
THE TEACHER WITH A DESIGN MINDSET

by Donna Lasher



INTRODUCTION

We are all designers, creators, and makers. As teachers, we can adopt the same mindsets and strategies that we teach our students. The framework and tools of design thinking can help us plan learning experiences and find creative and innovative solutions to the problems we encounter in our classrooms now and in the future.

MAKER VS. CONSUMER

We never want our students to be mere consumers of information. We want them to be fully engaged in their own learning, self-directed, able to think divergently, collaborate with others, develop creative solutions, manage projects, take educated risks, and be able to handle mistakes and setbacks along the way. These are traits of design thinkers.

Teachers who exhibit these same characteristics are more likely to develop and try innovative approaches and methods in their classrooms. They have more of an "[action research](#)" approach and are open to trying new things, knowing that lessons, methods, or practices are works in progress.

Your classroom is your "maker space" where you are constantly observing, monitoring, and adjusting in order to achieve the results you envision. Even when the learning path is unpredictable and students are doing much of the creating, such as in project-based learning, there are many elements the teacher must design in order to manage people, processes, and materials.

YOU BE YOU

Many teachers today deal with the effects of "[teacher brain](#)." There are so many new trends and buzzwords each year. And while social media is great for inspiration, it too can be overwhelming. The time spent consuming could be devoted to creating what you really need.

A design mindset can guide you in directing your own professional growth and practice. Alone or in collaboration with others, bring your unique personality, your strengths, your vision, and your knowledge and creativity to the process.

JOHN SPENCER USES THE ACRONYM "**LAUNCH**" AS A FRAMEWORK FOR INCORPORATING DESIGN THINKING.

USING THE SAME FRAMEWORK AS A GUIDE,
HERE ARE SOME RESOURCES AND IDEAS FOR TEACHERS.

"L" IS FOR



[Watch video](#)

LOOK, LISTEN, AND LEARN

Inspiration can come from unexpected places. Paying attention to what you and your students find interesting and engaging can spark ideas. Noticing problems can also ignite the search for creative solutions. Observe, keep an open mind, and expand your own learning.

"A" IS FOR



[Watch video](#)

ASK QUESTIONS

As teachers, we often don't consider our own curiosity and interests when we're developing new ideas. But our enthusiasm for learning about specific issues or topics of study can be contagious. Like our students, we can ask questions such as, "What am I curious about? What do I find interesting or intriguing? What kinds of projects do I find meaningful?"

Innovators also ask questions related to problem-finding such as "What's not working?" Imagine going through a typical school day, beginning with walking into your classroom in the morning. In your mind, go through your day and STOP when you feel tension.

Ask yourself, "Why is this a problem in my day? What can I change?" Think about problems on your campus in the same way. Consider small changes that might have a big impact.

*Curiosity
is your
super
power!*

**"IT IS THE SUPREME ART OF THE TEACHER TO AWAKEN JOY
IN CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND KNOWLEDGE."**

~ ALBERT EINSTEIN

"U" IS FOR



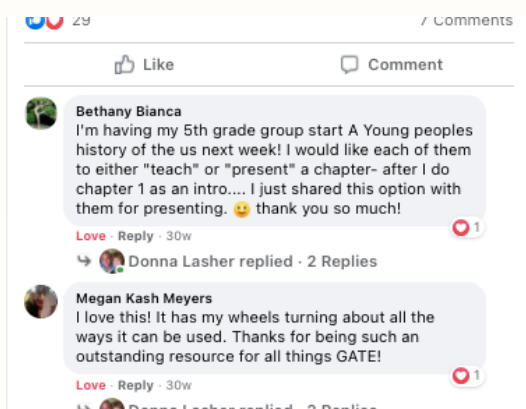
[Watch video](#)

UNDERSTAND

Focus can be difficult for educators. There are so many things we can improve or change! But, we can only do one thing at a time. Focus on defining a goal or purpose and then do a little research to learn more about that specific topic or issue, Find out what you can learn from others.

Envision what can be, and then learn about how it might happen.

"N" IS FOR



[Hidden-Picture Guessing Game"](#)

NAVIGATE IDEAS

There is no shortage of ideas for teachers who want to try new things.

One of the reasons I created [Big Ideas for Little Scholars](#) is that I saw a need for the curation of ideas and resources for teachers of advanced and GT students.

It's exciting when the same idea is incorporated in many different ways by different teachers. Combining ideas and elements in original ways is what those with a design mindset do!

For those new to gifted education, I hope the site will give you [a place to start](#). For others, I hope it is a source of inspiration and can enrich what you are already doing with your students.

"C" IS FOR



CREATE A PROTOTYPE

In education, the prototype is basically an implementation PLAN. It might be the lesson or unit plan. It could be a plan of action, a new strategy, a management technique, or an event.

We develop a plan with all the variables in mind and then go forward.

Sometimes this involves taking a risk. We may only know part of the plan because we want our students to have ownership in the process.

Every teacher experiences some trepidation when trying something for the first time with students, teachers, or parents. Adopt a design mindset and give yourself permission to learn by doing!

"H" IS FOR



HIGHLIGHT AND FIX

Thinking about our strategies and plans with a design mindset means we are open-minded observers as we carry them out. We assess what's working and what needs revision. What can we do differently tomorrow or next time?

Some teachers make notes in their written plans and others reflect through discussions with colleagues. These reflections and self-evaluations help us maintain the growth mindset that we encourage in our students.

My students and I once initiated a major project that took seven months to complete. I learned so much by recording reflections throughout the process. You can read about it [here](#).

Big Ideas for Little Scholars



RESOURCES for GIFTED
& ADVANCED LEARNERS



In an effort to provide a kind of “library of resources” for teachers of gifted and advanced students, the content on this site has been collected, curated, and some developed by yours truly – Donna Lasher, a teacher with nearly four decades of classroom experience teaching gifted and advanced students. My goal is to share learning experiences (mine and yours) and any activities, projects, lessons, and units that keep students joyfully engaged and sufficiently challenged. You’ll find many of my favorite resources on the site as well as a few things I’ve developed. I hope you will share yours, too.

Share Your Idea

The final stage in the LAUNCH process is sharing your ideas or products with an audience! If you have an original lesson, activity, or project idea that you’re interested in sharing, please send a [MESSAGE](#) with a brief synopsis of your activity. You are also invited to describe any TPT products you’ve created for advanced and GT students. You can read about how to share those [HERE](#).

For Further Reading

"Three R's for a Teacher's Summer ~ Habits of Happy Teachers"

"Every Day, Focus on Improving One Thing- And Just One Thing"

"Novelty, Surprise, and Twists: How to Sneak These Into Your Lessons"