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**Column: Innovation in Libraries**

## Operationalizing Values to Create Communities of Care

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### ABSTRACT

In this column, two instructional designers (housed in an academic Library) reflect on their journey to operationalize care grounded in the tenets of instructional design, critical digital pedagogy, and open pedagogy. They provide concrete and actionable ways to implement these strategies in this present moment to create meetings, spaces, projects, curriculum and more to change the status quo while challenging and encouraging readers to do the next right thing where they currently are!

### KEYWORDS

Critical instructional design, Critical digital pedagogy, Open pedagogy, Care

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*In design, philosophy (thoughtfulness), action (decisions) and form (artifacts and activities) come into dynamic tensional accord. [...]Indeed, without the philosophical element, I argue that design loses its essential quiddity; it becomes simply a way to direct process towards solutions- and this is the job of management, not design.*

(Parkin, 2022, p. 34)

### **Learning Moments Everywhere**

As instructional designers with over 28 combined years of experience, we have spent the last few years making progress toward articulating, understanding, questioning, and evolving our ways of working to adapt to the current moment. By “current moment” we are referring to the struggle to articulate the vastly different world we now live in where we aren’t working, living, parenting, or connecting in ways we are familiar with, where racial unrest and a call for social justice and liberation is a necessity, and where, in general, people are “not okay.” In this time of change, trauma, pain, and chronic uncertainty we know that we are not alone in shaping and finding systems, and strategies that reflect and honor what we have all been through that can create stability, equity, and belonging. Our goal is to provide a glimpse into the “philosophy” as well as the “actions and forms” that influence and shape the way we show up as whole humans to our work as critical instructional designers. Because, as the quote from Parkin (2022) notes - without that intentional work we are missing the essence and value of what designing can bring to every moment.

While “crafting our philosophy” has been happening for us since at least 2017, it was in 2020 that we really asked the following questions: “What is our lane? What’s our space to make a difference? What are we doing?” Through 2020 we found our “lane” by doing our own personal work, deep reflection, and engaging in dialogue around some heavy topics like critical pedagogy and liberatory practices, equity in a broad sense, as well as within academia and academic Libraries, and creating inclusive spaces. Importantly, we also needed to consider our personal identities and context (two white, cis-gender, able-bodied, full-time instructional faculty, caregivers, and women who work at a PWI and are housed within an Academic Library) before we could move forward. During this time, we have really been able to refine and more clearly articulate how our personal and professional values intersect and guide our work, from big decisions to small actions. Through grappling with what it means to be instructional designers in this moment, we wanted to answer the question “where do we belong?” We found refuge in the work around critical digital pedagogy, open pedagogy, and eventually critical instructional design. Using these values-based frameworks to ground our practices, rather than only using theoretical underpinnings or evidence-based practices (which, to be clear, are valuable and still integral to our work) has been incredibly influential. And as we continue to develop our philosophy, we keep seeking to understand the why of what we know is working and to question “the way things are always done.”

By weaving the values of critical digital pedagogy and open pedagogy (see Image 1) with instructional design principles, we created our philosophy that we have tested, shaped, and continue to practice in all facets of our work, whether it be interdisciplinary projects, curriculum design projects, faculty consultations, or research projects. As critical instructional designers, we approach all our work as learning opportunities and can thus more clearly apply the strategies we share in the rest of this column. These learning spaces include meetings, project development work, facilitating and supporting collaborations, and even writing this column!

Critical Instructional Design	
<p><b>Critical Digital Pedagogy values</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching as political</li> <li>2. Equitable distribution of power</li> <li>3. Centering community</li> <li>4. Not being defined by a single voice</li> <li>5. Requires open and networked environments</li> </ol> <p><a href="https://pressbooks.pub/criticaldigitalpedagogy/chapter/chapter-1/">https://pressbooks.pub/criticaldigitalpedagogy/chapter/chapter-1/</a></p>	<p><b>Open Pedagogy values</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respect</li> <li>2. Reciprocate</li> <li>3. Risk</li> <li>4. Reach</li> <li>5. Resist</li> </ol> <p><a href="https://thatpsychprof.com/5rs-for-open-pedagogy/">https://thatpsychprof.com/5rs-for-open-pedagogy/</a></p>
<p><b>Instructional Design Principles</b></p>	

**Figure 1**

*Grounding “the work” in values*

### Operationalizing Values

How do we actually *operationalize* our values in our work? What does an action look and feel like when grounded in the values from Image 1? How do the values influence our everyday work - like making decisions, balancing project commitments, the setup and facilitation of meetings, fostering relationships and collaborations, and even developing our own teaching? How do we center the people we are working with -as whole humans, as people who may not be ok, who are all balancing many different things (from caring for others like children or aging parents to our own mental health struggles to brain fog, isolation, loneliness, and a broad spectrum of comfortability with “returning” to various spaces)? We approach our work by asking these critical questions to design systems and processes that support, center, and operationalize care for the humans in them. One simple example is that we design meetings to be working meetings, honoring that people’s most precious resource right now is their time and attention. In these meetings, we create one agenda google document in which each meeting becomes its own table with topics, facilitator, timing, planning notes, and meeting minutes. While this may not sound revolutionary - the care comes through in the action and form when the philosophy is applied. While we (the designers) set up the agenda, the group always discusses that each

agenda is open and edited in real-time so that all collaborator's voices are heard. We make space early in the process to dialogue around the ethics of writing in the document to ensure we are considering power dynamics, the distribution of work and power, and individual needs. Finally, we make time and space in each meeting to gather the next steps and people's needs in order to set the agenda for the next meeting (which centers community, respects people's needs and time, and ensures that our meeting topics are not set by a single voice).

Another seemingly small but mighty action is leveraging the first few moments of a meeting, consultation, or gathering by beginning with a centering activity (Parker, 2018). Practices that we implement include guided meditation, a collective breath, or reading a poem and using a modified circle to share what comes up. In all "the work," we hold space to listen, build trust and have tough conversations, whether it be about a design problem, the real fears, and impacts around our local and regional political climate, or grappling alongside faculty who are trying to dismantle white supremacy culture. And, of equal importance, we make space for joy - for celebrating our successes- we do this through conversation, but also through our reporting processes. Finally, we are always considering what we are documenting and our reporting processes by acting on the following questions: who can use the documentation and how can it be used? How do we articulate the successes and challenges of the group, keeping in mind people's needs based on classification, tenure status, and more - which requires incredible trust between everyone involved?

We recognize that we are a unique blend of instructional designer, faculty developer, facilitator, teacher, and project manager. Where this becomes an incredible asset is in our ability to build authentic, caring, and trusting relationships with faculty and other campus partners. Bringing together our skills, grounded in the values we've discussed, allows us to co-create systems, processes, and relationships that become the glue that holds together the work of various projects: the values provide direction for decision-making on small choices, like defining roles in a group or scheduling a meeting, to larger decisions, like ensuring that our institution is funding speakers in an equitable way. These systems become one where our collaborators know what to expect from us. Examples of this include co-creating the writing of goals and objectives, articulating the values of a team, developing clear but flexible timelines, designing meetings in a way that honors everyone's time and expertise, and collaboratively writing a reflection that everyone can use in their end-of-year faculty reflection. Staying accountable to these expectations is operationalizing care, for both the people and the work.

### **Where Do We Go from Here?**

Going back to the values in the visual, we ask, "Where do we go from here and why?" Firstly, as our work continues to evolve in this way, we have to be sure we are "practicing what we preach." We are constantly in conversation with each other about how we are caring for our own needs to be sure we can show up fully to this work. Like many other professionals, as our

work changes, so does the demand on our mental and emotional energy. We continue to develop systems and strategies for ourselves, such as creating spaces in our calendar for collaboration and working meetings for us, respecting and understanding our own boundaries, and asking for what we need from each other. All of this supports our efforts to remain connected, healthy, able to contribute - and more importantly, able to call each other in when we need to re-calibrate, rest, or acknowledge failure or a need for change.

Secondly, we work to balance the implementation of systems and processes grounded in our philosophy in many different settings while keeping an open mind and the ability to change the process based on needs. It is a difficult line to walk sometimes as “flexibility” within a group can quickly slip into chaos and unhealthy work boundaries/habits for everyone involved. However, this is why we make space for reflection and circle processes when working on collaborative projects with multiple partners. As we reflect on our experiences in various settings (interdisciplinary projects, faculty consultations, Libraries committees, etc.), we learn and build our repository of critical instructional design practices so that we can adopt and adapt this philosophy by applying the values of critical digital pedagogy and open pedagogy. Finally, we hope to have more opportunities to be in conversation with many communities about this work. If our work is going to be liberatory and meaningful, then it must continue to center connection; ultimately, connection to ourselves and each other is the key to resisting oppressive systems and building communities of care.

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