

Vive Hoy: A Popular Education Curriculum to Foster Emotional Health among Farmworker Communities

Outreach Promising Practice

Vive Hoy is a Spanish-language popular education curriculum that seeks to foster farmworker communities' physical, emotional, and social well-being. Developed by a farmworker advocate and educator, the Vive Hoy curriculum uses interactive communication and reflection learning techniques to encourage conversations and meaningful exchanges around emotional health in a community space. The purpose of Vive Hoy is to empower farmworkers by recognizing the strengths within their community, and draws on these strengths to develop supportive programs that best serve the needs of the community.

Organization:

Name: Fernando Molina

Location: Chicago, Illinois



About:

Fernando Molina is the creator and facilitator of the Vive Hoy curriculum, an Emotional Health program using popular education to support vulnerable populations. Fernando was born and raised in Matehuala, San Luis Potosi, Mexico. He earned a degree in Social Work from the Marist University of San Luis Potosi between 1995 to 2000 and immigrated to the United States in 2000. He volunteered for youth groups, where he learned the methodology of popular education, a method that he still uses in his personal and community empowerment workshops.

In 2020, Fernando earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from St Augustine College in Chicago. He currently works as an Outreach Supervisor at Community Health Partnership of Illinois, a Federally Qualified Health Center. The Vive Hoy program has been implemented for more than 5 years at the University of Illinois at Chicago with Latino parent leaders and other vulnerable or underserved groups such as survivors of domestic violence and farmworker communities.

Unmet Need Addressed

Farmworkers are a vulnerable population that face many daily challenges which take a toll on their physical and mental well-being. Yet, they often lack the space, resources, and opportunities to address their emotional health. Furthermore, there is rarely little time and space to reflect and create meaningful connections with other community members to discuss different aspects of their lives and find emotional support. As a result, this could limit their ability to recognize and accept the challenges they are facing and address these persistent issues.

The Vive Hoy curriculum creates a safe and comfortable space for farmworkers to come together to share experiences and create solutions that serve the needs of the group as a whole. Based on popular education, the exercises in the curriculum facilitate open discussion amongst the community members so that together they build empathy, encourage collective problem solving, and inspire change. By creating an informal atmosphere based on listening and sharing, groups can dive deeper and engage in more meaningful conversations about their challenges and experiences. Therefore, the learning space is centered around the participants. This participant-centered method helps build confidence amongst and between the individuals and encourages deeper engagement.

Description of the Practice

As outlined in the book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, popular education is a technique for vulnerable or oppressed communities to approach education as an environment of respect and mutual learning opportunities for students and instructors alike. This approach humanizes the student and builds their power to change and influence their circumstances.

The Vive Hoy curriculum developed by Fernando Molina employs popular education methodologies and is adaptable to a variety of settings and groups. Vive Hoy means “live today,” and the curriculum promotes mindfulness toward one’s emotions, body, and mind. Additionally, the curriculum encourages open and honest communication amongst participants.

The Vive Hoy curriculum and popular education methodologies are important tools for farmworker communities and outreach workers alike. Promoting mental and emotional well-being is critical for both those who receive and deliver care. Creating a space for farmworkers to voice challenges or emotions can bolster outreach workers’ connection to the community they are serving.

Additionally, popular education methodologies can be applied to many public health education initiatives and can engage learners through interactive or participatory activities. Some examples include round table discussions and role-playing exercises.

Vive Hoy meetings are centered around the participants, who are viewed as the “experts” of their own life experiences and their ideas are as valuable as the instructors. Participant input can be utilized to find community-based solutions to the challenges they are facing. This curriculum can also be used as a capacity-building opportunity for instructors and advocates in leadership positions to create meaningful communication between community-based organizations and the farmworker communities they serve.

Key Strategies

Informal Meeting Structure

The Vive Hoy curriculum emphasizes the importance of subverting traditional teacher/student relationships by creating an informal meeting structure that allows flexibility for participants to guide the direction of the discussion and highlight insights from unique perspectives. A popular education methodology is a participant-guided approach to education that requires a high level of input from all group members. In this structure, the flow of information stems from group members sharing their experiences with everyone getting a chance to learn and teach as part of the process. To create an atmosphere that encourages individuals to participate honestly and meaningfully, the structure and dynamic of the group must build confidence within individuals to open up about their experiences and share their perspectives.

The first step to building a safe and trusted learning environment is to begin sessions by simply asking individuals how they are doing at that moment, what is on their minds, or how they feel about the space they have created. Making participants feel comfortable and respected is essential to creating meaningful community dialogue.



The Vive Hoy curriculum is structured for a variety of settings, such as church groups, community spaces, classrooms, and worksites. An informal meeting structure is important for reaching farmworker communities. Sessions may be held in the field during breaks or lunchtime, at housing sites, or anywhere farm workers gather. Additionally, the curriculum applies to all communities. Some examples of groups that have utilized the Vive Hoy curriculum include survivors of domestic violence, farmworker communities, immigrant and refugee support groups, and Latino parent support networks.

Flexible Topics

Because every community faces unique and complex challenges based on specific historical contexts that define their experience, the Vive Hoy curriculum contains 10 general topics. These topics allow for flexibility so each session can be adjusted based on the learned experiences of the farmworkers present. The curriculum also allows for group activities to be based on relevant aspects of their daily lives that would allow them to formulate solutions that are pertinent to the issues they face in the real world.

The topics in the Vive Hoy Curriculum are as follows:

- Introduction: Creating a safe space
- Giving respect to be respected through dialogue
- Freely expressing my emotions and feelings
- Freeing myself from the past and enjoying the present through forgiveness
- Strengthening my body and my mind with good health habits
- Valuing gender equality and sexuality
- Acknowledging my strengths and areas for improvement
- Analyzing the resources of my community as protective factors and support network
- Creating my goals for good living: Vision exercise to develop a project of life
- Celebrating life: Graduation party



Engaging Group Activities

The Vive Hoy curriculum emphasizes the importance of creating an engaging atmosphere by organizing fun activities related to each session's topic, encouraging teamwork, and facilitating communication among the participants. The curriculum includes role-playing scenarios, developing short speeches, or participating in team-building games. Each exercise requires active participation from the group members and leaves the opportunity for everyone to reflect on the topics that may arise during the exercise. This is key for farmworker communities, especially those who often work long hours and may not otherwise have the opportunity to engage in a traditional classroom environment. Incorporating games and active participation exercises encourages learning and reflection for all participants. Furthermore, engaging activities create the opportunity for group members to develop stronger connections and learn more from each other in a relaxed, pressure-free environment.

Results

Vive Hoy has received positive feedback from its participants. Feedback and reflection are built into every aspect of the curriculum, and are collected in the form of testimonials and participant reflections. An example of a testimonial received from a participant in the “Vive Hoy” curriculum is listed below:

“One of the main benefits of this particular program is the diversity in topics as well as the dynamic instruction through which group activities and games are implemented. It is a very interactive program based on the needs of its participants with an emphasis on sharing our personal ideas and thoughts. The theory behind the structure of Vive HOY, is one in which participants dive into their own experiences to better enrich their future. Self-reflection and self-acceptance are at the core of this program and these concepts allow participants to achieve a beautiful relationship of trust and friendship with each other.”

- David Quiroz, Parent Educator, Todd Early Childhood Center, West Aurora SD129

Pictured: an activity and group picture of Vive Hoy participants.



As part of the curriculum, a Self-Care Inventory is shared with participants to complete once at the start and again upon completion of the program. The Inventory is based on the topics covered in the curriculum and prompts participants to reflect on their physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and workplace or professional self-care. The Inventory is used to measure the impact of Vive Hoy on the self-care practices of the participants since the start of the program. An example of the “Self-Care Inventory” is featured below:

Rate the following areas in frequency:

5 = frequently

4 = occasionally

3 = rarely

2 = never

1 = it never occurred to me



Emotional Self-Care	5	4	3	2	1
Allow for quality time with others whose company you enjoy					
Maintain contact with valued others					
Give self-affirmations and praise					
Love yourself					
Reread favorite book or review favorite movies					
Identify and engage in comforting activities, objects, people, relationships and places					
Allow for feeling expressions (laugh, cry, etc.....)					
Other:					

Key Challenges and How to Address Them

Training for Popular Education Facilitation

A significant challenge in facilitating the learning space is balancing a structured lesson plan and the flexibility required in popular education. Individuals trained in this methodology must have the patience to allow participants to dictate the flow of the session while adhering to the general topic chosen for that session.

Because encouragement may be needed to promote active participation at the beginning of sessions, facilitators need to be properly trained to create trusting and open learning environments. Active questioning is a critical component of facilitating popular education programs, including Vive Hoy. Facilitators must be prepared to ask participants open-ended questions that will get them talking about their experience (e.g., asking participants how they feel about a certain topic or interaction, and to explain why) and then find the right time within the discussion to ask follow-up questions that bring the discussion back to the topic planned for the session. This creates a comfortable environment for the participant to feel that their experiences are valid and deepens the discussion by providing the group an opportunity to see how their experience can be applied to specific topics or to any aspect of social change they are looking to make in their community.

Representative Leadership

Another challenge that comes with implementing the Vive Hoy curriculum is the lack of representation in leadership from vulnerable communities being supported through the program. Some organizations that support vulnerable communities, including farmworkers, may experience difficulty hiring staff with the same background or histories as the populations with whom they work. It can be difficult to establish meaningful dialogue if community members do not feel that external entities truly understand the conditions they face.



However, many social movements for vulnerable populations have been supported by leaders who were not originally part of those communities. To address this challenge, leaders must listen, practice and project empathy to the group by structuring the dialogue around the experiences of the communities they serve. Developing trust and respect is critical to facilitating meaningful communication within groups and encourages community members to be more open to the support systems offered through these sessions.

Resources Needed and Expenses

The Vive Hoy curriculum requires time on both the part of the facilitator and the participants, as well as space to be actively engaged in and present for all learning sessions. This space could be in a variety of settings to fit the needs of the group. The standard curriculum requires a total of 20 hours to complete, with 2-hour sessions held each week. Delivery cost of the Vive Hoy curriculum is \$2,000. However, aside from the time commitment and cost of delivery, there are very few resources that would be required to implement the Vive Hoy curriculum.

Fernando Molina also provides “train the trainer” courses that focus on three aspects of Popular Education delivery: (1) how to structure popular education lessons, (2) how to implement popular education lessons, and (3) examples of popular education activities. This training includes all materials associated with the Vive Hoy curriculum and is priced at \$4,000.

Partnerships

The Vive Hoy Curriculum has been used extensively with Latino parent groups, and provides communities with tools to best support their children and families. An example of the curriculum in action can be found at [Academia de Padres](#), [The Hispanic Center of Excellence](#).

Fernando Molina has also worked with and learned from international organizations implementing Popular Education as part of their programming. These include:

- [Educación Popular en Salud \(EPES\)](#), an organization based in Santiago, Chile, that services vulnerable communities using participatory education strategies focused on health, economic mobility, gender, legal rights, and a respect for diversity and the environment.
- [Instituto Mexicano para el Desarrollo Comunitario \(IMDEC\)](#), an organization based in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico that promotes human rights and democracy through a popular education framework.
- [Latin American Association for the Training and Teaching of Psychology \(ALFEPSI\)](#), an organization based in Mexico, whose mission promotes culturally and historically sensitive psychology practices with an eye towards Latin America. The goal of the organization is to advance psychology that improves the well-being, freedoms and development of individuals, families, communities, and institutions across Latin America.
- [Cátedra Libre Ignacio Martín-Baró](#), a non-profit organization based in Colombia, focused on psychological support for victims of violence, mistreatment or abuse. The mission of the organization is to strengthen psychological and social resources in Colombia and in Latin America.



Learn More

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Tools and Resources

- Paulo Freire - Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- Teaching Democracy - Popular Education Tools
- Journal of Geography - Mapping as a Means of Farmworker Education and Empowerment



Pro tip:

When conducting meetings with farmworker communities, consider implementing a popular education approach. Interactive meetings that center the voices and experiences of a community can support the mental and emotional health of meeting attendees. This approach also amplifies the voices of the community served and builds strong relationships between farmworker-serving organizations and their communities.

This publication was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$4,000,000 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.