equity**X**design 3.0

A WORKING REPRISE

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, **equityXdesign**, a framework for transformation, was published approximately 2 weeks after the 2016 election. At that time, the equity discourse in the education ecosystem was taking center stage. The work of Michelle Molitor at Fellowship for Race and Equity in Education (now The Equity Lab) and LaShawn Chatmon's work at the National Equity Project was amplified as a strategic mantle while we collectively witnessed the lynchings of Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner. Their work lit a pathway forward, helping schools, leaders, and the education ecosystem talk about race, equity, and learning.

However, the design lens in the equity conversations was sidelined as white technocrats continued to dominate the dialogue around innovation and agency. Those who have historically had more access to lines of credit and power (white men and women) shut out the voices of those who do not have the same access to those resources. Those with the closest hand on reality were silenced and ignored, especially Black folk who raised their voices and pounded their fists about the experiences of teachers, leaders, and students.

CENTERING BELIEFS

INVENTION "forsee"

INCLUSION "be seen"

RECOGNIZE "see"
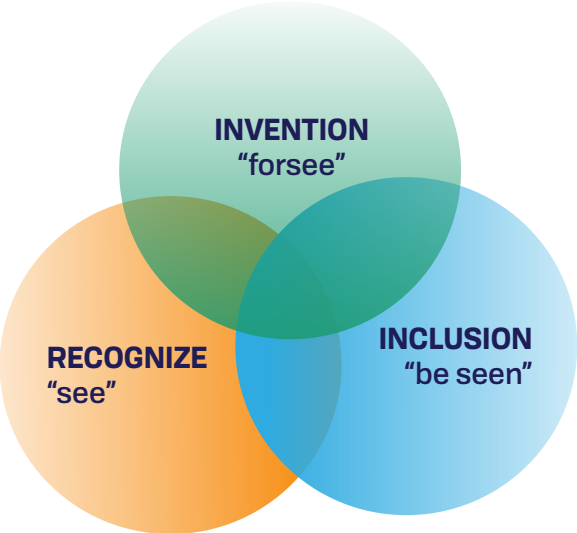
There was a shared outcome, but the language, and therefore ideas/actions were disparate. Bringing them together to share the conversation required a conceptual bridge and framework with multiple entry points, allowing us all to see equity and justice work as the work of *all*.

The **equityXdesign** framework was designed to bring these two conversations and groups of people together—integrating the discourse of equity work and our innovative methodologies with the hopes of awakening new ideas, identities, and perspectives on a few, very old problems—creating a conversation whose unified power is greater than its parts. Since then, the idea of design for equity has taken on many names, forms, and fashions. The idea has found a home in the design of workforces, breastfeeding collectives, schools, and inspired other equity centered frameworks such as liberatory design.[1]

This reprise is not intended to replace the spirit of the current framework. It is not intended to argue with, dispute, or challenge its underlying premise. We believe that it still speaks a resonant truth that should continue to inform how we think and do, create, and design. The intent is to acknowledge while we feel and know that the truth is evergreen, it is often helpful to recontextualize it in the present moment. Much has happened in the past 5 years. We have experienced a wired racial reckoning while isolated in a pandemic. Living rooms became schools, with the most privileged of us forming our own local learning communities and units. Schools reopened with instructional leaders trading in their pedagogical skills and acumen for public health credentials, becoming experts at contact tracing, testing, and quarantining simultaneously. Both domestic and international turmoil has brought us all to our knees crying to go back to the normal that we remember—an order that was predictable, familiar, and comfortable. Days become months and then years. Our desire to control the pace of change and its timing is very human.

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[1] D'Ignazio, Catherine. "Hackathons as Participatory Design: Iterating Feminist Utopias." *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 20 Oct. 2019, https://www.academia.edu/40545845/Hackathons_as_Participatory_Design_Iterating_Feminist_Utopias.

Lam, Livia. "A Design for Workforce Equity." *Center for American Progress*, 19 June 2021, https://www.academia.edu/49291836/A_Design_for_Workforce_Equity.

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My grandmother reminded me again and again that "time and tide wait for no man." Things change. We change. Our understanding and ideas should change as well. We are not the people we were two years ago, and we should not be.

This iteration employs the metaphor of the edge and a new presentation of the physical body to illustrate the tool and mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and othering, equity and inequity. Redlines, property lines, state lines, and zip codes are the geographic representations of the edges of belonging and othering—the governing the ethos of supremacy. Edges restrict free movement across the earth for some bodies and permit it for others bodies. Internally, they are the first space of discomfort where true learning is experienced. Retreating from edges creates and maintains comfort at the expense of growth. Transcending edges without psychological and physical safety causes pain, injury, and the need for repair. Neither reckless haste or lethargy are beneficial.

We have inherited these ways of thinking and moving. They impact our bodies and our physiology, even if we are not always consciously aware of it. Human history tells us that we can adjust to both trauma and barbarism. Thus, this new discussion of design principles and beliefs invites a more intimate conversation about integration, the movement of private and Public Bodies and their ranges of motion and flexibility, and ultimately, our collective imaginations.

So, how do we move forward stronger, wiser, more connected, and more integrated than before? How might we continue to design for equity, and what has to be true of our technologies and innovation frameworks to solve problems rooted in systemic oppression? How might we become the light in what feels like persistent darkness? This reprise will offer the ways, tools, and use cases that can help us accelerate equitable design at this moment in time.

PART 1: Historical Context Matters for Radical Inclusion

The past is present in people, things, and systems of oppression. The past was designed, and the present is being designed. We are all designers. We must design for radical inclusion by acknowledging the stories and narratives that separate us from ourselves, each other, our pasts, and the more loving, centered, coherent, imaginal world that we all deserve.

We can only design at the margins by starting with self—exploring our own perceived limits and edges, revealing our chosen ways of knowing, perceiving, thinking, being, and engaging in the lifetime work of becoming more centered, wise, and intelligent.

- Which edges have I inherited?
- Where are my bleeding edges?
- How have I moved at my edges?

We can only design at the margins by starting with self.

Design at the Margins by Starting with Self

The previous iteration of the **equityXdesign** framework proclaimed designing for equity required the designer to see the impact of the historical context and that the past lives in people, things, and systems of oppression. In the first iteration of the **equityXdesign** framework, the framework was designed as a "technical tool for moral work." In its inception and conceptualization, it was designed to unify the Public Body. The Public Body is the membership of all bodies—the interdependent network of all us bound and rooted in the earth.

With that humble acceptance, we must now bridge the gap between healing the private body and the relationships between bodies that make up the Public Body. Expanding the concept of designing for equity to include healing brings attention to the restoration and repair of the private body: its well-being, ability, and capacity to transform the relationships and interactions between bodies.

Designs for equity must become designs that heal, repair, and restore.

The complex relationship between the private body and Public Body can only be seen by an evolved design process. Designs for equity must become designs that heal, repair, and restore.

Evolutionary science tells us that the most beneficial traits survive. We are the recipients of the genetic legacy of our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Social inheritance mimics the genetic: we inherit the traits and habits of privilege and oppression. When identities have been designed in the image of the white male supremacist and his oppressive ideas, many of the traits, habits, and ways of survival must be interrogated. Exploring and imagining identities unencumbered by oppressive systems and relationships is a thought experiment worthy of pursuit. Interrogating the survival tactics that evolved in oppressive systems and that were passed down as a part of our cultural inheritance is a design task that should be encountered with tenderness and care. When traits and habits emerge as relics in the healed self, we must thank them for their contribution, and release them. This welcomes the emergence of the healed self. The new self moves forward with scars, but without the pain or the ways that we inflict pain on ourselves or each other. The consistent practice of healing reveals how to maintain range of motion through the scars. We can move forward with new ways to treat ourselves and others.

This requires courage, psychological safety, and physical safety. We must see both who we were (our historical selves), who we are (our current selves), and who we need to become (our future selves). In order to understand the present, we must understand the inherited legacy surrounding the relationships we are designing, the place we are designing in, and the community we are designing with. While it is easier to look externally and see systems of oppression at work in our broader social systems, the convenience of the external and its anonymity can overshadow the intimacy of the internal.

Acknowledging that systems of oppression provide insight on how we perceive and make sense of the world without attending to the impact of oppression on the physical body, is not incorrect. It is simply insufficient if our goal is to heal, reconcile, and repair the relationship between oppressors and oppressed. It is insufficient if our goal is to unify the Public Body. Developing flexibility and fluency in both is required.

Designing at the margins requires proximity to the bleeding edge as well as its systemic abstraction.

But thinking and talking in this way is sometimes hard and requires consistent practice. We tend to reduce the complexity of problems because this eases their analysis, but this can lead to problems that transcend time and space, impacting whole bodies in various ways. Designing at the margins requires proximity to the bleeding edge as well as its systemic abstraction.

One Body, One People, and Defining Problems

The **equityXdesign** framework hinges on the fundamental logic in these statements: "Racism and inequity are products of design. They can be redesigned." If we consider the brutal impact on physical bodies, the intentional separation of individual bodies, and the importance of understanding how oppression is maintained, we can begin to redesign.

With this sharper focus, we can see equity challenges, problems, and their responsive therapies. They are promising spaces of embodied contradiction—a tension or sensation, revealed in ourselves, our relationships with each other, our relationships with the earth, and any cultural habits and ways of living when we are stretched, challenged, or fearful. With this lens, two bodies come into focus. First, the private body—the intelligent system of chemicals, fascia, bones, muscles, and animated matter—that we all have. This is easy to see. We look at it daily and sometimes spend a lifetime learning to take care of it and love it. The second body is harder to see because it requires a different lens and perspective. The Public Body— the interdependent network of all bodies bound and rooted in the earth— creates a dynamic cosmic accountability that requires us to emerge as better humans for ourselves and our progeny. If we are members of a bigger Public Body, rooted on the same earth, we then see equity challenges as assaults on the private body and understand their impact on the Public Body. We see methods that are used to tear and weaken parts of the Public Body and their impact on private bodies, especially when those methods are justified, incentivized, and endorsed for one part of the Body and come at the expense of another part of the Body. We see that equity problems and challenges are those that tear the Body apart, justifying the destruction of one part of the Body for another.

Employing this metaphor unlocks new ways to see equity challenges, solutions, and informs the ways we define problems. There are incredible implications to conceptual understanding of equity centered problem definition.

Problem definition through this lens impacts private bodies and the Public Body, and sees the edges of separation. Incorporating these thought routines when attending to equity challenges and designing solutions is critical. It allows us to hold the experiences of systemic interdependence when making sense of gaps and disparities enumerated by numbers and the atomized, basal experiences of the microaggressions, assaults, insults, and direct harm upon the private body. Problem definition must hold both. If the problem definition impacts the body, then it is only fitting that a design at the bleeding edge must attend to our bodies first as a requisite for the equitable design—for the appearance, movement, and flexibility of our bodies creates our biases and how we make sense of them. When the private body is rigid and unable to move, how it thinks, dreams, and speaks is limited.

The same analogs are seen in the Public Body. When parts of the Public Body are restricted by edges either inherited, imposed, or created, it distorts its cosmology—its ideas about itself, its relationship to others, and its relationships to its home—Earth. The word cosmology is used intentionally. It is derived from the Greek kosmos meaning order and harmony and logos, meaning discourse and word. Harmony is what the body experiences internally within itself and externally with the earth.

The internal distortion, misalignment, separation, and violence that we see in the Public Body is also **within ourselves**. The harm outside becomes a malady internal. A healing discourse integrates, acknowledges, and sees the body beyond the head and is essential to an equitable design process.

When the private body is rigid and unable to to move, how it thinks, dreams, and speaks is limited.

Designing A Healing Discourse

This discourse is not new. Early adopters have centered somatic teaching and practices in their equity work, but healing discourses are just now being integrated into equity work and are rarely integrated into design discourses. As we are designing solutions to attenuate the impact of harm upon the private and Public Body, leaning into the same ways of thinking and doing only puts us all at risk of creating more harm. If the designer is not healing the impact of inequity and oppression in themselves, they will only create experiences and products that do not heal. Thus, incorporating a healing discourse when designing at the margins is not optional for the designer, **it is required.**

The technological and material conveniences of the modern era (colonization) came at the expense of the Public Body and was a detriment to the earth. Colonization did not happen sporadically. It has been a consistent and deliberate tear for hundreds of years.

A healing discourse of this magnitude thus sees the problem as chronic and persistent, therefore our treatments must become routine and daily. Incorporating a healing discourse means that our approaches to the work are not acute—a remedy prescribed when there is a symptom in the Public Body like disparities in achievement, discipline, or visible public harm. Adopting a healing discourse acknowledges our shared membership in a universal Public Body. Therapies for healing are not just for those at the bleeding edge, they are for everyone.

A healing discourse also understands the impact and mechanics of segregation, the disease that holds oppression, inequity, and racism. This discourse understands how it employs distance and proximity to dull our awareness and sensitivities to the suffering of others on the bleeding edge. Our numbness does not heal the tears experienced in the private and Public Body, it simply makes us unaware. The lack of awareness creates little urgency for meaningful response.

Again, it further stands to reason that if the sustained injury of oppression and supremacy **numbs our sensitivity** to the suffering in the Public Body, our treatments become not only routine and daily, but wholly embodied, immersive, integrated, and most importantly, connected.

Holding the historical context when designing healing solutions means an acknowledgement of the ways people repair, stitch back, and make themselves whole again. Elevating ancient, indigenous wisdom, and healing practices as privileged expertise can create more flexibility and movement in the Public Body. It should be explored even when they stretch us beyond our inherited boundaries of belonging. This requires an integrative approach, one that acknowledges the interconnectedness between the mind, body, spirit, the centrality of the design of our physical and energetic bodies, the organization of our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and understands that we can't just think our way through a journey as if our minds travel without our bodies.

This also requires respect and acknowledgement of the reverence and sacred nature of healing practices and White Supremacy's cultural habit of ripping the secular from the sacred. Further, it begs us to also see how the need for control redacts, constricts, and bounds ways of thinking, being, learning, and moving. This need for integration can help us integrate ourselves—the material and immaterial, the secular and sacred, the oppressor and the oppressed.

This need for integration can help us integrate ourselves.

Instead of appropriating, commodifying, and objectifying the practices of other cultures, they serve as sign posts and reminders that our existence occupies and is purposed in realms beyond the physical. An informed healing discourse informs us that the diversity in healing practices leads us back to the self. It reminds us that stories and practices of healing exist within our own family traditions.

Again, this is not a new acknowledgement. The proliferation of social and emotional learning, trauma informed practices, mindfulness practices, movement, and asana have earned admission into the canon of sound pedagogical practice for students, especially students of color and those who have experienced trauma. However, we often fail to see that the trauma experienced by the most marginalized is **our trauma too**.

If we agree that the historical traumas are manifested and embodied in the present, if we accept that trauma informed responses and social-emotional learning (SEL) is sound pedagogical practice for students who have experienced acute and chronic system traumas, then it is only fitting that our design and resistance practices for equity also integrate these ways of being for the adults as well. We must center them as core and integral to enable radical inclusion.

When the body moves differently, it thinks differently. When private bodies move and think differently together, the imagination of the Public Body emerges unbounded, unleashed, and free. We all become more free.

THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC BODIES ——
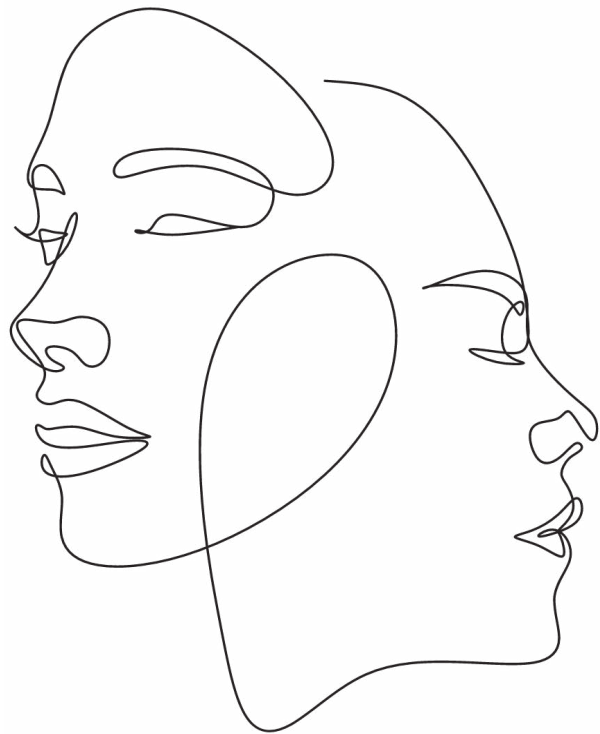
PART 2: Radical Inclusion is the Process

The problems of equity work—racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc.—are rooted in our distance, our single stories, and our habits of exclusion. Radical inclusion is the intentional act of interrupting inequity where it lives in our separation. Recognizing the multiplicity of stories, truths, their proximities, their intersections, and the people who own the stories are requisites of equity design work. **This is radical inclusion.**

The work of healing and coming together lives in our bodies—how they move, where they move, and how flexible they are in space. The act of ceding power is a somatic experience of surrender—discomfort and discomfiture tells us when power needs to be ceded and opens an opportunity for a new emergence. As we emerge as radically inclusive, the impact of the power dynamics, biases, and invisible structures are revealed and made more visible. Space is integrated for reflection and repair.

- Which edges do I maintain?
- Which edges have I crossed?
- How do I move at my edges?

This is radical inclusion.

The **equityXdesign** framework is intentional about bringing diverse stakeholders together across race, role, gender, and socioeconomic status to build relationships and lay the groundwork for community. Inclusion is not merely the absence of exclusion. Radical inclusion requires going further. In this work, we take the added steps to ensure barriers themselves are identified and eliminated, we intentionally welcome different bodies, stories, and experiences to the innovation conversation. This radically inclusive framework aims to create spaces where everyone can truly bring their full selves and be equally valued. It is not simply about reducing hate or respecting difference; it's about truly loving others.

Cede Power to Make the Invisible Visible

While none of us are born subscribing to tenets of supremacy, we learn them quite effectively. The socialization of our formative years is full of lessons that are painful, uncomfortable, and discomfiting. When these lessons engage with our subtle emotional bodies, the physical manifestation of the emotional response makes these curricular lessons enduring, firm, and steadfast. When the lessons directly threaten the safety and security of our physical bodies, the lesson and traumas endure for generations. Imaginations are limited, range of motion is restricted, and our physical bodies are made more rigid.

Anti-Blackness makes race the signature marginalization agent in our experience. It keeps schools and communities racially segregated and asymmetrically resourced. This disparity was further revealed with COVID-19 and the breakneck-paced redesign of the school experience that followed. As learning transitioned from in-person to on-screen overnight, the divide and disparity deepened. For those who had access to wealth, technology, time, and literacy (predominately white students, teachers, etc.), learning could easily take place outside of school. For those without the same proximity to these privileges, for those who depend on the economic agency, and visibility that education offers, there was suffering. Essential workers, people of color, and working mothers disproportionately endured strife from this restructure to the education system.

The bodies that benefit most from supremacist structures were able to move freely, to quarantine in second and third properties, to maintain flexibility and range of motion using exercise equipment, and had access to healthy food by delivery. The bodies that do not benefit from supremacist structures had their range of motion limited by confined physical space. Increased density further restricted range of motion and flexibility, making the bodies already under the stress of supremacy break more easily. We have demonstrated the ability to redesign structures quickly.

However, we cannot redesign without attending to the relationship between the bodies in the system and give care to their individual experiences in a white supremicist system. The heart of the system—the bodies and their relationships—must also change.
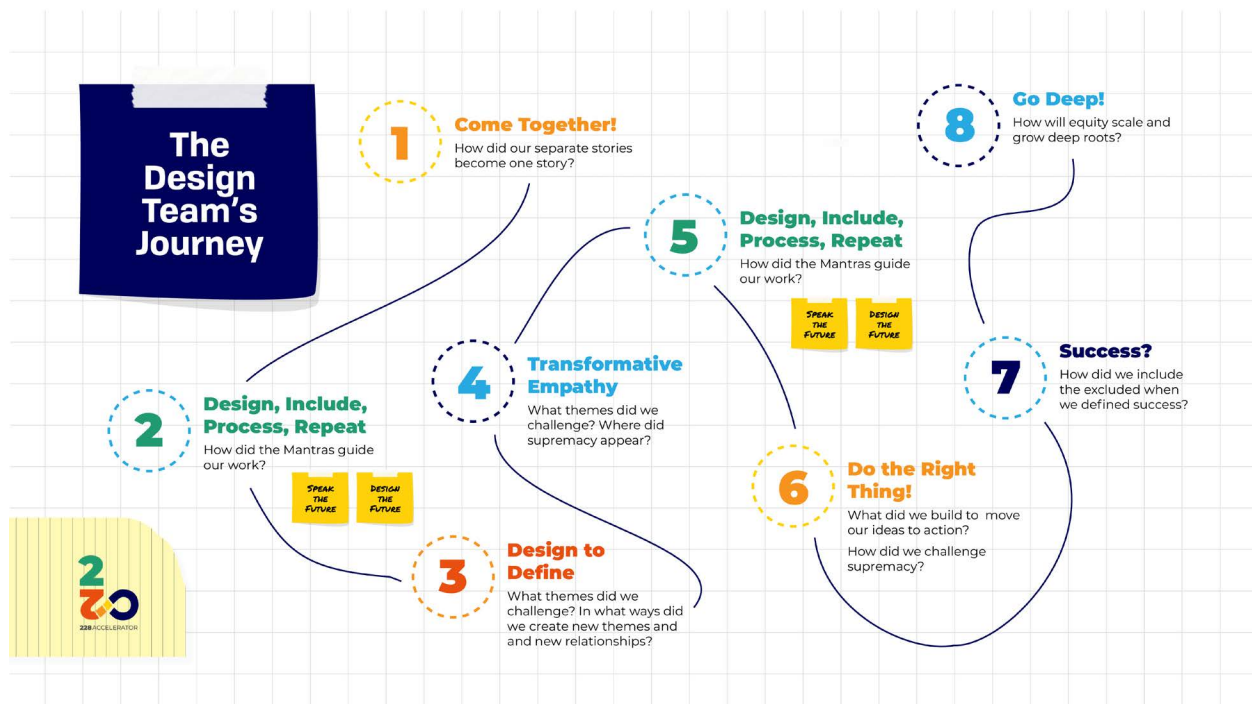
This is where the process of radical inclusion can help. We have to be in relationships with each other with a shared purpose, following a common path in order to animate radical inclusion in the process. We also have to recognize that the need for equity work is due to the ill health of the Public Body. The design team's journey is constructed to integrate radical inclusion while designers are actively healing while on this journey.

Step 1: Come Together: The first step on the design team's journey is the radical act of healing bodies, coming together, and connecting their separate stories. Here is where the principles of Designing at the Margins and Starting With Self come alive and become integrated.

Empathy work is not a transactional process to learn more about the problem, it is a transformational process to learn more about ourselves and each other. This initial layer of transformational empathy requires design team members to share and explore experienced pain and harm, unpack the impact of their antecedents on their collective wellness, and when necessary, start the work of coming back to themselves.

Respecting the intrinsic nature of an interdependent system—the private body and Public Body—enables team members to hypothesize and name both direct and indirect causes of the pain. Because radical inclusion is the process, it stands to reason that it is also important to share the outcome, the new imagined world where all team members, especially those who have been marginalized and excluded, become more whole and well.

The first step on the design team's journey is the radical act of healing bodies.

The Design Team's Journey

1 Come Together! How did our separate stories become one story?

2 Design, Include, Process, Repeat How did the Mantras guide our work? _Speak the Future_ _Design the Future_

3 Design to Define What themes did we challenge? In what ways did we create new themes and and new relationships?

4 Transformative Empathy What themes did we challenge? Where did supremacy appear?

5 Design, Include, Process, Repeat How did the Mantras guide our work? _Speak the Future_ _Design the Future_

6 Do the Right Thing! What did we build to move our ideas to action? How did we challenge supremacy?

7 Success? How did we include the excluded when we defined success?

8 Go Deep! How will equity scale and grow deep roots?

Step 2: **Design, Include, Process, Repeat:** Bringing different bodies together without new ways of being, thinking, and perceiving repeats the past. Desires for comfort and certainty lean us into our historical selves and inherited scripts and narratives. We may be in the same room, but not connected. We use the Mantras for Equity to help us direct how our bodies should be moving and interacting in this new relationship. The Mantras for Equity guide our perception of the problem and challenges. We also begin to see the distance between the ideal state and the current state, the lines, barriers, and boundaries of separation are realized in our bodies and relationships. We start to explore the first, private edge of awareness with the problem space. A private journey inward reveals which habits of one's personal practice may be creating the experience of the problem in the Body. This first design is the redesign of the self.

Step 3: Design to Define: Using our emerging sense of awareness, after locating the first edge of the problem, we design the small test to learn more about the public edge of the problem, our relationships, and ourselves. We explore this edge of the problem, the discomfort that it creates in ourselves and others. We also know that the first edge of the problem is just that, the first edge.

We stay there and experience how the stretch into a new healing practice is embodied communally. By thinking big and designing small, we create and use our design actions and movements as practice. This collective movement reveals the public edge of the problem—the space of resistance and tension in the Public Body. The depths of the separation are perceived, then defined materially. That is, we become aware of the separations in and of the Body, then use more common, industry specific definitions to share our awareness of the separation with others. Our exploration intentionally integrates timeless wisdom as well as modern, industrial knowledge and then bridges the realms of private and public.

Step 4: Transformative Empathy: Supremacy lives in the private body and separates the Public Body. As a group, the redesign of our relationships deepens with the express interrogation of supremacist structures and ideals—the way they live in us, adjusted and normed by our cultures, and its designed relationships.

Our need for belonging can create pain for others.

Our need for belonging can create pain for others. This checkpoint allows us to notice where supremacy lives in ourselves and on the design team, the process, and the emerging product or experience. This awareness creates space for pivots, changes, and iterations in both process and emerging outcome. At this point, we practice sharing our private edges in public. We share and discuss the experiences of supremacy that created them, sharpened them, and their impact on our bodies and lives.

The design team communes around these edges and the experiences of harm and trauma and collectively decides which themes of supremacy to challenge. The surrender to the shared experience redistributes the burden of oppression and supremacy, allowing the dismantling to be held by all.

Step 5: Design, Include, Process, Repeat: We try again, knowing the resilience of supremacist structures and the resilience of our permanent habits. Checking to ensure that the Mantras for Equity are guiding not just what we are designing but how we are designing. The body scan as a pedagogical tool corrects and adjusts the internal dialogues and scripts that govern our senses and data. We are reminding ourselves of how to see, hear, stand, speak, and design to realize the imagined state. The idea of practicing in public is centered in this step. This Equity Pause is a breath—the stillness in the process—where we observe ourselves and how we are relating to each other.

Step 6: Do the Right Thing: The revelation of both the private and public edges of the problem allows the design team to determine the next critical step to create the ideal state. This requires a departure from the ways and adjustments to supremacy. Therefore, all design team members, including those who have held positions of historical power and those who have not, decide on the private habits that create edges, limit motion, and block transformation for themselves and others.

This is fertile ground for a new relationship in the private self and the Public Body. We explore and assess our own leadership capacities for courage, leading change, building movement, and influencing others.

Step 7: Assessing Impact: At this stage, we interrogate the success metrics of the intervention using the experiences of the marginalized as a starting point. Again, interdependent relationships between the powerful and powerless are centered. Before the experience of the marginalized and oppressed changes, the private relationship of the powerful oppressor and their new relationship must be assessed first. Did the harm stop?

Were new habits adopted? Were new edges discovered? Is there alignment in both private and public life? When effective, the edges of marginalization should move and inviting others to join into the design process is integrated into the design.

Step 8: Go Deep: With the new awareness, the design team determines the next edge to explore. At this stage, membership is permeable which allows for more and more to have the chance to participate, give, and receive. The design of the healing space is rooted in transformed relationships between the powerful and powerless, marginalized and included, oppressor and oppressed.

These are the steps needed to animate radical inclusion. Collective healing and reconciliation is a requisite of radical inclusion and there is a great imperative for school spaces and work places to emerge as healing spaces at this moment. This design process is a protracted struggle and the stakes are high. It will not be easy or glamorous, requiring all of us to remerge anew and mourn and grieve what was. But joy comes in the morning for those who can see past tomorrow—the place where we can think about not just what is, but what could be. This is the moment to dream about the version of the world we live in and the one we need to create.

This is a clarion call to design spaces that live into the words of our founding documents.

Reimagining public spaces as healing spaces creates the foundational radical inclusion necessary for effective and transformative equitable design. Redesigning these spaces that heal both the lines that divide internally and externally can accelerate our collective design journey. This is a clarion call to design spaces that live into the words of our founding documents. This is a necessary shared objective needed to make radical inclusion a reality.

PART 3: Integrating Process and Product Enables Equity

FORESEE: PROCESS AS PRODUCT

Equity is a verb. It is the process, not an end point. When designing, both the ends and the means matter. We can't model the future on the past; we need to live the future we want today. We talk about the world not just as it is, but imagine it as it should be—a world of unconditional belonging. This new world is the product of radical inclusion. Integrating process and product is the practice that enables equity. When we practice in public, we speak and design a new future for ourselves and others. We welcome the messiness that comes with reconciling our private and public selves. We show up ready to learn and master ourselves using technologies of the past and present.

We are vulnerable and resilient, take feedback, and we grow together. We design new relationships with ourselves. We design new relationships with others. **We write the new story together.**

We write the new story together.

- **How do I cross edges privately?**
- **How do I cross edges publicly?**
- **How do I find new edges?**

In order to design for equity, we must design equitably. The practice of equitable design requires that we are mindful of how we achieve equity. Inclusive design practices raise the voices of the marginalized, strengthen relationships across racial differences, shift positions, and recharge our Public Body.

Because exclusion feeds inequity, we can no longer argue that there is not enough time to include the community. We must make time for the magic of human connection, especially across racial differences. The world we face today is frightening and uncertain but it also offers a priceless opportunity to design a new system. Especially during this time of crisis, designing new relationships requires courageous interrogation and assessment of current toolkits and processes.

This work is challenging, to be sure, but to choose not to engage in it is to be an active participant in further entrenching an exclusionary status quo. It requires speaking and designing a future that hits the taproot of all supremacies—the undergirding and overarching idea that one human or group of humans deserves more trust, wealth, grace, understanding, and virtue than another group of humans. The idea that they are supreme and have the right to author the story for another sovereign, self-determined human being threatens the opportunity for interdependence.

The design journey includes the integration of our stories, redesigning our relationships as both the process and product, intentionally challenging supremacy in all of its forms, starting with race. It requires not just equity pauses, observations, and reflections, but the intentional act of challenging the root of oppression—our exclusion and separation. Revealing the lines of separation requires the immersion in a relationship across differences. They are invisible without this immersion.

Designing with **equityXdesign** intentionally produces a new product or experience that changes the lived experience in the present and a new relationship that heals the traumas of the past with an orientation to the future. It enables us to not just look at oppression, but to look past it. It helps us feel our edges, breathe into them, and allow release, enabling greater flexibility and range of motion. It unleashes and unbounds our imagination.

Admission and acknowledgement of the mechanics of the current design is critical for redesign. Every design has its tools, methods, and blueprints to help see the design and opportunities for disruption.

Understanding the intricacies and dynamism of the natural world has always had a role in the justice theater. This relationship is paramount. We belong to the earth. We are made of it. It is us.

However, we rarely center it given the vital life force energy it provides. Its role rarely takes center stage. Because the past is present in people, things, and systems of oppression, the next few paragraphs will remember the integral role of the natural world, science, and technology in designing for equity. Technology when used to challenge supremacy in all of its permutations beckons the power and energy of the natural world to work in concert with the spiritual world to transform the lived experience in the physical world. Here we go.

When enslaved Black Americans liberated themselves from southern plantations, **it was the science of the skies that created a guide to sovereignty.** The night sky and organized stars existing beyond the reach of human manipulation enabled some 400,000 enslaved people to make a life move towards more independence, interdependence, and sovereignty.

It was the science of the skies that created a guide to sovereignty.

This early cryptography used the harmonies and the healing frequencies of spirituals and field songs to communicate the escape path. The line and boundary between bondage and sovereignty was drawn by man but made visible in the night by the heavens.

Continued advances in understanding light and glass accelerated camera technology in the 1930 film camera. Thurgood Marshall and Charles Hamilton Houston used still and film cameras to show the line that separated the school experiences of Black and white children in the deep South, revealing the fragility of the separate but equal doctrine, and ushering in the landmark decision of Brown vs. Board of Education.

Further advances in telephone and data transmission made the inhumane barbarism of Jim Crow policies and the South visible to every American living household and living room. The television as a storyholder and storyteller was in 12 million homes by 1951.[2]

Moore's law, increased computing power, and the arrival of ubiquitous storytelling devices enabled the visibility of the line between the experiences with Black adults and law enforcement, Black children in school, and anti-supremacist protesters and law enforcements. Web 2.0 technologies and the current iteration of the internet ushered in yet another era to see the story as it unfolds, connect and share in the stories of others, and begin to write the story ourselves. At the time of this writing, the lynchings captured on postcards 100 years ago are now animated in the palm of our hands. This visibility is felt in the body. For once we see the line of the bleeding edge; we are compelled to act.

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[2] Stephens, Mitchell. "History of Television." *History of Television - Mitchell Stephens*, https://stephens.hosting.nyu.edu/History%20of%20Television%20page.html#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20television%20sets,all%20U.S.%20homes%20had%20one.

Practicing in Public Speaks and Designs the Future

If we accept the premise that racism and inequity are a part of the design of our American systems and our own stories, then we can also accept our own responsibility to be the champions of that redesign. We are the designers. As the giants of the civil rights movement transition to the ancestral plane, they leave us work to do. Our healing and equity plans have to be more intentional and intelligent than the forces working to separate us. Our plans have to attend to spiritual and emotional intimacy, acknowledge anti-Blackness, and respect the current existence of our separation. Our plans need an intelligence that designs ways for us to come together across lines of difference and learn the competencies of civility that cannot be practiced in private.

Our healing and equity plans have to be more intentional and intelligent than the forces working to separate us.

Public organizations are inherently political spaces that take on the political will of the dominant culture. That means, that until we collectively reckon and heal, we will continue to bear witness to the blood-letting of supremacy.

We have no choice but to redesign and reconstrue both our private and public spaces as racial healing spaces where all bodies can learn to move together, heal together, and learn together.

This is not an easy feat for we have inherited the habits of segregation, reinforced by the geographic organization of property and its intertwined relationship with wealth accumulation. For too many of us, the incentives to stay proximate to the most marginalized and the suffering at the margins are just not there.

However, we do think that we can transcend the barrier of incentive and design new ways to practice being in community, progress on the journey, and distribute resources. Web 3.0 and its technologies can help us live and practice the future we want today.

The rhyme of history reminds us of the lessons learned and practiced in the segregated schools of the South. It can inform our imagination of a new education ecosystem which seizes injustice, unapologetically declares that all bodies, especially Black bodies, matter.

Getting to this new education ecosystem will require educators, leaders, teachers, and students to emerge as healed designers. It asks that they move with authority to co-design and co- create learning spaces, prove their commitment to justice, equity, and learning, and practice re-distributing resources. It will require actors in the ecosystem to work together and be led by those in marginalized communities.

Equity work remains the work of our time, and while we have made progress with some policies and procedures to promote inclusion, we still have work left to do in and with our bodies, hearts, and minds. This movement needs a studio—one that allows us to practice new relationships with ourselves and design new relationships with others. In the spirit of equitable design, practicing in public, we offer the following three integrated learning studios. The first learning space interrogates how we substantiate this very important work. The second learning studio explores virtual reality as a tool to transcend the traditional barriers and boundaries of separation. The third and final studio explores the democratization of philanthropy and how educators can reimagine themselves as equity philanthropists funding the necessary innovations that can accelerate our repair, our healing, and our collective restoration.

Learning Studio 1: Learn to Document—Substantiating and Legitimizing Equity Learning with Portable, Immutable Credentials and Equity Learner Records

How might we substantiate our learning, document our journey, and share our growth?

Equity literacies are 21st century competencies—required for all of us to fully participate and design schools, communities, and a democracy where we all are seen, heard, and loved. This learning is at risk of marginalization once again. The need for an articulate equity ecosystem that integrates the brilliant work led by women and men of color is greater than ever. We believe that this learning is the propelling force to a multicultural, multiracial democracy where the most marginalized and excluded experience a life of visibility and dignity.

The 21st century workforce can deconstruct oppressive hierarchies and design for the obsolescence of oppression by prioritizing the needs of the most historically marginalized. This requires the future of work to take hold of this American promise and reimagine all employees as equity centered designers. It creates intentional space for people in the democracy and economy. But this only happens when supremacy in any and all forms is seen as incompatible with an organization's goals and one's professional competence. Thus, professionals in all arenas would benefit from consistent, ongoing learning and innovative ways to mark progress on the journey.

Urgency and haste without consistency and endurance creates ephemeral understanding. The reimagining of equity literacies as 21st century competencies that begin in adolescence and continue through adulthood for the entire workforce beyond the education sector could have lasting benefit for all.

However, without portable credentials and records that have been substantiated, organizational leaders don't have evidence that can help them see their colleagues' collective commitment to their own journey. Too often, the ethos of a "racist body is being better than nobody" is employed in hiring practices, and while staffing shortages are a real experience, leaders still need ways to assess competency and commitment to equity. Furthermore, for colleagues early on their journey or just starting, leaders need lower cost, personalized ways to up-skill equity literacies on the job and ways to assess progress.

DIGITAL WALLET

We are learning more about this problem by launching a digital wallet with immutable credentials that live on the blockchain. These credentials are held in a wallet that can hold not only equity credentials from the 228 Accelerator, but any credential in the equity ecosystem that signals continued professional learning in this learner domain.

Blockchain technology can help us create meaningful documentation of our equity work that enables ideas to move from performance to practice, helping us support all learners on their journey to become more equitable, competent professionals. We can no longer acquiesce to the demands and influence of literate racists or oppressors—the people who demonstrated mastery in the calcified world of the past seek to reproduce it in the present because they are fearful of learning new skills and competencies needed for the future.

Moreover, with an organized education ecosystem reoriented to healing the Public Body, we can tactically see redundancy and strengths in the current ecosystem, spaces and bridges for innovation, and relics of the legacy system. Learning is the antidote to ignorance. Redundancy in relics reinforce oppression. Repetition and practice in new skills at the edges of our identity enable greater flexibility. **We were born to move, and we were born to move together.**

We were born to move. And we were born to move together.

This is personal and private work and since we are in a relationship with each other, we need ways to share our private journey publicly. In sharing the public journey, our collective practice becomes transparent. It matters not that mastery is achieved in the first attempt.

We have generations of accumulated traumas, unbeneficial ways of relating to ourselves, and others stored in bodies, our conscious minds, and our unconscious minds.

The belief in process as a product suggests that consistent, well instructed routine practice over time creates the transformation needed for a more equitable world. Assessing the commitment to the process keeps the door open for everyone to practice being better together. Personally managed, immutable micro-credentials give all professional learners the ability to tell their own transformational story of the journey with evidence, challenging stable hegemonic discourses of performance.

Learning Studio 2: Learn to Heal in Public—Immersive, Unbounded, Interactive Learning in the Metaverse

How might we animate radical inclusion?

As we all emerge from the pandemic, schools and organizations are engaging in aggressive and informed responses to 21st century economic demands, equity, and cultural needs. The need to innovate is palpable.

The ability to create an innovative and equitable culture lives with school leadership. Improvement, design, and innovation efforts at the school level begin and end with leadership. However, the analog technologies of segregation have effectively created lines that have defined our cultural habits and relationships. Uniting our Public Body requires us to learn how to share space together without fear of othering, violence, or harm. But the resilience of boundaries and lines dividing us make it hard. We miss out on valuable opportunities to learn together. Web 3.0 technologies hold tremendous potential and promise to transcend traditional boundaries that keep us divided and separated.

A RENDERING OF METAVERSE LEARNING SPACE
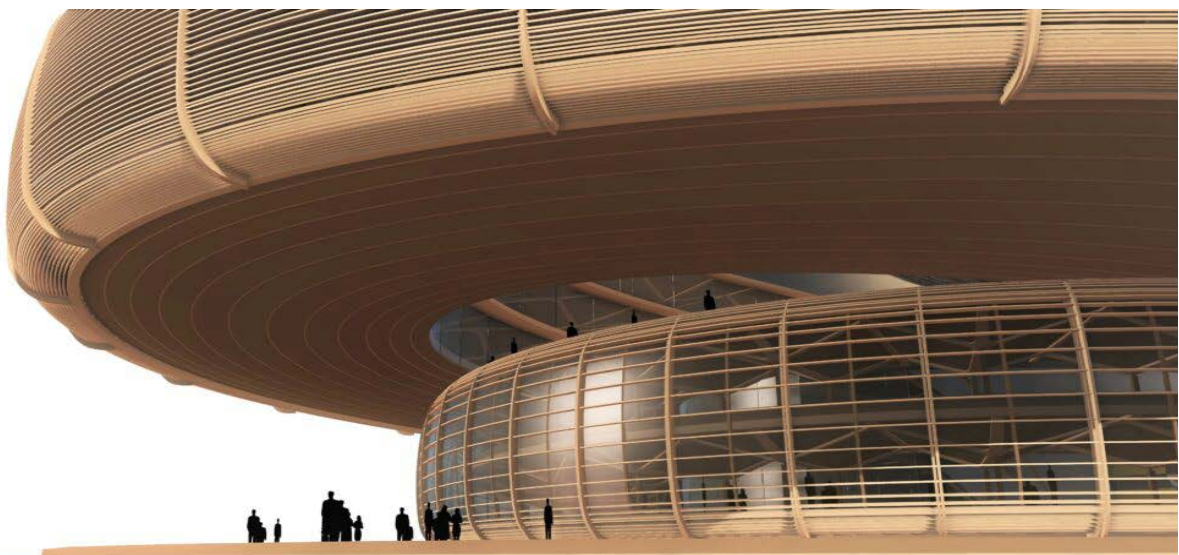
This need is greater now than ever before. The legislative burden blocking books and anti-racist education is falling on the backs of the systems teaching the most marginalized students. Cultural competence is a job requirement, but leaders and teachers still need ways to learn and practice being equitably centered in a lower risk, lower stakes environment. They need ways and spaces to talk freely, plan boldly, and organize equitably. Yet still, students need ways to learn the content and skills that will prepare them to design our multicultural, inclusive democracy.

As school district autonomy around equity and justice literacies becomes more and more restricted, teachers and leaders on the journey still need ways to be in community, become developed professionals, continue to collaborate and share and create rich learning experiences in ways that leverage economies of grace and scale. With immersive, interactive, and unbounded learning experiences in virtual reality, we can practice living the future we want today.

With immersive, interactive, and unbounded learning experiences in virtual reality, we can practice living the future we want today.

The metaverse—a collection and connection of virtual worlds that provide experiences that are social, immersive, and interactive—holds unprecedented promise to provide an unbounded and immersive learning experience that could allow children, teachers, and leaders to learn together, irrespective of their geography. Equity literacies can become embedded and integrated into the learning experience.

Imagine a learning environment that is immersive and interactive where teachers and students from all over the country and world could upskill in equity literacies, practice in lower risk environments, get feedback, resources, and tools, and most importantly create new relationships virtually online that can be practiced offline in the material world. This is not only probable, it is possible with the Metaverse and Web 3.0 technologies.

Learning Studio 3: Learn to Repair, Learn to Redistribute, and Learn to Heal

How might we decolonize wealth, learn to repair, learn to redistribute, and learn to heal?

Equity work and justice work in a culture supremacist in its origin can feel Sysphian at times. Progress feels ephemeral. Exhaustion feels eternal. While there is joy in resistance, staying engaged when it's hard requires more than pats on the back. Especially in a political climate where threats to the body are the weapons of choice.

This creates a culture of fear that may not only silence our most innovative and equitable teachers and leaders, but serve as their exit ticket out of the profession. As equity learning and training become increasingly criminalized and the funding pipelines to incentivize this learning are constricted, we need new ways to incentivize this incredibly important work, ease financial hardship that might come for courageous and persistent leaders, and invest in new innovations for educators to accelerate and scale equity.

Money creates space to think, keep educators in the classroom, and engage in the resistance. But how do we move and redistribute financial healing without reinforcing existing power dynamics that are typically associated with centralized philanthropy? How might we streamline diligence processes knowing that the commitment to designing for equity, evidence of past commitment, and the promise of a new innovation mitigates risk?

Educators and leaders' commitment to work of **equityXdesign** justifies the bet, the risk, and sound investment in the equitable future. As Edgar Villanueva reminds us, when money is not hoarded, and we employ ancient and indeginous wisdom to guide our design and creation processes, it emerges as a healing agent. What can be when the people doing the work become the philanthropists that fund and fuel the work?

Decentralized Autonomous organizations, or DAOs, provide visibility into how an automated, autonomous, educator-led fund could accelerate, sustain, and incentivize equity work in classrooms, community centers, and any other physical space reimagined as a healing space. Membership and enfranchisement is meted by only one's will to learn and practice. Digital badges and earned microcredentials proxy this desire and will. The architecture would enable educators to fund, fuel, and fan equity centered design. It should be noted again that the educator's authority to distribute healing funds should be arbitrated by the educator's commitment to their own healing, creating symmetry in process and product, in both the material and immaterial, disrupting salient historical patterns of giving and receiving. As mentioned before, the work of healing the Public Body requires regular, consistent, thoughtful therapies, not rushed, urgent, and spasmodic reactions. This new innovative organization led by equity centered designers and equity centered educators creates the structure to incentivize the creation of more tools, learning experiences, and resources. We can create products together that scale equity.

We can create products together that scale equity.

The reinvestment of earned revenue into the Public Body provides the much needed nourishment for our collective innovative thinking, dreaming, and designing. We can put ourselves back together again.

Why This? Why Now?

The work to an equitable future is through the messiness. The messiness is in each of us—healing requires integrating multiple ways of knowing, including those traditionally evidenced by and those embodied and experienced. This new future requires new spaces to practice new relationships. This new future requires fuel and nourishment to maintain its health and wholeness.

Getting there is both a private journey and a public journey. It requires us to interrogate the stories we were told about who we are, and when they challenge who we aspire to be, have the courage to abandon them and write new stories. It will require us to challenge the lines that have created our comfortable senses of belonging that we have called custom and tradition. At the private level, it means that we practice mercy, compassion, and forgiveness with ourselves. At the relational level, it means we practice mercy, compassion, and forgiveness with others. It means we heal to design. Moving our national ideals to reality will require beautiful and healing contributions from the healers, thinkers, teachers, leaders, and all of us to create and design the tools and experience that will accelerate our progress toward a more equitable, interdependent, and whole society.

As words like equity, racism, cultural relevance, identity affirming, and oppression gain more currency and garner more attention in the dominant discourse of schools and organizations, our understanding and experience of the impact of these phenomena deepens. **Equity and justice are objectively the proverbial holy grail waiting for us at the end of the journey.** This is not to be disputed.

Equity and justice are objectively the proverbial holy grail waiting for us at the end of the journey.

However, if we analyze the words garnering more attention in dominant discourse, we find the key to the path forward. The opposite of oppression is liberation. The opposite of inequity is equity. If we can agree that the experience of oppression and inequity is not only mental but physical, emotional, and spiritual, it only makes sense that a practice designed to wholly respond to all of those realms of the human experience is paramount. Without this wholly healing approach to equity work, our collective acts of interruption and resistance are insufficient and could perpetuate self harm and destruction.

We have inherited both barbarism and trauma. Our responses thus must be able to design and hold the wholeness. Acknowledging cultural relevance and affirming identities that were shaped by oppression only acknowledges the power of oppression and brokenness of the body. We must now move past simple acknowledgment to wholeness, healing, and putting ourselves back together. **Who we were does not have to be who we are or who we will become.** Knowing that our private work animates a public design requires all of us to humbly hold and recognize our power and responsibility to repair and heal.

Racism and inequity are products of design. They still can be redesigned. We hold the tools, the power, and the path forward in our individual and collective hands. Now is the time to redesign. Now is the time to heal.

ABOUT
CAROLINE HILL

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Caroline is a thought leader who lives, works, and designs at the intersection of education, innovation, and equity. Her work inspired the creation of **equityXdesign**, a powerful design framework that merges the values of equity work and innovation with the intentionality of design. Her latest venture, 228 Accelerator, catalyzes the redesign of the relationships that normalize mistreatment and oppression, builds bridges between the powerful and the powerless, and accelerates our journey to a more inclusive society.

Caroline's work is rooted in more than 20 years of experience in public education, education innovation, management consulting, and engineering. She has lived the life cycle of school creation and transformation as a teacher, mentor, coach, founding principal, and investor in innovative school models. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from the University of Virginia and a Master of Education in Learning and Teaching from Harvard Graduate School of Education. She received an additional Master of Science in Administration through New Leaders for New Schools, a principal training fellowship.