

A Virtual Learning Excursion: The HĀ unSummit

By Ann Jaquith

About This Series

This series of field-facing memos describes promising assessment for learning practices. The series examines the various ways in which Assessment for Learning Project grantees are using, adapting, and creating assessment practices oriented to learning. To see the full series, please visit https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/library/publications/Assessment_for_Learning_Project

This research is made possible with funding from the Center for Innovation in Education at the University of Kentucky.

SCOPE
Stanford Center for
Opportunity Policy in Education

Stanford Center for
Opportunity Policy in Education
485 Lasuen Mall
Stanford, CA 94305
scope@stanford.edu
edpolicy.stanford.edu

In May 2020, six weeks into sheltering-in-place procedures, an invitation arrived. It was sent to 25 members of the Assessment for Learning Project (ALP) community—teachers, school leaders, and other designers of professional development and formative assessment—who a few weeks earlier had learned that the [HĀ Summit](#) they planned to attend in April in Maui, Hawai‘i, had been postponed. The coronavirus was sweeping across the nation, arriving in our communities. The dangers of the new reality we were living in were seeping into our collective conscience as we saw images of hospitals filled to the bursting point in Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York; as we heard the siren calls for personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep frontline workers safe; and as we listened for and responded to the needs of family members, neighbors, and colleagues. Each of us was trying to make sense of the effects of this pandemic on us, our families, and our loved ones living close and far away: What were the implications for our students, for our colleagues, and for our work? When the invitation arrived, the message from Kau‘i Sang read:

From the shores of Hawai‘i to each of the spaces you occupy in this unprecedented time, Cheryl and I would like to wish each of you safety and good health as we continue to raise the vibration of our ALP community. We believe strongly in the proverb, “A‘ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho‘okahi” whose interpretation is “One can learn from many sources.”

With this intention, we extend an invitation to those who planned to join us in Hawai‘i for the HĀ Summit to advance our collective learning journey through a virtual HĀ “unSummit.” As we navigate Covid-19 Coronavirus, we wanted to provide an additional source and space for our shared learning. Each of you will be receiving a gift that we had intended to share with you prior to the HĀ Summit regardless of your acceptance of our invitation.

The following dates have been identified where we hope folks will want to join in on a video conference conversation rooted in community and nurtured by the collective strengths of the WE!

Dates and times were given for five 90-minute sessions that would take place every two weeks. The gift, a copy of the book *KAIĀULU: Gathering Tides*, arrived in our mailboxes with a request that we look for examples of HĀ in the stories (mo'olelo) in the text.¹ (See Exhibit 1: KAIĀULU Reading Questions.)

Exhibit 1: KAIĀULU Reading Questions

Prompt Questions (to think about while reading the chapters)

1. Can you find examples of HĀ in one of these mo'olelo or stories?
2. More than who is in your community, who has always been in your community?
3. What words of wisdom resonate with you in these chapters and where do they take you?
4. How do you connect to your natural environment as vital to your learning?
5. What does abundance look like in your environment?

Prework for 1st Session: What is a question provoked by these chapters that you now have? Here are some of ours you might want to explore together:

6. What might we learn from this book when we think about localizing learning hubs and leverage strengths of the learning community?
7. What is lost and gained when ancestral knowledge is no longer part of your learning environment?
8. What value do you see mo'olelo having as an assessment for learning process?
9. What role has government and laws played in altering natural sustainability practices and what has to shift back?
10. What practices exist in education system that allow for regeneration, ho'omaha, and ho'oulu?
11. When is enough, how do we know, who decides?
12. Describe a regenerative and/or a reciprocal process for learning in your place
13. How do I define catch and release (related to quote page 46)
14. What is left out of balance in the public education system when we focus so much on college and career readiness?
15. Based on what you read so far, what is the importance of place, learning journeys to and from these places, and common/shared experiences? Might you take a walk in your community and look for deep culture as a way to prepare for this journey – see Poka's definition of deep culture.

Source: Kau'i Sang and Cheryl Ka'uhane Lupenui

The HĀ-BREATH Framework

The Hawai'i Department of Education developed a culturally responsive framework of outcomes called *Nā Hopena A'o*, abbreviated to HĀ. Hawaiian schools serve a diverse population of students. Importantly, the framework

recognizes the values and qualities of the indigenous language and culture of Hawai‘i and describes these as what makes Hawai‘i “a place unlike anywhere else.” In Hawaiian, “hā” means breath or spirit. BREATH is also the acronym for the six elements of the framework: Belonging, Responsibility, Excellence, Aloha, Total-well-being, and Hawai‘i. The idea of the framework is to strengthen these six learning outcomes in every student over the course of their K-12 learning journeys because, as the framework states, “when taken together, these outcomes become the core BREATH that can be drawn on for strength and stability throughout school and beyond.”²

Grounded in Hawaiian values, language, culture, and history, the [framework](#) is both culturally responsive and culturally sustaining. A culturally sustaining aspect of the HĀ Framework is the process through which it is introduced to others. Its creators believe the best way to demonstrate HĀ is through direct experience. Therefore, the Office of Hawaiian Education developed a process, called HĀ Community Days, to support school-communities to design and enact transformational experiences that allow people to collectively experience HĀ. Since the development of the HĀ Framework in 2015, more than 25 Community Days have been hosted in

Exhibit 2: HĀ Framework



Source: [The Hawai‘i Department of Education \(HDOE\) HĀ Framework](#)

communities across Hawai‘i. In keeping with many of the [Community Day design principles](#), Kau‘i Sang (director, Office of Hawaiian Education) and Cheryl Ka‘uhane Lupenui (president and CEO of The Kohala Center) created the HĀ unSummit as a collection of integrated experiences designed to introduce us to the underlying ideas of the HĀ Framework, including cultivating ways to strengthen our relationships to each other within the ALP community and to bring more attention to the importance of cultivating relationships among school, community, and place.

HĀ unSummit Goals

The goals of the HĀ unSummit were to learn about HĀ and the intersections and interconnections of place, community, and learning practices. The physical separation induced by COVID-19 offered an opportunity to explore virtual learning excursions and to experiment with practices that might create a sense of belonging and connection in virtual environments. The leaders of the ALP Network were interested in engaging in a collective exploration of the possible connections among HĀ, the ALP Network, and individuals’ own contexts. How might our individual and collective understandings of HĀ influence assessment for learning practices?

Importantly, the HĀ Summit the year before had influenced the leaders of the ALP Network in significant ways. As the ALP team members from Hawai‘i explored HĀ as a principle for reimagining and reframing a system of assessment based on ancestral knowledge and ways of knowing and then shared their explorations with members of the ALP community, they awakened realizations in others, such as recognizing that learning and assessment for learning must be about far more than preparing students for college and for career. Instead, learning and learning practices must be rooted in a larger sense of purpose and reason for

being. Learning ought to be connected to helping our communities be more sustainable and resilient, and they must be more (not less) expansive and culturally relevant. With these understandings in mind, ALP leaders Sarah Lench and Tony Siddall collaborated with Kau‘i and Cheryl to design the HĀ unSummit.

Learning Individually and Collectively: Reading KAIĀULU

We began reading.

As we read, we looked for examples of HĀ.

In Hawaiian, one meaning of KAIĀULU is *community*. When we accepted the invitation and began reading *KAIĀULU*, we were in the beginning stages of becoming a learning community. At the time many of us may not have realized that our individual acts of reading the same text began our initiation into this community by giving us a common experience from which we could learn and grow together. Already, our journey of learning from many sources had launched.

The first chapter introduced us to ‘Āina: That which Feeds and the second chapter to Ho‘ihi: Reciprocity and Respect. The author of *KAIĀULU*, Mehana Blaich Vaughan, tells the story of a fishing village in Kaua‘i, drawing upon local stories (mo‘olelo) she has gathered from the people who live there—people she knows. She weaves together the mo‘olelo of the people—descendants of their ancestors—who live and holoholo (fish) in that village by taking care of the ‘āina (land). Mehana laces together the stories of Hawaiian elders, village leaders, and fisher men and women in a manner that conjures up images of selecting flowers for a lei and braiding them together. She weaves these stories to show how native Hawaiians cultivate fishing spots using ancestral practices, make efforts to maintain connection to family lands, and teach future

generations to value community, place, and ancestral ways of knowing and doing. Reading these mo‘olelo revealed truths that resonated for us, such as:

Living within the limits was a key part of good care-taking and ensuring sustenance for future generations. (p. 47)

The more you share, the more you catch. (p. 17)

Specific places shape people and feed their sense of who they are. (p. 24–25)

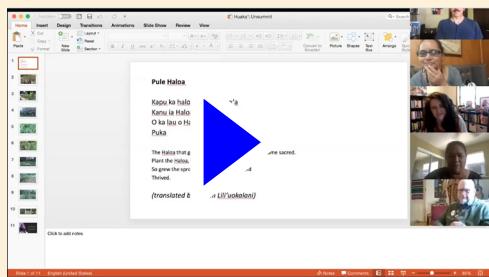
When an elder dies, a library burns. (p. 11)

Abundance and community resilience rest on bringing people and their individual gifts together to take care of resources for the benefit of many. (p. 173)

“Kuleana grows from reciprocity: regular return, cultivation of relationship, and active work to nurture abundance. Caretaking renders certain places “ours,” while making us more conscious of our behavior when we are in places cared for by others. (p. 48)

These were some of the lines from the book we brought with us to our first virtual HĀ unSummit. We each read out loud a line we had selected, which woven together became a co-created poem. We listened to each other read.

Exhibit 3: Hawaiian Chant



Click the icon to listen to Kau‘i Sang chant and to read the English translation. (0:59)

We heard the echo of particular lines when they were shared more than once. Listening to the lines that resonated for each of us created connection among us. When we shared the examples of HĀ in the mo‘olelo of the text, as we understood the concept, we also told our own stories—to each other and to ourselves. We listened for ideas and feelings that we had in common and that resonated with us. In doing so, our participation in the HĀ unSummit afforded us new ways of doing, seeing, and being in a virtual community. Kau‘i closed the first session with a traditional Hawaiian chant. (See Exhibit 3 to watch the chant recording.) Then, in a sort of virtual and communal exhale, we each left a single word in the “chat box” that might be read as a reciprocal expression of both the gift we had received and the gift we were giving back. (See Chat Box in Exhibit 4.)

Aloha Circle

Our first HĀ unSummit session began with an Aloha Circle.

“[This is] part of how we start our work, greet one another, and bring our ancestors and our intentions into our work.” We were invited to enter the Aloha Circle by naming where home is for each of us and by sharing the name of a relative or elder that we were bringing with us into this HĀ unSummit experience. “Speak from the heart,” was the intention that was named for us. We were told (reminded) that each of us has a circle of people who stand behind us and propel us forward together in our connections.

Exhibit 4: Chat Box

Mahalo
Mahalo
Mahalo
Kaiāulu
Thank you
Thank you
Thank you
Exploration
Open
Thank you
Integrity
Grateful
Connected
Making senses
Generous
Connectedness
Centered
Space
Community
Humble
Best
Invited
Acceptance
Connection
Belonging
Belonging
Beauty
Mahalo

The power of this idea and the ritual of naming the place we call home and bringing the spirit of a relative with us welcomed us into a space that at once felt special and protected. For many of us, the Aloha Circle was a new experience.

Going on a Huaka‘i: A Learning Journey

With Cheryl as our guide, we saw images and heard the story of a huaka‘i taken during the HĀ Summit last year. (To watch clips from the huaka‘i, see Exhibit 5.) With photographs, Cheryl showed us how land becomes both teacher and classroom on a huaka‘i. We saw the planting of keiki trees and as Cheryl “talked story,” we learned that the site for planting was chosen with intention. The planting site was chosen by considering which place the trees would have the best chance to grow. In my notes, I wrote: “Look, pay attention, listen, observe, sense. Where do we place the keiki?”

Noticing the attention that was paid to create the optimum conditions for the growth of each tree, we couldn’t help but think about if (or what if) we gave the same care and consideration to our children when placing them in schools, in classrooms, and in learning groups. We were shown pictures of an invasive plant that was not indigenous to the island that had sprawled across the land and, as Cheryl told us, “[was] sucking up all the breath from that

place.” Cheryl explained part of the huaka‘i was to remove the invasive plant so the keiki could grow and thrive in the company of other keiki. Creating spaces where children can thrive in the company of other children seemed like a reasonable and mission-critical goal for our nation’s schools.

What do we need to clear away in our classrooms, schools, and districts so that our children, especially those who are most vulnerable, can grow and thrive in the company of their peers? As Cheryl described the purpose of huaka‘i—to deepen our sense of HĀ and our sense of aloha (well-being)—our thoughts turned to pondering ways that we might create a greater sense of well-being and belonging for our students (and colleagues) in our school communities.

In small groups we shared our own stories with each other. We told stories of places where we felt an extreme sense of belonging, and, as we talked story with each other, we learned. We considered (some of us for the first time in a long time) our relationship to the land and connections to our elders and ancestors. In the words of one participant, “the experience brought me to a place where I got to listen to others but also listen to myself.” Through stories, we shared the gift of better understanding who we are.

Exhibit 5: Huaka‘i Learning Journey Videos



Part 1: Watch the introduction to the huaka‘i learning journey. (1:39)



Part 2: How to we create the best environment for our keiki to grow and to live? (2:56)

Our Huaka'i: Our Learning Journeys

Learning has both individual and collective dimensions. Individually, we read *KAIĀULU* and watched a video clip of Aunty Puanani Burgess share the story of “the gift.”³ We engaged in a series of activities on our own and in preparation for the next learning session. For example, we selected lines from *KAIĀULU* that resonated with us; we went on our own personal learning journeys to places we deem intimate—where we experience a strong sense of belonging—and we traveled (psychically if not physically) into our communities of learning to look for our community’s gifts.

Our individual learning journeys were in pursuit of the idea that ‘āina—connection to place and community—is what feeds us. For some of us, place was embodied by the people we were with; for others, a particular landscape was essential. Many of us described feelings of centeredness, calm, ease, being seen and accepted as we are, warmth, and care when we journeyed to those places. From our reflections on our own experiences of belonging in these sacred places, questions emerged about the educational environments we are responsible for creating. The idea of ‘āina reverberated. We asked: In our classrooms, especially in virtual learning environments, what does it mean to actively engage in caretaking? We asked: How can our classrooms shape and feed our students so that they understand that they are *someone* who matters; *someone* who makes a difference; *someone* who can help others make a difference? We asked: What would happen if we recast schools as communities of care?

Our individual learning was braided together with each other’s learning. Each time we gathered in our virtual Aloha Circle, we brought artifacts from our learning journeys with us; we shared these artifacts through collaboratively constructed slide decks, with choral

readings, and by talking story with each other. Through these shaspotred experiences, we got to know each other and ourselves better. Together (and individually) we considered how we might create more just, sustainable, and culturally thriving worlds in our own home environments. What ideas for new ways of doing, seeing, and being in a virtual environment had our participation in the HĀ unSummit afforded us?

The Impact: Transformative Elements of Participation

We were asked to create invitations to a learning journey of our own. What would our invitations look like if we were hosting a huaka'i for others to get to know our community and the work we do? We were asked to bring our invitations to our final gathering. Reflecting back on this request to develop an invitation, one participant said, “I really struggled to know how to design that experience because I didn’t have a clear sense of what was expected of the work product.” This participant recognized the intentional ambiguity in the design of the task and the deep sense of “disequilibrium” that this ambiguity sparked. Reflecting further on this diequilibrium, this participant wrote:

This helped me experience the HĀ notion of creating a framework where every community member can develop their own pathways and take responsibility for doing what had meaning for them. It inspired me to trust in the community of belonging to take ownership of the whole. As a result of participating in the unSummit experiences, I’ve been able to practice and deepen my understanding of what is possible in a learning community....In our HĀ community, we experienced authenticity, emotional risk, exposure (we let ourselves be seen) because we feel safe to do so. I am reminded that to feel vulnerable is to be alive. It is not a weakness. And feeling

connected is what makes life purposeful. As the isolation born of sheltering and working from home has persisted over the months since we participated in the unSummit, issues of connection and belonging are paramount in the work of classroom educators and those who support them.

This reflection led to an ongoing curiosity: “As learning experience designers, how do we create the conditions for belonging *and* opportunities for learners to improve their capacities to belong?”

Experience as Transformative Learning

One answer to that question is: through offering and participating in the task to create an invitation for a huaka‘i, and then sharing one’s invitation (participation in the task) with others. Experiences of belonging—caring and feeling cared for—involve both external and internal processes. There needs to be an external opportunity for a shared experience, and the individual must also be open and willing to participate in that shared experience.⁴ Creating the external conditions in which individuals feel comfortable enough to be open and willing to participate becomes the critical work for the designers of learning experiences.

At the final HĀ unSummit gathering, we shared our invitations, which were constructed as individual PowerPoint slides that were stitched simply together in a Google slide deck. (See example invitations in Exhibit 6.) Among the invitations offered were: an invitation to consider the relationship between your learning community and the town or city you live in; an invitation to be part of a book study—*Ruled by Race: Black/White Relations in Arkansas from Slavery to Present* by Grif Stockley—as a way to learn how to strengthen our sense of belonging in our own communities by better understanding our many pasts; an invitation to join a People’s Education

Exhibit 6: Invitations



Movement to re-learn about the institutional origins of education in order to see and deconstruct its harmful structures; and an invitation to participate in a gathering to examine school systems and whiteness.

Reflecting on the Experience

Months after the HĀ unSummit was over, participants talked about their experience of the HĀ unSummit. Below are comments from four individuals:

“It felt like a break from this terrifying reality we are in, which actually feels surreal....It felt like a break from the surreal reality into a better reality. It was a space

for me to exist in the real world even though we were meeting online.”

“There was a humanness to the HĀ unSummit that I wasn’t feeling in my real work.”

One person spoke of the contrast between the work of HĀ and the “sick, cynical system that we are living in where college and career readiness is the goal instead of belonging, beauty, truth, and goodness.”

“I would re-emphasize the importance of community. People talk about getting through the multiple pandemics—the systemic racism that is hitting multiple inflection points, the global pandemic, the wildfires....I have always believed that schools are communities of learning and at the heart of communities are people. And, too often, systems take over. Whether it is bureaucracies [or] the effort to get work done without thinking about the humanity at the heart of it...the HĀ unSummit demonstrated...even within systems there is heart, people, and community.”

Generative Experiences as Acts of Field Building

Participants carried their invitations forward in various ways. Two HĀ unSummit participants, Gary Chapin and Carisa Corrow, hosted a virtual learning journey over the summer from their home base in New Hampshire. Their [invitation](#) was sent out and offered “3 days, 4 circles, 1 community, for good.” They invited people into an experience to think about the transformative possibilities of *Assessment for Good*, which they described in their invitation as assessment that is “ethical, equitable & justice-oriented.” A central feature of the virtual learning excursion that they created was “circle experiences,” which were in part modeled on and adapted from their experience of Aloha Circles at the HĀ unSummit. The circle experiences were designed to “model how to create

meaningful relationships and learning experiences in a virtual environment.”⁵ Like the HĀ unSummit, their virtual learning excursion concluded with a prompt for reciprocal action, continued learning, and an invitation to carry the learning forward: “*What will you bring back to your own community from this conversation?*”

When asked to reflect upon why they chose to accept the invitation to the HĀ unSummit, Carisa said that these are “the type[s] of conversations that I want to be in with other people.” She said it is “difficult in New Hampshire to find folks who are talking about assessment in a different type of way that is not so technical” and she highlighted the importance of developing understanding “through story...[and] from indigenous folks, not just in Hawai‘i but from New Hampshire.” Carisa also spoke about how participating in the HĀ unSummit influenced the planning of their virtual learning excursion.

The way it [HĀ unSummit] was facilitated and the organization of it really got us to think about: how to tell story and how to bring folks together who might not be in the same space or in the same community. And, [how do we] get them to have conversations that get really deep, really quickly....It really made us think about how much you can handle and talk about with some of these deeper conversations:

Exhibit 7: Video Reflection



Listen to participant Carissa Duran reflect on her experience of the HĀ unSummit. (2:04)

when we have conversation about white supremacy culture or systems of whiteness [and]...to understand that you don't need to have a full day immersion [in order to have depth]. Sometimes learning over long periods of time in community with folks is a much deeper experience than four days crammed...a deeper kind of relationship can be built.

Carisa said she and Gary are still learning and practicing these approaches to creating a sense of belonging in communities that they convene. Carisa said the HĀ unSummit “was a model for us about how to hold circle with strangers.” In a [blog](#) reflecting on what they learned from their *Assessment for Good Conference*, Gary wrote,

Reflection and dialogue are at the heart of rethinking assessment, and the way we frame our reflections and conversations through our professional relationships matter.

He also said that his understanding of the meaning of *belonging as a relationship that can't be undone*—a meaning of belonging that he learned from the HĀ Framework—had changed everything for him. Ultimately, Carisa and Gary took up the challenge given at the unSummit to create an invitation to a learning journey of their own design. They sent out their invitation to the world and in return received opportunities to deepen their learning in abundance.

Questioning and Creating as Acts of Field Building

Our participation in the HĀ unSummit influenced our actions and it also influenced our thinking in both subtle and profound ways. For example, another participant, Jon Vander Els, reflected on questions stimulated by the HĀ unSummit about *who we are and what we are trying to become as a society*.

Talking about what he has learned through his connection to Kau‘i and Cheryl and their work in Hawai‘i, he said it has “impacted how I’m looking at everything; [prompted me] to ask more questions and to try to understand better.” Jon spoke about wanting to explore why, in schools, “we are not doing more to tap into who we are as people and consider our rich histories and the experiences of those who came before us in order to better understand where we are trying to go.” He said he was reminded “to slow down and really think about what is important.”

Another HĀ unSummit participant was Jeff Heyck-Williams, who is the director of the Two Rivers Learning Institute in Washington, D.C. He wrote a blog in June in which he described the importance of schools operating as communities of care. Eloquently, he described the adults’ responsibility in schools to cultivate students’ sense of belonging. He explained belonging as a critical part of feeling safe in school, which is, of course, a foundational condition for learning. He called upon us to “raise the expectations for ourselves as teachers to help all of our students meet our expectations.”⁶

Another participant, who teaches high school English, purchased a copy of *KAIĀULU* and sent it to a friend so they could discuss ways to integrate their insights from their joint reading of *KAIĀULU* into their teaching. As a result, this participant said she “created a HĀ learning process for myself and my students.” She said, “My ultimate goal with the *Hā* Journey is to build more collective space for knowledge-sharing and construction, as well as an aura of belonging, acceptance, and beauty.” The idea of HĀ—breath, life, belonging, and care for all living things—and the connection to culture, place, and history that hā signifies is braided into these instances of creating the conditions for care-taking and strengthening community.

Our participation in a community of care that was grounded in belonging and acceptance in order to learn and explore ideas together at the HĀ unSummit stimulated a wide array of actions and of ways of thinking and being in the world, some bold and daring, others quiet and contemplative. When we create learning environments for our students that embody a similar sense of belonging and a recognition of the gifts that all of our students brings with them into our classrooms, imagine the waves of caring and curiosity that we will unleash and in so doing buoy the many different learning journeys needed to create a just, sustainable, and culturally thriving world.

Reflection Questions

The reflection questions are intended to spark consideration about how to incorporate learning from this memo into your own work in order to achieve a more equitable and meaningful education for each student.

- Where do you feel a deep sense of belonging? What is it about that place and the people in it that make you feel safe, loved, and cared for? What opportunities are there to incorporate those elements you identified that contribute to a sense of belonging into your own classroom, school, or workplace context?
- Think about your students (yourself, your colleagues and community). How do you create a sense of belonging in your environment so that each person feels like they matter, like they make a difference, and like they can help others make a difference?

What do you need to do (or might need to do differently) in an online learning environment to create a sense of belonging and total well-being?

- Who are the students (or colleagues) who are most vulnerable and, perhaps, most in need of your care? What sort of care, consideration, and help can you offer?
- What might you need to clear away in your own classroom, school, or community so that your students (or colleagues), especially those who are most vulnerable, can grow and thrive in the company of their peers?

Endnotes

1. Mehana Blaich Vaughan, KAIĀULU: Gathering Tides (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2018).
2. Hawai‘i Department of Education (HDOE) HĀ Framework, <http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/DOE%20Forms/NaHopenaAoE3.pdf>.
3. To read about Puanani Burgess’s work of community building, see <http://maui.hawaii.edu/pd/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/09/Burgess-Puanani-Building-the-Beloved-Community-A-Life-Practice.pdf>.
4. Frederic Luskin, “Practicing Gratitude and Taking Care of Self,” presentation, Stanford University, November 18, 2018.
5. “Assessment for Good: Ethical, Equitable & Justice-Oriented Assessment,” A Virtual Circle Series, August 10–12, 2020, <https://www.educatingforgood.com/assessment-for-good-virtual-conference>.
6. “Designing for Equity: Schools as Communities of Care,” <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/articles/schools-as-communities-of-care>.

