

Final Reflection: Learning Through Design

It didn't take long for me to realize that design was something much deeper than simply organizing content. Through this experience, I learned that being a designer in education is about being a listener, a question-asker, and most importantly, a problem-solver who isn't afraid to rethink the familiar.

My original problem of practice focused on the D2L discussion tool. Students were required to post and reply each week, but despite completing the assignments, many expressed feeling like it was just "busy work." I began by empathizing with their experiences, surveying them anonymously and having conversations with a few brave volunteers. Their feedback surprised me: while most actually did find some value in the discussions, they also yearned for deeper, more practical engagement. This pushed me to reframe my perspective—not to scrap discussions altogether, but to design something that felt real and meaningful to them.

In defining the problem, I used tools like the "5 Whys" and the "Why-How Ladder" to dig into the root causes. It wasn't just that the prompts were boring; they were too broad, too disconnected from students' real-world experiences. I realized that my students weren't lacking motivation, they were craving relevance. They wanted to see how what they were learning applied to their future careers. That insight shifted everything for me.

Then came the ideation phase, one of the most unexpectedly fun parts of this journey. During a trip with a friend who owns a funeral home, I talked through my problem out loud—brainstorming wildly, even tossing around ridiculous ideas like students wearing clown costumes. As silly as it sounded, that creative freedom led us to the idea of a first call simulation: a role-play exercise where students would practice handling one of the most sensitive and critical conversations they would have as future funeral directors. It was simple, authentic, and closely tied to real skills they would need.

Prototyping the simulation was something I enjoyed creating. I developed a structure where I would call the students pretending to be a grieving family member. They had a worksheet to guide them, and after the call, they reflected on their experience. I offered extra credit to incentivize participation, and four students stepped up to help me test it. Watching them navigate the simulation was powerful. Even those already working in funeral homes faced unexpected challenges: managing their tone, asking the right questions, and closing the call with compassion and confidence.

Testing showed me just how much students can grow through experiential learning. Role-play wasn't just engaging; it revealed gaps in understanding that traditional assignments couldn't. Some students forgot key questions or struggled to stay composed. Others realized they needed to be clearer in setting appointment times. But what struck me most was how deeply they appreciated the experience and how much more connected they felt to the material afterward.

Through this process, I realized that design is valuable far beyond education, it's valuable to life. It teaches you to listen before assuming. It encourages you to create, to fail forward, and to iterate with humility. In teaching, this is crucial. Students aren't blank slates; they bring their own experiences, struggles, and aspirations. Good design acknowledges and builds upon that. It meets learners where they are.

Design thinking changed the way I approach my work. Moving forward, I plan to expand the simulation by adding a peer-to-peer version and a final follow-up call, offering even more opportunities for students to practice and reflect. With all that being said, I didn't just abandon the idea of improving the discussion posts. It is something that I continue to work on and I have implemented a few changes for next semester that I am eager to see play out. I refined my discussion prompts to tie them more clearly to real-world practice, so students can see the relevance immediately, not after the fact.

Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned through this course is that meaningful education isn't just about information transfer; it's about transformation. When we design thoughtfully, when we invite students, and me, to struggle, explore, and connect, we give them the opportunity to not just learn but to grow into the professionals they are becoming.

I am incredibly grateful for this experience, not just because it gave me tools to improve my teaching, but because it ignited something important in me: the joy of designing for humans, not just for outcomes. In the end, I think that's what real education, and real design, is all about.

Along with this reflection, I wanted to add something a little fun and a little out of my comfort zone. So linked is my first attempt at an infographic. It was a fun way to really sum up this class and everything that I worked on during this time.

[INFOGRAPHIC](#)