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### Design Thinking: A Pedagogy for Higher Education?

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## What is Design Thinking?

Design thinking is a process for creative problem solving to devise user-based solutions to complex problems. It encourages organizations to focus on the people they are creating for, which may lead to better products, services, or processes. Design thinking can bridge the gap between theory and practice, support outcomes such as empathy, reflection, and creativity, and encourage risk-taking and community engagement. Traditional design thinking contains phases such as empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (d.school, 2010). However, the Liberatory Design Thinking (Clifford, 2017) process adds the steps of notice and reflect as ways to investigate identity, power, privilege, and the relationship between the designers and the possible users of the innovation.

## Teaching and Learning

### Context and Challenge:

US schools have many systemic barriers to producing equitable opportunities and outcomes for students of different backgrounds, identities, and experiences. Disparate outcomes exist in achievement rates, graduation rates, discipline rates, and program access for students depending on many factors including their economic, racial, ethnic, or language background.

### Objectives:

- Graduate students in educational leadership program will participate in design thinking activities
- Students will reflect on issues of identity, power, privilege, equity, and educational leadership using the Liberatory Design Thinking process
- Students will create 3-5 prototypes to be tested in their schools

## “How might we create and lead more equitable schools?”



### Sequence of 7 Week Design Thinking Unit

**Read and Discuss:** *Transformative leadership in education: Equitable and socially just change in an uncertain and complex world* (Shields, 2018)

**Class Session 1:** Introduction to design thinking process and group activities

**Video Lecture:** *Notice and Empathize* phases

**Assignment:** Activity choice for *Notice and Empathize*

**Written Reflection:** Explore self-identity, power, privilege, disparities, and structural barriers. *Reflect*

**Class Session 2:** Design Sprint- *Define and Ideate* session after share out of *Notice and Empathize* activities. Brainstorm and brainstorm with constraints.

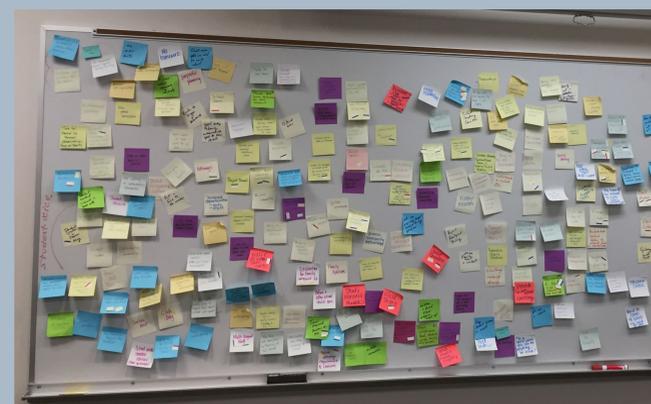
**Assignment:** *Reflect* on ideas from Design Sprint. Prioritize ideas for prototypes.

**Class Session 3:** *Prototype*-Develop possible individual and group prototypes

**Group Prototype:** Sketch and explain one protocol you developed.

**Written Reflection:** Individually *Reflect* on design thinking, equity, and leadership.

**Application:** *Test* protocols and/or apply design thinking process in your school, classroom, leadership.



## Student Reflections

This process really broadened my own views and helped me explore and understand implicit bias more as well. -Rose

*I learned equity issues are present in so many facets of a school, and that was alarming to me.* -Nicole

The Design Thinking Process is a strong, safe way to understand oneself, learn about common assumptions, and build powerful solutions or strategies. -Michelle

Working in groups of diverse people helped me see different perspectives and work through problems in a different way than I would have if I were to be tackling equity issues alone as an individual. -Jessica

*I learned the huge value behind using the design thinking model to problem solve; this allows equal voice on a team and opens the way for wonderful and unique solutions that, more than likely, never would have been otherwise brought to light.* -Dave

## Implications for Practice

- When using design thinking, instructors should set norms for listening, brainstorming, sharing, reflection, and participation. Instructors need to consider the tasks, the processes, and relationships to meet their objectives. This unit involved individual, small group, and whole group activities. Students had choice about how they chose to engage with the equity topics and how they shared their experiences.
- The Liberatory Design Thinking allowed students to examine issues of equity, power, privilege, and marginalization in K-12 schools.
- Design thinking provided an avenue to design radical yet actionable solutions to combat institutional racism and barriers to equity that exist in schools.
- Design thinking provided practice for social justice leadership as students engaged in notice, empathize, reflect, and test activities.
- Design thinking allowed for risk-taking, community building, listening, and critical self-reflection.

## Resources

- Clifford, D. (2017). Equity-centered design [Google slides]. Institute of Design at Stanford. <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources-collections/liberatory-design>
- d.school (2010). *An introduction to design thinking process guide*. Institute of Design at Stanford.
- IDEO (2012). *Design thinking for educators*. <http://designthinkingforeducators.com/>
- Interaction Design Foundation. (n.d.). *What is design thinking?* <https://www.interaction-design.org/>