, efforts were made to keep note of transitions and any energy that suggested there might be an issue, and to intervene by checking in with individuals as appropriate. ***Efforts were also made to facilitate connections across, not just between, pairs by dedicating time to small group discussions and opportunities to exchange ideas in the full group cohort meetings.***

## SUCCESS IN PRODUCING OUTPUTS

Despite the "yes" environment and offers of support, some research pairs were unsuccessful in the end. Of the 20 pairs, three did not complete their research. A few others submitted their research in an incomplete form, meaning they were unable to complete their research project as designed but they did produce at least a reflection on their learning or a summary of the work in progress. There are differences in level of depth and diligence across the final research projects. ***It is also the case that some educators received more direct and collaborative support from their researcher partner than others.***

## VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

As was stated above, this project took place during a global and unexpected pandemic that limited our ability to convene in person. It also limited researchers' ability to enter educators' learning spaces and to engage with students and other stakeholders. ***Overall we navigated this challenge to the best of our abilities, and there were some beautiful things that came out of it. We can only imagine the possibilities of this work under normal circumstances.***



---

# EDUCATOR-RESEARCHER PAIR PROJECTS

While this case study focuses on the macro-process—that being the overall initiative design and implementation—we would be remiss if we did not share abstracts of the nearly twenty pairs of educators and researchers. To learn more about any particular project, such as their research questions, design, and findings, please contact the educator.

## RESEARCH ON CULTURALLY SUSTAINING STEAM

*Maya Angelou Learning Community*



### SCIENCE TEXTBOOK SURVEY: REPRESENTATION OF BLACK AND BROWN SCIENTISTS

**Educator:** Dr. Andre Samuel, Citizen Science Lab

**Researcher:** Dr. Lori Delale O'Connor, University of Pittsburgh, School of Education

**Abstract:**

To counter the white male stereotype of scientists, diversity in science must be illustrated in the tool most commonly used to instruct future scientists: textbooks. This research focuses on an analysis of college textbooks and survey data from teaching faculty across six institutions of higher education. Not one text book analyzed by the team represented a diverse science workforce.

Contact Dr. Andre Samuel at [asamuel@thecitizensciencelab.org](mailto:asamuel@thecitizensciencelab.org) to learn more.



## THE EFFECTS OF USING FINCH ROBOTS TO TEACH MATH ON MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' MATH SELF-EFFICACY AND ACHIEVEMENT

**Educator:** Malimi Joram Kazi, Provident Charter School

**Researcher:** Laura Aldrete, Trying Together

**Abstract:**

Use of educational robotics in mathematics education seems to have potential of improving students' math achievement and self-efficacy. This study used mixed method design to investigate the effects of using Finch robots to teach math on middle school students' math self-efficacy and achievement. Analysis of the quantitative data suggested that use of Finch robots have a significant negative within-subjects effect ( $F(1, 4) = 35.41, p = .009$ ) on students' math self-efficacy and nonsignificant within-subjects effect, ( $F(1, 4) = .314, p = .614$ .) on math achievement. However, analysis of qualitative data revealed a positive effect in both math self-efficacy and achievement.

Contact Malimi Joram Kazi at [joramkazi@gmail.com](mailto:joramkazi@gmail.com) to learn more.

## MATH AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING YOUNG BLACK MATHEMATICIANS

**Educator:** Shaasia Jackson, Pittsburgh Public Schools

**Researcher:** Sarah Selmer, West Virginia University, College of Education and Human Services

**Abstract:**

It was observed in the teacher's learning environment that the students seem to like math more than reading, but often lack related confidence to solve math problems. It is very rare that students identify as Mathematicians. As part of this research project, students completed a math autobiography and engaged in a parent/family interview assignment to learn how adults use math everyday. Students also researched different African American mathematicians that have contributed to the field of Mathematics. Overall, the math autobiography project increased students' engagement and confidence in math.

Contact Shaasia Jackson at [jacksonswof@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonswof@gmail.com) to learn more.



## CHANGE IS HERE TO STAY

**T**HE LATE ASTRONAUT JAMES DEWEY might think going to the moon was the project ever, but they literally "threw us" in the moon. We had to adjust our course every meter we got." On that mission, every change, no matter how essential to success, of the wind—adjust your sails." We cannot but need to be by remaining what we are. People have it's the only thing that brings growth. There is no permanent as change. Everyone wants to change the world, but not changing himself.

*He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction will prosper.*

The road to success is always under acceptance of your present

## TRUTH, IF HURT YOU

...rician for a check-ears with an "o-tired in here?" The Do you think I'll the little girl was her chest. As he ink I'll hear Bar- l. "Jesus is in my

...nmit yourself to excellence. The on to your com-choose to do.

*Use to accept often get it.*

—W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

...past you can to do something right than it does to determine your future.

# RESEARCH ON EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT AND LENSES FOR PRACTICE

*Toni Morrison Learning Community*



## BLACK IDENTITY, ARTS, AND INDEPENDENCE IN A SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

**Educator:** Delana Flowers, Pittsburgh Public Schools and Independent Teaching Artist

**Researcher:** Rachel Robertson, University of Pittsburgh, School of Education

**Abstract:**

This research combines the researcher's expertise in behavior and classroom management strategies for students with and without disabilities and the educator's expertise as a teaching artist. The central research question posed is: How does a curriculum that affirms black identity and acknowledges belonging and/or a curriculum that incorporates creative expression help to foster an effective learning environment in a special education classroom? The educator designed and used a lesson entitled "Hair Love" to engage students in one elementary special education classroom. Reflections from the educator, observations of impact on students, and recommendations for integrating creative expression are reported.

Contact Delana Flowers at [delana.eclecticsoul@gmail.com](mailto:delana.eclecticsoul@gmail.com) to learn more.

## THE BLACK TEACHER PIPELINE IN PROPEL SCHOOLS

**Educator:** Alonna Cuffe, Propel Schools (former), KIPP NJ Schools (current)

**Researcher:** Sarah Hamilton

**Abstract:**

In 2014, Propel Schools created a four year residency program in partnership with Chatham University as a response to the statewide teacher shortage, specifically in schools serving urban, high-poverty areas. In the years since, the number of incoming resident teachers began decreasing, as did the retention of residents, specifically black resident teachers. This research project aims to find the challenges facing Propel Schools' Residency Program so that potential improvements can be identified to address the lack of teacher diversity in the organization. The researchers recommend three opportunities to strengthen the already established Propel Teacher Residency Program.

Contact Alonna Cuffe at [alcuffe@gmail.com](mailto:alcuffe@gmail.com) to learn more.

## NO MORE ZEROS

**Educator:** David Hairston, Pittsburgh Public Schools

**Researcher:** Candice C. Robinson, University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work (former), University of North Carolina, Wilmington, Sociology (current)

**Abstract:**

The focus of David's research shifted away from an initial focus on race-centered conversations, to an interest in grading and its impact on students. The final product, No More Zeros, makes the case for prohibiting the use of zeros in a gradebook that has a minimum value of 50%. A final slideshow presentation shares findings on raw scores, scale scores, and the impact of implicit bias in grading.

Contact David Hairston at [dhairston1@pghschools.org](mailto:dhairston1@pghschools.org) to learn more.

# RESEARCH ON CULTURALLY SUSTAINING CURRICULA

*Toni Cade Bambara Learning Community*



## TEMPLES FOR TOMORROW: UNVEILING OF BLACK PARTICIPATION IN CLASSICAL VOCAL MUSIC

**Educator:** Candace Burgess, Pittsburgh Festival Opera

**Researcher:** Amanda Cross, University of Pittsburgh, Office of Child Development

**Abstract:**

Inspired by Langston Hughes' essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Temples for Tomorrow is an eight-week cross-curricular music history workshop for high schoolers. The program is designed to strengthen students' presentation/public speaking, musical historical evaluation, self-efficacy for musical text comprehension, research and translation skills while introducing students to the history of Black participation in Classical vocal music. In the fall of 2020, Ms. Burgess taught a five-week virtual residency during which time Dr. Cross observed live program lessons. Based on the pilot feedback, the Temples for Tomorrow Curriculum has been refined, elaborated and formalized.

Contact Candace Burgess at [canburgess@gmail.com](mailto:canburgess@gmail.com) to learn more.

## THE LINK BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: STUDENT REFLECTIONS AND ATTITUDES DURING THE CLASS STUDY OF STAMPED

**Educator:** Jason Orr, Propel Schools

**Researcher:** Kimberly Kris Floyd, West Virginia University, College of Education and Human Services

**Abstract:**

The pair's central research question dealt with the effect that reading culturally relevant texts have on how Black and Latinx students feel about school and learning. Seventh and eighth grade students received a copy of the book, *Stamped: The Remix* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi, and a special journal for note taking and activities. Interviews were conducted with students and teachers. As a final product, a video was developed to represent qualitative research.

Contact Jason Orr at [jasonorr@propelschools.org](mailto:jasonorr@propelschools.org) to learn more.

## EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF USING PICTURE BOOKS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND ABILITY

**Educator:** Deshanna Wisniewski, Hampton Township School District

**Researcher:** Caitlin Spear, University of Pittsburgh, Office of Child Development

**Abstract:**

The purpose of this research project was to use picture books to provide young children with positive identity supports, and to examine the ways in which young children respond to picture books and conversations about race and disability. Specifically, our goal was to learn more about the process of using picture books to have conversations about race and ability. A tool (Briggs & Spear, 2020) was adapted to examine the ways in which racial and disability representation and identity supports were portrayed within these books. A sample of books were coded for Representation and Social Justice Orientation, as well as impact ratings provided by the educator.

Contact Deshanna Wisniewski at [deshanna.carter@gmail.com](mailto:deshanna.carter@gmail.com) to learn more.

## TEACHING RACE, RHETORIC & RELEVANCE: JOURNALING TOWARDS A CULTURALLY SUSTAINING AP ENGLISH TEACHING FRAMEWORK

**Educator:** Stacy Tweedy, Nazareth Prep

**Researcher:** Cristina Ashwin, Chatham University

**Abstract:**

The educator documented and incorporated methods of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) into the AP English Language and Composition course. The goals of this work were to use HBCU methods to foster an emancipatory learning framework for the educator's predominantly African American AP students, to foster achievement on the AP Language exam, and to prototype culturally relevant learning materials for the AP Language and Composition courses.

In practice, the educator introduces her students to Ta-Nehisi Coates' letter to his 15-year old son in *Between the World and Me* (2015) and uses its juxtaposition with Abigail Adams' letter to her 13-year old son (1780) as an opportunity to teach the concepts of rhetorical situation and understanding deep context.

Contact Stacy Tweedy at [tweedy.stacy@nazarethprep.org](mailto:tweedy.stacy@nazarethprep.org) to learn more.



# RESEARCH ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

June Jordan Learning Community



## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY OF THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

**Educator:** Ginger Thompkins, Pittsburgh Public Schools

**Researcher:** M. Beatrice (Bea) Dias, Carnegie Mellon University (former), University of Pittsburgh, School of Education (current)

**Abstract:**

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the traditional, brick-and-mortar classroom model of education and brought into question previously held understandings about student engagement. A major focus of this study was to shift the perception of engagement that is largely based on student behavior to a better understanding of how to engage students cognitively through intrinsic motivations. The key research questions were: What does student engagement look like in a virtual learning environment? How do you transition to a form of student engagement based on cognitive participation, and not purely on behavioral measures of engagement? Different approaches to increasing students' cognitive engagement within a virtual and hybrid school environment were explored in two 4th grade science classes. This research found that Ms. Thompkins' adapted teaching approach did noticeably increase student engagement which was particularly evident in how students participated in classroom discussions, and demonstrated interest through interactions with class content and media.

Contact Ginger Thompkins at [gthompkins1@pghschools.org](mailto:gthompkins1@pghschools.org) to learn more.

”

*Some of the leadership in my school, though they are Black, their mind appears to come from a place of white supremacy. And Shifting Power has really empowered me to... it's shielded me from that. I feel like a superhero where I had a forcefield around myself. I just went in with my students and in spite of them and whatever, I feel like I had a great year. It's really because of Shifting Power and all the tools, and really the energy, most of all, that I've gained from you all.*

— *Educator, Anonymous*



## R.A.W. STUDY: RACE BASED TRAUMA, AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH & WELLNESS

**Educator:** Lisa Pickett, Pittsburgh Public Schools

**Researcher:** Channing Moreland, University of Pittsburgh, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SHRS)

**Abstract:**

The purpose of the R.A.W. research study is multifaceted and includes the goals of advancing understanding of race-based trauma; examining race-based interventions designed specifically for African American youth; illuminating positive race-based intervention experiences of African American youth; identifying common reasons why African American youth believe the interventions helped them to successfully mitigate race-based trauma academically, socially, and emotionally; providing voice to the African American youth perspective; and providing insight on how to best support African American youth in educational spaces. The researchers applied their respective research, educational expertise, and experiences related to race-based trauma, mental health, African American youth, and race-based interventions to develop a marketable professional development series that will provide insight on how to best support those who work with African American youth.

Contact Dr. Lisa Pickett at [zhane920@gmail.com](mailto:zhane920@gmail.com) to learn more.

## SUPPORTING YOUTH WITH LIMITED TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE TO SUCCEED IN AN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

**Educator:** Lisa Marie Benavides, Homewood Children's Village (former) and Equus Workforce Solutions (current)

**Researcher:** Shamyia Karumbaiah, University of Pennsylvania, Penn Center for Learning Analytics

**Abstract:**

As the project manager in an afterschool program, Ms. Benavides identified that many students struggled with digital literacy, limiting their ability to engage fully in the education system. Once learning from home became the requirement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this barrier became even greater and began limiting the level of engagement in the afterschool world. The research team sought to better understand: How did EdTechnology (EdTech) contribute to the decreased youth engagement in an after school program after moving from an in person setting to a virtual setting due to COVID? In what ways, if any, does previous experience with EdTech affect the level of engagement of youth? Unfortunately, several challenges emerged which proved to be too difficult to overcome, and the research was unable to be completed.

Contact Lisa Marie Benavides at [17lisamarie@gmail.com](mailto:17lisamarie@gmail.com) to learn more.



## USING NUDGE LETTERS TO ENGAGE PARENTS AND INCREASE ATTENDANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER 9–12TH GRADERS

**Educator:** Eduardo Alfonso Fajardo, Pittsburgh Public Schools

**Researcher:** Josie Innamorato, Allegheny Intermediate Unit (former), Berkeley, The Goldman School (current)

**Abstract:**

Attendance is critical to academic success—increased attendance is correlated with academic performance and graduation. Parents and caregivers play an important role in both ensuring that their learners attend and reinforcing its importance. The role of parents and caregivers in attendance is perhaps more critical during virtual learning than when in-person. A quasi-experimental approach was developed to send nudge letter(s) to parents and caregivers of between 40 and 50 students. Outcomes were assessed using an interrupted time series design, comparing measures of weekly attendance before and after the intervention. The findings show no evidence that sending letters to parents about attendance decreased the students’ number of absences, and that parents underestimate the number of times their child has been absent. Several recommendations are offered to improve the efficacy of using nudge letters..

Contact Eduardo Alfonso Fajardo at [efajardo1@pghschools.org](mailto:efajardo1@pghschools.org) to learn more.

”

*When you think about activism, usually you think about we’re gonna march and we’re gonna have signs - nothing wrong with that. But just thinking about other ways that we can do that. And you know, we’re fighting against something that’s systemic. And it feels good to be part of a group that recognizes that and is actively doing something about it. And that is activism for me. We’re doing something that will make a difference, and something that will not only educate ourselves but educate other people and influence change. And that’s what activism is about. It’s about change and being a catalyst for change, and pushing that forward, and I feel like that’s exactly what we’re doing. I feel empowered by that.*

— *Educator, Anonymous*

# RESEARCH ON LIBERATORY PRACTICE

Audre Lorde Learning Community



## HOMESCHOOLING: A HEALING AND LIBERATIVE LEARNING MODALITY FOR BLACK FAMILIES?

**Educator:** Cynthia “Muffy” Mendoza, Pittsburgh Brown Mamas and Homeschooling Parent

**Researcher:** Fatima Bruson, Pittsburgh Public Schools, School of Education

**Abstract:**

Since the 1990’s the number of homeschooling families has grown by 74%, and today about 8% of homeschooling families are Black (Hirsh, 2019). Participants of this study include six Black homeschooling families in the Pittsburgh region. Each homeschooling parent was interviewed individually and asked 10 questions related to their homeschooling experience. We conducted semi-structured interviews related to: the reasons these parents choose to homeschool; the impact of that decision on their children, themselves and their family; and the resources used to engage learning standards and culturally responsive tools. The following five themes emerged that improved understanding: the motive, resources, barriers, supports and overall impact of the black homeschooling experience.

Contact Muffy Mendoza at [brownmommys@gmail.com](mailto:brownmommys@gmail.com) to learn more.

## WITNESS THE REFRAME OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: THE CASE FOR AFROCENTRIC EDUCATION

**Educator:** Sister IAsia Thomas, Pittsburgh Public Schools and Children’s Windows to Africa

**Researcher:** April Warren-Grice, Liberated Genius, LLC

**Abstract:**

This community autoethnography focuses on reframing educational equity by making a case for Afrocentric education as a more inclusive approach. Together we explore: (1) How two Black women, one from South Africa – Sister I, and one from the United States – Dr. April, conclude that Afrocentric Education (ACE) is the equity work needed for African migrant students and Black students in general; (2) How African migrant girls were influenced by their participation in The Promise of Sisterhood, an equity-based Africana arts-integrated program in Pittsburgh Public Schools; and (3) How using equity-based cultural enrichment opportunities, specifically an Africana arts-based approach, tells the story of migrant African girls and supports their cultural preservation. Together, we demonstrate the efficacy required for educators to expand the notion of equity work and support students in accessing the liberatory power of Sankofa and remembering.

Contact Sister IAsia Thomas at [eybers.crae@gmail.com](mailto:eybers.crae@gmail.com) to learn more.

## BUILDING A RESTORATIVE SCHOOL-FAMILY COMMUNITY

**Educator:** Judith Williams-Wright, Propel Schools

**Researcher:** Eleanor Anderson, University of Pittsburgh, School of Education

**Abstract:**

While restorative justice is often used as an alternative to punitive systems for responding to harm after it has occurred, the foundation of any restorative process is a community with strong relationships. The purpose of the study is to identify key barriers or harms that disrupt the connectedness between the school, students, and families, and learn from students and families how they can be removed or repaired. In order to do so, we developed a plan to conduct focus groups with students and families around questions developed with the help of a group of student leaders. To date, we have engaged in conversations with these student leaders, while the remainder of the research project is still in process.

Contact Judith Williams-Wright at [judithwilliams@propelschools.org](mailto:judithwilliams@propelschools.org) to learn more.



---

# CONCLUSION

Power is often so nebulous. Sometimes, power is obvious, clear, and easy to identify and name. Other times, power is elusive and hidden from both the trained and untrained eye. It shows up in many forms, including but not limited to financial power (access to resources and capital), positional and decision-making power (ability to determine laws, policies, practices, and outcomes that impact others), cultural power (influence over accepted norms, habits, and means of communication), interpersonal power (influence within and over relationships), and intrapersonal power (personal sense of agency and self-efficacy). This list is not intended to be exhaustive. However, it is meant to demonstrate the magnitude of ways in which power takes shape and impacts people. In all its forms, the distribution of power matters.

***The holding, or possession, of power in educational research and development is essential to consider, examine, and openly critique.***

It goes without saying that power impacts the lines of inquiry that are pursued, the framing of the questions that are asked, the ideas that are tested and validated, the perspectives and voices that are heard, the lenses (e.g., deficit or strengths based) that are used to analyze and make meaning of data, and the ways in which findings get interpreted and disseminated. Because power is never neutral, it is important that educational leaders and researchers shift existing power dynamics that undervalue the knowledge and expertise of Black and Latinx educators. Thus, we boldly call on our researcher, practitioner, and leadership peers to join us in the work of shifting power in educational research and development.

The Shifting Power initiative stands as an early model from which to build. ***While it must be noted that the implementation of this initiative had some challenges, the exciting conclusion is that power shifts were in fact observed, documented, and taken up.*** These shifts primarily surfaced in the form of power transfer from researcher to educator and in a sense of growing power and assurance within

individual participants. Additionally, **several research teams reported noticing power shifts in their learning spaces and within students as well.** By creating space for Black and Latinx educator voices in the R&D process and by grounding the work in emancipatory concepts, we have created a new infrastructure. It is this infrastructure that has the great potential to improve the relevance and impact of research across many more learning environments than just the 20 involved in this pilot. It also has the potential to revolutionize how Black and Latinx educators are centered in, and central to, R&D processes.

The personal impact of the initiative, as described by the participants, cannot be understated. When asked to describe what Shifting Power feels like, one educator said, “I am at peace, and I never want to let it go.” Another said that Shifting Power feels like church, “not in the sense of the supernatural, but in the sense of electing to be in a group with shared values.” Yet another educator said, “Shifting Power feels like expansion. It’s filling up spaces I didn’t know I’d be able to fill up, ever.” **Researchers were impacted as well, with one saying it feels “like an answer being provided for a question we didn’t know about.”** The fact is that the full impact of the observed shifts in mindsets, behaviors, and practices cannot be measured or fully known, being that these changes are likely to stay with and continue to impact the participating educators and researchers—as well as the leadership and design team members—for years to come. Our work together, as a cohort and community, is just the beginning.

Looking ahead to the future, the work of Shifting Power must continue. **At an individual level, roughly one-quarter of the pairs have communicated their intentions to continue collaborating on the research that they have begun together.** We can hardly wait to see what they accomplish! We imagine that other pairs will stay in touch, and that all participants will take what they’ve learned through this experience and apply it in their teaching and research practice. At an institutional level, the University of Pittsburgh School of Education and Remake Learning continue to explore and host opportunities to both deepen and sustain aspects of this work within their overall structures and through multiple partnerships. Relatedly, the leadership and design team will continue to make every effort to share this work and our learnings with others in the region and across the country. One primary goal is to encourage school districts, out-of-school-time learning organizations, institutions of higher education, and other research and praxis-based institutions to take up and implement the charge.

We close by returning to the definition of transformative research developed by [Dean Valerie Kinloch](#) in collaboration with team and cohort members. It states:



**We understand transformative research as multiple, interconnected, and critical ways of being, knowing, experiencing, exploring, and questioning the world. In fact, these ways are guided by an unwavering commitment to dismantling all forms of inequities, inequalities, and injustices within schools and communities and within local, national, and global contexts. Transformative research centers freedom dreaming and freedom learning, joy, hope, and hopefulness, and humanizing engagements and inquiries in our interactions, one with another. Using various critical methodologies, transformative research represents proactive questioning, thinking, doing, and engaging that disrupt the status quo, that value collaboration, and that commit to creating a more equitable and just world. The impact of transformative research is that it, in fact, purposefully “shifts power” through its critical, unconventional, and non-hierarchical approaches to being with others in the world in very responsive and responsible ways.**

Let us all—as individuals with agency, and as institutions with formal power—engage in the hard and necessary work to make this transformative research the new reality. Our young people, especially Students of Color who need and deserve our dedication, stand to benefit.

“

*It's helped me actually reconnect with my identity as a researcher - recentering, rethinking, reframing what academia could be for me. Starting with the application process and articulating my relationship with scholarship was really critical to me, then really shifting in my mindset where I belong and where I don't belong. Because for a long time, I believed I didn't belong in academia. And this has paved the way for me to transition to my new position... This has been a dream journey with a lot of bumps on the way but a lot of community support to bring me here. I feel all the love from this group and just the elevation to help me see myself in a different way, so I really appreciate this group.*

— **RESEARCHER**, ANONYMOUS



---

# APPENDIX

## Our Shared Understandings of Equity, Justice, and Transformative Research, written by Dean Kinloch in Collaboration with Team Members

According to the Aspen Institute, “educational equity means that every student has access to the right resources they need at the right moment in their education, despite race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, nationality/immigration status, disability, family background, or family income.” Additionally, the Aspen Institute claims, “Equity does not mean creating equal conditions for all students, but rather targeting resources based on individual students’ needs and circumstances, which includes differentiated funding and supports...[that] remove barriers<sup>2</sup>.”

The Shifting Power team agrees with this definition. ***We believe equity is an intentional effort to acknowledge, address, and dismantle historical and present-day injustices that negatively impact how and what people learn within schools and how people survive and thrive within society at large.*** Working from the understanding that our educational system is unequal and unfairly advantages some and disadvantages others, our focus on equity represents a commitment to providing access to financial, instructional, and material resources and high-quality opportunities to children, youth, and adults of marginalized identities and histories (especially Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other minoritized Peoples of Color as well as non-binary and transgender people).

With this understanding of equity, we define justice as a tangible action, or required outcome, of equity. ***Justice includes not only acts of fairness, but practices that produce participatory, anti-oppressive, antiracist, and healing experiences.*** From ensuring that sociopolitical, economic, educational, racial, and health disparities are eradicated to structuring opportunities that are grounded in worth, dignity, and humanization, justice gets us closer to freedom. That is, living in a free state in which acts of harm, damage, and the conditions of inequity and inequality that have been enacted onto others (especially

<sup>2</sup> See Aspen Institute’s Statement on Equity.



Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other Peoples of Color as well as non-binary and transgender people) have been both repaired and alleviated.

Finally, we understand transformative research as multiple, interconnected, and critical ways of being, knowing, experiencing, exploring, and questioning the world. In fact, these ways are guided by an unwavering commitment to dismantling all forms of inequities, inequalities, and injustices within schools and communities and within local, national, and global contexts. Transformative research centers freedom dreaming and freedom learning, joy, hope, and hopefulness, and humanizing engagements and inquiries in our interactions, one with another. Using various critical methodologies, transformative research represents proactive questioning, thinking, doing, and engaging that disrupt the status quo, that value collaboration, and that commit to creating a more equitable and just world. The impact of transformative research is that it, in fact, purposefully “shifts power” through its critical, unconventional, and non-hierarchical approaches to being with others in the world in very responsive and responsible ways<sup>3</sup>.

## Themes and Takeaways from Community Cohort Meetings

Session	Agenda	Selected Comments and Reflections
<p><b>Welcome Reception</b> Session #1 September 24, 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: <a href="#">Kid President’s Pep Talk</a></li> <li>• Introduction of community practices</li> <li>• Introduction of research partners</li> <li>• Research partners talk time</li> <li>• Closing: <a href="#">Ancestor and descendent visualization</a> led by Mazin Jamal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers and educators were introduced to their partners</li> <li>• Sample of close-out comments: aware, hopeful, centered, grounded, Ashe, curious, empowered, ready</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> See Dean Kinloch’s 2021 NCTE Call for Proposals for more insights into equity, justice, and transformation: <https://live-ncte-convention-v2.pantheonsite.io/2021-convention/2021-call-for-proposals/>

Session	Agenda	Selected Comments and Reflections
<p><b>Collaboration</b> Session #2 October 10, 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: I AM, inspired by Lovecraft Country character Hippolyta Freeman who names and reclaims parts of herself lost to racism and sexism (episode 7) and reading of <a href="#">“We Are Worthy”</a> by Elandria Williams</li> <li>• Concepts of equity, justice, and transformative research</li> <li>• Lightning Talk by Sister IAsia Thomas: “Knowing, Experiencing, Exploring, and Questioning the World through a Lens of Equity”</li> <li>• Emancipatory R&amp;D Framework, developed by Temple Lovelace</li> <li>• Personal reflection prompt: Imagine a learning ecosystem that is completely grounded in and framed by equity, justice, emancipatory R&amp;D, freedom, and liberation. How does that society operate? What are your personal experiences living in this world?</li> <li>• Research partners talk time</li> <li>• Expectations and timeline</li> <li>• Closing: Affirmations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educator Sister IAsia Thomas shared her experience of serving on a culturally responsive pedagogy committee and being asked to revise her professional development ideas multiple times because others did not understand her perspective. “They didn’t get me or understand why epistemic diversity matters.”</li> <li>• Educator Judith Williams-Wright: “When I hear ‘learning ecosystem,’ it makes me think of the necessity of each member and aspect of that system in order to flourish and survive. In natural ecosystems when the water is compromised or one of the living organisms is missing it totally compromises the whole of the system.”</li> <li>• Sample of close-out comments: excited, inspired, on fire, possibility, love, learning, honored, empowered, blessed</li> </ul>
<p><b>Joy in Challenging Social Times and Work</b> Session #3 November 17, 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: Joy and revolution with <a href="#">Pleasure Activism</a> meditation by Adrienne Maree Brown</li> <li>• Emancipatory R&amp;D Framework, developed by Temple Lovelace</li> <li>• Research proposal process</li> <li>• Small group discussions: How can we create joy-centered learning environments with young people? How can we make sure that we are sharing comprehensive narratives and stories... sharing our trauma and pain, but also our resistance, triumph, and joy?</li> <li>• Personal time to reflect on connection to self (identity, positionality, and ideology) and to our personal ways of knowing and our approach to research</li> <li>• Research partners talk time</li> <li>• Closing: <a href="#">Catch the Fire</a> poem by Sonia Sanchez</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher Christina Ashwin: “Emancipatory R&amp;D puts the researcher in a position of servant; in service to the expertise of the practitioner, and practitioner as knower.”</li> <li>• Partners reflected in response to questions about centering equity, justice, and transformation to help them determine readiness for engaging in equitable praxis.</li> <li>• Sample of close-out comments: determined, honored, emancipatory, joy, focus, possibilities, human, humbled.</li> </ul>

Session	Agenda	Selected Comments and Reflections
<p><b>Love for Ourselves</b> Session #4 December 9, 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: “<a href="#">I Am Love</a>” by Iyanla Vanzant</li> <li>• Revisiting goals, timeline, and frameworks</li> <li>• Five learning communities introduced, named after Black female poets, authors, and activists</li> <li>• IRB considerations</li> <li>• Research project proposals</li> <li>• Logistics</li> <li>• Closing: “<a href="#">Glory</a>” by Philadelphia youth team, Brave New Voices Grand Slam Finals, 2015</li> <li>• Partner time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher Bea Dias: “I love the idea of moving from a research methodology that is extractive and focused on production – to an approach that honors the collective wisdom in community spaces.”</li> <li>• Sample of close-out comments: joyful, fearless, energized, connected, love, warm, #wefonbealright, powerful.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Affirmations</b> Session #5 January 13, 2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: Shaping change, by way of “<a href="#">Homage to My Hips</a>” by Lucille Clifton and “<a href="#">I Dream a World</a>” by Langston Hughes</li> <li>• Getting your research going: plans, budgets, resources</li> <li>• Learning communities</li> <li>• Next steps</li> <li>• Closing: Choosing our desires</li> <li>• Partner time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants responded to this powerful prompt: ““I am shaping a world where/that/by...” Selected responses included: “I am shaping a world that remembers how to enact love.” “I am shaping a world that allows everyone to live and speak their truths without fear.” “I am shaping a world that listens and learns from each other.” “I am shaping a world where the celebration of Black genius, in all its forms, is a given and is the norm.” “I am shaping a world that is full of love and respect.” “I am shaping a world where children learn to be advocates and allies.”</li> </ul>

Session	Agenda	Selected Comments and Reflections
<p><b>Re-centering and Reflecting</b> Session #6 February 10, 2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: Snake Breath</li> <li>• Revisiting the Emancipatory R&amp;D Framework, with guiding questions: What are the new sources of evidence and rigor that can be created through your project? What are the “wicked problems” that you can address through your project? What are current solutions that can be illuminated, expanded and elevated through your project? Who is being liberated by the work you are proposing to do?</li> <li>• Brief impact survey</li> <li>• Learning communities</li> <li>• Logistics/updates</li> <li>• Closing: “<a href="#">Ebonics 101</a>” by Steven Willis</li> <li>• Partner time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anonymous participant: “This work has helped to center my priorities for solidifying activism in my community.”</li> <li>• Anonymous participant: “Shifting Power has made me more defiant, and determined to change how our kids are presented with information especially in math. I have been presented obstacles and limitations in my quest from the European-American hierarchy in my building. I did not face this in my last school district as many of the administrators were African American.”</li> <li>• Anonymous participant: “My participation in Shifting Power has increased my confidence in myself. Now I feel more confident to conduct research about my students.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Creativity, Identity, and Culture</b> Session #7 March 9, 2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: Basic Earth Touching Practice, followed by <a href="#">Letting Young People Lead with Their Identity</a>, Edutopia</li> <li>• Lightning Talks by Amil Cook and Delana Flowers: Engaging Youth with Arts and Culture</li> <li>• Learning communities</li> <li>• Logistics/updates</li> <li>• Closing: <a href="#">Celebrating Cultural Identity Through the Arts</a>, Edutopia.</li> <li>• Partner time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educator Delana Flowers shared how she uses art as a vehicle for learning and creative problem solving. As one example, she wrote a song and choreographed <a href="#">movement</a> to accompany the book “Hair Love.”</li> <li>• Educator Amil Cook shared his personal story related to race, music, and education, and gave examples of how he brings cultural authenticity to his graphic design and computer science classroom.</li> <li>• The group reflects on cultural identity: “It’s not by accident that Shifting Power is arts integrative.”</li> </ul>



Session	Agenda	Selected Comments and Reflections
<p><b>In Our Own Voices: Research and Documentation through Portraiture</b></p> <p>Session #8</p> <p>April 12, 2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: “Cite Black Women” and “He Always Comes,” poems written and performed by Medina Jackson</li> <li>• Portraiture as a Research Strategy, talk by Dr. Vajra Watson</li> <li>• Logistics/updates</li> <li>• Closing: “<a href="#">Afro-Latina</a>” by Elizabeth Acevedo</li> <li>• Partner time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medina Jackson’s poetry touched everyone deeply. Absolute fire!</li> <li>• Dr. Watson’s talk introduced the cohort to portraiture. She framed research as having the potential to be transformative and healing, even spiritual, and also described the means and methodology (e.g., poetic probes, guiding questions, beautiful storytelling). Dr. Watson directly addressed race and the work of white researchers.</li> <li>• Sample of close-out comments: full, emotional, alive, fuego, heart, seen.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Centering Student Interest and Co-Creation</b></p> <p>Session #9</p> <p>May 13, 2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: 10-minute <a href="#">guided meditation</a> with Jessamyn Stanley</li> <li>• Discussion: Debriefing Dr. Watson’s talk</li> <li>• Lightning Talk by Muffy Mendoza and son: Black Homeschooling</li> <li>• Revisiting research project goals: To what extent will the output “further emancipation or be complicit in continued oppression” (Lovelace)? What medium(s) are best to communicate your research findings? How will the design of your research output create change? How will the prototype help marginalized students?</li> <li>• Projects check-in and open floor to share</li> <li>• Co-design: celebrating, showcasing, staying connected</li> <li>• Closing: <a href="#">The Shift from Engaging Students to Empowering Learners</a>, by John Spencer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space was taken to debrief Dr. Watson’s talk and unpack comments about not trusting white people, capturing stories (not data), personal bias, and what it takes to truly pursue equity in research.</li> <li>• Educator Muffy Mendoza shared her personal journey and experience with homeschooling. She discussed the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation for learning (as compared to coercive learning), and spoke about the balance of removing her children from white supremacy but not from relationships and community.</li> <li>• Poll: 13% feeling great about research project, 70% feeling mostly good, 17% have concerns</li> </ul>
<p><b>What We’ve Learned and Where We’re Going</b></p> <p>Session #10</p> <p>June 8, 2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding: Holding and releasing</li> <li>• Broaden our connections</li> <li>• Discussion: reflections on shifting power</li> <li>• Choice enrichment options: (1) Informal Q&amp;A with Dr. Watson, (2) Curious Explorations with Sheba Gittens, (3) <a href="#">Make a Joyful Noize</a>, Learn from Carnegie Hall</li> <li>• Closing: “<a href="#">2053</a>” by Jamila Lyiscott</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed small group opportunity to deepen personal connections.</li> <li>• Participants shared when and how they experienced power shifts through this process. Responses mentioned seeing shifts in student agency and confidence, new views of oneself as a researcher, and a renewed sense of purpose.</li> </ul>



