

**INTERGENERATIONAL  
TEACHING AND  
LEARNING:  
IMAGINING BEYOND  
ADULT-CENTERED  
VERSUS  
CHILD-CENTERED  
EDUCATION**

A ZINE CO-CREATED BY:  
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[bluedandelion.org](http://bluedandelion.org)

sketches in the poetics of learning



# WHERE DID THE IDEAS FOR THIS ZINE GROW FROM?

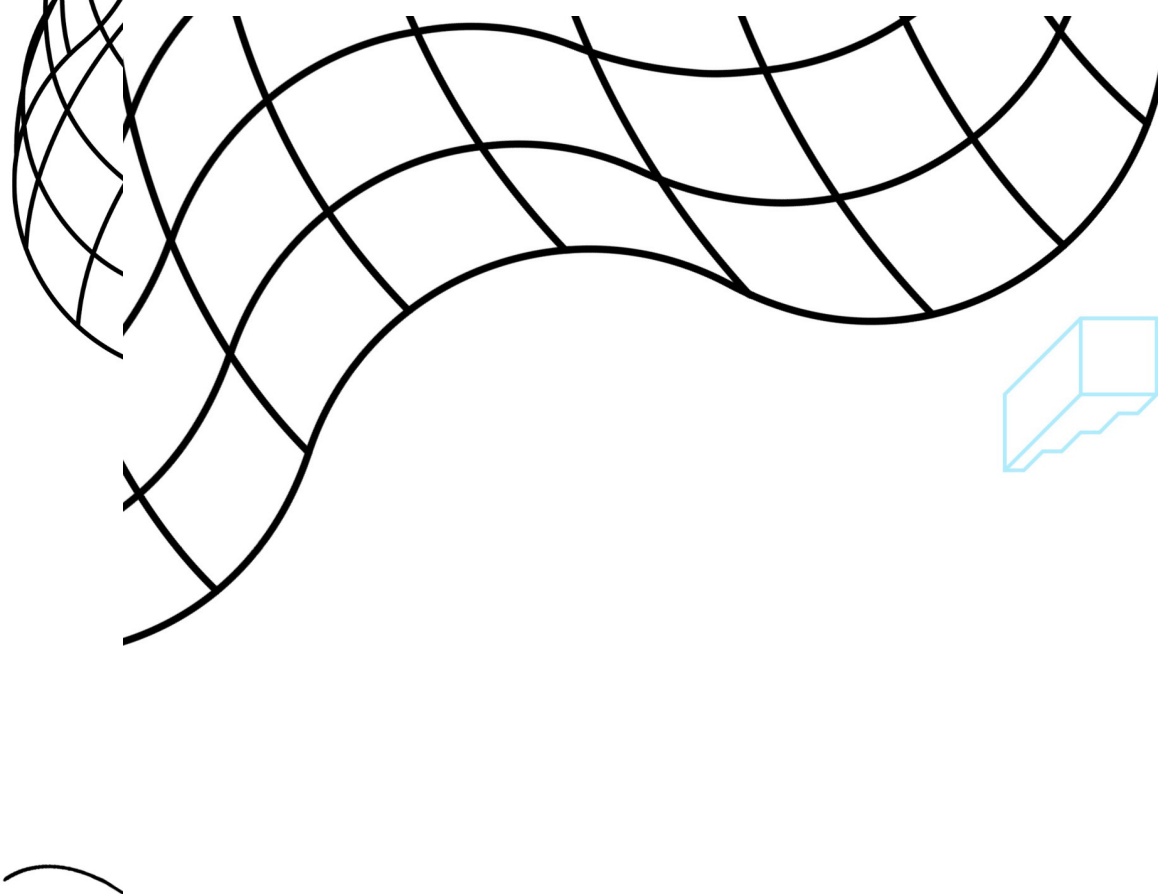
**CHILDREN. EDUCATORS. ELDER.  
FAMILIES. ANCESTORS. ARTISTS.**

The ideas we share here grow from our own life histories both as children and caregivers within families with roots in the Global South who model values of collectivity and intergenerational relations. We have also learned from a history of collaboration with educators of color who approach the design of learning environments as artistic activity.

Throughout our work in youth programs and critical education spaces, we have witnessed how educators committed to liberatory learning often wrestle with a “pendulum swing” between adult- and child-centered education.

Many of us come to youth work to struggle against dehumanizing forms of teaching and the ways they work to constrict the minds and spirits of children of color.

Think of your own experiences as a student. When did you feel most supported?



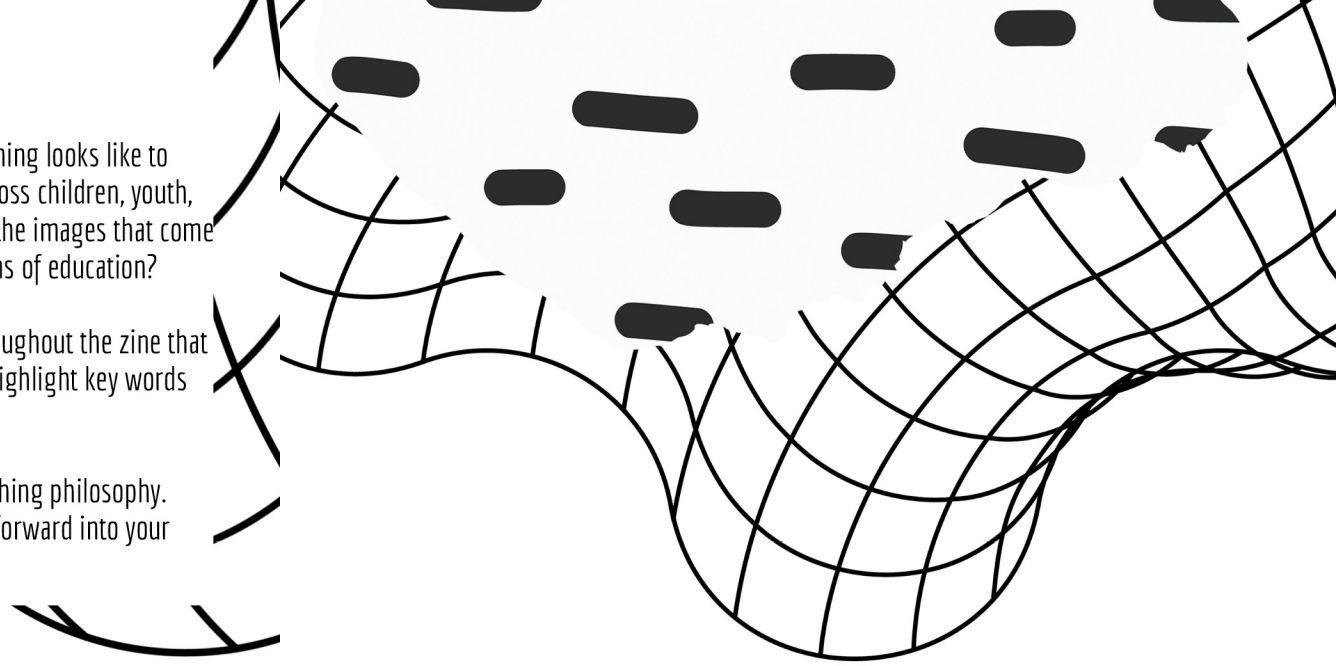
For further reading, the core ideas for this zine come from a piece we wrote in the online outlet Youth Today entitled “Tinkering After School Program Demonstrates Moving Beyond Binary of Adult- Versus Child-Centered Education” and a piece called “Beyond the Binary of Adult Versus Child Centered Learning: Pedagogies of Joint Activity in the Context of Making” In the journal, Cognition and Instruction.

### Some Ideas For Reflection:

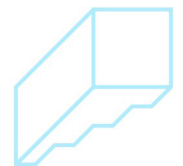
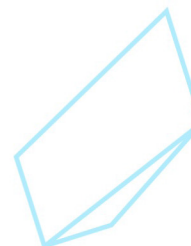
Draw, write, reflect, map, what intergenerational learning looks like to you. What does collaboration and shared thinking across children, youth, adults, elders look like, sound like, feel like? How do the images that come to mind imagine beyond colonial and oppressive forms of education?

Create a highlight poem using the quotes + ideas throughout the zine that speak to you, or that you want to think about more. Highlight key words or phrases and re-write them on this page.

Write a haiku or a short poem on your emerging teaching philosophy. What are some values or practices you want to carry forward into your next interactions with learners?



Yet the pendulum swing  
can also lead educators  
to avoid direct teaching  
for fear of being too  
school-like...

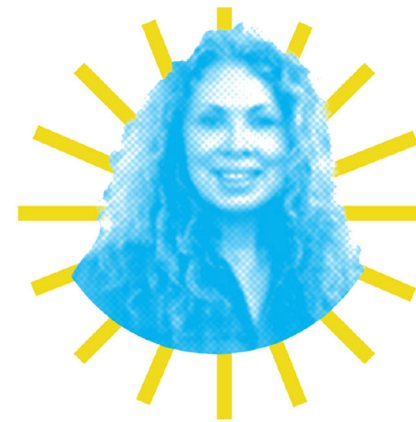
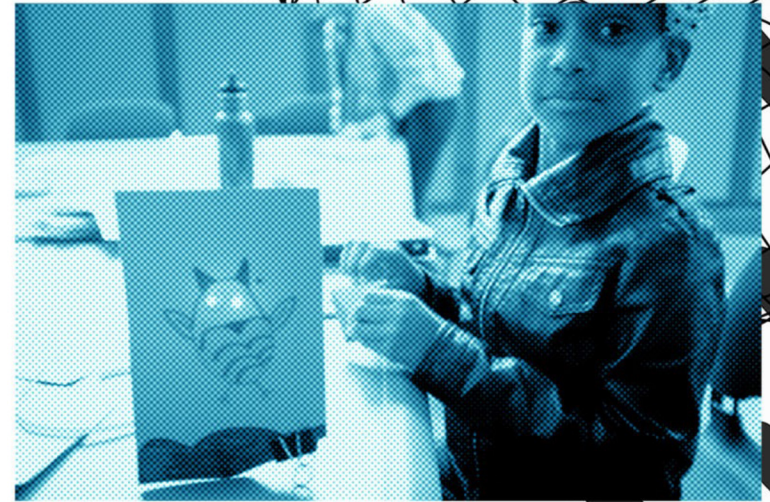
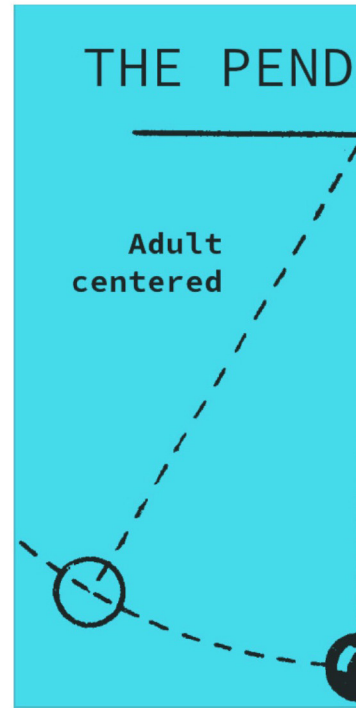


# THE PEND

**“I SAW THE STUDENTS GOING OFF TASK SO I TOLD THEM HOW TO DO IT THE RIGHT WAY”**

What are the limitations of adult-centered education?

We can all probably name many of these! Teachers are in control, students don't have much agency, there's usually one "right way" to do things and students who don't engage that way are seen in a negative light. Western schooling is often based on adult-centered models.



“The goal is to co-create a third space where a wide range of cultural and linguistic practices are utilized, and where expanded forms of learning and knowing become possible.”  
-Kris Gutiérrez

Rogoff, B. (1994). Developing understanding of the idea of communities of learners. *Mind, culture, and activity*, 1(4), 209-229.

### 3. LASTLY, WE FOUND THAT...

Meaningful forms of guidance often emerged from deep listening and attunement to children's questions and ideas.

During a paper circuits activity, Tania (7 years old) shared a suggestion for using labels on paper circuits to keep track of the terminal ends of a battery within a whole group discussion.

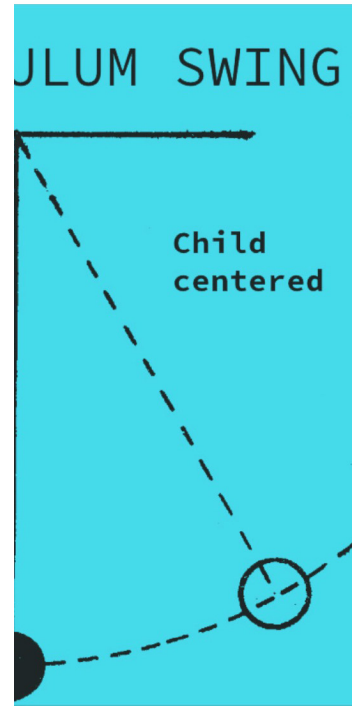
Tania: "um, can we like label on the tape, if we forget, like, I said I forgot which side to do it, so like, can we label it (showing two different sides with her finger) on the tape?"

Walter and Meg's responses moved between encouraging, revoicing and extending Tania's inquiry:

Walter responded, "Yeah, definitely. You can label the tape so that you know what side is positive. And you can even label the legs of your LED's so that you know, if you're gonna put more than one light on, that it always goes to the right place." Meg added, "That's good cause Tania said that was something she discovered last time about the lights you have to flip sometimes. So, you can always label it to help you understand it."

Walter and Meg extended Tania's understanding and endorsed her suggestion as one worthy of collective engagement. Meg also re-framed Tania's expression of confusion as a discovery, shifting Tania's position from unknowing to learned. Walter and Meg demonstrated that they were listening to Tania in ways that assumed her thoughtfulness and emerging expertise, alongside understanding themselves as responsible to support her and her peers' learning.

## ULUM SWING



What are the limitations of child-centered education?

Even though educators often move to a 'hands off' approach to avoid being heavy handed, stepping too far back can lead to too little structure, leaving students without the support they need to thrive within the activity. Child-centered models also typically privilege independent work rather than collaboration across generations.

**"I NOTICE THE STUDENTS ARE STRUGGLING BUT I FEEL LIKE I SHOULD BE 'HANDS OFF' AND NOT INTERVENE..."**

YET FOR US, THE GOAL IS NOT TO BE “IN THE MIDDLE” OF THESE TWO EXTREMES, BUT TO THINK OF EDUCATION DIFFERENTLY. WHAT ARE SOME OTHER WAYS TO IMAGINE TEACHING AND LEARNING? ... TO PURSUE THIS QUESTION, WE THOUGHT ABOUT WHO ELSE HAS WRESTLED WITH THIS AND WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THEM? WE ALSO LEARNED FROM OUR RESEARCH IN THE TINKERING AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM (TAP), AN ECOLOGY OF MAKING/TINKERING SETTINGS SERVING BLACK, LATINX AND ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN & YOUTH IN THE BAY AREA. HERE WE SHARE THREE PRACTICES OF INTERGENERATIONAL TEACHING & LEARNING FROM TAP.

“Learning is the transformation of participation over time in cultural practices that are also changing.”  
-Barbara Rogoff



“YOU’VE HELPED ME A LOT WITH UNDERSTANDING THE SEPARATION BETWEEN NOT KNOWING THINGS AND JUST LEARNING THINGS. LIKE NOT GOING INTO SOMETHING AS: ‘OH I DON’T KNOW THIS’”

-\*JAMES, YOUNG ADULT EDUCATOR

## 2. THE POWER OF EMPHASIZING THE PROCESS OF MAKING + LEARNING

TAP educators routinely emphasized process when supporting children to use new tools and techniques. Locating challenges in the tools or materials (“those LED legs can be tricky!” or that tool is “finicky”), served as a one way to de-individualize struggles, and to position students as members of a community who share insider knowledge about tricky tools.

To support the development of multiple ideas and solutions, educators often used different kinds of models: sharing multiple completed models of a project for inspiration, student models that showed different possibilities, and incomplete or faulty models that students were invited to brainstorm around.

TAP educators also drew attention to the process of developing ideas, testing, drafting, and revising. Meg often connected stories of process to the work of artists, scientists and writers, emphasizing the creative power of listening to the materials one is working with. Stories of process helped create a spirit of second chances, defining the experience of newness as a starting point for practice, rather than a marker of incapability.



“Moving beyond colonial models of age segregation means working to restore intergenerational relations in everyday activity.”  
-Megan Bang



“What one cannot do in trying to divest of authoritarianism is relinquish one’s authority as teacher...The facilitator who claims that ‘since I respect students I cannot be directive’...denies himself or herself the pedagogical, political, epistemological task of assuming the role of a subject of that directive practice.”  
-Paolo Freire

“Redefining learning also means redefining (rather than rejecting) teaching.” -Meg Escudé



# 1. INTENTIONAL + WELL-TIMED EXPLANATIONS

We found that educators often used **direct and artful forms of explanation** to introduce an activity or tool, to make the “why” of particular practices visible (a teacher explaining why she was holding a hammer further back on the handle) or to work with children to interpret the results of a test run.

When working with 7-year-old Shauna, Walter (artist and educator) pointed to the legs of an LED light and said, “These are sort of set apart on purpose because if they touch then you can get a short-circuit.” Shauna replied, “What’s that mean?” Walter explained: “That means any electricity that jumps across this gap. Like if this is bent and touches this one then your light won’t turn on.” Here explanation helped nurture a spirit of inquiry and observation, as seen in the thoughtful use of technical terms that invited Shauna’s curiosity.

We noticed that productive explanations emerged in the context of **thinking with rather than doing things for** children. This nuance is important for addressing a common tension voiced by novice educators: “I saw them struggling but didn’t want to take over.” When we asked children to describe the help they received in TAP, many commented on the ways TAP educators help kids learn how to build and create.

Well-timed explanations that emerge in the flow of collaboration can convey respect for children’s minds, meeting their desire for growing competence with substantive supports. They can also serve as portals into the wider conceptual universe of activity.



“The mature person, to put it in moral terms, has no right to withhold from the young on given occasions whatever capacity for sympathetic understanding [their] own experience has given [them.]”

-John Dewey

“IN TINKERING, THEY TELL YOU A LOT ABOUT HOW TO DO IT AND THEN THE [SCHOOL] TEACHERS ARE TELLING YOU WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO, LIKE WRITE THE LETTER AND STUFF LIKE THAT”  
-TANIA, 7 YEAR OLD TAP PARTICIPANT