Learning Experience Design as Collective Praxis: Two Design Cases from Higher Education

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Collaborative Praxis
Critical Pedagogy
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This paper explores the pivotal role of learning experience designers in fostering collective praxis through two design cases, embracing critical pedagogy. In the "Centering Justice" program, they facilitate collaboration among faculty, students, and instructional technologists, for an inclusive and socially just teaching framework. Navigating power dynamics, they promote awareness of privilege and oppression, and encourage dialogue and reflexivity. In the online course on intimate partner violence, they orchestrate interdisciplinary collaboration, ensuring authentic and empathetic

content through participatory design. These case studies highlight the central role of learning experience designer in managing stakeholders, power dynamics, and fostering transformative education.

Introduction

The swift advancement of technological innovation has fundamentally transformed the educational landscape, opening new possibilities for interactive and personalized learning experiences (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Marcus, 2022). The rapid pace of technological advancement within higher education institutions has been paralleled by a notable demographic shift, with today's student body reflecting unprecedented diversity in terms of culture, socio-economic standing, and prior educational experiences (Bass, 2023; Orr et al., 2020). These transformative changes necessitate a profound reassessment of traditional pedagogy and call for the implementation of critical pedagogy, which not only conveys knowledge but also empowers learners to critically analyze and influence their world (Giroux, 2020).

The traditional instructional design approach, often perceived as an isolated entity solely working with subject matter experts and serving as the final link in the chain to create instructional content (Davey et al., 2019; González & Quiroz, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019), falls short in meeting the expectations of this evolving educational landscape. It lacks effectiveness in engaging learners and fostering their ownership of the learning process, while failing to encourage critical analysis and student agency in navigating their complex world. For example, when designing a face-to-face undergraduate course, instructional designers may only be required to define learning objectives and create standardized assessments based on a predetermined structured curriculum. However, the emergence of advanced learning technologies (e.g., MOOCs, extended reality) has highlighted the need for more personalized and adaptive experiences. In addition, it underscores the importance of designing equitable learning environments that address diverse learner needs, promote inclusivity, and bridge educational disparities.

In response, there is an unprecedented demand for learning experience designers recognizing their pivotal role in meeting the needs of the diverse and technologically adept student population (Heggart & Dickson-Deane, 2021). With their expertise in pedagogy and technology, learning experience designers are uniquely positioned to design innovative learning experiences that leverage emerging tools and methods, ultimately enhancing student engagement and improving learning outcomes. Their focus is broad and holistic, encompassing the complete learning journey to create more enjoyable, engaging, and effective learning experiences (Schmidt & Tawfik, 2022). To achieve this, learning experience

designers wield a robust toolkit that combines design thinking, user-experience strategies, system design principles, change management techniques, and insights from learning sciences and analytics (Thurber et al., 2021).

These endeavors have led learning experience designers to gain professional recognition that extends beyond standard course design and development to encompass new responsibilities such as project management, learning analytics, and faculty development and collaboration (Brown et al., 2020). Furthermore, learning experience designers play a central role in orchestrating *collective praxis*. This process integrates the efforts of various stakeholders, including faculty and students, to co-create learning experiences anchored in theory, best practices, and learner needs, all while addressing educational inequities. Despite this progress, a gap remains in our understanding of how learning experience designers facilitate collective praxis to embody critical pedagogy. There are outstanding questions concerning how learning experience designers manage divergent perspectives, navigate power dynamics, apply their extensive toolkit, and build consensus to foster an environment that promotes critical thinking and transformative learning.

In this paper, I present learning experience design as a collective praxis by positioning two cases. Each case prefaces a form of the praxis of deliberate, thoughtful, and reflective action amongst an interdisciplinary team, including learning experience designers, subject matter experts, potential learners, technology experts, and other stakeholders. The process involves acting and reflecting in tandem to bring more social justice by negotiating, challenging, and reshaping knowledge to awaken others to the possibilities of a different perspective. Finally, I outline how learning experience design methodologies (e.g., learner persona, journey map, participatory design) were utilized that embrace differences to nurture critique, challenge, and extend our design thinking.

Related Work

From Isolated Practice to Collective Praxis

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines praxis as “the process of using a theory or knowledge in a practical way”. It emphasizes that theory should be firmly grounded in real-world experiences and that practical action should be informed by critical reflection and analysis (Walker et al., 2019). While practice refers to the actual execution of an activity, procedure, or technique for the acquisition of practical abilities, praxis emphasizes the holistic integration of theory, action, and critical reflection, encompassing a broader understanding of the social, political, and ethical dimensions of an activity or discipline (Wenglinsky, 2004).

Praxis, often misunderstood as mere reflection, requires a more comprehensive understanding of learning experience designers operating in complex and diverse contexts with power disparities, conflicting reforms, and equity concerns (Freire, 1970). Extensive research emphasizes the importance of ethical awareness in learning design practice, recognizing that decisions made in learning experience design are not neutral and can have significant social, cultural, and political implications (Gray & Boiling, 2016; Gray & Howard, 2015). Learning experience designers should navigate these complexities, taking into

account the broader ethical implications of their design choices to ensure inclusive and equitable learning experiences for all learners. Reflection, although important, is just one aspect of the multifaceted praxis that learning experience designers engage in, encompassing critical analysis, ethical considerations, and a deep understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which learning occurs (Gray et al., 2015).

To address biases and assumptions that can perpetuate inequalities and marginalize certain learner groups, learning experience designers should adopt more participatory approaches. This involves recognizing their biases, embracing diverse perspectives, and incorporating the needs and experiences of learners and stakeholders (Gray et al., 2015; Hladik et al., 2021). By including more participatory approaches, learning experience designers can foster inclusivity, promote equity, and create design outcomes that challenge dominant discourses. It is essential for learning experience designers to reflect on their biases, engage in critical analysis, and collaborate with diverse stakeholders to ensure more inclusive, equitable, and responsive learning experiences (Gray et al., 2015).

Another essential part of this process is the designer's capacity for high-level *epistemic fluency* (Colton et al., 2022; Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2017). Epistemic fluency refers to one's aptitude to understand, interpret, and apply various knowledge forms, appreciate their distinct expression and evaluation methods, and empathize with individuals operating within a different knowledge framework (Morrison & Collins, 1995, p. 40). In general, learning experience designers are expected to perform complex design work with subject matter experts to create rigorous, high-quality, and accessible educational programs that serve the needs of all learners (Roberts et al., 2022). By virtue of epistemic fluency, learning experience designers can question traditional pedagogical thinking (Boling & Gray, 2021) and remain open to innovative design approaches.

What traits, then, can learning experience designers facilitate collective praxis for their design practices? *Be reflexive*—reflexivity enables them to recognize and challenge their biases and assumptions and reflect on how their designs may perpetuate social inequities. *Have a critical perspective*—A critical perspective allows them to challenge the current state and power dynamics in their design contexts and to consider how their designs can support social justice and equity. *Be collaborative*—collaboration facilitates the exchange of diverse perspectives and knowledge, enabling learning experience designers to co-create solutions that respond to the needs of all learners (Door, 2014). Together, these qualities enable learning experience designers to engage in a continuous cycle of reflection, action, and refinement, leading to more responsive and equitable learning design practices (Hutchings et al., 2013).

Critical Pedagogy and Praxis

Critical pedagogy and praxis have a close and interconnected relationship. Critical pedagogy is a teaching philosophy that stresses the need for education to be empowering and transformational and to question the status quo (Giroux, 2020). It is grounded on the notion that education is not neutral but rather perpetuates and reinforces existing power systems and inequities. By empowering students to become critical thinkers and agents of change, critical pedagogy strives to challenge these power structures (Braa & Callero, 2006). In this sense, critical pedagogy emphasizes praxis as a central component of its approach.

An essential principle of critical pedagogy is that education should be based on the experiences and perspectives of students. This implies that students are encouraged to share their stories and experiences and critically assess their social surroundings (Joseph Jeyaraj, 2021). For example, learning experience designers might create a "learning circle" activity in which students sit in a circle and take turns sharing a personal experience related to the course topic. After each person shares, the group can discuss the underlying power structures and social context contributing to the experience. Learning experience designers can also create assignments that ask learners to reflect on their experiences and how they relate to course content and provide opportunities for learners to share these reflections with the class. By incorporating these activities, learning experience designers can create a more inclusive and empowering learning environment grounded in learners' experiences and perspectives.

Barab et al. (2007) state that “designers should regard their work in terms of its impact not on a situation directly but, rather, on how users transact with the work, with each other, and with their contexts” (p. 296). By integrating critical pedagogy ideas into learning experience design, learning experience designers should be able to create transformational learning experiences that enable students to become engaged community members. For example, to encourage learners to critically examine the world around them and take action to challenge injustice and promote social change, learning experience designers can design a project where students work with a local community organization to address an environmental issue. Students could research the issue, develop a plan of action, and work collaboratively with the community organization to implement their plan. Through this project, students would not only apply the knowledge and skills they gained in the course but also engage in praxis by taking action to promote social change.

Likewise, critical pedagogy aims to develop inclusive and empowered learning settings that inspire students to challenge presumptions, study social and political situations critically, and take action to promote social change (Green & Chewning, 2020; Morris, 2018). It also entails developing critical thinking and reflection and designing activities that encourage students to assess situations from many viewpoints and engage in conversation with others (Barab et al., 2004, 2007). However, research shows that learning experience designers are not always receptive to a critical perspective on design practices (e.g., Gray, 2020; Reeves et al., 2005; Schmidt & Huang, 2022).

One possible reason is that learning design has traditionally focused on scientific approaches prioritizing unbiased design models (Yeaman et al., 1994). Despite the non-neutrality of learning, the learning design community has primarily a process-oriented, model-driven understanding of practice, which excludes a critical awareness of the underlying power dynamics and social inequalities that influence the learning process (Barab et al., 2007; Gray & Boiling, 2016). Another reason might be that the current emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness in learning design can prioritize technical solutions over critical inquiry and transformational experimentation (Boling & Gray, 2021; Doering & Veletsianos, 2008). A more fundamental reason can be that it is easier to discuss theoretically than to apply in specific learning contexts (Wehr, 2022).

Some recent studies have made explicit efforts to apply specific frameworks and outline practical strategies learning experience designers can use for this purpose (e.g., Abramenka-

Lachheb & de Siqueira, 2022; Elkhoury & Usman, 2021; Gachago et al., 2022; Sirkhotte & Vilakazi, 2022). To contribute to this endeavor, I position two design cases for greater emphasis on collective praxis as a way of meeting learning experience design goals: (1) actively engaging learners' social identities in the construction of meaning within their learning space, (2) representing practice in ways that reflect the real-world conditions in which meaningful learning takes place, and (3) increasing the possibility for knowledge transfer beyond their learning space. I select these cases that do not just introduce students to declarative knowledge or procedural skills so they can pass the appropriate exams at the end of the learning program (i.e., poiesis); instead, they were designed to transform learners in a way that enables them to be socially responsible and capable of actively contributing to their communities at all social levels (i.e., praxis).

Case 1. Design for Faculty Development Program "Centering Justice"

This case describes the design of a faculty training course titled "Centering Justice," focusing on the period of 2018 – 2020. The purpose of the design was to convert an existing face-to-face, a half-day workshop about inclusive and socially just teaching and learning in higher education into a 4-module online course to provide flexibility in terms of time and location, access to resources, self-paced learning, enhanced collaboration, and data-driven insights. This case demonstrates how various user experience methodologies were used not only to create a faculty training course to help incorporate the concepts of privilege, oppression, diversity, and social justice (PODS[1]) in teaching but also to examine and realize those concepts within their practices. As a result, the course aims to bridge theory and practice to drive change in both spaces.

Course Description

"Centering Justice" runs as a fully online course through the Canvas learning management system at the University of Michigan School of Social Work. As shown in Table 1, the course features four modules. The faculty participants are required to complete the program over 15 weeks as a cohort. The activities feature individual learning activities and assignments (interactive, animated texts, graphics, videos) and peer-based interactions. One faculty member was internally selected as a subject matter expert for creating the content and designing the activities. One educational program manager (with a social work teaching background) was a facilitator for offering guidance, clarification on assignments and instructions, and follow-up consultations for course design and implementation.

Table 1

The Structure and Content of the Four Online Modules

Module	Topic	Teaching Principles & Resources	Discussion
1. Introduction to Centering justice	• Why centering justice • Key approaches to centering justice • Methods for centering justice	• PODS intensive course design • Checklist for PODS integration in class • Samples for PODS intensive course	• Define socially just teaching and learning • Describe your implementation of PODS (concept & pedagogy)
2. Diversity and positionality	• Why diversity matters • Positionality • Critical awareness of positionality	• Positionality wheel • Implicit bias • Inclusive teaching strategies and examples	• Discuss cultural humility in a real-world scenario • Share and reflect positionality wheel
3. Privilege, oppression, and intersectionality	• Domains of power • Privilege and oppression • Intersectionality	• Anti-racism pedagogy • Transparent assignment	• Create transparent assignments • Discuss equity-focus assessments
4. Social justice	• Perspectives on social justice • Factors influencing perspectives on social justice • Frameworks of social justice	• Universal design for learning • Web accessibility • Checklist for accessible course design • Samples for accessible course design	• Discuss different perspectives on social justice • Discuss activities for student reflection on their positionalities

Each module contains core tenants of PODS-related theories and the relationship of those tenants to the principles of diverse, equitable, inclusive, and socially just teaching and learning. This structure is repeated in other modules. The faculty participants were encouraged to read audio-narrative texts/images, watch videos, and take interactive activities (e.g., interactive timelines/maps, matching games, role-play scenarios, etc.). Once they finish a lesson, they are asked to complete quizzes, short essays for self-reflection, and cohort discussions for action planning.

Building Mutual Understanding Through Participatory Design

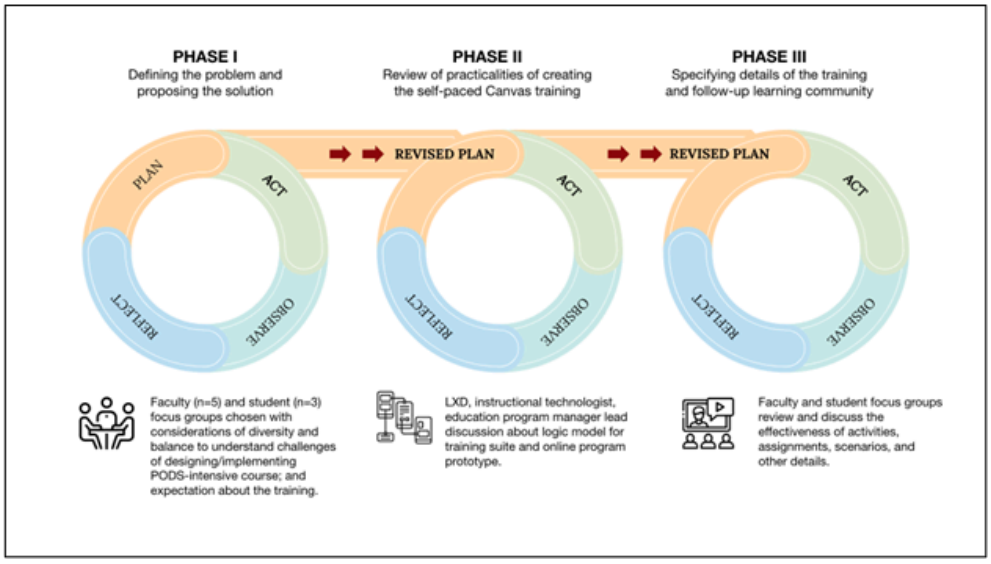
The target audience for Centering Justice consists of social work instructors (all level tenured professors, non-tenured instructors, and graduate teaching assistants) who are subject matter experts in social justice and human rights but are not prepared to teach effectively and mentor students by realizing equitable and just learning in their classrooms. They established a project team, including twelve members: one faculty subject matter expert, one learning experience designer, one instructional technologist, one education program manager, a faculty focus group (five instructors with disciplinary expertise), and a student focus group (three graduate students). In this case, the learning design team consists of all participants except for faculty and student focus groups.

The participatory design approach was implemented to democratize design processes to empower our target trainees and give them a voice in the design process. Development and improvement were accomplished through a concurrent process of action and study, informed by user participation, and regulated by critical reflection. The process comprised multiple focus groups for feedback, reflection, and critical evaluation, each of which was facilitated by the learning experience design lead (Cumbo & Selwyn, 2022; Könings et al., 2014).

Prior to each focus group, the learning design team created the meeting's agenda, and collaboration guidelines and summary notes were shared after each meeting. The focus group participants were encouraged to produce feedback by including a set of suggested actions prioritized for the next stages of action and implementation. As shown in Figure 1, the learning design team outlined the three participatory design phases.

Figure 1

The Iterative and Incremental Cycles of Three Participatory Design Phases

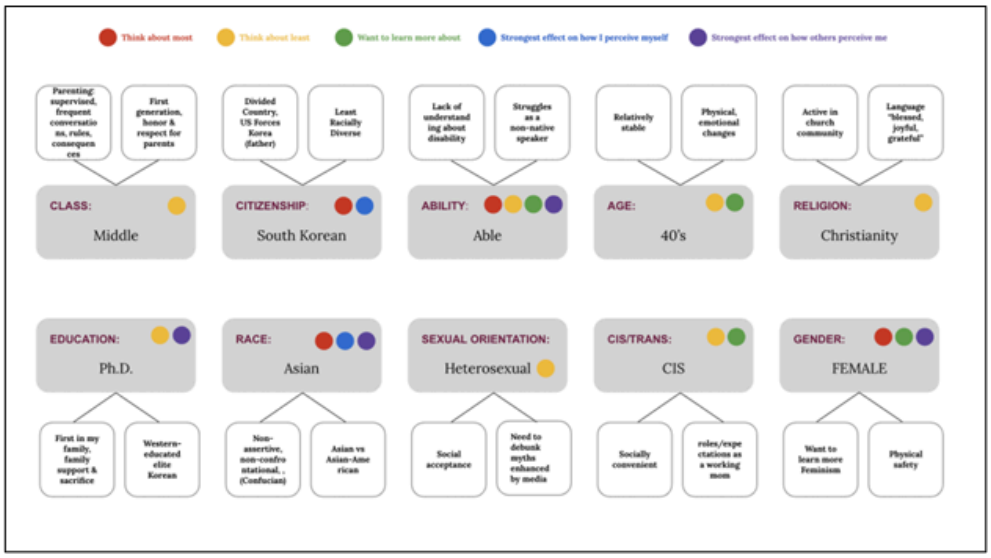


Phase I - Establishing a Common Language

The faculty focus group was invited to openly discuss the issues they encountered in their classrooms, what they believed would cause or influence these, and any helpful activities. During the first meeting, the learning design team found discrepancies in understanding the core concepts of the course. To address this, they used the positionality wheel (also called social identity map) activity (see Figure 2) with the faculty focus group so that every participant could check their own positionality considering their potential biases, experiences, and understanding of the PODS concepts. The learning experience designer shared one's own social identity map as a reflexivity tool to explain how to practice positionality in critical learning design explicitly. The learning experience designer highlighted the fluidity of my ever-changing social identities, the abstract, intangible nature of my social identities, the difficulty of knowing which facets are more influential over time and place, and how my social identities impact the design process (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). This helped us contextualize our definitions and allowed for an inclusive dialogue about the nuances of each term. Also, it led the entire team to explore how to make ideation and decision-making processes equal, ensuring all ideas are considered equally and presenting a defensible strategy, which could be explained to each other, to condense many ideas into a few concepts while ensuring fair representation.

Figure 2

Example of Social Identity Map

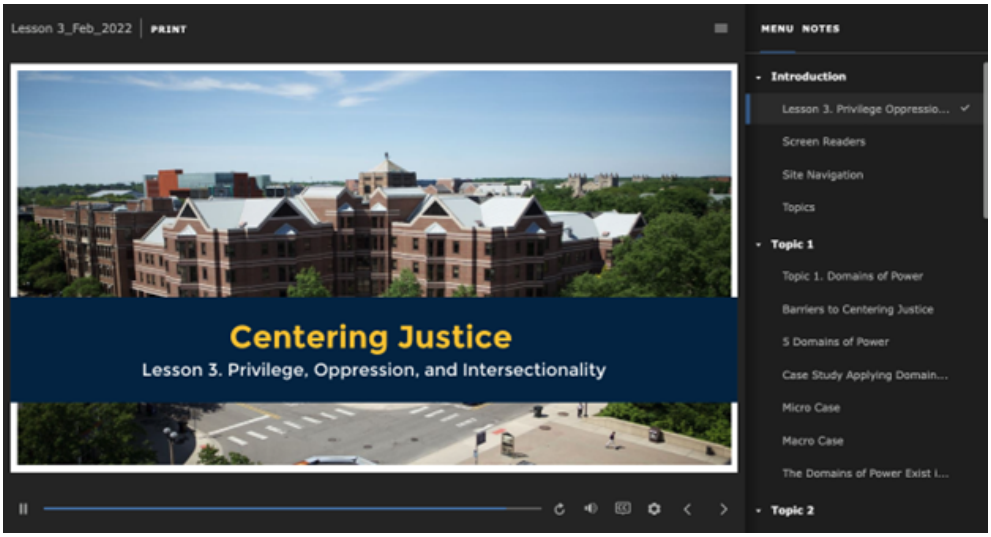


Phase II - Technology and Accessibility

Midway through the project, the learning design team presented the prototype that contained the training program backbone, for example, its structure, primary click-through navigation, and layers of more complex interactions (scrolling, dropdowns, menus, various effects, etc.; see Figure 3). The instructional technologist employed a cognitive walkthrough method with the faculty focus group, who actively navigated the course prototype while the learning design team observed their interaction, to identify potential technology-related challenges. They iterated the design based on their feedback, and this practice exemplified the inclusivity that our course aimed to promote. One notable suggestion was to provide alternate media options for those with difficulties using audio-narrated interaction or who prefer paper-based activities. This engendered a question for the learning design team "What would be maximally instructive for as many trainees as possible?" which led the team to utilize a learner persona activity (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Lesson Homepage Prototype



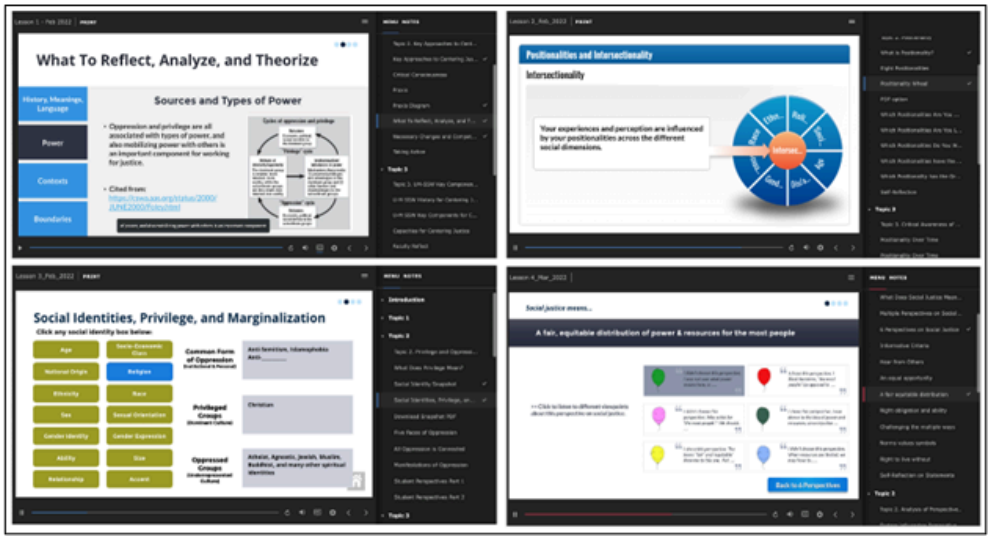
Phase III - Usability Testing and Iterative Design

For Phase III, the Canvas training site was presented to show the faculty focus group (*n*=5) and the student focus group (*n*=3). All participants had the opportunity to review this site in advance (see Figure 4) and submit feedback by completing a survey about visual design, layout, and information architecture, interaction design, responsiveness, accessibility, and consistency.

In this final phase, concerns emerged about how to practically apply the course content to different teaching contexts. They used a participatory design method, inviting faculty members to co-design discipline-specific scenarios and case studies. This process democratized our course design and ensured that the course content was grounded in the realities of various academic fields.

Figure 4

Screenshots of Interactive Activities



Using Persona for Agency and Autonomy of the Learner

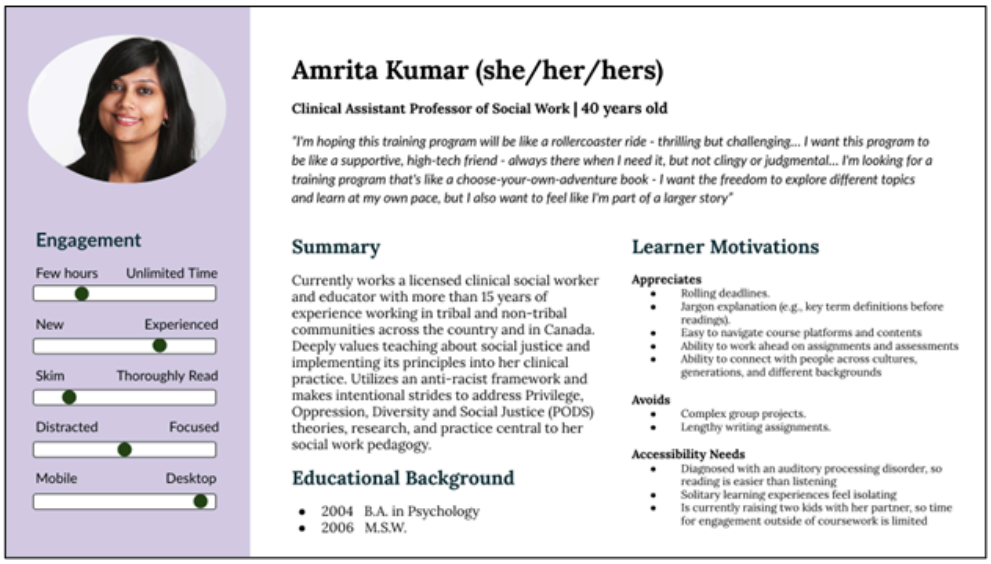
Originally, personas were designed to enable designers to focus on people other than themselves (i.e., creating for actual users rather than their own needs). Thus, they were supposed to be reflective of the target user groups or a specific user within those categories (Bowen et al., 2020). Research shows that personas can enhance the agency and autonomy of the learner by customizing the training program to meet the individual needs of each learner (personalization), providing more relevant learning experiences that make learners more engaged and invested in the training (relevance), providing multiple options and allowing learners to choose the methods that work best for them (flexibility), and helping designers to understand learners challenges and opportunities (empathy) within a context (e.g., Ferreira et al., 2015; Harley, 2015; Krueger, 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Using the three categories of persona established by Quintana et al. (2017), the learning design team constructed an assumptive, aspirational, and data-informed learner persona to spark a conversation about ways to more consciously incorporate socio-cultural perspectives into the learning design processes (Schmidt et al., 2020). An instructor's perception of a student's interests and values in a course forms an *assumptive persona*, often informed by the faculty's residential teaching experience. Our assumptive persona was created in this project based on the aforementioned positionality wheel (social identity map) activity (see Figure 5). Instructors create *aspirational personas* to attract a certain type of student: for example, STEM instructors may want to attract female students. Our aspirational persona was established based on the expected learning outcomes of the training, which was designed to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to improve their teaching practice. Finally, *data-informed personas* reveal potential learners' demographics, motivations, and backgrounds using survey and interview data. To create this

persona, the learning design team used the annual faculty survey results and relevant meeting documents that provided insights into faculty members' training preferences, interests, and needs. They also conducted individual interviews with the faculty focus group (*n*=5) to gather more specific and nuanced information about how faculty members engage with training and use it to inform their teaching practices.

Figure 5

Example of Assumptive Learner Persona for the Faculty Training "Centering Justice"

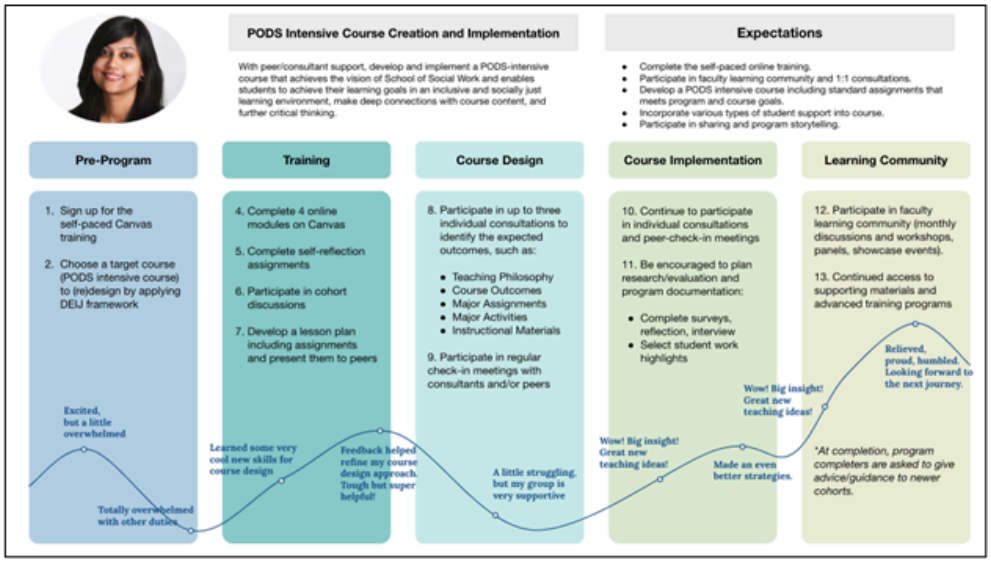


Journey Map and Cognitive Walkthrough for Inclusion and Accessibility

Another design issue raised by the participants was inclusion and accessibility. Using a learning journey map[2], the learning design team attempted to spot pain points and learner frustration and identify potential support (see Figure 6). It helped better understand the learner's needs, motivations, and goals. After creating the first prototype based on learner persona and journey map methods, the faculty focus group reviewed it individually to provide improvement areas for multiple engagement and representation options.

Figure 6

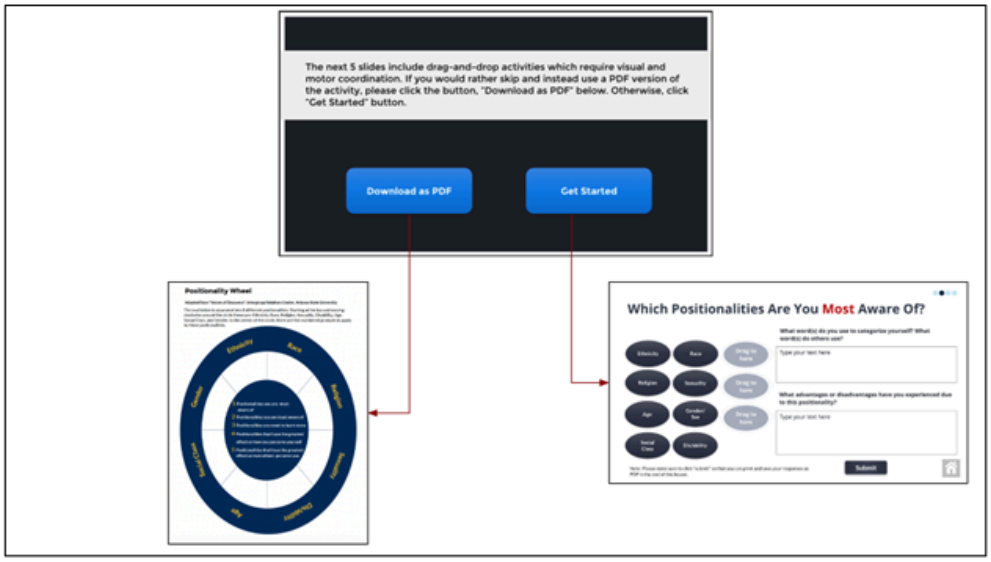
Learner Journey Map



One notable suggestion emphasized the importance of examining accessibility for diverse learners, highlighting that "designing with" people with disabilities or special needs is more effective than "designing solely for" them. Thus, the learning design team revised the first prototype to make it screen-reader-friendly and facilitated a cognitive walkthrough with one participant from the student focus group with visual impairment. In addition, they decided to provide alternative means of engagement for all interactive activities. For example, trainees can choose whether to take an interactive drag-and-drop quiz or download an equivalent PDF version of the activity to experience offline or use it in their classroom.

Figure 7

Example of Providing Multiple Means of Engagement



Case 2. Design for Massive Open Online Course "Intimate Partner Violence"

The second case describes another example of learning experience design as collective praxis in developing a massive open online course (MOOC). The MOOC title is “Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Interprofessional Strategies for Prevention and Response, " launched on the edX platform in 2021. The following section explores the MOOC design and practices, centering on contextualization, with input from the interdisciplinary group of faculty members, IPV field practitioners, and survivors.

Course Description

The project team was established as a partnership between the University of Michigan and the University of Maryland to utilize the extensive faculty expertise from these two institutions. The subject matter expert group consists of nine faculty members, including four social work professors, two nursing professors, one medicine professor, one law professor, and one dentistry professor. Three learning experience designers, one instructional technologist, one project manager, and one software developer served as the learning design team.

The driving force for the MOOC development was the absence of interprofessional education opportunities focused on strengthening clinicians’ awareness of IPV and designing and implementing interprofessional care for patients experiencing IPV. Therefore, the course consists of five modules covering IPV key concepts, definitions, and theories from public health and legal perspectives. Learners are expected to use interprofessional ways to detect, screen, and respond to IPV in clinical practice settings, including social work, law, nursing, dentistry, and medicine. Once completed, learners can claim one-credit continuing education in their discipline.

Table 2

The Structure and Content of the Five Online Modules

Module	Topic	Voices from Real Life People	Role-Play Simulation
1. Defining and Contextualizing Intimate Partner Violence	• What is IPV? : Definitions, Prevalence, Risk and Protective Factors • Indicators & Consequences • Theories about the root causes of IPV	• 4 Survivor’s Voice • 1 Practitioner’s Voice (Social Worker)	Physical Abuse

Module	Topic	Voices from Real Life People	Role-Play Simulation
2. Person-Centered Responses – Screening and Interprofessional Care	• What is Interprofessional Care? • Screening Tools and Methods • Trauma-informed, Patient-centered Care • Personal and Professional Competence • Interprofessional Response	• 2 Survivor's Voice • 4 Practitioner's Voice (Medicine, Nursing, Social Work, Law)	• Economic Abuse • Financial Abuse
3. Person-Centered Responses – Legal and Community-Based Interventions	• What is Safety Planning? • Legal Interventions • Healthcare Interventions • Community Resources & Responses • Interventions for Partners who use violence	• 2 Survivor's Voice • 2 Practitioner's Voice (Law, Medicine)	• Adolescent tech-facilitated IPV • Stalking? • Sexual violence
4. Underserved Populations and Special Considerations	• Social and Historical Context of IPV • Population and Culturally-specific Screening • Community Responses & Strengths • Responding in Context	• 1 Survivor's Voice • 2 Practitioner's Voice (Social Work, Nursing)	• Undocumented partner's immigration status as means of control
5. Prevention: Looking Ahead	• IPV & Public Health Prevention • Self-care in Clinical Practice	• N/A	• Critical reflection and action plan

Each module contains a variety of learning resources, including readings, lecture videos, quizzes, and simulation activities. Age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation are among the cultural factors and social inequalities covered in this MOOC.

Persona Co-Development for Interdisciplinary Design of MOOC

The project began with the challenge of ensuring an inclusive representation of IPV from diverse professional perspectives. Faculty members from social work, nursing, medicine, law, and dentistry were all involved, each bringing unique insights but also discipline-specific biases.

Recognizing the importance of inclusive collaboration and *epistemic fluency* (the ability to navigate different fields of knowledge), the project team sought to foster understanding among diverse disciplines. Through active listening and open dialogue, the learning experience designer created a safe space for faculty members to share their disciplinary expertise while also encouraging them to explore and appreciate the insights and viewpoints of others. Initiating team-building activities, actively valuing diverse expertise, and facilitating structured discussions, the learning experience designer nurtured an authentic and inclusive environment. Reflective exercises were thoughtfully designed to prompt individuals to critically examine their biases and assumptions, creating an atmosphere conducive to open-mindedness and personal growth. By continuously emphasizing shared goals and collective responsibility, the learning experience designer nurtured an authentic and supportive space where faculty members felt empowered to explore ideas and actively contribute to the inclusive interdisciplinary design of the MOOC.

To prevent oversimplification or overlooking aspects of IPV's complexity, participatory design methods for persona development were employed. Challenging traditional power dynamics, the activity aimed to ensure that every voice was heard, resulting in personas that resonated with each discipline. Initially, the learning experience designer presented assumptive and aspirational personas as models. Then, each discipline created personas and shared their learning design ideas to meet their unique needs and preferences. This process sparked intense discussions, exposing deep-rooted disciplinary biases while providing an opportunity for transformative learning that shaped the course's development.

Figure 8

Examples of Learner Persona Learning Experience Designers Presented

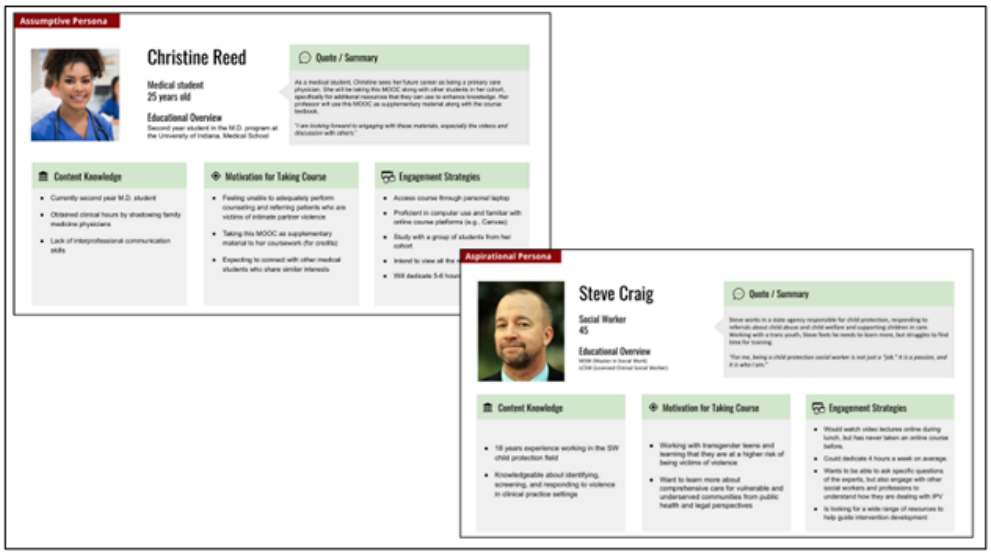
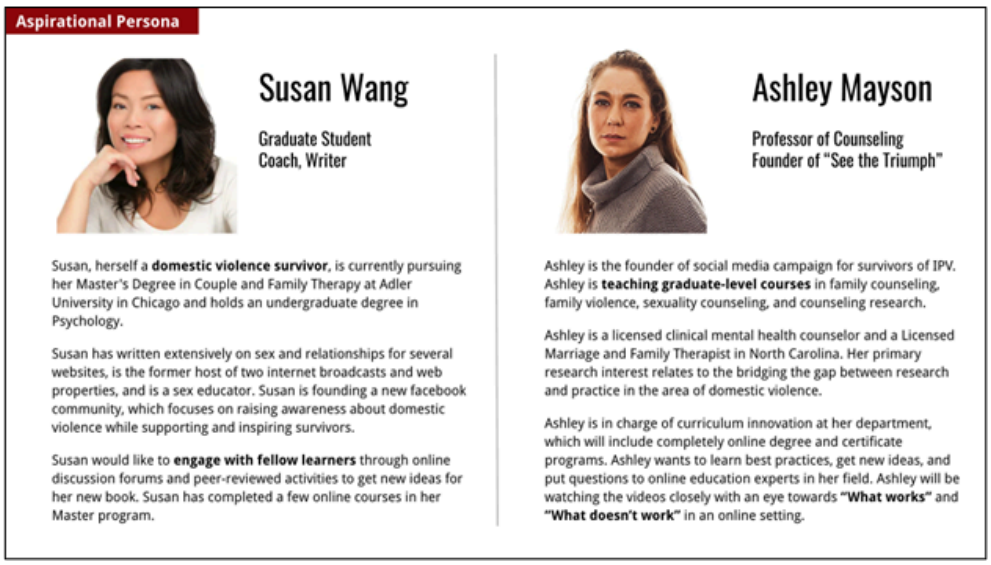


Figure 9

Examples of Learner Persona Subject Matter Experts Developed



Listening to the Unheard Voices of IPV Survivors

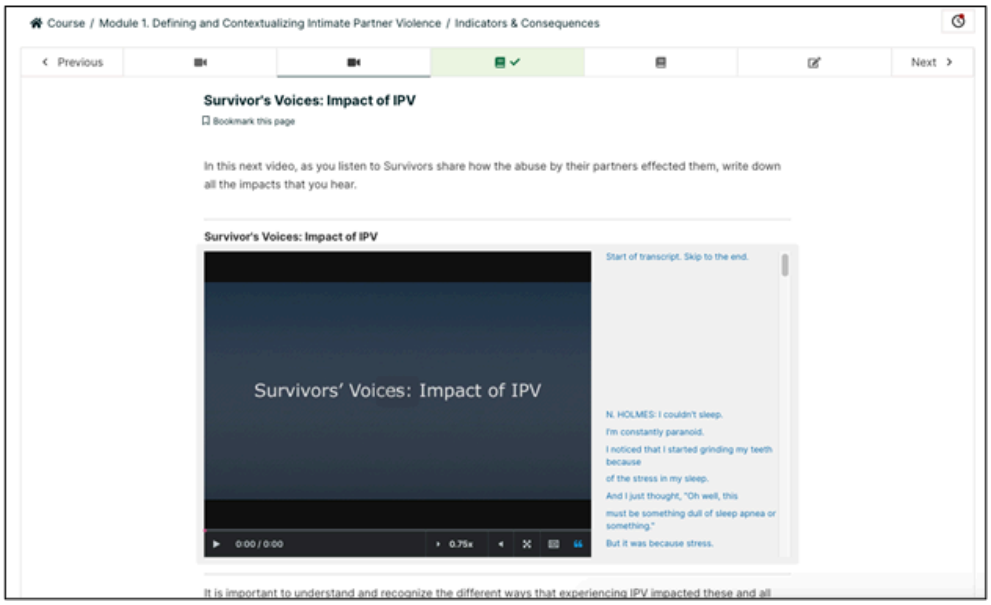
Building on the authentic representation of IPV, a significant step was to incorporate IPV survivors' voices. This decision, however, posed ethical challenges. We needed to ensure that these narratives were shared in a respectful, non-exploitative manner that protected the survivors' identities and emotional well-being. Balancing authenticity with sensitivity was critical.

To address these concerns, we reached out to several IPV survivor support groups. Through informed consent, we recorded survivor testimonials, carefully considering their inclusion in the course. These narratives were thoughtfully integrated, accompanied by trigger warnings and support resources for students who may be affected. By presenting the raw, unfiltered stories of IPV survivors, we aimed to provide a powerful learning experience that exemplified critical pedagogy. Centering marginalized voices and fostering empathy among learners were core principles guiding this approach.

By listening to these narratives, learners acquired a deeper understanding of the complex factors that contribute to IPV, such as power dynamics, trauma, and systemic issues like poverty and racism. The stories also emphasized the barriers survivors face when seeking help, including fear of retaliation, lack of trust in service providers, and limited access to resources. To ensure safety and accommodate preferences, we provided multiple means of representation, including text, audio, and video formats. Figure 10 illustrates an example of a video interview with an IPV survivor, offering a glimpse into their experiences.

Figure 10

Survivor's Voice (Video)



Role-Play Simulation: Putting Yourself in Someone Else's Shoes

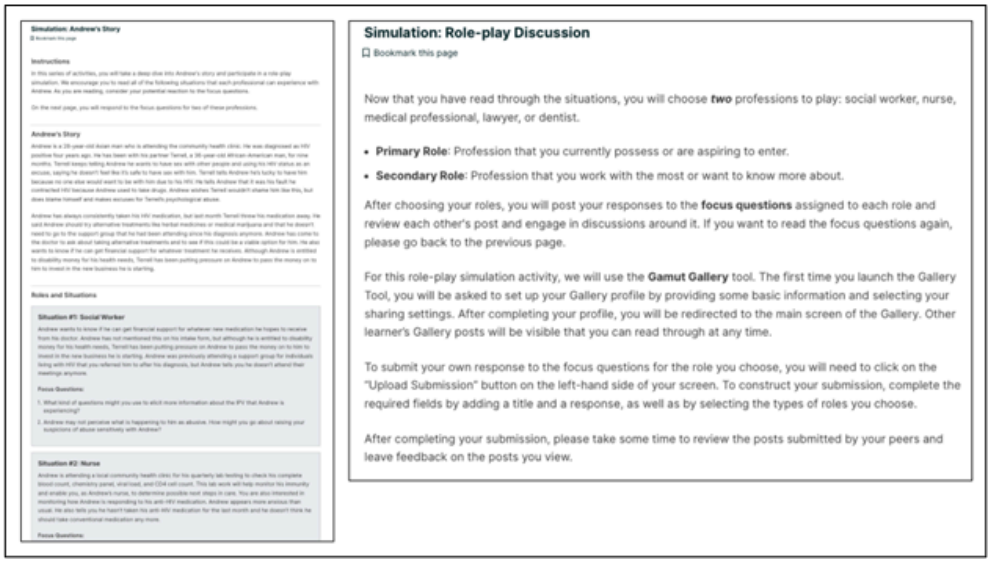
As we continued to strive for an immersive, empathy-driven learning experience, the team developed role-play simulations for learners to effectively address IPV in healthcare settings. These simulations enable learners to navigate complex situations, manage conflicts, and cultivate trust and mutual respect with colleagues. Moreover, learners develop empathy and gain a deeper understanding of other professionals' perspectives, preparing them for real-world scenarios that necessitate interprofessional collaboration.

Designing these simulations required sensitivity and expert guidance to accurately represent IPV without reinforcing harmful stereotypes or causing distress. Faculty members from various professions contributed their expertise to develop victim and abuser personas, as well as interactive scenarios based on these personas.

In each simulation, learners choose their own profession to engage in the role-play, followed by selecting another profession they anticipate collaborating closely with in the future. This design allows learners to gain insights into the challenges and opportunities of working with different professions, fostering the necessary skills for effective interdisciplinary teamwork.

Figure 11

Selecting Primary and Secondary Roles in Simulation



Ensuring Accessibility and Ease of Use

As the course content began to take shape, we turned our focus to ensuring the MOOC's accessibility. Given our diverse learner demographic, we needed to ensure that the platform was intuitive, user-friendly, and universally accessible.

To ensure a seamless learning experience, we carefully examined the interoperability between the MOOC platform and the third-party tool utilized for role-play simulations and collaborative reflection activities. Conducting a comprehensive cognitive walkthrough, we proactively identified potential barriers that learners might encounter. Complex navigation and unclear instructions for these activities emerged as key concerns during the evaluation. Additionally, we discovered that some video content lacked appropriate captions, posing challenges for students with hearing impairments. Recognizing the significance of accessibility, we promptly addressed these issues by streamlining navigation, providing clear instructions, and ensuring that all videos were properly captioned. These modifications reflect our commitment to inclusivity, by making the learning experience more accessible and equitable for all participants.

To rectify these issues, we simplified the navigation, made instructions more explicit, and ensured all videos were captioned, thereby aligning with the principles of inclusivity and accessibility inherent to critical pedagogy. This process was a testament to the crucial role user experience (UX) methodologies play in democratizing education and making learning experiences universally accessible.

Discussion

This study illuminates the multifaceted role of learning experience designers in navigating the intricacies of collective praxis within two distinct design projects, thereby actualizing the principles of critical pedagogy in the creation of transformative educational experiences.

The methods employed and the challenges encountered provide key insights into the practical application of critical pedagogy within the realm of learning experience design.

The first case, “Centering Justice,” presented a fundamental change—bridging the divergent perspectives of the faculty, institutional administration, and students to create an inclusive and socially just teaching framework. The learning experience designer guided the design team, faculty, and student focus groups to navigate nuanced power dynamics, potential resistance, and the concept of PODS, employing a participatory design approach that actively involved all stakeholders in the process.

To better understand the needs and perspectives of faculty, we collaboratively created user personas that represented the diverse range of faculty experiences. Additionally, we employed journey mapping techniques to visualize the faculty's learning progression and anticipate potential obstacles in embracing the PODS concepts.

The inherent sensitivity of these topics posed a significant challenge. As expected, we encountered resistance, primarily driven by an underlying fear of not "getting it right." However, we recognized this as an opportunity to foster open dialogue, encourage self-reflection, and cultivate empathy among all stakeholders. These efforts were aimed at guiding the collective toward a comprehensive understanding of the necessity and value of centering justice in the educational context.

The practical application of PODS concepts presented another significant challenge. Our solution was to use a participatory design approach. Collaborating with faculty members to co-create discipline-specific scenarios and case studies ensured the course content was relevant and easily applicable. This not only increased the course’s effectiveness but also democratized our design process, embodying the principles of social justice we sought to instill.

In the second case, the MOOC project titled "Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Interprofessional Strategies for Prevention and Response,” learning experience designer’s role expanded beyond design to include effective change management and facilitation of interprofessional collaboration. Here, the cognitive walkthrough method proved invaluable in discovering any implicit disciplinary bias and ensuring an equal voice to all professions in the course content.

One of the central principles of critical pedagogy is that learning should not be a passive act of information transmission but an active process of knowledge construction. This philosophy was realized in this project through role-play simulations and real IPV survivor testimonials. Role-playing is not new in learning design; however, its use in an online, interprofessional context to simulate IPV scenarios is a pioneering approach that contributed significantly to an empathetic understanding of IPV. Additionally, including survivor voices not only made the learning experience more authentic but also served as a potent reminder of the reality and urgency of IPV. These innovative instructional strategies significantly bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical, empathetic understanding, which has often been a shortcoming of traditional online courses.

The practical application of knowledge was a key challenge in both design projects. In the "Centering Justice" course, this was addressed through participatory design, where faculty members co-created discipline-specific scenarios and case studies. Similarly, the IPV response program incorporated role-play simulations, making the learning experience more practical and empathetic.

The learning experience designers of these two design projects faced numerous challenges. First, achieving a balance between interprofessional integration and profession-specific customization was a delicate act. While personas and journey maps facilitated this balance to a significant extent, it was a constant iterative process. Second, ensuring the course was user-friendly and accessible for a diverse set of learners required meticulous attention to detail and frequent course iteration based on learner feedback. Third, incorporating role-play simulations and survivor testimonials demanded a high level of sensitivity and care. The designers had to ensure that these elements were realistic and informative without being triggering or distressing. Finally, a significant challenge was the iterative nature of a praxis-centered, critical pedagogical approach. It demanded that the learning design team be open to constant course revision and improvement based on learner feedback. It meant relinquishing a degree of control and being responsive to the needs and experiences of the learners, which can be challenging in a tightly-scheduled academic environment.

In summary, these case studies offer critical insights into the application of UX methodologies and critical pedagogy in learning experience design. They underscore the potential of these approaches in addressing challenges like ensuring a shared understanding, navigating digital literacy barriers, managing emotional discomfort, and bridging the gap between theory and practice. They also demonstrate the potential for these methods to create more relevant, accessible, inclusive, and empathetic learning experiences. These insights hold substantial promise for future endeavors in both traditional and interprofessional online education, contributing to the evolving discourse on best practices in learning experience design.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The current study, while contributing to the field of learning experience design through two innovative case studies, is not without its limitations, and these provide opportunities for future research.

Firstly, the study's scope was limited to the development and implementation stages of the two learning programs. An in-depth examination of the long-term impact of the programs on learners' behavior and attitudes was beyond the study's reach. Future research could focus on a comprehensive evaluation of the outcomes of such pedagogical approaches. Longitudinal studies could be employed to measure the sustainability of the learning impact and changes in attitudes or behaviors over time. Such studies would also help identify any delayed effects or potential benefits of these innovative approaches that were not immediately apparent in the short term.

Secondly, our study was confined to the role of learning experience designers in implementing UX methodologies and critical pedagogy principles within higher education settings. Therefore, the findings might not be directly applicable to other learning environments, such as K-12 education, professional training, or informal learning contexts. Future studies might consider exploring the application and impact of similar strategies across a broader spectrum of educational settings. Comparative studies examining how these methods and principles play out in different learning contexts would add valuable insights to the field.

Additionally, the study heavily relied on qualitative methods, which, while essential for in-depth understanding, may lack the generalizability of quantitative approaches. Future research could consider employing mixed-methods designs that combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. This could enhance the robustness of the findings and offer more comprehensive insights.

Lastly, the study was predominantly practitioner-led, with learning experience designers deeply involved in both the design process and the research. While this approach has its advantages, including insights from the "front lines," it may also introduce bias, as the researchers have a vested interest in the outcomes. Future research could benefit from involving independent researchers in the process to bring a fresh perspective and further validate the findings.

In conclusion, while this study offers valuable insights into the role of learning experience designers in integrating UX methodologies and critical pedagogy in designing inclusive learning experiences, there is still much to explore. Future studies building on this work could focus on longitudinal impacts, broader educational contexts, mixed-methods designs, and the inclusion of independent researchers. In this way, we can continue to expand our understanding and further advance the field of learning experience design.

Conclusion

The presented cases highlight the transformative role of learning experience designer in higher education, guided by critical pedagogy and informed by UX methodologies. Learning experience designers successfully integrate stakeholders, navigate sensitive topics, and bridge theory-practice gaps for relevant, accessible, and empathetic learning experiences. They employ UX methodologies to adopt a user-centered approach, understanding learners' experiences and needs through techniques like persona creation and journey mapping. UX methodologies also address complexity and sensitivity, facilitating nuanced conversations and promoting practical application of knowledge through role-play simulations. Learning experience designers function as agents of collective praxis, embodying critical pedagogy by facilitating collaboration, open dialogue, and continuous feedback from all stakeholders. Despite challenges, the successes and insights derived from this approach demonstrate its potential in diverse educational contexts. These experiences contribute to the ongoing dialogue in learning experience design, sparking further exploration of critical pedagogy and UX methodologies in education.

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[1] This is the abbreviation used internally in the school.

[2] Based on customer journey mapping (Flom, 2011), a learning journey map helps understand touchpoints, challenges, and opportunities in a context. By tailoring a course to meet specific learner needs, it enhances the learner experience and ensure alignment with real-world demands.