

DESIGNING Positive School Communities



Design Thinking

for a Better World



Trinity School
Welcomes
Syrian Refugees

Janice Dyer



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What Is Design Thinking?

When you see a problem in the world around you, do you want to help solve it? If so, then design thinking may be for you.

Design thinking is a **process**—a set of steps to take you to your goal. It's also a **mindset**—a set of attitudes a person has about something. You can use design thinking to look at problems in a new way and find brilliant solutions. Design thinking is a powerful, people-focused way to help people of all ages and backgrounds become **change makers** in their communities.

The Focus: People's Needs

Design thinkers start with **empathy** for the **user**, or the person or group who is experiencing a problem. They work to understand the problem from the user's point of view. Design thinkers stay focused on the user and the user's needs as they work to develop a solution.



Working with a partner or a small group will help you come up with new ideas while working through the design-thinking process.

Where Did Design Thinking Come From?

User-focused problem solving is an approach that has been used for years, under many different names. Design thinking is also called public-interest design because it is a way to inspire people to work together to create solutions that are in the interest, or will benefit, people in a **community**. You can use design thinking to help you find solutions to all kinds of problems.

Jeremiah Anthony Taking Action against Cyberbullies

Jeremiah Anthony was a student at West High School in Iowa City, Iowa, when he learned about cyberbullying. Cyberbullies target others on social media, usually writing hurtful messages and posting them publicly or sending them privately. Many teens use social media sites daily. Jeremiah learned that **some** students at his school were being cyberbullied. They felt bad about themselves every time they used social media. He **listened** to their experiences and decided to make social media a positive place for them.

Jeremiah created a Twitter account, @westhighbros, to tweet compliments to students he **thought** might be feeling bad that day. His friends started tweeting compliments to their friends, who then tweeted their friends. Thousands of tweets later, sending sincere compliments to other students has become a regular part of life at Jeremiah's school. Jeremiah and his friends were inspired to make a difference in their school and community by reminding people of their value and strengths.

Jeremiah Anthony explains: "Cyberbullies try to focus on what's bad about a person, and I try to say, no, you're actually really good at this, and you're much more good at this than you're bad at this."

Meet a
**CHANGE
MAKER**

"When I got the tweet it just really brightened up my day that someone would send a tweet like that."

"What he is doing with complimenting people, one compliment can change their entire life."



westhighbros @westhighbros

You are so full of character and energy. You're a great friend to anyone and can find the good in everything. [@JAMIE04](#)



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The Design-thinking Process

The design-thinking process is a set of steps that guides problem solving. There are a few different versions of the process, but all of them focus on putting the user's needs first.

Loop the Loop

The design-thinking process we will use in this book has six steps. Often, you won't find the solution to a problem on your first try.



Members of positive school communities **respect** each other's ideas and needs.



Design thinkers don't give up if their first ideas don't work. Design thinkers **fail forward**, meaning they use mistakes and failures to improve their solution on the next try.

Community Connections

A community can be small, such as your class at school, or large, such as a whole country.

Have you heard the expression “Think globally, act locally”? It means we help the whole planet when we make positive change in our own small part of the world.

Positive school communities make everyone feel welcome, safe, and included. You can use design thinking to help create positive school communities at your school and around the world. This book shows you how.



Mindset Tips

- Be interested** Listen to other people. Learn about their lives.
- Dig deep** Be curious. Explore. Ask lots of questions.
- Share** Work on problems with others. Value their ideas.
- Be open** New ideas can come from unexpected places.
- Be brave** Try out original ideas. Don't let fear of failing stop you.

Empathize

What Is Empathy?

 Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of others. Design thinkers use empathy to help them see a problem through the eyes of the person experiencing the problem.

To spend time with a user in your school community, you could ask to sit together at lunch or be partners in a classroom activity or field trip.



Empathy allows design thinkers to identify the needs of the person or people experiencing a problem. A need is any requirement that a person or group has. A person's needs are specific to them. They can be physical, social, and **cultural**.

In a school community, a physical need could be a safe area for students to voice their concerns or a space that students with physical **disabilities** can access. A cultural need could be allowing students time to practice their cultural or religious traditions. A social need could be ensuring that all students are able to participate in extracurricular activities.

Learning How to Empathize

The best way to understand a person's thoughts, feelings, and needs is to spend time with them. Ask questions about their life. In some cases, you could relate the person's experiences to your own to help you understand their point of view. You can use more than just words to learn about your users. You or the users can make drawings, take photos, record quotes, tell stories, draw maps and other images, and visit particular areas in the school community.



Engaging to Build Empathy

Here are some ways to gain empathy and learn about your user:

- **Immerse** Spend time with your users.
- **Engage** Talk to your users and ask questions, such as:
 - How do you feel about starting in a new school?
 - Why is it difficult for you?
 - What might help make it easier for you to fit in?Make notes as you listen to your users.
 - Pay attention to the words they use to describe their experiences.Ask follow-up questions to make sure you understand, such as:
 - Tell me more.
 - How do you feel when that happens?
- **Observe** Watch and listen to your users as they experience their lives.

New Students and THINK

Fitting in at a new school can be hard. Fifth- and sixth-graders at Rymfire Elementary School in Palm Coast, Florida, formed a group called THINK, which stands for "To Help Include New Kids." They talked with new students to understand their needs. They learned that new students often feel confused about where to go. They also feel lonely and excluded from the school community. THINK used this information to design a solution.

New students at Rymfire are now given a welcome box of school supplies, a free snack ticket for the cafeteria, and a tour of the school. THINK members schedule times to have lunch or play at recess with new students. They hold "get to know you" events during the year. The THINK team used empathy to design a solution that truly meets the needs of new students.

The THINK team welcomes new students and makes them feel more comfortable in their new surroundings.



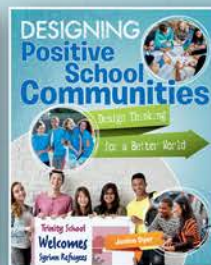


Become a change maker in your community through design thinking! Design thinkers are problem solvers who try to understand a problem from the perspective of the person experiencing it. This guiding principle leads to solutions that fit the user best, not the designer. The design-thinking process inspires empathy, collaboration, and innovative thinking. Each title in this unique series features case studies related to social change and engaging hands-on learning.

Designing Positive School Communities

School communities should be accessible, inclusive, and safe places for students of varying backgrounds, abilities, and needs. This introduction to the design-thinking process shows how to create positive change in school communities. Finding ways to make new practices accessible to everyone can also lead to solutions to big issues—such as bullying and addressing individual learning needs.

TITLES IN THIS SERIES



Guided Reading: W



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