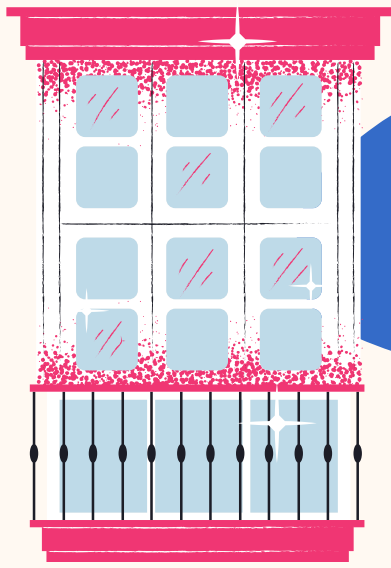


Liberatory Design: Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors



Holly English



“High in a white palace the
king's daughter, the golden girl.
...” - F. Scott Fitzgerald *The
Great Gatsby*

Musings on Traditional Design and The Great Gatsby

I have a guess as to what you might be thinking. **“Holly, what does *The Great Gatsby* have to do with liberatory design?”**

The answer is: **nothing and everything.**

Nothing in the sense that it has little to do with my graduate coursework on making inclusive and safe spaces at the school I work (though I could go on for hours about intersectionality and identity in *The Great Gatsby*) and everything in the sense that as I was reading chapter seven aloud to my students, **this quote leapt out at me as a connection between traditional design models and new, more inclusive and liberatory design models.**

For context, this quote is about Daisy Buchanan, the object of Jay Gatsby's (love? affection? obsession? desire?) for the past five years. She's a vapid thing, trapped by her circumstances and upbringing, and yet completely shallow and unwilling to change. Gatsby pursues her relentlessly, shaping his whole world around the idea of obtaining her, only to realize in the end that Daisy would never truly be his. **Traditional ways of teaching are like Daisy: made for white, privileged, and able folks who sit high in their palaces and occasionally deem to dispense knowledge to the rest of us, the Jay Gatsbys of the world, who are in search of knowledge, but are kept from it.**

Paulo Freire (2009) called this traditional way of teaching “the banking method” and proposed a more egalitarian way of teaching where the traditional power structure of teacher-to-student is dismantled and knowledge is instead co-created with all of a learner's identity is valued and accepted. Liberatory Design goes hand-in-hand with Freire's ideas.

Fitzgerald, F. S. (1925). *The great gatsby*. Union Square & Company.

Freire, P. (2009). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts 2(2), 163-174.

In **English education**, we use the metaphor of **mirrors and windows** to process reading literature about **experiences similar** to ones we have (mirrors) or **experiences different** from ours (windows). Liberatory education takes this one step farther by providing a **sliding glass door** through which to **exit the house and truly empathize and build understanding**.

When starting down the path of working with Liberatory Design, I asked myself:

How do I leave my house? Through



NATIONAL
EQUITY
PROJECT

Liberatory Design for Equity Process



Liberatory Design for Equity.

April 2021



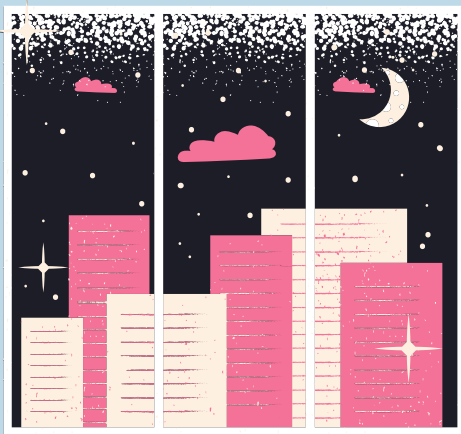
LIBERATORY
DESIGN



I have
cleaned, scrubbed,
laid my window bare
weathered storms that scraped
the glass
and made repairs
when stones and other acts of
God made me see the world
anew
and into a different point of
view

Is it enough?

Should I tear the entire
house down?



To see outside of my
window, I enlisted the help
of some trusted
colleagues and students
so we could: see,
empathize, define, inquire
and imagine



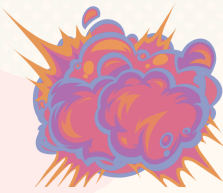
What do the students face?



How do I balance my responsibilities with self care?

Are there ways to pursue passion projects at school?

These are two questions students identified when I spoke to them.



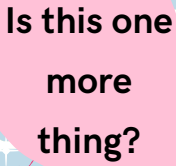
When I went to talk to my colleague, our predetermined topics blew up due to unforeseen circumstances.

Our “noticing” and empathizing led us to realize our school:


Needs to place greater emphasis on acknowledging and honoring a range of identities.

How do we demonstrate the great importance of valuing a range of identities in:


- a rural town
- a school that is predominately white
- this political climate
- to a staff with a range of experience



Is this one
more
thing?



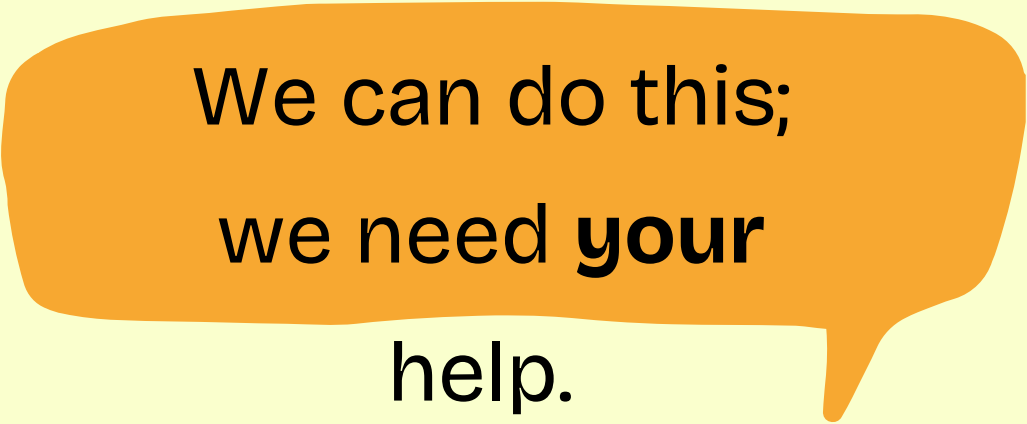
I'm scared
to get it
wrong.



How do I
do this?



Create Buy - In



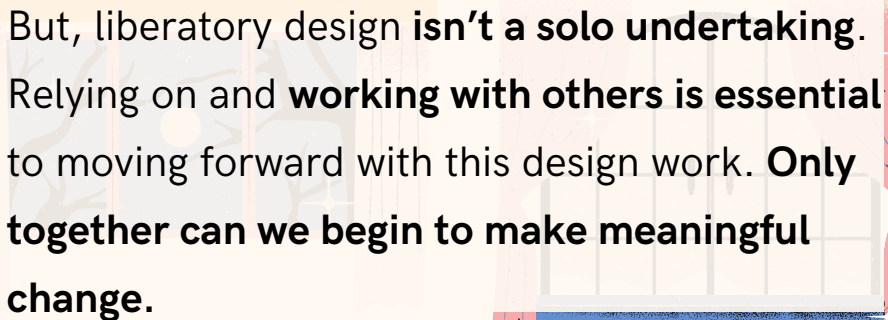
We can do this;
we need **your**
help.



Liberatory Design

Requires we **cast off old ways of thinking** and throw **open our windows** and **step through sliding-glass doors** to engage in **critical** and **just work**.

It can be frightening, or even overwhelming at first.



But, liberatory design **isn't a solo undertaking**. Relying on and **working with others is essential** to moving forward with this design work. **Only together can we begin to make meaningful change**.



*Thank you
for reading!*