Chapter 3. How Might We in the Writing Classroom Engage in Community-Building Approaches That Pursue Social Justice via Emerging Media?

The promise of social justice in the community writing classroom is the opportunity to work alongside partners whose intent is to create more equitable, socially just worlds. That said, social justice is a potential, a possibility—not something inherently found in all community-engaged writing projects. Drawing from the scholarship of Frey & Bohnet (1996), Jones et al. (2016) claimed that social justice research in a technical communication context can "amplify the agency of oppressed people - those who are materially, socially, politically, and/or economically under-resourced (p. 2). According to Kari M. Grain and Darren E. Lund (2016), the social justice turn in the writing classroom is accompanied by "a pedagogy that encounters injustice and divisiveness as it occurs in local and global communities" (p. 46). In "The Technical Communicator as Advocate: Integrating a Social Justice Approach in Technical Communication," Jones argued, "A social justice perspective must not be purely descriptive but actively integrated into the research and pedagogy of our field in a way that promotes social change on a broader level" (Jones, 2016, p. 349). Community-engaged projects have the potential to "integrate social justice into research and pedagogy within the field" and entail "critical reflection and action that promotes agency for the marginalized and disempowered" (Jones, 206, p. 342). Both critical reflection and action are necessary components of a socially just pedagogy in the writing classroom. Although the case for the social justice turn has been made in the literature, "few resources exist to help teachers explicitly address diversity and social justice in the technical communication classroom" (Jones et al., 2016, p. 242). Jones and co-authors (2016) warned that

> without targeted teaching resources, educators will continue to struggle—or worse, fail altogether—to equip the next generation of technical communication scholars and practitioners for the complex work of recognizing, acting within, and shaping issues of social justice and diversity. (p. 242)

Providing an opportunity to critically examine how race, class, and gender shape identity is a necessary starting place in the community-engaged writing classroom, as both students and teachers will undoubtedly confront socialized and entrenched notions of power and privilege within the context of this work. Examining our positionality is a part of building empathy in the research process

and includes looking at how we are positioned (by ourselves, by others, by particular discourse communities) in relation to multiple, relational social processes of difference (gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, education, ability, religion, nationality, sexuality). Doing this work means taking a critical look at how we are each differently positioned in hierarchies of power and privilege. Collins (1990) argued that "people experience and resist oppression on three levels: the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions" (p. 223). Additionally, Collins (1990) acknowledged that "each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone's lives" (p. 229).

Alongside critical reflection, active participation in a partnership is the second piece of a social justice pedagogy in a writing studies context. As Jones (2016) noted, "Community-based research allows teachers to pair with specific communities and work collaboratively to address or solve a problem that directly impacts the community" (p. 355). In community writing partnerships, we join forces with grassroots, community-based organizations and nonprofits fighting for justice. Empathy and humility serve us well as we strive to "(a) redress colonial influences on perceptions of people, literacy, language, culture, and community and the relationship therein and (b) support the coexistence of cultures, languages, literacies, memories, histories, places, and space—and encourage respectful and reciprocal dialogue between and across them" (Jones, 2016, p. 350).

One of the challenges of community-university partnerships is redressing the university's historic devaluation of nonwestern forms of knowledge and value systems. Anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2018) questioned whether universities are too ensconced in colonial systems to truly value community-based knowledge, and he acknowledged that formal educational systems, such as universities, have historically devalued multiple forms of local knowledge and meaning-making. He asked, "Can the university really move beyond its inexorable ties to the cultures of expertise?" (Escobar, 2018, p. 233). While arguing for a decolonized approach to design, Escobar (2018) questioned whether those in the university can truly design and learn "within grassroots cultures" (p. 223). There is often a stark difference between what universities practice and what they preach. According to a Leading and Learning Initiative report written by Erica Kohl-Arenas and coauthors (2020), "Institutions often claim to value community-engaged, collaborative, diverse, social change, and equity-based work in their missions yet internally organize around the norms and structures that reward individualism, competition, prestige, assimilation, and the status quo" (p. 3). If our goals are to engage in co-creation (see the Co-creating Knowledge section in this chapter) in a research process that values multiple ways of knowing and being, then we must actively work to locate, integrate, and value those ways of knowing and being in our community-engaged partnerships.

In that light, the social justice turn must be accompanied by the decolonial turn in writing studies. Decolonial scholars work to "build a foundation, a history of local knowledges and meaning-making practices" while highlighting "the colonialist legacies that inform the management and control of knowledges and subjectivities in literacy, composition, and rhetoric curricula" (García & Baca, 2019, p. 3). Decolonial scholars focus on collaborative and place-based practices that honor plurality as it shifts power and perspectives away from an established colonial center. To do this work, we need better tools to use—better ways to understand and perform the co-construction of knowledge between community and university. As Walter D. Mignolo (2007) argued, "If knowledge is colonized, one of the tasks ahead is to decolonize knowledge" (p. 451). We must interrogate our acceptance of our widely held colonial modes of thinking as the default modes. This might entail finding new possibilities in our partnerships that do not continue to serve and reproduce further oppression. Along these lines, Angela M. Haas (2012) argued that "for decolonial ideologies to emerge, new rhetorics must be spoken, written, or otherwise delivered into existence (p. 287). Decolonial work seeks "to change the terms as well as the contents of knowledge production" (García & Baca, 2019, p. 15). Mignolo (2007) claimed that delinking "leads to decolonial epistemic shift and brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding, and consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics" (p. 453). As Romeo García and Damián Baca (2019) argued, "The dangerous and radical possibility of the decolonial turn is the fact of its foundation's being based on the stories, epistemologies, thoughts and feelings of the anthropoi" (p. 15)—that, is of local communities operating within local meaning-making frameworks.

Practicing decolonial methods alongside our students and community partners, we can continue to change the terms on which we do the work. As García and Baca (2019) argued, the decolonization of knowledge production and meaning-making also needs to be accompanied by the "prospective task of contributing to build a work in which many worlds could exist" (p. 23). This entails a commitment to "honor and uplift traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, Introduction section). When we understand our partner's stories of hope, survival, and resistance as a foundation for our partnerships in communities, we might begin to do the work of dismantling oppression while at the same time working toward more just and equitable futures in what García and Baca (2019) termed a "spirit of pluralversality, which imagines humanity in difference" (p. 23).

Projects with Emerging Media

When combined with a community-engaged, socially just pedagogy, the study of emerging media can connect writing students with a network of publics and counterpublics, including activist groups and grassroots organizations—some

of which may reside right in our own neighborhoods. Mathieu (2005) acknowledged that "by exploring and taking part in the public works of activists and writers in the streets, teachers and students of composition have much to learn and contribute to public discourse" (p. 28). The study of media in a community-writing context connects students with audiences and issues well beyond the classroom walls. In this book, the term "media" encompasses digital media, new media, multimedia, emerging media, and transmedia. Henry Jenkins has written prolifically about media education in the 21st-century and about fostering media literacies that focus on collaboration, networking, community, public voice, active participation, and democratic dialogue. These skills build on the foundations of traditional literacy that have traditionally been part of a literacy curriculum, such as research skills, technical skills, and critical analysis skills. In one publication, Jenkins and his co-authors (2016) observed that "we have seen an expansion of the communicative and organizational resources available to everyday people (and grassroots organizations) as we become more and more accustomed to using networked communications toward our collective interests" (p. 3).

A commitment to community building and civic action offers faculty and students opportunities to address immediate real-world issues right in our neighborhoods. When we view our work as a form of community-building, students and faculty can partner with communities to create new knowledge about communication practices and promote that knowledge transfer to school, workplace, and community contexts. The power of emerging media can be harnessed to suit the specific visions of communities, and we can use it as we work with our partners toward the social change that so many of us desire. This is a cultural shift, as well as a technological one. This is not just about the technology; it is about understanding the culture that emerging communication technologies enable—a culture of change-making.

Opportunities abound to work collaboratively with partners to understand how community writing teachers can employ emerging media to engage powerfully with communities, allies, stakeholders, and policymakers. We can accomplish this work in a range of academic courses, such as ones called

- community literacy
- decolonial studies
- design justice
- digital composition
- digital humanities
- digital publishing
- feminist media
- grant writing
- literacy activism
- multimedia writing

- nonprofit communication
- organizational writing
- professional writing
- public composition
- public rhetorics
- social media
- technical writing
- visual rhetorics
- web design
- writing in the public interest
- writing with communities
- writing studies

Although worthwhile, it is not necessary to have an entire course devoted to such work. A single hands-on project within a course can put theory into practice with a community partner. For example, in a technical writing course, a class project could create a social media campaign or a website for a nonprofit organization. Engaging in a media project with a community partner is a way to help organizations grow, making them even more effective at creating change in our communities. Community writing projects are a "power-up" for local organizations. Just as the Super Mushrooms in the Super Mario Bros. video game give players heightened powers, each community writing project amplifies an organization's goals and objectives by adding benefits and building capacities that were not there before. This process provides our community partners with the tools and strategies they are looking for to create a more effective, lasting change. Discussed next are three approaches to working with community partners on course projects that pursue social justice via emerging media.

Production-Oriented

When community partners build capacity with emerging media platforms and literacies, they can make a significant impact with modest resources—becoming more effective in their work and their reach as they challenge injustices and systemic inequalities. A production-oriented project is sometimes the most direct and immediate way to work with partners to create change. Some production-oriented media projects include

- producing materials for advocacy campaigns,
- developing and designing websites,
- creating graphics and logos,
- engaging in photography and visual storytelling,
- analyzing and visualizing data,

- writing and editing blog posts and newsletters,
- creating content and working with editorial calendars,
- filming and editing promotional videos,
- scripting and filming educational videos, or
- crafting event promotion materials.

Training-Oriented

A community writing project may involve hands-on media-based training at the partner's request —whether that be training in learning a new platform or training to better engage local audiences and discourse communities on platforms already in use. Students learning about emerging media can lead training sessions. They can also follow up with partners to reinforce the training since "those who make a practice of regularly producing and circulating their own media improve their skills and abilities over time" (Costanza-Chock, 2014, p. 198). Not only do media-based training-oriented projects offer community partners new technical and rhetorical skills, but also they provide new literacies that strengthen "awareness of ourselves as actors who have the ability to shape and transform the world, as well as of the structural (systemic) forces that stand in our way" (Costanza-Chock, 2014, p. 207). Some examples that could build capacity for communities might include

- providing a hands-on tutorial for a media platform such as WordPress or Squarespace,
- hosting a digital storytelling workshop where both community and university participate in the co-creation of knowledge, or
- demonstrating how to record interviews or podcasts.

Research-Oriented

Nonprofit and community-based organizations rely on strategic communication to create social change. When conducting media research with partners, student consultants consider practices in the field and conduct research to develop tailored recommendations and tactics to drive online engagement. While working through research-oriented projects, students learn useful platform-specific skills, including writing for and engaging communities online. Some examples of research-oriented projects include

- researching current practices and trends in digital media,
- strategizing with social media content,
- researching and writing for grants, or
- conducting a rhetorical media analysis.

Chapter 4 describes a variety of research-based media analysis projects. When

community partners build capacity with emerging media platforms and literacies, they can make a significant impact with modest resources—becoming more effective in their work and in their reach as they challenge injustices and systemic inequalities. Learning to leverage media platforms to advocate for and with local community organizations provides students a meaningful way to engage in community-building approaches that pursue social justice.

The Beautiful Social Research Collaborative

In the spring of 2010, during my first year as a tenure-track faculty member, I created a social media course for the new communication studies program at my institution, Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While speaking to an acquaintance who worked at the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), I mentioned that the course focused on studying the social web and how it could be used as a platform to manifest ethical action and civic engagement. Immediately, he asked if the students in the course would help him to understand how to use Facebook to support the message of the YMCA to a younger demographic. He said he didn't grasp the value of social media but knew he had to understand it to reach the nonprofit's audience. When I brought this request back to the students, the response was enthusiastic. Students stayed after class, discussing how they could collaborate with the YMCA to understand how social media could work with the organization in furthering its mission "to develop a healthy body, mind, and spirit." Having a full semester together to put theory into practice, students said that they wanted to ally with people and organizations who were trying to make a positive change in the world.

Motivated by the beautiful, social aspect of working side-by-side with partners who were driven to make transformative change, we embarked that day on a class project to understand how local nonprofits and cause-based organizations can harness the power of the social web to connect with their audiences and achieve their goals. That semester we took a team-based approach to working with the YMCA and the Rotary Club on social media strategies for Facebook and Twitter. We learned that the success of a community project takes everyone working together, researching, writing, editing, designing, and presenting. For detailed descriptions of collaborative team-based work, see Appendix B: Roles on Teams.

That semester, while learning (sometimes the hard way) about working with community partners, we began to see possibilities for the course project that could last long after the semester officially ended. To help control some of the logistical chaos involved with community-engaged research, I asked, what if there were a system to connect student media projects with organizations that wanted to grow and pursue research together? In response to that question, I founded the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative, a community-engaged writing program. In the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative (or B: Social as

students call it), students in upper-level courses lead media-rich research projects with local nonprofit and community-based organizations. Through strategic partnerships, organizations receive support (at no cost) on an issue they identify while students gain valuable experience putting theory into practice. Collaboration is the key to successful partnerships—"derived from the Latin cum (with) and laborare (to work), collaboration means the act of working alongside someone to achieve something" (Manzini, 2015, p. 83). Collaborative organizations "are social groups emerging in highly connected environments. Their members choose to collaborate to achieve specific results, and in doing so, they create social, economic, and environmental benefits" (Manzini, 2015, p. 83). I viewed the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative not only as a creative community of people working together but also as a system. I realized this system could be designed intentionally as a writing program that conducted useful research in communities. I turned to Grabill's (2010) work on outreach research in which he noted, "To think of writing programs as infrastructure for outreach and research is, in my view, to place writing programs in a new category within taxonomies of university programs" (p. 21).

Encouraged by the idea that "what a writing program does, therefore, helps determine what it is" (Grabill, 2010, p. 15), I began talking about and framing the collaborative, not as a simple class project but as a complex network (or institution, even) with multiple stakeholders, strategies, visions, beliefs, and even policies centered around our central ideas. Grabill (2010) has claimed that "entities that do high-quality outreach research are rare because they lack the ethos, the personnel, the opportunity, or the disciplinary and methodological freedom to inquire in these ways" (p. 27). I knew if I wanted to achieve the high-quality work that we were capable of in Greater Philadelphia, I had to embrace the "methodological freedom" that comes with starting a new kind of writing program at my institution. Grabill (2007) ended his book *Writing Community Change: Designing Technologies for Citizen Action* by stating, "Writing programs can be part of the very infrastructure that supports communities writing for change" (p. 124). I contemplated this ending as a possibility, as an experiment in writing program design.

Twelve years later, the program is at the center of a thriving department, one of the largest in the college of arts and sciences at my institution. When the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative is ready to set up new partnerships for the upcoming semester, we put out a public call through social media channels to request proposals from interested organizations (see Appendix C: Locating Community Partners for more details). We collaborate with various nonprofit and community-based organizations via a writing-intensive upper-division course for third- and fourth-year undergraduate students in our communication and media studies department. Students in the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative pursue answers to current community-driven questions regarding media practices. This community-engaged writing program was founded

on the premise that nonprofit and community-based organizations rely on strategic communication to create social change. The study of media (both new and old) can contribute to designing products for knowledge making and can support communities in communicating more effectively and persuasively.

The Beautiful Social Research Collaborative is a model of community-engaged writing that transforms classroom learning and ultimately teaches students how to become agents of social change by working alongside partners to tackle community-identified challenges. Students in this writing program have led with communities more than one hundred research projects free of charge in new media and social web consultancy, training, professional writing, social media management, online survey design, web design, and web-based video. In its first twelve years, we have

- advocated for people without housing and jobs, people who are disabled, who have been abused, who have a mental illness, who have a disease, who are injured, and who are hungry;
- built capacity within institutions to promote literacy, provide counseling, support job training, develop clean energy, and advocate child welfare;
- supported projects on behalf of prisoners seeking rehabilitation, veterans healing from combat-related disabilities, formerly incarcerated people navigating reentry, and neglected and abused children;
- campaigned to fund research to fight disease and provide medical services for cancer, diabetes, celiac disease, spinal cord injuries, heart disease, and Multiple Sclerosis;
- provided resources for local organizations to ensure safe shelter, medical care, clothing, school supplies, and healthy food to at-risk women and children;
- launched initiatives with community partners to bring books, toys, musical instruments, sports, urban parks, mindfulness training, after-school programs, technology, and summer camp into the lives of inner-city youth;
- researched emerging communication technologies to promote music, art, sculpture, nature, science, community theater, cross-cultural interaction, and peace and humanitarian initiatives;
- hosted public events to promote restorative justice, women's leadership, social entrepreneurship, and memorial fundraisers; and
- collaborated with over 100 community partners both locally in Greater Philadelphia and globally in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, The Gambia, Haiti, the United Kingdom, and throughout South America.

To view a complete list, please visit https://www.beautifulsocial.org/partners.

The Beautiful Social Research Collaborative embodies a long-standing commitment to working with community organizations to carry out projects that

advance and share knowledge about media and communication that have real-world impact. The driving force behind this collaborative is not just to achieve measurable impact or results on any given project (rewarding in its own right) but also to create mutually beneficial relationships with allies who are committed to creating just and equitable futures. This includes working with local organizations regarding their media and communication practices and other academic partners who wish to enact a culture of change making and community building at their respective institutions.

Case Study: Life After Life

This section offers a community partner project case study and illustrates our equity-based approach to writing and designing with communities. It highlights the situated local action and decision-making process that guides our work but that is often invisible from view.

In the fall semester of 2019, a student team at the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative partnered with the newly formed community-based organization Life After Life, which sought to develop a website to increase its digital presence. Life After Life is a community of formerly incarcerated men and women who were sentenced to a term of life in prison without the possibility of parole for involvement in a homicide as children. They had their sentences reduced due to the landmark Miller v. Alabama decision of 2012, in which the United States Supreme Court deemed mandatory life-without-parole sentences unconstitutional for defendants under eighteen. As an organization comprised of people directly affected by the Supreme Court decision, Life After Life wanted to build a website to support other life-sentenced children and returning citizens transition into society after spending decades in prison.

One of the most critical aspects of the community writing program is our face-to-face meetings with community partners. We met with Life After Life throughout the semester in a communications classroom on campus because the organization does not currently have a common meeting location. The classroom provided a flexible space with moveable tables and chairs and access to laptops and media equipment, including a screen and data projector, for the group's meetings and training sessions. For more insight and logistics into the meeting process, see Appendix D: Meeting With Community Partners.

Building Empathy

In the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative, we create a research context where positionality, power, and privilege are actively considered in order to build empathy. In the first week of class, we begin building toward empathy with an activity on positionality and oppression. This activity includes looking at how we are positioned (by ourselves, by others, by particular discourse com-

munities) in relation to multiple, relational social processes of difference (gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, education, ability, religion, nationality, sexuality) (details about this activity are in Appendix A: Positionality Activity). Doing this work means taking a critical look at how we are each positioned differently in hierarchies of power and privilege. This early work leads us into discussions about the role of positionality in the context of research ethics—especially how power dynamics flow through the research process and why it's our work to mindfully attend to our role in the contextual power interplay of the research process with community partners.

For this project, student group members needed to learn more about the history of juvenile incarceration and recent changes to the law to become better allies with members of Life After Life. In a blog post for the Juvenile Law Center, one of the organization's founders, Aaron Abd'Allah Lateef Phillips (2018), wrote that "there are others, like myself, who are full of promise and potential but void of opportunities to fully integrate into society" (para. 12). Throughout our conversations with Life After Life, and in-class reflections, some student group members were humbled to learn that their assumptions about formerly incarcerated people were misinformed. As one student admitted, "So often, people make the assumption that people who have been incarcerated have an awakening moment while in prison that ultimately empowers them to change their life around. I was one of those people." Instead, students learned that Life After Life argues that the potential for good was always there inside those who have been incarcerated and did not arise from time spent in the prison system, nor was it nurtured or protected in the environments in which those who became incarcerated grew up.

In getting to know this community group, it was apparent that empathy isn't always enough. We cannot always access empathy with our partners to the extent that we can truly understand their experiences and share their feelings. A few moments of insight cannot substitute for lived experience. Humility can serve us well in accessing compassion and empathy when working with our community partners. We need to hold courageous conversations, be vulnerable, experience discomfort, admit mistakes and wrong assumptions, acknowledge that we don't know. These are all ways of loosening those traditional, hierarchical power structures found in many traditional service-learning and community-engaged partnerships. Reflections are a time to consider events from a deeper perspective to better understand ourselves and our community partners. When students in this group openly acknowledged that they had been wrong in their initial assumptions about Life After Life regarding the potential for good, they made some headway. Empathy-building and reflective practices pave the way for collaborative learning and power-sharing in community partnerships. See Appendix E: Facilitating Reflection for both group and individual practices.

Framing Inquiry

The design (or research) question frames inquiry around the community-identified goal and works to structure the project. When Life After Life initiated this project, its goal was to build a website to develop its digital presence. As we started to frame inquiry around this goal, we began to understand the organization's vision. Framing inquiry around the project was a collective, back-and-forth process that emerged from in-depth conversations around access to technology, as pictured in Figure 3.1. After an initial meeting with Life After Life, it was clear that the organization wanted a website that was a "one-stop-shop" featuring

- blog posts that showcased personal stories and biographies of the members,
- press mentions and highlights of the group's members,
- podcasts/audio stories that featured personal stories and biographies of the members, and
- videos that featured personal stories and biographies of the members.

Moreover, via its website and social media, Life After Life wanted to recruit new members, provide resources and opportunities to support formerly incarcerated individuals, and advocate for policy change within the judicial system. After these initial discussions and some class activities on framing inquiry, we arrived at a design question that specifically stated the focus of the project: How might we support formerly life-sentenced children and advocate for policy change through storytelling via a WordPress website?

Figure 3.1. Framing Inquiry with Life After Life

Co-Creating Knowledge

When engaging in methods of collaborative knowledge production in the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative, we place emphasis and value on community-based knowledge. When working with Life After Life, framing inquiry helped to establish some direction for the project and allowed us to co-develop insights, identify opportunities, and better understand the underlying vision of the project. It became clear Life After Life could accomplish many of its goals for the project by emphasizing and sharing their collective knowledge and experience. It was clear that life experience was a strength and the source of passion. We realized this experience could be harnessed for good to mentor others who were navigating reentry and to support child-advocacy organizations and initiatives. After conducting media activities in class that focused on the organization's purpose, mission, and vision, we met with Life After Life to develop a more explicit mission statement and "about page" content for their website. This was a lengthy conversation that ultimately resulted in a more concise statement that outlined the goals of the organization:

> We . . . endeavor to use our collective voice and unique perspectives as former life-sentenced children in order to:
>
> 1. Enlighten policy-makers, stakeholders and the general public about the adverse consequences of imposing extremely lengthy sentences upon youthful offenders.
>
> 2. Engage with media outlets in order to profile stories of transformation, healing and redemption.
>
> 3. Support other child-advocacy organizations (and initiatives) that are headed by and/or informed by the collective wisdom gained from formerly incarcerated persons.
>
> 4. Develop innovative youth outreach and at-risk teen intervention strategies using our collective experience, influence and mentoring capacity in order to curb the epidemic of violence, drug abuse and bullying that is rampant within many high schools across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania–including restorative justice practices, community healing & restoration. (Life After Life, n.d., para. 2)

It can be beneficial to newly formed organizations to hold these kinds of mission-building conversations. While it is not necessarily our role to direct or lead the conversation, we can be engaged listeners and ask guiding questions to better hone in on the organization's mission and purpose as well as structure the conversation in a productive manner, especially when there are a multitude of voices and ideas at the table and meeting time is limited.

Re-searching

Research is refined by investigating methods that best inform the research or design question. With our design question in hand, we began to conduct research to create the website prototype for Life After Life. The student team conducted a comparative media analysis that examined mentor accounts to help our partner explore potential strategies and possibilities for the website (this analysis is described in the next chapter). The group collected and annotated a list of comparable websites with mission statements similar to Life After Life's that they shared in a presentation. The mentor accounts included

- The Innocence Project—a nonprofit organization dedicated to freeing innocent people who remain incarcerated and to providing support and reform around unjust imprisonment,
- DreamCorps Justice—a bipartisan organization that works to reduce crime and incarceration across all 50 states, and
- *The Incarcerated Children's Advocacy Network (ICAN)*—a group of formerly incarcerated adults who create positive change in their communities.

With our analysis of the tactics and effectiveness of the various mentor accounts, Life After Life was better able to articulate what they wanted from its own website, how it could be structured, and what it could look like. It also became more evident that the organization wanted a platform on which it could tell personal stories. Not everyone in the group, however, was comfortable with writing alphabetic text. We needed to make sure that podcasts and video could be incorporated into the site at a later date.

Composing and Recomposing

In composing and recomposing, we bring ideas to life through tangible means to create a draft or prototype. Midway through the semester, the B: Social team was ready to create a website prototype for Life After Life. A design persona activity served to guide the process of production. Some of the student team members had previously taken a course called "web design and development," a required course in our communication and media studies department. This web design course serves as an introduction to the theory and practice of web design. Students learn about web technologies and standards, responsive design, accessibility, and mobile technologies. They also code a multi-page portfolio website in HTML5. This background knowledge was useful to team members as they built the site. The team worked with Life After Life to purchase the domain name and set up the initial site. They used the fully hosted version of WordPress, WordPress.com, for ease of use and installation, and the prototype could be transferred to a self-hosted site later if desired.

The B: Social team chose a theme that worked with both WordPress.com and the self-hosted version of WordPress, WordPress.org, in case Life After Life even-

tually decided to transfer over to WordPress.org, which would give the organization more flexibility in how the site looks and functions. The Balasana theme the team chose to create the front-end styling of the page featured a clean and minimalist design. The team felt that a black and white color scheme depicted reality and set the tone for the documentary storytelling that the site would eventually feature. As Darren R. Reid (2015) wrote of his choice to use black and white film in a documentary movie, "It was as if a lack of colour served to create a semi-blank canvas onto which an audience could project emotion or sentiment" (para. 6). Students explained that the choice of a limited color palette would highlight Life After Life's stories and not overwhelm the site with unnecessary ornament.

Testing and Revision

We gather feedback about the prototype in the testing and revision phase and synthesize that feedback into insights for further refinement. When the website prototype was nearing completion, we met with Life After Life for site feedback and provided some training with the WordPress interface. The B: Social team walked the members of the organization through the existing pages, including the home page, about page, blog page, and contact page. The group discussed the goals of ultimately posting blog posts, press mentions, podcasts, videos, and biographies of the individuals involved. We also spent some time talking about how the "voice" of the organization was portrayed via the site and how Life After Life could connect with its audience by developing its collective voice. Since Life After Life wanted to reach different audiences and stakeholders via the site, the group wanted to create a cohesive voice across the board. After the discussion, everyone agreed that the site's voice needed to be serious (but not intimidating) while also friendly and inviting (but not too casual).

In the media training session that followed, B: Social worked with some of the members of Life After Life. In a hands-on demonstration, members learned the basics of navigating WordPress, including logging in, adding and editing media, and creating new pages and posts. The members of Life After Life were beginners to blogging and using digital media in general. The team used resources such as the website Nonprofit WP—The Start-to-Finish WordPress Guide for Nonprofits (https://nonprofitwp.org/) to talk through with Life After Life the process of content creation. We ended the feedback and training session to discuss how Life After Life would like our community-university partnership to move forward. Members of Life After Life talked about how they had been inspired by the film *It's a Hard Truth Ain't It*. They explained that the documentary is directed by thirteen incarcerated men and gives the audience an intimate look at their lives. In this film, the subjects interview each other and talk about their past and where they are now. Life After Life expressed great interest in creating a similar kind of film with an interview-in-the-round format. They also proposed an entirely different training workshop to learn how to use social media for advocacy work. We made a plan to continue working with Life

After Life on the interview-in-the-round video project the next year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this project was postponed.

Evaluating Capacity

Evaluating how the community has built capacity through the project is a shared endeavor between community and university partners. This project built capacity for Life After Life by developing a mission statement and creating a website. With these tools, the organization was better able to connect to a variety of stakeholders about its mission. A media training session also built capacity around basic blogging skills and connecting to the audience. Creating this website was the first step in a much larger project that speaks to developing a generative community-university relationship that spans multiple semesters. Students involved with Life After Life were engaged and profoundly impacted through the work. Three of the students involved in the project went on to take leadership roles within the Beautiful Social Research Collaborative as course mentors or fellows (students who lead group projects).

Phillips, the Life After Life founder who participated in this case study, responded to an evaluation survey at the end of the semester. He expressed that he had "nothing but the highest forms of commendation for the students who went above and beyond in their dedication to elevating the visibility and storytelling of former life-sentenced children." He said that the project "met their expectations and that the collaboration went extremely well." He indicated that he looked forward to continuing the partnership and "conducting in-person interviews, recording of a round-table discussion, and creation of b-roll for our video-based web content." Although the project was deemed successful in many ways, the project also had its challenges. Although the website is technically ready for the group's use, it has not been utilized by members of Life After Life (as of this writing). Clearly, sharing stories is not as simple as having a website. This brings to question issues around project sustainability. It is possible that more guidance and technology training is needed, including training for login and posting procedures, since members of Life After Life are not familiar with the WordPress platform and creating posts for a blog. The group mentioned that they would like to collaborate on storytelling facilitation to capture their personal stories for the website. Due to the pandemic, we have not yet been able to resume our partnership and build upon the work we began. Having an expansive view of our partnership relationship (beyond the scope of the semester) means that we have the time and space to continue working with Life After Life.

In Summer 2020, Stacey Torrance, a community member of Life After Life, initiated an off-shoot project with B: Social. In the 2021-22 academic year we collaborated with Torrance to launch the Free Mind Entrepreneur Network. This organization provides entrepreneurship resources for formerly incarcerated individuals. We worked with Torrance to create the logo, social media accounts, and

website for the organization. In a short amount of time, the former CEO of the NAACP Real Estate Division and Philadelphia's District Attorney has expressed interest in joining the organization's efforts to reduce recidivism, promote entrepreneurship, and showcase racial inequities in the prison system. By framing our research as a long-term process that builds community, we can work toward more profound, more sustainable long-term commitments.