

The
EDGE
Project

Animating Youth Passions, People & Power

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Introduction

*Critical pedagogy refers to the means and methods that test and hope to change the structures of schools that allow inequalities and social injustices. Critical pedagogy is a cultural-political tool that takes seriously the notion of human differences, particularly as these differences relate to race, class, and gender. In its most radical sense, **critical pedagogy unoppresses the oppressed and unites people in a shared language of critique, struggle, and hope to end various forms of human suffering. ...***

Critical pedagogy incorporates a moral vision of human justice and decency as its common vision.

--Kanpol, B. *Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction*, 1999, emphasis added

The EDGE Project was originally ignited by the high school youth of an after-school program known as The Westside, located in West Chester Pennsylvania, in collaboration with a young adult staffer from the Rustin Urban Community Change Axis (RUCCAS) at West Chester University. The need for The EDGE Project springs from

- Often-overlooked urban and rural and suburban neighborhoods that are central to a region's culture but undervalued
- Community organizations and school-based extracurriculars looking to make changes for the better through bringing the voices of young people in on this change, going beyond clean-ups, homework help and mentoring to critical perspectives and action. There are many youth community organizing projects nationally (see the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing for some of our inspiration), but the EDGE is meant to be used in other types of out-of-school arenas as a short-term introduction to these ideas.
- Inspiration from many sources already in development locally, as well as educational theories being practiced in many youth development forces nationally. Need in Deed is a Philadelphia based non-profit known for "connecting the classroom to the community." It has been implemented in Philadelphia schools, with elementary and middle school students, for decades. The EDGE Project draws on themes and instructional strategies that the *Need in Deed: my VOICE* curriculum has put into practice but redesigned for older youth (middle to high school rather than elementary to middle) in out-of-school time rather than in-school settings. This project also draws on components of the *Youth Power Curriculum* developed by the Tobacco Prevention Project, Community Wellness and Prevention Program, and the TeenAge Program, Family, Maternal and Child Health Program in formatting and curriculum outlining. The strongest base, however, for this curriculum--and the theoretical basis of many youth empowerment curricula such as those mentioned above--has been the work of the educational philosopher Paulo Freire and its many adaptations to on the ground critical pedagogy.
- Theories and practices developed in the Youth Empowerment and Urban Studies (YES) program at West Chester University, housed in RUCCAS. Some specific activities are outlined in *Popular Education Practice for Youth and Community Development Work* written by Dave Beck and Rod Purcell. Throughout this curriculum, you will notice emphasis on certain terminology and models that are derived from a Freirian base of critical pedagogy.

This curriculum was written and piloted and revised by Emerson Diluzio when she was a senior YES and Education student at West Chester University, in collaboration with Hannah Ashley, YES Program Director and convenor of the Rustin Urban Community Change Axis (RUCCAS) at WCU, with the support of Ryan Enns and Jeremy Vanderslice, staff at the Westside Community Center. It was piloted by Emmie at Westside as well as six other YES students at four different sites, and then revised—see our words from the wise pull quotes from them. EDGE may be used at no charge with appropriate credit: *The EDGE Project Curriculum*, RUCCAS @WCU 2018. For inquiries about the curriculum, please contact us at www.RUCCAS.net.

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About This Program

Mission: The EDGE Project exists to ignite a passion for equity, a deeper understanding of diversity, and a desire for community change through positive youth development.

Method: We conduct weekly meetings with teenagers, facilitating discussion and active learning, and support youth toward collective action, as a means to understanding identity, empathy, and advocacy. It follows a three-part structure:

PASSION

PEOPLE

POWER

Vision: Our vision is to amplify the voices of our youth while they lead the way in a community-centered understanding of social change.

Core Values: The EDGE Project works based on a set of four core values; equity, diversity, growth, and empowerment. However, based on our emphasis on relationship building, these values are being built from the ground up, beginning with empowerment.

EMPOWERMENT- Staff encourage youth to understand their own identity, and the impact that their lives have on the world around them through their passions, and provide a space where their voice is valued.

GROWTH- We walk along side youth as they begin to comprehend their emotional capabilities, refine their values, and grow in the ways of compassion. They begin to move from valuing their own voice, to understanding how to use it to make an impact for their community.

DIVERSITY- While looking inward toward growth, youth will also be looking outward toward assessing and understanding the systems that affect their communities and to consider obstacles, injustices, and inequities.

EQUITY- Alongside engaging in self-reflection and critical understanding, students will begin to consider how they can take action. By applying everything they have learned toward their own community, youth will take steps to assist in moving their communities closer to *equity*. We will take steps toward an equitable community by choosing a particular problem to work on, of key interest to youth themselves, identify a specific aspect or issue that we can address together through a combination of advocacy and direct service. This concrete collaborative work circles back around to the E-D-G components of the project in a cyclical manner.

Youth almost NEVER have their voices heard, even in good schools or other arenas. One of the hardest parts of EDGE is to convince youth that their ideas mattered, that we would listen. But they love it, once it starts to happen.

How to Use This Guide

DO ADAPT. The EDGE Project Guide is designed to outline the basics of a 12-20 week community engagement plan. Facilitators are invited to provide their own take on any meeting to increase their own comfort or content knowledge. Over time, group dynamics will begin to show areas of fruitful deviation from the curriculum, and facilitators should be open to it, while keeping the core principles of critical pedagogy and youth empowerment in mind. Trust the young people to lead you to the wound where their community is hurting the most. They can feel it. It's not an accident that we called this project "edge." So...

DO MAKE SPACE FOR FEELINGS. Community organizing and youth work are often intertwined with feelings of hopelessness, anger, and confusion. Facilitators may or may not be familiar with these experiences, but it is important to be prepared for them. What works for one group in igniting motivation, may bring anxiety and tension to another. Taking time to stop, reflect, and process is crucial to The EDGE Project. Facilitators are encouraged to trust their instincts when reading the room, and be present in order to listen to how the group is feeling. Breaks may look like paired listening, a game, "family-time" style sharing, or laughing together. A warning though: don't assume that tension, anger, conflict or even yelling or crying means that a break is needed or you are doing anything wrong or the group is off-course. Often conflict and "big feelings" are the clue to direct the group in exactly that direction. Our feelings often highlight our innate knowledge that our society treats us inhumanely, so make space for them through the listening and other activities to try to get through to the other side.

DO SET UP YOUR SPACE AND TIME THOUGHTFULLY. For example, discussions should take place where everyone is able to look at each other, and everyone is on the same level. If there are chairs, there should be enough for everyone, or the group should be on the floor together. We have had success building in informal community dinners afterward, too.

DO MAKE YOUR OWN RULES. Before getting into too much content of the meetings, it is important to develop ground rules for the space together. Everyone needs to be bought into the process, so the rules need to be agreed upon by every group member and even more specifically, the young people. Rules for this project may look very different from other community center or after-school rules, because they are not immediately associated with being "well-behaved," but primarily correlate with healthy relationship building. For example, while one after-school program might state that there is no cursing, your EDGE Project might state that we are allowed to express our emotions verbally however we choose, but we speak about each other and ourselves in a positive manner. This gives young people room for expression and autonomy over their language.

DO BELIEVE IN YOUTH. Throughout this program, volunteers or facilitators will be noted as the Freirian term; *animators*. The term *animators* focuses on managing and assisting groups in the achievement of their own goals. The youth in this program already have everything in them to effect change, our job is to challenge systems they may buy into, name ideas they are processing through, and motivate them toward self-efficacy. That said, there is a strong possibility for group members to feel the sting of youth oppression, even when working within The EDGE plan. It is important to recognize our role as allies and animators. We can use our privilege as adults, and whatever other race or class or gender privileges we individually have, to lend to and stand behind our group members. Local businesses or politicians might give us more information or be more courteous with us. While we work within this system of oppression, it is also important to inform our youth about this power dynamic, and lift them up as young people. Another way we can assist is by bringing areas of knowledge that we have more access to, such as the usage of libraries or networks. Bringing in outside information shows care for the group members, as well as a respect for what they are working through.

DO GROW. Take time after meetings to go back and reflect. Be open to acknowledging mistakes and making changes.

Key Terms and Definitions

These definitions can be used as reference for animators or as an explanation to group members. Some may come up during your program and some may not. Next to each word is a textbook definition as well as a more simple or understandable definition. All textbook definitions come from Merriam Webster's Dictionary

Advocate: one who pleads the cause of another // *holding a megaphone to the voices of those who have been silenced*

Classism: prejudice or discrimination based on class // *upholding the idea that the poor are choosing to be poor and can pull themselves out of it without assistance; that middle-class and owning class people, ideas, values or jobs are better than poor and working class*

Cultural/Social Lenses: something that facilitates and influences perception, comprehension, or evaluation // *the way our identity shapes how we view the world*

Hegemony: the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group // *keeping oppression alive by saying, "That's just the way the world works."*

Identity: sameness of essential or generic character in different instances. // *Who we are and how we interact with the world around us*

Injustice: absence of justice : violation of right or of the rights of another // *Taking active or passive steps away from equity; injustice is about more than something being unfair for a moment or individual bias; it is about systems of inequality*

Microaggression: a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority) // *Making a statement or taking an action that expresses cultural/social unconsciousness; most are not deliberate and may even seem "positive" (e.g. telling women they are beautiful in a professional setting, instead of highlighting other qualities)*

Oppression: unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power // *combining prejudice and power to make others powerless*

Privilege: a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor // *A sometimes invisible advantage given to us based on race, class, gender, age, sexuality, religion, etc.*

Systemic Oppression: unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power of, relating to, or common to a system // *structures that keep marginalized groups down through political, cultural, or social norms*

Systemic Racism a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race of, relating to, or common to a system // *Influences beyond individual biases that impact the lives of People of the Global Majority (People of Color). For example; mass incarceration, political policies, media representations, etc. (Note: we take issue with Merriam-Webster, defining systemic racism as grounded in "belief" rather than in systems and institutions; this is an important distinction and applies to all systemic oppression. Thus, we have widespread and toxically damaging "racism without racists" in the United States and beyond.)*

Youth Oppression: unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power over young people // *assumptions, laws, regulations, or statements for and about young people without consideration for their humanity and voices*

Parents, gun violence, school uniforms, standardized testing, police brutality, school discipline, gentrification, bullying—these all have systemic components. Sometimes youth see the systems but not how it affects them directly, sometimes the reverse...Or they get trapped by “we can’t do anything about it, so why talk about it?”

Sample Meeting Breakdown

Each meeting is set up in four parts.

FUNdations: A beginning activity, game, or modified discussion. In educational terms this would be considered the “anticipatory set.”

→ From the FUNdations, the group should be able to:

- Feel a sense of togetherness: Activities will be whole group participation-oriented.
- Ignite background knowledge: This activity should act upon topics that are already familiar to the group. The goal is not to teach, but to allow thoughts and voices to begin bubbling to the surface.
- Begin laying the foundation for further discussion: Each FUNdations will be focused on “intentional play.” The ideas brought up during activities should be noted as important to the rest of the content.

→ During the FUNdations, animators should be on the lookout for:

- Group members who do not want to participate: A signal to switch things up to something that works better for that individual next time or to listen to what they are feeling.
- Conversational “flags” to plant: A “flag” is something that a group member says that it is important to go back to later. The reason we plant flags is to remain fully engaged in the given activity, while keeping the overall goals in mind and noting that youth voice is not something that should ever go unnoticed, even during an activity.
- Inequities in background knowledge: You may have group members who have more experience with certain topics than others. Take note of when it may be appropriate to explain a term, or ask a group member to explain a term they have used. Also notice when youth ask about a concept that seems normal to you or other group members and be sure to handle it with care.

Debrief: A discussion outline that connects key ideas in the FUNdations to critical thinking topics through activating more explicitly background knowledge and questions. It is NOT a script—just a starting point, but don’t let things completely devolve into easy “same old” complaints or long lasting banter.

→ From the Debrief, the group should be able to:

- Reflect on subjects brought up during the FUNdations: Debriefs should flow naturally out of the thoughts and emotions stirred up during the FUNdations. It is not a place to force dialogue, but rather to slowly pull back layers of vulnerability through communication. Animators may not always be prepared for the direction the Debrief will go, but youth-led discussion is central to the curriculum.

- Speak freely: Speaking freely is an important part of the Debrief. During the activity, there is a lot of potential for excitement, silliness, as well as frustration, disagreement, and hurt feelings. Group members need a place to express these emotions in a healthy way, as well as an animator to encourage group members to look deeper into those feelings.
- Challenge ideas: Your Debrief should be a space where risks, question asking, and mistakes are encouraged. Building a culture where group members can call out both positive attributes as well as harmful behaviors is a difficult task for any animator. Model this by first being willing to admit you have made a mistake.

→ During the Debrief, animators should be on the lookout for:

- Appropriate places to question hegemony: Every group member will come in with their own ideas about how the world works. Many of these beliefs come from systems of thinking that our role in culture and society has trained us into believing. Buying into systems because “that’s just the way things are,” is part of upholding hegemonic dominance where those in power stay in power. When animators hear or even say thoughts that may stem from a problematic abuse of power, acceptance of cultural myths (e.g, “those kids are just lazy--they don’t want to work hard”), or beliefs that the system is basically working (it is, for some select groups of people) or designed to work, it is important to ask questions. Modeling the skepticism for systems in power is crucial to understanding the systems working against the community.
- Oversharing/Undersharing: In group discussions it is important to remember and keep track of how each member is interacting with one another. This program needs to be a place that is unlike school or certain clubs where the conversation is driven by the loudest voices. Teaching youth to prize their own thoughts and feelings cannot happen if we do not allow them to share those thoughts and feelings. If certain students have not spoken, it is absolutely appropriate to ask what they are thinking, or just set up a go-round to give quieter youth a chance. Another tool that can be implemented in the Debrief if necessary is an educational practice known as “NOST UESO.” No one shares twice, until everyone shares once. It is not recommended to use this with every Debrief because the discussion might feel a little dry. However if there are a few group members who interject, interrupt, or distract, there are plenty of measures that animators can take to level the playing field, per say.

One Step Further: A learning or action focused on understanding the ideas brought up in the Debrief on a deeper level. This can be both intellectual or emotional understanding of the subject. Deciding what One Step Further activity to do could be based on the group's interest, a pattern of choices in the past weeks, or the trajectory of the discussion. Many of these require external resources such as research, people, activities, so should be planned in advance, with the idea that they may be modified spur of the moment. Encourage youth to use their individual and group strengths and relationships.

→ During the One Step Further, animators should be on the lookout for:

- Possible activity or needed discussion topics or projects: There may be ideas that youth can connect and collaborate on that they may not have realized yet. There could also be an extremely relevant topic that a group member has not been willing to share. If an animator ignites these conversations, it shows a desire for amplification of the collective youth voice. Keep track of repeated topics, or topics that youth have

been processing through for a long time. These could be potential projects to work on as a whole group when the What Can We do section of the program begins.

Closing: Closing is a second discussion that recaps what happened, and points the group toward the next meeting as well. Even if the activity suggestions don't include this explicitly, at least a few words should be said in that regard. Closing brings the findings of the group together. It is designed to collect thoughts and ideas as well as spark new inspirations. The closing may not always feel like closure, though, and that is okay. It is important to bring the group back and leave the space as the same team.

→ From the Closing, group members should be able to:

- Share burning ideas and ask for opinions on next steps: Group members should take advantage of the closing to share pieces they have been working on. Encourage applause/snaps for all excerpts and shares. This is also a good place to ask opinions on next steps for the following week, or let youth in on your thoughts about next meeting.
- Express emotions toward the day's meeting: Even by asking youth to share "one word that describes how they felt today" is a great start. There can be some topics that group members feel frustrated by or disagree with. Sometimes in the heat of a discussion, we use language or actions that we do not mean or that hold up a particular system. Leaving those thoughts lingering can become a point of confusion or bitterness later in group members. The closing should be a safe place to do so without these emotions needing to be "fixed" unless they are harmful to someone else. This is also a place where excitement over a subject should be encouraged! It is so easy to fall into the apathetic trope that youth are pushed toward when their opinions are disregarded. Listening non-judgmentally is a 100% winner here. Remember and remind youth that self-care is an act of strength and justice.

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- *NO privilege walks!*
 - *Don't be too cute, too babyish, too school*
 - *Whatever the activity is, animators do it too—all in*
 - *You need an inside informant if you are coming in from the outside for a short stint: to recruit, to trouble shoot, to know some things that matter in advance*
 - *If you are working with an extra-curricular group or community center, take the time to introduce them to the program and see if they can create complimentary activities*
 - *If you are coming in from the outside—don't step on people's toes. They are there day in day out and have a different understanding. Relationships are everything.*
 - *Play and keep it fun. Even when things are heavy there is room for laughter.*
-

Meeting Plans

Unit One: Passions—Connecting to Each Other and Our Community

Don't skip over the opportunities here to build trust and connection among the group and to dedicate at least one meeting to noting strengths and assets of a community or communities that youth are a part of. Adapt and use activities that you have done that have worked for you: perhaps you have done motivational speaking and try an activity asking youth "what are your dreams?" Other types of arts activities can work well here too.

In our experience, sometimes urban youth or youth from other marginalized communities might initially say that they don't see anything good about their own communities. Come prepared for this, and note for yourself and for the youth that in a couple of meetings we will talk about what is hard, unfair or unjust in our communities, but not yet. Our experience has also gone the opposite direction: youth initially say that everything is great in their community, so come prepared for that too when you hit Unit II. Lastly, if you have an extra meeting time (if you have more than the minimum of 10-12 weeks needed) you might consider building a meeting around the power chart exercise in the resources section.

Meeting One: WHO ARE WE

Goals:

- Get to know each other
- Understand & feel proud of own identities
- Break down barriers to collaboration and shared understanding through play

Resources/Materials (for Debrief)

Art supplies- paints, magazines, markers, crayons, pencils, brushes
Youtube search ability

FUNdations: **Play** a game of *Switch If*, a kind of “identity musical chairs.” Everyone sit in a circle of chairs and someone will start in the center of the circle, without a chair, to explain the game. The person in the middle, starts a sentence off with the words “Switch if…” and says a statement that is true about *them*. If the person has brown hair, they cannot say “Switch if you have red hair.” If the statement is true about anyone else in the circle, they have to run and try and find a new seat around the circle. The person in the center is also trying to find a new seat so there are one fewer chairs than people. The last person without a chair goes to the center and says a new phrase. Animators should take their opportunities in the middle to say phrases linked to their own identities—see Debrief questions before playing!

Debrief (**Discuss** with the group):

- What did you notice during the game?
 - Did anything that someone identified as surprise you?
 - Are there things you thought you were the only one who could relate to?
 - Did you learn anything new about anyone? Does sharing something in common make you feel more connected?
- Identity questions (possibly in pairs first)
 - Have people ever assumed something about who you are because of the way you look?
 - Did any of these questions asked today point to something about you that you are proud to have as your identity?
 - Did any of these questions bring up subjects that you don’t usually discuss as something you identify as?

One Step Further: **Create** something to answer the question, “Who Am I?” This could be a collage, poem, multi-media item, an old-school coat-of-arms, a series of tweets, etc. An animator should create one as an example to show beforehand.

Closing: Everyone **shares** and shows off all or a part of their “Who Am I?” piece. If time, reflect on any surprises, strengths, or connections among the group. As always, close with a tentative preview of what comes next week, and a reminder of how this fits into the bigger picture of the group’s work together.

Who Are We?

FUNdations Game (5-8 mins)

Switch If

Focus: Positive connections, fun

Debrief Discussion (10-12 mins)

What did you notice

Focus: making meaning of our own and shared identities

One Step Further Arts activity (15-30 mins)

Who Am I creations

Focus: Sharing what makes us unique and proud. Our strengths.

Closing Share out (15-30 mins)

Show off creations

Focus: Being open and connecting. Noticing value and assets in a diverse group.

Meeting Two: COMMUNITY

IDENTITY

Goals:

- What is community—to us?
- Established more of a collective identity
- Be proud of specific community strengths

Resources/Materials:

Paper, Pencils/Pens

Community Fishbowl directions in Additional Resources

Timer (phone, watch, etc.)

Link to appropriate community video or other sources of information and computer/projector if possible (e.g., Bypassed Coatesville Link:

<https://vimeo.com/159703389>)

Optional: Access to smart phones (Adobe Premiere Clip, iMovie)

FUNDations: **Play** Community Fish Bowl.

Debrief (**Discuss** with the group):.

What is our community like?

- What are some things that make our community different and unique?
- Who are some of the influential people in our community?
- What are some of the best memories you have had in this community?

What is “our community”? Define it as a group.

- Were there people/places you didn't know? Were there people who others considered to be a part of your community that you wouldn't consider?
- Are there people here from different communities?

One Step Further: **Create** a community commercial in groups of 3-4. This commercial should answer the questions: what are some of the best places in this community, and what are some of the strengths of the people in this community? Use props, explore the area, and get creative. These can be performed for the group, or even filmed and, if time, edited on simple smart phones or apps like Adobe Premiere Clip or iMovie.

Closing: **Share** the commercials. Give one or two word positive feedback on each video. Then reflect as a whole: Does talking about our community from a strengths-based perspective matter? If time, share a video created by an outside group, or another resource (reading, song, image) that captures something about the community (example for one community is the Bypassed Coatesville video)—perhaps a less positive view. How does the outside resource talk about our community? If time, return to definitions from debrief and redefine either “community,” “our community” or “NAME of the community,” e.g. “Coatesville,” “South Philly.”

Community Identity

FUNDations Game (10-15 mins):

Community Fishbowl

Focus bringing community background knowledge into the foreground

Debrief Discussion (5-10 mins):

Our Community

Focus define community

One Step Further Create (30-45 mins):

Community commercials

Focus Community assets and strengths

Closing Share (15-20 mins):

Show off creations, look at another perspective

Focus Noticing how we and others talk about our community

Unit Two: People—What’s Going On?

A note on Unit Two: Freirians call the activities in this “developing generative themes”--areas that are full of meaning, feeling and often, relate to what is not right in our world. These are the areas with which youth will most readily engage, wanting to learn about, explore, and change. (Groups that have extra time might want to try leaving more time for this—the Hot Wings, Hot Topics extra exercise has worked well!) This is the first part of what Freire defined as being fully human: people with the capacity to name their world (before they act on it to change it). It is really important that youth do the seeing, the naming, the analysis, rather than being directed to “just do a project.” Youth, as students and family members and sometimes as citizens, have little control over their lives and their minds are often discounted. This is even more true of youth of the Global Majority, poor and working class youth, immigrant or LGBTQ youth, or other oppressed groups. While any individual action your group takes will inevitably result in, at best, a small win, the human change that engaging in a collective analysis of the world and power in it can last, in our experience, a lifetime.

In the next part of the unit, youth get to imagine a different world/community, and then to come back to our previous direction to develop a representation of one particular problem in the community, in order to unpack it and understand it better. Freire would call any kind of symbolic representation of a specific problem in a local community a “code”--an image, song, skit, poem, almost anything that the group can analyze together that represents the problem. This is an effective way for groups to take on the questions of “why is this issue the way it is?” We are all “organic intellectuals,” as Freire said, but need to examine the right material with the right dialogue to free our minds to see what is true.

Meeting Three: WHAT BRINGS US DOWN?

Goals:

- Identify problems our community faces.
- Empathize with issues that affect each other

Resources/Materials:

A printed out (with copies) and recorded song (or spoken word poem or similar text) that lists out similar community difficulties, from a systemic perspective, written by a person internal to a shared community. For example, *Black America Again*- Common/Stevie Wonder, lyrics in Resources section

Pencils/Pens

Art supplies

Computer access

FUNDations: Pass out the lyrics to the song and have the group **listen** to it once all the way through. Listen again and circle every instance of a social or political issue. At the end of the song, group members will shout out the lyric and what issue they thought it was about/why they circled it. If needed, ask, “What lines stood out to you the most and why?”

Debrief (**Discuss** with the group):

First ask: Are there any terms up here that you may not know? Then make connections by discussing the issues and their causes.

One model is SHOW:

- S – What do we SEE or how do we name this problem? (Ask: Are there any lines you feel you can related to? if they are stuck).
- H – What is really HAPPENING? (How do people feel in this situation? Whose interests does it serve? Who holds power in the situation? Where have you seen/felt this unfairness? Some of these questions might be hard and need to be returned to after the other questions below.)
- O – How does this story relate to OUR lives? (Re-ask: Are there any lines you feel you can relate to?)
- W – WHY does this problem or strength exist? (What are the root causes? Are there any things happening politically or economically which are having an impact on this situation? In the song, what/who are responsible for the causing some of the problems? What/who are responsible for solving or improving the situation?)

One Step Further: Every group member is going to **create**/find something to represent what brings them/our community down. They can write a journal, create a painting, or find/edit some sort of song, poem, or TV clip. This can address large issues or local issues.

Closing: **Share** at least a piece of what they found or created. List together: what are some shared issues bringing our community down? How do these affect our community? A lot or a little?

What Brings Us Down?

FUNDations Listening Activity (10 mins):

A song or poem that raises issues

Focus naming issues

Debrief Discuss (20-30 mins):

Deeper analysis of what’s going on

Focus identify large scale problems

One Step Further Create (20-25 mins):

Multi-media creations

Focus Considering individually and specifically what brings us down

Closing Share (15-20 mins):

Show off creations

Focus Share your thoughts on how individual concerns are often collective issues

Meeting Four: LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY

Goals:

- Compare what brings us down to the perspective of others affected by systems in their community
- Feel less isolated in pursuit of justice

Resources/Materials:

Guest Speaker: a local community leader, organizer, activist—does not have to be that person’s job, just any one who can model taking a perspective that community change is needed and possible OR

Interview Questions (see Resources for interview question suggestions or prompts for speaker)

Whiteboard or other way to share ideas

FUNDations: etting to hear from and question the guest speaker if planning was possible in that way OR spontaneously go out into the community and conduct interviews.

Debrief: If debriefing the speaker, allow the group to ask questions and share their prior concern generated in the last meeting. If debriefing the interviews, ask each group to recap who they were able to interview and what was said. What were the common themes? Did anything surprise you? Was there anything said during the interview that connected with what we talked about during the last meeting?

One Step Further: Brainstorm words/phrases/ideas that have been brought up multiple times during the program that group members believe really stand out. They can be positive or negative forces on the community, but somehow they are things that the group keeps coming back to. Record these.

Closing: Ask leading questions that will set your group up well for the next meeting. Where might these issues stem from? What results from them? Is there anything that can be done about them? Who holds the power in these situations? Is a larger issue is being addressed here? Is your experience the same or different than this? Is there anything being done to affect this situation? Where have you seen this affect your community? Do not feel like these questions need to be answered right now, but instead set them up as something to think about during the week. If one big theme emerges, you can focus on that, or if a couple common themes emerge, take a few minutes on each one.

****A note: if this hasn’t happened yet, now is the time to point out challenging dynamics, out loud!** This may feel uncomfortable, but well into this week animators have earned the right to notice problems. Address issues like interrupting, miscommunication, and checking out, sometimes right as the activities are happening. Use the Pair-Share activity in the Resources section. Remember: feelings will come up around thinking about the world as it really is, and what that looks like might be absences, playing around, resistance, anger, focusing on easier lighter things.

Listening to the Community

FUNDations (30-45 mins)

Guest speaker/community interviews

Focus putting our concerns in broader perspective

Debrief Discuss (15-30 mins):

What more do we want to know?

Focus connecting issues to real lives

One Step Further Brainstorm

common themes (10-15 mins):

Closing Share (15-20 mins):

Thinking toward causes and effects

Focus Share your thoughts

Meeting Five: FROM IDEAL COMMUNITY TO ONE REAL PROBLEM

Goals:

- Acknowledge that there is room for change before we can be ready to effect change.
- Dream for big change
- Choose a single problem for our focus

Resources/Materials:

Giant chart paper, Pens/Pencils, Markers, other optional art supplies such as straws/popsicle sticks, yarn

<https://worditout.com/> (if this resource is difficult, you can just write notes, old-school style)

FUNDations: Split into teams (3-5 people is ideal) and give out resources to construct an ideal community. This can have some lightness, with imaginary water slides or video game rooms, but there is also room for it to be serious. (And play is serious, especially for youth--a safe public skatepark, for example, can address a whole host of issues.) Each community needs to have a name, a tag line, and three words that are important to the community.

Debrief: **Share** out the communities. While everyone is sharing, the animator will be recording the tagline and qualities into the word-it-out system. When each group is finished, project the “word it out” onto the board and explain that the largest words are the ones repeated the most. Are there any words up there that shouldn’t be? Are there words that should be up there when considering what we want our community to be? Are there any words that should be bigger, are more important?

One Step Further: **Discuss** the things that are in our current community that are not welcome in our ideal communities. What issues have we talked about during this program that are in the way of our ideal? Does our “perfect community” get rid of all of the things hurting our real community? What is the one issue that we want to change or end in our community that will bring us closer to this ideal? This may begin a debate or long discussion. Allow room for disagreement and listening. By the end of this discussion, the group should decide on **one** issue to confront in their community. You may need to narrow to a couple of issues, do some research in the next meetings, and come back and decide, or there may be a strong sense of the group. Some helpful questions to narrow it down: do we care a lot about it? Will other youth and adults want to work with us on this? Does working on this issue bring us together? Will everyone in our group have way to participate in our work together? Can we find a way to make at least a small, local impact in a short amount of time?

Closing: Give the group some “homework” to observe their surroundings for the next week and remember or write down instances where they see your particular issue being played out OR if you notice any people or groups or community assets also dedicated to this issue. These will be used in FUNDations next meeting.

From Ideal Community to One Real Problem

FUNDations (20 mins)

Creating ideal communities

Focus *what really matters, hope*

Debrief Discuss (15-20 mins):

Share communities

Focus *What sticks out as the most important*

One Step Further Discuss (10-15 mins):

Wordle

Focus *What does this show we care about?*

Closing Share (5 mins):

Homework

Focus *Can we locate and re-view the problem we have identified*

Meeting Six: **WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON HERE?**

Goals: In this meeting, the group will

- **Solidify their vision of what the issue is, and what our role is in it.**
- **Think critically and take steps out of comfort zone**

Resources/Materials: optional props to act out scenarios

FUNDations: Discuss observations made throughout the week. Have each group focus in on one story from a group member of a moment or event that exemplified the issue the group has chosen. Choose ones that bring up emotion (just did not feel right, angry, sad, ashamed, shocked, or confused), or where they didn't know what to do. Each group will then use every person in the group to **act** out a skit that either re-creates or modifies that scenario. The skit does not need to come to any closure. After all the skits have been performed the first time, choose one or two and incorporate "Spect-actors": everyone watching is now welcomed to participate in the skit and change its outcome. Start it up again, and anyone in the room can call a freeze, and someone (it doesn't have to be the person who called freeze) can jump in and "tap out" an actor, or add someone or something new to have the scene proceed in a different way so that it goes better for *everyone*. As many spect-actors can jump in as the group would like, and the scene can be started over several times if that seems useful. The changes cannot be "magical" such as having superpowers, but can be visionary and idealistic, such as having 100,000 people show up somewhere.

Debrief: **Discuss** after each skit: What made a change happen? Were there ideas that we differ on? Have you faced a situation like this? Could what happened in the skit to change it happen, in some way, in real life (even if in the skit the change is metaphorical—what could that really be in real life?)

One Step Further: Have each group member write down a particular question they still have about your chosen issue. These do not need to be discussed on this day but can be used to understand the topic further on the research day. You can return them to the acronym SHOW, adding to it now SHOW-ED:

- S – What do we SEE? (How do we name this problem? How do people feel in this situation?)
- H – What is really HAPPENING? (Whose interests does it serve? Who holds power in the situation?)
- O – How does this story relate to OUR lives?
- W – WHY does this problem or strength exist? What are the root causes? Are there any things happening politically or economically which are having an impact on this situation?
- E – How might we become EMPOWERED now that we better understand the problem? Is there anything being done to improve this situation? Is there anything we could do to improve it?
- D – What can we DO about it? How might we do this? Who else could be involved?

Closing: Hand exit tickets to animators. Play a closing game if time (see Resources for team building games—this is just for fun).

What is Really Going on Here?

FUNDations (30 mins)

Theater of the oppressed

Focus *making the issues real,*

What is our role in solving issues

Debrief Rewrite (15-20 mins):

Spect-acting

Focus *What is our role in solving issues*

One Step Further Discuss (10-15 mins):

What did these skits show us?

Focus *Change is possible*

Closing Reflect (5 mins):

Exit tickets, questions left

Unit Three: Power—Just Do It, With Study

Unit III is where the group engages in action alongside reflection. It includes activities that can feel a little school-like, so it is important to reframe “research” as ways of knowing about things that matter to us. If youth get stuck or resistant, pause and find where that sticking point is. The last weeks of the unit are unplanned because they have to emerge from your decision-making, and also may depend on the group—though we say weeks 9-12, the + indicates the group could engage in an open-ended campaign that is long-term. On the other hand, you should be sure to plan for an action that fits into the time frame of your program. Even if that means something happens in just the space of 3-4 weeks, as long as it emerges from your group’s work and analysis, that is a fine start and will have an impact on the group’s empowerment.

Meeting Seven: CHANGING OUR COMMUNITY—POWER ANALYSIS

Goals:

- Take the problem they have decided to focus on, and break it down into understandable and winnable fights

Resources/Materials:

Post-its, construction paper, markers, Power Analysis instructions (in Resources), big paper

Computers, Cell phones

Large fish poster, Fish cut outs (in Resources), glue or tape

Crayons/pencils/markers

FUNDations: Introduce this day as a **research** day. Share common/key questions that group members brought up during the last meeting. (Animators should have taken time to review them, group them, and possibly think through in advance the research and analysis process.) Possibly put up on post-it notes and have youth walk around in teams of three or so, and look at them, grab one they are interested in as a team.

Make a first dive into research a game where the teams try to as quickly as possible gain some information to answer their question and drop it into a Google doc you have created and shared with them—say a fifteen minute “race.”

Debrief: Note questions that you found interesting but have the group decide what and why it is important to know these as we begin addressing this issue.

One Step Further: Start Power Analysis of the issue. See Resources for how to do a Power Analysis—this is scheduled to be continued next week. You will probably need even more research as you all realize what you don’t know. Animators not knowing is ok and is good modeling for youth. You might want to share a version of the following note about research: “Research just means collecting information in a methodical way and it is crucial to planning the right action. New information will change how we understand at the problem and directs you toward solutions and strategies. Local data (neighborhood, city v. state or national) are very important in getting local decision-makers to feel like the problem is their responsibility to fix.”

Closing: Every person receives a fish cut out and writes their strengths on it. They may decorate if there is time. Remind group of their strengths. Have everyone write at least 3. **Create** large fish together. Ask: What does this image represent? Can we make change on our own? How can we use everyone’s individual strengths plus our allies and our potential allies?

Changing Our Community

FUNDations (30 mins)

Researching last week’s questions

Focus Feeling more ready to tackle an issue

Debrief (5-10 mins):

What do we know?

Focus what have learned, what else do we need to know

One Step Further Power analysis (20-45 mins):

Learn more by figuring out who the players are and where we can make a difference

Closing Relax (10 mins):

Create a big “people power” fish

Focus Our strengths

Meeting Eight: **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

Goals:

- **Find areas where they can be involved in making change.**
- **Deepening understanding of what is possible by and for youth**

Resources/Materials:

Phones, computers

A pre-found example of a successful people-powered youth-led change campaign, local or national—video, magazine article, etc. Can be big picture (children suing government over climate change) or a very local campaign (a youth-led campaign to get free or reduced-price public transportation passes). Historical examples can be good too (youth leadership in labor or civil rights struggles, for example).

FUNDations: Watch the video or read the article together

Debrief: Pair-share (see Resources for reminder on how to do that) about what comes up when considering taking on a big challenge and what is it like to rely on each other. Share out to group.

One Step Further: Continue Power Analysis, leading to making some decisions about action. Move from large group to small group brainstorming if need be. Remind groups of the issue, time frame, and skills the group has. Are there any action plans that need to be crossed out due to what we have? Are there any action plans that stand out to you the most? It is okay if you do not choose an exact action plan by the end of this meeting. Allow room for thinking and processing during the week!

Closing: This closing should allow group members to get up and moving since the meeting had so much sitting and thinking. Depending on your program this may look different for everyone. It is okay to revisit a game that you know your group members like. A dance party might be necessary. Some programs may be in walking distance of a familiar restaurant or hang out spot. Allow the group a break from thinking about big issues and just have a second to relax and remember that they are good humans who deserve happiness. Research on topics like this can be frustrating or draining. Take a moment to breathe, share and have fun

What Can We Do?

FUNDations (10-15 mins)

People power--Learn about youth-led change

Focus What is possible?

Debrief Discuss (10-15mins):

How does it feel to try hard and rely on each other?

Focus supporting each other and our action

One Step Further Brainstorm (20-30 mins):

What are our action steps?

Focus Action that has lasting impact

Closing Play (15-20 mins):

Play a game or do something fun

Focus Take a break and connect

MEETINGS 9-12+: TAKING ACTION

Note: This section of the program is formatted differently because it is entirely based on what your group is working on. When looking at the big picture of what “action” your group will take, it is assumed that you may be in one of the positions listed in the following three panels. Depending on which panel is most closely related to your group, follow the tips and information given on the next few pages.

<p><u>Keep Thinking:</u> Either your group despite your best efforts has a large number of issues identified and cannot narrow it down to one, or you are having trouble naming some of the systems working against your community. Your group has not yet selected an issue to focus around and are struggling for new ways to brainstorm ideas. It feels important to come up with something quickly, but choosing a subject that does not have young people’s interest can be just as disengaging.</p>	<p><u>Fine Tuning:</u> Your group has definitively landed on an issue that affects their community. It is something that everyone is on board with. However, there seems to be a blockage in your ability to think of an “action.” This could be due to a feeling of hopelessness, lack of community support, not developing an analysis that addresses systematic oppression, or a variety of other reasons. Your group needs assistance finalizing an “action” that can use the strengths of your group as well as the resources available to you.</p>	<p><u>Ready To Go:</u> During the much of the program, your group has been focused on an issue that is both personal to them, and impacting the community. While learning more about the issue, an “action” for your group has become increasingly obvious. The action is very doable, can fit within the time frame, and it has goals for doing it that is about addressing the systemic parts of the problem. Everyone seems to be on the same page with the action, and spending any more time thinking about it could decrease momentum or interest in the subject.</p>
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Remember: Amplifying the voice of young people is already creating change. It is okay if your action does not look how you originally planned, or even “succeed” (though small wins are important to frame back to youth if there is no big win). It will also be useful to not only “check-in” on your action plan, but also with your group. There may be something going on that you are not yet aware of, or as animators you may be on a different page than your other group members. Be sure that you are in tune with the wants and needs of your group members. Also, check-in on group members who may not be heard as often to make sure the group is moving at a pace that is comfortable for them. Quiet does not equal disengaged or unenthusiastic. It is important to keep working as a team, especially during an “action” when groups of people may have different jobs to work on. Remember, no one group is going to end gentrification, or heterosexism, or global warming, all at once. But all of these things stand on multiple legs, and aiming at just one in some small way matters. Remind youth that change is a long-term effort.

Keep Thinking: Do not be discouraged because your group has not set on an issue just yet! Remember that *they (and all of us) are placed within a system that doesn’t want them to think about what’s wrong with our world.* Getting to that point may be harder for some groups than it is for others. It is important for facilitators to be honest and recall the events of the program so far. Have group members felt listened to? Are there specific discussions that they engaged in more than others? Has anything stood out as a flag to come back to later? Any

of these could be used as a jumping off point. Bring them up in a group discussion as something you noticed they care about. If no ideas stick out to you, begin by looking back at previous meeting outcomes and group work.

If the issue is that your group has too many ideas and cannot narrow down on one, there are many ways to brainstorm which is the best fit. Be sure to remember the other options for years to come, if you will have the opportunity to work together long term. Try the “retrial” activity in the Resources section. A pros and cons list can be used between two options. A researched debate can be effective and allow both sides to present why they are so interested in their issue. Listing resources available for each issue may reveal that some are much more doable for the time frame and group dynamics. The most important thing about revealing your issue is that every group member feels bought into the idea. This project is designed for all to be a part of. If there are members still not on board, be sure to intentionally listen to why and consider these when deciding on the plan. Perhaps there is a way to incorporate these outlier wants and needs in the final action. After your group has decided, move on to the **Fine Tuning** portion.

Fine Tuning: First, take a moment to be excited that your group has chosen an issue! This is a success! Some issues can be so overwhelming that action seems out of reach. Remember to focus your group on hope and potential for change. You may need to take one meeting day and bring in an outside expertise. You may need to reflect on the positives going on in your community again. Circle back to the community commercials addressing the positives in the community. Is there one that can be enhanced if an obstacle was moved or power was given to those in the community? Allow time for both animators and group members to do research on groups or organizations that are combating the issue you have decided on, using your Power Analysis grid. Look for stories on youth led protests, petitions, policy changes, etc.

If students are engaging in discussion already, staying as a large group is a great idea. Be sure to record every idea that group members have as a potential action. However, if there is not much talking, breaking into small groups can also be extremely effective. Many group members may feel more comfortable talking to a small group before sharing.

Although The EDGE is entirely youth led, it is okay for the facilitator to come up with the preliminary action idea, as long as there is support and excitement from the entire group. If the Power Analysis was not fruitful, another way to brainstorm would be to start directly with the issue and break it down until you visualize a solution. Create a brainstorm web or other graphic organizer with your group. If the issue is racist bullying in school, begin at racism on one end and bullying on another. **Remember** that many issues have a few places that it stems from. Remind them of their skits and how things got changed in each iteration. In this example, bullying is an issue that does not affect only young people, but more often than not, young people’s feelings are invalidated. So, racial bullying not only stems from racism, but also adultism. How would racism/adultism begin to be eradicated? Through a shift in power and education. In school, who has the power and is doing the educating? The white/racial majority students as well as Teachers/administrators/faculty. What can these people in power be doing to interrupt this system? What can those not in power be doing to disrupt this system? Who is already doing these things? Where does there need to be improvement in these existing efforts? How can we make these concerns known? Questions like this might lead to creating a **faculty and student round table**. It may lead to creating an **educational video** that teachers can watch and show their classes on race in school. Or a **social media campaign**. Or a new student action group to promote a **policy change** or create a **peer educator network**, a **book club**, a **dance** where people pledge to act against racist bullying, a **flash mob**, **themed art show**, (check out <http://beautifultrouble.org/tactic/> for even more ideas!) After deciding, head to the **Ready To Go** section. Good Luck!

Ready To Go: Remind the group of their root causes discussion and check and see: is our action connected to at least one root cause of the problem? How?

In this stage of the process, it is important for animators to take a look at their own networks and lives to see where they can step out of the two hour box and begin to see community engagement as a flexible and continual goal. Although an action may be very apparent, as it grows, the group may slide back into some foggy areas. This is good! For example, if the “issue” being addressed is gentrification or displacement, the group could decide to hold a neighborhood **block party** to engage the community in neighborhood pride (and include a table on displacement education by a community group already working on this). Your group can begin to take steps in this direction. It is important to include community members in this process, set a timeline, and set goals in order to achieve the project. However, when the block party continues to develop, it could become clearer to group members that there is no defined and lasting systemic impact generated by the party itself. It is important to always circle back to asking what is the issue we are attempting to address? Has our action shifted who the power belongs to, or is it a step on the way to that? Groups may get wrapped up in the action and forget the reasoning, be sure to take time to step back. **The “what” is not nearly as important as the “why.”** Continue to have the goals of The EDGE Project in mind. As you are cycling through important questions, continue to move forward with your action. Remember to be attentive to the entire group as the action progresses. Also remember to include community voice in the project, and don’t take over for the youth. You are ready! If an action still seems to overwhelming to tackle, begin by making lists with your group. A list of goals. A list of needs. A list of jobs. Do not feel as though planning the action is entirely up to you as an animator. (In fact, that would be completely counter to the mission of EDGE.) This is a group effort, remember. Also as an animator, do not be afraid to ask for help outside of the program. This may come easy to you as someone who has orchestrated events before, but if not, there are people who have planned and organized events that would be willing to jump in. Do not feel as though just because an action is youth-led, that it cannot be inclusive of other community members.

Action time! Before you go on your way, here are a few reminders:

- *Successful programs can have unsuccessful projects. It is okay if things start to get messy at this point. In an ideal world, we would make mountains of change, but navigating through the trenches of systems working against young people is far from ideal.*
- *Remember that the goal is humanization (which Freire defined as the capacity to make change in one’s own interests, to use the word to name and change the world). Believe in the young people’s humanity and the process they are going through, even if it does not match with what you originally envisioned. Take time to check in with how they are feeling and know that amplifying their voice is already an action itself.*
- *It is okay to ask for help! Reach out to other organizations, non-profits, and individuals who have more experience than yourself. These are big goals that may need to expand. Alliance and mobilizing others are key learnings.*
- *It may be difficult, but do not be bogged down by dollars. Often times, there are ways to maneuver around financial issues and this is another great area to ask for help. People want to better their community and will be willing to provide.*
- *Struggle is long term. Keep reminding your group members that systems like classism, racism, adultism, etc. cannot be eradicated in twenty weeks. The hope of this program is to begin to wobble one of the legs that an oppressive system is standing on. Remember this yourself, as well, when things become overwhelming.*
- *You’ve got this!*

Final Meeting: CELEBRATION AND SELF-CARE

Goals: In this meeting, the group will

- **Reflect on the past work and acknowledge the work they have done!**
- **Celebrate small and large scale change—plan for a next step, a hand-off, or a new way forward**
- **Take advantage of this time as a designated self-care space.**

Resources/Materials:

Any party supplies!

Self-care bags (created by YOU! It is okay if financially this is not an option. It is not necessary. If possible, it would be ideal to create a self care bag for every group member. Inside should be an array of items from snacks/candies, positive and individualized compliments-which everyone can afford, stress balls, etc.)

Self-care guide

Program Assessment Tools

FUNDations: This meeting can be structured based on the wants/needs of the group. If during this project, you worked with a particular outside group, it may be appropriate to invite them to the celebration. If there is one official person you worked with, asking them to speak and thank the group would be welcomed as well.

Allow the group to discuss what they are proud of from this year. Go around and have everyone point out one take away they have from the program. Also ask questions along the lines of, where have you noticed change in yourself? Where have you noticed growth in someone in the circle? What is something you will do differently after this program?

Debrief: Spend most of the time in full group conversation lifting each other up. A final animator should begin by addressing the fact that all of this new knowledge is incredible, but can begin to weigh on you. Has anyone seen examples of them thinking about upsetting things that they haven't thought about before? Has anything thought about the larger systems? Has there been times during this program where you felt sad or angry because of what was going on?

One Step Further: We can better affect change when we are taking care of ourselves. *Loving yourself is its own act of rebellion against the system.* Choose a few self-care tactics from the Self Care Guide to introduce and practice. Also give time for the group members to read through the guide and ask questions, or bring up ones they want to practice now.

Closing: Close with next steps—where will your campaign go next? Who might continue their involvement? How?

Celebration and Self-Care

FUNDations Reflect (10-15 mins)

Take Aways from the year

Focus Celebrating!

Debrief Discuss (15-20 mins):

What has been hard?

Focus authentic feelings

One Step Further Self Care (20-25 mins):

Self Care

Focus Checking in with ourselves to move forward stronger

Closing Next steps (15-20 mins):

Focus Leaving the group with positivity and hope

*****If there are seniors in your program, this is an excellent time to honor them in some form. Giving them a gift, speaking about them individually, or giving them time to share wisdom are all examples of how to send them off well***

Additional Resources

Team Building Activities

Use some of these as you wait for the group to gather at the beginning of meetings, or to blow off steam if needed, along the way.

The Human Knot

Have a group between 4-8 people stand in a circle facing each other. Everyone in the circle raises their left arm at the same time, and holds hands with someone in the circle who is NOT directly next to them. Then everyone raises their right hand and grabs hands with someone else who they are NOT already holding hands with. The object of the game is to untangle the “knot” until there are no arms crossed over each other WITHOUT breaking contact with each other. (In very specific cases based on how groups held hands, some tangles might be impossible to untangle. This can be a timed race for two groups if you have a lot of people!

Animal Team Up

This game can be a win or a loss so read your room well! For this you need to have an even number, so an animator may need to sit out which will be helpful so they can turn off the lights. Could how many group members you have participating. Then, on small pieces of paper, write different animals who have distinct sounds. Each animal should be written TWICE. Each animal must have a pair. Have each group member choose the name of an animal out of a bag. When the lights go off, they must make their animal sounds in order to find their matching pair. First to find their pair wins! (Animal ideas: cow, horse, pig, dog, cat, duck, chicken, snake, etc.)

Rearrange

Instruct the group first to line up according to height. This should be easy. After that, announce that there will be no more talking from this point on, unless its from the person giving directions. The group now has to arrange themselves in a line from oldest to youngest including MONTH and DAY. Designate where oldest will be as well as youngest. Start over, or add time if there is talking.

Hula Hoop Race

Have the group in a circle holding hands. In between two hands, place a hula hoop. The group must travel through the hula hoop, making it go all the way around the circle, without disconnecting. Try more than once to get the group going faster.

Trains

Groups will be split into teams of 4. Teams will line up “conga line style” with their hands on the shoulder of the person in front of them. They are now a train. One animator is the train conductor and must call out commands. Trains can NEVER stop moving, and can NEVER collide. Groups begin walking around the room while the commander says commands. Begin with just a few, and then add based on how the groups are doing. If a train fails to respond to a command or collides with another train, they must sit down. TUNNEL: All train members close their eyes except the engine (front), until the conductor says END TUNNEL. SWITCH: The whole train spins around, and now the caboose is the engine. ROTATE: The second and last person switch spots WITHOUT disrupting the remaining train carts. CHANGE: The engine runs to the back of the line and now the

second person is the engine. The commands all sound similar to note whether or not groups are paying attention. It is fun to call out things like CHANGE SWITCH CHANGE ROTATE ROTATE SWITCH.

Bumpity Bump

Have the whole group form a circle. Make sure group members note who is to their left and who is to their right. One animator will stand in the middle and become comfortable with saying the phrase “bumpity bump bump bump.” The animator will go up to one group member, and at a steady pace say “left, right, me or you” followed by “Bumpity bump bump bump.” The person they are speaking to must say the name of the person you have described. So, if the animator says “Left, bumpity bump bump bump,” the person must say the name of who is on their left BEFORE you finish bumpity bump bump bump. If they say it too late, or mess up, they must sit down. If you say right, they must say the person to their right. If you say me, they say the animators name. If you say you, they say their own name. Have a few practice rounds, and then go faster and faster.

Don't Drop

Have the group stand in a circle. An animator starts with a ball in their hand. The animator will toss the ball to someone who is not next to them, and say their name out loud. That person will do the same. This will continue until everyone has gotten the ball ONCE and the last person throws it back to the animator. Ask the group if they remember who they got the ball from, and who they passed it to. Do the rotation again, still saying names out loud, and not rushing. Then ask the group how fast they can do it. Then see if they can do it without saying names. Then begin to add more balls. Start with one, and then once the ball has gone to three people, add in the second. This can go on for 4-5 balls or even more depending on how your group does. If a ball drops, you restart.

Paired Listening Activity

Use this paired listening activity whenever big feelings arise in the group, or you can build it in as a regular part of each meeting at the beginning, middle or end, if your group has time. In his handbook, Support Listening for Teachers, Russ Vernon-Jones writes, "There are many real difficulties and hardships in our lives and in our work. Talking about them and ex-pressing our feelings about them can help lighten the load and help us think more clearly about what to do about them" (7). This is as true for all of us, including youth workers and youth, as it is for teachers. Setting aside just 10 minutes to listen to each other can not just make us feel better--feeling better is a bonus outcome--but it actually allows the profound flexible intelligence which is the gift that we all have as humans to more fully work. Not-our-best thinking results from treating this moment as if it is the same as moments in the past that hurt us. This moment is never exactly the same as the past. Our best thinking results from getting rid of some of the charged emotions that got us stuck in a pattern in the past, like a replay loop, a habit. And this will help us change the world.

1. Get youth in pairs (you can participate in this too--animators, if you have never done this you should try it yourself prior to using the strategy).
2. Decide who will listen first, and who will share what is going on for them first.
3. Give them some version of these directions
 - a. Listener--your job is to not talk, not to share how you feel the same way or even comment on the situation, not ask questions out of curiosity or do anything that puts the attention on you. In a short listening session (about 5 minutes), your whole job is listen with care, to regard the person sharing with total positive affect. You keep in mind that you like them, that they are a good human being, who may feel bad at this time, and show that with your eye contact and your looking pleased with your partner (remember, even if they are sharing something painful, what they are doing right now is moving them and the world toward creative thinking, brilliant solutions, joyful connection, so you should be pleased!) Don't try to "make them feel better." This rarely happens in the world, and you will be surprised how hard it is at first to interact this way. This is NOT a dialogue—it is exchanging one-way listening.
 - b. Sharer--your job is to use your listener's attention any way that helps you to process your tough emotions or confusion about the situation. This might look like talking, or laughing, or even yelling or crying. It might be embarrassing at first to have someone pay attention to you for even five minutes with liking, respect, even love, and definitely with the idea that you are the person who--if able to think clearly enough--has access to the best solutions to your issues and issues in the world that affect you.
 - c. We all agree that what gets said in our sharing-listening turns is confidential. We won't bring it up later, even to the person themselves, unless they bring it up first. That way, people can feel safe to bring up hard feelings in little bits.
4. Keep the time. Tell people to switch at five minutes. (You can do this for much longer, but you won't have the time to do this, and most people won't feel comfortable with listening and being listened to for much longer than five or ten minutes at first.) Sometimes, it helps before you switch to have the person pay attention to something outside their strong emotions, if they have been expressing some--it could be anything, like, "What kind of tree do you think that is out the window?" Or "What are you looking forward to this week?"

That's it. You will be amazed at how much this will help move people's thinking forward. You can use these listening sessions in a group by asking people to talk again--but not about anything their partner said! Only what they said or about new clarity they have now.

Community Fishbowl Directions

The group will start sitting in a circle. Each group member will get three pieces of paper and be asked to write parts of their community: people, places, things that others will know too. They can write proper nouns as long as everyone in the circle knows of it. (For example, they may be able to write the name of the local pizza shop, Lorenzo's Pizza, but they may not be able to write their neighbor's name.) Other examples of writable items include high schools, gas stations, city officials, school teachers, neighborhood names, and intangibles such as shared attitudes or cultural orientations, etc. The group should not be sharing what they are writing! Directions should be that at least two of the three things should be things they are proud of or are unique and interesting to the community. All three could be positives. An animator should have an example three already thought of to share if there is confusion about the topics. (Note: if you are a person outside this community, and you can't name three people, places or things that could be recognizable to the group of youth—you need to spend more time in this community!) Everyone places their three papers in the same bowl. The group will be split into two teams by having every other person on Team 1, and the remaining every other person on Team 2. One animator should be facilitating and keeping the timer.

A member on Team 1 will have 30 seconds to pick items out of the fishbowl one at a time and get their team to guess as many pieces of paper as possible without using the words on the paper, as in charades or \$10,000 Pyramid (**Be sure that this team member removes the papers they have guessed correctly from the bowl and keeps track of them**) Then the bowl is passed to a person on the opposing team. This team does the same thing, and the bowl continues being passed from Team 1-Team 2 until it is empty (not every member may have gotten to go) Each team will count up how many papers their team got and whichever team has the most wins.

The next round is played like the game Headbands—each person on the team gets one item from the fishbowl taped to their back or to their forehead. People must treat them as who or what they are, and that person must guess who they are. If they guess, their team gets a point.

Black America Again Lyrics: Common Ft. Stevie Wonder

Here we go, here, here we go again
Trayvon'll never get to be an older man
Black children, they childhood stole from them
Robbed of our names and our language, stole again
Who stole the soul from black folk?
Same man that stole the lamb from cheap black smoke
And made the whip crackle on our back slow
And made us go through the back door
And rap for black bodies on the slave blocks
Now we slave to the blocks, on 'em we spray shots
Leaving our own to lay in a box
Black mother's stomachs stay in a knot
We kill each other, it's part of the plot
I wish the hating will stop (war)
And the battle with us
I know that black lives matter and they matter to us
These are the things we gotta discuss
The new plantation, mass incarceration
Instead of educate, they'd rather convict the kids
As dirty as the water in Flint, the system is
Is it a felony or a misdemeanor
Maria Sharapova making more than Serena
It took Viola Davis to say this
The rose of the help and the gangsters is really all they gave us
We need Avas, Ta-Nehisis, and Cory Bookers
The salt of the Earth to get us off of sugar and greasy foods
I don't believe the news or radio, stereotypes we refuse
Brainwashed in the cycle to spin
We write our own story, black America again

[Sample - James Brown:]

You know, you know, you know. One way of solving a lot of problems we got is to let a person feel like somebody and a man can't get himself together until he knows who he is and be proud of what and who he is, and where he come from, and where he come from

[Common:]

Hot damn, black America again
Think of Sandra Bland as I'm staring in the wind
The color of my skin, they comparing it to sin
The darker it gets, the less fairer it has been
The hate the hate made, I inherited it from them
But I ain't gon' point the finger, we got annointed singers
Like Nina, Marvin, Billy, Stevie
Need to hear them songs sometimes to believe me
Who freed me? Lincoln or Cadillac
Drinking or battle raps so is it Godspeed that we travel at?
In danger denied on habitat
The guns and dope man y'all can have it back
As a matter of fact, we them lab rats
You build the projects for us now you want your hood back

I guess if you could rap you would express it to
That PTSD, we need professionals
You know what pressure do, it make the pipes bust
From schools to prison y'all, they tryna pipe us
Tell your political parties invite us
Instead of making broke laws to spite us
You know, you know we from a family of fight trust
Fought in your wars and our wars
You put a nigga in Star Wars, maybe you need two
And then, maybe then we'll believe you
See black people in the future
We wasn't shipped here to rob and shoot ya
We hold this truth to be self evident
All men and women are created equal, including black Americans

[Sample - James Brown:]

You know, you know, you know. One way of solving a lot of problems we got is to let a person feel like somebody and a man can't get himself together until he knows who he is and be proud of what and who he is, and where he come from, and where he come from

[Stevie Wonder:]

We are rewriting the black American story
We are rewriting the black American story
We are rewriting the black American story
We are rewriting the black American story
We are rewriting the black American story
We are rewriting the black American story
We are rewriting the black American story
We are rewriting the black American story
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We are rewriting the black American story
We are rewriting the black American story

Guest speaker prompts

The speaker should be able to address some of the following questions through their own story or experience: When is the earliest experience of being treated unfairly that you can remember? When did you begin to notice that sometimes unfairness stems from something much larger? When did you begin playing a role in community change? What individuals in your life strengthened your perspective? What obstacles did you face?

Community Interview Questions

This includes shop owners, students, parents, etc. The goal of these interviews is to collect personal narratives of issues facing the community. Record questions and answers.

Do you live locally?

How long have you been a part of this community?

Would you say this place is a happy place to live?

What is your favorite part of your community?

If you could improve something in your community what would it be?

Who are some of the influential people in this community?

Do you think there are any people or groups or systems working against the people in this community?

Have you seen positive changes happen in the past to this area?

Are there people in this community who seem to not have any power even though they live here like everyone else?

Do you feel that the people with power in this community understand what is best for it?

Does anything about the way this community functions make you upset?

Have you ever seen someone affected negatively by a policy or norm set by this community?

Would you be interested in being a part of changing some negative forces working against the community?

This is a group exercise adapted directly from Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE) that activists and organizers can use in order to better understand the power dynamics in our communities. Visualizing our struggle can help us create strategies for addressing inequity. In order to achieve long-term social change, we need a more systematic way of understanding power and how it is exercised. You are ready to do this power analysis if you have an answer to the following: What is the problem we want to address? What are the competing agendas of those who want to keep things as they are? This is challenging thinking work and may take quite a while, so do take more time than part of one meeting to keep working at it.

Assumptions of the power analysis:

- Power relationships are unequal right now. This is a key reason for the problems and conditions we face.
- There is a political agenda at work that causes these problems, and power is being exercised behind it. We have to develop strategies that address these realities, mount issue-based campaigns that help to build power and win immediate changes, permanently altering power relationships in favor of the people suffering from the conditions we seek to change

Materials:

- pieces of construction paper, pre-cut into triangles, starbursts, ovals and squares (there should be two colors of square paper)
- a large posterboard that will serve as the power analysis grid divided into quadrants along 2 axes: supporter-----opponent (all along the way are possible allies and organizable constituencies) and a lot power-----very little power (all along the way are possible power centers and structures)
- pens or markers

Be sure to push people to be accurate in their assessment of where to place each piece.

Step 1: Plot the major policy battles/campaigns that are happening locally

1. Ask participants to write down on a starburst-shaped piece of paper the major battles and/or campaigns that are ongoing relating to the problems/conditions your organization is working to change. You may not know what these are—go slow and do research if need be.
2. Go through sheets and have the group collectively decide where to place each battle/campaign on the grid.

Step 2: Plot the key decision-makers/power centers

1. Pass out pieces of paper to each member of the group
2. Ask participants to write down on a triangle-shaped piece of paper the persons and/or bodies who make the decisions shaping the problems/conditions your organization is working to change (make sure they use markers and write big). You may not know what these are—go slow and do research if need be.
3. Go through sheets and have the group collectively decide where to place each decision-maker on the grid (Are they a supporter or an opponent? Do they have a lot of power or not?)

Step 3: Plot your organization and your organized allies

1. Ask participants to write down on a different colored square of paper the names of organized allies involved in local battles/campaigns (make sure to include your own organization).
2. What are their agendas (the conditions they want to bring about)?
3. Go through sheets and have the group collectively decide where to place each ally on the grid.

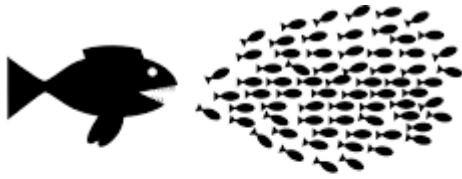
Step 4: Plot organized opponents

1. Ask participants to write down on a square-shaped piece of paper the names of organized opposition groups (i.e. corporations, business lobbies, chambers of commerce)
2. Go through sheets and have the group collectively decide where to place each opposition group on the grid.
3. Write down their competing agendas—what they want that opposes what your group and allies want.

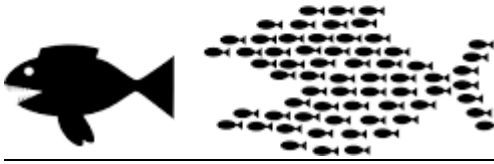
Step 5: Plot other unorganized social/economic/political groupings

1. Ask participants to write down on an oval-shaped piece of paper the names of unorganized social, economic, and/or political groupings affected by the problems/conditions you are fighting (i.e. geographic communities, ethnic communities, socioeconomic groups, voting blocs, sectors of the workforce)
2. Go through sheets and have group collectively decide where to place each unorganized grouping on the grid.

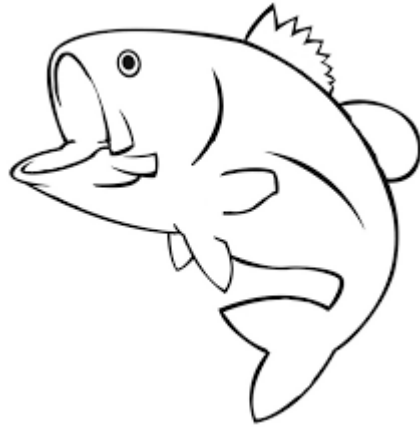
By the end of this, you should have more answers to the following What do we want? This is a specific solution to a part of the problem. What do we want now? This is a short-term, winnable goal, something we could win within a year. What do we do next? What are the opportunities to leverage community power to win our overall goals/agenda to create long-term systemic change towards our goal? What challenges are in the landscape that would impact our capacity to influence decision-makers in support of our agenda? What questions do we have about the landscape? What additional research is needed?



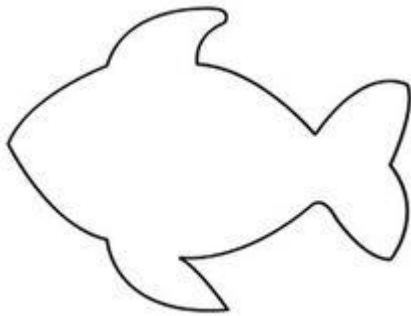
ORGANIZE!



The bottom half of this image is how it should look at the end!



For the large fish (print out BIG)



for the small group of fish (print out small)

Breathing Exercises!

Breathing not only centers our bodies, but also soothes our mind when we notice all that our bodies are capable of sustaining. Encourage group members to focus only on breathing in this moment and release the weight of the world.

<https://www.anxieties.com/57/panic-step4#.WmDAdpM-eqA>

<https://greatist.com/happiness/breathing-exercises-relax>

<https://draxe.com/breathing-exercises/>

Grounding Exercises!

Grounding is a term for being fully present in the here-and-now. After being opened up to the systems around us it is easy to be swept up in drama, distractions, and temporary anxiety everywhere you turn. Grounding connects us to ourselves, the earth, and each other.

<https://scottjeffrey.com/grounding-techniques/>

<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-8311/what-you-need-to-know-about-tapping-a-free-easy-stress-buster.html>

http://www.peirsac.org/peirsacui/er/educational_resources10.pdf

Disengage from the media

Often times, the biggest stressor in our lives are the way in which we are connected to a constant media outlet. We were not designed to process suffering on as large of a scale as our news sources permit us to.

Disconnecting from this temporarily relieves tension and guilt in order for us to exist again. Disengaging from social media outlets is important as well and can be used to focus the attention of our lives back on deep relationships with ourselves and others.

Find Beauty

Being exposed to ugliness does not mean there is an absence of beauty. It is important to search both outward and inward when completing an action that could take a toll on the way we see the world.

→ Outward: Revisiting the positives that are happening in the community is an excellent way to remember beauty. Being outside in nature works as both a grounding exercise as well as a way to seek beautiful things and surround yourself with them. It is also extremely important to remember the beauty that is expressed through the connections we have made with others during this program.

→ Inward: As a diverse body of people, there are many responses to being shown injustice in our community. For all, particularly white students, there may be an overwhelming sense of guilt. *This is important to be attune to.* Be mindful of when guilt arises and be ready to receive it, analyze it, and do away with it. Where is the guilt coming from? Can I control the source? Can I control my preceding actions? Is guilt helping me make the best possible choice toward humanization and love of others? Then it is gone. It is important to remember and remind others that they are *good* human beings. This may feel extremely uncomfortable, and that is okay. Other ways to find beauty inward is to compliment each other and instead of responding with “Thank you,” group members can respond with “Yes, I am.” as a practice in self love.

Compartmentalize

Compartmentalization is a tool used when too many concerns are flooding your brain. Something to be reminded of is that compartmentalization does not work with most aspects of life. Like a fire, a tragedy does not care what doors you have closed before it rips through them. However, when engaging in day to day work, compartmentalization can be used effectively. Allow yourself to imagine your life in boxes. Picture a box of worries for your future, for the environment, for sexism, for racism, etc. During the day, allow yourself to take out the box and open it for a set period of time. Worry about this, do what you can for that day, and put the box away. Perhaps one day you take out your environment box and are overwhelmed by the disregard for wildlife coming from government officials. You decide to take time to call your officials and voice your opinion. You put that box away. The aching worry that comes with leaving that box open all day can affect your other areas of work as well as relationships. Again, this is not always an option. **Some days it is necessary to stay mad as an act of protest.**

Fix Yourself on a Small Project

Hobbies are an incredible way of freeing our souls. Allow yourself to be consumed by something that seems trivial to the outside world. Justice work is never done, so finding something that can be completed and will leave you feeling satisfied is a work of self care. Paint a picture, knit a scarf, finish a video game, read a book.

Treat Your Mind, Body, and Soul

This is all of our favorite act of self care. Treating yourself is an amazing thing! Be sure to treat your mind and soul as much as your body. Enjoying a treat or day of rest is important, but something that is life giving to your soul or mind might look very different. Visit and talk with a friend who listens well. Read a book about discovery. Meditate, pray, or sleep. These are all acts of self care. **If you, like many of us, have had experience with mental illness, it is advised that you keep track of your acts of “treating yourself” and perhaps even sharing them with someone around you. Sometimes, sleeping as rest can turn into sleeping to avoid the world. Keeping track of these acts helps us notice patterns and areas that need changing.**

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

—Audre Lorde

Hot Wings, Hot Topics

Use this in Unit II if you have extra time, or substitute it for another way to get at generative themes.

Animators bring in chicken wings for a snack to go with the theme, or if funds are tight, even Red Hot candies will do. You can really ham up the theme by playing some “hot” themed music (“Hot Hot Hot” by Arrow is a great retro one.)

Come prepared with a 5-10 “codes”—images from the media such as commercials or magazine ads work well, or popular memes on social media. Flash them up on a projection screen, with youth in a circle. Have youth move to one side or the other of the circle or room: “Ok” “Not ok.” Then discuss briefly. Depending on the size of the group, you may do this as a formal go-around, so everyone gets a chance to speak each time, or with larger groups, follow the “no one speaks twice before everyone speaks once” rule, so that all youth get at least a chance to say something.

This is not a time when you are planning to get in-depth with youth on analyzing any one “hot topic,” but rather, having picked up on some themes either with this group in specific or in popular or political culture right now, give them an opportunity to react, school each other, and see “what’s hot” with them.

Power Chart

You may find that your group might find this exercise useful (filling it out together and discussing) if your group is less familiar with the overall ideas around systems of oppression, or if the group of youth is very diverse internally, or as framing reminder, for example, in Unit I if you have more than two meetings available.

<u>Power Group</u>	<u>Less Powerful Group</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>System of Oppression</u>
White People			
	Women		
		Rich people can often afford better healthcare for their families	
			Adultism

Retrial

This can be used any appropriate place in the program where you need to have the youth value their voices, explore an issue more deeply, figure out what matters to them, or brainstorm solutions or actions. It is loosely based on the idea of restorative justice.

Have youth have a “trial” of something that occurred that they saw as unfair, but in which they did have a role in breaking rules or having things go not well in some way. It could have been a school discipline issue, or it could be something that happened in the community. Designate roles, such as judge, lawyers on each side, jury, defendant—sometimes, if it is something that actually happened to one or more of the youth, it is restorative to have them replay being the “defendant,” or sometimes they need someone else to play that role, or have a posse of folks be part of their team.

Have the judge and jury decide on a new, just outcome. This does not mean absolving responsible parties, but arriving at restorative solutions.

Program Assessment Tools

For High School Students

Overall, did you enjoy this program?

What is the biggest thing you learned over the course of this program?

Is this program something you would like to be a part of again?

Do you feel like this program helped prepare you for your future? Why or why not?

Do you believe your voice was heard during the course of the program? Why or why not?

Did the animators or volunteers support you and your peers during this program?

What activities or meetings stood out to you the most as the most engaging?

What activities or meetings stood out to you the most as uninteresting?

What improvements can be made to this program?

What will you remember most from this program?

Final Comments:

For Animators

What is the biggest thing you learned over the course of this program?

Is this program something you would like to be a part of again? Why or why not?

Did this curriculum accurately prepare you for what you would be doing during this program?

What improvements or suggestions do you have for this curriculum?

What will you remember most from this program?

What meeting or meetings seemed the most effective for meeting The EDGE goals and mission?

What meeting or meetings seemed the least effective for meeting The EDGE goals and mission?

Do you feel as though this curriculum supported you/set you up well as an animator?

Final Comments:

