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10 ACTIONS FOR EMPATHY & INSIGHT

HOW MIGHT I GAIN DEEP INSIGHT INTO THE PROBLEM WITH THE GOAL OF DESIGNING A HUMAN-CENTERED, TRANSFORMATIVE SOLUTION?

1. Observe

Set aside time to sit quietly and observe everything around you from several different locations at different times of day—watch how environments change behaviors and interactions. While observing, consider the following:

- What do you see that is expected?
- What do you see that is unexpected?
- What do you see that is surprising?
- Pretend you are walking into this environment for the very first time. What would you notice right away? What would you see differently?

2. One-on-One Interviews

Consider the flow of the conversation and outline the key questions you will ask. Consider beginning with a question that people will be more comfortable responding to at first. What happens if your interviewee says they don't know? How will you respond? Keep alternate questions on hand if you are finding certain questions aren't getting you anywhere. As you reflect on the interview, consider the following:

- Was this individual representative of their peers? Why or why not? If not, what makes them unique?
- What are they doing that is different from others? What are they doing that's the same?

3. Positive Deviants

Identify individuals or groups of who are not representative of their peer group in a positive way. For example, 150 seniors have the opportunity to attend a free college-planning workshop, but only 12 show up. Why did these 12 actively participate when the majority did not?

Give these individuals a second look, dig deeper into their uncommon strategies, unconventional and counterintuitive methods. Meet with them in a group and discuss why they are NOT experiencing the problem that you are tackling—what can you learn about the issue from their perspective? Can you translate what they're doing into a solution?

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4. Shadow

Once you have completed an interview, pick one of those individuals to shadow. This could be someone with direct or indirect experience your design challenge. Look for individuals who are open, honest, and reflective. In the case of students, determine needs for parent/family permission, especially if observing takes you off-site. Make clear that the purpose of shadowing is to experience life in their shoes. Explain your goal to develop a new solution to an existing problem. They are your partner in this goal and will help generate ideas.

5. Group Interview

Bring together a group of three or more individuals who experience the problem and facilitate a conversation around the experience. Utilize the same list of question you prepared for the one-on-one interview. Encourage participants to ask questions of one another—take special note of what they ask and why. Establish group norms and expectations to ensure an safe, honest, meaningful conversation.

6. Multi-Generational Interview

Same as above, but the group is a family—this can be particularly helpful for understanding challenges involving family/parents/community engagement.

7. Expert Interview

Identify experts who study your particular problem. Send them an email or give them a call. Give them an overview of your vision and why you're passionate about solving this problem. How would they tackle this problem if they were in your shoes? What additional resources do they recommend you consider?

8. Exemplar Model

Same as #2, but replace "expert" with a school that is solving your challenge with amazing success.

9. Models Outside Education

Is there a similar challenge being faced in an industry other than education? If so, how does that industry solve the problem and are their opportunities to learn about and apply their approach to the education space. Research different sector solutions.

10. Asset Deep Dive

Is there a particular resource or tool that could potentially be utilized to help solve the problem? Are there assets that require additional research to determine how they might be leveraged for change? Examples include visiting a community center to better understand the programs serving youth or researching free web-based tools to simplify lesson plan co-creation and sharing.