Uncovering Opportunities in Tutoring: Exploratory Lab

Sam Tai, Spring 2021

WHAT IT TOOK

From Participants

- **7 participants -** 3 program directors from MMSD, UW-Madison Morgridge Center for Public Service, and Schools of Hope; 1 volunteer coordinator from Schools of Hope; 1 AVID tutor and UW-Madison design student; 1 MMSD Community Schools Resource Coordinator; and 1 Community and Social Impact Specialist from American Family Insurance
- **4 hours** of collaborative learning and thinking time split between two virtual meetings
- **3 hours** of additional time spent by the sponsor planning with and giving feedback to ROCKiT strategists
- **Approximately 1 hour** of asynchronous interview time

From ROCKiT

- **1 strategist** as lead and **2 strategists** providing as-needed support
- **13 hours** of behind-the-scenes work planning and developing the lab
- **5 hours** of live meeting facilitation and supporting interviews

The Situation

In the spring of 2021, Laura Whitmore, Partnerships Coordinator at MMSD, approached ROCKiT with a question: how can we increase the number of tutors being placed in schools? This question was borne out of several overlapping phenomena. For one, evidence suggested that tutors appreciated the flexibility and time-savings of virtual tutoring. Additionally, tutoring and positive adult one-on-one relationships with students had gained increased attention as a tool for student achievement given some of the challenges of large-group virtual learning in schools. Finally, these interests highlighted that some tutor coordinators experienced a greater "supply" of tutor availability than "demand" for their services, insofar as demand was evident to the coordinators themselves. To learn more about this problem, ROCKiT strategist Sam Tai worked with Ms. Whitmore as sponsor to assemble a seven-person design team made up of tutors, tutor coordinators, and program directors from across many local organizations: MMSD, United Way and Schools of Hope, AVID, American Family Insurance, and the UW-Madison Morgridge Center for Public Service.

The sponsor decided to pursue an *exploratory lab*, which would help uncover problems and opportunities in a given ecosystem or challenge context. Within the scope of this exploratory lab, the team would seek to understand and gain user information relevant to the phenomenon of tutor uptake by teachers and schools; specifically, explored the question of *"how might we increase the utilization of tutors in our **classrooms**?"*

Research to Discovery

The team began with a meeting during which members got to know each other and familiarize themselves with the process and outcomes of this lab. Ahead of this meeting, four people representing different roles in the tutoring support ecosystem - a tutor, a tutor coordinator, a program director, and a teacher - answered questions about their daily physical and emotional journeys, which were downloaded and presented visually as individual *journey maps*, tools used to represent key activities, feelings, and interactions of users over a given period of time. After looking at these layered journeys, the team identified that tutors and teachers are the key actors in determining whether or not a tutor joins a classroom. The team then completed *empathy interviews*, transcribed conversations with users designed to elicit feelings and user needs, wants, and desires for a given experience, with tutors and teachers. These interviews had questions for interviewees about their positive and negative experiences with tutoring and about the conditions that made tutoring rewarding and effective. Team members conducted interviews over the course of a little more than two weeks, taking into account teachers' and students' spring break.

"It would be nice to have a tutor for every single student in the classroom because it gives them an opportunity to engage in one-to-one conversation, it creates a sense of belonging in the building, and it creates comfort, which lead to academic success… [When a tutor is] getting through the assignment, knowing when to be conversational and when to focus on the assignment - it feels great."
- Teacher

Tutor Journey Map - Term of Service (All Actions)
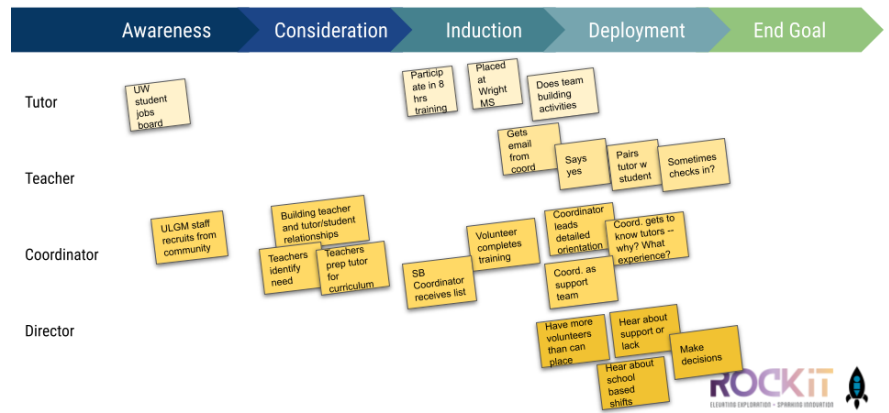
The team reconvened in its second of two meetings to download and theme the content of the empathy interviews. Two strategists supported two breakout sessions of three to four participants each, as they downloaded the 11 total interviews using MURAL. The team then began manipulating the insights, clustering them around shared or common themes, such as "content/classroom knowledge," "tutor purpose," "communication," and "consistency." With these themes also came value indicators: insights into "good communication" and "bad communication," and "the importance of consistency," to name a few. With these themes established, Laura felt well-positioned to incorporate learnings about the ecosystem into any programmatic shifts to increase tutor uptake in schools.

Outcomes

Being a lab, the intended outcome of this experience was to provide our sponsor with important initial identification of or insights into problems related to their area of concern to a level of detail that allows for taking action if desired. Upon the conclusion of this lab, the sponsor found value in the themes and insights from the interviews as they pertained to what she identified as the key drivers of the tutor uptake problem and possible solutions to that problem, especially insofar as the learnings challenged some of her assumptions and confirmed others. ROCKiT provided access to all of the documents and artifacts from this lab to all team members, to use in any way they found valuable.