

CAPSTONE DEFENSE

Sarah Steinhauer

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

In 2020, American teachers have faced a paradigm shift. Society's split ideologies of how education should operate during a global pandemic have created unprecedented learning and working environments. While many teachers are publicly resisting these changes, many still fear repercussions for speaking out. In a time where physical proximity cannot be achieved, they are struggling to find support and solidarity. American teachers need a virtual community and tool to help them achieve self-empowerment and connect on a national level so that they can build power and strategies for collective action.

SOLUTION

To approach the aforementioned problem, I will be working with two existing projects, TeachUp and Drawing the Line. TeachUp is a virtual community for educators seeking self-empowerment and effective advocacy. Drawing the line is a potential social movement presented as a web tool and resource for progressive education activists. Through the use of graphic and user experience design, I will work to further develop these projects so that they encourage more engagement and progress towards a solution.

METHODOLOGY

- Exploring two existing projects that require further development
 - TeachUp - A virtual community for educators
 - Drawing the Line - A web tool and resource for progressive education activists
- Continued engagement with TeachUp community
 - Moderating and creating content for Facebook group
 - Hosting weekly virtual meetings
 - Monthly development meetings with co-organizers
- Engagement with other grassroots rank and file labor organizations
 - National Educators United, Refuse to Return, Educators Rank & File Safety Committee, Teachers for Good Trouble
 - Regular conversations and feedback for DTL
- Historical and Contemporary Research
 - Books, New Articles, Podcasts
- Setting long and short term goals
 - Iterating for responsiveness to current events as needed

METHODOLOGY (Cont.)

- User Experience Design approach to project development
 - Research
 - Brainstorming
 - Prototyping
 - Testing
 - Analysis
 - Iteration
- Regular contact with advisors and mentors for feedback and development
 - Use of VoiceThread to provide visual updates for work in progress
 - Capstone Panel
 - Leaders in connected organizations
- User Research Process
 - Survey and Talk-Aloud User Testing
 - Development of Usability Testing Poster to present findings and opportunities

LITERATURE/RESOURCES

- Books
 - When We Fight, We Win
 - Rules for Radicals
 - Pedagogy of the Oppressed
 - Red State Revolt
 - Secrets of a Successful Organizer
 - No Shortcuts
- Websites
 - Labor Notes
 - World Socialist Website
 - EWOC
 - NNG.org
- Podcasts
 - Art and Labor
 - CTU Speaks!

KEY CONCEPTS/SKILLS FROM MA/MFA

- Graphic Design
- Web Design
- User Experience Design
- Organizational Design
- Social Media Strategy
- Contemporary Storytelling
- Project Management

ANALYSIS

Through the capstone process, I was able to improve the design of existing projects to meet the needs of teachers. This project is directly connected to current events, therefore it required frequent adjustment to meet the needs of the moment. While the deliverables of this capstone may have been adjusted, its overall goal of building a virtual community and tool to support and empower educators during this time has been met, as user engagement continues and grows. I consider TeachUp and Drawing the Line to still be in an early stage of development. Through the user experience design process, I will remain curious and responsive as I further develop these projects.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

As I near the end of my graduate programming at Goucher, I hope to use the work of my capstone to inform future volunteer engagement in grassroots organizing for educators and beyond. I plan to develop a small business called "Designed for Empowerment". In this I will offer free/reduced cost design services and training for non-profits, grassroots organizations, campaigns, and emerging underrepresented small business owners.

CONCLUSION

Although I would describe myself as a designer first, the work done on this project has steered me further into the role of an organizer. I have had to learn quickly, as I had no academic or deep practical experience in labor organizing and unions. Approaching movement for collective action through the lens of a designer has deepened my interest in learning more about the role design has played in historical education labor movement, as well as its implications for contemporary and future use.