

Design Thinking

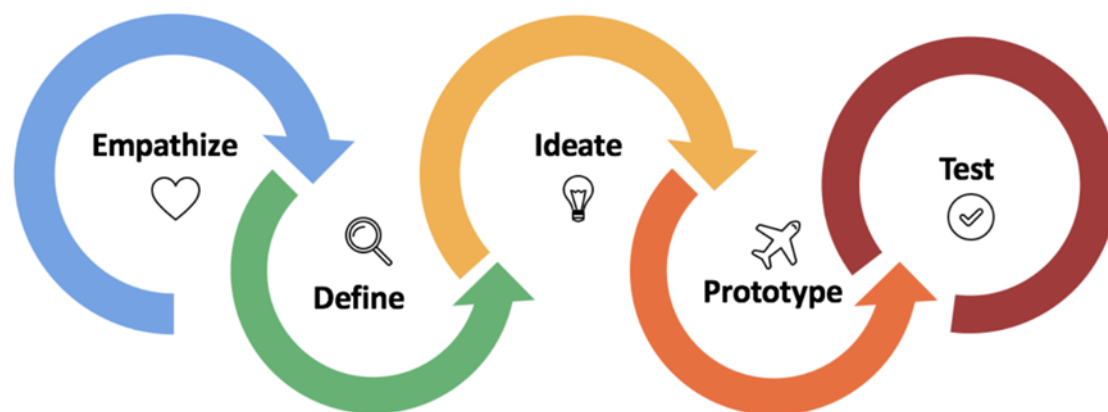
by Carol Campbell, PhD


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Picture two classrooms. Classroom A students are restless and disengaged in their learning environment; whereas, Classroom B students are motivated and engaged in their learning environment.


What defines the difference between the two classrooms? Classroom B had transitioned from a traditional, teacher-centered approach that characterized Classroom A to an innovative, learner-centered approach that made school more relevant by connecting learning to real-world applications. This shift was accomplished through the adoption of Design Thinking.

Design Thinking is a process used for creative and innovative problem-solving. In education, it empowers students to develop the skills and mindset needed to solve real-world problems. By emphasizing empathy, experimentation, and collaboration through a series of phases, Design Thinking shifts the focus from simply learning content to actively applying it to generate solutions to problems.



 The first phase in the Design Thinking process is Empathize, which focuses on understanding the users for which the design is intended. In this phase, designers (students) gain a deep understanding of the needs, wants, and motivations of users. They are then prepared to create relevant solutions that effectively address the requirements and expectations of users.

Designers research the needs and perspectives of the people they are designing for through techniques such as observation, interviews, and immersing themselves in the environment. For example, while designing a playground for handicapped students, Classroom B interviewed the students and observed them on the playground to identify their needs and challenges, as well as opportunities for improvement.


 In the Define phase, designers interpret and synthesize the information gathered during the Empathize phase. This allows them to define the problem statement, which helps them stay focused on a specific challenge instead of jumping to conclusions. It also assists the designer in thinking about how this can be a collaborative approach.

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Design Thinking, cont.


Designers articulate a clear and compelling problem statement based on their users' needs, often beginning with "How might we . . ." For example, Classroom B developed the statement "How might we improve our playground to meet the needs of our handicapped students?"

 The Ideate phase is focused on generating possible solutions for the problem defined in the previous phase. With a clear problem statement, designers can generate a wide range of creative and innovative ideas for solutions. A brainstorming process is used to explore different ideas, challenge assumptions, and produce innovative solutions.

Designers often record ideas on post-its® to add to a solution wall. For example, Classroom B worked collaboratively in small groups to create their solution wall, group the proposed solutions in categories, and select the most relevant.

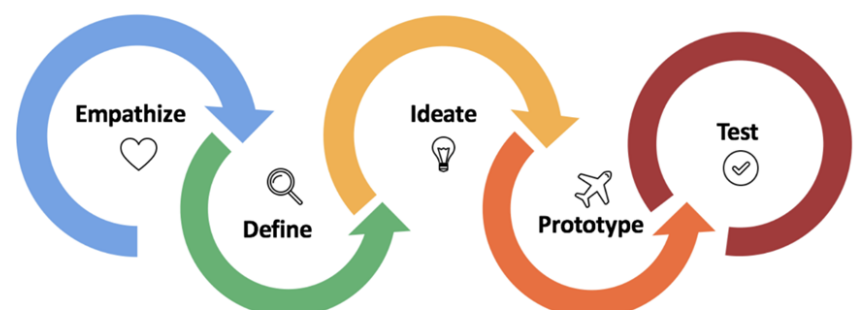
 The Prototype phase includes creating prototypes to test the selected solutions. Prototypes allow the designer to identify usability issues and refine the design before investing in production. This is the experimental phase of turning ideas into inexpensive, scaled-down versions of the final product or service.

Designers develop prototypes such as rudimentary sketches, models, or storyboards using craft supplies or employing digital tools for a simulation. For example, Classroom B chose to use craft supplies to develop a model of a playground that incorporated selected solutions.

 The final phase of the Design Thinking process is Test. Through user testing and feedback, this phase is aimed at refining and improving the prototype. Its ultimate goal is to ensure that the product satisfies the users' needs and requirements through a cycle of continuous improvement.

Designers use the insights obtained during this phase to serve as a foundation for the next iteration of the Design Thinking process if needed. For example, Classroom B tested simulations of various playground designs with the handicapped students to determine if they were viable solutions. The results indicated that there needed to be some further adjustments, so another iteration of the process began.

Ellen White noted in *Education*, p. 265, that when students are "cut off from the responsibilities of everyday life, they become absorbed in study, and often lose sight of its purpose." However, thinking like a designer can serve to engage our students, as well as transform the way they approach the world when imagining and creating new solutions for real-world problems.



PURPOSE

Education by Design Scholarship—EbD scholarship applications are due; send to jpage@swuc.org. This is the final year for this scholarship.

Recruitment of Teachers—Two initiatives regarding the recruitment of teachers have been developed: [SWUC Teacher Education Scholarship](#) and SWAU Intro to Teaching Dual Credit Course. Contact Dr. The, (cthe@swau.edu) at SWAU if an academy would like to offer the Intro to Teaching Course.

Aspiring Teacher Club—Scholarships are available to inspire the next generation of teachers from among

PLAN

Library Resources—The Southwestern Adventist University Library has developed a collection of open-source resources for academy students that can be found [here](#).

Elementary Curriculum Timeline—See the attached chart for timeline information.

[Library and Science Materials](#)—Funds are available annually to junior and senior academies for library and science materials.

AEtech Updates—See the attachment for the latest Adventist Education Technology (AEtech) updates.

NAD AEtech—Technology resources and pricing can be found [here](#).

Versacare Grants—Some of the parameters have changed for the Versacare Grants. Please access this [link](#) for updates.

our academy students. Contact Jackie Downs from the SFFC Foundation (jdowns@sffcfoundation.org) if you are interested.

SWUC Teacher Incentive—A retention bonus of \$5000 will be given at the end of each of the first three years of teaching to SWAU teacher education graduates hired by the SWUC conferences. To be eligible for the bonus each year, the teacher must continue teaching for the conference the following year. The bonus is to be paid directly on student loans or paid as a lump sum to the teacher if the teacher does not have student loans.

Creative Products 4 Reading—Email Melissa Hanson at creative-products4reading@gmail.com to gain access to an Orton-Gillingham Based Reading Program. See attached flyer.

["I Love U Guys"](#) Foundation—Programs for crisis response and post-crisis reunification are used in more than 50,000 schools, districts, departments, agencies, organizations and communities around the world. They are created through the research-based best practices of school administrators, psychologists, public space safety experts, families, and first responders.

Generative AI Guidelines—The NAD Generative AI Guidelines are attached. They may be adjusted to fit your context.



PRACTICE

PL Funds—[Professional learning funds](#) are available for attending a convention, workshop, or webinar every four years.

Webinars—See the attached flyer for 2025–2026 Educator Webinars.

ASCD—The annual Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Convention is June 28–July 1, 2026 in Orlando.

SWUC Educators' Convention—The next SWUC Convention is August 3–6, 2026 in Frisco, TX.

NAD Educators' Convention—The next NAD Convention is August 7–10, 2028 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center.

Robotics Tournaments

March 8, 2026—Lone Star Camp—Register [here](#).

March 24, 2026—Bentonville, AR—Register [here](#).

PRODUCT

Data Cards—The Data Card for 2025–2026 is attached. Please let us know if you would like copies.

Data Profiles—Demographic Data Profiles will be sent by the first of January.

MAP Testing Windows

Winter—January 5–23, 2026

Spring—April 20–May 8, 2026

ASDASA—The next [NAD ASDASA Convention](#) is February 9–12, 2026 at the Hilton Woodlands. Registration is ongoing.

Featured Book

Review—*Iterate*:

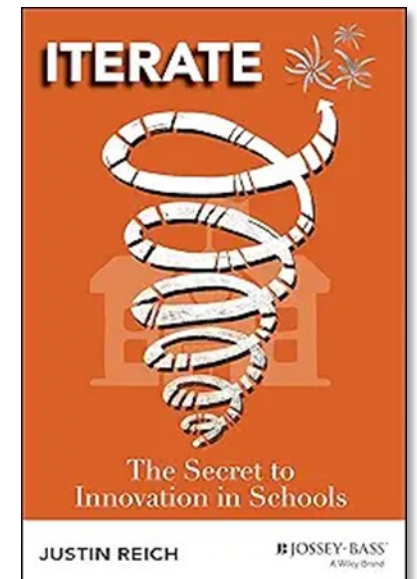
The Secret to Innovation in Schools, 2024;

Author:

Justin Reich

Veteran educator, MIT professor, and incorrigible

innovator, Justin Reich, delivers an insightful bridge between contemporary educational research and classroom teaching. He shows you how to leverage the cycle of experiment and experience to create a compelling and engaging learning environment. In the book, you'll learn how to employ a process of continuous improvement and tinkering to develop exciting new programs, activities, processes, and designs.



CSI Certification—The SWUC is rolling out a CSI Certification process for schools. See this [link](#) for access to a flipbook on the process. The first certificates will be awarded at the 2026 SWUC Convention.



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SouthwesternAdventistEducation.com

Contact: Education@SWUC.org

PRODUCT

Surveys—Student, Staff, and Parent Surveys are scheduled for February 9–20, 2026.

Program Data—Survey Data is available on Union-wide implementation of [Continuous School Improvement \(CSI\)](#) and [Standards-based Learning \(SBL\)](#).

Portrait of a Graduate—The 7Cs have been renamed Portrait of a Graduate. Please see the attached flyer.

CSI Plans—In addition to a CSI Plan, it is recommended that schools develop the following plans:

[Spiritual Master Plan](#)

[Marketing and Recruitment Plan](#)

[Technology Plan](#)

[Emergency Preparedness Plan](#)

[Professional Learning Plan](#)

[Social Media Policy](#)

EXSEED Grant Recipient—Houston Adventist Academy has received an EXSEED grant to transform its STEM curriculum. The grant will help embed problem-based learning for all grades, provide faculty development and equip a new innovation lab. The proposal from teacher Michelle Saker was selected for its thoroughness, detailed lesson plans and implementation-ready framework.



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