

RHETORICS OF ASYNCHRONOUS DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS & THE
MAKINGS OF EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By

Madeline R. Shellgren

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is positioned as asynchronous educator professional development and is designed and written to be an *experience* (spotlighting the rhetorical potentials of text-based asynchronous engagement). It attempts to call attention to, through its design, the very things it discusses. In this way, this dissertation is self-reflexive and highly self-aware; a meta-methodological approach to (and about) asynchronous educator professional development. This dissertation uses methodological bricolage, weaving a series of mixed-methods approaches to make sense of everything from the current state of educator professional development, to the purpose of higher education, and even the meaning of life, as a means to visibilize how we might *do* and *make* differently within educator professional development because educator professional development.

It bridges conversations and tells multiple stories of the intersections of asynchronous digital learning experiences and educator professional development, including stories of the author's own professional development journey (which serve as a situated and contextualized mechanism for locating educator professional development and asynchronous digital learning within and across Academia). This dissertation demonstrates that we are limited by attempts to design around singular perspectives and binary notions of professional development. It calls upon cross-disciplinary scholarship and the stories of others in order to argue that if we are to come to an understanding of what educator professional development is, as well as the role(s) asynchronous digital learning experiences play with the context of educator professional development, we must engage with the ever-shifting constellation of lived experiences

that make educator professional development what it is today and what it might become into the future. It leverages several constellating rhetorical theories as lenses through which to view, understand, and interpret the worlds of educator professional development and asynchronous digital learning, advancing that how we come to educator professional development, specifically professional development facilitated through asynchronous digital learning experiences, impacts how we experience it and what we make from it.

This dissertation intentionally doesn't provide an answer to the challenges of educator professional development; in fact, it intentionally attempts to avoid *an* answer. It concludes that there are no singular conclusions, and relies on multiple rhetorical lenses and theories to argue that perhaps this is the most significant conclusion of all. The point is, that like educator professional development and asynchronous digital learning experiences, this dissertation is not and will never be about *one* thing or mean *one* thing, or be experienced in *one* way. It is, and will be, what readers make of it. As a result, this dissertation contradicts itself at times. It dares readers to get lost and even attempts to intentionally facilitate getting lost, as a means to invite readers into direct dialogue with rhetorical theory as applied to asynchronous educator professional development through experiencing it. It is meant to be an invitation...to muse, to wander, to imagine, to feel, to dialogue. While the "jury's still out" on what the future holds, this piece will hopefully make you laugh, will optimistically validate your lived experiences, and ideally be meaningful to you in at least *some* way, helping you make sense of *something* and supporting you on your own work in and around educator professional development, whether you are a learner or a designer in that space.

This dissertation is dedicated to Holly.
Thank you for your patience and love, and for always
helping me understand truths I was otherwise unable to recognize myself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'll keep this simple, because I went to write these acknowledgements at least four times and each time, I could never quite find the words to describe the exigencies I feel for acknowledging the people and communities that helped to make this dissertation what it is. I have encountered, throughout all of my academic and professional experiences, countless people who have informed this work. Truthfully, what I find difficult in writing an acknowledgements section is that to truly acknowledge all that informed this work, I'd have to write what feels like an extensive autobiography. More than that, to trace all my relations would be deeply personal and I am not sure I am even ready to tell all those stories, nor that I even want to. In telling those stories, I would want to ensure I was guided by practices of care, empathy, and wellbeing of self and others, and in a way that aligned to my own values, and that would take time, energy, and dialogic relational work that takes me far beyond the context of this dissertation (at least in terms of time and space...though I would argue that if and when I do this work, I imagine they would make for interesting companion pieces for much of what you are about to read in terms of concepts and theory and practice).

Regardless, it feels customary to expand on the practice of naming as an explanatory means to qualify why *these* communities and people are acknowledged here and not others. But I'm not going to do that here...not in this piece at least. The reasons for each are, in some cases, complex. Not all of them represent holistically positive experiences. In fact, some of them represent extremely toxic and negative experiences. Nevertheless, each point of connection is tied to transformative learning as well as transformative personal and professional development for me. As a result, I

wouldn't have formed my thoughts as they are expressed in this dissertation were it not for these relations, and thus, together, they serve as key pieces in the backdrop that is my lived experience with Higher Education and teaching and learning more generally. Importantly, given that this composition is part autoethnographic...they will surface in my dissertation in various ways, whether named or not. But that contextualized surfacing is the only explanation you will receive, for that's all I feel I am able to responsibly and ethically give at this time.

All this in mind, here are some of the individuals and communities who played important roles in my development and who surface as key figures during transformative moments in my life: Bill Hart-Davidson, Trixie Smith, Melissa McDaniels, Dànienne DeVoss, Emily Manetta, Scott Schopieray, Kate Sonka, Patti Stewart, Erik Skogsberg, Angela Gunder, Jennifer Mathes, Laura Geringer, my wife, my parents (all of them), the student-athletes on the Michigan State Varsity Women's (MSU) Rowing Program as well as the MSU Club Crew Team, the MSU Graduate School staff, the MSU College of Arts and Letters Dean's Office staff, the MSU Hub for Innovation in Learning and Technology staff, the rowing staffs I have worked with, the leaders within the MSU Athletics Department I worked most closely with, the MSU faculty I learned under (including all of my committee members, past and current), the Online Learning Consortium (particular shoutout to the Engagement Teams, conference volunteer community, the IELOL Global extended network, and the OLC's many partners and collaborators), the MSU Writing and Rhetoric Department, and the educator professionals who contributed to this dissertation as research participants.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: A PROLOGUE	1
CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION & EXIGENCIES	18
CHAPTER 3: SITUATING THE SELF & OTHERS	66
CHAPTER 4: SITUATING THE SELF THROUGH / IN / & WORK	109
CHAPTER 5: METHODS & MEANING MAKING	126
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION: PERSPECTIVES ON AND APPROACHES TO DESIGN AND ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING	192
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION: METRICS OF SUCCESS, EVIDENCING VALUE, AND ASSESSING QUALITY	293
CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION: IMAGINING A DIFFERENT FUTURE	312
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION	340
WORKS CITED	345
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS	383
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCRIPT AND QUESTIONS	391

CHAPTER 1: A PROLOGUE¹

I think I'm always going to be unhappy with this dissertation to some degree. And there are a few reasons for this. Like Clifford (2003), "I frequent the borders" of disciplines. Because of this and because of what I have learned about how disciplines *discipline* their members, it has become part of my core methodological practice (perhaps exigency, even) as a scholar to intentionally blur and cross those borders, putting them into more regular conversation with each other. I find an examination of disciplinary borders generative and productive work. In fact, I echo Riley-Mukavetz in arguing that "as scholars, it is our responsibility to take the time to form relationships with many rhetorical traditions and understand how these rhetorical traditions are at play with each other" (2014, p. 110). But there are always more disciplines to transgress and more landscapes to explore. Of landscapes, Royster (2003) writes:

What we choose to showcase depends materially on where on the landscape we stand and what we have in mind. The imperative is to recognize that the process of showcasing space is an interpretive one, one that acknowledges a view and often re-scopes that view in light of aesthetic sensibilities—values, preferences, beliefs. We landscape. We select, focus, and develop, bringing more clearly and vibrantly into view particular features that we frame and foreground, while simultaneously disregarding or minimizing other features and dimensions that we might have selected, developed, and showcased instead. (p. 148)

The trouble with attempting to showcase the landscape I stand on is that there isn't simply one; I am standing among a constellation of disciplinary landscapes. They move in and out of focus each time I come across a new article or text, or an interviewee shares something that references a whole separate field and I find myself pulled in that

¹ This chapter was meant to be a preface, but given that...according to publication guidelines...a preface should be 1-2 pages, I am bypassing that rigid practice and beginning this dissertation with a Prologue instead.

direction, gravitating towards a new disciplinary force. I see their interconnectedness, the ways in which the disciplines *could* speak to each other but tend not to. Take, for example, the ways in which diversity, equity, and inclusion became embedded discourse and area of focus within academia. “Diversity” as an area of focus, was a core part of my academic upbringing. As a sociolinguist, scholarship that considered a multitude of diverse characteristics (e.g. age, sex, socioeconomic status, language, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) and the ways they intersected was commonplace. That is not to say I thought that linguists knew everything or held all the perspectives. But when I was introduced to “DEI” as a “new” focus for Higher Education nearly 8 years after my first sociolinguistics course through things like the “identity wheel,”² I couldn’t help but reflect on the fact that I myself had been engaged in “diversity” work for nearly a decade as a student, learning from scholarship that had been engaging in “diversity” work far before I ever began. I also couldn’t help but notice that *language* as a dimension of diversity didn’t feature on identity wheels when they first made their rounds in academic circles. So I could see a clear point of connection that could be drawn between this “new” thing and the intersectional research practices of sociolinguistics, and as a student wondered at how such a connection hadn’t been drawn before. This was, for me, one of the first clear examples I engaged with that helped me to understand the way(s) in which academic disciplinary boundaries often serve to further silo and make collaboration across disciplines more difficult. The example of institutional approaches to centering DEI is a fascinating one to me because to this day, the “identity wheel” surfaces as “new” to some. Two years ago, a member of a volunteer team I

² A quick google search for “identity wheel” will supply you with an abundance of references should this be a new activity concept for you.

oversaw came across an identity wheel activity. To them, at the time, it was transformative and innovative. It made them think about identity in an entirely new way and they wanted to take that transformative experience into the conference community we were designing programming for. Though the identity wheel felt outdated to me by that point (and I was worried that others might critique the conference programming as equally out-dated as a result of our decision to run an “identity wheel” activity), I trusted my gut and approved their plans. To my genuine surprise, the activity was well-received and many commented on feedback forms that not only was it the first time they had ever seen identity explored in that way, but also a transformative learning experience for them (i.e. helping them think about identity through a lens of intersectionality). I’ll comment two things before I advance. The first is that I use the word “surprise” quite authentically. I was, truly, surprised. Reflecting on this surprise was a useful reminder of the pace at which Higher Education and academia tends to operate and transform...rather slowly.

The second note I need to make is that I share this example with no intention of trying to make anyone new to the identity wheel feel bad or somehow lesser than for not knowing it...I have quite the opposite intentions, in fact. I have experienced the pressures to know more, cite more, reference more. I have felt academically shamed for not knowing something or being new to something that has existed in other disciplines for decades. In many ways, I seek to draw attention to these pressures and to call them out. What is out-dated to some will be innovative to others. What is commonplace to some will be unheard of for others. What feels *right* or *correct* to one discipline does not automatically make what happens in another *wrong*. Academic structures are notorious

for helping to reinforce discipline-bounded and siloed cycles of knowledge distribution, circulation, and engagement.

On circulation we can momentarily look to Foucault, who states that “the history of a concept is not wholly and entirely that of its progressive refinement, its continuously increasing rationality, its abstraction gradient, but that of its various fields of constitution and validity, that of its successive rules of use, that of the many theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured” (Foucault, 1972, p. 4). In other words, the iterative nature of a concept’s use, the ways in which it is produced and reproduced, in addition to the testing and validation of the concept’s utility across multiple theories and scenes reinforces its strength and therefore it’s potential for impact on motives for how a concept or term is used and engaged with across disciplines. Royster and Kirsch (2012) argue that engaging in circulation “can help us see how traditions are carried on, changed, reinvented, and reused when they pass from one generation to the next” (p. 101), across time, space, and context. We can see the effects of the “stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances” (Foucault, 1972, p. 3) that results from knowledge production and maintenance by looking to the ways in which Edward Said describes how the Western world “Orientalized” (Said, 1979, p. 5) the Orient. In his 1979 text, he describes Orientalism as “a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power” (p. 12). He lists political, intellectual, cultural, and moral as types of power which govern notions of the Orient, from what canons developed regarding the Orient to ideas “about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do” (p. 12). This allows us to point to the

“distribution,” redistribution, and redeployment “of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts” (p. 12) as largely to blame for this Orientalization. Key to his argument is the iterative nature of the constructing of the Orient. What we therefore end up with are disciplines competing for circulation in a knowledge economy, each establishing and offering up their own cannon for redistribution as a means to validate and reinforce the existence and power of the discipline. Unfortunately, because of this competition and expectations around “expertise,” efforts to become a *part of* a given discipline tend to lead to highly localized and siloed work, where it is commonplace to be further identified with a discipline the more you cite, publish, and entrench yourself within it. All that to say that it makes perfect sense, given how academia functions, that I still have colleagues to this day for whom the identity wheel is novel and transformative, and this is not only a perfectly acceptable truth, but one worthy of reflection, too. If we wish for Higher Education and Academia to change more quickly and wish for more collaborative spaces and transformative spaces, I would argue that we must, too, wish for more interdisciplinary spaces.

How is this discussion relevant to this dissertation? In short, I seek to visibilize these sorts of cross-disciplinary connections. I am a cross-disciplinary scholar. So for me, there will always be more disciplines to transgress and more landscapes to explore and the desire to make connections will be a pressure I perpetually feel (hence why this dissertation begins with the complicated emotions of a known disappointment with respect to the limits of this dissertation). I will likewise always feel the pressures to be more disciplined (i.e. to fit *better* within the disciplines I work in and identify with).

As a result of this tension, this dissertation looks very different than what I originally proposed. I had this three tiered study outlined, with multiple phases of data collection. Thankfully, my committee was far wiser than I was and saw that I was already doing enough with interviews and a survey. That said, I can't help but see those other projects in the future, all the future work I have yet to do and still could do. Like my participants and the educator professionals I will story, I am equally a victim of capitalism; in my case, the hustle of academia and higher education drove me to burnout. Even from within that burnout, though, there's still so much I want to do and so much work I see that can be done. As a result, I will always be a little bit unhappy with this dissertation by not feeling I did enough to make visible the connections I see and to advance all the work I want to contribute to.

That said, I'll contend that this is a perfectly adequate place to dwell and perhaps, even, a productive one. Before you attempt to console me or try to convince me otherwise, I ask that you let me dwell in this dissatisfaction. Bear with me as I wrestle with genuine tensions seen within lived experiences of educator professional development and grapple, not trivially, with the meaning of life and the purpose of higher education. I discuss hope, alongside sharing stories of losing hope. I discuss cynicism, and at times, will be cynical. I talk about failure while feeling as though I, too, have failed (failed to resist the desire to "do more" and failed to be satisfied with "making do"). I have to remind myself that, "any scholar who believes that she has arrived and the work is finished does not understand the nature and meaning of scholarship" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). So what I come to, in the end, is all I can give at the moment: a "uniquely adequate account" (Latour, 2005, p.144) of the rhetorics of

asynchronous digital learning environments and the makings of educator professional development.

I agree with Wilson (2008) that “all things are related and therefore relevant” (p. 58). This belief has significantly impacted the writing of this dissertation. Like Wilson, I have allowed myself to wander and meander. I took this meandering into the space of the interviews I conducted and my own reflections and storytelling. It will all connect and all relate, but some things will look like and feel like tangents. Stepping back though, and looking at it as a whole, I am going to argue it says something quite meaningful about asynchronous professional development and challenges us to consider how we might intentionally design for this meandering.

I make several distinct and intentional moves throughout this dissertation. They are meant to make you think and rethink and then rethink again; to shift your perspective, or minimally make you aware that you have one. I’ve developed a cultural-rhetorical sensitivity (Shipka, 2009, p. 76) and through calling out and naming these moves, my goal is the development of your own cultural-rhetorical sensitivity. Though this might, on the surface, not look like the work of talking about asynchronous digital learning environments or educator professional development, I’ll make the case that it *is* part of the work. At work I am known for being “meta.” I thrive in that space and think in the meta; I’m a ecosystems thinker, I am constantly constellating. I am going to try to use that to my advantage here by naming what might otherwise remain hidden within and across prose (and perhaps in doing so, reveal a strategy we might leverage to design “better” educator professional development, whatever “better” means).

I might argue that if the moves, themselves, aligned to a method, that one possible candidate would be *antenarrative inquiry*. Antenarrative inquiry is “the attempt to free stories from the linear sequence of beginning, middle, and end in narrative” (Jørgensen & Boje, 2009, p. 34) and “invites storytellers to place a bet on the future(s) that they would like to see come to fruition through their actions (Boje, 2011; Boje, Rosile, & Gardner, 2004; Jørgensen & Boje, 2009)” (Shellgren et al., 2021, p.8). I am trying to place a bet on the future: that change is possible, that we can move towards a better future together, that the system of educator professional development can be redesigned.

One move I make, which I call attention to here (because I don’t call attention to it anywhere else), is honoring all my scholarly relations through “unconventional” citation practices. I raise it here because it has to do with freeing stories from time-boundedness. As much as I aim for freeing as many stories as I can through visibilizing what and where I can, I also believe in tracing and honoring stories already told.³ As a writer, I was taught to *exclude*, to avoid including and pulling over in-text citations from quotes I incorporate. Rather, if I want to quote source material, I was told I should just go to the source itself and cite them directly. While that might make my quotes and references “cleaner,” I would argue that it advances several negative stories about what’s expected of scholars and the general scholarly community within academia. First of all, it forces me to read and reference more and more and more; the labor turns to me

³ This is actually quite important to me professionally. I have been in far too many roles working for supervisors and colleagues who don’t give “credit where credit is due.” In a professional culture where “credit” maps to productivity and signals academic wealth via “valuable” investments, the stories I tell are thus commodities, making the practice of not “giving credit” one of stealing. Moreover, to claim the credit as your own is a colonial act based in control and power over knowledge and meaning-making.

and me alone, then, to trace and engage and connect. I don't have endless time to read everything I want to cite. Regardless, I choose to cite them because their words were significant enough to me to warrant citing, whether I read them for the first time in another article or retrieved them from their original published location. In time, I will read them all and let them take me beyond the dissertation; but to be clear, I'd be doing it as a means to explore and learn more, not to performatively check off the box of "clean academic writing" I feel pressured to reinforce. For now, I will show all my relations and even my relations' relations through detailed, storied, sometimes complex citation practices. Secondly, conventional practice beyond academia doesn't necessarily operate on a foundation of *trust*, and building a culture of trust and accountability is important to me and important to the work this dissertation speaks to. If I am bought into the system of citational practices that academia follows, I should expect that scholars are holding themselves accountable to responsible referencing and quoting (i.e. that they aren't taking quotes out of context or intentionally misrepresenting them). I can, of course, already hear my self-reflexive self being critical of those words; I know this type of irresponsible behavior happens all the time in broader society and I'd be remiss not to acknowledge that I am writing this dissertation in an age of unprecedented and very public misrepresentation of others (from their words, to their voices, personas, and even their likeness, etc.). That said, I am going to give the scholars I reference and engage with the benefit of the doubt and trust that they are trying to hold themselves accountable and reference responsibly. In my experience, I haven't met an educator professional working in higher education that doesn't want to contribute to a better future. And I am not alone in these sentiments; many of the people I interviewed shared

the same belief. Now we could and should (and, in this dissertation, I do) debate what we understand “better” to mean and what we consider to be a meaningful “contribution” towards that “better” future, and we should also invest time in understanding who we mean when we say “educator professional” and what their “work” entails (and again, I speak to these things later in this dissertation). That said, our perceptions around whether or not someone is *trying* impacts how we engage in educator professional development, making a *belief in trying* a powerful and potentially generative lens.⁴ So in this dissertation, I am going to choose to believe that the scholars I reference tried to act responsibly and ethically in their citational practices. Again, in time I will read them all and let them take me beyond the dissertation; and should I find that they acted irresponsibly, well that just gives me one more thing to write about doesn’t it? So when I cite someone, citing someone else, know that this is intentional and a demonstration of trust, I am likewise choosing to believe that the people I interviewed are sharing honestly and in earnest (in fact, in Chapters 6-8 I share direct evidence demonstrating this and the generosity and authenticity the interviewees brought to this dissertation). So when I share stories or quotes from interviews, you will see that I give them great weight and importance, because I believe they were shared under the auspices of advancing and not deceiving my work and the broader theorizing I am engaging in throughout this dissertation.

Want to know something interesting that relates to these rhetorical moves and writing decisions? Across the entirety of my graduate degree in Writing and Rhetoric, not a single one of my teachers defined *rhetoric* for me. I’ll thank them here for not

⁴ Interested in exploring this further? Check out Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

doing that. Instead, they revealed rhetorics to me and helped me to understand how they operated in the world. In doing so, what I came to understand about rhetoric was far more powerful than a single definition ever could be. So I honor them by aiming to reveal rhetoric(s) and help you observe and better understand how they operate. I aim to accomplish this in a number of ways, but one move I feel compelled to prepare you for is my use of footnotes throughout this dissertation, as well as my choice to talk directly to you, as a reader. I use footnotes strategically and intentionally as a writing method to call attention and visibilize. They are not simply after thoughts or recommendations for further reading (though some of them do this work). Most of them contribute directly to the goals of this dissertation, often explicitly calling out rhetorical moves I make. Likewise, as I imagine myself in direct dialogue with you (as reader), you will see that I speak to *you* quite often. It is nevertheless important to recognize that I see this *you* as plural; there are many *yous* who will read this dissertation (this is the hope at least). Each of *you* will come to this dissertation with different backgrounds, different lived experiences, different stories and beliefs. At times I might say something to “you,” and you might think “well surely that can’t be meant for me because I don’t believe that.” This would be a perfect example of where the “you” wasn’t meant for *you*, but rather another reader (i.e. another *you*). The ambiguity thus felt by who I mean when I say “you” is likewise intentional, positioning you to reflect on whether or not I am, indeed, talking directly to and with you. These moves (e.g. naming my relations, meta-reflecting and commenting, talking to the reader directly) were inspired by a number of scholars, but I will explicitly name Thomas King and Shawn Wilson, who made similar moves and showed me that these moves are not only valid, they can be transformative.

I have been told that I am a good communicator. Really, I just try hard to be understood. And that's certainly at least one of my goals in this dissertation: to be understood. I give you permission to read into that last sentence, because it carries with it more than one meaning. Yes, I want you to understand the content in this dissertation. I also want you to understand and see new possibilities. I am likewise seeking community, a community that understands me and who I am as a scholar, a community that wants to collaborate together in the making of new possibilities. So I'll try to communicate as effectively as I know how to and I will signal that *trying*⁵.

Finally, I am positioning this dissertation as educator professional development. If this made you pause, think for a second...how do you define educator professional development? Your answer might vary, but you likely said something along the lines of training or development experiences that advance your capacity (including skills or knowledge base, etc.) to do your job or engage in your profession. Well, if the approach I took in this dissertation is successful in meeting my goals, by reading and engaging in it, you (assuming you identify as an educator) will learn or read or think something that will advance your capacity to engage in your profession, therefore establishing this entire piece as educator professional development. That said, should you like more justification for my claim that this dissertation is educator professional development we need go no further than the interviews themselves. For example, in my interview with "Gift Giver," we spent at least 10 minutes talking about phases of change management. It related to what we were talking about in the context of the interview: the future of

⁵ You won't get why I call out this word through italics yet, but I'm quite fascinated by the following provocation: what if we (those of us in educator professional development and us educator professionals) stopped *trying*?

Higher Education and the likelihood of educator professional development improving into the future. Now I know he went into this because it is how he goes about understanding what's going on in higher education: he's a storyteller and a gift-giver who offers what he can in the hopes that it will help others learn and advance their goals. So his detailed account of phases of change management (while they could have been seen as a tangent), were his unique way of answering my question as well as theorizing about the future of Higher Education. I was familiar with change management prior to our conversation, but I hadn't heard about this particular lens on change work from him in this way before. So it not only felt like a microlearning experience, it was a microlearning experience for me, wherein during the context of that interview, I was an educator attending professional development and "Gift Giver" was an educator developer, leading a microlearning training experience. As another example, "Sci-Fi Fan," "Daughter," and "Dungeon Master" all took notes during their interviews. When I asked them about their reasoning for taking notes, they told me it was because something had come up in our conversation that they either wanted to reflect on further (e.g. a question I asked), return to in some way (e.g. something they shared), or engage in beyond the interview (e.g. an article or theory referenced). This one example serves as a comment on the exchange of resources, frameworks, and theories which typically happens in educator professional development. Additionally, this work has already helped me personally develop new connections around scholarship through collective exploration and brainstorming, something we hope educator professional development does and which it often tries to do. To demonstrate this work in action, during her interview, "Blogger" said "I'm so excited you're doing work there because I haven't found

anything to like congregate to, or people that have even mentioned it that could geek out with like we have here.” I speak back into that interview and with you directly in mind, “Blogger,” extending our conversation throughout this dissertation, connecting it to the interviews I had with other educator professionals, and inviting all potential readers to “geek out” right alongside us on the things we discussed in the hopes of making new connections and engaging in collective theorizing about educator professional development. In doing so, I might ask you, reader, is this not educator professional development?⁶

In this way, the interviews themselves then point to the makings of educator professional development: that which we are collectively or individually building, bringing, contributing to, etc. in the development, scoping, and ideating, constructing, and delivery of educator professional development. We can learn from these interviews as well as with them. I am also positioning this dissertation as an example of *asynchronous* educator professional development, specifically. If this made you pause, think for a second...how do you define asynchronous educator professional development? In the context of this dissertation, I’ll approach the definition of “asynchronicity” in several ways, but one starting stance I hold is that it is not time-bounded. If your definition excludes this dissertation for not “counting” as asynchronous educator professional development, I’ll prompt you to read the rest of it, then return to this section and ask yourself the question once more. If at that point you’d still say no,

⁶ I prompt you to reflect on this not in jest, but because it is important for you to define what *you* think educator professional development is or is not (apart from what I share here). I am taking an intentionally broad position in my understanding of what “counts” as educator professional development so that I might call attention to the breadth and scope of things often categorized as “educator professional development.” Part of the challenge the future of educator professional development faces is a definitional, as you will see elsewhere in this dissertation.

then I'd genuinely love to hear and learn from you and extend my thinking. But sitting with this and your own working definitions is important for further engagement with this dissertation because we are about to embark on a reading journey that stories asynchronous educator professional development from multiple perspectives and angles. We will ask and discuss what "good" asynchronous educator professional development is. We will theorize, through story and lived experience, the indicators of "good" and "bad" educator professional development and what the future might, could, and hopefully holds. We will make space for tensions and disagreements, for hypocritical thinking and reflecting, and for questioning and revising. So I invite you to answer the questions I ask along the way for yourself because my goal is to enter into an asynchronous dialogue with you in the space of this dissertation.

Now that I have set the stage for the discussion that follows, "good" asynchronous online learning experiences provide recommendations for pacing and engagement (Carter Jr. et al., 2020; Cuccolo, 2024; UNC Charlotte, n.d.). As this is asynchronous educator professional development, I offer the following:

Recommendations for pacing and engagement:

First, skip to Chapter 5: Methods & meaning making first. No really, after reading this, read the methods section next. Then return to the introduction, and then go wherever you are led next. And then we can have a very different conversation, you and I, about what this dissertation is really about (at least to me) and what I think it's doing and can do and the conversations I hope to have in the future. That section will help ground you and will illuminate choices I made throughout this work.

Second, take your time in reading the footnotes. Or don't. It's really up to you. But I think I have done some useful visibilizing work there. I am being intentionally playful here in that you could certainly engage with this dissertation and skip the footnotes, but as mentioned previously in this chapter, the footnotes are not after-thoughts. Rather, I strategically use them as a structural feature to analyze, critique, reflect, add commentary, trivialize, pose questions, make recommendations for further reading, and more. But the choice to engage with them is fully yours and I desire most for your experience with this dissertation to be a personally guided one.

Third, this dissertation is long and there's a lot in it. While I have hopes and opinions on how it might be useful, I also understand our experiences with *meaningfulness* as an example of "pluralistic mode[s]" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.79). I therefore operate under the assumption that what we find meaningful is personally contextualized. As such, I encourage you to treat this like any other asynchronous professional development experience you sign up for. Seek and follow what is meaningful to you. Find and trace that meaning as you desire.

Finally, get lost in this dissertation. A good asynchronous professional development experience makes space for personalized connections and explorations (Prester & Moller, 2001; Stagnaro, 2021; Sibdari, Cole, & Larson, 2014). Read straight through, jump around, skim this dissertation and come back to it later. Regardless of how you pace your engagement, make a point to reflect on what brought you to this dissertation in the first place, what your goals are for engaging in it, and how those goals will impact your engagement experience. Effective online learning also designs for social learning (Kerrigan & Andres, 2022; Ratan et al., 2022; Prestridge & Cox, 2021; Tu & Corry,

2002; Harasim, 2002; Delmas, 2017; Liu et al., 2007; Shea et al., 2019; Rovai, 2002; Ghuftron, Prayogi, & Nurdianingsih, 2023), so feel free to reach out to me to discuss anything further, as one type of further connection⁷.

⁷ No really, consider this your official invitation, you can find me on LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/madeline-shellgren-498a381b8/>). Let's connect, let's commiserate, let's geek out, let's collaborate.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION & EXIGENCIES

What is this dissertation about? That both is and isn't an easy question to answer. I'll start first with the easy answer. This dissertation seeks to answer the following question: *What kinds of experiences, design features, and structures do professional and lifelong learners need in place in order to engage in asynchronous learning experiences?* I think a more interesting question, though, is how I came to this particular question. For the answer to that question, we have to turn to my own experiences working professionally in the field of online, blended, and digital learning, along with my history as an educator and learner within these contexts.

As this dissertation will be partly autoethnographic, I will briefly contextualize this dissertation in personal experience. I currently work for the Online Learning Consortium, a collaborative and global non-profit dedicated to advancing quality online teaching and learning experiences. Within this context, my role is, in part, designing and facilitating professional development and learning spaces for other educators and leaders across Higher Education. Through my position with the organization, I have the privilege of working with a team of educational experts, who design engagement spaces and learning spaces for fellow educators. Importantly, one thing that I regularly observe within this context is that what educators teach and build into their own spaces (based on best practices, research, and scholarship) are not necessarily what educators want or choose to engage in themselves, nor what they leverage to build learning spaces for their peers. There are a lot of factors that help to explain this: burnout, time, capacity, and perceived return on investment are among them. That said, I find that I am nevertheless fascinated with the misalignment between theory and practice in this case,

especially since educators are looking for purposeful, meaningful, and valuable professional learning and development experiences. The issue, as I story for you here in this dissertation, is that how we define “valuable” and “meaningful” and “purposeful” varies depending on the person, the context, and their goals / outcomes. This dissertation seeks to better understand this point in more detail, and specifically as it relates to asynchronous digital learning experiences. I ask questions like *Why do educators seek specific professional development spaces to begin with? What do they want out of them and what are they looking for in terms of the design and the outcome? And as a result, how do the rhetorical parameters they bring to the space impact the rhetorical expectations (i.e. everything from how the space is designed to how they are onboarded into it, and even how they are meant to engage with it to name a few)?* To help answer these questions, I conducted a series of interviews and a survey, which ultimately led me down the path of an interdisciplinary literature review. This work indicates that there is still much work to be done with respect to our understanding of effective educator professional development (let alone how to leverage digital learning environments in support of educator professional development). That said, professional development is a staple of Higher Education, often a required component of career advancement. It also takes a lot of time (i.e. time to build, time to complete, time to engage in). When we take into account the growing issue of faculty burnout (see Pope-Ruark 2022), time and energy must be viewed as resources not to be wasted. As I sit and reflect on asynchronous digital learning experiences for educators, I wonder, *Are we investing time in something educators ultimately won't engage in? Are we wasting*

time in designing something educators don't want or need? If we could design anything with the limited time we have, what should we design?

My goal is simple: I wish to learn from the stories and experiences of fellow educators to better inform the design of educator professional development digital learning environments (DLEs), in order to 1) advance more equitable and quality educator learning experiences, and 2) help address the growing urgency of educator burnout. As digital learning experience professionals seek to advance the field through the development of quality standards and wrestling with how to ensure diverse, inclusive, and equitable digital learning experiences in the future, I seek to ask similar questions of the spaces educators design for each other, specifically educator professional development spaces.

My dissertation, however, does much more than this and approaches the topic of asynchronous digital learning in the context of educator professional development in a surprising way (the direction it took even surprised me). As a result, asking what my dissertation attempts to do, in my opinion, leads to a much more interesting line of questioning than asking what it is about. For example, in the end, this dissertation is about asynchronous digital learning and online learning more broadly, but it is also not about asynchronous digital learning and online learning. If it were about asynchronous digital learning experiences and online learning, I might have studied an asynchronous digital learning experience and reviewed the literature to learn what I could about their design, as well as how they fit into the larger landscape of online learning. That said, due to what this dissertation does (or attempts to do), you will find yourself reading about capitalism, and decolonial approaches to time. You will find me wondering about

the meaning of life and the purpose of Higher Education. You will come across meanderings and tangents and layered relations. This is because this dissertation explores and seeks to understand the *rhetorics* around and of asynchronous digital learning experiences, as well as the *makings* of educator professional development. It does this through literature review and engagement in scholarship, but its central methodology is *story*. Why story for the purposes of understanding the *rhetorics* and *makings* of asynchronous digital learning experiences and educator professional development? Simply put, I believe, as many other scholars do, that to engage in storytelling is to engage in active theorizing (Ochs et al., 2009; Vannini, 2009; Erasga, 2010; Gelman & Basbøll, 2014). I provide a more thorough introduction to storytelling (particularly from a rhetorical lens) in Chapter 5, but as a means to help better prepare and orient you to how I leverage story in this dissertation I will share this: By “to engage in storytelling is to engage in active theorizing” I mean minimally two things. First, storytelling is a powerful methodological tool to help us make sense of the world around us. Second, it is also a powerful analytical tool for understanding how others view, engage with, and understand the world. Taken together, this means that I can both engage in story as *data* (i.e. theorize using the stories as object of study), but likewise engage in story as *method* (i.e. using story as the direct method to theorize), both of which I do throughout this dissertation. Moreover, as a methodology, story allows me to actively and collaboratively theorize with and alongside others (in this case, alongside the 14 participants I interviewed). While, in isolation, either of these points can reinforce the relationship between *story* and *theory*, together they represent two core tenets of the use of storytelling in research that are supported across the disciplinary landscape.

See, for example, works from Sociology (Frank, 1995), Anthropology (Geertz, 1974), Psychology (Bruner, 1986), Education (Egan, 1986), Literacy Studies (Benjamin, 1968), Management and Organizational Studies (Gabriel, 2000), Communication Studies (Fisher, 1987), Philosophy (MacIntyre, 1981), History (White, 1987), Political Science (Feldman et al., 2004), Religious Studies (Lincoln, 1989), and Medicine and Health (Charon, 2006).⁸

So through story (which, at times, takes the form of a detailed personal account, while in other moments throughout this dissertation might be shared through short or fragmented snippets), I help to capture those things we'd say when no one was listening and the thoughts we typically keep to ourselves. I help to explore and share that which educators truly think and believe without the pretenses of academic politeness. I have the opportunity to situate their worries and desires, their wishes and dreams and the things that keep them up at night within the context of online learning and learn from their lived experiences. These participants...these people...are educational experts. They are pulling from years of teaching and instructional experience, administrative experience, their own experiences as learners, as thought leaders, as researchers and scholars, as members of professional communities. During the interviews, they are actively searching and referencing the archives of their minds and embodied memories in order to provide insight for me as they answer my questions. In turn, I reference my own experiences, scholarship, research, and thoughts. Between interviews, I make connections, theorize further and then bring that new theorizing into the next interviews, furthering our collective theorizing in a pseudo-dialogic manner (meaning that even

⁸ To name a few.

though we weren't all actually in a discussion together synchronously, core pieces, echoes, and contributions from each interview make their way into one another, forming a fragmented weave of interconnected theorizing...positioning us as in dialogue with one another across time and space (much like I am in dialogue with you now and would be in dialogue with a colleague of yours should you story this work with them). As you will come to see as you engage in this dissertation, while I directly ask participants about asynchronous digital learning spaces and educator professional development, our conversations took me on personalized journeys that went far beyond what I originally predicted this dissertation would be about. So I had to reorient the direction I was headed in, so that this dissertation would follow the path the interviews compelled me to pursue. It is in this way (through engagement with hopes and dreams, the things that keep us up at night, and all that surfaced during my work on this project) that this dissertation explores the *rhetorics* and *makings* of / around / within / across / about asynchronous digital learning experiences and educator professional development...necessarily making it both about and not about what I originally thought I'd be expounding on here, as well as resulting in it doing far different things than I ever imagined it would. It is, at its core, a story about stories, and through this storytelling, I aim to collaboratively advance our thinking and theorizing around asynchronous digital learning environments and educator professional development.

So if you came here for a thorough, overly focused, or exhaustive review of what scholarship says about asynchronous digital learning experiences, know that I am not going to expand on the intricacies of the instructional design work of asynchronous digital learning environments designed for educator professional development, nor will I

engage in an extensive literature review in an attempt to advance a narrative around “best practices.” We’re also not going to closely examine a specific asynchronous digital learning experience together for the purposes of dissecting it piece by piece to talk about how each design choice maps to “best practices.” I am going to tell you some things about asynchronous digital learning in the context of educator professional development, though. We’ll talk about best practices, but this, in and of itself, is not the primary work of this dissertation. I’ll share a list of things I learned, to that end, and forward recommendations related to the design of asynchronous digital learning. But those recommendations will come directly from the interviews I conducted and will advance a story about what educator developers *desire* when it comes to the asynchronous digital learning experiences designed for them, and I’ll enter concepts like *desire* into the conversation of educator professional development effective asynchronous digital learning as a variable we must engage in and contend with. In my attempts to answer my research question, I was pulled this way and that, taken down a multidirectional path of exploration. I ultimately found that by exploring educator professionals’ thoughts, opinions, and lived experiences with asynchronous digital learning environments designed for educator professionals, I was actually exploring so much more, including myself and how I might fit into the future of Higher Education. So what does this mean this dissertation is actually about? In short, you could say it is mostly about how we talk about, orient to, engage with, and approach asynchronous digital learning as educator professionals and the subsequent implications we might take away from engaging in this type of research regarding the current harsh realities as well as the future of educator development.

Exigencies

The future of Higher Education

There are several significant and important exigencies that guide and motivate this work. I'll start with the one I ended the last paragraph with, though: the future of Higher Education. The future of Higher Education is, of course, actually unknown and it has always been an unknown. As of late, though, this unknown-ness has now been centered quite abruptly, thrust into our immediate focus due to a failure of Higher Education and larger systems operating in society to meet basic⁹ needs in alignment with the broader goal of serving the public good.

According to Berlant (2016), "...we live on the precipice of infrastructure collapse [and] twentieth century forms of expansive world building toward the good life have little or unreliable traction" (p. 409). In our current state, genuine "...public goods of any kind are increasingly difficult to speak of" (Brown, 2015, p. 176) and "any sense of civic responsibility struggles to gain purchase in the current sociopolitical landscape" (McConnell, 2023, p. 280). In other words, the educational system we work in exists within a larger system that isn't actually working in favor of the public good and which has never really had a stable infrastructure of support. More concerning is recent data that shows the potential impacts of this current state. For example, in an American Academy of Arts and Science report from the Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship, "The Commission found that many U.S. residents 'have no experiences that give them a sense of common purpose'" (Commission on the Practice

⁹ NOTE TO SELF: I've always thought the term "basic" respect to human needs and societal goals was an interesting choice of words. They should be basic, and yet we always seem to develop systems of power and control that make delivering on those needs and goals so complicated. Someone's probably written on this before. Explore this further after I dissertate.

of Democratic Citizenship, 2020, p. 18, cited in McConnell, 2023, p. 280). This has resulted in a relative lack of a public sense of civic responsibility and therein little to no resources and infrastructure to persuade otherwise. Higher Education, we might argue, was historically positioned as a foundational public service, even using messaging like “a higher education for all” since as long as I can remember. That said, Higher Education has not proven to be the public service offering that it promised to be.

McConnell (2023) writes about the “growing disillusionment with college” and argues that “a 40 percent student dropout rate nationally should be an impetus to think beyond degrees and consider possibilities for affordable programs including work-based learning” (p. 283, citing Hoffman & Schwartz, 2017 and Kirp, 2019). While the dropout rate is trending slightly back up (following a massive increase in dropout rates during and following the COVID-19 pandemic) (see *Current Term Enrollment Estimates: Fall 2023, 2024*), the cost of higher education has remained the same and has even steadily increased. This has led to a shift in industry towards the decreasing value of a degree. For example, in a recent survey of industry employers, 45% “said they had done away with degree requirements for certain roles over the past year. Seventy-two percent of firms said they prioritize candidates' skills and experience over the diplomas they hold” (Cerullo, 2023, para. 6). As part of the trend towards a skills-based future, we are seeing certifications and job-linked apprenticeship programmes as being advertised as important for future job employability and attractability (Majumdar, 2024). And Higher Education’s response has been to do everything it can to retain students and push back against massive dropout rates, which in turn has resulted in Higher Education’s shift

towards a skills-based future as well (as is reflected in even the shifting roles of academics, as I will detail in the next section).

Based on these trends, the market and public broadly speaking is questioning what the current value of Higher Education is. With respect to the workforce market, recent reports showed that in today's capitalist market, Higher Education does still hold some value. For example, "during the worst of the COVID-19 recession, the unemployment rate for those with no college experience was 18 percent, compared to 10 percent for those with a bachelor's degree" (Mejia et al., 2023, para. 5). Andrews (2023) similarly reported slightly lower unemployment rates in general for those who hold a degree (para. 29). Additionally, employers do still hold a positive opinion and hold positive stereotypes about degree holders, believing that college degrees do still indicate some measure of *quality* (2023 Recruiting Benchmarks Report: Executive Summary 2023, p. 2; Zara, 2023). However, these numbers are slowly trending downwards, paired with a quickly rising trend towards looking beyond the degree for eligible candidates.

Against a backdrop (even pre-COVID-19) of "a sense of crisis, a fear that we cannot count on one another or on our shared civic and political institutions to function in pursuit of our common interests" (The Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship, 2020, p.12, cited in McConnell, 2023, p. 290) and a move towards capitalistic-driven individualism, it is no longer trivial to question what the value of Higher Education is, what it can be, what it might become, and what the role of an educator and educator developer is given this larger context. It is also not trivial to ask whether Higher Education will even still *be* and *exist* in the future, and if it does, wonder

what it will look like and the implications of those potential futures on the work of educator professionals.

While the transformations that took place across the education sector in response to COVID-19 resulted in a “new era” across multiple sectors and facets of work and life that we must now adapt to (Bozkurt et al., 2022; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020b; Schwab & Malleret, 2020), it is not the only major shift to impact education today. Educators are currently facing an increasingly growing political influence on education across the sector (K-16+), which has impacted everything from governance, to academic freedom, to hiring choices and promotion guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2024; American Association of University Professors, n.d.). Direct examples of this growing political influence include book bans and curriculum restrictions (Cohen, 2023), as well as faculty and staff censorship, harassment, and even job loss (Abrams, 2023a; Abrams, 2023b, Bauer-Wolf, 2023). Combined, this has transformed the education sector into a more volatile, uncertain, and fear-governed place to work. Individual units, departments, and institutions might be actively pushing back and fighting in the ways that they can to mitigate this burgeoning negative political influence, but the larger political and public rhetoric is inescapable and has already contributed to politically-motivated structural and cultural changes to education. Alarmingly, this is a trend that only appears to be strengthening with the upcoming 2024 Presidential election, as Right-Wing rhetoric is uncritically citing current challenges Higher Education is facing as a means to sow distrust of education altogether in support of political agenda (Knott, 2024). With the existence of foundational educational bodies

like the Department of Education potentially on the line, it is hard not to move beyond wonder and into worry with respect to the future of education.

Finally, educators today contend with challenges such as the corporatization of Higher Education (which I expand on in the sections that immediately follow, as well as Chapter 7), rapid and continuous technology advancement, and poor leadership. With respect to the corporatization of Higher Education, capitalistic models and a “market-led approach” have resulted in the pressure for “academics to be less scrupulous in order to achieve high standards with less resource” (Jones-Devitt, 2022, p. 71). Coonan (2022) describes the current moment as “a radical shift in university values and positioning from a culture that privileged critical thought to one that privileges the demands of the marketplace” (p. 146). This high-production oriented environment, driven by externally motivated market pressures raises questions about institutions’ focus on and commitment to high-quality and equitable learning experiences. It takes time and intentionality to design quality learning experiences. If we consider just one case in point, an educator might be able to (relatively) quickly adopt an institutionally-created template for a course within their learning management system, but course content and learner experience would still need to be designed for accessibility. Having been in the world of Higher Education myself now for many years, including in environments governed by fast production timelines, I can share from personal experience that I have been on teams where the choice of whether or not to prioritize accessibility was considered and ultimately deprioritized as a result of needing to get a “product” out to learners. In brief, accessibility still remains a significant failure of Higher Education. I am not ignorant to the complexities of accessibility as a challenge for Higher Education.

That said, I can still sit and dwell with the fact that courses and learning materials still, to this day, remain inaccessible (for both teachers and learners, see for example (Saltes, 2020; Linder et al., 2015; Mullin et al., 2021)). When considering this alongside the new federal regulations regarding accessibility for public entities (including public education at all levels) (ada.gov, 2024), educators will be imminently confronted with the high prevalence of inaccessibility in their courses and institutions will be forced to reconcile their overall lack of preparedness and prioritization of systematic support for accessibility. To be clear, I believe learning should be accessible to all, and as a result, believe in the moral basis of the new regulations (i.e. it's about time institutions were held accountable to accessibility standards and expectations). I can, however, simultaneously imagine and prepare for the likely adverse negative impacts this will have on educators as institutions scramble to comply with the new regulation as early as April 24, 2026 (depending on the size of the institution). Again, keeping in mind the broader public rhetoric regarding the failure of Higher Education today and the need for massive disruption, a potential failure of institutions in meeting these new regulations will only serve as further fuel for ill-intended and uncritical political motives.

Turning next to the rapid and continuous advancement of technology, Higher Education must contend with existing in an age of pervasive misinformation and disinformation (Viccari & Chadwick, 2020; Hight, 2022; Shoaib et al., 2023). As new technologies like Artificial Intelligence make innovations like deepfakes possible, the integrity of information (e.g. the concept of truth, facts, expertise, as well as academic research, publication, and knowledge dissemination) has likewise become a central issue. I raise this here because while in my professional life I am privileged to sit and

debate with colleagues about the potential benefits and downsides of the integration of Artificial Intelligence into education, I am exhausted, in my personal life, by the onslaught of misinformation and disinformation. Taken together, my sense of moral, ethical, and professional obligation to learners is, as a result, significantly influenced by the increased need to center critical and digital literacy much more prominently in conversation and training as a means to combat the larger societal impacts of misinformation and disinformation (particularly as compounded by the current age of AI and its capacity to, for instance, forge deepfakes). While I never bought into nor supported the narrative that educators and academic researchers are de facto experts simply because they represent the institution of education, it is nevertheless uniquely challenging to work in the profession of teaching and learning when truth, fact, and reality itself is up for debate.

Finally, Higher Education is faced with poor, under-prepared, and under-performing leadership, particularly on the part of top-level educational leaders (Bills, 2020; Gertler, 2023). Moreover, many Higher Education leaders have contributed to and even led the drive towards corporate models, which have exacerbated existing challenges within Higher Education (Steele & White, 2019; Oleksiyenko, 2018). Beyond this, there is a larger concern with respect to the values, vision, and leadership ethics espoused by Higher Education leaders. While I won't do this particular topic justice in this dissertation (it simply isn't what it is centrally about), when I reflect on my own experiences as a student, scholar, and educator at Michigan State University, it is hard not to share in the feelings of instability and echo the lack of faith in top-level leadership that I have heard from so many colleagues across the years. Since beginning my

graduate studies at Michigan State University, campus has navigated multiple high-profile and public scandals (Buck, 2023; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2023; Schanz, 2023b), seen turnover in the Board of Trustees and other top-level institutional leadership (likewise storied in scandal and questionable leadership, see (El-Din, 2024; Schanz, 2023a), and been under the leadership of six different university presidents (six since 2018, in fact). Again, tying this into a larger conversation about the future of Higher Education, you don't have to look far for stories that make you ask: *if top-level university and institutional officials can't figure out how to lead and transform, what hope does the rest of the institution have?*

The current state of educator professional development: Some data

A recent survey¹⁰ of 39 educator professionals representing 39 institutions, 12 institution types, and 4 countries, demonstrated that educators are engaged in a significant amount of professional development. On average, survey respondents estimated that they engage in roughly 191 hours of professional development per year, with one participant estimating that they spend roughly 2000 hours per year engaged in professional development. Of that professional development, the majority of it incorporates a digital learning experience as a significant element of learning (a core component of that professional development was facilitated through digital / online / virtual means). More specifically, over 50% of all estimated professional development was said to include some core digital learning experience; 30.8% of participants estimated that 90-100% of the professional development they engage with incorporates

¹⁰ Which survey, you ask? The one I conducted for this dissertation. I intentionally and playfully include the results as part of the Introduction & Exigencies chapter as a means to 1) weave results and findings throughout this dissertation, and 2) because the findings *did* serve as an exigency in terms of where my research went and what I ultimately talked about.

a core digital learning component. Moreover, 76.8% of participants said that 50 percent or more of their professional development is facilitated entirely as a digital learning experience, with 25.6% sharing that 90-100% of the professional development they engage in is facilitated entirely online.

Interestingly, the majority of that professional development is non-required. When asked, *Of the total number of hours of professional development you engage in, what percentage is required?*, 59% of respondents stated that less than 10% of their professional development was “required.” That’s not to say that respondents don’t engage in required professional development. In fact, 7.7% shared that 90-100% of their professional development is required. If we run with the average number of professional development hours per year, this could mean that 7.7% of survey respondents are engaging in (roughly) between 171 to 191 hours of required professional development per year. This would, however, largely imply that the majority of professional development is engaged in by choice. This assumption is echoed in survey responses about agency when it comes to choices regarding which professional development experiences they engage in: 89.8% of participants shared that they either had “A lot” or “Complete agency” over the choice of professional development.

Given that relative agency, we might wonder what educators prefer when it comes to professional development. Survey data shows that 43.6% prefer a hybrid or blended modality for professional development, followed by 33.3% who prefer a fully online modality. These numbers align somewhat to their actual engagement with professional development, though educator professionals tend to actually engage in more fully online professional development. When asked *What is your typical modality*

(as a learner) for professional development? 64.1% responded “Fully Online,” followed by 30.8% responding “Hybrid / Blended.” Finally, with respect to choice of modality (in terms of *synchronous* versus *asynchronous*) they prefer, the results are rather split; 33.3% indicated that they prefer “Asynchronous,” 28,2% prefer “Synchronous,” and 38.5% shared that they prefer them equally.

The survey also inquired into educator professionals’ engagement with professional development resources (i.e. event or program recordings, session handouts, etc.). In both cases (the case of recordings and the case of resources), survey responses trended towards engagement with these assets (as opposed to lack of engagement). When it came to engagement with recordings, A majority (61.6%) chose an option on the higher engagement side of the scale (i.e. selecting either “Occasionally,” “Very Frequently,” or “Always”), with 38.5%, the highest percentage across the survey, stating that they “Occasionally” engage with session recordings, 20.5% stating that they “Very frequently” engage with them, and 2.6% selecting “Always.” Turning to session resources, the numbers track similarly, though the percentage of survey respondents who selected “Occasionally” jumped significantly (48.7%). That said, 30.8% still said they “Very Frequently” reference session materials, and 7.7% said they “Always” do.

Educator professionals’ motivations for attending and engaging in professional development vary widely, from “enjoyment,” “skill enhancement,” and “growing as a person,” to “curiosity,” “keeping up-to-date,” “socialisation with peers,” and operating under the belief that “responsible educators are active learners.” When asked to identify and name barriers to their engagement with professional development, “Cost,” “Time,”

and “Workload / Capacity” were by far the most dominant barriers, followed closely by “Poor design” and “Return on Investment” (see Figure 1, below, for complete results for this question).

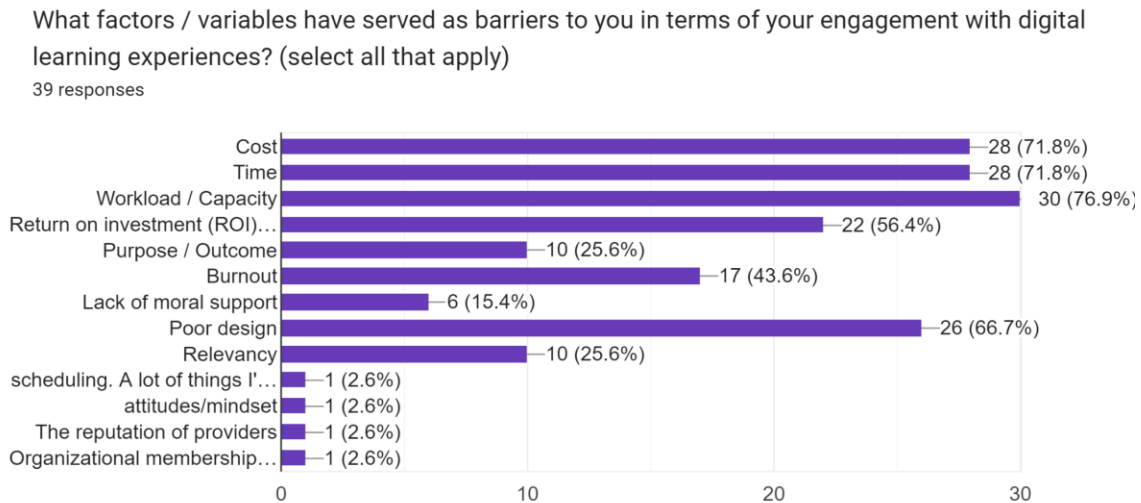


Figure 1. Survey data pertaining to the question “What factors / variables have served as barriers to you in terms of your engagement with digital learning experiences? (select all that apply)”

Beyond raw numbers, survey participants were also given space to talk about the impact of these barriers which proved to be incredibly varied and deeply personal. For example, some shared that the stress of facing and managing these barriers (often overlapping) has led to burnout. Others reported disengagement, a lack of access, and a decrease in the trust they have in some colleagues and the field at large when it comes to designing effective and quality professional development. Though the question wasn’t particularly framed in a negative way, survey respondents were aware that the survey was a space to share their honest opinions about professional development, and more than one indicated that several of these barriers led to the feeling that professional development was a “waste of time.” I will quote one survey

respondent's response in full, here, as it is telling of a larger trend as well (the all-consuming nature of professional development and the larger cultural and societal pressures educator professionals' engagement with professional development exists within):

I finished an emotionally destructive PhD, spent 3 years almost continuously on the job market and desperately completing prof dev opportunities to support a career change from biology over to instructional design. In 2022 I finally landed a stable, long-term position and was immediately inundated by work and was well over 100% capacity for about a year just with my most essential job duties. Then my supervisor left & now I am the Director and PD as both a learner and an educator is 80% of my job. But I am so, so tired & insecure that I am actually focused on what my audience will find valuable. However, the faculty I serve are also extremely tired and are NOT going to engage with yet another survey.

Taken together, what does this survey data tell us and how does it serve as an exigency for this dissertation? Educator professionals engage in a lot of professional development (nearly five whole working week's worth) in a year. Most of that professional development takes place online or digitally (or incorporates some core digital learning experience). While most of that professional development is not required, educator professionals are still engaging in a significant amount of required professional development. All that said (and despite the large number of hours spent engaging in professional development), there still exist a number of barriers to engaging in professional development, barriers that have real and significant impacts on educator professionals, including their ability, capacity, and choice to engage in professional development.

Stepping back, we might then wonder if it is worth it? We might then question the amount of hours that go into making professional development and what those hours and that labor prioritizes. This is especially pertinent when considering survey

responses related to engagement with session resources and recordings. Given that most people only “Occasionally” engage with these resources, it does beg the question of what purpose they serve and whether or not they hold value. We might likewise wonder what, then, is professional development doing? What does it accomplish? What does it contribute to? What does it perpetuate? Who / what does it benefit? If professional development is “bad,” then we might wonder what compels us to nevertheless engage in so many hours of professional development. Is professional development actually “bad”? How do we measure that? How do we assess that? Finally, it leads me to question what we can do differently? What do we want to do differently? What should we do differently? Who is responsible for this work? But going back to one question again, what can we (given the larger context that educator professional development is situated within) actually do differently?

This dissertation seeks to explore these questions and move towards answers. This exigency is a personal one as much as it is professional (and as much as the profession compels us to answer them). I, too, am tired of “bad” professional development and long to engage in more collaborative, transformative learning experiences (and for those to be seen and valued and supported). Like the survey respondents, I feel the impact of little time, high costs, and no to little meaningful return on investment. I, too, feel stuck in a cycle of professional development that falls short on its promise to *develop* me in the ways the capitalist market states it should. But beyond that...beyond my own experiences as a learner with professional development...I feel the moral and ethical responsibility to reflect on and analyze my practices as a designer of educator professional development. This survey was completed by a group of

individuals that don't just represent my peers, they *are* my peers, members of various communities which I am a part of. What can I personally do to address their concerns and their needs? What can I personally do to contribute to a better future for educator professional development? If they are willing to invest their time, money, energy, trust, and hope into a professional learning experience I create, I believe I owe it to them to make it one worth investing in.

The current state of educator professional development: A literature review

Up to this point, I've been referencing something called *educator professional development*. But what exactly do I mean by that? Let's start with a definition of "educator professional development" first and dive in deeper from there. In its simplest form, educator professional development could be considered anything that helps *educator professionals* (noun, plural) *educator professional* (verb) more effectively. Osman and Warner (2020) refer to educator professional development as "...a patchwork of formal and informal activities" (p. 1). That said, I personally like their framing in quoting Little (1897, p. 491) in stating that educator professional development is "any activity that is intended partly or primarily to prepare staff members for improved performance in present or future roles" (cited in Osman & Warner, 2020, p. 1). Osman and Warner (2020) argue more specifically that when trying to define what educator professional development is, we should be less concerned with the tasks and activities and more about the outcomes. They quote Kennedy (2016) in saying that in the case of educator professional development, the intended outcome is "that teachers enhance their teaching practices and outcomes for students" (cited in Osman & Warner, 2020, p. 1). While they are specifically referencing "teachers" here, I find their definition to be

fairly representative of general understandings of what educator professional development is for (at least in terms of how it is defined elsewhere in literature, as well as across my own lived experiences with educator professional development).

This definition provides a useful starting point to better understand the current context of educator professional development (which, I'll foreshadow here, is a rather negative and darkly described state). This is partly due to a more expansive (and perhaps damaging) definition of what *professional development* and *higher education* are for. By and large, the current dominant narrative is that the purpose of higher education is to produce well-rounded professionals and market-ready, as well as market-attractive, graduates. In Cerullo (2023), we see strong rhetoric that positions higher education about career readiness: "attending college isn't only about racking up educational credentials — it's also a place where young people can learn soft skills, such as the ability to work as part of or lead a team, as well as the kind of vital critical thinking and communication skills necessary for so many careers" (para. 28-29). Likewise, in Gallagher (2016), a book about the future of university credentials, the argument is made that we should care about credentials because:

Employers are not simply buyers of college-educated talent at the end of an educational pipeline; rather, they are active participants with great power and influence in shaping or even dictating in some sense how the higher education marketplace evolves in this age that recognizes university-level education as the dominant pathway to professional work. (p. 186)

Calling attention to a much larger system of capitalism and market-readiness, Gallagher and Cerullo position Higher Education not about learning or a better future for humanity, but rather about producing better professionals.

Others, like Henry Giroux, argue that higher education is about “killing the imagination” and “repression.” Regarding “killing the imagination” Giroux claims that, “Education is not just about empowering people, it’s not just about the practice of freedom. It’s also, in some ways, about killing the imagination and in some ways educating people to adjust to conditions in which their own sense of agency is basically limited” (CCCB, 2019). Giroux would call a lot of current pedagogy “pedagogies of repression” and argues that the current “debate about education today, with its emphasis on methods, represents a new kind of pedagogical stupidity because it completely ignores the most fundamental question of education. And that is, ‘What is education for?’” (CCCB, 2019). To Giroux, education should be about agency, as he believes “...all education is an introduction, in some way, to the future” (CCCB, 2019). He finds “the notion of neutrality and when it’s raised in education [to be] the worst form of politics.” To Giroux, “it’s impossible for education to be neutral. There’s no such thing as a neutral education. So those who argue that education should be neutral are really arguing for a version of education in which nobody is accountable” (CCCB, 2019). This is an incredibly different take than the market-focused purpose of Higher Education described by Gallagher and Cerullo, but two descriptions that speak to each other as contradicting forces in a sense. Giroux recognizes the capitalist and market forces at play but argues that they shouldn’t drive the purpose of Higher Education. Rather, he believes a better future (a future of increased agency and “a future very different from the present”) should drive Higher Education (CCCB, 2019).

Nevertheless, the commercialization and commodification of knowledge is now pervasive in Higher Education. Academics are well aware of this and struggle with what

this means for them and the larger profession of teaching (and even working within Higher Education more generally) (Donnelly, 2015; O'Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013; Solomon et al., 2006; Whitchurch, 2013; McIntosh & Nutt, 2022; Osman & Warner, 2020; Kandiko, 2012; Lemoine et al., 2020; Hazelkorn et al., 2018; Groen et al., 2023; McArthur, 2013; Maxwell & Gallagher, 2020; Yajima, 2023; Hall, 2022; DeRosa, 2023; among others). Within this larger context, conflicting narratives around what Higher Education is for are only getting messier. We are moving towards a skills-forward society in which the perceived value of higher education is being actively diluted (Perna, 2023; Healey, 2022; Berlant, 2016; McConnell, 2023; Kirp, 2019; Hoffman & Schwartz, 2017; Cerullo, 2023; Majumdar, 2024). And rightfully so. As Healey (2022) demonstrates, "it is undeniable that the proliferation of low-quality, high-cost degrees has diluted the value of higher education for some, contributed to the racial wealth gap and brought the previously unassailable social goal of perpetually expanding participation in higher education into doubt" (para. 8-10). But this larger shift towards a skills-focused future has resulted in an expansion of the educator professional role (as a means to better prepare students for a seemingly ever-increasing market).

Within the context of this job scope creep, educators and educator professionals are expected to do a lot of things and know a lot of things¹¹. Blackmore and Blackwell (2006) refer to this as a "blurring" of roles. For example, in addition to being content experts, educator professionals across a range of roles are expected to be "effective" collaborators, communicators, instructional designers, educational technologists, and policy interpreters, among other things (see Donnelly, 2015; Bath & Smith, 2004;

¹¹ Land (2004) refers to this as *procedural knowledge* and *propositional knowledge* and argues that we are moving toward a culture that prioritizes procedural knowledge.

Nicholls, 2001; Whitchurch, 2013; Whitchurch, 2022; and Hall, 2022 for a deeper exploration of the range of roles and expectations of educators). They are required to develop knowledge skills, thinking skills, personal skills, personal attributes, and practical skills (Nicholls, 2001, p. 59). According to scholars like Nicholls (2001) and Cheetham and Chivers (1996), educator professionals also benefit from the development of meta-competencies; they forward meta-competencies such as knowledge/cognitive competence, functional competence, personal or behavioral competence, and values/ethical competence (p. 125) as good measures for effective professional development (i.e. if the learning experiencing is advancing these four meta-competencies, it is effective or valuable professional development). The fact that educators are expected to do so much and know so much is partly driven by the fact that those working in educator development have to manage and navigate the needs and goals of students, academics, and the institution (Webster, 2022), which each ask different things of educator professionals and are not always in alignment...in fact most of the literature I reviewed would indicate that they are rarely in alignment. Similarly, as a result of job scope creep, our identities as educator developers are often at odds with institutional expectations of the role (O'Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013). As we shift through positions and roles, we're experimenting with our professional identities and as a result, there is a phase where our professional identity is "uncertain and unstable"...known as our "provisional selves" (Beaton & Hope, 2022, in reference to Ibarra, 1999). While there is a degree to which embodying and practicing these provisional selves can be seen as professional development, and while it could be argued that they better prepare us for the broader market, it points to a "carelessness" which [Lynch (2010)] sees as

being at odds with the moral imperative on the academic to care and support. Universities have become overtly 'managed' in a culture of marketisation where performance is measured by quantifiable, but 'blunt' indicators" (Anderson, 2006, in O'Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013, p. 232). Examples of this include the pervasiveness of "indicator fetishism" (Erickson et al., 2021, p. 4), "shame logics" (Shahjahan, 2019, p. 2), and 'weaponized resilience' (Coonan, 2022, p. 147), whereby performance is judged by things like time spent and output and production rates, and where educators are expected to address their own burnout and well-being (and even celebrated as 'models to learn from' when they do so). In other words, the fact that the university has come to rely on and perpetuate these blurred roles points to a carelessness on the part of Higher Education to actually support and care for academics and their development.

Relatedly, O'Farrell and Fitzmaurice (2013) that the expanding roles have resulted in jobs that don't align with the "the values that led many of us into academic development in the first place" (p. 232). I know that I personally have felt at odds even in my own professional contexts, feeling like I wasn't actually facilitating and contributing to the type of transformative learning that I got into education to do in the first place due to my job mainly being taken up by other tasks and duties.

Related to the broader conversation around the role of educators is an old argument, one of a "divided profession." This has been cited and discussed more times than I can recall (truly, I can't tell you how many times I read about this in working on this dissertation), but Higher Education is still a space that tends to value research over teaching. Even in 2001, Nicholls describes an increasingly stratified, hierarchical and market-driven, capitalistic, governed and managed, higher education (p. 79) wherein

research is rewarded and teaching is not. Nicholls (2001, p. 92), later goes on to cite several criteria that still dominate the professional image of the academic (with a heavy emphasis on research involvement) and I would argue that many (if not all) of these are still alive and well today. This is frustrating, of course, because we are more than two decades out from that publication and yet it feels as though nothing has changed. Ironically, this is something Nicholls (2001) even points out: “As Fullan laments, ‘Most educational change in education seems to fail, and failure means frustration, wasted time, feelings of incompetence and lack of support, and disillusionment’” (Fullan, 1982, p. 63, cited in Nicholls, 2001, p. 111). If Nicholls was talking about wasted time and slow educational change in 2001, and I am writing here about the very same topics and pointing to very similar narratives, we might wonder what changes the next 23 years will bring (or rather which attempts at change will fail).

Regardless of this sustained binary, there are additionally growing “pressures to professionalise” for educator developers (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006, p. 373), as well as an extreme pressure for educator professionals to continuously learn and to always, therefore, be professionalizing (see, as a start, Scherer et al., 2021; Tondeur et al., 2021; Tondeur et al., 2023). To dwell in the darkest version of what this means, then (which is an interpretation I am currently wrestling with myself): “To join the academic world is therefore to enter a ceaseless quest for knowledge and freedom” (Said, 1996, p. 228, cited in Nicholls, 2001, p. 88). This ever-changing environment and the pressures to constantly learn and grow and be up to date on all the new advances have resulted in some extremely negative consequences and dire circumstances, such as educator burnout (Pope-Ruark, 2022).

The expansion of the educator role has also resulted in the lack of “a shared narrative around the nature of impact, or even a unified view of academic development, its goals and underpinning philosophy” (Bamber & Stefani, 2016, p. 342, in reference to Land, 2004). Likewise, the shifts in educator development makes it hard to assess, evaluate, and demonstrate value and achievement (see Leibowitz, 2014; Bamber & Stefani, 2016; Lauridsen & Gregersen-Hermans, 2023). As someone who designs educator professional development, this is particularly salient for me personally and professionally; how do I know whether what I designed is effective? As an educator professional who engages in professional development, this is likewise salient for me; how do I measure what I just learned or achieved through the experience and how do I measure whether I have effectively *developed*? To add to the complexity of this challenge, Osman and Warner (2020) demonstrate that a lot of factors impact the effectiveness of educator professional development, including, for example, educator beliefs, attitudes, and motivations, in addition to a whole slew of external factors. Likewise, how educators teach, what educators think about teaching, and what educators think about learning all have an impact on student learning (whether that be their habits, their approaches, their beliefs, etc.) (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). The ways in which knowledge and knowledge application is perceived by educators also impacts their practices (like if they are prepared to innovate and learn from their teaching, for example) (Brew & Wright, 1990). So again, as someone who designs educator professional development, I have to contend with a myriad of factors, then, to assess *effectiveness*, including whether an educator is ready and prepared to learn or engage in new practices. This realization can make for a rather depressing outlook for educator

professional development designers who might be hoping for a certain type and level of engagement in their professional development experiences. Even more depressing is that a lot of educator professional development efforts fail to challenge assumptions and lead to changes in practice (Day, 1999; Nicholls, 2001). While several have written about this failure, I appreciate the phrasing from Weidman et al. (2001): “Few substantive changes in the preparation of professionals or academics have succeeded in revolutionizing the socialization process. Instead, methods passed from generation to generation, however archaic or flawed, have remained in vogue” (p. 91).

In response to the relative lack of holistic frameworks for evidencing the value of professional development, Groen et al. (2023) adapted (and applied) Saunders’s (2000) RUFDATA framework for evaluating planning to educator professional development. Given that I am personally constantly negotiating feelings of optimism and cynicism about the future of Higher Education, I appreciate their approach for the ways in which they acknowledge that they don’t think we can escape capitalism but then nevertheless offer something practical for use in terms of a series of questions and an approach to thinking about evidencing the value of professional development. Groen et al. (2023, p. 91) close with a call to action, arguing that “It is incumbent on all of us to create a vision for the age of evidence and start living it. There is a real danger that if we don’t take stock of our data now, others will do it for us. Therefore, we cannot wait for calmer seas.” Hines (2017) and Bamber (2013) speak into this call, both suggesting that we need to be building the work of evidencing the value of educator professional development into our regular practices. I’ll note that I use “evidencing value” in this dissertation as a result of Bamber and Stefani (2016), who argue that through impact,

we risk being “trapped in a positivist, new managerialist spiral of demonstrating the value of our work” (p. 242). Rather than “impact,” then, they make the case for “evidencing” because this “also acknowledges the role of judgment, experience, and contextual knowledge in determining what needs to be evaluated, and how. It allows us to reconfigure what can legitimately be included in our heterogeneous mix of evaluation data” (p. 242). Their work has weighed heavily on my mind as of late, as I consider ways to incorporate more regular practices of “evidencing value” into my own work. Something that is hard to digest in relation to this work is that “as educational developers we are in the audit culture, but not of it, and are aware of the inadequacy of our conventional evaluation tools to demonstrate the significance of our work (e.g. Stefani, 2011)” (Bamber & Stefani, 2016, 243). In other words, we know there is an issue, we know that the system is inadequate, and yet, we still haven’t developed a better one¹². Building in this type of infrastructure, of course, takes time and resources (which are, as I have mentioned, limited). In a recognition of this fact, Bamber and Stefani (2016) cite Nutley et al., (2013, p. 3) in suggesting that what we need is “good enough evidence” for the contexts in which we are working.

Interestingly, on the part of educator professionals, there is a recognition that Higher Education has failed to provide a systematic and supported structure of professional development, resulting in them seeking spaces and opportunities outside of their own units and localized academic spaces for professional development (Denney, 2022; Denney, 2020). As a result, MacPhail et al. (2019) have referred to the lack of actual large scale strategy and support for educator professional development as

¹² Not for the sake of not trying though; I already mentioned that Bamber & Stefani (2016) have advanced a framework for our use. We can also look to Stoakes (2013).

“haphazard professional learning.” They likewise argue that Higher Education has come to depend on and rely on self-directed learning on the part of educator professionals.¹³

Because of the varied roles and responsibilities, some argue that we should be developing highly customized and contextualized professional development (see, for example, Greytak et al., 2013). While I would philosophically agree with this, it brings to question who does the work of educator professional development and how this work is supported within and across the context of Higher Education (because currently, it is not (see MacPhail et al., 2019 and O’Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013). The current state of educator professional development has also meant that there are a lot of opinions about and frameworks that advance “best practices.” I will share some of the recommended models that impacted my thinking in Chapter 6.

When considering the larger conversation about the shifting of educator roles and the purpose of educator professional development within the context of Higher Education, I’d argue, that the inadequacies described thus far also have to do, in large part, with the fact that educator professional development has never really been defined as being for the educator...it is typically and has historically been defined as ultimately being for the student (and we can return to Osman and Warner (2020) for an example of this: “that teachers enhance their teaching practices and outcomes for students” (p. 1, citing Kennedy, 2016). I explore this in much greater detail in Chapter 7, but I think it worth noting here, as it served as a major point of inquiry for me throughout this dissertation: *who does educator professional development really serve / benefit?*

¹³ I return to this in Chapter 7 through a discussion of self-directed learning in the context of educator professional development.

I am interested in the space of educator professional development for a lot of reasons. One reason I have decided to explicitly study it, though, through this dissertation, is that professional development is not a neutral act; it is designed (see, to start with, Hall, 2022; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010; Erby et al., 2021). As a result, I am interested in the people, the rhetorics, and the choices surrounding that design and the impacts of design choices in the case of educator professional development. This dissertation isn't a study of efficacy, though. It doesn't look at nor measure the effectiveness of professional development as assessed by any classic metric or standard. It provides insight into preferences and perceived value, on desire, wonderings, and wishes. It asks about what educator professionals want and what they would spend their time and money on...what they believe will impact them most. In their study of academic developers, O'Riordan et al. (2022) demonstrate that the most valued (as measured by educator developer feedback) professional development experience is collaborative. A collaborative model for professional development has also been advanced by King (2019), who showed that it can lead to increased interaction across learning contexts. Many of the educator professionals I interviewed echo this sentiment and long for more collaborative and dialogic professional development spaces. In fact, it is a recommended practice that has stood the test of time and has been argued for by several others across the educator professional development world (see also Tondeur et al., 2018; Wenger, 1998; MacPhail et al., 2019). In addition to collaborative learning spaces, O'Riordan et al. (2022), along with Zuber-Skerritt et al. (2015) and Asghar and Pilkington (2018) make the case for a deeper commitment to and integration of critical reflection. You will find in the interviews

I story, as well as in my own reflections, that educator professionals desire more time to dwell and to reflect as well. But there's the rub... *time*. O'Riordan et al. (2022), along with several others up to this point (see, for example, MacPhail et al., 2019), have identified time as a significant barrier to the capacity to engage in the type of professional development as well as the capacity to engage in professional development in the ways they wish to. They likewise forward other significant barriers, such as deadlines, support, prioritization, workload, and so on and argue that these barriers serve to create conditions where educator professionals ultimately question whether they "hav[e] permission to commit to professional development" (O'Riordan et al., 2022, p. 9). I find the word "permission" here particularly salient, as it signals the larger systems'¹⁴ means and mechanisms of control over educator professional development. This dissertation seeks to explore that larger system and how educator professionals view themselves in relation to it. It seeks to explore and understand the things educator professionals desire for themselves and the future of their profession. It seeks to understand why we still seem to not be able to move systematically towards those collaborative and reflective spaces educators want and scholars prove are effective. Educator professional development will always be beholden to the larger institutional structure because it is a part of the institutional structure (Bamber, 2020; Groen et al., 2023; King, 2019). That said, we can look for ways to change and transform that larger structure. This dissertation explores those possibilities too, like those imagined by Nicholls (2001), Giroux (CCCB 2019), and those who believe in a

¹⁴ I use the plural of "systems" here because there are multiple systems at play here. Capitalism and coloniality are two such systems we can name, both of which surfaced as heavily relevant in this dissertation.

Higher Education for good (see Czerniewicz & Cronin, 2023). In this dissertation, I examine the conditions currently serving as barriers, preventing us from moving towards that kind of vision and look to the rhetorics at play in and around the world of asynchronous digital learning and educator professional development as a window into possible futures, and moreover a means to make sense of the here and now. I'll close with a quote from Nicholls (2001) that keeps me up at night, thinking about this work in generative ways:

The question is whether higher education will be able to reflect self-critically on its position in terms of professional development, and thus create and allow for a genuine learning community to evolve. Or must its changes be led by external bodies, with imposed development strategies, regulated levels of competence and an assessment process that does not reflect the values and goals of a higher education learning community? (Nicholls, 2001, p. 71)

I offer this quote to you, here, so that you can ask alongside me whether higher education can change, and if it can, what it will take?

Educator burnout and well-being

Burnout is “a feeling of weariness, disinterest and reduced performance” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, referenced in Watts & Robertson, 2011, p. 34). A global phenomenon (see Watts & Robertson, 2011; Winfield & Paris, 2022), it is commonly associated with impacts that researchers (like Maslach & Jackson, 1981 and Watts & Robertson, 2011) categorize into three domains: “the depletion of emotional reserves (emotional exhaustion), an increasingly cynical and negative approach towards others (depersonalisation) and a growing feeling of work related dissatisfaction (diminished personal accomplishment)” (Watts & Robertson, 2011, p. 34, with reference to Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

In a recent publication that shares the results of a scoping review of research on burnout, stress, anxiety, and depression among teachers, Agyapong et al. (2022) found that “the median prevalence of stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression among these studies were, respectively, 67.0%, 60.9%, 39.6%, and 14.0%” (p. 9). Reporting similar numbers, the HMS Faculty/Staff Survey (which was conducted between September 2022 and May 2023) reported that 64% of faculty experienced burnout due to work (Vyletel et al., 2023).

Why should we care about educator burnout? Well, apart from the fact that burnout is associated with (and in part defined by) “chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed” (World Health Organization, 2019, cited in Pope-Ruark, 2022, pp. 7-8), among other things, burnout correlated with higher rates of desire to leave a position in higher education (Winfield & Paris, 2022). Over the last few years, in fact, turnover rates have increased. The CUPA-HR 2023 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey (Bichsel et al., 2023), which showed an increase in turnover rates between 2022-2023, purports that there is still a high likelihood that those working in Higher Education will look for other employment beyond 2023.

A number of things contribute to burnout. For example, those who experience disruption (e.g. losing a job, a major stressful event, etc.) are more likely to experience burnout (Winfield & Paris, 2022). With respect to educator professionals, an increased demand on time and role expectations without an increase in resources has been shown to correlate to increased rate of burnout (Winfield & Paris, 2022). Workload, in general, is a significant factor reported in research on educator burnout (Turner & Garvis, 2023; Lederman, 2022b; Carrol et al., 2022). As two points of nuance related to

workload, Bichsel et al. (2023) report that over half of Higher Education employees work beyond full-time expectations with no increased pay nor benefits. Additionally, there is a clear need for deeper understanding of burnout across educator identities, as burnout and the current state of Higher Education, does not impact everyone to the same degree. For instance, the American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Inequities in Academic Tenure and Promotion (2023) report on the extra, “invisible labor” expected specifically of faculty of color (p.10). In terms of other factors that contribute to burnout, the elimination of staff positions correlated with higher burnout (Winfield & Paris, 2022). Additional factors include lack of organization support (whether perceived or actual) (Lederman, 2022b), values conflict (Lederman, 2022b), complexity of roles (Turner & Gravis, 2023), and inadequate compensation (Lederman, 2022a). To expand briefly on a few of these latter factors, supervisors with institutional support were found to be less likely to leave Higher Education (Bichsel et al., 2023). With respect to the complexity of roles, we know from research related to those who work across professional roles and boundaries that the blurring of roles can also lead to decreased sense of clear professional identity and belonging (Beaton & Hope, 2022), which could create conditions vulnerable to burnout. Related to values conflict, Bichsel et al. (2023) report a high prevalence of misalignment between what staff want and what institutions are providing; employees prefer hybrid work arrangements and while a majority reported most of their work could be done remotely, they also reported that a majority of their work is expected to be performed onsite. This misalignment is tied to a larger finding seen in the Bichsel et al. (2023) report: low job satisfaction with respect to work environment, employee benefits, work-life balance, pay and retention incentives.

Threading these findings together into a broader narrative, the report stresses the importance of validating Higher Education employees (through, for instance, recognition for contributions, sense of belonging, feeling inter-personally valued). They share that while increased pay is an incentive, personal validation of this sort is a far greater indicator of job retention and satisfaction (Bichsel et al., 2023).

It is difficult to mention burnout without also mentioning the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on Higher Education and educator well-being. COVID-19 has, without doubt, had lasting impacts, dramatically transforming the educator sector. With respect to educator professional development, COVID-19 influenced everything from which topics were in focus (see, for example, Hamam & Hysaj, 2022), to the approach to modalities used for delivering professional development (see, for example, Perry, 2023), to funding and budget allocations.¹⁵

Bozkurt et al. (2022) published an extensive literature review of published works related to the impacts of COVID-19 on education. Within the review, Bozkurt et al. (2022) raise a number of important considerations related to educator professional development worthy of further thought. One major trend they identified was the need for better training around digital pedagogy, exacerbated by the pandemic and the massive move online (Bozkurt et al., 2022). As part of their discussion, they called attention to Higher Education's "adoption of new roles to survive in the learning ecologies informed by digital learning pedagogies" (Bozkurt et al., 2022, p. 889) and new educational

¹⁵ I had difficulty in locating a reference that specifically supported this, but leveraging personal and anecdotal evidence, I can attest from my own experiences in working in the field that hiring freezes and a significant reduction in funding allocated to travel and professional development were among the major challenges reported by educators as a determinant for whether they could engage in professional learning experiences following COVID-19.

landscape. In the context of a study on COVID-19 in Portugal, Flores and Gago (2020) use the term “technostress” to describe the stress educators felt in response to the rapid adaptation to the new, online working context brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (Flores & Gago, 2020). Bozkurt et al. (2022) additionally found that a significant body of research stresses the importance of clearly defining the difference between emergency response education and quality online learning. I’ll linger on this here briefly to share that in my opinion, the fact that this was a major trend in research supports minimally two lines of productive thinking: 1) educators are prioritizing a conversation around quality online learning, and 2) educators are aware that societal narratives around “online learning” during the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic were, in reality, in response to emergency response education. The former gives me hope for the future of online learning (i.e. perhaps we might address the challenge of quality with respect to educator professional development) and the latter gives me hope for the future of Higher Education (i.e. perhaps we might be able to counter uncritical narratives regarding what online learning is / isn’t, as tied to the larger conversation around the current failures of Higher Education). Finally, Bozkurt et al. (2022) share a significant finding of loss. They write,

It is quite clear that learners have experienced educational loss (e.g., drop-outs, achievement gaps, academic procrastination, etc.), as well as social and emotional impairments (e.g., fear, frustration, confusion, anxiety, sense of isolation, death of loved ones, etc.). Therefore, we need to critically approach the situation, focusing first on healing our social and emotional losses, and then, on the educational losses. (p. 892)

In their argument, they cite a compelling quote by Bozkurt and Sharma (2020a), which I will echo here, for I find the sentiments shared both thought-provoking and somewhat

therapeutic when I consider my own lived experiences and the tensions I struggle with in terms of both delivering and engaging in professional development:

What we teach in these times can have secondary importance. We have to keep in mind that students will remember not the educational content delivered, but how they felt during these hard times. With an empathetic approach, the story will not center on how to successfully deliver educational content, but it will be on how learners narrate these times. (p. iv, in Bozkurt et al., 2022, p. 892)

When we consider other COVID-19 related educator deaths (Lederman, 2022a; Lederman, 2020), the ways in which the pressure to return to in-person teaching resulted in the subsequent feeling that institutions weren't prioritizing teacher health and well-being (Lederman, 2022a), reports of emotional exhaustion (Wang et al., 2024), and "endemic bullying and harassment, chronic overwork, high levels of mental health problems, general health and wellbeing problems, and catastrophically high levels of demoralisation and dissatisfaction" (Erickson et al. 2021, p. 15), it is difficult for me (at least personally) to ignore the significance of the above sentiment.

As this dissertation will story educator professionals' lived experiences with professional development (some of whom share aspects of their overall health and well-being and symptoms of burnout, it is therefore important to keep in mind that burnout and the current state of educator professional development are inherently linked. Educators often turn to professional development to address burnout or health and well-being, only to have a professional development experience perpetuate that burnout or other health or well-being concern. This in mind, this dissertation takes up the task of asking whether or not this cycle can be broken, and if it can, what we as individuals and as a community of educator professionals might need to do in order to take up this work.

The story of my burnout

This dissertation is also motivated by a personal exigency; it serves as a response to my own burnout and a strategy to help manage my burnout. I needed to do *something*, and investing time and energy into a dissertation to help answer some of the questions I, myself, was wrestling with seemed valuable to me.

My burnout came on quickly and unexpectedly, though knowing what I now know about burnout, I can look back and see the indicators more clearly and see the path towards burnout that I ultimately found myself on. In storying my burnout for “*Daughter*,” I said this of my burnout:

I liked the people I was working with. I could see that I was having an impact. You know, all of those things that I wanted and thought were meaningful to me as a teacher, as an educator, as an educator professional developer...all of those things were happening. I got to work with awesome people, got to do cool things, and I could say really positive things about my work. But at the same time there are all these other factors and variables that ultimately led to me feeling tired. It became hard to do my job. And that was everything from how much I was being paid to how much I was being expected to do. So just like you were telling the story of being asked to teach another course, like “just one more.” And you’re like, “it’s just one more.” No...it’s not just one more. If you pile it up on everything else, that one more thing just makes everything harder to do. In addition to other things, I felt I was being increasingly at risk of not doing anything to the level of quality that I wanted to, that I felt responsible to, that I felt ethically responsible to. And so in addition to trying to have a life and being a partner to my wife, and a good pet parent, and completing home renovations, and being a rowing coach, and all those other things, I just felt like I was not doing anything in my life or work to the level and degree of quality that I wanted to. More so than that, I couldn’t actually do what I wanted to at my work due to my existing capacity, which therefore led me to feel that the work I really wanted to do wasn’t being valued at work. So it was just all those things piling up together.

I really enjoy the work of the OLC and have benefited historically from the OLC community. And yet, even in that context, I felt like I wasn’t being supported in the way that I wanted and felt like I needed to be, because of all the real tensions I was experiencing and the toll it was taking on me emotionally,

mentally, and physically. At one point in time I was managing like 7 different events yearly, and, as you know, our events aren't small. The work that goes into engagement planning for a conference...we plan for like 9 months for that one conference, alone. So everything was just like that one more added thing and by the time you're like, "I'm doing too much," it's too late...you almost don't see it coming. You could see it happening, but you tell yourself it's fine and that you can manage it...you believe in your abilities to manage things, and manage more. And it's not like I didn't say "no" or try to say "no" to things. The structure enabled me to do more, and we didn't have barriers to say "No, actually, you're over capacity. We literally can't give you this, not even if you wanted to say yes." Imagine if your institution had a built in system to help assess capacity in that way and tend to your actual needs in that way for and with you, better enabling the choice of whether to say yes or no to something and that didn't make you feel lesser than or like you weren't doing enough by saying "no." So that's what it meant for me...burnout. It meant a lot of things, but it just made it really hard for me to feel like I could stay...that I could even sustain.

And again, I love the OLC. I've got great colleagues and the like. But it literally took a whole year for the system of work and management to shift enough to address my burnout. The system had allowed me to be a single point of failure for several projects due to org-wide capacity, so I was caught in a cycle of needing to complete things because if I didn't, it just meant shifting my workload on another already over-capacity colleague, which I wasn't willing to do. I also couldn't fathom, at the time, just not completing the work. That didn't feel like a viable option. But I was ready to jump ship...was ready to quit and find a different job. Because as much as I loved the work we were working towards, I was just caught in the space of feel like like if something didn't change, I was going to have to leave in order to simply sustain. It just simply wasn't manageable for me anymore. I was fortunate to have some great colleagues who were cognizant and doing what they could to help me with the capacity and needs our org was facing. Eventually, things began to be taken off of my portfolio to open up time. What was hard is that it didn't feel like enough. For like an entire two months, at least, it felt like I wasn't doing my job. I was so used to being so busy that I didn't have any concept of what a work week could look like. There were multiple weeks where I felt I couldn't do anything, I was just so exhausted. And then crept in the self-imposed pressures to fill the time I was given. I saw more time and my brain thought, "Oh look, you have more time now to do other things, like pick up that passion project you've been side-lining or workout more or attend more professional development." I saw an opportunity to engage in all the things I felt like I didn't have time for before. But I found that the time given back, I needed to do nothing with it, because I was already over the capacity,

right? And I feel like at the end of the day, we really need to strip the system down in order to get to a point where I feel like I genuinely have the built in capacity to engage in things like professional development...where that is a valued part of my job and not something I take extra time for. Because when I got to the extreme stage of burnout that I did, when I finally did get time back, I just couldn't do anything with it, even when I tried and even when I wanted to...I was just too burned out. And now I am so much more cautious to trust a workplace system and feel like I need to be far more proactively protective of myself, like my time and my energy and my mental, emotional, and physical health and wellness. Because the system isn't set up to protect me or care for me. So I feel like if I were to enter into a different system (or even if like my workplace shifted to a new system), it will take me a lot of time to relearn and to trust any new system because I was burned by one before...burned out by one before.

So why this dissertation and why focus on educator professional development (and specifically asynchronous digital learning experiences within that context)? I need to do *something* to talk back to my own burnout, and *something* to actively push back on the systems that enabled it, both for myself and for others who have experienced burnout and those who still might (a community who I can now deeply empathize with). Given my professional role and my professional and scholarly background, a focus on educator professional development felt like a good place to start, especially since I work in a role directly responsible for the design of digital learning-based professional development experiences for educator professionals. I also happen to have a lot to say about asynchronous digital learning and believe it to provide a meaningful location for critical insight into the potentialities and possibilities of educator professional development.

On the many exigencies

So where does this leave us? I would argue that we are living and working within the context of a significant existential moment of Higher Education. An existential

moment because we're operating at a time when we have good reason to question the purpose and value of Higher Education. An existential moment because we are witnessing unprecedented political influence on the nature and structure of Higher Education. An existential moment because we have yet to define who we are given massive shifts and transformations post-COVID-19. An existential moment because educators are struggling to identify with their role and to find a sense of belonging (as a result of factors like job scope creep, among others). An existential moment as educators reconcile working for an institution and a profession that doesn't seem to value and prioritize their mental, emotional, and physical health and well-being (against a background of significant rates of educator burnout, stress, anxiety, turnover rates, and other significant health and well-being concerns). An existential moment due to the failure of Higher Education to adapt to change (like changing market pressures), while also simultaneously failing to support educators amidst rapid change and innovation. An existential moment due to poor Higher Education leadership. An existential moment due to the realization of the relative poor quality of educator professional development and the perceived waste of time (in addition to the misalignment between what educators want and need and that which is provided / offered to them). An existential moment due to the impacts of the commodification and corporatization of Higher Education and the impacts of the neoliberal university model on faculty and staff well-being (see Lemon, 2022).

I write this dissertation within this larger context (the context described above), all while knowing and recognizing that I have only scraped the surface of the realities of working in Higher Education and the education sector today. I didn't even talk about, for

instance, climate change and its impact on Higher Education.¹⁶ We should be alarmed that we exist among conditions under which the act of valuing self-care is now positioned as a form of resistance and activism (Clarke, 2022, p. 35). We should be worried that more institutional leadership isn't actively talking about and addressing the broader socio-political-cultural transformations taking place right now and what they might mean for our local institutions (and Higher Education in general). We should be critical of the habit of just operating as if it is 'business as usual,' for I don't know about you, but I don't really like much of anything about the current business model of education. We should seek real, transformative, long-lasting change and create spaces for authentic dialogue about the current state of educator lived experiences in Higher Education and educator professional development. It is my hope (though a lofty and altogether altruistic one) that this dissertation will help address these concerns through engaging directly with the lived experiences of educators (including my own). For now, though, keep these exigencies in mind, because they serve as important anchors for the stories to follow and represent key considerations to return to as the educator professionals I interview for this dissertation attempt to make sense of it all for themselves (and alongside me).

Chapter overview & broader goals

This dissertation, when treated less as a focus on a specific set of topics and more in light of what it attempts to *do* and *accomplish*, is designed around five primary goals:

¹⁶ Though I highly recommend Bryan Alexander's book "Universities on fire: Higher education in the climate crisis" (see Alexander, 2023) as a means to begin thinking about this.

1. **Situate and Story**— I seek to situate and story the work of educator professional development and the lived experiences of asynchronous digital learning experiences designed for educator professionals. This is, in part, due to a desire to validate. I see you, reader, as a human and a person in this space and want to acknowledge and validate you as a self-directed learner in this space. The stories I share should provide you multiple pathways to explore and lines of inquiry, interest, and curiosity to follow. I want you to know that you are not alone in this work; I am right there (or rather, here) with you.
2. **Change and transform**— If this dissertation shifts your perspective, or makes you think about something in a different way, I have achieved my second goal. Wilson (2008) writes, “If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right” (p. 135). With this in mind, minimally, this dissertation has changed me as a person, so I can be satisfied, to a certain extent, in what this dissertation is doing and contributing to.
3. **Model**— They say dissertations aren't meant to be read. But I hope this one is. I hope this because I have spent a lot of time and energy into intentionally designing this dissertation to not just be *about* something, but ideally *do* something. I'd like your feedback on how you think it went and what I could do better next time. I would benefit from knowing and understanding which strategies you found useful, which (if any) will change your own practices, and which you are drawn to or find value in.

Through attempting to model through this dissertation the very things the dissertation is *about*, I aim to draw attention to the *how* as much as I do the *what*, and situate this within a larger conversation of the *why*. Have I compelled you to act? How did you experience this dissertation and what has that experience meant to you? What have you learned from it? What are you taking away?

4. **Question and challenge**— Percec (1999) asks:

How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infraordinary, the background noise, the habitual? ... To question the habitual. But that's just it, we're habituated to it. We don't question it, it doesn't question us, it doesn't seem to pose a problem, we live it without thinking, as if it carried within it neither questions nor answers, as if it weren't the bearer of any information ... How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down rather, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally speak of what is, of what we are. (pp. 209-210)

This dissertation questions the 'common things' of educator professional development and asynchronous digital learning. Through this questioning, it works to identify locations, opportunities, and points of engagement. It challenges what I am compelled to challenge. Other times, it simply observes and comments. It shares and plays and muses and wanders. It surfaces that which aims to remain hidden. Along the way, though, it does ultimately ask who we are in asynchronous educator professional development and what we are doing (or not doing). It wonders what we can do better. It challenges what we mean by *better*. Through this iterative and, at times, incessant approach, it seeks to locate and explore

possibilities and alternatives, with the goal of putting those into dialogue with our imagined futures for educator professional development.

5. **Dialogue and constellate**— I consider this dissertation to be a dialogue; a dialogue between me and you, a dialogue between me and the folx I interviewed, a dialogue between me and the scholarship I engaged with, and so on. We are now in a new relation with one another through this dissertation. I want to make space for us here to dwell together, learn, and collaborate through this new relation. As I constellate scholarship, stories, lived experiences, data, and research, I aim to facilitate a space for you to locate and explore new connections alongside me. Perhaps through these new connections, connections you make beyond this dissertation, we will move even closer to *answers*, *solutions*, and pathways forward.

I won't achieve these goals without you. In this way, you and I have now entered into a collaborative, emergent space together. I hope it turns out to be a reciprocal one. I have designed the space, and by reading these words, you've signaled that you're already engaging in and with it. So pick this dissertation up, read it, listen to it. Come back to it. Forget about it. Remember it in five years when you're working on a project. Have a visceral reaction to it. Hate it. Love it. Be indifferent about it. But no matter how, when, how often, and in what way you engage with it, take a moment to determine its value to you and reflect on what it tells you about educator professional development and asynchronous digital learning experiences designed for educator professionals. They say the best educator professional development is that which is designed not just *for* others, but *with* others. So let's design, you and I, this dissertation as an

asynchronous professional development experience. Through our collective musings, imaginings, discomforts, failings, and questioning, perhaps along the way we will also (re)design the future of educator professional development.

CHAPTER 3: SITUATING THE SELF & OTHERS

Maybe it's a function of ageing but I have become more and more uncomfortable with education scholarship that remains disconnected from the lives of real people.

(Jansen, 2015, p. ix)

Positioning queerness in educator professional development

It was a busy week wrapping up a series of presentations for the Online Learning Consortium Accelerate 2017 conference. I couldn't remember the last time I was so excited to go to a conference and share ideas with new colleagues. I was a part of the Technology Test Kitchen (TTK) Team that year; we were responsible for designing and facilitating all "TTK" conference programming. The TTK was intentionally situated around exploring, sandboxing, testing, creating, and playing in the space of educational technologies. My participation on the team that year marked an important shift in my approach to and orientation towards conferences / conferencing¹⁷. Up to that point, my presentations had largely been about 'doing'; where I reported on things I had done and planned to do in the future and sharing things that others could do. The TTK team and the larger OLC Accelerate 2017 Engagement Team¹⁸ helped me to see that conferences could be about 'making;' that we could co-create and build together at conferences. It shifted my perspective on what was possible when it came to "engagement" and, for me, pushed the boundaries around the possibilities of conferences, complicating the narratives I entered the space with regarding what a conference can / can't do and what it should / shouldn't do and therefore also what my role was / wasn't and should / shouldn't be as "presenter" in that space (i.e. the space of conferences).

There I was, though, facing new possibilities and in a position of helping to share¹⁹ that new narrative (i.e. that the TTK - and thereby conferences - was a

¹⁷ In the spirit of situating myself, it is important to note that I currently work for the Online Learning Consortium (OLC). This is important because I am about to say some rather positive things about my experience attending OLC Accelerate 2017. This could be taken as a 'sales pitch' or an attempt on my part to get you to attend one of these conferences. I hope this note and the ways in which I continue to work to position myself in this dissertation help you to see that this is not my intention (though if that's what it results in, it would certainly help me communicate the "value" of this dissertation to my employers and colleagues). To be extra sure, though, you can engage with Past Maddie, who wrote about the OLC and its impacts on her even before she was on staff (see Shellgren & Davi, 2019).

¹⁸ A group of volunteers that oversaw and facilitated all "engagement programming" at the conference.

¹⁹ Once I began formally working for (and getting paid by) the OLC, the imperative became about "advancing" the narrative, for the OLC, at that point, recognized it as a Unique Value Proposition and therefore something recognized as valuable in the academic conference market. And I use the word

space for new possibilities). I had also just recently taken *Queer Rhetorics with Dr.*²⁰ Trixie Smith, where I learned about zines and the rhetorical roles they have historically played (e.g. in facilitating and practicing activism, validating the queer community, counterstorytelling, etc.). Being queer, zines spoke to me personally. Being an educator wanting to dismantle colonial and oppressive systems living and working within Higher Education, zines became a method and a practice for doing this type of work. Being an educational technologist, zines provided me an opportunity to talk about the ways in which technology and tools can be leveraged in support of meaningful and transformative work. So with all these identities in mind, I designed and facilitated the session “Using Google Slides to Create E-Zines” to be part of the 2017 TTK.

As a means to facilitate the session, I created an e-zine in Google Slides. It was an e-zine about e-zines²¹. Here’s what it looked like:²²

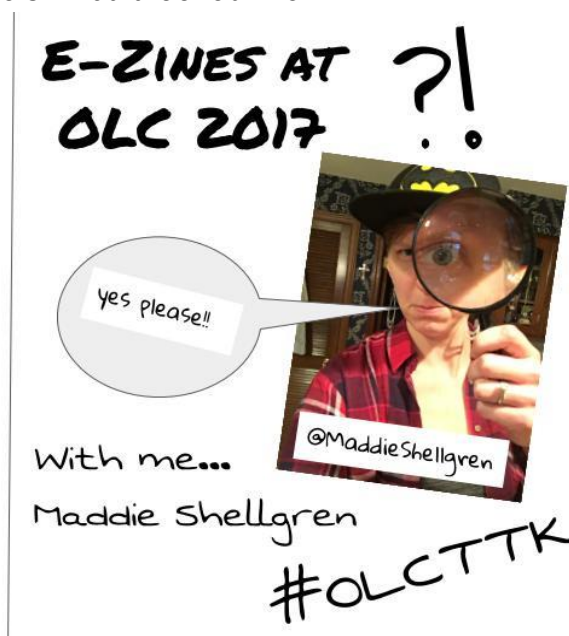


Figure 2. “Pages” 1 and 2 of the e-zine “E-Zines at OLC 2017?!”

“imperative” here, intentionally, as a result of the way it points to “vitality.” The OLC is a non-profit that survives through meeting the bottom line. This survival is, in part, supported by marketing the things that are uniquely OLC and ultimately selling professional learning experiences.

²⁰ Never in my life have I ever called Trixie “Dr. Trixie Smith” to her face...not because I don’t respect her, that can’t be further from the truth in fact. Rather, she introduced herself to me as “Trixie” and asked that I call her “Trixie.” This is how I know her. But I don’t know how she’d like you to know her, and in Academia the honorific “Dr.” is one linguistic device we use to position ourselves and others. It carries with it a lot of meanings, depending on the context, its use, and the requirements we place / communicate around its use.

²¹ I told you, I live and work in the “meta.”

²² In addition to being session slides, this was designed as a starting template and a resource. Feel free to use it; consider it a gift from me to you to assist in your development however it might be useful. You can access it here (please note that this link is set to copy):

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/12TsYrNJ6IGTg7Jl6BXPOqYdsXU7kS0bw3Z6jzSokb2w/copy>



My name is Madeline (Maddie) Shellgreen. I'm the one with the batman and dinosaur tattoos. Starting this year as a PhD student in Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures, I spent the last six years at Michigan State as a PhD student in Linguistics. I devote a lot of time to thinking about professional identities within higher education, inclusion, equity, and accessibility, language and identity, pedagogy, educational technology, and a bunch of other things. That said, I also spend a lot of time trying to figure out which local stores sell the best donuts (extensive research and data collection still underway) and which parks provide the best dog-walking experiences. When not teaching, being a grad student, or working for either the College of Arts and Letters, the Graduate School, or the Writing Center, you can find me coaching with the MSU Varsity Rowing Team, working as a Simulated Patient for the College of Human Medicine, or eating cannolis at Roma Bakery.

Figure 3. "Pages" 3 and 4 of the e-zine "E-Zines at OLC 2017?!"

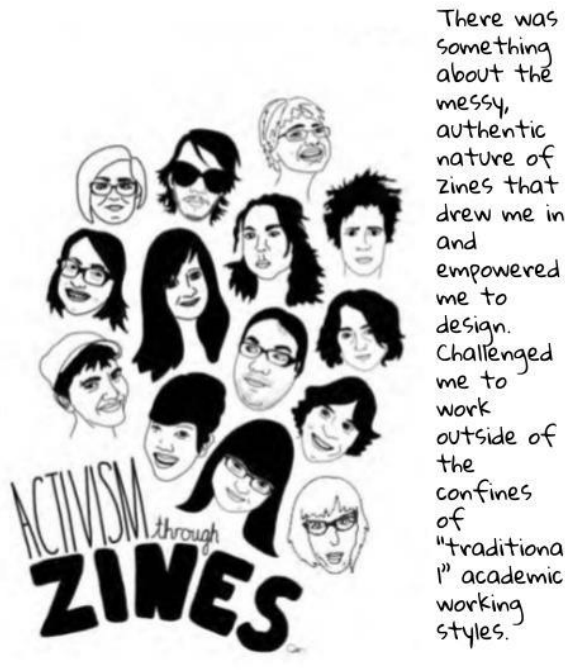
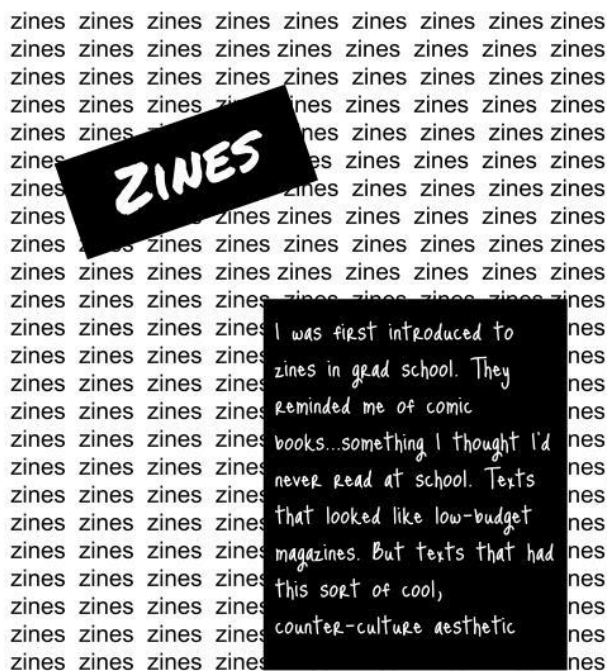


Figure 4. "Pages" 5 and 6 of the e-zine "E-Zines at OLC 2017?!"

WHY ZINES?



Like this amazing mashup of my boss's face and mine, zines are a location and space for artist experimentation, self-expression, and can accommodate a variety of composing styles.

The real question is why not zines?

Today

TODAY,
WE WILL BUILD
AN **OLC** ZINE
TOGETHER.

THINKING ABOUT WHAT GOES INTO A ZINE.

CONSIDERING
HOW TO DESIGN
AND ARRANGE
THE PAGES.

AND DETERMINING WHAT
STORY WE WANT TO SHARE
WITH THE OLC
COMMUNITY THIS YEAR.

Figure 5. "Pages" 7 and 8 of the e-zine "E-Zines at OLC 2017?!"

Small publication	community	Do-it-yourself	DIY DIY DIY DIY DIY DIY DIY DIY DIY
activism	Sharing	They usually deal with topics too controversial or niche for mainstream media, presented in an unpolished layout and unusual design. - EMMA DAJSKA	
Low-budget (don't require a lot of resources)	Getting your work/word out there	"Zine-making isn't about rules or knowledge; it's about freedom and POWER. " - EMMA DAJSKA	

Figure 6. "Pages" 9 and 10 of the e-zine "E-Zines at OLC 2017?!"

In it, I positioned myself as a person (e.g. told them a little about me), I positioned myself in relation to the the work (e.g. how I came to be interested in zines and why I chose zines), and I positioned zines in the larger context of Online Learning. This positioning work took several different forms, meaning that

it looked very different and I used different strategies depending on what I was positioning. Through this collective and pluralistic approach to positioning, I also showcased various features and design tools built into Google Slides.

Simultaneously, I presented a “non-traditional” way to use Google Slides.

During the session, the e-zine was both presentation delivery mechanism and presentation topic (i.e. I used the e-zine as my “slides” to talk about e-zines, which were...the very same slides). We then spent time creating e-zines together.

*But the session was doing so much more than that. In / for / through the session, I was queering zines. All the zines I had engaged with up to that point were either physical prints or photocopies of printed zines, hand-designed and very much tangible and pick-up-able. In *Queer Rhetorics* I learned that this was important for communities that originated and leveraged zines (especially activist communities) due to the ways in which they could subvert mainstream publication processes, making zines easier to disseminate and more accessible (in one sense) to a broader public. Their style took on a very subversive practice as well, resisting established norms for what “counted” as a publication in the first place. As I ideated the session (before I even proposed it), I sat with this history, wanting to honor it and respect it (especially since much of that history was also queer history...part of my community’s history)²³. The question “why shouldn’t they be digital?” was, therefore, not a trivial one. I viewed the act of transforming them into a digital space as queering them, in the sense that I was rejecting the traditional publication format of zines (which again, were traditionally physically printed). That said, I felt good with nevertheless proposing the session because I could still carry the original intent of zine-making and disseminating into the digital space. I could still do and engage in activist work through a digital zine. A digital zine could still be queer in its design and its practice. So I queerly designed a queer e-zine.*

Through the session, I was also queering Google Slides. One of the things I have found most rewarding in the work of educational technology is being able to push the boundaries of what a tool can and can’t do and to trouble the narratives about what a technology was or wasn’t designed for by demonstrating possible ways it could be used beyond its “original” purpose²⁴. Why shouldn’t we use Google Slides for the purposes of making zines?

Finally, through the session, I was also actively queering the “traditional” conference session. I was doing this in two ways. First, I positioned myself not as “presenter” in this session, but as “facilitator” and as “e-zine author.” I was a co-creator and a community member. The session was facilitated very intentionally

²³ This is the “relational ethics” (Ellis, 2007) I speak of in Chapter 5.

²⁴ Think “pluralistic modes” here (Anzaldúa, 1987), a la Chapter 5.

to make sure these were the identities I was positioning myself as, and not a presenter delivering and transmitting information, which is what I was used to doing at conferences. In this way, I was engaging queer theory as a means to challenge the dominant narrative around what a “presenter” is and does. Secondly, the fact that I used the e-zine as my slides was a queer move. “Normally,” your slides are where you talk about the thing you came to talk about; they don’t “traditionally” also function as the very thing you are talking about. I was blurring the lines between subject and object here²⁵. It also bridged modalities in an intentionally queer²⁶ way. While the session was synchronous, it played with and in a technology that could easily be used asynchronously. I called attention to the multimodal nature of e-zines in this way, both in terms of temporality and in terms of composition^{27,28}

Let me re-position myself, I am a queer scholar and it’s important that you know this because it impacts how I approach my work (including this dissertation), it impacts how I view and engage in and make sense of the world around me, and it most certainly impacts my orientation to asynchronous digital learning and educator professional development. Working at the intersections of at least three of my identities, the specific conference session / offering / programming I story above was a way for me to position and practice my queerness. I used three words here (i.e. “session,” “offering,” “programming”) because at OLC conferences, engagement programming is positioned in the liminal space²⁹ between “session,” “offering,” and “programming.” All TTK

²⁵ See Chapter 5 for more on this practice.

²⁶ I could call upon my other relations to look at this act in another way. For instance, I could also refer to this as an example of a decolonial practice (they have related goals and can dialogue with one another, as a result). But I positioned this story in relation to my queerness, and therefore identifying it as a queer practice is a better fit. This nuance is important and demonstrates my active commitment to practicing cultural rhetorics. So when you read Chapter 5, remember this footnote and return to it is you’re looking for an example of a cultural rhetorics methodology in practice.

²⁷ See Prior et al. (2007), Shipka (2009), and Kitalong and Miner (2017) for more on multimodal composing.

²⁸ This is a story that doesn’t have an end and I am refusing to give it one just to satisfy reading conventions. If you don’t like that this just...ends, maybe skip to Chapter 5 and read about how I engage story as method (particularly the part about fragmented stories).

²⁹ See Donahue & Foster-Johnson (2018) and Jeyaraj (2004) for more on liminality and the role(s) it plays in rhetoric, academia, and professional spaces.

programming was listed in the conferred program and therein formally positioned as a traditional “session,” but they took place as a fundamentally differently situated and positioned space (signaled by a separate and dedicated physical space, unique storytelling efforts to orient people to the space and its goals / outcomes, as well as the work that happened there). The session was a part of a larger suite of sessions, constituting an overall strategy and planned “programming” facilitated through the TTK. We often use the term “offering” to talk about services and opportunities within the OLC. I play on the term here, though, as a result of my history with the OLC. My first point of engagement was as an engagement volunteer (mentioned in the story above). In this position, I was, without question, taken up by the narrative that the work I was doing with the OLC was service (it even lives and is storied in my curriculum vitae in my service area). I was offering my time, expertise, strategies, and ideas to a community of educator professionals as professional development. Additionally, I play on the terms here through the ways that we regularly pushed on the boundaries of what was given for free versus that which sits behind a paywall in relation to the things that take place in and are shared during conferences. Though synchronous sessions were always a part of the paid programming, we collectively contributed to the creation of asynchronous materials meant to extend the learning far beyond the physical and virtual walls of the conference.

That acknowledged, I story the experience here as another means to situate myself and the work of this dissertation in (my) queerness. I could have included Queer Theory in *Chapter 5: Methods & meaning making*, but I ultimately chose not to. I

embody queerness; it is a part of me in a way that none of the other methods I storied³⁰ in Chapter 5 can ever amount to. To therefore relegate it to a method, and method alone, wasn't work I wanted to do here. This doesn't mean I don't recognize that "queer" is not just an identity for me, it is a practice and an orientation, and, in this dissertation, serves as a method as well. Taking a consideration of my queer identity, then, we might ask if it was my *queerness* that led me to identify with scholars like Clifford (2003), Anzaldúa (1987), or even Hart-Davidson (2001)³¹ who live and work and write on the margins and at the borders? I would argue that it did (whether I knew it at the time or not). But I can say that my *queerness* feels at home (Ahmed, 2008, p. 20) there. According to Ahmed (2012), Queer Theory is not just anti-heteronormative, it is anti-normative (p. 426). Did my queer identity, then, influence my decision to write this dissertation in the style I did, with the explicit intention to work against academic writing and publication norms? I would argue that it did (whether or not I could name that when I first started). I share this here as a means to situate this part of myself in this dissertation because my queer identity lives and breathes through it; it is woven throughout the pages, it was present in the Zoom rooms during interviews, it joined me in understanding and applying reflective conversations with my wife, and the echoes of Queer Theory (understood through my own queerness), guided me as I chose which codes to carry forward following analysis, finalized which stories to tell, and made sense of my own lived experiences.

³⁰ Google's built-in text editor recommended I change this to "described," but I resisted.

³¹ I haven't introduced this text to you yet, but it was one of the first times I ever identified as being also in the field of Technical and Professional Communication. Up until this piece, I always just assumed those skills were something people just had. I had never thought to orient to it as a community of professionals who approached their work from a place of theory. Nor did I ever think to question how we might theorize the work of Technical and Professional Communication. To me, these were just skills that I took with me across boundaries and, importantly, skills that enabled me to cross boundaries.

I would argue that my queerness and the lens of queer theory that I bring to this dissertation also shows up in my approach to the scholarship I engage in throughout this dissertation and my stance of interdisciplinarity. I mentioned this in Chapter 1, but this dissertation works across disciplines. While this, in itself, is not necessarily *queer*, my seemingly incessant resistance to being bounded by a single discipline leaves me feeling drenched in Queer Theory, particularly given that Queer theory is entrenched in resistance and rhetorical agency. Let me attempt to explain. With respect to Writing and Rhetoric³², I am pulling largely from “rhetoric,” which has offered me scholarship (such as Queer Theory), scholarship which has, in turn, helped me to locate and situate my interdisciplinarity. For example, my queerness often positions me at the margins. But at the margins, you are better able to see the true pluralities that queerness is and the ways in which queerness is thus “at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin, 1995, p. 62), forces which do not recognize nor validate pluralities. Queerness is about “being on the margins, defining ourselves” and the understanding that “everyone [sic] of us is a world of infinite possibility” (Rand, 2014, p. 2, in reference to the “Queers Read This” flyer). Through interdisciplinarity, I see nothing but infinite possibility; there are so many connections to be made across scholarship and across theory. As I work to define myself at the margins, I can therefore leverage the rhetoric of Queer Theory as a means to feel ‘at home’ in my interdisciplinarity, just as I have to feel ‘at home’ in my queerness.

From the moment I entered graduate school, I felt the pressure to identify, to bound my identity, and to conform to a single discipline. I felt the pressure to follow a

³² Which is, after all, important to center since I am graduating with a degree in Writing and Rhetoric.

predetermined set of rules and guidelines and understandings regarding who I was and would be as an academic, scholar, researcher, and professional. The only problem was I never fit neatly into those categories. It is all too easy to make direct connections to my queerness in this present moment. I identify most with the term “queer” as a result of its active resistance “against (and as other to) normativity” (Ben-Moshe et al., 2015, p. 266), and labels and categories and established ideas about identity and lived experience, as well as the active theorizing about what could be, possibility, and that which is not. In many ways, the feelings and emotions I navigated as a queer person in society very closely parallel those I felt navigating Academia as someone who is not content situating themselves fully within a single discipline.

As I struggled in this dissertation, even with determining which disciplines to dive into and to what extent, one of my committee members reminded me that “some traditions exist for a reason.” She said this particularly in the context of a discussion around whether I needed to reference a specific body of work, Online Writing Instruction. As I reflected on this discussion, I realized that this is actually part of my point, *disciplines and their traditions exist for a reason*. While my dissertation is about asynchronous digital learning environments and educator professional development, the manner in which I approach discussing these topics leverages specific rhetorical strategies not just because I, myself, am an interdisciplinary scholar, but so that I can use my interdisciplinary background and lived experience as an example of the norming, categorizing forces at play in Academia.

I should (and will now) recognize that there is an entire subdiscipline within “my field” that studies online learning in relation to writing (Online Writing Instruction, or

“OWI”), as well as conferences (like Computers and Writing), where important work happens about teaching and learning online. When studying and working in the department of Writing and Rhetoric at Michigan State University, I ‘found’ a part of myself living comfortably in those spaces and that work. But, to me, it was just one among many disciplinary conversations I engaged in. And given that my academic interdisciplinarity is a key piece of my scholarly background, influencing my approach to and engagement with this dissertation (and therefore something I explicitly discuss), to limit myself through a deep dive down one specific disciplinary tradition and not others in this dissertation would be counter-productive to a larger narrative that weaves through this dissertation...one of multiple disciplines coming together to form a constellation approach to doing scholarship and theorizing. To dismiss any online learning scholarship (including OWI) or not include it for sake of other research would not only be counterproductive to my goals, but antithetical to my lived experiences. I discuss this in much more detail in Chapter 5, but factually, the theories and conclusions I myself pull into this dissertation are so heavily influenced by my multiple scholarly backgrounds that it would take an entire second dissertation to attempt to unravel the complex, interdisciplinary tapestry that is my “academic perspective.” I therefore view OWI as one among many voices in online learning. I see it as existing alongside other scholarship (a relative cacophony of scholarship, in fact, that exists about online learning).

This broader understanding, though, helps me feel confident in very clearly articulating that I would be lying if I were to claim I was an expert in online writing instruction. I am not. But it is not a lie to claim that I am an expert in online learning...my

expertise just uniquely draws from a specific array of (sub)disciplines and lived experiences. And while I am a part of the field and writing “in the field” of Writing and Rhetoric, it is the work across boundaries that has most transformed and influenced me as a scholar and professional, and so that scholarship is what you engage with most in this dissertation. This dissertation is equal parts Rhetoric and Education because I am equal parts Rhetoric and Education. This dissertation incorporates Linguistics because Linguistics is a core aspect of my academic identity. This dissertation cites scholarship across many disciplines; it seeks to engage in and represent the pluralities and possibilities of Academic scholarship. In this way, my interdisciplinarity serves as an attempt to avoid succumbing to the category-based identity-based politics of disciplinarity, much like early queer theorists aim to offer an alternative to the “category-based identity politics of traditional lesbian and gay activism” (Cohen, 1997, in Rand, 2014, p. 3).

Queer Theory also encourages me to lean into the “carnavalesque, parodic, rebellious, and playful” (Plummer, 2005, p. 370). So while I am still intent on offering pragmatic takeaways (a tension Plummer, 2005 and De Ridder et al., 2011 speak on), you will find that as a result, this dissertation is an academic performance³³, using play, parody, rebelliousness, and even carnivalesque like writing and rhetorical strategies as a means to explicitly surface aspects of Academia and academic writing for the purposes of using them as examples of norming and dominant forces (and therefore points of discussion). In some cases I would argue I even engage in this work to extreme degrees and in risky ways (i.e. where I risk, for instance, doing “too much” to

³³ Performance and performativity is a core part Queer Theory. See, for example Jones (2020), McKelvey (2021), Butler (1988), Turton (2020), Rooke (2022), Huang (2023), Gambetti (2022), and Turner (2019).

make a point or annoying readers). But then, this too, was intentional (and I call these moves out as such). In this way, I consider this dissertation a sandbox for rhetorically playing in Queer Theory, as I seek rhetorical agency within the context of an otherwise largely category-based scholarly world. Rand (2014) argues that “queerness is both the general economy of undecidability that makes agency possible and also what is always displaced at the moment that agency is actualized” (p. 25). So while I simultaneously work to engage in queer dissertation writing and academic scholarship in queer ways, the moment I decided on interdisciplinarity as a stance was the moment I also displaced my queerness. Nevertheless, Queer Theory helps to contextualize the choices I have made throughout this dissertation, including the ways in which I view and engage in scholarship across disciplines.

Being uncomfortable

I find solitude³⁴ my queerness. That is not to say, though, that I always feel *comfortable*. I often use the space of professional learning to play in my queerness. I know, you see, that my queerness is read through the screen. So when I position myself with bright pink, rustled and spiked hair, big dangly earrings, a face full of makeup, and a sleeve full of tattoos on day one, followed by a makeup-free look paired with a fitted button-up, bowtie, pullover sweater, and studs the next, I am performing pluralities. Sometimes, I will wear a flat-brim black snapback hat emblazoned with a yellow batman symbol with my three-piece suit just to test the “professional waters” and see whether

³⁴ “Solitude” because I have, at times, felt deeply alone in my queerness. It can be comforting to be a part of a defined community, and it can be discomfoting to be a part of a community that actively works not to be defined. At the same time, “solitude” because I have also found deep peace in my queerness. It can be discomfoting to be forced to identify in terms of singularities; it can be comforting...liberating, even...to live a life of pluralities.

someone will call it out, daring them into a space of dialogue about queering professionalism. It can be exhausting, though; leading and facilitating professional development puts me (and therefore my queerness) center-stage. For one conference, I had created over 2 hours worth of asynchronous content, chunked into small segments, curated into a self-directed professional learning experience which guided presenters through effective and recommended practices for using the tool PlayPosit. All presenters preparing fully asynchronous presentations were required to use PlayPosit as a session presentation platform. I recorded a welcome video, introducing myself to the presenters (asynchronously), meaning that every asynchronous presenter who engaged with that training would also be engaging with me, seeing my face, hearing my voice, exploring my recommendations and considering my ideas. When the synchronous virtual conference finally started (months later) several conference attendees said something to the effect of “Oh I know you, you made the PlayPosit video. I spent a lot of time with you working on that presentation.” Similar sentiments of “knowing me” resulted in the years I was responsible for our conference-wide welcome video (meaning the video that officially welcomed all conference attendees to our virtual conference). They felt like they knew me. Sometimes, someone would comment on my hair or my choice of outfit. This usually made me sweat a little, as I never knew where the comment was coming from nor where it was headed³⁵. My role made it such that I could no longer hide, I was in a position of public leadership now. My queerness was, in many ways, on display (even if this display wasn’t explicit). When I was most uncomfortable, I found myself wanting to push harder, wanting to wear pajamas or keep

³⁵ Ahmed discusses discomfort as a “sweaty concept,” one which “comes out of a description of a body that is not at home in the world” (feministkilljoys, 2014, para. 3; see also Ahmed, 2017).

my camera completely off just to have them join me in discomfort (in this case a new discomfort facilitated by me via a blatant disregard for “professional expectations” of the staff at OLC conferences³⁶). I never did (I value having a job and this is what feels like it would be at risk), but I wanted to.

It was Queer Theory where I found refuge. I learned I could make meaning of my own experiences through a lens of discomfort and that I could be transformed through discomfort (see Chadwick, 2021; Milani, 2021; Zembylas, 2023; Glasby, 2019; Ahmed, 2012; Ahmed, 2017). I felt comforted by a community of scholars in Queer Theory, talking and theorizing about things I felt and experienced. Discomfort is “a visceral and relational intensity, feeling or sensation” (Chadwick, 2021, p. 557). Dwelling on discomfort means sitting with “the unsettling and the dislocating in efforts to open up spaces for transformative praxis” (Chadwick, 2021, p. 566). It’s a locating strategy; one way I can identify opportunities is by recognizing and locating discomfort. It allows me to pay attention to my body in ways that other orientations to transformation don’t. Within a lens of discomfort, I can, for example, pay attention to and engage with “gut feelings” (Chadwick, 2021, p. 556) and those moments where I “sense that something is wrong” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 22). Let’s imagine, for a moment, that you are in the midst of designing an online learning experience and choosing which modality to use. You know that by making it fully synchronous, you will automatically be excluding individuals who cannot attend due to conflicts, time, or another barrier. This makes you uncomfortable. This discomfort could be driven by several motivations, but nevertheless, recognizing

³⁶ Why did I nevertheless record a welcome video and allow myself to be so “present” in the course then if I also ultimately acknowledge the ways it makes me uncomfortable? Theory and literature compels me to, of course; instructor presence / being present has been shown to increase learner engagement, motivation, and satisfaction (see Barnes, 2016, for example).

and feeling discomfort in this case is helpful, as answering it, dialoguing with your discomfort, could result in alternative possibilities. For instance, maybe you decide to therefore hold multiple versions of the same learning experience, taking place at different times throughout the week as a means to open it up and make it as 'attendable' as possible. Maybe, as another example, you move towards a fully asynchronous learning experience, if maximal attendance is your primary concern. Both choices would result in other considerations, of course, but the purpose presently is that discomfort identifies opportunities. As another example of the transformative potentialities centered through dwelling discomfort, I'll share a brief personal story. Before I share this story, though, I am going to contextualize it with a trigger warning, as it references potential suicide.

We were in the middle of the semester and I was teaching a fully asynchronous online course. One of the students had previously reached out to me requesting additional supports (like additional, synchronous meetings outside my already scheduled office hours) as a result of a major concern of failing and a desire to really make sure he understood the assignments and what I was looking for. Our conversations in these meetings usually consisted of me reassuring him that he did, in fact, already 'get' the assignments, so all he needed to do now is complete them because if he wrote about everything he just told me about, he'd most definitely pass the assignment. Our conversations also led to other accommodations, which I later extended to the rest of the class, such as podcast-style assignment responses as opposed to writing (where students had the option to verbally record their responses rather than being relegated to writing them). Similarly, I opened up as many channels of communication I felt comfortable opening up. For example, in the case of this particular student, he struggled with using and understanding many forms of technology (largely due to stress involved with having to use so many and the time it took to learn to use them all). One tool he was comfortable with, though, was Facebook. So instead of other video conferencing tools (which were a bit clunky at the time), we had our video touch-ins through Facebook Messenger. In order to do this, this meant that we had to be "friends" on Facebook (Facebook didn't allow messages between strangers until years later). We both agreed to under the condition that

we only communicated through and leveraged Messenger...that the rest of the app was to be considered private. This surfaced an entirely different moment of discomfort for me, where I had to wrestle with the personal-professional line of exactly how much of myself I was willing to expose to my students and how much of my life I was willing to make public and open to them (but I won't expand on that, specifically here). Most importantly, though, I came to recognize the important affective work I was doing in these meetings with this student; he told me that he felt cared for and that it was actually possible for him to do well in this course because of that perception of care. That care motivated him throughout the course and he began to submit his work (and he was doing well).

One week I stopped hearing from him. He didn't reach out and missed our regular meet-up time. I messaged him through all the tools we had used to connect and then gave him some space (in my messages I told him I would reach out again, but give him time in case he needed any). When I didn't hear back again, I facilitated another round of outreach through all our channels. When the third week came around (in a 7-week course), I began to worry; if he didn't begin to engage again in the materials he ran the risk of not completing everything in time because he'd have too much material to cover. I sent him another round of communications reminding him that my policy was a flexible one in terms of when assignments were completed, so long as they were in by the end of the semester. I reassured him that he did still have time at that point and that I would do what I could to assist him in moving through the work (even if that meant weekly meetings, again something I had extended to all students at that point since fairness and equity is also important to me³⁷). I never heard from him again and he ultimately failed the course.

About a year later, I was scrolling on Facebook and to my surprise, his name and account was on my 'for you page.' One of his friends had tagged his account with a message about missing him and phrasing that sounded familiar. I realized within seconds that I had read about similar phrasing in mental health workshops in the sections related to suicide...messages from friends and family about the pain being gone, about being in a better place, about the struggle being over. My heart sank. With the course being over and our Facebook connection still being present, I had a decision to make about whether or not to address the gut feelings of worry and dread I felt in the pit of my stomach from the 'not knowing' by clicking on his page. I ultimately did and from what I read in the few minutes I was on his page, scrolling through recent messages on his page from friends as well as the last ones he himself posted, lead me to highly

³⁷ Which, again, points to another discomfort I could (and did) dwell on...how much of my time I was willing and able to give to support the success of learners based on my commitment to fair and equitable opportunities for success.

suspect suicide. Now importantly, I still don't know and I never will. My intrusive inquiries stopped there³⁸. The extreme discomfort I felt, though, led me to question a lot of really important things. For instance, I questioned whether I could have or should have done anything differently. We had, after all, opened up a technologically supported connection through Facebook. When he stopped responding to messages, should I have explored his page? Had I done so, I would have seen the messages he was posting on his page and my mental health and wellness training would have led me to worry and ultimately report on that worry. But we had an agreement and had set up boundaries and those boundaries were critical to the trust we developed together. So no, I don't believe I should have done anything differently in the context of that agreement. Could I have done differently, though? I could have, yeah, but at the time I didn't know what. It wasn't until I pursued this line of inquiry that I learned that there was a reporting structure built into the institution meant to open up spaces for dialogue for me to report things like sudden lack of engagement in class (and that these reports would go to a larger support system like student housing and residence officers, student advisors, etc.). Had I known this resource existed, I could have reported lack of engagement as soon as the abrupt change in behavior occurred (meaning his lack of responses). But I didn't know that resource existed, so I am careful not to be too upset with Past Maddie for not acting. I was using the resources I had at the time to do what I believed I could to ethically support him. I know it exists now, though, and from the moment I became aware of it, I built it into the infrastructures of the courses I designed. I began to incorporate the resource into the list of recommended practices for instructors and began to tell some version of this story (where and when and in the ways that felt appropriate depending on the context) as a means to contextualize its potential use and impact.

Up to that point in my personal career, I had been told a lot of things about what "lack of engagement" data and metrics could mean and signal (e.g. that it signals lazy students, that students might have just gotten busy, that maybe your course is boring, that maybe your course doesn't make space for dialogue and 'active engagement,' that drop-off engagement like that was just "common" in online learning courses, especially 7-week semesters that required a semester's worth of content over a shorter period of time), but never had anyone gone to the level of depth as to mention things like potential suicide and death and because that wasn't ever mentioned, it wasn't something that my infrastructure of support made space for nor recognized as a possibility. Importantly, I will never know for

³⁸ Another point of discomfort found in this story which I still dwell on to this day; I technically broke the social pact we had made as student and teacher. I reasoned it at the time because I was no longer his teacher and therefore we were beyond the context of our original agreement. But it still gnaws on me.

sure what happened, and this point is actually quite significant here. I don't actually need to know. The irony is that had I known, had someone told me at the time that this student committed suicide, I would have been upset but the lack of engagement would have been explained and address and it is possible that as a result of that resolution, I would have moved on and not dwelled on it as much. But it was the not-knowing that led me to reflecting, which led me to questioning, which led me to learning about additional institutional resources, which led me to transforming my practice (both as an instructor and as a facilitator of educator professional development).

Now before I conclude this section and move away from this story I will mention one thing: I am going to offer up not-knowing and dwelling on discomfort as generative, but critically different than willful ignorance. I didn't know not because I chose not to know or protected myself from not knowing. In a conversation with a coach I once worked with, I asked him why he didn't make more space for the open and public validation of athlete's identities within the context of the team (e.g. publicly claiming that you support transgender and LGBTQ+ athletes). His response is something I think about often. He said, "I asked a mentor about this and was told not to go there because if I am not an expert and if I don't have a plan to manage it, then I just shouldn't go there because then I am responsible and liable for any information I receive," and that as a result of this advice, that's why he just doesn't ever address identities beyond "student athlete." While this entire exchange is plenty of fodder for a much larger conversation, I won't have that here. What I will say, though, is that the concern for things like being held liable and a perceived lack of expertise can pressure us into intentional or willful ignorance, the active choosing to not know so that you can't be held responsible³⁹. I am

³⁹ Again, reflections and conversations for a later day, but cultures like this, guided by advice like this, leading to choices like these serve to perpetuate a broader system of willful ignorance (and given a system of willful ignorance, we shouldn't be surprised that abusers like Nassar (Sommerland & Baio, 2023) are able to exist and persist).

therefore not suggesting that we start to engage in identity unethically nor irresponsibly. We should take time to learn and gain a better understanding on how we might do this work. We should manage with care and be intentional with the ways in which we design for this type of work. And in this work, we need to think about what support resources and infrastructures educators need as well, for they are a part of this larger system as well⁴⁰. What I *am* suggesting is that we position ourselves to consider all that we don't know and can't know, and work from that not-knowing as a means to explore alternatives and possibilities, therein also positioning our new exploration of what *could be* in order to consider how we might better support the humans we are engaging with.

Not-knowing can be incredibly uncomfortable whether that be not knowing what's going on, not knowing what to do, not knowing what might happen, etc. But I agree with Chadwick (2021) who argues that it encourages one to “embrac[e] interpretive hesitancy” (p. 556). It encourages me to question whether I actually know what is going on by realizing I might not actually know, allowing me to see other possible stories. I believe, like Ahmed (2017) that “we have to stay with the feelings that we might wish would go away” (p. 28, see also Chadwick, 2021) so that we can “resist, confront and engage the systematic ignorances” (Chadwick, 2021, p. 566). Ahmed (2012) points out that in spaces where we are comfortable, it is because that space “[allows our] bodies to fit in” (p. 425). In the context of this story, if I moved beyond this experience and chose not to reflect on and think about it as much as I did, I would be, in my opinion, choosing

⁴⁰ Another thing for a later day, but I reflect often on how under-prepared an ill-informed most educators are at following institutional guidelines around being a ‘mandatory reporter’ and what it means to both care for those you are institutionally responsible for reporting about while also tending to yourself as receiver of potentially traumatic and triggering information / stories. These are nuances that are usually mentioned but not thoroughly discussed in spaces of required, institutional trainings.

to not recognize that student could be experiencing life-threatening pain and choosing to question that maybe there is something I could do to support them, even if indirectly and even if it feels like a small act to report sudden lack of engagement *just in case*. But I personally don't want to feel comfortable in the space of teaching online nor comfortable in the space of not-knowing what lack of engagement data *could* signal and point to; especially now knowing that it could mean that a student might be suffering to that extent (even if that extent is even a mere possibility, not a reality). Comfort often coincides with complicity. It is not healthy to dwell to the extent that we get lost, ourselves, in the dwelling. But I can be open to the possibility of possibilities and design and teach in such a way that cares for and tends to those possibilities to the best of my capacity. And now I have positioned you to do the same; have you ever considered all that "lack of engagement" could signal, for instance? Have you considered whether you've designed your asynchronous digital learning experiences with these other possibilities in mind? What kinds of additional support structures can you incorporate for the *just in case* cases?

On emotions / feelings / anger

Another important queer lens that enters into the work of this dissertation is how I make sense of my feelings about and in relation to the rhetorics of asynchronous digital learning experiences, particularly those designed for educator professionals. As Chadwick (2021) did, I will also call on the work of Ahmed (2014) in my understanding that "feelings and affects are not attributes of individual selves, but products of swirling, moving sets of relations between persons, bodies, material spaces, objects, discourses, conceptual histories, locations and geopolitics" (p. 557). Ahmed (2012) positions "queer

feelings” as distinct from “feeling queer” by asking, “How does it feel to inhabit a body that fails to reproduce an ideal?” (p. 424). So throughout this dissertation, you will see that I interrogate how I feel when I don’t reproduce an ideal (e.g. when I fail at my job). Why dwell on and consider feelings? Again, looking to Ahmed (2014), “emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside” (p. 10). In other words, I can leverage my own feelings to help find, locate, and examine boundaries...to help visibilize them. By visibilizing them, I can analyze them and identify their habits and traditions. I recognize this as a privilege. Those working in educator professional development (e.g. facilitators, designers, and developers) might not be prepared, trained, or ready to leverage their own practices and lived experiences as examples, as this can be an incredibly vulnerable practice (MacPhail et al., 2019). Writing with and through emotions can be a difficult embodied experience (something I expand on more in Chapter 5). Some of the methods I employ set me up to do this work. For instance, “a cultural rhetorics dissertation requires an emotional component that is not always a part of other writing processes” (Cox et al., 2021, p. 150). I use “set me up” here playfully, as I find it hard to approach a cultural rhetorics dissertation without addressing my embodied experience, including my emotions about this work. That said, the theory and approaches to cultural rhetorics also provide me guidance on how I might do this work and scholars I can call on for support and modeling. I am ready, though...or ready enough to do that kind of work in this dissertation.

I am not attracted to nor do I desire to do things the “traditional” way. And please know here that I am quite intentionally playing on the notions of *attraction* and *desire*

here, as Queer Theory reveals generative ways to / through theorizing things like *desire* (Kempnaers, 2019; Alexander & Rhodes, 2011; Monson & Rhodes, 2004; Hammers, 2015) and *attraction* (Marcus, 2005; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). Being attracted to or finding something desirable are feelings and map to states of emotionality. In this dissertation, I will talk about that which we are attracted to (i.e. what types of learning spaces educator professionals are drawn to and attracted to). I will talk about what educator professionals find desirable within the context of asynchronous digital learning and professional development. I will tell stories about these feelings. Some of the stories I will tell in this dissertation are stories of anger. Some are stories of worry. Some are stories of joy. But all of the stories were associated with some feeling and emotion. Some stories will even be about *pleasure* and the ways in which we seek those learning spaces we find pleasurable. In the context of these stories, I will view *pleasure* as expansive, calling upon queer theorists once again for this lens. On *pleasure*, Ahmed (2012) and Leder (1990) say the following, "Pleasure is expansive: 'We fill our bodies with what they lack, open up to the stream of the world, reach out to others' (Leder, 1990, p. 75)" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 437). With this lens, I can view the choice between one professional development experience over another as possibly satisfying *desire* or seeking that which is *pleasurable* (i.e. that which fills our body with what it lacks). So what again does this have to do with educator professional development? Simply put, the work of teaching and learning is full of emotions, as you will see, and this dissertation will make space for those emotions.

Making connections and further positioning

If you don't take up queer theory nor feel compelled to position yourself in the ways I have above, there are a lot of other ways to position yourself in your work. I started off this dissertation by positioning myself through Chapter 1. I told you that this dissertation would be reflexive (both self-reflexive on my part, but also self-reflexive on the part of the dissertation itself). I later hope to help you see the ways in which reflexivity is paramount to our work as researchers (see Chapter 5). Note here, for now, Scott and Morrison (2007) who reference reflexivity as a continuum, "the process by which the researcher comes to understand how they are positioned in relation to the knowledge they are producing," whereby "the [research] subject and object are not clearly separated" (cited in Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015). Wilson (2008) argues similarly, that "it is not possible to be accountable to your relationships if you are pretending to be objective" (p. 101). In this case, I am referring to our relationships to asynchronous digital learning and educator professional development. Wilson offers an indigenous lens on this work which changed the ways I thought about research and therefore changed the ways in which I positioned myself in relation to my work. In the words of Wilson (2008), "rather than the goals of validity and reliability, research from an Indigenous paradigm should aim to be authentic or credible. By that I mean that the research must accurately reflect and build upon the relationships between the ideas and participants. The analysis must be true to the voices of all the participants and reflect an understanding of the topic that is shared by researcher and participants alike. In other words, it has to hold to relational accountability" (pp. 101-102). I expand on what this has meant to me in the context of this dissertation in Chapter 5 (making connections to

scholars like Riley-Mukavetz (2014) and Powell et al. (2014), who also speak to relational accountability. I likewise reference scholars like Ellis (2004) and (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014) who demonstrate the methodological benefits of engaging in autoethnography. They also contend that we must critically engage in the “politics of positionality” (Madison, 2012). Ellis (2004), argues that as a researcher, “you have to decide where you want to locate yourselves in terms of your identity and in every research project you do. That location will determine your goals, the procedures you use, and the claims you make” (pp. 25-31). To critical autoethnographers like Boylorn and Orbe (2014), Madison’s (2012) politics of positionality “require researchers to acknowledge the inevitable privileges we experience alongside marginalization and to take responsibility for our subjective lenses through reflexivity” (p. 15). As a result of the influence these works had on me, you will see that I position myself in this dissertation through the use of critical autoethnography⁴¹.

When we position ourselves, we not only do important work of helping others understand our vantage point or landscape (Royster, 2003, p. 148), but we contribute to the making of connections by making space for the possibility of connection in deeply human and personal ways. Lindquist (2004), for instance, helps us (in our positions as educators) to understand how understanding positions of “class” (i.e. socioeconomic class) and how “class” is positioned in classrooms, is “an important part of developing a more affective pedagogy” (p. 192). I also made space for new connections through positionality work in the interview for this dissertation. In my interview with “Sci-Fi Fan,” for example, I had just shared a brief story about a conversation I had with my wife

⁴¹ And you can note that this sentence, alone, is a form of *positioning*.

about *The Great Filter Theory* and the *Fermi Paradox* (Adler, 2023) and talked about it with respect to a metaphor I was using to discuss the future of Higher Education in this dissertation. In response, “Sci-Fi Fan” said, “I’m gonna read all that and look that up more because I love science fiction.” Because I then knew “Sci-Fi Fan” loved science fiction, I then later referenced the science fiction books *Ready Player One* and *Ready Player Two*, which likewise influenced my thinking in this dissertation. Given the ways I was talking about the books, “Sci-Fi Fan” said that she might now go and re-read the books (which they also love) and bring this new lens and frame of reference to their reading. So through positioning ourselves through story, even, we make space for new connections, and, like others, I argue here that these new connections are important because they can help to facilitate community building, relationality, and strengthen collegiality (O’Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013), and they can lead to transformation through perspective shifting (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) and making space for new possibilities through practices of (re)orientation (Ahmed, 2008). That said, for now I offer this lens to you, reader, in case you are questioning why it is / can be important or useful to situate the self in the context of research and your work.

Insights from positionality statements

I go through these lengths here because there are some, particularly within the scientific community, who believe that things like positionality statements have no place in research (see, for example, Savolainen et al., 2023). But where’s the fun in that? No truly...where’s the fun in that? I had *fun* writing this dissertation, I had *fun* talking with people about asynchronous digital learning and educator professional development. Why not make space for *fun*? Why not capture that feeling and talk about it so that we

can reproduce *fun*? Like Cedillo and Bratta (2019) I challenge the narratives that claim there is no space for the personal in our work and I do this to ardently “challenge the academy’s dominant beliefs, assumptions, knowledges, and values as they relate to different forms of bias and identity avoidance” (p. 219). To Cedillo and Bratta (2019), “positionality stories are implicit enactments of counterstory” (p. 219) against those dominant narratives. Through positionality stories, we can collectively “demonstrate a productive vulnerability—one way that invites students to see their instructors as also learners whose expertise is both the result of an extensive lived process and potentially achievable by others” (Cedillo & Bratta, 2019, p. 222). Of course, we have to be careful with how we tell these statements, as they could serve to contradict social justice oriented goals and approaches to change (see Tien, 2019), thus making it imperative for us to carefully think about how to craft a positionality statement and position ourselves in our work⁴². Part of this work though, as scholars like Cedillo and Bratta (2019) would no doubt agree with, is the coming to terms with and understanding that the work of positioning ourselves does not end with the positionality statement (Martin et al., 2022). While positionality statements / stories can be powerful ways to open up space, engage with community, and contextualize or situate ourselves in the work being done in any given space (see Slotkin, 2023; Hampton et al., 2021; Boveda & Annamma, 2023; Martin et al., 2022; Tien, 2019; Cedillo & Bratta, 2019), this work requires constant negotiation and iterative, critical reflexivity. As a result, it might lead to the necessity to restory and reposition ourselves as we learn something new about a context or ourselves. “When a story of the self no longer coheres, no longer helps us

⁴² Boveda & Annamma (2023) offer useful strategies for how to craft positionality statements and position yourself through an intersectional lens.

make sense of our experience, then we must change it. Randall (1996) in fact describes transformative learning as a process of restorying” (Clark & Rossitter, 2008, p. 62, with reference to Kenyon & Randall, 1997, as well). Finally, I will leave you with this thought for now: If we are not positioning and storying ourselves, we leave it to others to potentially do for us. In research, it is very common to engage in the practices of storying others. In fact, the work of qualitative research could be said to be a practice of storying others, particularly if it involves any understanding of people besides the researcher themselves. So do you want to leave that work to others or do you want to take up the responsibility and opportunity to also story yourself?

Author biography for an upcoming book chapter^{43 44}

Madeline (Maddie) Shellgren serves as the Online Learning Consortium’s (OLC) Director of Global Outreach, providing oversight on the implementation of the organization’s global strategy, with a focus on collaborations, initiatives, communications, special programming (including OLC’s global leadership programming), and the global experience. Prior to this position, she worked as OLC’s Director of Community Strategy and Engagement, working as the lead innovator, designer, and project manager of the OLC’s portfolio of engagement opportunities. Known for her love of storytelling, play, and all things gameful, Maddie thrives on facilitating and designing meaningful ways for people to connect, learn, and grow together and even has the distinct honor of being the mastermind behind the OLC Escape Rooms. Core to her working philosophy is a commitment to sustainable, equitable, and anti-oppressive ecologies within education, something that Maddie strives to advance by leveraging her interdisciplinary scholarly and professional backgrounds.

Maddie’s intentional career path weaves throughout the world of higher education; from teaching, to academic technology and instructional design,

⁴³ Bios are such an interesting type of positionality statement and an interesting location for doing this work. How often do you read author bios? I find I rarely do, and yet I often languish in the work of trying to describe myself and justify who I am in relation to the work in just a paragraph or two.

⁴⁴ I strategically reference a “book chapter” here as a nod to the types of professional experiences often deemed most “valuable” and “valid” within Higher Education. Book chapters tend to carry a level of academic currency that engaging in other, more “traditional” forms of professional development does not. But is this a good thing? Is this desirable? I explore stories of validation and academic currency further in Chapter 7.

leading program-level revisions, and designing and implementing campus-wide educator professional development. Maddie joined the OLC from Michigan State University (MSU), where she served as the lead on numerous student success initiatives related to instructional design and technology, accessibility, and equity and inclusion. Over the past eleven years, Maddie has dedicated her professional life to teaching and learning-related initiatives and has strategically sought out opportunities that give her a multi-dimensional perspective on teaching and learning, including working as a Standardized Patient training medical students, serving as Program Director for Teaching Assistant development, taking lead on a number of cross-institutional educator onboarding and professional development projects, and teaching across online and face-to-face contexts and everything in between. She has additionally been serving as a collegiate rowing coach since 2011, extending her work as an educator and her exploration of “play” to the water and world of Athletics.

Being (care)ful when situating others

On the note of storying others, I have done so in very intentional ways throughout this dissertation. Throughout the interviews, the educator professionals I engaged with positioned themselves in different ways. One of the ways that I found particularly compelling and which I was drawn to (which becomes more evident in Chapter 5), was through their sharing of parts of themselves and their identities that have rubbed up against the boundaries and expectations of Academia (whether that be notions of things like *professionalism* or the ways they felt being a student, learner, or scholar in Higher Ed). They nevertheless shared these parts of their identities with me, storying themselves through these identities as a means to help me understand who they are as educators and educator developers. I honor this part of them here in my dissertation—an academic publication⁴⁵—so that I can assist in re-writing the narratives which told them that part of themselves had no place, should be silent, or was otherwise subjected

⁴⁵ One of which, I might add, is typically so pressured to perform “academia” through conforming to academic expectations for dissertation requirements that it makes it a particularly compelling place to do this kind of work, in my opinion.

to the unseen within their professional world and Academia. This in mind, you will see that I refer to them through nods to these identities; their pseudonyms are representations of these identities: “Low Income Learner,” “Interdisciplinary,” “Daughter,” “Mom,” “Storyteller,” “Dungeon Master,” “Satirist,” “Blogger,” “Introvert,” “Punk,” “Sci-Fi Fan,” “Musician,” “Architect,” “PhD-less.” I recognize these are only fragments of their stories, but I believe in the power of fragments to “denaturalize(sic) the gatekeeping aspects of (an) academic discipline(s)” that act as mechanisms of control with respect to who we are in relation to how we work (Yajima, 2023, p. 244).

I have, up to this point, shared stories which serve to position myself. In fact, throughout the dissertation, you have already and will continue to engage with stories of my lived experiences. They serve as significant anchor points for many of the exigencies foundational to this research. That said, my experiences alone aren’t the only things that motivated the conversations, the scholarship, and the research I report on here in this dissertation. It was, in large part, the stories I engaged with over the years from fellow educators and educator developers that convinced me that there was more to learn and more to share. While I will detail the methodologies and the surveying and interviewing techniques further in Chapter 5, I understand and recognize that it is also important at this point in the reading of this dissertation for you to begin to make connections to the other storytellers present and living throughout these pages. So let us now spend time with a few stories of *others*.

I am about to introduce the 14 interview participants — the 14 storytellers — in more detail. In doing so, I will also share the ‘origin stories’ of their pseudonyms (i.e. those parts of our conversation that served as points of inspiration for the practice of

“naming” each interview participant in the context of this dissertation research). As an important note, in introducing them to you, I am beholden to privacy agreements, which will prevent me from sharing specific details (both that which I agreed to through the IRB process, but also a trust I built with participants). While the whole of the online learning world is quite large, *my* online learning world is comparatively small. It is therefore critical that I work to ensure you are not in a position to guess who these individuals are. It is through the trust that we created that these storytellers were able to contribute genuinely and authentically to our conversations and offer invaluable insights into the world of online learning and educator professional development. With that, let me introduce you to these 14 storytellers:

“Punk”

“Punk” is an educational Administrator engaged at the state level who also teaches at a community college. They identify as both an educator and an educator developer. They bring with them to their work a background in Composition Studies and Rhetoric. Finally, they are a firm believer in OER and open education. The pseudonym “Punk” is inspired by a story they told during which they connected both a musical genre that is meaningful to them, to both a political philosophy and an educational ethos. Here is his story:

The origins of it are having a message and packaging that message in such a way, whether it's abrasive, whether it's poignant, whether it is direct, to illicit engagement from people who are there, positive or negative. But, like, engagement is the point, because ultimately you want to shock someone into paying attention and appreciating the world around them, and largely the people in the world around them, like, social equity and social justice are so core to a lot of the punk ethos. It's been contorted just like any other genre, of course. but what he was describing. And maybe this is the pivot I'm gonna start making when I get asked questions like yours like, “why do I keep doing this stuff” is that, you

know, beyond the positive role of influence that educators played in my life as stable, functional, serious people, I was a punker, too. Like I played in punk bands. And when he was describing his story I got a wash of nostalgia where it's like, "Oh, yeah, that's how I got into design" and like, "Oh, yeah, that's how I got into really caring about teaching other people and helping them see the world in the way that I was seeing it...so they would appreciate humanity." And I'm like, "How cool is that?" "How how cool could it be that just the ethos of a social movement that's wrapped around art and music and culture and aesthetic, but to also have a point and have a guiding philosophy or goal of engaging with others, that that would be the cornerstone of why I teach and like why I work as an education professional, and why I think education is important." And like, I still have the same standards, the same values. It's just like I wanna shock people into paying attention, like, I wanna jolt them. And I've found more effective ways and more palatable ways that are easier to listen to and engage with, and some of the like really angsty and loud punk music that I would play and listen to as when I was younger. But the values are still the same.

“Sci-Fi Fan”

“Sci-Fi Fan” is an instructional designer and professor, currently working within the context of community college. She identifies as both an educator and educator developer and shared that humanized online learning is fundamental to her approach and beliefs. She is intent on remaining grounded in her work and believes in doing what we can wherever and whenever we can in our small circles to impact change. She loves science fiction, time travel, and alternate universes and often looks to Sci-Fi stories and futuristic novels for allegories for where we are today in education today. This love inspired her pseudonym. Here is her story:

I'm not an anarchist. And I don't necessarily think like, "Oh, let's just tear and burn this shit down and start it over," but I'd kinda like to. I don't know how else to get out of it, like when you said that, I thought about just tearing things down. You know. I'm gonna read all that and look that up more because I love science fiction. I love time, travel. I love alternate universes. I love the idea of time being like not in a line, and that there's 20 of us right now, different versions of us doing the same thing, and in a different direction. That kind of stuff I love. So like even in science fiction novels, when it's in the future and you got a teacher, you

still...even if the persons in like, say, the oasis, which is the alternate to the world wide web that you can sort of live in...it's still a professor or a teacher in front of the group of students, and the students are still sitting in chairs. Even if they're gonna go explore the insides of a frog, or if they're gonna go, do a space travel thing, it's still- every futuristic novel with teaching is still like a professor in front of some students, and I'm like, "Oh, my God! Nobody can think of it different!" So I don't know, like I hear you on that. I don't see how we're going to get out of it unless the whole thing got burnt down and we started again.

“Dungeon Master”

“Dungeon Master” is a playful educator, currently working as an educational technologist at a 4-year institution. He identifies as both educator and developer. He has a deep commitment to both games and collaborative building. His name is inspired by the ways in which his engagement with games informs his educational practices.

Here is his story:

I do a lot of informal learning. I would say a lot of my Dungeons and Dragons learning is informal learning because I listen to actual plays of people playing. I listen to videos of people dissecting play. I listen to guides for DMs. I listen to guides for players. I actively explore explore books. I read various things that people post or publish. But I also ,like, will play in other people's games to also learn. I've learned things that I don't want to do in my games, but I've also learned I've also taken away things that I do want to do in my games. Some things are simple, like if we had a monstrous encounter against a literal devil that had slayed the quest giver of the party and they were like trying to get them back and save them and whatnot and rather than taking this enemies ability to create more threats on the board-- I had just like, I'd stolen this from one of my friends who DMs a similar kind of situation, where they're just enemies everywhere. And so like, rather than us showing individual monsters and having to track this, the enemies everywhere approach is like, you can just attack the board. It's so much easier and streamlined to say, like, “if you're not within range of the big bad, you can just attack the board, and you are contributing towards the end goal in this way...in fact, at certain thresholds you're really helping your cause.” And so like, folks were like doing things actively to engage in that way. And yeah, so that's something that I experienced and then pulled in and thought through how it

would apply in my situation, so that kind of like an example of transference occurring in my learning and then applying it and testing it, and it going off well, like well enough that I will likely use it again for other situations as well.

“Low Income Learner”

“Low Income Learner” works as an IT Analyst at a community college. His role situates him between faculty and IT, whereby he only advances IT strategy, but is also responsible for designing training related to the pedagogical uses of technology for faculty. He is currently a PhD student and views asynchronous professional development quite broadly (including the news, podcasts, etc.). He is trained in the Humanities and human-centered design, which he shared impacts his approach to designing professional development. He identifies as both an educator and an educator developer and incorporates a regular and very intentional practice of searching for deep, meaningful, transformative professional development. The pseudonym “Low Income Learner” comes from an experience he shared during our interview regarding a transformative learning experience he had in a graduate class (transformative for the ways in which it helped him rethink his own lived experiences growing up as a learner).

Here is his story:

The webinar that I was talking about that kind of totally changed my thinking was...there was like a- I can't even remember what the company was because it didn't matter to me, right. But the topic was like students, and poverty, understanding like poverty mindset, and it like not only changed like the way that I thought about like how I'm providing content to my like low income students that are coming from these backgrounds. But also like informed like, how I shouldn't understand myself because I grew up in like a low income environment like oh, like. It was like bringing to my own consciousness...what was unconscious for me. And it was like kind of like helping me understand myself and my family, and like my friends, and like all this stuff like I didn't even realize. And then, like also, it was like, “Oh, and this makes such a difference for understanding like how our students and like what their values are and what they need and what they actually want versus those that are not. And then also, like the middle class values that are put on in higher education and like why those come up against

friction, and why, like myself, as a student going through college like why I kept hitting these barriers and like why it was like my value system didn't seem to line up with like Higher Ed's value system and why there was like this tension." Anyway, that was like so transformative for me, right? But it just came from some like commercial about a tool where they brought in this guy to talk about this like framework. But it just changed like my entire mindset.

“Interdisciplinary”

“Interdisciplinary” identifies as both an educator and educator developer. He believes asynchronous learning is happening all the time. He orients his practice around what he can give to others. He currently teaches in a Master’s program, and has a background in organizational change and change management. He has additionally worked across sectors and takes up a very interdisciplinary approach. He referenced specific frameworks from software engineering, psychology, change management, education all within the first minute and 47 seconds of our interview, thus inspiring his pseudonym. Here is his story:

Then you might guess I'm pretty biased about this issue. But to be an educator, you got to be a cognitive psychologist in some level right? You have to understand how the mind works, and how people learn and how people don't learn. I mean, there, there's. you know, and there's a whole. There's a long research field out of all this stuff because you have to. That's what you have to enable. whether you're a physicist or in nursing or business. knowing that people get overwhelmed. Well. okay. But there's actually a science to understand. How do you determine whether you're gonna overwhelm someone or not? I mean, there's lots of stuff out there. Right? So. So I think that that's the you know. And there's a lot in professional development that's happening. You know. Where where people are explaining some of these things. And people are, you know but you know, calling telling a physicist they need to become a psychologist, you know, sometimes it. That's not the way to language it.

“Daughter”

“Daughter” works as a Professor within the context of a 4-year / Research institution. She is also currently a student in a fully online Counseling Master’s program. She believes that professional development is a constant need for educators and is

constantly engaging in professional development, herself. She is an optimist at heart that believes in a better future, likewise believing that there is a lot of good professional development out there...we just need to find it. She is community and people-oriented who enjoys community online. She identifies as both an educator and educator developer. Her pseudonym stems from a story she shared with me about a deep desire of hers to write an autoethnography about her family, storying her mother, who had a significant impact on her and the way she engages in the world. This story was particularly impactful and inspiring for me because she told it within the larger context of types of published works that aren't seen as "academic" by her immediate supervisors. Nevertheless, she is driven by engaging in this type of work because she knows it would not only be personal, but it would help her further push for healthier boundaries and more inclusivity in terms of what is and is not recognized as "scholarly" work. Here is her story:

I wanted to tap into autoethnography and write the story of my life, but in a professional way, like interviews. One of my biggest homeworks to do is to go to Argentina and truly interview the people who knew my mother, because right now all I have is the stories of my family who have a completely subjective interest in the process. My mother was a medical doctor in Argentina in the seventies and she was known by people. So I could go and do interviews...Now I wanted it to be a fiction book about myself like a novella, but then why not make it in an official research, where actually, I talk about my story and how eventually your personal life impacts who you are in the world, you know? And it can help other faculty members and also talk about mental health and narcissism, because I believe narcissism exists in academia and it harms a lot of people, because narcissists don't see what other people do. They only care about themselves. And these personalities can hide in big institutions. They are our leaders. They are our guiders. But they can create a lot of harm. And people who are always giving empathy, you know 'we want the world to be a better place,' are always giving and we're not seen by these creatures whose only care is their personal interest or organization, right? So they're gonna suck. It's like a vampire...the research I've done, they compare them to vampires. [...] But what I'm saying is we need to have clear boundaries, and in my situation we have to be proactive so there's nobody who will ever say to me, 'Don't do that!'

“Mom”

“Mom” works as an academic specialist supporting educator professional development at a 4-year institution. She identifies as both an educator and educator developer. She believes learning is always happening and that we should acknowledge the wisdom and knowledges of those around us. She's a scholar of informal and social learning. Works remotely. Her commitment to lifelong learning, even in her approach to parenting, inspires me. Here is her story:

...if it's something that I think is important to either my personal or professional. both being but I don't have my unit support. you know. Acknowledgement. Financial contribution. It's much, much harder for me to build in the space to do it. And that's where I like, I start to lean on the more informal structures like social networking sites. where I can like kind of tailor who I'm following to be content at who, I perceive to be content, experts in things that I'm like not getting paid to learn about but I still feel like I need to learn about and like. It's in much more like quick, digestible chunks because of the nature of the platforms. So when I'm learning about gentle parenting, I'm doing that on Instagram, because no one at my job is paying me to learn about gentle parenting. But when I am learning about Sis, I'm working towards the systems, thinking credential. That's something that is very easy for me to tie into what my role and responsibilities are.

“Storyteller”

“Storyteller” loves gamification. She is also a die-hard sci-fi fan. She is indigenous and recognizes that her Indigenous background gave her a clear sense of identity, as well as impacted her approach as a professional and how she learns. She identifies as both an educator and educator developer. She is drawn to things she thinks will actively model something we can use or put into practice. She called herself a “storyteller,” and the name stuck. Here is her story:

I come from a long line of storytellers, you know. I'm indigenous. We do seller storytelling. It's just a way of life. So I will bring a lot of my experiences to the

table as a learner, or to widen the perspective of the faculty that don't tend to see things from the student perspective.

“Satirist”

“Satirist” works as an Assistant Director within an educational technology unit at a 4-year institution. He identifies as both an educator and educator developer. His first big influence in online learning was a Coursera course. Sarcasm is not just a rhetorical approach to answer questions for him, it is a way of reconciling life. Here is his story:

So the first thing that really had kind of a measurable impact of me was a coursera course about educational technology. And I took it because I was working nights and I had nothing else to do. And I wanted to get a different job. So I was like, well, let's learn. I guess.

“Blogger”

“Blogger” is a first generation student who was introduced to asynchronous learning during her Master’s (which she completed remotely). She has engaged in research directly about asynchronous learning and most of her professional career has consisted of developing online learning across modalities. She identifies as both an educator and educator developer. She recognizes she was very fortunate to have overall very positive learning experiences and moreover to learn from an amazing instructor who delivered high quality online learning experiences. Her pseudonym hails from her active engagement in the blogosphere. Here is her story:

I don't know if it's helpful or not, but I can put something in I'll put a blog post I wrote in the chat. So let's look at the date on this...2019. So I've been trying to like, think right about this for a while, but...

“Introvert”

“Introvert” serves as a director in a learning technology and development unit within the context of a business school and 4-year institution. She identifies as both an

educator and educator developer. Through her job, she develops quite a lot of asynchronous offerings for learners (and engages with a lot herself as a learner). She views asynchronous as “radically more accessible and can be more equitable.” She is also “extremely introverted.” Here is her story:

I am extremely introverted. It is, take, it, takes a lot. What of me to engage meaningfully. So if I haven't been inspired by whatever has happened so far. I am leaving the second they say that word

“Musician”

“Musician” is a Dean at a faith-based university in Canada. He identifies as both an educator and educator developer. He is an avid musician (hence his pseudonym), passionate about learning new instruments. He seeks authentic engagement. And deeply connective spaces and dialogic and transformative spaces. Here is his story:

I've recently I'm trying to learn the guitar or solo for Jimi Hendrix song the little wing. And I'm trying to transpose that to an ukulele. So it's a different chord structure and a different set of patterns. And there was a Youtube video where the a person was just walking you through, but just going really fast. And and then the comment was, Well, you can push, pause, and slow down to follow along. But it was. Still, this is sort of this transmitted. I'm doing it this way. Now you follow along, and it just it wasn't helpful. And then I found another source where I was able to contact the the person who developed that and said. I would like to follow your video, but then I would like to record myself. and then I would like for you in your own time, provide me some feedback, and maybe you can see where I actually need a little bit more help in in this position. So it was. you know. So he agreed to that, you know, and there was an exchange and a fee, and then I listened, I watched, I practiced, I did my part, I uploaded it, and then, you know, I think, was within 24 HI got very powerful. meaningful feedback, asynchronously, that then I can then incorporate and use to sharpen and hone my skills. And I thought, wow! This is pretty pretty interesting use of an an asynchronous environment for a particular skill that was purely for my own sort of edification. This was not tied to any credential. This was just something that I found. that I wanted to pursue, so that that was one example of that playing out.

“Architect”

“Architect” works as a director of education and development programs. She identifies as both an educator and educator developer. Previously in her life, she was a graphic designer who started out working in marketing and found herself in educator professional development. Her pseudonym just ‘made sense’ to me. I have never heard her sound so excited talking about anything else in my life as I have when she told the story of her background in Architecture and her consistent pursuit for new pathways.

Here is her story:

I am curious about all kinds of things. I you know. Years ago I went and got a it took the test to become a license builder because we were gonna build a house, and I wanted to save some money. But I was also like incredibly geeky about what we were. Il just love learning and I would I would probably do just about anything. I may end up being that 80 year old person who I have always loved architecture. I had to like pause it. At 1 point I was conditionally admitted to U of M's architectural program years ago, and I hated math. But I started taking math like I started out with just the basic math classes at community colleges Oakland community colleges and worked like I finally found really great math teachers, and I was I was te starting calculus when my oldest daughter, who was my niece, came to live with us at the time. We ended up adopting her, but having a 2 year old and a full time, Job and my spouse, who was on a different. He was on second shift, and it didn't work well for learning calculates and physics, but someday I may go back to that. But I think my I've always liked learning. I'm always curious about lots of things.

“PhD-less”

“PhD-less” works as Director of Online Learning at a faith-based, Higher Education institution in Africa. Within his Institutional context, full online learning experiences are delivered primarily asynchronously. Their onsite coursework has become increasingly blended, but those online portions are primarily synchronous. He identifies as both an educator and educator developer. He inspired his pseudonym

through the way in which he positioned himself and his current career as working in counter to institutional norms. Here is his story:

...in my institution as the director of online learning. In other institutions. The the position is normally by professors when I mean Professor, is is not the professor in American way. You know somebody who has done a doctorate and the next level. because we use the the English system. A professor is hierarchy. and if it's not a professor is adopt somebody with a doctorate personally, don't have it. But I think it is my skills that I got from the so-called short courses and the like. those seminars, those trainings, and like that. put me at a level. You know that even the management we are wondering now, this professor really doesn't fit. But this person doesn't have a doctorate. but he has the skills. He has the leadership, the management skills. So for me, now I'm in dilemma but I can say that my institution recognizes it.

An important note: Please recall that it is common practice in qualitative research to create pseudonyms for participants as a mechanism for referring back to their interviews. In the past, Past Researcher Maddie made up new names, but used names that still felt like names (e.g. “Kenny,” “Ike,” Watson”). Past Researcher Maddie once even used numbers and letters...further distancing from the real people I learned from during the interviews. Those moves feel overly reductionist to me now, which is why I chose the move I described above; a move to still keep things as personal and human and representative as I could while still respecting the terms of privacy and concealment that my IRB dictates. That said, I do want to make utterly clear that these are not their only identities. They tell other stories of themselves during their interviews. It is important you understand this so that you do not move beyond this dissertation assuming a single story nor reducing any of the interviewees to a single story (and I will do work elsewhere in this dissertation to demonstrate they are more than a single story). If I only shared this one aspect of their identities, I'd be advancing a single story about them, for “that is how to create a single story: show a people as one thing, as only

one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become” (Ngozi Adichie, 2009, n.p.). I want to be careful not to do this because the single story “robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar” (Ngozi Adichie, 2009, n.p.). I want to make space for difference, but in doing so, I will make sure that difference does not become *the* story. So I want to be careful with the stories I tell, both of myself, of others, of the field, of any discipline, etc. As King (2005) shares, “stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous...For once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world” (pp. 9-10). So I ask this of you: be careful with the stories you engage with here, for once you have heard them, they become a part of you.

Do educator professionals really care about this type of work?

If you are *still* unsure about engaging in the work of positioning yourself in your work, know this: educator professionals might (some already do) judge the learning experiences you design by whether or not (and how) you position yourself in the context of that experience. “Mom” and “Punk” reinforced this hypothesis for me. “Mom,” for instance shared that she actively searches for this as she chooses which professional development opportunities to engage with:

I look for a sense of storytelling, like a person sharing their own story. Whoever the facilitator is, the sharing or connecting of their content to their lived experience is really powerful for me. If people are just sharing content at me, like I'm more likely to disengage, and then ultimately leave if it's a more formalized experience. I'm kind of looking for how the person or people who are facilitating or sharing are acknowledging, like their position in the context of the information that they're sharing. So like, who are they? How did they come to know this? How does the way that they walk through the world influence the way that they know that information or experience the phenomenon? Those are kind of like

core pillars of things that I like that make things feel more accessible or like credible to me, I think, when it comes to digital learning.

(From my interview with “Mom”)

As for “Punk,” they shared that a major turnoff from professional development stems from the ways in which a facilitator, organization, or institution does or does not position themselves within the larger context of higher education and the world. To “Punk,” if an organization aligns with a person they (“Punk”) ethnically disagrees with, then they won’t engage in the professional development experience:

How I feel about the sponsoring organization, about the facilitator, the people who are involved with the resource...it weighs on me considerably. I do a lot of thinking about the general ethos of folks and organizations and content creators, and I'm not gonna support you if I don't agree with you from an ethical standpoint.

(From my interview with “Punk”)

So, reader, know this: whether you choose to position yourself in your work or not, know that will be judged for it regardless and that *that* design choice is one that educator professionals do actively look for and consider when choosing whether or not to sign up, to dedicate time, and to engage in that learning experience.

CHAPTER 4: SITUATING THE SELF THROUGH / IN WORK

Six stories about (asynchronous) educator professional development

A story about “educators”

Following the transition to my second PhD program, I worked as a member of a project team at Michigan State University, on a project called the #iteachmsu Commons⁴⁶.

I was one of the core team members (you could consider us founders, in a way), ideating the project and much larger #iteachmsu initiative from the bottom up. A core part of the work was reframing who constituted an “educator” within institutional spaces, recognizing that teaching and learning work happens across roles and positions, and beyond the contexts of classrooms, as well.⁴⁷ This was an important narrative for me at the time, as well; being a graduate student, I often felt like I wasn’t quite an educator yet...as though the institution and everyone and everything around me was telling me I had to graduate and earn my degree before I could claim that term. My work on projects like #iteachmsu challenged that narrative, of course, as did the fact that I was, already educating. That said, there I was, a graduate student educator, working and ideating and co-creating other educators, including other staff, leaders, and students. This project was a part of a larger and ongoing initiative to build inter-institutional partnerships and coalitions across units and leadership to better support teaching and learning related initiatives (including training and professional development). Though the initiative is still underway, as a project team, we created a fully asynchronous digital commons space where educators (broadly defined) could post / share / curate educational resources, connect with other educators, and grow in their own teaching and learning practices. It was one of the first projects that ever gave me insight into the truly transformative potentials of cross-institutional collaboration, and particularly the ways in which asynchronous infrastructure could support massive, large-scale institutional change efforts.

A story about playful learning

Every time we got off of Zoom following a working meeting, I always felt so much joy and creativity. Our project work together didn’t feel like work; it was play but it was also professional development for me. I learned so much from John and Keegan as we gathered to work on GOBLIN 2.0 (a gameful educator

⁴⁶ Check it out at <https://iteach.msu.edu/>.

⁴⁷ See Skogsberg et al. (2021) for an understanding of why I use the term “educator” in this dissertation as opposed to “faculty” professional development.

professional development experience). GOBLIN 2.0, had quickly evolved into multiple sub-projects, which comes to no surprise to me. It feels like any time I entered into a creative, passion project with other like-minded colleagues, we have to remind ourselves that we don't have time for everything. We were gearing up for a conference presentation, though, of our fully asynchronous escape room. The escape room was designed to introduce educators to asynchronous escape rooms and how they might engage in 'play' as a cornerstone for professional development. The plan for the presentation was to run the escape room live, followed by a discussion about the experience as professional development (both participants' experiences in playing it as professional development, but also shared brainstorming about how they might leverage it (or a similarly designed experience) as part of the professional development they designed. As we reflected on our project work together, thus far, I realized that this 'passion project,' and the collaborative environment we had created with and for one another, was professional development for me...and one of the best "PD" experience I had engaged in at the time in relation to gameful learning.

A story about connection

In my first year with the Online Learning Consortium, I began to redesign our suite of Presenter Services offerings as Director of Online Engagement. One of the things we began to build (during my second year with the OLC) was a new set of fully asynchronous learning experiences designed to help presenters in leveraging PlayPosit to create fully asynchronous sessions. Because it was fully asynchronous, I wanted to make sure to model practices like making customized pathways available, incorporating effective organizational structures, onboarding, instructor presence, among others. As a result of presenters therefore spending a fair amount of time engaging in the content (including video recordings featuring my face), those who then saw me later at the synchronous events shared that they felt they had already spent time with me prior to the conference. It made me rethink what it could mean to connect asynchronously.

A story about onboarding

IELOL Global is a leadership program I currently direct that has as a core goal the help build and foster global coalitions dedicated to supporting digital learning change work. The program curriculum is designed around the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and during the program, we spend time as a learning community thinking about and storying the ways in which what we do in online learning works to advance those goals. The program begins with

three weeks of self-paced onboarding and orientation. When we began the work, we had an interesting design challenge to address: how do you onboard a group of individuals from around the world, who have different roles, different backgrounds, different experiences, different goals, etc. to this kind of work? Our answer, ultimately, was 'story,' but it took us months to come to that approach and still longer, time and space to determine how we wanted to work with and through story as a means to both situate the work while honoring the diversity in the learning space. This program was fundamental in my own professional development in helping me to think about what professional development can contribute to beyond the boundaries of higher education. I carry this work on, now, as Director of Global Outreach for the OLC.

A story about takeaways

When I was working as a Graduate Assistant for the MSU Graduate School, I had the chance to design a new event type to be included as part of educator onboarding events. It became known as the "Teaching Toolkit Tailgate." The goal of the event was to change the narrative and expectations around 'takeaway' resources, which normally ended up in a stack somewhere near our working spaces until they eventually ended up in the recycling bin. Many resources weren't designed in a way to support action. So I designed a new template that each educator used to help advance pedagogical change through actions...actions which could realistically and responsibly be implemented from a one-page guide. I've never thought about 'takeaway resources' the same since.

A story about thought leadership

I had a good mentor as a graduate student, who instilled in me a ardent belief that students are thought leaders too. As an #iteachmsu Graduate Fellow, I collaborated with a group of graduate students and together we facilitated workshops and wrote blogposts about teaching and learning from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Apart from influencing a shift in my career path (because this experience helped me to see that educator professional development was a viable pathway), this fellowship later transformed into the larger #iteachmsu initiative (including the #iteachmsu Commons that I opened this section with). Though we were leading professional development, the experience itself was professional development, which helped launch me into a career of professional development.

How do we come to make sense of these stories? What might they tell us about the work of educator professional development? The short answer is that educator professional development is somewhat ubiquitous in higher education. It happens across all departments, is facilitated by people across various roles, and is focused on a variety of topics. As a result, the educator developer community is “a fragmented community of practice. [...] They have different academic and professional identities, inscribed within different discourses and drawing on different metaphors to represent the issues they face and the contexts in which they work” (Land, 2004, p. 12). This is important context to keep in mind because this work, then, is not centralized within the space of higher education. Some institutions do have centers, but that doesn’t mean that educator professional development isn’t happening outside of those centers (because it does). So as we work to locate educator professional development, we don’t need to look far. Additionally, it is good to ask who trains those who lead educator professional development and how are they supported? Who *should* facilitate educator professional development? What measures or criteria are we using to determine who should / shouldn’t be facilitating educator professional development?

Situating (asynchronous) digital learning in educator professional development

A story about Virtually Connecting

OLC Innovate 2020 (OLC’s first fully virtual conference) had just come to a close. It was my first OLC conference as a full-time staff member and I had been heavily involved in the planning, design, and the implementation of the conference engagement programming. I, along with a number of my close colleagues, was invited to be guest for a Virtually Connecting session⁴⁸. The idea was to help connect folks who could not attend OLC Innovate to the conference experience nonetheless through our reflections. The session facilitator opened the panel-style discussion by stating that this was an “OLC missed conversation” and with the following question: “What part of the conference were you not able

⁴⁸ You can engage with this session, still; see Bauer (2020).

to take a part of that you really wish that you could have?” As the group of us took turns sharing our responses, you could begin to see the ways in which we began to play off of each other, sharing at first things we wished we could have done, but gradually, and person by person, extending that further into a larger reflection on the conference as a whole, its online format, and what we felt like we missed when we compared our 2020 virtual experience to our previously onsite conference experiences. One of the most consistently shared things across the room was the people. Even I (though my personal response did not reflect such a response) can remember nodding my head in agreement at the time in recognition that I, too, felt those things.

Last to respond to that prompt was Angela Gunder, OLC’s Chief Academic Officer, who shared the following reflection:

“Before we started this call, Autumn had said that we could push back on her question and be a bit provocative and I always like to take the opportunity to twist and bend and make us think in different ways.[...] The question sort of has us thinking about translation. And it’s tempting because we were planning a fully face-to-face conference in a location, we had dedicated time, we knew the affordances of that and then the world blew up and we had to shift and pivot and create this new thing. And I think if anything, if I were to reflect and say ‘what did I miss?’ I missed the opportunity for us to just sit in the unique affordances of the online modality and not think about “What did we do face-to-face that we couldn’t do online?” Forget that. What should we be doing online for online’s sake? And how can we make things and create things that we haven’t thought of before or that are not typically part of the quote-unquote conference structure. And even with all of the years that the many people on this call have been part of face-to-face conferences, the one thing I think we always talk about is “are we just perpetuating culture that is not necessarily in line with the culture that we want to represent? Are we just kicking along the same can of how we’ve done things prior? [...] So I would just challenge all of us to say ‘let’s really think about what we can be doing and if we’re missing anything?’” It should be things that are wholly new, wholly challenging, and will push us in new directions that will get us back to our culture and values.”

A note on the history of online learning and asynchronous digital learning

I do not wish to argue in this dissertation for blended learning over face-to-face or even on behalf of asynchronous learning over synchronous learning in the context of digital learning environments, although I recognize that I carry with me years of engaging in scholarship and the scholarly world of blended, hybrid, and HyFlex models. There is plenty of research that compares these modalities and formats already (see for example one of the most well-known in the field of online learning — SRI’s meta-

analysis). There is also a tremendous body of work about online learning more generally (for example, see Northcote et al., 2019; Sullivan et al., 2018; Saba & Sherer, 2018; Jan et al., 2019; Gurley, 2018; Koseoglu & Bozkurt, 2018; Olesova & Campbell, 2019; Goin Kono & Taylor, 2021; McClannon et al., 2018; Rutherford-Quach et al., 2021; Honig & Salmon, 2021; Chen & Swan, 2020; Gay & Betts, 2020; Wilton, 2018; Zgheib & Dabbagh, 2020; Martin et al., 2020; Borup & Evmenova, 2019; Han & Resta, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2023; Duha et al., 2022; Minga-Vallejo & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022; Romero-Hall & Ripine, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Hansen-Brown et al., 2022; Olcott, 2022; Butters & Gann, 2022; Heflin & Macaluso, 2021; Backer & Schad, 2022; Martin et al., 2021; Chien et al., 2022; Moore & Miller, 2022; Gonzalez & Ozuna, 2021; Borowiec et al., 2021; Yang & Stefaniak, 2023; Drysdale, 2021; Lowenthal & Trespalacios, 2022; Pawan et al., 2021; Ensmann & Whiteside, 2022; Nichter, 2021; Garrison, 2022; Beach et al., 2022; Miller & Ives, 2020; Vally Essa et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2023; Watson et al., 2023; Gogus, 2023; Presley et al., 2023; Shi et al., 2023; Howell, 2023; Fortman et al., 2023; Pawan et al., 2023; McDonald, 2023; Aad et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2023; Gilpin et al., 2023; Meech & Koehler, 2024; Ozogul et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2023; Borgman & McArdle, 2019)^{49, 50}. Likewise, there is a significant amount of work that dives into the design

⁴⁹ Too many citations? First, who says? Secondly, this was intentional. I wanted to communicate, without a shadow of a doubt, that there is, indeed, a large body of work that dives into and focuses especially on the world of online learning. I reference these publications, specifically, because they have impacted me and my work (in general) in one way or another. If you're new to online learning or wanting to explore further, you could start with these.

⁵⁰ Additionally, however, I list them here in this way in order to call attention to them. You probably noticed the block of citations on the page, so it worked. Beyond the work of this dissertation, but something I will nevertheless call attention to is the labor that goes into literature reviews. There has to be a better way to trace the work of the past, learn from what has already been done, and collaborate across disciplinary boundaries. If you work in online learning, but haven't yet heard of this journal, I could argue that you're missing a whole part of the conversation; and that, I suppose is my point...we're having a lot

intricacies and instructional applications of asynchronous digital learning more specifically (you can start here: Olson & McCracken, 2015; Hiltz et al., 2007; Twigg, 2009; Ice et al., 2007; Waters, 2012; MacMillan et al., 2014; Wegerif, 2019; Brown, 2019; Meskill & Sadykova, 2019; Dzuubinski, 2014; Dziuban et al., 2007; Ronen & Langley, 2019; Aviv et al., 2019; Cunningham, 2015; Martin, 2013; Woo & Reeves, 2019; Zingaro & Oztok, 2012; Jaffee, 1998; Cooke, 2016; Lowes, 2014; Moore et al., 2009; Schifter, 2019; Jackson et al., 2010; Fredericksen et al., 2019; Olesova et al., 2016; Wicks et al., 2015; Wang & Chen, 2008; MacKenzie, 2019; Morse, 2019; Shea et al., 2019; Schroeder et al., 2016; Heckman & Annabi, 2019; Moore, 2019; Picciano, 2002; Picciano, 2009; Milliron & Prentice, 2019; Haavind, 2019; Snyder & Dringus, 2014)⁵¹. Beyond this section, this dissertation won't talk about them in great detail. This might seem odd to you, believe me, it was odd to me at first too. When I started this project, I thought I would provide the field a systematic, thorough, and exhaustive review of asynchronous digital learning applications, resulting in a list of best practices and recommended strategies. It turns out, though, that this is not where the research took me. I share in Chapter 5 that this dissertation is grounded in the lived experiences I

of disparate, siloed conversations about the same things across time and space. There has to be a way for us to more regularly and more effectively bring these into dialogue with one another beyond the context of a literature, which runs the risk of getting lost in the void entirely, or worse, only circulating within its assumed discipline, therein perpetuating disciplinary echo chambers.

⁵¹ Too much here, as well? Again, who says? Additionally, to add onto my last footnote, I aim to communicate that online learning and asynchronous digital learning has been around for decades. A scan of the publishing dates of these works will tell you that. We are not the first to be having these conversations and we will not be the last. Consider this an act of naming my relations and those that came before. In fact, if you look closely enough at the journal these articles appear in, and trace the scholars, you will see that they collectively help to tell the story of the Online Learning Consortium (at least part of it). Some of these scholars were some of the OLC's first board members; some still sit on the board today. In this way, they have quite literally contributed to making this dissertation possible through their impact on the organization's history and where it is today. Similarly, some of the scholars are known as being founders (or among the founding group) of now well-known parts of the field of online learning (e.g. Blended Learning). In this way, I honor my relations here through referencing the lineage of online learning and asynchronous digital learning.

engage with and I mean that; this dissertation was guided by stories, and while the educator professionals' stories I engage with reference and talk around and about asynchronous digital learning, our conversations were actually about life and work and meaning making and learning...and so that is what this dissertation is about. They were about hopes and dreams and worries and fears...and so that is what this dissertation is about. They were about, in essence, our lived experiences with asynchronous digital learning...and so *that* is what this dissertation is about. I share this here, in as transparent a way as I possibly can, so that you are not disappointed with what this dissertation *does not* do or is *not about*. So if you're looking for a rhetorical analysis of that sort...one that examines published works across time and considers the makings of asynchronous digital learning and educator professional development in that sense, that is not this dissertation⁵².

Through an exploration and engagement with lived experiences, though, I aim to learn more about asynchronous digital learning and professional development experiences (thereby extending the scholarship that already exists). Rather than talk about how to apply a given design choice, I aim to understand how educator professionals *feel* about that design choice. I am curious how it impacts them and their engagement with / within professional development. Rather than forward "best practices," I am curious about naming "desired practices" and understanding why they are desirable. Many have begun to argue and demonstrate the ways in which asynchronous learning contributes to increased equity in learning spaces (see Bali & Meier, 2014 and St. Amour, 2020 for two examples to start with). Are educator

⁵² NOTE TO SELF (and reader): This would be an interesting project for the future.

professionals aware of design choices that facilitate increased equity in asynchronous learning spaces? If so, how important is that to them? What does it mean to them and what does it signal for them?

In “The Moment Is Primed for Asynchronous Learning” Online Learning Consortium’s CEO, Jennifer Mathes, was cited as sharing that “Faculty can also choose when synchronous learning is necessary” (St. Amour, 2020). My interest in this line is two-fold here. First, it is the “choose when synchronous learning is necessary” part of that article that I find most fascinating. It points to the fact that there are people behind these designs and that these people are making choices (and in doing so may or may not be using some sort of heuristic to determine when synchronous vs asynchronous learning is “necessary”). In this vein, I want to know more about what’s behind these choices and explore educator professionals’ opinions, thoughts, and experiences with these choices.

But there is another reason I am intrigued by that line: “Faculty can also choose when synchronous learning is necessary” (St. Amour, 2020). The article is written to clearly make the case for asynchronous learning, and the quote even positions the decision making point around whether or not to use synchronous learning. Now, I know Jennifer Mathes, she is my boss, and I know that within the OLC we design quite a bit around the synchronous, so I don’t want to read unnecessarily into that line and assume that she (Jennifer) was trying to argue that DLEs should be dominantly asynchronous and sparingly synchronous. That said, I found the overall argument of the article interesting when taken up in consideration with the fact that most of the publications that exist are comparison studies. I will clarify here that I am not surprised by the fact that

most studies are comparison studies. What began to fascinate me, though, was the relatively small number of studies that focused on fully asynchronous digital learning environments. As someone who often finds myself lingering on and talking to others about “the unique affordances of online learning,” I began to wonder about the unique affordances of asynchronous digital learning environments (and therein the boundaries, potentialities, and possibilities of / through the asynchronous). As a (likely over-) simplification of this interest, I want to know what we can and cannot do in both synchronous and asynchronous environments. Are there things we *should* do in a synchronous environment over another modality? If so, what and why, who makes that determination, and what is impacting that decision? I explore these questions primarily through Chapter 7, and as you will see, I fail to focus solely on asynchronous digital learning (though I now have a new appreciation for and understanding of why so many studies are comparison studies, and perhaps can offer new insights into our tendencies to offer “comparisons” in the first place.

Weaving in community

I began this section with the story about a Virtually Connecting conversation I was a part of due to the ways in which it might help us to understand the importance of and significance of *community* within the context of asynchronous digital learning and educator professional development. As the world shifted online and remote that year (the year that conversation took place), with it also came a tremendous outpouring of feelings of loss and of being short-changed related to learners’ experiences with remote learning solutions. At the time, I remember one thing in particular that stood out: by and large, one of the most significant things they called attention to was the loss of

community and connections with other students and faculty (see for example Newsome, 2020 and Ong et al., 2020). And from this Virtually Connecting story, it is clear that undergraduate students and graduate students were not the only ones that harbored this sentiment. Community building has been pointed to in the world of education as a significant factor for us to consider (in part because it has been linked to things like student success (see Rovai, 2002)⁵³).

Community has been at the center of conversations around the choice between asynchronous vs synchronous learning (and even surfaces in at least 3 of the interviews I conducted for this dissertation as a “deciding factor” for their selection choices of which professional development opportunity to invest in). While many make the case for dialogic engagement as central to community building (see Levine, 2020 or Levine, 2004 as an example of this argument in the context of conferences) some situate community more specifically. One useful site to reflect on is a twitter thread between Steven Krause and Maha Bali. Steven Krause asks: “I haven't read enough of your post or tweets yet, but I have to ask: why not just teach the class asynch, which is how it works with most online classes? Especially if you aren't going to make them turn on their cameras (which I totally respect/get)?” to which Maha Bali replies: “Many reasons. We do a lot of conversation and we hear each other's voices. Students here seem to find async a higher cognitive load and they want the emotional connection of being together and hearing voices. Easier to manage time and workload. Your question is like asking why make a phone call rather than send an email? We know some things you can do w phone feel v different to writing in an email. Each one has its place, and lots of

⁵³ Community in educator professional development is referenced elsewhere in this dissertation, as well, don't worry.

my course work is asynchronous... but the synchronous part has its place too” (Krause & Bali, 2020). What is important to reflect on here is that Bali positions some work as more suited for synchronous as opposed to asynchronous learning environments. In all 14 of the interviews I conducted, every single person expressed the belief that it is possible to build community and be in community asynchronously. Like Maha, argues, though, there are nuances to this work. This dissertation seeks to explore these types of nuances. As an example, in an article about *Virtually Connecting* the team of Virtually Connecting designers shared that “much of what makes VConnecting work is sustained interaction within the volunteer community semi synchronously, privately, and mostly textually via Slack. The community is sustained through other community specific activities such as larger planning projects, writing and scholarly opportunities, and modeling hospitality with new members, which is complicated when the entire team are volunteers. But it is also sustained through broader interactions that are outside of the community itself but which have cross-over membership” (Bali et al., 2019, para. 26). Though forwarding examples of asynchronous engagement for community building, these actions nevertheless follow synchronous engagement. They do continue by arguing the connections to equity work they are able to provide with their platform and community, noting that “Connecting may also have a neutral or ameliorative effect if they are able to watch recordings (because this would still seem like broadcasting, or enhancing access, but not directly addressing cultural or political injustice as their voice does not get heard)” (Bali et al., 2019). But what strikes me most here is the situatedness of community building within (or beginning with) the synchronous. Though a very specific nuance, we might ask whether all educator professionals view / position

community in this way, and if they do, what this helps us to understand about asynchronous digital learning in the contexts of educator professional development.

Weaving in ephemera

Educator professional development has an ephemeral nature to it, particularly when you look at common design choices. We can look to, for instance, one-and-done or short series experiences, wherein the community, the experience, and (perhaps) the learning within these spaces is fleeting. Whether sit-and-get or active, most educator professional development is not situated within sustained educator learning communities. Though I didn't ask about this specifically, using my own lived experiences as a gauge, I'd estimate that 90-100% of the formalized professional development I typically experience is of this sort: the ephemeral sort.

Chun explores the relationship between memory and ephemera, pointing to these two phenomena as being related but distinct. They argue "memory, with its constant degeneration, does not equal storage; although artificial memory has historically combined the transitory with the permanent, the passing with the stable, digital media complicates this relationship by making the permanent into an enduring ephemeral, creating unforeseen degenerative links between humans and machines" (Chun, 2008, p. 148). Chun's analysis is helpful beyond distinguishing memory from ephemera. Chun talks about time and speed, citing Lovink in saying "because of the speed of events, there is a real danger that an online phenomenon will already have disappeared before a critical discourse reflecting on it has had the time to mature and establish itself as institutionally recognized knowledge" (Lovink, 2003 p. 12, in Chun, 2008 p. 151). Equating this to a common educator professional development

experience, I am called to reflect on the speed (i.e. rate) at which I am designing right now as well as the rate at which professional development opportunities are being shared and engaged in. Each year, the OLC alone holds two major conferences. We now also hold 7-9 semi-large community events, as well as over 60 webinars a year. Do I as a designer have enough time in between offerings to sit and shift things from the ephemeral and into my memory? Do learners have time to reflect between events to ensure their experience isn't relegated to the ephemeral? Chun further goes on to explore the notion of storing and the ways in which media is stored. The argument is essentially this: media is being produced at such a high rate that space needs to be made to store it in the memory. However, our memory is not ever-flexible. So we shift older things out (typically) to make space for newer things. With respect to conferences and using Chun as guidance, I will share that I can barely remember what sessions I went to at the Spring conference last year, let alone the one that just took place last Fall. So if I am not remembering them, how can I meaningfully engage with them? And if I am not meaningfully engaging with them, how can I learn from them? In Chun's opinion, the result is an enduring ephemeral and the trap of a repeated past: "the scientific archive, rather than pointing us to the future, is trapping us in the past, making us repeat the present over and over again" (Chun, 2008, p. 158). To help us not be in this cycle, Chun argues that media needs to be disseminated. Taking all of this together, this dissertation "geeks out" on ephemera and its relationship to time (see Chapter 6). It seeks an understanding of how asynchronous digital learning spaces disrupt otherwise ephemeral practices and the practices of ephemerality. Given the documented and stored aspects of asynchronous digital learning spaces, do they help

us to evade Chun's warning of a repeated past? If so, does this mean they provide us insight into possible futures?

The ideal asynchronous digital learning experience for educator professional development

If you're considering designing an asynchronous digital learning experience to serve as professional development for educator professionals, consider the following:

The ideal asynchronous digital learning experience for educator professional development is one that....

- ...is intentional, where " the amount of time that's expected to go in is carefully curated, based on the value that the credential or the professional development will offer."
- ...is "accessible."
- ...is "designed to be engaging; [...] interactive. I expect it to be engaging. I expect to engage with others in an asynchronous format."
- ...does "not feel regurgitative, but feels like we're diving deeper and getting more meaning out of what we're learning, and that there's more clarification and sharing and collaboration and I feel like I'm building a network with other folks that are learning."
- ..."is facilitated [...] has some kind of like hybrid or high flex opportunity at some point as part of it."
- ...welcomes students to the class, and connects them with the instructor. Where they can ask questions easily and engage with one another. Where the instructor is a part of the community and authentically engages as part of the community.
- ...is highly engaging.
- ...is structured clearly and that includes clear direction of how you move from one module to the next.
- ...has a clear schedule and timeline, where I know what I am supposed to do each day.
- ...is structured with clear objectives and clear outcomes.
- ...makes space for self-driven learning, and which prioritizes flexible topics, self-pacing, and facilitates choice.
- ...values and leverages good, clear, and consistent communication.
- ...includes a reward (i.e. recognition or certification) at the end.
- ...validates learners.
- ...is multimodal.
- ...is scaffolded.
- ...has a low barrier of entry.
- ...is timely.
- ...is relevant.

- ...inspires action.
- ...respects learners' time and interests.
- ...incorporates regular, timely, and personalized feedback to learners and which incorporates feedback loops.
- ...is humanized.
- ...is designed in such a way that students have agency and control over their learning.
- ...connects back to learners' interests and what they're doing outside of the learning experience.
- ...makes space for people to be in scholarship with one another.
- ...exists alongside synchronous to some degree, with synchronous touchstones.
- ...designs within guardrails of equitable and accessible design principles.
- ...makes space for and facilitates thinking around what's possible.
- ...meets the needs of the learners.
- ...makes space for collaboration.
- ...models that asynchronous digital learning is a viable option.
- ...centers discovery.
- ...makes space for fun.
- ...values play.
- ...tends to the affective nature of learning.
- ...is designed to be "intuitive to navigate, has flexibility in terms of when I can access that content, and also has embedded within it lots of choice in terms of engagement with content and with individuals."
- ...prioritizes facilitators positioning themselves and situating themselves within the work.
- ...incorporates storytelling and connection to lived experience.
- ...acknowledges multiple ways of knowing and learning and meaning-making.
- ...has some kind of end point, but which is not time-restrictive (in terms of hard and fast deadlines throughout).
- ...offers some way to communicate completion.
- ...builds upon itself in a meaningful and intentional way.
- ...includes a clear description of overarching goals or theme and some kind of indication that the design of the experience achieves those goals (i.e. is aligned).
- ...is accessible in terms of being easy to access but also following accessibility guidelines.
- ...is welcoming and accessible to a range of audiences (i.e. inclusive of a broad audience).
- ...signals intentionality.
- ...makes space for learners to opt into forms of engagement (and where this choice is welcomed and personal).
- ...has a synchronous caretaker.
- ...has intentional navigation and where the learning objects and experiences are easy to find and get to.
- ...centralizes what *needs* to get done or is expected to get done and lists these in order (if there are expectations around order of completion), whereby what is expected is communicated directly and up front.

- ...functions as a properly tagged resource (so we can better assess relevance).
- ...includes a clear description of what we are about to invest time in.
- ...”results in an artifact that I can put on my resume.”
- ...is lower cost (or no cost).
- ...is self-paced-enabled (e.g. being able to watch or listen at multiple speeds).
- ...removes extraneous info and navigation and clearly communicates what’s there, where they are, and why they are there, and which “removes stuff that isn’t in service of the primary goals”
- ...is ideally a community (of people engaging), “where people care about the content, but also each other.”
- Ideally a community they want to return to
- ...is aligned to something...and whatever that something is, that this alignment is communicated (whether those be a particular set of values, or a mission, etc).
- ...explains the rules of engagement.
- ...makes space for continuous feedback on the experience itself.
- ...centers presence, connection, and relationships.
- ...finds the “sweet spot in connecting all the members of the learning community (including the facilitator) around their wants and needs.”
- ...results in a “return on learners’ time (not just their investment).”
- ...is hospitable.
- ...is led by a “Chief Worry Officer” over the learning that happens in that space.
- ...is designed *with* and not just *for* learners.
- ...is designed by someone well-versed in adult teaching and learning theory and practice.
- ...acknowledges and makes space for a plurality of ways to engage within and across the space.

(From my interviews with “Low Income Learner,” “Interdisciplinary,” “Daughter,” “Mom,” “Storyteller,” “Dungeon Master,” “Satirist,” “Blogger,” “Introvert,” “Punk,” “Sci-Fi Fan,” “Musician,” “Architect,” and “PhD-less”)

CHAPTER 5: METHODS & MEANING MAKING

These numerous possibilities leave la mestiza floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79)

Starting from where I started

I thought I knew how to write a *Methods Section*. But when I sat down to outline this chapter I didn't know where to start. One primary issue I ran into is not wanting to start where I started. Let me explain: I learned to write a *Methods Section* within the context of my training as a social scientist, a sociolinguist to be specific. But that training actually started within the boundaries of Anthropology. There, I learned that I was *researcher* and that the people I *studied* were *subjects* (sometimes called *participants* depending on the context of the research I was conducting). I was trained to be an outsider looking in, using theory to understand the world I observed, with the goal being to advance that same theory. Sometimes this also meant suggesting a new theory for others to scrutinize and determine if they thought it was viable or not. A *Methods Section* within the boundaries of academic disciplines like anthropology and linguistics

looked quite similar (although by the time I got deep into my training as a sociolinguist, I also learned the disciplinarily-approved ways to share mixed-methods data and results and to report on statistical analysis, data collection and experimental methods...reporting that ultimately resulted in a *Methods Section* that read more like one you'd find in a "scientific" journal, see Hesson and Shellgren (2015) for an example). As an anthropologist and a sociolinguist, when I sat down to write my methods section, the outline looked something like this: 1) study design, 2) setting & materials, 3) subjects/participants & sampling, 4) data collection & procedures, 5) data analysis, and 6) ethical approval.

In my fifth year of a PhD graduate program in sociolinguistics, I realized the program wasn't a good fit for me. Part of this realization came from a growing feeling that I didn't *fit* in the discipline. I had never seen the benefit of being what was called an "armchair linguist." My intent in sharing that here is not to negatively criticize theoretical linguistics. Theory for the sake of theory was simply not for me; I wanted to apply the theory I was learning and using to facilitate positive change in the world. This meant that I craved to apply the research I was conducting beyond the proverbial walls of the discipline of linguistics and for the theory I was generating to *do* something beyond just informing sociolinguistic theory.⁵⁴ When I talked about what I did as a sociolinguist, it was not uncommon for me to say that I studied "how people (*noun*) people (*verb*)

⁵⁴ Again, my intentions are not to criticize linguistics, nor (and most significantly) the program I was a part of. There were active departments elsewhere (meaning at other institutions) who were leading this kind of work (i.e. "Applied Linguistics"), but this work had not yet risen to the level of prestige that theoretical research held at the time of my studies. And, to be frank, I didn't have the competencies yet to effectively argue for what my mind was conceiving of and the future I saw for myself as a linguist, and the program I was in didn't have the structures and support to mentor me in this regard either (though I recently learned that the department is excitingly expanding in this direction and will be able to mentor students like me more effectively in the future).

through language.” And when I was asked why I studied that or what good it did in the world, I would say “so people (*noun*) could people (*verb*) through language better.” The key word there was “better.” It wasn’t “more effectively,” though some of my research could be interpreted and leveraged for such an outcome. I wanted to help expose systems of racism and sexism and bias and judgment. I wanted to raise awareness around the pluralities of language use and that there were multiple ways of knowing and making-meaning and expressing and being and help make the case that we could better understand this through language with the optimistic outlook that when we had a better understanding of such a fact of what it meant to be human that we might be able to be better as humans to one another. I embraced terms such as “descriptivist” early on and assumed it as an identity, describing language as it was (in contrast to “prescriptivists,” who defined language as they believed it *should be*). The last project I worked on as a sociolinguist started because I wanted to be in a position to speak into the efficacy of educator professional development (specifically, in the case of that project, to be able to know how educators’ perceptions and judgements of others were impacted by professional development and training around linguistic diversity). I hoped that, through my research, I could provide recommendations around best practices in professional development, whereby “best practices” were judged as those that would contribute to decreasing bias and increasing openness and understanding and (ideally) empathy of others. And to be in that position, I was under the impression that I needed to conduct research and publish and situate myself as an *expert* so that others would listen. So I conducted research and began a research initiative. I was fueled by data about and stories from students and others that demonstrated inequitable treatment that

resulted from biased perceptions and judgements (e.g. students receiving lower marks on a task simply as a result of the dialect they used, or the larger trend of women being seen as “less professional” for using the word *like* in a specific way). I was fueled by the hope that my research would help dismantle (one professional development workshop at a time) the larger oppressive and discriminatory systems that governed our uses and judgements of language and moreover the ways in which we treated one another as people (and, truly, whether we treated one another as people in the first place).

My coming to terms with how I was (or was not) situated within the discipline of Linguistics was influenced by the other things I was engaging in. I was working as an adjunct instructor at a local community college which provided me with an impactful lens on academic privilege and institutional privilege. “Proper” sociolinguistic theory began to feel trivial when there were students struggling to pay for school in order to get a better job so that they could better care for their families and selves and attend to their basic needs. I had, by that fifth year, also been exposed to and was engaging with / leading and facilitating conversations around diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (which was *all the rage*⁵⁵). I was familiar with scholarship around humanized learning, human-centered learning, and universal design for learning, among others. “Care,” “identity,” “holistic/whole selves,” “authenticity,” “empowerment,” “justice”...these were now a regular part of my vocabulary. In other spaces I was diving into the world of innovation, agile design, design thinking methods, scrum, project management (work and time

⁵⁵ I originally drafted “*the trend*” here, but like “all the rage” for the ways in which it satirizes both the tendency to orient to things like DEI in higher education as a trend, as well as the nature of this orientation, which is, at times, performative and even rage-full. This is not to say I think focusing on DEI is an empty pursuit, I believe quite the opposite, in fact. But at least in my experiences, some of the ways in which we orient to things like DEI serve in contradistinction to the values those orientations...or better, approaches, espouse.

management platforms and processes). At the same time I was learning about graduate student socialization, training, and professional development through fellowships and roles in the Graduate School. At the same time I was carving out a potential future working in online learning and educational technology, likewise deepening a dedication to pedagogy and praxis through graduate assistantships with the College of Arts and Letters and additional fellowships and projects across the university. At the same time, some of those very same projects gave me insight into institutional and organizational change within and across the context of Higher Education. At the same time⁵⁶, I became aware of the ways in which institutional boundaries (like between academics and athletics) served to limit the possibilities of student-athlete support and was wrestling with my own role(s) as *coach* and *queer mentor* and what it meant to operate on a fundamental basis of *care*.

I was learning more about the *culture* of higher education, gaining direct or personal experience via my own navigation through it and therefore raised awareness of it. At some point (though I didn't recognize it until much later...and I am still recognizing it through the writing of this dissertation), *these* became the project(s), the things I spent most of my time thinking and talking about and engaging in and investing time and energy into. The things I was drawn to and *wanted* to explore and understand. I had found meaning in them and felt like I was moving towards something *better* through an understanding of and engagement with them.

⁵⁶ I repeat this phrase quite intentionally, because I was, at one point in time (and for a long time), graduate student, and fellow, and adjunct instructor, and teacher, and graduate assistant, and project manager, and coach, and queer mentor, and project lead, and, and, and. And the fact that I was all those things, at the same time, is important for you to understand. And if not understand, then at least know that it was important to me.

My disciplinary world was quickly expanding in ways that I not only welcomed...I sought out. As I was beginning to question my place in Linguistics (though I was simultaneously resisting this questioning), I began to also feel like I had a place in the *in between* of academia...the spaces of educator professional development, pedagogy and praxis, institutional change, etc. Finding a sense of belonging in other spaces, unsurprisingly, only illuminated what I felt I was missing in Linguistics, which only further strengthened my belief that I didn't *fit* in that discipline (at least not in the narrow and bounded ways in which the discipline defined *fitting in*). It's important to note, before I go any further, that my Linguistics graduate department wasn't against my larger goal and hope of contributing to a better future. What they weren't able to support (and what I wasn't able to articulate at the time) was that I no longer wanted to be *just* that sociolinguist known for that *one* thing. What they couldn't see (and I was too afraid to admit) was that I was struggling to finish my "core" and "theoretical" exam (a paper) not because I didn't know how, but because it was no longer meaningful to me...I didn't see any point or purpose in completing it. It had become and was only, at that point, a checkbox...something I *had* to complete or else not advance and graduate (and therefore not become that professor of sociolinguistics I had been studying, working, and training to become, as well as that professional development change-maker I was hoping to transform into). I tried to find a way, any way, to connect that paper and those theories to *something...anything...*I was interested in. The task, though, felt like a pointless exercise and was ultimately something I wasn't able to accomplish.

My failure to fit in my department and discipline resulted in a massive disruption of my life. I don't say this lightly...I was questioning who I was, what I cared about, and

what I was doing. I had, up to that point, spent ten years of my life pursuing a career in linguistics. I had fostered being a sociolinguist as a core part of my identity and it felt like a structure and a barrier was being built before me, denying me further access to that identity and the culture that came with it. According to Anzaldúa (1987), “Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power” (p. 16). So yeah, my belief system (particularly what I believed about myself and who I was and was to be as an academic) was being challenged as a result of the fact that my divergence from the dominant paradigm surrounding what it meant to be a linguistics graduate student at my institution was nothing compared to the “unquestionable” and “unchallengeable” forces it was up against.

On the design of graduate programs, Horner & Lu (2010) share, “In identifying what will be taught in graduate courses, designers of graduate programs are defining what they believe future members of [that program] need, or ought, to know and be, which depends on what is believed these future members will and should be doing, likewise matters of dispute” (p. 476). I didn’t understand it at the time I was experiencing this disruption in my life, but engaging later in Horner and Lu’s framing helped me to see that my program was just doing what my program knew to do, based on the beliefs that had been instilled in them from their own lived experiences and time in the discipline.

Enter into the story, Committee Member A, positioned within my college as someone who could give me advice on my predicament. His advice was both simple and difficult. Simple in delivery in that he helped me to see that my path didn’t have to

end with my formal severance from Linguistics; I could explore other programs. Difficult because this meant taking more classes and reapplying to graduate school after already having spent 5 years in a PhD. I knew no one who had done this before. To pursue this path meant accepting and dwelling with a failure. I failed to graduate with a degree in Sociolinguistics. To change programs, to chance applying and risk getting rejected would position me to face other possible failures. But to not try was yet another form of failure in my mind, so in my sixth year, I took a whole new courseload, 'trying on' different disciplinary identities by taking courses across different graduate programs: the Teacher Education program, the Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education program, the Second Language Studies program, the Higher Adult Learning and Education program, and the Writing and Rhetoric program.

I think, upon reflection, I liked Writing and Rhetoric the most because it wasn't about teaching or pedagogy or learning or higher education...at least not explicitly. But through exploring things like *desire* and *failure* and *making* and *story* I came to understand teaching or pedagogy or learning or higher education differently. It was a different lens and a different way of thinking and knowing and it made me question everything. My coursework was about these different lenses and the ways in which they operated in the world. It was about different ways of thinking and knowing and questioning. I was excited to learn and question and question again. I hadn't had that feeling since my first year as an undergraduate student...at least not so profoundly. The courses I took changed the way I thought about the world. Granted, I was already doing some of that thinking ...but Writing and Rhetoric gave me language, theories,

scholarship, and a community with which I could validate that thinking and knowing. It was empowering.

Though I won't go into it more deeply here, I often wonder whether my choice would have been different if I had not begun with Queer Rhetorics and Cultural Rhetorics. I expand on both at other points in this dissertation and share qualities of these two approaches to rhetoric that are ripe for later reflection. My 'gut,' though, is telling me that I might have chosen differently. Queer Rhetorics and Cultural Rhetorics disoriented me in the best way possible. Sara Ahmed, one of the first scholars I was introduced to in Writing and Rhetoric, has this to say on (dis)orientation:

In order to become orientated, you might suppose that we must first experience disorientation. When we are orientated, we might not even notice that we are orientated: we might not even think "to think" about this point. When we experience disorientation, we might notice orientation as something we do not have. (Ahmed, 2008, pp. 5-6)

Becoming reorientated, which involves the disorientation of encountering the world differently, made me wonder about orientation and how much "feeling at home," or knowing which way we are facing, is about the making of worlds. (Ahmed, 2008, p. 20)

Ahmed's words helped me to see and make sense of my own orientations and disorientations and reorientations. I engaged with them in a time of my life where I, myself was disoriented, trying to find a new orientation. And through them I was reoriented towards a new disciplinary home and a new path. Likewise, while I was being disoriented through and reoriented to Writing and Rhetoric scholarship, I was simultaneously being reoriented to Linguistics. Here I was, in a classroom, still talking about things like language, identity, meaning, culture, perceptions, etc. This time, though, in a very different way. What had felt like a "severance" (I used this word

earlier), now felt like a different perspective. So through (dis)orientation I was able to enter into a new relation with Linguistics and became both linguist and rhetorician.

Among the things that I now questioned was what it meant to be a “researcher” and what rhetorics and systems I was unknowingly reinforcing and perpetuating by using the term “subjects.” Again, up to this point, I was taught that the best research was unbiased research and that to achieve this meant doing what I could to not influence the data collected. I think there’s still a deep and important benefit to this type of research. But through Writing and Rhetoric, I learned that this wasn’t the *only* way to do research. I learned that because I was a part of the research, the research could not be apart from me, that I was always intertwined with my research in one way or another. This new perspective opened further doors and revealed additional pathways for me.

I still ran into disciplinary boundaries, narratives of what it meant to be *in* the discipline of Writing and Rhetoric. I ran into the same sorts of *actors* that I had encountered previously in Linguistics. Latour (2005) comments that actors “too, compare; they, too, produce typologies; they, too, design standards; they, too, spread their machines as well as their organizations, their ideologies, their states of mind” (pp. 149-150) and that they do so “constantly as well, actively, reflexively, obsessively” (p. 149). Disciplinary actors leverage a “stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances” (Foucault, 1972, p. 3) that reinforce their practices of knowledge production and maintenance, and in doing so, ultimately communicate (in many cases, I have found, without even knowing they are doing so) a disciplinary story “about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do” (Said, 1979, p. 12). Or simply put, as Ahmed (2008) says, “subjects reproduce the lines that they follow.” (p. 17). So I

shouldn't have been surprised that I found resistance to my questioning of the rules of engagement I was encountering within the new disciplinary landscape I found myself surrounded by. But remember, it was a landscape of multiple ways of knowing and thinking, a landscape of questioning, a landscape of (dis)orientations. It's important that you remember this. They thought they were telling one story, but I was experiencing an entirely different one. What can be done about this? "The answer is not as simple as just leaving forever," whether that be the discipline or any other storied space. "The answers are much more complex: we need to step back and figure out what our stories are about and what they are doing to those who don't feel like they fit in" (Powell, 2012, p.391).

This in mind, I will continue to seek productive ways to push against this boundary-reinforcing storying (especially that occurring within Writing and Rhetoric). And you know what's just *chef's kiss* within the contexts of that specific commitment: Writing and Rhetoric scholarship affords me the space, the language, the theory, and the scholarship to do so. In fact, while the process of PhD-ing in Writing and Rhetoric (read here also the academic expectations of completing a dissertation in any field) pressures me to situate myself in the discipline, the very discipline I am PhD-ing in and the theory it introduced me to compels me to do otherwise. It supported my agency in doing so. It allows it. It welcomes it. So in this dissertation, I am going to dwell within the murky spaces of rhetoric by resisting the powers leading me to supplant⁵⁷ myself through the process of being disciplined. It is through my resistance of the *one* and my

⁵⁷ transitive verb. 1 : to supersede (another) especially by force or treachery. 2a.1 obsolete : UPROOT. 2a.2 : to eradicate and supply a substitute for. 2b : to take the place of and serve as a substitute for especially by reason of superior excellence or power (Merriam-Webster, 2024)

embrace of the *many* that I can begin to demonstrate all that I now believe about knowing and being, and therein begin to articulate my *Methods Section*. So Dear Committee Members,⁵⁸ Dear Educator Developers,⁵⁹ and Dear Academia,⁶⁰ allow me to situate myself in the discipline of rhetoric by making space for the many others I carry with me.

Starting from where I am

Like *la mestiza*, I have “a plural personality” and “operat[e] in a pluralistic mode” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.79). I carry with me all the disciplinary, scholarly, research, and professional experiences that have served to help make me who I am, who I was, and who I might become. As has been the case elsewhere in this dissertation, my methods section will attempt to communicate, through doing and showing, these pluralistic modes, to honor and visibilize them. And I honestly couldn’t imagine it any other way, for doing so would be denying the existence of these many relations and invalidating the impact they have had (and still have) on me. I was, in part, made through them and as such, they are a part of me. And so I dialogue with them here and am inviting you into this dialogue with me.

Who you are as a reader and how you are situated and positioned with respect to it, will impact how you orient to these methods and approaches. For some of you, a

⁵⁸ In this case, you are formally and structurally *judge* and *jury* in the court of law that is this Writing & Rhetoric dissertation and therefore quite literally have the power to determine what moves and motions you will allow.

⁵⁹ In this case, you are my colleagues and the community I seek to engage with most. Will you accept my invitation? .

⁶⁰ In this case, you are the larger culture that perpetuates the “unquestionable” and “unchallengeable” dominant paradigms through which this dissertation will be judged. You will set boundaries and expectations on how it can, should, and will exist and circulate within that culture. Will you welcome the challenge or document, archive, and store it, checked off as just one more dissertation within your catalog?

given method might be new. For others, it might feel dated. In some cases, you might wonder why it is that I am going into so much detail (especially if it is so “common” within the context of your discipline or if it feels “expected” given the nature of this project). But it is because I am imagining an audience beyond my graduate program’s discipline (i.e. an audience beyond Writing and Rhetoric) that I make space to name these methods. It is because they are all genuinely a part of how I went about my research and the meaning making I do in this dissertation that I put them into conversation with one another. And if I may suggest it here, should you be one of those readers who reacted in any such way, you could ask yourself why you feel the way you do. I found this line of questioning productive for myself, at least.

“Study” / design & setting

This “study” was designed around stories and dialogue; it was designed around lived experience. In short, I made space for storytelling around lived experiences (i.e. thoughts, experiences, opinions, knowledges, so on), as related to digital learning spaces (and particularly asynchronous digital learning experiences designed for educator professionals)...whether those be past or current. Stories can look a lot of ways...they show up and surface in a lot of ways. For the main “study” (the portion of my research which required IRB approval⁶¹ and therefore will be called my “study,” presently), I facilitated both a quantitative and qualitative design for storytelling and story-collecting / curating: an online survey and online interviews.

⁶¹ This study (study ID #00010383: 'The Rhetorics of Asynchronous DLEs') was approved by the IRB office at Michigan State University and was determined to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d) 2(ii).

An online survey was deployed.⁶² Participants first completed a demographic section, which asked about their selection criteria identity, age, gender, race / ethnicity, cultural background, nationality, working context (i.e. country, role, job title, setting, institution type, and area of concentration), disability status, worldviews and culturally contextualized perspectives. They were then asked a series of questions meant to help quantify their experiences with and engagement in professional development (e.g. *“How many hours of professional development do you engage in over the course of a year (rough estimate)?,” “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “None at all” and 5 being “Complete agency”), how much agency do you feel you have in terms of the choice of which professional development experiences you engage in?,”* and *“What is your preferred modality (as a learner) for professional development?”*). Finally, participants were asked a series of questions related to their lived experiences with digital learning environments (on the part of themselves as learner, designer, and / or both) and were given open-ended space to respond.

The online interviews were designed to equally make space to discuss lived experiences. Interviews were scheduled for 2-hour blocks, and ranged anywhere from 90-minutes to 3-hours depending on the conversation and availability. They were all semi-structured in design, meaning that while there were a core set of questions⁶³ the researcher entered into the interview with and aimed to ask, the interview could ultimately follow the discussion more naturally and authentically. Semi-structured interviews occupy a space between the formal and the casual. Due to the fact that this

⁶² This language feels...different from the rest of the dissertation. Why is that? What am I hoping to accomplish? What if I told you this is a part of my academic voice, one among many I variably employ?

⁶³ See Appendix B for the interview script and questions.

research project sought to answer specific questions while also leaving space for discovery, a semi-structured interview design seemed most appropriate.

Interviews always started with the same question: *Can you tell me a little bit about your perspective on asynchronous digital learning and the role it plays in your life?* From there, the interviewer leveraged the flexible interview protocol in order to choose a new question that best matched where the conversation was headed. Follow-ups (some pre-imagined, but most improvised and responsive to the dialogue) were also used throughout to facilitate the most natural and authentic interview possible. All questions were strategically written and chosen, as each intended to do different work. Given that all interviewees were also expected to complete the survey, survey contributions also became fodder for follow-up and extension. For instance, the words “good” and “bad” were included in the survey question: *Knowing that concepts of “good” and “bad” are subjective, can you tell a specific story about both a “good” and a “bad” asynchronous digital learning experience you engaged in as a learner? As you share, what made them “good” vs “bad” in your opinion?* In the context of the interview, the interviewer would repeat the sentiment behind the framing of the question (stressing the understanding and acknowledgement of subjectivity), as a transparent strategy to not only elicit personal opinions, but also a strategy to put their own opinions in conversation with the opinions of others as well as theory and best practices related to quality online learning and professional development (all of which they’d have deep experience engaging with as educator developers). As a result, when this survey question was revisited during an interview, it afforded space for participants to respond in a number of ways and from a variety of perspectives. Most shared not only their own,

personal opinions, but also the opinions they've heard shared by others, as well as their thoughts on the overall complexity of assessing online educator professional development along notions of "good" and "bad." In this way, the specific wording of each question also served as points of productive conversation. As another example of this, in a question about time investment in professional development creation,⁶⁴ "Punk" first responded by commenting on the idea of "investment" and "return on investment" in Higher Education. This supported the overall goal of a flexible and authentic conversational flow, whereby any response became a valid and relevant one for the purposes of this dissertation research.

This study was designed online for online engagement. There is a certain poetic nature to this research being a demonstration of blended and hybrid methodologies that I find amusing. I am studying asynchronous digital learning experiences for educator professionals, leveraging digital and online tools both synchronously and asynchronously in order to engage in that study. In doing so, I, myself, was co-creating digital learning experiences with other educator professionals, and together we were making meaning online, about online learning and meaning making for educator professionals. The alignment is important. As I will discuss in more detail later, it gave me an authentically "meta" space within which I could more meaningfully talk about asynchronous digital learning and professional development. I was bound by the same barriers for this project that I am in my other work and learning spaces: location, travel ability, time, money, time zones, scheduling.

⁶⁴ The specific wording of the question was: *Switching question styles a little bit. Imagine we are gearing up for a debate on this topic and you are presented with the following question: Are we investing time in something educators ultimately won't engage in? How would you respond?*

The study design and its alignment to my research topic was not lost on the people I interviewed either; two commented directly on it during our conversation together, using my study design (whether that be the ways in which I asked questions or the space I was creating for dialogue) as evidence for something they were storing at the moment. For example, both “Blogger” and “Punk” made reference to the ways in which the interview protocol made them feel more included in the process, as well as prompting dialogue.

Because the survey was online and asynchronous, I was able to survey people while I slept. Because the interviews were online, I was able to schedule them at times that were convenient for participants, one who was 7 hours ahead of me, another 5, and some who were 3 hours behind. Because it was online, we were able to dialogue across time, space, and place. As for me, I was either physically in a hotel room wearing workout clothes or at home in sweatpants and a sweatshirt, donning a North Face hat, and often eating a snack and drinking a coffee. Some interviewees likewise commented on the flexibility made possible online (e.g. sharing that they, too, were wearing sweatpants). Occasionally, I had to pause the interviews to use the restroom or let my dogs outside. On two occasions, interviewees came with me via my laptop to let my dogs outside and so our interview started first at my living room working space and then moved to my backdoor. The online recordings and survey responses provided me with data and stories that I could work through when I could and for as long as I needed to. Our synchronous conversations were extended and endured asynchronously. In these ways, because it was online, this research, this data, these stories, these conversations, and these reflections were made possible.

“Subjects” & storytellers

Subjects

Participants were recruited through two primary means: email and online message board posting. The survey (an online questionnaire) was distributed using convenience sampling (specifically leveraging two online communities of which the researcher is a member). In order to investigate the difference in lived experiences between those who designed educator professional development from those who participated in it, participants were asked to first self-identify as either an “Educator professional,” which includes but is not limited to teachers, administrators, instructional designers, instructional technologists, etc. or an “Educator currently working in educator professional development,” which was defined as someone designing learning experiences for other educator professionals. These categories were intentionally broadly defined for the purposes of this research project in order to be maximally inclusive of those working in Higher Education.

Overall, a total of 39 people responded to the survey. Over half (51.3%, n=20) identified as both an “Educator professional” and an “Educator working in educator professional development.” Of the remaining participants, 30.8% (n=12) identified as an “Educator professional” and 17.9% (n=7) identified as an “Educator working in educator professional development.” All participants identified as currently working within the context of Higher Education.

Participant ages ranged from 28 to 67, with the mean age being 44 years old. In terms of gender, participants leveraged a variety of terms to self-identify. For the purposes of this project, the data were grouped into three primary groups: female, male,

and non-binary. "Female" includes the following codes: "female," "cis-woman," "cis-female," "she/her/hers," and "woman." "Male" includes the following codes: "male," "M," and "man." "Non-Binary" includes the following codes: "non-binary. This in mind, the data was distributed as follows: 64.1% (n=25) Female, 33.3% (n=13) Male, and 2.6% (n=1) Non-Binary. As was the case with gender, participants were given space to share which racial or ethnic group they identified with most. 79.4% (n=31) said "White," 7.6% (n=3) said "Asian / Asian American," 2.6% (n=1) said "Hispanic/South American/Latinx," 2.6% (n=1) said "Black from Africa," 2.6% (n=1) said "American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Native/Indigenous," and 5.1% (n=2) preferred not to say. Four countries were represented by participants in terms of nationality, with 92.3% (n=36) identifying as from the United States of America, 2.6% (n=1) identifying as from Kenya, 2.6% (n=1) identifying as from Sweden, and 2.6% (n=1) identifying as from Ireland. Due to the fact that this project asks about participants' working contexts, they were also asked to identify which country they were currently working in. Of note, survey responses revealed that 3 participants are currently working in countries that do not map to their nationality; one identified as being from the United States, working in Ireland, one identified as being from the United States, working in Canada, and the other identified as being from the United States, working on projects in India and the Middle East. A total of 9 participants (23.1%) identified as having a disability.

In terms of professional working contexts, 46.2% (n=18) work fully remote, 10.3% (n=4) work fully onsite, and 43.6% (n=17) work hybrid. There were a range of institution types represented (see Table 1 below), though a majority work in 4-Year and 2-Year institutions. 3 (7.6%) identified as working across multiple institutional contexts.

Institution Type	Number of Participants	Percentage
4-Year College or Research Institution	28	71.8%
2-Year College or Community College	7	17.9%
Private non-profit, self-paced online university	1	2.6%
Teaching university	1	2.6%
NGO (Independent researcher, consultant, quality reviewer and expert)	1	2.6%
State Higher Education Consortium of Colleges and Universities	1	2.6%
OPM that supports 4-year institutions	1	2.6%
Tribal College or University (TCU)	1	2.6%
Historically Black College or University (HCBU)	1	2.6%
Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)	2	5.1%
Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AAPISIs)	1	2.6%
Technical School or College	1	2.6%

Table 1. Breakdown of Participants' Institution Type(s)

In a similar manner, there were a range of job titles, roles, and fields of study / areas of concentration represented. For the purposes of data analysis, participant titles, roles, and areas of concentration will be explored through a consideration of broad, grouped categories like “leaders,” whereby a “leader” could be signaled through a designated “leadership position” (e.g. “Director,” “AVP,” “CEO”). This method of grouping might provide an interesting avenue for exploration; for example, 17 participants (43.5%) would be categorized as a “leader” in the case of this study, and we might wonder if “leaders” experience professional development differently. For the present moment,

however, it will be simply stated that participants represented a diversity of job titles, roles, and fields of study / areas of concentration.

Storytellers

I am privileged to be connected to several large and global networks of educator professionals. So when I sat down to recruit folks for this research project, I reached out to my friends, my colleagues, and those larger communities of educator professionals and educator professional development designers I benefit from being connected with. Of the 39 who participated in the survey and the 14 who engaged in interviews, I know 24 of them as collaborators; we have worked on projects together. 6 of them have known me for nearly a decade now (some more than that). Some of them I count as personal friends. Others who participated and self-identified (i.e. shared their names with me) I know by name. Meaning that of the 39 people who participated in total, I knew 27 of them at least by name alone. Given this, I felt an overwhelming sense of care throughout each of the interviews. This was, in part, because I knew each of the interviewees to some degree prior to the interviews. None of them were strangers, and this is important context. That unique point of connection served to center the interview around care and around our relationship / point of connection. For instance, if one of the interviewees knew me from a specific teaching and learning or online learning context / community, that specific context or community came up explicitly in conversation. This personal / previous point of connection supported more authentic conversations, making methodological processes and commitments like establishing trust variable and dependent, in part, on the relationship I had with each interviewee previously (i.e. for participants I knew longer or more deeply, it was a lot easier to jump right into

conversation as though we were just old friends or colleagues catching up). As such, when I report in Chapter 7 on participants' hopes, fears, worries, concerns, desires...these are real, these are embodied, these are visceral.

As articulated in Chapter 3, I didn't provide a specific demographic profile above for the people I interviewed. This was quite intentional. Similarly, the approach I took to writing the beginning of this chapter was also intentional. If you read the "Subjects" section above and felt uncomfortable, know that this was intentional. If you read that section and felt "at home," know that I chose a specific scholarly voice in order to "identify" more with you in that moment and a subset of academic researchers (therein decentering others). You can interpret this choice as a rhetorical strategy for exemplifying the ways in which disciplines might have difficulty communicating across disciplinary boundaries (though, in this case, specific approaches to writing about and storying research / scholarship). If you are reading this and reveling in what I hope is a chaotic-good orientation to writing about professional development, do you like Dungeons & Dragons? Because I feel like we'd have quite the campaign experience together⁶⁵. Regardless of who you are, reader, I encourage you to return to the Ahmed (2008, p.20) reference and dwell on where you feel "at home" and why you feel that way. I will note, though, for my sake as well as for the sake of those who participated and even everyone reading this, that I intentionally made space for people in my study design. From the way I approached asking about identity in the survey⁶⁶, to the questions I asked during the interviews, to the framing of my research in the IRB

⁶⁵ Really, though, I'd love to play in this space, any space really, but largely the space of educator professional development with you.

⁶⁶ See Appendix A to reference the questions I asked in the survey, which included exposition on why I asked them the way I did.

application, I centered people and wanted to make as much space as I could for anything and everything they might bring with them.

That said, there are a lot of methods I know for storying people. But importantly, they are *people* to me. They are friends and colleagues and collaborators and community members. And there are lots of stories I won't tell here and that won't be told here. For example, I don't provide a comparative profile analysis within / across datasets (i.e. those who agreed to be interviewed versus not)⁶⁷. Maybe later I can do a deeper analysis into the survey data I collected and run all the cross-tabulations my mixed-methods researcher heart desires. And I want to...you never know what stories might reveal themselves through that kind of analysis. But for now, other stories have captured my interest.

The larger "project" here is actually about something quite different and I am of the opinion that even a small note that might otherwise seem like a tangent about "subjects" and how we position people in research can actually tell us quite a lot about how we are, have been, continue to be, and will likely be, into the future, professionalized and developed as educator professionals. As I stated in Chapter 1⁶⁸, I am claiming that you are actively engaging in asynchronous professional development right now by reading these words (regardless of how you're coming to them). As such, I am intentionally surfacing the moves I try to make, pointing them out, talking about them, visibilizing them throughout my dissertation so that we can collectively understand

⁶⁷ Oh yeah, everyone that engaged in an interview also participated in the survey. Some of you will find this important.

⁶⁸ Oh you skipped that section? No worries and zero offense...I often skip that section too. If I've intrigued you here, though, and you want to learn more about what I mean, you'll find me in Chapter 1.

them better, differently, more productively...in whatever way is meaningful to you at the moment.

“Data” / “collection”

First, a note on data collection (a relational ethics)

I knew all of the people I interviewed in one way or another before starting this dissertation. Some of them have known me for a while, some of them I have friendships with to varying degrees. Some of them have been colleagues. All of them are part of communities I am a part of. So what does this mean and why is it important enough to note here? For me, it means that I have a responsibility to tend to their stories and contributions with care. I am choosing to adopt a “relational ethics” (Ellis, 2007) and am committing to being deeply cognizant of what I do with the storying they have done as well as the storying I am doing. I am committing to holding myself accountable to the value system of relational ethics, which is one of “mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis, 2007, p.4). In short, I *care*. A relational ethics, though, helps to keep me accountable to that care. It requires us (i.e. researchers) “to act from our hearts and minds, to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others” (Ellis, 2007, p.4). It centers those bonds and as a result guides how I engage with them. It impacted how I onboarded participants (e.g. at points in the IRB script I felt compelled to add things like “it is especially important to me that *you* hear this and understand that I mean it, because we have an existing relationship beyond this dissertation”) and it even changed how I began the online meeting (e.g. for those who I was closer to or hadn’t seen in a while, it was difficult to actually begin the interview due

to getting caught up just catching up with one another). Likewise, it altered the way we closed the space (e.g. making plans to connect again soon). What do I mean when I say, "It altered"? What is *it* again and how is it altering things? *It* is the relational ethics I spoke of...*it* is my commitment to acting from my heart and mind...*it* is the commitment to practicing and honoring my relations. And *it* altered my research practices because it made me think about who I was to these participants, who I wanted to continue to be / become, and how that desire then compelled me to act...and it wasn't to act as the cold, distant researcher I was once taught to be.

Now I'd argue that a relational ethics is important for any data collection; it is just applied differently depending on the relation and the degree of intimacy attached to that relation. My research practices were guided in a unique way (unique to me and those relations). That said, had I not previously known them, I still would have and could have engaged in a relational ethics. One imaginative future that helps me to understand this in practice is imagining what I would hope would happen in the future if I ran into an interview participant at some point following the interview. I would want that meet-up to be a happy one. I would want that experience to acknowledge that we built something together during the interview and that at least one of those somethings was a connection. Who would I want to be to them at that point? Just that person who interviewed them that one time? A potential colleague or collaborator? A conference buddy? Hopefully you get the point now if you, like me, needed to dwell a little more on the significance of an applied relational ethics.

A relational ethics does require constant negotiating and I would argue that making space for mutual vulnerability can support these negotiations. Like (Arellano et

al., 2021), “I don't even know if there's a way to do it perfectly, but for me it seems that part of the work [of ethically working within community] is a willingness to be vulnerable—an openness to others' thoughts and knowledges, and a commitment to making genuine connections that will help us grow” (p. 9). Part of this work also involves the development of trust and empathy, which have likewise been demonstrated as supporting community building within and across learning spaces (e.g. classrooms, see Pilkington & Guldborg, 2009).

Finally, I'll note that a relational ethics is likewise beneficial for me in helping make ties to other methodological frameworks and approaches I am adopting throughout this dissertation, such as Cultural Rhetorics. I won't define Cultural Rhetorics here, that work happens later, but I will minimally surface two pieces from within Cultural Rhetorics as a result of their relevance here. The first is Shawn Wilson, an indigenous researcher and scholar, who wrote one of my favorite⁶⁹ publications—*Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. For Wilson (2008), relationality wasn't just part of the work, it was the work. He has been a significant influence on my thinking around naming my own relations and sitting, dwelling, being with them in and across my work and life. The second is a consideration from Riley-Mukavetz (2014), who wrote: “scholars draw from various theoretical and methodological frameworks to create a rhetorical tradition that is relevant to their subjects of study and the shared beliefs and practices of that cultural community” (p. 109). Throughout this dissertation, I have intentionally made space for and engaged with the theories, frameworks, and

⁶⁹ Favorite in part because it was a story, but also due to how he wrote it and the work he did through it. I highly recommend it for anyone that loves stories or is interested in engaging with a piece that pushes on the boundaries of what might be considered “academic,” what is acceptable for a “publication,” and what might constitute an “academic publication.”

metaphors that participants shared with me during interviews. What I mean to point to is not how I made space in the interviews for participants to talk about theories, frameworks, and metaphors relevant to them. Rather my aim is to point out that I then brought those very theories, frameworks, and metaphors into my dissertation (not all of them, but several of them). I am thus drawing from these theories *with* participants; what was relevant to them became relevant for me during the dissertation process and in writing of this dissertation, and highlights another practice and strategy of a relational ethics.

Another note on data collection (an orientation)

Crucially, I am not “studying” the people I interviewed. I am learning from them. I am engaging in professional development with them. They are teaching me something about the topic that I am researching, which is the rhetorics of asynchronous digital learning and professional development designed for educator professionals. To me, it’s akin to being able to talk with any of the other scholars I have read for this dissertation, only I have the privilege of asking questions in real-time, learning from their thoughts, opinions, and lived experiences. Everyone agreed (i.e. consented) to me sharing their stories. Each shared those stories knowing ahead of time that I already anticipated learning from their stories...that this was a goal of mine. This gives me a chance to share a data collection story:

I reached out to one colleague to invite him to participate. We had worked on projects before but hadn’t ever really sat down together to talk about digital learning or professional development. I had always enjoyed working with him and felt as though I’d already learned a lot from him, so thought it might be fun and interesting to get to know him better through a conversation about asynchronous educator professional development. So I sent him the invitation to participate. His first email back was:

*“Hey Maddie,
I’m happy to contribute, but I’m not sure how useful my experience will be.
I can certainly provide my opinion, but I don’t have much evidence to back
it up. Our asynchronous offerings are, in general, not often utilized and we
have yet to implement changes to them that may make them more
effective or attractive. But, let me know if there’s something I can do.
Thanks.” (From an email exchange with “Satirist”)*

*When I first read his email, it made me question what I had sent in my
recruitment materials. Could I have been clearer...I bet I probably could have.
But then I realized that that wasn’t the only potential read of his email. I also
began to smell the stink of colonial forces at play, leading him to believe he had
needed to complete some change project or have a before and after story to tell
me regarding implementation in order to have anything useful to say. I heard that
he felt his lived experiences and opinions didn’t amount to “useful” points of
reference or “evidence.” It was a healthy reminder for me that not everyone had
undergone the transformative learning experiences I had questioning those very
same things when I crossed over the disciplinary wall from Linguistics to Writing
& Rhetoric. So I felt like my response needed to reassure him that he didn’t need
anything other than what he already carried with him. It read:*

*“Hey! Read your email. You could totally contribute a ton (but understand
you feeling that way for sure). Essentially, so long as you have thoughts,
opinions, and experiences with synchronous and asynchronous learning
and are willing to share those, you have all I am looking for (meaning your
lived experience...or that of the people who contribute...is the precise
'expertise' I am hoping to capture).” (From an email exchange with
“Satirist”)*

*He ended up participating in the end; his interview was one of the most impactful
for me personally. He doesn’t know this yet⁷⁰, but it made me think, made me
pause, made me laugh (genuine laughs). It was what I needed at the time. Given
that I am still struggling with burnout and given that this dissertation raised much
bigger questions that I didn’t expect I’d be thinking about (like literally the
meaning of life), I needed a good laugh. His way of being and existing within the
Higher Education landscape right now gave me insights into how I might reorient
myself personally within that same landscape; I saw the benefits of sarcasm and
laughter, for example. He was, without knowing it, already helping me develop,
both personally and professionally. Here I am thinking I’m writing a dissertation to
try to help others and I end up being helped, myself, along the way. I shouldn’t
have been surprised, I am, after all, a part of the very same community I am
writing with and for. If I am positioning this as professional development for
others, why should it also be professional development for me?*

What was so pertinent and helpful about the interviews I facilitated was an irony
that surfaced: the opinions shared “count” as traditional “data” for my dissertation in the

⁷⁰ Oh hey, if you’re reading this, thanks dude!

sense that their opinions and preferences and habits represent the very judgements I sought to capture. Their lived experience is the exact data I was hoping for. That shouldn't have to be justified, and yet colonial histories governing what *is* and *is not* knowledge and evidence are so deeply entrenched in the system of Higher Education that I still feel it necessary to justify it as such. "Satirist" was not the only one to express similar sentiments. "Daughter" and "Gift Giver" likewise worried that some things they shared with me were off topic. Their worries were couched in phrases like "I hope that answers your question," "I don't know if that's helpful there," "I hope it was helpful. I hope it's useful for your dissertation," and "I have again gone far afield, I think." From one interview to the next, I found myself beginning to intentionally incorporate more exposition around what I am making space for and what I consider to be "valid" contributions. For example, in my interview with "Introvert," she was responding to one of my questions and went a lot of ways with it and ended by saying "I don't know. My brain is a little lost." In my response to her, I validated her feelings of being lost, told her she wasn't alone in sometimes feeling lost (with respect, specifically, to what we were talking about at the time), and offered up a few potential pathways we could move towards together in the interview, but also made it clear we could completely change questions as well if she wanted. But to me, there's something generative in dwelling on getting lost. I found even *that* useful...so useful there is not a dedicated section talking about getting lost in professional development. So I am glad that I wasn't so concerned with capturing a specific answer or a specific type of lived experience that I missed the opportunity for "Introvert" and I to create a new experience together in getting lost during our conversation.

Beyond constituting valid “data,” these are the opinions, fears, worries, beliefs, hopes of the folx also designing. They are the worldviews of current leadership, mentors, colleagues....people I would have turned to and cited and referenced through “scholarship” to inform this dissertation as it was. Colleagues I would have turned to for advice and help in understanding what I was learning. So I am not being at all facetious when I say that their contributions are “data” just as they are “scholarship.” If I take them at their word and if I was successful in creating a space for honest and open conversation during the context of these interviews (and because I knew them all beforehand in one way or another, I am more inclined to...because these interviews, while following a formulaic process...felt familiar...they were conversations we’d have anyway, we just carved out time for it (and many even commented on exactly this)), then what they have to say is not only the exact type of data this type of project should be informed by, their words and perspectives are *theory*, and thus engaging in them is *scholarship*. Why should their lived experiences have to be published for them to be considered valid?

You’ll see me make a very intentional move, as a result of my reflecting on this specifically, in my dissertation. I am choosing to weave in participant stories and contributions throughout, as opposed to holding onto them until a “Discussion” section. I am choosing to open with them, choosing to leverage them as *background*, giving space for them to serve the same functions the scholarship one might reference in a literature review would. In this way, I am orienting towards them as colleagues, guides, as allies in the world of educator professional development. On allyship, Del Hierro et al. (2016) share the following call for researchers to consider:

In sum, this essay does not attempt to provide a definitive answer about how to practice allyship across cultural difference. Rather, it's a call for those building cultural rhetorics to think and communicate explicitly about how we will orient to each other's differences and affinities, in the spaces where we come together, in our scholarship, and in the ways we support one another in the larger (and often hostile) academic world. Allyship is not a state to be achieved, but a community-based process of making. We want to push cultural rhetorics to think seriously about what it means to negotiate difference in the spaces we create, and communicate explicitly about what our practices of allyship should look like going forward. (pp. 2-3)

To me, I am practicing allyship by honoring participant stories and contributions as scholarship. Validating their lived experiences as scholarship within the colonial hierarchies of knowledge, knowledge production, and knowledge maintenance. If you care about my methods, this is an important orientation to understand, so I hope what I wrote is helpful for supporting your understanding.

A third note on data collection (the semi-structured interview)

Try as I might to do differently, the interviews I conducted for this dissertation were indeed "interviews." They were semi-structured, and as I have already shared, we had space to wonder, get lost, go where the interview took us. But I was still *interviewer* and participants were still *interviewee*. This caused a tension for me in every interview I conducted, a tension I named explicitly (though this naming looked different depending on who I was talking to at the time). For instance, because "Punk" and I took to discussing the interview itself as a point of reference for the larger concepts we were discussing, I was able to contextualize my own tensions with being *interviewer* rather explicitly:

I find it challenging to not bias all your responses by sharing my own here, and so I'm being...trying to be cautious and intentional about not doing so, which is always the unfortunate dynamic of an interview as opposed to a straight up conversation that we just happened to get into.

(From my interview with "Punk")

I dwell on this too long here because I have already shared with you that I operate with pluralistic modes and that I still feel, as a result, the push and pull of my respective disciplines. This is one of those moments where you can see that push and pull in action. So rather than story this as a limitation or a misstep (because I don't see it that way), let me instead situate the choice to remain an "interviewer" despite my desires to just simply have a conversation.

I agree with Ellis (2004) that as a researcher, "You have to decide where you want to locate yourselves in terms of your identity and in every research project you do. That location will determine your goals, the procedures you use, and the claims you make" (pp. 25-31, cited in Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, pp. 359-363). As a reminder, I grew up in an academic tradition where it was common practice for researchers to "construct and present objectivity and subjectivity as a dichotomy with clear points of demarcation, and they prize objectivity and dismiss or even ridicule subjectivity" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 452). I then transitioned to a discipline that showed me there are "alternative modes of experiencing the process of research" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 450), and I transitioned into scholarship that "attempts to disrupt and breach taken-for-granted norms of scientific discourse by emphasizing lived experience, intimate details, subjectivity, and personal perspectives" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 450). The fact that I wrestled with how to actually conduct interviews once I was in the moment, shows you that I still struggle with this dichotomy and am still impacted by the rather binary system

it reinforces, even as I attempt to resist it. As the interviews continued (both within the context of a single interview, but also across interviews), I began to share more and more of myself, finding ways to do so constructively without sharing too much of myself.

As I reflected on this tension, it reminded me of another: the tensions I often feel when I facilitate educator professional development. I never know how much of myself to give. On the one hand, there is educator professional development scholarship that tells me I am there to serve learners; on the other hand, there is educator professional development scholarship that tells me that the best facilitators are those who are, themselves, authentic in the space. I often struggle with how I fit in the space of educator professional development when I am the facilitator and the roles I do / can / should play. Though talking about how to talk about / make space for *class* differences (i.e. socioeconomic “class”) in the classroom, Lindquist (2004) nevertheless gave me at least one new way to nuance my thinking here, through framing this as a paradox of teaching which calls for “deep acting.” She writes,

For Kameen, what allows us to live with, and even make productive, the knot of rhetorical (moral and performative) contradictions at the heart of teaching is a kind of ironic distancing that makes commitment something other than ownership [...] Even as we take our jobs as teachers terribly, deadly seriously, we should not confuse this commitment with the impulse to take ourselves—that is, our power to control all the possible impressions we give off, much less all the possible outcomes of these impressions—too seriously [...] ...the more one can call upon this protective irony, the more one can afford to call one’s emotions into play when deep acting becomes necessary. (Kameen, 2000, in Lindquist, 2004, p. 205)

In other words, even though I want to be authentic and understand that to be a meaningful way to connect with learners, I find myself distancing myself, presenting versions of myself, acting and performing the role of “teacher” (or in the case of professional development, “facilitator” or “expert”). There is an important “protective”

element to this work, as Lindquist points out. By doing so, I am both moving to protect myself, because I can't control how others will respond to me so I control what I can by distancing myself and not being as "honest" or as "forthright." And I think this is where I find a path forward for my thinking. There is something quite different between being "honest" and being "authentic." Lindquist (2004) helps to disentangle this a bit with me through expanding on the roles of "honesty" in the classroom:

The paradox is that teachers must sometimes be dishonest to be most real to students, to create the kind of environment of trust that allows emotions to be something other than commodities or distractions. As teachers, we want to be ethical in our treatment of students who come from marginalized groups. Quite naturally, and by all means honorably, we see "honesty" as entailed by this ethical treatment. And yet, given that these students often have emotionally complicated relationships with schooling, it is important that we not see an "honest"—that is, emotionally and performatively untheorized and unstrategized—stance as a way to forgive ourselves for not becoming whomever our students need us to become in order to engage these emotions. (p. 206)

So if I am honest, this actually could be damaging. This makes sense. If I were in a workshop talking about diversity and inclusion and the facilitator shared that in their opinions, queer people shouldn't be allowed to marry, that honesty would absolutely impact my engagement in that space, what I felt I could and couldn't share, who I could and couldn't be. But I also wonder, is there space for me to share things like that I think racism is bad, that police brutality should be considered a crime and treated as such, or that our current political system isn't actually serving the country (the US)? If the topics are relevant and I am personally committed to contributing to a better future and I believe part of that better future is the dismantling of racism, a system of accountability for police violence, and a more representative government, don't we have to name that *better* future to move towards it? Isn't that naming being...at least a little bit...honest? Lindquist (2004) acknowledges the larger paradox teachers find themselves in, referring

to the act of teaching as full of “complicated games of positioning and concealment” (p. 206) and I’d argue the same is true of designing and facilitating educator professional development. I’ll expand on this more elsewhere in this dissertation, but I will minimally share here, that those “complicated games” leave me asking much larger questions like *What is the purpose of professional development?* and *What is the purpose of Higher Education?* Again though...more on this later...this is supposed to be just a Methods Section, after all.

I share this all with you here because during my research process (including during the interview phase), I genuinely entered into a type of existential crisis. I was genuinely questioning things like the meaning of life last week. While I was physically fine...I wasn’t so in crisis that my body was in danger, it was another crisis of identity. I wasn’t sure, at multiple points in the writing of this dissertation what I was even writing about even more. Past Researcher Maddie would have been concerned that this impacted the data. Past Researcher Maddie would have said that the fact that these thoughts and wonderings altered the questions I asked during interviews represents a “misstep” in my methodologies. Past Researcher Maddie would not have said anything. I would have concealed this from you and “sanitiz[ed] [my] accounts, omitting missteps as irrelevant, tangential, or overly personal” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 453). But I am not going to do that here. I’ll openly discuss them so that you can have a better sense of what the research process was truly like. My goal is not to detail my methodological process so that you can repeat it for yourself. That’s not possible...it was unique to me. I share this so that you can understand it and understand that my research process tells

you something about *me* as well as how I made sense of what I heard and learned throughout the composing process I engaged in for this dissertation.

While many confessional tales have as their goal the reassurance of the reader that their findings are "uncontaminated" and hence "scientific" and "valid" (Van Maanen, 1988), I have as my goal the opposite: to reassure the reader that my findings are thoroughly contaminated. This contamination with my own lived experience results in a rich, complex understanding. (Ellingson, 1998, p. 494, cited in Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 452)

So let me be clear, "my findings are thoroughly contaminated."

Now, a note on data

Surveys and interviews weren't the only "data" I "collected." As is common to all the qualitative methodologies I share below, there are other forms of qualitative data that can be "useful." Cultural Rhetorics has been quite transformative for me, actually, in knowing this, as quilts, photos, letters, drawings, etc. all become points of conversation, story, and connection...they are, themselves, ways of knowing and making meaning. That said, you'll find reference to reflections, voice notes, hand-written notes, casual conversations I had with friends and family and colleagues, published scholarship, tweets (i.e. from Twitter), podcasts, meeting with my advisor, my own lived experiences and memories, ponderings, wonderings, provocations. In this dissertation, I consider these all to be valid data.

Analysis and meaning making

Methodological bricolage

I will be honest; I was guided less by the methodological imperative to triangulate data than I was by what made the most sense for making sense of the "data" I was engaging with at the time I was engaging with it. Having just said that, I recognize those words and that honesty doesn't do much in the way of storying my background as a

researcher and my development as a researcher (which, as you now know, plays an important role in my choice of methodologies in this dissertation). I knew what I was doing even though I didn't always know what I was going to do next when it came to methodological choices. So I mixed methods...I suppose that's what I do...I am a mixed methods researcher. That being said, there is a precedent for combining methods (particularly a variety of qualitative methods that otherwise have a history of reinforcing themselves as separate in distinct through rigid boundary maintenance, facilitated through understandings and claims around "validity," "quality," etc.). We could argue whether a precedent beyond this dissertation alone is necessary...meaning whether or not I even need to frame this around some *other* previously published work in order to justify my doing it here (I won't here), but one useful example can provide you if you were expecting such positioning is Annells (2006). There is a long history of pressure to try to preserve the "integrity of each [methodological] approach" (Annells, 2006, p. 56) as distinct from one another. I am choosing to follow Annells (2006), likewise inspired by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 1061), in embracing the "seventh moment" of qualitative research and identifying as an 'interpretive bricoleur.' In this anticipated 'seventh moment' (of which I am now a part) "invention is not only the child of necessity, it is the demand of restless art' and qualitative approaches 'become the "invention", and the telling of the tales – the representation – becomes the art'" (Annells, 2006, p. 56). But unlike Annells (2006), I would argue that my use of the various methodologies I leveraged are not bounded by multiple, distinct phases (whereby I engaged with one and then another and then another). Rather they are constant and cyclical and relational

to one another. They are not linear; one did not progress to another. Rather, I allowed them to inform each other throughout the entirety of my research process.

Annells (2006) references the metaphor of “turning the prism” (in reference to Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991, p. 274) as a means to talk about using multiple methods in order to better view, understand, and study a phenomenon. For me, that isn’t the best metaphor. Here are some others:

- **A kaleidoscope:** Not quite...because it assumes that all the pieces were in the kaleidoscope to begin with and I am blending them together in a seemingly haphazard way.
- **Weaving:** A little more like it in that I am threading and weaving methodologies together in order to construct something. But it is weak if we take an understanding of weaving as having already had a planned pattern and materials. I didn’t know I was going to leverage discourse analysis. It surfaced during my research process. I hadn’t planned on leveraging phenomenology either. In fact, in my dissertation proposal, I listed autoethnography and grounded theory as my primary methods. But I realized I had a lot to say on the topic under exploration before interviews already began, and those thoughts guided the interview questions I ultimately asked and many of the codes and categories I went into interviews looking for and hoping to dialogue around and learn more about. So weaving could be a useful metaphor if it is understood that the threads aren’t of equal size, shape, color, texture, etc., that I added threads along the way, that I wasn’t following any particular pattern (rather letting the practice of weaving guide where I made the next weave and which threads I weaved

together, as well as the formation of the shape of the thing I was weaving took). I could go on...it's a close metaphor, but an imperfect one. And I could attempt to identify other metaphors, but I won't here (that's not what this dissertation is for). But I have nevertheless dwelled on this intentionally as a means to show how metaphors can be a useful mechanism for storying something that might otherwise be challenging to describe. Even an imperfect metaphor can be helpful in conveying what something is through a centering of what it is not.

I do find meaning in the term *bricolage*, and could identify my methodological choices as a practice of *emergent bricolage*. According to Pratt et al. (2022), they “use the term methodological bricolage in contrast to methodological templates and refer to it as an approach rather than a method because we consider it a way of thinking about how you do your methods (i.e., it is metamethodological)” (p. 217). If you've learned anything about me at this point, let it be that I feel at home in the spaces of the *metamethodological*. There are “three central elements of bricolage: making do, utilizing the resources at hand, and combining resources for new purposes (Baker & Nelson, 2005). These elements help create an “effective arrangement” (Duymedjian & Ruling, 2010, p. 141), contributing to the trustworthiness of the research” (Pratt et al., 2022, p. 217). Let me unpack that last quote for a second so you can fully understand why I identify with bricolage. First, I am going to lean into methodological bricolage here in that I am “making do” with what I have at hand as well as what I come across along the way. I am pulling from a variety of disciplinary scholarship and am considering a variety of theoretical frameworks as a means of informing what methods I carry with me and which I can use here. When I came across a point where I wasn't sure what to do next

or came across a question I couldn't answer with the methods I had been using, I added another. I allowed my methods to layer and crossover each other, combining them into a uniquely "effective arrangement" of methods for this dissertation. I engage in bricolage⁷¹ by "drawing on moves from different methodologies and even different ontologies" (Pratt et al., 2022, p. 220).

I said earlier that I live in pluralistic modes (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). Let me demonstrate that by saying this, as much as I have leaned into methodological bricolage, I could just have easily leaned into *Strategies of Inquiry* (Wilson, 2008) or *design ethnography* (Rose, 2016).

- **Strategies of Inquiry**

- Wilson (2008) writes:

By using the term "strategies of inquiry," I am implying that one specific research method would not fit the subject being studied. Instead of writing down one (or several) chosen methods and planning to stick to them, I developed a general strategy of where I wanted to go. This strategy needed to allow for change and adaptation along the way. By having an end goal I would like to achieve and perhaps a process or way by which I would like to get there, I hoped to remain open to any change that the situation required. In addition to the process changing in order to achieve the end goal, the end goal also changed to meet the emerging process. (p. 40)

- **A design ethnography**

- Rose (2016) writes: "Design ethnography creates the opportunity to understand the cultural and social context of everyday life to provide examples and rich descriptions that can inform the designs of technologies" (p. 434), and in the case of Rose (2016) this was "a study that uses a variety of qualitative methods."

⁷¹ I first learned about *bricolage* as a sociolinguist. There is something satisfying about being able to return to and leverage a concept from some of my earliest beginnings as a "researcher," as defined and trained by academia (albeit applied in a different way and for a different reason).

*Cultural rhetorics*⁷²

This dissertation is both significantly influenced by and leverages cultural rhetorics as method and methodology. If you're new to cultural rhetorics, this section is for you. If you're already familiar with Cultural Rhetorics, this section will give you insight into the cultural rhetoricians who influence me. "Cultural rhetorics is an orientation to a set of constellating theoretical and methodological frameworks" (Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab, 2012, p.2). When *doing* cultural rhetorics, scholars "investigate meaning making as it is situated within a specific cultural community" (Riley-Mukavetz, 2014, p. 110). I am practicing a cultural rhetorics approach in this dissertation by "resist[ing] the notion that community-based research should be replicable" (Riley-Mukavetz, 2014, p. 121). A cultural rhetorics scholar works from the understanding of "rhetorics as always-already cultural and cultures as persistently rhetorical" (Powell et al., 2014, 3), and therefore the understanding that rhetorics cannot be removed from the cultures within which they are operating. We cannot talk about rhetoric without talking about culture; they are intertwined. As a scholar, cultural rhetorics compels me to be "willing to build meaningful theoretical frames from inside the particular culture in which [I am] situating [me] work" (Bratta & Powell, 2016, p. 6). This does mean I can't cross disciplinary boundaries. Quite to the contrary, a cultural rhetorics approach allows for border and boundary crossing (Arellano et al. 2021; Anzaldúa 1987). It works to visibilize those boundaries and border and likewise works "...to help us see something that challenges

⁷² This section is a weaving of voices. This was intentional. I was once told that having "too many" quotes or including quotes that were "too long" was bad practice in academic writing. I was told that I should interpret and translate and synthesize, thus share more of *my* own words. Why should I? Why should I follow that practice when there are others scholars who have shared words before? Why shouldn't I center their words? Aren't their words enough so long as I weave them together in a meaningful manner?

master narratives” (Hidalgo et al., 2021, 9). I am practicing cultural rhetorics by asking questions about the performance of academic texts (Cedillo et al., 2018, 5) and visibilizing the writing strategies I am employing to push up against those narratives. While engaging in this boundary pushing, this disciplinary critique, a cultural rhetorics approach is nevertheless also concerned with what happens after and during critique; they are concerned with *making*:

...although we do believe critique of our current disciplinary practices is important and necessary, we want to make sure that critique leads to something even more important—making. Critique is not the end of the process of decolonization—it's the beginning. We want to make something that people will use, rather than to take things apart only to show that they can be taken apart. (Powell et al., 2014, p.11)

I am practicing a cultural rhetorics approach by not simply critiquing the cultures of Higher Education and educator professional development, but also by trying to contribute to the making of other possibilities and pathways.

Cultural rhetorics helps us to focus on and understand the processes of *centering, decentering, recentering* (Cedillo & Bratta, 2019), it centers the self and the other and the self in relation to the other. “A practice of cultural rhetorics means to consider the spaces beyond the present, individual state. It means to consider your own story, and how your position contributes to your understanding of that story, but it also means to consider all the other stories that aren't being told, or aren't being heard by the majority. It asks—is anything sacred?” (Cedillo et al., 2018, p. 5). I am practicing cultural rhetorics by considering my own story and my own positionality, and by considering all the other stories too.

Cultural rhetorics helps us to understand that everything is related. Cultural rhetorics has deep ties to indigenous ways of knowing and being and often calls upon decolonial scholars in an understanding and practice of relationality. “It’s through listening to decolonial scholars that we’ve come to understand the making of cultures and the practices that call them into being as relational and constellated” (Powell et al., 2014, p. 4-5). Cultural rhetorics uses *constellation* as a metaphor because it “allows for all the meaning-making practices and their relationships to matter. It allows for multiply-situated subjects to connect to multiple discourses at the same time, as well as for those relationships (among subjects, among discourses, among kinds of connections) to shift and change without holding a subject captive” (Powell et al., 2014, p. 5). A cultural rhetorics methodology is the practicing of the “pluralistic modes” Anzaldúa (1987) spoke of and which I began my methods section with. A cultural rhetorics approach, then, is an active and cyclical (de)canonizing (Hidalgo et al., 2021, p. 3) of lives, of systems, of being. A cultural rhetorics methodology is an intervention:

...let’s go back to our discussion of constellation as a metaphor. Part of using a metaphor that assumes and honors multiplicity is to assume and honor the multiplicities of orientations to scholarship that are possible. This acceptance of multiple possibilities, multiple approaches, is also a part of decolonial practice. Remember, we’re not on a mission to convert everyone to decolonial practice, or to our version of cultural rhetorics practices. We’re visibilizing options and making those options available for others to use, and doing so as part of an attempt to intervene in and enlarge the acknowledged practices of our disciplinary community. The way we’re doing that here is by constellating stories in order to visibilize a web of relations. This web can help us intervene in the discipline by acknowledging our location within a set of dominant institutions within which we are complicit with colonialism. And all of these locations, institutions, and interventions exist as constellated practices. (Powell et al., 2014, p.8)

I am practicing cultural rhetorics by making space for and vizibilizing these multiple ways of meaning-making and accepting them as valid, as legitimate, and therefore as being available for use as I, too, work to find an intervention in the larger colonial system within which I am complicit. The interventions of cultural rhetorics are personal and make us vulnerable (Arellano et al., 2021). As a cultural rhetorics scholar, I am encouraged to “know what [I] don't know and ask for help; allow for intervention and disruption” (Arellano et al., 2021, p. 10).

But cultural rhetorics believes that through making space for vulnerability, we can grow (Arellano et al., 2021, p. 9). It is ultimately a deeply human and deeply humanizing practice (Hidalgo et al., 2021, 12). Throughout this dissertation, I will be asking questions about how we *human* in the spaces of asynchronous educator professional development. I will be asking questions in order to “pursue connections that reveal how different bodies of knowledge can converge and can facilitate responses to the material conditions that imperil or curtail people's lives. These discoveries (in those moments that we question “what am I doing here?”) remind me that rhetoric has a meaningful impact on how we meet each other in the world” (Arellano et al., 2021, p. 14). As we (you and I, the scholarship, participants, my wife, my advisor, etc.) engage in a dialogue around these many connections, we will consider how we *meet each other* in the world of asynchronous digital learning and consider what those moments of meeting can tell us about the makings of educator professional development.

Story, storying, storytelling, stories

I have come to understand that stories do a lot of things, and, as a result, believe they can play a really impactful role in educator professional development. In this

section and dissertation, I am going to engage in story as method with and for you in a way I haven't yet done. In order to help you understand some of these choices, let me first start with a brief story:

In the Institute for Emerging Leadership in Online Learning (IELOL) Global program—a leadership-focused professional development offering I direct⁷³ at the Online Learning Consortium (OLC)—I leverage story as a practice and method for supporting and facilitating global coalition building around digital learning changework. In fact, the entire program and curriculum is designed around a storytelling framework that was created for the program and for the work of storying digital learning change work (see Shellgren et al. 2021). During the 2022 cohort year, I revised one of the onboarding and community building activities with the goal of leveraging it to demonstrate and raise awareness around different modes of telling stories and storying the self. The revision was spurred on by an experience I had had the year prior. I was part of a international team collaboratively working across organizations to design and facilitate a professional development training and event together. Because the OLC was “owner” of the event branding, the collaboration designed in alignment with the overall event “brand,” which leveraged that very same storytelling framework (the one created for IELOL Global). Very early on in the space of our co-working sessions (but critically after partner contracts and agreements were already signed), one of the project team members (located at an institution in Africa), shared his discomfort with our use of story in the context of this event. At first, I'll admit to being a bit taken aback since we had already signed contracts and I thought we had been very clear at the front-end that the event type was based designed around the storytelling framework. But as we all talked further, we ended up having a really powerful conversation around how story is perceived globally within the context of academia and educator professional development. Of course I knew that not everyone saw story in the same way. I myself was once of the camp that believed story had no place in academic papers unless it was to be dissected into its discrete linguistic components. The concern that was raised, however, wasn't whether story was valid, it was how we tell a story about story so that it might be considered valid or received as such by the people we hoped would attend our event. I learned something during that project about how to orient others to story and I brought that learning into the revisions I made to the IELOL Global curriculum.

⁷³ What does my use of the word “direct” here say about me and how I position myself with respect to this program? By using the word “direct” am I denying that I also “coordinate,” “facilitate,” “design,” “collaborate,” “support,” “teach,” “lead,” “model,” etc.? If I didn't intentionally keep that word for the purposes of writing this footnote, would you ever know my other ways of being in relation to that program? After learning more about me throughout this dissertation, how might my use of the word “direct” my positioning of myself as a “professional”? What am I revealing about what I hope this dissertation *does* by so openly visibilizing that my choice in using the word “direct” carries with it more than one meaning?

The activity was playful in its design; it was a persona building activity wherein learners were given space to create a persona-based character of themselves (using a character sheet template, like the character sheets one might use for Dungeons and Dragons, or similar games). They were given space to creatively think about and present their “skills,” “role,” think about what picture or images they might want to use to represent themselves, etc. I had positioned it as a fun and different way to 1) get to know each other in the space, 2) learn more about story and different ways we might tell stories. In the instructions and onboarding to the activity (which mind you, was completed fully asynchronously), I made sure (thinking back to that other event) to situate the activity in a conversation about story. I shared quotes and embedded it in scholarship. I genuinely thought I had situated it effectively. And I did...I situated it in story. The problem was, though, that I neglected to tie the activity into the larger narrative and story of the work or global coalition building in support of digital learning change work...the primary reason we had all gathered together in the program. I thought I had done enough and I thought that I didn't need to tie it back that explicitly, that it would be obvious given that it was embedded in a program about global coalition building. But this was a massive assumption on my part. And that became clear one day when one of the cohort members, two years later as we were talking about educator professional development in the context of an interview for my dissertation, told me that he had no idea what the purpose of the activity was and referenced it as an example of “bad” design choices in the context of asynchronous professional development.

With this story in mind, I am going to position *story* in two additional⁷⁴ ways. The first is a neat and easily copy-and-pasteable list of truths about story. I want you to be able to take this list and use it. I want you to be able to cite this list and reference this list. I don't want you to have to pull quotes from here and there in order to more easily talk about story. Consider this a “takeaway handout” of a sort, an associated resource for this asynchronous professional development experience.

Truths About Story (for use in educator professional development)

- Narrative practices have been leveraged across a range of disciplines and contexts (Riessman, 2008)
- Narrative can be used to explore future possibilities and inspire change (O'Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013)
- Narrative learning can be used to teach adults and support adult learning (Clark & Rossitter, 2008)

⁷⁴ Additional because I've already positioned it in at least one way by positioning it as method; I am trying to tell you something(s) about story through story.

- Story is beneficial in managing situations of uncertainty, perspective taking, reflection, comprehension, applying theory, visibilizing processes and systems, helping us imagine alternatives and new / different possibilities (Moon, 2010, pp. 71-72)
- Story serves critical social, cultural, emotional, interpersonal, and communicative functions in society (Moon, 2010)
- Stories can help support change and transformation (Moon, 2010)
- Theory and story are deeply connected in that theories are stories and story informs theory (Kafar & Ellis, 2014, pp. 138-139); “story is a kind of theory (and theory is a kind of story) (Kafar & Ellis, 2014, p. 138)
- It is important to view “...story as research, research as story” (Cedillo et al., 2018, p. 8)
- “Stories have an effect. They are real. They matter.” (Powell, 2012, p. 390)
- “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (King, 2005, p. 2)
- “...to carry stories means to consider how to be attentive to the materials we use to practice and make knowledge; that our knowledge lives in our bodies and is affected by what bodies experience; that sometimes, we have to wait for the knowledge—it will come to us when we are ready. To carry stories is a way to practice relational accountability.” (Riley-Mukavetz, 2016, p. 8)
- We can leverage the existence of stories to “[examine] the pernicious, unquestioned assumptions” (Barlowe, 1995, p. 117) that get reinforced through their circulation, as well as interrogate the “rhetorical histories’ underlying” their use” (Skinnell, 2015, p. 122).
- “powerful engines of social and cultural reproduction and resistance” (Baszile, 2015, p. 239)
- “through the formation of counterstories or those stories that document the persistence of racism and other forms of subordination, voices from the margins become the voices of authority in the researching and relating of our own experiences” (Martinez, 2014, p. 65). In other words, counterstories (which feature as the primary methodology for Critical Race Theory) are those which seek to dismantle dominant narratives and vizibilize marginalized [or ‘subaltern’] voices. Importantly, they are “not just about adding more perspectives to the proverbial pot,” though (Baszile, 2015, p. 239). Rather, they are “about fundamentally challenging the myth of the rational mind and its claims to justice for all.” (Baszile, 2015, p. 239)

NOTE: If you’re looking for a thorough introduction to the whys and how of using story as situated specifically within professional development, you can check out Moon (2010).⁷⁵

⁷⁵ If you’re questioning whether or not this type of rhetoric belongs in a dissertation, I’ve failed at arguing a much larger point which I am hoping to make: this dissertation is an embodiment of professional development. In my experiences with professional development, it is common practice to share resources with others. So why shouldn’t I do that work directly and explicitly here?

Secondly, I will tell you a little bit more about my own use of story elsewhere in this dissertation. Be aware that I plan to provide and insert my own stories and lived experiences. These will be “fragments” (Yajima, 2023) because I don’t know how else to tell the larger story of my own relationship to educator professional development and asynchronous digital learning spaces designed for educator professionals. They will be fragmented because they surface in unpredicted ways, as a piece of scholarship or participant story reminded me of my own lived experience, or as moments from my professional and scholarly life (beyond the dissertation) helped me make sense of the dissertation as I wrote it. As Riley-Mukavetz (2016) reminds me, stories “come to us when we are ready” (p. 8). They will be fragmented because the learning represented in this dissertation was not linear. To Yajima, fragmented writing is a form of “embodied knowing” (p. 243). While this might be unsurprising to those in rhetoric or rhetoric-friendly disciplines, if you are reading this and identify as outside of rhetoric...if you are reading this and are wondering what that might mean, I’ll draw once again on Yajima for language around what this form of writing might help us accomplish. It can “challenge the institutionalization of the knowing process rhetorically and epistemologically” (p. 243). So story, for me, is a way to push back and to challenge. By sharing my own stories and the stories of others, particularly stories of the margins, I am actively counterstorying the dominant narratives surrounding asynchronous learning and educator professional development.

Like Yajima, I, too, wish to “talk back to” the scholarship I’ve engaged with and the system within which I am working, naming and spending time understanding “my complicity roles” in perpetuating the systems I operate in (p. 244). “If, as Momaday

claims, we are the stories we tell, [then I want to know who “we” are in Higher Education]? More specifically, [I want to know who “we” are in educator professional development]? What stories do we tell of who we are, where we’ve been, where we’re going?” (Momaday, 1991, in Powell, 2012, p. 289).

This research is also interested in the concept and theory of ephemera. If, as Chawla (2007) suggests, that memories can “stay alive” through story (p. 19), then I need to be concerned with story in order to understand memory and therein that which endures within and across the spaces of educator professional development. Stories will help me theorize these spaces and make sense of my own position in relation to them. By considering stories and asking “is anything sacred?” (Cedillo et al., 2018, p. 5), I can be positioned to ask what *should* endure?

Stories commune with a relational ethics. “Take [my] story, for instance. It’s yours. Do with it what you will. [Mock it. Roll your eyes at it. Identify with it. Post it on social media. Share it on your LinkedIn or talk about it at an upcoming conference]. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (King, 2005, p. 119). My story now lives in you...it is a part of you. You are now responsible to and for the stories I have told you up to this point. I’ve told you a story about the current state of educator professional development and educator burnout (it’s not looking great). What are you going to do with that story? What are you going to do in response to that story? I’ve told you a story about asynchronous digital learning experiences and what they make possible. How is that going to change the stories you tell about them as you leave these pages?

Finally, stories can be a mechanism for change. For me, stories have been and will continue to be a way for me to see possibilities. Given the current state of educator professional development, it is new possibilities and alternatives that we need. I take refuge in stories. They have helped *me* endure in the work of educator professional development. I have to believe storytellers like Thomas King are right when they extend optimistic and hopeful sentiments like the following: “To reference Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri, ‘In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives’” (King, 2005, p. 153). If I don’t believe we can change, then what am I doing in the world of educator professional development? What am I doing in the world of Higher Education?

Critical autoethnography

We cannot remove ourselves from our world in order to examine it.

(Wilson, 2008, p. 14)

There are other people who have dedicated *a lot* of time to the justification of methods such as autoethnography and critical autoethnography (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Yajima, 2023; Robinson, 2021; Klevan & Grant, 2022; Orbe, 2005; Ellingson & Ellis, 2008; Ellis, 2007; Kafar & Ellis, 2014; Jackson & Grutsch McKinney, 2021). So I am not going to justify its use here; you can go to those places and learn from those scholars if you require a justification. That said, I will position it within the context of this

dissertation because I do understand the importance of contextualizing my choice in using it.

This dissertation is deeply personal. I began in disciplines where the personal was outside the context of accepted research. Where story and my own subjectivity only served to bias and unduly influence the research results and the data. This is a story I've told you before. Transitioning to Writing and Rhetoric was transformative for me, mainly through the ways in which it helped me to understand more than just what story was and could do and more than just that autoethnography was another potential method. It drew for me a boundary I had not yet recognized...a disciplinary boundary. It drew for me a boundary I hadn't yet visibilized...a boundary about knowing and learning. Crossing the discipline had a profound impact on me and ultimately changed my scholarly, career, and intellectual trajectory. It genuinely changed the way I thought. Don't get me wrong, I knew story was a thing before Writing and Rhetoric. I had lots of experience with story...and not just in life, but in an academic context...a discipline-based research context even. Again, as a Linguist, I was using story...just in a different way and towards a different end. But for the first time, I had a *tool*. Suddenly story, *my* story, became not just a method, it was a productive point of contention. Suddenly telling my story was a way for me to actively critique and resist (Klevan & Grant, 2022). This is the work of autoethnography. "Autoethnography is a method that allows for both personal and cultural critique" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 17). Through autoethnography, I can "tell stories that are informed by and help make sense of lives in a cultural context, making these stories commentaries on culture and self-reflexive accounts" (Boylorn &

Orbe 2014, pp. 17-18); my life and my stories and how my lived experiences are both informed by and can help make sense of the larger cultural contexts I exist in.

As a “constructivist project (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008), I can reflexively theorize about the world around me and the part I play in it. This *theorizing* “captures the essence of something alive, fluid, and current’ (Orbe, 2005, p. 66) and cannot be regulated to rigid conceptualizations of what should or should not be counted as scholarship,” often defined and bounded through the word “theory” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 235). This self-reflexivity and theorizing can be a “liberatory” practice (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 236). I got to experience this personally through learning about critical autoethnography. Literally, even just reading an autoethnography was a core transformative learning experience for me. On the note of transforming, critical autoethnography is not simply storytelling; it has a point and a purpose. To engage in critical autoethnography, I am required “to acknowledge the inevitable privileges we experience alongside marginalization and to take responsibility for our subjective lenses through reflexivity” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 15). If I wasn’t doing that work...holding myself accountable to my own privileges and taking responsibility for my own lenses, I wouldn’t be engaging in critical autoethnography. My story matters, but it doesn’t matter more than any other story. This is an explicit goal of critical autoethnography “when approaching issues of identity and personal experience;” critical autoethnography as a method has “the explicit objective to resist unidimensional treatments of complex phenomenon” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 16).

Within the context of educator professional development, critical autoethnography will allow us to push against, dissect, and examine narratives that are

otherwise supported by “dichotomies” common within academic, research, and life. While I don’t want to expand more here on these dichotomies (we’ll talk about them elsewhere in this dissertation), I am drawn to the ways in which autoethnography was formed as a method around a commitment to relationality and situatedness and the makings of things like knowledge and learning. Moreso than that, I am drawn to the ways in which the (critical) autoethnography is positioned as a form of activism, where I can personally reflect on and write about and learn about and share my passion for / about educator professional development and asynchronous digital learning experiences as inspiration for activism (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 448). Critical autoethnography provides a method whereby I can acknowledge that this research is not neutral; it is personal and it is therefore political because “the personal is political” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 458). For me, while I started with a focus on asynchronous digital learning environments, it became something else along the way. As it was for Kafar and Ellis (2014), “It was not about completing another scientific project, it was about life in the first place” (quoting a letter between authors, Kafar & Ellis, 2014, p. 126). As it was for them, so it is for me as well, “It’s not meaningful to me to just gather knowledge for the sake of knowledge. I have to feel that whatever I am doing is potentially making life better” (Kafar & Ellis, 2014, p. 126). I talk about, in this dissertation, the politics of Higher Education, along with large systems and forces that govern and control those politics (such as capitalism and colonialism). And through critical autoethnography, I join the ranks of those who “[shed] light on uncomfortable issues that others wish would remain hidden” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 458). I do this to expose, to raise awareness, to prompt or encourage conversation, to relate, to resist,

to promote change, to counter dominant narratives...there are a lot of goals for why one might share their own stories. For me, I aim to 1) advance more equitable and quality educator learning experiences and 2) help address the growing urgency of educator burnout. As I blur the “lines between self and others” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 456) through the use of critical autoethnography, I hope to “counter accepted claims about “the way things are” or “the way things always have been” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 449) and hopefully contribute to the larger narrative about the way things *could* be.

One final reason why I leveraged critical autoethnography here is that it affords me space to put into conversation the rest of my methodological choices. As I engaged in grounded theory, for instance, there was a side of me that worried about following grounded theory protocols point-by-point. As I was trained to do in my qualitative methods course. But there was also a side of me that said, use it as inspiration and be ok with that because you know your work is “grounded” in the sense that it is situated. It is “valid” because it is *real* and it is *personal*. Were it not for autoethnography, I would have felt compelled to compose a “limitations” section whereby I defended my own perceived “missteps” or even framed them as such. They were choices...and grounded choices, guided by theory. On the note of my other methodological choices, I’ll return to a relational ethics here, because it is relevant in a new way. Though critical autoethnography empowers me to tell my own story, I am nevertheless still committed to a relational ethics with those I am telling stories about and a relational ethics to my multiple selves. I will be playing in “the grey areas between revealing and concealing” (Ellis, 2007, p. 19) out of respect to the people I am telling stories about (i.e. the other people I might reference in stories of my own lived experiences). I am thus making

intentional choices and engaging in intentional acts of concealment about how I tell the stories here so that I can align my practices to values important to me personally, mainly values of *care* and *empathy*. As a result, there might be some stories you read that you want to know more about (e.g. what the institution or organization was, who the facilitator was, etc.). In many cases, those details have been intentionally left out. This is an important practice of relational accountability required of me for any contributions made through the survey or the interview (i.e. that all stories are intentionally de-identified), but I am extending this relational ethics to my own stories as well. In this way, I am trying to perpetually “seek the good” (Ellis, 2007, p. 23) because, like Ellis (2007), I believe “our studies should lead to positive change and make the world a better place” (p. 25). So that’s what I am going to try to do through this dissertation.

Constructivist grounded theory

Grounded theory has a long tradition within the social sciences (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as does constructivist grounded theory (see Charmaz, 2006). I was first explicitly introduced to "constructivist grounded theory" during my sixth year of my first PhD program, specifically both in the course I took in Teacher Education as well as the course I took in Second Language Studies. I felt a deep irony in this fact at the time, because while the term "constructivist grounded theory" was new to me, many of the methodological practices and core tenets were very familiar to me. As a sociolinguist, we dealt in codes (including qualitative) and believed in maintaining a rigid coding system for the purposes of establishing theory from data. While I didn't use a technology like NVivo in this dissertation (which, again, I had used previously as a sociolinguist), I nevertheless engaged in time stamped transcripts located in google documents, where I

leveraged comments and highlighting to identify codes and connections and began theorizing from the data collected from the survey and interviews.

For those less familiar with grounded theory, within this method, a researcher will typically conduct a series of interviews and then begin a process of cyclical coding of different types and for different purposes⁷⁶, starting first, for instance with less generalized terms and then moving into what is eventually a theory of (and from) the data after having categorized and grouped codes and made sense of how they relate. In grounded theory, the researcher leverages the codes to build theory from the data. In this way, the theory could be thought of as “emerging” from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Importantly, I am in the camp of constructivists who believe that theory is *constructed or developed*. In this perspective, any theories or frameworks that emerge from the data don’t emerge because the data itself compelled it to (meaning it wasn’t there to begin with). “Theory is not discovered; rather, theory is constructed by the researcher who views the world through their own particular lens” (Chun Tie et al., 2019, para. 7, in reference to Birks & Mills, 2015). The goal of a constructivist-interpretive paradigm is to “seek understanding of the world in which [we] live and work” (Cullen & Brennan, 2021, para. 25). In this way, it becomes a bit clearer why I might want to leverage constructivist grounded theory in my dissertation; that is my goal as well. As has already been clear, though, I went about doing this in multiple ways and using multiple methods; grounded theory was simply one of them.

⁷⁶ For example, initial coding is used to “fractur[e] the data while theoretical codes ‘weave the fractured story back together again into an organized whole theory’” (Chun Tie et al., 2019, para. 13, citing Glaser, 1978).

Discussed and debated frequently among grounded theorists is the notion of “quality” and “credibility” when it comes to the theories generated from a grounded theory methods. For good reason as well. When situated against a dominant backdrop of quantitative methods, the qualitative methods of grounded theory had to be justified. That said, what this resulted in were some rather rigid approaches to the process of engaging in a grounded theory methodological practice. There are strong narratives, for instance, around the dangers in “methodological slurring,” arguing that we should instead abide by the “the core analytic tenets (i.e., theoretical sampling, constant comparison, theoretical saturation)” (Cullen & Brennan, 2021, para. 27) regardless of what approach to grounded theory we took. That said, in measuring the “quality” of grounded theory, Cullen and Brennan said this of grounded theorists: “With grounded theory, terms such as credibility, applicability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, generalisability and objectivity” (Cullen & Brennan, 2021, para. 29). This leaves a little room for generative discussion, then. How do we establish and determine if theories are “dependable” or “credible”? “Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 302) describe quality qualitative research as that which ‘resonates with readers’ and participants’ life experiences...that blends conceptualisation with sufficient descriptive detail to allow the reader to reach his or her own conclusions about the data and to judge the credibility of researchers’ data and analysis...that stimulates discussion and further research on a topic” (Cullen & Brennan, 2021, para. 29). If I were, then, to make a claim that makes no sense to readers, that might question a given theory’s credibility. Likewise, if I make a claim or theorize about interview data in a way that misrepresents the intentions of the

speaker, that, too, would compromise the credibility of any findings I extend. Thus, grounded theory relies on “theoretical sampling coupled with constant comparative analysis” to both direct where the research goes, but also inform the developing theory, ensuring along the way that the theories under development are “credible” through a constant process of referring back to and across the data (Chun Tie et al., 2019, para. 13, in reference to Birks & Mills, 2015).

Now that I have told you a little about what constructivist grounded theory is, let me move into some notes about how I engaged in it as a method. For me, I let constructivist grounded theory take me where it could. It was an extremely cyclical, unfolding, evolving process, where each interview influenced the next and as theory began to be formed, it informed where I went next. The ways in which I asked interview questions changed from interview to interview. The conversation I had before impacted the conversation I had following. I allowed myself to follow the conversation...not just within a single interview, but across. As I read, wrote, reflected, my thinking shifted...and so did what I ultimately was interested in talking about from person to person. My dissertation focus shifted, in real time, as I interviewed. In this sense, I would argue that I engaged in an adapted form of grounded theory...I might make the case for something akin to “continuous-lived-grounded-dialogic-theorizing” as both my method for data collection and data analysis. It ended up being adapted because I also leveraged hermeneutic phenomenology (described in the next section). For some of the data, I leveraged grounded theory nearly to a “t.” The cyclical, iterative, evolving, emerging, dialogic, co-constructed process resulted in all the expected and required codes: in vivo coding (using participants’ exact words, which you will actually see

leveraged for quite a few section and chapter titles), focused coding, theoretical coding. I leveraged all the classic analytical strategies and tools and moved through the phases of grounded theory work. However, along the way, I was also simultaneously engaged in the other methods I detail in the whole of this dissertation's methods section. So while some theories emerged from the data (i.e. the survey responses and interviews), the theorizing I ultimately do across the whole of this dissertation represents a woven and bricolaged methodology. In this sense, I allowed myself to not form perfectly to the rigid standards of previous grounded theorists. Though if you're one of them...I did the thing, I went through the motions, the theories were just influenced by far more than the data itself.

This allowed me to actually engage in the conversation in a way that I perhaps wouldn't have been able to otherwise had I been concerned with trying to stick to my planned semi-structured interview protocol. It also gave me the opportunity to collect data, if you will, through what wasn't surfaced or discussed and to use that as a guide for what to prioritize as I theorized. There were several questions in my interview protocol which I had originally anticipated would be 'key' questions⁷⁷ which I never asked. In fact, it became clear after the first interview that there were other, more relevant and potentially interesting things to talk about...something I was able to gather from both those I interviewed as well as my own interests. And these *not discussed* elements surfaced as equally pertinent and interesting. I anticipated that they'd be important. I anticipated that they'd come up as core elements. So the fact that they were *not* talked about *is* important to note, but something that would have been difficult if not

⁷⁷ "Key" due to theorizing I had already done prior to conducting interviews. See the section on Hermeneutic phenomenology for more on coming to data with theory.

nearly impossible to code for had I followed a grounded theory methodology more rigidly.

As an additional point of departure, I didn't distance myself from the data. Though I was careful (through a practice of relational ethics) to be sure I was not saying something about the data that the data itself wasn't telling me, my lived experiences very much "contaminated" (Ellingson, 1998, p. 494, cited in Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 452) the codes and theories I generated. I cannot ignore the fact that I am not and was never an external researcher looking in. The questions I asked of the people I surveyed and interviewed, I could have (and ultimately did) ask of myself. I could have been (and ended up being) a member of the subject pool. As a result of the fact that I am a member of the community and culture in question, I developed codes that were necessarily meaningful to me. That being said, I still followed the data, still paid attention to the patterns developing, and decided not to focus on things that seemed only meaningful to me and me alone since the data clearly didn't corroborate them as being as important as I thought they'd be. No codes surfaced as shocking or surprising and I'd predict that this is largely because of the identities I share with participants (i.e. both *educator professional* and *educator professional developer*). And this fact, in my opinion, helps to reinforce my choice for a bricolaged methodology, for each method served to check and / or corroborate each other along the way.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

Wherein through the process of constructivist grounded theory, theory emerges *from* the data, I leveraged hermeneutic phenomenology in bringing meaning and theory *to* the data. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a methodological approach grounded in

“interpretation—interpreting experiences and phenomena via [an] individual’s lifeworld” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 94). Like cultural rhetorics and critical autoethnography, hermeneutic phenomenology deals in the world of the individuals (in the case of hermeneutic phenomenology, the term “lifeworld” is commonly used). For hermeneutic phenomenology, a lifeworld takes as an understanding that “individuals are understood as always already having an understanding of themselves within the world, even if they are not constantly, explicitly and/or consciously aware of that understanding” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 94). It also recognizes that “the researcher’s past experiences and knowledge are valuable guides to the inquiry. It is the researcher’s education and knowledge base that lead [them] to consider a phenomenon or experience worthy of investigation” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 95). In my methodological approach, I used hermeneutic phenomenology by leveraging existing literature and theories, as well as my own lived experience to guide initial research questions, interview questions, and even other choices like selecting participants and informing sample size⁷⁸. Regardless, I came to the research project with already formed ideas and codes based on the research I had already done, the conversations I had already had, and my own lived experiences. This approach can, of course, be useful because “theories can help to focus inquiry, to make decisions about research participants, and the way research questions can be addressed” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 95). That said, it is an important divergence from constructivist grounded theory.

⁷⁸ In phenomenology this might typically be 1-10 interview participants, for example. See Starks and Brown-Trinidad (2007) for a comparison of Discourse Analysis, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, and Grounded Theory.

I additionally diverged from constructivist grounded theory by leveraging phenomenology in that a lot of my sense-making happened *through* writing and thinking about if what I was saying made sense and whether I thought the stories I was telling through this dissertation were plausible and representative to the lived experiences I was engaging with (including my own). This is, again, a departure from constructivist grounded theory (where the findings emerge from the data). As I analyzed the data and even throughout the timeline during which I conducted interviews, I would often *try* to set aside (for the moment) my own thoughts, feelings, and opinions, in order to keep an open mind as I learned from participants. That said, in the case of my actual, real, honest methodological practices, I wove hermeneutic phenomenology, along with constructivist grounded theory, along with critical autoethnography, storytelling, and cultural rhetorics (and as you will shortly learn, discourse analysis) simultaneously for different purposes and in relation to various “data.” It didn’t follow the “phases” that come constructivist grounded theorists say it “must”. Rather, I let myself be guided by various needs and contentions along the way. When a given “data set” called for a different method, I allowed myself to diverge, resulting in a cyclical, constellating, and uniquely situated methodological approach for this dissertation. In this way, I will argue (and cheekily so), that I allowed for theory to emerge from the data (Stauss & Corbin, 1998), but I also allowed theory to emerge from the process and I allowed the process to become theory and theorize by bringing theory and process into new relations with one another.

Discourse analysis

“Discourse analysts argue that language and words, as a system of signs, are in themselves essentially meaningless; it is through the shared, mutually agreed-on use of language that meaning is created. Language both mediates and constructs our understanding of reality” (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374). So how does one *do* discourse analysis based on this definition? Well, let me *show* you by pointing to the ways in which I am doing it here in the space of my dissertation. In the “*Study*” / *Design & Setting* section, I intentionally highlight the word “study” with quotations (like a discourse analyst might physically highlight a text with highlighter to indicate that a given word, phrase, or piece of the discourse is significant in some way. I then later reveal its meaning through an understanding of its larger context (in this case the larger cultural and academic discourse around research methods. That said, I could push discourse analysis further in this dissertation by pointing to the overall structure of the *Methods & meaning making* section. It follows an outline structure that mirrors that of social scientific and scientific cannon (meaning that it is fairly archetypal in its structure). And yet, the rest of the written discourse (i.e. the actual words in the document) talk about disciplinary boundary maintenance and the colonizing effects it had on the author, pointing to a stated resistance against such forces. Thus, we can interpret the quotations around the word “subject” within this more localized discourse (i.e. that of the dissertation) as an intentional communicative strategy at the intersections of language and text to produce a highly situated and contextualized meaning and reality with respect to what is really going on in the text at various levels of the discourse.

Now that you have a (hopefully) better understanding of what discourse analysis is, let me now *tell* you how I leverage it. I am leveraging aspects of discourse analysis in the sense that I am not just referencing and citing the theories and theorizing of the scholars I engage with, I am also analyzing them and the discourse they use to frame that theorizing. The words they use, within the context they use them, help reinforce and perpetuate more dominant narratives about what asynchronous educator professional development is. They help construct, help resist, help mediate...they are important and non-trivial in this way. And I am going to make the case that scholarship within the context of academia creates a discourse; we “talk” and “dialogue” with one another asynchronously, over time, through publications and shared works. So as I read and find connections, I am also analyzing the texts (including this one) to locate meaning. I am not the only one who has analyzed scholarship in this way, nor will I be the last. MacLeod et al. (2024) recently published what is now one of my personal favorites: “*A meta-study analysing the discourses of discourse analysis in health professions education.*”

Reflexively applied methods

The framing of the curriculum necessarily contains an epistemology. A curriculum is more than its knowledge components; much more [...] the medium is the message.

(Barnett, 1994, pp.45-46, cited in Land, 2004, p. 10)

I won't lie...as a reader, it is not uncommon for me to skip over the methods section and go straight to the results or discussion. In fairness, I was socialized into an academic discipline where all the methods sections were more or less the same. It was only when something was novel or when I was seeking to replicate that I thoroughly

dove into a methods section. All I thought they did, though, was explain what a researcher did so that we could understand what they discovered. I still see a Methods Section as doing that work. So why did I go into so much detail here? You might think it was simply so that I could responsibly detail my methods. If you thought that was the *only* reason, I will remind you that this dissertation is asynchronous professional development. As such, I wanted to be thorough and intentional enough for it to count as such. These methods then, and this Methods Section, do not just combine to serve as a methodological approach for research; they combine to serve as a methodological approach to educator professional development (or at least one approach). I am practicing being in relations with *you*. I am commenting on my own writing as a form of reflexive discourse analysis. I am weaving the discussion around methods through story so that you and I might enter into a more authentic dialogue with one another, knowing that if I am successful at doing so, you, too, might be transformed by story just as I was. I am leveraging critical autoethnography as a means to invite you into theorizing with me about what is or is not professional development through reflexivity on the dissertation's self. If any of this resonates with you as it did for me, you might feel somewhat liberated from the "rigid conceptualizations of what should or should not be counted as scholarship" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 235). I have written this dissertation in such a way that were you to apply constructivist grounded theory and analysis to it, you'd minimally identify patterns of methods-making and meaning-making, and reveal the cyclical, unfolding, evolving processes I leveraged throughout to construct this professional development experience for and with you⁷⁹. Finally, I am engaging you in

⁷⁹ "For" because I of course wrote this with you in mind as a potential audience member. "With" because it only functions as professional development if you allow it / make space for it / agree to playing and

hermeneutic phenomenology by regularly inviting you to use your own lived experiences in order to theorize and interpret this dissertation as educator professional development.

engaging in this dissertation with me in that way, reorienting your perspective in order to view me now as *facilitator* and not just *author*.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION: PERSPECTIVES ON AND APPROACHES TO DESIGN AND ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING

Framing the discussion

These discussion chapters and their sub-sections will speak into each other in overlapping and recursive ways because they represent an overly structured way through which we will enter into a conversation about an ecosystem that is complex and messy and difficult to bound in orderly conversation. In other words, while these chapters look structured, they represent natural dialogue that take twists and turns and unexpected tangents. As author and researcher, it was my task to then string them together in a way that might be meaningful to you. That said, given that a core goal of mine is providing the space and means for you to explore (both at your own pace and in terms of topics of interest), my hope is that the sub-sections and individual chapters can stand alone, in a way, and that you can pop into and out of them as you desire. As such, I want you to read these like the short stories they are.

The discussion sections will be decidedly storied and intentionally fragmented. They share musings and imaginings, wonderings and worries, annoyances and theorizing. Recall that each interview was slightly different as a direct result of the interview protocol's flexibility. As such, I will not systematically share interviewee responses to each question one after the other. Rather, their responses and stories of lived experiences are woven together, across topics, across interviews, across contexts.

I hope at least a few of the stories shared will transform your thinking and knowing as they did mine. I encourage you to skip the ones you aren't finding useful, or to approach them with the intent to compare your lived experience to the storyteller's. In

the end, this dissertation will not advance any one specific framework or set of practices as ‘the best’ or ‘most effective.’ It addresses the research questions I sought out to explore, but does not approach this answering in a stepwise fashion, as one might expect from a “Discussion Section.” Again, the discussion is recursive, overlapping, and inter-woven. In fact, this dissertation likely asks more questions than it answers, and in doing so, enters into a dialogue around, about, and through asynchronous digital learning and educator professional development. This dialogue is shared here, composed as a constellation of contributions. If this were a multimodal project, these snippets of discourse would keep their original forms (i.e. audio recordings, sticky notes, video clips, hand-written notes, etc.) and would be presented without a singular order, giving you the choice on where to start and where to go next⁸⁰.

This in mind, regardless of where you engage, I hope you extend and expand upon the ones you feel you can add to, and that you identify your own points of connection. I can see them in my mind, already, new contributions to the constellating dialogue. I hope you follow that which you find valuable. I encourage you to trace that value, question it, understand it, and interrogate it (e.g. *why is it valuable to you?*). Look back and scan the ones you engaged with less or completely ignored. Ask yourself why they were less helpful or insightful. Were they superfluous in your mind (i.e. extra and irrelevant)? Was it something you already knew or had thought about? Did you simply not like my writing style? All are valid options and this dissertation attempts to make space for each of them. Moreover, it is an explicit goal of this dissertation (in terms of how I approach writing it) that you can leverage your engagement with this dissertation

⁸⁰ I’ve always had a project like this in mind, so perhaps this is where I go next.

as a parallel for how you might otherwise engage with professional development offerings. I hope you use this dissertation to help visibilize your knowledges, your skills, your thought leadership, your lived experiences and opinions and theories.

Before you start, I recommend identifying your purpose for being here. What are you looking for? What are you hoping to learn? Is there a specific topic you came here to explore or better understand? Are you just here to geek out with me? Maybe you like stories or just wanted to spend time with me in these pages. Maybe you know me personally or professionally and are here simply to support me. Regardless, having a sense of your purpose will impact how you orient to the discussion chapters and therefore how you engage with them.

Framing asynchronous (digital) learning

Can you tell me a little bit about your perspective on asynchronous digital learning and the role it plays in your life?

(A question from my interview protocol)

Though I mentioned this earlier, I will begin this conversation by returning to the reason I started every interview with the same question (referenced just above). Simply put, asynchronous digital learning means different things to different people...this much I already knew. In my experience, some orient to it positively, some negatively. Some love it and have a lot of experience with it, others think it can't be successful. Not shockingly, the interviews conducted for this dissertation confirmed that educators and educator developers have a lot to say about online digital learning environments (including asynchronous learning specifically) and bring with them a wealth of experience through which we can learn.

There were a few higher-level understandings that surfaced throughout the interviews about asynchronous learning and the concept of synchronicity, more generally. One key understanding is that *learning is always happening*. In fact, this is something that surfaced in every interview in one way or another. This is a fundamental understanding to the overall positioning of asynchronous learning in the sense that it undergirds not only their orientations to modalities, but also what they consider *learning* to be and look like. I'll return to this throughout the discussion section (i.e. Chapters 6-8) in various ways, but will start here with an example from "Blogger" as to how this understanding impacts the framing of asynchronous digital learning.

"We're always synchronously learning": Reflections on time

In "Blogger's" opinion, "we're always synchronously learning." She continues by discussing larger assumptions about when learning takes place and dominant narratives regarding the relative dynamicity of digital learning across modalities:

I think specifically with that word "asynchronous," there's a conception that that is a passive sort of learning. It's either the instructors who are trying to create those experiences or pushing against them, or even as learners who believe that the asynchronous learning experience is just about going to get content or like transactional, right? You're getting content. You're moving at maybe at this, you know, self paced sort of speed. Asynchronous in my mind isn't necessarily self paced. This goes to the multiple definitions. It can be. But I see powerful asynchronous learning environments as this interaction between and discussion with the content, and that comes directly from conversations with [other scholar's name]. He was really fundamental to me, and he was another sort of a pioneer in the space, and he absolutely hated message boards and zoom conversations. You know, he really wanted that intellectual engagement to be with the content and the instructor giving feedback in a supportive way. So that really helped me to frame some of that thinking around asynchronicity being extraordinarily active and engaging but also layering in a social element, too.

It was exciting to me that “Blogger” brought this up without me prompting her, as it is something I have been thinking about a lot over the last few years as well. You can even see influences of my thinking in this dissertation and examples of how my shared beliefs with “Blogger” manifest in my writing and rhetorical choices (e.g. me positioning this as asynchronous digital learning but nevertheless talking directly to you as a reader, inviting you to “talk back” to the text, encouraging you to reflect and dwell on any feeling, thoughts, or opinions that might surface, etc.). You are actively engaging in this right now simply by reading or listening to these words. What I find helpful (and clearly “Blogger,” too) about acknowledging this is that we can then consider what this might mean for digital learning (and learning in general). For instance, we can rethink learning as not so bounded by strict or rigid concepts of *time*. Expanding a bit more on this, I would argue that it is fairly well known and understood and agreed-upon that asynchronous learning frees up time in the sense of giving learners agency with respect to when they access the content and when they engage with it. That said, even within that frame, both “Blogger” and I would agree that a lot of educators and educator developers would still see learning as happening when learners are accessing the course and engaging in it (i.e. logged into the LMS or working on an assignment). But what would it look like if we acknowledged that the ways in which people learn is far less rigid than that? I might attend an asynchronous webinar discussing engagement strategies only to then think about it while sitting at a bonfire with friends months later or while walking my dogs, and then in those moments I am making new connections or relating back to old ones, extending the learning of that webinar far beyond the time it took me to watch the recording and beyond the digital learning space itself.

This kind of thinking (“Blogger” thinks about it by asking herself, “What does it mean when those words are taken away?”), can be incredibly productive for redesigning digital learning experiences and transformative for educator developer’s approaches to design in general. Again, we can look to an example from “Blogger:”

I had this amazing...one of those life shifting discussions with one of my students when I first started teaching at [institution name] who is an indigenous man, and we had the most fascinating discussion about time and concepts of time. And this is where I haven't had that chance to kind of dig into enough reading or mind space to write something about that. But I have an article sitting in my mind, or thoughts about how like these Western notions of time are so baked into those systems. And that if we want to liberate them and like have places to look, it was was a discussion with [student name], and then there was another scholar- I lost the sticky. I had the sticky on my notepad forever. But it was about monochromatic timescale, like just about concepts of time, basically. And I know I'm kind of on a wild tangent, but I think there's something there to all of that, and really sort of liberating notions of time, but recognizing they have to be bounded right like, if you're in a system that is bounded. But there's things that we can go do to push on that. [...] You can shift and play with time. I can give one example...like a curricular example. So taught qualitative methods, the doctoral level course, and this wasn't quite a flip discussion, and I don't know how to frame this one, either. But we used Slack as our communication tool. And every week we had readings. This is kind of standard like you would. But instead of discussing the readings in the message board. I had the students post a question, only all you had to do was post a question that was arising from the readings by Thursday night. But then Friday morning, I would get up at five o'clock Friday morning, pull all the questions, kind of lightly code and organize them, and answer their questions in a podcast. I'd fire up Zoom and I would I would screen share so they could either watch it or they could listen. So I was trying to escape time, have them be able to have choice and escape the boundary of their computer. And I would say, “Well, you know, Maddie had this really great question about you know what...our understanding the boundaries of this and that, and also so-and-so said this and that and these questions connected.” You know, this is how I would answer. But then I'd also include “Here's what scholars say” and pull in scholarship, and focused on really intentionally trying to emulate or simulate a class discussion. But it escapes the boundaries of time. I saved all those recordings and the informal feedback I have from students. I had one that would say, “You know, I so looked forward to Friday morning because I would make my coffee pot. I would sit down on my porch, and

I would feel like I was in class...like it felt like we were together.” Or “I didn't have teams like popping up for some stupid reason on my computer.” Or “I don't have much time. I have a short commute, but I listen to you at twice the speed, but I got the whole discussion in my time.” And I think that if we can provide more examples like that, we could help create that cognitive shift. Because asynchronicity is still synchronous, right?

There are a couple things I will explicitly pull out of this specific story. First, we can learn a lot from the knowledges of different cultures. “Storyteller” likewise brought up indigenous knowledges (she is indigenous, herself), and said that the way she learned was really different growing up to the way she was taught in formal education spaces. *Time* specifically came up in my conversation with “Storyteller,” and, like “Blogger,” she shared that she approaches digital learning as not a linear experience (with respect to time). Indigenous theory has impacted and influenced my thinking and practice, as well. Mignolo’s (2012) work on decoloniality, for instance, has shifted not only my perspective on *time*, but also my orientation to, approach to, and engagement with time. It was Mignolo (2012) along with the many indigenous scholars I engaged with following Mignolo⁸¹ who helped me to understand that *time*, as I know it at least, is a colonial construct...a core part of the colonial imaginary (p. 152). It was Mignolo (2012) that helped me to understand that within the colonial matrix, I had been conditioned to be so concerned with the “reckoning” of time that I wasn’t able to see other ways to be with *time* (p. 164). Following Mignolo (2012), I now see *time* through a lens of pluriversality

⁸¹ Thank you, Kristin, for allowing me into the space of American Indian Rhetorics; it was a gift I won’t forget and one I’ll continually work to honor.

(p. 175) and, as such, an option⁸² of pushing back against the *traditional*⁸³. Mignolo asks:

Who would want to be traditional once the rhetoric of modernity put a value on time, progress, and development, and those time- values became accepted by rulers as well as by the governed? Once you control (the idea of) 'time,' you can control subjectivity and make the many march to the rhythm of your own time. (2012, p. 177)

As a presenter, a facilitator, and, moreover, an educator, I have decided I want to push back where I can to ensure that I am not attempting to control time by making others march to the rhythm of *my* time. That is why I have embraced and tried to make space for the possibility that you as a reader might choose to read these words first, last, or perhaps not at all. I can imagine you engaging with them in other ways, too...perhaps not through me or this dissertation at all. Perhaps you will come to the same thoughts I did (or perhaps you already have) and in that way we are engaging in them together. I can picture you spending a lot of time with this dissertation, or very little. They are all valid because they are all options. I am trying to, where I can, make space for the multiple truths and trajectories of pluriversality. Returning, again, to Mignolo (2012), "A world in which truth in parenthesis is accepted as universal is a world guided by pluriversality as a universal principle. [...] In other words, there is no one trajectory that has the right to prevail over the other" (pp.175-176).

As a very specific example, when I present at virtual conferences, I directly address both the "live" audience, as well as the audiences of the future, knowing that

⁸² One of many, which I like to think Mignolo would appreciate me acknowledging.

⁸³ Something I have also learned to do through other theories, scholarship, and relations...putting them in dialogue here (but crucially not *just* "now," for they have already been in dialogue before and will be again).

should the recording be accessed again, I want to create a point of engagement between those learners and myself. I like to think about this as giving the synchronous session an “afterlife.” I borrow this term from Muñoz (2019), who writes about finding an “afterlife, in its transformation and current status as residue, as ephemera. It partially (re)lives in its documentation” (p. 71). I am inspired by thinking about the potential additional lives something like a seemingly “simply” session recording might lead and therein like to challenge myself to consider what I can do in terms of the design and my approach to that session (including the mechanisms for sharing it, should I have control over that at all) such that I might better facilitate one or more of those afterlives. “Introvert,” I think, actually serves as a good example of a session recording’s afterlife. In my conversation with her, she shared a story about how she was in a live session and didn’t really take anything away from it in the moment, but months later, something surfaced that happened to have been talked about during that session and all of a sudden, she found herself going back to that session recording to engage with it. Not only that, she then gave that session recording new and different life, in this case taking a direct quote from it to incorporate in something she was writing. She shared another, very similar example, of using specific clips from recorded sessions to either send directly to faculty or include into professional development she is leading. Returning back to “Blogger’s” example, we can see something akin to the afterlife or minimally an extending of time at play...she is playing with time and calls this out directly.

The other thing I will pull out from “Blogger’s” story about the strategy she employed was the intentionality with which she designed that particular strategy. This will surface again later in this chapter, but we can build for things like community and

dialogue asynchronously. We can also demonstrate *care* and *empathy* asynchronously. Her students shared feedback regarding their lived experiences with that recorded content; they were, quite literally, engaging in the course content while commuting or drinking coffee in the morning...in other words, living their lives. There is something uniquely personal and uniquely human that is made possible through this type of learning (also something we will return to later in this chapter). Critical to this, however, is intentional design. Though I will explore intentional design more specifically elsewhere in this chapter, I will leverage it as a means to transition to the second major understanding that these educators / educator developers hold: *It's not about synchronicity, it's about the designer / facilitator and their choices.*

It's not about synchronicity, it's about the designer / facilitator and their choices

Throughout every interview, I asked questions that were designed to elicit personal opinion and preference, as well as general thoughts about synchronicity. One such question was: *I want to better understand the boundaries and potentialities of synchronous and asynchronous digital learning environments. In your opinion, are there things we should do in a synchronous environment over another modality?* I wasn't sure what to expect in terms of their answers. I had heard from countless numbers of educators and educator developers that there were things that we *should* or *shouldn't* do in a given modality (either based on their opinions, or personal experience, and possibly even on research and scholarship). I will admit that I didn't expect every single one of the 14 educators / educator developers I interviewed to ultimately hold the same belief, which is that what makes a digital learning experience is not inherently due to it being either synchronous or asynchronous, but rather the design choices made in its

development and facilitation. Now to be fair, knowing the 14 people I interviewed, I did expect this general sentiment, but I also expected such strongly and deeply held beliefs and opinions (e.g. I expected someone to say “oh yes, you should never do ____ in an asynchronous course”), because it was so common to hear these kinds of beliefs. So I was delighted and my spirits lifted a little to hear this group of 14 educator developers speak so critically about online learning.

More specifically, none of them would wholesale argue for either synchronous or asynchronous learning. Rather, they all believe that both serve different purposes. In the words of “Interdisciplinary,” for example, “asynchronous learning is ‘necessary but not sufficient,’ but so too is synchronous; “we need both.” Originally, “Architect” said that she thought maybe it was harder to do asynchronous learning well, but then took it back, “You know, I think I'm gonna take that back. I think it's up to the designer. [...] It's on the educators, on the instructor, and how they craft that experience. I don't think it's whether it's synchronous or asynchronous, or whether it's in person or online. I think it's in the hands of whoever creates that experience.” Many of the interviewees shared the overt sentiment that as a result of this, asynchronous learning could be used for good or bad. Here's an example from “Satirist” which I think provides a good representation of this observation as well as some of the variables and factors at play that complicate how we perceive digital learning:

So there's so many things that are attempting to solve a problem that's created by a societal inequity and that unfortunately allows for greater inequities. And sometimes I think asynchronous digital learning falls into that category because the problem is, people don't have enough time and they aren't given enough time, but they're still required to do things. And so now here's a technological solution that solves the part about not having enough time, because now you can do it in your free time, you know, when you're supposed to be a person and live

your life...now instead, you can still be working. Great, that problem is solved now, but that solution doesn't really actually get at the real issue of like what are you asking people to do? And maybe if it's so important that they need to do it, you should give them space during their jobs to do it. So I'll say that about asynchronous digital learning in the context of professional development. However, on the other hand, there are people who want to learn something that, due to their specific circumstances, it can't be time-bound. It can't be location bound either. They couldn't afford to get there, or they have to work or take care of children during the day, or at night, or whatever the thing would normally be asked for, but they still want to engage with material and find a way to either better their circumstances, or or just enrich their life in some way. And that's also the point of asynchronous digital learning, like for those people who there may not be another way to do it. And we have to also remember this. I forget it, unfortunately, sometimes, because it's not my preference. But some people prefer to do it that way. They don't like being around a lot of other people. They find it distracting or annoying, or whatever. They don't respond well to authority figures in a synchronous setting. They don't enjoy that, or they like to go at their own pace for whatever reason. Maybe they have a huge amount of knowledge about the topic, and they can skip over a bunch of it and just hone in on the parts they don't know, and that's also useful. So the degree to which asynchronous learning is used to benefit somebody's life, I think it's valuable and useful, and that's why it exists. The degree to which it can be used to intrude on someone's life, it's not great, and probably shouldn't be used that way, or the hope would be that it isn't used that way. You know, when we're putting stuff together, my hope is that instructors have a certain set of time, and they just couldn't come to the session when we had it. But they can do it the next day at the same time, you know, like 9 in the morning, 10 in the morning during their work day...they can go and engage with it, and then they can go home and be done with it. What I can't prevent, but what I wish doesn't happen is they're putting in a full day. They're working, you know, 10 hours, or whatever it is, then they're going home and doing more work, or they're at home working 12 hour days, and some of that is, you know, midnight doing these technology courses that we've put together. You know...that I don't think is worth it, honestly.

Reflecting on this offering by “Satirist,” I find it easy to appreciate how quick he was to put his own opinion aside in order to assess learning environments for what they are meant to do: serve learners and facilitate learning. He likewise recognizes that learners have different needs and preferences and desires. So while the access and lack of

time-boundedness of asynchronous digital learning has been abused by leaders who assume that this means people will have more time and be able to fit that learning in on top of everything else, asynchronous digital learning also (as he points out) meets real needs (like challenges across distance, time, family life, etc.).

“PhD-less” also recognize these tensions, sharing that the gaps we see in terms of “good” or “bad” pedagogy across modalities is due to “the limitations in terms of capacity, our abilities, in terms of the resources...even the nature of the student.” He believes that the boundaries people perceive in terms of the difference between *quality* with respect to synchronicity is not that large, and that with a bit more time and intentionality, can disappear altogether: “The boundaries are there, but they are not permanent boundaries. There are boundaries that if you have the right technology, the right tools, the right abilities. the right engagement, the right mindset. Maybe you can eliminate those boundaries.”

That said, although I would argue each of the interviewees would agree that intentional design is paramount and that assessments of *good* and *bad* are highly contextualized, this didn’t mean they didn’t also advance *some* aspects of learning that they saw working more effectively in one modality over another. As an example, “Musician” shared that he thinks,

Asynchronous digital learning, when done well, plays a role in the fact that it puts me as a learner more in control. The choices I want to make as to the time that I'm able to spend, it gives me the opportunity to take more responsibility for my learning. And when asynchronous learning activities and content and assessments are designed well, I think I actually feel a deeper sense of engagement in some ways. And I think the key distinction for me in what a well-designed asynchronous learning activity is, is that differentiation between a pedagogy and a modality.

He went on to expand on what he meant by a “deeper sense of engagement,” sharing as an example the experience of learning a new instrument asynchronously and discovering a model that was not only effective but deeply engaging. Granted, he also noted that he hadn’t experienced something quite like that in an academic setting yet, but he believes it possible. Aside from hypothesizing around things like *engagement*, others discussed whether asynchronous or synchronous digital learning experiences better supported *extemporaneity* and *serendipity*. “Interdisciplinary” shared that in his opinion, “when you go on-site, you’re ready for more serendipity, more uncertainty, more discovery.” This was echoed by “Punk,” who argued that,

What synchronous allows for really well is - and, I think, evidence in this interview - is extemporaneous chasing of thought between individuals who are exploring an affinity that they share at a specific time. And I struggle to think of synchronous engagement that is better than what I just described, which is just people coming together in real time to hash something out, or to tackle something.

They put this type of learning alongside asynchronous learning, not claiming that there is no possibility of extemporaneity in asynchronous learning environments, but rather that they felt synchronous learning environments (if designed well) can excel in making space for that kind of learning. In fact, they specifically made sure to mention things like collaborative and social annotation as a great model they look to for similar engagement asynchronously. Though it is not about extemporaneity, specifically, “Punk” followed their thoughts (above) with a comment I think is worth sharing:

I think, unfortunately, what ends up being the case is that we treat synchronous as something that needs to be highly scripted and structured. Again, retaining all of the pieces of scaffolding that we’ve embodied in an asynchronous environment. But, I guess that’s not fair, because I mean, there’s been a lot of play in synchronous with adding in some interactive components as part of like, just general knowledge dumps. I think about polling, quizzing, and these sorts of things that can help break the ice, because I also recognize that some learners

don't do well with one-on-one interpersonal engagement. But I think that's the problem right? It goes back to something I was saying earlier about throwing all in on video. If you throw all in on synchronous, then the imperative is to make synchronous everything to everybody. And I think that ignores the fact that maybe it's only for a select few, and so that should be one means of engagement coupled with a bunch of comparable (and by comparable I don't mean the same), but comparable asynchronous engagements to try and cultivate understanding and action.

I wanted to share that for a few reasons. First, I think it helpful to see the ways in which these educator developers are contextualizing their answers. They are not simply responding with gut reactions; they are taking their time to really think about their lived experiences and to be deeply reflective and critical, even allowing themselves a chance to change or refine their opinions throughout the course of our conversation. Secondly, I find it helpful framing for considerations of the pedagogy of synchronicity, adding another layer to what we have already discussed thus far. An aspect of intentional design necessarily must consider the unique purpose(s) for choosing one modality over another. It is justified, arguably even an ethical responsibility, to recognize that as we work to make all learning spaces as inclusive and equitable as possible, this means we must work with an understanding that every modality might not be for everyone (at least it might not serve everyone in the same ways). While these short excerpts from my conversations with “Punk,” “Interdisciplinary,” and “Musician” represent the kinds of beliefs and stances held by educator developers about synchronicity (some seemingly in support of one modality over another), it is important to recall that at no point did any of the 14 interviewees ever claim one modality was better or worse. They shared their preferences (i.e. which modality they preferred as a learner), but otherwise it will remain helpful grounding that they see them as two vital components of a larger learning ecosystem. Having said this, a primary area of focus for my dissertation was

asynchronous digital learning environments (particularly those designed for educator professionals). So throughout much of the remainder of this chapter, you will notice me shifting towards conversation around this modality in particular. As a case in point, I will move to close out this section by sharing the third and final opinion about synchronicity (one that all 14 of them ardently agreed upon): asynchronous digital learning environments are unmatched in terms of the access to learning they provide and facilitate. There are two key reference points that I will pull in here from the interviews, both of which share institutionally-specific examples. The first is from my conversation with “Punk” and the second is from my conversation with “PhD-less.” Beginning with the example from “Punk,” they detailed the ways in which asynchronous digital learning has enabled learners at a community college to have a more personally meaningful and tailored experience:

I'm teaching a course for a community college and the community college is on the other side of the state. They reached out to me because they were in need of adjuncts, and they knew that I had experience in online, asynchronous learning. And so what that means in practice with these students in particular, that are anywhere from high school age taking dual enrollment courses to your more, you know, conventional college age where they're going straight from high school to college but also with community colleges. Really the more conventional age is people who maybe tried college at a university, snuffed out for whatever reason, or pursued a career and decided to revisit and so now they're working adults who are going back to school, or they're, you know, folks who are retired and interested in learning something more. And so a large spectrum of learners with needs that need to be accommodated. And I think the general assumption in the past is that those sorts of learners, especially in community colleges, they're best accommodated by a traditional in-class experience. Community colleges are designed to serve the needs of their local community, and be geographically located approximate to people who would want to enroll there. But what that doesn't account for is, again, that key population of working adults who have needs for flexibility. They have scheduling accommodations that really need to be considered. And so I have a course that I'm - maybe because I just inherited it, but I'm still developing it as we go along sometimes a few days ahead of my

students at a point. But in large part, it is because I'm designing experiences that can function effectively and accommodate learners regardless of schedule, regardless of other life requirements and responsibilities that they might have and effectively just meet people where they're at regarding their interests. Some flexibility with deadlines. And I mean, some students are working ahead. Some students are working with suggested deadlines. Some students are naturally falling behind. But what's great is regardless of where those students are in the path, asynchronous online learning allows me to through the data that's accumulated through the learning management system and through their engagement with activities I've set up, as far as scaffolding identify where individuals are, and tailor my approach in my engagement to them specifically. And so to button it up, asynchronous learning, if it works well, is this happy merger between self paced learning and exploration, it gives agency to students while also providing greater access and opportunity for students to be successful.

Before moving to the example offered by “PhD-less,” I will quickly note a few things that struck me from “Punk’s” story. To begin with, “Punk” engages in important labor by recognizing the students in the way(s) that they did in this case. Where elsewhere we’ve heard that students’ needs are different, here we are engaging with a more nuanced discussion of the differences between students. Not only are their needs different, but their motivations are different, their ages, their histories and backgrounds, etc. These differences make for a multi-layered and complex learning environment whereby a commitment to frameworks like Universal Design for Learning⁸⁴ become all the more impactful. Secondly, by challenging a general assumption about community colleges, “Punk” outlines one way we might, as educators, push up against problematic structures and systems. In their institutional context, it was through approaching the design and facilitation of an asynchronous learning environment in a highly intentional and curated manner as a means to meet the needs of a diverse body of students. What I mean to

⁸⁴ I mention this framework, specifically, at this point due to the fact that it is core to “Punk’s” praxis and pedagogy.

say is this: in our darkest moments, when we might be wrestling with burnout or struggling to hold onto a sense of purpose as an educator within Higher Education, focused and small scale choices like redesigning your approach to asynchronous learning can have the potential for much larger impact. I think about the case of “Punk’s” institution, for example, and wonder how this particular community college might grow and sustain if it revisited that general assumption and instead viewed *community* as not being geographically bound. Finally, “Punk” offers us an important distinction between *access* and *opportunity*. In the case of leveraging an asynchronous format, learners could now engage with the learning experience (where otherwise they literally would not have been able to at all). But by tailoring the course in the way that they did, intentionally building in design aspects like self-pacing, flexible deadlines, and exploration, “Punk” facilitated *opportunity*. It is not enough to simply design for *access*, we must also design for the *opportunity* for success.

Turning now to the case of “PhD-less,” he shared an example from his institutional context (which is a faith-based, private institution in Africa). Similarly to “Punk,” his example speaks to adult learners and the ways in which asynchronous learning increases access in critical ways. In his opinion, asynchronous digital learning is:

...the best format for the online students who are mostly engaged with other activities and therefore they cannot afford to commit time to a synchronous kind of learning. Maybe because of time and space, they cannot afford to participate in synchronous learning and therefore it is the best mode or the best approach for digital learning...especially for those students who are far away from the physical buildings or from the physical lecture halls or lecture rooms.

He expanded on this answer by sharing a little bit more about his context. Of note, most on-site learning is engaged with by undergraduate students. Comparatively, postgraduate students are fully online (and largely asynchronous). He shared:

The postgraduate students, the majority of them are mature students and they are either working or they have other responsibilities. So for our institution, you will realize that all the postgraduate students are online students. But even undergraduate students, we still have some students who cannot afford to come to the physical classes. And when you look at that type of student again, they're either working or their mature students. They have been in the profession, and now they want to upgrade their career, and they have to do some undergraduate courses. Others have been set to overseas assignments, and others are from other countries who cannot afford to come to [country name]. But they can do it online.

In the context of this particular part of our conversation, I was curious how his institution determined this (meaning what kind of data led to this decision specifically and whether it was market-led or directed by student-feedback). The history he shared provides a useful lens into the ways in which culture plays a huge role in framing the decision-making practices across Higher Education institutions. In this case, “PhD-less” works in a cultural context that leverages a form of acceptance caps, which he labels as “discriminatory” and which he says led to a high level of high school dropout rates. It was reflecting on this history that ultimately led to the change in their educational offerings. In his words,

We noted that our education system was kind of discriminatory. This is what I mean: every time a student graduates from high school, there is a certain cut-off grade that the government normally applies. You know, kind of say, like ‘those with this grade can proceed to university.’ And therefore you will find a high rate of people dropping out at high school, but they qualify for university. But since the admission to the university is prospective on the number of beds for academic terms, if a certain university had a bed capacity of 3,000, even if 4,000 qualify for university, it will only pick 3,000. So it means, then, that there are 1,000 students who missed admission to university at that particular year they will never get

another chance. And if the following year, for example, the bed capacity goes to 4,000, the people who missed the university opportunity the previous year are never considered. But around 2011, when the so-called parallel programs came about, now these people who had missed chances in the previous year, they started enrolling into university programs. And that is the time when we realized that there is a group of people who cannot manage to come to the evening classes, who cannot manage to come to school when they have a break. Their jobs, their work schedules, even the country would not allow it. And that was the time we started the online learning program. So the market situation in part informed us that there is a need to have this kind of learning...and preferably asynchronous.

The primary point I will draw out from “PhD-less’s” story is that asynchronous learning not only has the capacity to transform an institution’s educational model; it can address a fundamental inequity that exists at the state (or in this case, country) level.

Stepping back and reflecting on both institutional examples, we can name a few points of learning. First, asynchronous digital learning provides critical access to education (particularly for certain populations of learners). Second, apart from access, asynchronous digital learning affords (or can, if designed well) the flexibility and opportunity for these learners to be successful should they engage beyond simple access. Third, and finally, the choice of whether or not to meaningfully and intentionally incorporate asynchronous digital learning experiences into Higher Education environments is a choice and it is important that we deeply consider the rhetorical parameters and contexts of that choice. However, as these examples demonstrate, whether the decision-maker is an adjunct faculty member or institutional leadership, the choice to design for asynchronous learning can contribute to real and meaningful change.

Framing educator professional development

Just as these 14 educator developers brought several high-level understandings of synchronicity and specifically asynchronous digital learning, they also brought general feelings and opinions about educator professional development. This subsection, then, is dedicated to sharing their stories and opinions so that we might better understand their overall framing of educator professional development. To provide the most pithy synthesis possible, they have each experienced really *good*, as well as really *bad* educator professional development. And this held true regardless of synchronicity. In other words, they have each experienced ‘good’ and ‘bad’ synchronous educator professional development as well as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ asynchronous educator professional development. Moreover, when they reflected back on the totality of their experience with educator professional development, all 14 expressed the feeling that they had experienced more ‘bad’ professional development than ‘good.’ As such, below I share some of their feelings and stories about ‘bad’ educator professional development.

First, we can turn to “Satirist,” Who provides us with a fairly strong rebuke of the current model for educator professional development:

I would say there's vastly more bad than there is good. But I will also say the concept of professional development is flawed. To begin with, what is the point of professional development from a business standpoint? It's like, how do we get more value out of this person? How do we have them learn more without paying them more? And if you're that person, the only incentive is "I don't wanna get yelled at," "I don't wanna get demoted," "I don't wanna get fired because I'm not learning enough new things." But in a lot of contexts, you're not working towards something that is defined or that the business or organization knows you're gonna need to know in some respects. And so you end up with this extra knowledge that there isn't anything to do with it, you know?

“Satirist” raises the business context in a way that hasn't surfaced yet. He insinuates rather directly that educators are more than likely learning “extra” things that have no obvious business (i.e. professional) purpose. He likewise points out that it is simply bad business strategy to require people to engage in something when you haven't set goals or expectations around that something. From a workforce standpoint, it potentially creates a professional context whereby learners are essentially learning within a void with no sense of direction. Additionally, he makes the case that this can develop a workplace culture of *fear*, whereby motivation to engage or complete something is not driven by mission, vision, or values, but rather the fear of punitive measures should they not engage. I share the direct quote in Chapter 7, but “Satirist” shared with me that in his professional context, and, in fact, throughout his professional career, one of the most predominant metrics he used for determining which professional development to engage in was based in *fear*. In sum, “Satirist” would advance that he has not only experienced more ‘bad’ professional development than good, but argue that the entire system is flawed to begin with.

For another story of ‘bad’ professional development, we can turn to “Architect,” who reflected on the ways her assumptions impact her perceptions and judgements of professional development:

When there is something magical, it's like, “Wow! Look! What has happened?” like I don't expect it to happen, I guess. I don't know if that's cynical. I'd like to think maybe it's more practical. I go to things thinking that- I mean even some of the programs we're encouraged to go to...the things that our office puts on. And sometimes they're just like, “Oh, my gosh! I showed up. I did the thing. At least I got a free meal.” The inherent value of going is 1) I'm kind of fulfilling an obligation, and 2) I'm probably gonna see people that I haven't seen in a while, and that'll make me happy, cause that personal interaction will make me happy. [...] I guess I'm surprised when things really connect, because I don't expect that

they're going to and then, you know, I guess I'm protecting myself from not being let down. But I usually have practical reasons for doing what I'm doing. And if I get something more out of it, then it's a bonus.

Again, sticking with the understanding that these represent the general framings and assumptions about educator professional development that these individuals bring with them into their working spaces and into the profession, it is really important that we recognize that many of them assume at the onset that educator professional development will not be helpful and not be valuable. When we look at “Architect’s” story, for example, we can see that she says she never expects to “get something” out of educator professional development beyond a free meal or the chance to connect with colleagues. This isn’t to say that these types of takeaways don’t have value, because they do. In fact, “Architect” herself points out that sometimes it is really helpful and can lead to feelings of happiness when we connect with people we haven’t been able to see in a while. Thinking back to literature and scholarship around educator burnout (see Chapter 2), for instance, having the time to just sit and *be* with colleagues over food could actually help to address feelings of burnout through contributing to a greater sense of social connection and belonging within the workplace. But what “Architect” is describing is not a dedicated space for connecting with colleagues over food; rather, what she is describing is a required training that was actually meant to achieve some other goal (whether that was content or policy review, strategy development...you name it). Knowing the specific goals and outcomes, here, is less important than recognizing that the types of things that “Architect” intrinsically finds valuable aren’t typically prioritized in and of themselves. In this case, she positioned them instead as things she was forced to subsequently find value in or story as valuable because the training

otherwise failed at delivering value (framed almost as though they were a consolation prize she awarded to herself for getting through 'bad PD,' in other words, the sentiment that 'at least I got these things out of it'). To these educators, the thought of wasting time they don't have is triggering, for they all said that *time* was the biggest constraint they were up against. It was clear, through "Architect's" framing of this experience (i.e. searching for value in something that otherwise wasn't valuable), her use of sarcasm, and the fact that she perceives her outlook as "cynical," that this is a practice and a reality she doesn't much like engaging in, but nevertheless has come to expect...and expect with such regularity that she now goes into most professional development assuming that she will likely not get out much value out of it.

When expanding this to other experiences with 'bad' professional development (sometimes referred to as "PD" in interviews), we can also see that some experiences can be impactful enough (in a negative way) that they serve as warnings for our future selves and impact our future choices. In other words, some professional development is so 'bad' that it leaves a lasting impact, and this impact can influence not only our decision-making practices regarding the professional development we choose to engage with in the future, but also how we then judge and perceive professional development we experience. "Mom," for example, shared that a particularly bad experience for her was one that featured no engagement and was just a "content dump":

An experience that I experienced as a learner that was bad for me...it didn't give me an opportunity to engage with the material, it didn't help me understand the person who was sharing the material at all. There were no opportunities for praxis, or like there was just- it was just a content dump. It was very banking model-based, right? Which doesn't work for me as a learner, and I know that about myself.

Given this, it shouldn't be surprising to us that elsewhere in her interview, “Mom” expressed that she prefers highly engaging, highly interactive, and highly dialogic digital learning spaces and that she tends to avoid things that are strictly content delivery. More than this, alignment to goals and outcomes (or the “promise” of a session, if you will), surfaced as important for her; if a session promised engagement, but the facilitator only engaged in content delivery, that decreased her trust and credibility in that facilitator.

“Low Income Learner” shared with me that the thing that will turn him away now is a persistence on offering “poorly planned” and “canned courses.” He shared a story of an organization he has done a lot of work with in the past that consistently delivers ‘bad’ professional development:

I've had poor experiences with things like [organization name] where something costs money, and I feel like it was a huge waste of my time, and it was like poorly planned. And that was open, asynchronous and synchronous. But at the same time, I won an award from them, sso it's hard to be like “I don't want to participate in your organization at all.” But every time I go, it's like this. The conference is poorly managed, and I was not really happy with it. Then professional development opportunities they offer that are asynchronous have been really poorly planned, just like canned courses that are terrible. And so it's like when they roll something out, I'm quite skeptical, especially if there's even like a minimal cost associated with it. It's like, I know that if it's free, maybe it's amazing. But if it's a cost, it's a definite no for me. Just because they've kind of burned that bridge with me by having such poor design. It's like, I believe that they can probably progress as an institution, but I don't have a lot of faith in their progress.

So for “Low Income Learner,” “good design is paramount.” I will also call out the aspects of *trust* as well as *cost* that came up from my conversation with “Low Income Learner.” Because the organization continued to deliver content that was poorly designed and poorly planned, “Low Income Learner” lost trust and the organization...which he shares

he wrestled with because that organization had given him award and therefore he felt a degree of loyalty to that organization (he shared this sentiment of loyalty with me just after this excerpt). I saw “trust” come up in “Mom’s” interview, as well (discussed above), and similarly in my conversations with “Blogger” and “Storyteller.”

“Blogger” referenced *trust* by incorporating scholarship that has been meaningful for her into a conversation we were having about the mechanisms we use as adult learners to judge professional development as either ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ She referenced a previous back-and-forth we had about virtual breakout rooms, specifically a strategy I began employing several years ago where I intentionally prep and onboard session participants for how I plan to use breakout rooms and the ways in which I frame and approach the use of breakout rooms (since there is the tendency of mass breakout room exoduses in virtual environments...people will just leave when they hear the word “breakout room”...and I wanted them to know that my approach was differently engaging and positioned than what they are used to). Specifically, she said,

A thinker that's been sort of central to my work is Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory for Adult Learning Theory⁸⁵. And he has a list of- I can't remember how many principals, but you know, once adults come into your care, our schema are pretty tightly set in terms of what we expect. And to get that to move past those, just as you were explaining, Maddie, with you having to stop people before like breakout rooms. We know people expect a certain schema of breakout rooms. There's an element of trust layered into this, too, like you have to build that trust with me that this is not going to happen here [that expected schema]. 'I'm not telling you you're going to have a transformative experience, but hold your coffee,' like you said, 'hold your tea, try to engage here or there.'

Tying it back to the notion of *trust*, “Blogger” points out that we as learners come to expect certain schema (i.e. certain frameworks or approaches) to be implemented. This

⁸⁵ See Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 1995; Mezirow, 1997.

is why the mass breakout room exodus is a thing, and similarly why so many people roll their eyes when someone says “discussion board.” We have this expectation, and in both cases, we expect that it won’t be engaging and, likewise, that it won’t be productive (at least not in the way that the facilitator was hoping it would be). Both have actually transitioned, as a result, as locations for *performative professional development*, which I return to in Chapter 7. Regardless, we have come to expect, or you might say *trust*, that it will be bad. So it takes a lot of upfront and intentional labor to reframe the use of something like breakout rooms or discussion boards, and there is increased pressure to follow-through on that promise to do something differently or else we risk losing trust all over again and having our ‘new’ uses of these tools support expected beliefs that these just don’t work and are essentially synonymous with poor design at this point (which is, of course, not the case, but a lot of people feel this way...that breakout rooms and discussion boards simply aren’t effective). In other words, a loss of trust means that there will need to be intentional effort and a commitment to rebuilding that trust, and this takes time and follow-through.

“Storyteller” entered into a conversation around *trust* through recounting an experience she had as a learner, specifically a situation where she was bullied in an online learning experience:

I was the victim of being bullied by a couple of my classmates who were very... what's a nice way to put it...very anti-minority and very anti-women. And the professors were nowhere in sight, and when they finally did surface, because I complained to the department chair about what was going on, all they did was shut down the discussion there. There was no follow up with me. There was no discussion about what could be done, what choices I had available, you know, where I could take my complaints. There was nothing. All they did was shut it

down and basically shut me down. And so bringing that experience into being a person who was teaching online asynchronously, I made certain that I was present throughout.

As “Storyteller” continued to expand on the many ways this specific experience impacted her as both a learner and an educating professional, one of the things she explicitly mentioned was that she is not on, nor does she engage with social media. Being bullied and facing leadership that did nothing about it (at the level of the professor, as well as the department / unit), made her feel that she simply couldn’t trust spaces like social media. She couldn’t trust that they’d offer safe or even brave spaces for her to engage in genuine, authentic, and productive learning. She never wanted to experience being bullied again, if she could help it, so the result was active avoidance of spaces known for that kind of behavior. I think her experience also speaks to *trust* in the sense that as a result of being bullied, she now has a new commitment to her approach to teaching (specifically her commitment to instructor presence). She never explicitly said this in this exact way, but the impression I left with was that she is committed to communicating a degree of trust that learners in her courses can rely on; she can’t promise that bullying won’t occur, but she can commit to being there and doing something...whatever she can...should bullying occur in one of her courses (serving as a direct response to the lack of action on the part of leaders she saw as a learner). Instructor-presence can be a useful strategy for building trust, in this way, around values-based commitments we make to ourselves and learners within a given learning community.

Returning to cost, “Low Income Learner” and I discussed the problematic assumption that dominates the professional development world that a higher cost

experience equals higher quality. We can argue that this should be a fair assumption, but both of us shared examples from our own experiences where we paid a lot for a professional development offering that left us feeling like it ‘wasn’t worth the cost.’ And he wasn't the only person to bring up cost as an element of decision-making and metric for judgment of professional development. “Introvert” also said that she looks for lower-cost learning experiences. “Punk,” however, expressed a very strong sentiment and belief that if it is ‘good’...more than that, if it is truly quality and transformative professional development, it should be free and open:

I think about just what I'm immediately repulsed by, or or feel repelled from, and it's that if there's a paywall or a subscription or some other arbitrary means of gatekeeping my access to that information indefinitely, I reject it. Like it could be the best training in the world, and I will try and find an alternative that is open or at least collaboratively sponsored, where maybe there's a means of contacting the author of the content, or the experience and gaining access. But to me, we shoot ourselves in the foot by pay-walling the sort of educational opportunities that we think are really valuable, inherently valuable. I understand people have to- you know, IP is important, and people have to cover the bottom line. But I don't think it's as black and white as either all of our professional resources and educational content are commercial, or they're all open. I think there can be a large spectrum there, and I would argue, especially, that individuals or organizations that are trying to serve an education population should be judicious and thinking about ‘Okay, is this a really in-demand, necessary training that reflects on our expertise and our compassion and willingness to support the education community?’ And if so, maybe we release that for open. And there's more technical drill downs or some other ancillary resources that we can provide if people want them, that may be a cost. But yeah, limits to access is probably my biggest driver...limits to access, or, alternatively and more constructively, a really thoughtful imperative to provide access is a big draw for me.

You’ll note in this excerpt that their belief in and stance of openness is so important and significant a metric that they used the phrasing “what I’m immediately repulsed by” and “repelled from.” It signals an active avoidance and perceptual judgements that are very

much value-based for “Punk.” This orientation to values resonates throughout all of my conversation with “Punk.” As another example of ‘must-haves’ or, in the case of “Punk,” those things that repel us, “Punk” raised the issue of facilitator ethos: “I do a lot of thinking about the general ethos of folks and organizations and content creators. And I’m not gonna support you if I don’t agree with you from an ethical standpoint.” “Punk” wasn’t the only one that raised this stance either; “Mom” also shared that facilitator ethos (“values”) is important to her:

If I perceive the organization or the facilitator to have said or stood by values that I don't agree with, it is highly unlikely that I'm going to buy into professional development from them. On the other hand, I am totally open to doing professional development from organizations and facilitators that are outside of the context of Higher Ed. I feel like that actually helps me do my job better. So I'm not trying to like limit the scope of context, but more so I'm looking for organizations that have mission, vision, values that align with, ideally, both mine and my unit's...but mine most importantly.

I think what is telling about these examples is that the feelings that educators leave ‘bad’ professional development with are real and visceral, so much so that our experiences as learners in these spaces significantly impact our engagement with future offerings and experiences (even to the extent of active avoidance and disengagement). More often than not, they’re left wanting to “just throw the whole damn thing away and start over”:

I have that feeling sometimes that we keep doing things the same way and expecting something to be different. And you know I have that feeling, and as you and I talked about, I've experienced probably more poorly done than well done...personally...PD. [...] A part of me loves the idea of ‘maybe we should just throw the whole damn thing away and start over and do it right and do it better.’ And the only way to do it is to forget the way you were doing it before, and to try something like totally different. And that's hard to do.

(From my interview with “Sci-Fi Fan”)

I will return to this conversation again in the final subsection of this chapter, as well as in both Chapters 6 and 7, but it is stories like these that make this dissertation valuable to the field, in my opinion. I think many of us, myself included (as well as these 14 interviewees), have found ourselves in a place with educator professional development where we feel or have felt stuck, primarily due to the lack of resources and leadership (whether that be in a current job or a previous one). As a result, I'd say we're suffering from having to live with the tensions between wanting, persisting, and even working towards generative change, and having to face the realities of what feels like forced complacency within a system we don't agree with. It takes us far beyond the narrative I often hear that the major challenge educators and educator developers face is trouble navigating *uncertainty* and *ambiguity*. Quite to the contrary, the 14 educators /educator developers I interviewed for this dissertation are ready to embrace *uncertainty* and *ambiguity*. I'd argue that it is where their flexible, adaptable, and inclusive approaches and stances on asynchronous digital learning (and online learning in general) actually thrive and prove most generative and helpful. I firmly believe that the things they forward and argue for (storied through this dissertation) will make for a better, sustained future for higher education, should they be prioritized. Instead, what I see as a major concern (and challenge in its own way) is the expected navigation, on the part of educators and educator developers, of sustained, perpetual, consistent, and even chronic disappointment. So when we talk about organizational change and transformation, one major barrier we are faced with is not the belief that change is possible...they all believe it is...it is instead the belief that change is likely (because none of them feel optimistic in this regard). 'Bad' professional development, then,

serves as a persistent reminder that change is unlikely, therefore making things like dreaming about ideal futures for Higher Education and educator professional development sometimes feel like a frivolous pursuit, because we live and work within a system designed to sustain and reinforce itself through the actively resisting changes that doesn't in turn advance that very same system. That's not uncertainty nor is it ambiguity; these imply that we are unsure what the future holds. With respect to our feelings about professional development, we're instead experiencing *pessimism* and *cynicism*; as a result of our distrust of a system we have found only works to serve itself, as well as our anticipation that most professional development simply won't be good.

What educator professionals want and value most

Moving now from high-level understandings to specific opinions, the interviewees had incredibly specific and strong personal preferences regarding design choices (particularly when I asked them to reflect on themselves as a *learner* and share about their ideal asynchronous learning environment). Before I make my way through these preferences, I will briefly remind you that all of the interviewees identify as both an educator and an educator developer. So the responses I share below are related in some cases to their thoughts as an educator developer and in others to their thoughts as an educator...inter-woven here because they are difficult (if not impossible) to distinguish. Altogether, I surface 9 design categories that represent specific elements of asynchronous digital learning that these individuals find important, whereby their reasoning for 'why' is varied and deeply personal. The subsection is organized by category as opposed to individual, so that we can more easily put interviews in conversation with each other.

Now, several of the stories I share come in the way of long quotations / excerpts. I have done work to try to reduce the amount of content that might be perceived as superfluous or beyond the context of the specific subsection where a given excerpt might appear. But as I told you earlier in this chapter, these stories are meant to be recursive and overlapping. Moreover, to strip a quote from its larger context feels disingenuous to the level of complexity and nuance present throughout the dialogues I had with these 14 educator professionals. It risks overlooking the caveats, the tangents, the emotions, and judgements...all the things that I know help to better articulate the larger rhetorical situation at play within the world of online learning and professional development. So know this, while my choice of including long excerpts was intentional, this decision represents a larger battle I faced between abiding by the rules of academic writing (i.e. I was strongly socialized into believing that long quotes had no place in academic writing) and doing what felt most in line with my methodological and rhetorical commitments.

During the interviews, I entered into a space of dialogue around what these educator developers want and value most through a conversation around *ideals*. Anzaldúa writes that “awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (1987, p. 87). So by asking, *If you were to imagine, for you personally, the ideal asynchronous digital learning environment...can you describe it for me?*, my intent was to begin to learn about the asynchronous digital learning environments that only live in their heads. Another question I used during interviews to elicit personal preference asked them to then

identify their 'must-haves,' the things that they prioritize most over all else: *When you are choosing a digital learning experience (broadly speaking) for yourself as a learner, what are your 'must-haves'?* Together, the stories and preferences I share in this subsection will largely represent their responses to these two questions (though they prompted a number of follow-up questions and took the conversation in very different directions depending on the interview). To give you a sense of how educators responded to the *ideals* question, here are two excerpts, one from "Low Income Learner's" interview and the other from "Blogger's" interview:

Where things are done intentionally, they're accessible. They're designed to be engaging, that it's been well thought through and planned. What I don't want is, "here's a bunch of reading materials, here's an asynchronous discussion post," and like that's your asynchronous learning material. Or "here's a recording of somebody standing on a stage and talking about stuff." I want it- I expect it to be interactive. I expect it to be engaging. I expect to engage with others in an asynchronous format that's going to not feel regurgitative, but feel like we're diving deeper and getting more meaning out of what we're learning, and that there's more clarification and sharing and collaboration and I feel like I'm building a network with other folks that are learning. So that's kind of like my ideal.

(From my interview with "Low Income Learner")

I would like something that was housed in a system. And whatever that system might be, that by learning, you know, the learning will take place within this space, this digital space that is sort of. you know, intuitive to navigate, has flexibility in terms of when I can access that content, and also has embedded within it lots of choice in terms of engagement with content and with individuals. It doesn't necessarily have to have. Like all of these, you know. people learning with each other in the asynchronous way. Necessarily that could be a choice. But I think that flexibility and choice of engagement with content instructor and fellow learners would be sort of ideal.

(From my interview with "Blogger")

Anchoring around the concept of an "ideal" ended up being an interesting place to start, in part, because a typical follow-up I found myself asking was whether the

“ideal” they described to me was common and whether they had ever experienced it. The general response was, as we might predict, “no” (we might predict this, because I asked them to describe an “ideal,” and this usually has the effect of entering into an imaginary), but the words they used to ultimately tell me “no” varied. For example, many said these experiences were “uncommon.” “Daughter” commented that, in her opinion, “there’s a lot of good PD out there, we just have to find it,” painting the picture of an elusive search for quality professional development. Other terms, however, also included words like “rare,” “magic,” “magical,” and “unicorn,” as though these ideals were so rare that they approximated fairy tales. That said, when I review what “Low Income Learner” and “Blogger” shared (i.e. the stories I just shared), what they want and dream about doesn’t sound impossible at all to me. Moreover, if we were to only prioritize that which they value most (for instance, the 9 design categories that serve as the focus of this subsection), it feels even less impossible. And this wouldn’t be a bad place to start for those looking for practical recommendations for improving educator professional development, for each educator professional truly only had 2-3 design elements that they named as ‘must-haves.’ So we might ask ourselves, *When we have all the tools, technology, and theory to support an ideal digital learning environment, why aren’t we?* We find some of the answers throughout this chapter and the rest of the dissertation, and, in fact, many factors have already been named outright: resourcing, staff turnover, burnout, poor leadership, funding, time, etc. This point becomes a significant narrative for this dissertation: while these educators *can* dream of highly innovative digital learning spaces, the likes of which we might not have ever imagined yet...while they could do that kind of work, that’s not what they dream about for

themselves right now as learners. Instead, what they're asking for, we could deliver on...but only if educator professional development is prioritized. This will serve as important framing and an important call-to-action, of sorts, as we shift into the 9 design categories under focus: 1) Transformation and Thought-Provocation, 2) Care and Intentionality, 3) Relevance, 4) Agency, Personalization, and Customization, 5) Multiple Modes of Engagement, 6) Alignment and Organization, 7) Flexibility, 8) Community and Dialogue, 9) Facilitation and Curation. Please note that some categories will have more text dedicated to them. This is not meant to signal that one is more important than another. As a reminder, these 9 categories represent the things that these educator professionals valued most, above all else, as well as the things they desired most as a learner. That said, in some cases, my conversations revealed additional nuance, which I aim to report on here (hence why some categories are associated with more discussion).

Transformation and thought-provocation

Educators want their thinking to be challenged in productive and generative ways (at least the educators I talked to). "Low Income Learner," articulated this through the use of the word "nuggets," which I use myself quite a lot, as well coincidentally (and which minimally three other interviewees also used). With respect to what he's looking for as a learner, he said,

I want that innovation. Like, who's gonna come out with this idea that's really gonna change how I think about stuff and that's really gonna affect my practice? You do find those nuggets, but I do feel like you have to sift through a lot. Like 8 out of 10, it's probably the same thing I've heard again and again and again. But there's those, too, that are like 'okay, like, I had these great takeaways, and it made a difference.' But it just kind of gets exhausting, and that's where I start to like pewter out and do less and less. Like AI has been one of those where it's

like, 'Okay, I've heard the same things again and again and again,' and that in particular for me is potent because I'm in a very social justice focused Ph.D. Program and the takeaways I get from there are so much more effective. [...] The main thing, is like the idea...that's the takeaway that I actually want is some kind of transformative idea or something that has me thinking, I'm pondering on it like days later.

He then went on to share more detail about his graduate course, namely pointing out that they have space for dialogue, it prioritizes different perspectives and backgrounds, and they get to explicitly share and engage in feedback about their practice while engaging in, learning about, and discussing applications of theory. He stressed, as he storied this, that what his grad class does that most professional development doesn't do, is make space for "messy" discussion and for working through something with others. He finds that kind of work particularly transformative because it provides a facilitated way for his own assumptions, beliefs, and worldviews to be challenged (i.e. through engagement with the perspectives, beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews of others).

Probably 10% of that, you know, actually like, truly, impacts my practice and the way that I think and go about doing my job and living my life. And yeah, it's kind of disappointing, you know. Like I want every PD to be super impactful and transformative and change the way that I am approaching what I'm doing, right? But the problem is kind of like this blanket approach. Like, you're trying to hit this huge swath of people and address these large sweeping problems. And oftentimes, there's just not really the space or time to get into the topic in the way that I would like to, right, where we're diving in and answering hard questions and trying to figure it out. But even if there's not a clear answer, a lot of PD doesn't really wanna deal with the mud. It just wants to present this nice acronym that lines up clearly, and is like clean cut and nice. If somebody came to me and said a PD was gonna be like 'we're not gonna have clear takeaways, but we're gonna dive in and really look at this problem and pick it apart and you're gonna walk away thinking about this for a week,' like I'm in, right? Like that's what I'm looking for. I don't need clear cut takeaways. I want it to be messy and get into the dirty details of what's going on with the particular topic.

The desire “Low Income Learner” expresses here aligns with that of “Dungeon Master” and “Punk,” who also stated they are looking for thought-provoking and transformative learning spaces:

I want things that push my thinking: alternative perspectives, interesting tools that I've never seen before, ways of doing things. So this is a weird analogy, but having grown up in families that have many pastors, in the times that I had been to church in the later half of that kind of time, those sermons never engaged me as much as they could have, because I just, at that point, I had cataloged and heard everything at that point, and so like going was rarely- like folks were rarely uncovering or revealing new kinds of truths, the sort of things that they would consider. So, yeah, that's a thing that I feel may or may not translate into this situation, as well.

(From my interview with “Dungeon Master”)

...they're timely and they're relevant, meaning that they're useful and they inspire action. Because ultimately, that's what we're doing PD for, right? It's not just to inform someone on a given topic, but actually for them to internalize the importance of that topic, that technique. and then to apply it. To feel inspired, to apply, to feel safe and comfortable, to do so. And there are a lot of external forces at play that allow faculty or education professionals going through your professional development to maybe effectively and energetically approach the former, which is ingesting information, appreciating something. It's that next piece...it's inspiring them to action that is critical. And I would almost argue that when I think about good and bad PD, whether or not the professional development lends itself to the faculty member feeling like they have cause and motive and safety to act, is the distinction between good and bad PD. Because I think PD for PD's sake is not necessarily good. It's great if a professional development opportunity is such that it's invited folks to participate. You've attracted a lot of eyes. They have a new understanding and appreciation of a given topic. But if it's not causing them to iterate or adapt, or even completely supplant their practice, then it wasn't effective.

(From my interview with “Punk”)

Taking a moment to synthesize briefly, it is clear that “Low Income Learner,” “Dungeon Master,” and “Punk” all desire spaces that challenge their thinking and idealize learning experiences that will ultimately result in the transformation of their practice. We can also

see that it is easy to disengage when learning experiences don't provide for this kind of learning (especially if the professional development you are experiencing feels regurgitative). Finally, most professional development is not transformative nor thought-provoking in the ways they are desiring. I'll nod back to something "Low Income Learner" shared, specifically...the tendency for professional development to advance specific frameworks or schema. Not that this was a direct result of my interview with "Low Income Learner," but I do love the alignment between a commitment I made in this dissertation and that observation he made. I stated this in Chapter 2, but I do not center a highly specific framework or schema. This dissertation could have been an extensive review of models of educator professional development around the world. I could equally have studied the rhetorics at play within and across those schema. I could have focused my analysis on what those schema and frameworks are storying in terms of educator professional development. This would make for a fascinating dissertation project and one I would love to read and engage with. Instead, what I ultimately decided to do given the conversations I had was make space for those things I and the 14 educator professionals I interviewed found most thought-provoking and interesting and valuable to discuss (i.e. the things that keep us up at night, the things we like to geek out about, the theories, assumptions, and beliefs that drive us, etc.). My hope is that something I share here will shift your thinking or practice.

On the note of shifting practice, "Musician" shared that this is something he explicitly looks for, as well:

The PD that sets me up with a takeaway that's going to help me implement a next step is PD that's valuable. And I've been fairly fortunate because I really try to choose wisely and carefully in the PD I do so that I actually see that there's something coming out of this. Yesterday [in reference back to a 'bad'

professional development experience he was required to attend] was not something that I chose. It is something that all faculty are asked to do. And so I went. I didn't know I was going to get anything out of this one. Typically I don't. I mean, it's good stuff, but not something that I'm going to go 'Oh, yeah!' So you know, in those instances, I don't know if I have a number, but I would say that the PD that I really find that matters is the PD that creates not only the occasion, but also the rationale where I will take that next step.

In their framing of transforming practice, both “Punk” and “Musician” used language that insinuated some degree of inspiration or motivation for change (e.g. “inspired” and “rationale”). Based on the sentiments they shared, I imagine they’d agree with “Interdisciplinary” in claiming that, “in educator development, we don't do a very good job in communicating how to inspire people to change rather than deny the need for change.” I think “Interdisciplinary’s” point is a compelling one to think about. What would we actually need to do to inspire change? A significant part of that work would need to go into, without doubt, actually addressing the systemic issues the profession is facing. As I discussed above as well, *trust* would have to be rebuilt, as well. But if we are seeking transformation, we have to be in a space where we have the infrastructure, community, and culture to feel like we can be inspired in the first place and that anything will actually come of that inspiration.

There are several frameworks and schema in the world of educator professional development that report to facilitate transformative learning, and I would feel irresponsible as a scholar in this space to not name at least a few of them:

Action Learning (see Zuber-Skerritt, 2011; Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015)

As might be expected by the name, Action Learning frameworks are action-oriented. I find participatory action learning and action research (PALAR),

specifically, to be a framework worth looking into further and exploring, as it “...is a way of thinking, feeling, living and being that is influenced by our values, worldviews and paradigms of learning, teaching and research; and in turn, that influence our behaviour, strategies, methods and therefore capacity for improving practice” (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011, p. 6, cited in Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015, p. 10) and because it prioritizes social learning.

Third Space Professionalism (see McAlpine & Hopwood, 2009; Whitchurch, 2013; Whitchurch, 2022; Solomon et al., 2006; Kandiko, 2010)

Third spaces involve “interactions between people who would not normally have worked together, where those interactions are focused on a shared (often novel) object (concept, problem, idea). In these third spaces individuals may have different personal intentions, but are drawn to working together due to common perception of the value or importance of the object at hand. These new constellations of people, and the common motive they share, offer degrees of freedom to explore new possibilities outside the constraints of established modes of working which shape interactions in the various contexts from which people come” (McAlpine & Hopwood, 2009, p. 159). I am biased in my intrigue in this framework and research, as it gave me a new phrase to describe work I have been engaged in, myself, for over a decade (and had a difficult time describing and defining). That said, it is forwarded as a site of resistance, and as contributing to the increased possibility to serve as a counterpoint to institutional hierarchies and rigid structures (see Whitchurch, 2013; Solomon et al., 2006). For example, Kandiko (2010, p. 3) argues that third space professionals can

“challenge traditional linear ways of leading and following...re-creating the university as a centre that supports creative individuals, is the home of creative teams, and the engine of creative enterprise” (cited in Whitchurch, 2013, p. 144).

Civic Engagement Models (see McConnell, 2023)

McConnell (2023) discusses Career Technical and Vocational Education (CTVE) education as a potential site for civic engagement. They argue for a “care for and repair of shared infrastructure” (McConnell, 2023, p. 284), particularly shared infrastructure that offers a public good. More specifically, McConnell (2023) argues “not just for applied civics but for revitalizing higher education’s civic mission by turning it toward repairing the dysfunctional, deteriorated state of shared infrastructure” (p. 291). I offer this, here, because I personally find it significantly thought-provoking to consider how my practice might contribute to a civic engagement mission (and in the case of some of the programming and initiatives I am working on currently, recognize the ways in which this line of think has already transformed my practice).⁸⁶

Education for Sustainable Development Scholarship (see Mulà et al., 2017)

Scholarship in this area specifically centers research, frameworks, and strategies that result in sustainable systems. Mulà et al. (2017), for example, offer a review of some of this scholarship, which helps shed light on “the professional development challenges facing universities that aim to provide a future-oriented, socially relevant and purposeful education to their students, in a climate of rapid

⁸⁶ See also “Higher Education For Good” (Czerniewicz & Cronin, 2023) for other scholarship that centers the relationship between our educational practices and broader societal concerns.

technological change, globalisation of labour markets and increasing participation in higher education worldwide” (pp. 803-804).

Networked Learning (see Dirckinck-Holmfeld & Jones, 2009, p. 281)

Networked Learning doesn't privilege a given pedagogical model. Rather, it is about *connections*. To cite Dirckinck-Holmfeld and Jones (2009), “networked learning is a socio-technical way of organising learning enabling learners to interact, connect, engage, relate and collaborate on joint enterprises and activities, through both strong and weak ties, and to dynamically accumulate and rework concepts, artefacts and knowledge in a variety of forms and from a variety of sources. Networked learning is as a consequence ever changing, with new constellations and relationships evolving depending on the engagement, interaction and contributions of the participants” (p. 281). Networked learning, as a result, would be a useful model to consider for locating strategies that support connection-building across disciplines or sectors. Other similar approaches can be found in those that center *patchworking* and *remixing* as pedagogy and praxis (see Ryberg, 2009 as an example).

Review work of continuous professional development (see Kennedy, 2014)

Kennedy (2014) puts into conversation 9 different models for continuous professional development, focusing specifically on the “fundamental issues of purpose” (p. 338) that they support. The review analyzes these 9 models, putting them into conversation with one-another, mapping them to a scale of transformation (i.e. how transformative they are), as well as a scale of increasing

capacity for professional autonomy (whereby the more transformative the model is, the higher the capacity for professional autonomy).

Care and intentionality

There are a number of ways that *care* and *intentionality* surface in digital learning spaces. As a result, there were a number of ways in which we collectively talked about *care* and *intentionality* during these interviews. Before sharing specific examples, I am going to engage you in the scholarship around *embodiment*. Again, there are a lot of ways to approach *care*, as well as a lot of ways to approach *intentionality* (especially from within scholarship). That said, my background in rhetorical studies supplied me with a lens of *embodiment*, and I offer it here not only because it influenced the direction of this dissertation, but because I find it a useful lens to share, particularly in relation to *care* and *intentionality*.

Embodiment (a definitional understanding)

This might be too simple a foundational definition, by embodiment is an approach to understanding and theorizing the *body*. “Our body is a site of knowing, experiencing, and living; we can locate our mundane everyday performances in our body” (Yajima, 2023, referencing Madison, 2005). Our body can tell us things, if we pay attention to it. So can the bodies of others. We can also learn a lot about how we orient to bodies and whether we make space for bodies. We can ask questions about whether or not we’ve designed for bodies, and if so, then whose? According to Sackey et al. (2015), “All bodies do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function,” we just have to pay attention and become aware of it (p. 39).

In a session on leadership I just recently presented, I introduced the group to the term *embodiment* as a lens to talk about leadership. I said that leadership is written on and lives in and through the body. To draw attention to what I meant, I talked about how there's a cultural perception that leaders have their 'shit' together (meaning that they aren't burnt out or managing chronic stress, etc.). This is, of course, not true. But as a result of these cultural expectations, the burnout that leaders experienced was overlooked (Pope-Ruark, 2022). So we can leverage embodied rhetoric to begin to locate this tendency because it "moves outside of the literal text on the page to consider all the ways someone composes meaning [...] they are relationally, culturally, and socially constructed" (Robinson, 2021, p. 23). As another example to explain what I meant by *embodiment*, I talked about how I present my queer identity as a leader, referencing Smith et al. (2017), in pointing out that embodiment facilitates a raised awareness around "...intersecting identities and ways of being and how these play out on/in/through the body" (p. 48). So when my face gets flushed and I begin to feel uncomfortable when colleagues I am really close with jokingly call me a thirst trap or a "good looking boy" in front of others who I haven't allowed into the space of vulnerability such that I feel comfortable with those *others* saying things like that to me or reading me in that way...like that was a part of my queerness that was private and between friends, not something I wanted associated with my public persona as a leader.⁸⁷ I also referenced *embodiment* through the things that literally keep us up at night or those gut feelings that signal to our bodies that something is not right...things I hear leaders talk about all the time. Knoblauch and Moeller (2021) refer to this as forms of "embodied

⁸⁷ See also Smith et al., 2019 for more on embodiment in Academia.

knowledge” as a result of the ways in which we know things through the body. As one final example, I talked about how we tend not to slow down in leadership, but that as a result, we have a tendency to miss “what connections were being made” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 57). This is embodiment, too, as we think about literally how fast our body is moving but it is also a reference to the body, which is a form of embodiment, as well.

There are several embodiment scholars who have even directly influenced my writing style and practice for this dissertation: Robinson (2021), Riley-Mukavetz (2014; 2016), and Cox et al. (2021) to name a few. This is because they urged me, via their scholarship, to pay more attention to my body as I worked on this dissertation. Cox et al. (2021) is actually about what we can learn about embodiment through the writing of dissertations. They share that “...writers are attached to their dissertations due to the physicality of writing them” (p. 147). When I take a second to sit and consider this, I come to realize, for instance, that my hands ache from so much typing, as do my neck and back. I will be feeling my dissertation, as a result, for a while. Yesterday my body felt weird due to travel and shifts in altitude; the words I wrote yesterday might not make as much sense as a result. I worry about this, too, for the words I composed when overly tired. My dissertation came to a pause at one point — there was an entire year that I didn’t work on it — as a result of the death of a student athlete I coached. At the time of Olivia’s death, my dissertation was the last thing on my mind. I had to remind myself that I might timeout of my degree and that, as a result of institutional structures and deadlines regarding “progress,” I would need to submit for an extension so that I could still pursue my degree. This weighed heavily on my mind and added stress to my body, but what was I supposed to do...my body still ached from crying and was

exhausted from engaging in so much emotional labor each day with the team, often shifting my own into the private spaces of my home. I was in no place to write or work on this. It was my body that told me that. I similarly cried through the whole of my dissertation defense. Days prior, one of my committee members passed away. He had meant a lot to me and had played a significant role in my journey as a graduate student at Michigan State University. I tried really hard to hold it together for the defense, but my body needed the emotional release, it needed to grieve. And so I cried.

Riley-Mukavetz (2014) actually talks about emotional labor in relation to research, saying, “Often, if I was tired or grumpy, I had to train myself to step back from the research. I had to pay attention to my body, listen to it, and re-orient my own mental, emotional, and physical self” (p. 116). Again, this isn’t easy work, especially in a capitalist structure that values and rewards speed, progress, production, and labor. Even emotional labor has become a “commodity” in this market, positioning us as feeling “the need to perform happiness, or at least “okay-ness” at work for fear that our exchange rate might go down” (Robinson, 2021, p. 35). As a personal example, my burnout and my disillusionment with the field has resulted in genuine annoyance and anger and these emotions sometimes surface at work in subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways. I was so fed up with the fact that we were talking about the same things we had just discussed three years prior, with no significant change, that I began to cry at one point during a meeting. The way my body expressed my emotions did have an impact on my colleagues, which I then had to address. Riley-Mukavetz (2016), in her scholarship on working with and through *anger*, reminded me that I have to remember that my anger has impact and consequences; anger can be productive, but it is also

deconstructive. In the instance of that meeting, it was productive for me personally because I think my supervisors finally realized the extent to which I was burnt out, but it was also deconstructive to the community environment we were otherwise trying to create in that meeting (which was a fun and inspired one with a 'we're ready to tackle big challenges and problems and develop new solutions' kind of vibe).

Point being, though, *embodiment* recognizes there is so much to see, understand, know, and learn from the body, and I do some of that work here.

Specific stories of *care* and *intentionality*

"Daughter" surfaces *care* through a story about having to attend an on-site professional development session just after the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic:

They put us in a room and they wanted to teach us online education in a room and it was mandatory to attend. And they put us together for 2 hours there, and everything we learned, we could have done online in a much more productive way. It was during COVID time, because everybody was freaking out and I felt very uncomfortable. I wasn't thinking about it. But I mean, it's such an oxymoron that we were all concerned about getting COVID, and we had to do this professional development to teach online in-person, because it was this concept that if it wasn't in-person it wasn't good enough. And it could have been done online. So all these people... I will never forget. They all have masks, and everybody was complimenting their mask, and we were in a room all freaking out. We're all sitting at arms distance, you know, whatever 6 feet...and writing on paper...still writing on paper, Maddie. And so we're like answering this survey and we're giving this to somebody else and then using hand sanitizer. So, I guess that part of it wasn't the content. The content probably was good. But I didn't learn anything. I didn't learn anything. We didn't even have our computers with us. We were instructed not to bring the computers, because it was too much to deal with digitally. But paper was okay. And so then we have to go back and do this on our computers on our own. This could have been a beautiful zoom call where we're all hands-on. But now they had to do it in person, because there is this idea that it was better, and so that I will never forget. And one of the facilitators was my colleague from French, and he's normally a person who is very shy, doesn't like to talk in front of people, and he has a little girl. And I don't think he was very happy that he had to do this in person during COVID, and

probably expose the family to the disease and the virus. And so he was sweating profusely. We all thought he had COVID, but it was more the nervousness that he had, you know. And, by the way, with masks on, we couldn't understand a word they were saying, so. Anyway, it was a whole mess. But that was my memorable experience of a bad PD. We couldn't focus.

There is a lot that I could pull from this one quote alone, but to demonstrate the connection between embodiment and *care*, we need to recognize that people are real...their bodies are real. If someone, in this story, had gotten sick, they could have died. But these facilitators weren't caring for the bodies in the room...they weren't caring for the people, the humans. "Daughter" said that her one colleague was literally sweating with nervousness. She also shared that the masks made it difficult to communicate. Likewise, she said that they were all so worried about their physical bodies that they couldn't even pay attention. These are lessons, here, in *care* that can be taught to us by the body...we just have to pay attention to it and tend to it. A practice of *care*, in this case, then, would have prioritized the body; it would have moved that professional development offering online (or even better, it would have already, intentionally, been designed for fully online engagement).

Other examples tie back into educator burnout. "Daughter" shared, "there's a reason I'm alone because I mean I never had time to have a relationship or anything like that outside of Academia. But your job should not consume your life." Similarly, "Mom" shared that the things keeping her at her job are "small stories of impact where people choose to share back." She currently works remote, but said that if another job opened up closer to her physical location, she'd strongly consider it. As much as she likes working remote and enjoys (and is grateful for) the flexibility remote work affords, she said she'd also "love to work in-person. But I'm not gonna drive- spend 3 hours in the

car every day.” But otherwise, “Mom” expressed feeling burnout, so much so that she has been considering leaving her position and institution, quite seriously, for some time now. “Storyteller” likewise shared a story of burnout:

It was almost a surreal time for us in faculty development, because literally, we had faculty that never had anything to do with the center for teaching and learning clamoring for help and we literally helped every single faculty member. And some days it was overwhelming, because you just literally went from one to the next to the next all day long, with no breaks, no time off. No lunch. No...I mean, just you know, it was...it was really a surreal time. But everybody survived it...some better than others.

“Storyteller’s” is a fairly commonly shared COVID-related lived experience, but nevertheless one that reinforces the way spaces can engage in active harm to our bodies...something that we see in the stories shared by each of these educator professionals (e.g. getting no sleep and not eating, never being in a relationship, being so burnout out that you want to leave your job, etc.).

Educator professionals want to be recognized as people (and for that acknowledgement to lead to intentional design). “Dungeon Master” offers a really great example of this:

...the personal side of it, that kind of was why that was so fulfilling to me at the time and what I mean by that in that space. Even though I was still kind of like- I'd considered myself an educator, I dabbled in online things. But it was also really the first time that I felt like others were kind of like treating me as a peer in the space, as well, if that makes sense, because one of the things about like face-to-face to that point is like, and I grew in my kind of face-to-face offerings and kind of understanding, and all of that, but I was pretty young back then, and so like it was one of those things where there wasn't the kind of overhead, or the baggage of being a young professional in the space. So really what it boils down to is there were folks that were there that were open and recognizing just me...as a person...as a person that was wanting to learn and explore. And like that may have been, I don't know if this was the case, but that may have been around the first time that some of my other posts and thoughts and journals and blogs and

stuff have been responded to. I remember one individual, she was playing with online puzzle creation tools. And I remember she had made a puzzle out of one of my profile pictures and it's just one of those like, almost like a silly kind of thing, but I definitely felt included in the community in ways that made it really valuable, because some of the blogosphere experiences I've had in the past is where, like you're writing and you might have some responding and whatnot, but it's never guaranteed per se, right. Like sometimes you'll have views and folks will just come and maybe read it and whatnot. But you don't ever know who's doing it and who's participating in that way. And this connected learning MOOC was one of those times where we were...yeah, we were just gathered and personally kind of getting to interact with each other and getting to know each other as people. And that was...I don't know...that was one of the things that was really powerful about it.

In his case, he recounts a deeply meaningful experience for him, which carried so much value because, as he expressed, it was one of the first times he felt like he was treated like a peer, a professional, a colleague, and a person in an online professional development space. He and I talked about this further, and the more he storied it, the more obvious it became just how impactful it was. While on the Zoom call with me, he actually pulled up the digital spaces and looked back at what all was contributed, reminiscing about the community and the learning environment that was facilitated. So the space, for him, was a *caring* one.

“Satirist” also talks about *care* in relation to being recognized as people:

I think that also gets to people who do that like, we're all humans and when we care so much about something, and we're hired to do something, and the organization does not give a shit about it at all, sorry to swear, that gets demoralizing. And you are like 'I can put in minimal effort, and I get paid the same.' Then if I don't, and after a while you stop.

From his example, we can also see that a lack of care can directly impact performance, as well (e.g. “Satirist” said that in demoralizing working spaces there is no incentive to put in anything beyond the minimal effort). Elsewhere in his interview, “Satirist” said,

“Having an experience where your personal experience is valued and relating to the material is useful.” He described this as being something he looks for, but which he also thinks is lacking the most.

As one final example, “PhD-less” shared about the importance of getting together physically in his culture (namely that it is still really important, even though they have embraced online learning): “being able to touch, to feel, you know, to see each other, have coffee and the like. It’s a big, big thing in my culture.” We could turn to *embodiment* rather obviously, here, through the mentioning of the different senses and sensory experiences. To “PhD-less” the act of coming together physically was a way to communicate and demonstrate a commitment to *care*. He said it was to make sure people “don’t feel lonely, they don’t feel lost, they don’t feel disengaged.” He also said that when he designs an asynchronous digital learning environment, he tries to carry this same goal and commitment into his design practices.

Moving now to *intentionality*, what educator professionals described were design practices, strategies, and approaches that demonstrated that facilitators / designers were acting out a practice of *care*...that they were paying close attention and genuinely considering things like the body, our individual differences and needs, etc. Here are some representative excerpts (as a note, *intentionality* surfaced quite a lot):

I’m one of those folks who will bristle when people talk about how easy or inexpensive online educational experiences are to develop. Because, you know, in fact, what I just described means for a single lesson or piece of educational content, you’re maybe doing 6 or 7 times the work that you would if you had expectations of just having a one-to-one conversation with somebody in a classroom or on the street about some topic that you want to educate them on. It’s not just that you have to treat worthwhile contents in a variety of different

communicative modes, but you also have to think persuasively about any of those modes, so that folks can actually operationalize and actualize the educational content that they're ingesting.

(From my interview with "Punk")

...thinking about the available means of producing educational content - means of engagement - thinking about the learners of a specific cohort and what you know of them, and what their needs are, and that's always unfolding. And it's always formative and requires ongoing assessment. And this is it. This is the other one is technology getting in the way of any of these spaces. That was the thing that kept like fluttering back and forth. I'm like, what am I not talking about? I usually talk about this. And it's the idea that in the technology space, I'm not going to like gate it by saying educational technology space, but when we are choosing the means of engagement, are we fully addressing a learning curve, and also is a learning curve becoming its own educational opportunity that we're ignoring, and that ends up stealing the time and the attention and the will and the interest away from those who are trying to educate? [...] I want everyone to feel like they have a means of engaging the content and expressing themselves in

comparable ways. And effective technology use in learning opportunities is technology that gets out of the way and allows you to focus on the content and the tasks at hand.

(From my interview with "Punk")

...accessible, both like digital digitally accessible and access, like easy to access, across identities and roles. And, you know, an example would be like if something is framed as for faculty, I'm not gonna feel like it's a space where I'm welcome to be, because I'm not a faculty member, and I chose to not be a faculty member. Quite intentionally. And so that would be a signal to me that, even if the goals of the learning and the design of the experience sound interesting to me. I am not the intended audience. And so I'm going to have to do extra work to make this meaningful for me. So instead, if it is designed and communicated clearly from the beginning to be accessible to an inclusive and broad audience, that is important to me. And that goes from everything from how you have framed your research, audience as educator, pretending that you don't know anything about me, that resonates very strongly with me. You know, all the way to videos being closed-captioned and different kinds of bodies being represented in the examples and the text and how we are highlighting people and knowing. All of those kinds of things are either going to pull me in deeper, or they're gonna push me away. There's not really a neutral. It's either 'm gonna be like, 'oh, I see, I see you all

trying to like be really intentional with what you're asking me to do, and how you're representing voices.' Or, 'Wow, you're really not doing that.' And I don't think that there's like an in-between. People might not intentionally be doing that, but by not intentionally not doing it, you're making a choice to not do it.

(From my interview with "Mom")

The bad design of the learning can be so contextual. What someone appreciates, someone else may not appreciate. But I think the thing that really turns me off is that if I feel, if I don't get a sense that the design behind this was done with a lack of intentionality or care.

(From my interview with "Musician")

If there are a set of values or strategic visions that's either framed by leadership or understood by the members of that community 'this is gonna make us better,' right. And I see value in it, and it's relevant, then I'm going to make and take the time to do that. And that's enough incentive. That's a hard proposition to try to convince, unless we've taken the time to really know who we are and where are we going? And then within that 'Where are we going?' How do I individually fit into that? And I think if that is framed, then you have the motivation. So then you've got to check the external versus the internal motivation to help define and frame what that time is. And this is where the ecosystem becomes important as an institution. If we're gonna be known as caring then everything that we do and how we do it should come out of that frame. And if there's consistency and not, you know, cognitive dissonance, we're kind of grooving along. The difference between the participatory nature of an event and a recorded event is that if the design of that event is meant to create a type of connection and presence where that participation synchronously is important. then all you're doing is reunifying that by making a recording and putting it on online, you're just making a PDF of it. Then it's not going to be nearly as valuable. What would be more valuable is a short and condensed video that would point you towards that event. If that event is designed as such, to know that we're trying to design it with the people in the room. But we're also trying to design it for people who may be connecting synchronously, but remotely. And we're trying to design it for people in the future to engage with it asynchronously. Then we have to take the asynchronous component design seriously.

(From my interview with "Musician")

...don't just have your asynchronous options be the recordings of your synchronous options. That is totally, 100%, what we were doing most of the time for the last couple of years, mainly a time thing, also mainly a recognition that

most people are going to want to come to the synchronous sessions and 'cause that's what they asked for. So we're kind of looking at that as a secondary thing. But something I felt was lacking was the ability to keep track of what you've done and build towards something. And so we're building out that experience of you know, our defined offerings are categorized. Each offering is gonna have some sort of badge related to it. The badge is gonna work towards their certificate in that offering and at the very least people will have one central location they can go to to track what they've already done. You know, 'cause these things happen over multiple years. And keep in mind, and remember or find what's interesting. And then, with that same vein, instead of just having the end result, be the recording of the webinars, we're actually going back in and editing them and adding in guidance, you know, sometimes simple instructions, sometimes other things. So that it becomes a more, you know, valuable asynchronous experience, rather than just watching something that already happened.

(From my interview with "Satirist")

Each of these contributions all speak to *intentionality* in very similar ways. But in brief, it is the practice of taking the time to genuinely consider your learning community. It is deep reflection and ethical and responsible decision-making around your choice of technologies. It is the recognition that everything doesn't work for everyone. It is establishing who you are and where you are going. It is the use of inclusive facilitation strategies. It is alignment to goals and outcomes and unique learner needs. It is all these things. It's deliberate and purposive practice.

Relevance

Relevance arguably could have been subsumed under *Care and Intentionality*, but I call it out through its own category, because it is a really specific strategy of care and intentionality. First, let's start with some excerpts:

...it needs to be relevant. And what I mean by relevance is a little bit complex, because it requires some forethought or some thinking by the content creators, by the education providers. If you think about the rhetorical situation of its

supposed learners or prospective learners, does the content that they're making available....is it important? Is it timely? Can it stand on its own? Is it exhaustive?

(From my interview with "Punk")

I'm getting training on stuff that I don't know why I've been asked to do it. It's not...you know? It will become apparently relevant at some point. But I'm not having the eyes to see and the ears to hear it in that moment, and therefore I spend my time. I click the box, I get it done. I get their certificate, I add the badge. But then, when I actually go to apply the, you know...how to use a pivot table in excel, or whatever it may be, I have to go back and relearn it. So for me, when we talk about timeliness and relevance, that's really powerful. And that's where asynchronous, I think, becomes a differentiator because I'm not beholden to the system schedule...another faculty member schedule. I can seek out those sources that I need in that moment.

(From my interview with "Musician")

I needed to learn SPSS. I tolerated a lot of bad training to learn SPSS, but I needed to do it, right, so the goal drove me through the "bad" (his emphasis) design of that learning.

(From my interview with "Musician")

As we can see, the idea of *relevance* is really closely tied to *timeliness* for both "Punk" and "Musician." In this way, it is also distinct from *alignment*. What "Punk" and "Musician" are both talking about here is whether a given topic or strategy covered by professional development will be able to meet the needs of an individual learning at a given point in time. Now, why I personally find this so interesting is because it actually plays on the notion of time. A learner, at a specific moment, we'll have some sort of need that they are hoping to address. This could be information they need, or a strategy, or process, you name it. Whatever this thing is, it could be relatively ephemeral in the larger context of this student's learning. That said, so long as it's meeting that need at that time, it could be considered relevant. However, professional development could also be considered relevant in the way that "Punk" is asking us to think about,

through talking about professional development as standing on its own or as being exhaustive. If something can stand on its own, that means that no matter when I engage with it, it will be relevant. We can take, as a specific example, the difference between a professional development experience aimed at teaching people how to leverage Google Hangouts for discussions as compared to one that aims to explore theories of engagement. The one that centers Google Hangouts might become irrelevant if Google goes under as a company or if Hangouts as a feature is no longer supported from a technological standpoint by Google. Comparatively, the one centering engagement theories will arguably always be relevant...even 30 years into the future (unless, of course, you don't believe engagement is relevant). In a similar manner, if something is approached with the goal of being exhaustive, it might be considered relevant if this level of detail is truly helpful in that moment. If I am designing a training and want to implement an engagement strategy, I could turn to a professional learning experience for ideas and recommendations. If the professional learning experience I turn to provides an exhaustive review and history of engagement as incorporated into professional training, that won't be *relevant* to me in that particular moment. This doesn't mean it cannot become relevant, but this is where we return to the relationship between *timeliness* and *relevance*.

Relevance is prevalent in scholarship in the teaching and learning world. For instance, Killingsworth and Gilbertson (1986) surface the relationship between relevance and time in their work in Technical Writing. They argue that "to be considered relevant [...], all the modes of technical writing must relate to the *present* reality of the audience" (p. 287, their emphasis). They understand the *present* reality of the audience

to map to and shift with the specific audience member (meaning that the same person could return to the same document at two different points in time, therefore resulting in two separate present realities for that one individual. I think this is helpful in thinking back to the ways we design for asynchronous digital learning environments. I shared this earlier, but in my own practice, when I am leading a virtual session (or any virtual experience that I know will be recorded), I always refer to the future audience while I am synchronously speaking. This is because I am imagining that future present reality and because when someone engages with that recording in the future, I want to be speaking to them as though I am there with them in the present, playing into that concept of a session “afterlife” (Muñoz,2019). If we were to treat relevance, then, as a design challenge, how else can we make asynchronous digital learning content and experiences as relevant as possible?

Agency, personalization, and customization

As has, and will continue, to come up throughout the dissertation, *choice* is hugely important and meaningful to these educator professionals. That said, *choice* is not necessarily the same thing as concepts of *agency, personalization, and customization*. They are similar and related, but not synonymous. Again, this category could have been included under the Care and Intentionality subsection. However, just as was the case with *relevance*, I find benefit and nuance in separating out *agency, personalization, and customization*. During my conversation with “Introvert,” we were talking about engaging in asynchronous learning through the use of tools like TikTok. While telling a story about scrolling, she commented that if something comes up on her screen that she doesn’t want to engage in at that moment in time, she can just swipe to

another video. She articulated this by saying, “Nope, not today. I am just here for cute baby animals. We'll unpack therapy later. TikTok therapy tomorrow.” In other words, she has the *agency* to choose whether or not to engage in that video or not. As compared to *choice*, *agency* requires the means to enact choice. I can decide that I don't want to watch a video, but if I don't have the power to not watch that video (i.e. the technological skills or tools, the knowledge, the capacity, etc.), then I don't have the *agency*. In this way, *agency* is closely aligned to action and the ability to act. When you don't have *agency* as a learner, this can be quite “demotivating.” “Sci-Fi Fan” shares an example of this based on her own experiences:

That whoever designed that even knows who you are, you know, or even has a clue about what you need, and it feels so disconnected to me. It's very demotivating. And I have seen it with students, you know, they just get frustrated and give up. It doesn't feel like a human being. It feels like a technical manual that was written in a different language and translated to English. And you have no idea what's happening. And that is a terrible feeling. It is so discombobulating, so unsettling. And that's enough to just ruin it, you know. And so I think that's the biggest thing that it gives students the wrong idea about who they are, and what their role is, and what it means to be a learner, and it just is so disrespectful to them and thoughtless. And I feel that from that side when I'm taking learning that was thrown out that way, you know, and it's terrible. I don't know what else to say about it. It's just so demotivating, isolating.

Having *agency* in online professional development (particularly asynchronous experiences) decreases concerns around exiting or leaving a professional development experience. Both “Dungeon Master” and “Architect” expressed that they didn't really feel like they had the *agency* to leave synchronous professional development (regardless of whether that was online or onsite). This is due to the fact that they feel social pressures to stay. Some units or facilitators even track who is in attendance and when they leave. So while “Dungeon Master” and “Architect” had the technical power to leave (meaning

they could have clicked “Leave” on their device), they didn’t have the social power to leave. Asynchronous digital learning, however, eases this concern and builds agency.

“Dungeon Master” said that “One of the joys of online spaces is they're easy to leave.”

“Architect” commented similarly, saying,

I can just fast forward to the point where I left off and watch the rest of it later. It's not that it's any less important, but having that ability was really great. So I appreciated that. But the other thing of it is the decision to leave was partially like, nobody knows whether I'm coming or going anyway. Does it really matter if I'm there in the moment, or if I'm there at all?

We can then consider asynchronous digital learning as building agency by removing the pressures of being a captive audience member. Finally, on the note of *agency*,

“Introvert” did share that as an introvert, she relies on choice and having the agency to decide when and where and how she engages. As you might recall, for instance, she shared that when she hears the word “breakout rooms” in a virtual session, she’s out of there quickly because she has grown to expect something very specific of breakout rooms, but she also knows that genuinely with others expends emotional energy which she doesn’t have an endless supply of. So again, having that *agency* is vital for her, particularly given her introvertedness, as she shared.

Before moving to *personalization* and *customization*, I will first briefly talk about the difference between *agency* and *autonomy*. To advance an extremely pithy definition, *autonomy* is the capacity to do it on our own. As “Interdisciplinary” puts it, “I can get it all by myself and get it and do it when I need it.” I raise this difference here not only because it is an important distinction to make in the context of learning, but also because within the context of professional development, some make the case for boundaries and limitations to autonomy. Blackmore and Blackwell, for instance,

question whether we can actually have “autonomy” if we exist under the pressures of professionalism (2006, p. 375). *Autonomy* and our capacity for professional autonomy is a significant component of transformative models of learning (see Kennedy, 2014 as an example). So if Blackmore and Blackwell (2006) are correct, I think remembering that we can support autonomy through building agency (even if we can never achieve autonomy...again, if we agree with Blackmore and Blackwell (2006)). Other scholars have wrestled with this as well. We can look to Fung (2006) for a discussion around “accountable autonomy,” whereby we tend to our own, local needs, while still aligning to a centralized power. We can also look to Lopez and Willis (2004), who offer “situated freedom,” wherein we have the capacity to make choices, but those choices are bounded in some way by our context and the conditions within that context...our situatedness. Regardless, *agency* and *autonomy* are not the same thing.

Turning now to *personalization* and *customization*, by this the educator professionals were meaning that they would have the agency to pursue unique pathways during the learning experience. As opposed to having to follow a strict, cookie-cutter, learning experience, we could instead choose bits and pieces or remix or swap one thing out for another, etc. Facilitator-articulated outcomes become differently important in some ways in this kind of learning context (for they have to be flexible enough to accommodate customized learning of this sort). I decided to include both the terms *personalization* and *customization* because they are not entirely the same. For instance, if we consider these terms in the context of an online shopping site, if that site is *personalized*, that likely means that the company has implemented a practice such that when I engage with the site, it is updated through data-informed information about

my use, my previous purchases, perhaps my geographical location, etc. If that site is *customized*, though, this would mean that I as a user have changed, adapted, or otherwise remixed the site. For instance, if I wanted the site to be translated to another language, that is a type of customization. The key difference is in who is doing the labor. In the case of personalization, it is not the user (and if we extended this to a classroom, the user would equate to the learner, as opposed to the designer). An example of the ways personalization and customization came up during interviews can be seen in my conversation with “Blogger.” She storied an innovate digital learning experience that she says she has never seen before, but has always wanted to create:

This has always been sort of a dream of mine to be able to create: is that when you enter whatever module or class it is, that it could kind of give you customized content, like the instructor would build a range of objects...you know, you have learning objectives and all that kind of stuff. But that, you know, if I have a big love of culinary arts, right (which I do)...that maybe if it's an article, you know, if it's a psychology class or something, that there's one that favors heavily on analogies with food or something, but that there's a range of articles that have a concept for students to learn. But you kind of get this piece of content, and then you could also see the other content there. But it kind of helps navigate the path through the learning in a slightly customized way. And we talk a lot about, as you know, customized education and stuff like that. I just don't think it's at the really nuanced point yet to form a learning sort of connection. So if I had the ability to imagine and dream up those spaces that would be, I think, really cool to experience and also create.

Looking at her example, she only mentions the concept of customization explicitly, but I would argue that it is a good example of both an effort on the part of the instructor to personalize the content, as well as an opportunity on the part of the learner to customize their learning journey. In order for this learning experience to work, the instructor would need to collect information about the special interests of their learners to then create content with them specifically in mind (or ideally have such a robust and

well-tagged system that this doesn't require a high-degree of labor each semester).

Another strategy would be that the instructor would minimally design course assignments in such a way that it flexibly allowed learners to find their own special interest-related articles (so long as it met the parameters of the assignment).

Additionally, the learner would then need to take up the opportunity they have to choose which content they want to engage in, specifically, thus customizing their experience.

Multiple modes of engagement

Something to know about me, as a scholar, is that I am deeply passionate about *engagement*. I like to geek out about it. So, I was excited when engagement surfaced as a 'must-have,' particularly in the way of multiple modes of engagement. To "Low Income Learner," he values digital learning spaces where he can just *be* and also where he can experience genuine connection.

Yeah, I think part of it for me is I personally feel that tension because I'm in my hoodie, basketball shorts, no shoes. And you know I'm in my office with a bunch of board games and whatever. And yeah, anyways, I love being able to just like even just listen in. Like sometimes if I'm at a webinar, I just throw the laptop on the counter, and I, you know, prep my lunch, and then while I eat my lunch I'm watching this webinar...whatever. And that's awesome. I can't do that in the office, or you know, not in the same way, and can't be casual and comfortable, and that definitely resonates with me and like my own like personal preferences, right. Like, I don't wanna drive 23 miles across town to go into the office. I wanna just be at my house and do my thing. And I don't want to travel across the country to go to a conference in Toronto, or whatever. But at the same time, when I'm there, like having those opportunities to meet and talk with people in person, there's just certain things that you can't do asynchronously. To get back to the actual conversation, it's really hard. I don't know. Maybe I don't believe that actually. It is more challenging...I don't think it's impossible. It is more challenging, more time consuming, to have real conversation. In the sense of just like connecting as people about life and other things that are important to you.

So for “Low Income Learner,” he is primarily framing multiple modes of engagement around the choice between asynchronous and synchronous learning (including both onsite and online). This is similarly echoed by both “Blogger” and “Storyteller”:

I think that so much of digital and online learning has been top down, or sort of things decided within a frame already, in terms of that engagement, because it gets messy to have groups figure out when they're going to meet and things like that. But there's something to the learner having the agency to also choose the level of synchronicity they want to have.

(From my interview with “Blogger”)

...definitely with design, I am, and this is something I emphasize in in my workshops and back to learning communities and anybody who listen, basically, that the design must be engaging on multiple levels for the students. Otherwise, it's too easy to just let an online course slide. Students, unfortunately, are not really good with time management skills. And so it's so easy when you've got so many things going on in your life...it's just easy to say, 'Oh, well, I'll get to my online class tomorrow. I'll get to it tomorrow' and then, you know, then it's a deadline, and you've already missed it, or something. And so that's where, from a design perspective, I think it is crucial that we basically entice the students to participate. And that's why I am so infatuated with gamification, because I do see it as the best way to actually keep students engaged, keep them coming back.

(From my interview with “Storyteller”)

I will just briefly comment on these two contributions before moving to the next.

“Blogger” reminds us that we, as educator designers, have a degree of control of the space (if we design it as such). If we choose not to offer multiple modes of engagement, that is a choice we are making. But this also means it is a choice we are making for others, therefore setting parameters around how they can or cannot engage. So choice is an important factor to consider (and one of “Blogger’s” ‘must-haves’). “Storyteller” extends the concept of multiple modes of engagement to types of engagement, by offering gamification to the mix. She argues that it is “the best way to actually keep

students engaged.” Nevertheless (and regardless of her personal love of gamification), she makes the case for choice and diversity in engagement.

Adding a bit more nuance to the conversation, “Punk” raises different modalities (in the way of referencing video, audio, etc.):

It is multimodal in how it engages me with content because I can't always ingest educational resources or materials or opportunities in the same way. I have kids. I have a family, bunch of other responsibilities. And so having content available in a spectrum of different modalities, is incredibly important. [...] Are you also expressing it in a variety of different digital modes that allow for engagement, regardless of, you know, if I can listen to something, if I can't listen to something, if I can read something, if I can't read something?

To “Punk,” providing different modalities better supports their needs as a learner right now given their family situation and life. They point out that sometimes they might be able to read something or listen to something, and at other times they might not have that affordance. I am thinking, for instance, about if your kid just recently went to bed and your office is right in the next room and you don’t have headphones, listening to something might not be the best option in that situation.

These considerations align well with my own orientation to engagement, which is a practice of critical embodiment. Cedillo (2018) states that “By developing pedagogies based in critical embodiment, we can recognize the diverse ways by which we all navigate spaces on the page and in the world” (n.p.). Functionally, this is what my orientation to engagement recognizes: the “diverse ways by which we all navigate spaces.”

What this means in practice (and I will talk about this with respect to online learning and specifically online educator professional development), is that I genuinely and personally do not care (meaning I am not bothered nor offended) by whether

someone is off camera or never comes “on mic.” In fact, if they never even contribute to the chat, that’s ok with me, as well. I use these as initial examples because I do know a lot of facilitators who use these as points of engagement. These aren’t the only points of engagement, but I recognize that feelings about them will differ depending on how we weigh different points of engagement. For me, when I took time to think about what really mattered when I facilitated educator professional development online, it was that everyone that came fulfilled *something* they came to the experience to fulfill. I know that I won’t always do that for everyone, but this goal allowed me to shift my perspective. It liberated me from fears that no one was listening by allowing me to instead see that people were still in the virtual room with me. Who am I to say they’re not listening just because they don’t add anything in the chat or come on camera or mic? I don’t know that they’re not listening. This, to me, was an important point of reflection and transformed my approach to online facilitation. It has also resulted in a much more inclusive and welcoming environment. This is actually something I have become known for online...creating a welcoming and inclusive environment and effective facilitation⁸⁸. What strategies do I use? Well one is simply acknowledging the many ways the people in the space might be coming to the space and letting them know that, no matter how they came to the space, they are welcome there. I don’t mean to oversimplify the practice of this...because it took practice...but I do mean to draw attention to the fact that it is possible and it is something you can absolutely learn to do. I will note though, that I believe it only works because I genuinely mean it and believe it. So I acknowledge and welcome the different possible modes of engagement.

⁸⁸ During her interview, “Daughter” actually commented on this, specifically.

This approach shows up as I facilitate breakout rooms, for example. It is, at this point, a well-known behavior that when educator professionals hear “breakout rooms,” many leave the virtual space. As I sat and reflected on how my perspective on engagement would address that tendency, I decided to change the way I introduced breakout rooms. Before I even begin to open the rooms, I remind people that no matter how they came to the space, that I am glad they are there and that they are welcome. I also make space for them in breakout rooms by publicly welcoming all ways of engaging into breakout rooms. For example, I welcome people to be “flies on the wall” if that’s how they can best learn that day (meaning they might never come on camera, on mic, or engage in the chat). This is a fundamentally different approach than most people are used to, myself included. Breakout rooms usually bring with them a very specific expectation around engagement (“Blogger” refers to this as “schema” elsewhere in this dissertation). Mine is a pluralistic one. Mine assumes all possible ways to engage and actively attempts to make space for all those possibilities. The result? Well, I don’t typically experience the “breakout room mass exodus.”

So what might this look like, more specifically? I never use a script, so what I say changes a little every time, but when I welcome people into a virtual space, I always say something that approximates this:

Before we begin the session I wanted to take a brief moment to acknowledge all the ways you all came here today and situate what that means within the context of this session. You could be driving right now and therefore maybe you can’t safely view the screen, come on camera, or hop on mic. Welcome! Maybe you are in another meeting and are multitasking because that’s where you are right now and that’s the only way you felt like you could come to this session. I see you, I’ve been there. This session is for you too. Maybe you don’t like coming on camera, maybe you’re joining via a mobile device and it makes it more difficult to access the chat. No matter how you came to this session, you are here and

that's all I care about. So come on camera, or don't. Hop on mic or remain muted. Use the chat, or never contribute. Either way, this session is designed with you in mind. So with that, welcome! Let's get started.

In doing so, I aim to challenge dominant narratives around what it means to “show up” to professional development and what it means to be present and engaged during professional development. I aim to argue that we can successfully design and facilitate more inclusive and welcoming online educator professional development spaces by imagining and validating all the ways people might be joining and what they are bringing to the space (including barriers to dominant modes of engagement).

When I surfaced this practice as an example during my interviews, it mapped precisely to the ways in which educator professionals like “Blogger,” “Storyteller,” and “Punk” orient to multiple modes of engagement. It is not simply facilitating choice in terms of synchronicity; it is also facilitating choice with respect to modality.

Alignment and organization

While this subsection represents a “shorter” one, I will provide a reminder that this doesn't make it any less significant. *Alignment* and *organization* were among the 9 ‘must-have’ categories for well-designed asynchronous digital learning environments. I am a big personal fan of memorable quotes. “It does what it says on the tin,” was an Irish saying offered during my conversation with “Blogger.” She used it as an entry point to talking about one of the things she uses to assess whether educator professional development was “good” or “bad,” in her opinion as a learner; the alignment / misalignment of what the learning experience said it was going to do versus what it actually did. Here is the full quote:

I had a really bad experience yesterday. I was an attendee of a workshop. It was proposed as a workshop. I won't get into details about it, but it was not a

workshop. It did not do- One of my favorite Irish sayings is, "it does what it says on the tin." And this workshop did not do what it said on the tin. Like, there was no interaction. It was being told what was happening. We were given an illusion of choice, and there was no choice, and there was clearly no thought behind the experience. So I think about experiences I have facilitated or tried to experience, and what I really try to do is honor and get to know as much as possible the people that are in the room, virtual or otherwise, around me, and making sure that I am listening and engaging and scaffolding and trying to provide that experience to get them, either if it's within the context of an academic module or across, what the objectives say.

This was, perhaps, one of the most consistently raised measures of judgment on the part of the group of educator professionals I interviewed for this dissertation. Many shared that if there was significant misalignment, they would not only disengage from the experience (i.e. leave), it might result in them intentionally choosing not to take professional development run by that facilitator (or facilitators) ever again. As one example, "Introvert" said,

...misalignment between what they said I would get out of it. It doesn't necessarily have to be like- I'm thinking of learning objectives that someone might put together in a bullet-form list versus just the general like paragraph description that they gave. If at some level there is misalignment, I'm going to be pissed.

She expanded on her prioritization of alignment and organization by also talking about *navigation*. In her experience, "You can have amazing content and meaningful activities, but if your student can't easily find them and navigate them, they're not gonna have a good experience, no matter how well anything else was designed." As a learner, she therefore idealizes learning experiences that function as "a properly tagged resource." She wants to be able to search it, know what the goals are at the frontend, know who the facilitator is, know what type of learning will happen and what the assignments are, what is about to happen, and what she might get out of it. "PhD-less" shares these

sentiments. He expressed that organization and navigation are of high importance for him:

How is it designed? How is it organized? Sometimes you might go through a good course, but you feel like there's something not clicking. You know, there's no good organization. It's like you have a fear that you may not even achieve the outcomes.

On the mention of outcomes, educator professionals felt nuanced ways about them. They called them out as important and did say that if they were not included that signals something for them, however, they also acknowledged that they bring their own goals and outcomes to learning experiences (you'll find this explored further in the final subsection of this Chapter). "Low Income Learner," for instance, said, "I know what my goals are [...] I design my own outcomes" and "Introvert" said, "I usually have some amount of overlap between their outcomes and the ones I'm there for. But yeah, I definitely cherry pick." I find that this prompts a generative design challenge: how do we both design with clear goals and outcomes in mind (knowing that these are helpful for supporting and communicating alignment, organization, and navigation), while also having one of those goals and outcomes be making space for and honoring the goals and outcomes that learners themselves bring to a space? I personally believe that this can be accomplished quite simply (though you all can be the judge of this strategy); I often leverage transparency. In this dissertation, for instance, I acknowledged that I did have a specific question I was exploring and that I came to this dissertation with specific points of interest, but I also directly acknowledged you as a reader and have not only acknowledged that you came to this dissertation for personal reasons, I have, at multiple points, encouraged you to engage in this dissertation with those reasons in mind (e.g. I've encouraged you to skip around, search for relevant terms, take what is

meaningful and not worry about whether I'll be offended if you don't read or like every word). These were small rhetorical moves, but if they served to validate you as a reader (i.e. learner) in the space of this dissertation and also supported your agency to engage in the ways that make sense to you, then I accomplished at least one primary thing I was hoping to accomplish with this dissertation (which was facilitating you accomplishing at least one thing *you* hoped to accomplish by engaging in this dissertation). This in mind, I'll encourage you to reflect on this type of strategy and decide for yourself if you thought it was effective (i.e. calling it out so transparently at the frontend).

A similar design challenge, for me, surfaces with the consideration of those who wish to explore (such as "Dungeon Master," who said that he idealizes learning experiences that afford space for exploration). How do we intentionally design for the *losing of one's way* and for *meandering*? Halberstam (2011) proposes that "to lose one's way, and indeed to be prepared to lose more than one's way" can be a generative goal (p. 6). In asynchronous digital learning spaces, I can get lost in thought, I can pursue pathways of interest and become joyfully disoriented. I can spend hours thinking about something before I finally realize that I am technically "off the path" that was created for me. What if we forgo pathways and instead question the path itself? What if we allow ourselves the time and space to get lost?

"Punk," likewise, brings in an element of nuance to the category of *Alignment and Organization*, by adding that "effective technology use in learning opportunities is technology that gets out of the way and allows you to focus on the content and the tasks at hand." I include this here because what "Punk" is effectively raising is that our choice

of technology should align to the goals and outcomes of the learning experiences we are designing (as well as the needs of the learners). If it doesn't, it might "get in the way" of learning.

Flexibility

How does time function to prioritize the lives of those already privileged?

(Cedillo et al., 2021, p. 22)

Remarkably, there was quite a bit of nuance in terms of the ways in which these educator professionals were orienting around *flexibility*, and each had something to do with *time*. I've organized the excerpts below into sub-categories (you can think of these as themes if this makes more sense to you), each of which maps to some rationale for flexibility in relationship to time⁸⁹.

Not having enough time

In education we are over committed, under resourced, and underprepared for change. So time becomes a critical factor.

(From my interview with "Interdisciplinary")

My time is very valuable and very precious, and I'm going to choose to spend my time in those environments that I actually see an evidentiary warrant, or, you know, align with that. And if it doesn't, I'm just not gonna spend my time there.

(From my interview with "Musician")

I'm looking for something because I have a need I'm trying to solve. And I'm looking for the best, I guess- and that's the question. What makes it the best avenue? Not only for myself, but for my faculty, knowing that the biggest barrier is really the time barrier, the incentive barrier, and people seeing what are they

⁸⁹ There are plenty of other scholars out there thinking about *time* (see, for example, Graves Wolf, 2019 and Kidd, 2023).

going to get out of this? So when I mean the best, I am I able to do a calculus that coming out of this environment, you're going to come away with 3 things that's going to stick and change your practice?

(From my interview with "Musician")

I don't know if it's wise to record this or not, but I often sign up for webinars and if I can watch part of it, then I do but I often go back and use the links to listen to it while I'm working on other things, because my schedule has gotten really jam packed with stuff. So it's about the only way that I can get my own professional development in. So I'm grateful for the webinars that people record because those are invaluable to be able to have that flexibility.

(From my interview with "Architect")

Constraints on time

There has to be the ability for me to like engage at my own pace. So with some kind of mechanism for like pause and return. I feel like that's a must-have. Like I have 2 small people in my life and I can never- it is very rare that I can sit down and do one thing from start to finish like, even if it is intended. So I feel like that's really important for me.

(From my interview with "Mom")

So I've been on vacation last week, and the week before was insanely busy, and it kind of pushed my physical limits like I'm starting to pay more attention to my capacity. And so I had done 7 presentations that week. 2 or 3 of them, I can't remember, were original things, you know, the ones that we've done over and over again. There were a couple of them I could probably do in my sleep if I had to. But that's probably not the best experience for the participants either. So I wanna be mindful of that. But towards the end of the week, just before my last presentation with a colleague, I started getting a migraine. It was because I didn't eat and I didn't drink enough water. And so it's taken me way too long in my lifetime to realize that those things are really critical for doing your best. And yeah, I could not string together a sentence for the life of me, and I was standing in front of people. And so I am going to return to the practice of trying to block out time and making sure that I can get the things in that I need to know. I was hoping to go to another conference this year, but things were just so busy I didn't. Like, I blocked it out on my calendar, and things still showed up in there. So making the time to do the things that are really important.

(From my interview with "Architect")

Respect for people's time

...what immediately comes to mind is a respect for others' time and interests. I mean, you can even chop it up to something as complex as cognitive load, where I mean, because of the modularity that's allowed for by a asynchronous learning experiences, you're able to chunk content, break it up again. It really indulges folks on their own time and at their own level, where I feel like there's often in synchronous, I could find a lack of preparation from time to time in terms of, you know, really figuring out 'here's all of this. Is it useful? Is it meaningful? Is it valuable?' Or are people going to feel like there's a bunch of filler as part of their synchronous engagement?

(From my interview with "Punk")

Timelines and end-points

I can't tell you for how many coursera courses I've said, 'Oh, my gosh! So exciting!' And then, like I get through the first module, and it's just me, and I'm not like I'm not doing it for anything. Besides, I thought it was interesting, but because there was no like actual impetus for me to finish, there was no like group accountability or or like hook, maybe they're like books that I read the first 3 chapters of, and then they're on my shelf behind me. Someday maybe I'll return to them. So I do feel like the timeline is a component.

(From my interview with "Mom")

Judgements of time spent

...this is kind of interesting. What I've noticed is like if there are PDs that take a lot of time and somebody's putting in like all the time and effort into it, I have seen it, I've noticed it within myself, and I've also foreseen it from colleagues that people are kind of like a little bit like they'll mock or condemn people that are actually taking so much time and efforts. Like, 'You don't have time to do that like, what are you doing like? This is ridiculous like, how did you even complete this PD, that took like 80 hours was like- did you even do your job?' Right, like it's kinda like that. Like 'I'm proud of you for taking time for yourself' is like what would be my secondary thought. But my initial reaction is like, 'how did you even do that?' Right? Like 'I know what your job is, and how much time and effort you should be putting into these other areas like, how did you even complete like a PD, that takes time like that?'

(From my interview with "Low Income Learner")

Time-efficiencies

Before COVID, people were very negative about the effectiveness of anything happening online. But after COVID, there was some kind of mindset change. Yeah, there was a kind of paradigm shift. And you realized that people started appreciating technology. They started, realizing that it makes a lot of sense. It is more convenient. Instead of, you know, waking up, boarding a vehicle, traveling for 1 hour and 30 minutes. for a meeting or training or a workshop or a seminar. Because by the time the seminars start you waste another 31 hours and then after that you have then to travel back home, so you will find there was a lot of waste, and people started seeing it makes sense. If I can wake up, maybe then 10 min to 8:00, and immediately the meeting starts at 8:00, it is very convenient. And again, we are at a point where the institution is experiencing some financial challenges, and therefore it makes a lot of sense doing everything online or some of this development.

(From my interview with “PhD-less”)

As you can see, the call for flexibility is largely drawn from some sort of time-related barrier, constraint, or limitation. This has resulted in some specific strategies on the part of educator professions, like trying to be really practical and pragmatic and highly selective with our time and the practice of looking for an *evidentiary warrant* (“*Musician*”) as a means to justify the use of our time. They seek those spaces where they can engage at their own pace and have the space to determine when they engage (like what time of the day, for instance). They have made attempts at blocking off time in their schedules (even if these attempts have failed). They’ve turned to recordings, and in some cases, now rely on them for professional development as a result of there simply not being enough time. We see discussions around the abuse of people’s time and articulations of why it is important to respect the time of others. They have identified that the strategic use of timelines can help respect people’s time and help them navigate time. Finally, they are actively engaging in finding ways to more efficiently

spend time, by looking to flexible models. They need flexible models, though, because time remains one of the most significant barriers they each said they face.

In response to *flexible* learning, some educators have expressed concern over the lack of “control” they’d have “over the learning context” (Tondeur et al., 2023, p. 40). As an example, if I opted to incorporate a highly flexible model for assignments and due dates, this would mean I have less control over *exactly* when assignments might be turned in (and not every educator is comfortable with that, according to Tondeur et al. (2023). That said, this is kind of the point...flexible models serve a purpose and confront real and highly limiting barriers (like not having enough time). There are a lot of mechanisms of control at work in Academia, though, when it comes to time. As Arellano et al. (2021) point out, “Academic Time™” doesn’t care if we’re ready to engage nor if you have the time to engage because “Academic Time™ refuses to account for human bodyminds and community relations—and how discourses of scarcity and precarity are used to enforce exclusionary timelines” (Arellano et al., 2021, p. 21). “Academic Time™,” a making of the colonial imaginary (see Mignolo, 2012), leads us into the belief and the reality that we don’t have time, that there is never enough time, and that if I take the time I am not doing something else I should be doing. If you were to re-read this dissertation, you’d see vestiges of this thinking, for while I am trying to push against it, I am living and breathing and working within this construct of time. So I often feel like there is never enough time...it is a lived reality I am currently and always negotiating. I can recognize, as Mignolo (2012) points out, that “There is significant room for maneuver beyond the illusion that if you are not fast, you do not deserve to be in this world” (p. 179-180), but that certainly doesn’t negate the fact that I still feel the real and

embodied effects of a culture based around “the survival of the fittest” (p. 179). The more productive I am, the better and more attractive I look to potential employers (and even my current employers).

The interviews raised what, to me, feels like a paradox of *time*. It goes something like this:

One of the major things that has surfaced in literature, about burnout and about limitations for engaging in professional development has been time. And almost every single person, in fact, I think actually every person I've talked to, looks to asynchronous digital learning as a potential solution because it affords us the capacity to engage in that professional development when we have time. In other words, it makes space for time. But then we don't have time. So we don't take the time. Or we don't make the time because of all these other priorities, all these other stresses. And so then we might turn to things like synchronous learning. But then we get into this potential situation which I have experienced myself where I go to a workshop, hoping that it's going to meet my unique needs because I don't have a lot of time. And then it doesn't, because, of course, it wasn't designed just for me and it wasn't designed to just meet my needs. But then I feel like I have wasted time because I took the time that I didn't really have in the first place, or I felt like I didn't have, in order to go to that professional development experience that I ultimately didn't learn as much from (or at least didn't learn what I had hoped I would want, at least). And it feels like this endless cycle where we avoid the thing (meaning asynchronous digital learning) that was designed for me to take the time because I don't have the time (even though because it was designed with the taking of time in mind, it has the real potential of being a more valuable use of my time). And instead, I take the time to sign up for an engage in something else that usually ends up not being as valuable a use of my time, but because it took less time my brain tells me that this is somehow better and before I know it, I've signed up for multiple synchronous sessions on the same topic (each resulting in me still feeling like I need more), usually amounting to more time in total than if I would have just spent the time I did have on the asynchronous experience in the first place. And this was all driven by the belief that I never have enough time, which is, of course, ironic, because I clearly had the time, I just wasn't able to recognize it as time in that way. And this extends to even smaller instances like meetings at work. It's always a struggle when someone says “Oh, this might need to become an asynchronous activity because we are running out of time.” It's like it stirs the paradox into action. I immediately think “you think I have the time outside of this meeting, which we

already spent an hour on, to spend another hour on this thing we honestly probably could have completed differently in this meeting or even better...did we even need to have this meeting in the first place? If you were inevitably going to ask me to engage with it asynchronously, we could have saved time by not having this meeting to begin with and I could have taken that hour to work on this on my own time.” But then of course, I say that also knowing fully well that as soon as we try that, there’s all these other things to do and finish, inevitably reinforcing the cycle of never having time⁹⁰.

Sitting with Mignolo and Arellano et al., I can now understand this to be a paradox of time because we are living and thinking and working at the boundaries of constructs of *time*. I can see and imagine and acknowledge decolonial options (like one where time isn’t controlled and bound), but there are forces working to keep us grounded on colonial terrain. I, myself, want to just...not...but I need to survive, and the system is so pervasive that it restricts my reality to one in which I never have enough time. But I’d like to be in the version of the world where “not today...later...tomorrow” is seen as a valid option...not necessarily better or worse, but an option.

One undeniable benefit of asynchronous digital learning spaces is their capacity to extend time. In an asynchronous modality, because time is not bound in the same ways, I can (usually) spend all the time I want engaging in the course. More importantly, I can spend *what time* I want, engaging in the course. In fact, I can *waste time* if I chose to. And I don’t mean “wasting time” in the way that “Low Income Learner” implies when he says, “I’m not gonna waste my time on something that’s a poorly designed project or professional development opportunity.” I don’t mean *wasting time* in the sense of

⁹⁰ As I wrote this, I caught myself holding my breath...as though my body was trying to recreate how it feels to never have enough time. I had to remind myself to breathe. I don’t know what will come of this for you, but I’d be curious how your reading of this passage changes (if it does) if you focus on where you take the time to breathe. Likewise, I am additionally curious what calling attention to your breath as you read does to your reading experience.

purposefully under-valuing the time and the effort on the part of the designer / facilitator either (this would work in counter to my ethics of *care*). No, I mean wasting time in the way that Mignolo (2012) means it:

Corporate ideology makes of time an essential component of efficiency and the incremental pace of production; it disregards the possibility of overproduction; it denies that "wasting time" could benefit the many, whose labor is being sold instead of being used for the benefit of the community. (Mignolo, 2012, p. 178)

That said, when it isn't our choice, when we are forced to take the time, a danger is that time becomes an "intruder on someone's life" ("Satirist"). In citing Welton (1995), Solomon et al. (2006) say that it's important for "adult educators [to protect] the lifeworld from such intrusions" (p. 11). Because otherwise, if we let time become an intruder, then before we know it, we're checking emails on our day-off and not taking vacation days (I see you, "Architect"). "Punk" extends this, but from the perspective of designing, saying that in design, we need to have "a respect for others' time and interests" and argues that professional development (in general) isn't "good" unless it respects the time and interests of others ("Punk").

So we bound time to prevent things like this from happening. We put timelines and end-points on courses. And typically I would argue that bounding time is not the best strategy asynchronously (because I am choosing an asynchronous modality as a learner to not be time-bound). However, "Interdisciplinary," "Dungeon Master," "Satirist," and "Mom" all talked about the benefits of putting a degree of time-boundedness on an asynchronous digital learning experience to 1) give learners a start and stop date and at least one major deadline (the end of the experience), and 2) let the learning community know when to engage. Due to the busy nature of work and life, if I have *all the time*, I might take years to engage with something. And depending on the

pressures on the outcomes of that learning experience, I might not, in reality, have years to complete it. So in this way, deadlines can function as drivers for asynchronous engagement.

I met “PhD-less” through an online offering I was leading. The program consisted of people from around the world. “PhD-less” lived and worked in a country in Africa, I am located in the United States. As an entire group, we talked a lot about the fact that we probably never would have met if it weren’t for online professional development of this sort. In fact, during his interview, he said, “Can you imagine if it was the time of no online, I mean no zoom, no Internet. I couldn’t have met you.” One of the difficulties we were having, though, was when to hold our synchronous session such that no one was incredibly inconvenienced. The very first year I directed the program, there were some joining at 2:00am their time. That didn’t sit well with me. I appreciated that they wanted to be there, but we met every day for three weeks in a row. It’s a lot to ask to have you shift your entire schedule for three weeks in order to accommodate a synchronous session.

The group came up with a potential strategy: rotating session times. Each day, we’d meet at a different time as to more equitably accommodate global timezones. We decided really quickly that this was not something we wanted as a result of how socialized we had become with respect to wanting consistency across the days for an experience like this. We then thought about rotating weeks, but with only three weeks, we were sure how to decide which timezones to use. To this day, I am still working to finesse our model for that portion of the experience. So, when it comes to time-based privileges, one thing asynchronous learning helps navigate well is timezone differences,

making this a good example of where asynchronous learning might facilitate more flexible (and equitable) models for professional development.

Finally, flexible approaches can be critical for times of emergencies. Following the COVID-19 related global shift online (i.e. “Great Online Transition (GOT)” (see Scherer et al., 2020)), it became an imperative in the world of online learning to make a distinction between “online learning” and “emergency remote learning.” At work this was actually something we had to dedicate a lot of time to, and it was something that showed up in countless presentations at our conferences (meaning that the community of online learning was also trying to figure out how to distinguish the two because we all knew that the online teaching most people shifted to was not the best for demonstrating what online learning *could* be.

It remains a fact, though, that online learning is and can be a strategy for accommodating emergency situations (like unpredictable weather). Asynchronous learning, perhaps more so than synchronous to an extent, is also helpful if designed well for instances of potential internet outages (e.g. the space could be designed around a principle of downloadable-ness). Cedillo et al. (2021) actually talk about the benefit of online for emergency weather situations. They noted, however, that just because we *can* shift online, doesn't mean we always should. If it is too dangerous to travel or the area is facing massive outages, faculty, staff, and students alike are likely concerned with far greater things, like their basic needs. It's an important reminder that “we have to prioritize our own health and safety before we can think about what it is we are doing in our classrooms” (Cedillo et al., 2021, p. 19). As they (Cedillo et al., 2021) discuss, if the university is closed, it should be closed (meaning online too).

With respect to embodiment, I take a perspective that is in line with Pahl and Rowsell (2010) who understand that digital equipment can become “a tool for listening that open[s] up new stories” (p. 54). What I mean to say by connecting this quote to the concept of embodiment is that through listening and learning about how people are using digital tools and technologies, we open up a space to learn about the needs of the real bodies engaging with them. If someone says their power is out in the middle of a snowstorm, we can allow ourselves the space to imagine that they might be cold (maybe even wrapped up in a blanket with a hoodie on and shivering). If we imagine that, we can recognize that maybe hopping online for a synchronous session isn't the best option...especially for professional development that places cultural pressures around things like professional attire. Are individuals in that context going to feel like they could join a space in winter hats and bundled up? What would it instead make space for if we said, “you know what...this learning can happen later and I'll intentionally reimagine it for an asynchronous space.” Or perhaps you cancel altogether. Point being that if we open up a space to think about bodies in relation to technology, we can imagine possible scenarios and then better meet the real needs of the real bodies we are designing for.

As a final thought, Williams et al. (2021) argue that “all technologies are inherently culturally and rhetorically situated” (p. 6). Reflecting on emergency situations, if a modality like asynchronous digital learning is only ever leveraged for emergencies (whether that be in the context of educator professional development or learning more generally) then that is what it becomes and that is what it remains...an emergency response strategy that is only ever used for just-in-time use cases of this sort, as

opposed to the radical, time-liberating, and generative digital learning spaces these 14 educator professionals believe it can be.

Community and dialogue

By and large, every educator professional I interviewed said that they valued community, largely for the ways in which it supported social learning. It wasn't the highest priority for all of them. But many of them expressed the sentiment that they wanted to "be in conversations like this" (from my interview with "Daughter"). That is, they wanted space based on a foundation of trust where they could be vulnerable and enter into genuine and authentic conversation and learning with someone else. Here are three examples for reference:

For me, it's vulnerability. And that includes having space to ask questions and answer questions, expand on ideas, sharing of personal experiences, application, connecting to other ideas and interest areas, was like a natural, like conversational space, of like people that are just genuinely interested, not only the topic, but what other people have to say, and then, their own genuine contributions being added. I feel like that resonates for me the most, as far as like actual asynchronous community.

(From my interview with "Low Income Learner")

I think that the things I look for in synchronous community and things I look for in asynchronous community are the same and largely, they're born of camaraderie in play, because I think that if you're not focusing on what motivates someone to not just participate or sign up for an engagement, but to also persist and and be present to volunteer themselves, to offer vulnerability, to seek and expect and provide sort of raw material that's necessary for a vibrant and active and equitable community. People need to feel like they have safety and security to be themselves to play with others. And I think that's a vital piece of any asynchronous or any asynchronous engagement. How are you setting up that safety and security? And I don't think you can over engineer it. The design of your interview protocol and your survey protocol, I think, are really good examples, the interview protocol being a synchronous one where you thoughtfully packaged plenty of outs for participants, but also you really exhaustively covered the rules of engagement and what to expect. And having

that going into a synchronous environment, I mean, I know you, so I was already not like unnerved by the prospect of like sharing and being vulnerable and structuring a sense of community identity as part of this conversation. But that stuff...that allows the technology or the distance or means of communication to fall away and allows me to just feel like I can express myself.

(From my interview with “Punk”)

I've started to rethink this because doing DEI education online, there are some affordances that actually make it better for people that are less comfortable with sharing their stories and being vulnerable.

(From my interview with “Architect”)

From a descriptive standpoint, you can see what I meant...they're looking for genuine dialogic and community-oriented spaces that prioritize humans being humans. From a more practical or functional standpoint, we can also see references to the ways in which technology serves to help facilitate such spaces. “Architect” holds the perception that asynchronous learning has moved towards being “less personal” and yet youth today are far more knowledgeable about topics like DEI than she was when she was their age (was talking about her kids). I personally think this has a lot to do with the emergence of platforms like TikTok and the increased capacity for sharing personal opinions so openly and in a just-in-time fashion and having access to so many different topics. That said (and for later musings), she nevertheless sees the ways in which technology, in the context of DEI training has facilitated increased vulnerability (e.g. people feeling more comfortable sharing when they didn't have to have their cameras on).

That said, it is possible to be in “too many communities.” In my interview with “Low Income Learner,” he talked about how he really seeks out these types of community spaces, but recognizes a limitation in that if he truly wants to engage in the way that he and “Punk” are describing, then he has to commit to a relatively small number of communities. Pilkington and Guldberg (2009) make the case that we *can*

develop community, but trust and empathy is important in the development of community. Trust, as we have already discussed elsewhere, takes time to develop and takes constant labor to maintain. Empathy is no different...it is something you have to regularly practice, improve upon, and engage in.

Relatedly, though, not all communities have to be sustained communities. “Punk” and I got into a back-and-forth about a few communities of practice we were both familiar with. I had just finished theorizing about why one specific attempt at a community of practice model failed at developing sustained community. “Punk” responded by saying:

Communities of Practice don't create affinities and interests, they follow interests and affinities. And so that means, again, to the consternation, I think, of individual practitioners and the institutions that they work for, that you might stand up a community that's super active for a moment and then everybody goes away. And that's not a flaw in the design. That is actually saying that you read the moment correctly, and created a community of practice where it could exist. Or you found, I think, even better...you uncovered community practice that could exist in a particular moment, and then those folks are transferring into something else.

In that moment (i.e. during our conversation), “Punk’s” insights were actually genuinely helpful for me. I had been, up to this point, thinking this experience had failed to meet a major goal it was designed for, which was to support the development of sustained community. What it did, though, was succeed at creating highly focused and practice-based ephemeral community that people leveraged and liked. So it provided a useful reframing of *community*, reminding me that community can be ephemeral and that is ok.

Part of what makes creating sustained community challenges (or even engaging in community at all a challenge) when it is in the context of work is that you can't force

people to engage in the ways that these educator professionals are idealizing and describing here:

Ideally, also, it would be a community so that there are people actively engaged in it. And that is the hardest thing, just so hard and difficult. It's relying on people to care enough, not just about the material, but also each other. And you can set up ways to make that more likely. But just like with any kind of teaching experience, you can set up as idealistic a situation as possible, set up things to make it more likely, but you can never force anybody to do any of it. Unless you're...especially in this context, you can kinda force people to participate if you're grading them. And it's, you know, they need to get through the course in order to move on to something else. You can never force them to engage or to care, though. That's all internal. You can just set it up with that in mind, and hope for the best, and, you know, be intentional about telling people that that's what you're trying to do. And if you aren't succeeding, be open to the feedback about not succeeding. But like I said, ideally, it is a community that people want to return to, that they're asking questions at, that they're contributing to, and that they identify with. You know, we're all multi-faceted individuals, and we all seek, I think, or at least most of us seek some kind of connection with others.

(From my interview with "Satirist")

Some of the educator professionals expressed an explicit purpose for being in and engaging with community: building something together, doing something together, solving or addressing something together. Here are three examples of this, two from "Dungeon Master" and a third from "Musician":

It was the first time that I was doing professional development in the open. And having done a lot of open practice and open blogging, and those kinds of things, especially around that time, it was kind of my first time to see, like other educators in the blogosphere, banding together and contributing thoughts and responding to each other and like just being in scholarship together as kind of like a learning community. And that was, although I think there were some synchronous opportunities, the majority of that was asynchronous. And so there was playing with various digital tools...that was happening. There was like, specifically engaging and responding to ideas that people had much like I mean, similar to like a discussion thread would be, except in this instance, people were contributing towards their own kind of like personal spaces, journaling, doing all those kinds of things, and they were being aggregated using the feed wordpress

plugin to a wordpress site that was then easy to like, see everybody's contributions and whatnot. It was super eye opening, because it was one of the first times that I'd seen asynchronous done in a way that's I like really wanted to get behind it, I really understood the value of it, and that online asynchronous could be a viable solution for scholarship. That was kind of a defining moment.

(From my interview with "Dungeon Master")

Thinking about ways to fulfill people through engagement and by building community, a couple of things that I think are actually really easy...one having a genuine connection, making at least one friend in the space or one acquaintance that you want to talk to again...like having one genuine connection. One of the reasons I've enjoyed my master's program so much is because one of the girls and I joined at the same time, and we're the folks that are like doing our readings like by Monday, even though they're due the next Sunday and like posting. So we're like often doing things ahead of time, and we kind of like recognize that in each other. And then we worked on a group project together, and then we wanted to work on all the group projects together at that point, right? Having one genuine connection...just one makes the entire thing connected. Then you are connected to it. You have connective tissue. You've laid roots, whatever analogy for it you want to give. You have an investment in it to some degree. So that's one aspect, one authentic connection, always one authentic connection. The other is, there are activities that promote some of these things. One is building things together like working on projects together, being in spaces where you're, whether it's like small group and stuff, like some of this we were doing. We've been redesigning for the office our next template for Canvas and such. And this is like a smaller committee group thing that is working on this. So we are 5 instead of the entire office of 20 plus or whatever. And I have gotten to know those folks way better since we have worked on this project together because of it.

(From my interview with "Dungeon Master")

If I close my eyes, and said, what was the best professional learning experience that I had, what would that look like and what are the elements that would make that up? It would be akin to those encounters that we're using a liberating structure set of methodologies, where we're as a group solving or using our distributed funds of intelligence in a context to try to make meaning of a particular task, whether that's a case or something that we bring into the table. But we're working and learning from each other, and those environments where you, where we really come to terms with. I'm being asked to answer questions that I can no longer answer by myself, but working with a prompted process and a set of

people, I get really excited about that. And then I actually come back and I have something that's useful, or my faculty find something that's useful. Those are hard to find. I haven't found a lot of them.

(From my interview with "Musician")

A major takeaway from these examples, for me, is that a commitment to building even one authentic connection and working on a project with minimally that one person, is impactful community building.

Finally, I will just briefly address a popular assumption in the online learning world...that you can't build community online (at least community as described here). "Low Income Learner" says he "vehemently disagree[s] that you cannot build real community asynchronously online because [he's] seen it happen. And [they've] made it happen." And while all the educator professionals did agree that it is differently challenging, they nevertheless believed that it was still possible. The focus on this dissertation is not to thoroughly discuss this, but I minimally share it here as I anticipate it being on some peoples' minds.

Facilitation and curation

The final element that surfaced during interviews as a 'must-have' related to facilitation and curation. "Musician" believes that "we don't take curation seriously enough." He continued by saying,

You know I'm in a faith-based school. So for me, curation is rooted in the Latin word curae, which means to care for one's soul, to be care-full. So therefore, if I'm finding content, my role is to curate that. I don't need to be the expert in that video. But what I need to do is curate it because I'm making a decision to include that in this lesson. But then I also curate that experience and engagement of what that student is or is not taking. Are they getting the meaning and making sense of what I hope them to do? And if not, then I might have to find another resource. And hopefully, because I have some training and some experience and I've spent a lot of time watching 20 of these things, I have curated ones that I

think are most helpful. And then, if I find out 'oh, you're left handed. Oh, Snap! Everything that I've been doing is for the right handed person, let me, you know, change that.' So I think the aspect of where we get to an ecosystem that's agile is really acknowledging and thus rewarding and incentivizing that curational role. Taking that seriously, I think would be really important. [...] it's that next step of trying to get something to stick.

Curation ties back, for me, to the ephemeral aspect of learning. Implied, even, by “Musician,” without curation I might not remember what I learned...it might not “stick,” and therefore, it might be *ephemeral*...fleeting and temporary. I introduced *ephemera* in Chapter 4, but will revisit it here in relation to curation (which is fitting, because much of the work on ephemera I referenced in Chapter 4 considers ephemera in the context of museum exhibits). An important aspect of ephemera is *memory*. Moon (2010) references Harry Potter and the concept of the pensieve, which is a device that allows the user to remove and store embodied memories so that they can engage with them later. By looking at what remains and what is stored in the memory, we can better see what is forgotten and “what is lost or modified in the representation of the material, other than what the subject deliberately chooses to neglect” (Moon, 2010, p. 73). Moon also cites Bruner (2002), and I am going to extend those very same words once more here:

Through narrative we construct, reconstruct, in some ways reinvent yesterday and tomorrow. Memory and imagination fuse in the process. Even when we create the possible worlds of fiction, we do not desert the familiar but we subjectivise it into what might have been and what might be. The human mind, however cultivated its memory or refined its recording systems, can never fully and faithfully recapture the past, but neither can it escape from it. Memory and imagination supply and consume each other's wares. (Bruner, 2002, p. 93, in Moon, 2020, pp. 73-74)

I surface *memory* here (and through these words, specifically) because I find the way in which Moon approaches a conversation on memory helpful to reflect on in the context of

learning. We, of course, don't have pensieves, but if we did, I think it interesting to think about what we'd remove and store. What are the things we experience in learning that we'd find valuable enough to remove and store? We could look to things like learning journals and other similar artifacts as approximations of this, but this is beside the point. The point is that the act of removing and storing learning memories, if you will, is a form of curation, and I find the metaphor of the pensieve (as framed by Moon) productive for thinking about who is doing that curation work, what does the process of removal and storage look like, and what is being selected (and why). Thinking about learning in this way (through a consideration of *memory*) is also productive for thinking not only about what is lost, but what *can be* lost. Several of the educator professionals I interviewed said they valued relevance (and therefore preferred those learning environments that removed "extra" things). This again raises the question of who is doing that selecting work and how is that work being carried out? Who determines what can and cannot be lost? Finally, as a result of memory and learning behaving in this way (meaning as Bruner describes), what we remember and therefore what we learn are fused together. And unless we document and curate that learning, we're going to make up stories about it and what we ultimately took away. I saw this during my interview with "Dungeon Master," for example, when he said, "I guess the actual content and the learning at the time is overshadowed by the feelings of community and the learning of what is possible in online spaces as opposed to the actual learning in those spaces" (which I referenced in greater detail in the subsection on Community and Intentionality). Though there was a significant amount of content shared during that learning experience, what he was ultimately left with were impressions and memories, in this case of how the experience

made him feel and the way that it impacted the way he thought about community online. By reflecting on this, and focusing on what remained in his memory, he was able to more easily identify what was most valuable from that experience. *Curation*, then, as a result of the fact that it bounds and directs that storytelling (therefore influencing the learning taking place), should be taken more seriously, as “Musician” argues. Chawla (2007) states that memories can “stay alive” through story (p. 19). So, seeing *curation* as a method of storytelling, we should be asking ourselves what stories of learning we are (or are not) telling through our curation of digital learning experiences.

Facilitation was also raised as a key area of focus in several interviews. I mentioned previously that educator professionals (like “Punk” and “Mom”) might not engage with professional development if it is led by a specific facilitator due to misalignment of values or ethos. Relatedly, “Mom” shared that, to her, it was incredibly important for facilitators to position themselves:

I look for a sense of storytelling, like a person sharing their own. Whoever the facilitator is, connecting their content to their lived experience is really powerful for me. If people are just sharing content at me, like I'm more likely to disengage. Then ultimately, if it's a more formalized experience, I'm kind of looking for how the person or people who are facilitating or sharing are acknowledging their position in the context of the information that they're sharing. So like, who are they? How did they come to know this? How does the way that they walk through the world influence the way that they know that information or experience the phenomenon? Those are kind of like core pillars of things that I like that make things feel more accessible or credible to me.

This ties back to the importance of situating ourselves (discussed in Chapter 4), but I revisit it here, because it is a ‘must-have’ for “Mom.” She looks for this work specifically as a decision-making metric for deciding which professional to engage with. It’s a kind

of curation of the self, a strategy for a facilitator to frame and story themselves within the context of a learning environment.

Beyond this, though, there is more nuance to be understood in terms of why facilitation matters to educator professionals. “Sci-Fi Fan” and “Architect” shared that good facilitators are vital and something both of them look for when considering which professional development to engage in themselves as a learner. By “good facilitation,” I am referring to, here, the tactics and strategies of facilitation (i.e. the actual practice of facilitation). “Sci-Fi Fan” helps provide further insight into this:

...the facilitators... you talk about on-the-ball with the feedback. It was so important. Like you get the feedback so quickly. Response in the discussion as well as feedback in the comments...very personalized, you know. I felt connected to those 2 facilitators, to that course. It was well organized in that every module was set up the same as every other module, so I knew exactly what to expect. It provided choices. There would be 3 short videos of professionals talking about the topic, and I could choose to watch them or not watch them. That choice thing to me is so big, and I can talk about the negative of not choice later, but that I love that aspect of it. And yeah, I guess off the top of my head. Those are the things. How well facilitated the feedback and the connection with the professors was. The connection with my colleagues in the discussions...really engaging. It was a sense of community, you know, in those discussions, in those courses, but I think the facilitators had a big hand in that, as well as a great design in that course.

Based on this, “Sci-Fi Fan” makes the case that it was the facilitation of the learning experience that truly made it great. She specifically calls out responsive feedback strategies and active presence in the course as contributing to a greater sense of community and connection. Similarly, “Architect” believes that “a good facilitator is key.” Based on her current role, she now pays attention to facilitation far more than she ever did before. She shared a story about one of the most transformative learning experiences she had ever had, and it was co-facilitating alongside someone she

describes as a great facilitator. Through this experience, she gained new appreciation for effective facilitation, and now sees facilitation as “how you translate human-ness in that digital space,” arguing that there is a “difference between teaching and facilitating.”

I observed an interesting nuance between *facilitation* and *curation*, as described by “Musician,” “Architect,” and “Sci-Fi Fan.” A type of facilitator was introduced by both “Mom” and “Musician”: the “caretaker” (so named by “Mom”), also known as the “Chief Worry Officer” (so named by “Musician”). This person “needs to be able to collect participant data, adapt and adjust as necessary, based on that data, even if they're not actually live interacting with any of the people who are participating in the learning experience” (from my interview with “Mom”). For both of them, the best asynchronous digital learning experiences have that “someone” who is responsible for following along and essentially curating the digital learning experience. Someone who oversees the care of the experience, even adjusting content or programming as needed throughout in order to result in a better experience (e.g. how “Musician” described someone adjusting material to be more inclusive of diversity in handedness). As described in this way, this “caretaker” or “Chief Worry Officer” is both facilitator and curator, documenting and tracing student learning and engagement and then leveraging that in order to facilitate a more effective learning experience.

Living with the tensions of constellating and conflicting identities: Their experience as designer-learner

I wanted to intentionally close this chapter with a discussion about the lived experiences of being both *educator* and *educator developer*. As I told you earlier, the 9 design categories that I shared in this chapter represent things that they expressed

value in. At times, they shared things clearly from the perspective of a learner (i.e. seeing themselves as the educator attending educator professional development). At times, they shared things that were obviously from their perspective as a designer (i.e. the educator developer, developing and leading educator professional development). What became apparent, though, was that it was next to impossible to separate these responses due to the fact that they not only hold these identities simultaneously, but a core belief they hold of being an effective educator developer is that this means you are also a lifelong learner. So in a way, to identify as an *educator developer* is to also identify as a *learner*. This subsection dedicates time and space to explore the tensions they expressed in living this reality.

A core aspect of this, and what will make up the majority of this subsection, is a type of embodied and lived hypocrisy. This comes out in two really specific ways. First, educators don't make the best students, according to these educator professionals:

Faculty are such hypocrites when it comes to what makes a good student in their classes versus how they engage as a student. They're terrible students. It's general, but they have such expectations for their students.

(From my interview with "Introvert")

It's just always interesting to observe when you're with faculty. They always exhibit the behaviors that they hate in their students, like they're not paying attention, they're just on the phone all the time. It's like 'you're on your phone right now...You're supposed to be paying attention to this!'

(From my interview with "Satirist")

The general sentiment shared here is that if we judge educators by the same metrics and using the same standards they do for judging their students, educators are not 'good' students. I know I have observed this myself as a facilitator, but have also observed it in myself as a learner. I mentioned this in the beginning of this dissertation,

but this tension and our behavior across learner-designer identities, was part of the exigency for my specific area of focus. I wanted to know why we didn't seem to prioritize the very same strategies and theories we purported to be "best practices."

We can gain some insight from stories where educator professionals recognized that their theories and ideals as a designer didn't align with their own practice as a learner. For example, "Low Income Learner" shared,

This is where, like my theories and ideals don't line up with my own practice. I'm less concerned, like that's not on my highest priority, of like, 'Oh, am I going to develop a community from attending this webinar, or doing this asynchronous course for a week,' or something like that, right? I would love for that to happen. I would love for the community aspect to be there. But as far as engagement goes, also, sometimes that's not my priority. Like I don't want to go on a break around and talk with people, because I can answer like 30 emails right now. So I want to listen in, get what's going on, I want to glean what the topic is, but I don't, you know...so I think there's like finding that balance of those that want to actively engage, because there's times where I want to do that and there's times where I want to be a lurker and kind of like figuring those aspects out, or like creating space for bold dialogue like this, I don't know.

One thing we can draw from what he shared is that it isn't that he doesn't value *community*. Transformative learning and social learning theory and other frameworks, theories, models, and ideals...for him, they all signal that engaging in community is a good and even ideal practice. But he also recognizes that due to time constraints or perhaps his mood, he doesn't always want to engage in community-based work.

Similarly, "Introvert" shared an example of something she has really strong feelings about as an educator developer (i.e. designer), but realized during our conversation that she behaves differently and views them differently as a learner. She offered,

So outcomes are making me feel a little hypocritical right now, because someone can tell me I am the stickler a little bit for writing good outcomes and having intentionality in course design around, 'these are my outcomes for this course.' But I don't actually pay a ton of attention to them as a student. We might skim them and be like I might use them to get a sense of what the instructor's thinking. But I'm not looking at them as like cool. I want to be able to do that.' I'm going to take this course and looking at it as like 'cool, this is what the instructor had in mind when they designed it. And I'm looking for one of those things in particular' or to skim 2 or 3, and I'm not really deep diving and engaging and worrying about. Am I able to do these things at the end? No, I don't really care for me. If I see them, and I see that they're well written, I have more confidence in the instructor, but I'm not taking them to heart and being like, 'yes, those are great outcomes. I'm going to hold myself to them and be mad if I don't achieve them,' you know, like it's I guess it's a little different.

I appreciated this in the way that she actually paused and took a moment to call out this hypocrisy. Importantly, I don't argue here that this is necessarily a bad thing; I think it worthy of discussion. I think we have different needs as learners and when in the position of learner, some needs surface in an ever-shifting constellation fashion. So what we view as important in a given moment might also shift when we've moved into the next moment.

Increased awareness about pedagogy, though, and pedagogical theory has nevertheless impacted these educator professionals' perceptions of professional development. I like to think of this as "the critical lens we can't remove" and as us becoming almost "too aware" as a learner. Let's look at these three examples as a case in point:

So I was excited about this self paced asynchronous course, they call it asynchronous right. We met with the professor once a semester and it's recorded, but the course design had no content. It was the module. It was on Canvas and it was just modules that were hanging in there with PDFs. from the book publisher, that, you know the publisher gives you this PDF, or a bit of Powerpoint, and there is no instruction. So I felt cheated. I felt that the design

was terrible, and as a student I was a little...because I also know how to design courses. But I thought I wanted to address this to the supervisor of the program to tell him this is not acceptable, and it was taken as offensive. Although I have this double role because I'm a student, but how can I be just a student when I'm also a professor? So I want to play the good student. But I also am a person who's, you know, wants a well designed course. [...] As the designer I love when a student tells me this is not working. I click here, and the link wasn't working. I love them, I wanna kiss them because it's so helpful. I will not take offense on my design because I wanna become a better designer.

(From my interview with "Daughter")

I also did a training on open educational resources. When I got a grant for when I redesigned my medical interpreting class, I took training, and there were all these professors from especially in the South that we have to make our syllabus welcoming, you know harsh language. So before I took my midterm on one of these courses, I felt I was going to jail, you know, 'if we caught you cheating' you know 'we know where you live.' You know things in red font, and you know what that means. And it was very threatening, and there was no proctoring. There was, I mean, I said, well, how do they know if I open a browser? Can I Google that question? You know. But there's still this almost like God Almighty watching you, and if like, if you're cheating well...And I felt really disturbed by that language. And they also wanted a time limit that was self-inflicted. But they also had such bad design...so poorly designed. There was like 150 questions and they were multiple choices, and they were all in the negative. You know, your brain goes to a coma like this. And so what you can have one of those in multiple choice, you know that that approach, but this was every single question was in the 'no.' So this person grabbed the booklet from the textbook and decided to do the worst exam possible just because they could. Anyway, so it was not only design, but also the language. And I was learning that some people have access to create courses that don't really know how to create courses.

(From my interview with "Daughter")

As soon as I'm like, 'I can't fast forward through that video F you, I'm not doing this!'

(From my interview with "Sci-Fi Fan")

As we saw, in the first example shared from "Daughter," she knew that the course design was not good due to her experience as a designer and felt compelled to say something. In saying something, she might have crossed a presumed line that the

instructor was drawing between them (i.e. them as instructor and her as student). But as she points out, she holds both of these identities. In fact, she said at a different point she doesn't "see them as separate." In the second example shared from her, there is a moment where she references the use of multiple choice questions and begins to shift into actual theory and research regarding best practices for creating multiple choice exams. Finally, we can see in the excerpt from "Sci-Fi Fan" that it is all too easy to slip into moments of resistance as a learner, rejecting and refusing to engage with poor pedagogy. What's interesting, of course, about this dynamic is while most students would have a pretty good sense of what was and wasn't good course design, they might not be able to articulate it explicitly nor could they likely tie it to specific theory to justify its use. But these educator professionals do have this skill, these knowledges, and it seems...can't resist putting them into practice when they are learners. One of the other things that did surface was the fact that these were instructors that might not have had the best grasp of theory and praxis. This has been raised a few times, but part of this is that we need more training on pedagogy and practice...this needs to be prioritized...but also, a lot of educator developers have never actually experienced a 'good' online course, let alone a 'good' asynchronous digital learning experience. So we need to create more spaces that are transformative so that educators across levels (including top level leaders) can experience good, transformative, online professional development.

These educator professionals are also highly critical of themselves as learners. "Satirist" said "I've gotten worse," for instance, to describe who he believes he has become as a learner. "Low Income Learner" shared that he is "disappointed" in himself

for “not caring.” You can see the full excerpt from “Low Income Learner’s” example below:

I think it's just a natural thing as a human being, right, like you perceive the efforts of others, and it's like, 'Well, I'm not gonna keep giving my all to this if you all don't give a crap about anything that we're doing right now,' I do the same thing right? It's like, I'm gonna do them with all my effort if everyone else is too, right? Even though there's the other part of me that's like, I'm judging myself. It's like, I'm disappointed in myself for not caring about this, because I know how much better this should be.

(From my interview with “Low Income Learner”)

Amplifying the point he raised about the social influence of learning, I too, have been in situations where I do less because others around me are doing less (even though I know the instructor is looking for more). I have also been in situations where I did the max and didn’t seem to gain any additional, measured reward from it. It does make me wonder if the narratives we tell about professional development (i.e. as being bad) are also, to an extent, helping to further perpetuate bad professional development in and of itself. In other words, if the only stories we tell (or even if most of them) are of bad professional development...then that’s all we ever hear and all we ever might know.

Finally, there is evidence throughout the interviews that educator professionals struggle with reconciling the lived experiences of designing professional development that does not align with “best practices,” in terms of learning theory. In other words, the tension of knowing pedagogy and praxis and designing for reality. Here are two examples:

My professional research area has led me to often point out how insufficiently we make these same considerations in professional development work for the work that we developed for other educators or people who are in the position to educate so often. We just throw out all of our best practices and think that, like sage on the stage workshops and lectures are sufficient for engaging

professional learners which we know it's not because we have a healthy body of literature related to people who we would associate with traditional learning experiences or student situations.

(From my interview with "Punk")

Yeah it's hard, right. The practical reality is like, I don't have as much time as I'd like...and what they actually want is not what I would like to do. Like a good professional development is engaging, it has asynchronous learning engagement points. But the frank reality is like my users. They just want a quick video that shows them how to do what they need to do. And they wanna move on with their lives. So that's what we provide. It's not good professional development in the sense that it's designed well. It's not gonna be giving people like these Aha!-moments where they really learn how to use stuff. But it does address the need, the way that they want it to be done. [...] Because they're adjunct, they only get paid \$945 a credit to teach. They're making like 7 bucks an hour, probably, total with all the time they're putting in. They want a 2 to 3 min video that shows them how to do what it's gonna do, and so that's what we provide.

(From my interview with "Low Income Learner")

"Punk" described our efforts as "insufficient," and said that we essentially just throw everything we know and believe in out in favor of a model we know doesn't work.

"Lower Income Learner" echoes this, but does tie it back to the realities we are faced with (e.g. low pay, job instability, etc.). To me, a significant potential implication that results from this is how living in this constant state of tension, then, impacts our experiences as both a designer and a learner. It seems like in either case, we are setting ourselves up for and allowing a system to continue to perpetuate the persistent and recursive state of disappointing lived experiences. We could think of this as a form of engagement in an "affective dissonance," (Hemmings, 2012) where "there is a disjuncture or misfit between our 'embodied sense of self and the self we are expected to be in social terms' (Hemmings, 2012, p. 149) which we come to feel affectively as rage, anger, passion, loathing, loss or disgust" (Chadwick, 2021, p. 560). In other words, we see ourselves as expert designers, expert educators, and expert learners (in

the sense that we hold expertise in these things), and yet we feel like we are so brilliantly failing in the roles due to the realities of the social cultural situation we find ourselves in.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION: METRICS OF SUCCESS, EVIDENCING VALUE, AND ASSESSING QUALITY

“Success,” “value,” and “quality” are words so ubiquitous to today’s current educational context that it is easy to overlook that we might not all be on the same page regarding what these each mean, and moreover, how they are measured. And yet, they carry with them a lot of social, cultural, economic, and political capital. If I can demonstrate that my programming is more “successful” than someone else’s, this might make me better qualified for funding or a promotion. Similarly, if I can report on value-added, my company might prioritize strategy I ideated. Likewise, if I develop a framework around “quality,” I might be better positioned to say what is and is not a quality learning experience and might be pulled in for consulting or change-management projects. These would all serve as examples of economic capital that works in relation to these terms, but is this how educator professionals are thinking about these terms? When I say “successful” educator professional development, do they think in terms of revenue or economic gain? What about “value” and “quality”? Because surely, there is far more nuance to these terms than can be seen by a lens of revenue-generation. As it turns out, even when we have quality frameworks, even when we can reference specific metrics of success, and even what we can point to value statements driven by our institutions or the academic culture at large, we still don’t really have a firm and collective grasp on what exactly we mean when we say a “successful,” “valuable,” or “quality” educator professional development experience. This chapter is dedicated to the exploration of these concepts as they relate to educator professional development.

Metrics of success

When interviews began to circle around the concept of *metrics of success*, it primarily entailed conversation around two things: 1) metrics that we know are currently used and how we felt about them, and 2) how we felt about the practice of engaging in metrics of success in the first place. Regarding the former, one of the first things that came up was *counts*. Whether this be how many people showed up to a session, how many people responded in a chat, the number of downloads, the rate at which learners advanced, the proportion of people who returned...it became obvious that measures of the sort are incredibly common in our work environments and that we are often expected to evaluate our performance through and around them. That said, something else that did surface in these interviews was that when we, as educator professionals, approach critical reflection on what success actually looks like and what success actually might translate to within the context of educator professional development, the perspectives we hold true to be far more nuanced than purely quantitative scales of successful or unsuccessful (whereby higher numbers most commonly indicate higher degrees of success for the types of things educator professionals are developing and designing). For example, in my conversation with “Satirist,” he and I discussed whether or not a professional learning experience would be considered successful if only a handful of people showed up. To him, he believes that it should be considered successful... even if it might not be viewed as such by higher-level leadership.

Not everything we do has to work. It doesn't have to be successful. It doesn't have to. And I mean, what even is successful in this kind of context, like, you know? Something that my team struggles with is when they spend a lot of time on something, and only like 5 people show up. And I'm like, 'yeah, that feels bad, but for those 5 people, this is what they needed. There's no reason for them to do this. They don't have to at all. Nobody cares if they never show up to one of

these, you know, free offer trainings from [institutional name]. If so the fact that anyone shows up at all means we succeeded. This is time out of their day that they could be doing something else that their Dean actually cares about them doing. And the fact that they're here is great.' And if nobody shows up, and if nobody shows up consistently 'oh, no! All we did was, you know, learn about something cool or try something out, or learn something interesting, or learn that something wasn't that interesting?' And I think that's fine. I think the fear sets in or the worry sets in when you set things up, that the only time that anything you do is valuable is when a certain number of people care about it. And that number is...who even knows what that number is like? Tell me what number is important enough that makes it worth it? It's so, corny, but I always do think of like that beach with all the starfish coming in, and like they're kind of being swept away with the tide, and somebody's throwing some starfish back into the ocean. Like, 'why are you doing it? There's gonna be thousands of starfish who die, and then, like you can't possibly make a difference.' And it's like to that starfish, that made a difference.

Foundational to this point is really the questioning of what we mean by “success” as well as what *counts* as successful. In a similar vein, “Architect” and I talked about the term “engagement” and what that meant. She thinks that “when we're talking about engagement, we make the assumption that everybody's talking about the same thing, and I don't think we are.” One way that we could approach defining “success” is through “fulfillment.” The idea of fulfillment is actually quite simple: a learner has a need and my professional development experience meets that need...or it doesn't. The challenge here, of course, becomes that each learner has their own unique set of needs. Similarly, a given learning experience could fulfill some of those needs and not others.

“Interdisciplinarian” is of the opinion that “the variability among the learners is so great” that we will never be able to find a ‘perfect’ solution because there is “no one size fits all, or even one size fits most.” He is adamant, though that “if you do not validate the learner synchronously or asynchronously, that means it's gonna be a bad experience.”

In short, a primary goal of educator professional development should be fulfillment.

“Dungeon Master” is a firm believer of this, in fact. He said that he felt good in saying this as a “capital “T” Truth, in this moment: fulfillment matters.”

An additional challenge that was raised is that we don't always have awareness around what we need and, conversely, sometimes we have strong beliefs about what we think others need, neither of which will likely result and fulfillment being achieved. “Storyteller” told a story, for example, of a colleague who attended a professional development session she was running on Canvas. Accordingly, she came just to support her. As it turns out, after the session was over she shared that she actually learned much about the platform and the tool that she hadn't known before, so she was glad she came because in addition to being able to provide support, she also learned a lot. With respect to thinking we know what someone else needs, “Introvert” offered that she sometimes encounters faculty that have very rigid opinions about learning design and that these opinions sometimes result in educators wanting to retain control over the learning environment, dictating how students will navigate through it as well as what they might take away. In our interview, she exclaimed, rather directly, that she thinks,

It's arrogant to say this is how my PD will be used, and this is why it will be valuable. You're just throwing it into the void; you have no idea who's gonna engage with it, and why, and how, and what state they're gonna be in, and how much of that video they might watch. You think it is very controlling to try and dictate that. You don't get to have that control, especially in an asynchronous environment.

As a result, part of the work she engages in is reframing notions of control and approaches to understanding things like learner need so that can enter into more productive conversations around what it means to design for fulfillment of those needs.

One thing on my mind is whether or not we (educator professionals) have the agency to stop caring about the types of quantitative metrics of success that we know don't adequately assess "success"? What would happen if we stopped caring about these metrics? Truly, what if we took a second to just...stop. What would we see? What would we pay attention to instead? What new metrics might reveal themselves? What new frameworks or lenses might we find? One possibility is "ambivalence." To Glasby (2019) we can work through tensions through ambivalence "without the pressure of *figuring it out*" (p. 33). I feel like it would be productive to live there for a moment in educator professional development...and see what comes out of working through the "troubling space between doubt and committed action...a space of both possibility and paralysis" (Yagelski, 1999, p. 32, cited in Glasby, 2019, p. 28). I think Glasby (2019) offers some great questions for us to ask. Though in Glasby's writing context, the focus is on the work of writing, I nevertheless find the questions compelling for the work of educator professionals:

What is to be said for the deep ruptures and schisms between conflicting thoughts, ideas, and identities? What kind of meaning (and texts) can be made when [educator professionals] are asked to engage unknowing and enact dissent rather than produce clear and logical thought? What if we failed to make sense of things in, and *through*, our [work]? (p. 39)

These words, in part, helped to empower me to compose my dissertation in the way that I did...helped me to see that I could dwell in the deep *schism* created by my own internalized and embodied contradictions and hypocrisies. I have hope, but I'm also not hopeful. I operate under the belief that systemic change is possible, but I also see that it isn't. What do I do with that? What can I do with that? I can write about it...I can see what new connections it allows me to make and what new relations it might form. With

respect to metrics, specifically, I can generate alternatives...one of which could be that we simply don't measure "success" at all, though as someone who also believes in the practice of continuous improvement, this feels like a less than adequate alternative.

Not caring might also make space for the "good enough," which I think a lot of people would benefit from at the moment. As King (2019) shares, "reflective practice is being forgiving of yourself and knowing that it's not always going to be perfect. Sometimes you have a bad day, sometimes you can't make your teaching better, and sometimes you just have to be good enough" (King, 2019, p. 3). If I allow myself to *not care* as much, I can embrace the "good enough" and see that as a valid alternative. Through ambivalence, I can *not care* about being claimed by academia or higher education. In their work on third space professionals, for example, Whitchurch (2013) and Evetts (2003) story a group of educator professionals who are ambivalent about the "concept of being a professional in the traditional sense" (Evetts, 2003, p. 397, cited in Whitchurch, 2013, p. 104). This ambivalence enabled them and supported their agency in "challeng[ing] traditional linear ways of leading and following...re-creating the university as a centre that supports creative individuals, is the home of creative teams, and the engine of creative enterprise" (Kandiko, 2010 p. 3, cited in Whitchurch, 2013, p. 144). Through their ambivalence towards being narrowly defined by higher education, they formed new collaborations across disciplinary boundaries and intersections, which "offer[ed] degrees of freedom to explore new possibilities outside the constraints of established modes of working which shape interactions in the various contexts from which people come" (McAlpine & Hopwood, 2009, p. 159). So maybe we should care

less...at least about some things...most particularly metrics driven by and for capitalist justifications.

I personally agree with sentiments forwarded by “Punk,” who thinks that the incessant pull of “ROI” (“return on investment”) is nauseating and harmful. Rather, “Punk” believes that “if it’s worth providing learning opportunities for others, if that kind of learning, alone, is contextually valuable to pursue, then it should be work just making an investment and not knowing what the return is going to be.” That said, we did engage in a deeper conversation about our perceptions of success, as measured through things like ROI as a result of a question I asked every person during their interviews: *Switching question styles a little bit. Imagine we are gearing up for a debate on this topic and you are presented with the following question: Are we investing time in something educators ultimately won’t engage in? How would you respond?* Here is their reply:

Core to that phrasing which I think is relevant and is very common is the idea that if we invest in something it needs to scale. And I find that deeply problematic when it comes to designing learning for anybody, let alone professional development. Because if we create a professional learning opportunity, pour months of design and effort into it and no one participates in it, the people who were involved in designing it benefited from it. You could just go through the motions of designing it. And then that could be it. That's what professional development is supposed to necessitate is giving us tools for grappling with uncertainty in the work we do educationally. If one person shows up, I'm sure you've seen this, too, in your own career, that can be interpreted as a complete failure. If that one faculty member...if we appreciate pull back, but that one faculty member or education professional who participated is social, has colleagues, has students, teaches, classes, engages others in educational terms, all of a sudden you have a snowball effect of the zone of influence that originated from that one engagement. If it wasn't meaningful, there's also a snowball effect, as well in terms of that person's willingness, your willingness to come back, seek additional resources or professional development opportunities from you and from others who you work with, who helped design it. But all of these are

valuable, and all of these are inherently, I think worthwhile...doesn't mean they are in a capitalistic sense, and they certainly know what I mean in describing scales. But maybe that's the problem is that we're evaluating for scale and models that are as nebulous as how and when someone learns in the way that we want them to for their own professional benefit.

(From my interview with "Punk")

So again, we could consider pushing back on the expectation to measure "success" in the first place and try to find comfort in believing that "we are partially successful relative to if we didn't do anything" (from my interview with "Interdisciplinary")

Evidencing value

With respect to our approach and commitments to evidencing "value," this dissertation is ultimately going to advance a very similar narrative to that told above with respect to metrics of success. Foreshadowing the section to follow, we'll have a similar conversation when we get to "quality." This is largely due to the variable needs of the learners in these spaces. Keep in mind, though that Bamber and Stefani (2016), argued that Higher Education is not great at evidencing value, insinuating that it was something Higher Education needed to get better on (and again, for good reason...if we can't articulate why Higher Education is valuable, people will stop enrolling eventually. And we can think similarly for educator professional development: if we can't articulate why a given learning experience is valued, what incentive are giving people to sign up or attend?). Regardless, less dive into the ways in which these educator professionals are orienting around *evidencing value*.

One thing that resurfaced was the importance of validation. In the context of "value," though, validation began to mean several things. The word "validation" signaled not only a facilitator's recognition of learner-specific needs, but was also used to discuss

things like badges and credentials. “Introvert”, “Mom,” “Musician,” “Interdisciplinary,” and “Daughter” all named some sort of validation process / strategy during their interviews. “Daughter,” for example, shared that she loves earning credentials and is motivated by badges. “Interdisciplinary” stresses the importance of institutions recognizing “all that effort that you put in” to professional development, because that recognition not only has social and psychological impacts, it can also lead to economic ones (like promotions and raises). “Mom,” “Introvert,” and “Musician” all shared that the reality is...even though they aren’t personally motivated by these types of things, they looked for and prioritized some sort of completion element (e.g. “some kind of way to storytell the successful completion or end result” (“Mom”), “a demonstrable unit of merit towards my promotion or my advancement” (“Musician”), or “an artifact that I can put on my resume” (“Introvert”)).

Making space for the things we find valuable, though...that’s where we get into a messier discussion. Recall, for example, where “Daughter” got her name (or, in fact, the origins of everyone’s pseudonym): it stemmed from a conversation where she storied that she viewed something as a valuable scholarly pursuit that her supervisor did not (and therefore she didn’t have his support to formally pursue it). In a somewhat parallel way, “Mom” has to justify every professional development activity she engages in. She did express that she felt lucky to work for a unit that more or less unconditionally supports professional development, but she said there was “an instance” where her unit leadership (run by “dudes, male identifying folx”) took so long to make a decision on one of her requests that she was going to miss out on the opportunity, so she ended up just paying for it using her own personal funds. She acknowledged that she is in a place of

privilege to be able to do so, but pointed out that even in a unit that is highly supportive of professional development, there are times she is starting to notice when women make a request that is related to work (just maybe not explicitly so), and it takes leadership long-enough to review it that they are missing out of really cool and potentially transformative opportunities. It serves, though, as another example of a misalignment between perceptions of *value*, impacting what educators are and are not allowed to engage in.

I also entered into an interesting conversation around the idea of “wasting time.” Consider takeaway resources and handouts as an example. As a designer, sometimes I use them because I know there’s only so much time in a single synchronous session and I can’t possibly cover everything that’s relevant, so I’ll create a resource that attendees can engage with asynchronously. Sometimes I count on / rely on that resource (which could be the slides) because I’ve run out of time during a synchronous session, so I can point to that resource as an opportunity for attendees to spend time with asynchronously (in this case to review what I thought I’d have time for). Some of these handouts are designed with the asynchronous in mind, meaning that I designed them using principles of design I would otherwise employ when designing an asynchronous learning environment. Others are essentially representations of points of interest discussed during the synchronous session. As you might expect, this second type is the more common of the two...it takes less time to create. Those are typically short, one-page documents that are designed to be minimalist (a notes document, if you will, with a high-level preview). It is designed to not take a lot of time to engage with and to be easy to scan. The first type, which would most certainly take more time to design,

could also facilitate, though, the taking of more time on the part of those engaging with it because it is not meant to be scanned in the same way a one-pager is.

When creating these resources, one of the things I think about is whether or not they will be used, and I have to assess, based on how much time I have to design and create, whether it is worth my time to make in the first place. The survey data collected for this dissertation would suggest that people do engage with these types of resources (at least occasionally). So I have to weigh whether that 61.6% of people the either “Occasionally,” “Very Frequently,” or “Always” engage in session recordings or the 87.2% of people that either “Occasionally,” “Very Frequently,” or “Always” engage in session resources (like handouts) is worth my time. I would argue that it is, but that’s me...assessing *my* time.

Then again, there’s nuance here to be explored. From my conversation with “Low Income Learner,” I learned that he doesn’t engage with session resources like these unless they are easy to find, locate, and search. In his opinion, these resources should be publicly available too: “I would rather them be resources that are publicly available rather than for a limited time. It’s like, ‘Why don’t you just make it public? I’m not gonna go to your PD to get *this*.’” I had to sit with this comment for a second...especially the bit where he said “I’m not gonna go to your PD to get *this*.” Because this is important to remember: whatever time I do take on designing and creating a session handout, attendees did not come *for* that handout. I think part of this has a lot to do with the modality the resource was designed for and where the designer’s intentions were during its composition. If it is clear that it was designed as an artifact for something synchronous, I know to not spend a lot of time on it (it’s feels like an unspoken design

rule...I know and you know this handout is not supposed to take me a lot of time to engage with on the backend). If I know that it was intentionally designed for the asynchronous, I will spend more time engaging in it as a learner, especially if it was designed well. That said, from my conversation with “Low Income Learner,” I also learned that he is like me in that he usually ends up leaving an event (like a conference) with an either physical or digital stack of handouts, resources, takeaways. On our better days, those end up “on my Google drive like a folder of like takeaways, and like one sheets” (“Low Income Learner”). Usually, though, those remain there unless we happen to remember something and then we take even more time attempting to find the relevant resource (only to spend very little time re-engaging with it...as per its design).

“Introvert’s” experience is similar to ours, as well. For her, she estimates, “Maybe 10% of the time I go back.” Sometimes she goes back because she missed part of the session (and was liking it up to that point, so wants to finish it through the recording). Other times she goes back because she is working on something really specific and wants to reference it (echoing what “Low Income Learner” shared). For example, on one occasion, “Introvert” was working on a newsletter and needed a quote:

I went and found the email where they sent out the recording, clicked on the link, and re-watched the entire session again because I was putting together a newsletter and one of the speakers had said something really profound, and I wanted to quote them. And so I was doing something that reminded me of that specific resource. And I went back and found it later.

I’ll linger on her reference to the “profound” because it nods back to something “Low Income Learner” said, as well. For him, the takeaway isn’t actually the handout, it is, to use “Introvert’s” word choice, the *profound*:

The takeaway that I actually want is I want to change the way that I think about something, and I want to be still thinking about that thing. That's far more important for me than even being able to get a hold of that person ever again, or their email or any contact. The main idea...some kind of transformative idea or something that has me thinking, I'm pondering on it like days later...that's the takeaway that I actually want.

Why linger on this? Well, because it's not about the resource at all, then, it's about what they came to the resource for. In the case of "Introvert" and "Low Income Learner," we learned that for them, it is to spend more time again with profound things, the things that make them think, the things that changed their perspective. I'd argue that we can establish more effective ways to design for that. In fact, I can already imagine, if I close my eyes and allow myself the time to imagine (as I just did), a technology that facilitates synchronous, time-aligned reflecting and note-taking that gets automatically mapped to post-synchronous recordings in order to more easily facilitate asynchronous engagement⁹¹. Because that's what notes fundamentally are, really...moments in time where I signal to my-later-self that there's something worth spending more time on, later, asynchronously.

In some ways, a tool *does* exist that would allow us to do this...we just might not be leveraging it in this way. Let's take a second to reimagine Zoom chats as a possibility. Following a recorded session, Zoom chats are saved. When you watch the recording back, you can choose to do so while referencing the time-aligned archived chat as well (you can even search the chat). There are other tools that exist, too, like Panopto that arguably make this experience more user-friendly. But that's not the core idea here. Imagine if we prompted people to use the chat for the sake of their future

⁹¹ I wouldn't be shocked to learn that a tool like this already exists, to be honest.

selves? Imagine if we developed (whether that be as a collective or as individuals) a series of codes to use during the course of a synchronous session in the chat in order to tag things for various purposes, like “PROFOUND” or “DIVE DEEPER”?⁹² What if we made space for our future selves and designed the synchronous with the asynchronous in mind? What would that position us to think about?

This all troubles the concept of *value*, though, because based on that discussion, would I position a handout as *valuable*? I certainly wouldn't say that it holds *zero* value. But for “Low Income Learner,” I would predict it to hold less value than it would for “Introvert.” Likewise, I could approach this entirely from the perspective of time: was it a valuable use of my time to create it? And again, I could turn to metrics (like the kinds referenced in the Metrics of Success subsection), but these would obfuscate the nuance of variable value. The answer is, and will remain, it depends...Are we operating on the base understanding that the single starfish matters? Are we operating on the base understanding that failed experiences can still be considered “valuable”? I would argue that answering these questions is more important than establishing the specific metrics themselves, for our answers to these questions serve as the foundational anchors for our systems of evaluation and assessment. We need a reframing of what counts, a reframing of value, and a deeper understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic pressures at play in evidencing the value of educator professional development.

Assessing quality

As I already alluded to, this subsection takes the stance of: *it's complicated*. But, let's explore some of the reasons why this is (according to the interviewees). First, there

⁹² What does it say about the current state of educator professional development that I genuinely paused before writing this into my dissertation due to the fact that this is an idea that would “sell”?

are a lot of factors that are out of our control. For instance, an educator developer might be told the day before (or even day-of) that they need to design and deliver a new learning experience. Now, if that designer has a lot of experience and other experiences they can pull from, the chances of that being ok, are probably pretty high. But the chances of it being good are much smaller (especially if 'good' is measured by the 9 design categories I reviewed in Chapter 6). And this is just one example of the types of things beyond our control. It serves as a useful reminder, though, that the professional development we design exists in a larger system. As a result, though, assessing *quality* will actually be incredibly difficult to accomplish. Sure, there are quality metrics and standards out there (the organization I work for even has their own suite of quality scorecards). They are, in my opinion, great places to start, especially if you have never thought about assessing quality before. That said, they are limited in the sense of what they will ultimately tell us. They are primarily oriented around design choices and elements. But they can't really tell us about the quality of the experience, which is mostly what was surfaced during the interviews I conducted for this dissertation. "Punk" argues that this system is so large and complex, that we don't actually currently have the means to properly assess quality in this case, really and moreover that they "don't even know what necessary resources would need to be accrued in order to do it well and reliably." Part of this system complexity is an under-valuing of teaching and learning. In the context of "PhD-less" institution, research is still highly valued and respected over teaching (I use the word "still," because "PhD-less" did observe that this was shifting...it was just really slow):

In my opinion, there is this culture or mentality that I have graduated with a Master's, let's say in Mathematics, I have been employed by the university to facilitate Mathematics. And then there's that feeling that I'm qualified, and you know, I have reached the point. And the next qualification will be to get a Ph. D. And when you get a Ph. D. the other qualification, I mean after that, is you write papers, you know, and the like. But in terms of growth or development, to, let's say pedagogy, or let's say in designing content or assessment online, or even on-site. There is no structure on that. And people feel like you know what I did a Master's or a Ph. D. I'm good to go, and therefore you will even find when it comes to promotion, when you look at the promotion criteria, it really doesn't factor such causes. They only look at, you know, academic level: Masters, Ph. D. How many papers have you published? How many journals have you published? How many conferences papers have you submitted? There is nothing on how many workshops have you attended on, say, developing content? How many workshops, how many seminars, how many courses on designing good assessment tasks? It is not there. It is missing.

(From my interview with PhD-less)

He also stories, I think importantly, that his job is actually quite uniquely positioned, as a result. He doesn't yet have his Ph.D., but yet he persists and was able to get a Director-level position on the basis of his teaching and learning background and expertise...which is otherwise unheard of in his country. Personally, it took a second for me to pause and for the implications of this to sink in...especially when I had been discussing the challenge of market saturation in other interviews that were contextualized in Higher Educations based in the United States. But when you exist in a system that either outright doesn't value or significantly under-values teaching and learning, we might wonder how perceptions of *quality* are impacted as a result (with respect to educator professional development). If I have never experienced online educator professional development before, how do I know if it is a *quality* experience or not? If I have only ever engaged asynchronously, how could I possibly judge synchronous formats? I could judge them, but up against what is the question, we

(myself and these educator professionals) would argue. If most of us haven't experienced truly quality asynchronous digital educator professional development, none of us have a reference point for what holistic *quality* looks like. "Musician" helps us to begin to understand why we might care about this:

We just haven't seen a lot of good models of asynchronous learning that doesn't get past compliance sort of pedagogy, because that's the way things were done. And then we're also trying to get over the bias that people automatically relate face-to-face to high quality engagement. And anyone in a large lecture class knows that anything past fourth row you might as well call distance learning, anyway, right? So what are we doing to create those communities of practice, and not that every course necessarily needs to have a community of practice. I mean community and connection is really important. But there may be some scenarios where, where I really want to feel is deeply connected to how is this particular activity or content helping me get to where I want to go? And then I need someone to help assess if I'm getting there because that's what I really don't know. So are we doing enough to really take authentic assessment seriously? Or has assessment really defaulted to the twentieth century extraction sort of model of higher education. Posited as this premium? And I'm like that that needs to be flipped on its head.

This is helpful for extending the conversation, because it also puts into dialogue the assumptions that people bring to professional development (e.g. that face-to-face is automatically higher quality engagement). This should go without saying at this point, but given that these educators all forwarded that this should not be a debate between asynchronous and synchronous digital learning...it is not synchronicity itself that we should be judging and evaluating; rather it is our approach to designing for and facilitation in a given modality or temporality that we should be considering.

The broader conversations we collectively engaged in related to *quality* were expansive in their reach. "Punk" and I, for example had a lengthy back and forth regarding the fact that educator professionals don't have sufficient time to dedicate to

the development of quality professional development, and we discussed the implications for the scale, then, of what we have available to judge, and also our hypotheses for the long-term implications of this reality. We also talked about how technology, and tech literacy can serve to hide things like lack of teacher / designer experience. The additional and final point of discussion I will synthesize is the influence of performative professional development. By performative professional development, I am referring to both ways in which educators engage in professional development, as well as the ways the system or institution might “perform” professional development. As an example, we talked about the ways in which an educator might “perform” an expected type of engagement in a breakout room during a session. This could be considered “performative” in the sense that if the educator is behaving in a certain way as a means to advance a really specific persona or meet a general expectation, this wouldn’t represent authentic engagement. Likewise, an institution might develop a new technology system that is storied as supporting and documenting engagement in professional development, but if they’re not backing that up with additional resources and the necessary infrastructure to help ensure engagement with that new tool is successful, then it is also a type of performative professional development (at least in the way we were framing it). In both cases, they reveal inauthenticity. How does this relate to our conversation around *quality*? Well, as we reflected on the fact that many of our positive experiences were positive as a result of our engagements with others, our engagement with the tools and content, and our engagements with the facilitators / instructors, we also began to wonder if this inauthenticity might play as a layer over quality. If I engage in what felt like an awesome conversation and then later find out that

it was an inauthentic one, how does that impact my perceptions of quality with respect to that conversation? While this dissertation is not the time nor place for exploring this further, I did seek to give you a sense of the many ways in which these educator professionals oriented to and thought about assessing quality.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION: IMAGINING A DIFFERENT FUTURE

It's not an uncommon practice, by any means, for educators to talk about and theorize the future of education. There's a whole body of scholarship dedicated to things like future-proofing, in fact. But given everything I've shared thus far and particularly the fact that educators aren't feeling fulfilled by educator professional development, I became intent on understanding what, then, they thought of our future. Do they, for example, anticipate the system of educator professional development shifting and improving? What do they see the role of educator professional development being into the future given where the world is heading? Do they even believe Higher Education will still exist as we know it in the next 20 to 30 years? These are the types of questions explored in this chapter. More specifically, though, I synthesize and discuss what I found and observed throughout the interviews through centering dominant rhetorical threads, as well as major challenges and barriers they reported regarding futures of higher learning and organizational change.

The role of cynicism, pessimism, hope, and desire

In Chapter 6, I introduced the concepts of *cynicism* and *pessimism*, particularly within a discussion of general views and understandings (on the part of the interviewees) about the current state of educator professional development. Because feelings of cynicism and pessimism were so prevalent throughout the interviews, this subsection provides dedicated space for further exploration and discussion, including positioning it up against other rhetorical strategies for future-thinking like *hope* and *desire*.

Cynicism and pessimism

In every interview I conducted for this dissertation, I asked some version of the question “Do you think we’ll ever get to that better future, and if so, what will it take to get there?” Here is a sample of the responses:

Maddie. Here's what my frustration is. If the pandemic didn't do it...That's my question, why didn't the pandemic do it for most higher education institutions? They had to go in emergency mode with faculty, who were more outdated than some of the outfits I have in my closet, and they needed that professional development. So even a pandemic didn't do it, Maddie... So I don't know what it will take for universities to change. [...] They like to talk about it that's for sure. They wanna say we reach out to the world aggressively, providing access. They like to talk about it, but they're not doing it.

(From my interview with “Daughter”)

I'm not very hopeful of that process honestly, because the immediate demands for higher education to deliver what, you know, whatever they're doing are becoming more and more intense that this transformational experience requires exceptional leadership. And I think that's a huge problem we have in higher education; administrators have not been properly or effectively developed to understand the complexities of leadership and the investment that it takes. And so that comes back to the capability maturity model of the organization. We'll see some institutions will do a transformation because of who is there, but there's not a systemic method for higher education to change. It's still an uncontrolled process.

(From my interview with “Interdisciplinary”)

I feel like there isn't a lot of evidence through recent public high impact instances that haven't resulted in change that make me question whether or not like less public trauma things- like, oh you know, like the sexual assault of hundreds of people...and we're still having like administrators not report and not perform mandatory reporting duties years and years later. It's like, if we can't like do this really big public accountability stuff that people are like, “You are still having this problem. How is that happening?!” I don't feel really confident that the kind of more pervasively cultural things can change. And I mean, we could take as an example [specific project name]. When did it start? I don't know... 2014-15. It was before I started working at the grad school. And we're still to a place where, like there's not an investment in using the word educator instead of faculty members or like, you know, I'm still working on buy-in to [specific project initiative name], which is a program that costs no money. And so these things that with investment and admin leadership, investment like buy-in, could result in some major positive cultural shifts. If it's left to people in my position, which is like no

power, then...I'm gonna do everything that I can do within the scope of where I'm situated but my scope of influence and the ripples are pretty limited. So I feel sometimes disenchanting and kind of bummed out about that.

(From my interview with "Mom")

It's interesting, coming from a business education background, because there's a lot of criticism of the students in a business degree as having a very capitalist attitude there for the degree itself. Higher education has become an obstacle to people's survival. They have to get a degree to get a job. They have to have a job to survive. If that means they have to cheat, they will do that. Your assignment is not going to stand between them and getting this degree, so that they can get a job, so that they can have healthcare and shelter and food. Like they are here to get what they have to have. And that pressure that I have, that anxiety that I don't have time, the feeling that I can't engage with learners the way I know to...that's not going to go away until we actually, as a species, invest in ourselves again. [...] If we're going to reach wonderful Star Trek Utopia, it's a bumpy road to get there and it's gonna take a couple 100 years. Or we're all just going to vaporize and die. We're getting pretty bimodal here, so I don't know. I'm not feeling really optimistic right now.

(From my interview with "Introvert")

Cynically. I think teaching is going to be continually be devalued, unfortunately. I think you're gonna see an increasing number of adjunct instructors, and they're gonna try and make the cost of paying people who actually do the work lower at some places. And then you're gonna get some places that are gonna choose to get, you know, really high profile people and pay them a lot of money, and they'll go at a premium, basically. And the places that are gonna do that or the places that do it now, they're probably just gonna continue doing it. And I'm sure everybody could list 5 places off the top of their head, and that would be who it is. I think that's the thing that I'm most frustrated with and worried about that I can kind of see. [...] I kind of focus on the good parts and recognize sometimes that the bad parts aren't really in my control even though they bum me out. But you know, if I stop working here or even if I went and like advocated so strongly for anything, it's probably not gonna really make a difference.

(From my interview with "Satirist")

The optimistic side of me wants to believe that that's possible. But it would take such a drastic remaking of what professional development is. It would have to be a release, something very disruptive technology-wise, I think, and culture would have to change to the level of like it's expected that everyone that works in the field of higher education should be spending, you know, 4 plus hours a week on their own professional development and everyone is actually doing that and actually spending the time to develop meaningful materials and can participate rather than what we have now where most participants are answering emails and doing 4 other things at the same time, while they're listening to this webinar so they're not really engaged or participating in a deep conversation and setting it

outside that time. I just don't think...I would like to hypothesize that it is. But the frank reality is, I really don't think it's going to change anytime soon because the people that are preparing these don't have time. The people that are consuming them don't have time. So unless there's like massive shifts in creating space and priority, I don't think that they're gonna shift. But I think that would have to be like a national legislation or something like that that would mandate space for that within professional development. But I don't think that's ever gonna happen.

(From my interview with "Low Income Learner")

I feel like I'm working within the system to make changes, to break down barriers and to push back against the status quo. That's what I do within the system...playing by the rules within the system. I have my doubts. Because, for example, when the pandemic happened, a lot of things were brought to light: the digital divide, our racist structures, but also, 'Hey! Technology! Zoom learning online! Like, oh, we can get more work done, and people are at a distance. They don't have to be in the office. This is a radical, different way to do things. And it's working. How can we leverage that? Yeah!' But instead, it's a reaction against. And how can we get back to the other one? Or how can we fight? You know? but because of that, I feel like the lack of learning from the pandemic, and taking advantage of some things...I have my doubts. I really have my doubts. But I'm gonna keep working to make things better in my circle and in my small circle, and hope that, you know, I can have an impact greater. And that's my whole life, though I mean, I'm semi-buddhist in my outlook. I meditate, and I do practice yoga quite a bit, and I set intentions for things like that, you know, for the world. So I do what I can in my small circle. But I don't know about the big changes in Higher Ed. You would think it would be broken by now. I mean, it kind of is broken. But it's still running, you know. So...

(From my interview with "Sci-Fi Fan")

A lot of people come to professional development that's convenient and fits in your schedule. And I'm one of those. For as much as I wanna appreciate good professional development, if you need any professional development, you're gonna get what fits into your schedule. And that's how you're gonna prioritize it. Because it seems like things are just more and more and more and things get more and more and more out of control. We're all stressed out and nobody knows how to fix it...well we know how to fix it, but we don't cause...I don't know...like I've been struggling with this on my own. I thought back to the week before I took vacation, and it's like, how do you...I can recognize that was not good for me, that it was not good for the work I'm trying to do. It probably wasn't good for the team that I'm leading. You know? So how do I avoid doing that to myself again? One is, I probably should say no to more things or push them out further. Two is I have to recognize that I just can't do it all. Part of not wanting to say no is pleasing people, and the other part of it is like, I don't want to admit my

own limitations like...I'm starting to learn this about myself, too. [...]. It's the convenience of things though. We still only have so much time and so much money.

(From my interview with "Architect")

Their words echoed a lot of what I had been feeling for a while but hadn't really had a space to talk about with such honesty. Truth is, I don't know if I believe Higher Education can ever become what most of the educator professionals I talked to are imagining and what I, too, am imagining...at least not without some massive societal change that forces Higher Education to change. Based on where we are at the moment, though, and the current state that these educator professionals described, Higher Education is outdated and has poorly prepared leadership. Higher Education has been given multiple moments and opportunities to prove to us that it can change, both locally and globally, and didn't, and ultimately let us down...time and time again. For example, many across education viewed COVID-19 as a moment for cautious optimism for the future of Higher Education because it was such an abrupt and widespread disruption. Some even found hope. But while some things in Higher Education did change, the system as a whole did not. The push to "return to normal" was so powerful and decisive that any chance for systemic change was seemingly erased from the world of possibility. This concern (i.e. that we learned nothing from COVID-19) surfaced in "Daughter's" and "Sci-Fi Fan's" worries, who are both left feeling like we had an opportunity to completely transform things and we didn't take. Even on local levels, within the context of institutions that spread narratives of change and better futures, we see stories of top-level leaders engaged in very public scandal (like what I described has been happening at Michigan State University in Chapter 2). So even when facing such a public spotlight, it feels like there is no real urgency within the university to

actually transform, something that many of these educator professionals echoed throughout and across their interviews regarding other institutional contexts and top-level leaders. These very public examples of poor leadership certainly encourage distrust in university leadership and likewise decreases feelings of capacity for change at lower levels of leadership. This can be seen in “Mom’s” case. She shared that she recognizes and wrestles with the limited power her position holds and when witnessing others with far greater institutional power struggling with instituting change, it doesn’t result in helping her feel more empowered in her role...quite the opposite, in fact. It certainly makes it easier to harbor feelings like those of “Satirist” in that it feels like no matter what we do, those actions ultimately won’t matter at scale because of the larger, shitty situation we find ourselves in.

These educator professionals understand that this is a massively scaled problem involving multiple complex systems. It is a problem that exists at the level of our species (i.e. at a societal level and the level of humanity)...Higher Education is just one small component of it. Many people, including students, educators, and leaders alike, are working to simply survive at this point. These educator professionals understand that it will take massive coordination on a scale we’ve never seen before in order to establish a collective process for change. But oh wait...we have seen it...at least to a degree. We saw the world come together around COVID-19. There was a lot of death, there *still* is a lot of death. The pandemic is not over, we’ve just moved into a stage of “living with it.” And I suppose that’s our collective skepticism of Higher Education...that even if we get to the point of massively scaled, global collaboration and coalitions, that the pressures to “return to normal” (in this case, let’s take this to mean that the pressures of the

systems we live and work in which attempt to control the “normal”) will be too strong and we’ll ultimately shift back into a state of “living with it” again. I say “again” because that’s where I think most of us are currently (at least if these interviews are even minorly representative of the larger community). We’re living with it. That doesn’t mean that everyone is complacent. In fact, quite the opposite...everyone I talked to is doing what they can where they can, when they can to try to push against those pressures. Everyone is trying *something*. They’re just not sure what those actions will ultimately contribute to over time and what they mean with respect to the future of Higher Education. So in one way, we can interpret these actions as trying something...anything...to “live with it” as best they can. The slight irony of it all is these educator professionals have gotten to the point where they all think the only way for the current system to shift would be for us to experience some massive disruption (which, again, is where cynicism and pessimism creep in...because we just experienced a massive disruption in the COVID-19 pandemic). “Interdisciplinarian” hypothesizes that a significant failing lies within our administrative leadership...that we simply don’t have the leaders for this level of change. “Low Income Learner” hypothesizes that it might take the new release of a disruptive technology...maybe something that completely changes how teaching and learning happens.⁹³ “Introvert” thinks that in order to transform, we need to completely reinvest in humanity and confront the capitalist structure we are trapped in (something echoed by both “Architect” and “Satirist”). Regardless of our theories for what needs to happen, none of us feel overly optimistic about it.

⁹³ Perhaps we could look to Artificial Intelligence for a potential window, here, for the potential of system change and take the time to actually consider the long-term implications of AI for education.

It's a hard place to be and has resulted in some fairly significant consequences for me, personally, like burnout (as I described in Chapter 2). My burnout was certainly impacted by feelings and doubts about if my work was even making a difference at all. Even when I received feedback from individuals about positive experiences in programming, I saw the system persist (and in some contexts I saw things get worse). And I wanted to give more, especially if it meant that I could contribute to change, but I got to a point of burnout where I couldn't give anything else. It was a self-perpetuating cycle at that point. I am not the only one who feels like they've been giving a lot with no return. For others, like "Mom," this has led to the loss of a sense of community and commitment:

I used to feel a really strong sense of commitment to [Institution Name] as an institution. And then over time, like [Institution Name] feels a little bit like an abusive relationship, right. Like I'm giving all...giving her all my love, and she's not like giving much love back to me. [...] So right now, it's like the culture of my unit - the culture of flexibility and trust in my unit - that is what is keeping me in my unit. [Institution Name] is not doing much for keeping me at [Institution Name].

So what's being raised, ultimately, in these interviews are significant aspects of our identities as educator professionals being questioned and disrupted.

Given that I find myself in a similar situation and with similar feelings as these educator professionals, I decided that this dissertation would be another attempt at doing *something, anything* to change the current system. After all, like everyone else I've talked to and worked with over the years, I am governed and driven by the belief that individual people can instigate and contribute to large-scale change, meaning that even small acts *do* matter. I believe that even when my reality is telling me that's not the case. In my most cynical moments, sometimes I wonder if historical narratives of

change have been storied in the way that they have so I can retain *just enough* optimism to keep trying. Stories of race riots and social justice movements...stories of courage and heroism and sacrifice...stories that have and still to this day inspire me and remind me that seemingly small acts can have enduring impact. But do they lead to enduring change? In the U.S. alone, we've seen, in the last one hundred years, significant movement towards more equitable and socially just futures, as well as now, within the last 10 years, significant movement away from more equitable and socially just futures. It's hard not to wonder if we as a species are actually able to change.

This feeling...this terrible feeling of dread...this aching gut feeling that the answer is "no," often leaves me feeling stuck in the bimodal version of the future that "Introvert" references; that change is either going to happen or it's not, and that we're either going to move towards a "Star Trek Utopia" or "vaporize and die." And "Introvert" and I aren't the only ones who feel this way. "Storyteller" also storied this (also through a reference to Star Trek, funnily enough): "I'm really curious to see what's gonna fall out, whether we're gonna have the Terminator future or we're gonna have the Star Trek future." Likewise, "Interdisciplinary" and I talked about this as feeling on the "edge of a precipice." And in fact, the scale of the problem is so large and dire that we're on the "edge of multiple precipices," as "Interdisciplinary" and I discussed, each of us facing our own challenges but sharing the feeling of being on the edge of a massive precipice, burdened by a dominantly bimodal uncertainty about the future layered with the overwhelming cynical and pessimistic feeling that we likely won't go towards the Star Trek future. And who can blame us? Those working in Higher Education aren't even on the same page about the future(s) we're working toward. Can you describe it? Every

time I hear it described, it is different. And maybe that's the challenge...it's a future of pluralities and we're not actually all that great at embracing and making space for pluralities. When we say a "better" future, what do we mean?

Reminding myself that this is a dissertation about educator professional development, what in the world does this all have to do with it? I'd argue that it has everything to do with it. On the future of professional development specifically, "Satirist" said, "There's no solution to that besides people becoming better and radically changing all of society. But you can, as an educator professional, do your best to make sure the PD you're providing doesn't suck and acknowledges the realities that people exist in." He then followed this sentiment by saying, "I am just shaking my fist at clouds today," a self-reflexive comment he felt the need to share once he realized this was one of several cynical things he had shared already over the course of our conversation. Others, like "Storyteller" shared their worries about the current state of professional development: "I'm concerned about it." Our conversation (the one I had with "Storyteller") largely centered Artificial Intelligence as a critical area of focus within Higher Education at the moment, and something she believes we all need to take more seriously. She continued by saying, "I see the good in it. I see the bad in it, and it's gonna take a much larger consensus to get to a point where educators really can take this on and do what we need to do to make a better future - the Star Trek future, not the Terminator future - but it's gonna be a kind of all-hands-on deck moment...everybody."

The fact is, cynicism and pessimism weighs heavily on the work these educator professionals do. If you learned one thing from Chapter 5 of this dissertation, one thing to help you understand the implications of these stories, here, it is that we carry our

lived experiences with us; they contribute to how we make meaning, how we view and experience the world and therefore what we contribute back into the world. So for those of us wanting to move towards change and a *better* future, we have to recognize that this cynicism and pessimism is real, it is embodied, and it likely isn't going away anytime soon. "Introvert" argues that "a jaded, exhausted instructor cannot inspire students." If you agree with her, I would extend this to relatedly and suggestively ask, then: can cynical and pessimistic educator developers inspire change?

Hope

Hope is a common thread in current theories of change within Higher Education (or books about the need for change, at least). I am not new to the concept of *hope*. In Queer Theory, for instance, scholars theorize *hope*. As an example, Ahmed (2012) discusses *queer hope*, saying, "A queer hope is not [...] sentimental. It is affective precisely in the face of the persistence of forms of life that endure in the negative attachment of 'the not'. Queer maintains its hope for non-repetition only insofar as it announces the persistence of the norms and values that make queer feelings queer in the first place" (p. 437). Other Queer Theorists, such as Muñoz (2019) position *hope* in relation to 'the not' through conceptualizing it around "a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (p. 1). In this way, *hope* is that thing that helps drive us towards acknowledging that something is missing and that this world is not enough. As Muñoz continues, "queerness" (and I would bridge this to queer hope) "is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (p. 1). I feel

closest, I think, to this kind of *hope*. It is a related *hope* to that forwarded by Royster and Kirsch (2012). They reference Paula Mathieu (2005) in suggesting that “to have hope, to envision a future requires not only imagination but action” (p. 73). Slightly distanced from ‘the not’ that Ahmed and Muñoz position *hope* around, I would make the case that *critical hope*, a more recent argument for *hope* (see, for example, Grain, 2022; Bishundat et al., 2018; and Czerniewicz & Cronin, 2023) is an extension of Royster and Kirsch (2012). *Critical hope* is action-forward. According to Bishundat et al. (2018), “practicing critical hope requires an acknowledgement of the various ways in which hope has been used to both advance democracy, equity, and justice as well as to maintain the status quo” (Bishundat et al., 2018, p. 93). This is not to say that Muñoz (2019) wasn’t positioning *hope* as action-forward. Muñoz actually argued that we need to engage in a practice of hope “that is grounded and consequential, a mode of hoping that is cognizant of exactly what obstacles present themselves in the face of obstacles that so often feel insurmountable” (p. 207). From my understanding, *critical hope*, then, is more about looking at what is and imagining what could be (which is quite different than centering ‘the not’).

To me, it kind of feels like *hope* is everywhere right now. I am only halfway through the book at the moment, but the collective of authors who contributed to “Higher education for good: Teaching and learning futures” (Czerniewicz & Cronin, 2023) believe that change is possible. It is the kind of book that you read and gain *hope* from...knowing that there is a group of people dedicated, still, to the future of higher education. The book opens with a forward that extends a powerful call to action:

This courageous book works with an unspoken proposition, that we cannot wait for the neoliberal university to transform itself. Universities can change ‘because of their capacity for challenge, critique, invention and intellectual growth... but it has to be fought for.’ (Connell, 2019, p. 10, cited in Jansen, 2023, p. 27)

Throughout the book, the collective attempts to define what we mean by *good*, something I call for, too, in this dissertation. One thing they say to this end is that they are advancing “a vision of universities re/claiming their roles of ‘serving society as a change agent and empowering people across different sections of society’” (Misra & Mishra, 2023, p. 575, cited in Cronin & Czerniewicz, 2023, p. 3). The authors of this collection have hope that this is actually possible; we need people who have hope.

There is hope, too, in adrienne maree brown’s (2017) “Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds.” As maree brown claims, “everything we attempt, everything we do, is either growing up as its roots go deeper, or it’s decomposing, leaving its lessons in the soil for the next attempt” (p. 74). To maree brown, then, we have to engage in change and in doing so can adopt an “emergent strategy” for change, a strategy that recognizes and validates and values change in the places it occurs (activist communities, for instance). That said, when it comes to *hope*, maree brown (2017) positions it within the context of being “unrealistic” and within the context of a ‘worst case scenario.’ Take these two instances of *hope* in the book, for example:

At its worst, this approach builds up hope and encourages local communities to take risks, and then abandons them with the results. At its best, there is a moment of victory. But too often, in spite of their best intentions, those who aren’t directly impacted only see the surface layer(s) of the impact, and thus come up with surface solutions that don’t address the deep-seated multi-pronged need in the community. (p. 41)

These agendas are often burdened by an unrealistic hope, an underestimation of how long conversations may actually take. (p. 136)

I needed this reading of *hope* (i.e. maree brown's). If *hope* is part of a worst case, then it might not be what we're aiming for, but rather something we can use along the way, because like anything else, *hope* can be unrealistic. You might be thinking "well, of course, Maddie." But when you read that fear and isolation and despair are "enemies" of hope from scholars like Bishundat et al. (2018, p. 94) and you , yourself, have been feeling isolation and some despair and fear (feelings that, as you might recall, came up explicitly in the dissertation interviews reported on here)...I can tell you from experience that the last thing you'd want to hear is that you just need to hold onto *hope*. What if I, for instance, find it productive to dwell in my despair? What if through that despair I locate discomfort, and what if through that discomfort I am finally able to identify new alternatives?

I am probably oversimplifying all the arguments around *hope*, but to me, *hope* feels like education's *thoughts and prayers*. It feels passive and future-focused in a way that doesn't allow for the acknowledgement that things are actually quite shit and things that we can't just hope our ways out of. *Hope* feels like a part of capitalism's secret positivist-rhetorical arsenal...that when I have admitted to myself finally that change won't happen, I'm reminded that I am supposed to keep hope and remain optimistic. Given everything that has happened and continues to happen, particularly the aftermath of the massive shift online due to COVID-19 and the current and urgent moment of burnout for educators that is still yet to be addressed, I am still left feeling this pressure to *hope* for a better future. But these things are still active. We're not post-pandemic. We're not post-burnout. We're still living with and through these right now, and that has provided a real, embodied tension. I think we need to dwell on whether psychologically

and socially and culturally, we believe change is possible...and ask whether it will ever be possible and devise a scheme that dares higher education to prove us wrong. I'll take a brief moment to pause, here, because I use the word *scheme* very intentionally. The Oxford Dictionary defines "schema" as "a representation of a plan or theory in the form of an outline or model." By a happy accident, when I was retrieving this definition, I accidentally misspelled it and received a search result for "scheme" instead (Oxford Languages, 2024).

Scheme:

noun

1. BRITISH

a large-scale systematic plan or arrangement for attaining a particular object or putting a particular idea into effect.

"a clever marketing scheme"

2. INFORMAL•SCOTTISH

a public housing complex.

"the whole scheme is plunged into darkness, bar the light in Victor's house"

verb

make plans, especially in a devious way or with intent to do something illegal or wrong.

Phrases

the scheme of things — a supposed or apparent overall system, within which everything has a place and in relation to which individual details are ultimately to be assessed.

"in the overall scheme of things, we didn't do badly"

I began to wonder what would happen if, instead of framing our work around *schema*, we instead sought to orient around *schemes*? What if there were *schemes* to redesign educator professional development and *schemes* to reimagine how asynchronous digital learning was supported? What if the models we did create were deeply

entrenched in collective *schemes* for a better future; *schemes* for good, that is, taking up what might be “wrong” to a capitalist structure (like taking time, say an entire workday, to fully engage in professional development) in order to expose and rewrite the more nefarious *schemes* at the heart of and perpetuated by capitalism? Would these be counter-schemes? Could intentional scheming be productive? If we take up a lens of *schemes*, what other schemes are already active and underway? For example, Halberstam’s (2011) *subversive intellectualism* is, in my opinion, a *scheme* in this sense. “Dominant history teems with the remnants of alternative possibilities, and the job of the subversive intellectual is to trace the lines of the worlds they conjured and left behind” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 19). Schemes are subversive, but in a capitalist market that tends to co-opt and commodify, a well-planned and coordinated scheme feels necessary for change.

To bring us back to hope, then, I would argue we need to collectively devise schemes not through *hope*, but through dwelling in the cynicism, pessimism, and discomfort of reality and lived experience. *Hope*, if experienced like toxic positivity (e.g. “It’ll be great. It’ll be fine. It’ll happen. We just had to keep fighting the good fight...change will come”), runs the risk of further perpetuating burnout and despair. *Hope* asks us to trust in a future we cannot control nor predict. And as we have already seen, educator professionals have lost a lot of trust in the education system. We need to read and hear more stories about real change. The lack of change is driving a lot of folks out of the field and away from education...it’s driving me away and some of these interviewees (like “Mom,” who shared that there’s not much keeping her at her job right now). We need to know change is real and not just imagined. We need to know all

those pluralities are possible and not just imagined...that they, too, can be real. We need more stories of pluralities, real pluralities.

Interestingly, *hope* played an incredibly small role in the stories I was told by the educator professionals I interviewed. Only one interviewee, “Interdisciplinary,” even really brought up the concept. It was in a conversation we were having about “heroes” and “heroic actions.” As he was talking, he sounded somewhat hopeful to me, so I asked him if he was working on a premise of *hope*. This was his reply:

Even the recorded lectures that have no engagement, and that might be, you know, 50 minutes long, right? For some people who have no access to other people's view on things, that can be really helpful. And so again, I'll come back to what do people have and what would be a gift? When you're poor, you know, anything could be a gift. [...] And the reason I'm starting with that point is, you asked, 'do you think in the future we'll get to a point where we can help everyone?' I think, given the diversity of people and the complexity of what they need, we will never be perfect, right? There'll always be challenges. But I do believe that we are going to get better because I think what's happening, a little bit, is Education is recognizing that content is not all you need to know to teach, right, that the means of delivering that content to human beings, the technology and the engagement of the learner, and what they have to do...The practice of education, not the content of education is very important.

You might notice that he never outright states that he is hopeful, nor that he is operating on a basis of hope. Rather, he sees small examples of change and believes that to do something is better than nothing. More specifically, in his opinion, “we are partially successful relative to if we didn't do anything, right? There has been progress in the quality of professional development. But I think there's much more to become better at.” So he is committed to progress and understands that even small acts can have large impact(s), particularly when we consider individual learners’ and their needs. And even though he said, “I do believe that we are going to get better” in the context of this

particular part of our conversation, if we return to his response to when I asked him whether or not he thought we'd ever get to that better future, he began his reply with "I'm not very hopeful of that process honestly." All that to say that even the one explicit mention of the concept of *hope* was still at tension with cynicism and pessimism.

We might wonder, then, why educator professionals still persist in their roles? This exact question came up in a few of the interviews. Again, here are some of the responses:

Why I keep on pushing the things that I do is because I believe that education is that complex thing, but it is what can make the world a better place, right? And so we gotta figure it out.

(From my interview with "Interdisciplinary")

I think it's gonna take an awful lot of work, and the burden is gonna be on the shoulders of folks in Higher Ed. And it is really a burden that people don't want to pick up, because they've already got too much on their plates. And, you're right, the burnout is a very real, impertinent thing. I know I've felt burnout for quite a while now. Basically, since the pandemic where we were literally working 7 days a week to try to get everybody up and running online. And it was just expected that we were going to do that because that burden to help the faculty was on us and there wasn't anybody else. So it was, you know, they're either gonna sink or swim by themselves, or we're gonna have to be there to help them. And so we just kind of felt it as a moral obligation. And we were working 7 days a week, trying to help all of the faculty because we understood what was at stake. And that's where Higher Ed, in general, is today. We're going to have to be the ones to step up. Because if we don't do it, who is...industry? Hardly. You know their bottom line is profit. So if we don't step up to do it, then it's not gonna happen, and that's where it would be very easy to slide into the Terminator future.

(From my interview with "Storyteller")

A jaded, exhausted instructor cannot inspire students. But if you take a little bit of that burden and you're like 'I am in this with you, I am not just sitting here telling you that your course is bad, and you have to redo it' like I am here to say, you know, 'you last had to design this course with what you had available 3-5 years ago. If you could reimagine it in any way...sky's the limit...anything...you could do anything with this course, what would it be?' And then I find ways to get at

least part way there. And they're a lot more willing to invest in all of that work and do the extra part to build that course and make something really cool. But I have to believe that trickles down. And, you know, at least my corner of Tik Tok has a lot of young people who are dismantling the patriarchy and burning down capitalism and unionizing. So if I can give them boost into the business world, they can go burn that specific corner down, and I think that would be making it better, so...

(From my interview with "Introvert")

I'm looking for that nugget, you know. I want that that moment that's gonna change how I think about something, or I'm gonna find new information that I haven't heard before that's gonna open up a new space about how I think about or do my job in a more effective way. I'm still looking for it, and I'm willing to do the work and sit through the crappy PDs. But I do, I mitigate it, and I'll opt out. Like, if I get part way through something I'm like, 'Yeah, this is not just my time...I'm out'... just pop out or or I don't have time, you know, given the constraints of my job at the moment, or you know, whatever stuff's going on...just deal with it, right? Yeah, I don't know. There's not really another option right? It's like either I stay. I stand still, which for me feels like...(expresses a face of disgust), or I keep trying....push the envelope by going out and seeing what's out there, and then hoping to find that space, right. And I just- I'm not willing to feel like I'm standing still or regressing. But for my own personal development and my own growth, like I'm hungry for it, and I want it.

(From my interview with "Low Income Learner")

At its core, I think, it [education] is an altruistic endeavor, where people want the students to succeed. It's very rare you find an actual negative person. At least at the place I work. Not to say they don't exist, not to say there aren't bad people everywhere, but for the most part people are trying and they do care. The ways they express that are sometimes not what I would think are useful or helpful, but they're not doing it usually to just be punitive. They're doing it because they think it's valuable and useful for the students, and they want them to be successful. They're worried about them. They care about their success. It's rare that you find a place that the whole point is for other people to do well, you know. That's what everybody's driving towards. And not to just like be able to use this cool thing, and it better's their life, but like to do well in terms of 'I want you to be a better person, a more interesting person, more thoughtful person by the time you leave here, and I want your life to be more interesting. And for you to get more value out of the time you have being alive than you would have if you hadn't gone through this, because you've got to experience so many things and heard people

talk about it, you know, passionately or in an interesting way, or got exposed to something that you wouldn't have gotten exposed to.' [...] The ability for somebody to access information that they would never have any concept even existed is huge. And then to have somebody who's like passionate about that, or interested in, or at the very least, has some expertise in it to be able to guide you through a learning process, even if it's not the best learning process that has ever been existed, is also valuable. So, you know, I kind of focus on the good parts, and recognize sometimes that the bad parts aren't really in my control even though they bum me out. But you know, if I stop working here or even if I went and like advocated so strongly for...anything, it's probably not gonna really make a difference.

(From my interview with "Satirist")

What I see most present in these excerpts, particularly, are rhetorical mechanisms that sit at the intersection of survival and persistence. "Interdisciplinary" believes that education can make the world a better place "so we gotta figure it out." It's as though this is the future he has been working towards and believes in and so he is committed to it. It makes me wonder whether he could reconcile any other future and whether he could imagine any other future (aside from negative ones). To him, this is no alternative. "Storyteller" sees it as "a moral obligation" and believes that educators "understand what's at stake." As a result of the relationship between industry and capitalism, she believes we can't turn to industry for the answer, so she thinks educators are left with the "burden" of fighting for a better future (or at least a significant part of it). "Introvert" is deeply motivated by the personal commitment to not perpetuate the harmful systems she experienced as an early-career professional. She wants to "take a little bit of that burden" and gets by on a day-to-day basis by reminding herself that small impact moments like that do make a real difference. I think it's telling that she said "I have to believe that trickles down." It is as though she doesn't actually believe it (or is doubting it), even though she is reminding herself that she should. She then looks to spaces like

TikTok as evidence that perhaps it is true...perhaps change is possible and she could contribute to it. “Low Income Learner” also sees no other option. For him, standing still and not progressing is undesirable. He is motivated to continue to learn and grow, and it’s that personal desire that drives him (at least in the context of attending professional development, which is what his comment was specifically about). Finally, “Satirist” began his response (not quoted here) by telling me he still works in Higher Education because he got a job years ago, kept getting promoted and given additional opportunities to learn and grow and as a result, said part of his reason to stay is that he doesn’t know what else he’d do. He also mentioned a degree of loyalty he now feels to the university he works at, and admitted that for him to change jobs or careers would mean a lot of work (and he doesn’t much like the realities of the fact that he’d have to do even more work just to leave). He does view education as an “altruistic endeavor” and shared that he thinks it rare to work in an environment where he feels everyone he immediately works with is collectively working towards the betterment of others (his voice actually expressed what I took as excitement when he was talking about it, as though he were expressing that he truly thought this was cool). That said, his response took a rather different turn as he transitioned towards some of the realities of the profession. For instance, his belief that no matter what he does, it probably won’t make a difference anyway is probably the most traditionally pessimistic sentiment shared during the interviews (and by this I mean that when you think of “pessimism,” you likely think of something like that). So to survive and nevertheless still persist while living in this state of mind, he said he focuses on the “good parts,” even though they “bum” him out.

Again, I'll point out that these aren't *uncertain* educators. They are all certain and firmly believe that if we do nothing, the system is doomed. Some of them (namely "Satirist") believe that even if we do anything, the system will still likely fail. So they persist because they don't see any other alternative, and they persist in spite of the fact that none of them actually believe change is likely to ever happen.

Desire

As a direct result of my work on this dissertation, I have been wondering if *desire* might be a more productive lens than *hope*. I can hope for ice cream or I can desire ice cream. One feels passive, the other far more active. I *want* change...I have a deep and aching longing for it. Scholarship on *hope* does position hope as active, and as a practice, etc. But it is a practice I know I am personally exhausted by, and it became evident throughout the interviews that others feel this way too. One example that surfaced quite often was the expression of "exhaustion" felt by continually going to 'bad' professional development (like when "Low Income Learner" said "it just kind of gets exhausting, and that's where I start to like pewter out and do less and less"). I am tired of hoping; too many things gave me hope only to then let me down. And these educator professionals have also been let down by poorly designed learning experiences and poor leadership and the larger system of education that promises one thing but is delivering another. I don't seek to argue here that *hope* isn't active. Nor do I seek to argue that others shouldn't be hopeful. I understand the argument for hope (even if I might challenge it here, for myself). If I imagine a world where I am full of a lot of hope, that means that enough change has happened and is happening around me such that it has resulted in me being full of hope. But again...it can be snatched away. So for me,

hope is not a productive lens for change. And I mean “for me,” because this work is quite personal, after all. A lens that works for one person might not be generative for another. With this in mind, I share *desire* here not as a critique of *hope*, but rather as an alternative to *hope*, and do so on the off chance that you as a reader might resonate with the sentiments I hold about *hope*.

I want people to *want* change...to desire it and long for it; to crave it so badly that they just have to satisfy the craving. We can satisfy cravings. It’s an imperfect metaphor, I know...cravings go away. Maybe *hunger*? Something I feel so deeply in my body that I can’t ignore it; can’t live without continually satisfying it. That is how dire this all feels to me (especially facing burnout, but more so when staring into a future on fire, a theater of a government, and real people dying). My point is that through *desire*, I can observe and theorize that we (those of us working as educator professionals) are suffering because we’re so hungry and because we are starving for real change. And *hope*...hope just doesn’t satisfy the cravings for me...it never has.

Higher education is a community knowingly entrenched in the depths of neoliberalism (and all its minions). We’re a community who sees it and who is able to recognize it. We’ve written about it as a challenge (Donnelly, 2015; O’Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013; Solomon et al., 2006; Whitchurch, 2013, McIntosh & Nutt, 2022; Osman & Warner, 2020; Kandiko, 2012; Lemoine et al., 2020; Hazelkorn et al., 2018; Groen et al., 2023; McArthur, 2013; DeRosa, 2023; Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Yajima, 2023), we have talked about how we don’t like it (Donnelly, 2015; DeRosa, 2023) and we’ve recognized that it is a driver of current models of higher education (Maxwell & Gallagher, 2020)...and not just in the U.S. either (Hazelkorn et al., 2018). These

scholars have all shown how incredibly pervasive it is and how colonial it is (even arguing how a capitalist market takes over solutions based on reform, disruption, revolution (see Hall, 2022)). And yet here we are, still persisting in it, donning the rose glasses of *hope* that higher education will be able to escape it, challenge it, move away from it.

I might argue that this perceived divide between the “corporate” and “capitalist” world and the “academic” world is, at this point, a futile one to attempt to uphold. They no longer exist in opposition to one another, and tracing back the history of the academy...it could be argued that they never were. Rather than two sides of a coin or in some binary relationship with one another, they are part of the same ecosystem and indeed, I’d make the case that they exist now, overlapping on the same continuum...feeding a larger capitalist system. How they do this, how openly they do this, how much resistance there is to this, the narratives around whether they do this...that’s where I make the case that we see these perceived differences. They *are* the same.

I have, as of late, been considering moving into a position in the corporate landscape. Interestingly, there are two responses I get when I talk about this to others. One is excitement around the possible careers I might choose and what kinds of work I might be doing. The other consists largely of stories from those who had worked in corporate only to return to or “escape” to another sector. What I find interesting is the disillusionment of the latter; a group of people who thought a return to higher education was somehow less toxic. It’s not...it’s just less openly toxic. It’s like choosing between two capitalist-driven political parties, one which is very open about that agenda, and the

other that, at worst, intentionally hides that very same agenda behind narratives of human rights and collective care, and at best, is ignorant to the fact that they are contributing to the same toxic, capitalist structures that they claim they are against. Both are terrible choices, so the choice becomes navigating to the lesser of two evils. So I am warned against moving to the corporate landscape because it is toxic and doesn't center the human, even though that has been the exact experience I have had in higher education. Don't get me wrong, there are *people* who center people in higher education...but the system as a whole does not. And you'll find people that center people across the range of professional and work-based sectors. If higher education is driven by the corporate landscape, wouldn't whatever ounce of "courage" I have left be best served trying to change that landscape...or at least work towards providing a viable alternative? Right now, how we *work* is driving how we *learn*. And as someone searching to open up and engage others in the world of learning, I am realizing I might be best served engaging in the world of *work*...or at least this is a real tension I am wrestling with right now and a tension I am willing to admit to you and story for you here.

But this is where I think a lens of *desire* can be helpful to us as an educator professional community. There is certainly *pleasure* (see Ahmed, 2012 and Leder, 1990) for my orientation to this concept) to be found in both academia and the corporate world. I can view the feeling of receiving positive feedback on a presentation or workshop as a form of pleasure. Often, I have felt physical excitement and happiness and enjoyment from positive feedback. I have also experienced pleasure in receiving raises and promotions, something that would certainly serve as a motivating factor for a move towards the corporate world. So starting first with the nuance of *pleasure*, what

kinds of educator professional development do we find pleasurable? What kinds of digital learning experiences do we find pleasurable? What about education do we find pleasurable? Then we can extend this to a larger exploration of *desire*. Queer scholarship on *desire* (e.g. Kempnaers, 2019; Alexander & Rhodes, 2011; Monson & Rhodes, 2004; Hammers, 2015) is significant for the ways in which it considers historically unheard and silenced voices. *Desire* (and *pleasure*) for that matter, was subjected to the *sexual* realm and as a result of the cultural oppression of queer cultures (broadly referenced here), *queer desire* was (and still is) something that was actively silenced. So to surface and center *desire*, in and of itself, feels radical. To admit to having desires in the first place feels radical. And it shouldn't, but given the historical, systematic oppression of queer cultures, we can understand why it does feel radical. Queer scholarship on *desire*, though (at least for me), liberates. Farina (2017), for example, discusses several approaches to *desire* that appear across Queer Theory, but ultimately forwards the concept of a "queer intoxication with desire" (p. 93) and the idea of being 'drunk on desire.' It reminded me of two things "Punk" said: 1) "You know, if we're in the business of education, we should be educating unapologetically and broadly," and 2) "...responsible educators are unapologetic learners, they're hungry learners themselves." This, to me, is an academic approximation of what Farina (2017) means by a "queer intoxication with desire" and approaching our work with a willingness to be 'drunk on desire.' "Low Income Learner" also expressed being "hungry" for professional development. He said, "I'm hungry for it, and I want it." This, too, is an expression of desire. So to name our desires, embrace them, live them, make space for

them, prioritize them, honor them...what might this look like for us in Academia, in educator professional development, and in asynchronous digital learning experiences?

This is where I can return to cynicism and pessimism, as another example (i.e. alternative to “Punk’s,” above). I’ve found dwelling in cynicism to be incredibly therapeutic during the course of this dissertation. I needed to hear from and dialogue with others through cynicism and pessimism. I needed to vent and express my doubts. I needed to learn from others who equally don’t think the scale of change being talked about right now in higher education is actually possible. Cynicism and pessimism brought me joy and laughter during this dissertation; I genuinely laughed in response to several instances of cynicism (particularly those delivered through the sarcasm of “Satirist” and “Introvert”). I feel like I have begun to find a new community through cynicism...a community of realists who don’t want to be jaded by hope but who are still committed to doing *something* and are trying to figure out what that *something* means in the bigger picture of things. We protect ourselves through cynicism...against hope and particularly when it takes the form of false hope or performative hope. In our conversation, after “Architect” shared that she goes into professional development expecting it to be bad, she said, “I’m surprised when things really connect, because I don’t expect that they’re going to. I guess I’m protecting myself from not being let down. I usually have practical reasons for doing what I’m doing, and if I get something more out of it then it’s a bonus.” In other words, “Architect” leverages a practical cynicism to measure and qualify expectations. We could argue that this is not *ideal*, but it is realistic, and I find dwelling on what *is* as a means to orient to and locate what *is not* to be helpful. “Architect” actually quotes Dr. Marilyn Sanders Mobley (2013) later in saying

“What we cannot acknowledge, we cannot address, and what we cannot address, we cannot make the progress we need to make.” So if it helps us to better acknowledge and visibilize the structure(s) and realities we are working within, perhaps a little cynicism isn’t so bad. But even now...even as someone who identifies deeply by Queer Theory and sees queer, radical potentials, I feel the normative pressures. Even admitting to you here that I discovered I desire cynicism and pessimism feels like a mistake, like something I should be ashamed of. But again, through a theory and lens of *desire*, I can locate that desire, observe it, analyze it, understand it...and through this work begin to also unveil the many, multiple futures and possibilities it maps to, as well as my deep, longing desire for radical transformation.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

As a means of moving towards some sort of conclusion, I am going to return to one of my academic roots: Linguistics. For a linguist⁹⁴, modality means something different than just whether we are learning asynchronously or synchronously. “Modality is a category of linguistic meaning having to do with the expression of possibility and necessity” (von Fintel, 2006, p. 1). In English, linguists see modality expressed through words like "should," "could," "might," "must," and so on, as well as phrases like "need to," and "have to". All languages express modality, but every language expresses it differently.

To dive in even deeper, for linguists, there are also several different types of modality: alethic modality (Greek: aletheia, meaning ‘truth’), epistemic modality (Greek episteme, meaning ‘knowledge’), deontic modality (Greek: deon, meaning ‘duty’), bouletic modality, circumstantial modality, teleological modality (Greek telos, meaning ‘goal’) (von Fintel, 2006, p. 2). Additionally, some linguists even argue and theorize that "modal expressions express quantification over possible worlds. [...] Different kinds of modal meaning correspond to different choices of sets of possible worlds” (p. 3). If we take these theories as actually representative of how the brain works, this would mean that when we are interpreting meaning from language (say a phrase) that leverages a modal, our brain is going through sets of possible worlds and checking that phrase against all possible sets of possible worlds in order to determine what we think this phrase means and to what degree it is true.

⁹⁴ I say “for linguists” here because disciplinary boundaries circumscribe and often gatekeep meaning. So something might mean one thing in linguistics, but might mean something different (related) to rhetoric.

Finally, as von Stechow (2006) would point out, to linguists there is actually a separate approach to talking about the temporal domain, called "temporality" (p. 1). Regardless, modality and temporality work together to "enabl[e] natural language to talk about affairs beyond the actual here and now" (von Stechow, 2006, p.1). von Stechow references Charles F. Hockett in extending that "modality and temporality are at the heart of the property of 'displacement'" (2006, p. 1).

Whether you agree with the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis or not (that deals with linguistic determinism and relativism), it is undeniable that there is a relationship between language and meaning and between language and thought. What we more specifically know of modality is that language can (and does) work to express and arguably bound (though this is what linguists do...they debate such things) the "space of possibilities" (p. 1).

Taken together, these linguistic theories help us to understand that we language possible worlds and in doing so, we make meaningful the possible worlds we language. If we extend languaging to be an act of making, we could rephrase this to also read as follows: we make possible worlds and in doing so, we make meaningful the possible worlds we make. If we likewise understand designing to be an act of making, we could rephrase this once more to yield yet another interpretation: we design possible worlds and in doing so, we make meaningful the possible worlds we design.

So what does this have to do with this dissertation and how is this a useful place to start to conclude?

I am going to argue that modality, as it is treated in the world of education, similarly deals in the space of possibilities. I am going to argue that it is, in fact, all about

possible worlds. It is about how we orient to them. It is about how we make sense of them, how we language them, how we value and interpret and prioritize and bound and resist them. It is about how we feel and position ourselves in relation to them. It is about whether or not we acknowledge them and allow them and make space for them. Finally, it is about how we validate them and in what ways we go about assigning a truth value to them.

This means that through our decision making, use of, design of, languaging of, making of [insert so many other verbs here] synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences, we are signaling what possible worlds can and do exist within the context of that learning experience and situating ourselves and learners in a relation of meaning to them. If we aren't careful with those educative practices and critically reflect on how we collectively experience them - how we live with and through and by them - we might not see the ways in which we are languaging/making/designing any number of possible worlds out of the realm of interpretive existence. As such, just as Purdy and DeVoss (2016) urge writing studies scholars to makings and “space” of writing studies, so too will I urge those working in online educator professional development to dedicate attention to the space of online educator professional development, including the “practical, logistical, theoretical, and institutional aspects of proposing, designing, adapting, and assessing these spaces” (Purdy & DeVoss, 2016, n.p.).

To be even more blunt, because I think bluntness is in order here, which people, whose bodies, what lived experiences, whose realities, whose truths, which futures, what stories, what relations are we preventing from existing simply as a consequence of

how we, ourselves, as makers and learners in educator professional development are orienting to and designing possibility through modality?

Starting to conclude from this understanding, synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences, then, both deal in possibilities and possible worlds...it's just when those deals are happening and whether or not the learning community is sharing *time* as well as space when those dealings are happening. If the learning community is engaging at the same time, we can say that this is synchronous possible world making. If the learning community is engaging at different times, we can say that this is asynchronous possible world making.

Apart from temporality, though, this dissertation has demonstrated that asynchronous and synchronous deal *differently* in possible worlds; they locate possibility differently, they approach possibility differently, they make space for possibility differently and they are designed for possibility differently, and educator professionals orient to and approach them differently as a result. Asynchronous digital professional learning spaces could be a site for resistance, a site for self-care, a site for transformation, or a site for community (among other things)...but we have to choose to value these possibilities, we have to validate these possibilities, we have to make space for them and design for and with them, we have to engage with them, and we have to start living them.

“It's severely human...this whole field. That makes asynchronous delivery very challenging, but not impossible.” (From my interview with “Introvert”) The 14 educator professionals I engaged with for this differentiation offer highly critical and deeply reflective insights into the nuances of educator professional development and the

challenges we collectively face in supporting Higher Education's educating body. It is striking, in a way that might be surprising to some, the extent to which these 14 educator professionals care. They truly want change and it is obvious how tortured, haunted, disillusioned, and discontented they are in their roles to not be able to provide the effective learning experiences they know are possible. Many of the challenges they face operate at a level far beyond their immediate scope of impact (e.g. poor leadership, expectations placed on educators and educator developers, the under-prioritization of professional development, capitalistic forces at play, such as market saturation, and both "ROI" and "hustle" culture, resistance to adapting to today's learners, and "popular" beliefs about educators and Higher Education). That said, when they engaged in possible world making, they allowed themselves to dream, to play, to imagine, to connect, to weave. They conjured new imaginings for educator professional development and Higher Education, taking inspiration at times from the things they most delight in (e.g. science fiction stories, games, book clubs, social media platforms, park bench conversations, etc.). A deep exploration of both these challenges as well as these imaginings unfortunately falls beyond the scope of this dissertation. As educator professionals nevertheless work to address the challenges, and leverage their new imaginings in the making of possible worlds, the generative interplay between their cynical outlook, their reconciling of contentious and hypocritical lived realities, and their commitment to nevertheless *try*, position them to firmly dedicated to the making of a better future. It is now on us to locate ourselves in this endeavor.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Section 1: Consent Information

Over the past decade, I (Maddie Shellgren) have been deeply engaged in educator professional development. Even still, I am left with a lot of questions about how we define and assess things like ‘quality’ ‘effectiveness’ with respect to professional development. While I’d love to have the time and space to explore these concepts for ALL educator professional development, my dissertation specifically explores the world of asynchronous digital learning environments designed for educator professionals.

As shared in my recruitment materials, I am looking for people who identify as either an ‘educator professional’ currently working in Higher Education or an educator currently working in educator professional development (or someone who identifies as both). These categories are intentionally broadly defined for the purposes of this research project in order to be maximally inclusive of those working in Higher Education. “Educator professionals” includes but is not limited to teachers, administrators, instructional designers, instructional technologists, etc. “Educators currently working in educator professional development” are those designing learning experiences for other educator professionals.

If you DO NOT identify as either an “educator professional” or an “educator working in educator professional development” who is currently working in Higher Education, please do not advance to the survey and instead close this tab or web browser.

If you DO identify as either an “educator professional” or an “educator working in educator professional development” who is currently working in Higher Education, please continue reading the rest of the consenting language to ensure you know of your rights as a participant before beginning the survey.

In surveying educator professionals and educators working in educator professional development, I hope to gain a better and broader understanding of educators’ thoughts, opinions, and experiences with asynchronous digital learning spaces designed for educator professionals. My ultimate aim is to learn from the stories and experiences of fellow educators to better inform the design of educator professional development-based digital learning experiences in order to 1) advance more equitable and quality educator learning experiences and 2) help address the growing urgency of educator burnout.

The general structure of the survey is a series of questions that will take about 30 minutes (depending on how much time you choose to answer the survey questions). The purpose of the survey is to create both a quantitative and qualitative space for storytelling around your lived experiences (i.e. thoughts, experiences, opinions, knowledges, so on), as related to digital learning spaces (and particularly asynchronous

digital learning experiences designed for educator professionals)...whether those be past or current. Findings from the survey will be used to inform my dissertation project, and particularly to inform the discussions and recommendations I make through my dissertation. Insights from your survey responses might also be referenced in future publications, presentations, or similar resources.

Participation in this survey is anonymous. Your survey responses will be fully de-identified to ensure that your identity is protected (this is particularly relevant should you include any potentially identifying information in your responses). This means that any quotes or references to your survey responses in my dissertation or any future work will also be de-identified.

It is important to me that you understand that you can stop this survey at any time and retract your consent. Should you choose to retract consent and therein your participation, please stop answering the questions and close both the tab and web browser. Only submitted surveys will be collected. This means that upon closing the web browser and tab, all data and information pertaining to you will be deleted and removed from the research study. This also means that surveys not officially submitted will not be included either. Please note that because the survey is completely anonymous and does not collect your name nor your contact information, it will not be possible to identify which contributions were uniquely yours. Therefore, all submitted surveys will be considered for inclusion in this research project.

A copy of this consent language, as well as information on how to contact me or my dissertation advisor is available as a downloadable PDF document (linked after the completion of this survey).

With this in mind and before you proceed any further, please indicate your consent to participate. If you are no longer interested in participating, please close this tab and web browser. As a note, should you close the tab and web browser at this time, no information about you will have been collected.

- Do you agree to being surveyed today via Google Forms and to letting me use the findings from your survey to inform my project work? *Please note that by checking this box, you are indicating your consent. You will not be allowed to advance to the survey without first indicating your consent.*

[If 'Yes,' participants are allowed to advance to the rest of the survey.]

Section 2: Eligibility Identification

To help me contextualize the remainder of your survey responses, I'll need to know if you identify as an "educator professional," an "educator working in educator

professional development,” or both. I’ll also need to confirm you are working in Higher Education.

Which of the survey eligibility categories do you identify as?

- Educator professional
- Educator working in educator professional development
- Both

Please also confirm that you are currently working in the context of Higher Education. *As a reminder, if you select “No,” you will not be allowed to proceed with the survey.*

- Yes, I am currently working in Higher Education
- No, I am not currently working in Higher Education

[If ‘Yes,’ participants are allowed to advance to the rest of the survey.]

Section 3: Personal and Professional Information

The questions in this section will help me have a better sense of the identities you hold, the communities you are a part of, and the contexts you are working within.

Curious about the way we worded some of these questions? Take a look at these two resources from the UX Collective: 1) <https://uxdesign.cc/designing-forms-for-gender-diversity-and-inclusion-d8194cf1f51>, 2) <https://uxdesign.cc/the-frustrating-user-experience-of-defining-your-own-ethnicity-50b0edc87a6e>.

1. What is your age?
2. I identify my gender as... *Dropdown menus can be limiting, and shifting non-mainstream identities to an "other, please define" category is non-ideal as well. Share your gender here.*
3. To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you most identify? *Not sure what these categories mean? You can find descriptions of each here: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/not-od-15-089.html>*
 - a. American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Native/Indigenous
 - b. Asian/Asian American
 - c. Southeast Asian (Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese)
 - d. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - e. Black/African American
 - f. Hispanic/South American/Latinx
 - g. White
 - h. Prefer not to say
 - i. Other: _____

4. To which cultural group(s) do you most identify? *I ask this question in case your identity is not captured or well-defined by the racial and ethnic categories above. You can use the space here to help me better understand.*
5. What is your nationality? *This refers to the political nation state (e.g. country) you have a legal sense of belonging to, often equated with citizenship.*
6. What country do you currently work in?
7. Do you work remote, hybrid, onsite?
 - a. Fully remote
 - b. Hybrid
 - c. Full onsite
8. Do you identify as having a disability?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Are there any particular perspectives you bring that impact how you view, understand, or engage in professional development? (e.g. You come from a region of the world that views professional development in a really specific way, you have a background in a specific discipline that orients you to professional development in a specific way, you hold a specific worldview, etc.)
10. What type of institution do you currently work in?
 - a. 4-Year College or Research Institution
 - b. 2-Year College or Community College
 - c. Historically Black College or University (HCBU)
 - d. Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)
 - e. Tribal College or University (TCU)
 - f. Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AAPISIs)
 - g. Technical School or College
 - h. Other: _____
11. What is your job title? *Not sure what I mean by this? If your current job was listed on a job posting, how would it be listed? While this can be the same as “job role,” job titles are often less descriptive or limiting, compared to the work you actually do.*
12. What professional /job role(s) do you currently hold? *Please note that this can be more than one thing, e.g. someone can hold the roles of “Professor,” “Administrator,” “Researcher,” among others, simultaneously*
13. What field(s) of study / areas of concentration do you work in?

Section 4: Professional Development

1. How many hours of professional development do you engage in in a year (rough estimate)?

2. What percentage of that professional development incorporates a digital learning experience as a significant element of learning? Whereby a core component of that professional development was facilitated through digital / online / virtual means?
 - a. 0-10%
 - b. 10-20%
 - c. 20-30%
 - d. 30-40%
 - e. 50-60%
 - f. 60-70%
 - g. 70-80%
 - h. 80-90%
 - i. 90-100%
3. What percentage of that professional development is facilitated entirely as a digital learning experience?
 - a. 0-10%
 - b. 10-20%
 - c. 20-30%
 - d. 30-40%
 - e. 50-60%
 - f. 60-70%
 - g. 70-80%
 - h. 80-90%
 - i. 90-100%
4. Of the total number of hours of professional development you engage in, what percentage is required?
 - a. 0-10%
 - b. 10-20%
 - c. 20-30%
 - d. 30-40%
 - e. 50-60%
 - f. 60-70%
 - g. 70-80%
 - h. 80-90%
 - i. 90-100%
5. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "None at all" and 5 being "Complete agency"), how much agency do you feel you have in terms of the choice of which professional development experiences you engage in?
 - a. 1 - None at all
 - b. 2 - A little

- c. 3 - 50-50
 - d. 4 - A lot
 - e. 5 - Complete agency
6. What is your typical modality (as a learner) for professional development?
 - a. Fully Onsite
 - b. Fully Online
 - c. Hybrid
 - d. Other: _____
 7. What is your preferred modality (as a learner) for professional development?
 - a. Fully Onsite
 - b. Fully Online
 - c. Hybrid
 - d. Other: _____
 8. What are some of the motivations behind why you seek professional development experiences and why you engage in professional development?
 9. When provided event / program recordings (whether you attended the event live or not), how often do you engage with those recordings?
 - a. 1 - Never
 - b. 2 - Very Rarely
 - c. 3 - Rarely
 - d. 4 - Occasionally
 - e. 5 - Very Frequently
 - f. 6 - Always
 10. When provided event / program resources (e.g. a session handout), how often do you engage with those resources?
 - a. 1 - Never
 - b. 2 - Very Rarely
 - c. 3 - Rarely
 - d. 4 - Occasionally
 - e. 5 - Very Frequently
 - f. 6 - Always

Section 5: Digital Learning Environments

1. In 1-2 sentences, how do you define synchronous digital learning?
2. In 1-2 sentences, how do you define asynchronous digital learning?
3. As a learner, do you prefer synchronous or asynchronous digital learning experiences?
 - a. Synchronous
 - b. Asynchronous
 - c. I prefer them equally
4. Outside the context of your working environment (i.e. across the whole of your life), how do you engage in asynchronous digital learning? What do you use it

for? *Examples could include things like YouTube, TikTok, documentaries, podcasts, etc.*

5. Can you describe any experiences, design features, and structures that you look for when choosing a digital learning experience for yourself as a learner? *What brings you or attracts you to a given digital learning environment? What do you look for? Any 'must-haves'? Of all the digital learning experiences that exist, what measures do you use to decide which to engage in especially if it isn't required)?*
6. Knowing that concepts of "good" and "bad" are subjective, can you tell a specific story about both a "good" and a "bad" asynchronous digital learning experience you engaged in as a learner? As you share, what made them "good" vs "bad" in your opinion?
7. Are there any specific narratives in your field about what "good" or "bad" / "effective" or "ineffective" / "quality" asynchronous digital learning environments are like? *You can also take this question as wondering if there are any standards in your field regarding what an asynchronous digital learning environment should / should not include.*
8. Speaking specifically about digital learning environments designed for educator professionals, what narratives have you heard about their design, their effectiveness, etc., if any?
9. What are the elements or characteristics of an asynchronous digital learning environment that embodies community?
10. I am interested in better understanding how we are onboarded and offboarded into asynchronous digital learning environments (as well as what wrap-around supports are put in place to support our engagement in them). Reflecting on your own experience as a learner, what strategies do you want / benefit from?
11. How would you define quality engagement with respect to asynchronous digital learning environments and experiences?
12. What factors / variables have served as barriers to you in terms of your engagement with digital learning experiences? *(select all that apply)*
 - a. Cost
 - b. Time
 - c. Workload / Capacity
 - d. Return on investment (ROI) or perceived ROI
 - e. Purpose / Outcome
 - f. Burnout
 - g. Lack of moral support
 - h. Poor design
 - i. Relevancy
13. Reflecting on the potential barriers you just selected, can you expand on the impact they had? If there was a barrier not listed but which was nevertheless relevant, feel free to discuss that here.

Section 6: Opportunities to Continue the Conversation

In addition to a survey, I am conducting a series of interviews to more deeply engage in these topics. If you are interested in or open to being interviewed, please use this section to share your contact information with me.

Please note that your survey responses will nevertheless still be de-identified. This means that your contact information will only be used for the purposes of scheduling an interview and will not be associated with your survey responses in any way.

1. Your First Name
2. Your Last / Surname
3. Your Email Address

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCRIPT AND QUESTIONS

NOTE: Language read-aloud is italicized.

Welcome and Introductory Script

Hi [insert interviewee's name here]! Thank you again for responding to the invitation and for your interest in supporting my dissertation research. Before we dive into the interview itself, it's important that we first talk about your rights as a potential participant and run through the consent process.

Interview Verbal Consent Script

First, I want to take a little time to share a bit more about this research, including how I plan to use the data and information collected during the interview process. Over the past decade, I have been deeply engaged in educator professional development. Even still, I am left with a lot of questions about how we define and assess things like 'quality' 'effectiveness' with respect to professional development. While I'd love to have the time and space to explore these concepts for all educator professional development, my dissertation specifically explores the world of asynchronous digital learning environments designed for educator professionals.

As shared in my recruitment materials, I am looking for people who identify as either an 'educator professional' currently working in Higher Education or an educator currently working in educator professional development (or someone who identifies as both). In interviewing educator professionals and educators working in educator professional development, I hope to gain a better and broader understanding of educators' thoughts, opinions, and experiences with asynchronous digital learning spaces designed for educator professionals. My ultimate aim is to learn from the stories and experiences of fellow educators to better inform the design of educator professional development-based digital learning experiences in order to 1) advance more equitable and quality educator learning experiences and 2) help address the growing urgency of educator burnout.

I am conducting these research interviews as part of a larger dissertation research project, so it is important that you are aware that the interview and your engagement as a participant in the interview does constitute research. The general structure of the virtual interview (being conducted through Zoom) is a series of questions that will take about 90 minutes and is entirely conversational in focus / tone. The purpose of the interview is to create a dialogic space for storytelling around your lived experiences (i.e. thoughts, experiences, opinions, knowledges, so on), as related to digital learning spaces (and particularly asynchronous digital learning experiences designed for educator professionals)...whether those be past or current. Findings from the interviews

will be used to inform my dissertation project, and particularly to inform the discussions and recommendations I make through my dissertation. Insights from our conversation might also be referenced in future publications, presentations, or similar resources.

All interviews will be recorded. This is so that I can actively engage with you in an authentic and dialogic manner. There might be some moments where I take a few notes, but otherwise the recording will help ensure that I can remain a genuine conversational partner. Importantly, the audio and video from your interview will not be shared in any way (and will only serve as research notes and artifacts to inform my dissertation. In other words, no audio or video clips will be published with my dissertation or any future works. The transcripts from your interview will be fully de-identified to ensure that your identity is protected. This means that any quotes or references to our interview in my dissertation or any future work will also be de-identified.

It is important that you understand that participation in the research is completely voluntary and that you can refuse to answer any question and withdraw at any time. More specifically, you can stop this interview at any time and likewise change your mind at any time as to your consent regarding how your data is used. Should you choose to retract consent, all data and information pertaining to you will be deleted and removed from the research study (i.e. my dissertation project) or future projects, depending on when you retract your consent. I will provide a copy of this consent language in a follow-up email, including a reminder of your right to change your mind, as well as a description of the project timeline and how I plan to use your data through various phases of the project.

Before we begin the interview, it is also important for you to have the contact information of the research team as well as the HRPP so that you can reach out to them for whatever reason. I will share that information in the Zoom chat now:

[Research team and IRB contact information posted in Zoom chat]

With this in mind and before we proceed any further, do you have any questions?

[Pause to give participant time to respond and ask questions. Answer questions should they have them.]

Now that all questions have been addressed, I am going to read the verbal consent script. Do you agree to being interviewed today via Zoom?

[If 'Yes,' proceed. If 'No,' proceed to the "Interview Participation Conclusion

Script (for Retracted Consent).”]

Do you also agree to having your interview be recorded (both the audio, video)?

[If ‘Yes,’ proceed. If ‘No,’ proceed to the “Interview Participation Conclusion Script (for Retracted Consent).”]

Do you agree to let me use the findings from your interview to inform my project work? As a reminder, I will not reference your name or any other pieces of identifying information.

[If ‘Yes,’ proceed. If ‘No,’ proceed to the “Interview Participation Conclusion Script (for Retracted Consent).”]

Finally, before we advance, can you confirm for me that you identify as either an “educator professional” or a “educator working in educator professional development” who is currently working in Higher Education? If ‘yes,’ can you let me know which you identify as (“Both” is also an acceptable answer)? As a reminder, these categories are intentionally broadly defined for the purposes of this research project in order to be maximally inclusive of those working in Higher Education. “Educator professionals” includes but is not limited to teachers, administrators, instructional designers, instructional technologists, etc. “Educators currently working in educator professional development” are those designing learning experiences for other educator professionals.

[Wait for participant response. If ‘Yes,’ proceed with “Verbal Consent Script.” If ‘No,’ advance to “Interview Participation Conclusion Script (for Retracted Consent).”]

Thank you for confirming that for me. Before we move onto the interview itself, do you have any additional questions?

[Pause to give participant time to respond and ask questions. Answer questions should they have them.]

Great! Having addressed all questions, let’s get started!

Pre-Interview Transition Script

We are now about to shift into the interview, which means that I will shortly begin the recording. As a reminder, I might take brief notes throughout but otherwise will be an active conversational partner. Should you wish to stop the interview at any time, please just let me know by telling me so. For example, you might say “Can you please stop the interview” or “I wish to stop the interview” (or anything of this sort).

Please also note that Zoom does provide automatic closed-captioning should that be helpful to you at any point during the interview. If you require assistance in accessing the captions please let me know and I'd be happy to help you.

To support your experience, I will also copy and paste the interview questions into the Zoom chat along the way.

Do you feel comfortable with the location you have chosen to join this interview from? If not, please feel free to take a moment to change locations, servers, or anything of the sort to ensure you are comfortable before we get started.

[Pause to give participant time to move if they want to.]

Alright, are you ready to begin?

[If 'Yes,' start the recording and begin to read the "Interview Script." If 'No,' give the participant more time or assist them as needed.]

Great! I will now move to start the recording. You should hear the Zoom notification shortly letting you know the recording has started. Be sure to click "Got it" in the pop-up notification from Zoom.

Interview Questions

There are a lot of ways in which we could enter into this conversation, but how about we start with an opening question: Can you tell me a little bit about your perspective on asynchronous digital learning and the role it plays in your life?

- *If you were to imagine, for you personally, the ideal asynchronous digital learning environment...can you describe it for me?*
- *When you are choosing a digital learning experience (broadly speaking) for yourself as a learner, what are your 'must-haves'?*
 - *What brings you or attracts you to a digital learning environment?*
 - *What compels you to join? What compels you to stay? What compels you to engage? What has to be in place?*
 - *What do you look for when evaluating an experience as a potential learner?*
 - *Of all the professional development that exists, what measure(s) do you use to decide what to engage in? Especially if it isn't required?*
 - *Here's a scenario: say there are 5 different options all on the same topic. In this scenario, what do you use to choose between them?*

- Reference the following factors as additional follow-up to dive deeper, as needed:
 - *Design*
 - *Outcomes*
 - *How it is led / facilitated*
 - *The facilitator*
 - *The organization*
 - *Onboarding*
 - *Associated resources*
 - *Timeline / phasing / etc.*
 - *Completion elements (like certification, rewards, etc)*
- *Thinking now about asynchronous digital learning environments specifically, are there any specific ‘must-haves’ for you as a learner?*
 - *Is there anything that would detract you from engaging in a digital learning experience?*
 - *For example “if it includes X, Y, or Z I don’t want to do it”*
 - *What about asynchronous digital learning environments specifically? Is there anything that would detract you from engaging?*
 - *Do you have any stories you can share to help elaborate on that a bit more?*
- *Thinking now about onboarding practices in particular (e.g. how you are entered or welcomed into a space or experience and / or prepared for engagement within that experience), what are the things you’ve come to expect that, in your opinion, make for a quality experience?*
 - *Do you have any stories you can share to help elaborate on that a bit more?*
- *I am really curious about the outcome of community building in and across digital learning experiences. Can you share your perspective and preferences on this as a learner?*
 - *Do you have any stories you can share to help elaborate on that a bit more?*
 - *Do you think asynchronous digital learning environments can be effective in building or sustaining community?*
 - *What does community even mean in this context then to you?*
- *Engagement is another often discussed element of online learning spaces. What does it mean to be “well-designed” with respect to asynchronous engagement (again, from your perspective as a learner)?*
 - *Do you have any stories you can share to help elaborate on that a bit more?*

- *Do you think asynchronous digital learning environments can be effective in fostering or sustaining engagement?*
- *What are your thoughts about one-and-done programming then?*
- *What does engagement even mean in this context then to you?*
- *Have you ever found yourself in a situation where your expectations of a digital learning experience didn't match the realities of that digital learning experience? Did the lack of alignment impact how you engaged within that learning experience?*
- *Thinking back on an asynchronous digital learning experience you participated in...reflecting back on the design choices of others...was there ever a case where you thought "I know what they're trying to do, but it's not working or it's not going to work" and why you thought that?*
 - *What could they have done instead / what kinds of revisions or changes would have been needed?*
- *What governs your design choices between use of synchronous and/or asynchronous learning experiences in digital contexts?*
 - *Do you think your design choices are ever influenced by the ways you, yourself, like to learn / engage? If so, how?*
- *I want to better understand the boundaries and potentialities of synchronous and asynchronous digital learning environments. In your opinion, are there things we should do in a synchronous environment over another modality?*
 - *What about asynchronous digital learning environments?*
 - *Was there something or someone that really secured that belief for you?*
- *In your experience, what defines the process(es) of designing for community in digital learning environments?*
 - *To what extent can you genuinely build and sustain community in asynchronous DLEs? What all is involved in this process?*
- *As a designer, what is the relationship between "engagement" and "community"?*
- *What strategies do you use to prompt asynchronous engagement and prepare learners for asynchronous engagement?*
- *For you as a designer, what's the most and least successful asynchronous digital learning experience you've ever designed (or helped design)? What marks it as "successful" versus "not"?*
 - *Digging deeper, can you tell me about a design choice that ultimately led to community building / engagement? Versus a design choice that didn't lead to community building / engagement?*
- *Does the onboarding process look at all different for you when you design for an asynchronous vs synchronous digital learning environment? If so, in what ways?*
 - *Do you have any examples of either experiences you've designed or those others have designed of onboarding (or even re-onboarding) across*

multiple points in time for a program or digital learning experience (e.g. something that has a part 1 and a part 2 that are a week or even a month apart)? If so, can you share a bit about what strategies were used to help support engagement in that experience?

- *Switching question styles a little bit. Imagine we are gearing up for a debate on this topic and you are presented with the following question: Are we investing time in something educators ultimately won't engage in? How would you respond?*
- *Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you would like to share with me or anything you had hoped I'd ask but didn't?*

Well if you'll believe it we have reached the end of the interview. Thank you once more for your time! This concludes the interview, so I will stop the recording now before turning to next steps.

[Stop recording]

Post-Interview Script

Alright! So as a reminder, there are a few things that will happen now that the interview is complete. First, you will receive a follow-up email which includes a copy of the consent language (including your rights as a participant). I will restate here that what you have shared with me here will remain confidential; no part of our discussion, including names or other identifying information will be used in my dissertation or future works.

The follow-up email will also detail my project timeline and the process for retracting consent (and therefore participation) should you decide to go that route.

Again, thank you for your time, your stories, and your insights. Your contribution is invaluable to the advancement of my dissertation as well as the advancement of quality and equitable educator professional development.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me via email. Contact information will be shared with you via the follow-up email. Likewise, if you know others who you think might be interested in contributing to my project, information on how to share the invitation will be provided in the follow-up email.

Finally, I want to provide you with a chance now to ask any final questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time?

[If 'Yes,' take time to answer questions. If 'No,' wish the participant well and close the Zoom Room.]