An Examination of Participatory Design Framework in a Class Project in Higher Education

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This study seeks to describe and examine the experiences of persons in a participatory design project between a university and a not-for-profit charitable organization in a large urban center in Canada. In many design programs in higher education, the pedagogies of participatory design create experiential learning for, and with a community to produce mutual, beneficial outcomes. The data was collected by interview, visual research of course work and observations conducted with university students, leader of a women’s sewing collective, a course instructor, and a staff of a not-for-profit organization. At the conclusion of this study, a revised framework for participatory design is proposed. This study suggests that at the intersection of design for social innovation is where power dynamics can be challenged to imagine new ways of thinking to solve complex problems through participatory design.
Acknowledgements

As an Assistant Professor at OCAD University, I am keenly aware of the privileges of being an educator within an institution of land belonging to Indigenous peoples.

OCAD University:

OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishnabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand.

University of Toronto:

I wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

In appreciation

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and context of the study

In many design programs in higher education, participatory design is an approach to creating experiential learning for, and with a community to produce mutual, beneficial outcomes. This study seeks to describe and examine the experiences of persons in a participatory design project between a university and a not-for-profit charitable organization in a large urban center in Canada. The course assignment seeks to address the larger societal goal of poverty reduction through participatory design; while this study analyzes the opportunities and limitations of the participatory design framework. Through the study of the participants’ experiences, I seek to investigate the role of power in a participatory design project. The participant groups are second-year students from an industrial design class at OCAD University (OCAD U) and a group of immigrant women who sew and sell soft goods products as part of their livelihood. I anticipate through a broader understanding of the experiences of the participants, to develop a participatory design framework that will better serve design university classrooms that may collaboratively engage communities to address and attempt to solve societal problems beyond the scope and ability of the individual actor.

The issue of poverty is a problem in many large cities, and Toronto is no exception. Toronto’s Poverty Reduction Strategy proposes “to advance equity, opportunity and prosperity for all Toronto residents” and to “address the (poverty) issues, create solutions, and drive systemic change” (City of Toronto, 2015) by 2023. As an industrial designer and Assistant Professor at OCAD University (OCAD U) in Toronto, Canada, my research on participatory design in the context of university classrooms embarks on a collaborative
design project for social change with a local group of women through a not-for-profit organization in the city. By analyzing the experiences of participants in a university participatory design project, I identify the elements necessary to propose a revised framework that will drive an effective participatory design pedagogy in the future. The main purpose of participatory design is for designers to collaborate with the community to work towards a solution together, and Brown and Wyatt (2010) further define participatory design as experiential learning that is about “learning through doing”. Experiential learning is an essential part of the pedagogy in the industrial design (ID) program, where students are able to experience collaboration with the community in participatory design while learning through making and doing. As participatory design projects become increasingly integrated into industrial design programs at OCAD U and throughout higher education, it is important to fully understand the limits, benefits and opportunities of this participatory approach.

In order to improve equity, opportunity and prosperity (City of Toronto, 2015) for the women and their families living in poverty, there needs to be an understanding of the participants’ limitations and opportunities when they are invited into this participatory design project in the ID program at OCAD U. Power, as a subject and concept, necessarily informs participatory design projects given its substantial role in participatory design, especially when the other participants are members of a vulnerable group, such as: children, people with disabilities, or in this case, women or an immigrant population. Belonging to an educational institution affords credibility as well as power. Therefore, when implementing participatory design projects, it is important to examine all participants’ positions and ensure a process and its development within the participatory design framework in order to achieve innovative solutions in the community to help advance equity and opportunity for all people in Toronto.
In my university participatory design project, generally, the students in the class (who are referred to as “the students” in this paper) have little in common with the partner group, who are all mothers, and mostly middle-aged Afghani, Tamil and Bangladeshi women (who are referred to as “the women” in this paper). Through this project, the students were “challenged to change certain strongly held ideas about poverty or to expand their thinking” (Gallagher & Service 2010, 247). It was through my experience in the community with the participants, that I now see faces in all the numbered statistics. I learned that Toronto prides itself on being a vibrant and world-class city which provides opportunities for all its citizens to participate in its prosperity. However, the city is facing growing inequality—with an ever-growing gap between the rich and poor—with communities unable to fully enjoy that prosperity. According to the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy (City of Toronto, 2015), a family needs two full-time working parents making $18.52 per hour each, or a single parent making double, in order to make ends meets in our city, which equates to a household income of over $72,000. The incomes of many families supported by this local not-for-profit, fall well below this threshold. The following groups face disproportionately higher risk of poverty than their neighbours: 46% of recent immigrants, 37% of single mothers, 33% of racialized minorities, and 29% of children, which translates to 144,000 children (City of Toronto 2014, Tiessen 2015). In communities such as the one where this project takes place, where there are many recent immigrants, single mothers and racialized minorities, the child poverty rate is over 50% (City of Toronto, 2014), which means that one in two children will go to school hungry each day. As a parent myself, it disrupted my thinking that poverty is not only found in developing countries, but rather poverty exists a few kilometers away from home, where my children go to school well-nourished each morning.
I believe that the idea of an improved future involves a shared experience. The interdependency among each other is what builds humanity, which is then strengthened by education and social relations towards that fulfillment:

One response to the relation between humanity and education, if I may be permitted an oversimplification here, has often led to the development of ideas about what constitutes a shared human existence. How each individual might fulfill its potential in partaking in that existence, and the way in which education can then structure a path toward the fulfillment of that existence in relation to others. (Todd, 2009, p. 12)

What is that fulfillment? If the objective of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to “address the issues, create solutions, and drive systemic change” (City of Toronto, 2015), then approaching it from a design thinking lens seeks to change it in a way that had not been attempted in the past. As a design educator for the past thirteen years, I have seen how the discipline of design has shifted from being a tool for designing for function and aesthetics to designing for complex problems and social change. From what I observe, many emergent design practice disciplines have surfaced, such as design for health, systems design and design for social innovation, as the challenges in society change to become more complex problems (Cassim, 2013).

1.2 Terms used in industrial design

Complex Problems / Wicked Problems—are difficult problems to solve that often have interdependencies within a larger system.

Design Education—is the teaching of theory, application and problem solving in the design of products, services and environments.
Design Project—is an assignment given to a group of designers to solve, which has a specific structure and success criteria.

Design Thinking—is a process in design using strategies to help define the problem, think, ideate and prototype towards a resolution.

Industrial Design—is a process of design applied to products that are to be manufactured through techniques of mass production. More recently, this design process is applied to systems, experiences and other processes to help with idea generation.

Industrial Design Education—is the study of industrial design, also referred to as user-centred design.

Participatory Design—is a design process where two or more groups of people come together to co-create a solution for the problem at hand; it is more commonly used in creating solutions for solving complex systemic problems in our society today.

Project Brief or Design Brief—is a set of client requirements that provide designers with outlines, constraints and deadline information regarding a design project.

1.3 Rationale for the project and study

I believe that an opportunity to contribute to positive social change in our community lies at the intersection of design and pedagogy. In an art and design institution, such as OCAD University, I believe design work can challenge and interrupt the status quo to produce innovative solutions for the greater good of society and its people. The opportunity to respond to the changing nature of work in design for social change has arrived for the university. In my opinion, change has always been at the heart of institutions and programs that have survived are those that remained relevant for generations. Change is particularly
evident with OCAD University, which started as the Ontario School of Art in 1876 and evolved into the Ontario College of Art (OCA) (OCAD U, n.d.).

Today, OCAD University is Canada’s largest and oldest art and design educational institution. In 1996, the word “design” was integrated into the name of the school, adding the D, for design, at the end of OCA. Since then, the design programs in the institution have become a driving force for change and growth within the school, culminating with the construction of The Sharp Centre for Design. Currently, OCAD U is implementing the Creative City Campus project, where it is once again expanding in the midst of change (OCAD U, n.d.). The historical timeline in focus, highlights the importance of art and design as catalyst for change today, and into the future.

If the objective of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (City of Toronto, 2015) is to address and drive systemic change, then OCAD University is well positioned as a partner for this process. The historical changes within OCAD U are a testament of its inherent evolutionary nature to be relevant in the world. OCAD U has adopted a new vision and mission: “Transformed by Imaginations: OCAD University challenges you to audaciously and responsibly pursue the questions of our time through the powerful interplay of art, design, the social sciences, humanities, and the sciences.” (OCAD U. (n.d.). For, these reasons, I see OCAD U as the ideal institution to conduct this participatory design study given its mission, location, and leadership. OCAD U’s tag line states that we are Canada’s “university of imagination”. I believe that it is not until we can imagine differently that we can start to expect a different outcome, one which will produce a different future.

In this particular study, the participatory design project is a collaboration between these participants: a group of OCAD U design students and a group of immigrant women
sewers. Participatory design is more commonly used in creating solutions for solving complex systemic problems (Roth, Socha & Tenenberg, 2017). In recent years, researchers have:

Witnessed dramatic changes in the socio-physical environments of cities suggesting the presence of multiple diversities. This is exemplified by changes in the structure of contemporary societies, the emergence of informal settlements, housing problems… while the complexity of the existing gap between environmental growth and rapid urbanization on one hand and the human behavior in the built environment on the other hand… With these arising problems, demands for new types of knowledge and their application in design pedagogy are clearly on the rise. (Hasanin, 2013, p. 95)

Only by approaching community differently, acknowledging the role of power, in, between and among all relationships, can one start to challenge power in participatory design which tends to flatten the hierarchy of society and to allow a shared experience between two groups of people that would otherwise have no reason to work together. This is the sustainable approach to the project of change that I envision in an education setting such as OCAD U. Sharon Todd (2009) frames the question this way:

One response to the relation between humanity and education, if I may be permitted an oversimplification here, has often led to the development of ideas about what constitutes a shared human existence. How each individual might fulfill its potential in partaking in that existence, and the way in which education can then structure a path toward the fulfillment of that existence in relation to others. (p. 12)

In this project, the women sewed the design ideas that the students proposed, and the goal is for the designs to add value to their livelihood through business. This class assignment was
born of the goal targeted in the city’s Poverty Reduction Strategy and the reality that creativity and a new approach are necessary to combat the current system through participatory design. This research seeks to provide a description of a participatory design project within the context of an industrial-design-based school.

**1.4 Research questions**

I seek to describe and examine the experiences of the participants in a participatory design project between a university and a not-for-profit charitable organization. The participants are second-year students from an industrial design class at OCAD University (OCAD U) and a group of immigrant women sewing soft goods products as part of their livelihood.

My overarching question of inquiry: What are the opportunities and limitations in the participatory design project as implemented in a program of higher education in a design institution? To answer this question, I also ask:

1. What are the experiences of the students and community participants during the participatory design project.

2. Based on the analysis of all the participants’ experiences, what are the opportunities of the framework set by both the community partner and the university.

3. Based on the analysis of their experiences, what are the limitations of the framework set by both the community partner and the university.

In this participatory design project, I seek to identify the elements of the design process by analyzing the experiences of participants in the project to propose a revised framework that will drive and inform an effective participatory design assignment for future applications in a
design university classroom. The participants being interviewed for the study included the students, the leader of the women’s sewing collective, the not-for-profit organization’s staff participant (referred as “the staff participant” in this paper), and the course instructor.

1.5 My background as the researcher

My journey as a design educator informs my role as a researcher. I view teaching at OCAD U as an outflow of my passion for design intersecting with education. My professional practice originally stemmed from a traditional product designing process where I designed everyday products and manufactured them for companies locally and in the United States. These industry experiences led me to OCAD U where I teach the core studio classes in the industrial design program. Eight years ago, I transitioned my professional practice from designing products to designing curriculum by co-founding a registered not-for-profit in Toronto called Thinking Forward, where we offer character education programming through arts-based leadership in high priority schools. Thinking Forward is an approved partner of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and I serve on the board of directors to provide strategic direction while also working with the operations team to volunteer in the schools. As a mother of two boys in this diverse city, I believe in using my skills as a designer to impact the future and give back to the community.

I have been teaching in the industrial design program at OCAD U since 2005, offering my experience as a practicing industrial designer with applied design process knowledge exclusively in core studio classes. These studio classes are mandatory courses for all industrial design students pursuing the Bachelor of Design degree in the industrial design program within the Faculty of Design. Every year, I have taught the core studio class in second-year called ID2: Identity Materialized, the course in which this research is situated.
As an Assistant Professor at OCAD University, I am keenly aware of the privileges of being an educator within an institution of higher education and see my work along with that of the university to have great responsibility and opportunity to make a positive contribution to our society.

Five years ago, realizing a need for students to have experience in the soft goods design industry, I introduced an assignment into the ID2 curriculum on the design for soft goods products. At that time in my own professional practice outside of teaching, I found myself working on projects related to design using soft materials while incorporating the manufacturing process of sewing. I designed for a social enterprise that was manufacturing in various villages in Bangladesh, India and Haiti. Due to the nature of manufacturing through sewing, it could be done in small villages in developing countries, rather than in larger cities where most manufacturing companies have their warehouses and offices. I learned that by manufacturing in villages, mothers were able to be employed without having to move to big cities and leave their families and children behind. This experience was a real eye-opener for me as a designer in terms of how changing manufacturing processes through design, could benefit workers and change the way things have always been done. Hence, it was at this time that soft goods design was first incorporated into the undergraduate core studio class in the industrial design program at OCAD U. Change is part of the reality of design and by evolving, the institution not only makes design education relevant, but also responds to changes in the world around. The shift in the curriculum became an asset for students as they began to apply their design thinking to produce (designed) objects in both soft materials and hard materials. Consequently, students would have examples of soft goods designs in their portfolios demonstrating skill sets and abilities through a new process.
1.6 Summary of the project

To keep the work inside the classroom relevant, it is valuable to align it to the real needs outside of the university. Design projects in classrooms can be aligned with the real world by either the use of case studies or through collaborative work on a design project with a corporation or organization outside of the university. Briselli, Elizarova & Dowd (2017, December 14) illustrate that “participatory design is an approach to design strategy that brings customers into the heart of the design process” (n.p.). Furthermore, participatory design is the process where two or more groups of people come together to co-create a solution for the problem at hand. Participatory design is more commonly used in creating solutions for solving complex systemic problems in our world today (Brown, 2009).

Two years ago, I encountered a need from a local not-for-profit in Toronto, that will remain anonymous to protect the identity of the people in the participatory design relationship. The need was for a group of women sewers to acquire designs from a group of industrial designers from OCAD U to market and sell the products as a source of income. This encounter was the start of the participatory design framework in a university classroom. The timeline in the last two years is illustrated as follows:

2015 - Participatory Design Year One
2016 - Gap Year - Project as a Situational Study
2017 - Participatory Design Two

Participatory Design Two is the research project this paper analyzes, referred to as the “project”, or the “study”.

In this study, I analyze and describe how a design project at OCAD U works towards “equity, opportunity and prosperity” (City of Toronto, 2015) for those participants involved
in the participatory design project and their community. I analyze the experiences of all the participants in this participatory design project, and propose a revised framework to inform my assignment proffering a more effective participatory design pedagogy for the university setting. This new approach to pedagogy will consider both the opportunities and limitations of the framework set by both the community partner and the university. Understanding the limitations and opportunities arising, centres the important topic of power and how it plays an enormous part in participatory design, especially when the other participants in the study are immigrant women. Belonging to an educational institution gives credibility along with the power that comes with it. Therefore, when pursuing participatory design projects, designers have to understand their position and be even more mindful of whose decisions are privileged and whose voices are heard or not heard. It takes a village to raise child and it will definitely take more than a village to empower children and their families who have suffered in poverty. I hope my study will create a resource that will consider equity as I seek to analyze the design process and its thinking within a participatory design framework in order to achieve innovative solutions in the community to contribute towards the advancement of opportunity and prosperity charted out by the City of Toronto.
CHAPTER 2. Literature Review

This study seeks to deepen understanding of the participatory design process wherein I explore the opportunities and limitations of all participants in the design project recently implemented at my design institution. By exploring the participants’ experiences and how participatory design evolved, I seek to propose a new framework that will inform an effective participatory design assignment for future applications in design classrooms. In this literature review, I describe the ways in which design education has shifted from its historical context towards what it is today as taught in a university classroom setting. In this review, I also explore: 1) the role of the designer as a researcher and collaborator, 2) the experimentation methodology within the design process, and 3) how it leads to what is known as participatory design. I identify the elements of design education that will drive an effective participatory design pedagogy to inform my own teaching and further assignment development. By understanding the historical context, I analyze the shift in design education and understand what caused the shift and the need for change. Finally, this thesis describes how the shift in design thinking has enabled the use of participatory design to disentangle larger societal complex problems like poverty, racism or addiction, using design as a catalyst for social innovation through as a sustainable income resource.

2.1 Historical context of industrial design education

Design education was born within French Beaux-Arts and German Bauhaus education systems (Hasanin, 2013), wherein traditionally, designers primarily focused on skills and aesthetics, therefore, mainly improving the look and functionality of products. In
recent years, designers have expanded towards design thinking to broaden their approaches by creating entire systems to deliver products and services (Brown & Wyatt, 2010).

The machinery of the industrial revolution (Hasanin, 2013) changed the way things were made and mass production began to dictate how things were to be designed and produced. Today, industrial design education as a program in a design university goes beyond teaching students about the craft of making to include developing skills in critical thinking, while generating a space to ask questions in order to solve user needs problems. To think critically is to look at the problem and not just take it at face value, but rather seek to ask the right questions in order to develop understanding of the foundational issues. The changes were the outcome for the need to focus more on understanding the user’s needs and experiences, such as: basic needs to ergonomics, systems thinking, experiential or simply everyday things to make one’s life experiences function more seamlessly.

The shift from designing for looks and functionality to designing for systems came from the methodology of design thinking and its process that designers use to solve complex issues in business and social contexts through research and synthesis to create outcomes for a specific “end user” or client. Brown and Wyatt (2010) note how business adopted design thinking as a way to discover innovative outcomes while other industries including the not-for-profit sector began doing the same. The reason for this shift comes from seeing the effectiveness of using the design process and thinking to creating desired outcomes in complex issues (Brown and Martin, 2015), which is what many not-for-profit organizations face, such as social challenges that require systemic solutions that are grounded in the needs of the users or clients. Design thinking seeks to solve a problem while focusing on the user’s needs with the approach that is both constructive and experiential, because of the ideating,
prototyping and testing stages in the design process, where room for new ideas is purposively created (Brown, 2009). Designers are educated to be design thinkers, who, as a result of the design thinking approach are people that think differently looking for work-arounds to find ways to improve and serve a specific need.

Understanding the end user’s needs is part of the contextual research that designers engage in to solve a problem with a human-centred design thinking approach. In order to accomplish this understanding, empathy is key (Lam & Suen, 2015, Sanders & Stappers 2014), because it is what gives the designer and researcher the ability to understand the feelings and needs of other people. In design methodologies, end user perspectives are developed and understood through processes of listening, observing, storyboarding and building user personas (creating a fictional representation of the ideal client to better understand the end user’s needs and wants). By approaching a problem from a human-centred, design thinking modality, I can see how there is a greater chance of producing innovative ideas than would otherwise not be present. It is not until empathy is achieved regarding user needs and wants that possibilities of new outcomes may be envisioned.

Much research has been done on participatory design as a mode of designing with users rather than just for users (Bødker 1996, Sanders 2002, Sanders & Stappers 2008, Steen 2012). Some research has been done on participatory design projects in an industrial design class in higher education (Yalman & Yavuzcan, 2015) yet little research has been done on participatory design project between groups of marginalized participants and industrial design students in a higher education classroom. I believe that the way participatory design process includes designing with people rather than for people (Sanders 2002) can help to break down hierarchal power and make it a beneficial tool for my research project.
2.2 Designer as researcher

With the shift in design education from aesthetics to a human-centered approach, design students are taught to serve the needs of the end user, which often are groups of people unlike the designers themselves. Some might call these end users “clients”. This is the start of designers as researchers working to attempt to understand and seek a need for a problem to which they do not yet know the solution. In design methodology, the learner is actually the researcher and designer. This is the strategy and methodology of design that is called the design process. Contextual research is an approach for the designer to understand what do people and their behaviour mean in order to gain deeper insights. The designer might seek to understand how people work around a daily task or what motivates people’s actions, as an example. This observation can be done through both primary and secondary research and is part of what a responsible designer does within the design process; taking responsibility to learn about the end user and not let assumptions guide the design process and thinking. Adding a layer of complexity of research work in cities like Toronto is how globalization and immigration influence the development of multicultural societies, underscoring the critical need for deeper understanding of people in the design process.

Hasanin (2013) warns of the alternative,

On the one hand, the isolation of design students from the real socio-cultural situation, and on the other hand the designers’ ego that isolates the design professionals from interacting with the users during the design process which leads to a lack of understanding of human and cultural aspects, and in turn, to the failure to anticipate users’ needs. (Hasanin, 2013, p. 93)
Working in a multicultural city like Toronto challenges my work and how I teach design due to the responsibility to make understanding humans and cultures a part of the natural process of design thinking. “If we don’t learn to see ourselves through similarity and difference and radically love those differences, we’ll continue to separate. We’ll carry on categorically sectioning each rank, to hurt” (Patel, 2014, p. 2). I continue to see my work as a privilege and recognize the privileged position for both myself and the university with a great responsibility and opportunity to contribute to our rich, multicultural city.

Donahue (2014) describes the creative freedom inherent in the process of design thinking. Suggesting that the most freeing part of design is that it is not necessarily predetermined by how others have designed it in the past, which means that through design thinking, the process takes you through contextual research so the outcome is never predetermined. Designers work alongside with the understanding of context and materiality, which often change, to construct meaning and use. Design is a mode of “knowledge production”, which is why design thinking has been adopted widely in the business world, as it is a way to ask new questions in new contexts to come up with new contributions: a way to inquire and synthesize problems (Donahue, S. 2014). In my opinion, design thinking has contributed to a reimagined future by rethinking the way things are currently done. Through contextual research and design thinking, designs often emerge from the margins of the research and are diffracted as something worth investigating and pursuing (Donahue, S. 2014), opening process to the possibility of new contributions that may solve complex problems.
2.3 Designer as collaborator

Designers are constantly exploring with tools to make design thinking applicable in different contexts through research to understand human behavior via observations. Sanders and Stappers (2013) explain the process of how designers move through projects that are more “design-led” versus those that are more “research-led”. Furthermore, it separates how designers work with users with a more “expert mindset” or a “participatory mindset”. In the diagram, the different design processes are illustrated where, as one moves from left to right, the designer embraces less of an *I know it all mindset* and moves into the space of participatory design, on the right side.

![Diagram to show how participatory design as a collaborative process.](image)

Figure 1: Diagram to show how participatory design as a collaborative process. B. N. Sanders and P. J. Stappers’ Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design (Reprinted with permission).

In this study, when faced with the City of Toronto’s Poverty Reduction Strategy and its vision “to advance equity, opportunity and prosperity for all Toronto residents” and to “address the issues, create solutions, and drive systemic change,” (City of Toronto, 2015) the
approach can be to rethink the current process and system in order and thereby, the future. As a design educator for over a decade, I have witnessed the shift of design as a tool for function and aesthetics to designing for complex problems and social change (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Many new disciplines, such as design for health and systems design, have emerged as design research has changed over the years, often reflecting increasing challenges designers face today given the complexity of contemporary problems. Horst Rittel (1930-1990) was known to be the first person to introduce what we know of as design thinking today. Coined in 1973 by Rittel, a design theorist and professor, the wicked problem is an issue that is difficult to solve, resisting resolution, rather than considered evil and used today in business (Brown 2008, Brown & Martin 2015). I realize that the word wicked might form a barrier for progress with the application of language itself, but it is not the case in this instance as the term wicked problem describes complex problems that are difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and/or changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize, which some people would define this as systems design (Cassim, 2013).

Moreover, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems (Cassim 2013). Poverty is an example of a “wicked problem” involving the need for social challenges that require systemic solutions. Since design thinking is a new approach to creating solutions that are grounded in the root of a need or a problem, it is a tool to approach systemic issues like poverty, where the future can be reimagined.

2.4 Design process

Industrial designers are often faced with designing for users unlike themselves, so this takes a lot of shifting and changing of ideas to gain knowledge in understanding the user’s
needs. After learning about the end user and the issues they are dealing with, the design process goes through developmental steps of defining, ideating, prototyping and refining (Brown, 2008). The Stanford Model includes the client or end user and even proposes that the process begins with the understanding people first with empathy, which is the ability to understand the feelings and needs of others.

Design is an iterative process; therefore, effective brainstorming and ideation require a playful attitude in order for the process to be more effective. Play theorist, Scott Eberle (2014), rightly admits that play is “difficult to define because the concept is complex and ambiguous” (p. 214). Realizing that the creative process is never a linear one, how can play be incorporated more into the learning as designers? If play enables creativity (Eberle, 2014) and creativity enables innovation (Dodgson, 2017), then play is an important aspect to be incorporated in learning environments, especially in the learning environment of a design
student. I consider play and experimentation to be synonymous. When a designer experiments, he or she takes on a playful attitude, and is therefore more willing to make mistakes and explore possibilities without worrying so much about the end result. Kelley and Kelley (2013) call this creative confidence, as entitled in their recent book.

I experimented with play in my own teaching practice in the past when hiring an actor to do an improv workshop in my design class creating a playful approach resulting in anticipation, surprise, and understanding within my students. As mentioned earlier, I see playfulness and experimentation as interchangeable, therefore I like to encourage students to explore the playful side of things during the ideation stage of the design process. “The arts can inform us about the past while allowing us to envision a different future.” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 27). Furthermore, throughout the design process, designers iterate and reflect, constantly looking and thinking about their designs as reflective practitioners to “reframe problems as they imagine and examine solutions” (Torres, 2012, p. 63). The moving back and forth, thinking and reflecting, is what makes the design process an effective modality for the designer to grasp a larger image of the whole process rather than just the end result.

Eberle (2014) divides play into six basic elements. He acknowledges that play is not a linear pattern that these words suggest, but rather a more complex entanglement. Eberle has fostered my interest in making further connections between play and design thinking. This is where the role of design thinking enters as a non-linear way of solving problems, where possible new pathways can emerge. Examples of organizations that spend much of their efforts in experimentation and play are: IDEO1 (pronounced eye-dee-oh), an international

1 “We believe complex problems are best solved collaboratively. IDEO brings together networks to act on systemic challenges in education, food, mobility, and aging.” (IDEO, 2018)
design consulting firm that started in Palo Alto, California, in the United States (IDEO, 2018) and MaRS\(^2\), an innovation hub focusing on medical and related sciences in Toronto, Ontario, Canada (MaRS Innovation, 2015). Both these organizations have designers who collaborate with other industry experts in order to experiment and play as a way to solve complex problems in the community.

In order for the creative process to develop and expand while incorporating this specific notion of play, the nature of the design classroom as a studio setting is essential, affording experimentation. One of the challenges facing design educators today given the rapid pace of change is how to inform design students in light of the shifting definitions of the profession as well as changes in social responsibilities. The work of designers is never fixed and has always been influenced by the surrounding world, such as technology as well as cultural and societal shifts, thus the emphasis on process. A design studio classroom needs to be seen as a lab, where experimentation is encouraged and risk is celebrated through a strong emphasis on process. Mulder (2012) explains a classroom as a ‘living lab’ with a research methodology for prototyping, testing and refining complex solutions in a real-life context. In a living lab, it is crucial to allow for research engaging experience within the network of real people to tap their rich experiences, which may often result in a new way to address user-driven innovation. This is why lab living, as an approach, requires an open attitude and a human-centred mindset to gain richer insights into what drives people.

From my experience as a design educator, I recognize that design students benefit greatly when participatory design takes place in a design studio classroom, as project

\(^2\) MaRS Innovation specializes in extreme early-stage seed investing for companies and technology emerging from our 15 members. (MaRS Innovation, 2015)
outcomes with real users in contextual learning proves to be an effective way to prepare design students for the real world. Through this process, students not only learn effective approaches to participatory design, but also gain empathy from seeing people’s real-life experiences. (Sanders & Stappers, 2014) As mentioned before, empathy is a key element in the design process, especially early on in the process when students are observing and learning from the end users. In Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI), they expanded the empathy learning into the 3EMs: empathy, embrace and empowerment. (Lam & Suen, 2015) Having learned more about teaching design students and giving them opportunities to gain empathetic perspectives, I remain concerned about power and privilege imbalances, recognizing the significant need to approach this work through an ethical lens to make any partnership have an equitable opportunity. In this project, the end users and community partners through a participatory design project become co-designers engaging with students to shape the design solution. The “3EMs” framework can also be used to great effect in helping students freely express and share their thoughts and feelings with other participants throughout the design process. There are tremendous benefits for the students to gain, which can be compounded when the participants on the other side of the project in the design process are integrally involved and benefit as well. When both sides are equally considered, both the students and other participants become transformed, producing new outcomes as a result.

2.5 Participatory design

Participatory design’s main objective to design with users (Sanders, 2002), first started in the Scandinavian countries in the 1970s including Norway, Sweden and Denmark (Gregory, 2003). Participatory design started in the design industry and has made its way to
design schools (Brown, 2010) as a way to collaborate and invite the community as participants into the design process. Participatory design emerged somewhere along the line when design shifted from designing for aesthetics to solving wicked problems with complex interdependencies among and between people. As mentioned earlier, these complex issues tend to be what not-for-profit organizations face, such as social challenges that require systemic solutions that are grounded in the needs of the users or clients. As Bødker (2003) noted how participatory designers are committed to work with people and organizations in order to help them realize that there is a choice for exploration. In this paper, I refer to this collaborative design project as a participatory design since the purpose is not to just design a product together, but rather the iterative process is also pedagogical; consequently, both the design process and its environment interplay producing outcomes.

When the nature of the design (or methodology) is participatory, designers are designing “with” people rather than just “for” people. Another terminology that many designers interchange with participatory design is the term co-design or co-creation, which comes from the words co-operative design and co-operative creation. Using various stakeholders, co-design is the process of shared work in design to generate and inform new creations. Co-design has a strong focus on the collaborative aspect within the design process stated by Roth, Socha, and Tenneberg (2017) that is:

grounded in an anthropology of making, we propose a radically different use of the ‘co-’ that emphasizes the continued becoming and mutual shaping of people-and-materials-becoming-design. (Roth, Socha, and Tenneberg, 2017, p. 1)

A participatory mindset can break down disciplinary and/or cultural boundaries, offering a beneficial starting point to challenge power in society, while undertaking research into
complex issues. Add to that the tools that can put everyone on the same starting point and support a shared language, and you have a design space that supports the exploration of new ideas, even in wicked problem situations (Cassim, 2013).

The future of design lies in a multidisciplinary approach to solving complex problems (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). It takes more than just a designer or a scientist to solve a problem as collectively everyone comes together to participate in a participatory design process to solve a problem. The possibility of change can happen at the intersection of design and pedagogy, where barriers are broken down to produce innovative solutions for social challenges such as poverty in the city for the benefit of the larger society and its people. Poverty is an example of a complex problem in our world today that could benefit from participatory design.

Reality is often a feat in itself, especially in circumstances when life is tough, which is often the case when people experience poverty. This is often demonstrated in high priority schools when young children come to school without having a proper breakfast, or high school students who may have trouble finding the fare for public transportation to travel to school. These are examples of realities that are barriers and obstacles to learning. Likewise, adults who live in poverty often face many of the same barriers as we may witness across the city of Toronto. After learning about the group of immigrant women sewers through this not-for-profit in Toronto, an opportunity presented itself to make a difference through design for social change in a design course at OCAD U. This was an opportunity for students to experience participatory design first hand.

Through this participatory design project, the students designed soft goods products alongside a particular sewing collective of Afghani and Bangladeshi women who then produced the students’ prototypes as part of their wealth generation strategy. Design thinking
and process make a practical tool to solve social issues, as design takes us through a more
open way of thinking by approaching a problem with creative solutions while focusing on the
user’s needs and in this case, also the participants’ needs and their participation. However,
before participants can participate, there needs to be a space to participate in. Gallagher and
Service (2010), write about a “meeting place” and in the design world, the space is very
much part of the design process and where the participation of people takes place:

   theatre opens up a capacity to maneuver across borders and develop capacities for
   functioning in diverse situations. These are leaps of imagination, not concrete skills or
   causal relationships. Theatre does not necessarily make us better at understanding the
   worlds of others, but it does have an uncanny way of making us see both
   commonalities and differences, to dis/identify in intangible, often affective and
   visceral ways. (p. 240)

Gallagher and Service point to why a space is important for imagination and creativity to
flourish. This is the reason why designers conduct primary and secondary research as part of
the design process informing learning. What do a group of young OCAD U students know
about a group of middle-aged Afghani women and mothers when they do not have much in
common? Through this participatory design project, it was evident that going to an actual
“meeting place” to conduct primary research had “positively affected pedagogical
relationships and acted as a catalyst in exploring new pathways to teaching and learning” (p.
251). The actual meeting place further illustrates how design process is an important and
necessary step for designers to attempt to gain empathy in order to arrive at innovative
solutions through new pathways of understanding. In order for design thinking to solve social
challenges with innovative systemic solutions, the approach needs to be grounded in the
client’s needs for a meeting space to have a positive effect in the pedagogical relationship. The pedagogical relationship involves both teaching and learning whereby each group of participants are able to break barriers, open communication, and work towards a common goal.

the idea that pedagogy is about the demand for ‘learning to become’ crystallizes both the dream and nightmare of education itself. On the one hand, it touches on the hope that people can think differently, can change the way they relate to each other, and can form new understandings of themselves and the world that makes possible the very act of teaching and learning. (Todd, 2001, p. 435)

Participatory design disrupts current approaches of acquiring knowledge by supporting co-design models of learning with all participants alike, by empowering both the students and women to discover not only solutions but, to co-construct the problems as well. It integrates relationship and movement in a political dimension to provide new perspectives and considers the ethical responsibilities obtaining.

As a response to complex problems in society, design has moved beyond being simply about aesthetics and visualization to other new disciplines, such as service design and design for social innovation. These new design disciplines have emerged to tackle and solve problems for hospitals and other service-related systems and workplaces in society.

According to these disciplines, learning becomes more participatory and design “with” people rather than just “for” people (Sanders, 2002). The approach is best described in the Convivial Tool (2013) where they determine that:

A participatory mindset can break down the disciplinary and/or cultural boundaries.

Add to that the tools that can put everyone on the same playing field and support a
shared language, and you have a design space that supports the exploration of new ideas, even in wicked problem situations. (p. 23)

Adam and Yelavich (2014), present a collection of essays in Design as Future-Making by leading designers, critics and scholars to address design interventions to shape the future. I always find it fascinating when there is an intersection of multidisciplinary studies, as that is often where I find myself these days. As a practicing industrial designer, teaching at OCAD University and pursuing my graduate studies in education, I find myself at an interesting cross-section layered, and complex. However, I see the future of design lies where multidisciplinary thinking as the way to solve complex problems. MaRS Solutions Lab, which is the largest urban innovation lab in Toronto, defines complex problems as challenges that require systems change (Husain, 2014, May 26). This is where it takes more than just a designer or a scientist to solve a problem, but rather a collective joining together to pull apart problems (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). In “Design as Future-Making,” an essay calls it “unmapping”. Donahue (2014), describes unmapping as:

my ability to push and pull these qualities using the language of design in order to construct other types of engagements, exchanges, and understanding—this is where the speculation lies, where the ability to unmap the usual orientations and expectations proposes a different possibility, relationship—the future. (p. 36)

As societal problems become more complex, there needs to be a more collaborative mindset in order to collectively solve problems in our communities. Currently, participatory design is situated in the intersectionality of industries and through unmapping, my work as a researcher is becoming more focused on complex problems.
2.6 Participatory design as a means to produce sustainable income

After the invitation to participate in the study, the students had an in-person exchange with the women at the community centre where they meet to sew at the not-for-profit organization. We formed a large circle of seating in the room where most of the students sat side-by-side on one side of the circle, while the women sat alongside each other. The women wore hijabs and niqabs while sitting in the circle with all of us. The students were eager to ask questions and learn from the women, but there was a sense of awkwardness with the experience at the start. Yet, these two groups of people with not much in common met with an investment in the women’s livelihood and in what the city calls the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Sitting alongside the women gave faces to statistics, real stories, and families to numbers. Due to my concern about making everyone feel more comfortable, I decided to start the circle time with stories from home, as everyone present might just be surprised as to what commonalities we all shared. There were just as many immigrants in the student body as those who were born and raised in Ontario, or in Canada. I began saying: “Why don’t we go around and say what countries we were born in. I’ll start. I am of a Chinese descent, but born and raised in Cebu, Philippines for twelve years of my life.” It wasn’t until everyone talked about their places of birth that barriers started to break down, as laughter was suddenly heard when connections were made. There is comfort in stories and connections, as “stories of ‘home’ and arriv[al in] (sic) Toronto to move the stories into the current moment where our invited guests might have the greatest chance of intervening” (Gallagher, 2011, p. 4). It was then that I understood the power of storytelling and how it can be a tool to disrupt power. In this instance, another approach had to take place within both groups of participants, as the students were also completely outside of their element, while the women
might have been in their own space, they were meeting a group of students outside of their regular community. Storytelling was a powerful tool in this experience as the both groups of participants started the project were listening, learning and teaching each other simultaneously. This was a crucial moment for the participatory design project to have a successful beginning.

We do not know each other at all. We do not share a language, a culture, a citizenship, a social location, or a history. But we are here, at this moment, in Toronto, in a relationship. How will we begin to communicate? (Gallagher, 2011, p. 7)

Gallagher’s words kept running through my head as I watched the women and the students sitting in a large circle together. I knew that barriers started to break when laughter was heard in the room. In this participatory design project, the goal was to use design to present the products to the marketplace and possibly expand their reach across Toronto. By expanding their reach into the larger market, hopefully more opportunities will manifest for more women in their respective communities to contribute to family livelihood and create better prospects for their children. I suggest there is something beautiful that comes when two different communities work towards a common goal, which is what participatory design can offer. As those involved collectively embark on this unique opportunity, there can be a mutually gratifying and fruitful partnership to create a model that embraces a social innovation approach. Only by approaching community differently, can one expect to achieve different results. Participatory design projects affect pedagogical relationships and become a catalyst in exploring new solutions for communities and complex problems.
CHAPTER 3. History of the Participatory Design Project

In the last chapter, I described the continuum of changes within design and in design education, while also presented a picture of participatory design in its current form today. In this chapter, I provide the historical context of my participatory design project at OCAD U and the iterative process detailing the shift wherein it became “the study” for this work. It is in developing this context that I hope to develop a picture of what the future of participatory design framework might look like through this study by describing the participants’ experiences towards analysis of the opportunities and limitations revealed.

This participatory design project was a partnership formed two years ago in 2015, and there was no way of predicting what it would be today. Designers often take on projects, not knowing what the end results will look like. Just like this participatory design project, my initial thought was that this collaborative in-class project would simply produce new products for the women to sew and eventually sell. End of story and end of relationship as I could not know that it would take on a whole different approach and achieve new results in the form of a gallery and a public exhibition, where the students and the women, along with the community would come together to organize. Furthermore, this participatory design project became an ongoing relationship and partnership between OCAD U and the non-for-profit organization. To me, this is solidarity in community. The women left there with a new outlook, more resilient, independent, and confident. They valued the experience and asked to further pursue this partnership in the coming school year with another group of industrial design students. Students on the other hand, left grateful for having been part of such a meaningful exchange, and also wanted to be further involved where needed. Instead of just another design assignment, the students were able to use their design skills to have an impact
in someone’s life and for social benefit in the greater Toronto area through reducing poverty even on this small scale. The industrial design department at OCAD U recognized how a meaningful partnership with a local not-for-profit could become along with the impact the students can make with the community. As a program, design for social innovation is now integrated into the curriculum and will continue to embark on future projects of a similar nature. This is where OCAD U, the university of imagination, can be the heart of change and innovation.

3.1 Project development 2015-2017: design as an iterative process

This class assignment has changed significantly since it started in 2015. Industrial design projects are often more pragmatic with a focus on the end goal of the user. However, in a participatory design project specifically with a community group, I have come to learn that the process is more complex and messy; therefore, it holds greater consequence as it often involves more people, with more at stake. This messy process can offer new arenas of learning where thinking is disrupted in such a way to produce new ideas. It is in the loss and discovery of realities where the process becomes messy and new learning is developed as an outcome (Sanders & Stappers, 2012). Embarking on this participatory design project has taught me to let go of certain expectations that come with the week to week deliverables often packaged neatly in a design project. It is not until one lets go of what one knows, that the possibility of new concepts can be adopted.

As design is iterative, design pedagogy is also iterative. As an educator, I am always learning and I see my classroom as a living lab where assignments are not stagnant nor static, but constantly responding to industry and societal needs. I believe that learning needs to be relevant for students to be engaged. Having taught this same class for the last thirteen years, I
have changed the class assignment based on different brands that students would find relevance in to learn about culture, identity and materials, as indicated by the name of the second-year industrial design studio course, ID2 Identity Materialized.

3.2 Participatory design year 1 in 2015

Two years ago, this opportunity to design for social innovation posed a challenge to brand a neighbourhood in downtown Toronto as part of the participatory design project. Branding a neighbourhood requires that students gain deeper insights and create meaning beyond what is obvious, so in terms of meeting the course learning outcomes, the students do that and much more. When designing for an existing brand, it is easy to recognize that companies spend a lot of effort defining what their core values are, whereby the student-practitioner may more easily tease out their design principles, relating to choices of materials, forms, textures and colours. When designing for a place or a neighbourhood, students are left to imagine what the possibilities of its materials, forms, textures and colours may become. Students need to research historical context, observe, and interview people to learn about a place—which are all primary and secondary research skills for designers to develop a context for what they are designing. Moreover, changing the assignment to designing for social change not only gave deeper meaning and different opportunities for the students, it gave them a way to understand and gain deeper insights into something more abstract like a place in a particular given time. This specific part of the city, which was designed and built in the 1940s is very different in what it became in 1990s and even what it was ten years ago. As a result, the neighbourhood is currently undergoing a revitalization that will go on for the next decade. Change remains a constant at the moment and there is an opportunity at this interesting moment where design and social needs intersect. When new things are happening
simultaneously in the city, it also can be an opportune time to introduce a design project, as people within the community might be also be receptive of new ideas.

As an industrial designer, I understand and value the importance of process towards contextualizing products and systems in our built environment. As a designer, it is important to map these changes and to develop an understanding of where these communities came from, where they are now, and what they may become. When cities transition and gentrify, it is important to start with contextual research before considering and proposing a design brief or its development.

3.3 Gap year in 2016 - assignment as a situational study

There was a pause in the participatory design relationship in the year 2016 as both sides needed to develop further and reflect more deeply on what each learned from their respective experiences. The women needed to work on their business model further, and maximize what they could do with the existing designs from the previous year. From the participatory design experience, the women also had a chance to be invited to different pop-up stores and initiatives within the city. In my responsibility as an instructor at OCAD U, I also needed to explore what design for social change actually looked like while ensuring student learning outcomes were fully met; consequently, in that gap year, I ran a similar participatory design project in my class as a situational study. In this gap year, the students embarked on a design for social change project for a similar soft goods assignment but researched the problem and users without having actually met a group of people in the community. For the duration of the class, the students stayed in the classroom and I offered a tour in a similar gentrified community in Toronto. This situational study as an assignment
proved to be a good process for growth and reflection for both myself as a design instructor, as well as course developer.

Why is process important? The emphasis on “process” is what drives design to be relevant in these shifting times and consulted in a strategic capacity at the early stages of innovation, rather than just at the end for aesthetic value. Throughout the design process, designers are iterating and also reflecting, thus constantly looking at and thinking about their designs, as reflective practitioners. The moving back and forth, thinking and reflecting, is what qualifies designers as a good candidate for solving wicked problems, as reflection enables the designer to see the whole process rather than just the end result.

3.4 Participatory design’s impact on the future of industrial design as a means for design for social impact

Participatory design year 1 versus participatory design year 2:

I have spent almost my whole adult life in the field of industrial design, and just when I think I have learned my “craft”, there is always more to learn, which is why I strongly believe in being lifelong learners. The lesson of power and privilege is something that I faced head on while embarking on the participatory design project with the group of immigrant women sewers in the city of Toronto. The participatory design process is slower and messier than any other design assignments not involving real people. Two years ago, I piloted a participatory design project with my second-year class with the sewing collective, while last year, I chose to do the same assignment as a situational study without the group of women. It was through this experience and a comparison with the preceding study that I learned so much as a design educator. As an instructor, I purposely allowed the women to have the deciding voice as to which designs went forward and were chosen to be produced as part of
the new business. I was keenly aware of my power and privilege as a design educator in a design institution, therefore I chose to remove myself from the role as the main decision maker. As a result, I do not think the best designs were chosen, however both the students and the women still had a great exchange. This made me ponder the lack of criteria given when the project started. What would be considered the “best” design? In every successful design project, whether it is participatory or a regular design project, there is always a design criteria, where decisions are made based on research, which is what must/should/could be part of the design process. In this particular case two years ago, the biggest misunderstanding was the identification of the end user. The women thought they were the end user, and therefore, they chose designs that served their own needs steering students towards those needs during the design process. End users are defined as people whose needs are served through the object created; therefore, they are the market and the buyers who will eventually make the decision to purchase said products.

Encountering the misunderstanding of “end user” was the moment that I realized that the design process was not familiar to many people outside of design school. In order for a participatory design project to be successful, expectations need to be laid out and the processes better explained. The fact that participatory design involves many more outsiders is what makes the relationship more complex than other design projects. However, it is truly in this messy process where most of the learning takes place and where thinking is disrupted in a way to produce new ideas. It is not until the instructor, the students and the women let go of what they first know, then they can be open to adopt new concepts. Realizing that the design process needed to be taught to a group of non-design individuals was a steep learning curve for both the women and even for myself. The purpose of the project was significant, but the
process needed more careful planning in order for execution to be more seamless. Collective impact as a significant goal of the project, emerges only through realization that full achievement requires something crucial that is hard to execute within the constraints of university academic calendars.

Collective impact initiatives are long term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication. (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 39)

It is truly in the loss and discovery within the participatory design process where the messiness produced new learning as an outcome. This experience taught me about working around the constraints of time creatively and effectively. It taught me to plan ahead and meet the people on the other end of the participatory design project before it starts. Through this experience, I learned that for collective impact to be achieved, there needs to be open communication in terms of what the end goals are, such as: 1) who is the end user, 2) what will make this project truly a sustainable poverty reduction model, and 3) what is the design criteria. What was missing in the first year was the business input to help support the students’ research and the goals of the end user (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

Figure 3.1: Participatory design year 1 illustration.
Figure 3.2: What I learned after participatory design year 1.

3.5 The study in 2017

What is the goal of this participatory design project? Is it for the women’s sewing collective to learn about the experience of working with design students? Or is it for the women’s sewing collective to learn about the value of design to enhance business to positively impact the poverty reduction strategy? Or is it for the OCAD U students to learn about real needs outside of a classroom and design for social change? Or is it all of the above? These are all variedly different goals and add to the complexity of a participatory design project. As the participants work towards defining the goal of a participatory design project, the issue at hand is who gets to make these decisions, which brings up the real issue of power and privilege. As an educator in a university setting, I am keenly aware of my position and power in my class, as well as the community members as together we embark on participatory design projects at OCAD U.

In 2017, the participatory design project between the students and the women started once again. Please refer to Appendix H to see the original project outline for “the study”. This time, the project started at the beginning of September, which meant that most of the
preparations needed to happen in the summer before school started. This poses an issue when the university has other non-permanent faculty members who could potentially teach this participatory design project and when they are only compensated for their time when they are actually teaching during the school year. Looking ahead into the future, this would offer a limitation for participatory design projects to only be done when there are permanent faculty members teaching the course. Once again, this illustrates how participatory design does not fall neatly within the term’s schedule and tends to have a messier process; however, I believe it is in the messy process where deeper learning and enriching outcomes become possible.

The participatory project took place at the university for six weeks plus one week of reading week break, and the women and students met for a total of three times in the span of the six-week project. In week one, the students started right away on the project after the usual discussions of course introduction and expectations that take place at the beginning of every term. Students were expected to engage in their own secondary research of the place and locality where the women sewed and lived in that neighbourhood in Toronto, as week two would take the students on a tour of the actual place to meet the women. By going to meet the women and see the facilities, students were able to generate primary research by asking questions and making their own observations. In week three, students were asked to present their thinking and research of the place and what they learned from the women. In week four, students produced their initial concepts by showing drawings and paper prototypes in class to the women. This was the first time the women were at the university during this participatory design project. After this initial presentation, students refined their concepts based on the feedback given by the women, and then presented the refined concepts and process models during week five. Students then had a one-week break due to the
university’s reading week, which gave them more time to make a finished prototype. In week six of the term, the students presented their final work to the women at the local not-for-profit where the women meet to sew. The students’ final presentations consisted of a finished prototype and a PDF (portable document format) of their research, inspiration, thinking, ideations and how they arrived at their final design concept.

In the university, there are twelve weeks of classes plus a final assessment class in every term. In this particular year, the term was split into two parts, where the first six weeks were devoted to the participatory design project designing “soft goods” assignment, where the students offered marketable products to be sewn and produced by the women. The second part of the term was for the “hard goods” assignment. As previously mentioned, there are learning outcomes in a university course syllabus that students are expected to gain at the end of their second-year education in the industrial design program, which explain why there are a variety of assignments that take place within the one term. By week twelve, the students helped to design, organize and co-host, as part of their coursework, a gallery exhibition where the students and the women came together to showcase the soft goods products that were developed from this participatory design project.

It was an intense twelve weeks due to the participatory design nature of the project within the course, as it required a lot more time in and out of the classroom from all the participants involved. From this study, I have learned that participatory design projects tend to benefit those students who have the discernment to be able to see the bigger picture of the project and see beyond simply designing a soft goods project. This is a project of change and using design for social change and innovation. Students needed to be able to reflect deeper to gain the insights needed to solve a complex project in a simple way. Simply, because the
women have to be able to mass produce these items and the less time it takes to produce, the more they can make. Complex because the concept and the storytelling aspect of the product is what makes the project. Complex because you cannot simply make an item and expect it to solve poverty. Without the story, it’s just another object, because without the story, there is no meaning. Without meaning, there is no concept. Without a concept, there is no design. Without design, there is no innovation. Without innovation, there is no appeal. Without appeal, there is no market. Without a market, there is no strategy to combat poverty.
CHAPTER 4. Methods and Methodology

4.1 Methodology

The methodologies I used to inform my participatory design research are:

4.1.1 Case study

4.1.2. Research creation

4.1.3. Pedagogical methodology

4.1.4. Phenomenological methodology

4.1.1 Case study

The methodology used in my paper was case study as a form of research strategy. Case study has two sources of evidence, direct observation and systematic interviewing (Yin, 1989), which worked well in conjunction with the design process. Design methodology in itself is also inquisitive, probing the hows and whys, enabling it to align well with case studies.

Case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. (Yin, 1989, p. 13)

Designers are trained and educated to ask these questions in order to get to the root of the defining the problem and to design specifically for a user. Therefore, design methodology and case study methodology harmonize with ease. When teaching and researching in a design institution, case study is an effective strategy for my study, as the design process in itself is already a way to approach a design problem. The design process takes the designer and
researcher through stages of empathy. Being empathetic with the client will enable the designer to better understand the task at hand and then to define the problem; the design process goes from ideating, prototyping and refining your concepts all before the final presentation. This process is not necessarily linear but more iterative, which requires the researcher to be open to new possibilities and denies their control over the outcomes. During the design iterations, the how and why questions need to be constantly asked at every stage of the design process to fully understand the end user. It is through the various investigations, that outcomes naturally yield unexpected results.

There are at least four different applications (in case studies). The most important is to explain the causal links in the real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies. A second application is used to describe the real-life contexts in which an intervention has occurred. Third, an evaluation can benefit, again in a descriptive mode, from an illustrative case study—even a journalistic account—of the intervention itself. Finally, the case study strategy may be used to explore those situations in which interventions being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes. (Yin, 1989, p. 25)

This study investigated a course from my colleague’s classroom, which minimized the conflict of interest for me as the researcher, as I was not assigning grades for these students during or at the end of the term. As part of my role as course lead, I designed the course project and although having taught another section of the same class, would only conduct research in my colleague’s class in which I was referred to as “the instructor”.

The goal for this participatory design project was for the women to have products to market and sell. When the women expand their designs and product offerings, then they will
create more opportunities in their communities and possibly contribute to their family’s livelihood. This project is in line with what the City of Toronto outlined in the Poverty Reduction Strategy document released on October 20, 2015. The participatory design project was then used as an actual case study for this paper in order to better understand how to drive a more effective process through analyzing the experiences of all participants involved, as the initial project was solely designed from my perspective as an instructor and a designer. This research seeks to describe the experiences between two groups within a participatory design project, drawing upon the methodology of case studies is most effective, as it is an evaluation of a single example of a program through data collection by a third party (Slavin, 2007).

One drawback in case study is that people often ask how researchers can generalize from a single case. Having taught this same course for many years in the past where my research is currently taking place, I have facilitated this participatory project as a pilot project several years ago. It was at that time that I thought an investigation needed to take place in order to analyze the collaborative project and produce a more effective framework. As a designer, I am trained to see how something can be improved and made better, and this process has been ingrained. Therefore, this single case in this research study is already an iteration of other iterations, but the only difference is that there are participants who are being interviewed and analyzed in this particular process. Analysis through interviews and data collection never took place in the past, just iterations based on my own experiences to improve the process for the students.

As the course lead for all second-year industrial design core classes, I was interested to study an assignment that I designed and to see where improvements could be made in the process I had implemented within the design process. In order to reduce biases, I invited
participants in my colleague’s class, rather than from my own class. This study had also undergone an ethical review in order to decrease the amount of my personal bias and protect the participants before I begin the research phase of the study. The participants included the students from my colleague’s section as well as my colleague (the instructor), the leader of the women sewing collective, and the staff participant.

4.1.2 Research creation

There are some similarities between research creation and participatory design as it unsettles existing relations of power and knowledge in addition to identifying its political and ethical dimensions, thus informing my practice. It disrupts current approaches of acquiring knowledge by supporting co-design models of learning with teachers and students. It empowers students to discover not only solutions but to co-construct the problems as well. It integrates relationship and movement in a political dimension to provide new perspectives and considers the ethical responsibility of researchers.

Research-creation unsettles knowledge by transforming not only the cognitive but the behaviour as it “provokes and evokes a different way of thinking about and experiencing” (Rotas & Springgay, 2013, p. 285). It does this by challenging one’s thinking in the present and subsequently modifying one’s actions accordingly, thereby offers a new and unpredictable future. However, the problem is that education is still currently “hinged on perception and interpretation, where the unknown is reduced to the already known and the already determined” (p. 286). Research-creation argues knowledge from an unknown point as illustrated in the Ask Me Chocolates residency, where students were asked to brainstorm ideas for a few days while waiting for a “potential landing site to emerge” (Rotas & Springgay, 2014, p. 5). End results or landing sites are not pre-determined topics within the
school curriculum, but rather a pedagogical approach that supports the co-design of the studies by the teachers, artists and students alike. Research-creation shows us something organic that invites the students to co-create the curriculum with the teachers. Research experts support the concept of the classroom operating like a work of art. They suggest that “rather than seeing the classroom, curriculum, and the artists’ practices as already established entities that one could ‘research’ or extract “data” from, research-creation becomes a milieu, the included middle, the conjunctive” (p. 6). Research-creation unsettles knowledge by flattening the roles of teachers and students. Teachers need to be comfortable with having the curriculum unfold in a more organic manner and to not necessarily have full control of the class direction but to be open about the final learning outcomes. Similarly, research-creation disrupts power, as it is the kind of research that invites all parties to be involved equally without a hierarchical divide. It emphasizes co-research environments for both the teacher and pupil, which is essential because “when students engage in the process of discovering solutions to problems posed by teachers, ‘pupils lack the power to constitute problems themselves, and the construction of problems…is tantamount to one’s sense of freedom” (Rotas & Springgay, 2014, p. 14). The purpose of education is to further knowledge, and the most effective way is to involve both teachers and students to co-create the approach to achieve best practices of learning and to create an environment that empowers students to discover not only the solutions but be forefront in designing their problems as well.

Research-creation also identifies political dimensions. It involves intra-active relational connections as “politics-to-come is concerned with what happens to politics when researchers think about it as a material process, as relational and as movement” (Rotas & Springgay, 2013, p. 278). The political dimension of research-creation not only considers the
physical world but its relational surroundings as well, which really helped to inform my research in this participatory design project.

Research-creation always considers the ethical dimension and our responsibility. Researchers must consider both “the ethics and responsibility of facing up to the event; where the situation is unprecedented and the future is open” (Massey, 2005, p. 141). It is ethically responsible for research-creationists and in this case, participatory designers, to disrupt current approaches of acquiring knowledge by supporting co-design models of learning with teachers and students; to empower students to discover not only solutions but to co-construct the problems; and to integrate relationship and movement in a political dimension to provide new perspectives. These approaches will not only create a more effective learning environment which is ethically the right thing for researchers to do.

4.1.3 Pedagogical methodology

As the main designer and course lead for this participatory project, I found that taking the time to analyze and understand the design thinking and process would help me create a better framework for participatory design in the future. In a usual participatory design project, to be conducted within a term in the university setting, there is little, or usually no time given for reflection or assessment, as when one term ends the next begins. Therefore, this study is an opportunity for me to take the time to describe and understand the experiences of those involved in the participatory design project. This process helps me to better understand if the framework used is best and where improvement needs to be made. By analyzing all participants’ experiences based on their answers reflected through the different stages in the design process, I am hoping that a framework can be designed with
both the community partner and the university to balance out the opportunities and limitations.

Pedagogical methodology is also utilized as this study not only seeks to gather data but also informs my teaching in design education, especially in the participatory design process for all the participants involved in the project. This would be the first time that students could partake in such a project due to the fact that it is a second-year level course. Prior to this course, the industrial design students would have had projects that were quite linear and focused more on designing within the constraints of materials and processes, and less about designing within the constraints of real people or designing with real participants.

In this course, students not only learned about the design process at a greater depth than they did in first year, but they also learned how to design for/with a group of people other than themselves. Students learned how to ask questions within the limitation of the participatory design project, which meant that they needed to come prepared with their questions already in mind, as the next time they meet the women again would already be after the research stage. Students learned to acknowledge and navigate around their own biases and assumptions when they met the women and learned about their backgrounds and stories.

The entire participatory design process was pedagogical from the perspectives of both the students and women. Just as much as the participatory design process was new for the students, it was also new for the women. Both sides came together to learn in the process of design making through this collaborative project, which added a methodology that is pedagogical in nature. When the women met the students for the first time, the women were also learning about a group of people outside of themselves. Some of the women were part of the process from when the pilot project took place a couple years ago, but others were new to
the process. I sent the course outline to the women ahead of time, so that they would know the timeframe of when the students were meeting them. The women had to learn about the weekly timing of the design process, and what it took for the students to do contextual research before arriving at their final design outcomes.

It was through this participatory design project where the participants positively affected present pedagogical relationships and became catalysts in exploring new solutions for communities and complex problems. From this participatory design project, I was able to use this study to analyze the pedagogical relationships among all participants in order to produce the optimal framework for the university as it would be embarking on more design collaborative projects with the community in the near future.

4.1.4 Phenomenological methodology

As a designer, I need to learn to not always privilege sight in the visual research method. In my own research, it is important to be mindful of what I privilege if I am looking for a new way of thinking, therefore I extend my approach to include a phenomenological lens. Through the phenomenological approach, meanings are interpreted from the interviews of the participants to better understand their individual perspectives and experiences affording discovery of the opportunities and limitations embedded in participatory design framework.

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it. (Max van Manen, 1997, p. 9)
This allowed flexibility in the interview session to happen in real time. “Phenomenology is not introspective, but retrospective” (p. 10), therefore, this methodology was most helpful for my study at the culmination of the participatory design project in asking all the participants about their experiences.

As a researcher, I have the responsibility to know my biases. It is only through the collectivity of language that I can assess experience, the experience of others as well as my own.

If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already ‘know’, we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections. It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories. We try to come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character. (Max van Manen, 1997, p. 47)

4.2 Method

These are the methods I used to gather data in order to learn about the participants’ experiences and the opportunities and limitations of participatory design in a university classroom:

4.2.1 Visual research

4.2.2 Interviews

4.2.3 Observations and analysis of field notes

4.2.4 Triangulation
4.2.1 Visual research

The data I collected consisted of course work from the students that were naturally occurring in the instructor’s course. Additionally, I utilized visual research as a method because:

Visuals are so ubiquitous, it’s argued that social scientists must engage more with them both as data and as tools for research. It’s argued that, inserted into interviews of various kinds, images can encourage talk about things that would not otherwise be achieved. It’s suggested that they are very useful tools to deploy in participatory research projects, enabling marginalised identities and groups to articulate their worldview. And it’s often claimed that research results can be communicated more effectively and more powerfully to non-academic audiences if images are used.

(Rose, 2016)

Visual research was a beneficial method since the course had deliverables, consisting of drawings, prototypes, students’ research and written reflections, along with the work the students developed and designed with the women for the participatory design project. Visuals were a beneficial way to help break barriers and use it as a method of conversation. Furthermore, visual research served well as an approach to record and analyze my findings when researching and looking at students’ design submissions in order to discover and develop an innovative strategy within the design process framework while moving forward.

4.2.2. Interviews

The data collection methods included structured interviews that I conducted with the students, the instructor of the course, the staff participant, as well as the leader of the women’s sewing collective at the conclusion of the project. The interview method offered the
flexibility needed to engage with participants in their real-time responses; that is flexibility to allow for more conversation within a topic of question to learn more about their experiences deeper. The data in this research were all naturally occurring from the course itself, which included students submitting documents of their research, written reflections, ideations, insights, design criteria and final presentations. At the culmination of the course, the students showed their work along with another class in a form of a gallery exhibition to the public.

Outside the course work, I interviewed students individually about their experiences of the participatory design project in order to gain further insights regarding this research. I personally interviewed all the participants so I would be able to hear their stories and learn from their experiences in pursuit of my research questions (see appendices E, F and G). This was the reason why I chose to study the course instructor’s section and be the main researcher, rather than using my own classroom and having to hire a research assistant in order to reduce biases. As the main researcher afforded me the opportunity to make appropriate changes in the order of questions depending on where the conversation went. The following appendices comprise these survey instruments.

Appendix E - Interview questions for OCAD U students

Appendix F - Interview questions for the leader of women collective and the community organization participant

Appendix G - Interview questions for OCAD U course instructor

4.2.3 Observations and field notes

Every week during the participatory design project, I took field notes when observing the students who consented to be part of this study. In these notes, I recorded the interactions
between the women and the students, giving close consideration of the women’s reactions and feedback about the designed objects throughout the design process. Students would produce deliverables such as: concept ideations, written reflections, model prototypes, design refinements and final presentations. These deliverables would be presented at the front of the class while the women sat in the audience and were subsequently invited to come up and test out the products. I observed not only their interactions, but also body language and their voice tones. These observations allowed me to gain knowledge of their experiences that would inform the opportunities and limitations of the participatory design framework. I then analyzed and coded my field notes by organizing them according to the thesis questions to learn about the participants’ experiences.

4.2.4 Triangulation

I understand that the interview method (Bell, 2010) is subjective and can be biased, therefore the triangulation method will help to collect data from opposing sources. Triangulation is broadly defined as the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. Accuracy of judgments is improved by collecting different data on the same phenomenon, and observing convergences between methods. Within the design process, designers are also constantly diverging and converging, so I see the method of triangulation to be naturally familiar to industrial designers. Using multiple methods to research the same study, with various participants allows the researcher to observe what data leads to the same conclusions, or differing perspectives from various viewpoints to allow for greater accuracy.

Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation but an alternative to validation.

The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials,
perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. (Denzin, 2012, p. 82)

When interviewing both the leader of the women’s sewing collective as well as the staff participant, I received a more holistic view of the experiences outside of my class and beyond the students’ experiences.

4.3 Ethical considerations

The methods also include an ethical review to protect the participants as outlined in my ethics application to conform with the ethical protocols and approved by both educational institutions: University of Toronto and OCAD University. All participants were informed about the study and the process of consent through a letter (see appendices A, B, C, and D), along with an in-person invitation and explanation of the research project. With the students in particular, due to the greater power imbalance, I first explained the project, answered questions, reviewed the letter of invitation together, before giving them a week in between to think further about participation. Giving the students the week to think and read the invitation would trustfully lessen the pressure to participate. The data collected was password protected and stored in Homespace, which is University of Toronto’s server and will be destroyed in 3 years after the completion of my thesis. The following appendices comprise the letters of consent documents.

Appendix A - Informed consent letter for OCAD U students

Appendix B - Informed consent letter for OCAD U industrial design chair

Appendix C - Informed consent letter for OCAD U course instructor

Appendix D - Informed consent letter for the staff participant and leader of women collective
This participatory project took place in my colleague’s class in order to lessen the power imbalance between myself and the students. However, I understood that being an Assistant Professor at the students’ educational institution, and although I was not their direct instructor, there remained a power differential between the students and myself. Understanding this, I made it clear to the students that participation in this study is completely voluntary and would not affect their grades for the class. Also, since this was a second-year class, I may or may not have known them from the previous year. Furthermore, their instructor who was also my colleague would not know which of the students have agreed to participate in the research, as the students would be kept anonymous in the study. The ways in which the participants would be protected was outlined in the ethics application as well as in the consent letters that the students were given as an invitation for the study. I was especially aware that I would most likely be teaching some of these students again in later years, so I considered it to be even more important for the students to remain anonymous to avoid biases now or in the future.

The instructor was not aware which students agreed to participate in the research and was informed that her involvement would be completely voluntary and would not affect her employment at the university. The letters of invitation to all participants stated that their participation would not be mandatory and were free to withdraw from the research at any time.

The staff participant at the not-for-profit organization worked closely with all the women on a weekly basis and served as an expert liaison for me to interview. She was a full-time employee of the not-for-profit organization, which would also not be named to provide anonymity.
The leader of the women’s sewing collective was the main contact of the women and the head of the sewing group. I waited until the end of the course to interview her to lessen the power differential, as I did not want her to feel obligated and to only take part in my research because of the participatory nature of the course assignment between the sewing group and OCAD U. I also informed her that participating in my research would be completely voluntary and not affect any future participatory relationship with OCAD U or her involvement with the sewing collective and the not-for-profit organization. Her responses in the interview were solely from her own perspective, or bias, though they may have been informed through the women’s experiences in the participatory design project as she knew them.

I chose to not interview the rest of the women in the sewing group because I knew they were not comfortable with the idea of being in an interview setting, and I did not want them to feel intimidated. An integral part of working in participatory design was relationship-building and if taking part of an interview would undo that relationship, then it would defeat the purpose. Also, after learning about the language barrier along with their comfort level, I decided that it would also be in the best interest of the women that I would hear about their experiences through the lens of the leader of their sewing collective. The leader was someone who met with the women on a regular basis and had casual conversations with them regarding their experiences, therefore I was able to glean insights through interviewing the leader of the collective.

4.4 Thematic analysis and data collection techniques

I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2016) in order to code and analyze the qualitative data and to answer my research questions. In this study, I am looking to describe
and examine the experiences of the participants in a participatory design project between a university and a not-for-profit organization. My overarching question of inquiry: What are the opportunities and limitations in the participatory design project as implemented in a program of higher education in a design institution? Additionally, I utilized the following questions to expand on the original inquiry:

1. What are the experiences of the students and community participants during their participation of the participatory design project

2. Based on the analysis of all the participants’ experiences, what are the opportunities of the framework set by both the community partner and the university.

3. Based on the analysis of their experiences, what are the limitations of the framework set by both the community partner and the university.

Through the methods previously mentioned, the data collected were organized and coded against the research questions through thematic analysis. I took field notes and observations for the students involved, however, by the time the course finished, I only managed to conduct the interviews with the five out of the eight students who gave consent to participate. From analyzing the experiences of a range of participants in this participatory design project through interviews, observations and triangulation, emergent themes were interlaced through the data that required detangling through thematic analysis. These emerging themes will be discussed in the next chapter.
4.5 The participants

In order to learn about the participants’ experiences in the participatory design project, I interviewed all of them separately after the conclusion of the project. The participants included the students, the leader of the women’s sewing collective, the staff participant and the course instructor. A common thread of being an immigrant was brightly woven through all the different participants from the student body as well as the staff participant creating one avenue for bonding in the project. The sewing collective was made up of mainly mothers, who were mostly middle-aged Afghani, Tamil and Bangladeshi women. As the principal researcher, also born outside of this country, this fact stood out to me so strongly as it makes researching in a city like Toronto unlike anywhere else. There was diversity in so many different ways, such as: religion, gender, age, culture and socio-economic status, imbuing the experiences with dynamic and richness. Participatory design is pedagogical in nature because all participants are constantly learning and teaching at the same time. In this study, the participants are from diverse backgrounds and because the project is participatory in nature, it makes the learning broader than just learning the content of the course itself. The students and the women were exchanging knowledge of each other’s skills and ideas, as well as the diverse perspectives of their day-to-day lives. Through the participants learning from one another, participatory design process disrupts power, as it is the kind of research that invites all parties to be involved equally without any hierarchal divide. When power is affected, the dynamics of the participants are changed, therefore affecting the project outcome. Here is what one student said about their first impression when meeting the women:
Living in Toronto (and being a student), it’s pretty easy to feel like you are at the bottom of the food chain, so it’s always a shock to learn that there are other people who have to work twice as hard as you to make half of what you do. It’s a little bit of an eye opener.

Out of fourteen students in the class, eight students gave their consent to be part of this study. Students come from various backgrounds with broad experiences that informed their perspective on poverty in Toronto. Some students experience poverty on a whole different level than what is seen here in Toronto. One student who is an immigrant from a developing country said:

In Canada, I didn’t look at it (poverty) that much. Compared to middle eastern countries, Toronto is so much better, so Toronto never seemed to be a place fighting with poverty for me. I was always comparing it to other countries I was coming from, until I met people who are in it (poverty).

The diversity in culture is what makes research in a city like Toronto richer, given the varied experiences affording unpredictable results. The student body was made up of students from the Middle East with both Muslim and non-Muslim descents, Canadian students of both Chinese descent and those who are from China, as well as other North American, Asian and Caribbean countries.

4.6 Site location

The location is a neighbourhood in Toronto built as a public housing project in the 1940s. It was designed to have housing blocks facing inwards with the thought that it would be safer, but it ended up creating a crime-ridden “ghetto”, as many would call it starting in
the 1980s (Horak, 2010). In the article “Understanding Neighbourhood Revitalization in Toronto” presenting the history of the area, Horak (2010) suggests:

The residents in this community lobbied for physical reconstruction of the housing project for many years before the Toronto Community Housing Corporation undertook the total reconstruction that is currently in progress. Not only was the housing complex long in poor repair, but residents blamed its built form - with few through streets and many poorly-lit corners—for fostering criminal behaviour and creating unsafe spaces and complained about the complete lack of commercial amenities within the complex. (p 6)

This part of the city was overdue for repair to undo the initial plans that left it in a state of desolation. The revitalization project within this neighbourhood began in 2006 with a public-private partnership, including the City of Toronto and a builder corporation, and transformation continues to this day with plans of completion in 2025. We are currently in phase three of the revitalization project (Toronto Community Housing, 2018) and are now creating a vibrant mixed-income and multi-use community. Transforming a neighbourhood into mixed-use and mixed-income allows local businesses to thrive and as a result you now find retailers such as restaurants, banks, pharmacies, coffee shops and supermarkets serving those who live in the neighbourhood and beyond. Having a mixed-use city block allows for those who do not live in that community to have a reason to visit it, and the newly built amenities like the state of the art aquatic centre, an arts and culture centre, soccer fields, ice rinks, and city parks, in addition to retail stores. The city learned from its past mistake of designing an entire city block for social housing and is realizing that mixed-use communities are the way for both the people in the neighbourhood and the neighbourhood itself to thrive.
Along with new amenities, the neighbourhood public high school also underwent its own revitalization after receiving a $28 million renovation. Schools are now expected to have higher enrollments in the years to come and this is a clear indication that families are moving back into the community, attracting other new families into a safer neighbourhood with improved amenities.

The relocation process of current residents has been riddled with mixed reviews, due of the fact that people’s homes and community are being disrupted. In this image, you can see that it is more than just a building, it is teeming with colourful interiors that were once filled with family conversations and dinners (see figure 4).

Figure 4: A building with a side of the building demolished revealing the colourful interiors of people’s homes. Alex Lukey Photography. Reprinted with permission.

Real people’s lives and actual family homes were interrupted as a result of the revitalization project of social housing. Residents who were relocated were given the right to return to the new units and families were regularly updated throughout the process of revitalization.
However, the reality is that the change did not take place overnight, which meant that families started to establish new roots in other neighbourhoods where they were temporarily relocated while waiting for the units of the new neighbourhood to be built. As a result, some families never returned.

Views from residents are varied and often contrasting. Some residents say, “For us to be uprooted and told to assimilate, even if it’s just temporarily, we feel like it’s unfair.” (McKnight, Z., 2014 May 3).

Many families feel the disruption in their lives due to changes that impact their transit, daycare, work, place of worship or just their daily conveniences.

We have mosques here, we have daycare here, we have home care, the doctor’s here. Everything is accessible. The majority of people that are being relocated are single mothers; we don’t drive, our university is right over here. (McKnight, Z., 2014 May 3).

Any change would often bring about mixed emotions and reviews. Though many found the relocation due to the revitalization to be disruptive, others found it to be progress. Some would argue that the relocation was a small price to pay in order to gain a better home and living condition for their families:

Sureya Ibrahim moved into her new townhouse in 2010, after her former home, a two-bedroom apartment in a six-story building, was demolished. “I had so many allergies when I was living in the old place. I developed allergies when I was living there. I felt like taking my eyes and ears off. It was horrible,” she said. “Since I’ve moved in, I see the difference. I don’t even sneeze right now at the place where I am.” (Alamenciak, T., 2014 February 19).
A study published from McMaster University and St. Michael’s Hospital (Smith, 2013, February 14) reported on residents who were interviewed before and after the relocation showed that participants experience positive outcomes in ways that are linked to the betterment of their housing and neighbourhood, which is a direct result of the revitalization in this community. After a year of moving back into the new living units, people experienced: greater satisfaction with their home and neighbourhood, greater sense of community, more safety in their neighbourhood, and a small improvement in anxiety symptoms (Smith, 2013).

Even in its mid-revitalization, this community now offers new experiences for their old and new residents. With these new experiences come expectations for new opportunities for these residents, and therefore a need to think about creating a change in systemic issues like poverty in the city. Residents can now see new opportunities all around, enabling them to rise above the poverty level and more fully enjoy new life experiences having witnessed the revitalization process in this neighbourhood through an innovative approach to public-private partnership. Through this experience, some residents can recognize that it will also take new thinking to envision new strategies in the city.

4.7 The participatory design project 2017 —“The Project”

This participatory project took place within a course over six weeks in a twelve-week term in a design program. The students and the women met a total of four times in a six-week project within the academic term. In week one, the students were introduced to the project and about design for social change. Then students were expected to do primary and secondary research about that particular neighbourhood in Toronto, where the women met to sew, and all the changes surrounding its history and recent revitalization. In week two,
students met the women for the first time, and both groups had the opportunity to ask questions. Students were also given a tour of the neighbourhood by the women enabling the students to learn firsthand the outcome of the revitalization and also to meet and begin to hear from the women. The best part about getting the tour from the women was hearing their stories. One woman told about the newly built aquatic centre and how it was beautiful but yet they couldn’t use it. Muslim women do not swim with men, and Muslim women do not swim with a large window opened to the streets. “We wrote a petition for the community centre to have a women-only swim time and we also got blinds for the large window,” says the woman, and this really showed the students how the revitalization gave the women a chance to experience opportunities to expand their voice in new ways. This showed the students the importance of research and how design needs to be relevant to the people within the targeted demographics.

In week four, the women came to OCAD U for the first time during this particular participatory design project, and students were asked to present their initial ideation and research to the women, which consisted of sketches and mock-up rough models. After this initial presentation, students refined their concepts based on the feedback given by the women, and then once again presented to the women their refined concepts and process models during week five. Students then had a one-week break due to the university’s reading week, which gave them more time to make a finished prototype. In week six of the term, the students presented their final concepts to the women at the local not-for-profit where the women meet to sew. The students’ final presentations consisted of a finished prototype and a PDF of their research, inspiration, thinking, ideations and how they arrived to their final design concept.
User-centred design is a focus that industrial design students have learned during the first year; therefore, designing around a constraint is something very familiar to them. In every project within the industrial design education, there is a design brief which outlines the do’s and don’ts, such as: different stages of the design process, who the user group is, and what the weekly deliverables are. Contrary to what people may think, designers work best with constraints in place. It is within the constraints where designers can gain creative freedom to come up with concepts to solve a problem in a new way. In this particular project, students have further constraints including: what sewing machines the women currently own, their ability to sew, what materials can or cannot be sewed, how often they meet to sew, and what products would be culturally offensive. After talking and interviewing the students, the one point that consistently came up is that assumptions should not be made. This is a lesson that has been reinforced to me as the principal researcher and an instructor; I cannot assume anything when designing for others. One student simply stated: “I learned how the women worked. I learned about their limitations and worked around them (those limitations).”

4.8 Limitations in data and methods

As an art and design institution with a studio-based pedagogy, class sizes at OCAD U are small and in this particular class, there were only fourteen students in total. During the invitation to participate in the study, eight gave the consent to participate; however, by the time the course finished, I only managed to conduct interviews with five students as the end of the term could often prove to be a very busy time for students. One limitation was the outcome of the limited sample size. If there were more student participants, a broader and more diverse set of opinions and viewpoints may have emerged.
Interview as a method proven to offer needed flexibility for engaging with participants through real-time responses; however, a limitation could be my being both an Assistant Professor at OCAD U and also the principal researcher at the same time. As much as I sought to inform the students about voluntary participation not affecting their grades, a part of me wondered if they would always still see me as a professor in the institution that they were studying in. Also, as the course lead for all second-year studio courses, another limitation could be whether students gave me answers they thought I wanted to hear in the interviews to curry favour or otherwise. An alternative could be an online survey instead of an in-person interview, but that method would not allow the flexibility that interviews offered.
CHAPTER 5. Learnings and Emerging Themes

I have learned that there are six emerging themes interlaced through the data that require detangling through the process of thematic analysis from the experiences of participants in this participatory design project through interviews and observations. These themes reveal a deep underlying concept of power, strongly interwoven through all the learnings, affording participatory design to become an ideal framework to use for a research with disparate peoples. The students felt the constraints that came with a participatory design project; however, they were able to experience a meaningful project and indicated much satisfaction from being part of a real-life project. The students recognized their own privilege, while the women felt empowered to continue with their work further as the project concluded. The emerging themes are organized around the following points:

5.1 What are the skills of a student designer in a participatory design project
5.2 How playfulness and imagination are essential for new ideas to arise in a participatory design project
5.3 How design raises the value of an object and the difference between cost and value
5.4 How community and accessibility are important aspects in a participatory project in ways I do not expect
5.5 How there needs to have a level of relatability between the participants
5.6 How the locality is important for the success of the participatory design project

5.1. Skills of the student designer in a participatory design project

5.1.1 Experiences of thinking critically and reflectively
In this study, the participatory project commenced at the beginning of the Fall term and when a project is participatory in nature, I found that the students who are likely more of a critical thinker and learned discernment and reflection gained a heightened experience and deeper insights. Critical thinking specifically regarding the student’s outlook and approach to the design brief. A student explained their initial experience when meeting the women at the beginning of the participatory design process noting:

Through my research experience with the neighbourhood, my most insightful part of the project was interacting with the sewing collective. Meeting with the women and asking them questions really opened my eyes to a new way of formulating design research, while at the same time I got the chance to meet some new and interesting people. I believe that this interactive research experience with the collective really helped in the assistance of developing a strong criteria and design.

Students needed to be open to new ideas as this participatory project was unlike anything offered in their previous experiences in first year industrial design courses at OCAD U. Students who displayed openness had heightened experiences to think discerningly and be reflective in the process, as shown in their written reflective responses regarding the project.

5.1.2 Experiences of curiosity, openness and listening skills to gain insights

Curiosity is an important trait for a designer (Kelley & Kelley, 2013) and in this participatory design project, a student’s curiosity played an important role. From interviewing the students and asking them questions prior to their meeting with the women, almost everyone’s answers were consistently reflected a curiosity about their needs, their cultures, their views of the city, their skills, their perspectives, their hopes and their current situations. It was surprising to me from reading the students’ responses that they anticipated
learning about the women’s daily pressures, their immigration story—whether welcoming or isolating, and other social issues they faced in their respective communities. The students’ responses showed signs of discernment and a willingness to learn beyond mere curiosity, but emerging from a deeper sense of sensitivity.

Some students held assumptions going into the participatory design project, as articulate by a student along with others who shared the same feelings: “It was not different than what I expected. I expected them to have the ability to have the skills to do the work and didn’t have the design aspects.” On the surface level, this was true that the women lack the design skills, which was the main reason why this participatory design project came into being in the first place. However, on a deeper level, the women brought tacit knowledge to the process. Openness from the students’ perspective was the best posture to have when starting in a participatory design project to dig past the surface and gain deeper insights. What sets apart a good design concept from a great design concept? It was insight. Insight into the research, insight into the user, insight into the process. Insights allowed students to come up with innovative ideas that were both new and marketable for the women.

Openness led to deeper insights and produced other skills such as empathy, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.1.4. During the project, the students had to develop a persona, which was a fictional character to represent a group of people that was part of the targeted end users. Openness in one male student led to choosing a single mother persona, which was empathetic on his part wanting to use his design ideas to help ease the burden of being a single parent. It is through empathy that one can gain insights, as indicated by a student’s response when asked about what was the most insightful part about the participatory design project:
While interviewing the women, they were talking about how they missed their country and the parents they left behind. But they also like being in Canada, because of how they didn’t feel free in their home country. Here, they can leave their houses whenever they want and be free. Their home sickness and freedom in Canada were something I can somewhat relate to, which made me want to come up with (design) ideas for immigrants like them to adapt easier to the conditions here.

Along with openness to learn, the students needed to be good listeners in order to gain empathy and be sensitive to the needs to people within the participatory design exchange. Students learned to listen better in order to gain deeper understanding through primary research. This process was a new experience for the students, because as second-year industrial design students, they have not had projects that involved real participants within a design process. Students were learning new strategies, as indicated in one student’s comment:

Meeting with the women and asking them questions really opened my eyes to a new way of formulating design research while at the same time I got the chance to meet some new and interesting people. I believe that this interactive research experience with the collective really helped in the assistance of developing a strong criteria and design.

As much as the students were learning new ways of thinking and knowing in the participatory design process, so were the women. Participatory design is also a pedagogical process, as participants in both sides were also learning the design process. When the leader of the women’s sewing collective was asked if the students’ criteria aligned well with the women’s goals, she said, “Not really what women want. I don’t think there should be (an)
aspect (of) what (the) women want. We should think about what the public needs.” The women have showed tremendous growth and learning since having worked together in the pilot project two years ago. The women used to think they were the “end users”, but now acknowledged the public as the actual “end users” that need to be considered in order to know what to design and market.

5.1.3 Experiences of humility

It took humility for the students to be able to learn from others, and I saw that first hand during the participatory design project. It was in the depth of insight in the contextual research where students gained understanding of what was necessary to design for a group of people unlike themselves. It required humility to gain empathy; and required empathy to gain deeper understanding. In design, it is hard to design for other people without a true sense of empathy, because without empathy, it is almost impossible to gain understanding.

Humility was a necessary component for students to learn. When the students were asked what they were hoping to glean from the women before the first meeting, here are some participant responses that demonstrate a lot of humility and curiosity:

I think meeting these women will be a very eye-opening experience into a world I don't have much connection to. I grew in a comfortable lifestyle and haven't really faced any oppression, so among the many things that I will end up learning from these women, I think their determination to keep going and fighting through the hardships that they face will be one of my biggest take aways.

I expect to learn what kind of the project that they need, what the story behind it, their personal preference, what they expired, what is they dream, and what their think of us.
I think that I will learn about how their life has been since they have immigrated to Canada, possibly a positive or negative experience of welcoming or isolation. I will also hope to understand where they are coming from, their background from their home country; their gender injustice, wars that may be happening, family pressures, etc.

I think I'll learn about their struggles and the issues they are faced with both in their daily lives and in their pasts, as well as other social issues that people in their communities have to deal with.

Humility was exhibited in the willingness to learn new things and to not assume to know everything. This was exactly what the students revealed when they were asked the question of what they were hoping to learn prior to meeting the women. Humility is a posture of learning, the attitude that one does not have all the answers and is willingness to listen and hear other people’s stories.

5.1.4 Experiences of empathy

Whether participants recognize this or not, learning to design with empathy is a benefit of participatory design. Empathy is gained from learning, sharing and understanding the other participants’ experiences. As mentioned earlier, many students who were not reflective in their practice saw participatory design as simply just another project. However, those with a more discerning mindset saw beyond this project as merely another course project, but a way to learn about designing with and for others. Empathy was a tool gained while students work through the design process to learn and interact with another group of people unlike themselves.
As mentioned before, HKDI defined empathy learning, stating 3EMs comprise of empathy, embrace, and empowerment. By engaging local community partners, design students at HKDI were given the opportunity to work closely with a group of visually impaired people to practice this approach. In this project, the users became co-designers engaging with the students to shape the design solution. Towards the end, both the students and the users were transformed. The “3EMs” framework was used to great effect, helping students freely express and share their thoughts and feelings with users throughout the design process. The project outcomes with real users in contextual learning proved to be an effective way to prepare design students for the real world through the development of empathy. Using simulated situations, empathy became the catalyst for human transformation as the students interacted with a real group of people to approach teaching and learning in a new way. I learned that empathy was gained from real life participatory design projects, which was why HKDI’s “project outcomes have demonstrated that contextual learning with real users is an effective way to prepare design students for the real world in the future” (Lam & Suen, 2015, p. 54). Design thinking and process, were well coupled with empathy engendering innovation through experiential learning or participatory design.

The goal is to help students to find their own ways of creative thinking by developing their own sense of “designing with empathy” and even going beyond that with more diverse capacities and knowledge. (Lam & Suen, 2015, p. 66)

New ideas are born of empathetic approaches to participatory design projects as assumptions are challenged and viewpoints shared influencing the other. In industrial design, the objective is to design a product or a system to meet a specific need of the user. The design process involves a strategic path of activities, such as storyboarding, interviewing, listening, creating
personas, and experiential learning for the purpose of gaining empathy towards the end user. In the case of this study, the interactions with other groups of people engendered deeper empathy through actual meeting (and connecting through collaborative work, shared stories). In participatory design projects, insights were learned through processes of listening with and learning from other participants, which then produced innovative ideas that otherwise would not be present. It was not until the design student explored and empathized with what the end users needed and wanted, that a new possibility could be envisioned for these end users.

5.2 Playfulness and imagination of participants

Imagination was required for a livelier exchange in the participatory design process in order for the participants to achieve new understandings. Engaging imagination during the initial brainstorming stage afforded disruption in their thinking. Playfulness disrupted what the designer thought was the norm, the expected, and the solution. Imagination was required from all participants to have a successful brainstorming and ideation process.

Early on in the design process, students necessarily relied on their imagination to come up with as many ideas as possible, turning a design class into drama as students are ideating. In this stage of the design process, students learned to brainstorm quickly while realizing that making mistakes was simply part of the process, and that there was no mistake that was too detrimental to fix and then build upon. Having the women in class was a form of disruption that allowed for moments of intervention for the students to move and explore the possibilities of newness. I learned that “while all the arts involve some measure of self-exploration, the dramatic arts also invite students to enter into the intimate learning processes of their classmates” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 4). The interaction within the participatory design process was how and where communities were built. It was not in being the same that the
participants were united, but rather, it was in diversity that the participants achieved unity and an idea of community was formed. Such a moment is revealed in an interaction between a student and the leader of the women’s sewing collective during presentation of a project:

**Leader of the women’s sewing collective**: it cost you $19? (referring to a prototype)

**Student**: Yes, but I’m sure you can find something cheaper.

**Leader of the women’s sewing collective**: This would be good for kids too—so they can’t lose their hat.

The manner in which the leader of the women’s sewing collective responded at the end showed much imagination and innovation in thinking. She did not just comment on the prototype but rather offered new ideas and new thinking by building on what she saw in front of her. This example was the evidence of how ideation and prototyping as part of play in the design process produced innovation and ideas that the participants could build on.

### 5.3 Participants learning the difference of cost and value

The project was to design a soft goods product using sewing as a way of manufacturing and designing products that the women would be able to market and sell in order to generate income, giving rise to the overarching topic of cost and value. What would it take for a consumer to buy a product? Why do people buy what they buy? What gives meaning to products? Since this was part of a larger vision that the local not-for-profit in alignment with the City of Toronto’s poverty reduction strategy, students had to use research and their design thinking in order to achieve all the criteria set for them, while listening to the women and developing an understanding of their goals at the same time. One student said this about his final product:
My soft good product addressed the poverty reduction strategy for the neighbourhood by two means: through the use of simple and inexpensive materials and by utilizing a strong design. The simple aesthetic of the product makes it easy to sell to many different groups of buyers, allowing the product to be retailed in both low and high-end environments.

When students designed with the poverty reduction strategy in mind, the constraints guided most of them towards designing where manufacturing can be simple and easy, while offering a high value for the end user to bring in the most income for the women. Simplicity in manufacturing would mean that the women are able to sew more quantities per hour, which as a result would enable them to make more money. Adding value to an everyday product could occur in many different ways like the use of a new material, a design detail, a different way of applying a process, a new way of making a task easier through the use of a product, a new narrative and story told through an object, or a new concept altogether resulting in a new product category. Most of the students were all quite sensitive towards the goals of this participatory design project, which was to enable the women to have a line of products to sell at the end of the creative exchange.

During the ideation stage of the design process when the women were invited to join the students at the design institution, it was clear that one of the main concerns the women had was the cost of the fabric and how that would impact the final cost of the overall designed object. Due to the concern of cost being in the forefront of the women’s minds, many of the students’ concepts were steered during the participatory design exchange. When asked about their experiences, the women’s main goal was obviously to sell and make income. The leader of the women’s sewing group said:
As sewers, we know what we can sew. We just think, “what is good for us to sell?”.

We just think of the idea, for example, telephone (cell phone) holder pouch. We see things around and we assume. It’s successful in a sense that we sew, and we try to sell and we know it sells.

It was evident from the interviews that the women’s main criteria for success was to sell the products. With this criterion in mind, it was easy to understand why the cost of materials was a key factor for them. From the women’s perspective, an inexpensive product would sell faster and easier, which proved what criteria was most important to them.

The theme of cost versus value arose. Designed objects that have value do not necessarily have to be high in cost, while designed objects that have a high cost do not necessarily offer value. Students who were listening to the women would have weighed these two factors carefully while designing. An example of a well-designed object by a student that carefully assessed both value and cost would be this:

**Student**: “I wanted to tackle a problem that everyone has (demonstrates by emptying all the things in a jacket pocket containing: pencils, wallet, charger, keys). So I basically wanted to design a case, a basket to keep everything and also a case with everything in it. So rather than transferring everything from your pockets to home and back out again, everything is just in it. Cost is not huge and super simple to assemble (sew) and you can iron to have all the creases (showing the prototype)

**Leader of the women’s sewing group**: “So what’s the final cost?”

**Student**: $2 (material cost of felt and elastic)

Everyone in the classroom clapped.
Furthermore, this same student’s strategy was to keep cost as low as possible. He thought that it was “important as we are in Toronto and people are diverse. Idea of the product is visually strong. It was in the use of the product and not just the product itself.” (which was to focus on design concept to bring value to the user). Value was created when there was a need for a targeted end user. However, value was also created when there was a strong narrative in a designed object. Part of the role of design in developing products for social change was creating value in the object.

Students did not always see the interaction with the women as valuable or helpful in the design process. An example occurred when one student participant compared his project with those from another class, which were not part of this participatory design project:

As much as I liked my project, the other class came up with more finished designed. That has something to do with our class interacted with the women. The other class had more thinking with why the students are designing what they are designing. Our class was guided by the women’s input.

The students who felt that the women steered their projects towards weaker and less successful designs, still saw value in meeting the women, but suggested that perhaps they could learn and focus on design first, before meeting the women right away. Overall, all the student participants found the interaction to be helpful in their learning to be a designer. As much as the women focusing on cost posed as a restraint, it proved to be beneficial learning for manufacturing in design. One student showed much empathy and understanding as he learned to calculate the cost of his prototype. He said:

I talked to a friend in fashion and he said it would take him 15mins to sew it (his design), but it took me one hour. But I figured you (the women) are professional at
sewing. I calculated $2.65 in fabric plus $15 per hour. And the women can make four per hour. I spent a lot of time calculating this.

The way the students presented the costing of their design to the women shows empathy for the women in making a livelihood. This proved to me that the students believed in the cause of the poverty reduction strategy and saw how design truly could make an impact in social change.

5.4 Communication and accessibility of participants

The students and the women met four times in a span of six weeks in the first part of the term, and it was quickly evident that communication was necessary in order to have a successful participatory design project. Besides communication, accessibility for the women proved to be necessary in ways I did not expect. Out of the four meeting times, I arranged for all participants to meet half of the time at the community centre and half at the university with the idea of equity in mind. Later I learned that travelling to the university was not accessible for some of the women, which I discuss further in Chapter 5.6 under “locality”. I learned that a rigid dichotomy is not what is fair, and what is often equal is not always fair.

On the first day when my students and the women met, it was not until everyone talked about their birth places that barriers started to be lifted for the women and the students and a level of comfort allowed the sharing of ideas. Storytelling was a powerful tool utilized in this first day experience as both women and students embarked on listening, learning, and teaching each other all at the same time. The initial meeting took place at the community centre where the women meet weekly to sew providing a level of comfort as they were
“home”. I observed how the women were less vocal when meeting outside of the community centre and at the university for the remaining presentations.

After initially meeting the women in week two of the project, the students were tasked to prepare a research document and present it in class to their instructor the following week. The document was a digital presentation consisting of the students’ research of the neighbourhood, demographics, target users, along with their rationales and insights from the research. This was the first year that I shared these digital documents with the women for their viewing while hoping to afford the opportunity for learning from said documents, as I carefully thought that if the research is shared, then any learning can also be shared, thus having the same foundation. As a design instructor who is passionate about this participatory design project, I hold both learning outcomes inside and outside of the classroom in a delicate balance. From this study, the overarching lesson was not to assume anything. From conducting the interviews with both the women and the staff participant, I learned how the digital presentations containing the students’ research were not accessible to the women, as most of them did not have computers in their homes. In a design institution, once we convert any digital document into a PDF file (portable document format), the file would be made accessible to most people. Accessibility in this case meant that one can access the file on any computer and not have to rely on a specific program to open the file, since Adobe Acrobat is free to download and use. However, this was premised on the assumption that everyone had access to a computer and the know-how to access the technology. It was only through interviewing the leader of the women’s sewing collective and the staff participant that I learned that many of the women participants did not have email addresses and some are not
literate in the English language. As a result, the women did not have a chance to read the students’ research files on the neighbourhood at all.

We do not know each other at all. We do not share a language, a culture, a citizenship, a social location, or a history. But we are here, at this moment, in Toronto, in a relationship. How will we begin to communicate? (Gallagher, 2011, p. 7)

In addition to the women being unable to access the students’ research documents, I learned the course document that was sent to the women prior to the participatory design exchange explaining what the project was about was also not accessible to them.

With most of the women being English language learners (ELL), verbal communication was not a dominant suit in the participatory design project. Other than the leader of the women’s sewing collective, most of the women sewers were pretty quiet during the participatory design project. Many of the women also do not work outside of the home, so the whole participatory design project was a brand-new experience. Two out of the four meetings took place at OCAD U, which brought the women out of their neighbourhoods altogether. There could be many reasons other than cultural reasons as to why most of the women were quiet during the participatory design exchange, such as comfort level of location or largely the overall new experience.

When the students and the women met, the students offered sketches, as well as mock-up models up to full-scale prototypes as part of the design process. These models and prototypes really helped facilitate communication between the women and the students in the participatory design process indicating how design can really help to cross culture and communication boundaries. As a design instructor, I know the importance of making full
scale prototypes to test products for both the designers and the clients. In this case, the clients were the women, and I observed that the students with the full-scale models, even those in paper as rough models, received more interaction and feedback from the women, than those students who did not. As I observed interactions between the women and the students, laughter erupted. This was the kind of exchange between participants that broke barriers in participatory design projects and built connections between two groups of people.

**5.5 Relatability of participants**

In terms of relatability, when students were asked to develop a persona, I was expecting that most students would choose personas that were like themselves. However, that was not the case, and it was quite surprising for both the course instructor and myself. As mentioned in an earlier point, a male student chose a persona of a mom in poverty, while another male student chose a financial district persona and eventually produced a product for a business woman.

The analysis of my observation notes suggest that the women had more input about products they were already familiar with, that is designing for women or for children. The staff participant would comment on products that were outside of the realm of designing for women and children, which also showed how she was of a different demographic from the women’s sewing collective.

My thematic analysis suggests that in order for all participants to be able to relate to designing for specific end users, all participants needed to be involved in the primary and secondary research. In this particular study, only the student participants embarked on the research of personas and possible targeted end users. The research documents were meant to
be shared as PDF documents with the women participants; however, this aspect of the project was unsuccessful due to accessibility issues.

5.6 Locality and relationship-building of participants

The students and the women met for a total of four times, twice at the university and twice at the community centre where the women regularly met to sew. As a design instructor, meeting half the time at both localities seemed like the equitable way to conduct this participatory design project. The main advantage was for both groups to be able to learn about the locality and to gain insights from actually being in the place, whether at the university or at the community centre location. For participatory design to be pedagogical, locality mattered since learning also happened simply through observation and designers could have a deeper learning experience by just observing the other participants in their element. I learned that because the first meeting took place at the community centre, the students had a chance to meet and ask the women questions. However, after interviewing the leader of the women’s collective, I learned that the women did not quite feel like they had a chance to get to know the students. Trust was important for the success of a participatory design project, therefore taking the time for all participants involved to get to know each other was crucial.

The choice of location for meetings was an important aspect and I learned that spending half the time at the university also had its disadvantages for the women. First of all, there were opportunity costs incurred by the women when they travelled to the university, whether it was actual cost for transportation or the cost of their time to be there. I learned that some of the women had other jobs like cleaning homes and babysitting, which earned them
some hourly wages. Therefore, for the women to be at the university, they were not able to work these jobs and lost the opportunity to earn those hourly wages.

Through observation during the field research, I also learned that most of the women who came to the university were very quiet and not as vocal during the participatory design exchange. These were the two stages of the design process where the students were seeking for the women’s participation and feedback in order to inform their final designs. I wondered how much of it was due to the comfort of being outside their “home turf” that established a possible cultural barrier. From the interviews after the participatory design project, I learned that many of the women did not normally go outside of their neighbourhood on a day-to-day basis, which would position travelling to the university as outside of their comfort zone. A part of me wondered if the women would speak up more if they were more comfortable and at ease in their own environment, rather than being at the university. What seemed like an equitable way to spend our time between two locations equally had more negative outcomes than the positive experiences. By considering the issue of location and what equality meant, I am using participatory design as a way to address power and challenge the idea that fairness is not always equal.

The value of the participatory design exchange was not immediate and required some time to take fruition. When people live below the poverty line in Toronto, I learned that there was more value in earning the hourly wages doing odd jobs than looking ahead for a greater potential from the outcome of this participatory design exchange. The staff participant said, “value was not apparent in the beginning, but it is more apparent now”. Since there was history between the women and the university, more trust had been built over time, and with trust, the women were able to see the value of this participatory design exchange. When
asked how the participatory design experience had been beneficial for the women, the staff participant noted: “not just getting designs, but meeting people, interacting and networking with people.” The women saw the benefit of promotion and interaction with people through the gallery exhibition that took place after the participatory design exchange. The women also learned about the different targeted “end users” and how using personas was a way to “not make assumptions, as everyone is different, and that there is no science to it,” according to the leader of the women’s sewing collective.

I learned, from interviewing the staff participant, that although the women felt like their voices were heard by the students, the women may not have fully understood that they were being consulted during the participatory design exchange, which might explain why some were quiet during the process. I learned that the participatory design exchange needed more explanation to those who were not regularly part of the design university or familiar with the design process and that the course outline should perhaps be accessible in their native language. I also learned from interviewing the leader of the women’s sewing collective that structure that comes from working on projects within deadlines was not something that came naturally to the women, so this was something that they had to slowly learn through the participatory design exchange.
CHAPTER 6. Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss what changed in the participatory design framework and reasons for the change due to the emerging themes identified in the last chapter through learning about the participants’ experiences. Participatory design is hereby demonstrated to be an ideal framework for research projects between marginalized participant groups working with industrial design students due to the nature of participation which flattened the power dynamics between the roles of the participants. This participatory design project is now an ongoing project within the second-year course in the industrial design program at OCAD U and it continues to develop. After this research project, I propose the following changes:

6.1. Discussion of student designer skills

Given that attribute of the designer in a participatory design project matters, it is important that the students who are registered in the class are there for the project, as commitment is key. By letting the students know ahead of time when they are registering for the course about the nature of this participatory design project, I hope it will draw students who are more critical and discerning in thinking, curious and open about taking on new projects, humble towards learning with and from others, and empathetic towards people. Therefore, I have written in the online course outline made available to students as they register, specific details to inform them about this participatory design project with a group of the women’s sewing collective in a particular neighbourhood in Toronto. By letting students know ahead of time during registration, any student can choose not to take this particular section while preferring another section of the same course for credit.
6.2. Discussion of playfulness and imagination of participants

Given that playfulness and imagination matter, I hope to spend more time allowing all participants to get to know one another better, and to actually engage in the design process together. By engaging together in every aspect, participatory design flattens the roles of the participants and truly challenges the role of power between the groups. In the past, students derived design ideas after primary and secondary researches, and then presented them the women. This time around, I hope both the women and the students would be able to research and ideate together to a greater extent, in order to make the process even more participatory. I believe that deep research produces deep insights, which generally produce innovative products.

One student noted about his product, “it is inspired by the ever-increasing demand for mobility; people are on the move, so should their items.” This response is an insight into human behaviour due to research and observation, leading to the creation of a new product as a result.

6.3. Discussion of participants learning the difference of cost and value

Given that there is a difference between cost and value, it is important to define what the women’s criteria is as well as to talk about the participatory design expectations ahead of time. By defining the women’s criteria early on, it also ensures that their voice is heard and their criteria becomes part of the benchmark of what makes a successful outcome in the participatory design project. I hope to have all participants recognize a common goal reflecting the outcomes of the participatory design project and to understand the value of design for social innovation. By talking about expectations from both parties, we then can
start to discuss the differences between cost versus value, and produce products with meaning and narrative.

6.4. Discussion of communication and accessibility of participants

Given that communication and accessibility matter, I see value for all participants to spend more time together in interpersonal interaction, then we can rely less on technology to transfer files from one group to another. Therefore, the women do not need to have access to computers in order to read the students’ research or the course outline. Also, with the women and some students being ELL, communicating in person will allow for nuances to be communicated more easily through body language and facial expressions.

6.5. Discussion of relatability of participants

Given that relatability matters, it is important for the women to be part of the primary and secondary research, in order for the women to understand where the projects are heading and why. By spending time together during the research stage, it also allows the students to glean insights from the women during the process of researching and not just during the presentation of their research.

6.6. Discussion of locality and relationship-building of participants

Given that locality and relationship building matter, I have sought approval for the upcoming course to take place in that particular neighbourhood in Toronto for the entire term. I hope that being offsite from the university will build more trust as all participants will be working more closely together for all twelve weeks. Also, for all the above reasons such as communication, accessibility, and relatability to be addressed, I have proposed this
expansion of the project timelines where all participants can be together throughout the whole term to truly flatten the roles between the participants.

Given that the locality will be their “home turf”, I anticipate that the members of the sewing collective would be more comfortable in offering ideas and suggestions to the students. By being offsite from the university, I also hope that it will garner more media attention and possibly result in funding for the sewing collective participants, in order to offset their time for being there and other opportunity costs.

6.7 Implications for thinking about participatory design and updated project outline

I learned that participatory design is complex due to the fact that designers are involving more people in the project, but after this participatory design project between the students and the sewing collective, I learned that it is even more complex due to the major differences between the participants. This study raises four implications for participatory design education in a university classroom setting in order to have better opportunities for all participants:

6.7.1 An updated project outline with a common locality
6.7.2 A project brief that emphasizes the concept of value in a designed product
6.7.3 Intentional relationship-building takes time
6.7.4 Assumptions cannot be part of the participatory design project experience

6.7.1 An updated project outline that requires a common location

As a result of all these learnings, a new framework for participatory design has been designed with an updated project outline, see Appendix I: Updated Project Outline. Changes are made based on the analysis of the participants through an exploration of identified
opportunities and limitations towards the production of an improved participatory design framework. In the new project outline, one of the main changes is the location of the participatory design to be held weekly offsite in the community centre where the sewing collective meet to sew. The project brief now states that the “members of the sewing collective (name changed to protect their identity) are present on a weekly basis to make this project truly a participatory design project. Weekly consultations are expected” (see Appendix I). By meeting in the same location for the entire term, it gives all participants the opportunity to learn and implement the design process together and to make the collaborative project truly participatory. Being together allows for an improved flow of ideas between participants in the design exchange with less interruption, as well as opportunities to create more trust throughout the process. As participant interaction increases, members can learn to be more playful and creative together. The more trust that is built, the easier it becomes for both parties to share opinions. The more shared opinions given, the more design iterations can take place in between the design process stages. The more design iterations that happen, the more beneficial movement towards a desired outcome becomes plausible. This is the heart of participatory design, which flattens the relationships between participants while contributing to an ‘undoing’ of the power dynamics between people in an institution and those outside the institution. By arranging for all participants to be in the same location, I have also discovered that other issues might also be solved. These issues include accessibility, relatability, communication, and ultimately, relationship building—the foundation of a participatory design project.
6.7.2 A project brief that emphasized the concept of value in a designed product

I also learned from the study to emphasize the concept of value by asking direct questions in the brief. Questions such as: How can one use design to bring value to an item, because it is unique and bespoke? By asking such a question, it is already elevating the sewing collective and the expectations of the project beyond just another soft goods product. By elevating the value of the products, it gives the sewing collective a greater opportunity to make a sustainable source of income, which would directly impact the poverty reduction strategy in a positive way. The word bespoke has a connotation of something special and custom, something that Norman (2003) would consider to be \textit{reflective design} as it “considers the rationalization and intellectualization of a product. Can I tell a story about it? Does it appeal to my self-image, to my pride?” (Norman 2003, 3). This suggests that a product has a narrative and would tell a story to the user and others around them. Furthermore, there is also an emphasis in the sewing collective concerning materials sourcing, as I have learned that the selection of materials can also help elevate the value of a product. For this upcoming participatory project, the sewing collective is committed to help produce the designed product exactly the way the participatory project has imagined it to be, as the value of the product is now the aim and not how inexpensive a sewn product can be made.

6.7.3 Intentional relationship-building takes time

I will be spending more time with all participants so that we may get to know one another better as everyone is in the same location on a weekly basis. By spending more time together and knowing one another on a deeper level, more opportunities to build trust may arise which can directly impact the participatory design relationship. The participatory
project is also longer in timeframe (eight weeks instead of six weeks) to give more
opportunity for design development between the participants, and therefore all participants
may gain deeper insights into the process of producing more innovative outcomes.
Furthermore, there is an added week imbedded into the project for the students to improve
their prototypes through consulting the women after they have submitted their final
presentations. By elevating the quality of their sewn prototypes, the gallery at the end of the
term would make a more visually compelling exhibition for the public and media alike, thus
providing other possible income opportunities as a result.

6.7.4 Assumptions cannot be part of the participatory design project experience

I learned that assumptions cannot be made for all participants on both sides in order
to have improved opportunities for all participants alike. I cannot assume the level of
commitment and discernment from the students who are taking the course. Therefore,
realizing that this is a mandatory course for industrial design students and not an elective
course, by making the participatory design project transparent for students to see at the time
of course registration, students are afforded choice between different course options or
modalities. Since this course is offered in multiples sections, transparency is the key to
drawing those students who truly want to be part of a participatory design project. I also
realize that designing for social innovation is radically different than designing an everyday
object, therefore it is crucial to have a committed group of students. When designing for
social change, the student needs to consider other participants, be eager and open to learn,
and be willing to understand their backgrounds and biases. As for the sewing collective, the
students cannot assume what the women know or do not know, and what the women want or
do not want. All participants cannot assume what is accessible or not accessible. All
participants cannot assume communication is simply what they say verbally, everyone involved needs to be observant of body language as well. I have learned that sketches, drawings, mock-up models and prototypes break barriers and receive more feedback from the sewing collective during the design process stages. I also learned that storytelling is powerful, consequently, all participants needs to learn to ask good questions to elicit answers in order to further break down barriers.
CHAPTER 7. Conclusion

My study’s overarching inquiry is describing the opportunities and limitations of participatory design as implemented in a design university institution by gathering experiences from the students, the leader of the sewing collective and the staff participant in order to produce a revised framework for participatory design. In this concluding chapter, I will explore the limitations of the study along with proposing future considerations for other researchers interested in participatory design situated in a higher education setting.

After analyzing the experiences of all the participants, I have discovered many limitations to conducting a research study of a participatory design project within a university term. These limitations include:

1. A small student sample that producing limited data suggested by their experiences.
2. A singular group, the sewing collective that was not representative of all demographics of other sewing collectives in Toronto.
3. A captured moment in time of the revitalization project does not reflect an accurate experience of all sewing collectives in the city.
4. The timeline and locality constraints of having a participatory design project within a portion of the academic calendar.

As mentioned earlier in the limitation of my data in Chapter four, due to the small class sizes at OCAD U, I learned that not all students in the class may agree to participate, reducing sample size. In this study, I had a response rate of fifty-seven percent of the students who agreed to participate, or eight students. I would have preferred to gather more varied data if I
had more students responding to the invitation of the study. Even if the response rate
remained at fifty-seven percent, in a larger class size, there would be more participants.
The fact that the participatory design was with one group of a specific sewing collective, I
realized that it is not representative of all sewing collectives in the city of Toronto. This
particular sewing collective had women from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, and
other sewing groups might consist of other nationalities, and even other genders. With
different backgrounds come different experiences, which would affect the participatory
design experience altogether. Also, having only interviewed the leader of the sewing
collective, I was relying on her experiences to inform the data by representing the voice of
the entire sewing collective. The reason for this decision was due to language barriers and an
attempt to ensure that the women in the collective would not be uncomfortable and/or feeling
obligated to participate due to an incomplete understanding of consent and voluntary. Also, I
would be able to collect more varied data and have more depth in the study if there were
many sewing groups from several neighbourhoods in the city.

With the not-for-profit organization being in this specific neighbourhood in Toronto
and with the current revitalization taking place in 2017, it is almost like a moment in time
that is unique to this time and location. One of the limitations is that the data suggested by
the women’s experiences could shift based on the extent of the level of neighbourhood
revitalization and gentrification. As mentioned in Chapter four in “location”, there were
differing experiences and reactions towards the revitalization in the neighbourhood.
Depending on the level of satisfaction with the changes in the neighbourhood, the women’s
experiences would directly inform and have impact on the data.
The limitations given locality and timeframe in this study was driven by the university’s twelve-week school term for my participatory design project. The constraint of the timeline produced other limitations, such as only being able to work with organizations with the flexibility to begin and end the participatory design project that coincided with the university’s term. Beyond the timeframe, I am interested in whether having a common locality for all participants would indeed produce a richer participatory design experience and thereby change the data. Further, regarding place, might the data suggested by the participants’ experiences show the design process be more iterative, and in turn have the potential for a more desirable outcome. Other questions and considerations remain.

Future research in participatory design within an industrial design classroom in a university may choose to work with a larger group of students by inviting more than one class. By doing so, it will increase the number of students, therefore acquiring data from a broader and more varied group of participants. Another future consideration could be to focus on comparative studies between working on a project with participants from different neighbourhoods and communities across various sewing collectives. Multicultural cities like Toronto are ideal for this kind of research, as many cultural groups tend to live among each other, making every neighbourhood uniquely different from another.

By working with multiple groups of sewing collectives, then the data suggested from the participants’ experiences may possibly consider the level of revitalization and gentrification experienced within neighbourhoods, and how their experiences may compare to one another. This way, the data provided may possibly be more accurate in reflecting the opportunities and limitations of most sewing collectives in a large multicultural city like Toronto.
Another future consideration could also be to have all participants work and collaborate in a common space at all times, so that the sewing collective is not only participating during the presentation of deliverables as outlined within the course schedule (students presenting ideations, prototypes and final presentations as examples), but rather participating in the whole design process on a weekly basis. Being physically together would allow for all participants to learn, think and make at the same time in an iterative manner. By making the classroom accessible to the sewing collective at all times allows for participatory design to be more pedagogical in its nature. This structure allows both the students and the sewing collective to engage in teaching and learning with one another, and thereby make participatory design more accessible to all. The timeline in a university term stays the same, however, the fact that all participants are in the same place will lengthen the time they spend together. By trying new structures, new processes may emerge along with new outcomes. Participatory design is a means to seek solutions to complex problems, like systemic poverty in the city, therefore, attempting different considerations might just be a way to envision new ways and, a new future.

At the conclusion of this study, a revised framework for participatory design will be implemented for the new term of an industrial design classroom at OCAD University to be held offsite in the neighbourhood’s community centre where a new sewing collective meets. This sewing collective is from another not-for-profit organization working in the same community that is currently undergoing revitalization. This revised framework for participatory design aims to further challenge the power dynamics by fully immersing both groups of participants in the learning and teaching on a weekly basis making for a deeper experience. By approaching participatory design in this immersive manner, it truly flattens
the power differentials between and among the roles of participants; and thereby making it more of a project of change.

On the cusp of a new academic term with this revised project outline for participatory design, new questions arise from the study. What are the demographics of the new sewing collective and how will that influence the data? As for the upcoming participatory design participants, I have been informed that a man is involved in the new sewing collective. How will the participants’ experience change by being in the same location for the full term? Would new opportunities and limitations arise from being in the same location? How would the product outcomes differ from past participatory design experiences?

In conclusion, I hope my study of describing the opportunities and limitations in a participatory design project would inspire future inquiry towards designing an even more effective revised framework for participatory design in a university setting. I believe that in the intersection of design and social innovation is where power dynamics can be challenged and new ways are imagined to solve complex problems like systemic poverty through participatory design projects in a multicultural city like Toronto. Through experimentation and improving participatory design frameworks, new processes emerge, and thus, new outcomes. Since participatory design is a way to solve complex problems, attempting different and multiple considerations affords new questions, some which may lead to innovative answers and solutions for our society.
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Appendices

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Appendix A
Informed Consent Letter for OCADU Students

Dear OCADU Student,

My name is Ranee Lee and I am a masters candidate from the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am conducting a qualitative research study to examine the participatory design framework in a higher education between students and a group of immigrant women for the benefit of designing for social change.

Through this study, I will be investigating the experiences of people involved in the project in order to learn more about teaching participatory design in higher learning. I am requesting your co-operation as a voluntary participant in my thesis study, which I hope will lead to shape participatory design in design institutions for the purposes of social change. Defined broadly, with complex issues surrounding services and systems today, design is seen as knowledge production to change how we see and do things to produce new outcomes. Social challenge is an example of a complex problem requiring systemic solutions grounded in the needs of the users/clients. This aligns with the purpose of my rationale to study and describe how designers can engage in participatory design projects within a local context for the benefit of social change.

In order to better understand the opportunities and limitations when designers engage in the design process with the marginalized group, I will be interviewing students in INDS2003 in section 06. All participants in this study will be asked to sign individual consent forms and choose a pseudonym. The data collected for this research study will be naturally occurring in the courses, therefore the risks for the students will be low. Even though OCAD University will be named in my research, participants will still have anonymity as those two INDS2003 courses have many other similar sections. All work will be password protected and kept on Homespaces, which is University of Toronto’s server and will be destroyed in 3 years after completing my thesis. Homespaces is only accessible by my thesis advisor, Dr. Leslie Stewart Rose. Each interview will last 30 minutes and be conducted at a time that is convenient for participants. The timeline for data collection will be in the duration of the course.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding this study, you may contact myself and I would be happy to provide additional information. If you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

Ranee Lee
Masters Candidate
Department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
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(416) 818-7100

Thesis Supervisor:
Dr. Leslie Stewart Rose
Associate Professor, Teaching Stream
Department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning
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252 Bloor Street West, 10th Floor,
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e-mail: leslie.stewartrose@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix A
OCADU Students Consent Form

I, _________________________, agree to participate in Ranee Lee’s masters research study from the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I understand the purpose of this research is to examine the participatory design framework in a higher education between students and a group of immigrant women.

I understand that my participation would involve one individual interview that will take approximately 30 minutes, and that I can elect to participate in a subsequent interview. Interviews will be audiotaped, and will occur at a time and place that is convenient for me. I understand that I am under no obligation to agree to participate in the interview. I understand that my professor will not be informed of who agrees to participate in the study and who does not, and neither decision will have any consequences for my grades in the course. I understand that only the researcher will know that I am a participant and that I will be asked to select a pseudonym for anonymity. I will be asked to read transcripts generated by the project that contain information related to my interview and provide suggestions for edits. I understand that I may decline to answer any questions, to stop the interview at any time and/or withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that my specific answers and comments will be kept confidential. I understand that my name will not be identified in any report or presentation that may arise from the study. I understand that only the principal investigator and her supervisor will have access to the information collected during the study.

I understand that the findings of this study will be presented at conferences and included in a range of publications. I understand that a possible benefit of this study is the reflective growth process. I can request a copy of the study and a summary of the findings of the study will be sent to me.

I understand what this study involves and agree to participate. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature _________________________

Date ________________

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the principal investigator please contact Ranee Lee at (416) 818-7100 or email at ranee.lee@thinkingforward.ca.

Sincerely,

Ranee Lee
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e-mail: leslie.stewartrose@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix B
Informed Consent Letter for OCADU Chair

Dear Program Chair (name, title)

My name is Ranee Lee and I am a masters candidate from the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am conducting a qualitative research study to examine the participatory design framework in a higher education between students and a group of immigrant women for the benefit of designing for social change. Through this study, I will be investigating the experiences of people involved in the project in order to learn more about teaching participatory design in higher learning. As the chair of the industrial design program at OCAD University, I am requesting the co-operation of your institution in my study, which I hope will lead to shape participatory design in design institutions for the purposes of social change. Defined broadly, with complex issues surrounding services and systems today, design is seen as knowledge production to change how we see and do things to produce new outcomes. Social challenge is an example of a complex problem requiring systemic solutions grounded in the needs of the users/clients. This aligns with the purpose of my rationale to study and describe how designers can engage in participatory design projects within a local context for the benefit of social change. In order to better understand the opportunities and limitations when designers engage in the design process with the marginalized group, I will be interviewing students in INDS2003 in section 06. All participants in this study will be asked to sign individual consent forms and choose a pseudonym. The data collected for this research study will be naturally occurring in the courses, therefore the risks for the students will be low. Even though OCAD University will be named in my research, participants will still have anonymity as those two INDS2003 courses have many other similar sections. All work will be password protected and kept on Homespace, which is University of Toronto’s server and will be destroyed in 3 years after completing my thesis. Homespace is accessible only by my thesis advisor, Dr. Leslie Stewart Rose. Each interview will last 30 minutes and be conducted at a time that is convenient for participants. The timeline for data collection will be in the duration of the course.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding this study, you may contact myself and I would be happy to provide additional information. If you have any complaints or concerns about how students have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

Ranee Lee
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Appendix C
Informed Consent Letter for OCADU Instructor

Dear Course Instructor,

My name is Ranee Lee and I am a masters candidate from the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am conducting a qualitative research study to examine the participatory design framework in a higher education between students and a group of immigrant women for the benefit of designing for social change.

Through this study, I will be investigating the experiences of people involved in the project in order to learn more about teaching participatory design in higher learning. As the course instructor of INDS2003 section 06, I am requesting your co-operation as a voluntary participant in my thesis study, which I hope will lead to shape participatory design in design institutions for the purposes of social change. Defined broadly, with complex issues surrounding services and systems today, design is seen as knowledge production to change how we see and do things to produce new outcomes. Social challenge is an example of a complex problem requiring systemic solutions grounded in the needs of the users/clients. This aligns with the purpose of my rationale to study and describe how designers can engage in participatory design projects within a local context for the benefit of social change.

In order to better understand the opportunities and limitations when designers engage in the design process with the marginalized group, I will be interviewing students in INDS2003 in section 06. All participants in this study will be asked to sign individual consent forms and choose a pseudonym. The data collected for this research study will be naturally occurring in the courses, therefore the risks for the students will be low. Even though OCAD University will be named in my research, participants will still have anonymity as the INDS2003 course has many other similar sections. All work will be password protected and kept on Homespase, which is University of Toronto’s server and will be destroyed in 3 years after completing my thesis. Homespase is only accessible by my thesis advisor, Dr. Leslie Stewart Rose. Each interview will last 30 minutes and be conducted at a time that is convenient for participants. The timeline for data collection will be in the duration of the course.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding this study, you may contact myself and I would be happy to provide additional information. If you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

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Appendix D
Informed Consent Letter for the staff participant and leader of women collective

Dear Community Partner Staff Participant (name, title),

My name is Ranee Lee and I am a masters candidate from the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am conducting a qualitative research study to describe how power dynamics in participatory design projects for social change.

The purpose of this research is to describe how students in a design program can engage in participatory design (PD) projects within a local context for the benefit of social change. This study will examine:

1. What experiences regarding the participatory design process are described by the immigrant women and the students through course of the project in one term.
2. What power imbalance exists, if any, between the immigrant women and the students.
3. To what extent is participatory design mutually beneficial for all participants.

As our community partner staff participant, I am requesting your co-operation as a voluntary participant in my thesis study, which I hope will lead to shape participatory design in design institutions for the purposes of social change. Defined broadly, with complex issues surrounding services and systems today, design is seen as knowledge production to change how we see and do things to produce new outcomes. Social challenge is an example of a complex problem requiring systemic solutions grounded in the needs of the users/clients. This aligns with the purpose of my rationale to study and describe how designers can engage in PD projects within a local context for the benefit of social change, while maintaining a balanced power dynamic with the marginalized group of people.

In order to better understand how designers engage in the design process and how they maintain a balanced power dynamic with the marginalized group, I will be interviewing students, instructors. All data generated during this study will remain confidential and the institution will be given a pseudonym. No one beyond myself and my supervisor Dr. Leslie Stewart Rose will be told of your institution’s involvement in the study. To help protect your institutions’ anonymity, a pseudonym will be assigned to it in all reports. In addition, all participants in this study will be asked to sign individual consent forms and choose a pseudonym. All work will be password protected and kept on Homespace, which is University of Toronto’s server and will be destroyed in 3 years after completing my thesis. Homespace is accessible by my thesis advisor, Dr. Leslie Stewart Rose, in the duration of my class until I can access it after my marks have been submitted. Each interview will last 30 minutes and be conducted at a time that is convenient for participants. The timeline for data collection will be in the duration of the course.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding this study, you may contact myself or my thesis advisor, and we would be happy to provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Ranee Lee
Masters Candidate
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Appendix E
Interview Guide – OCADU Students

The purpose of this research is to describe how students in a design program can engage in participatory design (PD) projects within a local context for the benefit of social change. This study will examine:

1. What experiences regarding the participatory design process are described by the immigrant women and the students through course of the project in one term.
   - Looking back, what would you change in the participatory design project to make it a more successful process?
   - What was in your research that you found most insightful for this project? (a-ha moment)

2. What power imbalance exists, if any, between the immigrant women and the students.
   - What do you think you will learn from the women when you meet them?
   - Is there a point that you disagreed with the women’s input?
   - From engaging with the women, did your concept change to become stronger or weaker? Why or why not?

3. To what extent is participatory design mutually beneficial for all participants.
   - Did the input from the women help you achieve your design criteria?
   - What did you actually learn from meeting the women in week 2? If different from your initial thinking, what were the varied points?
   - Did your design criteria align well with the women’s goals and priorities?
   - Did the input from the women change your concept? If so, how?
Appendix F

Interview Guide – The Staff Participant / Leaders of Sewing Collective

The purpose of this research is to describe how students in a design program can engage in participatory design (PD) projects within a local context for the benefit of social change. This study will examine:

1. What experiences regarding the participatory design process are described by the immigrant women and the students through course of the project in one term.
   - Has the participatory design project experience been a good one for the women involved?
   - Was there anything in the students’ research that gave the women insights towards this project?
   - Did the women learn anything new in the design process?
   - Is there anything you would change in the experience (interaction with the students) to make the overall participatory design project more successful?

2. What power imbalance exists, if any, between the immigrant women and the students.
   - At any point, did the women feel like the students didn’t take their input or that their voice wasn’t heard?
   - Was there a point that the women disagreed with the students’ research/concepts?

3. To what extent is participatory design mutually beneficial for all participants.
   - Did the women feel like they had input in the design process?
   - Did the students’ design criteria align well with the women’s goals and priorities?
Appendix G
Interview Guide – OCADU Instructor

The purpose of this research is to describe how students in a design program can engage in participatory design (PD) projects within a local context for the benefit of social change. This study will examine:

1. What experiences regarding the participatory design process are described by the immigrant women and the students through course of the project in one term.

   • Has the participatory design project experience been a good one for the students? Why or why not?

   • Do you think there was anything in the students’ research that gave the women insights towards this project? (a-ha moments)

   • Was there adequate time for the women to give input in the design process? Was it effective? What would you change? (longer, shorter, earlier, later in the course outline)

   • Is there anything you would change in the experience (interaction with the women) to make the overall participatory design project more successful?

2. What power imbalance exists, if any, between the immigrant women and the students.

   • Did you think there was feedback from the women the students did not take into account?

   • Did you feel like there were conflicting thoughts/concepts between the women and the students?

   • Did the students feel like they still had creative freedom despite the women’s input in the design process?

3. To what extent is participatory design mutually beneficial for all participants.

   • Did the students’ design criteria align well with the women’s goals and priorities?

   • Did the students learn something new from the women’s involvement in the design process?
Appendix H
“The Study” Course Outline

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

COURSE NUMBER: INDS2003
COURSE NAME: Identity Materialized

ASSIGNMENT Project 1
DESIGNING FOR IDENTITY – SOFT GOODS DESIGN- 30% of term’s grade

Date: Week 2

Course Instructor: Ranee Lee – rlee@faculty.ocadu.ca

CONTEXT:
Toronto prides itself on being a vibrant and world-class city which provides opportunities for all its citizens to participate in its prosperity. However, we are facing growing inequality – with an ever-growing gap between the rich vs poor. In fact, in Toronto, to make ends meet, a family needs two full-time working parents, making $18.52/hour each, just to get by. That’s a family income of over $72,000!

By the numbers, the following groups face disproportionately higher risk to poverty than their neighbours:

- 46% recent immigrants
- 37% single mothers
- 33% racialized minorities
- 30% people with disabilities
- 29% of children (with the number jumping to 50% in communities like Regent Park)

Read more about The City of Toronto’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, to combat the growing inequalities of our great City.

DESIGN BRIEF:

The Yonge Street Mission (YSM) has been on the front lines of service since 1896, providing emergency help, and fostering long-term change in communities, like Regent Park. Coming out of this work, is an exceptional group of women called the Women’s Development Network, focused on wealth generation initiatives, like the sewing collective.

You will be designing a soft goods product that can be produced locally by this group of women. Your task is to brand [ ] in a way that reflects all the redevelopment and revitalization that is already happening there – through your designs and research. As a result, you will present a poster advertisement along with this newly designed product. These products can be potentially sold in local stores like: http://www.thelabouroflove.ca, http://spruceonparliament.com - both storefronts in [ ], near the [ ] community.
SOCIAL INNOVATION APPROACH: By elevating their design and offerings to the market, they will be able to expand their reach across Toronto, creating more opportunities for more women in their communities to contribute to their family's livelihood and create better prospects for their children. Only by approaching community differently, can we expect to achieve different results.

After designing the product, you need to design a poster:
1 x Poster for bus shelter (or any other street advertising) to promote this new product.

DELIVERABLES:

**Week 2 / Sept 15 – Meet the Sewing Collective Women at YSM Community Centre (270 Gerrard Street East) across from the library. This is a hub for St James Town, Moss Park and Regent Park communities.**

- Be ready to take notes and ask questions
- This is part of your research stage: what is their criteria? (Paula and Ranee to finalize) What is important to them? What are their skill sets? How often do they meet? What are their challenges? What equipment do they have?
- Read “3Teapots” (posted on Canvas) to learn about Visceral, Behavioural & Reflective processes.

**Week 3 / Sept 22 - Conceptual Departure Points & Design Criteria**

- Having already met the women, we are ready to jump into conceptual departure points!
- Present an 11x17 poster of your analysis: What is the criteria? On your poster, you must show your departure points and criteria (Must/Should/Could).
- Analyze WHO will buy your potential product: talk to/research and analyze the user, understand the day to day use from the perspective of the user, empathize their needs. What do they want / What are their needs.
- Present an 11x17 Image Board Poster of PERSONA: Illustrating personality and Lifestyle – “visceral and behavioural” (who user is, what the brand that you create does). Illustrating Mood – “reflective” qualities (more intangible).
- Send research PDFs to Paula.

**Week 4 / Sept 29 – Sewing Collective to come to OCADU / Concept & Ideation Review (Paula and a smaller group of women leaders)**

- Sewing collective to come at 9am – 100 McCaul St, room 554.
- Minimum of 15 deep ideas of possible soft goods designs.
- Exploring range of concepts for expressing the persona through product and how the functional quality/ expressiveness can be evoked.
- Rough models of at least 5 ideas (can be to scale depending on product choice – discuss with instructor).
- In class discussion / critique to narrow down to the strongest concepts in each category.
Appendix H
“The Study” Course Outline

Week 5 / Oct 6 – Refinement (Larger group of women to come to OCADU)
- Concept refined from previous discussion.
- Clear direction selected.
- 3-4 Models (can be to scale) and 8 high quality drawings of tangible ideas.
- Use structured image layout for drawings (messy scribbles not accepted).

Oct 13 – No Class – Fall Reading Week

Week 6 / Oct 20 – Final Presentation (PDF) To present at [insert location]
- 1 x Poster – Showing street ad in “context” to show digitally (ie: bus shelter ad needs to show bus shelter, or subway ad or billboard, etc).
- 1 x Actual Model of Soft Goods.
- Supporting visual documentation showing key selling elements of designs (what are the details that heighten user experiences, why does the design fit the persona, any extra features including sustainable locally-sourced materials, etc).

MARKING OUTLINE.
The project will be evaluated on the quality of the EIGHT (8) equally important criteria as described below.

CRITERIA 1. Image Boards.

Unacceptable: Literal representation of persona. Poor quality images. Limited metaphorical imagery.
Exemplary: Deep use of insightful, metaphorical images that provoke conceptual thinking. Continued to develop visual language beyond initial deliverables.

CRITERIA 2. User Insight.

Unacceptable: Typical insights of user and materials.
Acceptable: Insight into core values of user. Clear articulation of insight for user and materials.
Exemplary: Deep insight provoking a thoughtful response of user and materials.


Unacceptable: Limited to mostly internet analysis. Limited personal interaction/synthesized research with/for user. Limited literature review.
Acceptable: Analysis includes insights from direct experience with user/user group. Process has included contacting people with direct connection with persona – users, sales, design, etc... Fair range of articles and readings into broader context of branding and visual communication. Insights translated into design criteria.
Appendix H
“The Study” Course Outline

**Exemplary:** Deliberate attempt to make direct personal experience with persona and user/user group.

**CRITERIA 4. Concept Development.**

**Unacceptable:** Limited range of concepts generated, poor attempts to diversify or challenge. Concepts ill defined, too broad or vague.

**Acceptable:** Great range of concepts, with diverse insights and creative thinking. Highly experimental metaphorically.

**Exemplary:** Iterative development and refinement of concept shows hunger to reach deep, tangible insight.

**CRITERIA 5. Ideation.**

**Unacceptable:** Ideation process does not reflect insights from persona.

**Acceptable:** Ideation takes clear cues due to insights from investigation into persona.

**Exemplary:** Highly experimental ideation process that embodies challenging, provocative decisions and actions inspired by the chosen persona.

**CRITERIA 6. General Design Process.**

**Unacceptable:** Process work messy and hurried. Limited visual hierarchy expressed throughout process. Work chaotic and confusing.

**Acceptable:** Process shows pride and investment. Process includes range of creative mediums – writing, sketching, modeling, computer rendering, etc. Visual hierarchy tells story of reflective creative thinking. Use of design criteria throughout process.

**Exemplary:** Professional attention to detail allows process work to be presented to anyone new to the project and be able to collaborate and comment on the creative thinking. High quality output ready for portfolio presentation.

**CRITERIA 7. Quality of Final Ideas.**

**Unacceptable:** No connection between ideas. Ideas poorly resolved, with key details not yet considered or refined. Visual language of designs disconnected from persona.

**Acceptable:** Well developed, considered and presented. Models high quality. Drawings high quality. Key selling details of design well considered and executed. Excellent visual language embodied in ideas.

**Exemplary:** Excellent investment into key details and refinement of ideas. Visual language of work highlights deep consideration and development from earlier experiments.

**CRITERIA 8. Quality of Final Presentation.**

**Unacceptable:** Concept poorly articulated. Lack of visual hierarchy prevents ideas from jumping out to audience.

**Acceptable:** Story clear, well articulated and presented, visually and verbally. Clear insights from research expressed. Clear visual hierarchy throughout all.

**Exemplary:** Excellent example of professional level communication with excellent attention to detail. Every element considered.
COURSE ASSIGNMENT

COURSE NUMBER: INDS2003
COURSE NAME: Identity Materialized

ASSIGNMENT Project 1 & 2
DESIGNING FOR IDENTITY – PARTICIPATORY DESIGN
Project 1A – 15% / Project 1B – 30% / Project 2A – 20% / Project 2B – 20%

Date: Sept 2018

Course Instructor: Ranee Lee – rlee@faculty.ocadu.ca

CONTEXT:
Toronto prides itself on being a vibrant and world-class city which provides opportunities for all its citizens to participate in its prosperity. However, we are facing growing inequality – with an ever-growing gap between the rich vs poor. In fact, in Toronto, to make ends meet, a family needs two full-time working parents, making $18.52/hour each, just to get by. That’s a family income of over $72,000!

By the numbers, the following groups face disproportionately higher risk to poverty than their neighbours:

- **46% recent immigrants**
- **37% single mothers**
- **33% racialized minorities**
- **30% people with disabilities**
- **29% of children** (with the number jumping to 50% in communities like Regent Park)

Read more about The City of Toronto’s [Poverty Reduction Strategy](http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-84626.pdf), to combat the growing inequalities of our great City.

DESIGN BRIEF:
In 2013, the [Centre for Community Learning & Development (CCL&D)](http://www.ocad.ca) launched a small social enterprise incubation program (Sewing Studio and Catering Collective) as a strategy to emphasize microenterprise and business development as a path for newcomers to make a living. The CCL&D and the social enterprise contribute to build a healthier community by:

- Helping women and single parents have access to sustainable income with flexible schedules, while still meeting family responsibilities.
- Providing supplementary income for individuals and families, who are engaged in precarious work, and/or low paid jobs, therefore continue to live below the poverty line.

In 2020, with the support of [Daniels’ Community Commercial Program](http://www.ocad.ca), the [DuEast Condominiums](http://www.ocad.ca) will open on the second floor of the community. This partnership will take social enterprise programming to the next level, by supporting newcomer startups and offering goods and services to the public.
Appendix I
Updated Project Outline

DESIGN FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: By elevating the Sewing Studio’s design and offerings to the market, they will be able to expand their reach across Toronto, creating more opportunities for more women in their communities to contribute to their family’s livelihood and create better prospects for their children. Only by approaching community differently, can we expect to achieve different results.

How can you use design to bring value to an item, because it is unique and bespoke? There is a story and a narrative behind each piece. Who is the target audience?
After designing the product, you need to design a social media campaign to promote this new product to the targeted user group of your choice.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN: You dream it, the sewers will help to source out materials etc. Members of the Sewing Studio are present on a weekly basis to make this project truly a participatory design project. Weekly consultations are expected.

DELIVERABLES:
Week 1 / Sept 5 – Meet at 100 McCaul in room 670.
• 3 students to a group for the research component of the project.
Week 2 / Sept 12 – Meet at
• Homework: Research about Regent Park and its importance as well as research on materials and soft goods
• Launch Project 1A
• Be ready to take notes and ask questions.
• Primary and secondary research.
Week 3 / Sept 19 – Project 1A: Research
• Create a persona
• This is part of your research stage: what do you see?
• Read “3Teapots” (posted on Canvas) to learn about Visceral, Behavioural & Reflective processes.
Week 4 / Sept 26 – Project 1A DUE: Final Presentation
• In a compressed PDF (pls refer to instructions on how to shrink your files), present your research: What is your design criteria? (Must/Should/Could) Along with your design criteria, show your departure points, research and persona.
• Show WHO will buy your potential product: talk to/research and analyze the user, understand the day to day use from the perspective of the user, empathize their needs. What do they want / What are their needs.
• Analyze PERSONA: illustrating personality and Lifestyle – “visceral and behavioural” (who user is, what is the brand that you create does). Illustrating Mood – “reflective” qualities (more intangible).
Week 5 / Oct 3 – Project 1B Launch: Concepts
• Concept sketches & mock-ups for target audience stated in design brief
• Minimum of 15 deep ideas of possible soft goods designs.
Appendix I
Updated Project Outline

- Exploring range of concepts for expressing the persona through product and how the functional quality/ expressiveness can be evoked.
- Rough models of at least 5 ideas (can be to scale depending on product choice – discuss with instructor and Sewing Studio).

Oct 10 – No Class – Fall Reading Week Oct 8-12

Week 6 / Oct 17 – Project 1B Refinement
- Concept refined from previous discussion.
- Clear direction selected.
- 3 Models (full scale) and 5 high quality drawings of tangible ideas.
- Use structured image layout for drawings (messy scribbles not accepted).

Week 7 / Oct 24 – Project 1B Final Presentation
- 1 x Actual Model of Soft Goods.
- Supporting visual documentation showing key selling elements of designs (what are the details that heighten user experiences, why does the design fit the persona, any extra features including sustainable locally-sourced materials, etc).

Week 8 / Oct 31 – Improving your Prototype
- You have one week to improve your final prototype.
- Consult with the women.
- Start thinking about Project 2B.

Week 9 / Nov 7 – Project 2A: Branding.
- Field Trip TBA
- Launch Project 2B

Week 10 / Nov 14 – Project 2A: Branding.
- Reimagine what “Sewing Studio” branding can be and why.
- Concepts (minimum 5) with rationales.
- Social Media Campaign (minimum 5)

Week 11 / Nov 21 – Project 2A: Packaging.
- How do you heighten the experience of the product? Add value?
- Packaging concepts (minimum 5) with rationales.

Week 12 / Nov 28 – Project 2A: Final Presentation.
- Social Media Campaign / Who is your audience
- Reimagine what “Sewing Studio” can be and why.
- Concepts (minimum 5) with rationales.

Project 2B - GALLERY: Possibly Dec 5-9 time/place TBA
- Graphics, printing, invitation, posters, promotion, media
- Set up, lighting, plinths, food, music, photography etc
- Tear down, clean up, thank yous
Appendix I
Updated Project Outline

MARKING OUTLINE.

The project will be evaluated on the quality of the NINE (9) equally important criteria as described below.

CRITERIA 1. Initial Research.

Unacceptable: Literal representation of persona. Poor quality images. Limited metaphorical imagery.
Exemplary: Deep use of insightful, metaphorical images that provoke conceptual thinking. Continued to develop visual language beyond initial deliverables.

CRITERIA 2. User Insight.

Unacceptable: Typical insights of user and materials.
Acceptable: Insight into core values of user. Clear articulation of insight for user and materials.
Exemplary: Deep insight provoking a thoughtful response of user and materials.


Unacceptable: Limited to mostly internet analysis. Limited personal interaction/synthesized research with/for user. Limited literature review.
Acceptable: Analysis includes insights from direct experience with user/user group. Process has included contacting people with direct connection with persona – users, sales, design, etc... Fair range of articles and readings into broader context of branding and visual communication. Insights translated into design criteria.
Exemplary: Deliberate attempt to make direct personal experience with persona and user/user group.

CRITERIA 4. Concept Development.

Unacceptable: Limited range of concepts generated, poor attempts to diversify or challenge. Concepts ill defined, too broad or vague.
Acceptable: Great range of concepts, with diverse insights and creative thinking. Highly experimental metaphorically.
Exemplary: Iterative development and refinement of concept shows hunger to reach deep, tangible insight.

CRITERIA 5. Ideation.

Unacceptable: Ideation process does not reflect insights from persona.
Acceptable: Ideation takes clear cues due to insights from investigation into persona.
Exemplary: Highly experimental ideation process that embodies challenging, provocative decisions and actions inspired by the chosen persona.


CRITERIA 7. Quality of Final Ideas.

Unacceptable: No connection between ideas. Ideas poorly resolved, with key details not yet considered or refined. Visual language of designs disconnected from persona.

Acceptable: Well developed, considered and presented. Models high quality. Drawings high quality. Key selling details of design well considered and executed. Excellent visual language embodied in ideas.

Exemplary: Excellent investment into key details and refinement of ideas. Visual language of work highlights deep consideration and development from earlier experiments.

CRITERIA 8. Quality of Final Presentation.

Unacceptable: Concept poorly articulated. Lack of visual hierarchy prevents ideas from jumping out to audience.

Acceptable: Story clear, well articulated and presented, visually and verbally. Clear insights from research expressed. Clear visual hierarchy throughout all.

Exemplary: Excellent example of professional level communication with excellent attention to detail. Every element considered.

CRITERIA 9. Written Component.

Unacceptable: Students did not answer the questions with specific examples. Students do not show leaning and insights in their answers. Students did not fulfill the assignment (answers not in full sentence or too short).

Acceptable: Students answered the question but only partially and not digging deep with specific examples. Students show learning with average insights into the process. Student fulfilled the writing assignment.

Exemplary: Students answered the questions thoughtfully by proving evidence with specific examples. Students are able to write about their learnings and show insights in their own learning process. Students fulfilled the writing assignment and managed to use every word to show insights into learning.