Community Research Collaboratives

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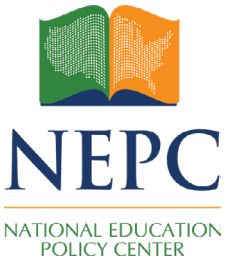

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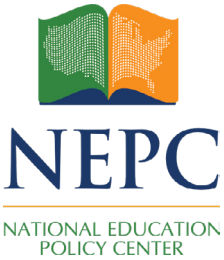
Executive Summary

This report discusses an approach to research and engagement that we call Community Research Collaboratives. Our goal is to further define and elevate an existing field of work currently under-recognized by academic researchers, philanthropists, and educational policymakers and practitioners. We describe CRCs as partnerships among community members, researchers, and/or educational institutions that work together to advance equity and justice by jointly creating new knowledge, policies, and/or practices that promote systemic change in educational systems and society. To initiate this study, we reached out to two funding organizations and two networks supporting research partnerships, conducting interviews of six leaders in order to vet the working definition. Using the resulting criteria, we identified seven existing collaboratives to learn from as subjects of this research. Subsequent interviews with 12 participants across these collaboratives yielded the following four core features of CRCs: (1) their commitment to systemic transformation, (2) their challenge to current knowledge structures as they prioritize community goals, (3) their understanding of research as a developmental process, and (4) their attention to effective collaboration. This report fleshes out these ideas and provides detailed snapshots of some of the representative organizations to illustrate how the core features are manifested in practice. We intend our analysis to highlight the unique attributes of CRCs, to boost their visibility in education, and to encourage funding support for this growing field.



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Why Define Community Research Collaboratives?

To create an effective educational ecosystem, all of the interacting parts must work together; this includes coordination among education experts, district leaders, teachers, community members, students and their families.[1] However, there is a legacy of inequitable practices in educational institutions that undermines trust and collaboration among school system representatives, students, and families, especially in low-income communities of color.[2] To address such inequity, this paper explores a field of research partnerships that work to ensure sustainable and effective system changes in education and that prioritize the perspectives and goals of historically marginalized people often excluded from research projects. [3] We call these partnerships Community Research Collaboratives (CRCs). Such partnerships have existed alongside other forms of research, but they have received significantly less support and recognition from educational researchers, philanthropists, and educational policymakers and practitioners. We believe that better defining CRCs and highlighting their defining characteristics can assist the field in imagining educational ecosystems that consider such research arrangements as key to systemic transformation.

In defining CRCs, we aim to highlight a critical mass of recent work that builds upon more than a century of education change led by community organizers and advocates, parents, and students in low-income communities, and communities of color that work in partnership with education scholars. For example, youth participatory research has yielded rich evidence about the types of knowledge that can emerge when the people most impacted by education systems ask critical questions with support from experienced researchers.[4] Young

people and supportive adults can serve as powerful teams for knowledge creation and use in school settings[5] because young people have valuable and unique perspectives on the opportunities in schools and other educational institutions that can inform researchers about what supports their learning.[6] Moreover, projects inviting young people to participate in investigation and analysis of systems provide youth with an opportunity for positive growth.[7] With its expanded belief about who can and should generate knowledge to inform policies and practices,[8] such collaborative research disrupts the dichotomy between researcher and research participants.

Similarly, scholars of civil rights and education justice movements have documented the power of low-income parents, parents of color, and community organizers in their partnerships with researchers. As one example, Oakes explains that for over a century, scholars have engaged deeply with communities in both researching and solving problems of inequity in public education. She explains that engaging with communities most impacted by inequality helps researchers define problems and identify solutions, producing scholarship more relevant and useful to the kind of democratic decision-making envisioned by education pioneers like John Dewey.[9] Another benefit of such participatory research is that it helps sustain positive change over time by building the political power and public will of historically marginalized communities.[10] Research documents changes in federal, state, and district policies—from court cases like *Brown v. Board of Education* or *Mendez v. Westminster* to policies on school discipline, college access, and school finance—that were directly informed by research designed in collaboration with low-income communities of color.[11]

The exact combination of principles, core components, methodologies, and emerging practices we use shape a working process that has some key differences from other types of research partnerships…we decided to investigate this idea more systematically.

The field of research-practice partnerships (RPPs) is also well documented and growing. In a forthcoming paper summarizing this subfield, Farrell, Penuel, Daniel and Coburn find that RPPs show positive impact in such areas as improving classroom practice, changing district operations, and providing support for research-based practices in educational institutions.[12] RPPs are organized in widely varied ways, including diverse structures, goals, roles, and types of projects. The authors confirm that RPPs have proliferated in part because of considerable philanthropic and government investment, including support at national and local levels. And, they note positive overlap between the fields of RPP and community-based research when an RPP focuses on participation and power and offers learning opportunities through research engagement.

While each of these academic disciplines—youth participatory research, education organizing, and research-practice partnerships—as well as many others overlap with the subfield we are calling CRCs, none display every defining characteristic. As practicing scholars in this subfield, we found ourselves and our colleagues regularly noting that the work we engage in feels different from previously defined subfields. The exact combination of principles, core components, methodologies, and emerging practices we use shape a working process that has some key differences from other types of research partnerships. With support from the

William T. Grant and Spencer Foundations, we decided to investigate this idea more systematically through a multiphase effort.

Overview of the Project

Before detailing our own efforts, we note that we are not alone in our efforts to define this subfield. Warren offers an initial functional definition of the field, what he calls Collaborative, Community Engaged Scholarship.[13] In his introduction to a special journal edition, Warren explains that, in these collaborative efforts, "scholars and a variety of community change agents work together to identify research questions, design appropriate research, collect and analyze data, produce research reports, and design educational interventions and policy initiatives based upon research findings."[14] Warren offers a useful starting point for understanding what CRCs do, but we believe that the deeper investigation described here is warranted.

In our investigation, we adopted the grounded approach of Coburn, Penuel, and Geil.[15] Rather than wait for the research-practice partnership field to crystallize over decades, these researchers investigated while the field was still new to try and understand the core components of the work. Their powerful paper provided a foundation for scholars to work together, speak across place, and develop relationships with other sectors like government, school systems, and education foundations to build a national network and advance the field. Individually and collectively, research-practice partnerships have benefitted in part from the work of scholars to better define and understand the field as it emerged and evolved, resulting in increased resources and policies to support such projects.[16] Knowing that there is likely positive overlap—as well as key differences—between research-practice partnerships and CRCs, our work is a similar effort to understand CRCs' defining characterstics as well as opportunities to support such collaborations.

The Process

Following here is an overview of our research process; greater detail is available in the Appendix to this document for readers interested in knowing more about our methodology.

Initially, we reviewed recent literature to generate a working definition of the field, beginning with research-practice partnerships[17] and community organizing partnerships[18] and expanding from this starting point. In a second phase, we interviewed six leaders in foundations and networks supporting research-practice partnerships to help vet our working definition and to identify representative CRCs. We subsequently interviewed 12 people working in community organizations, education systems, and research institutions across seven collaborations (profiled in the Appendix) that most closely relate to our understanding of CRCs. Using grounded theory data analysis[19] and cycling among our data sources,[20] in this phase we were able to expand our working definition by identifying or confirming some specific core features characterizing CRCs. Additionally, to deepen our understanding as much as possible, we explored why change agents and scholars engage in such work, and how they prioritize education justice in their efforts. In addition to our findings from our inquiries,

below we also provide a snapshot of some representative CRCs in order to demonstrate for readers how the principles we identified have translated to practice.

Throughout the process, we worked systemically to advance academic clarity about this genre of research partnerships, which has evolved over time and space. We believe that CRCs are emerging as a distinct approach and they should be discussed alongside other dominant methods of educational research, decision-making, and design. Additionally there is potential to grow these types of knowledge creation practices through connections with similar work being done in other fields (sociology, public health, and urban studies, for example). This paper offers a starting point for such discussions by sharing a clearly articulated definition and some specific examples of CRCs in education.

Researchers

All five co-authors are actively engaged in public scholarship. Adam York, Siomara Valladares, Michelle Renée Valladares, and Matthew Garcia all work for the Research Hub for Youth Organizing and Education Policy at the University of Colorado Boulder. The Research Hub advances education justice by co-creating and sharing research and curriculum with youth organizers, teachers, education leaders, and policymakers who are leading the education justice movement. Jon Snyder is the Executive Director of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) where he fosters research, policy, and practice to advance high-quality, equitable educational systems in the United States and internationally. This CRC project originally launched through our collaboration in the Education Justice Network and the Partnership for the Future of Learning—two cross-sector national networks that work to advance education equity and justice. Therefore, we began with significant experience and relationships across national networks of researchers who work directly with community organizations. Our combined experience gives us a deep understanding of the field we are working to define, as well as a strong list of potential peer organizations to learn from. Still, we are involved in a consistent struggle for critical reflexivity. That is, we are aware of our potential bias relative to the particular strengths and challenges of projects for which we have worked. Thus, we seek to learn from others' perspectives and experiences in the field.

What are Community Research Collaboratives?

Based on our existing knowledge of education research and, more specifically, participatory methods, we see Community Research Collaboratives (CRCs) as a subfield of public scholarship in education. That is, like other forms of such scholarship, CRC partners co-create knowledge with the goal of shifting cultural norms and political power towards greater equity.[21] We define Community Research Collaboratives as: *partnerships among community members, researchers, and/or educational institutions that aim to advance equity and justice by jointly creating new knowledge, policies, and/or practices that lead to systemic change in educational systems and society*. CRCs differ from other forms of research because community stakeholders make key decisions about the issues to be addressed through

the collaboration—they determine how research and project goals are defined and how research evidence is used. Researchers and other partners engage in the collaboration, bringing historical and theoretical wisdom and methodological expertise in support of the community-defined goals.

What is *research to advance equity and justice in educational systems?*

To understand our definition of CRCs, we must also understand what is meant by *research that advances educational equity and justice*. At the outset of our study, we began with a definition from co-author Renée Valladares: "Research is a tool or a process of inquiry that can initiate and inform an education debate, develop new solutions, open people's eyes, or document the inequitable educational opportunities provided to low-income students of color."[22] As we explain in our findings, based on our interview data and literature review,[23] we broadened this definition to include the co-creation of knowledge. Thus, *research that advances educational equity and justice is co-created knowledge that uncovers inequality, seeks to expand educational opportunities, and catalyzes change in educational practices, policies, and systems*.

Findings from our own data and from our literature review clearly indicate that offering a single definition of educational equity and justice that is uniformly applied across all CRCs is impractical and inaccurate. Rather, part of the work of each CRC is to interrogate terms, such as "equity" and "justice," while attending to the underlying foundations of research that claim to approach such goals.[24] CRCs, and associated efforts within the academy, must contend with a legacy of research that has exploited historically marginalized communities to the benefit of individual researchers and universities as a whole—commonly called extractive research.[25] Simply taking a community-engaged approach does not present simple answers to the historical problems of such exploitive, extractive research.[26]

CRC collaborators understand that the current political context of schooling and other learning opportunities calls for close attention to the ongoing political struggles of people affected by systems that research can help transform.[27] To advance equity and justice in educational systems, partners within the project must take deliberate steps to develop a process that guards against perpetuating existing bias and inequity while accounting for competing visions of justice, especially in the formulation of research questions and the epistemological assumptions that shape project design. Such research will look very different across contexts depending on the history of injustice experienced by specific project members. With these considerations in mind, we explored the ways various CRCs have approached their work and the impact they hoped to trigger with their efforts to generate and use knowledge.

As noted above, however, CRC projects include varied definitions of education equity and justice. It is helpful to understand these variations, just as it is helpful to understand different definitions of community engagement. The table below reflects three different approaches to defining educational equity and justice based on interviews with people working on CRC projects.

Participant	Definition
Lorraine Wright *The Dignity in Schools Campaign*	The protection of human rights is – it really is kind of ingrained in the authentic and sincere connection with people. And so often the oppression, so to speak, that we see on an everyday basis in so many spaces, not just education but also economic oppression, sometimes even spiritual oppression and the like – it really is based in dehumanization, right, really kind of separating and estranging the story from an actual person.
Ann Ishimaru *Family Leadership Design Collaborative*	At the same time, we also think about what does it mean for communities to define for themselves what education justice is? And how do we think about that beyond the sort of dominant white individualistic frame? Because, when you talk to families in communities, yes they want their children to be…successful in college and career…but it isn't, like, go and get good grades and good test scores and get into college and then escape from us and never look back. Especially in many communities of color, there's a much deeper conception of what it means to be educated as a good person, as somebody who's in relation with other people and with, you know, in indigenous communities in particular, with the land and with place and other relations.
Dane Stickney *Critical Civic Inquiry*	And so for me, I guess some sort of definition that says…practicing justice work in a safe education setting can then set you up to actually do that work and be that work as an adult. So it's not that you're learning about – you're not tackling justice in education solely to go to college and then have a successful career. It's, like, no, this educational justice is the foundation for your life moving forward. And that may include college and career. But most importantly it's holding those in power accountable for the actions they have. And to make sure that those actions are meeting the needs of the people it's meant to serve.

Clearly, pursuing equity and justice may involve such varied goals as as remedying dehumanization, or nurturing learning opportunities aligned with a community's values, or developing a kind of active, critical citizenship. In each case, however, the process prioritizes benefit to the community first and foremost.

What is *community* in Community Research Collaboratives?

The term "community" in education research is invoked often when university researchers partner with people outside of the university. Defining partnership in this binary way artificially elevates researchers and homogenizes the varied types of community members. This lack of clarity around what constitutes a "community" partner has led to debate over the differences among various forms of partnership work.[28] Simply put, in CRCs the people who engage in and make up the collaboration define the term. Across the groups we interviewed, we saw CRCs framing community in three distinct ways.

First, community can be framed as students, their families, and/or closely affiliated individuals who may also be united through shared values, practices, identity (racial, ethnic, religious, and so on), and space (geography or region, for example).[29] In this framing, the goal is to influence particular children, families, or local communities. Intended impact is often

some change in the personal circumstances and outcomes of individuals within an unjust system.

The second more common frame is organized community. This frames community as composite constituencies—such as organized parents, students, community organizers, and others—who share interest in a specific school, or perhaps in a policy issue affecting multiple families in a district or school.[30]

A third framing of community includes anyone involved in the ecosystem of a particular educational institution. The list could include parents and students, university researchers, district officials, school administrators, teachers, and community service providers.[31] Within this broader definition of community, opportunities to alter traditional power dynamics among different community sectors can occur. Larger collaborations might be supported when school districts have a core respect for constituents because then, as one of our interviewees noted, the work is "built on the notion that partnerships are necessary and valuable."

Beyond the discrete categories of titles (e.g., student, community organizer), other identity markers—including race, ethnicity, income, sexual orientation, immigration status— can indicate membership in a particular community, as in communities of color or low-income communities. Such categories are extremely important within projects and are often central to the goals of particular collaboratives. However, the scope of a CRC project need not be limited to a single identity category. In fact, we have seen multiple examples of work that expands possibilities within and across identity categories.

We focus on the above frames to highlight that much of what makes this field different is a deep consideration for the personal histories, and the wisdom gained from those histories, that participants bring to collaboratives. While community is often discussed or mentioned in research literature, how it has been defined is often not articulated—and perhaps not even considered. In contrast, we believe it is important to detail the ways community is framed in order to more fully understand CRC processes, how they emerge and how they work toward justice or equity-based goals.

We would also like to make special note of the fact that labels applied to individuals are fluid. For example, in our writing team, there are university-trained researchers *who are also* members of historically marginalized communities. Within any research collaboration, there may be people whose identities bridge labels and titles commonly used to describe partners. With that in mind, we try to avoid suggesting a dichotomy between researcher and community member. Instead, we remain open to the possibility that the people engaging in this work bring a rich diversity of identities and valuable experience to the collaborations.

What characteristics of public scholarship do Community Research Collaboratives share?

Public scholarship has a rich history, and the relationship between university research and public issues is a topic of ongoing debate.[32] In this work, we employ Oakes' recent definition of public scholarship as it relates to education research: researchers "joining with educa-

tors, political leaders, storytellers, and activists—to produce and use knowledge in concert to shift cultural norms and political power toward equity and inclusion."[33] This definition clearly delineates key elements of public scholarship. Participants are researchers "joining with educators, political leaders, storytellers, and activists." Its purpose is to jointly generate knowledge. Its clear end goal is to shift society towards greater equity and inclusion. While Oakes explains that her definition is still being developed, two core components are communication of research findings and engagement of the public. In her words,

> First, there is the act of translation–that is, scholars who effectively communicate research findings and recommendations to various publics in accessible and useful forms. Second, there are the modes of engagement–characteristically, research that is done in partnership with various publics in an effort to solve immediate, tangible problems.[34]

Similarly, such communication with broader publics and deep engagement are two defining characteristics of CRCs. As we found through our research process CRCs, knowledge is co-created across and within different publics, together, and collaborating partners work to make sense of that new knowledge and apply it to creating systemic reform.

Oakes offers examples of several fields of research and practice that fit within her definition of public scholarship—policy analysis and evaluation, teacher education, participatory action research, university-community partnerships, research-practice partnerships, and many others.[35] Each of these fields has a long history of epistemology, practice, and learning. For example, there is rich scholarship on the public benefits of education policy analysis,[36] education evaluation,[37] research-practice partnerships,[38] and participatory approaches to research.[39] Oakes also explains that fields like teacher education and university-community partnerships have existed for over a century. [40] We contend that an emerging critical mass of scholars and other leaders in education are expanding these traditions toward a specific kind of work (CRCs) that is related to, yet distinct from, these other forms of public scholarship. Such expansion is evident in research methodologies that are attending to historical context, interpersonal relationships, and current politics.[41] This study, born of our curiosity, also extends recent efforts to clearly articulate this methodological shift and adds to the conversation an explanation of how these methodological approaches come together in collaborative systemic work. We nest CRCs under the umbrella of public scholarship because it attends to the key components described by Oakes—communication of research and partnership with publics beyond researchers.[42]

Four Key Features of Community Research Collaboratives

Our data indicated four key features of CRCs, which stood out across our interviews with people in the field and were reinforced by literature from other fields of public scholars. Modeling the fluidity and interdependence of work in CRCs, these categories are intentionally overlapping and should not be considered mutually exclusive. We detail them here to fuel discussion in the CRC field and to encourage future scholarship to add nuance and depth to these, or to identify other common features.

1. Community Research Collaboratives direct research and knowledge-creation efforts at systemic transformation.

> *Some of the places that we're trying to get to we've never been, so it has to be more transformative than restorative. And so, I'm really all about repairing the harm and empowering individuals to understand what intrinsic strengths they hold and how to not be self-reliant on a system that was never meant to see their success.*
>
> – Lorraine Wright, I Vote for Me Richmond (Dignity in Schools Campaign)

Inherent in CRC work is an underlying belief that our educational system needs change, particularly to address a history of inequity and injustice. Community partners have an opportunity to ask important questions; as one interviewee asked, "What are the assumptions that we're making about the purpose of education?" Similarly, they offer critiques; one interviewee noted, for example, "the system really was designed to, in fact, benefit certain groups and exclude others." CRCs create a space for partners to name and document the unjust foundations and subsequent results of unjust education systems. For example, Dignity in Schools Campaign[43] works with researchers to quantitatively document extensive racial inequalities in school discipline nationally. They match such quantitative data with stories gathered through participatory research with youth organizers. The data provide a systemic analysis of the lived experiences of communities, and the result is a compelling narrative that provides guidance toward transformative outcomes that would address the injustice students currently experience.

The efforts of communities that engage in advancing equitable outcomes and opportunities in current educational systems are well documented.[44] Community-based efforts in educational justice aim to transform both systems of power and roles of individuals within those systems.[45] Dynamic and oriented toward process— in contrast with others focusing on specific "achievement" outcomes, for example—these groups are interested in holistic, community transformation.[46]

Several interview participants stressed that CRCs view education equity discourse as only a first step in systemic change. As one interview participant articulated, the overall goal of CRCs is "developing educational systems that empower all of our students to be change agents in their lives and communities." That is, CRCs are pushing past the idea of equitable access to existing education systems toward the idea of reshaping the goals, meaning, and structures of those systems. In a separate interview we heard, "It's not just opportunities for access. It's about opportunities to be a driver of the conversation."

For many who do CRC work, a commitment to systemic transformation leads to a re-envisioning of learning and expertise from the inside out. CRCs are mindful about grounding their shared work in the interests and experiences of those most affected by systemic inequality, namely students and their families. As one interviewee put it, CRCs are "recognizing that . . . there's so much expertise in so many pockets . . . organizers' expertise—whether it be youth, whether it be parents, whether it be communities, [or] educators." This perspective mirrors that of other interview participants who sense that knowledge and expertise can be found in multiple places, not only in traditional positivistic research. CRC partners

share an effort to transform not only the systemic inequality in education systems, but also the systemic inequality inherent in traditional research. This mindfulness is present in every aspect of CRCs, beginning with who is engaged in the work and provided resources to participate, and continuing through every phase of an effort, including collaboratively defining research problems, questions, methods, and analyses.

One key point echoing in the interviews was the potential for complications in the meanings associated with the roles of individuals and organizations in transformative processes. In politically organized communities, for example, school leaders are sometimes the target of action rather than a partner.[47] As one respondent remarked, "We don't necessarily have schools or school districts as part of these [collaboratives] at all." Importantly, within politically defined communities, not all members of a CRC work on the same side of every issue, nor does each organization always play the same role. When discussing a CRC focused on school discipline, another respondent explained that the community organization "sometimes plays an outside agitator role. And by that partnership, they play more of a policy-making role with the district in a collaborative but also [in a] necessarily sometimes adversarial way." Having distinct and sometimes conflicting roles is a challenge but can also be powerful. For example, most researchers who work at universities cannot lobby for a particular bill. They can produce evidence but often are limited in how they share it. At the same time, a political organization might have the capacity and legal right to lobby but lacks the time to analyze the data.

As a result, CRCs try to ensure that individual projects grow out of the expertise, values, and commitments of the many partners. Accordingly, this leads to a broad array of research questions and goals that can be addressed using a similarly diverse set of methodologies. This effort to systemically transform research itself leads directly to our next feature of CRCs—namely that CRCs challenge the structure of knowledge creation itself.

2. By centering the community and its interests, Community Research Collaboratives challenge assumptions about who creates knowledge.

> *Research "on" is the assumption that the people who are in positions of "research authority" are the ones who are the experts in not only knowledge generation but also analysis and findings and recommendations.*
>
> – Kristy Luk, NEYON

The above quote captures a message that we heard from several interview participants. Interviewees reflected on a long, oppressive tradition of researchers conducting studies "on" rather than with the communities they aim to help. By comparison, CRCs start from the perspective that the people most marginalized by educational inequality are the people best situated to define problems of practice and develop solutions. As such, it is these perspectives and experiences from the community that are centered in CRC work, a practice well substantiated by the research literature.[48]

In the words of one respondent, starting with the people most affected by inequality leads to "understanding the specific needs of communities and starting to ask and answer the

right questions." In this way, CRCs begin at the earliest stages of designing a project to shift power structures within knowledge-creation practices, because "[projects] come from questions that community-based organizations are already grappling with, that they then tap researchers' expertise to support with." That is, in CRCs there is a commitment to having the perspectives, concerns, and priorities of community members drive the formation of research questions and research design considerations.

Many CRCs start by understanding the history of local work toward justice. As an interviewee explained, it is critical to understand, "the historical and contextual factors of what is happening now and what has happened previously to bring us to this point–where you know [that] our partners have been doing this work for a long time." CRC partners—for example, community organizations, researchers, and education leaders—can choose to come together in solidarity to support the people that have a deep understanding of the problems and systems. Local historical wisdom in these collaboratives contains important guidance for transformative justice in a given context.

This critique also holds true for adolescents, youth, and young adults who compose an instrumental part of a community, yet are often overlooked or purposefully excluded from the process of knowledge creation. As one respondent noted, "Kids aren't positioned within classrooms to be knowers, authors of knowledge." CRC participants consider youth knowledge to be not just valid to the process of understanding education problems but also valuable in creating and implementing solutions. These types of CRCs challenge us to examine the advantages of goals defined by students, parents, and other community stakeholders as the starting point for research and design.

In CRCs there is a commitment to having the perspective, concerns, and priorities of community members drive the formation of research questions and research design considerations.

Centering the needs of the community does not mean that community members are the only expert partners in a collaborative. Rather, interviewees discussed how leaders within educational institutions and researchers are simultaneously engaged in multiple phases of the research process. They work collaboratively, and both have significant roles in defining problems of practice and research questions, deciding on the scope of a study or project, collecting and analyzing data, sharing project results, and building and holding power within the scope of the collaboration.[49] As we noted earlier, researchers (i.e., those trained and working in universities or other centers) can also be community members (as well as members of historically non-dominant groups) and bring valuable expertise beyond their research training in certain cases. Centering community interests in these projects does not require excluding or ignoring the expertise of researchers, but rather involves a thoughtful process of rethinking who is involved in asking questions and making decisions at various points throughout a project's evolution.

The work of CRCs demonstrates that including those most often excluded groups as leaders in the research process increases validity and credibility, both in how data is collected (because people are more willing to share knowledge with researchers they trust) and how it is presented.[50] While researchers often step in and out of particular contexts, community

members not only know the context better, they are also far more likely to exert the necessary political pressure on policymakers to ensure that justice or equity-focused changes are implemented over time.[51]

In CRCs, the collaborative creation of knowledge has many benefits, including the potential to lead to increased voice and leadership roles in decision-making. Lorriane Wright from the Dignity in Schools Campaign explains, "The rest of the community needs to hear from those that are impacted, because that's what that organic sort of empowerment model looks like." We heard many who do CRC work begin by asking "What does it mean for communities to define for themselves what education justice is?" At its best, interview participants explained, research can become a means for imagining and developing a more just or equitable future. Put differently, "[We are] successful if we actually are able to create some kind of knowledge that feels useful to our community partners or is useful to our community partners and then is part of a successful campaign to change policy or practice." Indeed, there is ample evidence that community organizations use research to define policy problems, advance political proposals, litigate, and monitor the implementation of laws.[52] Renée found that community organizers, and members of the low-income communities of color with whom they work, define research questions, analyze data based on their lived experience, cite well-known studies in public meetings or hearings, and often demand that new evidence be gathered.[53] In this way, research conducted by community organizations not only meets immediate campaign needs but also, as one respondent described, "challeng[es] the hierarchy of knowledge production."

Underlying this rethinking of where and how knowledge is created is a challenge to the expectation that findings should be generalizable across contexts: "We're a little bit suspicious of universalizing this experience everywhere or scaling up things that are then imposed down on other people somewhere else." As this respondent explains, CRC partners are less worried about scaling up their findings or imposing their recommendations on other communities than they are about supporting different communities in developing and using their own knowledge. Other participants explained that sometimes the *process* of creating knowledge is a more valuable element of success than any research *product*. According to one respondent, these projects focus on the "community of people and the histories and needs that enter that community." In centering people and the community, CRCs attempt to solve challenges that are specific to particular places. The knowledge generated from this type of research is essential for *interpretive research*—one producing dynamic, socially constructed meaning. The responsibility for determining the veracity and usefulness of local evidence is best carried out by local actors.

3. Community Research Collaboratives view research as a practice of intergenerational learning.

> *I think it's also a good success when you have students who come together with community members who make multigenerational spaces and learn and critique and challenge and grow.*
>
> – Shelley Zion, Critical Civic Inquiry

CRCs are uniquely situated to improve educational inequalities as well as the lives of their collaborators because, as Dr. Zion notes above, there is a wealth of learning and development that can happen when students and adults engage in creating change. Some CRCs focus on improving education opportunities and outcomes for community partners while also improving the field of academic research. For example, youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) centers *youth* in efforts to identify problems and solutions to create positive change. But our interview participants noted that YPAR is inherently an intergenerational practice. " . . .You have students who come together with community members who make multigenerational spaces and learn and critique and challenge and grow." This creates the potential to both produce valuable knowledge *and* transform the assumptions of adults and youth regarding whose knowledge is important.[54] We know from literature that YPAR and other types of participatory research approaches have the potential to disrupt power and privilege, to take a long unjust history to account in each moment spent redefining of what is "right" and "good" in education.[55] As a discrete methodological approach, YPAR is closely aligned with, and nests easily within, CRCs that often use multiple, parallel knowledge-generation approaches.

CRCs place a high priority on organizing research activities in such a way that collaborators learn more about the processes of inquiry, which can be used in future efforts toward change; this is especially true for youth participants in YPAR projects. One respondent explained how "getting kids to engage more with those kinds of tools so that they have more structured and intentional ways to use and collect data and to think about research" can give youth valuable ways of engaging with the world. CRCs also place a high value on learning from prior or parallel efforts. The emerging culture within this subfield of public scholarship supports learning across projects with a grounding in flexibility and adaptation to local needs. As we heard from this respondent, "If we learn something, we should share it out there and also use it as a kind of advocacy instrument to show the value of this kind of work in the larger world." CRCs exemplify engagement in multiple layers of development: from self, to community, to collaborator, to the collaboration, to the larger world, and back to the self. This cycle of inquiry, learning, and development is a central feature of CRCs.

4. Effective collaboration is essential to Community Research Collaboratives.

> *You can't just put people in a room without any guardrails and expect perfect collaboration.*
>
> – Hannah Goldberg, Atlanta 323

Across our data, we found several clearly defined critical components of collaboration in CRCs. First, collaboration means centering multiple voices, privileging the most marginalized, and being mindful of balancing power throughout the process. Collaborating is not just theoretical and cannot be accomplished with only words on paper. Collaboration requires a clear distribution of leadership and responsibilities and a distribution of funding and resources for all members of the project. CRC leaders are clear that creating and maintaining equitable distribution of resources and work also requires clear processes and governance

structures. In CRC work—in contrast to some other methods of community engagement demonstrated by schools, school districts, and universities—membership, roles, and responsibilities among researchers, community members, and school leaders are developed early and revised often. The aim is to build a group that is representative of the community being served and that is diverse in the different roles and expertise people bring to the work. Members of CRCs tend to be open to inviting more partners if they realize voices are being left out, and they are open to revising the way they work if they realize that there is inequity in whose perspectives are valued.

Another essential part of collaboration is attending to power dynamics in real, practical ways. One respondent explained politics as the enactment of power dynamics. This person noted that they approach "politics not as a theoretical or a research object but one of the things that we were constantly aware of." The Family Leadership Design Collaborative identified this following core lesson from its work:

> Recognize that histories and systemic inequalities shape how families and communities experience and participate in formal spaces, and that patterns of inequity tend to re-assert themselves despite good intentions. Support strategies that intervene productively in the interactions that function to reinforce hierarchical power.[56]

This theme of attending to hierarchy, binaries, and power were consistent across our data. CRC members are constantly watching the macro political context as well as the internal, micro political context of the CRC itself and trying to rebalance and address inequality across all of these different levels. One respondent pointed out that centering community also requires that all members check their own privilege throughout the collaboration. This participant explained that, in particular, university-based researchers need to make sure "that [they're] not going in with a savior mode, right, or going in where [they're] external to them, but [they're] actually part of them." The notion that a researcher can actually be part of a community contradicts much of the lived history of communities of color who have been the subjects of extractive research studies. As we noted, at times the lines between researcher and community member can be blurred; however, this does not erase the need for critical reflection on the privilege of one's position. To actually enter a collaborative with integrity takes time, conversation, and shared work to develop and maintain trust.

Descriptive Examples of Community Research Collaboratives

With four major features of CRCs clearly defined, it is useful to think about how members interact with each other within a single collaborative. This section describes three of our participating CRCs—Critical Civic Inquiry, Dignity in Schools Campaign, and Family Leadership Design Collaborative—and how they operationalize these features in their work. We selected these three CRCs because they exemplify the factors we defined, yet they are very different in terms of organizational history, membership, and goals.

Critical Civic Inquiry Project

Critical Civic Inquiry (CCI) is a multiyear project that has evolved over time. Partners have included multiple universities (The University of Colorado Boulder, University of Colorado Denver, and Rowan University), school districts (in the Denver Public Schools system), and community organizations (Philly Student Union and Project VOYCE). The project focuses on students' opportunities to become participants in decision-making related to their education. The *community* for the CCI project primarily refers to the students it centers (hundreds that have had opportunities to practice transformative work through YPAR projects) and the adults at schools and community organizations who support them. The researchers engaged in the work are part of a more macro-community surrounding the project.

CCI aims to collaborate with students, teachers, and administrators to co-design opportunities for youth to develop the language, knowledge, and critical understanding with which to critically assess and civically engage in their schools. The project has taken many forms, including a professional learning community for teachers, a masters-level course for teachers, and a formal partnership with a school district. One characteristic approach of CCI is developing a community of learners with teachers who, in turn, facilitate a cycle of participatory action research with their students. In this cycle, students reflect on their school experiences, identify a problem, study it through systematic research, and then develop an action plan to raise awareness or change a policy. One distinct aspect of CCI's design[57] is to integrate it into a range of academic classes during the school day, including literacy, science, math, and traditional civics.

While much of CCI's work aims to educate young people, it definitely shares the CRC feature of working towards systemic change in education systems.

While much of CCI's work aims to educate young people, it definitely shares the CRC feature of working towards systemic change in education systems. Each student project addresses a specific school problem (e.g., unhealthy lunches, unjust discipline policies) and aims to transform it. On a more macro-scale, members of CCI also envision a transformation of decision-making practices in education systems so that expertise of students are foregrounded. They enact this vision by documenting the impact of the program and the student-initiated changes and sharing them with district leaders and education leaders outside of the immediate school district and by partnering with administrators to enact changes.

Creating new spaces for students to develop and share systemic knowledge is an enactment of the second feature of CRCs. The CCI project elevates student knowledge and asks why those points of expertise are not more central to designing just and equitable educational institutions. In addition, the project elevates the professional capabilities of teachers as facilitators of critical thought and knowledge production. The idea of research being a developmental process is also very easy to understand in this student- and school-centered community research collaborative. The students who participate in the CCI curriculum are exposed to various processes of research with the goal of building skills in this domain and sparking interest for future learning. To help students grow in this work, the project has developed assessment tools, such as the Measuring Youth Policy Arguments rubric.

Finally, collaboration is core to CCI's design. The multiple layers of collaboration include university researchers and teachers, university researchers and district personnel, university researchers and K-12 students, teachers and students, other school personnel and students, and more configurations. In each of these spaces, explicit conversation about the critical civic potential of young people guides the collaborative work.

The Dignity in Schools Campaign

The Dignity in Schools Campaign provides a very different model of a community research collaboration. The Dignity in Schools Campaign is a coalition of "youth, parents, educators, grassroots groups, and policy and legal advocacy groups, which strives to ensure that those most affected by the education system and school pushout are at the center of our work and leadership structures."[58] Every aspect of the Dignity in Schools Campaign embodies the commitment to systemic reform that is characteristic of CRCs. Started in 2006, the DSC acts as a force multiplier by supporting diverse individuals and groups on multi-region campaigns that seek to humanize education. Specifically, the Dignity in Schools Campaign focuses on the mobilization of restorative discipline practices in schools, reducing school pushout, and dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. The Dignity in Schools Campaign frames education as a human right wherein all students, families, and communities should be supported toward successful educational experiences.

The Dignity in Schools Campaign accomplishes its work by working with funders, like the Communities for Just Schools Fund (CSFJ). CSFJ is a philanthropic collaborative and advocacy organization that forms issues-based coalitions. CSFJ support enables the Dignity in Schools Campaign to leverage a nationwide network of committed individuals and organizations. One such organization is I Vote for Me. I Vote for Me is a grassroots advocacy organization serving Richmond and Henrico County, VA. The organization's founder and sole staffer, Lorraine Wright, campaigns to "empower and ignite the underserved and unrepresented members of our communities through programs focused on women, youth, ex-offenders, and financial wellness."[59] In addition, the Dignity in Schools Campaign has a multiyear relationship with research organizations like the Advancement Project and the UCLA Civil Rights Project. These research organizations are seen as allies rather than leaders of the work.

As a coalition of community organizations first, the coalition's focus on youth of color being pushed out of school and into the school-to-prison pipeline is not just activism, but also the creation and sharing of knowledge. This powerful coalition has put youth organizers and policy advocates into regular collaboration and communication with statisticians who can track inequality with numbers and qualitative experts that can support the Campaign in collecting participatory research. The result has been significant policy wins.[60]

The Dignity in Schools Campaign is a powerful, long-term (13 years) example of what it means for multiple sectors to focus in on core principles of equity and justice, build on each of their unique expertise, and successfully create and sustain systemic reform.

The Family Leadership Design Collaborative

The Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC) provides another unique community research collaborative example. FLDC "is a national network of scholars, educators, and family and community leaders who work to center racial equity in family engagement," and their work reimagines "how families and communities can create more equitable schools and educational systems."[61] While the entire network is one community that is referenced with FLDC, more often they use the term community to identify the groups of people representing diverse community sectors in a specific place.

Led by an advisory committee that is representative of the network it supports, FLDC enacted a new research methodology that it calls "solidarity-driven co-design." Rather than taking for granted what family engagement *should* look like across racial communities and places, they engaged leaders in *examining* histories of inequality that led to the current unjust climates and *envisioning* possible solutions. The result was the creation of several design circles in which communities worked together to identify challenges that they would like to address.

The work of the FLDC is best described as a continual cycle of learning, developing agency, and transforming both communities and the broader institution of knowledge creation. This cycle helps illustrate the four features that we have defined of CRCs. The FLDC aims to grow both the collective agency of the people engaged in the project and social transformation in the communities in which they work. These two features of their work are intentionally intertwined and critical. Within the theory of change of the FLDC, challenging knowledge creation by centering community goals is part of what leads to systemic reform. As Ishimaru, et.al., writes:

> We begin from the premise that families and communities possess vital knowledge and expertise, not only about their own individual children but also about their communities, their histories, and systemic educational inequities in and out of schools. Such knowledge and expertise are not simply "assets" to appreciate. They are vital building blocks for efforts to transform our schools and broader educational systems towards educational justice.[62]

Additionally, design circles as a methodology also stand as a powerful example of our third feature—namely, that CRCs understand research as a developmental process. Finally, the fourth feature of collaboration is also modeled well by FLDC. The project is a multi-layered collaborative that engages people across professional and personal roles, race, positions of power, immigrant status, and many other dimensions.

Summary

An Expanded Definition

CRCs are partnerships between community members, researchers, and/or educational institutions that aim to advance equity and justice by jointly creating new knowledge, policies, and/or practices that lead to systemic change in educational systems and society. CRCs place community goals at the center of inquiry, emphasize processes required for effective collaboration, and view research as an intergenerational learning practice. Community members can include individuals, such as students or parents, and/or groups, such as community organizers, nonprofits, or service providers. Researchers can include professionally trained individuals who work in universities or other organizations that primarily function in knowledge creation and dissemination. Educational institutions can include schools, districts, and/or other entities that create the landsape of learning opportunities.

General Trends in CRCs

Importantly, our data show that CRCs go beyond vague ideas of community "participation" or "inclusion"; more specifically they intentionally shift power dynamics and place community members at the center of determining the purpose and process of research. Collaborating partners in the CRC field are concerned with how people generate knowledge, whose knowledge counts in decisions that shape not only *access to* educational institutions but in determining the *very shape* of those educational institutions and the opportunities they hold.

We found that CRCs are diverse across dimensions like size, location, and organizational structures; yet they share a core commitment to developing research practices that broaden participation in knowledge generation to improve public education opportunities. Some research approaches focus on equitable access to improved versions of the current forms of education (i.e., public schools as we know them broadly) while other projects draw on evidence to reimagine institutions and outline a transformative path forward.

Bang and Vossoughi capture the spirit of work in CRCs more broadly in their description of participatory research: efforts that "deliberately work to disrupt or create new roles and relations to achieve transformative ends."[63] The forms of partnering evident in our interviews and the literature base show that, at their core, CRCs are informed by a historic legacy of inequity, local histories and cultures that are place-specific, and they are driven by their interest in transformative change at a systems level.

We do not wish to understate the challenge of doing this work. In addition to the historical and political tensions surrounding the relationship between research and historically exploited communities, there are very complex challenges in the day-to-day enactment of these collaboratives. Promising examples of addressing these challenges include broadening participation,[64] generating more equitable partnerships,[65] helping universities support this work,[66] and improving developmental opportunities for young people through such

projects.[67] Similarly, evidence from partnerships where community partners take a central role among school, central office, and university partners indicate the need for increased attention to community participation in research-practice partnerships.[68] One of our key recommendations is to build on these promising studies, and increase support for knowledge-sharing opportunities across CRCs, through documentation and convenings to build on the learning emerging across this field.

Going Forward

As a writing team, we represent a broad array of personal backgrounds and commitments to this work, and a diverse set of professional experiences, including work in partnerships with students and families, with community organizers, and with various representatives from school systems. The stories we heard in our interviews, the evidence we encountered in the literature, and our own experiences all demonstrate the positive potential of CRCs to shift away from historically exclusionary practices in knowledge creation and work toward co-created knowledge systems. CRCs are one component of a complex ecosystem that determines the structure of educational opportunities, connected with many parallel transformative efforts. We believe CRCs to be a distinct approach whose key features offer a promising direction toward more just and equitable systems. As we proceed in our work, the findings from this set of interviews and literature inform how we might advocate for sustainable approaches within this subfield of public scholarship. To conclude, we felt the most generative contribution would be to include pressing questions we continue to consider after concluding our analysis and which we encourage others to explore as well:

- The functional work of CRCs may run counter to certain research traditions. What changes might be made within institutions, such as universities and philanthropies, to increase support for CRCs?
- Currently, CRCs take place across a variety of settings and levels of education systems. Are there types of sites where CRCs might find a supportive home for more widespread enactment (e.g., community schools)?
- Which challenges in this field present the greatest opportunities for learning across projects?
- Across educational ecosystems, how might people work together to articulate a vision of sustainable, community-driven knowledge creation?

These questions provide starting points for additional inquiry in exploring future possibilities for a field with rich history and deep commitments. In addition to imaging how to seek answers to these questions, we invite readers to consider how their own experiences represent or challenge CRCs' key features, as well as what role CRCs might play in the transformation of educational systems in their own contexts.

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Appendix

Mindful that reader interest in details of methodology will vary, here we provide additional information to expand the summaries of our research process provided in the body of the text.

Research Questions

The goal of our work was to loosely define a field (Community Research Collaboratives, or CRCs) and describe some of the key features of these approaches to structuring research. Three questions guided both our literature review and the resulting set of interviews we conducted:

- What is a Community Research Collaborative (CRC)?
- How do CRCs generate and use knowledge in ways that center educational justice?
- How do CRCs attend to history, power, and relationships in their work?

Research Process

We used an iterative data collection process with four complementary qualitative data sources: relevant literature, interviews with thought leaders in the overlapping research-practice partnership field, deeper investigations into existing CRCs through interviews, and document review.

Our literature review covered research on community partnerships, collaborative research, and research-practice partnerships in education. We began with a particular focus on research-practice partnerships and research and community organizing partnerships. From there, we expanded our literature review by building from the citations in those initial sources, as well as suggestions from people working in leadership roles in the field. We used targeted search terms in Google Scholar (e.g., community-research partnerships, research-community partnerships, community-based participatory research, participatory action research, youth participatory action research, etc.) to locate additional relevant studies in the field of education research. For research identified in this manner, we prioritized studies from the last two decades that included mention of participatory methods, social justice, educational justice, systemic reforms, family participation, and community organizing.

Based on this literature review and our years of experience in this field, we developed a draft document with initial definitions and a list of potential collaboratives that demonstrated the work we were seeking to understand. To push past our existing networks and biases to include a broader range of collaborative work, we also engaged in a generative process by conducting interviews and sharing subsequent electronic communication with staff at the William T. Grant Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the National Network of Education

Research-Practice Partnerships, and the National Center of Research in Policy and Practice. Throughout this research process, these foundation leaders and colleagues provided us with additional sources of research for our literature review, supports in clarifying our conceptual framework, and suggestions for sites to pursue for the interview component of the project.

Based on these interviews, we revised initial working definitions, designed an interview protocol for representative CRCs, and created a set of selection criteria for the collaboratives. We conducted online investigations of documents, websites, and other public information on all potential collaboratives in our database. Our purposive sampling criteria included collaborations or partnerships that:

1. include community-based groups in the work (defined as advocacy, organizing, service providers, and/or civic engagement);
2. use research to generate knowledge;
3. have existed for three or more years;
4. have evidence of collaborative work (completed or ongoing);
5. have a clear geographic location; and
6. have a clear scope of the partnership's goals.

Using these criteria, we selected seven partnerships or collaborations to serve as a representative sample. Four of these partnerships primarily self-identified as a community research collaborative, and three primarily self-identified as research-practice partnerships. All seven organizations existed before we conducted our study. Each of the seven organizations also identified as parts of other kinds of work. For example, some told us that they were a research-practice partnership that leans towards community, while another might consider itself a national network of community organizations that centers research as a tool. We provide a brief description of the seven organizations that participated in this study in the table below:

Collaborative or Partnership	Brief Description	Website
Atlanta 3-2-3 (323)	Regional research alliance between Atlanta Public Schools (APS); Georgia State University (GSU); center-based, early learning providers; and several community organizations focused on Atlanta's preschool to 3rd grade (P3), early childhood system	http://www.fcrr.org/projects/projects_atlanta323.html
Critical Civic Inquiry (CCI)	Regional collaborative of researchers and district leaders who engage in partnerships for youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) in and out of schools	https://outreach.colorado.edu/programs/details/id/244
Dignity in Schools (DIS)	National coalition that builds power amongst parents, youth, organizers, advocates, and educators to transform their own communities; support alternatives to a culture of zero-tolerance, punishment, criminalization, and the dismantling of public schools; and fight racism and all forms of oppression	https://dignityinschools.org/
Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC)	National network of 40 scholars, practitioners, and family and community leaders who seek to center racial equity in family engagement by catalyzing an expansive national research agenda and developing next (beyond current "best") practices, measures, and tools	http://familydesigncollab.org/
New England Youth Organizing Network (NEYON)	Regional collaborative of youth organizing groups supported by Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education, a university-based research center	https://cycle-rwu.org/new-england-youth-organizing-network
Research Practice Collaboratory	National research-practice partnerships hub of researchers and educators working together to develop equitable STEM teaching and learning	http://researchandpractice.org/
URBAN	International network consisting of disciplinary and geographic nodes that themselves are loose confederations of like-minded researchers, organizers, activists, and community members	https://urbanresearchnetwork.org/

We attempted to interview at least two people from each collaborative or partnership who also represented different roles in each collaborative. In the end, we conducted 12 interviews across the seven partnerships/collaboratives described above. One-hour, one-on-one,

semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. While a few interviews were conducted in person, most interviews were conducted via videoconference or phone.

Our analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the writing of the paper, from the initial refining of our research questions to the final writing of this paper. We cycled between reading and making sense with the four data sources, consistent with grounded theory data analysis methodology. As a multi-site team, we met twice a month via phone to move the project and engage in this analysis. Interviews were transcribed and inductive codes were generated. This process guided our writing and categorization of responses from the interviews. We completed our analysis with a second set of conversations with people in leadership positions in the field to discuss our key findings and shared our draft with interviewees to both assess accuracy and enrich our analyses.

The lead author wrote successive drafts, from the early conceptual phases to the final version of the paper, then all the authors reviewed and revised this writing as we developed our thinking. As we explored metaphors to capture and describe this project, we moved away from mechanistic metaphors (i.e., the nuts, bolts, and gears of individual projects) to a more apt artistic metaphor of broad-brush strokes common across projects that create the background for fine details to emerge.