

Spaces of Belonging: Learning with and from Black-Led Community Organizations and
Community Members of Color

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Project Description

We are a group of researchers of color (3 PhD students and an Assistant Professor) from the University of Washington (UW) learning with and from Black-led community organizations in Seattle, WA, that are engaged in anti-racist and educational justice work. We are one research team in a group of UW College of Education (CoE), UW School of Social Work and Washington State University College of Education researchers and community partners, including the Equity in Education Coalition, engaged in a research study sponsored by the Washington Education Association (WEA). The collective project titled, “Reducing Educational Injustices in Washington State” aims to better understand, from the perspective of historically underserved communities of color, the types of investments (e.g. policies, decision making, actions, time commitments, funding, resources, etc.) that are most needed to address and eliminate systemic educational inequities in Washington state’s P-12 education system. To achieve these collective goals of the project, we have been collaborating with and learning from people and community organizations of color, including students, educators, families, community members and community-based organizations.

Our research team’s particular research focus in the collective project has been to understand how Black-led organizations and other People of Color (POC) community spaces in Washington State serve as spaces of belonging, learning, planning and action, and what we can learn from these spaces to improve the P-12 educational experiences of students, families, and educators of color. To achieve these ends, we have been learning with and from the work of Black-led organizations in Washington state that serve as spaces of belonging and learning for its members and participants and that have organizational goals that included challenging and upending persistent and systemic inequities and injustices in the educational experiences of youth, families, and community members of color. We have also been learning from community members of color in Seattle and throughout Washington state about other community spaces that they have identified as spaces of belonging and learning. In sum, our project aims include the following:

1. highlighting/centering the great anti-racist and educational justice work of Black-led community organizations in the state of Washington;
2. identifying the characteristics of these and other community spaces that make them spaces of belonging and learning for participants;
3. learning how Covid-19 and ongoing anti-Black racism in this nation has impacted (or not impacted) their work;
4. hearing participants’ critiques of Washington state’s P-12 education system and their thoughts on the types of investments needed to transform schools into places of belonging and learning for their children, families and communities;
5. sharing implications and hopefully informing and influencing the types of policies and practices in schools that are most needed to dismantle institutional barriers to ensure the thriving of students, families, and communities of color; and
6. reporting back findings to WEA and the organizations represented in this report in creative and accessible ways (described later in this brief) that further their work and encourage greater collaboration and learning within and across organizations.

This report continues with a combined introduction and literature review followed by our research design and introduction of the Black-led organizations and other community spaces that informed this study. Next, we share our key findings and learnings from these organizations,

leaders, and community members. Lastly, we conclude by offering some recommendations for P-12 schooling.

Introduction/Literature Review

Indigenous and Black communities in the United States have a long history of exercising self determination in the education of their children that predates colonial schooling, which Lomawaima (1999) defined as “the reculturing and reeducation of American Indians,” and later African Americans, “by the secular and religious institutions of colonizing nations” (p. 2). Black and Indigenous children experienced education as a homeplace (bell hooks, 1990; Love, 2019) in that they were taught in their communities by family and community members which helped them to associate learning with belonging. In fact, prior to the permanent settlement of European colonizers and the imposition of colonial schools, Indigenous nations had been educating their children in their communities and homes for millennia by centering Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in instruction (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). This was achieved through language-rich contexts and activities to develop children’s communicative competencies and through learning by doing and engaging with the land and other lifeworlds (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Similarly, bell hooks (1994), Ladson-Billings (2006), and other scholars have argued that schools were places of belonging, learning, and thriving for Black youth when Black-communities were free to exercise self determination in the education of their children in the years leading up to and decades following emancipation. Anderson (1988) and Siddle-Walker (2001) have detailed the education of southern Black folks from 1860 to 1935, and African American teaching in the South from 1940 through 1960, respectively, offering counternarratives of a century long period in which Black folks exercised educational self determination and successfully created spaces of belonging and learning for their children.

After the permanent settlement of Europeans in what is contemporarily known as the United States, colonial schools were established as an arm in upholding White supremacy. Sabzalian (2019) described these schools as “massive instruments of colonization” through “overt practices of assimilation” and in “quieter, subtler ways...through legitimized racism” toward Indigenous (and Black, Brown, and other students of color) and “curricular silences” about their histories, heritages, and ways of knowing (p. viii). In other words, since colonial invasion, schools have been sources of harm and un-belonging for students and communities of color, spaces where folks of color have had to navigate systemic racism, erasure of their identities, and forced assimilation. For Native students, this harm began with the imposition of nineteenth century “mission schools” and twentieth century boarding schools that were purposed to “civilize” Indigenous children by eradicating their languages, customs, religions, etc. (Brayboy, 2005; EchoHawk, 1997; Grande, 2015). These colonial schools were sites of physical, sexual, and emotional harm for Indigenous children and youth. In the era of boarding school, Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes and many were placed in schools that were located hundreds of miles from their families and communities, adding further harm. And, in addition to the physical, sexual, and emotional abuses that most students experienced, many, literally and figuratively, did not make it out of these institutions alive (Grande, 2015; Miller, 1996; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2003). It is important to note though, that from the advent of colonial education to present day, Indigenous educators, family, and community members have persisted in their fight to exercise self determination in the education of their children by carving out “spaces of survivance” in schools and “within and in spite of US Indian

policy” (Sabzalian, 2019, p. 12) and by creating their own tribal run schools (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

Schools as sites of harm and un-belonging for Black students began with the removal (mass firing) of Black teachers and school administrators in the aftermath of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and school integration (bell hook, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to bell hooks (1994), once schools were integrated and most Black teachers and administrators were fired, schools became places of submission, assimilation, and where Black students were taught that they did not belong. Though the mass firing of Black teachers in the aftermath of the *Brown vs. Board* decision was a devastating loss for Black students’ sense of belonging and thrivance in school, like Indigenous peoples, Black folks have continued to fight for educational spaces that sustain their children. They have done this through the establishment of Afro-centric and Black-led community schools supported by family and community members (Drummond, 2016; Tellefsen, 2016) and, in the local context of Washington state, through ongoing advocacy and activist work/movements to secure more equitable funding and access to quality programming and schools for Black students and to make Black lives matter at school (Dixon, 2011; Dumas, 2011; Watson, Hagopian, and Au, 2018).

Unfortunately, despite ongoing initiative by Black and Indigenous communities to exercise self determination in education by establishing their own schools and spaces within colonial schools that sustain and support the thrivance of their children, schools continue to be sites of deculturalization and dehumanization for the majority of Indigenous, Black, and other students of color (Grande, 2015; Love, 2019). Grande (2015) asserted that

Formal education within the closed walls of schools continues to be a forceful weapon used by dominant powers to create boundaries to control and mold the minds of youth and adults, to eradicate or weaken their Indigenous identity, and to assimilate them into mainstream society. (p. 36)

Similarly, contemporary schools routinely are places of spirit-murdering for students with dark skin (Love, 2019). Love (2019) highlights how spirit murdering is situated in anti-darkness, racism, settler-colonialism and systemic oppression. In other words, students of color have their identities, imagination, culture and epistemologies crushed as they engage in the school system. The mainstream use of White-centered curriculum utilizes damage-centered narratives (Tuck, 2009) of communities of color and master scripting (Swartz, 1992), which is the depiction of White revolutionary political leaders as peaceful, and the erasure of POC cultures and histories. Moreover, systemic racism is upheld with the dissociation of academic life and personal life of students of color, as students are expected to leave their racial identities at the door. Even schools that claim to be against racism often operate within the color evasiveness myth (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017) --the idea that pretending to not notice or talk about race eradicates racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Covid-19 and shifts to online learning have shed new light on and exacerbated educational inequities (Ishimaru, 2020). Covid-19 is a pandemic that has disproportionately affected communities of color in death tolls. Ongoing anti-Black racism is another pandemic that continues to impact the physical and emotional lives and wellbeing of Black folks during this time. The structural racism that allows for these twin pandemics’ disproportionate impact is over 400 years old. Systemic racism in the U.S. can be seen in regular threats to Black, Indigenous and Brown individuals’ and communities’ physical and mental safety, through experiences with police brutality, mass incarceration, street harassment, false police reporting, voter suppression, body policing, cultural erasure, poor air quality, denial of healthcare, housing, and citizenship

access, educational push outs, job discrimination, media misrepresentation, and so on (e.g. Wright, 2019; Nix, Campbell, Byers, & Alpert, 2017; Miranda, 2018; Alexander & West, 2012).

In order to address these systems of oppression, it is critical that we look to spaces that have been places of resistance and belonging. bell hooks (1990) suggest that African Americans have historically believed that constructing a homeplace had a radical political dimension (Davis, 2005), and this homeplace allows for Black bodies to be fulfilled and whole. According to bell hooks (1990), as described by Love (2019), a homeplace “is a space where Black folx truly matter to each other, where souls are nurtured, comforted, and fed...” “a community, typically led by women, where White power and the damages done by it are healed by loving Blackness and restoring dignity” (p. 63). In essence, it is “a site of resistance” (p. 63). Places of learning have the potential for elements of a homeplace, by dismantling anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity and other forms of racism and oppression.

In this report, we argue that a sense of belonging is key in learning spaces that support the thriving of students of color. The need to belong is universal and is found across all contexts, cultures, identities, and classes of people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A sense of belonging promotes wellbeing (Allen & Bowles, 2013) and engagement in learning (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). A major characteristic of spaces of belonging (homeplaces) is that they support and center multiple identities, resist and seek to dismantle systems of oppression, and fight for intersectional justice and equity in education (Love, 2019). The Black-led organizations featured in this study, and the Black leaders and community members of color that we learned with and from were embodiments of homeplaces.

Research Design

Using a mixed methods research design that included components of community based participatory research (CBPR), the information shared in this research report draws from data gathered through/from participant observations, document analysis, a survey (translated in Cantonese, Spanish, Tagalog, Amharic, Vietnamese, and Korean at the time of this report) and in-depth virtual interviews via zoom. CBPR is a research design that includes community members as partners in all phases of the research process (Holkup et al., 2004). Similar to Indigenous research paradigms, CBPR adheres to the foundational principles of respect, relationships, responsibility, and reciprocity (Louis, 2007). Our CBPR began in April 2020 through our volunteer work and partnership with Nyema Clark at Nurturing Roots farm, a community farm located in South Seattle. Two of the project team members had a previous relationship with Nyema and Nurturing Roots, and it was important to us that we maintained a strong, relational, respectful and reciprocal relationship with her. Additionally, we felt that it was critical that the effort to support this partnership was collaborative. To achieve this, we formally asked Nyema to be a partner in our research and to allow Nurturing Roots to be one of the research sites. We also volunteered at the Nurturing Roots farm and created a volunteer task list to take some of the load off of Nyema.

In addition to our partnership with and volunteer work at Nurturing Roots, we engaged in participant observation, beginning in April 2020 through our membership and participation in other Black-led community-based organizations such as the Black Education Strategy Roundtable (BESR) and The Root of Us (TROU). Our participant observation with BESR and TROU included attending and participating in virtual meetings, town halls, and rallies hosted and facilitated by leaders and members of these organizations. We also explored organizational

websites to learn about the mission and work of the various organizations while also examining and analyzing information shared by the organizations in emails, newsletters, and other news and documents produced by and about each organization.

In order to better achieve our project aims, we created a survey and distributed it beginning in August 2020 at Nurturing Roots farm, to be completed on a volunteer basis by volunteers at the farm. In addition to Nurturing Roots farm, we reached out to many POC owned and led community spaces to advertise the survey via email, Facebook direct messaging and

group postings, QR code flyers, and digital flyers. Of those who responded, many agreed to partner with us and advertise our project on their websites, Instagram stories, Facebook posts, and email listservs. While we intend to keep this project going, at the time of this report we had 47 completed surveys.

Lastly, we conducted in-depth interviews as a way to better understand and highlight the strengths and assets of community spaces. At the time of this report, we had 8 interviews completed. Because one of the aims of the project is to better understand the ways community learning places foster belonging and learning among



Figure 1: Kaleb Germinaro holding up the QR code flyers and the Volunteer Task List at Nurturing Roots

communities of color, survey, observation and interview data are being used to create a community map of places that foster belonging, learning and healthy connections that will be shared with the greater Seattle POC community. We hope this map will serve as a domestic tourism guide centering POC folks and businesses that support and sustain their identities, similar to a green book.

The Negro Motorist Green Book, created by Green and Green during the years of Jim Crow, was created by and for Black folks traveling across the country. This book signaled locations that were safe(r) for Black folks to visit. This was a practice of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005); the skills required to move through a space that was built intentionally to keep you out. In this context, the Green Book was used to navigate de facto Jim Crow, as well as overall White supremacy culture. This image is of a Green Book that was taken in 2019 and started by a Black owned bookstore in New Orleans in 1999 (Community Book Center). While de facto Jim Crow ended in 1965, the harm inflicted by White



Figure 2: "A Guide for Black Tourists in New Orleans" distributed by Community Book Center in New Orleans

supremacy continues to this day. We hope to disrupt this with our community map.

Lastly, it's important to note that so often research has been and continues to be extractive of Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color in order to profit the researcher and universities and rarely the communities that made their research possible. Therefore, we sought funding through multiple grant applications, and will continue to do so in order to compensate POC respondents. We were able to compensate respondents \$20 each for their time and expertise. While their time and expertise are priceless and invaluable, it should be noted that this is a small amount compared to what they contributed to the project. We seek to compensate them with more, as we apply for more grants.

Centering Black-Led and POC Spaces

This Spring and Summer, amid all the sorrow and turmoil caused by Covid-19 and racial reckonings, we had the honor of learning with and from Black-led organizations and community members of color. In this section, we introduce the main organizational spaces that informed/contributed to our findings, share the community map, and some of the key/repeated places of belonging identified by survey and interview participants.

Black Education Strategy Roundtable

The Black Education Strategy Roundtable (BESR), a Black organization led by Steve Smith, executive director, is a coalition of Black community members and leaders, educators (P-12 and University level), parents, and partner organizations advocating for the improvement of public education in Washington state for Black students from early childhood through higher education. Its mission is to “achieve systemic changes in education that results in excellence and equity for Black/African American students at all levels of the educational continuum and to raise the bar for all students”. Furthermore, BESR envisions 100% of Black and African American students graduating with “a meaningful high school diploma, exceptionally prepared for college, work, productive citizenship and life”.

BESR is a coalition that holds and engages in quarterly and town hall meetings to discuss Black education and what needs to happen and change in schools to best serve Black students and families during remote learning and beyond. In addition to providing space for members of the coalition to share their concerns, experiences, and expertise, leaders and members also engage in advocacy by providing information to local and state school boards and policy makers about disparities in the educational experiences and achievement of Black students and to hold them accountable to establish and implement policies and practices to correct these disparities. BESR's coalition and advocacy work will be discussed in more detail later in the findings section.

The Root of Us

The Root of Us (TROU), whose founder and CEO is Fernell Miller, is a Black-led diversity, equity and inclusion consultancy community organization that focuses on “identity development, empowerment and building strong communities”. The mission of TROU is to “provide children, youth, mentors and community members opportunities to grow their knowledge of self, knowledge of historical and contemporary inequities, and acquire the tools, skills and strategies necessary for building more equitable and inclusive communities one root at a time”. The organization provides services that include: 1) Consultation & Coaching; 2)

Education & Training; 3) Organizational Assessment; 4) Workshops & Classes; 5) Speaking Engagements; and 6) Program Development.

TROU is a very active organization heavily focused on reimagining and reshaping the educational system in Washington state to end racist and assimilationist practices in schools, thus improving the schooling experiences of students of color. A big focus of the organization this summer was on hearing and learning from students, families and educators of color about their needs and wishes for an equitable, safe, and culturally affirming school system during and beyond distance learning. The main ways that TROU centered the voices and desires of students, families and educators of color this summer was through the use of surveys and student-led rallies, which will be discussed in detail later in the findings section.

Nurturing Roots

Nurturing Roots is founded and directed by Nyema Clark, also known as Farm Queen in the Seattle community. Nurturing Roots provides opportunities for youth and families of color to not only develop an intimate, hands-on connection with food sources, but also participate in improving the environment. They cultivate a 1/4-acre urban farm that offers healthy food options by growing organic produce. The organization engages community members through farm tours and invites them to help tend the farm through community work days where they learn while they get their hands dirty: weeding, planting, harvesting and caring for the soil. They share produce through a weekly farm stand with ROAR– the only farm stand on South Beacon Hill, providing organic produce at affordable prices. Further, Nurturing Roots offer educational opportunities centering food sovereignty and the intersections of race and environment through



Figure 3: Vegetable starts at Nurturing Roots

free or low-cost events. Their board of directors, staff and a majority of our volunteers are people of color whose lived experiences have been significantly impacted by structural racism, including but not limited to gentrification, food deserts, economic and educational inequity, sexism and healthcare inequality.

During the pandemics, Nurturing Roots continues to be a pillar of the community. For example, they built a greenhouse on the farm to implement a nursery program to raise plant starts that will be distributed for free to community members so that they can create produce gardens at home. Further, they serve as a place of comfort and refuge by hosting events centered on joy as resistance for Black folks in the community. Finally, they also keep community members informed with calls-to-action on ways to support the Black Lives Matter movement on their social media platforms.

Additional POC Led Spaces

While the initial starting place for the community map was with Nurturing Roots, we were able to learn from community members additional spaces for where they felt belonging, safety and comfortability. Local schools were seldom mentioned (twice out of 47 survey

responses and 8 interviews). Amongst the places mentioned were community centers, Black, Indigenous, and/or Brown-led community organizations, culturally sustaining museums, food spaces and cafes, parks in the South end of Seattle, their homes, and physical people. The majority of these spaces serve as places of learning outside of school spaces. For example, the Asian-led Danny Woo Garden, a community farm in the International District that was mentioned multiple times in the survey responses. It offers volunteer opportunities for students, while learning about the food they grow, building relationships with community elders, and participating in mutual aid during the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, the Latinx-led Estelita's Library, another popularly named place of belonging, proudly supports youth-led liberation movements and allows folks to organize in their physical space. Additionally, one of the most frequently named place of belonging was [The Station](#), a Black and Latinx-owned coffee shop located in North Beacon Hill who advocates on behalf of youth, families, and communities, particularly those placed in the margins (e.g. They serve as an art gallery, promoting artists of color, while also providing culturally sustaining resources such as ways to protect oneself from I.C.E. and offering free Defund The Police and Invest in Communities posters during the ongoing Black Lives Matter protests). Some community members even named specific people like [Tarik Abdullah](#), founder of a DJ and a Cook, a culinary duo who host pop-ups for the Seattle community and has been cheffing up free meals for community members through [Feed The People](#) prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic. These learning spaces allow for community members to experience positive learning, identity development and belonging as they fluidly move across multiple locations on the map. Some themes associated with these spaces are agency, liberation, justice-centered and safety with the opportunity to grow and be valued regularly. This is contradictory to the role schools are playing in many POC students' lives; therefore, these learning spaces provide insight in how school can be reimaged and extend beyond the physical or virtual classroom.

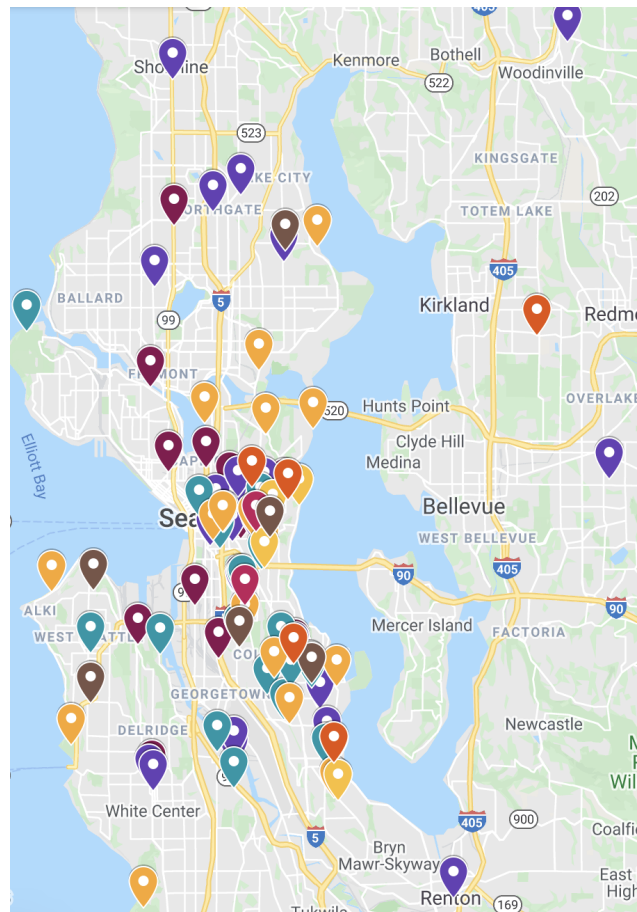


Figure 4 Map of places community members listed as feel belonging, safety, and comfort from the community mapping online survey and interviews.

Findings: Qualities of Spaces of Belonging and Learning

Our collective learning with and from Black-led organizations and community members of color through participant observation, a community survey, and interviews helped us to identify three key, interrelated themes that characterized the community spaces frequented by

folks of color. First, we noticed that they were often Liberatory Spaces in which participants were heard, resources were shared, and members were encouraged to engage in action for social change. A second major characteristic of these spaces is that they were Culturally Sustaining in the vibe they fostered and maintained through music and arts and in their advocacy calls for more educators of color and curriculum in the schools their children attend that center their lives, histories, cultures, languages, etc. Lastly, they were identified as homeplaces where folks of color are able to breathe and feel safe from daily racist attacks, microaggressions, hyper surveillance, etc. Next, we elaborate on these major themes and the sub-themes that support them.

Major Finding # 1 - Liberatory Spaces: Community Self determination and Action

We noticed from our volunteer work at Nurturing Roots and our participation in virtual meetings and rallies hosted by BESR and TROU that they are liberatory spaces of collective learning and sharing, where all members and participants are viewed and treated as knowledgeable and valuable contributors and are encouraged to be enactors of change. In contrast to the silencing, dismissiveness, and dearth of opportunities to engage in authentic partnerships and decision making that are often mainstays of schools, these Black-led organizations and community spaces are places where students, families, educators and community members of color are welcomed, encouraged to share, are heard, and where their input is taken seriously and implemented. They are also spaces in which participants are able to speak freely and frankly about their experiences with/in the public school systems as well as spaces to engage in collective dreaming, planning and action to re/imagine and re/design culturally sustaining and homeplace learning spaces for students, families, and community members of color within and outside of traditional schools. In essence, they are self-determining spaces where participants are the change agents.

a. Amplifying Community Voices and Agency

One of the ways that these organizational spaces are liberatory is in the way they are designed. They are spaces that seek out and value the voices and perspectives of all community members and participants, including youth/students, parents, and educators. The Root of Us does this work particularly well through their creation and use of surveys and through the focus and format of their virtual rallies. BESR also excels in this area through their regularly scheduled quarterly meetings and their impromptu town hall meetings when current events necessitate an immediate response. Nurturing Roots practices this in the agency that volunteers have in deciding what work to do at the farm, including implementing projects for the future of the farm. Throughout these organizations, we can recognize the ways learners in the space are encouraged to utilize their agency.

The Root of Us. Shortly after the world went into quarantine and schools pivoted to remote learning, TROU created and shared a survey titled “What is your vision for an equitable educational system for all?” to capture and center the educational experiences of those farthest from justice and to provide “extensive narrative voices to lead the vision for a new educational system for all.” In this beautifully designed and comprehensive survey created by Fernell and TROU youth that are members of a group that calls itself “The Equity Fishbowl,” there are separate, group specific surveys for students (Pre-k to college), parents and families, and staff (administrators, teachers, custodians, counselors and about a half dozen other support staff). Each survey comprises 10 sections with a collection of questions that asked respondents to share their feelings about being away from school and learning remotely using the format of a weather

report; what their experiences in school were like before Covid-19; and their vision for a new and improved educational system. TROU's most recent survey titled, "3-2-1- Launch into New School", builds on the previous survey by asking respondents (youth, families, and community members) to dream big by reimagining and sharing their vision of a new educational system for students and families of color that is rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion" (Aug. 29, 2020 email).

Another way that TROU centers the voices of POC communities and especially youth was through two virtual rallies that it hosted this summer. "Back to School - An Equity Centered Conversation," was the title of the first rally, held on July 21, 2020, and focused on P-higher education learning. According to Erin Jones, a veteran educator and current race and equity consultant and collaborator of TROU, the goal of the rally was to learn and share ideas (not fix education) and was an opportunity for voices to be centered that are not normally centered through an intersectional lens. Specifically, the rally was intended to center and celebrate the voices and leadership of elementary, middle and high school youth, voices that are not normally heard in education. Led by youth/students from the "The Equity Fishbowl," a group that was formed out of and continues to meet after Erin Jones' course on racial equity, the rally had roughly 550 students, parents, educators, and community members from across Washington state. Attendees were able to participate in 11 student-led break out rooms focused on various educational justice and equity topics identified as key issues of concern by students, parents, and educators of color across Washington state. The break out rooms titles comprised: Restorative Justice Practices; Counselors, Mental Health and Healing; Professional Development for Teachers and Staff; Diversifying the Workforce; Standardized Testing and Opt-Out Strategies; Black History and Pan-Ethnic Studies Curriculum; Integrating Higher Level Courses; Remote and Distance Learning; Supports for Students with Special Needs; English Language-Learners; and Parent advocacy and Activism.

The second student-led rally, held on August 8, 2020, was completely organized and run by TROU youth and young adults (high school and college students) who served as featured speakers and led all the breakout room groups. The rally, titled "Student Virtual Rally: The Root of Our Youth," focused on segregation and inequities within and across schools and had roughly 140 people, mainly youth, in attendance. There were eight break out rooms, many of which focused on the same topics as the first rally with a few exceptions that included the following, Segregated Learning (Standardized Testing/Integrating Advanced Courses) and Support for LGBTQ+ Students. In the aftermath of the two rallies, the youth of TROU, now officially known as "The Root Of Our Youth," have taken the initiative to start their own podcasts titled, "The lunch table." At the time of this report, there were nine podcasts that featured topics on POC History and Panethnic Studies, School Resource Officers & Restorative Practices, Education & Support for Students with Special Needs, Diversifying the Teacher Workforce, and the Elections.

A final way that TROU centers the expertise and desires of students, families, and educators of color was through the creation of a video titled, "I Can Return to School When...". In the video, mainly students, parents, and educators of color from across the state of Washington are seen sharing their needs and requests for a critical and culturally sustaining curriculum; an end to bullying and racially charged discipline against students of color; anti-racist training and accountability for teachers; the hiring of more teachers and administrators of color; and a commitment from educational leaders across to state to disrupt historical and present day racism and inequities in schools.

Black Education Strategy Roundtable. BESR, an organization that previously met on a quarterly basis, began meeting more regularly at the outset of Covid-19 and quarantine restrictions to provide space for members to share their experiences, frustrations, and expertise regarding remote learning and other challenges resulting from the pandemic. In their quarterly meeting on April 18, 2020, major discussion topics included: 1) 1,500 Black seniors from Seattle Public Schools (SPS) that were disengaged and unreachable since the start of quarantine and remote learning; 2) Inequities in/lack of access to technology (laptops, Chromebooks, etc.) and high speed internet to participate in online learning; 3) communicating to state agencies like WEA of the need for different curricula foci and pedagogy during distance learning and the need to not go back to education as usual after the pandemic; 4) consulting with students and families of color about redesigning schools; and 5) recognizing that this redesign work is already being done and that a land-scape analysis of this work is needed to move the work forward. One of the outcomes of this meeting was the creation of workspaces, described in the next subsection.

In another virtual meeting hosted by BESR on June 20, 2020, focused on reopening schools, major topics of discussion included: 1) concerns about learning loss compounded by remote learning in the spring; 2) heightened awareness of the digital divide (inadequate technology and internet service) for Black youth and families; 3) student engagement concerns and the need for stricter guidelines and expectations for engagement; and 4) student and teacher trauma resulting from and exacerbated by the pandemic. Lastly, in response to announcements by SPS and other school districts throughout Washington state that the 2020-2021 school year would begin with a fall semester of remote learning, BESR called two emergency town hall meetings. The focus of these town halls, scheduled the afternoon and evening of July 23, 2020 in consideration of members' and participants' work schedules and family responsibilities, was on "Reopening and reimagining schools now with many districts returning to remote learning". In both town halls, concerns about the digital divide, learning loss, and student and teacher trauma persisted and discussions about student engagement expanded to an intersectional lens and concerns about meeting the needs of English Language Learners, students with disabilities, homeless students and those in foster care. Other major topics included the need for educators to address communication gaps/barriers particularly concerning East African families who do not speak English as a first language, and listening to and implementing feedback from students and families about their needs. Lastly, there were more conversations about seeing this as an opportunity for redesigning schools to be culturally sustaining and anti-racist in its curricula, teaching, content, policies, and practices.

Nurturing Roots. While the start of quarantine may have slightly decreased volunteer participation, listening to community needs and amplifying those needs stayed a priority of Nurturing Roots. Right when shelter in place was initiated, Nyema continued interacting with community members on social media, in which they had requested her to start grow-from-home kits. Nyema promptly began creating free veggie boxes. To stay within safe practices, she had a limited number of folks help assemble free boxes of seeds and instruction manuals of how to grow each vegetable. Further, as Nurturing Roots gained attention, along with a major increase in volunteers during the start of the uprisings for Black lives, they were able to develop safety measures for volunteer days (e.g. sanitizer station, requiring volunteers to wear a mask, offering food and water, requiring folks to maintain 6 feet distance, etc.). Volunteers quickly learned that a key feature of this learning space is the ability for participants to choose their engagement level, learning direction, and work capacity based on what needs to be done at the farm and their own personal ability on a given day. For example, while Nyema is around for guiding support,

volunteers are trusted to tend to the farm in tasks they are drawn to, such as harvesting the tomatoes or clearing the weeds. Similarly, many folks have brought their visions for the farm to Nyema with a plan, including suggestions to build an aquaponics system, to use solar panels, and to create a virtual reality map of the farm. With that in mind, Nurturing Roots provides an example of how learning spaces can promote self determination amongst volunteers, amplifying their voices and supporting their agency within the community.

b. Sharing Resources and Promoting Learning and Growth

In addition to amplifying community voice and agency, the Black-led organizations we learned with and from this summer used their spaces to share resources with its members and participants, and this became more prevalent during Covid-19 and racial justice uprisings. Sharing resources for community learning and self-education was done in several ways.

Black Education Strategy Roundtable. BESR and TROU use email to share resources with and among its members. For example, on June 10th, in response to the murder of George Floyd by police and the adverse and disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on Black people and Black communities, BESR shared a repository of information titled, “Anti-Racist Resources and Actions/Covid-19. In the email there were links to videos, articles, blogs, teaching resources for teachers and parents, reading lists, and a link to a google document containing a repository of information organized by topic and focused on the intersection between equity issues and the pandemic. The repository of resources provided in the email covered topics such as policing and police brutality, how to talk to kids about race, teaching materials for Black Lives Matter at School, on being the change, and multiple readings lists for kids and adults about race and racism.

Another way that BESR shared resources was through the creation of work groups. In early June 2020, various workspaces were created in a platform called Slack in response to input from members and participants in an April 18, 2020 quarterly meeting that was largely focused on Covid-19, its impact on Black students and families and the challenges of remote learning. A total of six workspaces were created and designed for group members to collaborate and share information and resources. The works spaces comprised the following groups: Black organizations on education; online community development; parent engagement; student assessment; BESR workshops; and general.

The Root of Us. Like BESR, TROU keeps members connected and informed through email. For example, in a June 26, 2020 email, TROU shared a list of ways to “Educate, Participate and Celebrate Juneteenth EVERY day!” along with links. Also, in a July 24, 2020 email following the first virtual rally that it hosted, the CEO shared links to the recorded meeting/rally, the most recent [blog](#) (the CEO writes 1-4 blogs per month), and a link to [TROU’s store](#). The store page advertises classes and consultancy services along with pricings. TROU offers weekly racial healing circles; an Identity Education Series digital course; and consultation for individuals and organizations with Fernell on topics such as systemic racism, Black Lives Matter, and how to talk with youth about race. Fernell’s weekly blogs, which date back to March 27, 2020, have focused on the need for adult diversity in schools, self care, disrupting racism, and reimagining schools.

TROU excels in its outreach to youth. The Root Of Our Youth, a subcommittee of TROU that is 100% student run, has a personal page on TROU’s website where it shares links to resources on topics of interest to youth, a calendar of event, and its brand new podcast series titled, “[The Lunch Table](#).” To date, TROOY has recorded and shared nine podcasts episodes. In its first episode called, “Welcome,” members share the story of the origin of TROOY and

discuss racial stereotypes, cultural identity, and their hopes for “[The Lunch Table](#)” series. The other episodes have focused on the need for diverse representation in curricula to eliminate eurocentrism and false narratives in history class; the violence and harm of Student Resource Officers (SROs) and police officers in school on POC bodies; and the schooling experiences of students with disabilities and their needs for support from peers and teachers.

Nurturing Roots. As mentioned above, Nurturing Roots continued to be a source for mutual aid groceries. In addition to the grow-at-home veggie box, Nurturing Roots also partnered with other community businesses such as El Quetzal Mexican Restaurant and Feed the People to share produce from the farm. Further, Nurturing Roots hosted a variety of social distance events at the farm including a book release and spoken word event for local author and poet, [Ebo Barton](#); a film night featuring a documentary on food sovereignty in which Nurturing Roots was featured; a mutual aid drive for clothing, furniture, and school supplies; and a youth mask-making event. Nurturing Roots continues to be a place of belonging that aims to meet community members’ needs from food to clothing to safety, as well as a place outside of schools where youth of color can learn about issues affecting their lives.

c. Encouraging Action for Social Change

A final way that the Black-led and POC organizations were liberating spaces for its members, participants, and volunteers is that they encouraged and suggested ways for its community members to be agents of change in their communities by taking action. These organizations encouraged their participants to engage in self and group learning (described earlier), sign petitions, contact local and state education board members and representatives to name a few.

Black Education Strategy Roundtable. A major part of the work of BESR is advocacy. Leaders and board members of BESR are often called to testify before the Washington State Board of Education and local school districts on behalf of Black education and Black students. Since Covid-19, ongoing anti-Black racism, and resurgent racial justice (BLM) movements, leaders of BESR are being called in more frequently and earlier in the decision making process to testify on behalf of Black education and Black students. For example, in June, BESR was asked by the Washington State office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to be part of a workgroup. Major topics of discussion in this workgroup included educational justice for those farthest from justice, health and safety, and leveling expertise. Also, on July 9, 2020, they testified before the Washington State Board of Education regarding the proposed ruling that would extend a “two-for-one” credit policy to all courses that were originally designed for the Career and Technical Education Program. Additionally, BESR periodically sends out action alerts via email. In these alerts, members on the listserv are asked to sign petitions and to contact local and state boards of education. For example, in an August 24, 2020 Action Alert email, members were asked to email the State Board of Education to stop lowering standards and requirements for receiving a high school diploma; [sign several petitions by the NAACP](#) calling for a quality education for every student of color, sweeping police reform, quality and affordable health care for all, Justice for George Floyd, etc.; and to register to vote.

The Root of Us. Like BESR, TROU periodically shares opportunities for taking action through email. For example, On June 26, 2020, TROU shared a list of ways for people to get involved and support campaigns, organizations, and businesses that benefit Black communities. These included [signing petitions](#) to make discrimination illegal and to [make internet free for all](#); [making monthly donations](#) to organization that support Black communities; and [registering to vote](#). In a July 31, 2020 email, participants were asked to [sign a petition](#) to “call on school boards

and elected/public officials to make sure that educational funds #reachusall to #teachusall and #supportusall”. The petition also asked that education leaders and public officials “put equity and student voice at the forefront of decisions being made to return to school.”

Nurturing Roots and other POC community organizations. Similarly, Nurturing Roots utilizes their Instagram platform to advertise calls-to-action, such as the transferring of unused plots of land to Nurturing Roots to expand their ability to provide even more free produce for the communities they serve. Similarly, many locations like [El Centro de la Raza](#), [Danny Woo Garden](#), and [Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center](#) (located in Youngstown) consistently advocates for their communities through calls to action like calling on Seattle residents to [pay rent to the Duwamish peoples](#) who have stewarded the land since time immemorial. Many of the places listed by survey respondents and interviewees are spaces with a history of resistance and sovereignty work around racial justice. A few interviewees described how they remembered the inception of El Centro de la Raza (located in North Beacon Hill) - it was an abandoned school and then occupied by community members to claim space for folks of color (El Centro de la Raza, n.d.). Additionally, Nurturing Roots, and other community spaces mentioned in the survey responses, simultaneously serve as organizing hubs through social media, advocacy and events hosted and operated to serve the community. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, mutual aid projects like the garden-at-home baskets and farm to table meals put on by Nurturing Roots, food donations collections at the Station (Black and Latinx owned), and free meals cooked at [Musang](#) (Filipinx owned restaurant), were not only critical for community members impacted, but they were also another way these POC spaces modeled and encouraged action for social change.

Major Finding # 2 - Culturally Sustaining Spaces

The second major, interconnected theme that we identified from our participant observation in, survey of, and interviews with POC community organizations and members was that participants felt culturally sustained in these spaces and called out schools for being culturally un-sustaining places. Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), aims to sustain the cultural and linguistic competence of youth and communities of color in both traditional and evolving ways (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). It also demands, “explicitly pluralist outcomes that are not centered on White middle-class, monolingual/monocultural norms and notions of educational achievement” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 12). Paris and Alim (2017) explain that “Culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities” (p.1). They point out that CSP can happen anywhere and has always existed in places where ways of being and knowing are validated and thriving. These spaces were culturally sustaining in the vibe they provided through music and arts; in the critical, intersectional and panethnic studies curricula, resources and programming they imagined and advocated for, and in the critical community of relationships that sustained them.

a. “It’s a Vibe”: Music, Arts, and Food

Music and arts were identified and witnessed as key features of the community spaces. Many of the spaces, including [Cafe Avole](#), [The Station](#), and [Nepantla](#), displayed artwork by folks of color (some for sale), played music by POC, and/or contained posters or advertisements that

promoted love and support for Black lives. This purposeful and selective use of music and arts provided a vibe in the community spaces that made them inviting and culturally sustaining.

A common response among folks that were interviewed and who completed the community survey was that there is a vibe in the community spaces cultivated by the messages posted, artwork displayed, and music played. Similarly, in the Black-led spaces that we participated and volunteered in, music and arts was used to set a vibe and make the spaces feel more welcoming and culturally affirming to its participants.

Survey respondents and interviewees commented that poster messages in community businesses often expressed the unfiltered perspectives and commitments of their owners on local issues, which show unequivocal support for Black lives and folks of color. For example, posters included clear advocacy for defunding the Seattle police and



Figure 5 Luis (left) and Leona (right) holding up artwork from Nepantla at The Station

commitments to collecting food and masks for community members during Covid-19. Similarly, an interviewee mentioned that messages and artwork in the neighborhood acknowledging that Black lives matter, especially in a predominantly White neighborhood like Wedgwood where a George Floyd mural was painted, provides them with comfort.

Further, many of the locations provided by survey respondents have artwork by POC for sale, serving as spaces to promote and foster revenue for their work. For example, Nurturing Root's indoor space has artwork posted on the wall created by currently incarcerated community members of color. Nepantla, a frequently listed location, also features artwork by POC, while highlighting certain identities each month.

Music was another means that helped folks of color to feel welcome and like they belonged in the community spaces. One interviewee stated that the places they listed "have music that I listen to-- it means a lot because I know I belong there". Similarly, The Root of Us often played music by Black and other artists of color in their virtual meetings to create a welcoming and inviting vibe for folks entering the space. In addition to music, TROU brought in



Figure 6 George Floyd mural located in Wedgwood, Seattle. Artist unknown. Photo taken by Danielle Brown.

poets to their spaces as an artistic and powerful way of establishing the focus of and setting the atmosphere for meetings, and of extending key topics discussed in the spaces.

Finally, food was another frequently brought up topic when describing the comforting qualities of their named spaces of belonging. For example, one interviewee mentioned the struggle of not finding culturally sustaining ingredients in grocery stores in their neighborhood, but instead must go to [Uwajimaya](#), a large Asian supermarket located in the International District. Describing their experience humorously but frustratingly, they stated, “I went to three different grocery stores around [Central Seattle] and no one has fucking Chinese broccoli. Why is this so hard?”.

b. Critical, Cultural, and Intersectional Learning Environments

In the Black-led organizations and POC community learning spaces named by survey and interview participants, critical culturally sustaining curricula and supports for students’ multiple, intersecting identities was identified as critical to their identity development and self-reflexivity practice. Participants shared their desire for a pluralist education in which students are learning about multiple cultures, histories, and experiences (including their own) and having critical conversations about and critiques of institutional racism.

Community members of color shared their wishes for opportunities to explore their own complex racial histories. One interviewee mentioned that community learning spaces of belonging allowed them to explore their racial identity. Because schools often operate in a color-evasive myth (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017) or in harmful damage-centered narratives (Tuck, 2009), it is critical that students of color have the opportunity to “reconnect with histories stolen from them”, as a different interviewee shared.

In addition to wanting to explore their own racial histories, students, parents, educators, and community members of color emphasized the need for critical, ethnic studies curricula that centers the histories, cultures, and experiences of POC. For example, in the video produced by TROU - “[I can return to school when...](#),” students, parents, and educators of color shared their desires for diverse curricula that include pan-ethnic studies; represent the diverse group of students in the schools, state, and nation; and feature authors of color. There were also calls for an end to the Whitewashing of history through the glorification of colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism and for the explicit teaching of anti-Black racism and White privilege and how it pertains to history and contemporary society.

Conversations and calls for a pan-ethnic studies curriculum continued in virtual break out rooms during TROU’s first student led rally. Participants in the “Black History and Pan-Ethnic Studies Curriculum” break out room extended the conversation about pan-ethnic studies with calls for curricula, beginning in the early grades, that teach empathy, kindness and respect for all cultures and that do not solely focus on defeats but victories as well. Participants also expressed the need for more teachers of color (discussed in the next section) who typically possess greater knowledge and experience to effectively teach a pan-ethnic studies curriculum.

Ethnic studies also came up in conversations that we had with community members who participated in interviews. One interviewee mentioned that designating ethnic studies history courses as electives when Euro-centric history is considered a requirement signals whose identities they value and hold as standard. Furthermore, similar to conversations by youth, parents, and educators who participated in TROU events, one interviewee emphasized the learning that needs to be happening with younger students in earlier grades. They shared that “everyone should be learning how to be a decent person in any profession--[courses focused on

social justice] should be taught earlier to kids”. They went on to say “Engineers should have feelings too!” expressing that courses in the STEM field often do not center social justice issues.

A final aspect related to culturally sustaining curricula and programming that youth and community members of color want to see in schools is attention to and support for their intersectional identities. Recognizing that POC are complex and not monolithic, many respondents expressed the need for schools to recognize and provide resources and programming to support their multiple identities. The need to provide better supports for students with special needs and English language learners (ELL) was a rallying cry in meetings hosted by BESR and TROU. During TROU’s July 21, 2020 virtual rally, students, parents, educators, and community members called out the bullying and isolation that students with disabilities experience in school as a result of being separated from (in separate classes) and misunderstood by their peers. They also called for more opportunities for students with disabilities to be in classes with their peers, for strength-based IEPs, and more learning and training for teachers to better understand and implement accommodations. Many of the conversations about ELL students and families centered around communication gaps that have been exacerbated during Covid-19 and remote learning. One interviewee mentioned that they wanted to see ELL interpreters at school events such as listening sessions. Relatedly, students and parents at the July 21, 2020 virtual rally expressed the need for teacher-parent communication to be translated to their home languages. In addition to frustrations about communication, participants in the virtual rally wanted to see intentional efforts in schools to enact culturally and linguistically sustaining (not assimilationist) practices that foster a “culture of unity” between ELL and general education students, dismantle inherent biases against students of color who are also bi/multilingual, and instruction that is differentiated.

c. Critical Relationships and Critical Love

For education to sustain the lifeways of communities, it matters who is in the community, what their role is, and whether or not they are seen and treated as experts. For the participants in this study, cultivating strong parent-teacher relationships, recruiting and retaining more teachers of color, and “checking” community members are all critical components of learning spaces that are culturally sustaining.

Multiple interviewees mentioned that the relationships between parents/guardians and teachers/schools are critical in building trusting relationships. One respondent, who is an educator, asked “are parents being seen as someone who knows something?” Another interviewee, who is a parent, mentioned that this is a quality they look for when considering what school they’d want their children to attend. Additionally, when asked what qualities in the spaces of belonging were important, an interviewee stated that it was an intergenerational space--a space they saw “young Filipinos taking their parents and their grandparents there”. These statements emphasize how respect for parents and collaboration with families create schooling environments that are sustaining for them and their children.

Diversifying the teacher workforce was another topic of discussion among students, parents, and community members. In Seattle, White educators make up 80% of the teaching force, which is representative of the country’s teaching force (Loewus, 2017). Community members wanted access to opportunities for folks of color to become teachers. One respondent mentioned wanting to see a pathway for recruiting and training teachers of color, such as recruiting high school seniors to become teachers, offering career mentorship support during higher education that carries on into a long-term mentorship. The community member explained that this long-term mentorship is needed for recruiting and retaining educators of color as they

navigate a predominantly White field, which often requires significant emotional labor. Recruiting and retaining educators of color support students of color through representation, as they are able to see themselves in positions of power and as an affirmation of their own identities. Participants who attended the July 21, 2020 virtual rally hosted by TROU shared that the lack of racial representation among teachers and administrators in schools causes students of color mental, emotional, and racial distress and to be hypersensitive, overly adaptive, and maladjusted. Participants also shared the huge burden that Black women in local school districts feel and carry in wanting to support their students' of color identity development and success in school while being one of a few or the sole teacher of color in a school. So, hiring and retaining a critical collective of teachers of color in all schools strengthens relationships between educators of color and school systems that have historically excluded and pushed them out.

Lastly, a critical aspect of culturally sustaining spaces is that it allows for growth and critical love among community members. Paris and Alim (2017) describe the practice of critical love as inward gaze; the act of looking in our own communities to “check” one another, as one interviewee mentions. In other words, to look inward means to ensure that we are not reproducing or perpetuating systems of oppression. Another member of the community shared that one of the reasons they value POC learning spaces is that they have a “sense of community agreement of how one is approached if acting out of line”. Further, many community members of color voiced that they wanted educators to practice inward gaze too.

Major Finding # 3: Homeplaces

Citing bell hooks, Bettina Love (2019) describes homeplaces as “spaces where Black folk truly matter to each other, where souls are nurtured, comforted, and fed” (p. 63). They are spaces where “White power and the damages done by it are healed by loving Blackness and restoring dignity” (p. 63). They are sites of resistance. For folks of color, homeplaces are needed because “they are places that honor emotional, physical, spiritual, financial struggle of living under what hooks calls ‘The brutal reality of racial apartheid’ in the US and finding one’s humanity within the struggle against it” (p. 64). Another key finding from our work learning with and from Black-led organizations and youth and community members of color is that spaces of belonging feel like a homeplace, spaces where they are able to breathe and are free from daily microaggressions, racism, policing, police violence and murdering of members of their community, whether in schools or in society. They identified their homes and POC-led community spaces as places where they feel safe and are able to breathe.

a. Breathable Spaces

The POC-led spaces named in this project can be seen as homeplaces, given their characteristic of being breathable spaces. Breathable spaces are places where POC can seek an escape from daily anti-Black racism, microaggressions, and assimilationist schooling and work practices. This theme is particularly harrowing considering the many Black folks, including George Floyd, Eric Garner, Javier Ambler II, and Elijah McClain, who repeated the words “I can’t breathe” while police assaulted and subsequently murdered them. Similarly, due to systemic racism, Covid-19, a virus that affects one’s respiratory system, disproportionately affects Black and Indigenous communities. Habtom and Scribe (2020) discuss these connections and call for co-conspiring or, as they clarify, co-breathing relationships between Black and Indigenous communities. Therefore, in this section we explore how these named spaces of belonging are ones that are breathable: free from daily racism, code-switching, and instead one of existing fully and in solidarity with other POC communities.

At the “[Back to School - An Equity Centered Conversation](#)” rally hosted by TROU on July 21, 2020, Fernell Miller opened the space and time together with a breathing exercise articulating the need to focus on the heart of our youth and the trauma they have and are experiencing. She shared her work with young Black female students after quarantine went into effect in March, and how they expressed being able to take a breath. They felt huge relief in being able to escape from all the racism, microaggressions, and assimilationist practices that they faced daily in schools. Hearing the collective voice of these young women inspired Fernell to work with youth from “The Equity Fishbowl” to create the survey, “What is your vision for an equitable educational system for all?” Student respondents felt gratitude for being considered and heard by the survey. Fernell concluded her remarks by sharing the response of one survey respondent who expressed, “school should feel like love not a chokehold with a smile on it.”

In an August 6, 2020 podcast, Fernell Miller elaborated on what she had been hearing from students concerning the pandemic and racial justice uprisings. She expressed that students, for the first time, have felt “the lift of oppression taken off.” Students of color felt a calm and silver lining as a result of quarantine and remote learning. They have been “grateful for the room to breathe” and to be free from the daily microaggressions, anti-Black racism, assimilationist practices, and being ignored and hyper-visualized at the same time. Fernell concluded by sharing that “they don’t want to go back to school.”

Homeplaces are also breathable spaces in that they are places where participants feel free to be their authentic selves and to speak without censorship. One interviewee responded that they didn’t need to code-switch to be a part of these spaces. Code-switching is a tool many POC folks use in predominantly White spaces to navigate harmful structures. Delpit (1988) describes this navigational practice as the culture of power, a set of codes that, if understood, can support POC folks in surviving a society designed to oppress them. Further, the community spaces mentioned by participants are places where they don’t have to “censor”, as one participant put it, themselves. The opposite is true outside of these community spaces. One respondent shared that they recognized the hypervisibility of their Black identity living in a predominantly White city, and another felt that they were positioned to be a representative of their community in predominantly White spaces. However, in their community spaces, as one participant noted, they didn’t feel they had to prove their worth.

Most of the locations that survey respondents and interviewees named as spaces of belonging were Black, Indigenous, or Brown owned. Many mentioned wanting to see similar representation in school leadership, in classroom teachers, in curriculum, and in pedagogical practices. Respondents described how spaces that were POC owned allowed for representation with power. One respondent brought up the concept of “by us, for us” or BUFU. It signals a sentiment that spaces created by folks of color will have POC in mind, when so often White owned spaces are not created with POC in mind. With ownership, POC are able “to take up space”, as one interviewee mentioned.

b. **“Safe and Healing Spaces - “I can take up space here”**

Students’ inability to breathe in schools as a result of daily battles with and fights against racism, microaggressions and oppression contributed to their preference not to return to “normal” school or school as usual. Instead they, along with parents and educators of color, shared their perspectives on needed changes for them to feel safe returning to school. They envisioned a new school where their racial identities, histories, and cultures are centered, where they are not faced with constant physical and emotional threats, and where their mental, emotional, and physical wellness and wellbeing are prioritized.

In the [“I can return to school when...”](#) video produced by TROU and in the two student-led rallies hosted by TROU, students, parents, educators, and community members of color called for an end to business as usual in schools and demanded the following changes:

1. An end to daily anti-Black racism, microaggressions, and assimilationist schooling practices and anti-racist training and accountability for students and teachers
2. An end to racially bias and charged policing and disciplinary practice that disproportionately target students of color
3. Restorative Justice Practices instead of zero tolerance policing
4. The removal of student resource officers (SRO) and police officers from schools to disrupt to school-to-prison pipeline
5. Replacing SRO with more counselors and mental health specialists, especially counselors and specialists of color to support the trauma that students of color experience inside and outside of school.

What these demands have in common, is that they all articulate what students, families, and educators of color need to feel safe and whole in schools.

Multiple interview participants also mentioned that they wanted therapists of color available to students of color. Recognizing the harmful structures they navigate on a daily basis, whether that be microaggressions in school or grieving the murders of their community members by police, interviewees want access to representative mental health services for students of color. Further, one interviewee mentioned the need for “beautifully maintained spaces”. They elaborated that aesthetically pleasing spaces support healing and mental health, especially when students can be a part of creating that space. As one interview respondent explained, they wanted to feel that “this is for me and I can take up space here”. These spaces might include the 20 public parks named by survey respondents, most of which are located in the South end of Seattle. Aesthetically pleasing spaces are not exclusive to the outdoors. For example, Hood Famous Cafe, located in the International District, has a large backdrop inspired by traditional Batok tattoo patterns created by La Union Studio, a BIPOC-



Figure 7 Tinatalaaw-inspired patterned backdrop located in Hood Famous Bakeshop, designed by La Union Studio

owned interior designer company. La Union Studio owners explained that this piece particularly drew from the Tinatalaaw pattern that represents “day and night to compliment Hood Famous’ coffee-to-cocktail program”. These examples and those described in the section “It’s a Vibe”: Music, Arts, and Food”, show just how important art, created by and for POC, is for folks of color in their community/homeplaces. Culturally representative art in community spaces is what makes them aesthetically pleasing to folks of color and thus places where they want to “take up space.” The “vibe” that these spaces provide make them culturally sustaining places of healing.

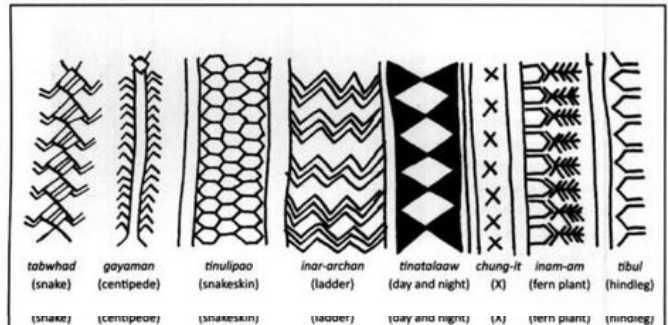


Figure 8 Cropped screenshot of traditional tattoo patterns from Jake Verzosa's *The Last Tattooed Women of Kalinga* (image shared by La Union Studio). The tinatalaaw pattern (4th from the right) inspired the backdrop created for Hood Famous Bakeshop.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Reimagining Schools

With this research, we aimed to identify qualities of Black-led and POC community learning spaces that fostered feelings of belonging in order to inform how schools can cultivate an environment of belonging for their students of color. From engaging with these spaces and speaking with community members of color who frequently use and participate in these places, we identified three main characteristics of these community learning spaces: 1) they are liberatory, 2) they are culturally sustaining, and 3) they are homeplaces. In this final section of our report, informed by these qualities of POC community spaces, we offer recommendations for reimagining and redesigning schools in ways that foster and sustain POC students’, families’, and educators’ sense of belonging and ability to not just survive, but thrive in schools. Our recommendations include: 1) collaborating with and centering students and communities of color, 2) enacting care centered practices, and 3) engaging in critical self reflections of values.

1) School-Student-Family/Community Collaboration

Throughout our research, we were able to learn with and from POC community organizations and members. Based on the major findings, we emphasize the need for schools/educators to collaborate with, listen to, and center the voices and input of youth and community members of color. As Erin Jones powerfully shared during one of TROU’s student-led virtual rallies this summer, we need to be listening to and centering the voices of those not normally centered. While this recommendation echoes many educational justice based work, we suggest specific actions that Washington schools can enact.

a) Community Apprenticeships for Credits

First, we recommend that schools consult with their students and families and reach out to and form partnerships with local businesses frequented by them (students and families), including business listed in our Community Map (see Maps & Images section), to develop apprenticeship opportunities for students of color to learn from business owners and gain hands-on experience in these community spaces that have been places of belonging for them, while being able to earn credit(s) for their work. Being able to receive school credit(s) for their work in these sites would allow students to move through their educational journey, at least partly, in spaces that sustain their identities. Further, creating this option encourages students to participate

in chosen spaces they find meaningful (Moore, 2020, personal communication). Establishing community apprenticeships for credit(s) acknowledges that education exists beyond the borders of schools and that such community learning spaces are forms of resistance in that community-based leaders and youth workers negotiate the dialectical nature of community-based educational spaces within a capitalist and racialized neoliberal state (Baldrige et al., 2017). Additionally, this can signal to students and community members that their schools value the work they do in service of their community.

b) School Engagement with Community Issues

Second, we recommend that school administration and educators are involved in community activism. Students, families and community members of color are engaging in community spaces and, as we learned from the findings, Self determination and action are a significant part of these spaces. Therefore, as a way to show allyship and be co-conspirators with students, families, and community members of color, administrators and educators need to boldly stand with them in their fight against local and global issues that are affecting them and their communities. This can include creating certain protocols that guide administrators and educators on how to support students, families and community members of color against systems of oppression. For example, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has terrorized communities of color since its inception in 2003, carrying out settler colonial traditions that include targeting, detaining, and threatening to deport them; physically and sexually assaulting them while in custody; and separating them from their families, (Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, Perez-Chavez, & Salas, 2019; Hacker, Chu, Arsenault, & Marlin, 2012). It is critical that schools are collaborating with youth, parent, and community organizers and activists to protect these and other historically and currently oppressed students and their families. What protocols are in place at schools that support educators in collaborating with community leaders and activists to advocate for the protection of undocumented students and families, students with disabilities, bi/multilingual students, racial and ethnically minoritized students, and those who are multiply-marginalized for embodying a combination of these and other identities? What resources are multiply-marginalized students and families of color seeking to support their own practices of protection against violence and violation perpetuated against them in and outside of schools? Reflective questions like these must be addressed to continue to support students, families, and community members of color beyond schools and academics.

c) Diversifying the Teaching force and Curriculum Building with Community Members

Third, community members of color, including students and parents, are seeking curriculums and educators that reflect their identities and center their narratives, recognizing that the combination of the two promote healthy identity development, self determination, and social justice advocacy. We thus urge educators to decenter Whiteness in their curriculums and to critically center the complex identities of folks of color (Paris & Alim, 2017). Further, school and district leaders must see as urgent and take necessary steps to recruit, hire, and retain, at minimum, leaders and educators of color that match the demographic makeup of students in their schools. We recommend that this work be done in collaboration with students, parents and community members. What would it look like to work with an advisory board of students, parents and community members of color (who are compensated) to recruit, train, hire, and retain educators of color that come from the community, as one participant suggested? Further, educators should be collaborating with students, parents and community members of color in the creation of anti-racist, anti-colonial, and culturally sustaining curriculums. One example of

collaborating with community members of color regarding curriculum can be to create assignments focused on students doing their own research by interviewing, shadowing, or creating with POC community organizations. What ways can an educator's curriculum center students as researchers of their own lives and communities? These types of assignments, for example, provide students the opportunity to practice their agency and to consult community members of color as knowledge holders and creators.

2) Care Centered Practices

Another important takeaway from the findings is the need for schools to be foundationally structured from a place of care and love. As we've seen from the data, schools have often been places of White supremacy and settler colonialism, systems that operate on violent and punitive structures. Morris (2016) makes clear that students of color are consistently disciplined and pushed-out of schools and at an exponentially higher rate than White students due to systemic racism. Therefore, reiterating what many community members of color shared, schools need to be police-free spaces. Recognizing that policing as an institution in the US was created to maintain enslavement, as well as the continuous physical and mental violence POC communities face from policing to this day, it is necessary that schools not turn to policing for school safety. Instead of punitive structures used to police students, schools must operate on an ethic and practices of care for students and their families.

a) Caring for the Whole Person

Ongoing anti-Black racism and the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on Black, Indigenous and Brown communities has not only exacerbated the challenges that these communities face but have also necessitated a need for schools to work harder and do a better job making resources more accessible to students and families. From our findings, caring for families in a time of Covid-19 entails ensuring that all students have access to reliable internet and technology to attend school virtually and complete assignments for their classes. It also requires a more holistic focus on students' and their families' needs that may include providing greater food and financial services, free Covid-19 tests, and better school-home engagement and communication, as requested by several participants. This includes having interpreters for parent-teacher conferences, curriculum nights and other school events, making sure that all school-home communication is in families' first languages, and more bi/multilingual programs in schools. Access to a bilingual program would help many folks of color whose languages are disregarded and targeted for erasure (Rosa, 2019). Access to diverse literacy programs and supports strengthen students' relationships to their linguistic identities. Further, it can affirm parents' linguistic identities and confidence in communicating with schools, strengthening relationships between teacher and parent. Many of these examples are things that should continue after distance learning has ended and students return to schools. Similar to the Black Panther Party's Oakland Community School which provided students three meals a day, health services, literacy programs for adults on the weekends, and other services (Tellefsen, 2016), there is a need for more full-service community schools in Washington state.

b) Healing Centered Care

Another way educators can think about centering care for students is through the offering of school therapists and counselors with expertise in culturally appropriate therapy for students of color. It is important to note that therapy and social work in the US often utilize practices that are racist and grounded in White norms or ways of knowing about how to treat trauma in students of color. Therefore, forms of therapy offered to students of color must decenter Whiteness and utilize approaches that are culturally sustaining, such as healing centered

engagement (HCE) (Ginwright, 2018). HCE is an asset driven approach that is culturally grounded, with the aim of holistic restoration for youth of color who have experienced trauma, including the restoration of their identities. HCE reframes trauma with language that is humanizing, moving beyond the questions of “What happened to you?” to “What is right with you?” Further, a healing centered approach views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively (Ginwright, 2018). This practice of care must be available for educators of color as well. In addition to recruiting more teachers of color, there must be care systems in place that support their wellbeing and sense of belonging, which in turn may contribute to the retention of these teachers.

c) **Aesthetic Care**

Also, as mentioned in the findings, the aesthetics of physical learning spaces help to create culturally sustaining environments for students of color while also supporting their wellbeing. We thus recommend collaborating with students of color and their communities to design learning spaces in schools that feature artwork and architecture that represent their cultures. This may look like classrooms with a pivoting window wall, which can be seen at [Off The Rez](#), an Indigenous owned cafe located within the Burke Museum at the University of Washington, Seattle. Architects Tom Kundig and Phil Turner designed a pivoting window wall with the intention of bringing people closer to nature. Beyond the parking lot, this window wall looks out to trees and is a great spot to see the seasons shift.

In addition to attending to the aesthetic appearance of learning spaces, we call on educators and administrators to privilege the arts in schools and to center arts that are traditional to and originate from communities of color. For example, Barajas-Lopéz & Bang (2018) took up and reclaimed clay making as an original technology that continues to nurture the way Indigenous people manifest their relationship with the land. Reclaiming traditional forms of clay making in maker spaces also serves to counter Indigenous erasure and settler-colonial constructions of materiality by centering Indigenous knowledge systems as continual, thriving, and self-generating. This making and sharing fosters learning that nurture human-nature relations, community relationships, and engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems.

3) Critical Self Reflections of Values

Finally, we see the evaluation of a schools’ and teachers’ values as essential in transformational education. The qualities community members of color identified regarding Black-led community organizations and other places of belonging were representative of the values leaders and owners of these spaces held. As Ladson-Billing states, “we teach what we value” (2017, p. v). While apolitical or unbiased curriculum and pedagogy is what many schools strive to have, Ladson-Billings, mirroring respondents, recognizes that our values show up in the language we choose to use, the books made available, the rules we choose to enforce, etc. Therefore, our values as educators are political. As Lerone Bennett Jr. famously stated, “An educator in a system of oppression is either a revolutionary or an oppressor”. Consequently, educators and administrators must interrogate their values and actions to ensure they are fostering spaces of equity, justices, and belonging for students and families of color. This may look like, for example, revisiting their values or mission statements and getting specific with defining what educational justice and a “quality education” means to students, educators, and families. This may also require anti-racist training for educators and administrators (including White students), as suggested by students, parents, and community members of color who participated in the TROU virtual rallies and video this summer. Lastly, we recommend that

educators continue to update their syllabi, activities, and assignments to reflect current local and/or global contexts and challenges that students are living through, as well as the identities their students hold to ensure curriculums that are culturally and life sustaining.

Maps & Images

[Historical Redlining Map](#) | [Community Map](#) | [UW Mapping Race in Seattle](#)

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