

## Insights for Innovation Class

Seeking an independent education in design methods

My next step towards learning about UX design was to enroll in a class taught by the design agency IDEO.

The course, "Insights for Innovation" was taught by Coe Leta Stafford and Jane Fulton Siri and focused on high quality ethnographic and contextual research, interviewing skills and distilling observations into actionable insights.

<http://www.ideo.com/products/insights-for-innovation>

### My Problem Statement for the course was:

How might we better suit early reading materials to meet the needs of contemporary first graders?

This curiosity grew out of several combined interests and information:

- 1) my dream of writing and illustrating children's books
- 2) Many of the early books I read to myself were so boring. E.x. rhymes like Cat/ Hat/ Pat/ Mat, etc.
- 3) My mother works as a 1st grade teacher and an increasing number of her students also struggle with learning disabilities such as ADHD and Autism that make learning to read even harder.

### I wanted to observe to gain insight on the following questions:

what do early readers like and dislike about the books they have to read? Where do they get frustrated, bored or excited? What grammatical structures, words and/or topics are easier for them to grasp than others? What plotlines maintain their attention longer?

### What extremes could I learn from?

My IDEO teachers stressed the importance of seeking outliers within your research area or group. I thought of a few various scales within my elementary school demographic which could point out these extreme examples.

- 1) Children who have learned to read in preschool VS children who are delayed in learning to read
- 2) Gender – boys learning to read VS girls learning to read
- 3) Socioeconomic – privileged children with rich learning environment VS underserved, low-resource learning environment
- 4) Type of Classroom: Classroom size: Homeschooled VS public school with a large classroom  
Classroom type: Only students with autism VS mixed typical and autistic learners
- 5) Environment: reading indoors in quiet library VS reading outdoors or while standing/ walking/ other distractions
- 6) Emotion: Reading when it's required VS reading when it's just for fun



Above: books selected for students to read to themselves during free time.

Below: books arranged by reading level in a first-grade classroom.



### Interviewing:

I conducted two interviews and two contextual inquiries (if not for time constraints I would have done many more). The first interview was with Kathy, a veteran elementary school teacher, and Robin, my mother who has been teaching elementary school for 7 years.

The two contextual inquiries were with seven-year-old students. We sat outside in the desert preserve near the school and they read their current assigned books to me. One child was an advanced reader, already reading Harry Potter books to herself at home, and the other was still struggling to sound out some basic English phonemes.

*Handwritten notes:*

Beatrice  
still struggling with some words -  
"w" words like "winner" and "who"  
Responded to + used pictures  
heavily to aid comprehension  
once ~~she~~ read "talons" when  
the book said "claws" (carnivores)  
Did NOT like the picture of an  
owl holding a dead snake  
Said at first "I'm going to finish  
the whole book", but at moments  
felt frustrated + didn't want  
to finish, but I encouraged her  
and she made it to the end.  
She said she would read the  
book again  
She seemed frustrated but  
easily motivated to continue -  
also seemed more knowledgeable  
about the subject matter -  
(I know what a carnivore is)  
but was limited by her  
reading ability.

Lillian  
- very advanced reader  
- did not stop to look  
at pictures  
read quickly, very few words  
tripped her up  
did not add inflection into  
sentences, ~~what~~ i.e. questions  
- said she is reading  
Harry Potter at home  
- she says she likes her book  
about composting (worms/recycling)  
and did not have many  
comments about it, positive or  
negative.  
- says she likes to write  
stories about horses

Kathy parents often put do  
one or another. Good idea -  
putting books at the table, in the  
car, in the bathroom so that  
kids can read wherever they  
are WAITING. - Make reading  
accessible. Also - speaking to children a lot +  
reaching new words.  
Books are given reading levels, but seem largely unhelpful in what  
is a primarily individualized process (individual selection per child)  
Kathy reads the books herself to determine what would be a good  
fit for each child.  
Most enjoyable part - seeing children's progress in learning to read  
over the whole year, boosting back. Most frustrating - children who  
we frustrated + stuck + Kathy has tried everything she knows to try  
and help them. Phonics work great for some kids but not others.

Right: my interview/ research notes.



Caldecott Award winning book by Mo Willems which utilizes speech bubbles and comic panel format.

## Formulating Insights

Based on these interviews, informal conversations with youth services librarians during my job at the Illinois Library Association, and reading articles about education, language acquisition as well as browsing early reading books themselves, I formulated a few insights.

### Insights

#### 1) Parents must continue to read to their children even after children are reading to themselves.

Who I learned from: Kathy, teacher.

*"Kids should be reading to their parents and being read to, but parents often just do one or another."*

Good idea: parents who put stacks of books wherever kids will be waiting, i.e., dinner table, the car, bathroom.

#### 2) Children's intelligence and maturity often is way above their current reading level.

Who I learned from: Beatrice, student. She was reading a book about birds of prey. She knew what a "carnivore" was, but could not sound out the word and felt frustrated by the limitations of her current reading level.

Good idea: when parents read to children, the child learns what reading can be and will inspire their imaginations.

#### 3) Comic book style books are very popular with young readers.

Who I learned from: Mo Willem uses speech bubbles to tell stories, and his books are wildly popular with children and adults alike.

*"Comic style books allow kids to feel like they are reading something more grown up."*

Publishers are catering directly to early readers who enjoy reading comic books. TOON Books, which publishes only comics for children, was founded by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly.

### Conclusion

Although the intent of the class was to go through the process of interviewing and researching, I felt inspired to continue to work on my project through the ideation and creation phases (which I have been doing informally since then). The class also piqued my interest in learning more about design methodologies.

