

Cultivating a Community of Care within Design Education

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Educators have a responsibility to create a learning environment that fosters individual and collective growth. Yet, university settings often focus on evaluating content knowledge without centering the people in the learning experience. We might ask, what does it mean to educate students about other ways of being in the world by centering their identities? What does it mean to create educational space for multiple ways of being through a focus on care? In Fall 2020, four educators hosted 10, two-hour workshops with 20 co-learners to think about our identities and how these identities shaped our ways of being in the world. We participated in activities that involved telling stories of our lifelong journeys with our identities, considering identity and power relationships, and having challenging conversations across differences. We created a community in which co-learners cared for one another, shared stories about their lives, and collectively engaged in fruitful dialogue among people from different worlds. In this presentation, the co-learners help us reflect on what we did as educators to facilitate these workshops. We offer reflections on our approach and the key considerations we took in cultivating a caring virtual learning space for collaborative reflection on identities.

design education; identity; reflection; care

About the Authors:

Wendy Roldan, Andrew Berry, Calvin Liang, and Burren Peil are all educators who share a deep commitment to create educational spaces that cultivate care and honor the lived experiences of every co-learner. We engaged in this work in the United States while the COVID-19 pandemic was disproportionately taking Black and brown lives, the U.S. presidential election was surfacing uncertainty and violent crimes, and folks around the world were organizing mutual aid groups in communities. Collectively, we have experiences across educational, healthcare, and design settings. Wendy is a PhD candidate who does research on equity, design, and education. Andrew is a design research who works to improve healthcare for people with complex health and social needs. Calvin is a PhD candidate who researches how design can support (or not support) LGBTQ+ people with their health. Burren is a PhD student researching STEM culture, mental health, identity, and embodiment.