# Expanding Theories of Educational Change in Family & Community-Led Designs

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## Abstract

In this paper, we share findings from Family Leadership Design Collaborative's (FLDC) multi-year work, which comprised 10 co-design collaboratives engaged in historicizing their experiences and imagining transformative possibilities for education together. Using knowledge and interaction analysis (e.g., diSessa, Levin, & Brown, 2015) we examined collaboratives' conceptual ecologies (Kelly & Green, 1998) to develop an empirical typology of collaboratives' theories of change (Tuck & Yang, 2018), or the broader aims and the who, what and how of their change-making conversations in community design circles, a first step of solidarity-driven codesign (Ishimaru et al., 2018). Across a diverse range of geographically, linguistically, and racially diverse families and communities, we intentionally rooted the design conversation in an initial set of principles in order to move beyond status quo problem-solving and open social dreaming spaces towards collective changemaking. We found: 1) a conceptual ecology of multiple theories of change both across contexts and within a given context; 2) systems-centric theories of change (premised on family deficiencies or institutional pragmatics) that constrained the dreaming of transformative possibilities; and 3) the increase of more expansive and transformative theories of change as the engagement was sustained and nurtured over time. We argue that sustained engagements that build politicized trust and the ability to grapple with tensions can deepen relational theorizing and enable groups to shape imaginative possibilities for pursuing and realizing change.

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Education has long played a central role in cultivating communal wellbeing across cultural communities and history (Smith, 2013). In particular, conceptions about the relationship between families and education profoundly shape what children learn, how they learn it and why they learn it. These intersections are historically saturated and inflected by power in ways that shape not only how we view education and families but also what is possible in efforts to produce just forms of education (Ishimaru & Bang, 2022a). Such dynamics have been made especially salient in the wake of a global pandemic, national (re)awakenings about anti-Black racism and xenophobia, and the devastating recovery of Indigenous children from Canadian (and other) residential boarding schools in the context of ongoing settler colonialism.

Despite these reminders, educational institutions often relate to families in ways that are untethered from nondominant communities' experiences, which constitutes a kind of genesis amnesia (Bourdieu, 1972/1977) of their own institutional histories. For example, the United States has a long history of both removing nonwhite children from their families and incarcerating families of color who are positioned as a threat (to white Americans or their interests). For centuries, Black children were stripped from their parent's arms and auctioned off as slaves. The U.S. government targeted Native American communities for generations with child-separation policies and incarcerated Japanese American families in World War II to force compliance and assimilation (Fryberg & Bang, 2018). Narratives of blame and deficiency about families and communities of color rationalize the separation of Latinx children from their parents as well as schooling practices that distance young people of color from their families and communities (Valenzuela, 2005).

While less overt than boarding schools or child-separation policies, many conventional family interactions with schools and "school readiness" efforts mirror these assimilative dynamics. For example many routine "family engagement" activities (e.g., open houses, parent-teacher conferences, parent trainings) often seek to compel nondominant families to adhere to settled, white normative expectations of "engagement" in support of the school's agenda (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). These narratives and relations require transformation in order to realize education that cultivates community wellbeing and justice, but many efforts to engage families more equitably have struggled to move beyond what Tilly (1998) refers to as "emulation," or institutional forms and practices that reinscribe inequities, often under the banner of inclusion and equity. For example, listening sessions have become a popular systems-based strategy for "engaging" family and community voices. However, these events often reinforce racialized power inequities when they position families as supplicants appealing to systems-based actors to provide resources, supports or more equitable decisions on their behalf. Further, these listening sessions often create the conditions for families to share the harms and traumas they have experienced in ways that preclude generative conversation about systemic transformation. Thus, we require new approaches and processes that deliberately disrupt and transform the underlying paradigm of assimilation and institutional control that permeate family-school relations.

As the field of family engagement continues to expand efforts and models towards racial equity and justice, we argue that solidarity driven co-design processes can be an important approach for creating spaces to develop knowledge, everyday practices, and relational leadership to envision and enact transformative possibilities for families and education beyond a school-centered, ahistoric paradigm. The Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC) is a national network of scholars, practitioners, and family and community leaders who have been working to develop family engagement that can contribute to family and community wellbeing and education justice. The collaborative proposed a core set of principles and commitments from which to engage in co-design that refuses instrumental partnerships motivated by interest convergence, whereby the interests of communities of color are only advanced when they align with the interests of whites (Bell, 1980). Instead, the FLDC evolved a set of what we call "solidarity-driven codesign" principles that seek to

premise partnerships on solidarities (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012; Vakil et al., 2016) that live in our relations with each other in collective struggles towards justice.

This paper continues the special 2-part section of the Journal of Family Diversity in Education. In Part 1, we framed the FLDC principles, context and process of partnering with codesign collaboratives across the country (Ishimaru & Bang, 2022a) and highlight the work of collaboratives in a predominantly immigrant community of Salt Lake City, Utah, and in a Persian school in Chicago, Illinois. In Part 2, we share codesign work led by Maisie Chin building Black and Brown parent solidarities in Los Angeles, a commentary by Muhammad Khalifa and Nimo Abdi, and a subsequent paper later this summer examines how an urban Indigenous community in Chicago sought to cultivate global Indigeneities and grow "good elders" in their codesign collaborative.

In this paper, we share findings from across all of these collaboratives as well as others to examine data from 10 FLDC co-design collaboratives as they engaged in historicizing their experiences and imagining transformative possibilities for education together. Using knowledge and interaction analysis (e.g., diSessa, Levin, & Brown, 2015) we examined collaboratives' conceptual ecologies (Kelly & Green, 1998) to develop empirical conceptualizations about their theories of change (Tuck & Yang, 2018), or the broader aims and the who, what and how of their change-making conversations in community design circles. Rooted in Indigenous research methodologies (Bang et al., 2016; Smith, 2013), community design circles are in-depth, reciprocal working groups with diverse stakeholders that aim to identify issues and collectively design solutions (Ishimaru et al., 2018). Across a diverse range of geographically, linguistically, and racially diverse families and communities, we identified key concepts and collective theories of change over time to address the following questions:

- What theories of change emerged from the collaborative codesign sessions rooted in expansive family and community ecologies?
- What were the trajectories of ideas and theorizing across co-design sessions?
- What are the implications for the practice of educational leaders who work with families and communities?

By intentionally rooting the design circles in an initial set of principles across contexts (described below and in more detail in Part 1 of the JFDE special section (Ishimaru & Bang, 2022a)), we sought to move beyond status quo problem-solving and begin instead from a place of social dreaming and collective changemaking. We hypothesized that such an approach might cultivate new and different ideas about what should change, who should be involved in changemaking, and by what mechanisms or processes changes might occur.

Moreover, we hypothesized that the deliberative practice of facilitation in co-design sessions rooted in these principles might cultivate particular rhetorical forms. Informed by the work of Scott Lyons (2000), these rhetorical forms reflect theories of change that have implications for constructions of agency and change making. Lyons (2000) articulated the concepts of "rhetorical sovereignty" and "rhetorical imperialism" in the contexts of examining what Indigenous peoples wanted from writing and narrative forms. He says: "Rhetorical sovereignty is the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and language of public discourse" (p.450). He further argues that rhetorical imperialism can be understood as "the ability of dominant powers to assert control of others by setting the terms of debate. These terms are often definitional—that is, they identify the parties discussed by describing them in certain ways" (p. 452). Lyons (2000) argues that the pursuit of rhetorical sovereignty for Indigenous peoples is "an attempt to revive not our past, but our possibilities" (p.450). Building with these ideas, an important question that gives rise to broader theories of change is who is constructed as having agency, on what terms and where change making is located and by whom - in short how are problems, opportunities, power and agency constructed in co-design?

Through an extensive analytic process, we found: 1) a conceptual ecology of multiple theories of change both across contexts and within a given context; 2) system-centric theories of change (premised on family deficiencies or institutional pragmatics) that constrained the dreaming of transformative possibilities; and 3) the increase of more expansive and transformative theories of change as relationships and conversations were sustained and nurtured over time. We argue that sustained engagements that build politicized trust (Vakil et al., 2016) and the ability to grapple with tensions can deepen relational theorizing and enable groups to hold multiple scales simultaneously to shape imaginative possibilities for pursuing and realizing change. We close with implications for educational leaders who seek to partner with nondominant families and communities and suggest areas for further research, including attention to the broader sociopolitical contexts and grounding assumptions that may shape local theorizing and relations in co-design.

## Racialized School-Centric Logics of Nondominant Family Engagement in Education

Though invariably well intended, efforts to consider equity in school-based family engagement often take the form of systems-based educators making minor adjustments amidst a relatively unchanging backdrop of conventional parent involvement activities, like PTA meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and calls home for trouble (Terriquez, 2011). For instance, language translation, childcare provision, new liaison roles, relationship-building efforts like home visits, and more welcoming environments are important departures from conventional approaches (Ishimaru et al., 2018). However, many of these efforts towards "incremental inclusion" (Patel, 2017) do little to interrogate school-based agendas, hierarchical power paradigms, or the underlying systemic assumptions about the racialized roles of parents, families, and communities at the margins of teaching and learning. Color-evasive, individualistic approaches to helping parents "navigate" or "advocate" for their own child still persist (Olivos, 2096; Warren et al., 2009). Such efforts reinforce the notion that "merit" alone accounts for success and mask a systemic dynamic that implicates individual parents when students do not perform school expectations. Such approaches fall short of fundamentally questioning and shifting powered notions of "what counts," whether as family engagement, "good" parenting, or as desired outcomes for young people (Valdez, 1996).

The school-centric determinations that *some* kinds of engagement count (e.g., attending PTA meetings) and others do not (e.g., teaching through cultural stories at home) are normed on a set of expectations of white, middle class (heterosexual, English-speaking, Christian, nondisabled, two-biological-parent) families (Auerbach, 2007; Baquedano-López et al., 2013). By exclusion, then, these determinations implicate students, parents, and families who do not conform to those expectations as deficient or problematic. Not coincidentally, these judgments are typically rendered in racialized terms by mostly-white educators or administrators in ways that limit opportunities for racially minoritized students and their learning (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

These consequential racialized assumptions function as a set of institutionalized logics and scripts in schools that govern what seem like "common sense" ways for schools and families to interact, but they are rooted in historically-based power inequities and institutionalized whiteness (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). As Cheryl Harris (1993) has demonstrated, the meaning and substance of race has changed over time, but "what persists is the expectation of white-controlled institutions in the continued right to determine meaning – the reified privilege of power – that reconstitutes the property interest in whiteness in contemporary form" (p. 1762). That is, as white-controlled institutions, schools maintain the right to arbitrate what behaviors and norms constitute "good" parenting or "positive" engagement and what settled ends "count" as success. For instance, the

expectation that parents should be deferent to the school's agenda and reinforce school discipline expectations at home can function as subtle forms of assimilation and control that derive from historical precedents and reinforce the powered status quo of racial inequities.

These expectations and norms are so deeply rooted in the institutional logics of formal schools, nondominant families rarely have opportunities to participate in shaping teaching and learning beyond providing support at home and narrowly structured avenues for "input" and "feedback" (such as family surveys or public comments on decisions, which reinforce educators as the ultimate decision-makers). Even educators and formal leaders who see themselves as engaged in broader educational justice projects often position themselves as advocates *for* minoritized students and families and lead improvement that excludes the expertise of youth, families and communities themselves (Ishimaru, 2020).

To disrupt the default to incremental inclusion (Patel, 2017) and the racialized assumptions that predetermine role-based interactions (for instance, between teachers and parents), a growing number of educational scholars have found participatory design processes can invite families, communities and educators into social dreaming (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2008) and reimagining teaching and learning in ways that re-mediate relationships and work to re-establish the epistemic authority of families (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Booker & Goldman, 2016). We turn next to a brief overview of participatory design research and the particular design principles evolved by the Family Leadership Design Collaborative as starting points for disrupting and transforming not only the entrenched dynamics of family-school relations but also the racial injustices and settler colonial logics that permeate schools.

## Participatory Design Research and Solidarity-driven Codesign Principles

*Solidarity-driven codesign* is an approach to participatory design research that brings together diverse stakeholders in order to collectively and iteratively identify issues, problems or possibilities of practice and to design change. Participatory design with (not for) youth, families and communities has deep roots in Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies, in nondominant community practices and in community-based design research (Bang et al., 2016; Brayboy, 2005; Kovach, 2010; Patel, 2015; Smith, 2013), as well as community-engaged scholarship (Anyon, 2009; Oakes et al., 2006; Warren et al., 2016). Solidarity-driven codesign emerged from the work of the Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC), a national, transdisciplinary collaborative of family and community leaders, educators and researchers who center racial equity in family engagement. During the first phase of FLDC, over 40 scholars, practitioners, and community leaders convened to identify an initial research and practice agenda shaped by a set of core principles to guide our collective work together (which we have elaborated elsewhere, see Ishimaru et al., 2018; Ishimaru & Bang, 2022a). Within broader aims of community-defined educational justice and collective wellbeing, solidarity-driven codesign seeks to:

Begin with family and community ecologies;
Refuse and disrupt dominant power dynamics;
Enact solidarities in collective change-making; and
Cultivate ongoing transformative possibilities

Through a series of engagements with and in different nondominant communities, we catalyzed a *solidarity-driven* process of partnering to disrupt historically-rooted power and normative institutionally-driven agendas but also to make decisions and design educational practices and tools throughout the research process in ways that build solidarities in the moment as well as over time (for a more complete elaboration of solidarity-driven codesign, see Ishimaru & Bang, 2022b). One

distinguishing feature of solidarity-driven codesign is its emphasis on *both* relational process *and* product, or foregrounding *subject-subject* relations in ways that implicate *subject-object* relations in cultural historical activity theory terms (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). That is, whereas some approaches to codesign emphasize the end product as the predominant focus of activity, solidarity-driven codesign sessions seek to examine and develop participants' relationships, interactions, and evolving shared understandings and tensions in *tandem* with attention to the focal aim or outcome. For example, this might mean attending to and intervening in the powered interactions between parents and teachers as they seek to collaborate in developing a curriculum. Such an approach posits that the end product (such as a curriculum) will be shaped in consequential ways by the relationships and process of partnering between participants with different roles, expertise, and knowledge. Disrupting historically-based dominant power in codesign necessitates making visible the political and theoretical histories of a particular project, including the personal histories of researchers and participants alike, to unearth the values, goals, and outcomes in order to disrupt inequitable partnerships and re-imagine transformative possibilities (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Vakil et al., 2016). As part of the process, then, roles (e.g. researcher, parent, educators) become porous categories that create space for expansive and multidimensional identities. As we have described elsewhere in more detail (see Ishimaru & Bang, 2022b), when codesigners bring their multiple identities to codesign processes (for instance, researchers bring in their roles as parents and members of particular cultural communities), broader understandings and possible solutions often emerge.

## Theories of Change in Conceptual Contexts

Solidarity-driven codesigns seek to cultivate community dreaming and decision-making while prefiguring the agency, solidarity, and justice making that we seek as an additional outcome of the process (Cole, 1998; Ishimaru & Bang, 2022b). An initial practice of solidarity-driven codesign invites families, educators and researchers to dream expansively about an elsewhere to the current state that births new possibilities that are not in response to or reactive of oppression, but actively seeking wellbeing and justice. The time and space to dream possible futures beyond the status quo are key in solidarity-driven codesign; without this intentionality, the readily-available solutions often reflect – and reinforce – settled expectations of systems.  More specifically solidarity-driven codesign orients design decisions towards collective wellbeing while wrestling with the complexities of socially constructed and historically infused power dynamics. Situated in particular histories and sociopolitical contexts, collaboratives' iterative conversations about community-specific definitions of educational justice and collective change-making built a collective conceptual ecology of knowledge (Kelly & Green, 1998). Conceptual ecologies are fundamental to human activity. People coordinate meaning and activity through shared understandings - and often the breakdown of shared meanings and activity can be connected to the lack of a shared ecology.

By starting from a place of social dreaming and collective changemaking, we hypothesized that participants might develop new and different shared ideas about what and who should change, who should be involved in changemaking and in what roles, and by what mechanisms or processes changes might occur. These conceptualizations offer insights into the consequential implicit and explicit theories of change (TOC) held by a collective (Tuck & Yang, 2018). Though not actions or solutions in themselves, theories of change are consequential for making sense of problems and strategies for realizing particular envisioned change. Such TOCs are crucial to attend to because the history of educational reform highlights a core repeating contradiction in the field: the jump to action with little interrogation about the underlying assumptions about what the action is intended to accomplish towards what ends. In the context of families and racial equity in education, a sense of urgency can

entail a rush to action that defaults to existing repertoires of actions, reforms, and solutions. Such "solutions on demand" (Martin, 2015) can embed dominant logics and assumptions that merely emulate or adapt to inequity (Tilly, 1998). For example, families of color can be socialized to "ask for the crumbs" instead of the "whole cake" because their dreams for their children have been enclosed by what they can imagine the system will grant them (Escalera, personal communication, April, 2021). Likewise, migrant youth can internalize racialized neoliberal logics about learning English as an indicator of belonging and life success (Rodriguez, 2020).

Thus, to explore how collaboratives' theories of change might evolve, we invited FLDC partners to deliberately design circles around solidarity-driven principles to interrogate the racialized histories of participants' lived educational experiences, challenges, and opportunities and to invite participants to imagine future transformative possibilities *beyond* the system as it is or as they had been socialized to expect it to concede. Our presumption was not that any singular theory of change was better or more just; indeed, we suspect the ability to hold and enact multiple theories of change simultaneously may be an indicator of a collective's complex systems thinking capacity, even if dimensions of said theories may be in tension (Tuck & Yang, 2018). We argue that change-making efforts that seek to live solidarities through the process necessitate intentionality about the logics and assumptions that underlie our theories of change. Thus, our findings offer an ecosystem of theories of change, how the terms of engagement embedded in those theories differed in consequential ways, and how they changed over time; collectively these insights offer a broader framework for how we might map the TOCs that emerge from family, community and educator deliberations about educational justice and community wellbeing.

## Methods

### Context

From the fall of 2016 through the summer of 2017, we engaged 10 family and community codesign collaboratives (collaboratives) in a series of community design circles (DCs), or in-depth reciprocal work groups. These collaboratives engaged in 3 to 5 design circles over a span of weeks or months to identify injustices and issues as well as co-design potential solutions towards education justice and community wellbeing. Across the 10 collaboratives, Indigenous, Latinx, African American, Asian American, and other nondominant families and community members joined researchers and in some cases, professional educators and systems-based administrators, in social dreaming (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2008) and collective changemaking to explore what transformative change might look like and how it might be brought about in education. The participating collaboratives emerged from the invited network of family, community, scholarly, and practitioner leaders in the field who first comprised the FLDC network, and included sites in: Central Falls (Rhode Island), Chicago (one in an urban Indigenous community, another in a Persian school, Illinois), Detroit (Michigan), Greenville (Mississippi), Los Angeles (California), Salt Lake City (Utah), Salem (Oregon), Seattle (Washington), and Southfield (Michigan). See Appendix A online for a full summary of each collaborative, their central aims, and the codesign partners.

Building from the solidarity-driven codesign principles elaborated by the broader FLDC, each of the community collaboratives worked to engage stories, experiences, and expertise within their communities to imagine what educational justice and wellbeing meant and how they might take it up for themselves within their particular context. Given the broad range of geographies, racial, cultural, socioeconomic and political contexts, each collaborative built from common approaches to design *different* practices, programs, or tools to support their efforts, but they all worked to co-design towards educational justice and community wellbeing.

To be clear, these initial design circles were intended to catalyze new ideas, different relationships, and next phases of work, not transform systems or accomplish educational justice in and of themselves. They did, however, either put new efforts in motion or provide the space and time to take existing work to a different level. For instance, in Chicago, members of diverse urban Indigenous communities envisioned a series of community-based intergenerational cultural learning activities aimed at "raising good elders." In Los Angeles, parent leaders and researchers designed in-the-moment interventions to humanize racialized parent-teacher interactions around discipline and build solidarity between Latinx and African American parents. In West Salt Lake City, Utah, the team developed parent and administrator materials for strengthening the role of families in school-based decision-making councils. Seattle-based community leaders designed facilitative practices for cross-racial coalition work. In Detroit, community organizers worked with researchers to develop an action research guide for youth and community organizers (more in-depth examinations of particular codesign projects can be found in Kuttner et al., 2022; Vossoughi, 2022; Chin et al. 2023); and Bang et al. (forthcoming) across the linked special sections in this journal as well as on the FLDC website: https://familydesigncollab.org/).

**Data Collection**

The design circle sessions were audio recorded and transcribed to produce a total of 40 transcripts (each ranging from 1.5-4 hours), which were all in English except for those from four collaboratives (which were in Farsi, Spanish, and a mix of Toishanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, all of which were translated into English for analyses). We also conducted interviews with facilitators before and after design circles to better understand multiple forms of community wellbeing and education justice and how those notions were manifesting in local context through codesign. This preliminary analysis was used as a framework for developing community-defined practices for partnership and decision-making that we enacted in partnership with the collaboratives in the subsequent phase of the project.

*Data Analyses*

Our university-based research team partnered with the local family and community design collaboratives to analyze the data both within and across design circle sessions to identify key concepts and theories of change that reflected the ideas and strategies that emerged from this co-design process. Following the precept of conducting research *with* families and communities rather than *on* them, we iteratively analyzed our data in five phases: 1) we first discussed transcripts, fieldnotes, and artifacts from each session with each set of site-based collaborative partners to inform next steps in the co-design process itself; 2) we subsequently revisited and analyzed transcripts to write analytic memos and develop our criteria and initial coding schemes; (3) we systematically coded all session transcripts and partner analysis conversations; 4) we analyzed the coded data to develop initial findings with site-specific collaborative members; 5) we re-coded our full data set using refined codes to finalize themes and consolidate findings with site-specific collaboratives and FLDC members more broadly. We elaborate each phase briefly below with examples.

The *first phase* of analysis with community design circles occurred during the design and redesign process that we engaged in with each site to make sense of emerging conceptual and relational themes and shape subsequent sessions. In previous work (Ishimaru et al., 2018; FLDC, 2017), we detailed how we attended to and redesigned in ways that would enact these iterative design practices; here we discuss how this in-situ reflection contributed to emerging thematic analysis. As aligned with the participatory design methodologies referenced above, this analytic process opened space for designers to make sense of their own data. In this phase, researchers (from the university team and from each site) read transcripts and sometimes fieldnotes then wrote brief memos to capture both relational dynamics and conceptual themes that emerged during these design circles. For example, in

the Chicago Global Indigenous Collaborative, themes during the first circle included historical trauma, Indigenous erasure both in formal school contexts and in society more broadly, intergenerational learning, and continuities or (dis)similarities within and across Indigenous peoples globally. We reflected on how this activity afforded a wide range of topics to emerge, but conversation often dwelt in "problems" or injustices. In reflecting on the data, codesigners sought to facilitate the second design circle in ways that would honor these conversations about educational injustices while also drawing out possibilities and social dreams. The researchers also used these initial memos to identify themes across the range of geographically, linguistically, and contextually distinct sites.

In the *second* phase of analyses, led and conducted primarily by the university-based research team (led by the authors and including additional graduate students over the years[1]), we analyzed transcripts and wrote analytic memos within and across sites to develop criteria and an initial coding scheme, engaging in an extensive process of developing a team codebook (Guest, 2008). We examined 1430 excerpts through multiple iterations and eventually honed the codebook to 16 codes. Of the total excerpts, 345 excerpts included theories of change. We also undertook iterative coding of a small number of the same transcripts (across different sites) to build inter-rater reliability across the team. We subsequently systematically coded all the data in the *third phase* of analysis using this team codebook. Finally, in the *fourth* phase, we worked with site-specific collaborative members to develop emergent claims about the conceptual ecologies and theories of change we observed emerging across tine in their design circles. We shared emergent claims with sites in the form of conceptual ecology briefs that highlighted each collaborative's top five themes and emerging theories of change. We used our conversations about the briefs as a way to refine, change, and further our sense-making with codesigners in the local collaboratives. Finally, in our *fifth* phase, we analyzed both within and across sites to elaborate a set of 16 emergent theories of change across the data corps. We then consolidated codes based on noticing conceptual "families" of theories that cohered, which we shared with the full FLDC collaborative (which included both local collaboratives and other members of the network who did not conduct design circles). Our subsequent refinements in response to FLDC feedback and engagement are reflected in our findings.

Consistent with participatory design methods, our research team of two PIs, one post-doctoral researcher and 2-4 doctoral research assistants participated in the sense-making and planning of the codesign sessions at different levels, depending on the site. In addition, a member of our core research team was present for at least one session for each of the 10 design circles, with the exception of the Persian school (which was conducted in Farsi). All but two of the partnering FLDC researchers and all of the codesign collaboratives identified as Black, Indigenous, Latinx or Asian American or other racially minoritized identities; all the members of our core research team identified as Indigenous, Asian American, or Latinx researchers, with four of us identifying as parents of color; We sought, through our support, analytic participation, and subsequent analyses, to cultivate an ethic of answerability (Patel, 2014) with and to the communities, learning, and knowledge we witnessed and supported. In a subsequent phase of the work, we worked with a subset of four collaboratives who went on to conduct deeper codesign work that evolved from these circles.

## Findings

Across a broad range of contexts, participants and approaches, our analyses of the community design circles highlighted multiple conceptions of the implicit aims and notions of what, who and how

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[1] Thanks to additional graduate student research assistants across FLDC phases, including Dr. Amber Banks, Karen O'Reilly-Diaz, Henadina Tavares, Mario Guerra, Katherine Chang, and graduate students at the University of Utah and UCLA/CADRE collaboratives.

change would achieve those aims. Notably, these multiple theories of change existed *within* each design circle and sustained across time, though the kinds of theories discussed also collectively evolved over time. First, we found that even when considered in light of organizational histories focused on singular theories of change (for example, organizing campaigns focused on policy wins or school engagement focused on individual parent support), design circles opened space for participants to articulate and grapple with *multiple* theories of change simultaneously, suggesting a refusal of universals or singular narratives that often drive change-making. Second, we found important differences in how theories of change shaped the kinds of educational change that were considered and imagined. More specifically, we found that systems-centered theories of change – such as deficit orientations towards families as well as change making efforts driven by incremental reforms or institutional pragmatics – constrained imaginative and transformative change. Finally, while most of the design circles took up deficit orientations or systems-centered logics at some point, we found that *sustained* engagement over time enabled a marked shift in collaboratives' conceptualizations towards theories that reached beyond the current system towards imagining and enacting transformative possibilities for community-determined justice and wellbeing. Collectively, our findings suggest that solidarity-driven design practices, even across dramatically distinct geographies, racial-historical contexts, can cultivate transformative visions and aims beyond the existing system in ways that contrast with more normative family engagements, such as "listening sessions" or research "focus groups," that can constrain or enclose possibilities, even as they seek to center family and community "voice."

## 1. Resisting Universals towards Multiple Theories of Change

As designers considered their own lived experiences, community histories and conceptions of the problems at the intersection of nondominant families, justice and wellbeing, their discussions engaged hypothetical causal relationships both within and outside of formal systems. Four "families" of theories of change emerged across their discussions: 1) Improving parent capacity; 2) Within-systems change; 3) Reclaiming systems; 4) Solidarity-dreaming. Over time, each design site critically took up (meaning it was more than a single mention) at least three theories of change (TOC) at different scales and towards different hypothetical aims. To be clear, the theories that emerged focused not on the actions pursued by the participants but on what participants talked about and *conceptually co-constructed* through their sustained dialogue with one another.

Although it may be tempting to read the four groups of theories as a hierarchical, linear or evaluative framework, we share them as a descriptive and overlapping ecology (which is imperfectly represented by Figure 1). Though the different "families" of related theories do layer in envisioning increasingly expansive aims, a key aspect of this first finding is that every site conceptualized *multiple* theories of change across this overlapping ecology. We discuss briefly below each theory of change family with examples, referencing Fig. 1, which illustrates the overall distribution of the grouped theories of change across all the design circles (see Appendix B online for the codes that comprise each family). In our second finding, we further unpack the undergirding assumptions and stances that shape and distinguish the four theories of change "families" and elaborate how the logics shaped social imaginaries across diverse communities. We examine the trajectories of deliberations over time in our third finding.
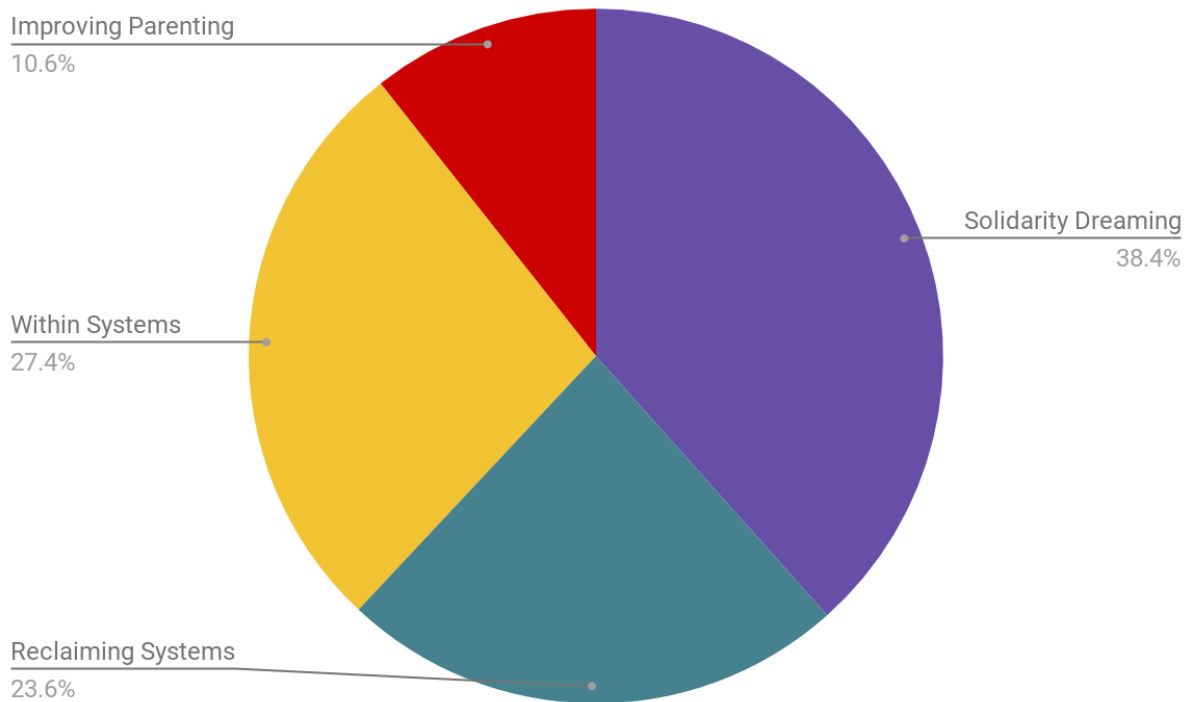
Figure 1. Distribution of theory of change "families"

***Improving Parent Capacity Theories of Change***

First, although quantitatively the group of theories that emerged least across sites, efforts focused on **improving parent capacity** to educate their children relied on dominant deficit-based conceptions of the problem as rooted in nondominant parents and families themselves (depicted in red, 10.6%). In this TOC, participants talked about nondominant parents as lacking capacities to parent their children well, sometimes in terms of meeting their basic needs and generally as defined by white normative standards. For example, in one site, a participant reframed multigenerational "stair step" families (with many children) as "homeless," as part of a rationale for the need for better financial supports for families. We also grouped here conversations about the need for existing services or agencies to be better coordinated in order to compensate for the multiple ways that parents or families struggled.

Despite the explicit focus on centering the priorities and practices of nondominant families in the design circles, some participants still envisioned solutions focused on "fixing" families or compensating for what participants saw as families' inherent short-comings. For example, an immigrant mother in one design session implied that uninvolved parents were the problem: "I know a lady who never comes to her son's conferences. She only knows that her son goes to school, she does not [know] the teachers, she has never gone anywhere. She doesn't even know the people when she goes to register him." This parent's narrative echoes a long-standing racialized assumption in both research and practice that implies that "uninvolved" parents do not care about their children's education (as evidence by their lack of information and presence at the school) and are therefore to blame if their children do not succeed in school (Ishimaru, 2020; López et al., 2001).

Importantly, though, discussions about improving parent capacity were not always raised in a way that reinforced dominant deficit-based narratives or implied blame. In some circles, participants also referenced a narrow institutional focus on improving parent capacity as a *source* of their own

conflicted historical experiences of school-based engagement (for instance, parent referenced trainings that presumed they did not value education). Moreover, the need to improve parenting capacity also came up in design circles grappling with the broader sociopolitical contexts that shaped their lives. For instance, during the Trump administration's "Muslim ban," parents in the Persian design circle grappled with how to raise their children and help them to navigate their identities amidst the increasingly hostile Islamophobic contexts their families were experiencing. Similarly, after the 2016 election, Latinx families in the Salem design circle grappled with their own parenting roles and responsibilities when their children were experiencing race-based bullying at school or were fearful that they might be separated from their children by immigration authorities. We address these dynamics in our conclusion.

*Within-Systems Theories of Change*

A related but distinct set of theories of change invoked by design circle participants focused on **within-systems change** (yellow, 27.4%)**,** which included strategies for working within the existing structures and paradigm of formal schooling, such as opening access, increasing representation, and aligning interests between families and educators. This theory of change was frequently invoked alongside improving parent capacity, but was present in every single site. The theories about opening access and increasing representation emphasized the need for decision-making to account for power and cultural dynamics in schools that tend to exclude families from participating in existing systems processes and decision-making bodies. For example, in Salt Lake City, codesigners talked about the process determining which parents would be represented on each school's budget-allocating School Community Council, noting that especially for immigrant families coming into new schools, the current election process excluded many parents:

> You're not asking me as a parent . . .You're just asking the [same] old school folks that are there. I think that, as parents, it's our position to say, "Hey wait a minute. You didn't get that vote from me." That's what's hard for us, or our parents, that we're not willing to get political because politics scare us. . . Well, my people are not comfortable with politics for many obvious reasons. That's the thing, is we [need to] stand up and we say, "No, no, no, no. Hold on. You got half of our kids that are still here, or coming in, so we should have a voice!"

In this case, parents are arguing for the need to expand participation in the councils and include the votes of immigrant Latinx families in decision-making.

The theories of change grouped together in this category were distinct from those in the improving parent capacity theories in that they were more focused on navigating the American educational system and leveraging power for change within it (whereas the prior set of theories emphasized remediating deficits in parents). Within-systems theories of change often had underlying assimilative assumptions that were not considered to be something to disrupt; that is, the need for families to assimilate to the aims, expectations, and normative interactions in formal schooling was taken as a given, a dynamic that often emerged in immigrant contexts. Training and education for educators also fell in this group, with the notion that educators need to shift their deficit-based perspectives of "our kids [as] the most problematic" (Los Angeles DC#1), and learn to better understand and engage with families. According to this theory, educators with better training and understanding of nondominant families would recognize and honor families and communities as supporters of their children in achieving systems-defined academic success, such as regular school attendance, homework completion, good grades, and academic achievement.

*Reclaiming Systems Theories of Change*

The third "family" of theories of change that emerged across design circles and sites were those focused on **reclaiming educational systems** (green, 26.3%). This group of theories of change sought to reshape the settled roles of families and educators, change the discourses or understandings of the issues and problems, and socialize young people in ways that instilled pride in their cultures while protecting them from systemic harm. We also included theories of change that emphasized the need for community-based organizations to build the advocacy and power of parents and families to demand and model change in schools on their terms, rather than simply increasing access to the system as it is. Collaboratives grounded in an explicit power analysis often took up this theory of change in tandem with others.

Theories of change in this "family" also focused on reshaping conceptions of the problem and potential solutions, exploring ways to move beyond simplistic roles (such as parent, teacher, principal) towards more fluid and multiple identities and relations. For example, families envisioned themselves not only as advocates and change-makers in the system in these narratives, but also as teachers, protectors and socializers of children, especially in addressing racialized or Islamophobic (in the case of the Persian school) harm. Moreover, they imagined reclaiming educational systems to support their children's cultural identities and perspectives:

> [h]ow about we give the right to the children to learn about [their religion and culture]? Give the right to them to have an opinion too. Yeah of course the public library [is] next door, but the school is where they spend their day. So if they are going to learn about Western culture, then, they should be equal. You know what I'm saying? That would be a great advancement in curriculum [to learn about Middle Eastern culture and history], not just for my child but for other children. (parent, Iranian school DC #3).

Thus, theories of change aimed at reclaiming systems sought to reshape status quo approaches to education and explicitly challenged the dominant norms and assumptions of schooling.

### *Solidarity-Dreaming Theories of Change*

Finally, we refer to the remaining family of theories of change as **solidarity dreaming** TOCs (purple in Figure A, 38.4% of the coded segments). As Alma, a Latina parent leader from Salt Lake City, said at a convening, "How can I think about reclaiming a system that was never mine?" This group of TOCs decentered the system entirely and focused on community and culturally-based forms of learning and education as a central resource or starting point for reimagining or making education anew. Codesigners talked about creating or maintaining space and time for reimagining education, humanizing each other, revitalizing and evolving cultural and community practices of education, growing kinship relations across roles and communities, and healing in communities. Particularly in the Chicago Global Indigenous Collaborative, codesigners reflected that healing was a critical component of evolving practices and reclaiming traditional forms of learning and decision-making in the wake of settler colonialism.

> Debra: Yeah, and just going back to where I feel and what one of the things that I was going to suggest, I mean, you have family well-being, but I think community well-being is important, and that is that building strong community, but building strong communities so that we get to a place where we have community well-being. Right now, when it feels so fragmented, that trickles down, and it fragments everything else, so what is it that we can do to create community well-being? ... I think once we have that, and we have a strong community foundation, then we can tackle these other areas, and I think we'd have a much stronger force in changing the system, or bettering education for our families, or for our kids, and creating educational justice ...

Vincent: ...To start building the family groups, just start putting salve on those fractures and helping families be okay with differences and able to celebrate each other's differences, because I know, just in my own family, I'm talking my brothers and sisters, we've had a lot of years disagreeing with each other and knocking our heads in how to deal with that disagreement. How to live with it, how to love each other through disagreeing with each other, and how does that affect our kids in how they relate with each other? We've seen differences in how they react with each other, because they grow up repeating what we ... the negative vomit that comes out..." (Chicago Global Indigeneity Design Circle #4)

In this case, co-designers discussed the healing that individuals or families must do both individually and as a collective in order to reclaim and evolve practices over generations to foster community well-being. Thus, theories of change grouped together as solidarity-dreaming theories grew from Indigenous, Black, Latinx and Asian American family and community histories and ecologies and their visions of healing, well-being, cultural revitalization, kinship, and humanizing relations (not status quo systems or settler colonial white supremacist institutions). Such solidarity dreams were premised on different onto-epistemological and even axiological grounds than those of dominant systems, which are motivated by individualism, neoliberal racial capitalism, and modernity (de Oliveira Andreotti et al, 2015). The circles that took up these theories of change moved beyond existing systems and institutions as a starting premise and sought to (re)imagine educative possibilities from "otherwise" futures (King et al., 2020).

### *The Significance of Multiple Theories of Change*

In sum, it comes as little surprise that different communities envisioned different notions of change and ways to achieve it, but given the normative drive towards singularities and either-or absolutes in both society and in schools, we call attention to the multiplicities that exist *within* a given community or context. That is, across the 10 design circles in vastly different geographies and communities across the U.S., participants resisted universals and singular theories of change with regard to educating their children and realizing justice and wellbeing in their communities. This stands in marked contrast to the dominant systems-based approach to families, which presumes a singular (white, middle class, heteronormative) set of behaviors, activities, attitudes, and interactions lead to individualistic student academic success. Scholars have long decried "silver bullet" solutions to educational inequities, yet singular theories of change continue to dominate the education reform landscape in the pandemic era, from remediating so-called learning loss to socioemotional learning. Despite trending district strategies, though, families, communities and educators across our design circles theorized multiple theories of change simultaneously to address complex, historically-rooted legacies of colonialism and racial oppression in education.

## 2. System-centric Theories of Change Reproduced Normative Power and Constrained Imaginative and Transformative Change

Although codesigners across contexts took up multiple theories of change across time, their conceptualizations were not equally distributed across the different groups of theories; rather, they differed in crucial ways in their "terms of engagement," or the explicit and implicit defining of who and what needs changing as the object of focus in co-design. These terms of engagement are constituted in a variety of ways in the theory of change "families" and shape the conceptual and imaginative space for educational change. We see this as aligned with Lyons' (2000) idea of rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical imperialism. That is, the four families of theories of change hold important distinctions about where and with whom power and agency - where change can be made - are located. For instance, theories of change about building parent capacity aligned with rhetorical imperialism in

reflecting systems-defined notions about parent deficits as the primary problem to address. To make these distinctions clearer, we collapsed our data into two categories: systems-centered logics, which resonate with rhetorical imperialism, and family/community-centered logics, which resonate with rhetorical sovereignty. Systems-centered logics include the parent capacity-building and within-systems theories of change. Family/community-centered logics included our reclaiming systems theories of change and solidarity-dreaming theories of change.

In our analysis, as illustrated in Figure 2, we found design circles that engaged in systems-centered logics driven by deficit-based conceptions of families or institutional pragmatics – our parent capacity-building and within-systems theories of change – to be less likely to engage in theories of change that involved reclaiming systems or solidarity dreaming and transformative possibilities. Indeed, we found that the three co-design circles that spent roughly 60% of their time or more in each of their co-design sessions in systems-based logics struggled to engage in solidarity-dreaming theories of change or even rupture deficit based theories of families. Two of the co-design circles (Seattle and Salem below) spent roughly 50% of their time in systems centric logics overall, though they did not do this consistently across each co-design session. In these two collaboratives, there was a single session that was heavily focused on systems but their other sessions were more significantly focused on family and community forms of agency.
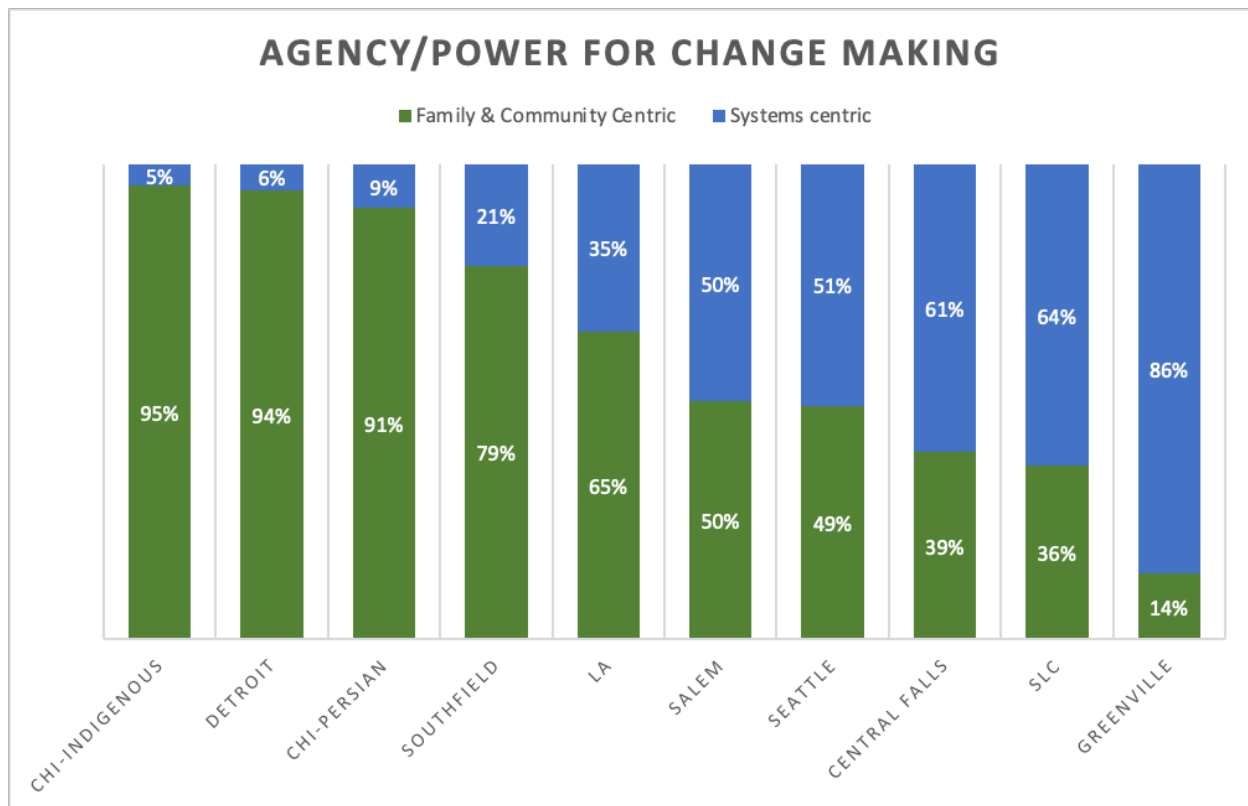


Figure 2. Percentage of codesign sessions focused on family and community-centric and systems-centric logics, by collaborative.

This distinction and its implications were critical to the practice of co-design and its possibilities and limitations. To be clear, we are not suggesting that these potentials are reflective of specific communities but rather are connected to the forms of leadership and facilitative practice that are enacted during co-design, as well as the local and broader sociopolitical contexts of the work.

The following example of within-systems change was related by Chinese immigrant parents in the Seattle design collaborative:

> Parent A (female): I feel that with the cultural difference and the language barrier, there are many things that we don't know. This makes our children's lives that much harder. Unlike white children whose parents can tell them what to do—they already have that experience, but we don't have that experience. So I think that it will be difficult for our children, and parents really need to think about how to…get more knowledge and more resources to help them and our community….

> Parent B (female): When I brought that up [about being able to borrow books to bring home], the point was that we just don't know what rights (options) we have… They [schools] don't think that this is something they need to tell us… So I really want them to provide us with this information so that we can personally go to the government and ask for these things. (*Seattle Design Circle #2*)

In these two quotes we can see that Parent A & B were attuned to the terms set by the school systems and dominant society. They did not identify that their own experiences or knowledges as helpful to their children particularly as compared to white children. They did not see their own terms as relevant to change making. Instead they position knowledge and experiences outside of their own as what is needed to help their children and community. We do see that Parent B wants to be able to advocate for herself directly to those she has identified in systems as having power and in trying to understand the options they have as determined by systems. While of course there may be important practicability to this stance, it reflects a within systems theory of change. Over the course of the co-design in this same group, Parent C comes to narrate a significant difference in perspective, one we suggest is reflective of family and community centric theories of change. She reflected:

> Parent C (female): Before coming to this group, I just settled for what was given to me. But after this meeting—after troubling you all to teach us how to use our voices––I know that I can now think about what I want and what I need. I can really dream. (Seattle Design Circle #3)

The shift this parent narrates - one from settling for what given to her to feeling she can "now think about what she wants and what she needs – is reflective of a co-design circle that enacted particular theories of change and cultivated this parent's personal form of rhetorical sovereignty. One in which she came to feel like her own perspectives were important and she could decide for herself what she wanted and needed. Importantly, she moves beyond that to even suggest she know feels like she "can really dream." Lyons (2000) work argues that a key piece of rhetorical sovereignty is not only redressing or reviving past and present, but also about the possible. Parent C here has moved from accepting the terms set for her by others to dreaming futures on her own terms.

As scholars, educational leaders in school systems, as well as community based educational leaders engaged in co-design, we must continually ask: what are the terms of engagement and who are they constructed by? Are we deliberately or unintentionally engaged in rhetorical imperialism in the context of co-design? What practices cultivate and support rhetorical sovereignty in co-design? Indeed, Lyons (2000) argues that "rhetorical sovereignty requires more than a renewed commitment to listening and learning; it also requires a radical rethinking of how and what we teach" (p. 450). In our context, it means radically rethinking how and what we facilitate during co-design as well as vigilant awareness of the ongoing status quo narratives of both problems and solutions and the ways in which historically shaped power dynamics – where powerful institutions and their actants set the terms – continue to be regenerated in current practices. Thus, a key implication for this finding is the need for educational leaders to have opportunities to recognize and experience theories of change beyond institutional forms, as well to experience and engage in practices grounded in familial and community

theories of change and possibility. This requires longer term relations and interactions than conventional forms of listening sessions can cultivate or sustain.

### 3. Sustained Engagement Enabled Shifts toward Reimagining and Making Anew

While we observed crucial distinctions between design circles that adopted systems-centered logics driven by deficit-based conceptions of families or institutional pragmatics, we also noticed a shift over time towards theories of change that sought to reclaim or reimagine education on the terms of families and communities. That is, across design circles and contexts, sustained engagement with nondominant families and communities opened conversations about transformative possibilities *beyond* status-quo systems. When we analyzed the design circles over time, a marked pattern emerged, as shown in Figure 3. Particularly, the design circles that continued into a fourth session engaged with theories of change driven less by institutional constraints and logics but were centered more in the priorities, power, and agency of families and communities in reclaiming systems of education or reimagining them entirely.
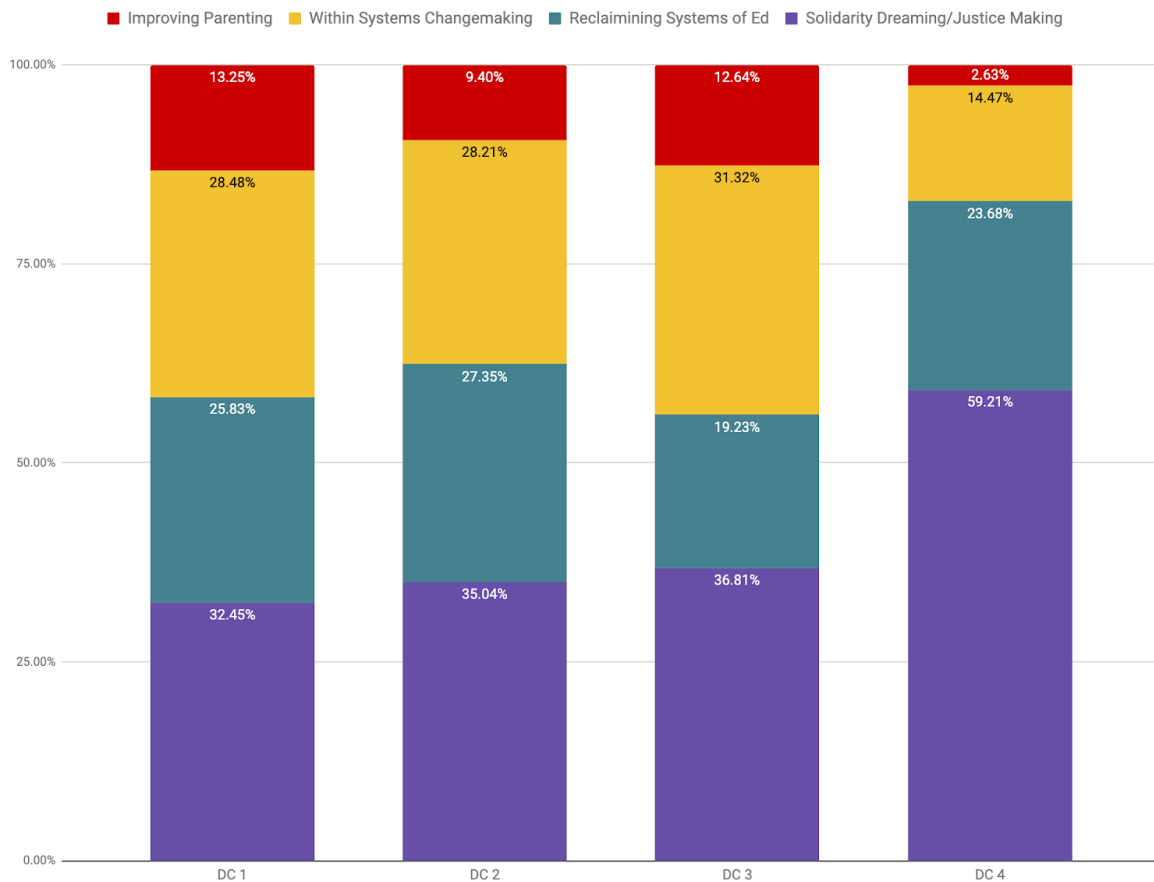


Figure 3. Percentage of theories of change discussed across all collaboratives, over time (DC=Design Circle)

The emergence of more transformative theories of change showed that the design circles engendered the growth of shared conceptions of change consistent with the intentional aim of solidarity-driven codesign. When we invited others to take up design circles, we did so in a deliberate effort to move beyond conventional focus groups or single family engagements which comprise the

norm in formal systems. While purporting to enable systems to "listen" to families, typical engagement formats tend to foster ahistoric, rigidly role-bound interactions between families and educators, replicate powered positionings (across roles, formal education, race, class, language, gender, etc.) and reproduce readily-accessible dominant narratives and explanations grounded in systems-defined terms about the purposes and aims of education. In this sense, then, the design circles achieved their aim in disrupting dominant logics and creating spaces that enabled families and educators to deepen their conversations over time and open the range of imagined possibilities for change. Through the codesign of the FLDC initiative itself, we came to refer to these as "aperturas" after the notion developed in critical pedagogy contexts – not simply openings but strategic entryways or portals into fundamentally different conceptualizations and potential solutions towards community-determined aims (Ishimaru & Bang, 2016). In Spanish, "aperturas" also connote tightness or pressure points, and the FLDC network invoked this term to highlight cracks in the dominant paradigm that provide an opening for collective change to reimagine education within particular communities in a specific sociopolitical and racial-historical moment.

The expansion toward solidarity-dreaming theories of change over time also represents a more profound emergence, however. That is, although these TOCs were present in a few collaboratives that began with community-based questions about wellbeing and justice, solidarity dreaming emerged and grew over time, particularly by the third and fourth design circles in a given context (notably, the sites that did not elect to extend into a fourth design circle were largely those dominated by remediation paradigms and systems-centered logics, as per the prior finding). Although the starting point and community contexts of design circles varied, the communities who sustained their engagements expanded their collective theorizing to examine different potential avenues of change related to growing humanizing, familial relations, building from and evolving cultural and community practices, and prioritizing time and space for healing and reimagining. As seen in Figure 3, the trajectory of design conversations shifted over time, particularly towards the third and fourth design circle, to reflect a greater incidence of theories focused on reclaiming systems and solidarity and justice-dreaming.

Five collaboratives continued into a fourth design circle, primarily because the designers themselves felt the need to extend or continue their conversations with one another (see Figure 4). Regardless of where they started their explorations, these collaboratives all tended, over time, to deepen those theories of change, particularly towards approaches that sought to build from community-based or cultural forms of education towards solidarity and justice-dreaming. For example, the Indigenous Chicago design circle talked about the crucial role of elders as teachers, asking themselves "How will I be a good elder?" (see Bang et al., forthcoming, in the summer JFDE special issue). Lani and Cynthia discussed their experiences learning from elders and the need to reclaim that form of learning as a routine practice in educational spaces:

> Lani: I feel like we should bring them [elders] in. Have our elders come share, not just from us, with us that they care so much more. There's nothing like I've said this before, there's nothing like it went apart from this. It works in so many ways. I know when my grandmother comes to share, she could still talk about the same topic perhaps but they will always have a different perspective of how to deliver it. I'm always amazed at that. It's humbling.
>
> Cynthia: I think a lot of times too our elders feel neglected as far as maybe not as well come in certain spaces or that their knowledge isn't really priced and valued. I think especially too with all the things going on in this world that we should really invite our elders more to be with us, so we can learn from them…just the thought of how the elders really do invest into our people, our youth especially. Not only teaching us just stories and wisdom, but the act of just keeping the traditional life something that what

some people think oh it's just on dancing but it's the way of our people. It teaches us humility. It teaches us grace. It teaches us about the community. It teaches us a lot about ourselves and how to become people to help make a difference for 7 generations. It also too gives me an idea more of like how I want to reach out to the community and help them. Maybe that will be me someday.
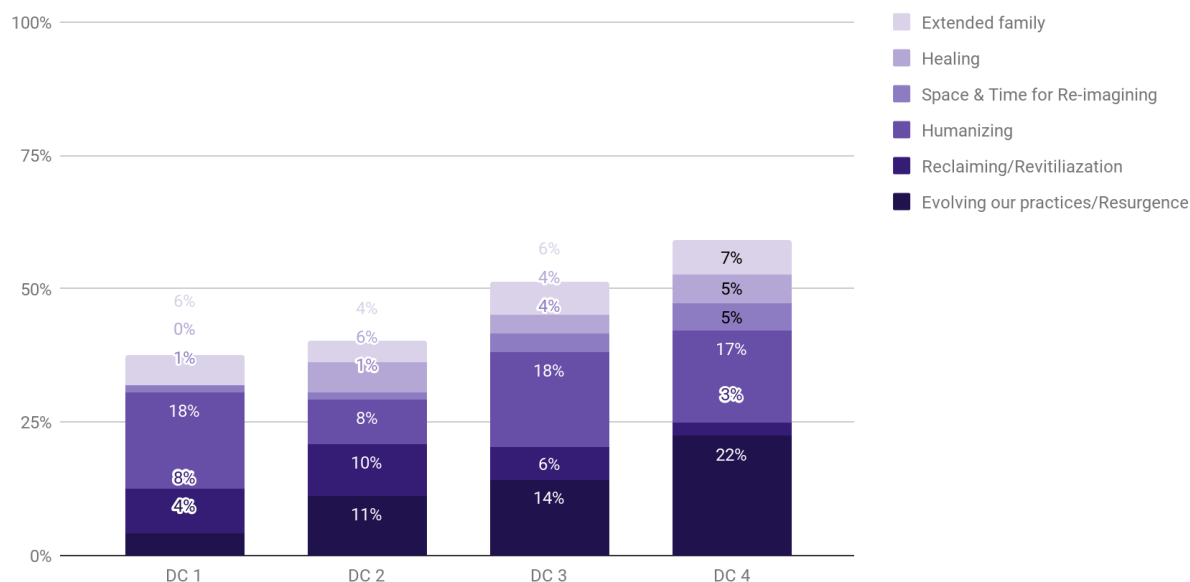


Figure 4. Shifts in solidarity-dreaming theories of change across engagements for collaboratives that conducted 4 design circles (Southfield, Salt Lake City, Indigenous Chicago, Detroit, Persian School)

Codesign theorizing over time also opened insights about organizational practices and the possibilities for rooting change-making in families' experiences and priorities, rather than systems-centered solutions. In Detroit, the organizing group took up a more transformative theory of change related to evolving their own practices in identifying campaigns using research tools (Wilson et al., 2018). The research collaborative between university-based scholars and youth and parent leaders in an organizing group introduced qualitative data collection, such as focus groups, and named organizing one-on-ones as tools for better understanding what families and communities want, not just what the problems are. One of the organizers reflected on their past campaign, and realized that they might have advocated for different kinds of solutions "with special ed, if we had talked to a bunch of our members, and learned that their experience with special ed or their concern with special ed was a lot about being pushed out of schools, or not being let into schools, [that] it wasn't as much about getting resources in [Detroit Public Schools] or something." In their case, evolving their practices meant ensuring organizational leaders took the time to understand members' experiences and insights, rather than presuming their funding-focused policy solutions would address families' priorities.

We wondered whether design conversations with only nondominant families and community leaders as participants (not educators or systems leaders) were simply more likely to grow into transformative possibilities, but this hypothesis was not supported by our analyses. Notably, the shift towards solidarity-dreaming theories of change was not confined to community-based contexts or design circles with only families and community members as participants. In fact, a couple of circles

with only parents and families struggled to move beyond within-systems change. Yet in both Southfield and Salt Lake City, educators and administrators were part of the conversation from the beginning, and both grew their beyond-systems theories of change. For instance, in Southfield, principals and parents shared emotional stories of their own struggles and aspirations, eventually referring to each other as "Aunt" and "Uncle" in relation to the children they were all endeavoring to raise together. Alma, a principal, explained that her own role as a mother was essential to her formal role:

> Alma: I think there's just stuff. Sometimes I'm in my formal role I would deal with a lot of people that by the time they got to me they were already on 10 or it was urgent. I had a pile of urgent already. What I have learned to do is stop, listen and I always try to remember this may be our student but this is their child and I'm a mother so I channel that same energy. I'm a firm believer of that whole reciprocity. What you put out you'll return. Whatever I want from my children I try to give to other people's children.

The relationships built through the deep listening in the design circles in Southfield began to approach kinship relations, something Derrick Lopez, the facilitator and assistant superintendent at the time, called moving from "positionship to relationship." Thus, despite vastly different roles of participants in each design circle, the design decisions and facilitative moves were crucial in opening deeper relationality and theorizing over time towards solidarities and rhetorical sovereignty.

## Conclusions and Implications

As the field of education continues to expand the forms of practice and methods (e.g. research-practice and research-community partnerships) in which engagement between scholars, practitioners, families and communities are routinized, there are critical questions about the nature and forms of those engagements. Indeed, previous scholarship has demonstrated that some forms of institutionally-based family engagement have been implemented in ways that have increased demands of familial participation in ways that further disadvantage families and communities who have been least well served by educational systems (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Valdez, 1996).

Theorizing has never solely been the domain of scholars or philosophers; theorizing is always happening, whether or not we recognize it as such, and prior work has highlighted the complex insights that parents, families and communities of color can bring to our theorizing of racial injustices in education (Barajas-López & Ishimaru, 2017). This study suggests that codesigners can take up conceptual theories of change that echo or reify dominant institutional logics as a form of rhetorical imperialism (Lyons, 2000) – such as remediating so-called "inherent deficiencies" of youth and families of color or assimilative efforts to increase access and representation in the status quo system. But these same codesigners can also evolve their theorizing over time to move towards rhetorical sovereignty, seeding their visions for educational futures on family and community grounds that reclaim systems or foster healing, revitalize cultural practices, and evolve new solidarity-driven approaches within and between communities. Thus, the theory of change "families," terms of engagement, and trajectories of codesign theorizing offer a broad framework for how we might shape and facilitate towards solidarity-driven designs that emerge from family, community and educator deliberations about educational justice and community wellbeing.

This framework for cultivating solidarity-driven theories of change and rhetorical sovereignty with families and communities of color, in turn, offers implications for educational leaders as they have increasingly begun to recognize that efforts to engage families and communities are crucial to pursuing racial justice in education. We elaborate some foundational but heretofore empirically underexamined conditions and groundings for solidarity-driven codesign. First, leaders should listen

and facilitate for multiplicities and support participants in holding multiple scales and possible ways forward. The refusal of singularities existed across all our collaboratives, which suggests that facilitators need only encourage these multiple conceptions rather than insist on universals, which can be challenging to normative expectations of leaders to provide definitive, singular solutions. Leaders can also help codesigners to notice and shift beyond readily available institutional logics and scripts – or "solutions on demand" (Martin, 2015) – and develop the politicized trust necessary for deeper theorizing and social dreaming that builds from family and community grounds, rather than accepting only the "crumbs" in deference to institutional pragmatics of what we can imagine systems granting communities. Lastly, dreaming and making has been ceded for over four or five generations, so imagining beyond the current system is a practice that takes time as well as care, so as to avoid merely renarrating trauma. We argue that a group's ability to grapple with tensions across multiple scales necessitates relationality nurtured over time. Sustained engagement – rather than one-time listening sessions or focus groups - can foster relational theorizing towards more transformative aims.

Lest co-design (ironically) become the next "silver bullet" in education reform, we caution that the initial process in these communities constituted a modest – though critical – step forward in enabling local family and community collaboratives to build their long-term capacity to make change over time. Tracking and supporting co-design processes across far-flung urban, suburban and rural geographies, distinct racial, cultural and linguistic histories, and particular community contexts entailed significant challenges, constant adaptation, and inevitable tensions. Despite the diversity of the collaboratives, though, the dominant structures of US schooling and deficit-based assumptions about nondominant families and communities in education were surprisingly consistent and often reasserted themselves amidst efforts to imagine alternatives.

Lastly, theorizing in local communities does not happen in a vacuum. We need to better understand both the micro-level facilitative moves that shape codesign trajectories as well as the broader sociopolitical and racial dynamics – such as the 2017 election, the Muslim "ban," anti-Black violence, immigration policies and raids, and of course, the global pandemic, racial reckonings and pushback. All of these contexts may profoundly shape local theorizing and communities' capacities to imagine possibilities for transformative change. In the companion pieces across the special sections focused on the work of the Family Leadership Design Collaborative, our partner collaboratives offer nuanced portrayals of how these theories of change played out in specific racial and sociopolitical contexts as they co-designed school decision-making and humanizing relations with Latinx immigrant families and educators in West Salt Lake City (Kuttner et al., 2022); intergenerational learning and parenting for complex personhood, race and identities in the Chicago Iranian diaspora (Vossoughi, 2022); Black and Brown parent solidarities to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline in Los Angeles (this issue, Chin et al.); and intergenerational cultural learning to "raise good elders" in Chicago global Indigenous communities (Bang et al., forthcoming). In tandem with Khalifa and Abdi's closing commentary (this issue) reflecting on both the entanglements of coloniality and the possibilities of centering collective dreaming in ancestral and community knowledges, it is our hope that these ongoing inquiries and emergent framework will support educational and community leaders across contexts in cultivating solidarity-driven codesign with youth, families and communities of color and building our collective capacities to imagine and realize educational justice and wellbeing.

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| APPENDIX A: Community Design Circle Descriptions | | |
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| **Geography** | **Central Aim of the Collaborative** | **Co-Designers** |
| Southeast Seattle, WA | <u>Toisanese Dreams Reshaping Seattle Schools</u><br>Toisanese (Chinese) families used data from a community survey of families' experiences with Seattle Public Schools and their own stories to identify priorities and advocate with city and district staff for policy changes to enable families to communicate their dreams and needs for their children and their schools. | - Partners: Southeast Seattle Education Coalition, Chinese Information Service Center, & University of Washington<br>- 15-20 Chinese American families<br>- Languages: Toisanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, English |
| Salem-Keizer, OR | <u>Family-School Collaboration to Support Immigrant Communities</u><br>Latinx families, community organizers, and school district personnel addressed Latinx parents' experiences and struggles to support their children, particularly in the current political climate. They discussed aggressions faced by their | - Partners: Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality and University of Oregon<br>- 8-10 Latinx families & parent leaders<br>- Languages: Spanish |

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| | community and children in schools and sought to explore how schools protect Latinx students and address the fear experienced by many. | |
| South Los Angeles, CA | <u>Humanizing Parent-Teacher Interactions</u> Black and Brown parents reimagined moment-to-moment parent-teacher interactions towards more humanizing relationships in work to address racism and the school-to-prison pipeline. | - Partners: CADRE and University of California, Los Angeles - 12-15 Black & brown CADRE parent leaders - Languages: Spanish, English |
| West Salt Lake City, UT | <u>Re-imagining School Community Councils</u> Latinx parents, community leaders, and school and district staff re-envisioned the purpose and function of an existing school-based resource and decision-making body, School Community Councils (SCCs).. | - Partners: West Salt Lake City School District, University Neighborhood Partners, University of Utah - 10 families & 10 educators - Languages: Spanish & English |
| Greenville, MS | <u>Collaborating to Support Early Child Education</u> Early childhood, P-12, and higher | - Partners: Citizens for a Better Greenville, Greenville Public Schools, Head Start, |

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| | education administrators and educators from federal, state, city, and community institutions examined how to increase ECE participation in Greenville, support ECE teachers in working with families, and address a long history of underfunding, which perpetuates the disenfranchisement of rural black communities. | Mississippi Valley State Univ., Bates College<br>- 13 District educators & administrators, childcare providers, higher ed faculty, black community leader<br>- Language: English |
| Chicago, IL | <u>Building Global Indigeneity</u><br>Indigenous parent and community leaders took up global Indigenous identities and built solidarities across multiple Indigenous communities to explore how they might "bend the river" - or engage intergenerational change from a historicized view. | - Partners: Aloha Center, the American Indian Center, Native American Support Program at the University of Illinois, Chicago, Northwestern University<br>- Languages: English |
| Chicago, IL | <u>Social Justice in an Iranian School Context</u><br>Iranian parents in a community-based setting envisioned, designed, and sustained efforts to support Iranian diaspora youth | - Partners: Chicago Persian School and Northwestern University<br>- 8-10 Iranian youth, parents, & grandparents |

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| | and families, particularly in the current context of racism and Islamaphobia. | - Languages: Persian (with English) |
| Southfield, MI | <u>Shifting from "Position-ship" to "Relationship" in School Leadership - Family Interactions</u><br>Principals and parents in the Southfield Public School district addressed the unequal power dynamics between leaders and families to co-develop a framework for a relationship built on mutual trust and respect. | - Partners: Southfield Public Schools<br>- 6 Black parents, 6 principals (5 Black & 1 white)<br>- Language: English |
| Detroit, MI | <u>Community Organizing Research</u><br>Community organizers and university researchers collaborated to marshal educational data and research in intergenerational community organizing strategies to advocate for school change at local and state levels. | - Partners: 482Forward and University of Michigan<br>- 6-8 youth & parent leaders, 2-3 org staff, 3 add'l researchers<br>- Language: English |
| Central Falls, RI | <u>Building Cross-Race/Cultural Parenting Solidarities</u><br>Parents in a small New England district | - Partners: Central Falls School District & Annenberg Institute for |

| | examined deficit-based mindsets and hierarchical roles in district family engagement and envisioned collective parenting approaches towards community well-being. | Education Reform<br><br>- 8-10 mothers (multiracial)<br>- Language: Spanish & English |
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| Appendix B: Theories of Change Identified during Community Design Circles | | | |
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| **TOCs Families** | **Theory of Change** | **Definition** | **Coded** |
| **Solidarity-dreaming & Justice Making** | **Evolving our Practices/Resurgence** | Families/communities/educators need to develop and/or learn new practices for education. | 10.% |
| | **Creating/Maintaining Space and Time for Reimagining** | We need resources and spaces in order to imagine and enact new possibilities | 2.47% |
| | **Healing** | We need to heal from or attend to historical and ongoing traumas. | 2.3% 13 excerpts |
| | **Humanizing Relationships** | We need to see each other as humans, respect each other's rights as humans, and take each others' perspectives | 13.3% |
| | **Growing Extended Families** | We need to take care of each other as family. | 4.4% |
| | **Reclaiming/Revitalizing Cultural Practices** | Families and communities need to reclaim or revive cultural practices, values, languages, etc. | 5.3% |

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| **Reclaiming Our Systems** | **Racial Socialization/ Protecting from Systemic Harm** | Families need to help socialize children into their cultural communities and educate/protect them from systemic harm | 9.1% |
| | **Expanding Conception of the Problem** | We need to better understand the context, issues, systems, and problems | |
| | **Developing Parent/Community Advocacy and Organizing** | We need to empower or train families and communities to advocate for their children and demand change. | 12.4% |
| **Within-Systems Change** | **Changing Mindsets/Perceptions** | We need educators/systems leaders to change their perceptions or beliefs about families and communities. And vice versa. | 7.5% 41 excerpts |
| | **Aligning Interests** | | 4.8% |
| | **Increasing Access/Inclusion** | We need better access/inclusion processes, practices, tools to increase participation or engagement of people who are typically dis-engaged | 9.3% |

| | Increasing Representation | We need more diverse leadership or representative leadership from our communities | 3.6 |
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| | **Educating Families & Communities** | We need to educate families on how systems work as is in order to change them | |
| **Improving Parent Capacity** | **Fixing Families & Communities** | We need to train parents how to prepare their children socially and academically | 5.1% |
| | **Coordinating Social Services & Programs** | Organizations or institutions need to coordinate services or programs aimed at children and families | 5.5%  29  excerpts |