Design Thinking
in the Middle

Tools and Techniques
to Understand Student Needs and
Support Differentiation

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DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MIDDLE LEVEL STUDENTS

Cultivating Student Voice for Differentiation • UK **dLab**

OPEN SPECIFIC

Start the conversation with simple and specific questions your participants will feel comfortable answering. You may want to begin with a compliment and short introduction and then move on to questions about the student's current life. This is your chance to build rapport with the student you are interviewing and to ask basic questions that will help you understand their overall situation, how they view the school, and how they view their grade as unique or similar to others in the school.

GO BROAD

Prompt bigger more general topics that ask the student to think about life, the school, and the future. Ask about their hopes and dreams for the future, as well as the barriers to achieving their goals. This is the chance to understand what they want to do in their life what might be standing in their way, and what they perceive the real paths to a better future might be.

PROBE DEEP

Ask deeper questions about your design challenge at hand & prompt with 'what if' scenarios. The last half of the interview is the time to ask questions that are focused on your design challenge. Make sure to ask concrete questions of the student that will help you define what is and is not desirable to this person.

OPEN SPECIFIC

- What year in school are you in?
- How long have you been at this school?
- What kinds of things do you think you [elementary level kids OR secondary kids] do differently from kids in your grade?

GO BROAD

- What are your aspirations for the future?
- Why did you choose those?
- What do you see that could get in the way of achieving your goals? (Could be anything -- not necessarily school-related)

PROBE DEEP

Tell the student: We want to figure out how to put you at the center of the way your school teaches. We want to teach you in a way that specifically tailored to your needs.

- What's the biggest problem currently in our school (class, grade, etc.)? WHY?
- What do you wish the teachers knew but don't about students? WHY?
- What do you wish the principal/head at school knew but doesn't? WHY?
- If you could give the teachers some advice, what would it be? WHY?
- If you had a week to spend learning whatever you wanted at school, what would that be? WHY?
- ASK 5 WHYS. ALSO ADD FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS THAT FEEL NATURAL (e.g. habits they have, habits they want to break, things they like, things they don't like)

Your Mission: Make your student's life BETTER & MORE MEANINGFUL. Start by GAINING EMPATHY

1. Interview (Review the interview guide and select and interviewer. Everyone else take notes.) Write down **everything** you hear.

NOTES/SKETCHES:
Use extra paper or the back of this sheet as needed

What stood out to you? What are you curious about?

INSIGHTS:

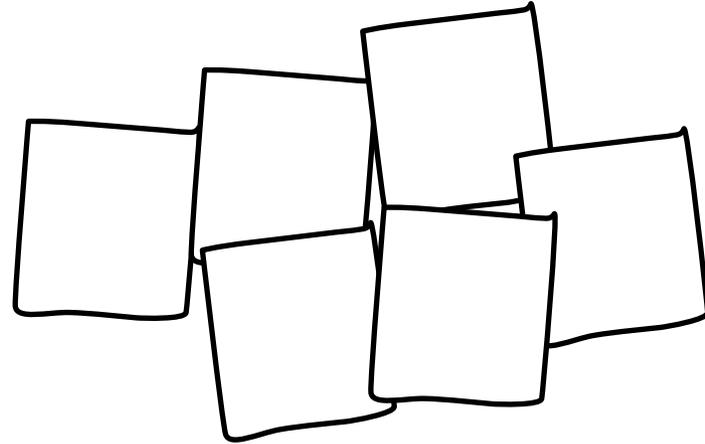# 2. Team Share and Capture

A. Take a silent minute or two for the following:

Unpack your notes and write down headline quotes, surprises, and other interesting bits:
ONE HEADLINE PER POST-IT.

Get down as many as possible

Use sticky notes on the table

B. Then take turns with your team to share, understand, ask new questions:

FIRST:

Each team member should give a tour of their Post-Its to the others.

Physically group all the Post-Its in your team. Look for patterns.

Goal: Understand what is really going on with your students. Discover who he is and what he needs in regards to the problem he's discussing.
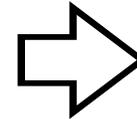
THEN:

Create at least two questions you'd now like to ask your students about the current issue.
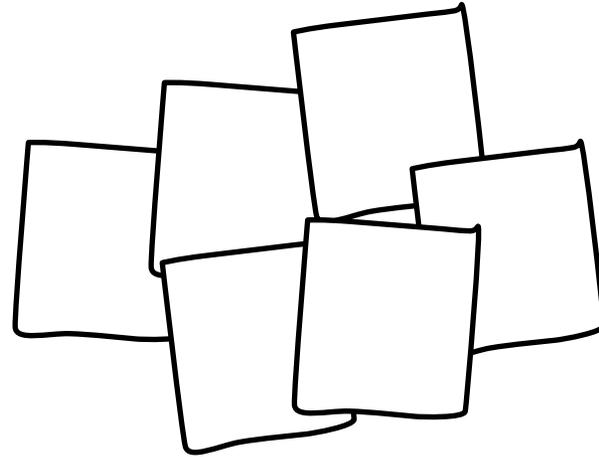
3. Generate alternatives to test:

A. Generate as many RADICAL ideas as you can to meet your student's needs:

How might we...

The "How Might We…" question is a question that focuses the problem on someone's needs.

50
per
table!

Use sticky notes on the table

B. Elect one idea for each of these four categories:

Rational	Meaningful
Sweet	Longshot

Don't immediately worry about feasibility. Hang on to the ideas about which the group is excited, amused, or intrigued.
An idea that is not plausible may still have an aspect within it that is very useful and meaningful.

4. **Prototype!**

A. Generate a SOLUTION

Write one of your four "harvested" ideas here that you will prototype.

Sketch your big idea!
This is your plan, map, scenario, script, blueprint for a ROLE PLAY you will conduct that SHOWS your IDEA
(RAPID PROTOTYPING + SHOW DON'T TELL).

5. Evaluate!

A. SHARE your solution + CAPTURE feedback

+ What worked...

△ What could be improved...

? Questions...

! Ideas...

6. REFLECT on your design thinking process:

1. Was your design the same or different than you expected?

2. Where did you get stuck?

3. When did you get your a-ha's?

4. How did EMPATHY contribute to your design?

5. How did PROTOTYPING alternatives contribute to your design?

6. How did FEEDBACK from evaluation contribute to your design?

7. How would you improve your process?