An Introduction to Design Thinking

A PROCESS GUIDE
For the Statewide Afterschool Networks
“Design Thinking is the confidence that everyone can be part of creating a more desirable future, and a process to take action when faced with a difficult challenge. That kind of optimism is well needed in education.”

Design Thinking for Educators http://www.designthinkingforeducators.com

Source materials used here were created by the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University and adapted for the use of the statewide afterschool networks. https://dschool.stanford.edu/

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Design Thinking
Introduction
for the National Network of Statewide Afterschool Networks

The statewide afterschool networks are creative, resourceful and thoughtful problem-solvers working to advance and sustain expanded learning opportunities for young people.

The national network brings together 47 state networks and partnerships to collectively tackle the challenges and explore the opportunities to build partnerships and policies for afterschool and summer learning programs.

In 2014, we’re putting a new tool in our toolbox—design thinking—to help us be inventors and innovators in our work. Experienced before, during and after the national network meeting, this brief overview of the process should be fun, meaningful and helpful in your work.

Why Design Thinking? Why Now?
Our work with the national network is to continually provide new tools for creative problem-solving. Design thinking is increasingly recognized in business and education as a tool to approach problems.

Individually statewide afterschool networks are charging forward in their mission, goals and workplans. Great work is happening all over the country. And yet we know everyone has that sticky issue, that back-burner issue, that thing in the workplan you never quite get to. Hopefully design thinking can give new perspective, new spin and a new approach to move forward.

Simultaneously, many states are seeing shifts in state budgets. The New York Times reported: “In a year when three dozen governors are up for election, unexpectedly robust revenues from taxes and other sources are filling most state coffers, creating surpluses not seen in years and prompting statehouse battles over what to do with the money.” Now is the time to ensure positioning for afterschool and summer learning. Now is the time to build on the foundation that has been built. And now is the time to be creative, bold and unfailing. Design thinking is one tool to develop new thinking for this work.

What is Design Thinking?
Design thinking is about believing we can make a difference, and having an intentional process in order to get to new, relevant solutions that create positive impact.

Design thinking gives you faith in your creative abilities and a process for transforming difficult challenges into opportunities for design.

It’s Human-Centered. Design thinking begins from deep empathy and understanding of needs and motivations of people—in this case, the students, teachers, parents, staff and administrators who make up your everyday world.

It’s Collaborative. Several great minds are always stronger when solving a challenge than just one. Design thinking benefits greatly from the views of multiple perspectives, and others’ creativity bolstering your own.

It’s Optimistic. Design thinking is the fundamental belief that we all can create change—no matter how big a problem, how little time or how small a budget. No matter what constraints exist around you, designing can be an enjoyable process.

It’s Experimental. Design thinking gives you permission to fail and to learn from your mistakes, because you come up with new ideas, get feedback on them, then iterate. Your work will never be finished or “solved.” It is always in progress.

In short, design thinking is the confidence that new, better things are possible and that you can make them happen. And that kind of optimism is well-needed in education.
“To create meaningful innovations, you need to know your users and care about their lives.”

**WHAT is the Empathize mode**

Empathy is the centerpiece of a human-centered design process. The Empathize mode is the work you do to understand people, within the context of your design challenge. It is your effort to understand the way they do things and why, their physical and emotional needs, how they think about the world, and what is meaningful to them.

**WHY Empathize**

As a design thinker, the problems you are trying to solve are rarely your own—they are those of a particular group of people; in order to design for them, you must gain empathy for who they are and what is important to them.

Observing what people do and how they interact with their environment gives you clues about what they think and feel. It also helps you learn about what they need. By watching people, you can capture physical manifestations of their experiences—what they do and say. This will allow you to infer the intangible meaning of those experiences in order to uncover insights. These insights give you direction to create innovative solutions. The best solutions come out of the best insights into human behavior. But learning to recognize those insights is harder than you might think. Why? Because our minds automatically filter out a lot of information without our even realizing it. We need to learn to see things “with a fresh set of eyes,” and empathizing is what gives us those new eyes.

Engaging with people directly reveals a tremendous amount about the way they think and the values they hold. Sometimes these thoughts and values are not obvious to the people who hold them, and a good conversation can surprise both the designer and the subject by the unanticipated insights that are revealed. The stories that people tell and the things that people say they do—even if they are different from what they actually do—are strong indicators of their deeply held beliefs about the way the world is. Good designs are built on a solid understanding of these beliefs and values.

**HOW to Empathize**

**Observe.** View users and their behavior in the context of their lives. As much as possible do observations in relevant contexts in addition to interviews. Some of the most powerful realizations come from noticing a disconnect between what someone says and what he does. Others come from a work-around someone has created which may be very surprising to you as the designer, but they may not even think to mention in conversation.

**Engage.** Sometimes we call this technique ‘interviewing’ but it should really feel more like a conversation. Prepare some questions you’d like to ask, but expect to let the conversation deviate from them. Keep the conversation only loosely bounded. Elicit stories from the people you talk to, and always ask “Why?” to uncover deeper meaning. Engagement can come through both short ‘intercept’ encounters and longer scheduled conversations.

**Watch and Listen.** Certainly you can, and should, combine observation and engagement. Ask someone to show you how they complete a task. Have them physically go through the steps and talk you through why they are doing what they do. Ask them to vocalize what’s going through their mind as they perform a task or interact with an object. Have a conversation in the context of someone’s home or workplace—so many stories are embodied in artifacts. Use the environment to prompt deeper questions.

**TRANSITION:**

Empathize ► Define

**Unpack:** When you move from empathy work to drawing conclusions from that work, you need to unpack all the things you heard and saw in order to understand the big picture and grasp the takeaways of it all. Unpacking is a chance to start that process—sharing what you found with fellow designers and capturing the important parts in a visual form. Get all the information out of your head and onto a wall where you can start to make connections—post pictures of your user, post-its with quotes, maps of journeys or experiences—anything that captures impressions and information about your user. This is the beginning of the synthesis process, which leads into a ‘Define’ mode.
Empathize

With your team, review your network environmental scan and identify KEY issues that affect young people, families, programs, schools, communities and the afterschool field in your state.

Networks should utilize this tool as a group to capture the many perspectives within the state and use that knowledge to expand your thinking about your potential options to position your network effectively in the external environment and help grow the field strategically.

Questions to Consider

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<th>Political Considerations</th>
<th>General Trends</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<td>Needs or issues of cities/counties?</td>
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<td>Trends and issues in school districts or education in general?</td>
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<td>State budget</td>
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<td>Needs for workers</td>
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<td>Median income etc.</td>
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<td>Numbers of youth served in afterschool: 21st CCLC, School-age child care, other</td>
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<th>Potential Organizations or Departments to Engage or Re-engage</th>
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<td>This could add to your outreach potential or understanding opponents</td>
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Empathy should be human-centered and about individuals.

In design thinking you want to understand a person’s thoughts, emotions, and motivations, so that you can determine how to innovate for him or her. Visit http://dschool.stanford.edu/use-our-methods/ for ideas on interviewing and observing individuals.

This adaption of the Statewide Afterschool Network Environmental Scan provides context and preparation for the empathize phase.
“Framing the right problem is the only way to create the right solution.”

**WHAT is the Define mode**

The Define mode of the design process is all about bringing clarity and focus to the design space. It is your chance, and responsibility, as a design thinker to define the challenge you are taking on, based on what you have learned about your users and about the context. After becoming an instant-expert on the subject and gaining invaluable empathy for the person you are designing for, this stage is about making sense of the widespread information you have gathered.

The goal of the Define mode is to craft a meaningful and actionable problem statement—this is what we call a point-of-view. This should be a guiding statement that focuses on insights and needs of a particular user, or composite character. Insights don’t often just jump in your lap; rather they emerge from a process of synthesizing information to discover connections and patterns. In a word, the Define mode is sensemaking.

**WHY Define**

The Define mode is critical to the design process because it results in your point-of-view (POV): the explicit expression of the problem you are striving to address. More importantly, your POV defines the RIGHT challenge to address, based on your new understanding of people and the problem space. It may seem counterintuitive but crafting a more narrowly focused problem statement tends to yield both greater quantity and higher quality solutions when you are generating ideas.

The Define mode is also an endeavor to synthesize your scattered findings into powerful insights. It is this synthesis of your empathy work that gives you the advantage that no one else has: discoveries that you can leverage to tackle the design challenge; that is, INSIGHT.

**HOW to Define**

Consider what stood out to you when talking and observing people. What patterns emerge when you look at the set? If you noticed something interesting ask yourself (and your team) why that might be. In asking why someone had a certain behavior or feeling you are making connections from that person to the larger context. Develop an understanding of the type of person you are designing for—your USER. Synthesize and select a limited set of NEEDS that you think are important to fulfill; you may in fact express just one single salient need to address. Work to express INSIGHTS you developed through the synthesis of information you have gathered through empathy and research work. Then articulate a point-of-view by combining these three elements—user, need, and insight—as an actionable problem statement that will drive the rest of your design work.

A good point-of-view is one that:

- Provides focus and frames the problem
- Inspires your team
- Informs criteria for evaluating competing ideas
- Empowers your team to make decisions independently in parallel
- Captures the hearts and minds of people you meet
- Saves you from the impossible task of developing concepts that are all things to all people (i.e. your problem statement should be discrete, not broad.)

**TRANSITION:**

Define ► Ideate

In the Define mode you determine the specific meaningful challenge to take on, and in the Ideate mode you focus on generating solutions to address that challenge. A well-scoped and articulated point-of-view will lead you into ideation in a very natural way. In fact, it is a great litmus test of your point-of-view to see if brainstorming topics fall out your POV.

A great transition step to take is to create a list of “How-Might-We . . .?” brainstorming topics that flow from your problem statement. These brainstorming topics typically are subsets of the entire problem, focusing on different aspects of the challenge. Then when you move into ideation you can select different topics, and try out a few to find the sweet spot of where the group can really churn out a large quantity of compelling ideas.
Define a Challenge

Dreams and Gripe Session

Finding opportunities for design often begins by noticing problems. Sometimes it comes out as wishes ("I really wish our school had _.") Sometimes it comes out as complaints ("It annoys me that we’re not _.") Either starting point is fine. You might want to try this with a friend... share your dreams and gripes and ask them to reflect back design opportunities.

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<th>Gripes/Things That Could Be Better</th>
<th>How Might We...</th>
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WHAT is the Ideate mode

Ideate is the mode of the design process in which you concentrate on idea generation. Mentally it represents a process of “going wide” in terms of concepts and outcomes. Ideation provides both the fuel and also the source material for building prototypes and getting innovative solutions into the hands of your users.

WHY Ideate

You ideate in order to transition from identifying problems to creating solutions for your users. Ideation is your chance to combine the understanding you have of the problem space and people you are designing for with your imagination to generate solution concepts. Particularly early in a design project, ideation is about pushing for a widest possible range of ideas from which you can select, not simply finding a single, best solution. The determination of the best solution will be discovered later, through user testing and feedback.

Various forms of ideation are leveraged to:

- Step beyond obvious solutions and thus increase the innovation potential of your solution set
- Harness the collective perspectives and strengths of your teams
- Uncover unexpected areas of exploration
- Create fluency (volume) and flexibility (variety) in your innovation options
- Get obvious solutions out of your heads, and drive your team beyond them

HOW to Ideate

You ideate by combining your conscious and unconscious mind, and rational thoughts with imagination. For example, in a brainstorm you leverage the synergy of the group to reach new ideas by building on others’ ideas. Adding constraints, surrounding yourself with inspiring related materials, and embracing misunderstanding all allow you to reach further than you could by simply thinking about a problem.

Another ideation technique is building—that is, prototyping itself can be an ideation technique. In physically making something you come to points where decisions need to be made; this encourages new ideas to come forward.

There are other ideation techniques such as bodystorming, mindmapping, and sketching. But one theme throughout all of them is deferring judgment—that is, separating the generation of ideas from the evaluation of ideas. In doing so, you give your imagination and creativity a voice, while placating your rational side in knowing that your will get to the examination of merits later.

TRANSITION:

Ideate ➜ Prototype

In order to avoid losing all of the innovation potential you have just generated through ideation, we recommend a process of considered selection, by which you bring multiple ideas forward into prototyping, thus maintaining your innovation potential. As a team, designate three voting criteria (we might suggest “the most likely to delight,” “the rational choice,” “the most unexpected” as potential criteria, but they’re really up to you) to use to vote on three different ideas that your team generated during brainstorming. Carry the two or three that receive the most votes forward into prototyping. In this way, you preserve innovation potential by carrying multiple ideas forward—a radically different approach than settling on the single idea that at least the majority of the team can agree upon.

“It’s not about coming up with the ‘right’ idea, it’s about generating the broadest range of possibilities.”
Generate Ideas

Prepare for Brainstorming

A successful brainstorm session requires planning. The small details matter. Invite a diverse group of people who can stay open-minded and can build on each other’s ideas. 6-10 is ideal for a brainstorm. Who will you invite?

NAMES

Sufficient wall space is necessary to have room for everyone to get up and see each other’s ideas, and will leave you with room to post plentiful ideas. Where will you conduct the brainstorm and how will you set-up the space to facilitate a brainstorm?


Facilitate Brainstorming

Create or use some of the suggested warm-up brainstorm questions from the Facilitate Brainstorming method to get people in the right mood. Which questions will you use?

WARMUP QUESTIONS

WHICH TOPIC WILL YOU FOCUS YOUR BRAINSTORM ON?

WHICH HMW BRAINSTORM QUESTIONS WILL YOU USE?

Stuck?

Add constraints

Change the magnitude of the solution space, using size, price, time commitments, and count. Ask yourself, “What if... it was larger than this room? smaller than a peanut? took 5 years to implement? took 1 minute? was available for all? available for only a few?”

Use inspiring brands.

Ask yourself, “How would McDonald’s, Nike, Apple, Urban Outfitters, or Disney do it?”

Make it time-specific

Ask yourself, “What if it were made for the morning? night?”

Pick a target audience

Ask yourself, “What if it were only for tweens? kids? athletes? parents?”

Brainstorm Rules

1. Defer ALL Judgement
2. Encourage Wild Ideas
3. Build On The Ideas Of Others
4. Stay Focused On Topic
5. One Conversation At A Time
6. Be Visual
7. Go For Quantity
“Build to think and test to learn.”

**WHAT is the Prototype mode**

The Prototype mode is the iterative generation of artifacts intended to answer questions that get you closer to your final solution. In the early stages of a project that question may be broad – such as “do my users enjoy cooking in a competitive manner?” In these early stages, you should create low-resolution prototypes that are quick and cheap to make (think minutes and cents) but can elicit useful feedback from users and colleagues. In later stages both your prototype and question may get a little more refined. For example, you may create a later stage prototype for the cooking project that aims to find out: “do my users enjoy cooking with voice commands or visual commands”.

A prototype can be anything that a user can interact with – be it a wall of post-it notes, a gadget you put together, a role-playing activity, or even a storyboard. Ideally you bias toward something a user can experience. Walking someone through a scenario with a storyboard is good, but having them role-play through a physical environment that you have created will likely bring out more emotions and responses from that person.

**WHY Prototype**

To **ideate and problem-solve.** Build to think.

To **communicate.** If a picture is worth a thousand words, a prototype is worth a thousand pictures.

To **start a conversation.** Your interactions with users are often richer when centered around a conversation piece. A prototype is an opportunity to have another, directed conversation with a user.

To **fail quickly and cheaply.** Committing as few resources as possible to each idea means less time and money invested up front.

To **test possibilities.** Staying low-res allows you to pursue many different ideas without committing to a direction too early on.

To **manage the solution-building process.** Identifying a variable also encourages you to break a large problem down into smaller, testable chunks.

**HOW to Prototype**

**Start building.** Even if you aren’t sure what you’re doing, the act of picking up some materials (post-its, tape, and found objects are a good way to start!) will be enough to get you going.

**Don’t spend too long on one prototype.** Let go before you find yourself getting too emotionally attached to any one prototype.

**ID a variable.** Identify what’s being tested with each prototype. A prototype should answer a particular question when tested. That said, don’t be blind to the other tangential understanding you can gain as someone responds to a prototype.

**Build with the user in mind.** What do you hope to test with the user? What sorts of behavior do you expect? Answering these questions will help focus your prototyping and help you receive meaningful feedback in the testing phase.

**TRANSITION:**

Prototype ➤ Test

Prototype and Test are modes that you consider in tandem more than you transition between. What you are trying to test and how you are going to test that aspect are critically important to consider before you create a prototype. Examining these two modes in conjunction brings up the layers of testing a prototype. Though prototyping and testing are sometimes entirely intertwined, it is often the case that planning and executing a successful testing scenario is a considerable additional step after creating a prototype. Don’t assume you can simply put a prototype in front of a user to test it; often the most informative results will be a product of careful thinking about how to test in a way that will let users give you the most natural and honest feedback.
Create a Prototype
Prototypes enable you to share your idea with other people and discuss how to further refine it. You can prototype just about anything. Choose the form that suits your idea best from the list below, or create your own.

Create a Storyboard
Visualize the complete experience of your idea over time through a series of images, sketches, cartoons or even just text blocks. Stick figures are great—you don’t need to be an artist. Use Post-it Notes or individual sheets of paper to create the storyboard so you can rearrange their order.

Create a Diagram
Map out the structure, network, journey or process of your idea. Try different versions.

Create a Story
Tell the story of your idea from the future. Describe what the experience would be like. Write a newspaper article reporting about your idea. Write a job description. Create a letter to be sent to parents. Describe your idea as if it were published on a website.

Create an Ad
Create a fake advertisement that promotes the best parts of your idea. Have fun with it, and feel free to exaggerate shamelessly.

Create a Mock-up
Build mock-ups of digital tools and websites with simple sketches of screens on paper. Paste the paper mock-up to an actual computer screen or mobile phone when demonstrating it.

Create a Model
Put together simple three-dimensional representations of your idea. Use paper, cardboard, pipe cleaners, fabric and whatever else you can find. Keep it rough and at a low fidelity to start, and evolve the resolution over time.

Create a Role-play
Act out the experience of your idea. Try on the roles of the people that are part of the situation and uncover questions they might ask

Other Ideas?

Experiment!
Experimentation brings your ideas to life. Building prototypes means making ideas tangible, learning while building them and sharing them with other people. Even with early and rough prototypes, you can receive a direct response and learn how to further improve and refine an idea.
“Testing is an opportunity to learn about your solution and your user.”

**WHAT is the Test mode**

The Test mode is when you solicit feedback about the prototypes you have created, from your users and have another opportunity to gain empathy for the people you are designing for. Testing is another opportunity to understand your user, but unlike your initial empathy mode, you have now likely done more framing of the problem and created prototypes to test. Both these things tend to focus the interaction with users, but don’t reduce your “testing” work to asking whether or not people like your solution. Instead, continue to ask “Why?”, and focus on what you can learn about the person and the problem as well as your potential solutions.

Ideally you can test within a real context of the user’s life. For a physical object, ask people to take it with them and use it within their normal routines. For an experience, try to create a scenario in a location that would capture the real situation. If testing a prototype in the situation is not possible, frame a more realistic situation by having users take on a role or task when approaching your prototype. A rule of thumb: always prototype as if you know you’re right, but test as if you know you’re wrong—testing is the chance to refine your solutions and make them better.

**WHY Test**

- **To refine prototypes and solutions.** Testing informs the next iterations of prototypes. Sometimes this means going back to the drawing board.
- **To learn more about your user.** Testing is another opportunity to build empathy through observation and engagement—it often yields unexpected insights.
- **To refine your POV.** Sometimes testing reveals that not only did you not get the solution right, but also that you failed to frame the problem correctly.

**HOW to Test**

**Show, don’t tell.** Put your prototype in the user’s hands—or your user within an experience. And don’t explain everything (yet). Let your tester interpret the prototype. Watch how they use (and misuse!) what you have given them, and how they handle and interact with it; then listen to what they say about it, and the questions they have.

**Create Experiences.** Create your prototypes and test them in a way that feels like an experience that your user is reacting to, rather than an explanation that your user is evaluating.

**Ask users to compare.** Bringing multiple prototypes to the field to test gives users a basis for comparison, and comparisons often reveal latent needs.

**Iteration and making the process your own**

Iteration is a fundamental of good design. Iterate both by cycling through the process multiple times, and also by iterating within a step—for example by creating multiple prototypes or trying variations of a brainstorming topics with multiple groups. Generally as you take multiple cycles through the design process your scope narrows and you move from working on the broad concept to the nuanced details, but the process still supports this development.

For simplicity, the process is articulated here as a linear progression, but design challenges can be taken on by using the design modes in various orders; furthermore there are an unlimited number of design frameworks with which to work. The process presented here is one suggestion of a framework; ultimately you will make the process your own and adapt it to your style and your work. Hone your own process that works for you. Most importantly, as you continue to practice innovation you take on a designerly mindset that permeates the way you work, regardless of what process you use.
Feedback

Feedback is one of the most valuable tools in developing an idea. Sharing prototypes helps you see what really matters to people and which aspects need improvement.

What has Potential?

What will be Challenging?

What Connections Should be Made? (partners, resources)

Questions?

Ideas!
Design Thinking

Integrate Feedback

Feedback is invaluable to developing an idea, but can also be quite confusing. It may be contradictory, or may not align with your goals. Sort through the responses you receive and decide on what to integrate in your next iteration.

Cluster the Feedback

As a team, discuss the reactions you received to your prototypes. Start by sharing the impressions you captured right after your feedback conversations. Take notes on Post-its. Sort and cluster the feedback: what feedback is most important to making it a success? Sort your notes and decide on what to integrate in your next iteration.

Evaluate the Relevance

Take a moment to revisit where you started. Look at your earlier learnings and ideas. What was your original intent? Does it still hold true based on the feedback you have received? What suggestions and builds did you find?

Prioritize the feedback: what is most important to making it a success? Sort your notes and create an overview of which feedback you want to respond to.

Iterate Your Prototype

Incorporate valuable feedback into your concept. Make changes where people saw barriers. Emphasize what was well received. Then, create a new prototype that you can share. Go through feedback cycles repeatedly and continue to improve your concept.
## Action Planning Strategy

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**KEY ACTIVITIES**

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**NEEDED PARTNERS**

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**RESOURCES NEEDED**

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**GOAL**
## Design Thinking Resources

### What is Design Thinking?

**Design Thinking for Social Innovation**
Stanford Review article on how social innovators are using Design Thinking to change their world.

### Impact of Design Thinking

**Why Design Thinking?**
http://bit.ly/1gcdGQJ
This moving video tells the story of one teacher’s evolution from skeptic to believer in the value of design thinking for educators.

**Design Thinking in Education**
http://bit.ly/NGB7rN
This article details the impact of design thinking in education.

**Design Thinking for Educators**
http://vimeo.com/46067111
A great IDEO Video Series featuring teachers and practitioners documenting their experience as they complete a design thinking challenge.

### Design Thinking Tools

**Design Thinking for Educators Toolkit**
http://www.designthinkingforeducators.com
This toolkit provides step-by-step instructions, guiding you through the five phases of Design Thinking to create solutions to your challenges.

**Bootcamp Bootleg**
This interactive toolkit, courtesy of the Stanford Design School, will walk you through each step of design thinking.

**Sample Design Challenges**
http://www.designthinkingforeducators.com/design-examples
See how educators across the nation have been using Design Thinking to solve challenges in their classrooms. Projects range in scope and scale including design solutions addressing problems in the classroom and across entire districts.

### Design Thinking in Educational Administration Courses

http://bit.ly/1gcdTDF
What does design thinking look like in action? This short video walks you through the Design Thinking process as it is used in an educational administration class at Iowa State University.

**A Call for Design Thinking**
TED Talk with Tim Brown on the conceptual framework of moving from design to Design Thinking.

**Impact of Design Thinking**

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