Unlocking Literacy: A Community-Engaged Impact Studio on Literacy, Equity and AI

Proposed use of Remesh and Cortico platforms

Project Overview

In 2023, and 2024, the [Museum of Science](#) and the [Burnes Center for Social Change](#) at Northeastern University in collaboration with [The GovLab](#) and additional partners will run an Impact Studio on Literacy, Equity, and AI designed to yield effective and implementable solutions to improve literacy inside and outside of schools nationwide and in Boston.

In 2022, only [63% of 4th graders](#) nationally achieved basic reading proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Though [70% of 4th graders across Massachusetts](#) achieved NAEP's basic level in reading – the highest in the nation – for [our students in Boston](#), this figure was just 54%. Further, while 87% of White 4th-graders in Boston reached NAEP's basic level in reading, only 44% of Black 4th-graders and 43% of Hispanic 4th-graders achieved this outcome. While there has been a new national reckoning regarding evidence-based literacy practices and some school districts are changing curricula, we know that we can serve our students better and make change happen faster.
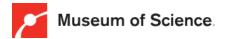
Over the course of the year, we will convene a series of national and local conversations and events with students, educators, caregivers, researchers and innovators, first, to understand why improving literacy has proved to be so intractable. We will leverage artificial intelligence to ensure more equitable and inclusive participation in these conversations. AI will enable participation in multiple languages in addition to English and enable those with low literacy to participate and make their voices heard.

Second, we will work with the public—caregivers, students, educators, entrepreneurs and activists—to identify existing and develop new solutions to the problems identified by communities. We want to know what's already working inside and outside of schools and what we can do differently with the benefit of new approaches. We will address the innovative role AI could play in helping to improve equitable outcomes.

Finally, we will work with public sector, philanthropic, and community partners to design and implement deep demonstration projects to accelerate meaningful outcomes and measure the impact.

Understanding the Problem:
The first aspect of this project, the "All Our Ideas" campaign, aims to engage parents, teachers, students, and other education stakeholders to pinpoint the root causes of persistent low literacy. By involving these key stakeholders, we will create a ranked list of root causes, based on participant preferences, that will inform the subsequent phases of the project. The campaign is scheduled to run from [XX-XX-XX].
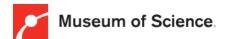
Next Steps: Inclusive Conversations

The next steps of the project involve a multi-faceted approach to better understand and address literacy challenges in the Boston community. This phase includes conducting in-person conversations with caregivers and students, as well as a real-time, deliberative dialogue at the Museum of Science to gain deeper insights into these challenges. The Burnes Center team will prepare a moderation guide in advance to prompt a deeper understanding, or reframing, of the root causes found through the All Our Ideas Campaign. The AI tools used both for the in-person and online engagements will allow real time synthesizing of responses which can drive the conversations in different directions outlined within the moderation guide to optimize the limited time we have with community members.

Tools:
1. [Cortico](#) – Developed at the Center for Constructive Communication, Cortico is a nonprofit project which convenes small group conversations that are structured to surface communities' hopes and concerns around a given topic. Participants in this phase will be Boston community members, prioritizing those with low literacy levels, who will be receiving compensation for their time to sit down with our team members and answer questions on their experiences and opinions on Boston's literacy levels. The Fora platform created by Cortico.ai will be utilized to transcribe, summarize, and analyze key insights from spoken discussions in real-time so the feedback can be used to drive the conversations in the most helpful direction.

2. [Remesh](#) – In parallel to the Cortico engagement, an online deliberation using the Remesh platform will be held with a representative sample of caregivers and educators, considering the convenience for working families. Remesh is a private vendor which provides tools to facilitate AI-based focus groups. A conversation facilitator can launch a question about the topic at hand and get people to offer responses, which the software's AI analyzes then analyzes to create real-time a

dashboard grouping the responses and how participants felt about the responses. Each hour-long conversation typically covers 25 to 30 questions asked in an hour-long conversation and can include up to 1,000 participants. We will use Remesh to run a representative sample of caregivers and educators in the Boston Boston area, explicitly seeking out community members of color and lower socioeconomic status.

Phase Goals:

The anticipated output from these efforts is the creation of a "Problem Catalog" to comprehensively outline the challenges of low literacy, the barriers to implementing change, and the root causes, as identified through community engagement and research. The target completion date for this catalog is December 2023.

Conclusion:

The Impact Studio on Literacy, Equity, and AI represents an innovative and collaborative effort to tackle the critical issue of literacy within and beyond schools. We seek to break down barriers, harness the power of AI, and expedite progress towards achieving equitable literacy outcomes. We humbly request your support to embark on this transformative journey.