

Reflections on Practice

A Return to Interrogating Educational Development

Marisella Rodriguez¹, Heather Dwyer² and Jamiella Brooks³

¹ Center for Teaching & Learning, University of California, Berkeley

² Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, Tufts University

³ Carey Law School, University of Pennsylvania

Abstract

Much has changed since we published our call to interrogate educational development for racism and colonization. Since then, our team has engaged in scholarly research to critically interrogate our own field and some of its unquestioned assumptions to better align our practices with our purpose. Our methodology incorporated journey mapping, an approach that centers narrative as a source of data. Our methodological choice acknowledges that as researchers, we are not neutral observers but are positioned within the professional contexts we investigate. Here, we describe how our maps have served as a reflective tool for our own experiences in educational development as we make sense of the results of our research during a time when those in political power aim to normalize racism and affirm settler colonialism. We offer our perspectives on the value and potential use of journey mapping in research and other contexts.

Keywords: educational development, Equity, Justice, Centers for Teaching and Learning

Introduction

In a previous publication, we observed how educational developers are often key touchstones for supporting instructors in equitable and inclusive classroom practices, and we encouraged the field to turn the mirror on ourselves: in what ways does our professional field perpetuate systems of inequality, including historical legacies of racism and colonization (Brooks, Dwyer, & Rodriguez 2022)? Since then, we have engaged in scholarly research to critically interrogate our own field and some of its unquestioned assumptions, to better align our practices with our purpose. The stakes for this work have only increased as the political atmosphere has shifted: now, more than ever, those in political power aim to normalize racism and affirm settler colonialism.

This essay reflects on a technique called journey mapping. We describe how we implemented this technique with research participants and ourselves, and our perceptions of how it improves our methodology. We also offer suggestions for how practitioners might consider using journey mapping in other research and disciplinary contexts.

Using Journey Maps to Tell Our Story

Our study aims to unearth values held in the field of educational development, and how these values are enacted and shaped. In an attempt to embody our endeavor of interrogating the profession, we broadened our preconceived notions of the types of evidence recognized as valuable and essential. Our methodology incorporated journey mapping, a method used more in trauma processing and survivor support than academia (Kellison et al., 2022; Lindsay et al., 2015). Journey mapping centers narrative as a source of data that can elucidate how “we traverse, encounter, and construct racial, ethnic, gendered, and political boundaries” (Powell, 2010). In our journey mapping approach, we aimed to draw inspiration from relational, oral and visual learning, as emphasized by Indigenous education traditions and arts-based pedagogy (Mercurieff & Roderick 2013; Mason & Rodriguez 2025).

Through journey mapping, *narrative inquiry* and *auto-ethnography* play a central role in our data collection process (Bochner & Ellis 2016; Clandinin & Caine 2013; Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Durham 2017). These theoretical lenses, not often used in the field of educational development, opened space for participants to guide and have agency over the conversation during the interview. These frameworks also emphasize storytelling as a means to truth, as opposed to objectivity-as-truth often prioritized in Western thinking.

After conducting a nation-wide call, we invited 10 individuals actively engaged in educational development to participate in the journey map exercise and corresponding 60-min virtual interview. Participants represented a variety of geographic locations across the United States, institutional types (research-intensive, liberal arts, Historically Black College & University, etc.), and diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, and length of time in the profession. Prior to the interview, we asked participants to reflect on their journey as educational developers by drawing a map depicting (1) meaningful events and milestones, labeled and represented through the path’s shape, boundaries, landmarks, terrain, etc., and (2) their personal and professional values. Participants were instructed to bring their completed journey map to a follow-up conversation in which the participant described their map and how their journey, as represented through the map, aligns with and impacts the values they hold as educational developers (see the appendix for the full protocol). This approach was designed to allow participants to authentically share their lived experiences without prompting, leading, or imposing our meaning-making onto them.

Early in our methodological development, we engaged in the exercise of creating our own journey maps (Figures 1–3). Our intention was to pilot test whether journey mapping could surface diverse experiences despite working within a shared professional context, like a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), and help participants articulate values at both an individual and institutional level. All three authors hold shared professional histories—having experienced a graduate student instructor teaching fellowship program, then entered into faculty development—but currently work within distinct institutional contexts, such as a research-intensive, liberal arts, and Ivy League university, and hold different racial and ethnic identities. In the remainder of this piece, we describe how our maps have served as a reflective tool as we make sense of the results of our research.

Our maps use distinct approaches to narrate shared feelings of relief upon discovering our professional field, only to face persistent barriers of isolation and performativity. Heather’s map follows a linear path using a mix of text and symbols to document her movement through multiple roles and institutions in higher education. Using images of sunshine, flowers, rain clouds, and stars, she highlights highs and lows in her search for belonging and professional growth. Jamiella’s map conveys meaning through subjective imagery. Through five scenes, Jamiella tells the story of how she weighed important decisions in her life: choosing educational development over French PhD research, balancing professional success with family

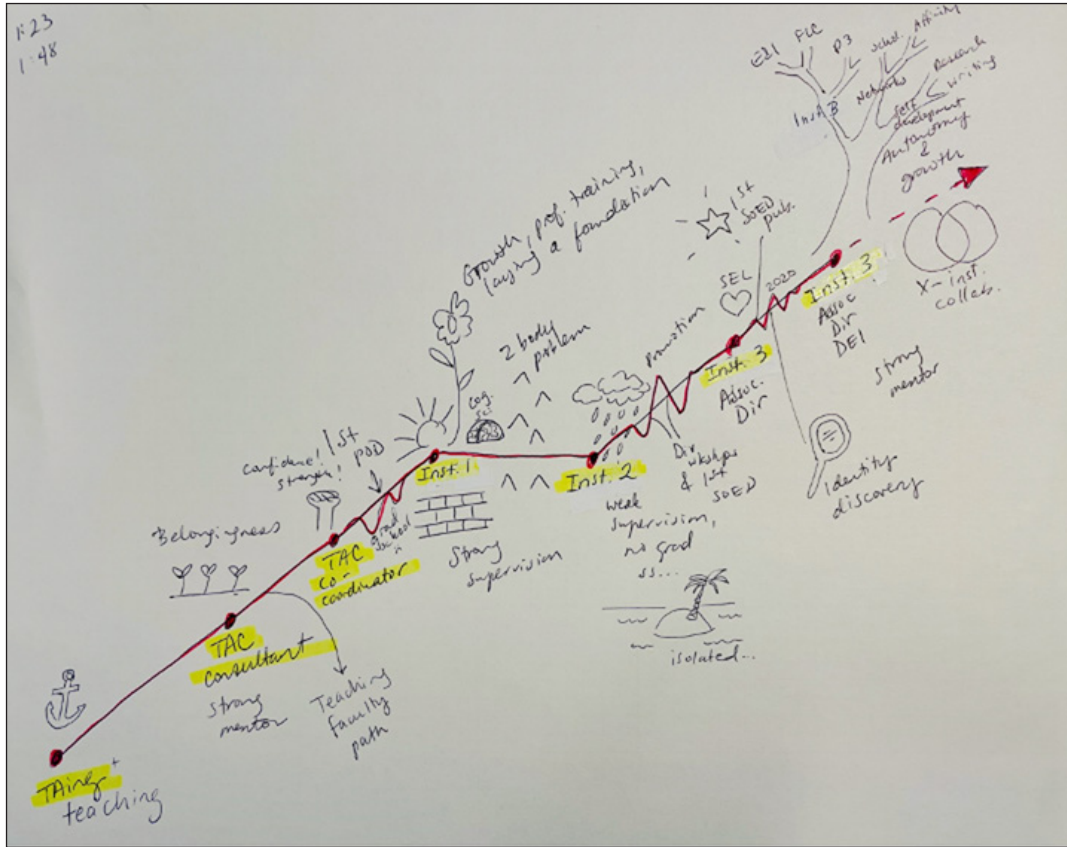


Figure 1: Heather Dwyer's Journey Map.



Figure 2: Jamiella Brooks' Journey Map.

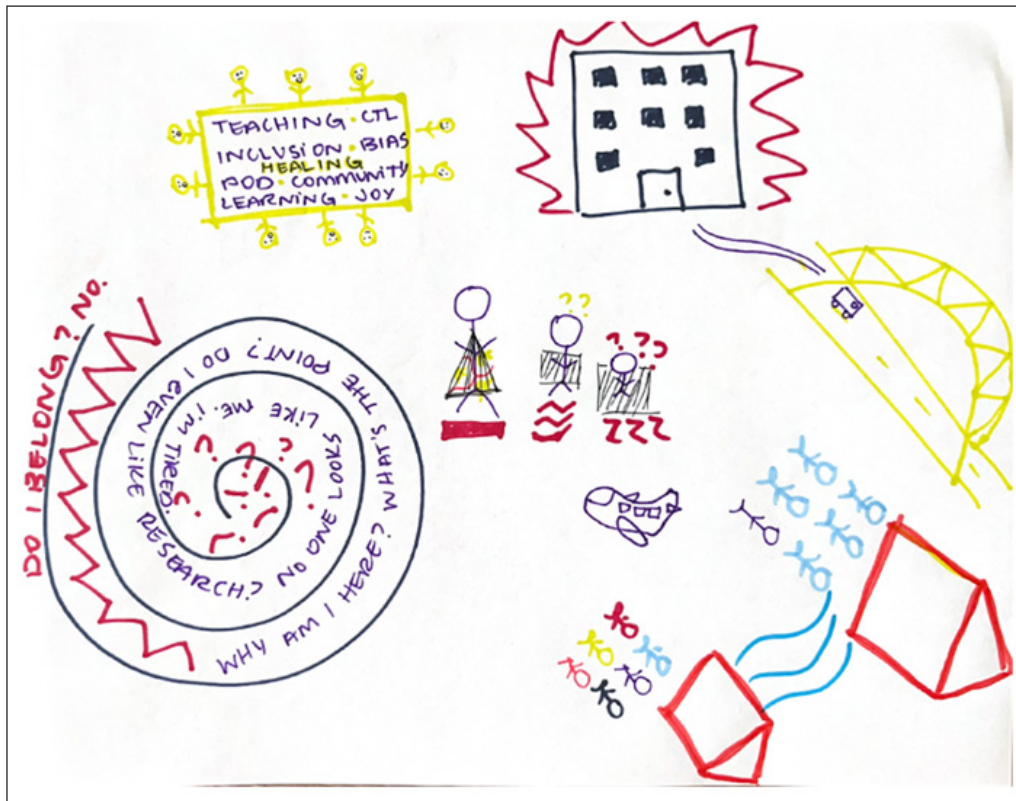


Figure 3: Marisella Rodriguez's Journey Map.

priorities, and walking away from professional spaces that advanced a performative pedagogy. Marisella's map uses color to depict moments when strong feelings led to self-discovery and change. Using minimalistic imagery, like question marks and sharp lines, Marisella illustrates a series of transformations, including anger into healing, isolation into community, and professional precarity into armor.

Emerging Themes Across Our Journeys

Like our own maps, participants' maps vary in their use of color, symbology, text, and blank space. We used a grounded theory approach to make sense of participants' stories and reflective process. Grounded theory is an inductive approach to thematic coding, which uses multiple rounds of independent coding, triangulation among the researchers, verification with the data sources to identify thematic categories (Braun & Clarke 2006; Corbin & Strauss 1990). In defining themes, we aimed to preserve the language used by participants. Each triangulation conversation surfaced new observations of phrases and symbols represented on a given map, as well as emotions it evoked for us as researchers. Prior to analyzing the interview data, the maps revealed themes including (1) struggle in professional uncertainty, (2) struggle in marginalization, and (3) supportive relationships. In what follows, we describe these themes and how they appear in our own maps.

Professional Uncertainty

Nearly every participant map conveys a sense of difficulty, struggle, and even harm caused by navigating an uncertain professional pathway. These maps illustrate experiences of stress, chaos, and confusion using swirls, hazard signs, and zig-zags as participants documented shifts in professional roles, interests, and institutional homes. Such images evoke feelings of fatigue and resignation as several maps conclude with aspects of continued searching for one's professional pathway and even deviations or exits from a path

(e.g., exiting the tenure track or educational development). Professional uncertainty is also apparent in Heather and Jamiella's maps. Heather's map depicts ups and downs, rain clouds, and a mountain range as she navigated different workplace environments and varying levels of mentorship. Similarly, Jamiella considers exiting her pathway multiple times—"au revoir?"—and ends on a note of uncertainty for what the future holds depicting a portal with a question mark at its center.

Marginalization

For many participants, their maps indicate professional uncertainty as a symptom of systemic bias and oppression. Participants use brick walls and mountains to symbolize just how immobile racism and marginalization can feel to the individual. Descriptive terms, like "fear" and "fatigue," evoke feelings of stress and sadness when faced with struggles in marginalization in the profession and workplace. We could not ignore how our own maps contained aspects of the intersection of identity and oppression. Jamiella was never uncertain of her potential in educational development, but rather her role in it, and the ways anti-Black structures would block her expertise, leading to inauthentic equity and inclusion work. The wall and barrier labeled "Anti-Blackness" demonstrates the interconnectedness between challenges in marginalization and that professional uncertainty. Marisella's map demonstrates how struggles in marginalization can result in feelings of anger, isolation, and her own uncertainty. At the center of Marisella's map are three self-portraits of her time at a CTL where she felt overburdened with work and like she was walking on unsteady ground in a workplace that questioned her value. Over time, Marisella learned to wear her self-worth as armor and express her ideas and concerns unapologetically as an act of resistance.

Relationships

The role and impact of supportive relationships on participants' journeys is also a consistent theme, particularly following a challenging moment in uncertainty or marginalization. The support from colleagues, mentors, family members, and professional networks afforded participants a sense of belonging and helped them navigate a difficult experience. Participants depicted figures helping each other climb up a hill or used phrases like "Mentors Matter" and "community." This theme holds true for our own maps. Heather noted how variations in the strength and connection with her mentors impacted her professional growth and feelings of belonging versus isolation. For Marisella, a teaching-focused community of practice helped her heal from disgruntled graduate student into a professional ready to step into a role supporting faculty across two campus locations. Several maps, including our own, name CTLs, the POD Network, and professional affinity groups as prominent locations fostering mentorship, belongingness, and self-discovery.

Journey mapping revealed the nuanced relationship between professional values and lived experience in ways that direct questioning could not capture. For example, the maps illustrated not just what we and our participants valued, such as bringing deep principles of equity to their work, but the emotional toll of being unable to fully enact those values due to institutional barriers and superficial implementation. This disconnect led to burnout, and, in some cases, departure from the field. When examining our profession's demographic patterns, journey maps offer crucial insight into the decision-making processes that shape individual career paths.

Your Stories Have Taught Us About Ourselves

For nearly 3 years, we have lived with the stories of how 10 colleagues navigated our profession. We think about these maps and our colleagues' voices while washing dishes, getting ready for the day, and when

navigating our own roles and responsibilities in our respective centers. To those colleagues—we now share with you how your journeys have reshaped our own and helped us see ourselves in new ways.

Heather. Like some of the participants, I gained a profound sense of belonging when I joined a CTL-based program as a graduate student. I was lucky to have mentors early on in my career who encouraged my growth as an educational developer, and I found community in the POD network. However, the community of educational developer professionals does not provide a sense of support and belonging to everyone. The maps elucidated for me how the experiences of educational development can feel isolating because it remains dominated by white women and often reproduces the hierarchical structures of academia. The theme of struggle in marginalization was notably absent from my map. Though I identify as mixed race, I often present as white, which may have shielded me from the othering and exclusion that many in the field experience.

Jamiella. I never regretted pursuing educational development, nor did I regret leaving it when it was time. Creating the journey maps and hearing others' stories was eye opening because I do think we are a unique field, and that many of us come to this work with meaningful values in mind, even if we aren't able to live out those values in the daily work that we do. I encourage everyone to reconsider their relationship to educational development if they feel strongly that this is the case for them as well. I also think there is a lot of work to be done to uncover the relationship of colonization to educational development and to, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has encouraged us, decolonize our minds.

Marisella. These maps came into my life when I was resigned about educational development. My center was suffering from repeated staff turnover and I was coming to terms with a racist interaction I experienced in a professional workspace. Learning about other people's journeys made me feel less alone. Images of tightly drawn swirls with arrows shooting outward helped me recall when I successfully exited my own graduate school doom spiral. Seeing mountains and brick walls alongside words like "bias" and "Black Lives Matter" spoke to me of a choice to conquer a mountain or walk around it. I also learned that the grass is not greener on the other side—many colleagues struggle to find their voice in CTLs. These maps became my compass for whether to leave or stay, be silent or speak up, keep to myself or seek out community.

This Interrogation Is Not Concluded

Our sample pool of journey maps, including our own, show that many initially discover educational development to be a safe haven from harsh norms and practices experienced when traversing tenure-track faculty workplaces. However, there is another story of individual experiences that cause us to question deeply held values within our field, such as the reinforcement of gendered and racial hierarchies reflected in CTL leadership demographics, our field's emphasis on care work over expertise, and superficial approaches to equity. In quiet rebellion against the field of educational development where an individual's experience is often displaced to serve university needs, our theoretical framework acknowledged the strength and necessity of giving voice to individual journeys in communion with others.

Preliminary analysis of our data reveals that, for some of our colleagues, educational development falls short of embodying values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Authentic—perhaps, difficult—conversations about our values, why we chose this field, and what motivates us each day needs to happen in CTLs, among staff, or as part of a professional development as a first step toward restoration. In this political moment, as institutions under threat of defunding reconsider their prior commitments to DEI, it is especially important for educational developers to acknowledge in conversation the possible tensions between their personal values and evolving institutional actions. Practitioners might consider using journey mapping in their own research, for self-guided reflection, or as a professional development activity for team building.

What could these conversations teach us if we are brave enough to have them? We might discover that supportive mentoring relationships do not have to be hierarchical and that, for some colleagues, their experiences of isolation and othering are amplified in this political climate. We may feel uncomfortable listening to one another's lived experiences; however, these authors think this is necessary work. After all, interrogating a field will require us to ask tough questions, and to listen when someone is ready to answer.

Additional File

Appendix containing journey mapping & interview protocol with plain text narratives can be found here: <https://doi.org/10.5070/N5.47244.s1>.

References

- Bochner, A., & Ellis, C. (2016). *Evocative autoethnography: Writing lives and telling stories*. Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brooks, J., Dwyer, H., & Rodriguez, M. (2022, April 25). A call to interrogate educational development for racism and colonization. *Faculty Focus*. <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/equality-inclusion-and-diversity/a-call-to-interrogate-educational-development-for-racism-and-colonization/>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2013). Narrative inquiry. In A. A. Trainor & E. Graue (Eds.), *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences* (pp. 166–179). Routledge.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2–14.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3–21.
- Durham, A. (Academic). (2017). An introduction to the autoethnographic method [Video]. *Sage Research Methods*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473991767>
- Kellison, B., Sookram, S.B., Camp, V., Sulley, C., Susswein, M., McCarty-Harris, Y., Dragoon, S., Kammer-Kerwick, M., & Busch-Armendariz, N. (2022). *Voices of Texas sexual assault survivors: Services, gaps, and recovery journeys*. Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault. The University of Texas at Austin.
- Lindsay, J., Proyer, M., & Walters, F. (2015). *Journey mapping study of domestic violence survivors in the Royal Borough of Kingston*. Kingston University London & St. George's University of London.
- Mason, T., & Rodriguez, M. (2025). Choosing Joy Over Dread: Bringing art, playfulness, and agency to learning. In E. K. Camfield (Ed.), *Joy-Centered Pedagogy in Higher Education*. Routledge.
- Merculieff, L., & Roderick, L. (2013). *Stop talking: Indigenous ways of teaching and learning and difficult dialogues in higher education*. University of Alaska Anchorage.
- Powell, K. (2010). Making sense of place: Mapping as a multisensory research method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(7), 539–555. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410372600>

Journal of Diversity and Equity in Educational Development is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the eScholarship Publishing. © 2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC-BY-NC 4.0), which permits unrestricted distribution, reproduction and adaptation in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, and that the material is not used for commercial purposes. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

OPEN ACCESS