TRANSFORMING THE FIELD OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Co-designing Research, Practices, and Measures for Educational Justice and Community Wellbeing

October 2019

FAMILY LEADERSHIP DESIGN COLLABORATIVE

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FAMILY LEADERSHIP DESIGN COLLABORATIVE

Our project — **the Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC)** — is a national network of scholars, practitioners, and family and community leaders who work to center racial equity in family engagement. We do this by reimagining how families and communities can create more equitable schools and educational systems. We engage in research to develop "next" (beyond current "best")[1] practices, measures, and tools to foster equitable collaborations toward community wellbeing and educational justice.

The FLDC is a participatory design research project (PDR). PDR emerges from design-based research and is an iterative research process that attends to power, relationships, and histories of oppression/resilience through partnering with young people, families, and communities. PDR advances theories of human learning alongside new sets of relations, practices, and tools towards social justice and change-making. We do this through a practice of PDR called solidarity-driven co-design.

Co-design is a process of partnering and decision-making that engages diverse peoples to collectively identify problems of practice and innovate solutions. Co-design has the potential to foster change-making that is responsive, adaptive, and equity-oriented.

For more information about our methods check our paper in the Journal of Family Diversity in Education: *Community Design Circles: Co-designing Justice and Wellbeing in Family-Community-Research Partnerships*, **http://www.familydiversityeducation.com/index.php/fdec/article/view/133/136**

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Our vision of community wellbeing and educational justice seeks to cultivate, enact, and sustain:

- Whole, healthy children in culturally thriving families & communities
- Relational, communal, and collective approaches to change-making
- Just institutions, policy, and practices

We enact this vision through a set of principles that fundamentally inform and guide our research and practice. These principles were born from our collaborative process and continue to evolve through our change-making work.

1 Beginning with Family & Community Ecologies to:

- Center the knowledge, priorities, and agendas of nondominant families & communities
- Recognize histories of resistance and transformation
- See communities as dynamic and multidimensional

2 Refusing & Disrupting Normative Power Dynamics to:

- Recognize inequities as shaped by histories and power
- Name colonization, imperialism, nationalism, racism, sexism, classism, and heteronormativity as root causes and intersectional forms of oppression
- "Desettle" forms of normativity that seek to assimilate and erase our cultural ways of knowing and being

3 Enacting Solidarities in Collective Change-Making to:

- Develop "how can" questions to envision beyond our existing systems and structures
- Sustain "here and now" relationships that realize the change we wish to see in the world
- Build solidarities across and with difference to enact transformative and consequential forms of learning and activity

4 Creating On-Going Transformative Possibilities to:

- Envision intergenerational change-making
- Transform power between communities and schools
- Draw across disciplines and theories to evolve language towards educational justice

BEGINNING WITH FAMILY & COMMUNITY ECOLOGIES

What are family ecologies?

Schools are important sites of learning, but they are only one of many places and spaces that shape who we are and what matters to us.

Young people and their families are not just students and stakeholders in schools. They are also members of other communities and organizations, such as those rooted in culture, language, religion, neighborhood, or civic life.

When we approach families as whole human beings on their own terms, we must step away from school constructs like behavior, academic standards, socioemotional learning, attendance, achievement, discipline, graduation.

Instead, we attend to the people, places, priorities, histories, and experiences — ecologies — of young people and their families themselves.

Why does this matter?

How we open a conversation, meeting, or space matters for how and what unfolds later. When we begin with routine or normative practices it signals "business-as-usual." For many families, this means school educators, administrators, and leaders are in power. This may disengage families!

When we begin with families and communities we share expertise and ideas. We share stories, experiences, and dreams to shape a better educational outcome for all students. Emphasis here is on reciprocal listening and sharing.

Highlighting family ecologies also means reflecting on how power, histories, and relationships normally operate. This challenges us to re-shape how we interact with one another. This begins to move us beyond transactional interactions to more authentic and humanizing relationships.

A CRITICAL NOTE

Our stories are our theories — they help explain how the world was, is, and can be.[2] But stories can also become tokenized if taken out of context or used by others who have not shared your experience. It is okay to ask others not repeat or record stories you share. It is okay to ask if you can share someone else's story, and be gracious if they say no.

HOW WE MIGHT BEGIN WITH FAMILIES' ECOLOGIES

One simple, but powerful, way to do this is to ask people to bring their multiple roles and values into the conversation in an introductory activity.

1. **Reflect:** Ask people to take a moment to think about something that is important to their family. This could be a person, place, object, or value. Ask people to draw something that represents what they are thinking.
2. **Pair Share:** In pairs or triads, ask people to share the story of their drawing and its significance to each other as a way of introduction.
3. **Whole Group Share Out:** Ask people to share one or two things that resonated with them as they heard each other's stories. This could be similarities, striking differences, or surprises.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

How is this similar to or different from the way I usually introduce myself in a family-school context?

How do I bring my whole self into the work I do? Do I feel comfortable being my whole self?

How can I begin with families' ecologies in my own work?

WHAT IS SOLIDARITY-DRIVEN CO-DESIGN?

In co-design, diverse stakeholders come together in order to collectively identify issues or problems of practice, and to design solutions. It is an iterative process made up of cycles in which people:

1. **Build relationships & theorize** around shared issues
2. **Design and develop** tools, practices, processes, and other solutions that push beyond the status quo
3. **Enact** or pilot these solutions and collect data on what happens
4. **Analyze & reflect** on what was learned, in order to revise theories and designs

Solidarity-driven co-design draws from design design-based research, as well as indigenous and decolonizing methodologies.[3] By engaging with and across diversity, and attending to historically accumulated forms of power, co-design can illuminate new avenues for change-making and allow us to collectively imagine possible futures.

Relationship Build & Theorize
• Identify and invite diverse stakeholders
• Engage in storytelling and perspective-taking
• Create space for inclusive participation
• Attend to inter-personal dynamics that reinforce power and marginalization

Design & Develop
• Engage in multimodal (visual, oral, etc.) and creative activities
• Build with/from the stories and practices of participants
• Address potential harm, limitations, and unintended impacts of designs
• Plan for how you will know if your designs are enacting your theories of wellbeing and justice

Enact
• Implement or pilot your designs
• Collect metrics that will help you understand learning or growth (notes, recordings, participant reflections, etc.)
• Allow enough time and space for your designs to be fully enacted

Analyze and Reflect
• Collectively analyze data and metrics from implementation
• Allow for sense-making and dreaming over time
• Seek systemic (rather than individual) transformation
• Begin a new cycle of re-design while tracking changes
• Celebrate and honor learning and growth

Co-design is more complex and less linear than this quick presentation suggests. We offer this not as step-by-step instructions, but rather as an adaptable framework to begin thinking about how a such a process could support changemaking in your context.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

What issues in my work require collaborative, systemic solutions?

Who needs to be at the table to design such solutions, and what power dynamics could hinder collaboration?

ABOUT THE FLDC CO-DESIGN PROCESS

We sought to identify and implement transformative solutions to educational injustices through two major phases of co-design:

- **In Phase 1** we partnered with groups in 10 cities across the U.S. Community leaders in each city facilitated a series of "design circles" that brought diverse community members together face-to face to identify and co-design solutions to local issues.

- **In Phase 2** we worked more intensively with partners in W. Salt Lake City, Chicago, Southeast Seattle, and S. Los Angeles. We supported each site in co-designing and piloting local solutions, while fostering solidarities and knowledge sharing across sites.

In the sections that follow, we dive a bit deeper into these four sites. For each site, we share one key practice that our partners used to begin the process of relationship building, learning, and co-designing.

RE-IMAGINING BLACK-BROWN SOLIDARITIES IN SOUTH LOS ANGELES

The goal of co-design in South LA is to interrupt and shift power dynamics between school staff and low-income parents of color. It is centered on the work of CADRE, a parent-led community organization, in partnership with UCLA faculty.

CADRE was founded in response to Black South LA parents who wanted to take on anti-Black racism. They worked to build a movement stitched together from individual parent advocacy, collective campaigns for systemic change, and Black/Brown solidarity.

At CADRE, a core group of parent leaders make major decisions about the direction of the work. Core leaders:

- Take on SYSTEMIC change; that is, they change the rules of the game vs. taking more of the pie
- Take on school pushout to end the school-to-prison pipeline
- Commit to changing conditions for Black families so that conditions change for all.

CADRE engaged in two phases of co-design. **Phase 1** involved parents identifying practices they could use to interrupt moments of tension and conflict with school staff. **Phase 2** is focused on proactively preventing these moments, or addressing them in transformative ways.

FOR MORE INFO

- *Check out CADRE's website for testimonials, reports, and theories of change at* **https://www.cadre-la.org**
- *Read the FLDC research-practice brief on* Re-imagining and Humanizing Parent-Teacher Conversations and Interactions through Role-Play at **http://familydesigncollab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/FLDC_Brief_RolePlayingv3-.pdf**
- *Listen to an interview with CADRE Director Maisie Chin on community wellbeing and educational justice at* **https://youtu.be/_kjeiH2UxiA**

VIGNETTE FROM SOUTH LA: ROLE PLAYS

Role-plays can help people reflect on the powered tensions and "racialized scripts" that play out between educators and marginalized families. They can also be used to help explore how to transform those interactions. In this excerpt of a role play set in a South LA school, a Latina principal is holding a mandated school site meeting about the development of a new school discipline policy. Because these meetings rarely involve a parent who is actually experiencing their child being pushed out for discipline reasons, a Black parent and a Latina parent (both parents from CADRE, which is monitoring implementation of the policy) are at the meeting to illustrate the gap between "working on the policy" with parents and implementing it with parents impacted by the policy.

Principal: I think it's really important to us here at our school - that there's been a lot of parent input [in the creation of the policy]... that's what they're asking for-

Who is in charge of the agenda?

Roslyn (Black parent): Do I have to raise my hand? I'm sorry I've cut you guys off, I don't mean that, but I missed a whole day of work and I really believe y'all are hearing me but not listening. My son has been suspended, taken out of his class for five days. He's in junior high school here. Every time he's out of his class, he's missing an assignment...We learn at CADRE that this is more of a push-out. I don't know what to do, and you guys keep telling me about "the paper, the data." ...Can I see the data? Because this is my son I'm talking about, he's my only son, and you guys are telling me that you have all these things and you called me. Why am I here?...

What concerns does Roslyn raise?

Does she feel her concerns are addressed?

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Maria (Latina parent): I'm sorry, but in solidarity here with Roslyn...she's really upset and you have not paused to even address that she is upset. And one, we want a copy of the [policy], because even though the parents have said that they've worked on it...we don't know even know where the copies of the things [are].

Principal: It's all available on our school website.

Maria: Take some time and let's talk about what's happening here..I appreciate that you've included her, but the way that you're treating her right now, the way that you're dismissing her, is the same --

Roslyn: You keep saying the 's' on the end of 'parents', but I'm a parent today, and I'm talking about ... I'm sitting here because I'm really hurting because if it's happening to me, how many parents is it happening to?

CRITICAL REFLECTION

What types of interactions in my work need to be critiqued and re-imagined?

BENDING THE RIVER: CULTIVATING INDIGENOUS WELLBEING IN CHICAGO

The Chicago Global Indigeneity Project is working to cultivate intergenerational learning opportunities to support Indigenous knowledge, identities, and practices. This project utilizes co-design to identify community-desired learning opportunities, design youth and family programs, and measure learning and change in the community. A central design goal has been the creation of intentional spaces to connect elders, youth, and families in traditional practices and especially storytelling and making. The design team has approached this as creating ecologies and pathways that support and teach younger community members to become elders.

Beginning in Phase 1, the Global Indigeneity Project has brought together partners from the Aloha Center Chicago, American Indian Center, the Native American Support Program at the University of Chicago, and Northwestern University. As an urban and inter-tribal community, this collaborative aims to build solidarities across multiple Indigenous communities.

A powerful metaphor, "bending the river," emerged from this collaborative. Bending the river is about honoring the past in order to imagine and generate possible futures for systemic transformation in solidarity across multi-tribal peoples. The group utilized a process called the "River of Life" that enabled them to engage in transformative social remembering and healing from historical forms of settler-colonialism. It also enabled them to socially dream, focused on cultural and community vibrancy, in order to adaptively resist ongoing challenges to self-determination.

VIGNETTE FROM CHICAGO: THE RIVER OF LIFE ACTIVITY

The River of Life activity asks participants to visually map the shifting paths of their communities. It offers opportunities for co-designers to share family and community ecologies and to begin generating new ideas and possibilities. Weaving together past, present, and future, this creative visual activity engages participants in:

1. Sharing stories and identifying shared experiences and systemic inequities
2. Collectively reflecting on current educational challenges and opportunities
3. Imagining future pathways and creating collective actions for community and family well-being

FACILITATION GUIDE

There are many ways to facilitate a River of Life. One powerful way includes creating a collective River of Life to encourage multiple ways to participate and share.

1. **Prepare.** Facilitators prepare a space to hold the River of Life using large chart paper or other surface with the drawing of a river across the length of the paper and then taped it to the wall at eye-level. Divide the river into "Past," "Present," and "Future." Facilitators can also draft questions to lead discussion.
2. **Reflect.** Prompt members or participants to reflect on past, present, or future. In Chicago, the facilitators asked people to reflect on the "needs, challenges, or opportunities" in their "educational landscape." She began first with past, then present, and lastly future.
3. **Share.** Use written words, symbols, or diagrams to share thoughts. Sticky notes can also let people continue to add or move their ideas. People can add to what other people put on the River through writing or drawing but should stay silent.
4. **Discuss.** After people have had time to read through everyone's idea or thoughts, discuss what stands out to people. How do individual stories or experiences represent broader systemic dynamics?

5. **Build Over Time.** In Chicago, the river of life visual was brought back at each subsequent community design circle as a way to orient new members and re-orient returning co-designers to the conversations and theories that were being cultivated around wellbeing and educational justice.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

From my perspective, what are the needs, challenges, and opportunities in my community's educational landscape?

PAST   PRESENT   FUTURE

BUILDING COMMUNITY & ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR RACIAL EQUITY IN SOUTHEAST SEATTLE

In Seattle, co-design was led by the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition (SESEC), in partnership with the University of Washington. SESEC is a coalition of Community Based Organizations (CBOs), schools, educators, community leaders, parents and caregivers, and concerned SE Seattle residents working to improve education for all children, especially those in SE Seattle and those farthest away from opportunities.

SESEC and core CBOs partnered to ask the co-design questions:

- How can we grow racial equity that is grounded in wholeness and wellness and learning to be just?
- How can we work across communities of color to build wholeness and solidarity?
- How can we work with white people seeking to be allies and organizations driven by dominant-culture goals?
- How can we be inclusive of not only different cultural groups but also people of different ages, languages, abilities, and experience level in doing racial equity work?

FOR MORE INFO

- *Check out SESEC's website* **http://www.sesecwa.org/**
- *Read SESEC's research-practice blog about their design work with Chinese immigrant families and community* **http://familydesigncol-lab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Circling-to-Move-Ahead_Blog-Series_2019.05.15.pdf**

VIGNETTE FROM SOUTHEAST SEATTLE: MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION

The SESEC and core CBOs co-developed a facilitation toolkit that created space for people to hear each others' stories and reflect on educational (in)equity from multiple perspectives. They focused explicitly on creating multiple pathways to participation, so that the dialogues were inclusive across diverse ages and experiences.

For example, during a community-wide event in SE Seattle, facilitators led small groups of community members to reflect on the past, present, and future of educational justice in Seattle. They created reflection questions of three different types to guide the discussion.

- **Inclusive:** Designed for people who are new to educational equity and justice work and older elementary school children.
- **Critical:** Designed to encourage deeper thinking.
- **Transformative:** Stretch people's thinking and encourage (re) envisioning our futures.

INCLUSIVE	What is something you know about Southeast Seattle schools or communities?
CRITICAL	What are the most pressing educational justice issues facing Southeast Seattle?
TRANSFORMATIVE	What does wholeness, wellness, and solidarity look like right now for students and communities in Southeast Seattle?

OTHER PRACTICES

- *Access Need: Asking at the start of gathering "Is there anything that you need us to know or do to be in just relationship with you?"*
- *Color Brave Space: These are meeting norms developed by consulting firm Equity Matters.* **https://fakequity.com/2017/05/26/ color-brave-space-how-to-run-a-better-equity-focused-meeting/**

CRITICAL REFLECTION

What kind of conversations am I having with colleagues in my work (inclusive, critical, transformative)? What questions might help push us farther in our thinking?

FOSTERING FAMILY-EDUCATOR COLLABORATION FOR PARENT POWER IN SALT LAKE CITY

The goal of the Family-School Collaboration Design Research Project is to design spaces where families have real, collective impact on school-site decision making. The central focus has been on redesigning School Community Councils (SCCs), Utah's forum for shared governance between families and schools. SCC's are failing — perhaps designed to fail — in schools serving low-wealth communities of color. Salt Lake City partners put the re-design of SCCs in the hands of those who are best equipped: families and educators themselves.

This ongoing project is a partnership that includes:
- **The Community Advocate Network**, a group of Latinx families organized around issues of education and wellbeing
- **The College of Education** at the University of Utah
- **The Salt Lake City School District** Office of Family-School Collaboration
- **University Neighborhood Partners,** a department of the University of Utah, dedicated to building resident-led university-community partnerships.

During Phase 1, families and educators developed a set of principles for re-imagining SCCs as equitable, family-centered spaces. **In Phase 2** the project expanded to include broader questions of how schools can welcome and value families. Currently, parents are piloting a peer-to-peer outreach effort around SCCs.

FOR MORE INFO
- *Learn about University Neighborhood Partners and its wide range of university-community partnerships at* **http://partners.utah.edu**
- *Read the partnership's report on reimagining Salt Lake's shared governance system at* **https://partners.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2016/09/Design-Circle-Final-Report.pdf**

VIGNETTE FROM SALT LAKE CITY: COLLECTIVELY REFLECTING ON TRANSCRIPTS

Central to the Salt Lake project is the creation of spaces where families of color and professional educators can engage in equitable dialogue. While the group works hard to put everyone on an equal footing, power dynamics are always at play, deeply rooted in race, gender, class, culture, professional position, and the history of community-school relationships. The goal is not to avoid these dynamics, but rather to challenge participants to question and dig into them.

One way to engage with these dynamics is to interrupt and question them in the moment. But this is not always possible. Another option, made possible by the co-design process, is to collectively analyze transcripts. Each design circle was recorded and transcribed. FLDC researchers helped Salt Lake partners selected rich moments of inter-action to bring back to participants a the next circle. For example, the excerpt below is from a spirited debate at one design circle.

Teacher (White): Respect's a loaded word, though. As a teacher, everybody's like "the rule is respect," and I can't tell you to respect me. Right? I have to earn that. Don't you?

Parent (Mexican/Mayan-American): That's a god-given respect that we all have. And in our cultures, in our indigenous cultures, we are taught to respect our elders. Just us, though, because once you start speaking English, you lose our respect...It's not that I don't like English language, but I would use the English language and disrespect everybody.

Teacher: Well I think anybody could use any language to disrespect anyone. But I feel like we need to understand all cultures cause I was raised to respect my elders and to speak with anyone older than me with respect but also to respect myself enough to stand my ground. And I think that there's a balance in that. So respect is a really loaded word to me personally.

Parent: Right now our children are taught that we have to earn it. My son has come to me with that and I just really want him to understand, it's not like that. Once the children learn that, they will be respectful wherever they are because they know the difference. My son will open the door for any lady walking up, or an elder person, he will help her or him because I've taught him that, as a respect to the elder.

Well you know, the way I was taught I would never change because I will never change being respectful to begin with. In my communities, where I grew up, elders were it. My poor parents to begin with. And then, of course you are taught to respect every individual as another individual.

Teacher: When I say you have to earn it, I do earn it. And I feel like the students and families I work with do appreciate me because I treat them with kindness and with love and with an open heart and an open mind. I've had kids say all kind of things to me. I remember the first time I had a child say to me some very explicit words and I looked at my principal and I said, "He can't say that." And he said, "Yes he can, he can say that." Maybe there will be consequences for what you say but you can say whatever you want. And I want every child to grow up with the ability to be free thinking and free speaking and not hold back for fear that they're gonna offend someone that's older than them. That is holding down a system that isn't working. That's keeping them from achieving their greatness.

At the next design circle, the core research team put this excerpt in front of the group. Participants read the transcript aloud, and then discussed what they saw taking place and what it means for building equitable family-school collaboration. Discussions like this can then inform the design process, guided by reflective questions like:
- What is each participant saying, and to what extent is the other person hearing it?
- How might the individuals' positionalities — race, gender, institutional position, etc. — be impacting this interaction?
- Do you see opportunities in this exchange for building new kinds of connections between educators and parents?
- What might be getting in the way?

Visual Practice: *In our word-based society, creating visuals can shift conversations, increase engagement. For example, we use collaborative drawing in our design circles as an alternative form of conversation. We also worked with parents to design a comic booklet as a peer-to-peer parent engagement tool.*

CRITICAL REFLECTION

How could I find ways, in my own work, to analyze interactions after they have happened? How might this help move my work forward?

RECASTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES AS CODESIGNERS OF EDUCATION IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES

In a national moment of political tumult and violence directed at people of color, immigrants and other marginalized groups, our education systems need new strategies for meaningfully engaging families and communities in ensuring equitable learning for our youth. Not only do families and communities bring historical and lived knowledge in how to persist through these challenges, they also can bring critical exper-tise in how to advance educational justice and community wellbeing.
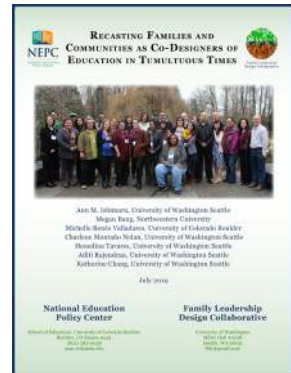
Amid these difficult times or perhaps because of them, we have found evidence of justice-based approaches to family engagement that posi-tion parents and families, particularly from nondominant communities, as fellow leaders in transforming schools and educational systems to better serve all children, families and communities.

This memo is shares what we have learned with public school leaders and others working to engage families and communities in education. Based on findings from our collaborative work, we conclude with a set of ten policy recommendations that seek systemic transformation.

Read the National Education Policy Center publication here:
http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/family-leadership

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1. The concept of "next practices" comes from Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan, authors of *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School,* from Teachers College Press.
2. For more on these ideas, see Joanne Archibald's 2008 book, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit,* from UBC press.
3. For more on PDR, co-design, and the roots of this approach, see Megan Bang and Shirin Vossoughi's 2016 article, *Participatory Design Research and Educational Justice: Studying Learning and Relations Within Social Change Making*; See also Ann Ishimaru & Megan Bang's 2016 FLDC whitepaper, *Towards a Transformative Research and Practice Agenda for Racial Equity in Family Engagement.*

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FAMILY LEADERSHIP DESIGN COLLABORATIVE

Resources, Tools & Practices
http://familydesigncollab.org/

Research-Practice Briefs synthesizing cutting edge research and point towards openings in the field for further exploration, deeper commitments to equity, and opportunities to impact practice.


Manuscripts and Publications authored by members of our collaborative, these manuscripts and publications contribute to our expanding interdisciplinary knowledge.

White Papers, Reports, and Policy Memos highlighting key design decisions and emerging findings at critical stages of our work.

Interviews with community leaders and scholars leading the way in community-defined wellbeing and educational justice.

Sign up for the mailing list on our website for updates on resources and publications!
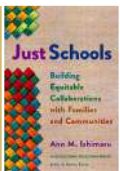
Don't miss Dr. Ishimaru's book, *Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborating with Families and Communities*, from Teachers College Press.