

What If School LOOKED Like This?

Centering Students in
Virtual Learning Design



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One Week This Summer

In a virtual space in late July, small groups of middle and high school students and teachers shared their stories and perspectives from online learning over the previous few months. “Think about a day last spring when you had virtual school,” they asked each other. “What happened? What was the best moment? The worst?” Probing more deeply into their experiences, students asked teachers, “What would a healing and joyful school look like?” In turn, teachers asked students, “Tell me about a time at school you felt someone knew you deeply.”

This was day 1 of Design Camp, a three- to five-day virtual experience that brought students and teachers together to tackle the question: **How might teachers and students build stronger relationships and more engagement in virtual classrooms this year?**

After stories and perspectives emerged from day 1, students and teachers began to brainstorm and prototype ideas to test as soon as virtual classes resume. Students, many from groups that have been historically underserved by school systems, stayed at the design table with teachers for the entire camp, rather than the typical experience of leaving design only to adults. Emerging research affirms that this is a rare opportunity. A recent research review from the Center for Reinventing Public Education asserts, “Students have rarely been asked their views on education in the time of COVID-19, especially compared to teachers and parents.”¹

This publication from

[Community Design Partners](#)

highlights themes that emerged from students’ experiences and provides educators with student-centered prototypes that any educator can test this fall. It also includes detailed descriptions of Design Camp elements, along with specific tools and strategies educators can use to engage students as co-designers. Because this is an emerging area of practice, the tools are intended to be a starting point that can spark new ideas that make sense for your students and your setting.

SAMPLE DESIGN CAMP AGREEMENTS

- We take care of each other.
- We identify and interrupt power dynamics.
- We listen from a place of love.
- We honor the stories, experiences, and emotions people share with us.
- We are patient with online technology, take breaks, take care of ourselves.

“I loved the idea of letting students use their voice for change, instead of only teachers and administrators.”

Student

“Students need to be involved way more. Just like this. They need to be there in everything we do.”

Teacher

Why Design Camp?

When COVID-19 required most of America's school buildings to close, educators were faced with the daunting and dramatically under-resourced task of shifting learning on line. Many teachers were left almost completely on their own to design and implement online instruction. Given both the abrupt shift and the length of time that schooling has remained virtual, it is not surprising that educators, students, and families have been struggling.² At the same time, for the near future, online instruction or hybrid re-entry models will be the reality for most schools.

While data about the effects of online school on students is still emerging,³ the combined impact of a global pandemic and rising calls for racial justice in the United States will surely continue to reverberate as schooling begins again. Absent intentional shifts in practice, systems that have historically failed many children and families will continue to do so. Beyond the potential academic consequences, young people are already expressing needs for greater social and emotional support.⁴

What do students themselves say about their virtual learning experiences? What changes to online learning would improve the experiences and outcomes for students, especially those who have been historically underserved by school systems? Perhaps most importantly, how might the current moment in the United States offer an opportunity to redesign remote learning to embrace an antiracist, culturally sustaining, pedagogy?

Design Camp responds, in part, to these questions.

What is Design Camp?

The Design Camp project is an effort to look more deeply at the day-to-day virtual learning experiences of middle and high school students and, with their engagement, to design prototypes to test in virtual, hybrid, or re-entry schools. Centering the stories and experiences of adolescent students—especially students from historically underserved groups—and inviting them to the design table alongside adults is at the heart of this project. Design Camp was conceptualized as student-centered, anti-racist, and highly interactive, utilizing the tenets of both Design Thinking⁵ and Liberatory Design.⁶

LIBERATORY DESIGN

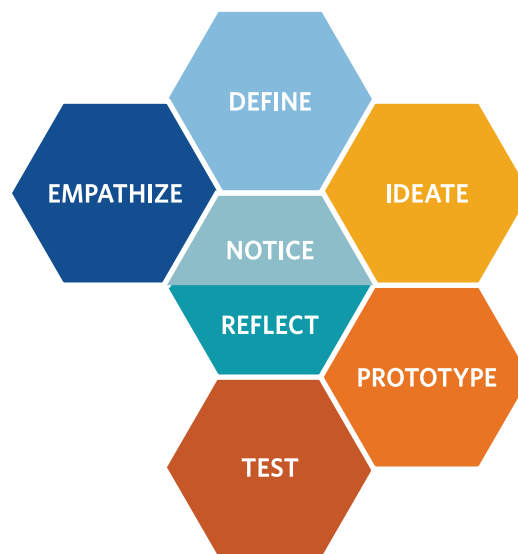


Image Source: David Pinedo, UX Design

The initial Design Camps engaged students and educators from three school districts across the country—in Maryland, Oregon, and Texas. This publication focuses on the Maryland and Oregon experiences, which involved middle and high school students and their teachers. A second publication, expected by October, will highlight themes and recommendations from Texas, where Design Camp focused on postsecondary supports and involved counselors and 2020 graduates.

The first two Design Camps met for three to five consecutive days in July, totaling 8-13 hours of meeting time. Approximately 10 teachers and 20 middle and high school students, all from the same school district, participated in each Camp. The student-teacher ratio was deliberately 2:1, and student participants were majority Black and Latinx. (See Tools and Tips for Student-Centered Design for a behind-the-scenes look at Design Camp details.)



Learning and Co-Creation: Four Themes

Listening deeply to students and teachers yielded insights into their strengths and needs. Four common themes emerged across the Maryland and Oregon design camps:

- **Connection and Community** Students and teachers both named these as important.
- **Consistency, Coordination, and Clarity** Expectations, systems, and workload were often uncoordinated and overwhelming.
- **Relevance and Meaning** Virtual learning felt disconnected from real life.
- **Flexibility and Choice** Students valued flexibility and choice, but didn't value "busy work."

The following pages include details of these themes and the corresponding prototypes that students and teachers developed during Camp. While the themes were similar across sites, there were contextual differences in the details and in the prototypes that emerged. Teachers will recognize that many of the themes and prototypes are simply good instructional practice, regardless of the mode of instruction.

A **prototype** is an early, inexpensive version of a change idea that is ready for testing. In Design Camp, prototypes emerged after participants brainstormed many different ideas and selected those they were both passionate about and were in their locus of control (could be implemented at the classroom level rather than the district level). Prototypes are change ideas to try out, study how they work, and adapt, adopt, or abandon based on what is learned along the way.

Connection and community were important to both students and teachers

Feeling acknowledged, supported, and valued were themes that came up repeatedly in student and teacher stories. Some students spoke about specific teachers or classes where they felt more connection than others. They valued class time spent checking in with one another, as well as small groups or individual meetings with teachers and peers. One student said, *“The best part of online learning was Google hangout with my teacher when we talked about life and we showed each other our pets.”* Another said, *“I just needed a space that felt comfortable.”*

Students specifically called out humor and laughter as an important part of connection. Some students said that they appreciated that they could reach teachers when they needed them which sometimes meant in the evening. They also described how teacher feedback on assignments was a way they felt their teacher cared. One student said, *“When teachers gave me feedback is when I felt connected. When I sent something in and didn’t get anything back, I lost the connection.”*

While a few students described deepening a connection with a teacher, others said they had no connections; which, in one student’s words, *“made it feel even more lonely.”*

“A lot of teachers sent videos. I loved them because they were funny and a good part of my day. Their personalities came out in videos; they cracked jokes and stuff.”

PROTOTYPE

Tea Time



Virtual time to check on students’ emotional wellness and strengthen understanding of each others’ lives.



Educators schedule a virtual time each week where students sign up individually or in a small group to connect over tea. Set shared norms at the start. Topics could range from light (e.g., sharing funny pet videos) to more personal.



STUDENTS SAY: *“Do this so that students and teachers know that someone cares and feels more comfortable.”*

PROTOTYPE

Tiger Toks



Students and the teacher perform a Tik Tok dance.



Students and the teacher choose a dance from Tik Tok and perform in a small group or as a class with the teachers. Consider class or grade-level competitions across the school. Replace “Tiger” with your school’s mascot.



STUDENTS SAY: *“This provides for different skill sets to shine.”*

PROTOTYPE

Siesta



Mental breaks during virtual learning.



Build in short 5-minute breaks planned by students. They could include music breaks (class DJ), snack breaks (chat and eat together), bio breaks (turn off camera and take care of your needs), and more. Consider a 5-minute break for every 30 minutes of online class time.



STUDENTS SAY: *“This helps take a step back, prevent feeling overwhelmed, and have fun. Plus, teachers need a break, too.”*

CONSISTENCY, COORDINATION, & CLARITY

Expectations, systems, and workload were often uncoordinated and overwhelming for students

Students described an online experience that could feel haphazard and inconsistent. Some teachers gave heavy work loads while other teachers were almost, as one student described it, “*missing in action.*” Workload and expectations were rarely coordinated across classes, leaving students on their own to manage the variance.

Teachers and students described struggling to learn and use various online platforms and tools. Sometimes, students played the role of “tech advisors” when it was clear their teachers needed help. Virtually submitting work was also a struggle in some classrooms.

“I had no idea what was going on with some classes. I thought I was going to fail. My teacher would assign the work but there was no place to turn it in. I had no idea the whole time what I was supposed to do so I never turned anything in. It was really confusing and stressful.”

In some classes, teachers provided supports like weekly timelines or due date calendars. However, students said keeping on top of their work was often about more than just time management. One student said, *“It took a lot for me to get through it. I had to dig in and get it done. I tried to plan. It is nothing like sitting down to focus in a classroom.”*

Students were grateful for the encouragement they received from teachers and peers. They wanted more opportunities to receive feedback and celebrate success.

“I had no idea the whole time what I was supposed to do so I never turned anything in.”

PROTOTYPE

Virtual Learning Manual



A one-stop guide to virtual learning for students.



Create a virtual guide that contains sections such as: google classroom features, virtual classroom etiquette, directions for submitting work, and responsibilities.



STUDENTS SAY: *“If we are more comfortable, we can learn better without stress.”*

PROTOTYPE

UPlan



A coordinated calendar across classes of projects, tests, and due dates.



Create a color-coded google calendar that shows projects, test, and due dates across all classes a student has. A group of students and teachers can build guidance on how to use the calendar.



STUDENTS SAY: *“Helps teachers & students build schedules and prevent pile on or overloading. Allows teachers to see into the workloads of their students.”*

PROTOTYPE

Internal Class Schedule



A predictable class schedule so students know what to expect.



For a 45-minute class, the prototype suggests: 8 minute warm-up (meditation, connection, poll, brainstorm), 15-minutes direct instruction, 15-minutes student interactions (breakout rooms, cahoot, jamboard, etc.), 7-minute review and wrap up (share out, questions, clarify homework).



STUDENTS SAY: *“This helps so that students are not guessing. It gives students more confidence.”*

Virtual learning felt disconnected from real life

A major theme heard from students was the disconnection between virtual learning and real life. Especially in a historic time of nationwide antiracist protests and a global pandemic, students wanted to dig deeply into “real life.”

“Right before school shut down we talked about coronavirus and what is going on. Our teacher was trying to calm us down and help us feel informed. It was really helpful because it gave us more of an idea of what is going on in the world.”

Students spoke candidly about racism and wanted teachers to more directly and deeply address it. *“The best part of virtual learning in the spring was when we were talking about our own history, like what happened with George Floyd. But we couldn’t dig into it how I wanted to.”*

Students had clear reasons for highlighting relevance and meaningful topics. They said they wanted to study different perspectives in the world in order to “be empowered to make decisions about our own life” and “gain new perspectives and create change.”

“Right before school shut down we talked about coronavirus and what is going on. Our teacher was trying to calm us down and help us feel informed.”

PROTOTYPE

What’s Happening?



Virtual student projects about current events.



Students and teachers brainstorm current issues, choose one or more and draft a framing question. Students use creative platforms to present information on the issue including recommendations for how to make real change.



STUDENTS SAY: *“This helps students know what’s going on in the world, recognize other opinions, and make more empowered decisions.”*

PROTOTYPE

Hot Now



Small group discussions of current events.



Students collect current events and choose one they want to read, research and share in small group discussions. Teacher checks in with students to determine if any protocols, prompts or supports are needed.



STUDENTS SAY: *“This helps make connections to the real world, be well-informed voters, and increase interest in learning.”*

PROTOTYPE

Photo Start



Use a photo of a current event to start class.



Use the first 5-10 minutes to class to share a photo from somewhere in the world. Students think about the prompt, “How does this visual relate to the world today?” Use oral discussion or online tools like jamboard or nearpod to post thoughts.



STUDENTS SAY: *“This could help make school less of a chore.”*

Students valued flexibility and choice, but didn't value "busy work"

Many students valued the flexibility that came with asynchronous learning. They said it allowed them to work at times that fit best with competing priorities such as jobs, family obligations, and sleep. They also appreciated flexible timelines and due dates; it was common for high school students to report doing their school work late at night.

"The best part about virtual learning is that I could do the work on my time. I did it when I wanted to, I didn't have to do it in class. I could do it at night."

Distractions at home, family responsibilities and jobs, and feelings of stress and overwhelm made virtual learning difficult. One student said, *"My best relationships were when teachers understood my life circumstances. I felt supported."* Students wished that all teachers would acknowledge the realities of their lives and provide even more flexibility.

Another value for students was choice in their learning. Among their favorite online learning experiences were projects that incorporated choice in what topics they studied, how they shared their learning, and who they worked with. As one student offered, *"The best was when we got to pick Prezo for a presentation or whatever other way we wanted. I did a presentation on the genre of sad music and it was cool."*

Students also said they were unmotivated by and uninterested in "busy work" assigned by many teachers as described by this student, *"It was frustrating because most of my electives went into busy work and just assignments that I didn't want to do; I'd leave them for the end of the week."*

Students knew what meaningful learning felt and looked like, and wanted more of it.

PROTOTYPE

Flexject



Student choice projects.



Students select and design a project aligned with learning outcomes while the teacher serves as a project mentor. Students have choice in everything from topic to format (writing, video, etc.) to whether they work alone or in a small group.



STUDENTS SAY: *"Allows for more flexible time, more regular check ins between classmates or students and teachers, and less like busy work—more meaningful learning."*

PROTOTYPE

Freaky Friday



Students are teachers on Fridays.



Students establish leadership roles by leading activities like group conversations, ice breakers, or lessons. Students also regularly share ideas and input with teachers.



STUDENTS SAY: *"Gives teachers a break and to be positioned as learners. Allows students to take the lead and have a voice."*



Teachers' Perspectives

While Design Camp centered students' experiences and needs, teachers also shared their stories and perspectives. There were powerful teacher testimonies about the stress and anxiety that accompanied the seismic shift to online learning. As one teacher reflected, *"I had nightmares about what was going on with students. I didn't know what was going on with some of them. Mentally, every day I had to find an outlet because it stressed me out so much."* Some teachers reported that often only four or five students would come to a live class and, despite multiple ways of trying to connect with students, there were some students that teachers never reached.

Some teachers described going to great lengths to reach their students. One teacher started a classroom text group and received texts at all hours of the day and night. Another said, *"I gave my students my cell number. My phone would be blowing up at 10, midnight, when things were due. While it wasn't a regular schedule, at least students checked in."* Another teacher described Friday night invitations to virtually watch movies with her students.

There were some bright spots in their stories such as deeper collaboration with their colleagues. *"More than before the pandemic, there was a lot of cross-curricular teaching. I loved teaching with my colleagues. It made a really long day, but it was glue."* Another bright spot was deepening relationships with some students: *"A lot of students I interacted with in virtual learning were overlooked before; they never had the attention. We had such a better relationship*

online. I learned more about them. I spent a lot of time asking them how they were feeling." Teachers also noted that some students *"talked up more virtually than they did when we had in-person class."*

"I started having Friday night movies that you could attend if you came to class. I even sent pizza to their house as an incentive."

Teachers pointed to many system needs and hoped that fall would bring improvements such as:

- Wider technology access for all students;
- System supports for emerging bilingual students;
- More outreach from administrators to understand and empathize with what's happening;
- Clearer and more reasonable expectations from the district; and
- Training, tools, and opportunities to support social and emotional learning.

The themes from design camp echo findings from other places.⁷ While Design Camp focused on classroom-level changes, teachers' systems-level concerns were shared with school and district administrators.



Beyond One Week: Sustaining Connections

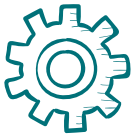
Teachers and students who attended Design Camp had the rare opportunity to listen to and learn with one another over a longer period of time than a regular class period offers. While the new school year will present a number of challenges, it can also offer new ways of working together. The prototypes in this document show what can be accomplished in just a handful of hours.

One of the many serendipitous outcomes of Design Camp was the deep empathy for each other that both students and teachers expressed. One teacher said, *"Listening to how empathetic high school students are today was amazing. We think students don't have empathy, but we listened to how much you care about your teachers and how much you know how to listen."* A student reflected, *"I loved how much the teachers just listened. I haven't felt so listened to in forever."* Hearing each other's compassion helped anchor Design Camp in trust, and strengthened relationships and perspectives that can last far beyond a few summer days.

What is also clear from Design Camp, though, is that students are eager for more of the kind of connection and creativity that was often missing from their virtual experiences in the spring. One student's words offer a clear call to action:

"Tell adults that you really have to build a connection with youth. It is weird because they view youth as no value to add. But we do have a lot of things to add. You have to do the things to keep us engaged."

This publication offers some ways that you can answer that call.



Tools and Tips for Student-Centered Design

Design Camp was inspired by the commitment to center students' voices and involve them in the design of their own learning experiences. Whether you are returning to virtual instruction or in-person classes, we invite you to **Bias Towards Action** (a key mindset of Design Thinking) by using the tools and tips in this section to center student voice and involvement.

Whether you have the capacity to run a full Design Camp, or you're starting with your first round of empathy interviews, you can use the tools and tips from this section as inspiration.

CONNECT WITH US

We look forward to hearing about what you do and what you learn. Please feel free to reach out to Julie Smith or Kari Nelsestuen at Community Design Partners by emailing info@communitydesignpartners.com.



Inviting Students to the Design Table

We were very intentional about which students were invited to Design Camp. The practice of being aware of who participates—and who does not participate—is central to Liberatory Design.

Each site centered racial equity in their recruitment. Of the over 50 students who participated, the majority were Black and Latinx. How were students recruited?

In **Baltimore City**, an urban district in Maryland whose student population is more than three-fourths Black, teachers who applied for Design Camp were each asked to recruit two students from their classes last spring. Teachers were asked to not only recruit “students who come easily to mind” but to also to think of students with a range of experiences with virtual learning, including students who attempted to participate and engage but struggled due to distractions or responsibilities at home.

Oregon’s Design Camp occurred in Tigard-Tualatin School District, a Portland-area district whose students are 57 percent white and 43 percent students of color. In the interest of racial justice, the team primarily recruited BIPOC students for Camp. Outreach to students came from adults they already knew; in this case, 9th-grade success coaches.

A three-day Design Camp in **Texas**, focused on student-centered supports for postsecondary planning, was held in mid-August. This group’s findings will be summarized in a follow-up report.

Additional hints for how to involve students:

- Keep at least a 2:1 student to teacher ratio.
- Provide incentives to students and teachers to honor their time and to create greater inclusivity.
- Acknowledge and hold space for who is not there. For example, these initial Design Camps could not include students who didn’t have sufficient internet access or students who needed language supports.

	Baltimore, Maryland	Tigard-Tualatin, Oregon	Dallas, Texas*
Students	23 middle and high school students	21 high school students	12 high school 2020 graduates
Educators	11 middle and high school teachers	10 high school teachers	3 high school counselors
Support Team	8 people	7 people	6 people
NSI Intermediary Organization**	Baltimore City Public Schools with support from NLD Strategic	Northwest Regional Education Service District	Dallas Promise
NSI District	Baltimore City Public Schools	Tigard-Tualatin School District	Dallas Independent School District
Platform	Zoom	Google Meets	Zoom
Camp Length	Five days (13 hours)	Three days (8 hours)	Three days (8 hours)

*See publication #2 in this series.

**An NSI is a group of middle or high schools working together in partnership with an intermediary organization to use a continuous improvement process to significantly increase the number of Black, Latino, and low-income students who earn a high school diploma, enroll in a postsecondary institution, and are on track in their first year to earn a credential with labor market value.



Planning

Like so many things in response to COVID-19, Design Camp came together in rapid response to an idea. In only three or four weeks, each site identified partners and support team members, recruited participants, drafted all camp materials, and trained local facilitators. Community Design Partners worked with district leaders and intermediary organizations at each site to prepare, convene, and facilitate the Design Camps. We prioritized building local support teams, rather than only external facilitators, in order to build the capacity of each school system to replicate and expand student-centered work.



Support and Facilitation

Design Camp was a collective effort. In a virtual setting for 30+ participants, each camp had support teams of six to eight people. Each support team member played one or more of these roles each day:

- Cruise ship director. Greet participants, set the tone, keep each day on track.
- Facilitators. Prepare for and facilitate various whole group activities.
- Breakout room facilitators. Facilitate conversations in breakout rooms; paying special attention to equity of voice and group dynamics.
- Tech help. Manage breakout rooms, individual tech issues, music, and features like chat and document links.
- Note-takers. Capture as much as possible in notes; especially during empathy sessions.
- Data crunchers. Meet after camp each day to prepare data and materials for the next day, such as headlining empathy interviews or organizing prototypes.

Each support team used liberatory design questions in our planning and debrief such as:

- Who am I/we? Who are our users?
- How are we respectively situated (relative to opportunity, institutional power)?
- How can we ensure we have designed for optimal collaboration and have invited multiple perspectives?
- How can we create an environment that encourages people to share ideas without fear of judgment and also maintains an awareness of biases?



Technology

To run Design Camp, we used Zoom in two camps and Google Meets in the second. Throughout the camps we also used tools that helped capture comments and insights from participants who prefer writing to speaking and that facilitated different needs of camp:

- Chat feature in Zoom and Google Meets.
- Nearpod for participant brainstorms.
- Google Jamboard as an inspiration board for prototyping.
- Google Docs for group discussions or to narrate prototypes.
- Google Sheets for breakout room ideas and note-taking.
- Google Forms for participant feedback at the end of each day.

Our goal was to model the use of virtual tools and practices that teachers could experience and then use in their classrooms.



Design Camp Agendas

Each camp met virtually for 2.5 hours per day.

BALTIMORE met for five days (13 hours total)

<p>DAY 1: EMPATHIZE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce yourself and get to know the other Design Camp participants. Agree on the terms of engagement throughout the design camp. Share your experience with virtual learning in the Spring and hear the experiences of others. 	<p>DAY 2: DEFINE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set a collective vision for virtual relationship building and instruction. Answer the questions: What do I need to see, feel, do, and have to make that vision real? 	<p>DAY 3: IDEATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer ideas as potential solutions to implement. Narrow down the list to ideas to be designed.
<p>DAY 4: DESIGN & PROTOTYPE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design ways to implement the selected ideas and solutions. Share the designs with the group and get feedback. Prototype (an) idea(s). 	<p>DAY 5: TEST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in test session(s) and provide feedback. Identify ways to implement ideas and solutions in the Fall. Reflect on the Design Camp process. 	

OREGON met for three days (8 hours total)

<p>DAY 1: EMPATHIZE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm up and get ready (10 min) Land Acknowledgement (5 minutes) Agreements (10 min) Empathy review & intro to empathy interviews (20 min) Breakout session 1: Students Interview teachers (25 min) Break (10 min) Breakout session 2: Teachers interview students (50 min) Reflection and gratitude (20 min) 	<p>DAY 2: IDEATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm up and get ready (10 min) Ideate/brainstorm practice (15 min) Review what came from empathy data (10 min) Breakout session 1: Ideate like crazy (35 min) Break, then energize activity and quick write (20 min) Narrow our ideas, elevate favorites (35 min) Reflection and gratitude (20 min) 	<p>DAY 3: PROTOTYPE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm up and get ready (10 min) Review top change ideas and model prototyping (20 min) Breakout session 1: Prototype (30 min) Break (10 min) Breakout session 2: Continue prototype (25 min) Share prototypes (25 min) Reflection and gratitude (20 min)
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■ Design Thinking + Liberatory Design

Camp agendas were inspired by the principles and tools of Design Thinking and Liberatory Design. However, we adjusted and adapted each process to fit our timeline and needs. For example, one camp dedicated the fifth day to testing their prototypes, while a camp with less time concluded with prototypes for participants to test once classes resume.

■ Inclusion

Simply inviting students to the design table doesn't count if they don't have a voice that is taken seriously once there. Five strategies that helped support inclusive space were:

- **Use community agreements** helped create a space of trust and care. We brought draft agreements to each Design Camp and asked participants to add their own.
- **Use asset-based language.** Because language is powerful and can have a direct impact on the experience of participants, we asked participants to use asset-based language. Asset-based language focuses on positive outcomes and personal strengths, rather than problems and barriers. When we heard participants use terms like, "low-achieving students," facilitators reminded participants of the power of asset-based language and helped them reframe their perceptions and language.
- **Use affinity spaces.** Each camp had some breakout rooms where students met together and teachers met together with the prediction that some people might feel more comfortable and more freely offer their ideas in affinity groups.
- **Use multiple forms of participation.** We found that some students were more likely to add their ideas when they could do so in chat, nearpod, or other written/visual formats rather than speaking. One student said, *"I liked the nearpods as a way to get ideas out, instead of speaking out."*
- **Address power dynamics.** We were keenly aware of the potential power dynamics that could show up in Design Camp: teacher to students; older student to younger students; English language proficiency; higher versus lower engagement in online learning. The agenda built in time for participants to turn off their cameras and think about or write about questions like (Students) How will I show up in our small group? What dynamics will I notice with other students? (Teachers) How will or could my position and/or privilege show up as I review ideas from students? The team of facilitators also kept an eye on power dynamics and discussed any issues during debrief meetings.

CAMP 1 AGREEMENTS

- We take care of each other.
- We identify and interrupt power dynamics.
- We listen from a place of love.
- We honor the stories, experiences, and emotions people share with us.
- We are patient with online technology, take breaks, take care of ourselves.

CAMP 2 AGREEMENTS

- Assume the best intentions.
- Listen how you listen; learn how you learn.
- Be at the table.
- Step up; step back.
- Add value!
- Everyone's opinion matters.

■ Take Breaks

In each 150-minute session we built in several camera-off/mic-off breaks for participants to walk away from their screen. We also used facilitator-led stretching, breathing, or meditation each day.

■ Breakout Rooms

“Small groups were the highlight,” was common feedback about the structure of Design Camp. We spent more than half of the time in small breakout groups of 5-8 participants; varying who was together. Most groups were pre-assigned and managed by our Tech Help. Because Google meets does not yet have a feature that supports breakout rooms, we set up a google classroom with separate Google meets links for every breakout room. While this was more work to plan, it modeled to teachers how to form small groups in their own classrooms on this popular platform.

■ Messiness + Mistakes

Design thinking is, by its nature, a practice of learning from failure and being comfortable with messiness and iteration. As one facilitator said, “*You just have to trust the process.*” We modeled grace and humor when dealing with technical problems (there were some every day!), messy prototypes, and other hiccups.

■ Joy and Fun

Each day we built in time for fun, interactive activities. For example, we had participants:

- Submit music for a play list to be played during breaks and think time.
- Draw a 30-second picture of an animal and share the camera.
- Share and describe a recent photo.
- Engage with silly examples like a design challenge to “get people to eat more cake.”
- Laugh.

■ Gratitude

Each camp included time for gratitude and appreciation. We often closed the day with a gratitude circle which gave space for students and teachers to share appreciations in the chat feature or orally. While sharing was optional, many people chose to contribute.

■ Land Acknowledgments

Even in a virtual setting, each participant occupies ancestral land of many Indigenous people. We examined maps of Indigenous people and used land acknowledgements.

“We acknowledge that we are gathered on the ancestral lands of many bands of Indigenous people who made their home here and/or traveled the Columbia River seasonally because Cello Falls was a place of major trading confluence. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Umatilla, and the Yakama Nation have a strong relationship to this region as do the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and the Chinook Tribe.

With humility and respect, we ask forgiveness for the genocide and displacement of families and relatives. Through this acknowledgement, we commit ourselves to dismantle ongoing legacies of settler history and move forward towards a stronger spirituality of peace. For all our relations.”

■ Empathy Questions

Design Camp was anchored in empathy; the first day focused almost exclusively on listening deeply to one another. Teachers and students used a semi-structured protocol with encouragement to ask probing questions like “why” and “tell me more.”

The sample empathy interview questions below are designed to elicit stories and uncover hidden needs through deep listening and follow-up questions. Even if your school or district does not have the capacity to run a design camp right now, beginning the practice of conducting regular empathy interviews by people trained in the practice is a great step towards being student-centered.

EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

In empathy interviews, it is important that the interviewer:

- Use humility.
- Attend to your own bias.
- Create comfort.
- Be neutral.
- Don't suggest answers.
- Honor those you are engaging.

SAMPLE Student Questions

- Tell me about a time you felt that someone at school knew you deeply.
- Tell me about a time you felt that students were at the center of the classroom.
- What was the best part of distance learning? The worst part?
- Describe what one day looked like during distance learning last spring.
 - What happened that day? What classes did you attend?
 - What was the high-point?
 - What was the low-point?
 - What worked or didn't work?
- Tell me about a time you felt connected to school during distance learning. Tell me about a time you didn't feel connected.
- How did your teachers contribute to your experience this spring? How if at all, did your relationship with your teachers change once school was virtual?

SAMPLE Teacher Questions

- Tell me about a time you felt listened to.
- Tell me about a time you could show up at school as your authentic self.
- What would a healing and joyful school look like?
- What makes you feel free as an educator?
- Tell me about a time you felt good about distance learning.
- Tell me about a time you didn't feel so good about distance learning.
- Describe what one day looked like for you during distance learning. What was the high point? The low point?
- Describe how relationships with your students changed once school was virtual.
- What was your biggest lesson learned from teaching virtually this spring?

Endnotes

1. Center for Reinventing Public Education, July 2020, crpe.org/thelens/students-count-highlights-covid-19-student-surveys.
2. Education Trust, for example, has been publishing state-level polls about parents' concerns: edtrust.org/parents-overwhelmingly-concerned-their-children-are-falling-behind-during-school-closures; This USA Today story describes both concerns and bright spots: COVID online school impacts kids' mental health. What can teachers do?; and Gallup.com has been polling teachers, parents, and students.
3. See, for example, Dr. Megan Kuhfeld and Dr. Beth Tarasawa's April 2020 brief: nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/05/Collaborative-Brief_Covid19-Slide-APR20.pdf. This McKinsey & Company analysis examines the potential lifelong effect of COVID-related achievement gaps for Black and Latinx students: mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime#.
4. See, for example, this nationally representative survey of high school students: americaspromise.org/press-release/national-survey-high-school-students-during-covid-19-finds-widespread-negative-impact.
5. For a few examples of how Design Thinking has been used in education, see edutopia.org/blog/design-thinking-empathy-challenge-discovery-sharing-susie-wise.
6. Liberatory Design combines design thinking principles with an emphasis on equity. See, for example, dschool.stanford.edu/resources-collections/liberatory-design.
7. See, for example, an article from the Washington Post about teacher stress. [washingtonpost.com/education/2020/07/20/teacher-eight-concerns-about-school-this-fall-robbing-me-sleep](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/07/20/teacher-eight-concerns-about-school-this-fall-robbing-me-sleep) and a tool kit from CASEL to support social and emotional learning (SEL) casel.org/reopening-with-sel.



Community Design Partners is a team of facilitators, coaches, and advisors. We partner with organizations and schools dedicated to a wide range of social justice issues such as accessing postsecondary options, diversifying the teaching workforce, and advancing student success by removing systemic barriers. We work with teams to deeply understand a problem and see the systems where the problem is rooted. We collaboratively design system change ideas, measure implementation and monitor outcomes. We take a strengths-based approach and help teams center the voices of those they aim to serve.

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