An Autoethnographic Exploration of Design Justice as a Framework for Anti-Racist, Equitable Curriculum Design

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Abstract: As higher education contends with the complexity of providing a more diverse and equitable education for students, we believe that social workers should lead this movement. This case study's purpose is to share the experiences of social work educators engaging in a justice-centered practice guiding curriculum development. In addition, we hope to inspire other faculty to consider implementing similar practices within their curriculum. The following study presents the experiences of four faculty and staff members at an urban-centered, generalist practice social work department in higher education. Using an autoethnographic model, we engaged in an in-depth exploration of our own educational experiences, uncovering our own biases, and working towards more progressive and equitable models of education. We learned new ways of sharing content, grading, and accepting the expertise of others. There are important implications of this work, such that design justice can increase students' engagement, sense of belonging, and ultimately degree completion.

Keywords: Social work, higher education, curriculum design, adult learners, design justice

As higher education contends with the complexity of providing a more diverse and equitable education for students, we believe that social workers should lead this movement. In response to these complex issues, a group of faculty and staff joined together to reimagine traditional conceptions of course design and share in an intellectual community of collaboration and fun. Eight faculty members, a curriculum designer, and seven student consultants came together to participate in a course design institute (CDI), with each faculty member designing or redesigning a course. As faculty and social workers, attendees invested in intentional curriculum design using the framework of Design Justice (DJ) principles. The goal of the CDI was to teach participants to design a social work course using DJ and anti-oppressive curriculum, as they relate to social work values, while also infusing the experience with a structure informed by these principles. We held space for conversation, and considered together how we could build on what we know. We also started from the beginning of the CDI in a critical instructional design process (Al-Haija & Mahamid, 2021; Morris, 2018).

Problem Statement

Power, oppression and privilege are deeply embedded in academic systems, often impacting the learning experiences for historically marginalized students (Almeida et al.,

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2019)**.** In addition, these embedded elements can result in a tension between the designer, student needs, equity, and academic rigor and expectations. As Luke (2013) indicates, classic models of curriculum development are "highly durable" to critique and in so create binary arguments between what are broadly accepted practices vs. models of anti-oppressive practices, creating a tension for those moving towards anti-oppressive practices (AOP). In social work education, these structures replicate historical inequities that more significantly impact students with marginalized identities.

Curriculum Design Institute

The instructional design process at the CDI was built on the theoretical framework of Anti-oppressive Curriculum (AOC) and DJ. Through these theoretical approaches with our community of peers, we were challenged to let go of the traditionally rigid course design structures (Czerkawski & Lyman, 2016; Quality Matters, 2025) such as the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) Model (Branson et al., 1975) and Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001), into a more responsive approach that challenged these traditional models (Moore, 2021) and/or embedded them using the AOC lens. By combining AOC and DJ we were able to center historically-excluded voices and create a new sense of belonging in our curriculum design, informing our work towards the integration of the 2022 Education and Policy Accreditation Standards (EPAS 2022) set forth by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2022).

Anti-Oppressive Curriculum

While we are seeing an increase in diversity and responsiveness in social work learning environments, there is still an urgent need to incorporate anti-oppressive practices in social work education. Anti-oppressive pedagogy involves "engaging students in discussions of privilege and racism and the systems that sustain them," including specific direction on methods of critiquing injustice (Galloway et al., 2019, p. 494). Daftry and Sugure (2022) note five ways to engage AOP in education, we focus on their recommendations to challenge oppression and to modify the curriculum. They posit that challenging oppression can happen through curriculum modifications. As one participant noted, students need to not only see themselves in the curriculum but also see themselves positively represented. Involving students in our course design (Goff & Knorr, 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017) and inviting collaborative discussion between faculty and designers (Hart, 2018) about strategies to dismantle oppressive structures will lead to faculty and designers providing more equitable and anti-racist learning environments. We propose it is critical for social work educators as we aim to train learners to engage with marginalized and vulnerable populations. AOC allows educators to scaffold an inclusive, universal infrastructure that fosters partnerships with students and colleagues. It is not a one-time event but a continual, progressive process that aims for quality improvement and best practice sustainability (Connor, 2022).

Anti-Oppressive Curriculum design incorporates an educational shift from exclusive hierarchical standards to prioritizing the design's impact on the learning community over the course designer's intentions. Each participant in the CDI focused on design impact and

awareness, bringing equity to the classroom, and building rapport with the student community by engaging a student's expertise as a consultant (Design Justice Network [DJN], 2018). AOC development was achieved through the DJ framework, which employed a series of principles methodically and intentionally scaffolded into their course.

DJ Principles

Created in 2018, the Design Justice Network (DJN) provides ten principles intended to address inequities in the design process by centering individuals typically marginalized by design and by encouraging collaboration and justice in making design decisions (DJN, 2018). These principles include:

1. We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities, as well as to seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems.
2. We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process.
3. We prioritize design's impact on the community over the intentions of the designer.
4. We view change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process, rather than as a point at the end of a process.
5. We see the role of the designer as a facilitator rather than an expert.
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.
7. We share design knowledge and tools with our communities.
8. We work towards sustainable, community-led and -controlled outcomes.
9. We work towards non-exploitative solutions that reconnect us to the earth and to each other.
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, para. 3).

While not originally created for use in instructional design, these principles address concepts relevant for curriculum and course design, encouraging collaboration and creating more accessible and sustainable solutions (Costanza-Chock 2018, 2020). By centering the voices of students and encouraging collaboration among faculty and an instructional designer, these principles enhance the course development process and introduce justice principles into instructional design in higher education.

Implementation

To infuse these principles, this two-week institute involved structured morning gatherings with time in the afternoons for faculty to meet with each other, student consultants, or with the instructional designer. The primary goal of CDI was fully developing a course while implementing DJ principles and AOC (Cottrell & Obermann, 2025). As such, our learning walked through all stages of the curriculum design process, from evaluating objectives, developing assessments, and creating course activities and

structure in the learning management system (LMS). While facilitating the CDI, the instructional designer left space for co-creation and faculty voice (DJ Principle #5). For example, faculty shared their strengths with the group (DJ Principle #6) by leading conversations around topics such as formatting and layout, teaching philosophies, ideas for class and warm-up activities rooted in DJ and community building (DJ Principle #4). During afternoon meetings, faculty met with peers to share ideas according to their strengths and needs (DJ Principle #7).

In addition to cross-pollinating ideas with colleagues, faculty participants each invited a student consultant to contribute to the design process (DJ Principle #2). Each student contributed depending on faculty needs and was compensated for participation with a gift card. Faculty also received a stipend for participation. This compensation motivated participation but also avoided exploitation of faculty and students by expecting them to provide free labor (DJ Principle #9). This case study explored the perceptions of faculty participants of CDI to understanding faculty insights and experiences.

Methodology

The following project utilized a critical social work frame, to implement a model of autoethnography as articulated by Jan Fook (2014). This model highlights the role of critical social work as a means of understanding oneself and others through a holistic (whole person) model that accounts for their social position through three domains: learning, reflection, and reflexivity. The learning domain encourages us to not just engage in taking in new knowledge, but also to implement that knowledge into new understandings and actions. Reflection invites us to question our deepest assumptions and biases and connect our personal experiences to how we perceive the world to be. Finally, reflexivity encourages us to interrogate how our learning and reflection on our whole being influences our experiences and those of others. Through this understanding Fook (2022) defines this overall process as, "uncovering the fundamental taken-for-granted thinking involved in making meaning of personal experience, and remaking this (and further guidelines for living) in the light of new awarenesses of the political and structural influences in one's life (pp. 5-6). Fook (2022) goes on to add: "In my experience effective critical reflection even on one specific experience can induce a self-acceptance which frees a person's ability to be accepting of other, very different experiences in other people" (p. 6). Therefore, we sought to embody this model of critical reflection to explore our past lived experience as a way of understanding our responses and conceptualizations within our present lived experience. Ultimately, we are striving to answer the question of who we are, and how that informs our evolution into becoming who we want to be.

Four (4) faculty and staff members from a social work department collaborated using the autoethnography model to explore and document the experience of participating in the CDI, which was designed to explore the DJ model to rethink the social work curriculum. Our group includes the department's curriculum developer, who guided this process and helped us to apply the model to our own classes, a clinical field faculty member who teaches in the master's program, a full-time faculty member and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion co-chair teaching primarily in our bachelor's program, and a full-time faculty

member who teaches primarily in the master's program. Among us, we have decades of experience within the higher education system, taking on multiple roles such as educators, advisors, advocates, and leaders, and we brought that expertise to this space. Through our analysis, we will highlight contributions made by our colleagues and student consultants. We will not share any identifying information regarding those individuals, as the autoethnography is intended to focus on the individual experience and informed consent was not sought from collateral participants.

Table 1. *Autoethnographic Participants Demographics and Alignment with Design Justice Principles*

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Alignment With Principles
Curriculum Designer	40s	Female	White	10+	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.
Faculty 1	40s	Female	White	10+	Principle #2: We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process.
Faculty 2	40s	Female	White	10+	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.
Faculty 3	50s	Female	Black	10+	Principle #3: We prioritize design's impact on the community over the intentions of the designer.

To start the process, as a team, we developed a set of questions built on Fook's (2014) model and each day after engaging with the CDI we journaled our responses to the questions, considering the experience of the day and what impact that had on our growth. At the end of the CDI, each team member shared their journal. We developed a team coding scheme based in part on recommendations from Clarke et al. (2023), that included identifying our purpose, planning logistics, and ongoing discussion. We used a first cycle descriptive coding method to code each other's journals (we did not code our own) (Saldaña, 2021). Once the first cycle was completed, we came together to begin the second cycle using a tabletop sorting method, reducing our codes to nine (9) core patterns. Through a second round of second cycle coding, we developed four (4) overarching themes that captured our shared experiences (Saldaña, 2021). Below we share our own individual experiences with the CDI, leading into the themes of our shared pathway to growth. As a means of our own member checking, once we'd completed coding, we each developed a personal statement that outlines our individual process of critical reflection, of our identities and alignment with design justice principles (Table 1. Autoethnographic Participant Demographics and Alignment with Design Justice Principles), that guided the

larger analysis. It is often the case with such reflection that individuals explore different areas of identity and experience; therefore, you may notice a lack of conformity among these statements. We argue that is necessary, as our stories and journeys that brought us here are not uniform, allowing us to honor the differences and the similarities of each story.

Personal Statements

Curriculum Designer

My early educational life started in private schools for gifted students, a place where I first benefitted from my identities associated with power and privilege. I am a white, upper-middle-class oldest daughter, and school was an area where I thrived. The joy of learning and the indulgence of academia has stuck with me through two master's degrees and a PhD. Traditional higher education works for me; I appreciate clear structure, guidelines, and rubrics. And yet I value creativity, diversity, and flexibility.

In my work as curriculum designer in higher education, I feel like I simultaneously hold on to two opposing concepts: one is the structure and productivity, meeting benchmarks and standards. The other concept is justice, inclusivity, and diversity. I fight my own need to take up space with the desire to hold space for others. DJ principles invite me to consider that tension, and to discover opportunities for growth, and I've begun to work harder to partner with faculty in course design, while also inviting students to collaborate in our work. These goals came together for me during our two summers of design institute.

As I work with students, who are those most impacted by our course design decisions, I am constantly surprised with how beautifully they advocate for themselves. As they've been invited into the design space, they've developed book clubs, prepared video demonstrations, and suggested specific course content that is inclusive of diverse voices.

I also collaborate with faculty members in course design teams. Faculty are innovative, eager to learn from each other and from students, and leave space for exploration. Collaborating with students and faculty has left room for meaningful personal and professional relationships. Nearly all of my current scholarly work is in collaboration with these partners, and numerous colleagues have supported me through personal successes and challenges. Working in collaboration with students and faculty through DJ principles has enriched my life, improved the learning environment in our department, and left space to share that collegiality with other students and social workers.

Faculty 1

I entered my career in higher education with little formal training on instructional design and delivery. As a cis-gender, white woman, I was taught in the traditions of Jesuit Catholic education. The Jesuit call to social action propelled me into a twenty-year career in social work with children and families. In moving into a career in higher education, I left the familiarity of community social work and jumped into teaching field education for graduate students. I was armed with years of social work practice, a joy of public speaking,

past experiences supervising graduate students, and a desire to make learning fun. My zest for engaging adult learners has not faltered, my awareness about my own biases, privilege, and traditional academic assumptions have been challenged and changed over the past seven years. Additionally, I have an emerging justice-informed philosophy of curriculum design and delivery.

Summer CDI was a free and fun space to reflect on my own assumptions. My traditional Catholic school upbringing influences my teaching approach. In contrast to my experiences as a student, I seek to offer learners variety and choice and celebrate students as both learners and experts. Through CDI I worked and learned alongside faculty colleagues in a new way. The institute structure allowed for intentional spaces for peer consultation and creative brainstorming. I discovered our diverse pedological approaches and teaching strategies. I enjoyed being a learning partner with fellow faculty members as reflected in DJ principle #7, sharing our design ideas (DJN, 2018). CDI both supported real connection with colleagues, while simultaneously refining my teaching and design skills. The tangible result was a thoughtful, well-designed course. More importantly, I had opportunities to critically examine my teaching approach, using principles of DJ that included challenging my assumptions, advancing my understanding of accessible learning, and lasting collegial connections.

In addition to faculty peer consultation, the student consultant proved a rich contribution to the course design process and to my evolving justice-centered pedological approach. The student was instrumental in encouraging design that centers the voices of those who are directly impacted, DJ principle #2 (DJN, 2018). The student pointed out duplication in course content across classes. They contributed to an assignment redesign with current content and choice. Our conversations encouraged me to continue to let go of control and share the course design with the class. This invitation to design a course that promotes student-instructor collaboration feels exciting and in-line with DJ; the designer is a facilitator, not an expert (DJN, 2018). Sharing power is a demonstration of the social work value of antiracist and equitable practice. I am committed to an ongoing journey of challenging my colonialized word-view. CDI offered a space to grow and share with colleagues using a shared framework and continues to have a significant impact on my evolution as an educator.

Faculty 2

While I will say that I began thinking about exploring more equitable perspectives of education, primarily due to my identity as a social worker, it was the DJ Summer Institute that required that I dig deep. As a white, middle class, cis-gender woman with a doctoral degree, I bring a lot of privilege to the classroom, which needed to be interrogated, and the DJ Summer Institute facilitated this. During the institute and through the process of the autoethnography, I was encouraged to think more deeply about my own biases and privileges and how those experiences were influencing the way I showed up in my classes and how I perceived student behavior and assignments. I quickly observed that the institute would not have been as successful without embracing the DJ principles that center and value marginalized voices in the process. Through this value, I was able to engage with my

colleagues and engage in collaborative learning. We were able to share what has worked and what hasn't worked, we each walked away with new ideas, new perspectives, and new pedagogical practices. In addition, the student consultants were invaluable to the process. During my time implementing the DJ model I had the privilege of working with four different students from diverse backgrounds. Their advice, suggestions, and feedback gave me the courage to explore new ways to engage students in their learning journey. The students could advocate not only related to their own experiences but engaged with their peers to share a broader perspective. The feedback from the students was so influential that I am now conducting peer feedback sessions in my classrooms, specifically related to the course organization, content, and delivery. Students want to be engaged in how they learn, if we just give them the space.

Overall, the DJ Summer Institute changed me, as an individual and an educator. It taught me how to sit with my own educational biases and to determine if those biases were influencing the judgements I was making toward students and their capacities. It has allowed me to name those biases and work towards a more equitable pathway. It has allowed me to let go of oppressive ideals of what teaching and learning "should" be, to allow myself and the learners to have agency in the process. I look forward to my continued evolution as an educator and a social worker, striving to send prepared, valued, and engaged social workers into the world.

Faculty 3

Since third grade, becoming an educator has been established inside my soul. My socialization in the public education system simultaneously and aggressively brought me a sense of purpose and doubt. All the things that make up my lived experiences brought me to my passion for social work. I am an eclectic academic. Having a lived experience outside of the box as both a Black woman and a neurodiverse human has reinforced my belief in the theory of multiple intelligences (Armstrong, 2018; Gardner, 1983; Kallenbach & Viens, 2001).

I formally arrived in higher education with a blend of trades and degrees that range from cosmetology and real estate to therapeutic foster care, disability specialist, case manager, and clinician. From the moment I graduated from my MSW (master's in social work) program, I began working with undergraduate students to mentor them.

I am passionate about adult education, and my andragogy style involves an anti-oppressive, anti-racist, equity, and disability justice lens. This lens is deliberate and requires an openness to learn, grow, and consistent self-effort. I design my courses and interactions with students in a way that empowers learners to do their self-work by exploring and investigating themselves. This exploration and development of personal values and perceptions promote growth as a social worker. I encourage learners to assess who they are as they increase their knowledge of social work values, concepts, and ethics.

Course and curriculum design are active. It requires ongoing learning, growth, and development. CDI was a remarkable space of self-exploration and evolution that supported me as an educator in critically thinking about my courses while fostering and encouraging

transformational learning. My teaching philosophy aligns with DJ Principle #6, that everyone is an expert with brilliant contributions to bring to a design process (DJN, 2018). During the summer CDI, our facilitator recognized that individuals have a valuable bank of experience that can support the design process. DJ principles delivered through the summer CDI reinforced my andragogical practice. Life-long learning, general skill transference, meaningful learning, and critical thinking were all reinforced in summer CDI. My classroom structure is built upon a relational and reciprocal learning environment. Summer CDI supported purposely designing the curriculum to include scholars who are neurodivergent, living with disabilities, and learners from diverse backgrounds with intersectional identities to minimize barriers to learning and maximize inclusion.

In my culture, many are sustained by a philosophy we call Ubuntu: the community's collective support. DJ Principal #3 reinforces the importance of community. Community building was a substantial part of the CDI, from including equity statements, to providing expectations around microaggressions. I gained a more profound awareness surrounding equality in online spaces and inclusivity. Through CDI, immersion with colleagues was an outcome: It was one of the most significant academic and professional development opportunities I have experienced.

Emerging Themes

Through our research and coding process, we developed four (4) overarching themes that capture our shared experiences in CDI and in implementing DJ principles. These themes are: (1) pathway to growth, (2) community and relationships, (3) social work values and (4) inclusivity and equity. These themes start with our individual growth and continuously expand outward to our individual relationships, social work values, and the impact on our university community. The final two themes have implications to broader social work practice as well as implications in considering issues of equity and empowerment. See Table 2 for a snapshot.

Pathway to Growth – Where Did We Start and How Did We Evolve?

The pathway to growth emerged as the first theme of the study findings. CDI encouraged participants to explore different identities and experiences that inform their perspectives as educators. This section explores two tenets of pathway to growth: socialization and growth tension. Growth in socialized identities necessitates tension and discomfort as CDI members were challenged to stretch and grow. Participants were asked to challenge held beliefs and to re-define their teaching pedagogy and design practice.

Table 2. *Explanation and Brief Examples of Emerging Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme	Description	Example
Pathway to Growth – Where Did We Start & How Did We Evolve?	Socialization	Explains the ways in which we were socialized into our beliefs regarding education.	My implicit bias has come from educational socialization, systemic hierarchy, & elitism has definitely impacted how I engage in the process. I was/am a student that followed all the professors' rules & didn't dare challenge or feel free to express anything outside the box in many spaces I was in. I have struggled to make things different than "traditional" ways of doing education…
	Growth Tension	Indicates that change is difficult & we experienced personal tension on our journeys.	I feel like I am holding onto two opposing stones- one in each hand. One is the structure, the productivity, meeting benchmarks & standards. In the other hand, I hold a stone for justice, & inclusivity, & diversity.
Community & Relationships: Creating Shared Learning	Collaborating as Colleagues	Describes the work we did between members of our staff & faculty.	I learn so much from my colleagues. Having this community is such a positive experience for me. I have worked siloed for so long that it is so nice to have others share ideas & information.
	Collaborating With Students	Describes the work we did with members of our student body.	Centering & prioritizing the student's needs over the norms in academia. My perception of the impact is that students tend to become more engaged in the process.
Social Work Values	Service, Integrity, & Competence	Defines the use of or move towards the integration of social work values to the design justice model.	It cultivated an instructional design awareness, strengthened an invaluable skill set, & was an essential investment in my professional development.
	Dignity, Worth & Human Relationships		I want my classroom environment, online or in-person to be a community. A place of exploration & for learning. I also spend a lot of time building trust & fostering a sense of belonging.
	Social Justice		Justice provides a framework to support & help guide moving from centering of self to those marginalized & impacted.
Inclusivity & Equity: Making an Impact		Refers to the ways in which models of inclusivity & equity have impacted our work & our students as we implemented new practices.	So yes, a design process needs to be both the instructional designer & instructor's ideas, but it also needs to stop being a binary process, to be more fluid in including more voices, with shared knowledge. Maybe a better question is how do we move away from the binary in the course design process to incorporate more voices, & work collectively?

Socialization

Participants reflected on their socialization as learners and students before they became educators. An instructor's philosophy of education may be consciously or unconsciously impacted by their history and intersectional identities. Members of the group examined their diverse backgrounds and socialization. Faculty 3 acknowledged:

> *I know what it is like to be an outcast, whether due to skin color, appearance, hair, weight, or learning disabilities. I know that barriers often stifle people, and their capabilities abound if we remove them.*

DJ principle #6 reflects the value of diverse identities, valuing everyone's expertise based on their own lived experience, with brilliant contributions to bring to the process (DJN, 2018). Even though we have our own experiences and perceptions, it is in sharing varied and diverse perspectives that we evolved through the learning process.

Growth Tension

Growth tension is required when one moves into the stretch zone from long-held knowledge and beliefs into the new and the unfamiliar. The need to center the design on the voice and experiences of diverse students requires us to let go of assumptions to traditional learning approaches. Faculty 2 explored this theme, stating, "When I think about my own intersectionality's [sic], it makes me feel like it requires an analysis not just of my current identities, but how my identities have changed through this learning process."

This evolution and change over time and balancing of opposing forces was necessary as a pathway to growth. Faculty 1 reflected:

> *I feel like there is increasing tension between the DJ principles such as a flexible, inclusive online course design, that is relational and supportive of those who are traditionally marginalized, versus an online course designed according to research-based best practices standards. I want to do both, and struggle with how to do this.*

As CDI participants, we spent time exploring this tension, challenging binary processes as we interrogated our own socialization and how that played out in curriculum design. The CDI inspired courageous personal growth for the faculty participants.

Community and Relationships: Creating Shared Learning

As Faculty 1 said in her journal, "I don't believe this process is possible alone or in isolation." In addition to personal growth, implementing DJ principles invited us into a space of community where we were able to develop relationships with colleagues and students. Developing relationships in and out of the classroom helped us to humanize individuals and provide space for voices of those directly impacted by course design.

Collaborating as Colleagues

DJ Principle six acknowledges the expertise that each stakeholder brings, while principle seven encourages sharing design knowledge within communities. It was clear during our work together that colleagues brought unique and brilliant contributions to the process, which helped us to develop relationships throughout the workshop. We felt that this collaborative relationship was a natural fit, and it was one of the strengths of designing in tandem. We had the chance to share ideas and were able to celebrate successes together. Faculty 2 said about the process: "We are building a strong community that allows this work to continue on and on, we keep each other accountable to the ideas and commitments we've made to the process."

Through these collaborations, each participant gained practical knowledge that translated into usable information they could implement in courses. The curriculum designer described reciprocal interactions like this: "sometimes the process is slower, but ultimately is like a slow-cooked stew- it's richer for the depth of conversation, expertise, ideas, and collaboration that were introduced over time." Through an iterative process many of these ideas were more fully developed using the DJ principles and implemented more widely throughout our department. What we learned from CDI was and is shared widely within our department and beyond, further expanding our collaboration and reach.

Collaborating With Students

Connecting with colleagues and designing in community was an important part of summer institute, but building relationships with students was also beneficial. Collaborating with student consultants ensured we honored DJ principle 2, which centers the voices of the students (DJN, 2018). Faculty 3 explained "one purpose was to view the student as an expert with lived experience and a lens to be honored [and]… give their expert insight from a student's perspective." Involving students also allowed us to care about our learners as humans as we drew on students' lived experiences and intentionally made space for them in our course design. As Faculty 2 reflected:

This work has also increased my own compassionate response to students in the classroom. I have learned to listen to them, to give them the benefit of doubt, to see them as full human beings, and not just students. I think that this creates an effective teaching and learning environment, where both the students and I feel as if we can take risks with one another.

Designing in community helped us to make connections with each other and with our students. We developed meaningful, lasting friendships that have allowed us to share what we've learned in our classes, in our department, and with the wider community.

Social Work Values

As social workers, we are expected to act on a set of core values outlined by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). There are six values, aligned with six principles of practice: Service, Integrity, Dignity and Worth of the Person, Importance of

Human Relationships, Competence, and Social Justice (NASW, 2021). The principles of DJ are aligned with the NASW Code of Ethics, which gave us the language to understand the intersections between the DJ model and our ethical obligations as social workers. Each of these core values was used as a means of understanding the implementation of this model in our course design and classroom interactions. As Faculty 1 shared,

> *The DJ Framework gave me a direct theoretical language to explain how I think social work values should be embedded in the design of a social work class. This was a lot more intentional and fun than just sitting down and re-working a class for sure.*

Service, Integrity, & Competence

For social workers, being of service to others is a core aspect of our identity. The language of service, integrity, and competence has helped us to better understand DJ principles. Faculty 4, the curriculum designer, described her experience as follows defining service, integrity, and competence not only as what we provide, but by leaving space for others to have a voice.

> *This changes my design process but also enhances it. In some ways, it takes the pressure off of me to be the one providing ideas, while centering others who have wonderful ideas that they can share. It left space for inspiration and exploration in a way that wouldn't have happened if I was the central focus for the session. It also increases my repository of ideas for teaching, design, and curriculum development, as I hear from others and learn from them as well.*

Competence stood out as critically important within the context of our exploration. Competence as a social work value is focused on social work with others. As noted, we are a group of doctoral-educated social workers and curriculum designers, we are competent in the dictionary sense of the word. However, we learned quickly that competence with the DJ model meant letting go of our sense of expertise and giving other lived experiences an opportunity to shine through. This is captured in DJ principles 5 & 6, which focus on letting go of the idea of "expert" to disrupt power structures by expanding who can provide that expertise. As the curriculum designer shared, "... DJ is a conscious letting go of the power and the hierarchy in the traditional course dynamic." The CDI gave us that opportunity, a letting go of the past and seeking a future that recognizes the strengths of all involved in the process, an openness to learning new things, and new ways of being.

To achieve this "letting go," we reflected on our own educational experiences and socialization and truly explored the impact that those experiences had on our perception of education and what it means to learn. We found that although we each come to CDI with different experiences of educational socialization, we each relied on that socialization to define the "right" way to learn. As we let go of such biases and adjusted standards, we were better able to understand and meet the learning needs of our students, demonstrating our commitment to service, integrity, and competence.

Dignity, Worth, and Human Relationships

The value of the dignity and worth of all people, often informed by relationship, is interwoven into each of the DJ principles. There is not one principle that doesn't capture these ideas. While we all came to this community believing in the dignity and worth of our students and sought to be in relationship with them, we thought more broadly about our own biases that might impact our ability to live up to this expectation. The curriculum designer shared this observation,

> There's enthusiasm, and welcome, and caring about students as humans. There are options for participation, for students and for affiliate faculty. There are intentional assignments and assessments that really allow students to explore their own lived experience as it relates to course content.

When we think we know what students "should" know, we are often setting them up for failure. Unspoken expectations without transparency can cause a disruption in trust between the student and instructor. However, if we come at design and instruction from a starting point of dignity and worth and engaging in relationship regardless of what knowledge a student brings to the classroom, we provide space for that student to ask for help, to seek out resources, and to gain the knowledge needed to move forward. Faculty 2 emphasized, "We can be all of those things, as we continue to recognize and respect the humanity of our students, we can normalize the counternarratives and make larger changes." Human relationships can be both difficult and rewarding, but this social work value reminds us that change happens in relationships. Relationships take time, effort, and often encounter disruption, and yet they are easier when we see each other's humanity.

Social Justice

To make the connection between social justice and DJ is an easy step, as both are focused on justice as a core value of the practice. Social Justice in social work is concerned with supporting the most marginalized through service and advocacy while DJ centers traditionally marginalized voices. Both seek to give voice to those often silenced, and to explore, disrupt, and dismantle the systemic issues that impact individuals and communities' ability to thrive, and not just survive. Faculty 3 summarized this beautifully,

> I consider myself a "justice" minded individual. I know that many components of higher education are not created or designed through a lens that seeks to bring equality to the classroom so that the students and the communities they serve benefit first.

Inclusivity and Equity: Making an Impact

Inclusivity and equity are critical components of DJ Principles, which aim to ensure that design is responsive to the needs of all individuals and communities. The impact of the CDI was far reaching as all participants are encouraged to reflect on their positionality and express how oppression, power, and privilege impact their perspective. Students are

encouraged to explore their own socialization and learning needs. Educators are further encouraged to be deliberate and thoughtful in incorporating student feedback, which in turn impacts decisions about the curriculum, course materials, and classroom procedures.

In CDI, we grew and developed as educators by involving students in the design process, providing student voice in the curriculum process and reminding educators of student needs. Through understanding these needs, we made our design choices transparent and provided students with options and alternatives to their learning journey. This included working towards providing course materials that are accessible and support empowerment regardless of students' socioeconomic status, race, gender, ability, or other identities. In considering the needs of diverse groups and designing for inclusivity. Faculty 3 explained that,

We were guided toward being mindful of community at every development step, from including equity statements to 'expectations around microaggressions.' I gained a more profound sense of awareness surrounding equality in online spaces and inclusivity.

During the CDI we also focused on thinking about increasing equity by recognizing and respecting diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within the classroom environment. Many of the students at our university live with diverse, intersectional identities and brave the realms of academic institutions that were not originally created with an intention for the inclusivity of all. Therefore, we saw our role as dismantling classic understandings and language paired with academic rigor to take a broader view of lived experiences, allowing students to see themselves in the classroom materials, and making space for often excluded voices. In relationship to this idea, Faculty 1 asked herself, "How might I be using language to avoid rather than name the equity issues I see? Interesting. Academic language may be a tool to sidestep difficult topics or issues." Faculty 2 furthers this,

We cannot progress by not naming educational trauma, by not naming oppressive traumas, by not naming learning difficulties and disorders, by not naming the mental health of students, all of which play a huge role in their ability to learn, engage, and process information, we cannot progress. I've been guilty of this so many times over my teaching career.

In CDI, language was honored and became a focus across many aspects of course design. Student consultants were encouraged to share their thoughts with faculty on the language used in the LMS and the syllabus. Faculty 2 shared that:

I need to be clear about using "I" statements to describe what this means to me and respect the diversity of the learning community and our student population. It can be easy to use language to avoid equity issues; most often, it goes back to the "shoulds" that we think students should know.

DJ principles were essential to our process of understanding the dynamics that educational systems have perpetuated that contribute to academic and societal inequalities and, ultimately, injustices. Educators participated in critical reflection about internal and external resistance when challenging traditional and sometimes harmful course structural

issues. However, educators took time to recenter students, many of whom have marginalized identities and are often othered through curriculum design, using the lenses of inclusivity and equity. Each instructor worked to gain awareness and identify design flaws that disregard and manipulate diverse lived experiences (DJN, 2018; Zinga & Styres, 2019).

Discussion

As seen through the CDI, and our own reflections on the process, DJ is a new framework that is a compatible and viable framework for anti-oppressive curriculum design, particularly within the field of social work. Its alignment with social work values, practices, and ethics allows us to engage in critical social work through learning, reflecting, and being reflexive not only in our teaching, but in our engagement with the larger institutional and systemic processes. DJ gives us a language and a framework to empower students and ourselves to be changemakers. Co-designing with students is a foundation of anti-oppressive practice, an intersectional activity that requires a cyclical approach to learning and growth. Co-creation fosters partnerships between students and faculty, ultimately developing an educational environment that encourages faculty, staff, and students to be agents of social change while redefining competence as growth rooted in justice.

These same skills of co-creation, fostering partnerships, and deconstructing power hierarchies will help students as they graduate and take on professional roles. By implementing DJ in our classrooms, we model for students and others how to implement anti-oppressive practice in their agencies, communities, and educational work. Having experienced these principles firsthand, students, faculty, and staff will be prepared to implement these concepts as they continue to develop partnerships and question power structures in their professional roles. An intentional cultural shift is taking place as educators become more conscious of and deliberate about DJ and their impact on education.

Implications

Social work educators need a framework that aligns with social work core values to support anti-oppressive learning spaces. The design justice framework is one model that fosters critical reflexive practice and inclusive engagement in course design. At a mezzo and macro level, implementing a DJ framework in course design allows for cultural transformation in an experiential and value-driven way. A small group of faculty and staff members, along with students, can then bring back those principles to the greater systems, creating courses that ultimately impact thousands of students over multiple years. Designing in community allowed the benefits of DJ to continue after the time together at CDI. We have researched, written, presented, and designed together over three years, as the relationships we built during our summers together have sustained us in doing critical design work. Also, braiding DJ principles into the work we do as educators, designers, and faculty has created opportunities for department culture to change.

In one small but far-reaching example, Faculty 2 shared a model of grading using a complete/incomplete method in our first year at institute. CDI participants asked questions and started implementing a similar anti-oppressive grading model in their courses. Over time, other faculty in the department heard about this strategy and reached out to Faculty 2 for examples and suggestions for implementation. These faculty are lead faculty for courses that have rolled out innovative grading models for all the sections of that course. Implementing this inclusive and supportive practice has now influenced nearly all students in our social work programs.

On a more micro level, as members of the CDI, we believe that it is our duty to advocate for change in oppressive and harmful systems, including those in higher education. DJ is one step in that direction; in our department the impact is already being felt by our students. Faculty 1 shared, "DJ provides a framework to support and help guide moving from centering of self to those marginalized and impacted."

As social work educators seek anti-oppressive approaches to course design, the design justice framework provides a model that aligns with social work values. The approach can serve as a guide for future social work design, with ample room for research on the value of the design justice model and how it relates to an evolving social work curriculum.

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