

The “Design Thinking” Classroom: Using Empathic Approaches to Address Complex Issues

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Abstract

Higher education in Canada faces multiple, complex issues. For example, retention of new students, the rising cost of education, teaching methods and curricula, disenfranchised students, employers and faculty. Many of the issues in higher education that need to be address stem from classroom settings which may express as; passive audiences, disengaged students, lack of an application focus, and inappropriate teaching methodologies to name a few.

Design thinking is not new; however, its application to higher education and, more specifically, to classroom settings is novel. Design thinking is a creative process that can be used to solve complex issues such as, “how do we create engaged, learning environments in our classrooms?” One core premise of design thinking is *empathy*. Therefore, a core area of focus for this session will be to demonstrate how students and faculty develop an empathic understanding of a problem (classroom related) they would like to solve. Empathy, used in this way, focuses on the human centeredness of the issue or problem being addressed.

Empathy is only one element of design thinking. Defining the problem, ideation, prototyping, and testing are other core elements.

The primary goal of this 50-minute workshop will be to present examples of how I have used design thinking processes, in classrooms, to enhance learning, engagement and inclusion. Another goal of this session will be for each participant to develop a plan for how they may incorporate design thinking principles into their classroom environments. This session will be workshop based, action-oriented and fun.