

Can we design for healing in the learning sciences?

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Can we design for healing in the learning sciences?

In this article, we plant seeds of what has emerged in our work together, some ideas grounded deeply in ancestral traditions and literature and other emerging ideas that are still taking shape as we continue to grow. We offer examples from our work and others to draw attention to how designs for healing can support social change alongside new forms of unlearning and learning.

The article began as a keynote given by Susan (the first author) at the 2024 International Society of the Learning Sciences conference, where the theme of the conference was “Learning as a cornerstone of healing, resilience, and community.” Susan invited Liz and Krista (second and third authors) to write this article for *Journal of the Learning Sciences* with her to honor that so much of the thinking shared in the keynote had been done collectively (e.g., Cortes, 2021; Mendoza, 2022; Mendoza et al., 2024). When Susan shares her personal story or reflections, we mark this explicitly; otherwise, we are writing as a team of authors and friends.

A personal journey to understanding healing (Susan’s story)

We all have experienced wounds. They might be physical, psychological, or interpersonal—about our relationships with ourselves, with others, and with institutions. Wounds take time to heal, require our attention, and often leave scars. Some wounds fester and don’t heal fully. I know something about wounds.

I spent 2 years in a battle with my institution. I was subject to an unfounded accusation and rightfully cleared after 2 years, but it harmed my sense of self, my relationships with colleagues, and my understanding of the purpose of academia (Jurow, 2024).

Like many women and people of color, I have experienced academic harm in higher education (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012). This is not the result of a single bad experience or interaction but an accumulation of them, enabled by the fact that higher education has not fundamentally transformed since I became an assistant professor over 20 years ago. What I mean is that academia continues to thrive on individualism, competition, and hierarchy (Lara, 2013; Shajahan, 2014). As my own experience has shown me, patriarchy and racism are woven into its foundation (Hong, 2020; Valverde &

Dariotis, 2019). These ideologies and practices shape who is valued, what is valued, and how we organize our time and relationships with one another as students, teachers, and colleagues.

Inspired by the Queer Chicana feminist author Gloria Anzaldúa, I use the word “wound” to describe my experiences. As she writes in one of her poems, *Healing Wounds* (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 249, See [Figure 1](#)):

“To repair, there must be damage.” To heal, one must have been wounded. Being wounded has changed me and helped me understand how it feels to experience institutional harm.

My process of healing has required both learning new ways of being and understanding and unlearning—or engaging in the difficult work of acknowledging and shifting how we may have adopted forms of oppression into our own thinking and ways of being (Anzaldúa, 2015; Kumashiro, 2000).

When I was deep into fighting with my institution, I continued to feel the need to be “productive”—that I couldn’t slow down and take care of myself (Hersey, 2022; Shahjahan, 2020). I felt anxious about what might happen if I took a break. I felt that I needed to continue writing, take on new work responsibilities, serve on lots of committees, and more.

I was experiencing physical pain from the stress of fighting an institution and that led to nightmares and chronic headaches, nerve pain in my arms,

Healing Wounds

I have been ripped wide open
 by a word, a look, a gesture—
 from self, kin, and stranger.
 My soul jumps out
 scurries into hiding
 i hobble here and there
 seeking solace
 trying to coax it back home
 but the me that’s home
 has become alien without it.
 Wailing, i pull my hair
 suck snot back and swallow it
 place both hands over the wound
 but after all these years
 it still bleeds
 never realizing that to heal
 there must be wounds
 to repair there must be damage
 for light there must be darkness.

Figure 1. Healing wounds by Gloria Anzaldúa.

and numbness in my face. But I kept up my work, took on more work in fact, and pushed aside my physical pain to maintain a conception of myself as a *successful* academic.

Part of my unlearning and healing involved making my wound visible and trying to transform higher education so that it might be less traumatizing. I wrote and spoke publicly about the experiences I faced at my university, and I took on a formal leadership role in my School of Education to help others avoid such harm. I was also reading and studying about healing—and engaging in practices of healing for my body and mind—but I was still overdoing it, continuing to feel the need to prove my worth to the institution. I turned to my friends and to the practice of writing creatively and theoretically as a way to name, process, and heal from the multiple dimensions of harm that I was experiencing. This brought me back to the field of the Learning Sciences, allowing me to see what it could offer, what it has offered, and where we could grow.

Engaging healing in the learning sciences

As a team of authors, we recognize that there is a vulnerability to using words like *wound* and *healing* in academic settings. In our own experiences and those we have witnessed of others, using such words has provoked challenges to its scientific value and foundation. Including such words, however, helps us to be attentive to the complexity of human experience. Scholarship in psychology, neuroscience, medicine, religion, and more supports the idea that wounds, trauma, and healing are deeply consequential for our well-being (e.g., van der Kolk, 2014). In many respects, science has been expanding and catching up to “prove” what ancestral and indigenous communities have known for millennia (e.g., Cajete, 2016; Cowen, 2014; Kimmerer, 2013; Simpson, 2014). Deepening our understanding of concepts like “wound” and “healing” will help Learning Scientists engage in design work that is accountable and respectful of our deeply felt experiences.

We are excited to see the field of Learning Sciences take up healing seriously in scholarship. We know—from talking with colleagues, students, and dear friends in the field—that many of us have been thinking about healing, personally and more broadly, because of the violence that inundates us—from hateful rhetoric and policies about immigration to mass shootings in schools, places of worship and grocery stores, wars and genocides around the world, attacks on the rights of women and LGBTQ people, fires burning communities, and the dismantling of the academy and academic freedom. We need tools to address these wounds and move us toward healing.

Healing is a concern of many scholars in the Learning Sciences, even though it is not often the explicit focus of published scholarship in the field. Susan (first author) recognized this pattern in her own research trajectory. She noticed that she has been consistently drawn to those addressing a range of wounds—physical, psychic, intergenerational, and historical traumas inflicted on communities. She has centered her research on people and organizations working to transform how we live, particularly by fostering greater care for one another and the places we inhabit. For example, Susan and her students have engaged in collaborations that have supported collective organizing efforts by students in higher education to change curriculum, policies, and pedagogy, advancing dignity and challenging the harms perpetuated by white supremacist, patriarchal, racist, and casteist systems (Pradhan et al., 2024; Shea & Jurow, 2020). Similarly, in her research with food justice activists, she and her colleagues focused on transforming food systems in neighborhoods marginalized by racist policies and neglect (Jurow & Shea, 2015; Teeters & Jurow, 2016). A key theme across these projects is the effort to make work—often devalued and “invisibilized” in current systems—both visible and consequential. This work, as we see it, is part of healing unjust structures, particularly those that disproportionately harm women and people of color (Jurow et al., 2016).

We share Susan’s reflection because we believe that many Learning Scientists may similarly engage healing in an implied yet consequential manner. We invite you, then, to wonder with us about what might happen if Learning Scientists made healing an explicit focus of our work. How might we better understand healing and its connections to learning?

Grounding ideas

In the following, we share some grounding ideas about how we are currently making sense of healing. We draw on the work of many practitioners, writers, researchers, and artists from multiple disciplines and traditions to inform our understanding of healing. What we share is a focused review that reflects our particular interests in learning and social transformation.

First, healing is personal and communal. Rarely, as bell hooks (hooks, 2018, p. 215) puts it, are “any of us healed in isolation.” How we come together is an aspect of healing. This speaks to how we gather (Parker, 2018), how we sustain our relationships with each other through the stories we tell (Ochs & Capps, 2001), and the policies and laws we create (Haney-López, 2003; Stevenson, 2014). We also underscore that how we come together to learn with other people, tools, places, ideas, and histories can support healing and transformation (e.g., Bang et al., 2015; Holland et al., 2001; Lave &

Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Salazar et al., 2025, Teeters et al., 2022; Meixi, 2022; Urrieta, 2019).

Healing also involves self-care. Following Audre Lorde (2023, p. 103), we understand self-care not as “self-indulgence” but as “self-preservation.” During her cancer journey, Lorde, a self-described Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, and poet, wrote that caring for herself was a challenge to systems such as health care tried to silence and control her. Self-determination was deeply intertwined with cultural and social critique and the possibilities of collective, community determination.

Second, healing involves the integration of the mind, body, and spirit. The Cartesian view of the separation between mind and body contributes to the challenge of accessing and understanding our bodies’ sensations and how they carry knowledge (Rendón, 2009). This separation is a harm amplified by ideology, embedded in dominant theories of learning, and enacted in our institutional practices (Meixi & Nzinga, 2023).

The phrase mind/body/spirit names “spirit”—the meaning of *spirit* can take many forms, including belief in a higher power, connection with the Earth, and its rhythms, or perhaps as Dan Liston (2000, p. 82) described, it can be understood as an “enlarged love” that moves us beyond our ego to allow “an attentive gaze outward toward the other, and an accompanying search for the ‘good.’”

As a person heals, the move toward integration across mind/body/and spirit, they can think and act from a place of alignment and wholeness. The healing traditions and practices from which we draw, including Curanderismo, Santeria, meditation, and yoga, emphasize that such alignment can allow a person to tap into their creativity and intuition (Facio & Lara, 2014). As Kachine Kulick (2024) has written in her dissertation, somatic embodied practices—such as intentional attention to breath and movement—can also help us recognize and regulate our reactions to situations that involve racism, sexism, and other so-called difficult topics (see also Menakem, 2021; Owens, 2020).

Third, the practice of making art can be healing. Artistic engagement can include writing prose, poetry, painting, sculpture, dance, music, and more (e.g., Nzinga, 2023; Teeters et al., Meixi, 2022). Elizabeth Dutro has helped us understand how writing can be used powerfully to explore traumas and difficult topics in the classroom (e.g., Dutro, 2011). Creating space for testimony and witnessing can change how we understand ourselves and each other (Cruz, 2017).

Authors who have written about their wounds—like Salman Rushdie who wrote a memoir called *Knife: Meditations on an Attempted Murder* (Rushdie, 2024) and Chanel Miller who wrote *Know My Name* (Miller, 2019) about life after being sexually assaulted—have bravely used their writing to make sense of what was done to them, detailing the multifaceted effects of the violence

on their lives and on the lives of those they love, and exposing the wound to others to increase understanding beyond themselves. This last point about exposing wounds resonates with what the feminist author Sara Ahmed has written about healing. In her words, “healing does not cover over, but exposes the wound to others: the recovery is a form of exposure” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 200).

Intentionally and carefully exposing wounds can support healing. Exposing wounds, as was done in the opening of this paper, can transform practices and institutions and can be a critical part of healing. Krista (the third author) has similarly written on her own wounds inflicted both inside and outside the academy as a way of informing how we can reimagine our relationship with and responsibility within the institution (Cortes & Guzman, 2025). Telling stories is one form of exposing a wound. It can be a powerful form of healing because it can re-cast individualized narratives that blame individuals for their wounds to highlight how the wounds are products of sociopolitical structures (Ahmed, 2021; Fernández, 2022).

Finally, we define healing as “a journey back to ourselves, our intuition, and our divine” (Mendoza et al., 2024). This definition is grounded in Indigenous and Ancestral healing traditions and Women of Color feminism (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2015; Cervantes, 2023; Dillard, 2016; Linklater, 2020; Lorde, 2012; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Simpson, 2014). We draw on Anzaldúa (2013, 2015) conceptualization of *conocimiento*, which is an ongoing process of making and unmaking ourselves in pursuit of a higher consciousness toward healing. The unmaking can include, for example, the further breaking apart of broken pieces to understand how we have embodied forms of oppression in ourselves (Rendón, 2009). This difficult but necessary process can create awareness to then piece together broken shards toward intentional realignment or misalignment with institutional norms. Healing does not have a resolution but instead “requires that we shift our perspective” (Anzaldúa, p. 29). This shift in perspective includes the unification of mind/body/spirit (Lara, 2013) and a re-memorializing of histories and practices to access our inner wisdom and intuition (Dillard, 2012) and to center the interconnectedness of our human relations and Mother Earth (Linklater, 2014). Thus, the journey back to ourselves does not mean a self-involved process or an individual one. Instead, the journey back to ourselves is about shedding learned forms of colonization held within us. It is creating awareness of the “shoulds” that we carry, and it involves breaking away from oppressive ideologies and practices that have shaped who we think we are and should be.

Questions that we can ask ourselves as educators and designers

Designing for healing requires reimagining methodology—from the questions we ask about the nature of healing and the potentially restorative effects

of the designs to the dispositions we bring to our design practice and what we count as evidence of healing (for related discussions, see Bhattacharya, 2022; Dazzo, 2023). In the following, we share prompts that can help guide designs for healing and invite Learning Scientists to reflect on our practices of design.

To design for healing, we need to begin with clarity and specificity by asking:

What is the wound? And what emotions does the wound carry?

We must name the wound because doing so can illuminate the ways in which systems of oppression can shapeshift into self-talk, protecting institutional failures while placing blame on individuals (Valencia, 2010). Naming the wound can also defuse its power (B. Brown, 2015). However, naming the wound may invite emotions that have been kept at bay. In other words, tending to healing for ourselves, others, and our designs may require traveling on a path that has unexpected turns and, at times, sharp edges that ask us to *slow* down and allow ourselves to *feel*. Allowing ourselves to remain in the messy, often contradictory ways our minds and bodies process wounds can be disruptive and unsettling, especially when we are out of practice (Hay, 1984). Stilling ourselves so that we can sense all the ways we are affected by the wound is an important step and one that we have been trained to skip. As academics, we are often quick to jump from identifying a problem to wanting to solve it, moving away from our emotions to our rational minds. As Tricia Hersey reminds us, “(w)e must go slow and place intention at the forefront of this disruption,” appreciating the emotions connected to the wound (Hersey, 2022, p. 25).

Emotions can provide a point of entry into what we are experiencing. It can also push us to settle into the wisdom of our bodies to push the boundaries of what we can express in words (G. Anzaldúa, 2015; Lorde, 2012). When we stop and allow ourselves to feel our emotions, to explore what they may be trying to help us understand, we can gain insight into the unnamed norms within which we are operating. From this place of curiosity about our emotions, we can start to imagine what we might do. Here, we ask:

What do we need to unlearn and learn to support healing?

As a field, we have developed great expertise on how to study learning (Bransford et al., 1999; Nasir et al., 2022; Sawyer, 2022). We hold true that learning occurs in everyday, moment-to-moment interactions as well as across our lifetimes (Banks et al., 2007). It is a process of *becoming* through developing knowledge, skills, and values in relation to the diverse communities and practices in which we participate and help to shape (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Critically, learning often includes the adoption of dominant ideologies, which shape what we believe is “normal” or “common sense”

(Garfinkel, 1960; Haney-López, 2003; Kumashiro, 2000; Leonardi & Staley, 2021; Philip, 2011).

Our common sense can often be harmful to our communities, our work as educators and scholars, and to ourselves. To ground this in an example, consider Susan's story. We might consider how Susan's path toward healing involves challenging the commonsense narratives that shaped how she believed she "should" feel, think, and act as a successful academic. These "shoulds," we want to underscore, are not unique to Susan but have developed historically in response to the unwritten yet powerful societal norms and ideologies that encourage unhealthy habits of production as necessary for success. Part of her healing has involved *unlearning* these norms and practices.

The concept of unlearning, often under-discussed in Learning Sciences, can help us engage more intentionally with healing. Unlearning is a vulnerable and ongoing process (Menakem, 2021). It involves acknowledging how we carry the oppressors in us (David et al., 2019; Matias, 2016; Rendón, 2009), breaking away from our "common sense" (Mendoza et al., 2016), and acting intentionally to move forward with this new consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2015).

The last question we need to consider when we are designing for healing is:

How can we embody healing?

Healing is not something we, as designers, can stand apart from; it is something we need to embody. This embodiment involves our full selves—thinking, feeling, and being—and has implications for what and how we design and our practices as designers. Put another way, the definition of healing and learning that resonates with you should be embedded in the decisions and actions that are reflected in your design. As Abrahamson and Lindgren (2014) have set out for us, in a learning ecology based on embodied design principles, "learners could approach a problem using their natural bodily instincts and movements" rather than relying on mental reasoning alone (p. 5). Applying this same ethos to embodying healing in our designs requires shifting our understanding of design from merely an experiment with learning toward pragmatic practice with cultural-historical significance (Cortes, 2021). Embodying healing in this sense reimagines our roles and goals as designers, opening us up to the possibility of reciprocal healing in our work.

Designs for healing: two examples

In this section, we share examples that demonstrate the different ways that healing designs have embodied healing. With each example, we bring

forward the aforementioned questions to uncover the intentionality of the designs toward healing: What is the wound? And what emotions does the wound carry? What do we need to unlearn and learn to support healing? How can we embody healing?

The first example is from the Fearless Collective, a movement of women artists in India that uses participatory art to support healing for the most invisible and misrepresented. This movement deeply resonated with Susan, an Indian American scholar who was forced to confront pernicious stereotypes about her identity and her “presumed incompetence” (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012) in her battle with her university. In search of models of other Indian women confronting power to incite hopefulness and social change, this was when she discovered the work of the Fearless Collective. The second example is from the HEAL (Healing, Empowerment, and Love) program, which we (Liz, Krista, Susan, and our collaborator Dr. Christina Paguyo) designed to support graduate students, primarily Women of Color, on their educational journeys in often hostile institutions of higher education. With the example of the HEAL Collective, we present another way of approaching healing and learning, highlighting how we are embodying healing as designers.

Example 1: The Fearless Collective

The Fearless Collective is a growing movement of artists who aim to replace fear with love in public spaces and on the frontlines of resistance movements. The following about the Fearless Collective comes from an interview with the group’s founder on the Arts Persists Podcast (2023).

The Fearless Collective emerged from the 2012 protests following the gang rape of 23-year-old Jyoti Singh in Delhi. The founder of the collective, the Indian artist Shilo Shiv Suleman, was a participant in the protests, and she noticed that in quiet moments, people were sharing stories of their wounds. As she explained, the storytelling was a kind of “alchemy”—the stories helped transform pain and shame into connection (B. Brown, 2007).

Much of the art and signage that Suleman noticed being used in the protest were negative—that is, she saw signs declaring “stop violence against women” and images of women being attacked (Fletcher, 2017). These were signs protesting violence. There was little discourse around what was possible and hopeful. Suleman wanted to change that.

Art, in the form of posters, became a way for people to tell their narratives and represent themselves. Art allowed them to shift the energy around the response to harm and imagine a path toward a more hopeful and fearless future (See [Figure 2](#)).

Since 2012, the Fearless Collective has worked with community partners around the world to create 40 public monuments in 16 countries. Their



Figure 2. Two examples of the kinds of posters the fearless collective creates (credit: Shilo Shiv Suleman, n.d.).

Fearless methodology includes engaging in civic dialogs in public spaces that create opportunities for “calling people in” rather than “calling them out” (for more detail, see Fearless Collective, 2017). The murals, which portray how the communities want to represent themselves, are created through collaboration with the artists and remain in the communities as reminders of those transformative conversations.

As Suleman stated, engaging in these participatory art projects is like creating “. . . a kind of parallel world where the wound doesn’t exist . . .” The images that the Fearless Collective creates are, in her words, “almost like portals to a future that doesn’t even exist yet, but simply by having a vision of it, we allow us to know what we’re moving toward.”

We use this example to show how artists and community members are designing actions that rely on communal practices and art to heal wounds. They are creating tools for nurturing a collective imagination, one that challenges oppression and can allow us all to flourish (Benjamin, 2024). Returning to the questions that we can use to understand designs for healing, we ask:

What is the wound? And what emotions does the wound carry?

The “wound” that needed healing in this example was caused by sexual violence against women. Feelings of injustice, rage, shame, blame, and pain inspired the protests against sexual violence. Suleman noticed what was happening; she *chose* to see it. She also noticed that the protestors focused on naming the wound but stopped there, not venturing to name a future where the violence did not exist. We underscore this because not everyone chooses to see pain and suffering and then decide to do something with those feelings.

What kinds of unlearning and learning were needed to support healing in this example?

Through listening to one another's stories, community members were unlearning feelings of shame connected to having been victims of violence. They were learning that their stories did not need to be hidden or silenced. At the same time, through sharing stories, the community was learning connection and pleasure in bearing witness to one another's pain; reciprocal healing was happening. They were also learning to use their imaginations to conjure beauty and intimacy in another possible world.

How were they embodying healing?

The methodology that the artists have developed to support healing is embodied through civic discourse that names the wound and helps others to see it and understand its impact (see also Kester, 2004). Healing emerges in this methodology through truth-telling and imagining what a more just future could look like. Lastly, through creating posters and large-scale murals that are visible in public spaces, the Fearless Collective and their community partners are trying to transform physical spaces to support psychological safety, belonging, and hopefulness. In their words, the Fearless Collective aims to make space to move fear to love.

Participatory art offers a powerful methodology for supporting healing by fostering collective dreaming, dialogue, and the creation of something beautiful. To create these vibrant spaces, engaging continually with power dynamics, voice, and representation are key aspects of the work of ongoing healing and transformation (Bishop, 2012; Cooke & Soria-Donlan, 2019). Healing, in other words, is not separate from power and politics (Lorde, 2012).

Example 2: The Healing, Empowerment, and Love (HEAL) Program

The HEAL program seeks to design and implement spaces of healing that address academic harm and center the lived experiences and expertise of women of color.

What is the wound that led us to create the HEAL program? And what emotions does the wound carry?

We initially created HEAL because we had experienced and noticed the ongoing "wounds" inflicted on women of color in higher education. Some dominant narratives of academia that women of color graduate students shared with us and that are echoed in the research literature (e.g., Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Yosso, 2013) include:

I was told to stop saying "I feel" and say, "I think."

Don't let them see you cry, it will make you seem weak.

I contort myself until I become what they want me to be.

I learned to police myself.

I tended to my body only when it could no longer carry me, and my spirit—my intuition—my superpower, became a whisper.

There is a lot that is being said in these statements.

You may have experienced something like this in your education.

You may have perpetuated some of these ideas as a mentor.

Feel these words in your body.

An important part of healing in education is recognizing that to create spaces of healing, we need to heal ourselves; otherwise, we can unintentionally pass that harm onto others. This means we have to allow ourselves to feel wounds and not just keep grinding forward.

In the narratives from graduate student women of color, we get a visceral sense of the pain caused by these wounds—the pain that comes from holding in your feelings, denying who you are, of trying to fit yourself into an image that some outside “they” wants you to be. This fracturing of the self can lead to depression, anxiety, and fear.

Many participants in HEAL have endured a fracturing of their minds from their bodies, which makes it hard for them to bring their full selves to their learning, their research, and their writing (Pérez & Saavedra, 2020).

As the designers of the HEAL program, we have asked . . . What do we need to unlearn and learn to support healing?

The approach to healing we take in the program is grounded in the idea that healing is a return to self—one way to think of this process is that it is about returning to a *core* sense of who you are, perhaps before you took in messages from school, teachers, and others about what you should be. Another way to think about this idea is that it is about remembering what brings you joy or learning, maybe for the first time, what makes you feel aligned in your body, mind, and spirit.

The unlearning that we focus on in HEAL is related to the wounds produced by an educational system that—despite the efforts of many of us here—continues to encourage distance from one’s cultural practices and histories, intuition, and alignment between the mind, body, and spirit (Lara, 2013). Meritocracy, imposter syndrome, white supremacy, and objectivity haunt many of the graduate students with whom we work (Yoon, 2019).

How do we embody healing in the HEAL program?

In HEAL, we come together with students with great intentionality. It is an invitational space where we engage in embodied practices that help us connect to ourselves and one another. This is important because students

often feel that they are alone and that they are the only ones who are not living up to the expectations of the institution.

In the program, we center on storytelling and witnessing academic harm to illuminate commonalities across experiences. This helps us to recognize how *systems* of harm are often experienced *individually* (Valencia, 2010). Core program components include dialog and the sharing of “love notes” or words of advice gifted by other women of color in the academy. We also engage in contemplative practices, breathwork, and movement to ground ourselves in our bodies (Menakem, 2017; Owens, 2020; Williams, 2002).

These practices are designed to help us remember that we are not just “brains” or reading and writing machines but integrated bodies, spirits, and minds—all of which are important sources of knowledge for understanding ourselves and creatively considering complex problems. Being in our whole selves is a strategy for remembering who we are and shedding the fear that often blocks us from the joy of being fully present for ourselves and others (Kaur, 2020).

As researchers and facilitators, we see ourselves as engaged in an unlearning and learning process parallel to those of the student participants. That is, we share with them the goal of “returning to ourselves” and engage with them, vulnerably, in shared reflective, embodied, and meditative work.

In line with hooks’ ideas about healing as an act of communion, our design work aims to allow us to hold space for each other so that we can become the kind of community that can support healing, where we can be engaged continually in unlearning what hooks describes as “all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination” (hooks, 2003, p. 36). Doing this can support individuals in returning to themselves, which frees up creativity and can lead to imaginative leaps. We have seen that doing this work together can inspire and support others to do the same.

In multiple iterations of implementing the HEAL program, we have witnessed that when given the space to be whole, participants have been energized and emboldened to take critical action regarding their research and writing, as well as inciting institutional change.

Through the HEAL program, we have worked to make sense of the *intangibles* in design (Castro & Cortes, 2025; Cortes, *forthcoming*). We recognize that design decisions are often guided by logic, emotion, and intuition, with the latter two often dismissed in research (see also Bhattacharya, 2022). Tending to the intangibles of design, including mind, body, and spirit integration in the design of HEAL, we lean deeply into the felt sense, often guided by the wisdom in our bodies that can push us to go beyond words and our current mentally learned frameworks (Anzaldúa, 2015; A. M. Brown, 2017). This reminds us to move toward the intuition with which we were born but that we often move

away from as we get entangled in the norms and practices of the social world. When discussing intuition and trying to tap into something that feels “right,” we must still grapple with its ethical dimensions. The value orientation of HEAL, our North Star, is our desire to disentangle ourselves from oppressive education systems (Paguyo, 2020). This includes deep reflections on, for example, how to hold time loosely to prioritize relationships and honor the flow of stories being shared. It also involves seeking a balance of desired goals and listening to synchronicities, which can help us guide meetings with greater clarity.

As designers and researchers, we have also been thinking about how we might study healing in the program to improve our ability to create healing spaces. We have used design narratives (Hoadley, 2002; Jurow & Freeman, 2020) to articulate our design decisions with special attention to their ethical and power-ed dimensions. We also use the design narratives as a reminder to embrace slow, intentional, and reflective design. Designing for healing invites us to think differently about the practices of *being* designers and facilitators of healing.

Practically, using intuition in our design and facilitation work means that we aspire to be present with each other and curious about the present moment. We aim to be slow, making space for feelings to emerge, especially those that we have learned to hide in academic spaces. As facilitators, we pay careful attention to the rhythm of conversations to be curious about when our muscles tighten or when we feel that we can *finally* breathe. We try not to ignore how our bodies feel so that we can appreciate what they are telling us. This valuing of how we feel challenges dominant educational practices in academia. It is not easy or comfortable. As designers and facilitators, we often need to remind each other that this discomfort is part of the unlearning process.

Conclusion

Designing for healing requires developing an understanding of what healing is, what needs to be healed, how healing can transform us (individually and collectively), and how it can lead to meaningful change in the world. The ISLS 2024 conference theme that inspired this article invited us to explore learning as a cornerstone of healing. To do so, we began with a question: Can we design for healing and learning? The answer is yes. It is possible, and it has been done beautifully (e.g., Barajas-López & Bang, 2018; K. D. Gutiérrez, 2008; R. Gutiérrez, 2022; Meixi, 2022; Padilla-Chávez, 2024). We desire and need spaces that center on healing and learning. We also need to acknowledge that designing for healing requires deep reflective practices, honoring and looking into the histories of diverse healing traditions, and considering what we might learn from understanding them. Healing is a way for us to be

whole, to tap into the wisdom of our bodies and our intuition. Understanding the processes of healing can help us create spaces where healing can take place.

These spaces need to be held *tenderly*. The language of “design” doesn’t exactly feel right for talking about the vulnerability of healing. We crave different languages for describing how we might *be* in spaces where healing can happen, where we can hold space for one another—as we try to do in the HEAL program.

We want to embrace healing more fully as a field. As we noted, many Learning Scientists are exploring healing in our work, even if we are not yet using the term explicitly. Foregrounding healing in our research and practice requires intention.

We chose the examples we shared purposefully. The example of the Fearless Collective is not from the Learning Sciences. We did this to remind us of the remarkable things that people are doing in the world to support one another’s healing. We also used this example to emphasize that Learning Scientists do not always need to be the designers of programs. We can join the amazing work that people have been doing for years, maybe even generations, around healing.

We chose to share the second example from the HEAL program because we want to highlight how Learning Scientists are taking up healing as a central focus in research and design. HEAL is focused on higher education, and our aim is to support graduate student women of color on their educational journeys and simultaneously transform the institution of higher education.

Embracing healing as both a goal and as part of the design process can positively transform how we make meaning and connect with each other. We look forward to seeing the changes that will emerge as Learning Scientists embark on this work together.

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