BE HUMAN-CENTERED

To be human-centered means that your improvement process prioritizes the perspectives and experiences of the people you're designing for.

When done well, a human-centered approach drives the creation of products and services that resonate more deeply with an audience and, thus, have greater impact. To be human-centered requires teams to diversify and be inclusive. And it means developing empathy for the users in your system. In other words, we need to deeply understand the diverse experiences, motivations, and values of students, families, and educators themselves.

Using an authentic human-centered approach is one way to operationalize our commitment to equity. When we uncover the stories, experiences, and motivations of students and families who have been historically underserved, we design with them at the center. As Tim Brown in Change by Design says,

> *By concentrating solely on the bulge at the center of the bell curve...we are more likely to confirm what we already know than learn something new and surprising. For insights at that level, we need to head to the edges, to the places where we expect to find "extreme" users who live differently, think differently, and consume differently.*

In other words, the mission of a human-centered approach is to translate user voice and experience into insights which will then become products, programs, or services that will improve lives.

These materials include information about important strategies to engage in a human-centered approach to improvement.

- Broaden the table
- Empathy data
  - Empathy interviews
  - Empathy immersion
  - Empathy observations

BUILD AN INCLUSIVE TABLE

The best ideas emerge when the whole organizational ecosystem - not just its designers and engineers and certainly not just management - has room to experiment.
-Tim Brown

Far too often, only a few people are at the decision-making table. This might make decision-making faster and more efficient, but it means solutions come from an incomplete perspective and, as a result, are often ineffective. Broadening the table to involve people with different perspectives, especially those who are historically underserved, helps ensure that the decisions and solutions serve *everyone* in the system. Creating an inclusive design process is also one way to operationalize a commitment to equity. The Creative Action Lab summarizes the importance this way:

> *People with different identities, perspectives, and backgrounds (e.g. race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) will bring holistic insights into any setting, particularly through knowledge building, problem solving, and implementation. Also, each sector of society contributes different perspectives and knowledge bases that should be brought together to effectively approach problems. We especially need to include the individuals and communities affected, also known as living experts, who are often excluded from design and decision-making processes. (Equity Centered Community Design Field Guide)*

Several recent projects in Oregon began their work by taking steps towards a more inclusive table:

Equity Pilot. Six high school students were invited to be design team members in a district-wide design team. They worked alongside their teachers, administrators, and community members. They were actively involved in two years of work, from identifying a problem the team would work on, to designing and testing change ideas. Watch this video to see the work in action.

School District Collaboration Fund. The design team carefully ensured that its membership reflected educators with different perspectives and experiences: brand-new teachers, for example, who were traditionally left off design teams because they were "too new." The team found that having diverse perspectives at the table offered powerful insights and stories that they traditionally didn't have.

Jefferson County School District 509-J's School District Collaboration Fund design team brought many different voices to their design team. Read about it in this blog.

HOW TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE TABLE

1 **COMMIT**. Be authentic and transparent in your call to include more voices at the table. Make sure those around you share this commitment.

2 **GET RID OF EXCUSES.** Bringing more people into the design process as true partners might require more time and more resources. Be wary of excuses that allow you to continue with the status quo.

3 **ASSESS THE STATUS QUO**. Who is at the table? Who is not at the table? Are those who we are designing for at our table? Why not? What conditions have we created that maintain everyone's ability to participate in meaningful ways? Be sure to ask these questions about historically excluded groups, such as students and families of color, LGBTQ educators, and families for whom English is a second language.

4 **IDENTIFY WHO TO INVITE.** Think first about the types of people you want to invite, rather than individual names (for example, first-year teachers, high school freshmen of color, or parents of recently arrived immigrants). Consider reaching out to people you don't know before people you do know.

5 **INVITE.** Start with the why; explain the purpose of what you're doing. Be specific about what their commitment would look like.

6 **BUILD TRUST AND AUTHENTICITY.** Acknowledge the various perspectives and backgrounds of everyone at the table. Establish and follow equitable team agreements so that you don't inadvertently do harm to people who have been historically excluded. An example of agreements could include:

- Stay Engaged
- Speak Your Truth Responsibly
- Listen to Understand
- Be Willing to Do Things Differently and Experience Discomfort
- Expect and Accept Non-Closure
- Confidentiality

7 **BE INCLUSIVE.** Inviting people to the table doesn't count if they don't have a voice that is taken seriously once there. Facilitate activities that provide space for everyone to have a voice. Ensure collaborative decision-making. Understand and address the barriers of sharing power and/or access that prevents diverse co-creators from coming and working together. Acknowledge, understand, and utilize the strengths and the nature of the expertise each stakeholder brings, but don't confine their roles and input to these areas.

8 **CHECK IN**. As you work together, continue to assess how you could increase the inclusiveness of your process and whether everyone there feels welcomed, valued, and has opportunities to fully participate. Be flexible and adjust.

Learn more about facilitating for equity and find other sample team agreements at the National Equity Project and the Field Guide from the Creative Reaction Lab.

COLLECT EMPATHY DATA

Empathy is our ability to see the world through other people's eyes, to see what they see, feel what they feel, and experience things as they do. Increasing empathy builds important insights into your community's world, uncovers their hidden needs and motivations, and guides improvement efforts. Collecting empathy data is a key way to practice the improvement principle: make the work human-centered.

You can collect empathy data in one or more of these ways:

Engage. The stories that people tell and the things that people say they do are strong indicators of their deeply held beliefs about the way the world is. Listening is a powerful way to understand and honor their truths.

Immerse. Walk the path with your user. Do what they do to understand their experience more deeply.

Observe. Watching what people do and how they interact with their environment gives you clues about what they think and feel. It helps you learn about what they need.

Why collect empathy data as part of improvement efforts? While it is always good practice to understand your user, empathy data can be particularly helpful when you want to:

- Identify or narrow down a systemic problem your team will work on
- Uncover hidden needs that aren't being met within the current system
- Understand a problem and its root causes more deeply
- Understand differences among users
- Get feedback on an idea or prototype

Finally, collecting empathy data is not a one-shot-meets-all-needs endeavor. To truly be human-centered, return to your users again and again.

GUIDELINES FOR COLLECTING EMPATHY DATA

Get out of your own space. Go where you find the community. Even if your team already includes a myriad of stakeholders, don't assume you are a representative sample.

Assume a beginner's mindset. This means:

- Approach problems as a novice. Question everything, even those things you think you know.
- Lose your agenda.
- Let yourself learn. Be truly curious by assuming a posture of wonder and curiosity, especially in circumstances that seem either familiar or uncomfortable.
- Listen and don't judge.

Include *historically underserved users* in your data collection. This means that you observe, immerse, or engage with people who do not represent the historically dominant culture such as students of color, families for whom English is not their first language, or LGBTQ teachers. Understanding people in historically underserved groups helps you uncover insights that may not be as obvious through a dominant culture lens. If we concentrate only on "average" users, we are likely to only confirm what we already know, rather than learn something new. This is the most important guideline for operationalizing equity in empathy data collection.

Broaden the table. Collecting empathy data can be a powerful experience. Include as many people as possible on your data collection team. Educators, students, and families - including those from historically underserved groups - can all be trained to collect empathy data.

Practice healthy detachment. Empathizing can take an emotional toll on an individual or group, especially when you hear difficult or painful stories. Healthy detachment means you can be involved without obsessing or seeking to control the situation. Make sure each person keeps an eye on their own needs as you observe, immerse, or engage.

Apply your insights. Whether empathy data is helping to define the problem, understand the root causes, or gain insights to new ideas, make sure to keep the findings close and refer to them often.

On the next page are a few examples of how the stories from empathy data informed the work of teams.

EMPATHY DATA STORIES

Empathy data led to change ideas. Educators on a district team charged with addressing chronic absenteeism interviewed students in elementary, middle, and high school. They talked with historically underserved students (those who were chronically absent) as well as students with expected attendance patterns. One unexpected and powerful finding from the students' stories was that returning to school was often intimidating and difficult; they often felt punished for their absence, teachers piled on make-up work without enough support, and they fell further behind. When this headline emerged in analysis, educators set to work to immediately test small change ideas at the classroom level. Many teachers began a more positive routine for welcoming students back into the classroom. One teacher tested a peer-to-peer protocol where a classmate went over the key learnings that were missed. One teacher changed the way make-up work was designed, timed, and supported. Empathy interviews had uncovered an overlooked aspect of chronic absenteeism.

Empathy data helped understand a problem and locate a good place to start. A large team of educators in one district came together to address inequities in their district. The team included teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, community members and students who interviewed students about their sense of connection and belonging in school. The analysis uncovered themes such as: students feel a sense of belonging when they are seen and heard; and students and staff feel connected and motivated when they have positive relationships. Their findings helped them identify a starting place: building positive relationships.

Empathy data helped see the system that led to the current outcomes. A middle school administrator conducted empathy interviews with students, staff, and family members to better understand why so many students were failing classes. The powerful words from community voices led to a small experiment that started with weekly grade checks with one administrator and a small group of students. After fast success, more staff and students became involved and, within six weeks, grade checks were a schoolwide practice. Student failure rates dropped drastically and most importantly, the scale up was teacher led and student owned so that the second semester's results were better than the first. As staff met with students, they realized through their own empathy learning that students were missing positive adult interactions more than they had thought and brought Homeroom back to the building. Listening to the voices of students, staff, and families allowed the school to better meet their needs and ultimately support their academic success.

EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

The stories that people tell and the things that people say they do are strong indicators of their deeply held beliefs about the way the world is.

Listening is a powerful way to understand individuals. Empathy interviews are designed to elicit stories and uncover hidden needs through deep listening and asking smart follow-up questions. Empathy interviews should not be confused with traditional interviews which ask for opinions and feedback on narrow topics. Rather, empathy interviews use a semi-structured protocol but follow the themes and topics that the users bring up through their stories.

These materials describe strategies for before, during, and after empathy interviews.

BEFORE INTERVIEWS

Be clear about purpose. Are you collecting stories to identify or refine a problem of practice? To understand the root causes more deeply? To identify the specific needs of certain users to ensure you design for them? In other words, how will you use the data and not just admire it?

Write interview questions. Empathy interviews use a semi-structured approach which means you begin an interview with a pre-established series of questions, but you also have the freedom to ask follow-up questions and go more deeply when possible. Your protocol should:

Ask open-ended questions. Host a conversation that builds upon stories rather than asking binary questions that are answered with one word like yes/no. Use question stems such as…

- Tell me about a time when...
- Tell me about the *last* time you…
- What are the best/worst parts about…?
- Can you help me understand more about…?

Ask about specific examples. Don't ask users to report what they "usually" do. Rather, ask them to specifically "tell me about a time when…"

Don't ask for the solutions. Users aren't designers. Interviewers should stick to concrete examination of what is happening and how the users feel, not "what should we do?"

Create conversation starters. Pictures, prototypes, or other objects can help elicit responses during interviews.

EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

Minimize the number of questions. Usually you only have 10-15 minutes to talk to a person, so 4-6 good, open-ended questions will be sufficient.

Deal with data logistics. Who is going to collect data? When? From whom? How will you ensure that historically underserved users are represented in the sample? How will data be recorded?

Decide on the number of interviews. There is not a magic number of interviews to conduct. Think about how to have a diverse sample, including historically underserved users. Consider your resources, the size of the interview team, and the purpose of interviews. Often, four interviews can yield as many insights as 40. However, because the data collection experience itself is powerful, make sure there are enough interviews for everyone on your team.

Train your team. Model an empathy interview and then practice together. Make sure everyone conducting the interviews is familiar with the guidelines, the questions, and expectations for note-taking. Role-play an interview, or use these videos: Empathy Do's https://vimeo.com/91484863 Empathy Don'ts https://vimeo.com/91484570

Find a partner. Conducting interviews in pairs allows one person to take notes while the other person remains focused on listening and asking follow-up questions. When it isn't feasible to conduct interviews in pairs, plan your note-taking method carefully.

Attend to your own bias. Be sure to reflect on how your identity and role might affect how and what individuals share with you. Maintain an awareness of your biases and challenge them in order to see the community more authentically. Ask yourself how systemic oppression and/or privilege might affect your empathy interviews.

DURING INTERVIEWS

Make the person you're talking to feel comfortable. Provide the purpose of the interview and promise their answers will remain anonymous. Start with a light, positive, personal connection. Take the posture of humility.

Encourage stories. Stories reveal how users think about the world. Ask questions that elicit stories; not questions that can be answered on a survey.

Go deeper. Use prompts like these to learn more:

- Why? (Then ask why again). Why? Why did you say/do/think that?
- Really? Why was that? What do you think would change that?

EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

- Tell me more. Can you say more about that?
- What were you feeling then? Why?

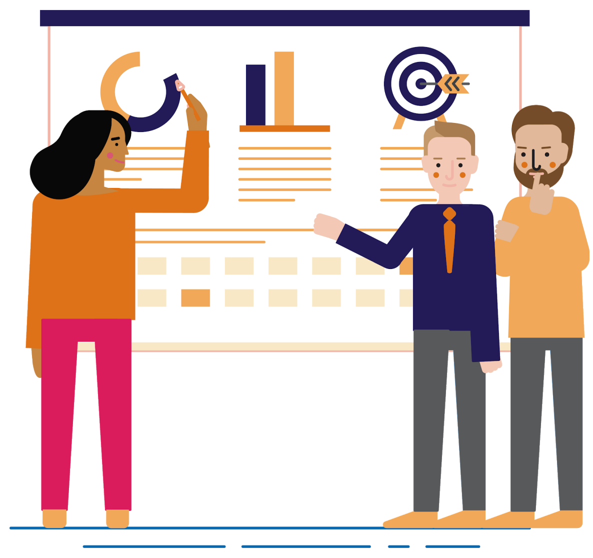
Be neutral. Don't imply your question has a right answer.

Look for inconsistencies. Sometimes what people say is different from what they do (e.g., I love my PLC, but I never go). These inconsistencies often reveal interesting insights.

Don't suggest answers to your questions. Even if they pause before answering, don't help them by suggesting an answer.

Capture what you hear. Capture as much as possible, including quotes. Use recordings only as a last resort and with permission.

AFTER INTERVIEWS



Prepare data for analysis. Remove any identifiable information, number the interviews, and print out the number of copies you need.

Bring a team together to analyze results. Involve people with diverse perspectives in the analysis of empathy data. Depending on amount of data and team size, allow anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes.

Debrief the process. What was the experience like for people? What worked well? What would you do differently next time?

Analyze data. Always be prepared to uncover something quite different than you expected during analysis. Three protocols are summarized below. You should revise or expand each protocol to meet your need.

Headlines. Use this analysis when you want a descriptive summary of the data you've collected.

1. As a whole group, model how headlines are created: One person shares an interview while other members capture headlines and/or representative quotes on post-it notes. These should be *descriptive* in nature; they should not contain inferences, opinions, or solutions. For example, "One time the PLC was so pointless I made my grocery list" or, "Teacher very bored by irrelevant topics in PLCs." One interview might result in one to six post-it notes.

Coaching for Improvement

2. Once the group understands the process, break into smaller groups or pairs to complete analysis of the data set (the size and configuration depends on the size of your data set, team size, and amount of time you have). Continue to generate post-it notes with headlines.
3. Once finished, saturate a wall space with the post-it notes and then organize the post-its into groups of related themes. Note: You may hit data saturation before you finish the full data set. That means that all the main themes have already emerged. It is okay to stop the headline activity if you agree you've reach data saturation.
4. Label the groupings with descriptive sentences ("e.g., Feeling safe is more than just physical safety" rather than just "Safety").
5. Discuss and apply what you've learned.

Possible extensions:

- As you are creating headlines, keep a side poster of: tensions, surprises, and/or contradictions.
- Create a list of insights as you move through each interview

Empathy Map. Use this analysis when you want to understand human needs or clarify the problem you are trying to solve from the user's perspective.

1. On a whiteboard or a large flip chart, draw a four-quadrant map. Label the sections with "say," "do," "think," and "feel," respectively.
2. Write down each of your key observations from the interview on one Post-it note and populate the "say" and "do" quadrants.
3. When you run out of observations (or room) in those quadrants, begin to fill the "think" and "feel" sections with Post-its, based on the body language, tone, and choice of words you observed.
4. Take a step back and look at the map as a whole. Create two spaces labeled "insights" and "needs." What insights or conclusions can you draw from what you've written down? What seems new or surprising? Are there contradictions or disconnects within or between quadrants? What unexpected patterns appear? What, if any, human needs emerge? Write them down, perhaps individually first and then collectively.

Point of View Analysis. Use this analysis when you have interviewed only one or a few people and want to go straight from human-perspective to brainstorming change ideas.

Share all of the data from an interview with a team and then generate one need statement which is *human + need + insight*. For example, the need statement is, "A seven-year-old hates doing homework because it takes forever to finish." The next step is to turn this into a Point of View Question, which always starts with *How Might We*. "How might we create a way for this student to do his or her homework more efficiently?" The HMW statement leads directly into a brainstorm of change ideas.

EMPATHY: IMMERSE

To gather empathy through immersion means to walk the path with another person; do what they do to understand the experience more deeply.

Educators, ethnographers, and researchers have long known the value of shadowing as a tool to increase empathy. The purpose is not to observe, but to immerse in all experiences and feel what it is like to live as that person does every day. When you immerse yourself in an experience, you'll use all of your senses and pay attention to details that might otherwise get overlooked. And, by choosing to immerse yourself in the experiences of people who have been historically underserved, you will continue your commitment to equity.

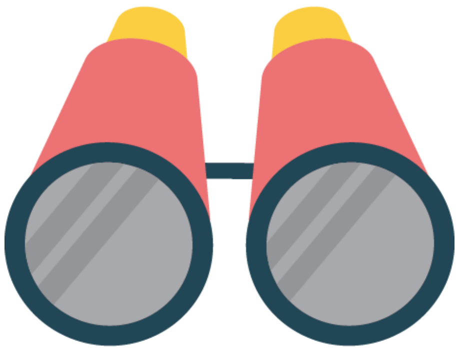
Most recently, the Shadow a Student challenge has brought this empathy technique to thousands of educators across the country. Shadow a Student starts with seeing school through a student's eyes, identifying meaningful opportunities to improve the school experience for your students, and then taking action to create change at your school site.

Read and watch stories from Shadow a Student in the Washington Post, and the Shadow a Student website:

Shadow a Student Toolkit has all of the tips and preparations you'll need to Prep, Shadow, Reflect, and Act.

And, while their site is all about shadowing students, you can follow the same guidelines to shadow a teacher, parent, or community member.

EMPATHY OBSERVATIONS



The secret to a good observation is to observe, get bored, and then observe some more. (Wired to Care)

Empathy observations allow you to watch what people do and how they interact with their environment. Observations give you clues about what they think and feel and help you learn about what they need.

Empathy observations are very dissimilar to traditional observations in schools that involve administrators observing teachers as part of the evaluation system. Instead, empathy observations are often open-ended, allowing the observer to capture descriptions and insights that might otherwise be missed. It is about finding a new perspective, from a different angle.

This story highlights the power of an observation.

> It was the day class lists and teacher assignments were posted in front of the school, the week before school started. This was a favorite day for Joan [the principal], since she loved welcoming back the students and families and was always filled with possibilities for the new year. This year, though, Joan decided to just observe. She parked her car across the street and watched. Sure, there was some excitement and happiness to be observed, but she also saw a different side to the day. She noticed the kids who feigned excitement in front of their friends while looking at the list, but then walked away with their heads down, fighting back tears. She noticed parents getting on their cell phones, having agitated conversations as they left school. Maybe the day wasn't as great as she had perceived it to be. Could there be a better way? (Design Thinking for School Leaders, page 25-26)

HINTS FOR EMPATHY OBSERVATIONS

Decide who you are observing and why. These answers might be specific (I want to understand how newcomer parents are treated their first time in the front office) or they can remain very broad (hallway behavior).

Be a learner.

- Approach problems as a novice. Question everything; even those things you think you know.
- Maintain awareness of your biases.
- Let yourself learn. Be truly curious by assuming a posture of wonder and curiosity, especially in circumstances that seem either familiar or uncomfortable.
- Observe without judgment.

Think like a traveler. Pay attention to every detail and be acutely aware of your surroundings. Find something new in the mundane.

Capture your learnings. It's crucial to record exactly what you see and hear. It's easy to interpret what's in front of you before you've fully understood it, so be sure you're taking down concrete details and quotes alongside your impressions.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Videos

What is empathy https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw and http://www.designkit.org/mindsets/4

Empathy types: Immerse, observe, engage https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=XcYrvvu2ElM

Empathy Do's https://vimeo.com/91484863 and Don'ts https://vimeo.com/91484570

Shadow a Student PBS Newshour Feature http://shadowastudent.org/

Articles and Blog Posts

Overview of empathy
https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/design-thinking-getting-started-with-empathy

Empathy + Equity = Justice http://interactioninstitute.org/empathy-equity-→-justice/

Free Toolkits and Resources

IDEO Design Kit http://www.designkit.org/ including a Field Guide to User-centered design
http://www.designkit.org/resources/1

Design Thinking Toolkit from IDEO http://designthinkingforeducators.com

Equity-Centered Design Toolkit by Creative Reaction Lab http://www.creativereactionlab.com/eccd-field-guide

Liberatory Design Cards https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/liberatory-design-cards

Stanford dSchool design thinking materials http://dschool.stanford.edu/use-our-methods/

Shadow a Student Toolkit http://shadowastudent.org/how-it-works

Books

Brown, T. (2009) Change by Design. Harper Collins Publishers, New York. (especially chapters 2 and 3)

Gallagher, A., Thordarson, K. (2018). Design Thinking for School Leaders. ASCD; Alexandria, Virginia. (chapter 3 is called, "Empathy is King")

Patnaik, D., & Mortensen, P. (2009). Wired to care: How companies prosper when they create widespread empathy. Upper Saddle River, NJ:FT Press.