

Learning Design Thinking: Empathy

John M. Quick, <http://johnmquick.com>

Suppose you look outside the window on a beautiful day to see an eagle soaring high in the sky. Imagine that you are the eagle. As you glide effortlessly with your wings stretched outward, you can feel the wind rushing across your face and over your entire body. You tilt yourself to the right and rapidly descend towards the sea. Suddenly, you lean your body back and extend both legs as far as you can. In unison, your claws plunge into the frigid water and sink into the body of a fish.

5 Questions to Design for Empathy

Although you will probably never fly like an eagle or swoop in to catch a fish using your toes, you are fully capable of imagining what it feels like to do so. In other words, you are capable of *empathy*. Empathy involves understanding someone else's perceptions without directly sharing in their experiences. As the cornerstone of any user-centered philosophy, empathy is a critical skill for designers who want their work to resonate with end users. In educational contexts, we may refer to learner-centered design, whereby learners are the end users. Meanwhile, the designers may come from a variety of professions, such as instructional designers, technologists, teachers, or trainers. No matter who is designing a learning experience, the skill of empathy can be exercised. To help focus your design on empathy, ask yourself these questions:

1. Who are my learners? Identify their needs, interests, and motivations.
2. What are the learning objectives? State what you aim to achieve from an educational standpoint.

3. How can I design an experience that supports both the learners and the objectives?

Your design should resonate with learners while achieving the educational objectives.

These elements are complementary and support one another.

4. How will my learners' experience this design? Imagine being a learner. Identify how your design will make them think, feel, and act.

5. How can I revise my design to improve the learner experience? Based on your understanding of the learner's perspective, determine how you can improve the overall experience.

Fly Like an Eagle

In conclusion, empathy helps you become a better designer. It allows you to understand what it feels like to interact with your design from the learner's perspective. The better you are able to channel the thoughts, actions, and emotions of your learners, the more capable you are of designing effective experiences. If you can understand the experience of an eagle soaring through the sky, you certainly empathize with learners. Start connecting with your learners today and channel their energy to design excellent learning experiences.