

## **Co-Designing FLDC Phase 2: Findings as Emerging Partnering Commitments**

Aiming to re-envision the roles of families and communities in educational and racial equity, the Family Leadership Design Collaborative seeks to address:

- *How can* communities, families, and educational systems co-design new possibilities toward community-defined wellbeing and education justice?
- *How can* we build and enact generative solidarities within and across communities?

During Phase I, we convened 40 collaborative members in a series of in-person and virtual gatherings and supported the facilitation of 10 co-design processes with collaborative members and local community members across the country to begin to address these research questions. Design circles were intended to be a beginning point in developing and enacting theories of change that centered non-dominant communities' wellness and educational justice. The design circles were a first step towards imagining, designing and enacting macro-level change that begins from and centers families and communities. We include here a high-level summary of our findings to date, which, in turn, will serve as our initial partnering commitments as we transition to Phase 2 of the project. These findings are based on data from each design circle, interviews with our collaborative members, and analyses of transcripts, field notes, and final products from our convenings and the design circles. We propose the following priorities for partnering commitments to enact during Phase 2, in which we hope to deepen co-design work with three sites. This work will extend from and beyond these commitments with more cross-site codesign in order to further this research agenda, generate new knowledge, and foster shifts in policies, structures, systems, and practices. During this phase, our UW team will be deeply integrated in the co-design process and learning across and within sites. We hope this document serves to initiate authentic inquiry around both our understanding of Phase I and what Phase 2 with us – each of you and our UW team – might look like.

### **Families and Communities as Co-Designers of their Own Solutions**

Practically, this means:

1. starting with and privileging family and community stories, lived experiences, knowledges, and cultural practices,
2. ensuring families and communities are actively present and shaping decisions throughout the work, including envisioning and enacting solutions to self-identified problems, and
3. engaging in social dreaming - collectively imagining futures founded upon educational justice, community wellness, and critical solidarities.

In some of the design circles, facilitators designed interactions that enabled non-dominant families and communities themselves - not their representatives - to become drivers of change in their own children's education. For example, facilitators in one design circle noted that research and schools have been a force of colonization, erasure, and oppression. Beginning with participants' ancestral histories and histories of marginalization, however, served to open space for dialogue that recognized this historical injustice and allowed group members to envision a self-determined future rather than one dictated by or always in response to inequity. In Phase 2 of our project, we hope to learn more about what practices foster generative spaces for families and communities to engage in social dreaming and change making, impacts of co-design participation on youth, families, and educators, and indicators of their leadership and collective action towards educational change.

### **Engaging Multiple Identities and Perspectives in Interactions and Relationships**

Practically, this means:

1. asking and enabling people to bring their whole selves into the work, including recognition that individuals hold multiple identities that bring value and new perspectives to problem solving,

2. inviting people to participate in the design space who have not historically been seen, heard, or powered; for example, youth, multigenerational families, minoritized peoples, Indigenous peoples, etc., and
3. addressing asymmetric power dynamics in relationships between and across individuals, organizations, and systems.

In our co-design work, we saw that moment-to-moment interactions could disrupt or inadvertently reinforce powered, marginalizing, and colonizing practices and expectations (“settled”) and that these moments required constant attention and iterative re-design of the spaces and interactions to be more equitable. For example, we saw that building authentic and just relationships required people to bring their full selves, including their multiple identities (e.g. mother and researcher and community organizer) to the design space. In turn, this enabled people to critically listen and learn from one another by hearing their own stories mirrored in the struggles and dreams of others. Conversely, when individuals brought singular identities to co-design conversations, existing hierarchies, power dynamics, and traditional notions of expertise seemed to limit understandings of the problem and possible solutions. In Phase 2, we hope to track how enabling multiple and intersecting identities in co-design work shifts the roles, quality of relationships and power dynamics in broader systems.

### **Reflexive and Iterative Learning Processes**

Practically this means:

1. engaging in iterative learning to reflect on and improve our practices, expectations, and positionalities in order to enact more just relationships and develop theories and practices for a broader audience,
2. being willing to be changed as well as push others towards change, and this may require “vulnerability” and “courage” to do so,
3. committing to repairing relationships, and
4. taking up tools and processes to engage in this reflexive work.

Across our work we witnessed facilitators and participants examining their own understandings and practices, both individually and in collaboration with others. When this happened, and especially when this happened reflexively, we saw increased politicized trust, which in turn, led to greater collective learning. We saw the utilization of reflection tools and practices to identify and “re-mediate” moments of slippage into “settled frames” in interaction. In one instance, upon revisiting transcripts from their previous conversation, the facilitators themselves recognized the need to engage participants in questioning the unspoken authority designated to the white facilitator (over the facilitator of color) in order to re-imagine new ways of interacting with each other. In contrast, design circles where only participants or historically marginalized members were expected to be vulnerable and to learn, we saw reified positional roles as well as increased points of relational and conceptual tension. As one facilitator noted, this was a reflexive process of reciprocal vulnerability. In Phase 2, we aim to co-create design principles and facilitation tools and practices that support reflexive, collective learning in design and enactment processes.

### **Taking on Current and Ongoing Tension Points**

Practically this means:

1. acknowledging tensions existing within our families, communities, and work that emerge as forms of internalized or lateral violence by seeking to heal from these symptoms as well as to redress the systemic cause,
2. recognizing that tensions within relationships and understandings of problems and solutions reflect structural and systemic inequities across generations and requires a critical historical analysis to unpack, and
3. addressing these tensions by envisioning new work, new possibilities, and taking on the immediate and pressing needs of families and communities, especially those facing systemic oppression.

In these data we saw the significance of opening spaces for new theoretical territories and new practices that move us beyond current realities. For example, in one design circle, families organized to overcome long-

standing distrust of schools and fear of retribution by speaking out against the district's erasure of their children's and families' needs. In another design circle, while envisioning multigenerational relationships as a pathway for educational justice and community wellness, a participant/facilitator critically examined how historical trauma and erasure continue to impact the ability to engage in intergenerational learning. Also, in a different circle, challenges to academic progress and physical health were reframed from community deficits to opportunities for additional community members to join the process and for all community members to consider new roles and responsibilities in the process. In Phase 2, we aim to further advance a theory and practice of transformational change that's responsive to the historical, political, and social challenges and resiliencies that shape and impact communities' and families' lives.

### **Imagining and Enacting Change**

Practically this means:

1. advancing both theory and practice through iterative design processes of dreaming and enacting,
2. making space for messiness, both/and's and letting go of the expectation that there will be a single or perfect model, explanation, or solution,
3. taking up new ideas, pushing beyond our current practices to imagine new "how can" practices, and thinking together across differences, and
4. creating knowledge products and tools to support field capacity and shifts at multiple levels in practice and policy.

Throughout this process, we saw that people grounded the development of practices, knowledge products, and tools in a shared research agenda that was responsive to local communities and authentic problems of practice. Doing so allowed for the emergence of new solutions and relationships that are typically not realized in traditional forms of research "on" or "for" communities. Instead, participants asked "how can" questions (instead of "how do") that shifted notions of research and practice towards broader aims of wellness and justice. This process was non-linear and evolved out of diverse socio-historic contexts, thus illuminating the importance of moving beyond singular or universal models. In this way, collaborative members described this co-design processes as "alive," "authentic," and "aligned." That is, facilitators and participants recognized that this process itself could be transformational. In Phase 2, we hope to document measurable shifts in practice, policy, and systems level change.