



## Friday Institute Education Brief

### “The Opportunity to Dream”: How an Early Learning Network Implemented the Liberatory Design Process

#### Abstract

From January-December 2021, five school districts participated in The Innovation Project’s (TIP) Early Learning Network, an initiative that centers equity in addressing vulnerable children’s learning needs. Participants on district teams underwent the Liberatory Design Process—a seven step approach to centering equity in reimagining and redesigning educational interventions.

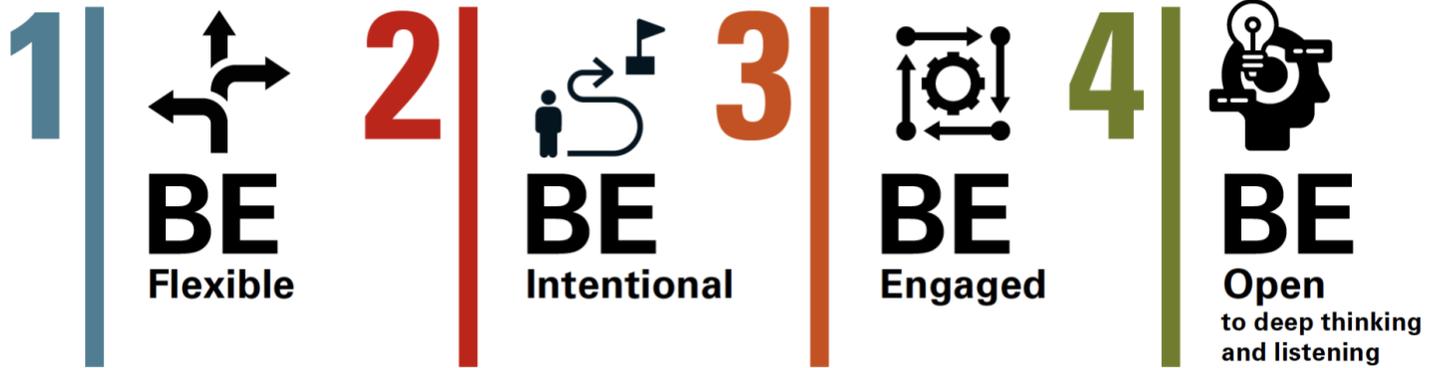
Researchers from the Program Evaluation and Education Research (PEER) Group from the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation sought to better understand (1) how the design process impacted district teams and (2) the supports and barriers to design thinking and how to improve the design thinking process. Through case study methodology that incorporated focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews and artifact analysis, the researchers found that notions of accountability and intentionality, the awareness of self and others, and the development of community partnerships were impactful for districts conducting this equity work. Further, intradistrict dynamics, the availability of resources, team-level dynamics and non-linear processes frequently acted as supports and barriers to successful implementation of the Liberatory Design Process.

#### Liberatory Design Process

[Liberatory Design](#) is an innovative and equitable approach to solving complex pressing problems. It emerges from a “multi-year collaboration between Tania Anaissie, David Clifford, Susie Wise and the National Equity Project [Victor Cary and Tom Malarkey].” The process underscores the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion throughout and incorporates seven iterative modes: Notice, Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test and Reflect.

#### States of “BE”ing of the Liberatory Design Process

District teams offered several pieces of advice to other groups considering using the Liberatory Design Process to guide their equity initiatives. Advice offered fell into four key themes: (1) flexibility, (2) intentionality, (3) engagement and (4) depth of thinking and listening.



### Be Flexible

Participants noted how essential it was for people to understand from the outset of adopting the Liberatory Design Process that it requires flexibility. Progress often may not look linear, which may cause frustration for some.

### Be Intentional

To get the most out of the Liberatory Design Process and to make equitable change, individuals and teams need to be intentional in their work. The work is something that participants must set aside dedicated time and effort to think through and carry out the work.

### Be Engaged

Related to intentionality, participants expressed the importance of being fully invested and engaged in the work surrounding the Liberatory Design Process.

### Be Open to Deep Thinking and Listening

The process is not meant to be solo work, and reflecting upon and thinking about the feedback from others on the team and from outsider perspectives is necessary.

[Read the full report here.](#)

### About the Authors



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