

LEADING THROUGH THE PORTAL TO CLAIM OUR HUMANITY: A DISCUSSION GUIDE

The present moment offers an opportunity for reimagination, particularly for educational leaders. Harness the bold visioning of your staff community to meet this moment by engaging in thoughtful reflection and meaningful discussion.

Small groups where trust has been built are most conducive to discussion, but it will also be important to bring all staff together to move from discussion to schoolwide action. This discussion guide provides ideas for blending those approaches.

Before Discussion

Share the article [Leading Through the Portal to Claim Our Humanity](#), written by Kathleen Osta of the National Equity Project. Preface that during your meeting you'll be discussing what they have seen and learned during the pandemic and their ideas about how to reimagine a future for the school that centers collective well-being.

Welcoming inclusion activity

Open your meeting with a welcoming inclusion activity (see more on the [SEL 3 Signature Practices](#)) that both connects to the work you'll be engaged in and invites everyone's voice into the conversation.

Suggested prompt:

Display or say: Osta writes "To practice what Tara Brach calls [radical compassion](#) — to lead through the portal — we must start by confronting the painful fact that while we all feel the effects of the current crisis, we are impacted differentially along lines of race and socioeconomic class. And, even harder, this is by design. More than intellectually acknowledging this, we must be willing to pause and feel this truth."

What feelings came up for you as you read this article?

To give all participants time to answer this question and be heard by others, it may work best to divide into smaller groups (virtually, you may be able to use a breakout room function on some video conference platforms) or have participants free-write on a shared document such as [Padlet](#), [Google docs](#), [AWW App](#), or [Lucidchart](#)).

Engaging practices

Move from the welcoming inclusion activity into conversations focused on your school community. The prompts below are best discussed with a small group (~4 people per group). Ask groups to identify both a notetaker and someone to report out to the larger group when you come back together.



Our essential questions:

- How has this moment highlighted ways in which we need to break with inequities and practice radical compassion?
- What have we learned that will help us to reimagine and take leadership for a “new normal” for our school that meets the current needs of all our students and families?

Within your discussions, consider these more focused wonderings:

- Arundhati Roy, in *The Pandemic is a Portal*, writes that “... historically pandemics have forced humans to break with the past” in order to “imagine the world anew.” What in our collective past, as a school community, must we break with?
- Osta writes about leading from the inside out surfacing that, “... by noticing and reflecting on our own emotions during this time of heightened uncertainty, we can begin to feel our interconnectedness with all those that are suffering and who suffer the harms of systemic oppression in all of its forms.” How can we create space in our school community to honor these feelings and foster this interconnectedness?
- Osta also writes, “How might we, at this extraordinary moment in human history, take an “equity pause” to notice and reflect on how our system operates, who is protected and who is harmed?” Our school is a system. How can we take an equity pause to notice and reflect on how our school system operates, and who is protected and who is harmed?
- How can we strengthen and engage with families in more authentic and culturally responsive ways?

Optimistic closure

End your meeting with an optimistic closure that highlights both an individual and shared understanding of the importance of this work, supports forward thinking, and surfaces appreciation and accomplishment.

Suggested prompt: Osta suggests that one way we can boldly reimagine what emerges from this current context is by channeling radical compassion. What is one way you commit to showing up in a way that exemplifies radical compassion?

