

Navigating Multiple Centers of Power in R&D for Public Education

Transcript of Pivot 2020 presentation

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How do collaborative design projects manage competing needs and power dynamics? In this coffee time session, I will present a brief case study of a partnership among five K-12 public school districts in an inclusive R&D process to address a shared problem of practice. This case study will illustrate multiple perspectives of participating stakeholders in order to provoke a discussion around the challenges of prioritizing a clear end user and navigating multiple centers of power. Students may be the clearest end user of R&D in education: it is their learning experience that is intended to benefit from new interventions. However some stakeholders focus on the role of school district leaders (who are necessary for redesigning systems that support new interventions), teachers and school principals (who play critical roles in implementing interventions and redesigned systems), or parents and community members (who depend on successful outcomes from the local school district). This tangled skein of perspectives provides a rich context for discussion. How do pluriversal designers navigate such power dynamics? In what ways are compulsory, public systems, like K-12 education, fundamentally projects of a one world ontology, and how might we successfully decolonize design within such boundaries?

K-12 education; co-design; power dynamics



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Hi, my name is Colin Angevine I work as an independent consultant, facilitator, and researcher. In this five-minute “coffee talk,” I will present a case study from a collaborative project in K-12 education in the United States and hope to start a discussion. For clarity, I will begin with a preview of the discussion prompts and then get into the case study with an overview and a few snapshots of diverse participant perspectives. And then, with this context in place, revisit the discussion prompts.

So first, the prompts:

- How do collaborative design projects prioritize the true end-user?
- How do pluriversal designers navigate power dynamics in interdependent systems?
- And in what ways are compulsory, public systems, like K-12 education, fundamentally projects of what Arturo Escobar calls a “one world” ontology, and how might we successfully decolonize design within such boundaries?



The case study that I am going to introduce here began with some research with leaders of public school districts in the United States to understand the most common challenges that they were facing. You can take a look at some of the results of this research at the URL provided [<http://challengemap.digitalpromise.org>]. Following this research, a team of educators, researchers, and developers from across the country worked together for 18 months on one problem of practice that emerged in order to better define it, research it, prototype, and test potential solutions to address this challenge.

What was the challenge? It centered on the idea of real-world learning. As a challenge statement, the team articulated that as: “How we might integrate authentic life relevant opportunities into school learning experiences?” With the goal of creating learning opportunities at the points where high school students and community partners meet, for example, internships, mentorships, and guest speakers. To fast forward to the end, this team created two different tools and a handful of resources: a “builder” for school administrators to create strategic frameworks for real-world learning; a “roadmap” for teachers that provided turn-by-turn guidance on how to implement real-world learning experiences; and a suite

of supporting resources beyond that. But the exciting work and the real questions here happened in the messy collaboration that led to these outputs.



So, let's take a closer look. To start, looking at what it means to connect students and local partners. In facilitating these kinds of connections, teachers have plenty of questions: who should I bring into my classroom? How do I prepare students and families? What does the community partner need to know in order to collaborate successfully? And from the community partner perspective, they have questions that begin with: how do I even communicate effectively with teenagers? But the questions here of *how do classrooms and community partners create meaningful learning experiences together* happen in a culture and a broader context that includes lots of different constituencies: the school buildings where these activities would take place; the school districts that have policies and procedures that support or don't support these things; the families and the communities surrounding all of this. And for each of these constituencies there are different priorities and different challenges all in the mix. Students are prioritizing challenges around the fact that their classes aren't relevant or engaging, meeting their needs. Parents are prioritizing learning outcomes. Teachers have a million responsibilities, and so would need professional support to implement something new like real world learning. Administrators are accountable for safety and state testing and community partners might be interested but already have other things taking up their time and would need meaningful support.



So among these different priorities and needs, how is it that collaborative design projects can prioritize the true end user? And in doing that prioritizing, how do pluriversal designers navigate the power dynamics that emerge? And then finally, given that this is all happening within an interdependent system like K-12, education to what degree is that fundamentally a project of a one-world ontology, and what would it mean to decolonize design within such a framework? This is a quick snapshot, and just

one example, but hopefully it will ground us and something concrete as we explore these questions together. I look forward to the conversation. Thanks!

About the Authors:

Colin Angevine is a white, cis-male, able-bodied, United States citizen based in Tacoma, WA, who natively speaks English. These elements of his identity constitute layers of privilege that have shaped the way he moves through the world. Furthermore, they are reflective of those who historically have been gatekeepers and decision-makers in traditional models of R&D for public education. The emergence of researcher-practitioner partnerships, co-design, user-centered design, and community-led design in K-12 is decentering those who share that privilege to redistribute power more equitably. Colin's work as a facilitator, consultant, educator, and researcher supports this transformation specifically, and the shared struggle toward social justice more generally.

Colin's perspective draws from previous work experiences: as an educator (in middle and high schools), a technologist (in edtech and legal tech startups), and as a researcher (in graduate studies of Learning Sciences and Technologies). Prior to beginning an independent consulting practice, Colin was the project director for Challenge Collaboratives at Digital Promise, where he developed and facilitated new models for R&D at the intersection of educators, researchers, and developers in education.