Co-Designing an Action-Oriented Instructional Design Community: Applying the Design Justice Network Principles to Shape and Inform Our Collaborative Practices

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In this paper, we share our process and learnings from growing the Instructional Design Working Group of the Design Justice Network, a group of instructional design professionals interested in understanding and applying critical, ethical, and socially-just approaches to instructional design. Following a brief review of the literature on approaches to ID collaboration and professional growth, and an introduction to the DJN Principles (DJN, 2018) that guided our work, we will weave stories of significant moments that highlight our use of design justice and co-design strategies to

intentionally design and grow the community,
highlight lessons learned, and reflect on the future.

Introduction

In the summer of 2022, a small but diverse group of readers gathered virtually to discuss the introductory chapter to Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the World We Need (Costanza-Chock, 2020). This was the first foray in a collaborative effort among a group of instructional design professionals to co-create a community of practitioners interested in understanding and applying critical, ethical, and socially-just approaches to instructional design. This community, the Instructional Design Working Group of the Design Justice Network (DJN-IDs), explores how the Design Justice Network Principles (DJN, 2018) can guide our work toward more inclusive and equitable design outcomes.

This group is distinct among instructional design (ID) professional communities in its adherence to a set of justice-oriented principles. Instructional designers (IDs) need opportunities to engage with critical approaches to their work to understand student experiences that may be vastly different from their own. Such approaches are typically eschewed in traditional graduate programs that train future IDs; for example, Yusop and Correia (2012) found many graduate programs emphasize "training-for-the-job" in their curricula at the cost of what the authors termed "civic professionalism" (p. 182). Critical and justice-oriented approaches are also under-explored in ID-related professional organizations. Some organizations have mission statements oriented toward doing good, with statements such as "uncommon thinking for the common good" (EDUCAUSE, n.d.); "create a world that works better" (ATD, n.d.); or "add value for your clients, their customers, and the global environment" (ISPI, n.d.). Other organizations may have a list of values that drive their practice, but concepts around justice are entirely absent (e.g., AECT, n.d.).

Designing with a focus on good intentions to solve problems, albeit common as a practice, is a design pattern likely to forgo ethical decision-making unless ethical considerations are foregrounded (Chivukula & Gray, 2020). The Design Justice Principles offer concrete guidance for practice that moves beyond design with good intentions, to "design using just and open processes for just and sustainable outcomes" (DJN, n.d.-b). Inspired by these principles, our group of ID professionals sought to center design justice in our how, or approach to nurturing the community; our what, or professional networking context and activities; and our why, or purpose for developing the group.

This paper will share our process and learnings from growing the DJN-IDs group. We will set the stage with a brief review of the literature on approaches to ID collaboration and professional growth and introduce the DJN Principles (DJN, 2018). Subsequently, we will weave stories of significant moments that highlight our use of co-design strategies to intentionally design and grow the community. Finally, we will elaborate on learnings from this collaborative process and reflect on where we envision its future.

Instructional Designer Collaboration and Professional Growth

Collaboration is seen as a key aspect of ID work and professional growth. Research on collaboration in ID has primarily focused on the relationship between IDs and subject matter experts (SMEs), given the importance of this relationship to successful course design outcomes. For example, Chao et al. (2010) examined the helpfulness of using online course quality guidelines to support designer and faculty collaborations, finding that such guidelines were most helpful for newer faculty. They noted the importance of rapport building early in the process, and creating a shared understanding of the priorities and process for the collaboration. Chen and Carliner (2020) described a variety of relationships that can frame course development projects, with instructional designers acting "as consultations, as customer services, as collaborations, as administrative endeavors, and as change agents" (p. 480). Moving beyond roles, Bawa and Watson's (2017) work focused on identifying the essential characteristics of a successful collaboration among stakeholders in an ID project: communication, humility, adaptability, mentorship, empathy, looping, engagement, oscillation, and networking. Indeed, Pollard and Kumar's (2022) literature review of instructional designer roles in higher education found that "managing and brokering successful interpersonal collaboration with SMEs" is a central characteristic of ID work (para. 15).

In most cases, ID collaboration outside of the course development process takes place within the framework of formalized coaching, mentoring, and apprenticeship models for newly hired IDs within organizations. Once an ID has been hired, whether they have come through a graduate ID program or via an alternative path, onboarding, and ongoing professional learning are needed to support ID success. As Mancilla and Frey (2020) point out, "there is no systematic method for preparing new IDs to become experts in their profession once they are employed in academic settings" (para. 3). As such, workplaces often depend on expert IDs to train their newer colleagues on the expectations of the ID processes and practices for their workplace. For example, Stefaniak (2017) points to coaching as an approach that allows for expert instructional designers to onboard new instructional designers into the profession, providing them with on-the-job professional development by emphasizing "coach-coachee relationships, problem solving, goal setting, and situational awareness" (p. 27).

The literature also contains examples of collaboration between ID educators, with the goal of strengthening instructional design pedagogy as well as their own instructional design practice. For example, Brown et al. (2013) described a collaboration between IDs to redesign an online graduate course for which they were also instructors; they found that the collaboration resulted in a "stronger course design" (p. 446), "pedagogical and social support" (p. 446), and "strengthened professional relationships and pedagogical expertise that developed and endured beyond the duration of the course" (p. 447). Slagter van Tryon, McDonald, and Hirumi (2018) shared their collaboration aimed at improving ID education, which resulted in proposing an experiential learning model to use as a pedagogical approach in their courses. These collaborations resonate more closely with ours, given that they occurred outside of the context of onboarding and ongoing ID professional development.

Our literature review describes ways in which collaboration shows up in ID work and highlights a gap in collaboration between IDs working in the same institution or across institutional contexts. A small segment of the literature on ID collaboration suggests that collaboration between IDs provides an essential avenue for professional growth. Collaborations between IDs take many forms, including within professional organizations created by and for IDs as opportunities for networking, advice, and support (e.g., UPCEA Uplift, ID2ID, Pedagome). In some cases, as Romero-Hall (2022, p. 210) describes, collaboration begins during graduate school and extends into continuing professional development as graduates move into instructional design roles.

Noting the limited opportunities for ID collaboration within and across institutional contexts, our DJN-IDs group was formed with the purpose of creating space for such collaboration. Whereas ID collaborations described in the literature above were focused on a learning product (a course), our group's collaboration was relational, exploratory, and inspired by a lack of opportunities to collaborate on justice-oriented instructional design practices. In the spirit of Pollard and Kumar's (2022) positioning of IDs as "reflective practitioners" who "generate their own support for the varieties of challenges they face" (p. 7), we sought to co-design a collaborative learning community to both support our own learning and practice around design justice, as well as to support other IDs who seek to be change agents in their work. We view a design justice approach as central to "discussions concerning technology-enhanced learning initiatives and challenging the pedagogical status quo" (McDonald & Mayes, 2007; Schwier et al., 2004, as cited in Pollard & Kumar, 2022, p. 5). Below, we describe the design justice framework in more detail, before sharing how we applied the framework to our collaboration.

The Design Justice Network and Principles

The DJN Principles prioritize attention to the distribution of harms and benefits in designs, center users in the design process, and foreground the lived experiences of folks who are typically marginalized by designs. These principles were formulated after a call to action stemming from conversations at the Allied Media Conference. In 2014 and 2015, designers Nina Bianchi, Una Lee, Andy Gunn, Victoria Barnett, and Ben Leon led the Design Futures Labs participants to "generate shared principles for design justice" (DJN, n.d.-b). The work of 30 or more designers, activists, artists, and technologists helped to form the principles with the goal of using common ideas and language to support designers when working with marginalized communities and reducing harm in design. At the time of the publication of Design Justice (Costanza-Chock, 2020), around 300 people and organizations had signed on or adopted the principles. As of this writing, almost 3,000 have signed on as adopters of the principles (DJN, 2022).

The DJN Principles (DJN, 2018) are as follows:

- Principle 1: We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities, as well as to seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems.

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

Instructional designers may be familiar with Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018) and inclusive design as frameworks and strategies for creating learning experiences that take into account a diversity of learner experiences, backgrounds, and abilities. Design justice shares with UDL and inclusive design the goal of reducing barriers to learning, through strategies such as designing for adaptability and flexibility, a focus on accessibility, and design processes that seek to integrate user perspectives.

However, there are some essential differences between UDL, inclusive design, and design justice approaches. Notably, design justice seeks to move beyond reducing barriers to focus on the transformation of the unjust systems from which barriers originate. Design justice asks us to consider: who participated in the design process? Who benefited from the design? Who was harmed by the design? During a design justice process, designers not only invite input from those with lived experience but ideally facilitate a process that is led by the community experiencing the design's harms. In this way, design justice seeks to move from "good to just," from "design with good intentions" to "design using just and open processes for just and sustainable outcomes;" from "hav[ing] empathy with people experiencing the issue" to "listen[ing] to and believ[ing] the people who are most impacted by the issue" (DJN, 2017). In instructional design, design justice practices might include students as partners, the classroom as a community, co-design, and critical pedagogy.

The Design Justice Network (DJN) serves as a home and loosely organized hub for people interested in putting DJN Principles into practice. It is led primarily by volunteer labor with only a few part-time paid positions that help to connect, support, and facilitate collaboration among DJN members via local nodes and working groups. Local nodes provide a place for people located geographically to connect and work collaboratively on initiatives from social engagement activities, to book clubs, to sharing best practices. Working groups focus on a particular topic area. For example, the Principles at Work working group has created opportunities for all in the network to share their stories about applying the principles in their practice. Over the past year, they have collaboratively developed a workshop and zine so peer facilitators can share the language and essence of the principles (DJN, n.d.-a).

In the fall of 2021, several authors of this paper collaborated to launch a new working group of the DJN, which we named the DJN Instructional Design working group (DJN-IDs). The initial goals of the group were to create a space for IDs interested in using design justice approaches to explore critical instructional design and co-designing learning that is equitable, accessible, and just. Early members envisioned that the group might work toward raising awareness about the design justice principles via website/social media; presentations at professional conferences; hosting conversation groups; creating resources such as sample design activities to help designers practice applying the principles; and hosting events for practitioners to share advice and support for putting the principles into action. Below, we discuss our collaborations, and how our work was connected to, and informed by, the DJN Principles.

Inflection Points Emerging From Our Collaboration

Rather than provide a chronological account of the emergence of the DJN ID working group, we focus this section on inflection points in our collaboration that gave us an opportunity to engage with and seek to align our process with the DJN Principles. These inflection points arose prior to the official emergence of the working group, while it was still in the planning and approval stages within the larger Design Justice Network. They are moments identified collectively by the authors during reflective discussions of professional experiences, particularly moments where we felt increased tension between how we wanted to practice and be instructional designers, and the requirements and limitations imposed on us in our professional contexts.

These moments are highlighted here because they are the moments of tension that had the largest influence on the way we designed the collaborative activities of our working group. We use these moments as reminders to help us think and work differently in our goals for justice in design, and they challenged us to shape or reshape our assumptions and our actions as we envisioned the working group. For several of the early members, these inflection points further illuminated the gaps we were seeing in our existing professional networks and professional learning opportunities, and the challenges of aligning a nascent professional network to DJN Principles. Finally, these inflection points highlight moments in which we learned something important about the how, what, and why of developing this group.

Inflection Point: Instructional designers lack professional codes and practices that enable them to view design from a social justice lens and in participatory ways.

Principle 2: We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process.

Principle 4: We view change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process, rather than as a point at the end of a process.

Principle 6: We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience and that we all have unique and brilliant contributions to bring to a design process.
(DJN, 2018)

In recent years, some academicians of instructional design practice have looked critically at the ways in which IDs and instructional technologists do their work. Gray and Boling (2016) note,

while ethical awareness is a key concern in many engineering, technology, and design disciplines—even an accreditation requirement in many fields—instructional design … has not historically focused their view of practice on ethics, instead relying on a more scientistic view of practice which artificially limits the designer's interaction with the surrounding society through the artifacts and experiences they design. (p. 969)

That is not to say that there is a shortage of codes and standards by which instructional designers must work to become more competent in their profession. However, a competency—which Richey et al. (2001) have defined as "a knowledge, skill or [ability] that enables one to effectively perform the activities of a given occupation or function to the standards expected in employment" (p. 26)—does not provide designers with a pathway to becoming more justice-centered in their design approaches. Lin (2007) "identified key areas of ethical decision-making on the part of designers, including copyright, learner privacy, accessibility, diversity, conflicts of interest, and professionalism/confidence. Additionally, Smaldino (2008) created an ID course framework focused on ethics, but this does not appear to have affected the field more broadly" (as cited in Gray & Boling, 2016, p. 975). Indeed, a review of several of the more prominent standards and codes of ethics for the field of ID revealed that competencies center on performance, industry knowledge, research, technologies, training, management, evaluation, and results (Martin & Ritzhaupt, 2021). This lack of attention towards ethical decision-making, participatory design practices (like co-design), and more socially just approaches to the work of IDs led several of the early members of DJN-IDs to seek out better models and frameworks to support our ideals, intentions, and practices.

As we designed our working group, DJN Principles became a way to foreground our thinking about how our profession might benefit from incorporating justice into ID work. As the literature review highlights, most IDs in higher education work in a solitary process, interacting mostly with SMEs or faculty members. The course design process rarely, if ever, includes students who have enrolled in the course or will be enrolled in the course. Principles 2 and 6 could significantly improve outcomes and learning experiences if they were incorporated into the design process. In reviewing the principles, we saw how moving away from standardized norms and codes could bring about real change in learning spaces. For example, what questions might we ask ourselves about the impact of our designs and the use of technology? It is not enough for our profession to outline ethical codes, such as AECT's Code of Ethics, that provide no instructive practices or examples of how to approach

these questions (Gray & Boling, 2016). Our profession's unrelenting focus on competencies, efficiency, and effectiveness as measured through scorecards, rubrics, and checklists of standards has left our small group desiring more connection with students and faculty and seeking a better way to engage, evolve, and evaluate learning.

As our group talked about the issues we experienced at our institutions, we shared concerns about the institutional course design and development process. The accelerated pace of work, while necessary to produce and launch several courses in a short timeline, can make a designer feel like a cog in a machine and deprived of opportunities to be collaborative and accountable throughout the process. Adopting Principle 4 might prompt IDs to work collaboratively with teams of faculty and students to be inclusive in our practice and process. Commiserating in the universality of feeling rushed through a development process with little to no time to reflect and build in an evaluative thought process, our group began to examine how the DJN Principles might help us trouble and bring more intentionality to our ID practices.

Inflection point: The dissolution of a well-regarded professional network focused on critical digital pedagogy and instructional design highlighted the importance of focusing on sustained community-led leadership.

> *Principle 1: We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities, as well as to seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems.*
>
> *Principle 6: We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience, and that we all have unique and brilliant contributions to bring to a design process.*
>
> *Principle 8: We work towards sustainable, community-led and -controlled outcomes. (DJN, 2018)*

Our early approach to leadership/facilitation of the DJN-IDs working group was shaped by the dissolution of another professional community in which several of the authors had been involved. That professional community had been a catalyst of important work in critical digital pedagogy and instructional design, and it had been a safe harbor for educators and education professionals who wanted to engage with critical ideas. Though the community had served an important purpose for educators and IDs for years, it quickly dissolved when the leadership of the community could no longer lead it. We viewed this as a lesson for our nascent community and, in early conversations about our approach to leadership, we discussed ways to intentionally structure leadership so that the community can thrive even as leadership changes. Guided by Principle 8, we embraced "structured structurelessness" (Spence et al., 2022) which meant providing enough leadership structure for the group to

move forward but not so much structure that it would create an unnecessary and counterproductive hierarchy. This approach to leadership within the community created openings for Singh and Harlap to join as facilitators of the working group and signaled to the community that the community was for them, not for the facilitators.

When the other professional community dissolved, we also observed a polarization among former members of that community, some siding with or critiquing former leaders of the community. At times, the dialogue between those groups became combative and toxic, leading to ad hominem attacks and rifts between members. As we observed what was happening, we discussed how to discourage polarization within our community and encourage an inclusive and supportive community orientation. We agreed that all working group activities should start with outlining community agreements. We borrowed this practice from other DJN nodes and working groups as part of enacting Principle 1. At the start of each book club meeting or visioning session, we reviewed the community agreements and invited additional input from participants on those agreements. During the first series of book club meetings, we revisited those agreements to address emerging interpersonal dynamics that could become toxic to the community.

As we began planning the group's activities in the early days of the working group, we were guided by Principles 6 and 8. This meant decentering our own expertise and centering the expertise and experiences of the community. The practice of co-design, described by McKercher (2020), was central to the enactment of these principles. Through open visioning meetings, we invited community members to co-design outcomes for the working group, such as activities, resources, publications, and leadership models. Both as part of and in addition to open visioning meetings, we designed multiple pathways to participation and self-expression in our book club events through synchronous and asynchronous means, and offered openly available materials from events and meetings as a record of our work and as an invitation to collaborate. Because we centered the diverse forms of participation from our community members, our working group activities welcomed a wide range of community members we had not initially envisioned being served by our community, including IDs working outside of higher education, community organizers, UX designers, and more.

Inflection Point: Navigating the norms of various communities with the Design Justice Network

> Principle 4: We view change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process, rather than as a point at the end of a process.

> Principle 7: We share design knowledge and tools with our communities.

> Principle 10: Before seeking new design solutions, we look for what is already working at the community level. We honor and uplift traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices. (DJN, 2018)

As a constantly learning and evolving group, we are always critically reflecting on our progress and processes. Early in our group's formation, we experienced a painful setback, causing us to spend a significant amount of time reflecting and holding ourselves accountable. This setback happened as we were figuring out how to structure an online, come-as-you-can book club. We knew we wanted to design for multiple modes of participation, and we wanted to use collaborative technology to engage participants. We also knew that other working groups and nodes had hosted book discussions in the past. Involvement in the DJN is generally collaborative, and in the spirit of sharing and uplifting what is already working (c.f., Principle 7, Principle 10), we as leaders made an assumption that artifacts created for DJN-associated book club activities were readily reusable, as it is common practice in education (e.g., fair use or fair dealing). As we planned our book club, we came across an excellent resource that was thoughtfully laid out using openly available tools to guide collaboration—we incorporated it into our book club materials with citations and gratitude expressed to the groups who worked on them before.

We were checked on these assumptions as another group in the network expressed unhappiness with our use of a resource they had developed. Although we had not intended to cause harm, it was clear that was the impact. As leaders, we immediately sought to repair the harm caused by taking the resource down, apologizing, and reflecting on our own assumptions. This incident allowed us to revisit the principles, reconsider our values, and chart a new path forward with a clarified perspective about what it means to practice design justice (c.f., Principle 4). Within our group, we made visible our commitment to Principle 7 by sharing our newly created book club materials with a CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0 license, and discussed additional ways of providing transparency into our processes through practices such as note-taking on openly-available Google docs. It also opened conversations within the network about how we can all be better at sharing resources and communicating with and across each node and working group.

Discussion

During the last year and a half of co-creating the DJN-IDs working group, we experienced inflection points that emerged from the friction between what we were trying to do as professional IDs and the DJN Principles. These moments challenged us to shape or reshape our assumptions and our actions as we envisioned the working group. Intentionally designing this group, its culture, and its processes through iterative conversations has given us the opportunity to learn to work together while navigating values and tensions, and creating space for shared leadership and decision-making. As we applied DJN Principles to our work, we learned and continue to learn many lessons about working across institutions, with each other, and with a larger international group of individuals.

One learning has been around co-designing shared processes for the working group. Co-design emphasizes opportunities for co-designers to meaningfully participate in the co-design process (McKercher, 2020). The facilitation team comes from diverse institutions, cultures, and locations, making it harder but all the more necessary to intentionally design ways for each team member to meaningfully engage in the work. We adapted to unexpected and expected challenges, including scheduling conflicts and shifting availabilities, and were mindful of when facilitators needed to step up to or step back from the work. For example, in

writing this paper, we employed different strategies, including synchronous and asynchronous work opportunities, to ensure that facilitators with different working styles and in different time zones had the space to co-develop the document to the best of their abilities on their own time.

The co-creation of this working group also deepened our belief that participatory design/co-design is a slow and intentional process. It was sometimes difficult to take the time needed for intentional inclusive design and keep the momentum of the group moving forward. Yet we thought it was important to, as brown (2017) encourages, "move at the speed of trust" (p. 42) and to resist the forward push of urgency as "our potential success lies in doing deep, slow, intentional work" (p. 114). Slow, intentional work requires constant review and reflection to avoid unintentional exclusion and make space for differences. We intentionally designed multiple pathways to participation and self-expression in our events through synchronous and asynchronous opportunities. Learning from our prior experiences with other professional communities, we were conscious of having some structure and leadership but not so much so as to become exclusionary in the process. While we started with certain ideas and goals, we realized the need to be more collaborative and adjust our expectations to be open to the ideas and potential opportunities that others would bring to the DJN-IDs working group. This enabled the group to hold space for deeper and more reflective conversations and learning.

We strived to share our learnings within and outside the group in line with Principle 7 and openly offered resources as a record of our work and as an invitation to collaborate. This included documenting our processes and learnings through publications or other means to share with others who may find them relevant. This process also gives us the opportunity to continually reflect and look back at our journey as we consciously approach a shared future for the working group.

Looking Ahead

Since the DJN-IDs working group is in its infancy, we have focused on creating the structures for participation and on creating a community. Our next steps include delving more fully into specific project work around this topic. After we completed our book club session in the fall of 2022, we hosted a visioning session. We offered both synchronous and asynchronous ways of contributing so that everyone who was invited could participate and shape future projects of the working group. A brief presentation was recorded to share with our asynchronous participants and a virtual whiteboard (Miro) was created, asking people to share their thoughts around two questions: how or what might we be co-creating within this working group in a year?

Several comments focused on engaging students in co-creation and participatory ways of designing learning. There were shared sentiments about addressing the lack of ethics within our profession from a social justice lens. Other ideas included resources to support curriculum design, inspiring examples of applying the principles to ID, and other approaches to supporting people in bringing design justice into their ID work. Participants proposed supporting each other, focusing on advocacy and systemic approaches, seeking wisdom

from non-ID practices, and other ways of learning from other perspectives, disciplines, and contexts.

We look forward to engaging with the ripples that might result from having collaboratively written this article, both in having deepened our connections as a working group and in whomever else might now feel invited into this community of practitioners. We are hopeful that the intentionality and thoughtful provocation will be shaped by a larger community of IDs, joining us in this work, and helping to evolve the current standards and codes limiting us into efficiency and rigid competencies. We need to open the silos in which designers work if we are to build a more robust framework that extends beyond the current views and practices of IDs and engages with those who are directly impacted by the choices of a few. This idea of evolving participatory and liberatory instructional design practices will hopefully emerge from engaging with the DJN Principles.

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