Commonplace •

Equity in Knowledge Production

Kelsey Dufresne

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This past summer of 2021, I *virtually/digitally* attended the [Digital Pedagogy Lab](#) (DPL) with the hope of learning more about equitable design implementation that I could bring back to my classroom teaching and own personal learning.

For context, I am a [student, a teacher](#), and a library affiliate (what I call myself for being a part-time Digital Project Coordinator for my institution's library and the [Open Knowledge Center](#)). And each of these roles constantly co-exist with each other — informing how I learn,

how I work, and how I teach in each role.

With DPL, I wanted to gain criticality to evaluate the choices I make (or refrain from making) when I design projects and curricula — and when I engage in academic discourse more broadly.

And importantly — as [Sasha Costanza-Chock](#) reminds us: design should not be considered exclusively by who is recognized as “designers.”

What is design? It is not confined to products or spaces. Design is every action done with intention. We are all designers.

Librarians design.

Teachers and educators design.

Academic design.

Students design.

Poets, engineers, farmers, photographers, neighbors, families, friends all design.

We all design. And we can draw upon design to strive for more equitable practices of learning, sharing, and producing knowledge

Personally, I am interested in community-centered design, education, and something that I am calling critical care.

Frameworks

community-centered design

collaboration

inclusion

co-design

critical care

data feminism

discursive design

design justice

data justice
+ ethics

education

digital humanities

storytelling +
storysharing

multimodality

critical making

As I participated in DPL, I realized how much these frameworks overlap with those of Inclusive Design and Design Justice.

This was evident to me, firstly, through the focus on anti-exclusionary design which I felt corresponded to my critical care. Then I saw a pointed emphasis on community-centered design through Inclusive Design and Design Justice. And lastly, I have felt compelled to share what I have learned with others, aligning with my own work in and with education.

CRITICAL CARE

If you are not familiar with this phrase, “critical care,” that is okay — because neither am I. But I needed something to describe how I simultaneously strive to lead with care *and* criticality. If you have a term for this, please let me know. Till then —

At the start of DPL, I was struck by the realization that my own default is to consider access, not exclusion. This switch results in questions like *Who has/doesn't have access?* shifting to *Who is excluded from this? Why?*

This is not to say that we must not consider access, but rather to illustrate that we must consider exclusion — and prioritize anti-exclusion.

But how do we identify exclusion? What is it?

In [“Mismatch,” Kat Holmes](#) identifies that there are five elements contributing to the cycle of exclusion:*

1. What we make
2. Why we make
3. Who makes it
4. How it is made
5. Who uses it

*this cycle is not sequential, but rather iterative

In exploring these elements, we can (and should) strive to consider who is excluded, under what conditions this exclusion occurs, and how our actions reinforce preexisting structures of exclusion.

“Mismatch” → Kat Holmes

1. INCLUSION ISN'T NICE -- IT'S CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO
2. INCLUSION IS IMPERFECT
3. INCLUSION IS ONGOING

When we understand
exclusion as a
cycle, we can
recognize the ways
that our design
choices can lead to
mismatching

Importantly, anti-exclusionary work is messy and difficult work. It is disruptive to the norm — but knowing that which is normative is harmful, hurtful, and painful to so many,

it is necessary work. And it is work that can be accomplished through community-centered design.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED DESIGN

DPL: Inclusive Design

Inclusive Design recognizes that the “one size fits all” model is ineffective — and we should adopt the mindset of “one size fits one.”

INCLUSIVE DESIGN.

3 core dimensions:

1. **Recognize diversity & uniqueness:** mass solutions don't work → diverse needs require diverse solutions
2. **Prioritize inclusive tools & processes:** teams should be diverse as possible with value placed in lived experience and without tokenization and subjugation
3. **Aim for a broader beneficial impact:** be aware of context and impact, and effect benefit impacts

In doing so, Inclusive Design emphasizes the power and significance of working with others towards a shared goal through co-design and sustained collaboration.

DPL: Design Justice

Design Justice considers how just designs are more needed than good or efficient designs.

Design Justice.

Design Justice rethinks design processes, centralizing those who are normally marginalized by design, and using collaborative processes/practices to address the deepest challenges that our communities face.

Design is used to dismantle structures that marginalize, dehumanize, subjugate, and oppress.

DESIGN'S IMPACT > DESIGNER'S INTENTION

Core questions:

1. Who participated in the design process?
2. Who was harmed by the design?
3. Who benefitted from the design?

Community participation & Leadership accountability

In utilizing the above core questions, I investigated how my own campus enacts exclusion — namely through the physical campus itself.

Importantly, DPL emphasized that Design Justice relies on several principles to guide just design that strives to challenge and disrupt exploitative systems of injustice:

1. define a set of principles by which you will work
2. distance yourself from those that work against those principles
3. rethink representation

4. consider your negative impact
5. get involved & build on preexisting/in-process work
6. humble yourself: *design with, not for*
7. learn about privilege & anti-oppression → and confront it
8. know when not to design
9. shape alternative futures
10. **begin by listening**

By following these principles, Design Justice encourages us to consider: **How can design better support communities facing injustice?** and **How can we foster design processes, and not just products, that reflect these values?**

In doing so, Design Justice prioritizes the community over the so-called expert or professional (as these individuals *are* the experts). Therefore, enacting Design Justice is centering and amplifying the voices of those who are most

Design Justice:
INDIVIDUALS ARE EXPERTS OF
THEIR OWN LIVES & LIVED
EXPERIENCE

marginalized to provide sustained opportunities for healing and empowerment.

EDUCATION

Action items: Prioritizing Equity

Below I have outlined a brief list of strategies specific to Inclusive Design and Design Justice. Additionally, I have included Working Openly — as this was a method referred to throughout the entirety of DPL.

Inclusive Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prototyping • Feedback • Use-cases • Co-design • Inviting collaboration
Design Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Talking and Listening • Reflecting • Co-design to develop approach • Storytelling
Working Openly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly-accessible and discoverable materials • Transparent sharing • Blogs, Twitter, Google Docs

The work of Inclusive Design and Design Justice can and should be implemented across the board, but I saw significant opportunities for implementation for libraries and classrooms (especially since these are the spaces that I most frequent in my own work/life).

As such, the graphic below explores strategies and opportunities specific to libraries and classrooms (grade school and higher edu).

Visit the web version of this article to view interactive content.

Ultimately, the suggestions for classrooms and libraries are very similar — and they both boil down to prioritizing equity from the ground up. More specifically, these suggestions all correspond to communicating with those impacted by our designs/work, connecting and collaborating with those same individuals — and ultimately building and supporting community.

Moving forward: take these suggestions, implement them, share them, build off of them and make them more applicable for your own work. Additionally, develop your *own* plans for growth. Critically evaluate how your own actions, daily choices, and outputs reinforce injustice.

Construct your plans for growth

Outline 4-10 principles you will look to and reflect on to practice anti-exclusion in your work to strive towards more just and equitable forms of knowledge sharing, teaching, and learning.

Here are guiding questions to assist you in developing your plans:

1. What from this presentation was new to you?
2. What was confusing or difficult to hear?
3. What are your own personal blind spots/biases that you need to keep in mind?
4. How will you prioritize justice and equity?

A variation of this essay was published by Kelsey Dufresne as “[Digital Pedagogy Lab: 2021](#)” with *Medium*.