Preface to the Special Issue

Attending to Issues of Social Justice through Learning Design

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Introduction

Across the globe, recent events have brought the reality and consequences of inequality and oppression to the forefront of our awareness. Economic and racial disparities in healthcare exposed by COVID-19 intersect with outrage over neglect of basic human rights, creating an urgent and pressing need to address the systemic nature of such issues. As the educational community moves into conversation and action around these systemic inequalities, many are asking, "What can I do?"

At first glance, the field of learning, design, and technology seems an unlikely context for taking up such issues. Scholars in our field have a rich history of studying the ways that technology improves learning and performance in various educational contexts, as evidenced in a number of recent meta-analyses on various technologies (see Hassler et al., 2016; Merchant et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2016). While this perspective is an undeniable part of our field's identity, it is also a narrow one. It ignores a growing interest and focus on learning design and the role that educational technology can play in addressing ongoing and longstanding issues of systemic injustice and oppression (e.g., Bradshaw, 2018; Dickson-Deane et al., 2018; Sulecio de Alvarez et al., 2018).

The reality is that our field is not merely a collection of tech-savvy scholars. We are a diverse, interdisciplinary group of educators who engage in learning design in complex and creative ways. Broadly speaking, our work explores how the purposeful analysis and design of learning environments can address persistent problems in a variety of educational and organizational settings (e.g., Henrick et al., 2015; McKenney & Reeves, 2017; Richey et al., 2002). We care deeply about the learner and the learner's experience and how to best support that experience in a given context (Schmidt et al., 2020; Stefaniak, 2020). To achieve this goal, we blend theory and technology in novel ways to develop, implement, and evaluate the efficacy of both instructional and non-instructional interventions. For many of us, this entails working in and pushing back against systems that promote or perpetuate injustice and inequality.

With this context in mind, this special issue was created to bring focus to the ways our field is attending to issues of social justice through learning design. The articles selected for this special issue explore and offer insight into the following questions:

> *How can learning design be applied and leveraged to promote social, political, and economic change? And what role can we, as designers, play in that work?*

Article Selection

For this special issue, we welcomed contributions from K-12, higher education, and other organizational or workplace contexts (e.g., nonprofit organizations, government, corporate) that focused on how learning design can serve as a tool for pushing back against and/or changing systems that often promote or perpetuate injustice and inequality. The final result is a collection of articles about the practical ways in which designers are taking up social justice in their own work, including the following:

- Culturally situated and cross-cultural approaches to instructional design and research
- Improving performance in the context of workplace inequity
- Participatory models of learning
- Long-term projects that address disparity issues regarding access to technologies and resources (e.g., digital and pedagogical divide)
- Applications of critical theory in learning design
- Ethical and responsible (i.e., humanizing) concerns regarding the collection, analysis, and presentation of data and findings

The contributions we selected paid particular attention to specific social and political issues, such as inequities in access and/or instruction based on race, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, etc.; power dynamics that create or sustain an environment of unequal opportunities or expectations; disparities in

identifying/designing opportunities for learning based on race, culture, or dis/ability. Because concepts like justice, equality, and change are complex and multifaceted, we sought contributions that articulated the relationship among the factors involved rather than studies that isolate any single factor on its own. In doing so, our hope was to promote the unique and innovative nature of learning design and organizational systems changes in addressing what have become long-standing issues in learning, education, organizational performance improvement, and change.

The result was a collection of 14 articles that are both conceptual and practical in nature. The papers, which are described briefly below, represent ongoing and current efforts to engage in the practice of instructional design while addressing social justice issues in today's learning contexts. It is our hope that these articles will offer other designers insight into the ways that issues such as racial inequity, inequity in power and access, and economic disparity can be attended to and, if possible, ameliorated through the act of learning design.

Overview of Articles

The 14 articles that make up this special issue are organized into four distinct themes: Perspectives on ID Practice, Social Justice Issues in Higher Education, Social Justice Strategies for K-12 Teachers, and Issues of Social Justice in STEM Education. The themes and papers within each theme are described below.

Perspectives on ID Practice

This first theme explores a variety of perspectives on ID practice that center on social justice theories to support learning and performance improvement. In the first paper, "The Design Models We Have Are Not the Design Models We Need," Stephanie L. Moore describes how the application of ethics as a design lens offers us welcomed insights into existing design models and new opportunities for design practices. Using an ethics framework, the author critiques our current models, describing gaps related to social, economic, political, accessibility, inclusion, and diversity. Finally, the author argues that adjusting existing models to solve such problems might be difficult, suggesting that our field may need to add new models or draw emphasis to different approaches like problem framing.

In the second paper, "Designing for Liberation: A Case Study in Antiracism Instructional Design," Ryan Ikeda, Kai Nham, Laura Armstrong, Victoria Robinson, Fiona Diec, Nicole Kim, Douglas Parada, Diana Sanchez, and Kelly Zhen suggest that instructional designers can support dismantling white supremacy logic and focus on the liberation of BIPOC students when provided with an

antiracist framework, principles, and model. They describe how this can be done through a case study approach. The results center on a fellows program designed to address inequitable access to innovative technology intended to amplify stories of individuals who are minoritized by dominant cultural frameworks.

In the third paper, "Promoting Organizational Justice In Cross-cultural Data Collection, Analysis, And Interpretation: Towards An Emerging Conceptual Model," Lisa Giacumo, Madeleine Yount, and D'Jeane Peters merge organizational justice theory with existing cross-cultural data collection, analysis, and interpretations guidelines for project work. Their result delivers a new model to guide researchers, IDs, and HPI practitioners in their work to facilitate decision-making that is more inclusive, equitable, and socially just.

In the last paper in this theme, "Reconsidering Dale's Cone: Towards the Development of a 21st Century 'Cone of Experience' to Address Social Justice Issues," William Sugar and Delaney Collyer describe a framework of instructional technologies that may be leveraged to impact social justice. They then combine this framework and Molenda and Subramony's (2021) communication configurations to propose an array of instructional activities related to social justice.

Social Justice in Higher Education

The second theme focuses on the ways that designers have addressed a variety of social justice issues in the context of higher education. In the first paper in this theme, "Equity Unbound as Critical Intercultural Praxis," Mia Zamora, Maha Bali, Parisa Mehran, and Catherine Cronin trace the emergence of Equity Unbound, an online, participatory community of educators conceptualized and initiated in 2018. The manuscript shares the design and collaborative path of educators from different countries and higher education systems. The social justice work done through Equity Unbound resulted in a supportive community where educators can be vulnerable as a way to become better teachers and human beings, yet cognizant of the limitations and constraints of aspiring for an equitable world.

In "Realizing Equity & Inclusion Goals in the Design of MOOCs," Chelsea Chandler, Rebecca Quintana, Yuanru Tan, and Jacob Aguinaga explore the connection between diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals of faculty and their enactment in a resulting open online course. The findings suggest that there are differences between DEI goal development in a single MOOC as well as a MOOC series. However, to achieve social justice, the authors argue that there is a need for learning designers and faculty to work collaboratively on the planning and implementation of DEI goals for each course.

In the third article, "Designing For Every Student: Practical Advice For Instructional Designers On Applying Social Justice In Learning Design," Eliana Elkhoury and Fouzia Usman argue for using a social justice lens when designing curricula for the classroom. Rather than present a prescriptive approach to addressing social justice, the authors provide broad recommendations for applying a social justice lens with a particular focus on inclusivity, communication, content, flexibility, and feedback-seeking. The recommendations offer other instructional designers an approach for developing curricula and creating an inclusive learning environment that serves the needs of all students.

In the last article in this theme, "Designing a Virtual Learning Environment for Critical Media Literacy Education," Ali Söken and Kysa Nygreen reflect on how they redesigned a large undergraduate course on critical media literacy. The authors describe how they used Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to inform design choices centering on equity, accessibility, and social justice. Their findings detail how the course redesign increased flexibility and accessibility while putting student learning goals at the center of the design. The authors advocate for design approaches that consider the impact of social contexts and social inequalities in an effort to maximize accessibility and social justice.

Social Justice Strategies for K-12 Teachers

The next theme explores the impact of professional development programs focused on developing social justice strategies for teaching and learning in K-12 contexts. In the first paper in this theme, "Preparing Educators for Culturally Responsive Teaching Through Technical Cultural Representations," Kevin Oliver, Angela Wiseman, and Cori Greer-Banks describe a professional development program that incorporated an immersive study abroad experience to prepare in-service teachers for culturally responsive teaching from a global perspective. Central to the PD experience was the opportunity for teachers to investigate and create digital representations of cultural themes identified during their study abroad. The authors report the results of an impact study on teacher participants' changing classroom practices after the PD and end with design recommendations for PD programs that support the development of CRT.

In the next paper, "Learning in Diverse Educational Contexts: Bringing Social Justice when Designing Culturally Rich Learning Experiences in Brazil," Vivian Martins, Ana-Paula Correia, and Edméa Santos explore the ways a professional development course can culturally situate educational experiences. Rooted in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, the authors used the

method of research training in cyberculture to collect and assess participants' narratives about their culturally rich learning experiences. These experiences supported teacher participants in identifying the cultural resources of the Baixada Fluminense in Brazil, and, by doing so, pushed back against a common narrative that this poor urban area does not have or produce a distinct culture of its own.

In the next paper, "Humanities Education in the U.S. Rural South: Design, Development, and Practice," Katherine Walters, Theodore (TJ) Kopcha, and Christopher Lawton examine how professional development can play a role in preparing teachers to take up issues of racial and economic inequality in the rural U.S. South. Using design-based implementation research (DBIR) as an overarching method, the authors present empirical evidence to establish learning strategies that supported teachers in fostering a unique blend of a humanities education with project-based learning.

In the last paper in this section, "STEM Teachers' Designs for Learning: Addressing the Social and Political Climate During COVID-19," Tiffany Roman, Belinda Edwards, Michael Dias, and Laurie Brantley-Dias report on the findings of a case study of secondary STEM teachers who participated in professional development on trauma-informed pedagogies and social justice education. Through analysis of interviews and teacher-produced lessons, the authors examine how these teachers designed instruction that supported students in applying STEM knowledge to social justice issues. The authors also identify the challenges faced by teachers engaging with social justice issues in the classroom and the types of continued support required to help meet these challenges.

Issues of Social Justice in STEM Education

The final two papers of the special issue focus on issues of social justice in STEM education. In the first, Diane Codding and Hui Yang examine how university-library partnerships can provide access to computer science instruction through culturally responsive informal learning design. Their paper, "Computing for Communities: Designing Culturally Responsive Informal Learning Environments for Broadening Participation in Computing," details a partnership between undergraduates and public library staff members in which they introduced computer science concepts and Scratch programming to underrepresented youth. Their paper addresses longstanding issues around the underrepresentation of female and racially minoritized youth in STEM disciplines.
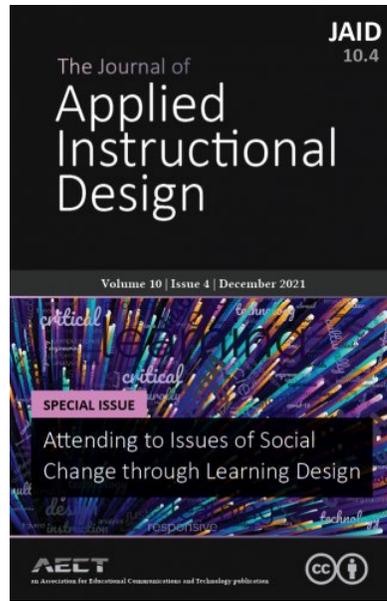
In the final paper in the special issue, "With Our Community, for Our Community: Expanding Possibilities for Engaging in STEM," Justine Nation, Francesca Sen,

Joi Duncan, David Sañosa, and Richard Durán examine a Community STEM project where Latinx teens addressed the issue of local noise pollution. Using an ethnographic perspective, the authors share the results of a curriculum design that leverages the expertise of STEM-underrepresented youth. Their results offer insight into the ways that afterschool programs can be used to promote STEM skills and foster greater interest in a career in STEM.

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