When Design Thinking and the Reggio Approach Collide: Creating Authentic Problem-Solving Opportunities for Students

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The Reggio Emilia Approach:

- Belief in the ability of young children
- Collaborative Learning (among students & colleagues)
- Asking Important questions
- Constructivist learning
- Drawing as research
- Loose parts and rich materials
- Taking time to play/learn/experiment
- Children as leaders
- Harnessing natural curiosity
“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.”
— Tim Brown, president and CEO, IDEO.

Design Thinking for Educators is...
A creative process that helps you design meaningful solutions in the classroom, at your school, and in your community.
Learn about the “user” for whom you are designing.

Construct a point of view (POV) that is based on user needs and your insights.

Brainstorm and come up with creative solutions.

Build a representation of one or more of your ideas to show others.

Return to your user and test your ideas for feedback.

The Design Thinking “Cycle”
Design Thinking Mindsets:

- Empathy (connecting to user)
- Low-res prototypes
- Learning through failure
- Obnoxious curiosity
- Collaboration
- Gathering and using feedback
Our Reggio/Design Thinking “Mash-Up”
Harnessing the Big Ideas of Both Approaches
(and making adjustments when necessary!)

1. skill building
2. connecting to the “user”
3. rich and varied materials
4. solving real and important problems
1. Skill building
2. Connecting to the “user”
Olivia

I am going to design a special bench just for you.

1. What would you like to do when you are using this bench?
   I want to use the bench to get ready for my running in the morning. I will also use it when I return from my runs. (If there are places on bench for my gear and supplies that would be great).

2. How would you like to feel when you are using this bench?
   I want to feel motivated when I am getting ready to run.
   I want to be comfortable on the bench when I return from my runs. (I stretch a lot when I return).

3. What is your favorite color?
   Green-neon
HEX BUG

PROBLEM

1. We need more exercise!
2. We hate to get stuck!
3. We want to have creative ways to play!
4. We like challenges!
GL/R noticed

Can push things
Can squeeze through
Like difficult things
Can go through things
Can knock things over
They can get stuck
They can go upside down

learned

not easy to keep it on course

Can’t have steep ramps

Can drive upside down
Gets stuck by heavy things or tight spaces
Has a mind of its own
Spins on its side
Can move some things
Can like you
2. Connecting to the “user”

Hi Rawson,
Please make sure that I can get up on the ramps - they look like fun!

Love,
Hex Bugs
“It’s not about decoration...”
3. Rich and varied materials
Not going for a slick product...
Letter to Bonin/Hines Pre-first Design Thinkers...

Dear Pre-First Students,

The administrative team and I need your help with a task that would benefit pre-first and first grade students for years to come. Our challenge is: How might we create more opportunities for creative play on our pre-first/first grade playground? I saw the fantastic “hexbug” amusement parks that you guys designed and thought that you might be just the right people to help with this challenge.

I have attached the description of an imaginary first grader that resembles students I have noticed over the years. I want you to think of this first grader as your user and I want you to imagine the playground additions that might benefit this child.

At the end of your design process I would like for you to present your best ideas to me. We have set aside an area of the playground and some budget and plan to build some of your ideas over the summer. Remember to keep the needs of your users at the center of your ideas. I would like to be invited as you develop your first and second prototypes. I cannot wait to see what you come up with.

Regards,

Mr. McKnight

Hi! Just call me Rosie or Robert Revere. I am 7 years old and I love to tinker. I want to be an inventor or an engineer when I grow up, and of course my favorite book is, Rosie Revere Engineer. Whenever I get a chance I go into my design studio at my house and fiddle around creating prototypes for my latest ideas. I would love to be able to tinker outside in the sunshine with my friends. I am really curious about how machines work and love to make stuff.
Nature
Nishka, creative

User
likes to be outside
7 years old

Collect stuff = sort them / compare them
Build stuff with nature → home for a gnome with nature
Interested in the science of nature
She likes to be under Big Trees

Spaces where she can be creative with her friends

Microscope (Carson)
Bird Feeder
Work bench (Suzanne)
Research
Brainstorm Ideas
Prototype
“I like, I wish, I wonder...”
FEEDBACK

I like...
I wish...
I wonder...

IMPROVE

What changes do we want to make to our prototype?
placing our user at the center of those changes.
Celebrate!
Implementing the students’ ideas...
Breaking ground the first part of April
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What happens when educators merge the problem solving methodology of Design Thinking with the materials-rich Reggio Emilia approach? This presentation chronicles an elementary school project that utilized this unique combined approach. Attendees will learn how to look for authentic problems to solve in their school community, and to create the project scaffolding necessary to build students’ problem solving skills so that they can take on bigger challenges. Presenters will give a brief but thorough overview of Design Thinking (the methodology pioneered by IDEO that now permeates much of the entrepreneurial culture in the Silicon Valley) and the Reggio Emilia philosophy (an innovative approach to early childhood and elementary education that values the child as strong, capable and resilient.) Presenters will tell the story of how they gave their students the challenge “How might we create more opportunities for creative play on our playground?” The careful documentation of this project will show how students learned to look at a challenge from another person’s point of view, and how they used recycled and natural found objects to build prototypes that brought their ideas to life. This unique process also gave students the opportunity to test their prototypes, incorporate feedback and to share their ideas with the school community. Finally, presenters will show how students’ designs and ideas are currently being incorporated into the school’s playground renovation – empowering students with the authorship of their own play space.

What happens when educators merge Design Thinking with the Reggio Emilia approach to teach creative problem solving to elementary aged students? Join two intrepid art teachers as they share the experiences and projects that helped them to develop this unique combined-approach to teaching design and innovation to the very young.
Celebrate!