

# Co-Designing with Anti-Oppressive Action Frameworks for Curriculum and Pedagogy

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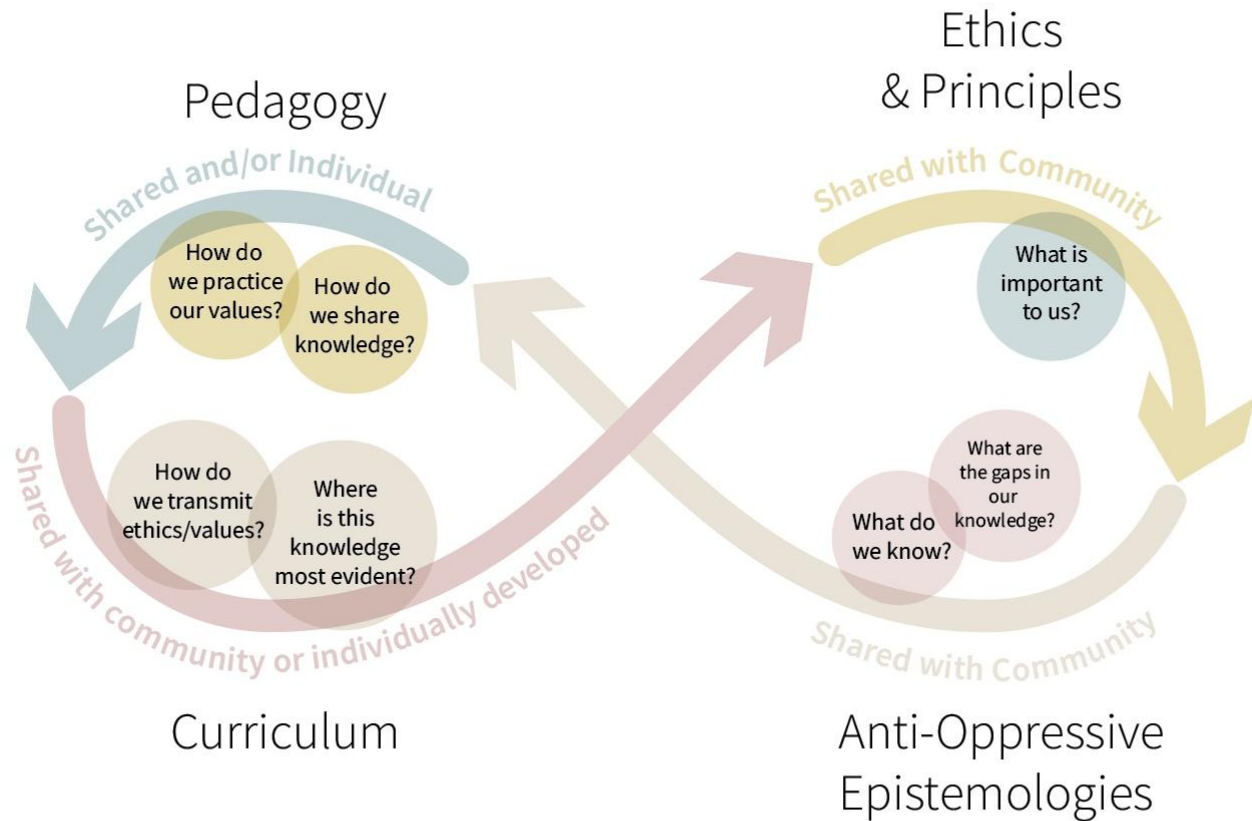
## Introduction

*An anti-oppressive action framework is a tool designed to engage faculty in building a shared approach to pedagogy and curriculum. Throughout the 2021/2022 academic year, we worked with design faculty members at Emily Carr University of Art and Design to discuss, co-design, and reflect on what it means to work in anti-oppressive spaces and how we might shift and grow our approach to curriculum. These workshops were intended to build and prototype a flexible and adaptable tool for the development of anti-oppressive frameworks in academic disciplines.*

*Our framework is a set of principles and ways of knowing inclusive to faculty, students, and staff. It does not only reflect “good intentions.” Instead, it is a tool that assists in sharing knowledge from marginalized sources and challenges designers to rethink how their pedagogy and curriculum might reproduce inequalities. This framework makes space for participants to review their curriculum and recognize the opportunities to address ableism, social inequalities, racism, and other universalist or Euro-centric approaches to knowledge that continue to limit our teaching and learning communities.*

## 1. Our Action Framework

Our framework seeks to recognize and dismantle power imbalances and discriminatory actions which limit teaching and learning experiences. It identifies strategies and tactics which address systemic racism, ableism, and colonialism which often operate institutionally and unconsciously.



This framework is cyclical and able to be adapted for use in other academic areas. It begins with the development of a shared group understanding of *ethics and principles*. These principles are developed by asking what is important to faculty members and staff, and what is important to students. Once we articulate these principles, we use them to understand and express the *ways of knowing* that influence our teaching and learning experiences. In this part of our framework, we ask, what have we already learned about anti-oppression and where the gaps in our knowledge remain. In some cases, this meant unpacking racism, sexism, ableism, and cultural bias specific to our discipline. These first two components of the framework establish a shared understanding and openness to aid faculty to develop *pedagogical strategies* and *curricula* with individual agency.

Anti-oppressive pedagogies “must support students to actively develop their own critical analysis of design, power, and liberation, in ways that connect with their own lived experience” (design-justice.pubpub.org). In discussing pedagogy we asked: what are the ways in which we practice anti-oppressive values? How do we share knowledge? How do we support our students?

The final component of this framework — curriculum — is intended to support faculty in their individual or shared curricular pursuits to develop inclusive and anti-oppressive courses and programs. In order to develop an anti-oppressive curriculum, we asked: Where are these values and knowledges most evident in our program? How do we transmit ethics and values to our students and our colleagues? The insights and observations developed while teaching will eventually lead to reconsidering and developing renewed ethics and principles, restarting the framework cycle.

## 2. Our Co-Design Method for Utilizing the Framework

This framework is meant to be utilized by groups, using principles of co-design. Co-design is the act of creating with stakeholders and requires inclusivity, respectfulness, participation, iteration, and a shared focus on outcomes (<https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Codesign-principles.pdf>). While co-designing requires a flattening of hierarchy within the working group, it still entails facilitation and stewardship throughout the process.

While we developed and experimented with our framework, we used the following facilitation techniques to keep the conversation active and outcome-focused:

- Reflecting our work back to the group, beginning with the statement “Here’s what we’ve heard…”
- Asking for concrete and specific practices in relation to ethics, values, and epistemologies
- Proposing commonalities in participants’ comments and contributions
- Encouraging reflective practices with each participant

It is crucial that these workshops are facilitated in ways that participants can build trust with each other, where everyone is given space to speak, and where everyone understands their responsibility in participating.

### **Framework Protocols:**

1. Gather materials to prepare faculty for conversations. Begin with *Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers* ([opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers/](http://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers/)) which is a source that can be adapted by a broad range of academic disciplines. The Anti-Oppression Network, located in Coast Salish Territory, is also an excellent resource: [theantioppressionnetwork.com/resources/terminologies-of-oppression/](http://theantioppressionnetwork.com/resources/terminologies-of-oppression/)
2. Determine the amount of time needed for each step of the framework. If faculty are new to anti-oppression ideas, allow more time for workshops focused on shared values and principles. Understand that this is a continuous process that may take time for deeper understanding and comfort in changing the use of terms and language.

3. Establish rules of engagement, or community agreements, for workshops. These should include respect, accountability, and fairness. Decide as a group what these rules look like in action, and how the group can support each other in maintaining these rules.
4. If groups meet in person, we recommend using large pieces of paper and sticky notes to record information. The sticky notes can be rearranged or recategorized as the discussions become more substantial and patterns of information emerge.
5. Groups should assign a facilitator for each discussion and workshop, using the facilitation techniques mentioned above. Begin each session with a feedback loop, starting with “Here is what we heard from you.” Participants can agree, disagree, or expand on these ideas.
6. Ethics and Epistemologies (ways of knowing) should be values that are shared by all members of the group. You may find that participants use different terms and descriptions for similar values. Facilitators can find commonalities and group these terms into one category, as well as gather definitions to develop a shared lexicon.
7. Once a set of values are determined, ask participants to describe how they practice these values. Where is it apparent to them? These practices contribute to shared and individual pedagogy.
8. In discussing practices, also ask, how do students and colleagues know our practices? What are the ways in which we transmit and share these values and practices?
9. Using large pieces of paper, or online tools such as Miro Boards, organize a chart that aligns each value with a set of practices and transmissions.
10. It may be necessary to return to the discussion of epistemology and forms of knowledge once the practices/transmissions discussion is underway. As with all topics within our framework, reflecting back on previous discussions and expanding the contributions with additional information is a necessary part of this cyclical framework.
11. The practices listed contribute to our pedagogical methods. These might include land acknowledgements, detailed student introductions, and class agreements.
12. The transmissions listed begin also contribute towards pedagogy, but begin to underwrite necessary curriculum changes. For example, if the transmissions of values outline the need for student agency and autonomous learning, it may be necessary to rewrite specific courses to support student-centred learning.

### 3. Our Prototype

#### *Faculty Preparedness:*

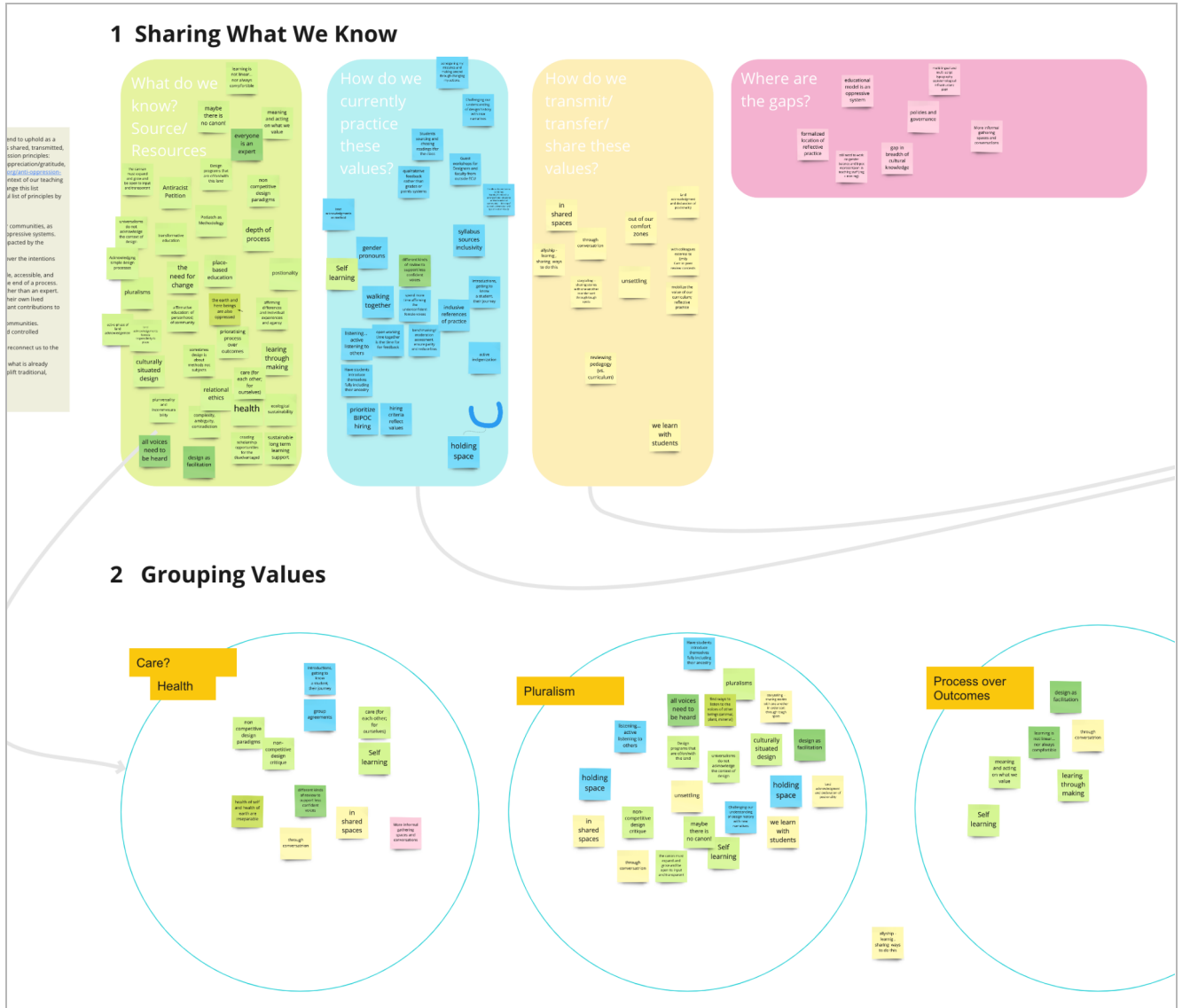
Before our workshops began, our design faculty spent the 2020/2021 academic year discussing ways in which we can decolonize our curriculum. We also recommended that participants spend time with the following resources to become familiar with the discourse and knowledge that have influenced and guided our workshops:

1. *Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers*: [opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers/](https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers/)
2. *A Sociologist Examines the “White Fragility” That Prevents White Americans from Confronting Racism*: [www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-sociologist-examines-the-white-fragility-that-prevents-white-americans-from-confronting-racism](https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-sociologist-examines-the-white-fragility-that-prevents-white-americans-from-confronting-racism)
3. *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*: [design-justice.pubpub.org/](https://design-justice.pubpub.org/)
4. *The Room of Silence*: [www.eloisesherid.com/the-room-of-silence](https://www.eloisesherid.com/the-room-of-silence)
5. School of the Art Institute Anti-Racism Resource Guides: [libraryguides.saic.edu/learn\\_unlearn/foundations](https://libraryguides.saic.edu/learn_unlearn/foundations)
6. *Being Anti-Racist*: [nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist](https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist)

In addition to this, we were mindful of Design Justice’s (<https://designjustice.org/read-the-principles>) principles:

1. We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities, as well as to seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems.
2. We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process.
3. We prioritize design’s impact on the community over the intentions of the designer.
4. We view change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process, rather than as a point at the end of a process.
5. We see the role of the designer as a facilitator rather than an expert.
6. We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience and that we all have unique and brilliant contributions to bring to a design process.
7. We share design knowledge and tools with our communities.
8. We work towards sustainable, community-led and controlled outcomes.
9. We work towards non-exploitative solutions that reconnect us to the earth and to each other.
10. Before seeking new design solutions, we look for what is already working at the community level. We honor and uplift traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices.





MIRO BOARD 1: USED FOR SEVERAL WORKSHOPS

Our second workshop looked at grouping our values and identifying gaps in our resources. We identified specific areas where resources are needed in order for faculty and students to sustain a community with anti-oppressive values, knowledges, and skills. These included: gaps in the breadth of cultural knowledge in our university, a need for more informal gathering spaces and conversations between colleagues, updated language and knowledges in our university policies and governance structures, and an identified need to work on gender balance and BIPOC representation in our faculty and staff.

As a group, we also identified three shared values: care/health, pluralism, and process over outcomes. We then spent time copying the original notes in our “what do we know” category, and placing them into the group we felt represented its value best. We discussed what we meant by “care and health” of our faculty, students, and staff and where we have agency and responsibility in sustaining a healthy community. We heard from our colleagues that the process and methods involved in our discipline were more valuable than the final outcome or





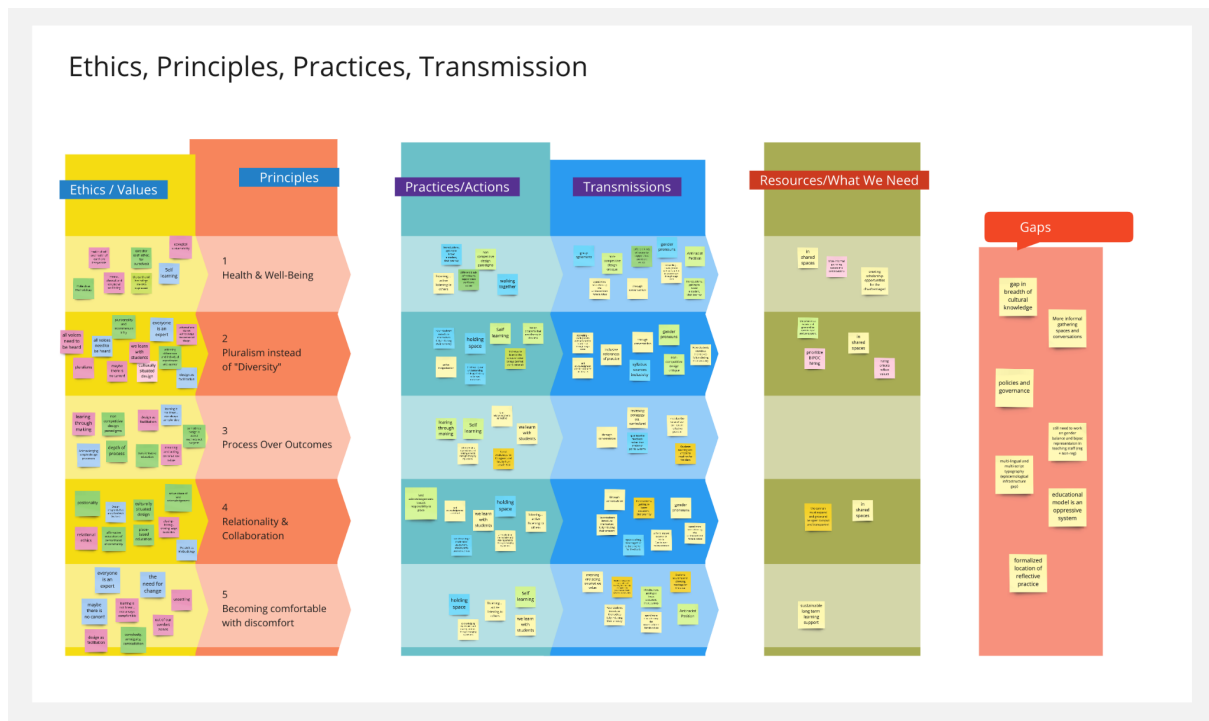
#### 4. Relationality and Collaboration

The history of design has often focused too much on individuals, individual achievement, and original works. Because of this, the field of design can be viewed as competitive. In reality, design is highly collaborative. We value the opportunity to teach allyship, collaboration, and sharing in order to assert change in our professions. Relational ethics, acknowledgements of place and the land in which we work, and culturally situating our design work reflect a deeper consideration of design futures.

#### 5. Learning to be Comfortable with our Discomfort

These principles can be challenging to uphold, and we make mistakes. We know that we will need to acknowledge and reconcile with these mistakes and that we will often work within spaces of complexity, ambiguity, and contradictions. We can learn to grow in these spaces.

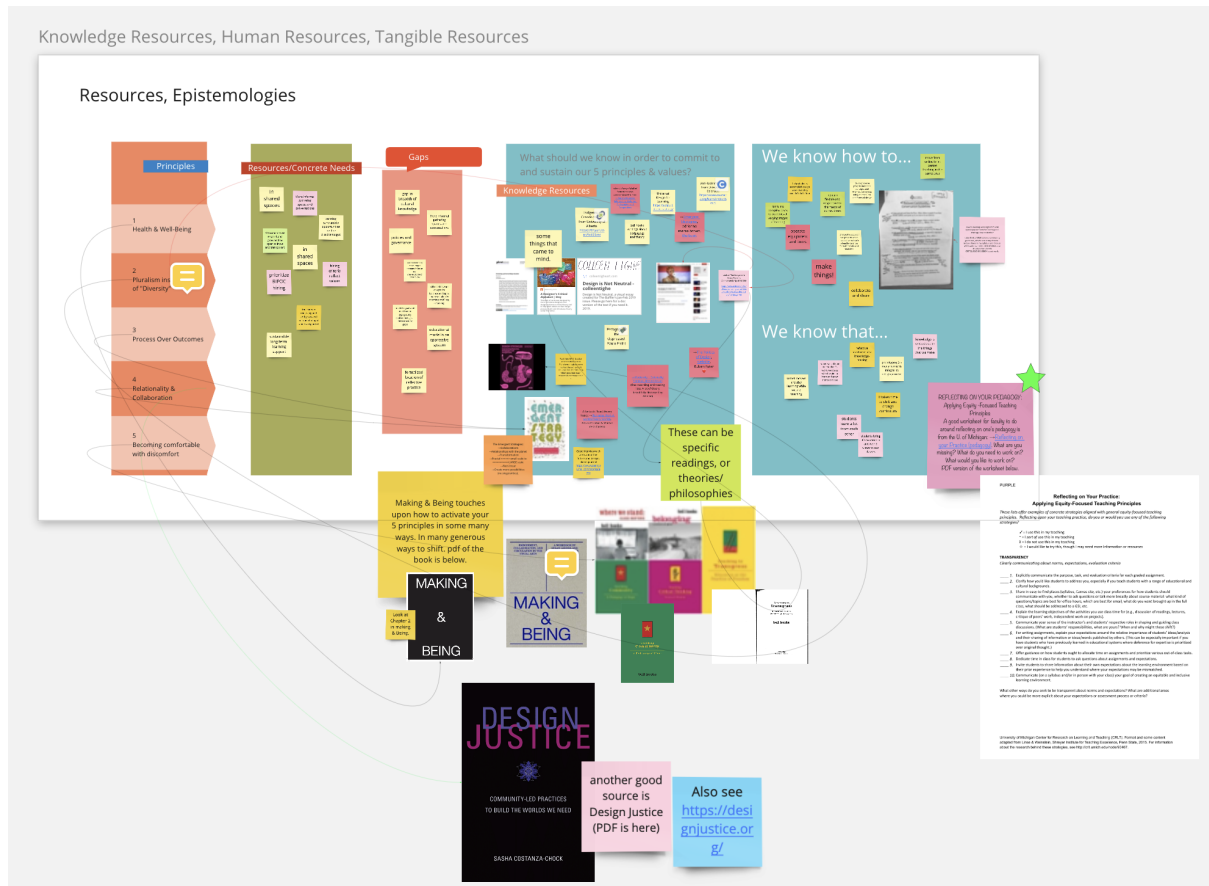
After refining these key principles, we met our co-designers with re-arranged content and reflections from our previous workshops. We transferred the comments and key concepts from our previous Miro board and asked our participants to add and expand on these ideas.



MIRO BOARD 2

This Miro board also aligned the categories of actions and transmissions used in workshops one and two with each principle. This allowed us to articulate the ethics and values that upheld each principle, where — or in what ways — we felt that we practiced these principles and the ways in which students experienced these actions and practices. We also listed the corresponding resources required to sustain these principles, where we felt it was important. Our participants spent considerable time discussing how faculty members feel vulnerable when we conceive and implement changes such as these. Sharing our vulnerabilities and offering support is crucial to maintaining our values.

Our final Miro board returned to epistemologies and resources, and how we express our knowledge throughout our programs.



MIRO BOARD 3

This board made space to list specific readings and courses for faculty to learn and share. Some of these resources included texts that are broad and can apply to multiple disciplines. These include the works of bell hooks (*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, *Teaching Community: a Pedagogy of Hope*, and *Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*) and Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). *Emergent Strategy*, by adrienne maree brown, describes the “ways for humans to practice being in right relationship to our home and each other, to practice complexity, and grow a compelling future together through relatively simple interactions. Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for” (2017.) Other broad and non-disciplinary resources that were listed also include short (and free) courses from Coursera: *Indigenous Canada*, developed by the University of Alberta, and *Anti-Racism 1*, developed by the University of Colorado. In addition to this, *Universal Design for Learning* (<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>) is an online resource that provides broad but effective guidelines and tools.

We also listed resources specific to design practices. These resources reflect the current discourse in decolonizing our structures in design and addressing the problems and issues created by the universalisms of modernism. While not discussing design directly, *The Danger of the Single Story* is exemplary in demonstrating how our

approaches to developing narratives and histories about our own discipline can exclude and deny access to important contributors.



MIRO BOARD 3: DETAIL

These final workshop sessions also asked participants to express their own development of teaching practices as knowledge. Here we asked participants to express knowledge through skills, abilities, and capabilities. In answering the phrase “We know how to...”, participants listed: move from online to in-person teaching in the same class, help students accomplish design work that they couldn't do before, remain flexible and responsive to

the needs of our students, change the scope of our projects when needed to maintain a healthy balance for both faculty and students, to name a few. The phrase, “We know that...” resulted in responses such as: when we critique our student's work, we do so with the aim to learn and grow, not to criticize; knowledge is embedded in the things that we make; students learn a lot from each other; and, students bring life experience and world views to our classes. These lists not only contribute to an active and vibrant curriculum, but they also precondition our approach toward teaching and provide a shared basis in which faculty can support and encourage each other.

**We know how to...**

**We know that...**

**REFLECTING ON YOUR PEDAGOGY: Applying Equity-Focused Teaching Principles**

A good worksheet for faculty to do around reflecting on one's pedagogy is from the U. of Michigan — [defining our own teaching practices](#). What are you missing? What do you need to work on? What would you like to work on? PDF version of the worksheet below.

**Reflecting on Your Practice: Applying Equity-Focused Teaching Principles**

These lists offer examples of concrete strategies aligned with general equity-focused teaching principles. Reflecting upon your teaching practice, do you or would you use any of the following strategies?

- ✓ = I use this in my teaching
- ~ = I sort of use this in my teaching
- Δ = I do not use this in my teaching
- ⊕ = I would like to try this, though I may need more information or resources

**TRANSPARENCY**  
Clearly communicating about norms, expectations, evaluation criteria

1. Explicitly communicate the purpose, task, and evaluation criteria for each graded assignment.
2. Clarify how you'd like students to address you, especially if you teach students with a range of educational and cultural backgrounds.
3. Share in easy-to-find places (syllabus, Canvas site, etc.) your preferences for how students should communicate with you, whether to ask questions or talk more broadly about course material: what kind of questions/topics are best for office hours, which are best for email, what do you want brought up in the full class, what should be addressed to a GSJ, etc.
4. Explain the learning objectives of the activities you use class time for (e.g., discussion of readings, lectures, critique of peers' work, independent work on projects).
5. Communicate your sense of the instructor's and students' respective roles in shaping and guiding class discussions. (What are students' responsibilities, what are yours? When and why might these shift?)
6. For writing assignments, explain your expectations around the relative importance of students' ideas/analysis and their sharing of information or ideas/levels published by others. (This can be especially important if you have students who have previously learned in educational systems where deference for expertise is prioritized over original thought.)
7. Offer guidance on how students ought to allocate time on assignments and prioritize various out-of-class tasks.
8. Dedicate time in class for students to ask questions about assignments and expectations.
9. Invite students to share information about their own expectations about the learning environment based on their prior experience to help you understand where your expectations may be mismatched.
10. Communicate (in a public and/or in person with your class) your goal of creating an equitable and inclusive learning environment.

What other ways do you seek to be transparent about norms and expectations? What are additional areas where you could be more explicit about your expectations or assessment process or criteria?

University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT). Format and some content adapted from Linn & Aikenhead, *Shaping Institute for Teaching Excellence*, Penn State, 2016. For information about the research behind these strategies, see <http://crlt.umich.edu/node/467>.

MIRO BOARD 3: DETAIL

#### 4. Our Reflections and Application

We originally proposed to facilitate workshops according to the framework, with each workshop addressing each individual step of the framework. While we still required multiple workshops and discussions, we found that we cycled through the entire framework during each workshop, touching on ethics/values, knowledges, practices/pedagogy, curriculum, and back to ethics. The framework was effective in questioning and developing our principles, epistemologies, pedagogies, and curriculum. We discovered, however, that these framework components are not discreet topics of conversation. They are mutually beneficial and intrinsic aspects of teaching and learning and emerge organically through discourse and collaboration..

As facilitators, we observed that:

- Faculty made assumptions about what it means to be prepared for these conversations; they've read some work but were not always prepared to resituate or recontextualize it for this framework, or for their syllabi.
- We sometimes relied on jargon and repeated phrases without diving deeper into what they mean for us ("nothing about us without us", "decolonization"). Developing and sharing a lexicon of terms would be useful for future use.
- Faculty were initially guarded and we were not always specific enough in discussing our goals for each workshop for them to immediately understand the aims of each workshop
- If faculty have vulnerabilities with each other on zoom, how will they be able to translate this work with students in a physical classroom? We need to spend time discussing our vulnerabilities, and ways to address them in our work.
- Cross-talk: faculty would often speak over each other, comment critically on the contributions of others or redirect the conversation of the topic set forward. This is part of coming to terms with the subject matter but requires the facilitators to become moderators of possible conflict.

Also, when working with faculty members in our workshops we noted that:

- Some "values" that the faculty listed were actually transmittable practices.
- Some values and principles were aspirational goals – we needed to restate whether we could practice them immediately.
- In order to alleviate the feeling of vulnerability in faculty, we need to make actual space and time for faculty to connect with each other.

An anti-oppressive framework is a set of principles and ways of knowing that is inclusive to faculty, students, and staff. It does not only reflect "good intentions." Instead, it is a tool that assists in liberating knowledge from marginalized sources and challenges Design, designers, teachers and community members to rethink how their pedagogy and curriculum might reproduce inequalities. This framework makes space for participants to review their curriculum and recognize the opportunities to address ableism, social inequalities, racism, and other universalist or Euro-centric approaches to knowledge that continue to marginalize our teaching and learning communities.

It is important to note that there is no single or universal framework to address anti-oppression for all teaching and learning instances. We understand that through participatory and inclusive workshops with both faculty and students attending, we can facilitate dialogue and activity aimed at constructing an adaptable framework that can grow and shift with experience and use.

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