Youth Designing for Communities

Explore how students from East Jordan Middle/High School in Michigan used the design process to collaborate with Spanish-speaking families and strengthened community connections.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

East Jordan is a rural town in northern Michigan with just over 2,000 residents. In recent decades, the agricultural industry has attracted a small but growing group of Spanish speakers from Mexico, Nicaragua, and the Southern U.S. states to the region, many of whom have settled in East Jordan to raise families.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

Angela Barrera, a Spanish teacher at East Jordan Middle/High School, and her students **observed** that many Spanish-speaking parents had been longstanding yet less visible members of their community, and in turn, most English-speaking students knew little about their Spanish-speaking classmates.

The limited opportunities for meaningful interaction with Spanish-speaking community members sparked a student-led initiative aimed at fostering connections and sharing language.

Students **brainstormed** on sticky notes to identify their **defining** question.

How can we connect with Spanish-speaking families so they can feel more welcomed in our community and how can we mutually help each other with our respective language goals?

BUILDING UNDERSTANDING

Students decided to gather research by conducting interviews to better learn about their Spanish-speaking community and co-create.

They were **innovative**, thinking of fun ways to interact and connect with the Spanish-speaking members of their community after the interviews by playing games together like Lotería and Go Fish.

During the interview process, one student, Luis, drew portraits of community members to honor the interviewees and make them more visible in an intimate and artistic way.

WHAT IS THE HARDEST PART OF LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE?

After brainstorming, translating, and practicing Spanish-language interview questions, students identified ways to foster meaningful conversations.

DO YOU FEEL WELCOME IN OUR COMMUNITY?

EXPLORING CONNECTION THROUGH COLLABORATION

Following interviews, students **collaboratively** re-listened to recordings, transcribed, and identified common themes that could lead to ideas that would answer their defined question. The four project ideas they **prototyped** were:

Conversation club

Community ESL class

Bilingual cooking classes

Bilingual painting classes with Luis

Students evaluated ideas, considered what they learned from the greater community, and identified bilingual cooking classes were the best approach as food plays a central role in everyone's lives.

CONCEPT TO CREATION

To prepare for their bilingual cooking classes, students continued their research by learning more about the community beyond school walls. They identified local resources and people who are funds of knowledge in the broader community.

Students traveled to businesses owned by Spanish speakers, first Providence Farm and interviewed Monica Rueda, the head chef behind a pop-up Mexican restaurant.

Second, they went to T.C. Latino, an international grocery store located an hour's drive from East Jordan. Led in groups by parent chefs, the students learned about produce, spices, and other ingredients used in cuisines from countries throughout Latin America.

FOSTERING LASTING IMPACT

Lastly, students and Spanish-speaking community members cooked together at Commongrounds Cooperative in Traverse City, preparing dishes from countries throughout Latin America.
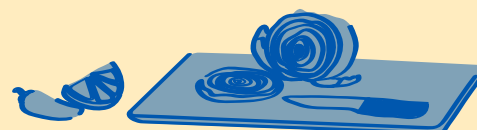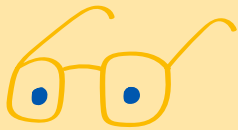

" EAST JORDAN IS NOT AS HOMOGENOUS AS I THOUGHT. NOT ONLY ARE THERE PEOPLE WITH ALL SORTS OF LANGUAGE BACKGROUNDS, BUT THERE ARE PEOPLE WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF PERSPECTIVES AND OPINIONS."
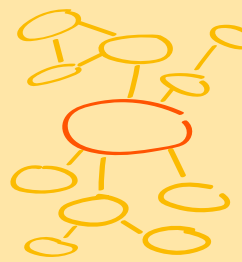
—STUDENT

This experience, and other cooking events such as the "Noche Latina," has created lasting impact on the community by becoming important occasions for sharing language and culture, and in building fellowship in East Jordan.

Design Terms & Strategies

DEFINE

Designers map out the challenges users face and identify key problems and opportunities for improvement.

RESEARCH

Designers gather and analyze information by combining interviews, data collection, and observations to understand the user, space, or system they are designing for, collaborating closely with users to avoid making assumptions.

OBSERVE

Designers are actively aware of their surrounding environment, taking time to look and listen.

BRAINSTORM

Designers generate multiple ideas and explore solutions freely before thinking critically over whether an idea is good or not.

USER

An individual or group of people who interact with a product, space, system, experience or service.

CO-CREATE

Designers work with users from the start to finish of a project as they are the experts on the object, space, or system. Users contribute ideas, skills, and insights, engaging in joint decision-making.

COLLABORATE

Designers often work in groups as having diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and skills can lead to better ideas and solutions.

PROTOTYPE

Designers find ways to bring ideas to life, share them with others, and test them out to see what does and doesn't work before going into a final design.
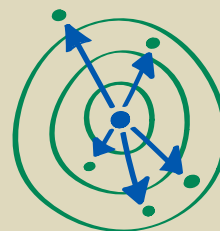
LOCAL RESOURCES

Designers use what is available to them to create sustainable solutions that connect with the community and or support the local economy.

EVALUATE

Designers critically assess ideas and prototypes, refining them based on feedback from peers and users, identifying what works or needs improvement.
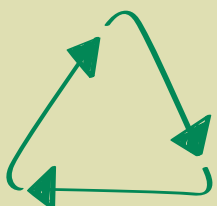
INNOVATE

Designers take creative and new approaches to conducting research, experimenting, collaborating, and solving problems.

FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Designers seek out and collaborate with others in their community who bring unique expertise, skills, or resources to help solve the challenges related to the product, space, or system.

IMPACT

Designers consider the impact of their solutions on users, communities, and the environment, both locally and globally.

COOPER HEWITT
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