

# GRAND CHALLENGES *and* OPPORTUNITIES

USC ROSSIER SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

REIMAGINING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN EDUCATION

PART 3

## Integrating Wellness into Informal Learning Spaces

Beyond formal educational settings, students regularly navigate recreational, digital and community spaces that have the potential to affect their well-being. These “third spaces” have tremendous potential to foster creativity, connection and community care. Explore strategies and initiatives aimed at cultivating holistic well-being among young people in informal learning spaces.

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## Third spaces & Non-traditional Learning Environments

Illustration: Koosje Koene

DAVINA  
WOLTER



(she, her, hers)

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Founder + Designer  
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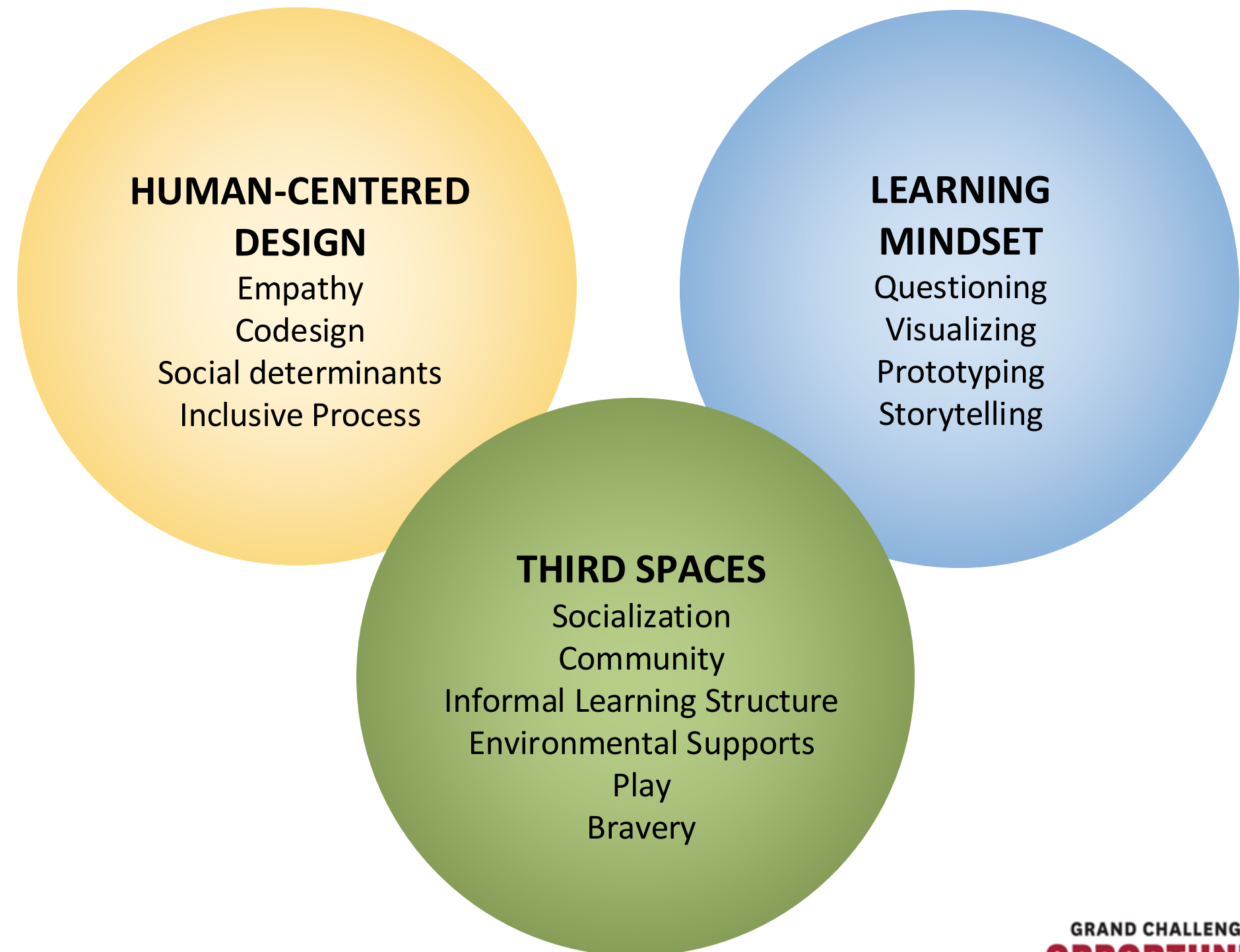
# Human-Centered Design & Non-Traditional Learning Environments

## HCD CORE METHODOLOGY



Human-Centered Design is a creative problem solving process that puts PEOPLE at the center of the development work.

By understanding an audience's needs and goals, we develop solutions that resonate with and are tailored to a specific audience.



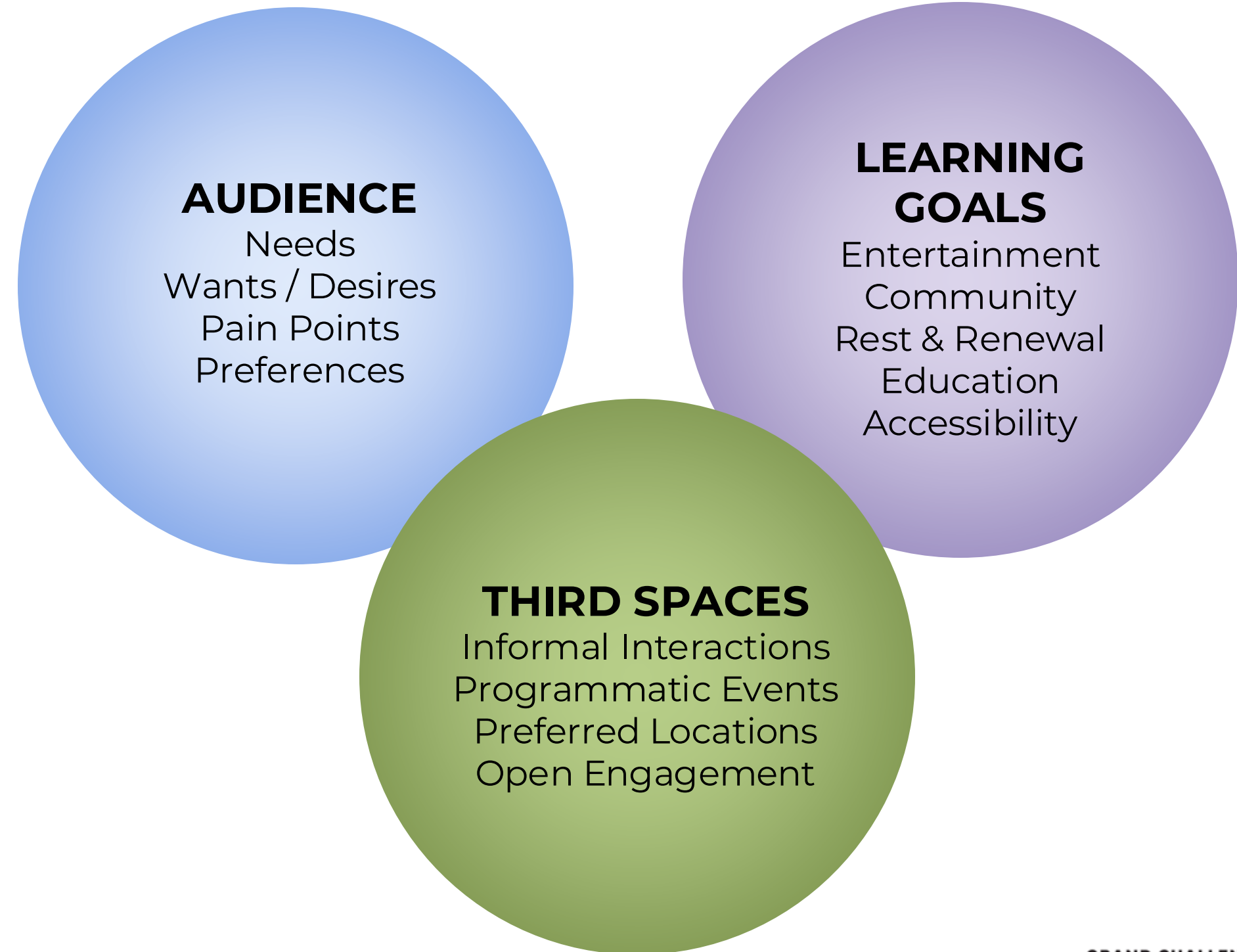


# Innovation/Practice/People

## NON-TRADITIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS



**Museums:**  
**Art & Science & Family**  
**Nature Gardens**  
**Open Studios &  
Collab Work Spaces**  
**Centers for Community**  
**Places of Rest & Renewal**





# Human-Centric Approaches to Well-Being



Illustration: Koosje Koene

Well-being can be supported by the use of third spaces.

Third spaces are often sought out in dense urban areas to enhance well-being.

By using HCD techniques and methodology, we are able to generate responsive environments that encourage each individual to reflect, rest, and renew.

These environments should ideally present a range of different engagement opportunities that address user needs in meaningful ways.





# Martin Vitorino PhD

Lecturer, Physical Education & Mind Body Health,  
USC Dornsife

## All of You is Welcome Here: Integrating Mind, Body and Spirit in LGBTQ+ Affinity Spaces

-Mindfulness Meditation Community for Trans/Non-Binary and Gender Non-Conforming Folx

-LGBTQ+ Catholics Faith Sharing Group



# The Need for This Approach

The LGBTQ+ community is more likely to experience trauma, mental illness, family rejection, bullying, discrimination, isolation, suicidality, homelessness, unemployment, substance use, and violence.

LGBTQ+ folks often do not feel safe or welcomed in religious spaces.

~46% of LGBTQ+ identify as religious compared with 67% of the general pop.

# The Need for This Approach

LGBTQ+ are less likely to have access to medical care (physical and mental health).

By virtue of the process of coming out to oneself and others, while navigating systems of oppression and internalized bias, spiritual health can be especially powerful element in helping people thrive in spite of adversity.



# Making Space for Emotional and Spiritual Health

- Safe enough container via consent and resilience-informed approaches
- How are you, *really*? Destigmatizing vulnerability and honesty
- Recognizing diverse beliefs and experiences in spiritual communities
- Integrating and processing life's painful and joyful experiences
- Making spiritual practices accessible to all
- Prioritizing the felt sense of human experience (well-BEING vs well-doing)
- Fostering community connection and belonging
- Combating stigma and stereotypes
- Restoring dignity to the whole person

# Some Benefits of Spiritual Wellness

- Strong correlation with Post-Traumatic Growth
- Increased resilience, confidence and comfort in uncertain times
- An ability to maintain or regain a sense of calm and focus
- A decrease in stress, anxiety, and many types of depression
- Better overall mental and physical health
- The ability to make sense of grief during times of loss
- A desire to be of service to others
- Experiencing a sense of community with others
- Feeling that life has a purpose and meaning
- Improved healing from trauma and recovery from addiction
- Greater creativity and ingenuity



# Spiritual/Heart-Centered Practices

Everyday Prayer Exercise:

- Wow! Awe!
- I'm sorry!
- Thank you!
- Help!

Meaning making and Reframing – I.e. “Rejection as redirection”

Glimmers! - Micro-moments of nervous system regulation

Meditations (compassion, lovingkindness, forgiveness, somatic, joy, beauty)

Journaling and creativity prompts for deeper reflection

Nature-based activities

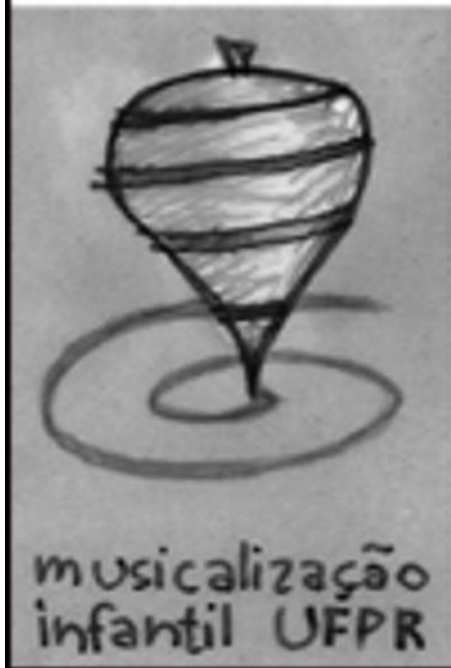
# Citations

Feng, Y., Liu, X., Zhang, S. *et al.* Relationship among post-traumatic growth, spiritual well-being, and perceived social support in Chinese women with gynecological cancer. *Sci Rep* **14**, 4847 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-55605-5>

<https://www.newwaysministry.org/2020/12/11/new-study-nearly-half-of-lgbtq-adults-in-u-s-are-religious-including-many-catholics/>

<https://summitmalibu.com/blog/how-to-increase-spiritual-wellness-for-recovery/>





## Beatriz Ilari PhD

Musicking, Self Care and  
Community

# Beyond the Concert Hall: Musicking in Everyday Life

- Music is everywhere.
- *Musicking*: Music is not a 'thing' to be learned; it is something that people do and derive meaning from.
  - Singing, dancing/moving, listening, creating, improvising
- Uses (i.e., to celebrate moments, to relax) and functions of music (i.e., communication, aesthetic enjoyment)
- Multiple spaces: home, community, schools, online
- Listening as a main form of engagement in some Western societies.
  - 20.7 weekly hours of music listening and through different methods (IFPI)



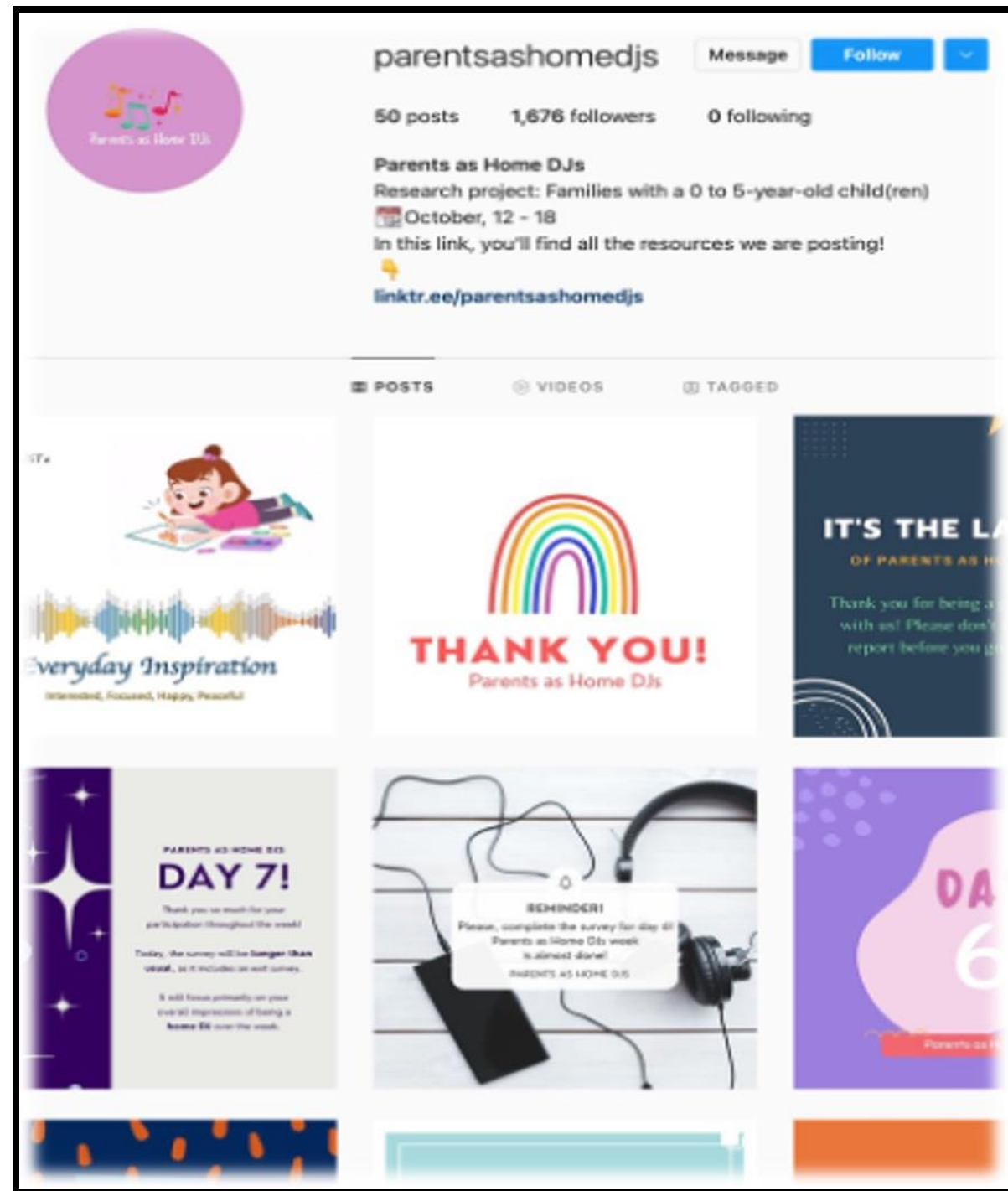
# Dispelling Myths: We are all Musical Beings!

- Most cultures have some form of music.
  - Vocal music (lullabies, work songs)
- Babies come into the world as sophisticated listeners and endowed with musical potential.
- Open-earedness diminishes as children develop and grow in culture,
- Music as a badge of identity in adolescence and young adulthood
- Music and the reminiscence bump (e.g., COVID listeners)
- Music marks special occasions
  - “Happy birthday,” “Our song”

Conceptions of musicality: ‘I’m not musical,’ ‘I can’t sing’ prevent people from engaging with music.



# Musical Care: Self and Community



- Music is a technology of the self
  - Mood and affect regulation
- Music viewed as
  - important for mental health (71%).
  - helping 78% relax and cope with stress. (IFPI)
- Music as social life: Semantic ambiguity, entrainment, and group cohesion
  - Safe spaces: interval, suspension

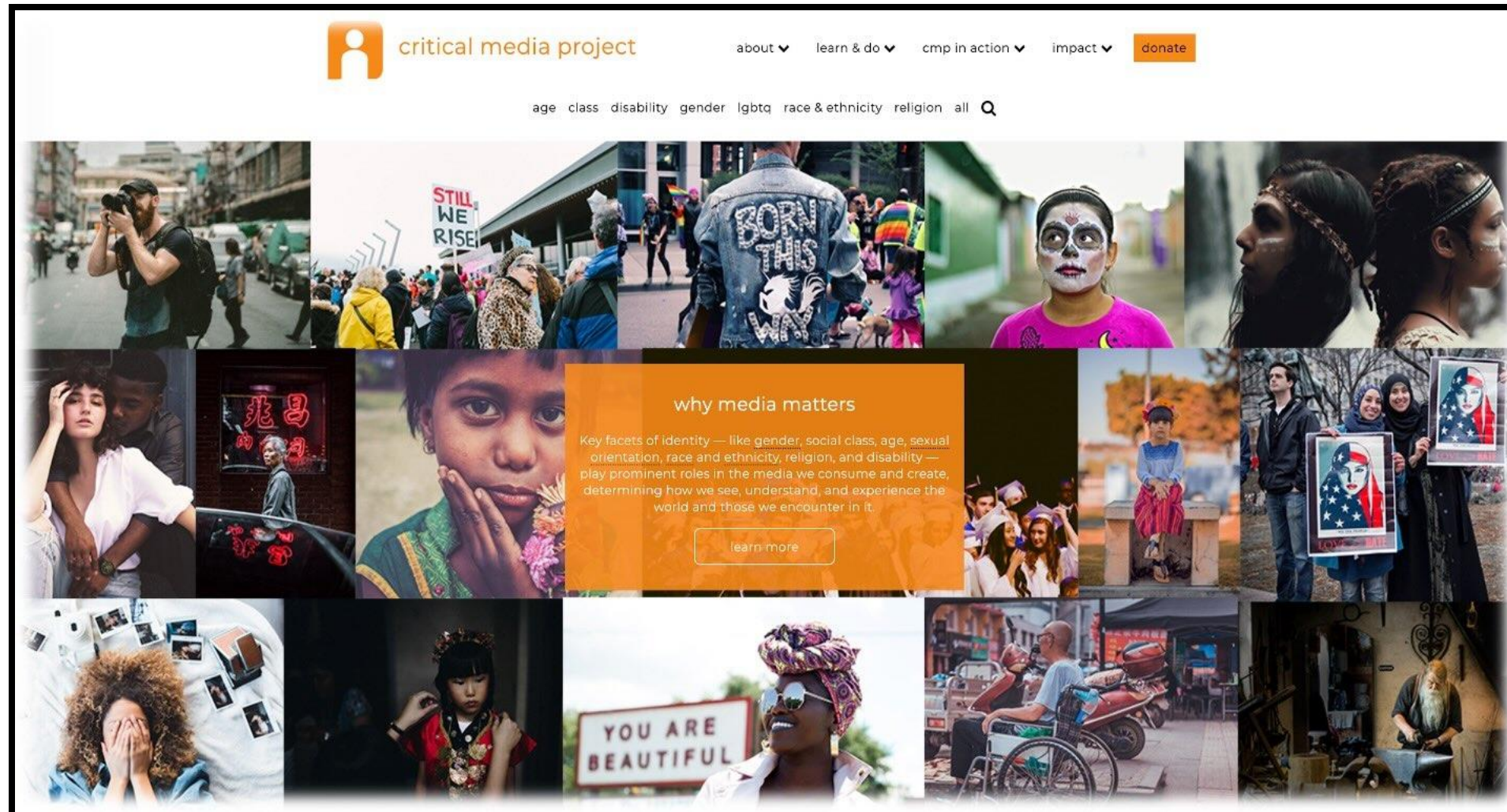


# Musicking and Musical Care

Some people will never participate in formal music therapy sessions. Some people will never sing in a choir. Some people will prefer other forms of creative engagement entirely. But many people will have some engagement with music at some time, whether or not they see that engagement as an explicit form of care.

Source: Musical Care Network (International, interdisciplinary team)

# Building Resilience Through Critical Media Consumption & Creation



**Alison Trope PhD**

Clinical Professor,  
USC Annenberg School for Communication  
Director, Critical Media Project

**critical media project (cmp)**

free media literacy initiative & web resource for educators and students (ages 8-21)

[www.criticalmediaproject.org](http://www.criticalmediaproject.org)



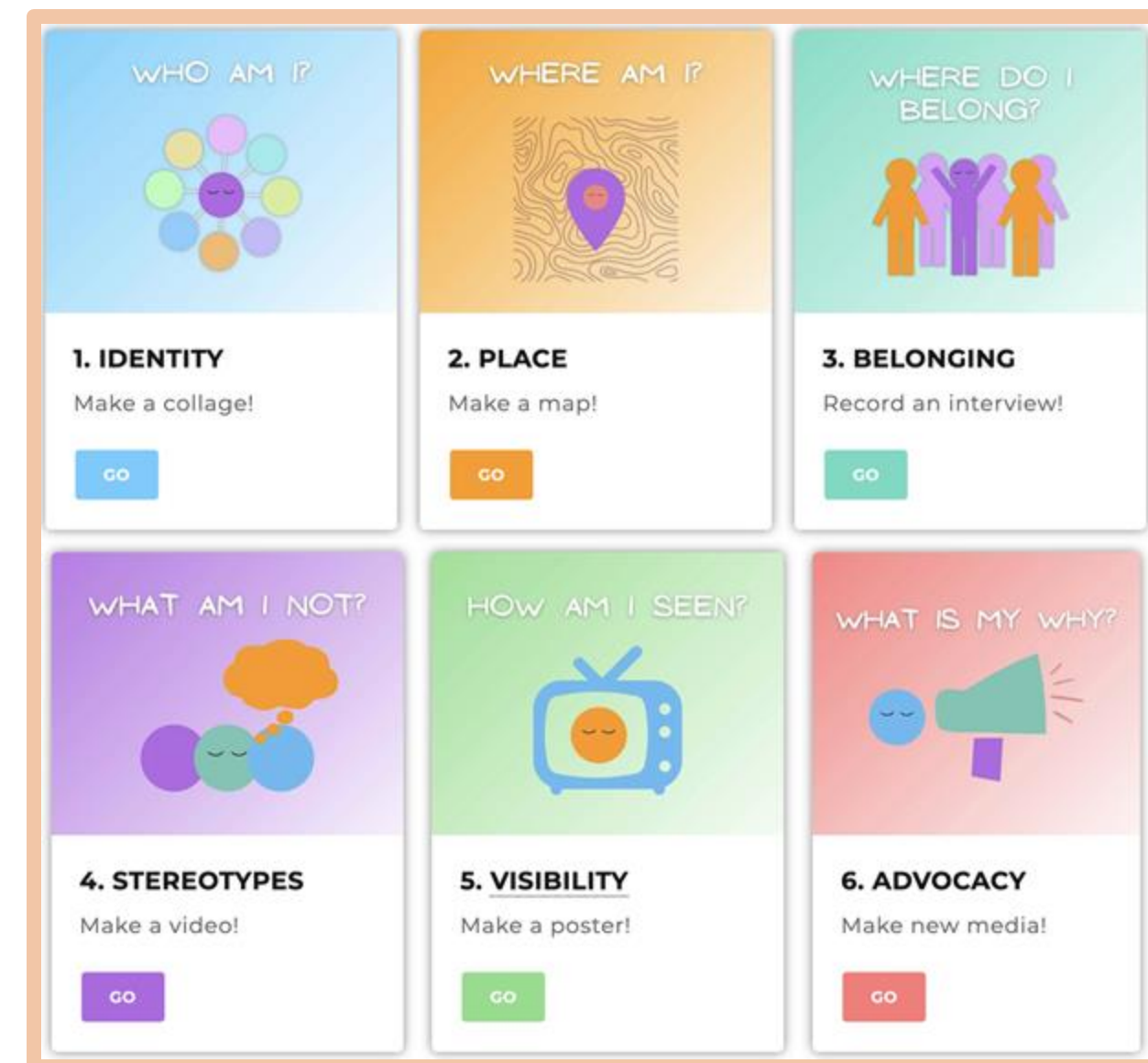
# Critical Media Project: I Too Am Programs



**I Too Am:  
Teens, Media Arts & Belonging**  
(outdoor education)



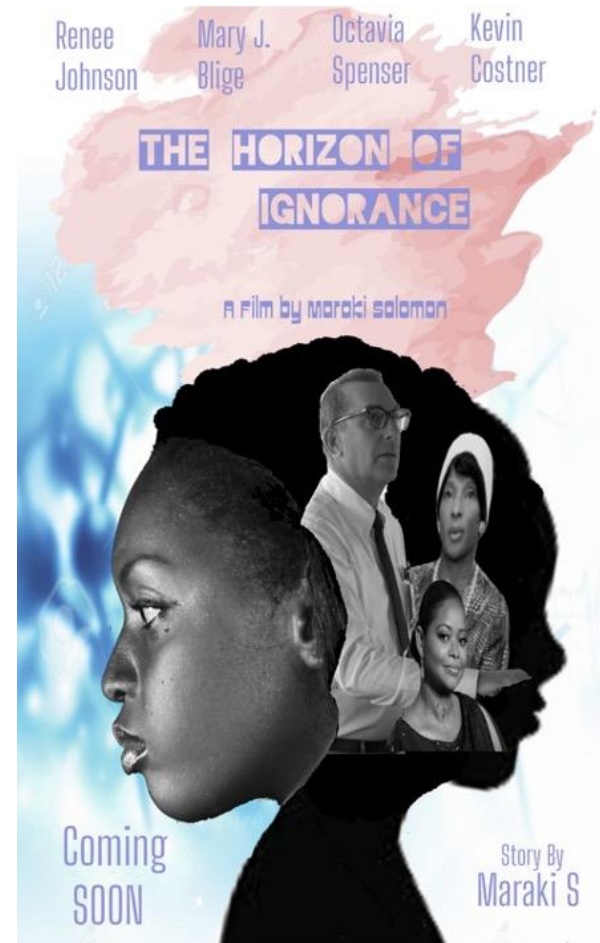
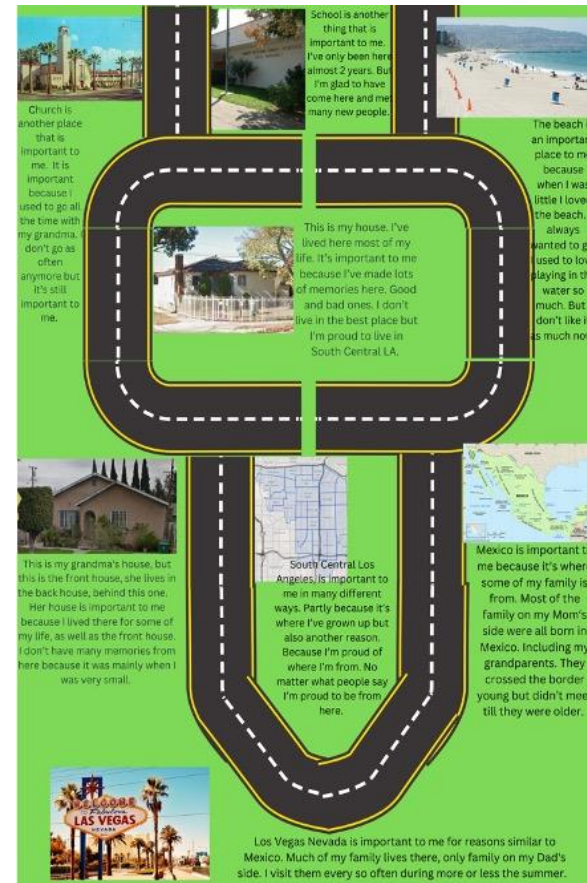
**I Too Am Media Festival**



**I Too Am:  
Critical Makers Lab**



# Resilience Through Critical Media Making



*I too am.  
I too am the people we look over on  
the streets.  
I too am the beats we hum as music  
blasts on the stereo.  
I too am...  
The barbeques at the park,  
The high school football games,  
The short walks to the liquor [store].  
I too am proud of where I'm from.  
I too am, South Central, LA.*

*poem by Cristina O.*

**I AM AN AMERICAN  
CITIZEN  
BUT... NOT ANY LESS  
HISPANIC.**







*Voice of Dante*

*Orlando Medical Magnet High School Student*



# Youth Voice, Self-Reflection & Impact

“It made me question, "why am I the way that I am?" I would have never been able to make that **one step towards self-acceptance** if it weren't for all of the soul searching assignments and personal reflections. The Critical Media Project helped me embrace my strengths and weaknesses. It gave me an insight on how media toys with these **strengths** and **weaknesses** of mine and my fellow classmates. It's not that we're being controlled or anything, but it's relevance is quite high in this day of age.”

*“I learned a lot about my own **identity** while making the collage. It helped me understand more about myself. While making the poem, it helped understand more of what was going on in the world and how it was affecting society.”*

## ***Resilience through...***

- ★ Reflecting on identity
- ★ Finding voice & validation
- ★ Creating & imagining
- ★ Building community & belonging
- ★ Redefining space & place
- ★ Sharing perspectives

# Youth Voice, Self-Reflection & Impact

“The project helped me remember my past and analyze myself. By being able to think I was able to **rediscover** what it was that I was **fighting for**, what it was that motivated me. What I found most valuable about this project was that I was able to present in class and **let out all the things**, my life story, the **hardships**, and my **motivation**, that I had bottled up inside.”

“I really got in my feelings because I have a very hard time knowing how I feel or even **expressing** it in a way that people will understand me.”

## ***Resilience through...***

- ★ Reflecting on identity
- ★ Finding voice & validation
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- ★ Sharing perspectives





## The Importance of Community and DIY in Skateboarding

**Miles Jackson MBA**



# Channeling the Power of Skateboarding

- **Empowering Through Physical Activity:** We promote skateboarding as an engaging physical activity, fostering students' physical health, confidence, and resilience in a supportive environment.
- **Community-Built (DIY) Skateparks:** By involving local students in the design and construction of skateparks, we create safe spaces for recreation and self-expression, reinforcing a sense of ownership and pride.
- **Sustainability-Focused Programs:** We introduce sustainability practices, from recycling materials to community clean-up initiatives, teaching students environmental responsibility and care for their surroundings.
- **Skill Development and Apprenticeship:** Through our apprenticeship program, young Cubans learn valuable skills in woodworking and construction, providing pathways to future careers and fostering lifelong learning.
- **Holistic Well-Being:** Our programs emphasize not only physical health but also mental and emotional well-being, cultivating resilience, creativity, and social skills essential for lifelong success.

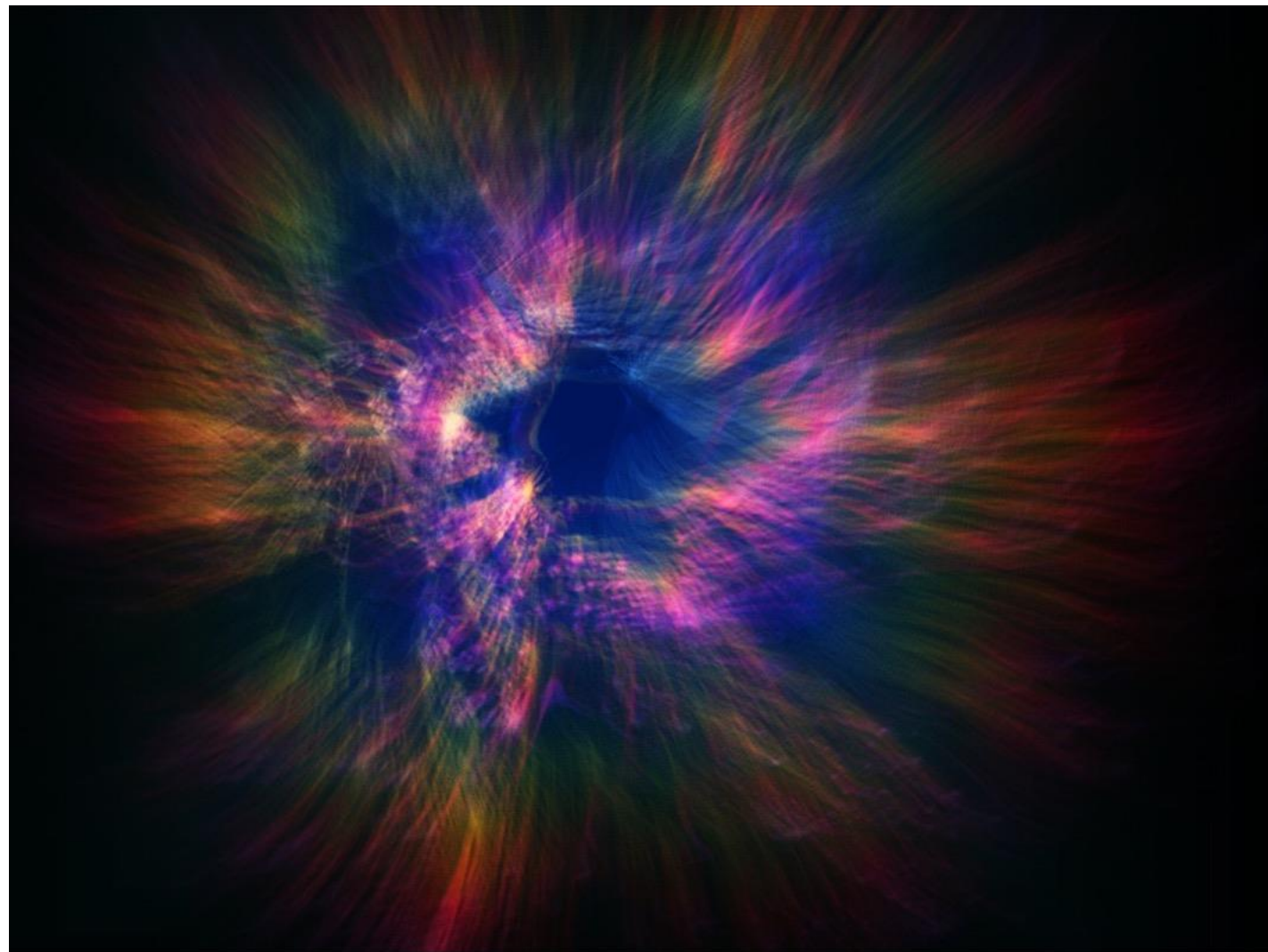
# The Impact of Skateboarding

- **Addressing Limited Recreational Spaces:** Both in Cuba and Los Angeles, underserved communities often lack safe recreational areas. Our approach provides skateparks as vital spaces for youth to engage in physical activity, self-expression, and community building.
- **Fostering Resilience and Self-Esteem:** Skateboarding helps youth develop resilience through repeated practice and perseverance, building self-confidence and teaching valuable life lessons that support their growth both on and off the board.
- **Bridging Cultural and Social Gaps:** By connecting Cuban and Los Angeles youth through skateboarding, we foster cross-cultural understanding and create a shared experience that emphasizes the universal language of sports and creativity.
- **Developing Skills for Future Opportunities:** Our apprenticeship programs empower youth with hands-on skills in areas like construction, design, and environmental stewardship, opening pathways for personal and professional development.
- **Promoting Physical and Mental Health:** Skateboarding encourages physical fitness and serves as an emotional outlet, reducing stress and enhancing mental well-being for youth in both regions, particularly those facing economic or social challenges.

# What Skaters Can Teach Us About Human-Centric Approaches

- **Passion for Self-Expression:** Students in Cuba and Los Angeles view skateboarding as a powerful form of self-expression, allowing them to showcase their unique identities and talents in a way that traditional sports often do not provide.
- **Desire for Safe Spaces:** Both Cuban and Los Angeles youth emphasize the need for safe, inclusive environments where they can freely gather, learn, and support one another without fear or judgment, making skateparks an essential community hub.
- **Curiosity for Hands-On Learning:** Students express a strong interest in acquiring practical skills, such as woodworking, construction, and design, seeing these as valuable tools for self-sufficiency and future career possibilities.
- **Community Pride and Responsibility:** Youth in both regions take pride in contributing to their communities, especially through sustainability efforts, learning the importance of environmental care and developing a sense of responsibility for their surroundings.
- **Mental Health and Emotional Outlet:** Many students share that skateboarding and the programs provide them with an emotional release, helping them cope with daily stresses and empowering them to build resilience, confidence, and a sense of belonging.





## Briana Hinga

Riddle: Guess the 3rd Space...

1. I am always with you.
2. Many schools require you to shut me off,  
to complete assignments.
3. You might remember  
me  
when you tune into your breath.



# The Body

A site of possibility



A microcosm of our larger structures





# Invitation to Collective Breath





“I think therefore I am.”



“I feel, therefore I can be free.”



# Schooling vs. Learning

- Schooling
  - Socially constructed (“justification” for) stratification
- Learning
  - Reaching for something that is fundamentally unknowable
  - Open to possibilities



# Embodied and Embedded Approach to Well-being

“Somewhere along the way, we were taught to stop feeling, instead of being taught to stop what harms us, as though the feeling were our enemy, as if the feeling were hurting us.” (Hemphill, 2024, p. 68)

“To search for power within myself means I must be willing to move through being afraid to whatever lies beyond. If I look at my most vulnerable places and acknowledge the pain I have felt, I can remove the source of that pain from my enemies' arsenals.” (Lorde, 1984, pp. 146–147)



- How might we transform conditions that isolate, numb, and break us?
- How might we tend to our bodies and honor our power?
- How might we open space for difference and authentic expression?



# References

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**THANK YOU FOR COMING!**

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**USC ROSSIER SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**SAVE THE DATE**  **for Spring 2025**

**February 4 - Part 4**

**Supporting the Caregivers: Staff Perspectives**

**March 4 - Part 5**

**Uplifting Educators: Teachers & Faculty Perspectives**

**March 26 - Part 6**

**Cultivating Systemic Wellness: Perspectives of Administrators & Leaders**

