Chapter 2. How Might We Join With Community Partners in a Process of Inquiry That Embodies the Values of Mutuality and Reciprocity?

This chapter focuses on methods of collaboration in community-engaged partnerships. The approach to collaboration with partners will determine how new knowledge is produced by whom, for whom, and by what means. If the goal is to engage in the "mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Commission on Public Purpose in Higher Education, n.d., Defining Community Engagement section) we will need methods that best enable that outcome. The guiding principles from Chapter 1 represent some emerging thoughts within the field of community writing. These principles can provide a framework for our goals and aims as we work with communities.

How can we best join with community partners in a process of inquiry that embodies these values? While there are many methods for facilitating projects with communities, including community-engaged research, participatory action research (PAR), service design, design-based research (DBR), assets-based community development (ABCD), and community-based participatory research (CBPR), this chapter will focus primarily on four design research methods for working with community partners:

- design thinking,
- co-design,
- design justice, and my own contribution,
- equity-based approaches in community writing.

Each of these collaborative methods entails a design research process where "people seek to understand, interpret and ultimately address a challenge or opportunity in their present reality by conceptually developing and creating things (e.g., spaces, physical products, services, infrastructures, policies etc.) that could create a (better) future reality" (Zamenopoulos & Alexiou, 2018, p.11). After a discussion of design thinking, co-design, and design justice, this chapter describes an equity-based approach to creating generative spaces in which communities and universities can collaborate in a research process specifically suited for the field of writing studies.

Design Thinking

When using design thinking, we start from a place of inquiry, whether the project engages *directly* with community members or *indirectly* with communities by

working with nonprofit staff. Design thinking can be a valuable method to facilitate aspects of community-engaged projects with community partners. According to social scientist Herbert Simon (1981), "Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (p. 54). Emerging in the 1970s-1980s to describe designers' ways of knowing (Cross, 1982; Lawson, 1980; McKim, 1972), design thinking is an approach to creative problem solving that uses the lens of inquiry. The process typically includes a cycle of empathizing, defining, ideating, prototyping, and testing (Brown, 2009). The specific methods employed, however, are not as important as the overall process, which is grounded in understanding what is meaningful to the audience, discovering the audience's articulated and unarticulated needs and desires, imagining the world from the audience's perspective, and connecting with the audience around what is meaningful and valuable to them (Brown, 2009; Cross, 2011; Lockwood, 2009).

With its rhetorical, audience-based approach and its claims to demystify the design process, it is easy to understand how practitioners have taken up design thinking in the field of writing studies. James P. Purdy (2014) acknowledged the ties between design thinking and the writing process in his article "What Can Design Thinking Offer Writing Studies?" in which he examined the level of "comfort that many members of the field feel using the language of design to explain the writing practices they study, teach, and enact" (p. 613). Composition scholar Richard Marback (2009), drawing on the work of Richard Buchanan, called for "a fuller turn to design in composition studies" and argued for design as a way into "wicked problems"—complex cultural or social planning problems in the real world that are not inherently solvable (p. 400). Design thinking not only helps students understand and practice the process of inquiry, it also helps "students learn to practice a focused, coherent approach to collaborative invention" (Wible, 2020, p. 413). Applying design thinking methods to real-world projects allows students "to think in terms of collaborative responses" (Purdy, 2014, p. 631). Additionally, design thinking in the writing classroom can "facilitate students' engagement with writing in ways that lead them to see its value for their future" (Leverenz, 2014, p. 10).

Another benefit to the writing studies audience of the design thinking process is how it invites students to view issues through multiple points of view. In Scott Wible's (2020) article "Using Design Thinking to Teach Creative Problem Solving in Writing Courses," he noted,

> Common proposal and feasibility report assignments too often allow students to describe problems from their own self-interested perspectives, encourage them to move too quickly to proposing solutions, or allow them simply to import solutions used elsewhere or develop new solutions from the comfort of the classroom. (p. 421)

Design thinking tools offer students ways to engage with "other stakeholders in order to discover new insights on problems and to develop creative solutions"

(Wible, 2020, p. 421). Importantly, for some students, a community partner project might be the first time they are asked to create something that takes another's point of view into account.

Design thinking offers a roadmap for applying design research methods to a community partner project. Design thinking courses, workshops, and certificates are currently provided across disciplines and fields—through IDEO, an international design and consulting firm; Berkeley's Advanced Media Institute; the University of Pennsylvania's nursing program; and MIT's Sloan School of Management, to name just a few. Not just for the elite institutions, design thinking is promoted in a wide range of settings, from start-up incubators, nonprofit boot camps, and continuing education classes at community colleges. The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University (also known as the d.school) shares a Creative Commons "crash course" by way of a three-hour video session. Design thinking is now packaged as a popular commodity with online enrollment and flexible payment options. From universities to industry to nonprofits, design thinking has broad appeal.

It has been noted, however, that part of the appeal of design thinking is in the way it packages a designer's sensibilities and tools "for a non-designer audience by codifying their processes into a prescriptive, step by step approach to creative problem solving, claiming that it can be applied by anyone to any problems" (Jen, 2017, para. 5). While design thinking has many benefits, feminist scholars urge us to consider if this system can be everything to all people—and more importantly, should it be? Feminist scholars warn that the current pervasiveness of design thinking across sectors can ultimately be a colonizing project to the extent that it can be ascribed to anything and everything. Sociologist Ruha Benjamin (2019) claimed that "whether or not design-speak sets out to colonize human activity, it is enacting a monopoly over creative thought and praxis" (p. 179) and asked, "What is gained and by whom in the process of submerging so much heterogeneity under the rubric of design?" (p. 176). Feminist designers and scholars claim that "the assumptions and methods of designers do not receive nearly as much critical engagement as they should" (Benjamin, 2019, p. 174). Part of what is at stake here is the question: *Who* is prioritized in the design process? Benjamin (2019) argued that such a wide focus on design could diminish

> the insights and agency of those who are discounted because they are not designers, capitalizing on the demand for novelty across numerous fields of action and coaxing everyone who dons the cloak of design into being seen and heard through the dominant aesthetic of innovation. (p. 179)

Design scholar Lucy Kimbell (2011) also acknowledged that "accounts of design thinking continue to privilege the designer, however empathetic, as the main agent in design" (p. 300). For example, in community-engaged projects, com-

munities are often invited "to give their perspective and to give their feedback, but are otherwise left out of the design process" (Miller, 2017, para. 6). Hosting a community feedback session with community partners is not enough. As Meg Miller (2017) noted, Antionette Carroll, founder of the Creative Reaction Lab, has explained, "You cannot say that you are effectively addressing these issues if you are not including the people affected by them into your efforts, and giving them access to power" (para. 7). If we are committed to co-creation and putting the community first in our writing projects, we need to do more than host a feedback session—we need to join together with communities in a way that works to build on their ideas and visions.

Another critique of design thinking is its emphasis on problem solving. As discussed in Chapter 1, an asset-based approach favors the framing of community projects in terms of strengths rather than in the language of problems and solutions. Employing solutionist language can do more harm than good. Scholar Lee Vinsel (2017) has argued that using design thinking in courses conveys an "elitist, Great White Hope vision of change that literally asks students to imagine themselves entering a situation to solve other people's problems" (para. 37). Solutionist language can also give students an "unrealistic idea of design and the work that goes into creating positive change" (Vinsel, 2017, para. 36). When working in communities, we confront inherently complex and "wicked" issues—the consequences of inequitable and unjust systems. In Miller's (2017) article "Want to Fight Inequality? Forget Design Thinking," she claimed, "These systems are so embedded into history and society they are invisible to many, meaning there's no one simple thing to solve for" (para. 12). As Miller (2017) noted of Carroll, the founder of Creative Reaction Lab, she "prefers to use the word 'approaches' rather than 'solutions'… because it shows this is not a finite type of solution—it's flexible, it's agile" (para. 12). Similarly, Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber (1973) acknowledged that wicked problems are not inherently solvable, rather, "at best they are only re-solved over and over again" (p. 160). We must be mindful with our words; communities are not problems to be overcome or solutions to be sought. We too might take up the language of asset-based creative approaches in working with communities toward equity and justice in all aspects of the partnership.

Overall, design thinking can offer us valuable tools in community-engaged projects. However, what would be lost if we relied on design thinking (a system championed widely by industry in the global North) as our sole method of engagement for working with communities? As educator Sherri Spelic (2018) noted of design thinking, it suits "a certain kind of neoliberal enthusiasm for entrepreneurship and start-up culture. I question how well it lends itself to addressing social dilemmas fueled by historic inequality and stratification" (para. 18). A challenge for those working from a design thinking perspective will be moving from a limited feedback model to a working model that more deeply values social justice, reciprocity, and the co-creation of knowledge.

Co-Design

This section moves beyond design thinking to examine co-design as a method for community-engaged partnerships. Co-design is about "people designing together" and has roots in 1970s Scandinavian participatory design techniques (Sanders, 2002, p. 9). Co-design is an umbrella term used for a variety of collaborative approaches—such as co-operative design, open design, and service design—all attempting to involve stakeholders and use participatory means deeply. A key tenet of co-design is the building and deepening of shared collaboration between communities attempting to resolve a particular design challenge in a particular context. Co-design is used in both academia and professional practice as a term to indicate the sharing of power and the prioritizing of the community in the design research process (McKercher, 2020). It occurs over time and "requires a different kind of relation between people which incorporates trust, open and active communication and multiple learning" (Burkett, 2012, p. 8).

Co-design works to shift the power relationship between designers and participants from hierarchical to collaborative. In projects employing co-design, both parties are viewed as co-creators. Community writing scholar Thomas Deans (2010), in *Writing and Community Engagement: A Critical Sourcebook,* distinguished between (a) programs that write *for* the community, (b) programs that write *about* the community, and (c) programs that write *with* the community. Participatory methods firmly fall into the latter category, writing *with,* although as Deans acknowledged, the definite boundaries are not quite as distinct as they seem on paper. A key tenet of co-design is the view that "collaboration is more than just tapping into the individual knowledge that internal and external stakeholders possess. It is about discovering their unique, and collective perspectives on the systems in which they live, which makes it vital to create together" (Stratos Innovation Group, 2016, para. 3). In the co-design process, "the knowledge that stakeholders bring, is both explicit and tacit" (Langley et al., 2018, "What is co-design?" section). It is critical that community partners see the design research process as equitable and are seen, heard, and treated as leaders and decision-makers throughout the process. Communities are positioned as experts of their own lived experience within the process, and their voices become central to the project. We can value community voices by supporting their perspectives and stories in order to combat biases and assumptions and to "focus on strengths and resources that acknowledge but don't focus solely on disadvantage" (McKercher, 2020, p. 171). In working toward reciprocal relationships, there are many ways to approach meaningful co-creation in research with our partners; we can gather the information together, co-create design questions, share insights, and co-evaluate outcomes, to name a few. Co-design is a flexible approach; we can ask our partners how *they* would like to share power and authority when we begin.

Despite our well-meaning intentions, the field of community writing acknowledges the work that is still left to be done: "Social, cultural, racial, economic, and

educational inequalities make it difficult for instructors to bring the ideals of reciprocity into practice" (Shumake & Shah, 2017, p. 6). Saying that we value co-creation with communities does not lessen the "unequal power dynamics that commonly exist between students and community members, especially when students are from privileged or elite backgrounds" (Shumake & Shah, 2017, p. 6). Additionally, Kelly A. McKercher (2020) argued that in order "to continue shifting power it's critical that we evaluate the success of co-design processes and their outputs (e.g., a service or policy) against whether they create value, from the perspective of the people they're supposed to benefit" (p. 219). Co-design is the act of creating *with* "stakeholders . . . specifically within the design development process to ensure the results meet their needs and are usable" (Stratos Innovation Group, 2016, para. 6). A co-design process is determined successful if the products or services "create value for the people they are intended to benefit" (McKercher (2020) p. 18).

In a university context, regardless of the amount of scaffolding provided by the educator, co-designing with communities can be a daunting endeavor with multiple moving parts. Many co-designed projects are not usable by community partners despite our best efforts. To this point, Shah (2020) followed up on 43 student projects created by various professional writing classes for nonprofits and found that fewer than one third of them were usable by the organization without alterations, and according to her, the outcomes of the projects, such as "brochures, promotional videos, data reports, or website plans . . . were not readily usable" (p. 67). Moreover, in her interviews, she discovered that the nonprofits

> discussed an ideal student group that would have the confidence to propose fresh ideas rather than merely follow the directions of the nonprofit staffer, to interact as colleagues rather than students - demonstrating assertiveness but also responsiveness - and to communicate about problems as they arose. They wanted students to participate in many ways as professional consultants, rather than as pupils. In sum, they wanted students to play an active role in the knowledge network. (Shah, 2020, p. 84)

Ultimately, the decision to implement the project as submitted by the students lies with the community partner. If there is still time in the semester, perhaps there is a chance to synthesize more feedback for revision. If the semester is over, there may be a chance to develop the project (and the community partner relationship) with another group of students in a different semester. One of the many challenges is "learning how to successfully navigate the 'messiness' of an inclusive design process that takes everyone's lived experience seriously" (Costanza-Chock, Preface section). When our research is grounded in co-creation methods, we can make more significant strides toward designing *with* our partners, not just *for* our partners—and having those designs actually be useful to the community. In this way, co-design is more than a research process—it is a movement toward more just and equitable partnerships.

Design Justice

If we want to change inequitable and unjust systems, first we need to do the work to understand them. It is not enough to join with community partners in a process of inquiry that embodies the values of mutuality and reciprocity—unless we are also examining the reasons why "not everyone starts with the same resources or experiences the same barriers to success" (Mission Investors Exchange, 2019, para. 10). In our work with communities, we must seek to understand the following: "Why are these communities in need? Why are these communities similar in demographics regardless of where they are located across the country? Why have the needs been consistent for several decades?" (Campus Compact, n.d.-a, para. 1). Centering equity in our work with communities means that we learn from those with experience in historically underinvested neighborhoods. The National Equity Project (n.d.) has argued that

> our public systems (education, healthcare, criminal justice, housing, etc.) were not created to produce equal outcomes or experiences for everyone. These structures - past and present - maintain inequity by design. These inequitable systems were not created by accident and they will not be undone by chance. New, liberating systems must be designed with conscious intention and a shared vision for a desired future state. (We Believe section)

When we center equity and justice in our projects, we begin to do the work of understanding why our current systems perpetuate inequity by design. Unless we are doing this work, our efforts toward mutuality and reciprocity are little more than lip service since "one cannot reciprocally value what one does not understand" (Davis et al., 2017, p. 49). Centering equity and justice in our work with community partners offers a way to diversify our theory building—"a vital project for the field of community writing" that seeks to "highlight inequalities between university and community" (Shah, 2020, p. 10). Charting a new path toward justice means creating spaces where "power, privilege, and oppression are actively and intentionally considered" (Dostilio et al., 2012, p. 25). The power dynamics that uphold oppression are embedded, in fact *designed* into, the very systems we want to change. Part of our work will necessarily be about how "systems of oppression, inequality, inequity are by design; therefore, they can and *must* be redesigned" (Creative Reaction Lab, 2019, para. 3).

In their recent book *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, Costanza-Chock (2020) described the design justice movement as "a growing community of practice that aims to ensure a more equitable distribution of design's benefits and burdens; meaningful participation in design decisions; and recognition of community-based, Indigenous, and diasporic design traditions, knowledge, and practices" (Introduction section). Design justice works to employ collaborative practices to prioritize people who have been historically

underinvested by design. It is a community-focused approach that intentionally asks "how design reproduces and/or challenges the matrix of domination (white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, settler colonialism, and other forms of structural inequality)" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, Introduction section). According to design justice practitioners, "We have an ethical imperative to systemically advance the participation of marginalized communities in all stages of the technology design process; through this process, resources and power can be more equitably distributed" (Costanza-Chock, 2018, p.6).

Critical discussions centering on design justice originated at a session titled "Generating Shared Principles for Design Justice" at the 2015 Allied Media Conference in Detroit, facilitated by designers Una Lee and Wesley Taylor, in which

> the hope was to start shaping a shared definition of "design justice" — as distinguished from "design for social impact" or "design for good", which are well intentioned but because they are not driven by principles of justice can be harmful, exclusionary, and can perpetuate the systems and structures that give rise to the need for design interventions in the first place. How could we redesign design so that those who are normally marginalized by it, those who are characterized as passive beneficiaries of design thinking, become co-creators of solutions, of futures?" (Design Justice Network, 2016, para. 2)

The Design Justice Network officially began the following year at the 2016 Allied Media Conference through a network gathering organized by Lee, Taylor, Victoria Barnett, Carlos Garcia, and Nontsikelelo Mutiti. Network gatherings at the Allied Media Conference have established opportunities for "a . . . way to connect with other people who share your values around a shared purpose or cause" (Allied Media Conference, n.d., FAQ 4). Today, the Design Justice Network includes over 2,000 "designers, developers, technologists, scholars, educators, community organizers, and many others who are working to examine and transform design values, practices, narratives, sites, and pedagogies so that they don't continue to reinforce interlocking systems of structural inequality" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, Preface) The members of the Design Justice Network produce zines, organize local nodes, host programs, trainings, reading groups, and working groups, and continue to coordinate an ongoing track at the annual Allied Media Conference. Their goal is to actively dismantle, rather than unintentionally reinforce, what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) termed "the matrix of domination" (p. 556). As Costanza-Chock (2020) explained,

> For many people from marginalized groups, the ways that the matrix of domination is both reproduced by and produces designed objects and systems at every level— from city planning and the built environment to everyday consumer technologies

to the affordances of popular social media platforms—generates
a constant feeling of alterity (feeling of being othered). (Design
Values section)

The goals of the design justice movement are to grow a community of practice
that works, not to limit or exclude design choices but rather to offer a robust
framework that can be used "as a prism through which we generate a far wider
rainbow of possible choices, each better tailored to reflect the needs of a specific
group of people" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, Directions for Future Work section).

Achieving reciprocity in community partnerships "requires that all involved
maintain their integrity to their own perspective, and bring their unique perspec-
tive to the project, sharing openly so that all may benefit from others' knowledge;
the process is one in which diversity is truly a strength" (Davis et al., 2017, p. 49).
By centering equity and justice in our work, we are better prepared to value multi-
ple ways of knowing and being. Pursuing research together in reciprocal partner-
ship means "providing a way for people to share their knowledge from the mar-
gins" (Shah, 2020, p. 26). Our community partners hold unique insight (not in
spite of, but) because of their positionality. Valuing experiential knowledge, lived
experience, and counter-storytelling (narratives that counter dominant assump-
tions) are some ways to prioritize underinvested voices in community-university
partnerships. There is a growing community of practitioners—people, agencies,
universities, and organizations—who work daily to leverage the power of design
for equity. The design justice movement is just one of many spaces that reflect the
values of anti-racism, anti-oppression, and justice. These include the following
organizations:

- And Also Too's mission is to "facilitate the co-creation of art, design,
  media, and technology to support movements for justice and liberation"
  (para. 1).
- Boston University Center for Antiracist Research's mission "is to convene
  researchers and practitioners from various disciplines to figure out novel
  and practical ways to understand, explain, and solve seemingly intractable
  problems of racial inequity and injustice" (Boston University Center for
  Antiracist Research, n.d., para. 1).
- Creative Reaction Lab's mission is "to educate, train, and challenge Black
  and Latinx youth to become leaders in designing healthy and racially eq-
  uitable communities" (n.d., para. 1).
- Highlander Research and Education Center's mission is to catalyze "grass-
  roots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South"
  (n.d., para 1).
- Hyphen-Labs is an international team of women of color "driven to cre-
  ate engaging ways to explore planetary-centered design. In the process they
  challenge conventions and stimulate conversations, placing collective needs
  and experiences at the center of evolving narratives" (n.d., para. 1).

- Ida B. Wells JUST Data Lab's mission is to join Princeton University "students, educators, activists, and artists. . . . to rethink and retool data for justice" (The Center for Digital Humanities at Princeton, n.d., para. 1).
- Research Action Design's mission is to "co-design tools, develop technology, and conduct essential research grounded in the needs and leadership of communities" (n.d., para. 2).

Equity-Based Approaches in Community Writing

While the previous three approaches to design research have their respective merits, none were explicitly created for writing partnerships. Additionally, approaching writing collaborations using only one of these methods may permit critical gaps that unintentionally threaten to undermine the work being attempted. For example, design thinking without the balance of a social justice framework could potentially perpetuate oppressive systems. Thus, here I introduce what I call equity-based approaches in community writing that synthesize assets from the previous methods discussed into a single, practical approach tailored for use in community writing.

Design research methods often employ an iterative feedback process, or what action research perennially (at least for the last 75 years) depicts as "spiral steps that form 'a circle of planning, action and fact finding about the result of the action" (Lewin, 1946, p. 52). Typically, the "circle of planning" is represented as a cyclical or hexagonal model with arrows indicating the action steps—a tidy package codified by a step-by-step procedure for the research. Although these visual models are ubiquitous and easy to understand, they are not always realistic, nor do they always represent what the collaborative process actually looks like. We know community writing can be messy, complex, "wicked" work that does not always adhere to a tidy step-by-step process. As Maggie Gram (2019) wrote, "to address a wicked problem is to look for its roots—and there's no hexagon map for getting there" (para. 64). My approach to community writing looks more like Figure 2.1.

The process represented in Figure 2.1 is a flexible and accommodating approach to writing and designing with community partners. In astronomy, the pole star positioned at the top of the illustration serves as a guide much like a compass would. In the northern hemisphere, the pole star never rises or sets and is visible any time of year. In this illustration, the pole star represents aspiring concepts such as social justice, reciprocity, and transformative change. These are the higher-order goals of our community-university partnerships. This pole star guides our work with communities and informs our on-the-ground tactics and decisions as we chart our path. Even if we are not always perfect at living up to all of them all of the time, we are actively engaging with these goals, and they can guide our work.
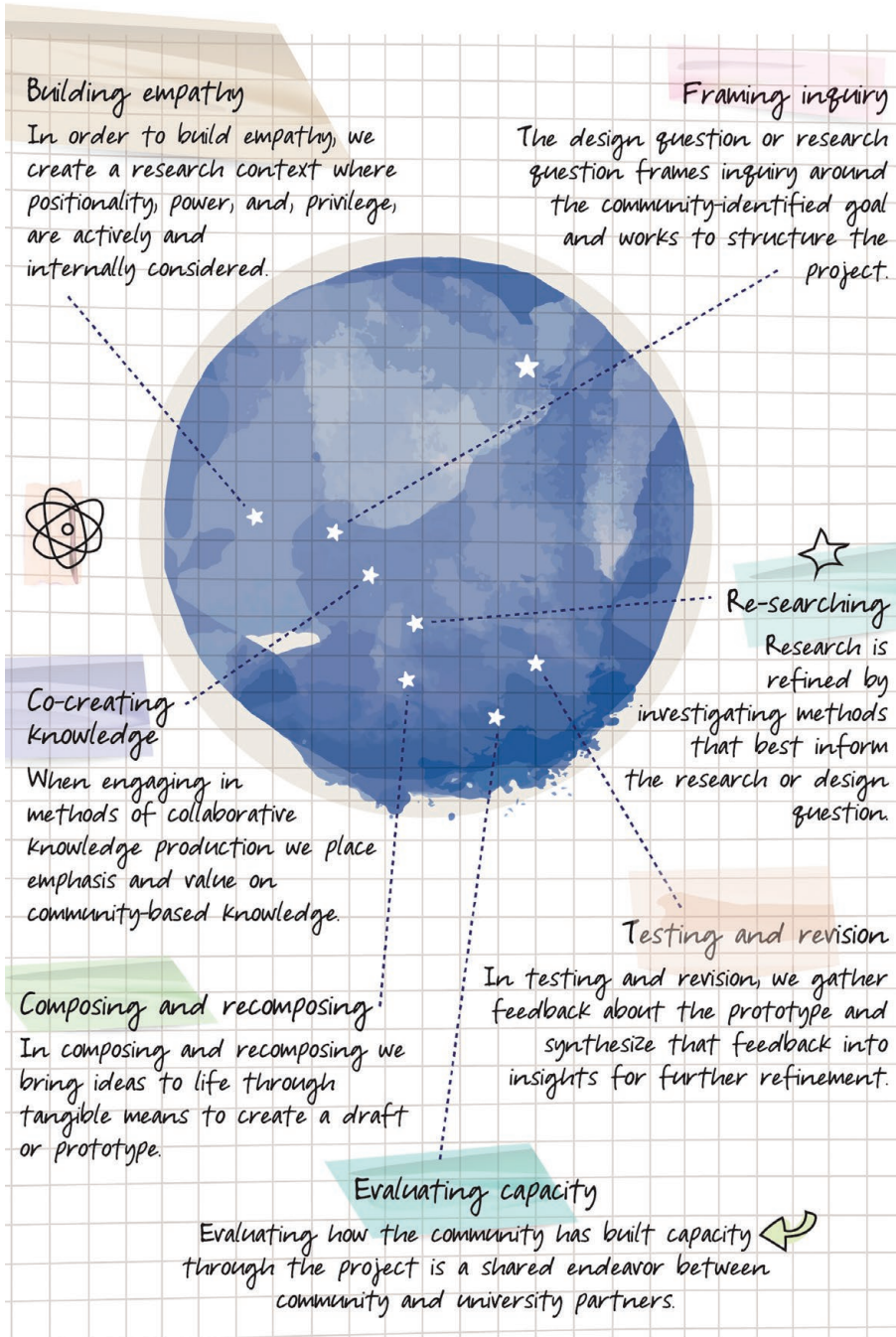
Building empathy

In order to build empathy, we create a research context where positionality, power, and, privilege, are actively and internally considered.

Framing inquiry

The design question or research question frames inquiry around the community-identified goal and works to structure the project.

Re-searching

Research is refined by investigating methods that best inform the research or design question.

Co-creating knowledge

When engaging in methods of collaborative knowledge production we place emphasis and value on community-based knowledge.

Testing and revision

In testing and revision, we gather feedback about the prototype and synthesize that feedback into insights for further refinement.

Composing and recomposing

In composing and recomposing we bring ideas to life through tangible means to create a draft or prototype.

Evaluating capacity

Evaluating how the community has built capacity through the project is a shared endeavor between community and university partners.

Figure 2.1. Equity-based approaches in community writing

Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (2008) has used a similar analogy when discussing mindfulness practices. His teaching has included the idea that the goal of mindfulness practice is "not to be perfect but simply to be mindful of ourselves, even when we make mistakes," and he continued,

> If you are lost in a forest at night, you can follow the North Star to find your way out. You follow the North Star, but your goal is to get back home; it's not to arrive at the North Star. (Hanh, 2008, p. 62)

Similarly, the goal here is "not to arrive at the North Star"—it is "to get back home"— to do better work with our partners to build more just and transformative worlds.

In Figure 2.1, below the pole star there are seven stars that depict the asterism known throughout the world by various names, including the Big Dipper, bear, plough, rudder, and sages. Metaphorically, these stars can be viewed not as linear steps in a process but as approaches or possibilities for engagement that center equity when collaborating with communities. These approaches are discussed in more detail below and are put into practice in a case study in the next chapter.

Building Empathy

To build empathy, we create a research context where positionality, power, and privilege are actively considered. Empathy is an essential part of the research process, as it "is the active attempt to understand another person's perspective by imagining how you would feel, think, or act if put in their situation" (Creative Reaction Lab, 2018, p. 19). In building empathy, we can examine how our own identities, values, biases, assumptions, and relationships to power and privilege impact how we engage with ourselves, each other, and the communities with whom we work. Charting a path toward justice means creating a research context where positionality, power, and privilege are actively and internally considered. The University of Pennsylvania's Weingarten Learning Resources Center provides materials for students and faculty on positionality in the context of research ethics. In one blog post, the Weingarten Learning Resources Center (2017) noted that "power dynamics flow through every vein of the research process" and stated that "it is our ethical duty to intentionally and mindfully attend to our role(s) in the contextual power interplay of the research process" (para. 1). We must be intentional about creating spaces to critically reflect with students on how our positionalities both cohere and diverge from our research inquiries. Part of this work entails examining our positionality and asking, "How does my positionality recognize, honor, and or problematize notions of difference (politics, economics, class, race, ethnicity, citizenship, legality, age, ability, education, sexuality, gender, or religion) as a conceptual praxis of analysis for my research context?" (Weingarten Learning Resources Center, 2017, Bullet point 5). In the process of building

empathy, we examine how our own identities, values, biases, assumptions, and relationships to power and privilege impact how we engage with ourselves, each other, and the communities with whom we work.

Empathy alone, however, is not enough to shift power or to change systems. Technologist Tatiana Mac (2020) has emphasized the need for trust and compassion to access empathy, arguing,

> Instead of trying to feel something we can't truly know to validate it, we should *trust* others' experiences. We can offer *compassion*, which doesn't require our own understanding in order to validate it as being real and worthy of attention. (paras. 8-9)

Additionally, the Creative Reaction Lab (2018) has argued for the need to build humility in order to access empathy, noting that an equity-centered approach "requires the humility to acknowledge where our assumptions and biases lie and the empathy to observe and listen with suspended judgment" (p. 19). Being vulnerable, experiencing discomfort, admitting mistakes, acknowledging that you don't know, learning together, sharing power—these are some ways to create a culture of co-creation and collective learning. More opportunities for building empathy in the classroom are offered in Appendix A: Positionality Activity.

Framing Inquiry

The design question, or research question, frames inquiry around the community-identified goal and works to structure the project. Our partnerships are based on a community-driven desire to build capacity or create change. We can continually inquire about the community partner's goals and work to collaborate with our partner as an ally. The design question frames inquiry around the community-identified goal and works to structure the project. A design question is a clear statement about a phenomenon of interest, a condition to be improved upon, an issue to be explored, or a question that exists in theory or practice for the partner's organization. An essential key to successful partnerships is sharing a vision to which we are all mutually committed. The purpose and vision of the project is established when we intentionally frame inquiry with our partners. Research questions and design questions are examined in more detail in the next two chapters.

Co-Creating Knowledge

When engaging in methods of collaborative knowledge production, we place emphasis and value on community-based knowledge. The National Equity Project (n.d.) has contended, "Co-creation acknowledges that we build *with* and not *for* others — we invite, engage and design solutions and co-produce knowledge in partnership" (We Believe section). When engaging in collaborative knowledge

production methods, we emphasize and value community-based knowledge—that is, knowledge, stories, and expertise arising from the community. This entails actively decolonizing spaces for our work with communities in a way "that re-envisions and develops knowledges and knowledge systems (epistemologies) that have been silenced and colonized" (Zavala, 2016, The Decolonial Project section). Epistemological diversity can guide our work with communities. Not only do we value the embodied, tacit knowledge within the community, we can stand alongside our partners in their goals to envision "new ways of seeing and being in the world" (Zavala, 2016, The Decolonial Project section). As our projects privilege diverse ways of knowing, it is necessary to often connect with the community partner for consistent input, feedback, and insights. It is imperative that "community members are seen and treated as leaders and decision-makers throughout the process" (Creative Reaction Lab, 2018, p. 33). In co-creation, we make greater strides toward designing *with* our partners, not *for* our partners—and having the projects we create ultimately be useful to the community.

Re-searching

Research is refined by investigating methods that best inform the research or design question. A well-defined research or design question posed in the framing inquiry phase will point to systematic investigation aimed at contributing to knowledge gained through careful consideration, observation, and study of our phenomenon of interest. Investigation will help to identify patterns and trends as well as to illuminate gaps or unknowns. There is an iterative nature to research—we often look for our phenomenon of interest and then must look again. Eventually, the research is refined by "progressively developing more specific knowledge about a particular situation, and more specific descriptions of the plausible solutions that would create a future envisaged reality" (Sanders, 2002, p. 11). Research methods might also include ideation techniques, such as public brainstorming sessions and round robins, or more traditional scholarly and academic methods, such as annotated bibliographies, surveys, interviews, and data collection. Research-based media activities are examined further in Chapter 4.

Composing and Recomposing

In composing and recomposing, we bring ideas to life through tangible means by creating a draft or prototype. Prior to this, we built momentum and a clear path forward once we began conducting research, and a leading idea emerged from the research phase. The composing phase is the process of making or bringing this leading idea to life—whether we are writing a first draft of a report or building a prototype or model (such as constructing a visual wireframe for a website, a mockup for a social media campaign, a sketch for a logo, or a storyboard for a video). Eventually, this tangible act of composing will result in a prototype or a

draft of a deliverable—or it will bring us back to the drawing board to conduct more research and begin the process of recomposing (composing again or differently). Costanza-Chock (2020) has noted that "narrowing down from big concepts to working prototypes within the available time can be very difficult. Part of the educator's role is to guide teams through this process with clear expectations and firm deadlines" (Design Pedagogies section).

Testing and Revision

We gather feedback about the prototype or draft in testing and revision, and we synthesize that feedback into insights for further refinement. With our prototype in hand, we can connect with our partners to determine the viability of our ideas and how to build on existing resources. Discussions, demonstrations, evaluation metrics, surveys, screenings, conversations, usability tests, conference rooms, virtual meetings, and coffee hours all are opportunities for feedback. As Costanza-Chock has reflected,

> Getting a prototype in front of real-world users early on in the design process is fundamental to making design more accessible. This is crucial because it helps to validate assumptions, reveal faulty thinking, and allow the team to iterate on the selected concept. (Design Pedagogies section)

Here we learn if the prototype-in-progress meets our partner's vision, and we can synthesize feedback from our partner into insights for further drafting and revision. Testing and revising is an interwoven process that happens throughout the project lifecycle. Sometimes revision means re-seeing the project from a new perspective and then rebuilding accordingly.

Evaluating Capacity

Evaluating how the community has built capacity through the project is a shared endeavor between community and university partners. In our work with community partners, we must prioritize the community throughout the process, including sharing and assessing insights after the project cycle is finished. When the project phase is complete, we can ask, "Did we engage in a process that builds community?" (Checkoway, 2015, p. 139). Ideally, the community partner would be involved in this evaluation. We can ask:

- Did the community partners improve capacity by adopting new habits, strategies, or skills for advancing change?
- Did we build a trusting, mutually enriching relationship together as co-creators?
- How can we best elicit community voices and perspectives in the project evaluation?

- How can we better work toward a collaborative evaluation process together?

Costanza-Chock (2020) proposed a three-part evaluation process to use when working with communities: "Who participated in the design process? Who benefited from the design? And who was harmed by the design?" (Directions for Future Work section). When someone says or does something to cause harm to someone, to marginalize someone, to make an assumption, to not listen well, to insist on doing something "our" way, to believe that we are "right," to issue a misinformed comment or judgment, to reject information that contradicts our beliefs, to uphold the status quo—these are just a few of the ways that we may do harm.

The Equity Design Collaborative (n.d.) defines design as "the intention (and unintentional impact) behind an outcome" (Design section). Thus, we should be held responsible for both the intentional and unintentional impacts of our design projects. Engaging in an opportunity for continuous improvement, for humility, for recognizing where we may cause harm creates an opportunity for us to consider the potential unintentional impacts of design. A project evaluation can help us attend to the unintentional impacts of the design process. Recognizing where in the course of a partnership we might have caused harm allows for accountability—and creates the possibility for transformation to occur.

When a community partner is harmed, trust declines. McKercher (2020) contended that "courageous conversations are vital" (p. 112). Can we be better prepared to hold deeper (and more courageous) conversations with our partners? Over time, as our community-university relationships develop, deeper and more honest discussions can take place. adrienne maree brown (2017) argued for adopting emergent strategy—that is, a strategy through which we can "intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for" (p. 3). brown (2017) recommended that we "move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass—build the resilience by building the relationships" (p. 42). BlackSpace (n.d.), in The BlackSpace Manifesto, advised that partners "grow trust and move together with fluidity at whatever speed is necessary" (para. 5). Building trust is slow and transformational work, and we must be prepared to accept a lack of immediate gratification.

This flexible approach for conducting design research with communities can point us toward more just and equitable partnerships. Intentionally centering equity and justice when co-creating with communities requires us to redesign both mindsets and infrastructures to share power and decision-making with our partners.