30 MINUTES

Anticipate Challenges and Unintended Outcomes

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Activity Rationale and Aims

Aims

01.
Identify challenges and unintended outcomes

02.
Develop strategies to mitigate challenges and unintended outcomes

Activity Summary

Collaborators develop operational definitions of equity that can be used to help consider ways that the research or design may impact different identity groups. Collaborators brainstorm key challenges and potential unintended outcomes. In small groups, collaborators build out one of the key challenges or unintended outcomes, developing a short vignette. Groups share out and develop a list of strategies that could help to mitigate negative consequences.

Rationale

Research and design projects inevitably encounter unanticipated challenges as well as outcomes. While this is inevitable, collaborators have a responsibility to anticipate potential downstream impacts so as to mitigate the chance for harm. Imagining potential challenges as well as ways that research and design can be taken up helps to minimize the potential for unforeseen consequences.

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In Person Steps

As a whole group:

1. Develop a shared definition of equity. Specifically operationalize it in the context of this specific project. Suggested prompts:

    a. How do we define equity?

    b. How will we know if our work is oriented-towards equity? How will we know when the work is moving away from equity?

    c. What does equity look like, feel like, sound like? For whom?

2. Keeping these shared ideas of equity central, brainstorm key challenges and unintended outcomes.

    a. Who might misconstrue the research?

    b. How might it be used for unintended purposes?

    c. What ways may the research be adapted?

    d. How might ideas or constructs be taken out of context and/or taken up by users in ways that do not align with original commitments to equity?

In small groups:

3. Build out one of the key challenges or unintended outcomes, developing a vignette of how it could develop.

    a. When considering how it will play out, groups should develop two pathways, one if left unaddressed, and one if addressed.

As a whole group:

4. Share vignettes.

    a. Engage in a discussion and develop a list of strategies identified that can help to mitigate negative consequences and encourage positive outcomes.

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Facilitator Preparation

IN-PERSON MATERIALS

- Board or chart paper

- Markers

- Pen and paper

DIGITAL MATERIALS

- Google drive or other place to share and track group work

Modifications And Virtual Adaptations

- The probing questions should be modified to meet the needs of the specific research project.
- If conducting this activity in a virtual environment, ask for collaborators to write responses in the chat feature of the online platform when brainstorming key challenges and unintended outcomes. Utilize breakout rooms for the small group portion, and then have each group share their discussion when everyone comes back together. Ask collaborators to write strategies in the chat that can help to mitigate consequences before opening up the discussion to short reflections and questions.

Facilitation Tips

- In whole group discussions, remind collaborators of the principle of 'leaning in and leaning out' to make sure that all voices are heard.
- In small group discussions, if not everyone is participating, assign roles (e.g. note taker, synthesizer)
- Provide ample examples of the tasks, as relevant to the research.
- This tool is complementary to the tool "Identify Indirect Stakeholders" and could be implemented together.

Specific Tips for Online Facilitation

- When engaging in whole group discussions for groups larger than 10 people, consider asking all collaborators to share out, with the person talking calling on the next person, or make sure that folks have a chance to write their reflections, to ensure all perspectives are gathered.

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Example from the field

When looking at broad implementation of scientific research, examples abound of research that has been taken out of context and/or had unintended, rippling effects (see Kirschner & van Merriënboer, 2013; Pashler et al., 2008; Stitzlein, 2017). While there is always some degree of risk that this may happen, it is helpful to proactively consider the ways that research and design could be taken up.

In the example of a multimodal storytelling project that supported community building via photography and narration of first person accounts, initial pilot data indicated that students found the process of telling their stories via photography as well as narration to be healing (see Trejo et al, 2022). The stories and experiences that students chose to share were personally meaningful to them and were intended to be used to advocate for systematic change within the school district. However, after initial pilot sessions, the design team paused to engage in this process to ask critical questions about how these stories may be received outside of the trusting community in which they were shared. In what ways could receiving the stories impact listeners/readers, and in what ways could hearing these stories put the students in vulnerable situations? The team adapted the steps in this protocol to meet their specific context and consequently were able to refine the delivery medium, intended audience, and facilitator protocols so as to mitigate the risk for unintended outcomes.

Commitments to Equity and Wellness

Throughout the course of research and design, the original plans will ultimately veer from the intended course. If the team is prepared for unanticipated challenges via a central commitment to equity and consideration of the ways that that commitment to equity could be challenged, there is greater chance that the team will be prepared to see challenges as opportunities for growth. Moreover, there is a need to imagine ways that programs will be sustained and taken up in new ways and places, so as to build in processes and procedures to reorient to equity so as to maximize benefit and minimize harm.

This activity is designed to promote the wellbeing of the broader ecosystem in which a designed activity is situated. Via anticipating challenges and unanticipated outcomes, we can plan so as to promote the wellness of the broader ecosystem and intentionally plan to mitigate the risk of causing unintended harm.

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Additional Reading

Akkerman, S., Bakker, A., & Penuel, W. R. (2021). Relevance of educational research: An ontological conceptualization. *Educational Researcher*.

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*(3), 409-427.

Works Cited

Kirschner, P. A., van Merriënboer, J. J. (2013). Do learners really know best? Urban legends in education. *Educational Psychologist, 48*(3), 169–183.

Pashler, H., McDaniel, M., Rohrer, D., Bjork, R. (2008). Learning styles: Concepts and evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 9*(3), 105–119.

Stitzlein, S. (2017). Teaching for Hope in the Era of Grit. *Teachers College Record*, 2017, p. 1-28

Trejo, B., Teeters, L.P., Zigarelli, J., Gleason, E., Shedro, M., & Alvarez, A. (2022, April 21-26). *Circles de confianza: Promoting the well-being of culturally and linguistically diverse youth via multimodal testimonio* [Paper presentation]. AERA Conference 2022, San Diego, CA.

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