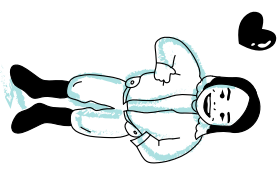


TRUNG'S  
ETHNIC STUDIES  
PEDAGOGY

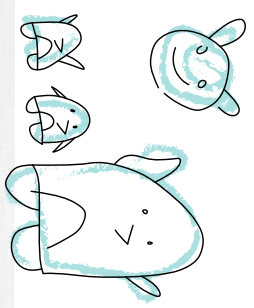
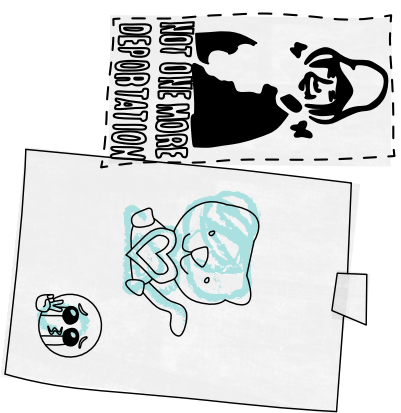
THE POSSIBILITIES AND STRUGGLES  
OF TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES IN K-12 SCHOOLS



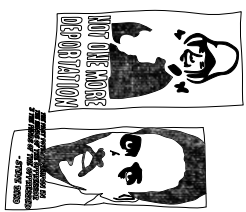
Ms. Trung (pseudonym), Teacher  
Josephine H. Pham, Researcher  
Esther S. Ho, Illustrator

Author's Statement

Our personal relationships with Ethnic Studies educators and organizers, passions for storytelling, dreams for collective liberation, and lived experiences as Asian American women and women of Color brought us together for this project. Bringing together our crafts and skillsets as scholar-educator-activists and drawing from research findings from a broader study on the day-to-day professional experiences of K-12 Ethnic Studies teachers of color, we developed a comic to capture a fuller portrait of one teachers' humanity and practices. Ms. Trung. At the same time, we were able to experience individual and collective healing through the act of generating new knowledges with one another. Designed as a form of "research activism" and as a pedagogical tool for teachers, teacher educators, and educational leaders, our comic aims to radically orient readers differently to learning and engaging with scholarship through creative expression. The comic form enables multimodal communication of theories, complex research findings, and critical perspectives on Ethnic Studies pedagogies in K-12 public schools. Our art-based research intentionally interweaves multiple aspects of Ms. Trung's narratives and practices across time periods and places to maintain our relational and ethical commitment to confidentiality while showcasing recurring interconnected themes of surveillance, organizing, resistance, and BIPOC life. We created this in solidarity and with care for Ms. Trung and other K-12 Ethnic Studies educators, and hope that this comic uncovers truths and renews political and pedagogical clarity for them as it has for us.



HI THERE! I'M MS. TRUNG (MA ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES)  
FOLLOW ALONG IN MY JOURNEY TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES IN  
K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS.



I IDENTIFY AS SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN WOMAN  
AND AS A WOMAN OF COLOR.

I AM A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, A FORMER ADJUNCT PROFESSOR  
AND I'M BILINGUAL IN VIETNAMESE, SPANISH AND ENGLISH.

DISCLAIMER: THIS RESEARCH IN GRAPHIC CONTEMPORARY  
FORM IS BASED ON THE RAW EMOTIONS AND TRUTH OF AN EDUCATOR.  
PLEASE ENGAGE WITH CARE.

YOU MIGHT ASK: WHY DID YOU DECIDE  
TO BECOME AN ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHER?



ETHNIC STUDIES REALLY SPATTERED IN  
REGIONS WORKING ON INTERCULTURAL OPENNESS  
WHICH I EXPERIENCED WITHIN MYSELF. IN 2014,  
IN SOMETHING I GAVE UP ON, ETHNIC STUDIES HELPED  
BEFORE IT WAS INTERGENERATIONAL. TRUTH: MY OWN  
DEES CONSERVATION WAS VERY HELPFUL IN IT.



I WAS STUDYING ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, DOING COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZING AND IMMIGRATION ADVOCACY + WORKING WITH  
FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE.. THIS BECAME THE CENTER OF HOW I  
CAME TO VIEW **ETHNIC STUDIES** AS AN **ABOLITIONIST WORLD**

- AT TIMES...

BEING AN ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHER OF COLOR CAN FEEL VERY **LONELY** & **MISIDENTING**



WHY?

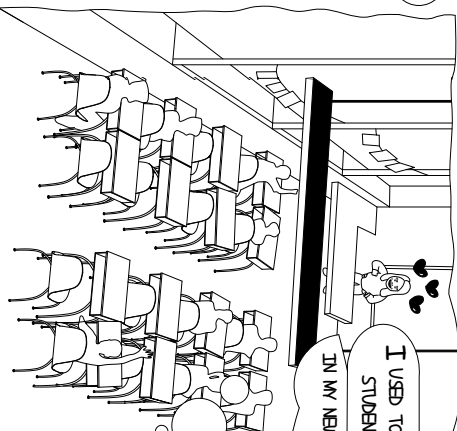
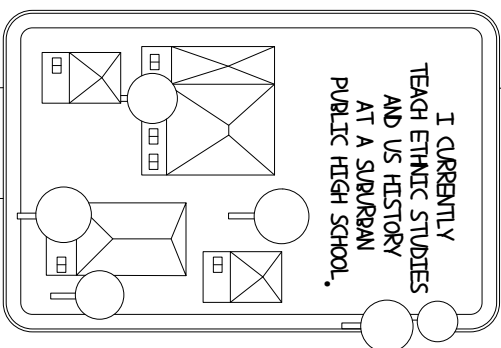
IT CAN FEEL DOWNDATING WHEN THE HUMANITIES AND LITERATURES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE TREATED AS SEPARATE FROM ETHNIC STUDIES CURRICULA AND INSTRUCTION...

SO I SEEK COMMUNITY IN OTHER SPACES BY FINDING LIKE-MINDED ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHERS AND ORGANIZERS, AND I'M PART OF A RACIAL AFFINITY GROUP WITH OTHER ASIAN AMERICAN TEACHERS.



WHEN WE INCLUDE LITERATURES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR, WE HONOR OUR OWN SHARED DIVERSE AND INTERSECTIONAL STORIES FROM THESE COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

Now...



BEFORE...

MY CURRENT STUDENTS ARE PREDOMINANTLY LATINX AND WHITE, WITH A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF BLACK AND ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS.

I USED TO TEACH IN AN URBAN SCHOOL, SERVING PREDOMINANTLY STUDENTS OF COLOR, AND I LOVED WORKING THERE.

IN MY NEW SCHOOL, IT'S SO DIFFERENT TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES HERE, ESPECIALLY WITH AFFLUENT WHITE STUDENTS.

WE LOVE ETHNIC STUDIES!

"ETHNIC STUDIES TAUGHT ME TO LOVE MYSELF MORE." ETHNIC STUDIES PROMOTES SELF-LOVE AND STUDENTS' CONNECTIONS TO THEIR IDENTITIES.

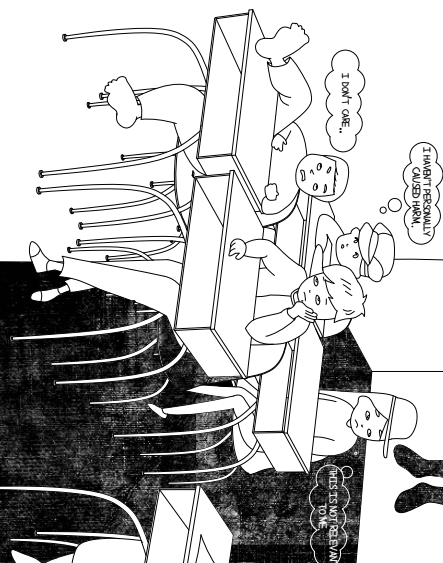
I TEACH A 'MAINSTREAM SECTION' AND A SECTION FOR NEWCOMER STUDENTS DESIGNATED AS "INVITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT" & "ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS"

WE WERE HAVING A GROUNDING FOR DISCUSSIONS ON RACE AND TALKING ABOUT HOW WE CAN COMMUNICATE WHEN HARM HAS BEEN DONE. WE CAN USE "I STATEMENTS"

HOW DO WE TAKE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE HARM WE HAVE CAUSED? IT WAS A SERIOUS CONVERSATION...

I FEEL WHEN BECAUSE

MS. TRUNG, THANK YOU FOR PROVIDING LANGUAGE TO EXPRESS HURT



THERE WAS A GROUP OF FOUR PRIVILEGED WHITE STUDENTS JUST ROLLING THEIR EYES...

STUDENTS OF COLOR WHO APPRECIATED THAT CONVERSATION WERE SITTING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM ENGAGED WITH THE DISCUSSION

MAINSTREAM STUDENTS



THE PERIOD BEFORE WITH THE NEWCOMER STUDENTS...

AND THEY HAVE OUR BACK WHEN PARENTS COME AT US.

SHE'S PUSHING HER OWN AGENDA.

ACTUALLY WE GENUINELY SUPPORT OUR TEACHERS AND THE CURRICULUM.

EVEN SO MANY OF OUR ADMIN ARE STUCK IN A MINDSET OF SCHOOLING AS A FACTORY SYSTEM.

DURING MY EVALUATION PERIOD MY ADMIN GAVE ME FEEDBACK THAT I SHOULD BE MORE STRICT WITH MY TRANSITIONS.

WHEN YOU GAVE STUDENTS INSTRUCTIONS THEY WERE A LITTLE SLOW TO THEIR WORK, EATING SNACKS FOR 5 MINUTES BEFORE THEY EVEN STARTED.

YUMMY SNACKS

IN THAT MOMENT, THE STUDENTS WERE NOURISHING THEIR BODIES AND EXPERIENCING JOY, AND THEY STILL COMPLETED THEIR WORK AND MET THEIR LEARNING OBJECTIVES.

THIS ADMIN ALSO SAID HE'D NEVER SEEN A TEACHER DO HIGHER ORDER LEVEL THINKING WITH THEIR NEWCOMER STUDENTS AND WAS IMPRESSED BY THE LESSON AND BY THE LEARNING OUTCOMES.

MANY TEACHERS THINK THAT NEWCOMER STUDENTS AREN'T ABLE TO DO HIGHER ORDER THINKING.

ETHNIC STUDIES GOES AGAINST ENGLISH-ONLY EDUCATION,

ONE TIME, MY NEWCOMER [LATINX] STUDENT WROTE IN HIS "I AM" POEM THAT HE FELT MORE COMFORTABLE USING THE WORD "SANDWICHES" INSTEAD OF "TORTAS."

ESL HAS A HISTORY OF BEING A COLONIAL CONSTRUCT--

SO I USE TRANSLANGUAGING IN MY INSTRUCTION + ALSO ENCOURAGE IT DURING CLASS DISCUSSIONS TO PROMOTE HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS IN STUDENTS' HERITAGE LANGUAGE

WHAT DO YOU SEE IN THIS PICTURE / ¿QUE VES EN ESTA FOTO?

I SEE PEOPLE PROTESTING AND A SIGN:  
"THROWOUT RACIST TEACHERS"  
WHO WERE RACIST TO CHICANO STUDENTS.

◆ TRANSLANGUAGING  
AFFIRMS OUR FLUID WAYS  
OF KNOWING  
AND COMMUNICATING  
OUR THINKING.

TEACHERS  
RACIST

TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
REQUIRES US TO ATTEND TO A WIDE RANGE  
OF STUDENTS' LEARNING INTERESTS AND NEEDS.

FOR EXAMPLE:

WE WATCHED A VIDEO WHERE A POLITICIAN  
FROM POLAND HAD SAID:

UKRAINIAN REFUGEES CAME TO MY HOUSE,  
I WELCAME YOU TO MY HOUSE.

A LATVIAN STUDENT RAISED HIS HAND AND SAID

I DON'T THINK HE REALLY MEANS THAT, HE'S JUST  
SAYING THAT BECAUSE HE WANTS POLITICAL POWER.

WHILE OTHER STUDENTS ARE STILL  
DEVELOPING THEIR CRITICAL LEAS  
HE UNDERSTANDS "YES, THAT'S RACIST."

HE HAS LOTS OF LOVE FOR HIS CULTURE & PASSION FOR TOPICS ABOUT RACE.  
WHENEVER WE LEARN ABOUT RACIAL INJUSTICES, HE GETS HEATED ABOUT THE TOPICS..

BUT HE ALSO GETS BORED.

AND IS WORKING THROUGH INTERNALIZED PATRIARCHY.  
WHEN LEARNING ABOUT UNEQUAL PAY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN,  
WE ASKED IS IT JUST OR UNJUST?

I'D BE LECTURING...

"THAT'S BECAUSE MEN WORK HARDER!"

AND HE WOULD  
START SINGING.

IM BORED  
LA LA LA BLAH LA LA LA  
DOO DOO LA LA LA



AND DURING PARTNER ACTIVITIES IN MY U.S. HISTORY CLASS,  
HE'LL START PLAYING AROUND WITH HIS FRIENDS.  
THEY PUSH EACH OTHER AND PULL EACH OTHER'S HAIR.

HE HAS A BIG HEART AND LOVES ETHNIC STUDIES.  
HE'S BEING DIFFICULT, BUT HE'S A GOOD LEADER.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE...

AND FOR A WHITE STUDENT WHO CARED ABOUT LGBTQ ISSUES...  
...AND WORKING THROUGH HIS OWN WHITENESS,

AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL TERM

WE GOT OFF ON A REALLY GOOD FOOT.  
HE WAS SO EXCITED TO LEARN  
ABOUT ETHNIC STUDIES

"I WANT TO LEARN  
ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE  
ISSUES!"

HE EVEN STARTED A  
SOCIAL JUSTICE  
CLUB.

"WILL YOU PLEASE  
BE OUR ADVISOR?"

I SAID YES! AND  
I'M STILL THEIR ADVISOR.

BUT NEARING THE END OF SCHOOL TERM

HE TOLD ME:

"YOU'RE PUSHING SOME NARRATIVE--  
YOU'RE NOT GIVING STUDENTS ROOM  
TO THINK A CERTAIN WAY."

ADMIN INTERVIEWED  
OTHER STUDENTS TO ASK  
IF THEY FELT THAT VALUES  
WERE BEING PUSHED ON THEM.  
STUDENTS SAID:

"NO, I FEEL I CAN HAVE MY OWN VALUES!"

HE EXPRESSED SO MUCH HATRED  
AND FEELING DISTRESSED IN  
HIS CLASS.

THIS SITUATION DOESN'T MAKE ME QUESTION  
THE WAY I TEACH ETHNIC STUDIES BECAUSE I KNOW MY  
CURRICULUM PIONEERS STUDENTS OF COLOR AND THAT'S MY PRIORITY  
BUT BEING HIS FAVORITE TEACHER FOR A SHORT TIME THEN SEEING  
HOW THE CURRICULUM MADE HIM 180 IS HARD TO PROCESS.



# FOR EXAMPLE:

A WHITE TEACHER CALLED A BLACK STUDENT THE N-WORD.

DID HE JUST?

I SAID THAT OUT LOUD...

WE'VE BEEN ORGANIZING THE STUDENTS CAN YOU HELP US ORGANIZE THE ADULTS?

THEY SAID:

AND SOME BLACK STUDENTS STARTED ORGANIZING A GROUP - I ASKED THEM, "HOW CAN I SUPPORT YOU HERE?"

MANY OF THE STUDENTS WERE TALKING ABOUT IT.

SO I ORGANIZED PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES. WE WENT TO SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS TO REALLY JUST SPEAK UP.

LET US SUPPORT EACH OTHER AND OUR STUDENTS.

WHAT HAPPEDED WAS NOT OKAY.

WHAT ACTION ITEMS CAN WE TAKE?

NO IT WAS REALLY BEAUTIFUL, HAVING PARENT ORGANIZING WITH THE STUDENTS.

MS. TRUNG

TESSA 4/10/23 AM

I'M SO PROUD OF YOU!

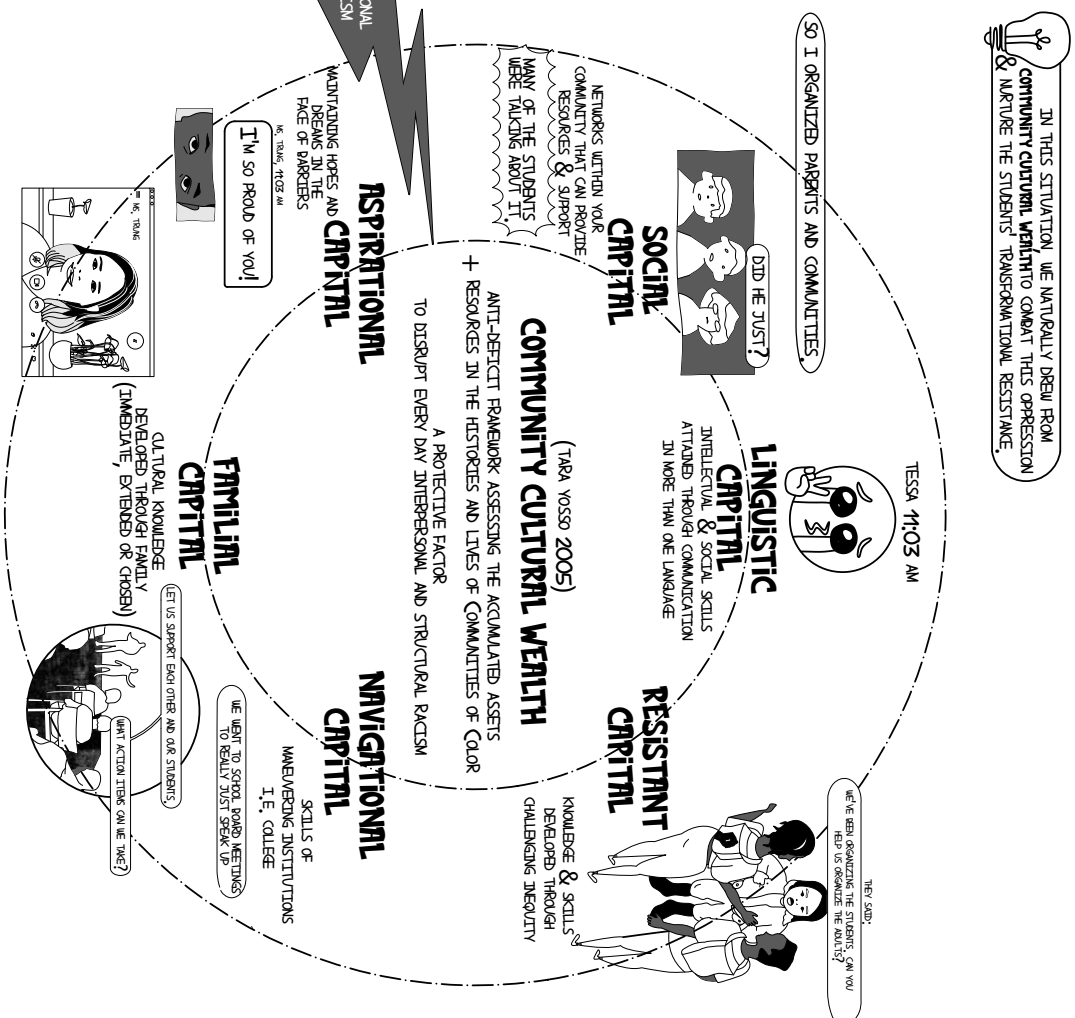
I WOULD PRACTICE ADULT ALLYSHIP BY ATTENDING THE STUDENTS VIRTUAL MEETINGS AND CHATTING ENCOURAGEMENTS LIKE:

MS. TRUNG, 4/10/23 AM

I'M SO PROUD OF YOU!

STUDENTS MANY YEARS LATER TOLD ME "HAVING YOUR SUPPORT REALLY CHANGED THINGS." "YOU'RE THE BEST TEACHER I'VE HAD EVEN THOUGH YOU AREN'T MY TEACHER."

THIS BROKE MY HEART -- THE SMALL ACTION I DID WAS SO MEANINGFUL TO THEM. IT SHOWED THEY DIDN'T HAVE THAT SUPPORT IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY AT THEIR SCHOOL.

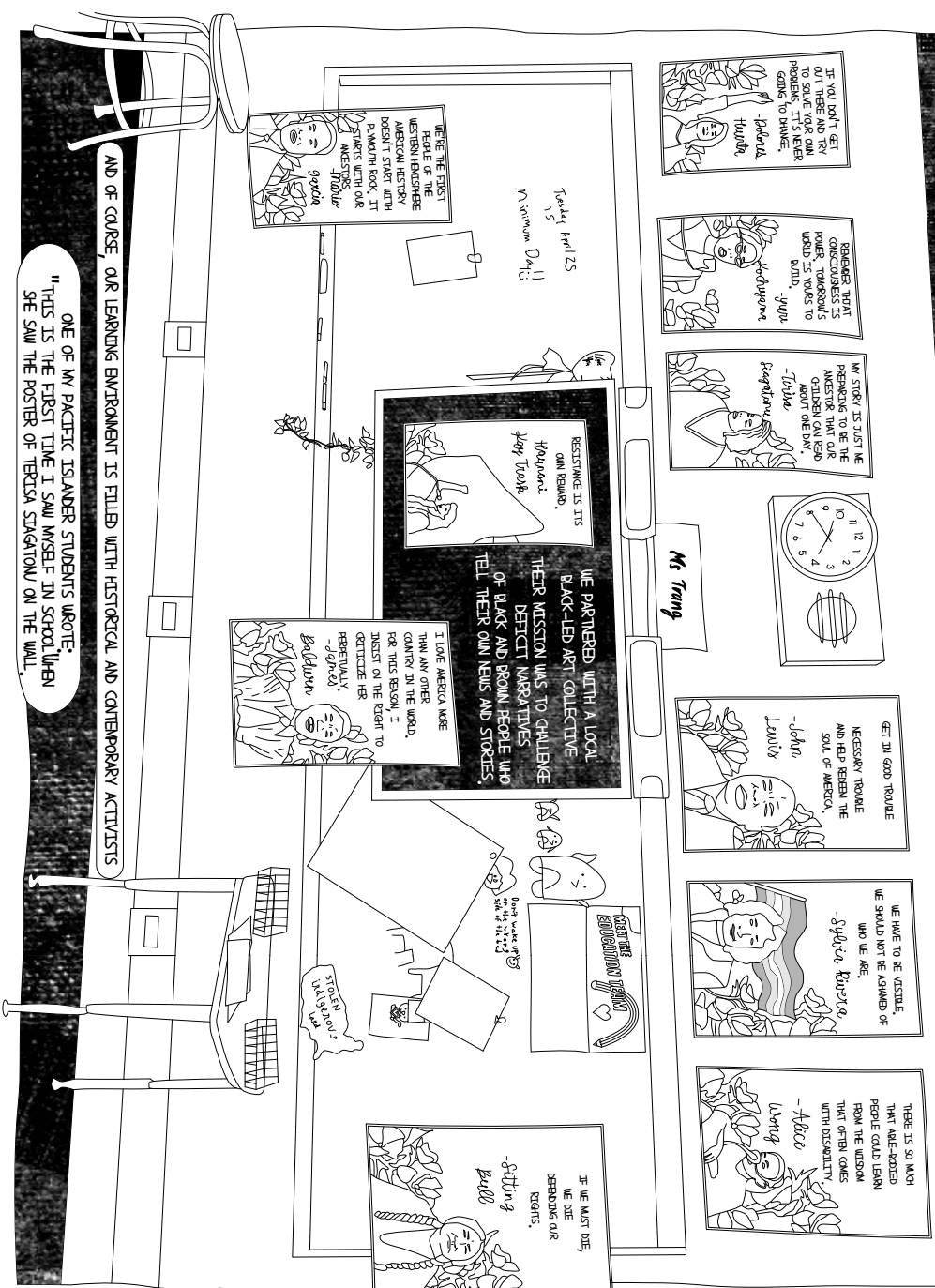




IT'S IMPORTANT TO ME TO INCORPORATE COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE AS PART OF ETHNIC STUDIES CURRICULUM

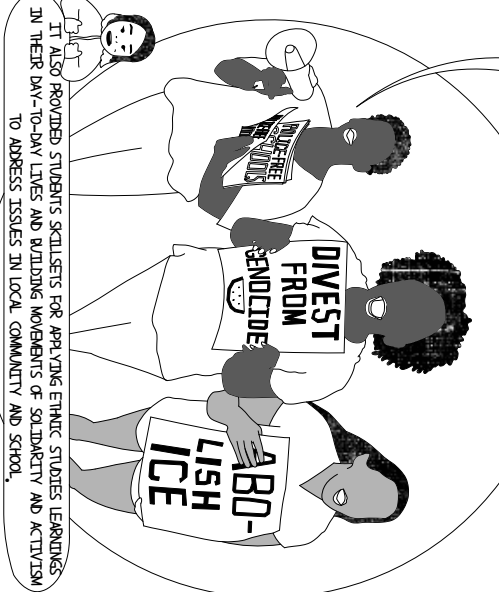
I DO THIS BY BUILDING WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, LEARNING ABOUT ISSUES, AND HAVING STUDENTS RESEARCH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

THIS LOOKS LIKE STUDENTS CONDUCTING RESEARCH PROJECTS TO IDENTIFY ASSETS OF LOCAL, HISTORICALLY BLACK COMMUNITIES



LEARNING ABOUT ETHNIC STUDIES IN CLASSROOM AND LOCAL COMMUNITY SETTINGS GAVE STUDENTS A FRAMEWORK FOR SEEING THE BEAUTIES, HUMANITY, AND RESISTANCE OF BLACK, INDIGENOUS, PEOPLE OF COLOR.

BLACK ART EDUCATION GAVE ME HOPE THAT A WORLD WITHOUT PRISONS IS POSSIBLE.



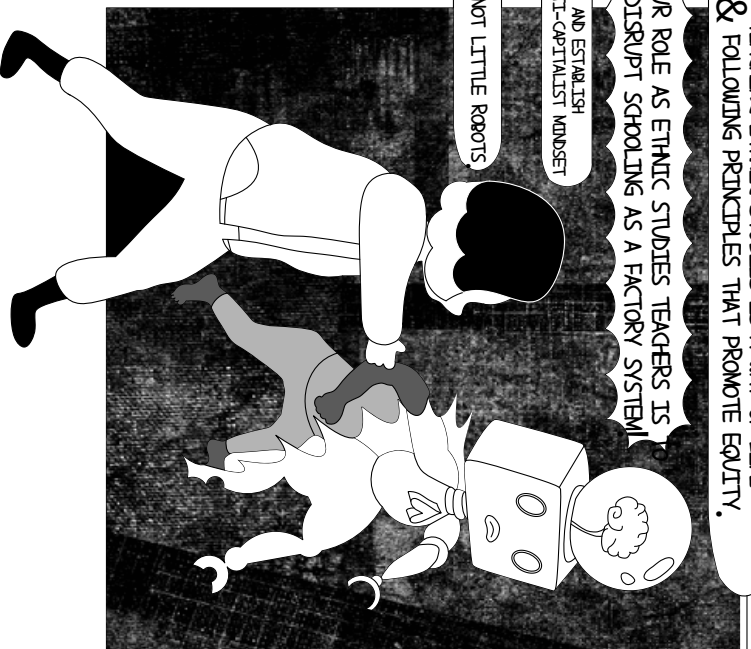
IT ALSO PROVIDED STUDENTS SKILLSETS FOR APPLYING ETHNIC STUDIES LEARNINGS IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES AND BUILDING MOVEMENTS OF SOLIDARITY AND ACTIVISM TO ADDRESS ISSUES IN LOCAL COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL.

TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES IS A WAY OF LIFE  
& FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES THAT PROMOTE EQUITY.

OUR ROLE AS ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHERS IS  
DISRUPT SCHOOLING AS A FACTORY SYSTEM!

AND ESTABLISH  
AN ANTI-CAPITALIST MINDSET

OUR STUDENTS ARE NOT LITTLE ROBOTS



WHETHER THE STUDENTS JOIN IN BECAUSE THEY COME FROM A LEGACY OF FREEDOM FIGHTERS,  
OR IF THEY WERE CURIOUS ON THE PATHWAY TO DISCOVER IT ON THEIR OWN  
OR IF THEY TOOK ETHNIC STUDIES BECAUSE IT WAS SIMPLY A REQUIREMENT ---  
SEEKING THEM TRANSFORM THEIR MINDSET AND HEARING THEM SAY:

I FEEL A LOT OF LOVE FOR MY CULTURE!

THIS SHIFTED MY LIFE TRAJECTORY <3

I THOUGHT THAT I WAS JUST BAD AT SCHOOL AND NOW I  
REALIZE THAT I CAN BE GOOD AT SCHOOL AND CRITIQUE  
THE SYSTEMS THAT LED ME TO THINK OTHERWISE

IS WHY...

I TEACH ETHNIC STUDIES.



BEING AN ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHER IS AN ONGOING  
EXPERIENCE OSCILLATING BETWEEN REIMAGINING  
EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE AND NAVIGATING THE REALITIES  
OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS.  
THIS CAN BE VERY ISOLATING AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO  
BE IN DIALOGUE WITH KINDRED SPIRITS ON: 'HOW WE  
TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES TO FEEL TOGETHER IN OUR  
LONELINESS!'

ETHNIC STUDIES TO ME IS MORE THAN JUST A CLASS, IT  
IS LIKE A WAY OF LIFE.

MY PAST WORK IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING  
PREPARED ME WELL FOR TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES. IT IS  
SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE TAUGHT ONLY THROUGH A  
GUIDE OR A SAMPLE CURRICULUM.

IN REALITY,

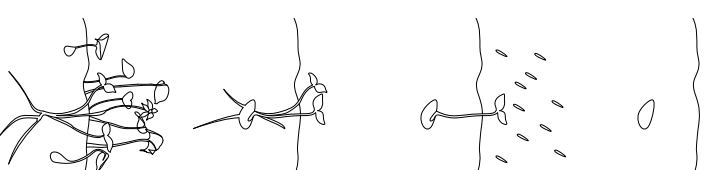
ETHNIC STUDIES IS CONSTANTLY BEING CONTESTED OR CHALLENGED.  
IT IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE TO BUILD A POWERFUL ETHNIC  
STUDIES EDUCATION AND MAINTAIN ITS INTEGRITY WHILE  
PROTECTING AND CARING FOR OURSELVES.

AGENCY IS IMPORTANT!

I TRY TO SET BOUNDARIES, AND I MAKE AN EFFORT TO  
FIND SPACES THAT GIVE ME JOY AND NOURISHMENT.

ALWAYS AND INTO THE FUTURE,

ETHNIC STUDIES HAD A POWERFUL ROLE IN MY OWN LIFE,  
AND I HOPE TO RECREATE THAT EXPERIENCE FOR  
STUDENTS. TEACHING TRUTH TO POWER CAN BE BOTH  
EMPOWERING AND HEAVY,  
AND I REMAIN COMMITTED TO OUR...



COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION.