

MARIA C. OLIVARES, PHD



EDUCATIONAL INNOVATOR | DESIGN STRATEGIST
RESEARCHER | FACILITATOR

Helping people navigate complexity, build shared understanding, and transform ambiguity into action.

Boston, MA — Relocating to Los Angeles / Santa Monica

CONTACT

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EDUCATION

University of California, Los Angeles
PhD, Social Sciences & Comparative
Education
2011 - 2017

University of California, Los Angeles
MA, Social Sciences & Comparative
Education
2010 - 2011

University of California, Los Angeles
BA, Chicana/o Studies & History
2004 - 2009

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

MIT Sloan Executive Education
Communicating Data Through
Storytelling
2022

FACILITATION & COLLABORATIVE INNOVATION

- Workshop Design & Facilitation
- Faculty Development
- Stakeholder Alignment
- Cross-Functional Leadership
- Curriculum Innovation
- Organizational Learning
- Change Enablement
- Participatory Design

RESEARCH & SENSEMAKING

- Qualitative Research

SUMMARY

PhD-trained educational innovator, researcher, and facilitator with 10+ years leading curriculum innovation, faculty engagement, and cross-functional initiatives that help institutions navigate complexity and adopt new approaches to teaching and learning. Expertise spans qualitative and participatory research, experience design, information design, visual sensemaking, workshop facilitation, and organizational learning. Creates research-informed frameworks, visual communication tools, and collaborative experiences that help people make sense of complex ideas, build shared understanding, and move from insight to action.

SELECTED IMPACT

- Facilitated collaboration across educators, researchers, schools, and community partners, creating alignment around shared goals, design opportunities, and pathways for implementation.
- Designed visual frameworks and collaborative systems that helped learners and practitioners navigate complexity, identify patterns, and make informed decisions.
- Led research-informed design initiatives that helped learners, educators, and community partners make sense of complex information and build shared understanding.
- Designed and implemented programs, workflows, and organizational initiatives that translated ideas into sustained practice.
- Created learning systems, visual communication frameworks, and collaborative structures that supported learning, reflection, collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

WORK EXPERIENCE

(2021 — Present)

Assistant Director of Design and Strategy | Earl Center for Learning & Innovation,
Boston University

- Led cross-functional initiatives spanning curriculum innovation, educational design, and program development, partnering with faculty, staff, and students to create new approaches to teaching and learning.
- Designed and facilitated workshops, strategy sessions, and participatory design experiences that helped diverse community partners build shared understanding, align around priorities, and move ideas into action.
- Designed systems, tools, and workflows that supported cross-functional collaboration, organizational learning, knowledge sharing, and collaborative problem-solving.
- Co-developed an interdisciplinary undergraduate specialization in Educational Design for Transformative Social Futures, integrating design, systems thinking, media literacy, and collaborative problem solving.
- Designed and led a multi-semester practicum experience within an undergraduate specialization in Educational Design for Transformative Social

- Organizational Sensemaking
- Participatory Research
- Experience Research
- Ethnographic Research
- Research Synthesis
- Systems Thinking
- Technology Adoption
- Journey Mapping
- Visual Sensemaking

COLLABORATION & INNOVATION PLATFORMS

- Miro
- Mural
- Framer
- Notion
- Google Workspace
- Microsoft 365

DESIGN & COMMUNICATION

- Experience Design
- Knowledge Translation
- Visual Storytelling
- Visual Framework Development
- Adobe Illustrator
- Adobe InDesign
- Adobe Photoshop

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES & AI

- Generative AI Exploration
- Adobe Photoshop
- AI-Supported Research & Sensemaking
- Multimodal Communication

LANGUAGES

English - fluent, speaking & writing
Spanish - fluent, speaking & writing

Futures, integrating design, systems thinking, media literacy, and collaborative problem solving.

- Designed and led a multi-semester practicum experience that guided students through field-based design projects, supporting learners working across diverse community contexts, challenges, and design opportunities.
- Designed the Earl Center's digital presence, developing information structures, communication frameworks, and content organization systems that helped diverse audiences discover resources and engage with complex ideas.
- Designed undergraduate courses from the ground up, creating learning systems, activities, and developmental pathways that helped students build knowledge and apply design practices over time.
- Designed and implemented Theory & Concept Visualizations (TCVs), an original visual sensemaking methodology that helps learners organize knowledge, surface relationships, and engage deeply with complex ideas. (2019 — Present)

Research Assistant Professor | BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

- Lead qualitative and participatory research initiatives with youth, educators, community organizations, and institutional partners, transforming complex findings into actionable insights and strategic recommendations.
- Facilitated collaboration across educators, researchers, schools, and community partners, creating alignment around shared goals, design opportunities, and pathways for implementation.
- Developed visual frameworks, knowledge artifacts, and sensemaking tools that helped teams surface patterns, connect perspectives, and make informed decisions.
- Explored emerging AI tools to support research, visualization, content development, and creative problem-solving.
- Mentored emerging researchers and educational designers in qualitative inquiry, visual communication, collaborative research methods, and community partner-centered design practices.

(2017 — 2019)

Research Scientist / Post-Doctoral Fellow | TERC, Cheche Konnen Center

- Led design-based research focused on computational learning, STEM equity, and collaborative inquiry, translating findings into practical tools, frameworks, and professional learning experiences.
- Designed and facilitated workshops that helped educators, researchers, and community partners explore new approaches to learning, participation, and innovation
- Synthesized research findings into accessible resources, visual frameworks, and implementation strategies that supported adoption and long-term impact.

SELECTED INNOVATION & SENSEMAKING PROJECTS

- **Theory and Concept Visualization:** Created an original visual sensemaking methodology that enables students to externalize thinking, surface relationships, and build shared understanding through evolving collaborative knowledge systems.
- **Design Companion Playbook:** Designed a reflective learning and collaboration system that helped participants capture insights, connect experiences across contexts, and translate observations into collective action.