CO-DESIGN IN EDUCATION

Ana Gracia
12 / 07 /11
Thesis Proposal
Research Question:

How might co-design enable the development of a holistic peer observation system that promotes trust among teachers?

Co-design:
- “The concept is related to co-creation”
- “An act of collective creativity that is experienced jointly by two or more people”

Peer observation:
- “Is a beneficial professional development strategy that open the opportunity to enhance teachers professional practices in actual classrooms”

Trust:
- “Reliance on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone”

Sub-questions:
1) What are the components of holistic peer observation?
2) What are the current conditions that create distrust during peer observation?
3) How might the design researcher engage the teachers to co-design each component to overcome conditions of distrust?
4) How might the redesigned components be re-arranged into a new system?
“We need teachers who can make learning exciting because they themselves are excited”

JUSTIFICATION

People often talk about education in terms of how the system should work differently, about statistics on student’s achievement, and also about how teachers have great amount of responsibility over improving and keeping high level of education system, “If America is to have world-class schools, and it must have a world-class teaching force” (NBPTS, 2002).

By having such big responsibility, teachers are under continuous supervision to guarantee their effectiveness in their teaching areas. This concern of maintaining high-level teachers and keeping them in constant supervision derives from the need of keeping schools accountable for each area and for the state.

According to their article Feng, Figlio and Sass mentioned that there is certainly reason to believe that educators respond to accountability pressure in the ways in which they carry their jobs. In other words, seems that by adding some pressure to remain accountable, teachers either improve their performance or leave the field of teaching.

Seems that in the pursuit of maintaining high standards schools seek to continuously improve teaching performance. The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards proposes the implementation of a policy position, which “seeks to identify and recognize teachers who effectively enhance student learning and demonstrate the high level of knowledge, skills, abilities and commitments reflected in the following five core propositions”.

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities

It is in the interest of this research, to focus on the importance of keeping teachers in continuous development. And as seen in the five previous core propositions that on number four and five the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards have a focus on teacher development within a community. Number four as established in the proposition, relates to the importance of “Striving to strengthen their teaching, accomplished teachers critically examine their practice, seek to expand their repertoire, depend on their knowledge, sharpen their judgment and adapt their teaching to new findings, ideas and theories.” And number five promotes “Accomplished teachers contribute to the effectiveness of the school by working collaboratively with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development.

In an opportunity of working collaboratively and create a culture of professional development among teachers, Edward P. Fiszer mentions that the implementation of a model incorporating peer observation, dialogue and feedback enlivens the profession for both new and experienced teachers. Peer observation encompasses the interaction of one or more teachers to learn and evaluate from other teachers. “Unfortunately, the expressed needs of teachers are not evident in typical professional development programs” (Fiszer, 2).

Peer observation, despite the lack of interest from some teachers “is a beneficial professional development strategy and that they would like more observation opportunities to enhance their own practice” (Fiszer, 19).

According to some experts that have implemented peer observation, the reasons of showing resistance to apply this strategy in their classrooms, is related to the lack of trust to other individuals performing the observation. Parker J. Palmer refers to this action as a “fear of having a live encounter with alien ‘otherness’, whether the other is a student, a colleague, a subject, or a self-disserting voice within”.

By knowing the importance of meeting teaching standards,
knowing the actual strategies for teacher development and the actual roadblocks to perform such action, open the door to a co-design opportunity.

In this case this approach is relevant for the benefit of teachers development, in which the designer will become a facilitator for a group of people in the development of an appropriate holistic peer observation system according to the needs of the school involved. Getting people involve that are impacted by the issue collaborate and have decision into the development of new opportunity is not a new approach, as Sanders says, “The practice of collective creativity in design has been around for nearly 40 years, going under the name participatory design”.

“Co-design refers, for some people, to the collective creativity of collaborating designers” (Sanders, Stappers, 2008).
The focus of this research will be in the area of teachers within the same school settings rather than teachers from different school districts collaborating with each other. This study is concerned only with the development of a peer observation system, not with the elaboration of new curriculum areas in case they are noticed during the research. Curriculum and pedagogies are out of the scope of this research. “Design is a type of problem solving in which the problem solver views the problem or acts as though there is some ill-definedness in the goals, initial conditions or allowable transformations” (Cross, 37).

It is important for this research to make clear that the design researcher will be implementing design research methods with only one school (IPS 79). This research is will explore the development of new ideas, solutions and implementation for the related complex issue. “The best collaboration environments provide opportunity to meet, share ideas, discuss, and learn from one another's experiences” (Thackara, 99).

The designer will not decide on the solutions by it self. “Design does not take place in the situation; it is the situation. As planners, designers, and citizens, we need to rethink our spaces, places, and communities in order to better exploit the dynamic potential of networked collaboration” (Thackara, 99).

Some other limitation that might show during this research is related to teacher participation. According to the context (IPS 79) not all teachers will be willing to participate, but it is the majority of the teachers that will be participating on this research. The designer will not be focused on administration development, such as schedule for implementation of the possible solution.

As a part of the research the researcher will start focusing on one to one observation at the beginning, following to the experimentation of more than one participant in a session.
The variable of the outcome will be measure by the ability to implement the solution one to one, compare to group to one or one to a group. For the designer, this research will be focused on applying design thinking skills needed to embrace innovation and facilitate teachers to explore multiple ways to solve problems. One of the most important limitations for this research will be that the designer will be merely focus on teachers and no on the students.

Ultimately, this research will explore the outcome of different solutions given thru co-designing with the teachers at IPS 79.
RESEARCH PLAN

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY
Co-design in Education

Research plan:

- January
- February
- March
- April
- May

- Collection
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Prototyping
- Implementation
- Writing
- Orals
- Committee mtgs

Collection
Analysis
Synthesis
Prototyping
Implementation
Writing
Orals
Committee mtgs

On chapter five by Kevin Clark and Ron Smith, they describe the importance of design thinking and how it embraces innovation, gives organizations freedom and explore multiple problems such as the many problems that can be found in a school setting.


In this chapter Farson talks about the education reform that is needed in classrooms. He explores the negative effects on constant judgement and express how better leadership in school will improve student achievement. A well, he express his concern on teachers unions and how they should relax and realize that teachers need to become metaprofessionals, teachers of teachers. Which it is important for a collaborative environment.


The authors in “Teachers helping Teachers” cover the area of the isolation problem and the consequences it brings to the teaching improvement into general education. They describe the need of better social interaction among teachers. Unfortunately they describe the solution as one to one peer coaching. These approch gained acceptance year ago, and today’s world seems to look for more diverse groups.

In this book Palmer describes the meaning of truth, and the importance of teachers to come together as a community and build trust upon that. He describes how important is for teachers to seek for support and new opportunities to growth.


In this book Fiszer describes the importance of achieving certain level of expertise in the area of study of each teacher. As well he mentions how peer observation is an usefull tool to continue with the professional development, but unfortunately not everyone get advantage of it.


This report about the American Human development Index, provides statistical information about the measure of all Americans in different groups, and the topic related to this research is on education. It shows how more and more teachers are moving from school to school searching for stability, and how it affects the students.


The authors present the importance of collaboration between special education and general education teachers. They mention that the stronger the collaboration between teachers, the better results for teacher effectiveness. “This is important so that the two groups of teachers not only maintain separate professional identities, but also have the necessary knowledge and skills to build collective expertise”

In this article the authors mention about the evolution that design research has taken with its users. They explain the meaning of co-design and how it is a subset of co-creation. The evolution that the designer takes as a facilitator within the design process.


In the chapter about situation, Tackara mentions the importance of collaborating places. These places allow the opportunity to share each other experiences.