

BUILD EMPATHY

INTERSESSION I

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ACTIONS

OBSERVE

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5 WHYS

TELL STORIES

PATTERNS + INSIGHTS

BUILD EMPATHY

TIME COMMITMENT: 5 - 8 hours

FOUNDATIONAL: 9-12 actions per team

ASPIRATIONAL: 15-18 actions per team

This phase is about gaining insight into the student experience by approaching the problem with a beginner's mindset, building deep empathy, and synthesizing findings.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. EDesigners gain insight into specific root-cause problems through deep understanding of user experience and needs (individual actions).
2. EDesigners reflect on empathy actions and synthesize empathy findings (team actions).



PHASE OVERVIEW: BUILD EMPATHY

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BUILD EMPATHY?


BUILD EMPATHY is about gaining deep empathy for a purpose – to learn more about the problem and create a strong foundation for solution design.

Empathy is both a mindset and a set of concrete techniques to **collect data** through **fieldwork**. These techniques are generally grounded in the power of immersion – getting out into the field and learning about the user and problem in their context. Through deep listening, experiencing their environment, and walking in their shoes, you encounter unexpected insights. Secondary research is also important, but it's helpful to first gain a sense of the problem firsthand. Data can mean many different things. When we talk about collecting data, we mean gathering qualitative and quantitative information and capturing change over time. We use data to learn, to describe, and to measure.

PHASE OVERVIEW: BUILD EMPATHY

TIPS ON FIELDWORK

- 1. Exhibit a Beginner's Mindset.** Try to see things with fresh eyes and use this as an opportunity to learn. Avoid preconceived notions or assumptions. Ask the basic questions and try to reconsider the status quo.
- 2. Be prepared.** Make sure you have everything you need to do fieldwork successfully. If you have pre-prepared questions, make sure to print them out. Bring a notebook and a pen, and something to write on, and whatever else you need to document the experience.
- 3. Take notes.** Capture what you see, hear, and feel. Write down direct quotes. Draw sketches or pictures. Audio-record if this is helpful to you, and take notes during your immersion actions. A best practice is to spend 5-10 minutes after each action to record immediate thoughts and reactions.
- 4. Take photos or videos.** Bring a camera to visually document your actions and share what you experienced with others. Ask your interviewee permission first to ensure they are comfortable with photos.
- 5. Be attuned to the environment.** Observe how people engage and interact with space.
- 6. Create a trusting environment.** Ensure everyone is comfortable. Try starting a dialogue around familiar subjects to build rapport. Share something about yourself —show you are open and willing to share too. Be transparent and explain your intentions, protect privacy as needed, and be clear that this is voluntary.
- 7. Use short prompts.** Ask “why” a lot, or “tell me about an experience when...”. Consider question prompts prior to interviews.



8. Dig deep. Look for emotion from your participants. Continue beyond the first layer of questions to learn about motivations, frustrations, needs, wants, and desires. Don't avoid difficult questions or tension, but handle these concerns with care and from a place of understanding.

9. Continuously Reflect. Are your empathy actions building toward a deeper understanding of the problem? Adapt and readjust as necessary.

TYPES OF DATA

There are different **types of data** to collect during your innovation process to learn more about the problem and measure the outcomes of your process.

During BUILD EMPATHY, you will mostly collect **qualitative data**, which describes qualities and categories (how/what/why). Qualitative data help you understand depth – people's experiences, subjective meanings, events, and processes. When you collect qualitative data, you are documenting what people think, say, do, and feel in an open-ended, exploratory way. This type of data can help us gain great insight into the user experience, emotions, values, and behaviors, but it requires you to interpret what you see and hear.

Quantitative data are things that you can measure (how many, how much, who/what/where), in quantities or variations. Examples of this are age, test scores, and the number of students who liked a class activity. This type of data is gathered through pre-determined, structured responses or counts. This could be as simple as asking students to raise their hands and counting them. Quantitative data can be analyzed statistically. Quantitative data help you understand breadth – how big the problem is, for how many, etc. You can still capture what people think, say, do and feel, but now you would be measuring how many people feel a certain way.



PHASE OVERVIEW: BUILD EMPATHY

BE THOUGHTFUL ABOUT DATA

We are asking you to define and describe the problem with different kinds of data. This helps you make an assessment of the current situation (what you want to change) and see change over time. As you move forward with data collection, note intended and unintended outcomes. A positive, unexpected outcome might be worth pursuing.

It's ok if you don't know what information you should capture now in order to measure change over time. You may find later on that you didn't get the 'right' kind of data. Focus on *learning* and getting in the habit of collecting data and being aware of its strengths and limitations.

We know that data collection in real life can be messy and imperfect, especially on a time crunch. Don't expect your information to be scientifically valid. Instead, be thoughtful about what you learn. What does the data tell you? What doesn't it?

This next immersion phase is critical: the impact of your team's innovation depends largely on the depth to which you understand the problem. What follows are a series of actions designed to help your team gather this information and insight. During this phase, conduct the actions you believe are most important for digging into your problem and "How Might We" statement.

NOTES

OBSERVE

Observe spaces, interactions and behaviors at your school or in the community that shape the user's experience with the problem

FOUNDATIONAL: 3 interviews of 20-30 min

ASPIRATIONAL: 3 interviews of 45-60 minutes

The term “observe” is used differently in education and design. We're not intending, for example, that you observe colleagues to provide feedback on instructional performance. We're using the term in the broadest, big picture sense.

In our lives, we often don't take the time to step back, take a deep breath, and simply observe. For many of us, we're moving non-stop and the minute we stop engaging we become uncomfortable. Challenge yourself to disengage and watch what's happening—it's a great opportunity to capture data and identify key findings.

Look for how spaces play a role in the school or community and shape the behaviors and outcomes of people operating in a given environment.

STEP 1. LOCATE

Determine 3 locations and/or times for your observations. Identify where you can actively observe interactions to inform your design opportunity. You may choose to observe in 3 different locations or in the same location at 3 different times of day.

STEP 2. OBSERVE

Schedule at least 20 minutes for each observation. Record your notes and findings on the next page. As you observe, minimize engagement—this might feel uncomfortable, but it will allow you to focus more closely on the observation itself.



STEP 3. FINDINGS

Determine 3 locations and/or times for your observations. Identify where you can actively observe interactions related to your problem or HMW.

While observing, consider the following:

- What do you see that is expected?
- What do you see that is unexpected?
- What do you see that is surprising?
- What do you see repeatedly?
- Pretend you are walking into this environment for the very first time.
What would you notice right away? What would you see differently?

EXAMPLE

Ms. Bashir's design team challenge is "how might we improve the quality and completion of homework?" She conducts three, 45-minute observations in three different locations: during lunch in the cafeteria, during advisory in the classroom, and after school in the gym. As she expected, students complete little homework during lunch or advisory and use this time to socialize. Unexpectedly, she observes some students using advisory time to copy homework. In the gym, however, students work independently and complete the assignment. This is the only environment where students are allowed to wear headphones and listen to music. She records this as a key finding.

OBSERVE NOTES #1

WHO	WHAT
WHERE	WHEN
KEY FINDINGS	

OBSERVE NOTES #2

WHO	WHAT
WHERE	WHEN
KEY FINDINGS	

INTERVIEW

Conduct interviews with users and key stakeholders to gain empathy and learn about the problem

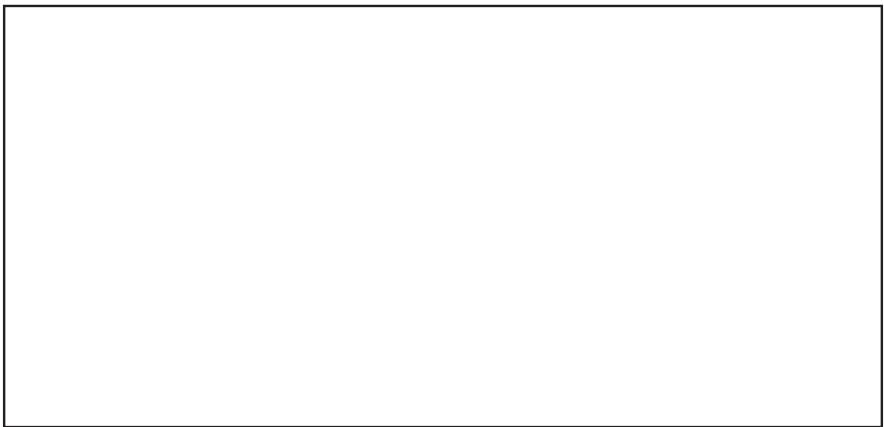
FOUNDATIONAL: 3 interviews of 20-30 min

ASPIRATIONAL: 5 interviews of 45-60 minutes

Interviews provide an entry point into the lives of individuals. It is one of the most crucial actions. You are seeking to gain insight into key perspectives surrounding your unique design opportunity. In addition, you want to broadly gain understanding of the individual's context and motivations.

STEP 1. GUIDE

Consider the flow of the conversation and outline the key questions you will ask. Consider beginning with a question that people will be more comfortable responding to at first. What happens if people are reluctant to answer your questions? How will you respond? Keep alternative questions on hand if you are finding certain questions aren't getting you anywhere.





STEP 2. INTERVIEW

Schedule time for each interview. Record notes and findings on the following page.

TIP:

- *Provide context for this conversation: let your interviewee know you're trying to create a solution to a problem and their insight is incredibly helpful. Let them know they are helping you to build the solution.*
- *Share something personal to set the stage for open for open, honest conversation.*
- *Consider starting off with a question that is easy and fun first—starting with a topic that is more accessible will help people become more comfortable and open up.*
- *Ask a lot of open-ended questions. Keep asking why to dig deeper and move beyond the first layer.*

STEP 3. FINDINGS

As you reflect on the interview, consider the following:

- Was this individual representative of their peer group? Why or why not?
If not, what separates them?
- What are they doing that is different from others? What are they doing that's the same?

INTERVIEW NOTES #1

WHO	WHAT
WHERE	WHEN
KEY FINDINGS	

INTERVIEW NOTES #2

WHO	WHAT
WHERE	WHEN
KEY FINDINGS	

SHADOW

Go deeper into the user experience by shadowing someone's daily routine

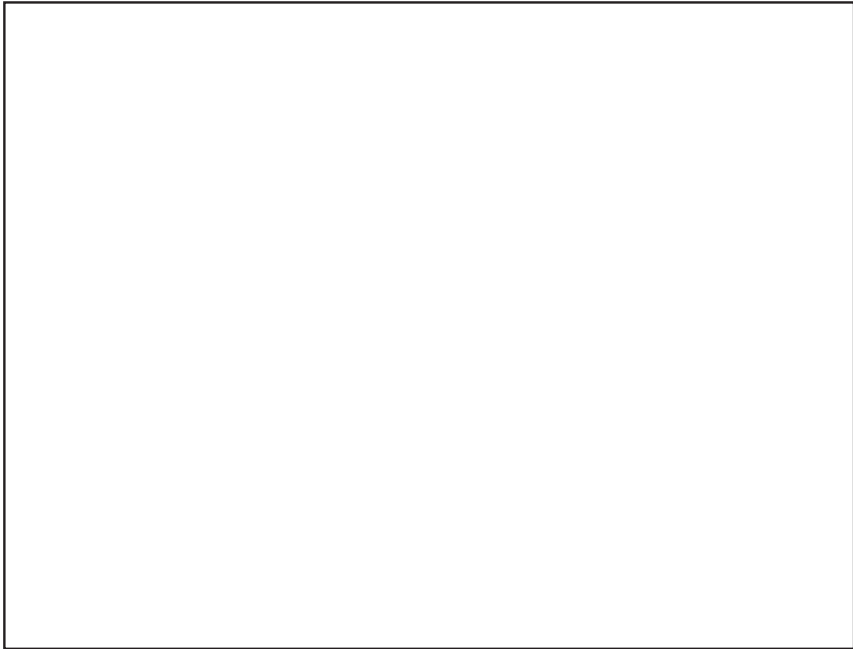
FOUNDATIONAL: 1 shadow experience, 60 min

ASPIRATIONAL: 1 full-day shadowing a student

Pick one individual to shadow. You will follow this person, with their permission, through their daily life and routine.

STEP 1. LIST

List the people you are interested in shadowing. These could be individuals who directly or indirectly experience your problem. Look for individuals who are open and reflective.





STEP 2. SELECT

Narrow your list and ask your top choice for permission (in the case of students, determine needs for parent/family permission, especially if observing takes you off-site). Make clear that the purpose of shadowing is to experience life in their shoes. Explain your goal to develop a new solution to an existing challenge. They are your partner in this goal and will help generate ideas and inspiration.

STEP 3. SHADOW

While shadowing, take notes on daily schedule and activities. If at all possible, aim to experience the problem area with the person your shadowing. How do they navigate this problem or the status quo? What are their priorities? What are they motivated by? What was expected? Unexpected? Surprising? What assumptions have been confirmed or dispelled? Take notes!

EXAMPLE

Ms. McNeal's design team challenge is "how might we create a more consistent, school-wide positive behavior system?" She decides to use a personal professional development day to shadow a student through their entire school day. One of her students, Terrial is frequently getting into trouble, but redirects when given praise and positive reinforcement. Ms. McNeal meets with Terrial, discusses the purposes and potential of shadowing (to create a new rewards system for the school) and gets permission from Terrial and her parents to move forward. She meets Terrial at her house in the morning and, together, they wait for the bus, ride the bus to school, attend all classes, eat school lunch together in the cafeteria, and return back home (on the bus) in the afternoon. Along the way, Ms. McNeal asks Terrial to reflect on her choices and behavior—why, in some situations, does she behave appropriately and other times cross the line? As a result of this day, Ms. McNeal generates tremendous insight into inconsistencies and consistencies in management procedures across classrooms and feels confident to design a new approach to rewarding and reinforcing positive choices.

SHADOW NOTES #1

WHO	WHAT
WHERE	WHEN
KEY FINDINGS	

SHADOW NOTES #2

WHO	WHAT
WHERE	WHEN
KEY FINDINGS	

DIG DEEPER

Dig deeper with additional empathy actions to uncover the root-cause problem

FOUNDATIONAL: 1 additional interview

ASPIRATIONAL: 3 additional interviews

1. Group Interview

Bring together a group of three or more individuals who experience the problem and facilitate a conversation around the experience. Utilize the same list of questions you prepared for the one-on-one interview. Encourage participants to ask questions of one another—take special note of what they ask and why. Establish group norms and expectations to ensure an open, honest and meaningful conversation.

2. Multi-Generational Interview

Same as above, but the group is a family—this can be particularly helpful for understanding challenges involving family/parents/community engagement.

3. Positive Deviants

Identify individuals or groups who are not representative of their peer group **in a positive way**. For example, 150 seniors have the opportunity to attend a free college-planning workshop, but only 12 show up. Why did these 12 actively participate when the majority did not? Give these individuals a second look, dig deeper into their uncommon strategies, unconventional and counterintuitive methods. Meet with them in a group and discuss why they are NOT experiencing the problem that you are tackling—what can you learn about the issue from their perspective? Can you translate what they're doing into a solution?



4. Models Outside Education

Is there a similar challenge being faced in an industry other than education? If so, how does that industry solve the problem and are there opportunities to learn about and apply their approach to the education space? Identify an individual working in that industry for a one-on-one interview.

5. Asset Deep Dive

Is there a particular asset or set of assets that relate to your HMW statement and could potentially be utilized to solve the challenge? Are there assets that require additional research to determine how they might be leveraged for change?

DIG DEEPER NOTES #1

WHO	WHAT
WHERE	WHEN
KEY FINDINGS	

DIG DEEPER NOTES #2

WHO	WHAT
WHERE	WHEN
KEY FINDINGS	

EMPATHY MAPS

Get deeper insights from your interviews by completing empathy maps

FOUNDATIONAL: 2 empathy maps of approximately 10-15 minutes

ASPIRATIONAL: Empathy map per additional interview and/or spend more time digging deeper into one individual's map

Empathy Maps are about stepping into someone else's shoes. Here you will analyze the responses you've received during interviews with the aim of seeing the world through their eyes.

STEP 1. COMPLETE

As soon as possible after an interview, complete the empathy map on the following page to gain a more holistic understanding of the individual.

STEP 2. DIG DEEP

Challenge yourself to visualize what the interview participant is thinking, feeling, doing, seeing, saying, and hearing as it relates to your problem.

EXAMPLE

*Mr. Crosby's design team challenge is "how might we reduce student suspension rates?" He conducts five interviews with students who have been repeatedly suspended. As he completes the empathy map for one student, Antonio, he remembers him repeatedly **saying** "no one listens to me when I have a problem." Antonio **hears** that "he's a bad kid" and **feels** like no one gives him the benefit of the doubt. As a result, Antonio isn't following his behavior modification and is **doing** the bare minimum academically. He **thinks** no one really wants him to come to school anyway and the only adult he **sees** regularly is the disciplinarian. Mr. Crosby realizes that Antonio needs to regularly meet with a neutral adult (not involved in disciplinary decisions) in order to disrupt this pattern and prevent future suspension. He records this as a key finding.*

EMPATHY MAP

THINKING	INTERVIEWEE IS HEARING...	SAYING
FEELING	DOING	SEEING

INTERVIEWEE:
KEY FINDINGS:



TEAM EMPATHY SYNTHESIS: 5 WHYS

Analyze problems by getting to the root cause

To understand a problem, you need to understand the root-cause of the issue. Start by asking “why?” This simple framework may seem too good to be true, but it is actually a great way to dig deeper and uncover underlying issues.

Try this exercise with a partner.

STEP 1. ISSUE

Start with an issue that seems to keep arising among users and stakeholders. Think about contradictions or paradoxes

STEP 2. ASK WHY FIVE TIMES

Work through different topics or take the same topic from different angles.

REFLECT

Do you feel like you got to the root of a problem? How different were your conclusions compared to where you started? Do you see how you can analyze problems from different angles? Did you identify anything that seems easy to change? What makes you think it would be easy to change?

TOPIC		
WHY?		
WHY?		
WHY?		
WHY?		
WHY?		



TEAM EMPATHY SYNTHESIS: TELL STORIES

Tell stories to share what you learned during Build Empathy with your team

Storytelling is an important skill to utilize during a design process. It helps others learn from what you've experienced and gives voice to the people we're serving.

Begin to analyze all the data you've collected so far. You may have a ton of information and it may feel difficult to navigate. One tip: look for information that was particularly surprising, inspirational, or unique to help with theme, insight, and pattern identification.

STEP 1: TELL STORIES

One at a time, tell one of the stories of a stakeholder you built empathy with. Focus on people, what they do, think, say and feel. Highlight what was surprising or interesting. Have other teammates record snippets on post-its.



STEP 2. WHAT/HOW/WHY

Go deeper into stories by analyzing one empathy action (notes from one interview or observation) in the following framework.

1. WHAT

Refer to your empathy maps and delineate concrete observations. What is the person doing, seeing, saying? What did we learn about them? What does the data tell us?

2. HOW

How is this person doing what they're doing? What emotions or states of being do they seem to exhibit?

3. WHY

Why does this occur? What are the users' motivations/reasons for doing what they do? What is really going on? What do you think is the take-away?

STEP 3: THEMES

Put the post-its together on a wall or a table. Group them together in ways that make sense to you – think of “buckets”. What are a few buckets or headlines that would be helpful for sorting your data? What are the broad categories or trends you're seeing across your empathy work?



TEAM EMPATHY SYNTHESIS: PATTERNS + INSIGHTS

Identify patterns and insights with your team

Review your data to delineate insights and identify patterns.
Building on Tell Stories, consider the following:

STEP 1. INSIGHTS

What new perspectives, challenged assumptions, or critical questions emerged from across your methods?

STEP 2. PATTERNS —→ FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

What does this mean for our innovation process?

1. PATTERNS: What patterns are emerging across users?

2. IMPLICATIONS: What are the implications of these patterns — both in the present and moving forward?

REFLECT

How did the synthesis frameworks you used help you process data?
Which one was most useful?

NOTES