

Design Thinking: The Point of it All

An Overview for Educators

Tom and David Kelley are two brothers who have worked together to take the world by storm. David Kelley is the founder of IDEO – a global design and innovation company. His brother Tom works alongside him helping the firm to grow. IDEO works with different companies and organizations to tackle big challenges and problems they may be having. IDEO works on products from toys to ATM machines, from health care insurance to designing a better education system for the country of Peru. The core belief of IDEO is best said by their president, Tim Brown:

“Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”

IDEO follows the Design Thinking process to help find solutions to these big challenges. But how? In their book, Creative Confidence, Tom and David Kelley claim that at the heart of innovation is “creative confidence.” This is the belief that everyone is creative. In their words, creative confidence “is about believing in your ability to create change in the world around you. It is the conviction that you can achieve what you set out to do.”

While we may at first reserve “creativity” for people like artists, musicians, and dancers, we must learn that creativity can be found in any workplace or occupation. In fact, it may be found in all parts of our daily lives. According to the Kelleys, people are often afraid to unleash their creative side for fear of failure. However, once we can overcome that fear, new possibilities emerge. Instead of seeing “failure,” people should see every experience as an opportunity for learning. While it may seem easier to keep our lives at “status quo,” with creative confidence, people can be free to “speak their minds and challenge existing ways of doing things. They act with greater courage, and have more persistence in tackling obstacles.”

So now, let's define Design Thinking according to the Kelleys. "Design thinking is a way of finding human needs and creating new solutions using the tools and mindsets of design practitioners." It is a method that addresses personal, social, and business challenges in creative new ways. When following the Design Thinking method, we use our human ability to "be intuitive, to recognize patterns, and to construct ideas that are emotionally meaningful as well as functional."

Too often, companies rely on data and analysis to make changes and solve problems. Design Thinking moves towards empathy and prototyping. Developing several solutions based on human needs. Each solution builds on the mistakes of its predecessor. Using this methodology, creative cultures are nurtured and growth mindsets are created.

The goal of this unit is to expose students to the Design Thinking methodology and have them learn the importance of problem solving that is people-focused. They will have the opportunity to find their creative confidence and strengthen it so they can use it in their daily lives as they continue to grow.

Of course, conventional math and science classes are important too. However, we also want to provide skills and strategies that go beyond the classroom walls. We want our students to overcome the mental blocks that may hinder creativity and to feel comfortable with failure.

Our objective is to empower them so that they may pursue new ideas with confidence.