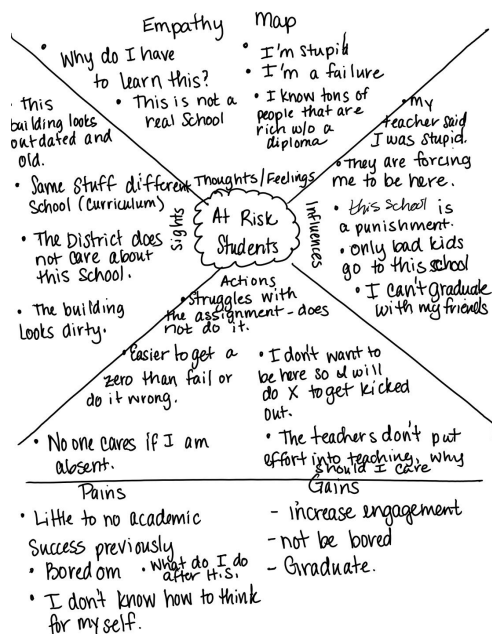


Final Problem of Practice Report

By following the Stanford Design Thinking Bootleg, "empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test," (Holcomb, Doorley, Klebahn, Segovia, & Utley, 2018) I began the design process with a general idea that I experience daily, the lack of student motivation and engagement in the classroom. I feel that with the increase in outside distractions and the change in the view of education, students are not engaged in learning. Lack of student engagement impacts the academic achievement of the at-risk population.

But Why? Could it be social, emotional, academic or behavioral? I tried looking at it through the eyes of my students. Many of our students come to us with problems traditional students do not have. They have lost one or more immediate family members, struggle with illness, have a chemical dependency, were bullied, are homeless and the list goes on. Without some of the fundamental needs, the students are unable to focus on learning and education. This results in chronic absenteeism, low grades and behavior problems.

After thinking about this and talking to students for insight, I created an Empathy Map to illustrate what I found. I included things I have heard from students and perceptions they have of the school. What I realized is that the students struggle with self image. Many of them have been told by teachers and family members that they are worthless and stupid. The school environment adds to this feeling. The building is a converted elementary school that up until recently, time forgot; overall the school does not look like a place for innovation and learning.

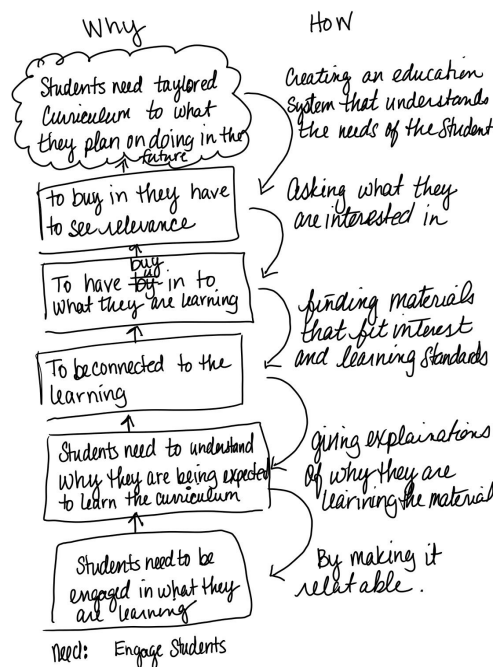


Many of the students have been forced to attend the program, they have been kicked out of the traditional high schools for academic or behavior reasons. But instead of spinning this as an opportunity or second chance, students are told that if they don't pass at the regular school, they will be sent to our school.

Often the students and families have not placed a high value on education, so the students do not see why learning is needed and what it can do for them. Because of this, they spend time trying

to get out of class, refusing to do work, or playing on cell phones. They focus more on social interactions than they do on academic interactions.

I think that some of the students are worried about failing when they try so they don't try because they at least know the outcome and feeling. They have had educational setbacks for a majority of high school. They don't see the point in learning because for them there is no point. Many of my students do not know what goals they have for after high school, this lack of direction can weigh on someone emotionally thus increasing apathy.



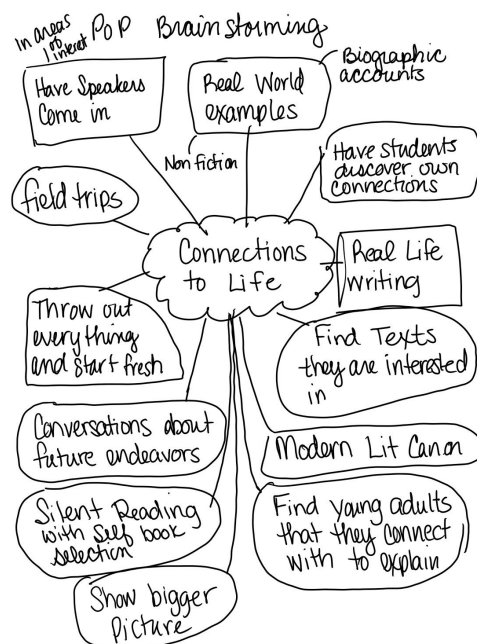
After creating and reflecting on the empathy report, I began exploring the problem by asking why. This helped in defining the root cause of the problem and honing my problem of practice.

The problem stems from individual variables within each student, some beyond the control of the student. At the most basic level, at-risk students do not see the point in learning because they do not see the big picture. They do not understand how an education will help them in the future and in

life. At risk students need to understand what they are learning, why they are learning it and how it will help them in the future.

The problem at risk students have is the inability to connect what they are learning to real world situations, this disconnect hinders students from engaging with the material in a meaningful way and prevents content mastery.

I know that the root of my problem of practice deals with students connecting what they are learning to the real world. Through the ideation and brainstorming, I think that this is a multifaceted problem and this is only one part of a possible solution. Students knowing why they are learning something



does help with motivation and engagement, but feel that the length of time at risk students have been disengaged with learning and the poor learning habits they have acquired feeds into the problem also.

My prototype is for an English class that directly relates to things students need to know in the real world. I began with thinking about what I could do in my classes to create one possible solution to my problem of practice. I was thinking of creating posters to put up in my classroom that show the translation from what we are learning to how it is used in the real world. Writing Skills can be used for letters, resumes, incident reports, etc... But felt that this might not give a real sense of how these skills can be translated. Then I began thinking about adding something to my daily lessons that shows the skills and what they are used for in the real world. This brought me to creating a class that actually applies the skills in authentic experiences.

Duration	Units	Topics
1.5 weeks	Unit One: Personal Learning	Decision Making, Note Taking Skills, Study Skills, Learning Styles
2 weeks	Unit Two: Personal Skills	Goal Setting, Time Management, How to Plan things, Good Life Habits, Problem Solving
4 weeks	Unit Three: Communication	Intrapersonal Communication (Journaling, Self expression, self affirmation), Interpersonal Communication (I language, active listening, non-verbal), Conflict Resolution, Public Speaking (Speech writing and debate)
3 weeks	Unit Four: Career and Future	Researching Careers, Researching University/Trade School, Understanding Financial Aid and Grants, Filling out Scholarship Applications
3 weeks	Unit Five: Job Hunting	Filling out Job Applications, Writing Resume, Writing Coverletters, Conducting Interviews (Interviewer and Interviewee), Work Habits and Ethics
3 weeks	Unit Six: Moving out	Apartment Hunting, Mortgages, Taxes, Utility (electric, gas, water, cell phone), Budgeting, Banking and Investments
1.5 weeks	Culmination	Life Portfolio - Each unit will have artifacts that will be added to this portfolio.

The class is broken into six units (each lasting 2-3 weeks) that focus on different skills and experiences that are authentic. It scaffolds the students beginning with focusing on how they apply English in personal life situations, interacting with others and the public, exploring career options and job hunting, learning the soft skills employers are looking for, and finally leaving home and living on their own. I made a list of all the things I would have loved to have learned before I graduated college. I then broke it down into units that combine like skills to create this course.

With the prototype completed, it was time to test my plan. For this test, I was looking at the feasibility of a course that centers around the real world applications of English as a way to engage at-risk students in learning. The course will run 18 weeks with six units.

Since I had to change my test subject, my protocol was a face to face discussion about the course that examines the constraints and affordances of the model with a former educator. I explained the concept and showed the outline of the course. I then reviewed the notes on the feedback I received and summarized my findings.

Overall, the course was "something that might get the students engaged." My test subject felt that the topics being covered were all something that students need to know and skills need to have after graduation. He suggested that I consider adding a section on comparing trade and college routes so the students understand that not everyone has to go to college. He also suggested adding information on Union versus non-union positions.

The test subject pointed out that even though this might make things more interesting, however, if "a student is disengaged it may not reach them. There are some students that have no value on education, no matter how it is packaged."

One thing I learned was that just giving the assignment without having the students explore why it is needed will not engage students more than just giving any assignment. So I will need to find strategies that will help with reengaging the disengaged.

Based on testing of a design, I have learned that no matter how well designed and thought out in your prototype, there is always something you have not thought of and by testing the prototype you can make informed decisions on changes that need to be made in order for the design to be successful.

Overall the design process was enlightening. As I moved through all of the steps, I began to understand why the process is structured this way. Each stage builds on the previous one and it guides you to creating a comprehensive view of the problem and possible avenues to find a solution. It then allows you to create and test the solution in order to assess its validity. Then, the designer is able to address any downfalls to create a stronger solution.

Resources

Holcomb, S., Doorley, S., Klebahn, P., Segovia, K., & Utley, J. (2018, June 7). Design Thinking Bootleg. Retrieved from <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/design-thinking-bootleg>