REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

SPRING 2021

Los Angeles County Arts & Culture

LOS ANGELES COUNTY artsed COLLECTIVE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We humbly acknowledge that this research project was conducted on the unceded, ancestral lands of the Kizh, Tongva, Chumash, Tataviam, Serrano, Kitanemuk, Acjachemen, Payómkawichum, and any others that we may have overlooked in what we know as Los Angeles County.

We also want to honor the teachers and ancestors of the past, present, and future that assisted us in this research project. A deep-felt thank you to everyone who participated in the one-on-one interviews, and especially to the young people that participated in the focus groups held over Zoom. 2020 and 2021 have been challenging years for many of us, and they illustrate the importance of our ability to connect with each other, listen, and take to heart each others' words and wisdom. Being able to witness all of it is transformative. Below is a list of folks we want to thank, in alphabetical order, and their organizational affiliations:

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THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING...

PREFACE

You are holding the work of six months of exploration, learning, and serious passion. We hope that this zine will invite critical reflection, challenge your beliefs, and inspire you to take action. Know that you are a part of a continuum of past, present, and future changemakers. Know that the research was conducted from October 2020 to April 2021. We invite you to start conversations within and outside of your communities to adapt, try on, and take whatever you find useful for your context. We thank you for taking the time to read this.

CREDITS

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PROJECT INCEPTION

As researchers, we could not be more honored to facilitate and advance the learning and understanding of such an important project. The moment to explore healing-centered engagement could not be timelier. In the backdrop of this research project, multiple crises unfolded. Below, we highlight the context for these conversations to better understand this moment in time, including local and global sentiments and emotions.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In 2020, our daily lives were upended with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. This highly infectious virus has claimed the lives of over 549,000 people in the US and became the leading cause of death in LA County from March 1, 2020 to February 22, 2021.[1] Of those, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities in the US are disproportionately represented in the dead, and over 2.7 million globally have passed away.[2] Sadly, families, neighbors, workers, and entire communities have been prohibited from gathering, mourning our dead, or celebrating our important milestones. The terms "social distancing" and "sheltering in place" became ubiquitous around the world. We were instructed to stay at home and have our children attend school virtually, forcing many women to leave the workforce to focus on caretaking. Workers who could telecommute and work in e-commerce thrived. Moreover, millions are still unemployed; eviction moratoria are limited; and many go hungry in one of the richest countries in the world.

GLOBAL DEMONSTRATIONS FOR BLACK LIVES

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, at the hands of Minneapolis police, millions demonstrated to show their support for the Black community, who continue to suffer from structural racism within the US criminal justice system. A loud cry to reform law enforcement, including a serious exploration of defunding the police, made national and global headlines. The #BlackLivesMatter movement received global attention, after organizing and advocating for justice for well over a decade on this very issue. This tragic event opened national conversations on the history of structural racism in the US and the need for greater Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) efforts throughout government, corporations, and non-governmental organizations.

Photo: Redrecords, pixels.com

CLIMATE CHANGE UNLEASHED

Climate change continues to alter landscapes, with raging wildfires throughout the West Coast of the US becoming more commonplace for longer stretches of the year. Meanwhile, other parts of the country like the South experienced record freezing temperatures. In response, young people globally have begun to demand action from world governments and corporations to mitigate further destruction. Global climate strikes began in September 2019, propelled by an ever-growing movement of young people organizing for climate justice and for a future on this shared planet.

PROJECT INCEPTION

In 2014, the LA County Department of Arts and Culture, the Probation Department, and a handful of community-based organizations that are now part of the Arts for Healing and Justice Network came together to examine ways the arts might support positive outcomes for youth in the County's juvenile detention facilities. Since then, this partnership has continued to grow, and now includes a network of eight County agencies and nearly four dozen community-based arts organizations working together to provide year-round, healing-centered arts instruction for youth in detention camps, juvenile halls, juvenile day reporting centers, continuation high schools, County parks, Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs), public housing, and for youth in diversion programs. This network for collaboration has become an integral, coordinated part of the County's justice reform efforts, and not only supports youth impacted by the justice system, but also serves as a key prevention strategy for keeping them from becoming impacted by the justice system in the first place. While the work is grounded in programming and services for young people, it also focuses on professional development for County staff working with youth in County facilities, and most recently has expanded to include social service agencies who also serve these youth. Today, arts-based youth development in community settings is part of a comprehensive strategy to promote healing and overall well-being, and to strengthen positive youth outcomes, community cohesion, and protective factors among youth and families who live in communities disproportionately impacted by the justice system and other systemic inequities.

From the start, the programmatic model has evolved within the emerging context of a "healing-centered" approach. As LA County's efforts to reimagine youth justice continue to manifest – with a focus on alternatives to incarceration – the healing-centered approach is emerging as critical for effective arts-based youth development. In order to advance this approach as a core part of its work, the LA County Arts Education Collective (the County's arts education initiative, coordinated by the Department of Arts and Culture), recognized the need for a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the topic. This is the inception of our research project: a quest to understand what healing-centered engagement is, and what it is not.

APPROACH

Healing-centered engagement is a nascent but growing field that is actively being codified by researchers such as Dr. Shawn Ginwright, who initially coined the term "healing-centered engagement."[3] This field includes many overlapping disciplines and theories, including: creative youth development, deep social justice roots, transformational social emotional learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural humility, decolonized and liberatory pedagogy, positive psychology, ethnic studies, and trauma-informed care. The authors also recognize that some practitioners have been doing this work for a very long time and may not use this specific terminology. For instance, First Nations/Native/Indigenous communities have integrated a deep understanding of how to live in intentional relation to others outside of this framework for many generations, and continue to do so. It is also important to acknowledge the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities that have established, and continue to actively create, community spaces for people to feel supported.

METHODOLOGY

Overall, our approach has followed the rigor one would expect of a traditional literature review that includes academic, peer-reviewed journals. However, that was only the first step. This research project also includes interviews with eight practitioners (two of whom are connected to universities) and guided conversations with two groups of young people (ages 15-22) to gain insight into their needs and challenges in healing-centered spaces. Interviewees and adult focus group leaders were asked to reflect on and respond to the themes we discovered in the initial formal research. What is presented here is not an answer but the beginning of a longer journey into how healing-centered engagement can work to develop new alliances, create hope and space, and guide people to find a greater sense of joy and collective transformation.

LET'S DREAM: THE ROLE OF RADICAL (RE)IMAGINATION

We begin with what we heard from young voices. This section honors the dreams and visions of youth focus group participants that tapped their five senses to radically (re)imagine what healing spaces in their worlds could be.

"If you fall in love with the imagination, you understand that it is a free spirit. It will go anywhere, and it can do anything."

—Alice Walker

We are living in the future. It is the year 2021, after all, and we are being called to imagine the way forward. In the book *Radical Imagination,* authors Alex Khasnabish and Max Haiven explain the term: "On the surface level, the radical imagination is the ability to imagine the world, life, and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be. It is the courage and the intelligence to recognize that the world can and should be changed… The radical imagination is also about imagining the present differently too. It represents our capacity to imagine and make common cause with the experiences of other people; it undergirds our capacity to build solidarity across boundaries and borders, real or imagined."[4] It is with this spirit that we dream, using the tool of imagination to guide our way to healing.

The term (re)imagination further implies that the imagination will not be static, but can instead be explored now and continually rediscovered, rethought, and reexamined. The process is never fully "complete," and this is the intention behind the use of this term and this thought exercise. To the right, we highlight some of the responses from young people on how they would imagine a healing space.

TAPPING INTO THE FIVE SENSES:

TOUCH

"Families wouldn't be separated. They wouldn't be separated because there would be enough for everyone, and I wouldn't have to miss my family."

SEE

"No more poverty, homelessness."

"I would say a lot of Native Americans, African American, a lot of races whose culture got taken away from them, and they got their identity taken from them, they'll know who they are. And they'll be put back in schools. And there will be no jails or prisons."

FEEL

"Everyone at peace…. Everybody winning, doing good."

"It's a place where everyone feels they have a blanket around them of a support system. No matter the situation or no matter how tough it is that they will always be someone to lift you up and to not bring you down."

TASTE

"Taste of purity almost."

IMAGES

"It would mean no financial problems, long-living humans eating barbecue on a fresh Sunday, no police shooting anybody, just a peaceful day with a lot of food."

SMELL

"Minty fresh."

"I smell flowers or trees, and no polluted air. I think that even if this community doesn't look perfect to someone else, for the person that's inside, it looks just perfect to them."

THE SHOULDERS

Like many frameworks, healing-centered engagement sits on the shoulders of key influences. Below we highlight its foundational concepts, in no particular order.

1. INTERSECTIONALITY

Invented by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her seminal 1989 article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," this concept focuses on the experience of Black women's marginalization in dominant narratives of feminism and race theory.[5] Crenshaw finds these dominant narratives too simplistic and argues that they need to be challenged. She highlights how one can experience the world through multiple social identities at the same time, recognizing the experience as one of "intersectionality." This concept is widely applicable to our contemporary contexts, particularly in social change movements that advocate for greater integration of various identities, such as the Latinx transgender rights movement.

2. TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

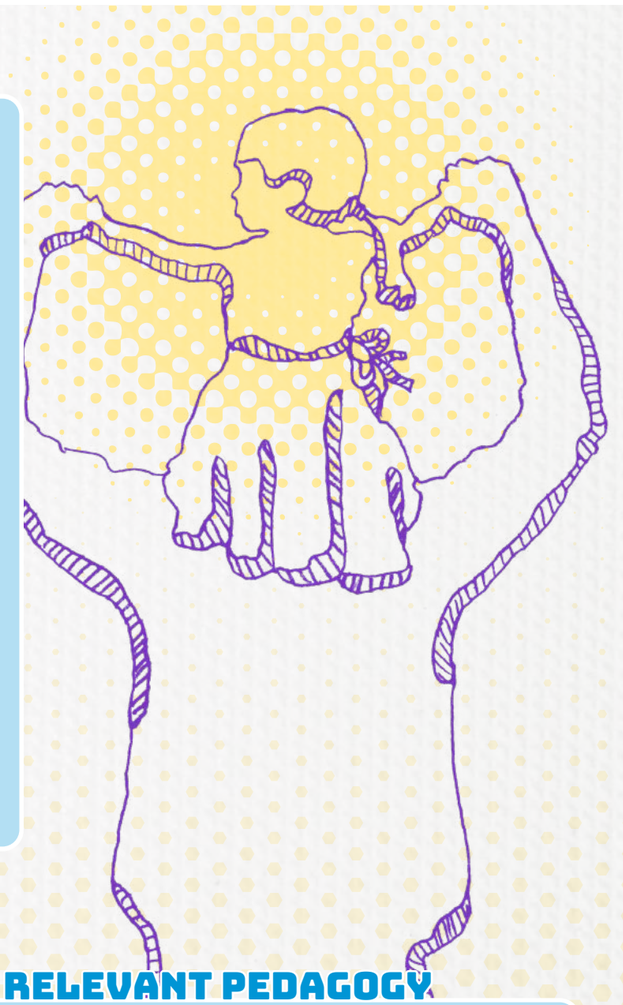
As defined by the University of Buffalo's School of Social Research, "Trauma-Informed Care is an approach in the human service field that assumes that an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma. Trauma-informed care recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma may play in an individual's life."[6] While now a widely accepted approach throughout the medical field, limitations do exist with this approach, principally the focus on *the individual*, in lieu of the collective experience. The surrounding environment of entire communities adversely affected by systemic oppression—including racism, homophobia, and ableism—cannot be addressed by focusing solely on the individual. This approach focuses on finding solutions at the individual level without challenging the existence of overarching societal changes.

3. CULTURAL HUMILITY

Melanie Tervalon and Jane Murray-Garcia developed this concept in 1998 as a name for what they saw as an essential missing element in the medical and public health fields. In their foundational article "Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education," they characterize cultural humility as "a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing power imbalances, and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations."[7] Basically, the approach is grounded in the importance of not assuming one knows everything about any particular cultural context one enters. The importance of being open, vulnerable and willing to humbly accept one's limitations is at the core of this concept.

4. LIBERATORY PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE

Advanced by one of the prominent educational thinkers and practitioners of this field, Paulo Freire, this approach is explained in his groundbreaking book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Key concepts of this work include the transformative relationship between teacher and student, whereby both learn from each other through shared dialogue, investigation, and praxis, which is critical to reflection and action.[8] Freire's pedagogical approach is centrally grounded in social justice movements. This book is hugely influential and read widely beyond the fields of education and literacy, including in the theatre, among many other disciplines. The social project proposed by Freire is about challenging one's role in participating in an oppressive society and within oppressive systems, to achieve real freedom and liberation. Current teachers and professors continue to evolve this field with a focus on justice.



5. CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Based on the foundational work of Gloria Ladson-Billings and her focus on educating teachers to work with African American students, this term celebrates students' cultural identities in their academic pursuits, as well as in their development of critical thinking skills, allowing them to understand and "challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate."[9] Though Ladson-Billings' work is from the 1990s, it is still relevant today. In fact, in 2021, the California State Board of Education approved a model ethnic studies curriculum that has direct ties with culturally relevant pedagogy.[10]

6. HEALING-INFORMED AND HEALING PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICES

This is an expansive concept that includes Indigenous ways of knowing and being, rooted in the cultural context where they are practiced, and it may integrate spirituality. Practices can include healing circles centered on the sacred circle concept embraced by many First Nations/Native/Indigenous communities. As Robert Regnier explains, "The Sacred Circle is examined as the expression of an aboriginal metaphysics in which reality is conceptualized as process, the movement of life through wholeness, connectedness, and balance."[11]

7. CREATIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (CYD)

Combines positive youth development with creative skill- building, inquiry, and expression.[12] CYD programs can focus on any form of artistic expression, including visual arts, dance, music, writing, and design, but must also integrate positive youth development principles.

8. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Rooted in psychology and slowly gaining support within the field, positive psychology "is an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions [e.g., hope], positive character traits [e.g., empathy], and enabling institutions [e.g., organizations that integrate a positive orientation into how they operate]."[13] In other words, positive psychology explores topics of well-being and happiness, a distinctive departure from the dominant psychological approach that focuses on problems. It redirects the focus from what may be wrong with a person to consider what is going well. The goal here is to create a coherent and balanced approach to psychology; instead of relying so heavily on negative emotions, it includes the positive ones that make up the experiences of daily living.[14]

9. POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Emerged in the 1990s as a response to the deficit model of adolescent development that had been predominant throughout the 20th century.[15] Positive youth development promotes and fosters at least one of the following in youth: bonding, resilience, social competence, emotional competence, cognitive competence, behavioral competence, moral competence, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in future self, and prosocial norms.[16]

10. SOCIAL JUSTICE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (SJYD)

Developed by Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota, SJYD explores healing youth identities by involving young people in social justice activities that counter oppressive conditions preventing healthy self-identification. This is an approach that builds on positive youth development and adds the intentional element of "critical consciousness" in youth, which is a concept grounded in Paulo Freire's praxis.[17] Through critical reflection and action, SJYD promotes personal awareness, community awareness, and global awareness for young people to find their voices and heal.

11. ETHNIC STUDIES

Emerging as a field of study in the 1960s out of student protests at San Francisco State University,[18] ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of race and ethnicity from the vantage point of underrepresented groups. This field is significant because it represents perspectives historically omitted from traditional university curriculum. Examples of ethnic studies include Chicano/a studies, Asian American studies, and Africana studies.

The following three sections of this zine explore themes that emerged from interviews and focus groups. Each section includes questions to consider and further explore when thinking about this approach. This first section focuses on themes related to what it means to be "healing-centered."

"Transform yourself to transform the world."
—Grace Lee Boggs

In healing-centered engagement, who we are on the inside—the interior—matters as much as our outward practices—the exterior. In interviews with healing professionals, we heard stories of powerful healing practices with young people that were often coupled with stories of the practitioners' own personal healing. Beginning the process of healing oneself before working with others to heal themselves emerged as an important theme.

THE INTERIOR

WHAT IS THE INTERIOR?

The interior is about our values, beliefs, and understanding of the world, including how we understand humanity. For example, one of the core beliefs shared by Jerry Tello, a healer who has worked with youth for over 30 years, is that we are all valuable and have a sacred purpose just by the fact of being. This belief is at odds with belief systems that value people based on what they produce or on their identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender identity, socioeconomic status, etc.).

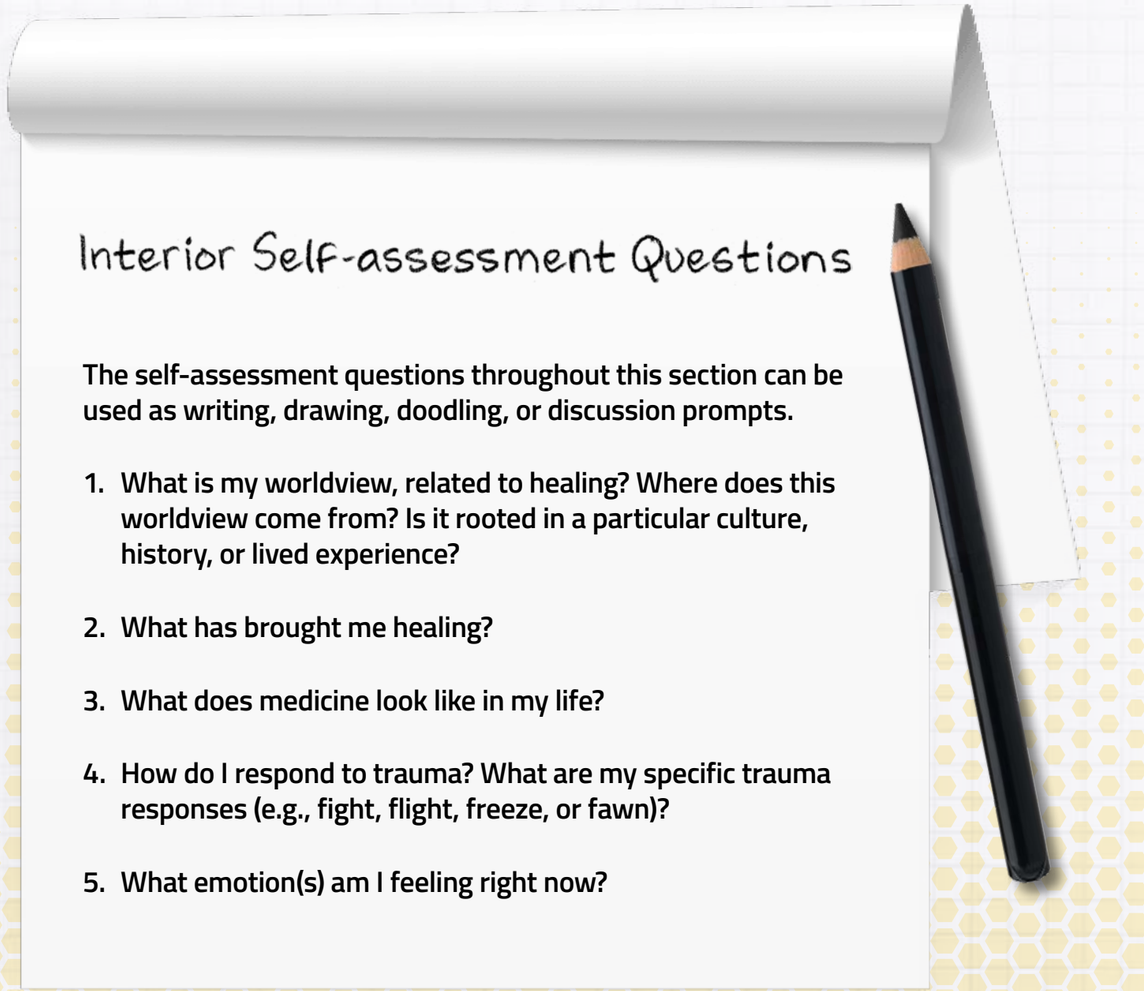
HEALING THE INTERIOR

HEAL YOURSELF SO YOUTH CAN HEAL THEMSELVES.

While we are all valuable and capable of healing, one of the themes that emerged from our interviews with youth development professionals is that the interior state of a healing practitioner needs to be in a state of healing in order to do healing work with others. A question raised by many interview participants was: "How can we heal others, if we can't heal ourselves?" However, anyone who has experienced harm or trauma and taken steps to heal understands that the process of healing is not easy. Healing is not the same thing as self-care. It requires us to face ourselves, build awareness of our triggers, and understand our trauma responses.

The danger in going straight into healing work with young people, without beginning the process of healing oneself, is the potential to cause more harm—not only to the young people, but also to the youth development professional. Practitioner Fabian Debora observed that "we have to be mindful of giving 'too much too fast,' to the point where [youth development professionals] lose sight of their own personal self-care and their recovery process." Participant Sarah Boehmke also noted that the experience of vicarious trauma can compound personal experiences of trauma. Without addressing healing, adults can put themselves and their young collaborators at risk of experiencing more harm.

Our understanding of healing continued to evolve when we gathered the interview participants together to reflect on preliminary findings. During the reflection, we were challenged to think more deeply about the word "practice" and what it entails. Referring to healing-centered engagement as a practice implies that if we do certain things or take certain actions, we are healing-centered. It implies that only the exterior is important. Yet, to be healing-centered, one must examine their interior as well.



The self-assessment questions throughout this section can be used as writing, drawing, doodling, or discussion prompts.

1. **What is my worldview, related to healing? Where does this worldview come from? Is it rooted in a particular culture, history, or lived experience?**
2. **What has brought me healing?**
3. **What does medicine look like in my life?**
4. **How do I respond to trauma? What are my specific trauma responses (e.g., fight, flight, freeze, or fawn)?**
5. **What emotion(s) am I feeling right now?**

THE EXTERIOR

WHAT IS THE EXTERIOR?

The exterior is our outward-facing presentation to the world. It is what we say, what we do, and what we practice. While practices are part of healing-centered engagement, they will vary depending on the beliefs, lived experiences, and knowledge of the practitioner. Not every practice is appropriate for everyone, particularly when it comes to cultural or spiritual practices. Interviewees cautioned against taking a healing practice that belongs to another person or culture without acknowledging and consulting with that person or culture and assessing if they are the right person to do the practice. Therefore, a list of practices is intentionally not included here. Rather, the following ideas provide grounding for how to become healing-centered.

THESE ARE NOT JUST PRACTICES

INTERCONNECTION AND RECIPROCITY.

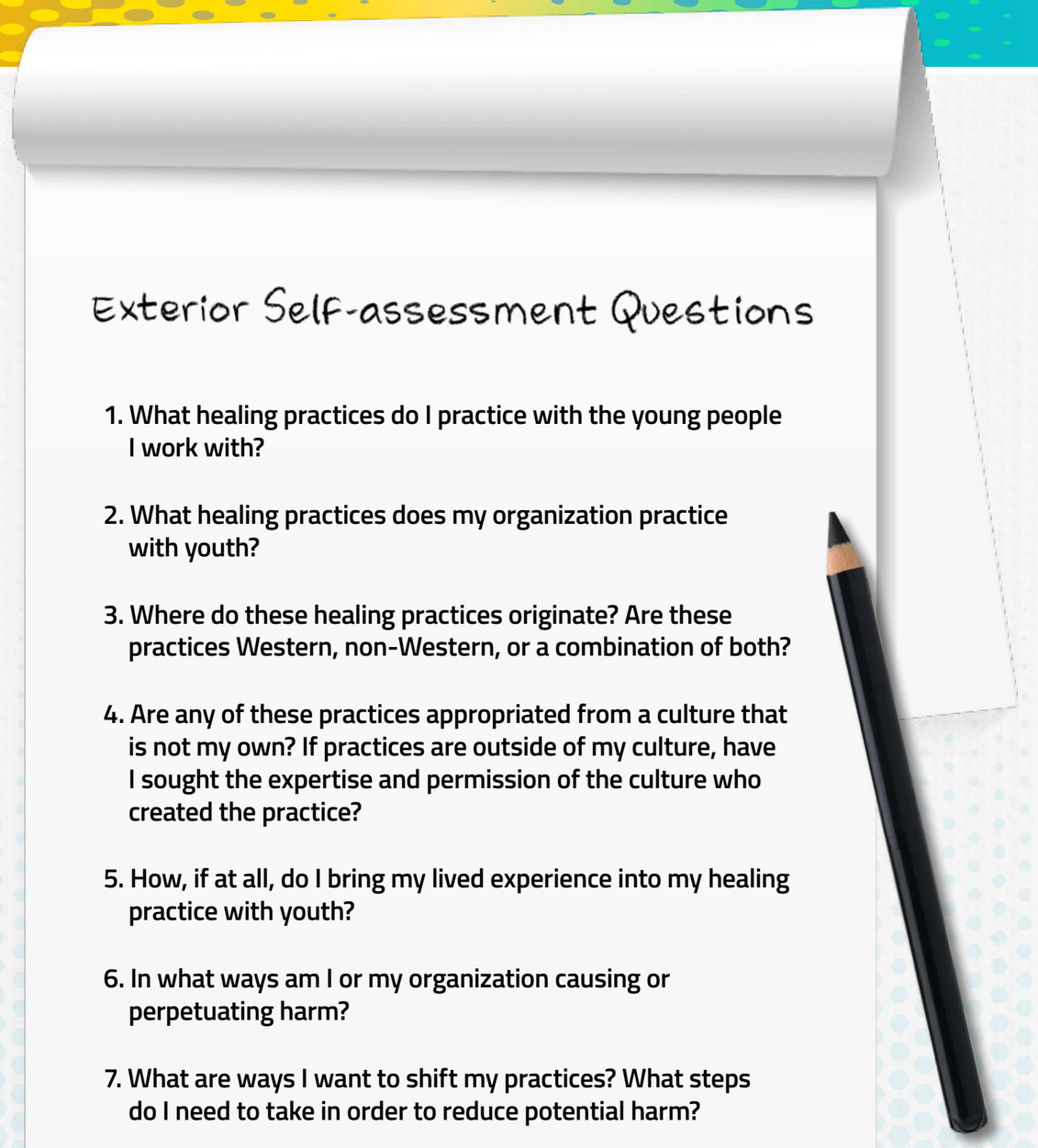
The process of connecting with others—being witnessed, seen, and heard—was identified by adults and youth as crucial elements for healing. While there was consensus among all interview participants that connection is important for healing, several youth development professionals provided a more nuanced description of the qualities of relationships that facilitate healing and transformation. Tello talked about the importance of interconnection as a value: "There is a word in our Nahuatl language called inklakenowakel, and that means interconnected sacredness. It means that we are connected to all relatives. When you work with young people, you really work with an extension of their family going generations back and generations forward…the question becomes, are you willing to be in relationship with these young people, not just through a program?" Shawn Ginwright, the researcher who coined the term "healing-centered engagement," discussed how youth development professionals can cultivate transformative relationships by removing the hierarchy between the adults and the young people. Being transparent about the fact that adults do not have all the answers, and acknowledging that they make mistakes, is an important part of shifting away from hierarchy. Interviewees also emphasized the power of group or collective healing processes that invite mutual sharing and reflection, in order to both model and practice healing with young cohorts and with fellow youth development professionals.

OPENING AND CLOSING SPACE.

When creating spaces for young people to open up and express vulnerability, care needs to be taken to ensure that the wounds that are exposed can be attended to. Debora described this process as "opening the wound" (reconnecting), "tending to the wound" (re-identifying), and "closing the wound" (reimagining) to make sure that the adult working with youth is not causing harm. In healing-centered engagement, youth development professionals have a responsibility to guide this process, to be aware of their own limitations as practitioners, and to be mindful of the resources and time needed to carefully hold space. Self-disclosure was also discussed as an approach to open space, but one that must be practiced skillfully, and in a way that benefits the young person rather than the adult.

RESTORING IDENTITY.

Interviewees frequently mentioned the process of conscious identity formation. This is a core healing practice referred to by many names, including "Indigenous re-connection," "la cultura cura," and "ancestral reclaiming." Many of us experience the world through a variety of identities; however, these identities may not be acknowledged or nurtured. Participating in the conscious construction of one's multiple identities can serve as a powerful healing process. As noted by Kimberly Bautista, "We can reclaim ancestral knowledge through our own identities. Through getting to know ourselves, we also are honoring our ancestors." Such identity restoration can include exploring historical trauma going back to colonization and enslavement. The process can also involve creating space to "see yourself outside of the bounds of oppression," according to Dr. Farima Pour-Khorshid. This process is personal, and as Tello emphasizes, "the medicine is inside." Developing the clarity of one's own story is a means for practitioners and young people to gain a greater sense of agency and purpose. The question remains, as Debora asks: "How do we invite ancestry" into our organizations and society.



SYSTEMS OF HEALING

Stepping aside from the personal and relational, in this section we turn to the challenges posed by our current systems to advance healing.

"There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures."

—bell hooks

SYSTEMS

A complex web of systems touches our lives, and the lives of young people even more so. Educational, social, health, and human services systems can engender positive, negative or neutral feelings about the world in young people, depending on the quality of their relationships with these systems. Healing-centered engagement invites us to examine our relationships to systems and explore how we can influence young people—and entire communities—to invite alternative approaches.

RECOGNIZE THAT CURRENT SYSTEMS CAUSE HARM.

It is a painful truth that the very systems created to support and heal young people—including education, criminal justice, health care, and social services systems—often perpetuate harm. Healing-centered engagement's role is not to disregard the dark reality of the world, but rather to be fully aware of it and understand deeply one's role as a practitioner that aims to be with and honor others.

One example shared by practitioner Jerry Tello discussed how probation officers in Santa Clara County changed their job descriptions to make them more closely resemble those of social workers. They wanted to change the dynamic, ground the experience in conscious interaction, and transform the system from the inside. This is just one example of how to bring a higher level of awareness to work that is done within programs, departments, and organizations. Jerry goes further to say, "You can make changes, little things to begin the healing process [like reorienting job descriptions], or you can retraumatize kids, what educational systems do, just by not being able to see them."

Acknowledging each other is a critical step in healing systems. Naming the legacies of harm caused by our institutions is also critically important. *How can this be done throughout our organizations, if we're serious about examining harm reduction and prevention?*

CHART NEW GROUND.

Fundamentally, healing-centered engagement is about designing and leaning on models that move beyond service orientations to honor interconnection. One model that closely aligns with this orientation is mutual aid. As prison abolitionist Mariame Kaba explained about mutual aid: "It's not community service — you're not doing service for service's sake. You're trying to address real material needs."[19] While mutual aid may have surged into mainstream recognition in 2020 during the pandemic, it has actually been around for quite some time. Models that lean heavily on peer support and community flourish when systems like governments cannot meet people's needs. The service model, in contrast, perpetuates implicit hierarchy that may not be required in all instances. Healing-centered engagement invites us to question if hierarchy is truly necessary.

BUILD THE NETWORK.

Overwhelmingly, interviewees were eager to "try on" and implement healing-centered engagement by relying on each other for support. Fabian Debora stressed the importance of "passing the baton" to other organizations that have the expertise and well-established relationships that allow each organization to work from its strengths, thereby creating a network of collaborators. Getting to know the strengths of each participating organization allows greater collaboration and less competition. In this way, practitioners can practice honoring what they do and don't know. Not only are they modeling greater self- awareness, but this very act of collaboration also highlights the importance of relying on a newly established network for trusted guidance and help when it is needed.

YOUTH VOICE

As part of our exploration of healing-centered engagement in practice, we talked with two groups of Los Angeles young people (ages 15-22) and asked them a simple question: What is causing harm in your community? As we listened to them and sat with their stories, we noticed that what they shared was not just about their homes, schools, and other communities, but also harm rooted in history and culture.

The examples shared brought to mind Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which describes the dynamic relation between a person and their environment. We cannot disconnect the harm we experience from the various systems that we live in. To illustrate this point, we have mapped youth descriptions of harm onto the four levels of systems in Bronfenbrenner's framework.

AMERICAN DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS *"I think something that I've noticed is understanding that success doesn't mean the same thing for every person. I think we all have this idea that, 'Oh, you're successful if you go to college.' Or you're successful if you go down this specific path. But specifically, for me, I do want to pursue higher education, but I know that that's my goal, and that's my path. But I wish people would understand that college doesn't always mean success, and there's other ways people are successful that way without going down that secure path."*

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM[20]

The **MACRO-SYSTEM** includes History, Culture, Laws, Economic System, and Social Conditions.

MISOGYNY *"In middle school,a lot of boys would make rape jokes all the time."*

ANTI-BLACK RACISM *"The most recent thing that's been really harmful that everyone got to see was the anti-blackness in our community. Starting from the youngest to the oldest person, there's this negative outlook to people, and the way they express the injustice they felt, and it's just disappointing because you're denying someone's hurt."*

The **EXO-SYSTEM** is an extensionof the meso-system and includesneighborhoods, parent workplaces, government agencies, and mass media.

FAMILY *"I have this rocky relationship with my family. A lot of them have views that I don't agree with. The way they talk, the way they talk about topics and people and who they respect, I just know they have a horrible viewpoint."*

The **MESO-SYSTEM** is the interrelation within and between someone's immediate settings (e.g., interactions between family, peers, school, or on social media).

A **MICRO-SYSTEM** is someone's immediate setting or place.

DEHUMANIZING THE OTHER *""I think another thing is denying someone's existence or rights or your moral values or whatever your religion... I don't want to be a person that just hates people because they were bullied by one person when they were younger. I don't want to be this horrible person and show hate all the time."*

School, Home, Youth Development Programs

EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY *"The schools in my community don't get the same acknowledgment as a school in Palos Verdes or Calabasas."*

SCALING HEALING

Traditionally, scale is about efficiency, with the goal of reaching more and more people. When we consider what's needed for healing-centered engagement practice – such as adults needing to do their own healing work, cultivating self-awareness, the capacity to support culturally grounded identity formation, to name a few, we need to think about scale differently. When considering the right scale for this approach, we need to be intentional about setting the proper conditions for the framework to be successful. We highlight four overarching considerations below.

DESIGN SHARED FRAMEWORK AND NARRATIVE.

Nothing is more critical than to co-create the language that will define healing-centered engagement for the region. This process needs to include agreement on definitions for key terms and components of the shared framework for organizational partners to develop shared ownership. Ping Ho emphasizes the importance of "codifying" the narrative, based on her own experience developing curriculums and fostering collaboration. One critical step would be to define what constitutes "healing." Other questions are also important: What is healing-centered engagement for LA County? What are the key principles that lead the work? In what areas can variance and flexibility exist? What are the biggest protective factors and how can we strengthen these factors? In answering these questions, a collective narrative will develop, with a common language as a reference to guide the approach and allow others to join the process and learn. A shared vision and collective narrative will prevent confusion and foster a healthy environment for collaboration.

REMEMBER SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF RESPONSIBILITY.

A critical component of the healing-centered engagement framework is a shared understanding of the high level of responsibility and commitment needed to implement the framework on a personal, programmatic, and, if possible, organizational level. It is worth examining the roles and responsibilities required of practitioners in order to create validating space for our peers and young people to fully show up and unapologetically be themselves. Some of this work can include setting grounding agreements to guide how we will interact and work together in the beginning, using our preferred pronouns. We can also remember and name the legacies of the First Nations/Native/Indigenous people in the places where we practice and include the rich stories of our collective memories, especially those from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. These are all practices to connect us to ourselves and each other, to allow ourselves to feel. As Kimberly Bautista reminds us: "Throw glitter, not shade, as a way of elevating each other."

AGREE ON SHARED PROCESS AND TRAINING.

Following development of a shared framework, the process for learning and training would follow. Yolo Akili Robinson of the Black Emotional Mental Health Collective (BEAM) raised the question: "How do we give people space in their different cultures and their different practices to build upon and modify the ways they speak to their folks?" With healing-centered engagement, there is a need to reconceptualize scale, including how training is designed, who is trained as a practitioner, and what the right rate of growth is for this model. A unifying process needs to guide these discussions.

IMAGINE OPTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

There are many options to consider for implementing this approach. Dr. Farima Pour-Khorshid suggests a "tiered" training model. The first tier introduces the concepts and assesses the capacity of the staff or program to integrate healing-centered engagement. The next tier focuses on shifting practices and policies, and the higher tiers focus on implementation within an organization. We have to remember that the question of how to implement healing-centered engagement practices is equally as important as what we are implementing. The approach cannot be prescriptive, because so much of the practice is intertwined with culture and identity, which vary greatly in Los Angeles County.

What would be the best way to think of implementation in this complex environment?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

While many more questions remain, this is an especially exciting beginning for the Los Angeles County region. This research project is the starting point to more conversations to come, facilitated by the Los Angeles County Arts Ed Collective. More details can be found at: lacountyartsedcollective.org/

Let's remember that this is only the beginning for long-lasting change in the Los Angeles region. This is monumental, and real change will need our dedication and healing intention as well.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Victoria Perera Rojas (she/her)

My approach to research is shaped by my many identities and lived experiences. I am a Black and Sri Lankan, cisgender, college-educated woman who loves the natural world, embraces paradox, and enjoys learning about other cultures and ways of thinking. I grew up exposed to both Christian and Buddhist teachings and as an adult consider the spiritual teachings of both religions to be beautiful and instrumental to my own healing. I have also found healing through therapy and support groups with friends that are rooted in authentic, candid conversations about trauma, and mutual love and support. I offer my sincere gratitude to researchers and practitioners we interviewed for sharing their wisdom on what it means to be healing-centered. I am also grateful to our partners at Arts and Culture for their vision and for the care they are taking in introducing healing-centered engagement to Los Angeles County.

Raquel Trinidad (she/ella)

I am a working class, queer, college-educated Latina that profoundly believes that all of us have a right to beauty, nature and joy. I am deeply and humbly grateful for such a soul-nourishing and intellectually stimulating project and process. I can say unreservedly that this project has forever made a profound mark on me personally and professionally. My healing practice includes daily meditation, making time to be in the wilderness and late evening conversations with friends and chosen family. Because of this project, I am now more acutely aware of the importance of my life-long healing journey, as well as relying on a broader network of incredible peers that are transforming future generations and entire communities through the healing-centered approach. There is always someone or something that can help us find support for our grief, joy, and all that life brings us. Onward to (re)imagining our collective futures!

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE PEER-LEARNING COMMUNITIES

MOVING FORWARD, WE'RE LEFT WITH MORE QUESTIONS INCLUDING:

1. What is healing? We need to define it.
    a. What are the variables we need to consider when it comes to healing?
2. How to define healing-centered engagement for the Los Angeles County region?
3. How will the approach account for geography demographics/diverse audiences?
    a. How to operationalize?
4. How do we conceptualize scale in the healing-centered engagement framework?
    a. What is the "right" scale?
    b. What is the relationship between scale and geography/demographics/diversity of the county?
5. What are complementary approaches that can support this approach?
6. What role do the arts play in healing-centered engagement?

READING LIST

BOOKS

1. *My Grandmother's Hands* written by Resmaa Menakem
2. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* written by Paulo Freire
3. *We Want to Do More Than Survive* written by Bettina Love
4. *The Radical Imagination* written by Alex Khasnabish and Max Haiven
5. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* written by adrienne maree brown

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2. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984): 110-114

RESOURCES AND INSPIRATION

1. Agreements for Multicultural Interactions at East Bay Meditation Center
2. Black Power Mixtape (historical documentary film), 2011
3. Black Emotional Mental Health Collective has a lot of resources for Black-identified community
4. Flourish Agenda offers a wealth of resources and a Healing-centered Engagement certification program for practitioners through San Francisco State University
5. Caring for Yourself to Take Care of Others: A Burnout and Vicarious Trauma Toolkit by Larissa Pham.

END NOTES

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REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

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