Envisioning Hopeful Futures: Designing Racially Just Online Learning

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Abstract
This autoethnographic study examined the influence of my positionality in designing a hopeful, racially just online learning. Hope stems from an innate belief in the possibilities for a brighter future. Therefore, hope involves embracing strengths. In this paper, I explore the influence of my positionality on my online course design through autoethnography. I analyze how feminism has impacted my online course design and strategies for cultivating teaching, social, and cognitive presence for racially just online learning. Racially just online learning aims for representational justice, recognitive justice, and redistributive justice to restore to people their history, culture, language, and dignity. I describe how my online course design is rooted in human-centered learning design with empathy where learners' cultural capital, lived experiences, and funds of knowledge are valued and honored. In this trusting, caring online community, open educational practices and appreciative inquiry empower learners with learner agency for a hopeful and racially just future.

Keywords: online learning, racially just, feminism, autoethnography, culturally affirming

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Distance learning offers flexible learning options with anytime, anywhere learning that is appealing to diverse backgrounds and life contexts (Martin & Bollinger, 2023; Pelletier et al., 2024). Enrollments in online learning have continued to increase from 2021 to 2022 and they are anticipated to grow in 2025 (Garret et al., 2023). However, despite the prevalence, preference, and practicality of online learning in the lives of traditional and non-traditional students, student retention in online learning has been a challenge (Greenland & Moore, 2022; Kember et al., 2023; Vinton, 2024). It is anticipated that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds will significantly increase in the U.S. by 2050 (Parker et al., 2019). Yet, the needs of racially diverse learners are not met as online learning continues to favor the privileged (Pouezavara, 2016). As a result, marginalized identities and backgrounds are more likely to drop out from an online course due to perceived lack of support, access, community, and belonging resulting in disengagement and attrition (Gurjar, 2024; Dziuban et al., 2018). Creating a sense of belonging by valuing diverse identities, learners' aspirations, and lived experiences is essential to online student retention (Gurjar & Bai, 2023). These lived experiences provide authentic and valuable insights into sociocultural contexts to empathize and design instruction best suited to learners' contextual needs (Gurjar & Elwood, in press).

Empathy is an essential attribute in humanizing online learning to support and retain online learners (Gurjar, 2024). Empathizing with learners begins with instructors being introspective of their own positionality and how it influences their course design. It is essential that we reflect on our beliefs, values, and social, cultural, and linguistic assumptions (Gunawardena et al., 2019; Gurjar & Bai, 2023) as awareness leads to instructor agency in designing culturally affirming and racially just learning to support student success and retention in online learning. I engaged in this autoethnographic work to reflect on my positionality and how it informs my values and beliefs in course design and pedagogy. This work offers a unique perspective based on lived experiences situated in specific sociocultural contexts to design online learning for global learners with sensitivity and responsiveness to various cross-cultural contexts. Furthermore, it provides an insight into possibilities of applying a feminist lens in designing culturally affirming online learning that strives toward racial justice. I describe how representational justice, recognitive justice, and redistributive justice (Fraser, 2005) could be incorporated into online course design while designing for teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. This work contributes by describing and explaining culturally affirming empathic design that leverages lived experiences, cultural capital, and funds of knowledge. This human-centered design values democratizing knowledge through open education with the hope for equitable access and representation. Learner agency and choice is valued in a caring, trusting, and supportive community to empower learners.

Literature Review

Online learning is informed by the community of inquiry that has been described as "a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and to confirm mutual understanding" (Garrison & Akyol, 2013, p. 105). Community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 2000) views learning as a collaborative-constructivist phenomenon that is centered around building a community of inquiry to engage learners in critical discourse, collaborative meaning making, and reflection to attain deep and meaningful educational outcomes (Arbaugh et al., 2008). It has three overlapping and highly interdependent elements: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. Online learning is presented in this paper through the lens of intersectional feminism (Romero-Hall, 2022) and how it manifests in the community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 2001) with instructor-learner interaction or teaching presence that plays a vital role in intentional design

of the online course for inclusivity (Gurjar & Bai, 2023) and facilitation of dialogue (Hall & Gurjar, 2023). Feminism espouses valuing intersectional identities, diversity, and lived experiences of online learners (Gurjar & Gurjar, 2024) and for all human beings to be treated with dignity and respect. Incorporating feminism in online learning supports students of all backgrounds as it is based on a foundation of care, community, and value for diverse lived experiences. Feminism also focuses on providing access to democratize online learning (Jiminez-Cortes & Aires, 2021). It aims to disrupt hierarchies for a more participatory learning, with consideration for the needs and interests of women (Koseoglu, 2020) as women may face barriers in the global contexts regarding gender roles and responsibilities, investment of time, and gendered power dynamics (Herman & Kirkup, 2017; Lazou & Bainbridge, 2019).

Teaching Presence

Teaching presence is a multidimensional construct consisting of the design, facilitation of online discourse, and direct instruction to support online learners (Arbaugh et al., 2008). Teaching presence is "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educational worthwhile outcomes" (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 5). Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) found teaching presence to be crucial in the satisfaction and success of an online course. Further, teaching presence supports social interaction in online learning (Caskurlu et al., 2021).

Designing teaching presence with feminism can lead to more relational and humanizing pedagogies where the focus is on building mutual understanding through dialectical discourse and valuing of lived experiences situated in different contextual settings (Gurjar & Gurjar, 2024). Feminism also seeks to disrupt hierarchies and power structures to aim for more equitable and harmonious participation where every individual is provided the conditions to thrive. Introspection and intentionality are essential components while designing for teaching presence (Gurjar & Bai, 2023) as instructors reflect on their assumptions, biases, beliefs, and values and how it influences their online course design. Online course design has been described as a "context-specific form of instructional design oriented to online learning spaces. Therefore, online course design focuses on both the features of the course and processes and procedures used to create that online course" (Martin et al., 2019, p. 35). Therefore, teaching presence involves introspection and thoughtful planning while designing the course for cognitive and social processes to realize a particular vision. Feminism envisions online learning to be accessible, equitable, supportive, collaborative, caring, and empathetic that is designed for leveraging lived experiences, multiple perspectives, and cultural capital to empower learners with choice and agency.

Social Presence

Social presence is "the ability to identify with a group or a course of study, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, develop personal and affective relationships progressively as a way of projecting their personalities" (Garrison, 2011, p. 34). Social presence plays a role in building a sense of community to support student learning (Borup et al., 2020; Gunawardena, 2020; Gurjar, 2020; Koseoglu, 2020; Lowenthal et al., 2023; Sung & Mayer, 2012). Social presence has been associated with course satisfaction (Akyol & Garrison, 2011; Richardson et al., 2017; Swan & Shih, 2005), critical thinking (Armellini & De Stefani, 2016), student participation and perceived learning (Hostetter & Busch, 2013; Joksimovic et al., 2015; Swan & Shih, 2005), and student retention (Boston et

al., 2009; Muljana & Luo, 2019; Richardson et al., 2015; Walsh et al., 2024). It is clear the crucial importance of social presence in building a community. Online researchers have explored best ways to develop connectedness and community in distance learning (Lowenthal et al., 2023; Trespalacios et al., 2021).

Feminism provides a valid approach to building an online community that is rooted in principles of social justice and equity (Fraser, 2005; Gurjar & Gurjar, 2024). By disrupting gendered dynamics and the status quo, feminism focuses on dialectical conversations to empathize; it values diversity of lived experiences to understand and care for the well-being of others by developing a social justice orientation. Therefore, feminism provides a pathway to building trusting relationships that is rooted in shared humanity, dignity, authenticity, and multiplicity of lived experiences and knowledge-building processes. Care, compassion, and community foster student well-being in online learning (Cox et al., 2021). The goal of feminism is for all individuals to thrive and fulfill their potential and purpose in life. The consequence of a lack of support in online learning is high attrition, especially among students from marginalized and disadvantaged communities (Dziuban et al., 2018).

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence is "the extent to which participants are able to construct meaning through sustained interaction" (Garrison et al., 2001, p. 81). Based on the Practical Inquiry model (Garrison et al., 2001), the initiation phase consists of the triggering event that stimulates awareness and dialogue with other learners. The next phase involves exploring multimedia and researching to get to know more about the topic. Exploration may alternate between reflecting privately and socially exploring the topic with others. The transaction between the text and the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978) happens during exploration and integration phase for collaborative and individual meaning-making. The third stage is the integration phase, where the new information found during the exploration phase is integrated with learners' prior or background information through critical reflection. Information is also integrated when learners share multiple perspectives with narratives and counter narratives. It is vitally important to center marginalized perspectives, voices, and lived experiences during this stage for racial justice. Integration involves making connections and solutions to problems may be formed during this stage. The last stage is resolution, where the solutions are proposed through sustained online discourse and reflection. This proposed solution may be tested vicariously in online learning. Sadaf, Wu, and Martin (2021) conducted systematic literature review on cognitive presence and concluded that more qualitative-based research is needed to explore novel instructional approaches, learning environments, and relationship of cognitive presence to other presences.

Designing cognitive presence with feminism honors multiple ways of communicating and knowledge constructing. It values multiple perspectives, cultural capital, and varied lived experiences to enrich online discourse and collaboration toward shared goals (Gurjar & Bai, 2023; Hall & Gurjar, 2023). Feminism views knowledge to be situated in specific contexts (Haraway, 1988). Therefore, all knowledge is partial and incomplete. This understanding gives individuals the humility to know that their perspective may be limited, and to genuinely listen with empathy to know more (Gurjar & Gurjar, 2024). Feminist theory encourages a dialectical discourse to learn from one another. Furthermore, feminism believes that knowledge is grounded in lived experiences and, therefore, wisdom and understanding generated by people in living their lives are valuable and valid (Collins, 2009; Sprague & Kobrynnowicz, 1999).

Methodology: Autoethnography

I discuss online learning in this paper through the lens of intersectional feminism (Romero-Hall, 2022) and how it manifests in the community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 2001). Autoethnography is a qualitative research method. Qualitative research aims to investigate the phenomenon under study through a humanistic lens employing the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2009). The term "autoethnography" was initially used by Karl Heider (1975) to describe a method used by cultural insiders to tell their stories. Ellis et al. (2011) describes it as "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (p. 1). It involves cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008). Autoethnography combines tenets of both autobiography and ethnography and is both a process and a product. It is an "autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Thus, it recognizes and acknowledges subjectivity and emotionality.

Autoethnography looks inwards through self-reflections and outwards to go beyond one's world through introspection, self-consciousness, concrete action, embodiment, and emotion (Ellis, 2004). Reflexivity helps researchers develop critical consciousness and self-awareness as researchers position themselves front and center in autoethnography (Mao et al., 2023). Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that meets empirical social sciences American Educational Research Association (AERA) standards (Hughes et al., 2012; Mao et al., 2023).

Ellis et al. (2011) noted that postmodern scholars sought accessible, evocative, and meaningful research grounded in personal experiences and stories that would deepen our empathy for differences (Ellis & Buchner, 2000). Scholars also recognized that there are multiple ways of knowing, valuing, believing, writing, and speaking; and that "conventional ways of doing and thinking were narrow, limiting, and parochial" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 2). They noted that employing autoethnography as a methodology opened a broader lens to the world and embraced inclusivity by shunning rigid perceptions of research. Autoethnography has been regarded as an "emancipatory discourse" (Mendez, 2013, p. 282) as "those being emancipated are representing themselves instead of being colonized by others and subjected to their agendas or relegated to the role of second-class citizens" (Richards, 2008, p. 1,724). Autoethnography employs research as a socially just, socially conscious, and political act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Autoethnography can act as a tool to transform education and a catalyst for change in education by describing and seeking changes in cultural, political, social, and economic systems (Mao et al., 2023). Bradshaw (2017) noted that critical pedagogies develop dispositions and habits of mind to continually question your practice through dialectical engagements.

Romero Hall (2022) describes the personal narrative as the storytelling of experiences that uses interrogation and self-reflection. These critical reflections are evocative descriptions of personal experiences. Personal narrative writing enables researchers to explore internal emotions and feelings, external contexts and environments, and present, past, and future as temporal conditions (Clandinin & Conelly, 2000). Personal narratives, a form of autoethnography, are "stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 7). Narrative writing enables researchers to explore internal emotions and feelings, external contexts and environments, and present, past, and future as temporal conditions (Clandinin & Conelly, 2000). Personal narratives aim to inspire critical reflection in readers (Bochner & Ellis, 1996).

Research Question

This qualitative study employed autoethnography as the research method. Specifically, I used personal narratives as a form of autoethnographic method to critically examine the following research question: How does my positionality as a feminist influence my online course design, particularly learning activities and strategies for social and racial justice? I explore this question by reflecting on my lived experiences situated in various sociocultural contexts and how they shaped my values and beliefs in designing for racially just online learning. Racial justice in this paper is conceptualized as restoring to people their dignity by valuing and honoring their identities, language, culture, and history. Value denotes a strength-based lens regarding cultural and linguistic identities and communities. Racial justice can be attained through representational justice, recognitive justice, and redistributive justice (Fraser, 2003).

Data Collection

Data were collected by participating in a positionality workshop arranged by a professional organization. Positionality is an individual's characteristics related to their origin and group affiliations. It is essential to consider one's positionality while doing an autoethnography (Adams, 2008; Bolen & Adams, 2017). Data were collected in three different phases: Before the workshop, during the workshop, and after the workshop. Before the workshop, we were asked to reflect on our positionality by thinking about various characteristics that define us as individuals and as cultural beings. We used the wheel of identity to think about primary, secondary, professional, and sociocultural identities. Then, we situated our intersectional identities on the United States power and privilege wheel. During the workshop, we had focus group discussions on Zoom. After the workshop, we had one-on-one writing workshop sessions and discussions with the facilitators and peers.

Data were triangulated through identity and U.S. power and privilege wheel artifact analysis, followed by journaling and critical reflections before the workshop, focus group discussions and communal reflections with other practitioners during the workshop, and then revisiting and refining retrospective reflections, with continual discussions with peers, after the positionality workshop as a secondary reflexive practice.

Data Analysis

I engaged in a multi-layered analysis over an entire year. I divide this multilayered analysis in three significant stages.

<u>Stage 1: Before the Positionality Workshop</u>

I engaged in artifact analysis and journaling before the workshop. Before the workshop, we were given two tasks to complete after critical examination of "positionality in the contexts wheel" and the "U.S. power and privilege wheel." The task prompts are listed as follows:

> Task 1: Positionality refers to an individual's constellation of characteristics. Identify different contexts where you research/practice and reflect on how your positionality relates to the contexts.
>
> Task 2: Review this positionality wheel. Identify a few characteristics of your positionality that influence your success as a researcher. Identify positionality that can be an asset for your research/practice. Identify positionality that introduces challenges or barriers to your success as a researcher/practitioner.

I did critical analysis using the positionality (identity) wheel and the U.S. power and privilege wheel situating myself within it for critical analysis. As I analyzed and reflected, I took journaling notes to bring them to our positionality workshop.

I describe my emic perspective followed by my etic perspective on my sociocultural contexts. An emic perspective takes an insider's perspective on a cultural context. Therefore, it provides a valuable perspective to outsiders to empathize and understand sociocultural norms and mores that can pose as affordances or constraints in online learning design. An emic perspective is based on cultural differences. On the contrary, an etic perspective is an outsider's perspective based on cultural similarities or shared values of our common humanity. Being away from India, I was able to view the Indian sociocultural context through both lenses to bring a certain amount of objectivity in an otherwise subjective narrative characteristic of autoethnography.

I present the emic (internal) perspective on my sociocultural contexts. The validity of the emic perspective is measured through my introspective reflections on my lived experiences and storytelling by relatives who are currently situated within the sociocultural context of India. The emic perspective analyzes concepts and processes in culture-specific systems to focus on cultural differences to interpret human behavior. The emic (focal) perspective is an internal review of culture (Chen, 2010). My retrospective journaling reflection is presented below.

> I was born in India in a middle-class family that provided me access to a quality education. I grew up in India with arranged marriages as the norm. A woman's worth was evaluated during these transactional family interactions. Widespread colorism prevailed in India thereby negatively impacting women. Women's agency and choice was lacking in significant decision-making processes as elders were considered wise to make those decisions. Patriarchy, a social system where the family descent is through the son, manifested in male dominance in positions of power and privilege, gender inequality, oppression, and violence against women. India has a deeply entrenched caste system. It persists currently as a manifestation of social class with deep inequities between the rich and the poor. Historically, India was colonized by the British for almost 200 years. The impact of colonization and the caste system perpetuated the status quo, social disparities, and inequities between haves and have-nots. I grew up in Kenya (East Africa) during my formative years. Social inequities existed between various ethnic groups in Kenya under an oppressive, authoritarian one-man state rule and dictatorship that lasted in Kenya for 25 years. These experiences within my sociocultural contexts formed my positional framework of feminism that values equality of rights and social justice.

The etic (global) perspective is the external review of culture that focuses on the universals and cultural similarities of human behavior (Chen, 2010). I measured and validated my etic perspective through discussions with peers who discussed that similar situations also exist in their cultural contexts. Patriarchy in every cultural context perpetuates an imbalance in power structures, power dynamics, gender inequities in various areas of life, and subtleties of oppressive behavior (Gnanadass et al., 2021; Weaver, 2015; Wilkerson, 2020). In thinking about the etic perspective on my sociocultural contexts, I viewed the universality of the human experience of patriarchy as portrayed in *Barbie*. My retrospective etic reflection is below.

> The commonality I see between the Indian sociocultural context and globally is that patriarchy and casteism exist worldwide as people construct social hierarchies for exerting power and privilege based on caste, gender, race, religion, or some other social marker. The origin of oppression has historical roots in different cultural contexts and have existed as the oppressor colonizes the oppressed to exert power,

> dominance, and status quo. A person who may be an oppressor (such as higher caste/class in their country of origin) in one cultural context may become the oppressed in another social context. Therefore, it is essential to critically reflect and do our part in decolonizing our attitudes to not harm others. Our shared humanity demands that we develop an awareness of our own biases, assumptions, evaluative judgments, and behaviors and intentionally contribute toward the social good by advocating for human rights, dignity, and well-being of other humans.

Stage 2: During the Positionality Workshop

During the workshop, we shared our strengths and our Task 1 and 2 notes as a whole group, and then, in Zoom breakout rooms, we engaged in deep focus group discussions for communal meaning-making through deeply introspective and vulnerable discussions. This socially mediated meaning-making was very powerful as an autoethnographic triangulation strategy as it is situated within the paradigms of authenticity and vulnerability involving critical reflexive praxis.

Stage 3: After the Positionality Workshop

After the workshop, I continued reflecting introspectively how my research and practice is influenced by my positionality situated in my past and present sociocultural contexts. To examine my practice, I used syllabi, assignments, archived materials, and in-class activities to reflect upon my online course design. Following the workshop, we had writing workshops where dialogic conversations and support continued throughout the year. We had the flexibility to be open to one another's ideas, to reframe our thinking, and engage in perspective-taking, and sometimes to go out of our comfort zone to think and analyze differently. It was a productive struggle to engage in this iterative, continual work.

Findings and Discussion

I would like to revisit the research question: How does my positionality as a feminist influence my online course design, particularly learning activities and strategies for social and racial justice? Feminism advocates for developing critical consciousness (Hooks, 1994; Richardson, 2018) and deep introspection into our values, beliefs, and biases and assumptions to evaluate how they influence online course design. I empathize with my learners and their contexts and view them as possessing their unique community and individual strengths that I can tap into while striving to mitigate any barriers existing in their contexts.

Teaching Presence

My online teaching presence or learner-instructor interaction with online course design and facilitation of dialogue is based on the following considerations.

Human-Centered, Empathic Course Design with Critical Reflections

I value human-centered learning design where I empathize with learners to see the course design and learning experiences from their perspective (Gurjar & Elwood, in press; Parrish, 2016). Having lived in different sociocultural contexts, I gained insights into how cultural context and social inequities can influence online learning. Seeing the course design from learners' perspective ensures that learning experiences are designed keeping their sociocultural contexts and contextual factors in mind for a relevant, enjoyable, and satisfying learner experience. Schmidt and Huang (2021) noted that Learning Experience Design (LXD) "seeks to promote empathetic understanding of the learner, their socio-cultural context, as

well as the context in which they engage in socially mediated meaning-making" (p. 149). Designers can engage in empathic forecasting (Tracey & Baaki, 2022, Tracey & Hutchinson, 2019) that predicts how learners situated in a particular cultural context would respond to learning experience (LX) from their unique vantage point (Tang & Porter-Voss, 2023). If feasible, it is best for learning designers to immerse themselves in a particular sociocultural context to authentically get to know their learners' sociocultural contexts for them to be able to design racial just online learning.

Kourprie and Visser's (2009) four phases of empathic design framework with discover, immerse, connect, and detach. The designer discovers by first entering the learner's world, then immersing themselves in it through participant observations, and connecting with the learner through appreciative inquiry, and finally detaching themselves to objectively examine the design for relevant authentic learning experiences that would be meaningful and enjoyable in a particular context (Gurjar & Elwood, in press). Researchers have posited that cultural differences can impact human-computer interaction to determine learners' sense of satisfaction (Vatrapu & Suthers, 2010). Cultural element can also influence various design aspects, including interface and web design (Evers & Day, 1997; Marcus & Gould, 2000). Most importantly, understanding how learners engage in technology-mediated interactions (Wallace et al., 2013) can help us design culturally responsive online learning as learner satisfaction is associated with higher rates of retention for online learners.

I care and empathize with my learners' life challenges and socio-cultural or contextual constraints. Flexibility is built into the assignment submissions and empathy is conveyed through syllabus statements. Empathy is also seeing the design of learning activities, assignments, and partnership experiences through the eyes of our learners and stakeholders. In my hybrid courses, experiential learning opportunities are built into the course to apply theory into practice in an authentic community-based setting. The feedback loop between the instructor, pre-service teachers, and classroom teachers is helpful in the iterative design of our community-based learning experiences. Critical reflection (Schön, 1982) in online learning is essential to ongoing self-evaluation and setting of desired goals.

Racial just online learning embeds culturally diverse literature, diverse authors, and provides opportunities to co-create and co-design culturally relevant materials. Furthermore, during the facilitation of discourse in online learning, lived experiences situated in diverse racial and ethnic contexts are welcomed and honored. The humanity and dignity of each person is valued, and their individual contributions are valued as well. This ensures recognitive and representational justice in online learning to infuse hopefulness for a brighter future.

Democratizing Knowledge Through Open Education

I value democratizing knowledge through open education. Access to materials behind a paywall and the cost of materials can pose barriers to learners with limited resources. Hence, I believe free access to open educational resources (OERS) help in easing the financial strain on learners coming from diverse sociocultural backgrounds and helps toward redistributive justice. Helping attain true equity involves training learners how to use these open educational resources in online learning effectively and efficiently by developing digital literacies and use of participatory technologies.

Open educational practices (OEPs) enable peer sharing and connecting with others to learn across geographical boundaries to learn anytime and anywhere surpassing temporal and spatial boundaries. They cultivate skills and dispositions to openly share and learn alongside others and from others in the online learning community, instilling humility and graciousness, positive emotions that sustain lifelong learning. These open educational practices include blogging and participation in online virtual communities and affinity groups for learners to contribute unique perspective and listen to diverse voices to learn and grow. OEPs that are

enabled by the 5 R's—retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute (Wiley & Hilton, 2008)—can include creating free open educational content, renewable assignments for peer learning, and social annotation and socially mediated collaborative meaning making where marginalized perspectives are valued and honored. Co-design with students offers opportunities for cultural relevance where they bring in their culturally relevant content. I have implemented renewable assignments and blogging as OEPs in my hybrid courses to facilitate open sharing and peer learning. The goal has always been to democratize knowledge to improve access and opportunity for all learners.

Freedom of Choice and Accessibility

As a multilingual female who grew up under patriarchy, I value equitable access, accessibility, and freedom of choice in online learning. Further, many learners come to us with invisible disabilities. Therefore, ensuring accessibility to mitigate any perceivable barriers is a crucial for creating equitable conditions for all learners to access online content in a language, format, and at a time they deem appropriate. Self-paced online modules, asynchronous online learning, and flexibility in check-ins (multiple days and times) accommodate the needs of women especially those with caretaking roles in international contexts. Further, translanguaging and codeswitching between two languages is an important part of bilingual identity and the online course design needs to account for linguistic diversity of online learners. Local dialectal differences in English based on the global context should be planned as well. For example, English used in India has a regional variety with a mix of Hindi and English words, and different intonation and stress patterns influenced by the local language.

Universal Design of Learning (UDL) (Meyer et al., 2013) ensures accessibility with multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of expression. It mitigates barriers in accessing information for online learners and fosters conditions for equitable participation based on interest and choice. Freedom of choice is important for cultivating learner agency in online learning as choice provides relevance (Keller, 1987). Incorporating UDL in online learning by providing choice in learning pathways will enhance relevance and motivation in learners to strive toward access and equity.

Leveraging Cultural Capital and Funds of Knowledge

Being an immigrant, I know that everyone has their unique ways of knowing, doing, communicating, learning, and living that are influenced by their native culture and backgrounds situated in specific sociocultural contexts. Cultural capital (Howard, 2018; Yosso, 2005) values these multiple ways of being in the world and considers these differences as benefits for our diverse society. Community is important to me. I grew up in a community-based culture and experienced the benefits of a large network of supportive relatives, neighbors, and community members.

I design for cognitive and social processes of online learning by leveraging Funds of Knowledge (Gonzales & Moll, 2022) and Cultural Capital (Howard, 2018; Yosso, 2005) residing in communities. Cultural capital or cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005) is a multidimensional construct that consists of aspirational capital with hopes and dreams, linguistic capital with languages and communication strengths of learners, familial capital with funds of knowledge of families and community strengths that can be leveraged, social capital with social connections and community resources, navigational capital in having the skill set to navigate unfamiliar or uncooperative spaces, and resistance capital to advocate for oneself and others. I design learning experiences to leverage these various forms of capital that I explain more in depth under social presence (see Figure 1).

Funds of knowledge (Gonzales & Moll, 2002; Moll, 2019)) concept indicates the practices families and communities have developed in living their lives are valuable. The

researcher "documents the funds of knowledge of families and re-present them based on the knowledge, resources, and strengths they possess" (p. 130). For example, my family back in India would freely dispense medical advice on every ailment that could be alleviated with a specific herb, spice, or food. This exemplifies the funds of knowledge concept of families. Enlisting and valuing the cultural contributions of family and community members leverages their funds of knowledge. For instance, family members could be invited as online storytellers and guest speakers to share their expertise. Funds of knowledge activity can be carefully structured to align with course learning outcomes. In my teacher educator context, we think about the funds of knowledge of children and families we work with in a school partnership community-based setting that can be online. These funds of knowledge are the linguistic and literacy practices that we could capitalize on to build upon children's prior knowledge for achieving personalized learning outcomes for them.

Appreciative Inquiry

I appreciate the dialogic, asset-based conversation in appreciative inquiry that focuses on strengths and empowers learners to make their own choices, thereby motivating them with learner agency. History tells us that marginalized, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) were not given choices in the land they wanted to stay or the schools they went to, or their right to vote in civil war era in the United States or equitable access to education and life choices in the global context. Marginalization occurs when the choice factor is taken away. Therefore, racial justice involves restoring people's dignity and worth by empowering them with choices and agency.

Appreciative inquiry (Bushe, 2012; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) is a versatile, asset-based strategy that leverages community and contextual strengths to promote learner agency. It uses the process of discovering one's purpose, appreciating the positive, dreaming of what could be and envisioning results, and designing and co-constructing, to deliver, innovate, and sustain. It can be used in any industry or organization. Facilitation of discourse between the instructor and learner occurs to facilitate deep reflection on the strengths that exist within the learner and in their environment to empower them to make decisions for achieving desired goals.

In teacher education, it is applicable in facilitating reflection with a strength-based approach when I supervise and mentor preservice teachers. I have used a similar strategy, SWOT analysis, to identify opportunities, strengths, areas of growth, and threats/barriers as a team with the preservice teacher (intern), supervising classroom teacher, and me (the college supervisor) using video conferencing technology in hybrid or blended learning in my distance education courses. Gratitude journaling online can scaffold the process of appreciative inquiry in identifying the moments, experiences, and strengths that are a "life-giving force" (purpose) or central assets in the online learner's life. The following table shows the process of appreciative inquiry with the prompts and examples from my online teacher-educator practice.

Table 1

Appreciative Inquiry Process and Prompts in Teacher Education

Process	Prompts
Discover and appreciate	What gives life? What are the "Life-Giving Forces" for you? What are the "central assets" in your team, group, or organization? What are the positive core strengths of your organization? For example, what are the central assets in the school or the classroom you are teaching? What makes you excited about teaching in this place? What is already working for you in student teaching?

Dream and envision results Produce a provocative proposition as a statement or a graphic (drawings or sketch notes)	What might be? For example, how do you envision a preferred future (teaching) grounded in past successes? The provocative statement or drawing bridges "what is" to "what might be."
Design and co-construct	What should be the ideal? For example: How do you envision the ideal? Let's look at the professional standards rubric to co-design your envisioned ideal with feedback (TC, CT, and CS feedback)
Destiny/deliver, innovate, and sustain	How to learn, adapt, adjust, and empower? For example: What do you think you need to adapt or adjust in your student teaching? How can I empower and support you?
Reflect and Plan (added component)	Metacognitive Reflection and Planning For example: What were some areas of your strengths and some areas of growth? What desired goals do you have for the next lesson?

Note: This is adapted from the original 4D model (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) for teacher education. "TC" is teacher candidate; "CT" is classroom teacher; and "CS" is the college supervisor.

Social Presence

Social presence (Garrison, 2011) or learner-learner interaction is important in online learning to establish a trusting community (Asino et al., 2021; Gurjar & Sivo, 2022). Humor, just-in-time spontaneous interactions (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009), and self-disclosure all help in building a trusting, collaborative community (Gurjar, 2020). I grew up in the oral storytelling tradition where my grandmother told Indian folklore. Through these cultural stories and proverbs, elders shared cultural wisdom and life lessons. Storytelling has a universal appeal in creating a community, and it is fascinating to see the similarities and differences in our cultural stories and lived experiences as human beings. We learn to see the shared humanity while appreciating the cultural differences through food, music, and cultural celebrations.

Having the positional framework of feminism, I leverage creative arts and poetry to build a community in online learning. Poetry such as "Where am I from?" and bio poems are leveraged to build a trusting community. Leveraging cultural heritage in icebreaker activities involving creative arts, storytelling, and performance poetry is a fun way to create a community that makes us see our shared humanity. I get to know my learners as human beings by learning about their aspirational capital—their hopes, dreams, and goals for their future. These aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) questions, inquiring into learners' aspirations, can be asked through the Google form at the beginning of the semester. In the social studies methods course, I ask my students about an advocacy topic they are passionate about and the

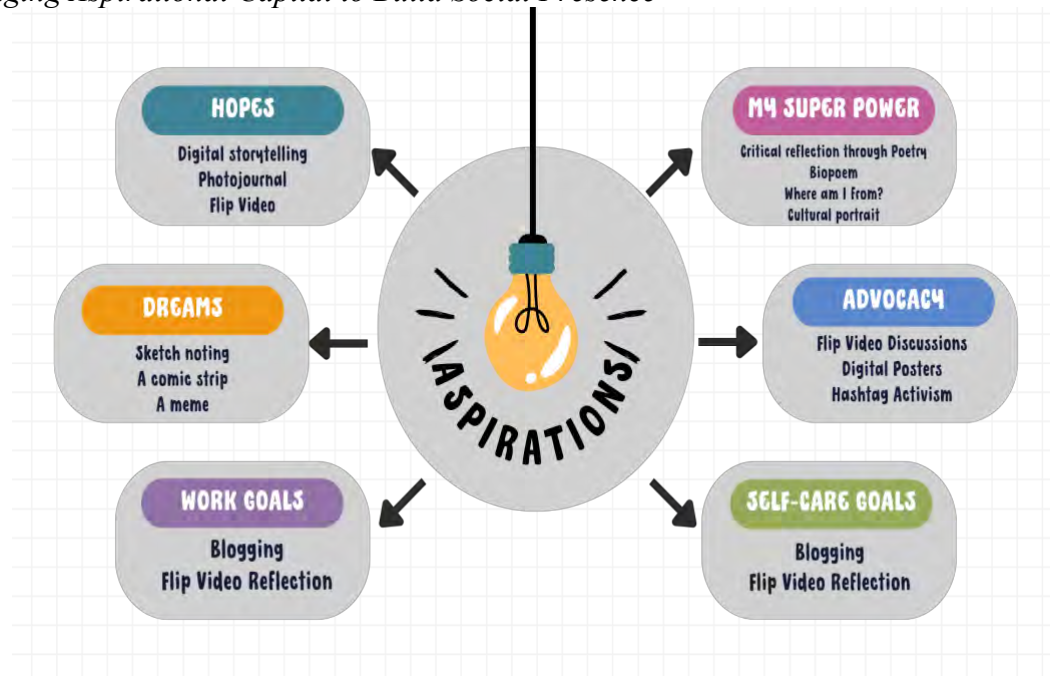
actions they have taken to work toward it, or a superpower they have and what it is about it that empowers them. This engages them in critical reflection on societal issues, civic engagement, and agency. Learning about students' passions, hopes, dreams, and aspirations lets me know my learners as human beings to develop empathy.

Creative ways to express aspirational capital and identity can be through poetry such as bio poems and "where I'm from" poems. Poetry is powerful in evoking emotions and memories and tapping into lived experiences. These could be composed creatively using multimedia tools with photographs, music, audio, and text. Instead of poetry, learners may doodle with drawings and words (sketch notes) to demonstrate their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. There are a variety of Doodle apps they may choose from. Socially mediated reflections on video technology, such as the Flip, can be a fun icebreaker to learn about students' cultural capital, such as a family tradition (festival) they enjoy, cultural proverbs they grew up with, their favorite cultural folktale with a trickster character, and their ethnic food dish and how they cook it.

Aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) involves learning about hopes, dreams, goals, strengths, and passions. It centers on the learner as a human being to get to know their needs, goals, and expectations in an online course. Providing a choice in creative ways for learners to express themselves motivates students to use their background knowledge, talents, and gifts. When students share themselves through creative expression, it is not only therapeutic and healing for marginalized identities (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002) but also ends up building a trusting community.

Figure 1

Leveraging Aspirational Capital to Build Social Presence



Photographs can be used as writing prompts to compose in any genre of writing such as a letter, a short story, a folktale, an eyewitness account and reporting as a journalist, a poem, a digital story, a newspaper article, a comic strip, a personal journal, a simulated journal by role-playing a real person or fictional character and taking on their perspective. Perspective-taking and role-playing creates empathy and compassion toward others. Photographs tap into our background knowledge and cultural funds of knowledge and evoke personal connections and creativity. Therefore, they make for an inclusive prompt to evoke sharing and building a community to humanize online learning (Gurjar, 2023).

Critical reflections that make learners examine their socio-cultural identities to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1973) toward wholeness. When learners bring their whole selves as cultural beings to the learning community with their multiple intersecting identities and their cultural contributions are valued and honored, it creates social comfort and joyful space (Jordan, 1985) for learning. Feminism believes in creating joyful, healing spaces where emotions and reasons, theory and practice, and lived experiences are all welcomed. I strive to create such places of affirmation and joy where racial healing can take place through radical self-care and subjugated forms of meaning-making through the creative arts, journaling, music, meditation, yoga, and performance poetry or spoken word poetry in a trusting, supportive community. Richardson (2018) advocates for creating these communal spaces of healing as a political path of resistance where marginalized peoples' knowledge and experiences are centered to strive toward collective freedom.

Also, for racial healing and justice, we can leverage navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) for learners to share to the extend they feel comfortable how they have navigated unsupportive or hostile places, how they overcame microaggressions or lack of support or adversities to succeed and thrive. This may involve the element of spiritual activism or inner faith to give hope to the people. Inspirational stories bring people together as a trusting community for racial healing and civic agency. I incorporate an empathetic approach to civic action toward the social good and individual well-being. "Rooted in a tradition of African humanism, each life is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life" (Collins, 2008, p. 252). Therefore, each life deserves dignity and an opportunity to fulfill its potential.

I value virtual informal learning spaces to build supportive communities for learners to connect with their peers and other affinity groups. Informal learning online also promotes learner agency and self-directed learning. I have facilitated building students' social capital through student-led collaborative discussions, community (K–5 school) partnerships, and by connecting students to virtual professional networks and affinity spaces (Gee, 2004) in online learning. Previously, my students have engaged in Twitter chats on course-specific topics and reflected through Flip or blogging to share, connect, and engage with their peers and other educators.

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence or learner-content interaction (Garrison et al., 2001) involves critical thinking and reflecting and dialectical engagements with other online learners. Learner-content interaction should leverage culturally relevant text, representative images and multimedia, meaningful topic choices that would be of interest to diverse learners, and learners' background knowledge for online discussion to be culturally relevant and racial just in terms of representational and recognitive justice.

Meaningful topics of interest for online discussion may emanate from global sustainable goals or human rights advocacy topics pertinent to the online course. Intentional decisions need to be made in choosing culturally relevant prompts (Gurjar & Bai, 2023; Hall & Gurjar, 2023) that would evoke thoughtful, deep discussions. Learners should be able to relate to the topics of discussion for them to be able to contribute effectively. Critical discourse empowers learners as students unpack hegemonic narratives in collaborative online discussions to hold a welcoming space for subjugated meaning-making and lived experiences (Gurjar & Gurjar, 2024). The topics vary depending on course learning outcomes from current district, state, and federal social policies, such as revisionist history, book banning, women's reproductive rights, etc., that have implications for higher education. The goal of the hegemonic power is to justify unjust racial practices and social and political disparities to "shape consciousness via the manipulation of ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies

(Collins, 2009, p. 304). Feminist perspectives empower learners to examine hegemonic ideologies critically.

Making connections through lived experiences energizes the conversation and keeps the online discourse going where other people come out of their shells to share and learn from one another. Understanding learners and their perceptions through their lived experiences can lead to "noticing and understanding situations in which learners' experiences differ based on their race and gender and, in turn, how these differences impact overall classroom culture" (Raza et al., 2020, p. 5). Empathizing makes us see different ways of seeing, speaking, and being in the world are valuable. Giving choices on topics of discussion and reflection addresses student interests, background knowledge, and motivation for sustained discourse, reflection, and engagement.

My positionality as a multilingual, immigrant Indian female makes me cognizant of how gendered power dynamics may influence online discourse where women, especially from the Global South and the Middle East, may feel hesitant to express their views or opinions and silence their own voice subconsciously. Having multiple means of expression helps, as well as a choice of discussing the topic with a peer or a small group works well to mitigate any perceivable barriers. Also, as a multilingual female, I understand translanguaging to be part of multilingual and bilingual learner's identity if their native language is not English. Yosso (2005) suggests leveraging linguistic capital that views different ways of communicating to be equally valid. Dialectal differences should be respected even if they do not conform to standard English as the goal of online discussions is to have authentic conversations by learners bringing their authentic selves to the learning process. Familial capital or funds of knowledge of communities should be encouraged in online discussions for all learners to have a sense of belonging and for their cultural identities to be celebrated. Dialectical engagements need to be planned to center marginalized voices, perspectives, and lived experiences for racial justice.

Limitations

Autoethnography research has limitations and risk of biases. Biases can manifest in researcher's subjectivity in choosing what to include or exclude from their narration and their interpretation of contexts and events (Poerwandari, 2021). She noted that the potential for bias occurs when the research unintentionally depicts an account to reach a certain conclusion. This autoethnographic research is limited in its generalizability. However, it has the potential to evoke generative conversations, conceptual insights, and scholarly discussions for theoretical and contextual understanding.

I mitigated potential biases by viewing phenomena from an emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspective and acknowledging the fact that "situated knowledges" are multiple and partial only involving certain perspectives (Haraway, 1988, p. 581) by engaging in intersubjectivity or having dialogue with peers and colleagues. However, I do acknowledge mine is only one perspective, partial in knowledge, situated in a particular place, time, and context. Poerwandari (2021) states that reflexivity makes us aware that knowledge and theory-building are not objective and that "it is not possible to be directly whole, comprehensive, and single" (p. 315). According to Poerwandari (2021), we engage in continual social construction of meaning for a complete understanding of dynamic social and cultural constructs that are sensitive. Nobel and MacIlevene (2012) posited that dialogic spaces minimize bias. I aimed to minimize bias through intersubjectivity and engaging in dialogic spaces of the positionality workshop, journaling, retrospective reflections, and reflexive practice in analyzing archived course artifacts.

I strived to minimize bias by developing an ethical awareness of power and privilege based on my positionality and by acknowledging the limitations of my single perspective

situated in my lived experiences. Even though autoethnography has the limitation of presenting a single perspective, in feminist research the "aim is to bring an awareness of an imbalance of power and to present a new framework of a more equal relationship" (Poerwandari, 2021, p. 318).

Conclusion

Autoethnography offers not only an insider's perspective to understand a cultural phenomenon but also has the decolonizing power in disrupting the status quo. The reflexivity embedded in autoethnography forges a human connection to evoke reflexivity in others as well. Instructional designers, Learning Experience (LX) designers, and educators must consider their positionality and how it influences their online course design and pedagogical decisions in designing learning experiences for racial justice in an online course. Online learning can be designed for racial justice through strength-based approaches. Hope is a common thread in strength-based approaches. Hope provides us with something to look forward to, and empowers us with resilience, perseverance, and learner agency. Representational justice, recognitive justice, and redistributive justice can be attained through intentional planning of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence in online learning.

In this autoethnography, I explored my positionality and how feminism impacted my online course design for racially just online learning. Feminism values equality of rights, care, community, emotions, empathy, and leveraging lived experiences in online learning. Feminism centers the human as a holistic, cultural being with all their intersectional identities. Acknowledging, validating, valuing, and honoring learners' identities, their cultural wealth of knowledge and their unique contributions empowers learners with agency. Freedom of choice is the core value of feminism. Freedom of choice is empowering for learners. Designing online learning with the human-centered, empathic design with critical reflections centers the learner as a human with their cultural capital and funds of knowledge, and helps the designer see the learning experiences through the eyes of the learner situated in their unique sociocultural context.

My positionality influenced my online course design in leveraging cultural capital and funds of knowledge of communities and families. Strength-based appreciative inquiry facilitates learning about the strengths existing in my learners' environments and supporting them in accomplishing their desired goals through co-design and mentoring. Further, cultivating social capital through thoughtful engagements in virtual communities and affinity groups (Gurjar, 2020) empowers learners with agency and self-directed learning. Open educational practices contribute toward recognitive, representational, and redistributive justice in online learning. Lastly, healing circles can be cultivated through the creative, performing, and fine arts and spiritual activism to heal and thrive in social just online learning.

Statement of conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest.

Research involving human participants or animals

No human participants or animals were involved in this study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was not needed for this study as no humans were involved.

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