

Details

Role of Technology in Design Thinking with Dr. Sabba Quidwai - 114

In this episode, Dr. Sabba Quidwai joins me for a discussion around the role of technology in design thinking. You'll hear about why it is important to incorporate design thinking in your teaching, connections to empathy and collaboration, and some tools and activities to get you started!

Introduction

Hello there! My name is Monica Burns, I'm a former classroom teacher and now I spend my time sharing tips, strategies and activity ideas to make EdTech integration easier in your classroom. You may be familiar with my books, like Tasks Before Apps or my blog ClassTechTips.com. Whether we've met at a conference or special event, you've followed along with my EdTech tips for years, or simply joining in for the first time today, I'm so glad you're here!

In this bite-sized podcast you'll get some quick info and actionable tips to energize and elevate teaching and learning!

You can head to my website classtechtips.com/podcast for all of the show notes. That's where you'll find the transcript for each episode, links to resources, and any of the free downloads I mention.

There are a lot of exciting things happening here this summer -- new webinars, a new book, and a chance to join me and become a member of my Easy EdTech Club. Make sure to get on my newsletter list to get free resources in your inbox each week. Just go to ClassTechTips.com/Newsletter for all of the details.

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This episode is sponsored by Hall Technologies, the team behind HIVE Control cloud-based AV for any state of learning. I'm so excited to be partnering with them again and sharing their role in the EdTech space. You can check out my exclusive blog post that covers how their solution creates a seamless learning environment with various devices and technologies. Head over to halltechav.com to learn more!

Today's Intro

This week's episode is all about Design Thinking and I am so excited to have Dr. Sabba Quidwai join me today! We have known each other for several years and Sabba does amazing work around design thinking. She is a graduate of the Global Executive EdD program at the University of Southern California, and her research focus is how design thinking can prepare individuals with the mindset and skills to

thrive in a rapidly changing world. Sabba hosts a podcast, *"Sprint to Success with Design Thinking,"* where she interviews researchers and practitioners about their stories and strategies for navigating change with design thinking and thriving in today's world. We'll talk about all things design thinking in this episode, let's jump in!

Episode Transcript

Monica:

Welcome, Sabba. I am so excited to have you on today's episode of the podcast. We've known each other for a long time and just really excited to have some time today to talk about design thinking and EdTech connections. But I wanted to start off with your role in education. What does your day-to-day look like?

Sabba:

So my day-to-day involves looking at, I do education research and I basically examine schools that are using design thinking practices and looking at the impact and outcomes of those initiatives for teaching and learning.

Monica:

Wonderful. So that term, design thinking, which is such a big part of your work, and we've already mentioned as we started to record here might be a new term for listeners, or they might have heard the term design thinking, but it's not something that they're kind of using every day or part of their everyday practice. So what does that term design thinking mean? What does it look like in action?

Sabba:

Yeah, absolutely. So, design thinking, the most basic definition would be, it is a way to think about not just problems and challenges, but also a way to think about opportunities. And especially if we think about the past year there have been so many different scenarios that we have had to confront, or there may have been opportunities for something that maybe we weren't able to uncover, but there was definitely no shortage of challenges that we experienced. And a lot of times these can feel extremely overwhelming. And what design thinking does, yes, it's there to help you solve those problems, but it really gives you a framework for taking that challenge that might be overwhelming, that opportunity that may feel vague or confusing and gives you an action plan. It breaks it down step by step by step to take something really overwhelming and make it very, very manageable.

Monica:

So then when a teacher might be thinking around what problem solving looks like in their classroom right now, or they might have some students that come to them

really concerned about something happening in their community, whether it's in their school building or somewhere else outside of the classroom or outside of the school walls, where does design thinking come into play for tackling some of those issues students might be passionate about? Do you have any stories of design thinking in action that could illustrate that?

Sabba:

Yeah, absolutely. So let's start with a student comes in and they have the challenge that they're dealing with or they see from being in their community that they're curious about. One of the great things about design thinking is that it really allows you to take a step back. And that's the first thing that you're able to engage with in a conversation where somebody has come to you with something, "Okay, let's take a step back," because a lot of times when we do see a challenge, whether it's personal, or community or anything at all, we tend to jump immediately to solutions. I see this problem and this is what I think people should be doing, or this is what I think I could be doing. And a lot of times, even if you have the greatest solution in mind, if it doesn't align with what actually is the missing component that is causing that challenge to begin with, your solution no matter how wonderful it might be won't necessarily help move this particular challenge towards becoming something more solvable.

Sabba:

So really the first step is like, "Okay, let's talk to people." So if you've come and you've observed a problem, let's find some people that might be open to a conversation to tell us, "Okay, what is this actually like for you," as if you're in this scenario, how are you feeling about this? It's called [inaudible00:03:44] just starting with like an empathy map or looking a little bit at someone's journey in that situation. And the best way I've ever phrased it is that when you begin with empathy, a lot of times what you think is challenged by what you learned. And I think a lot of times this communicates for a teacher too like sometimes we make assumptions about our students, "Oh, you're not doing your homework because of this reason or this isn't happening because of this reason."

Sabba:

But when you take that step back and you dig in a little bit deeper and ask them why is this happening, or what made you feel like this is something that you didn't want to be working on, or how can they support you better? Just engaging in that conversation allows you to oftentimes to identify a gap that that individual may not be able to identify for themselves. It's really hard for us in our personal context sometimes because we are in the challenge to say, "Okay, this is what's not working," but when you bring in that outside perspective, kind of call that beginner's mind, somebody else is able to hear you say something that triggers a thought, "Well, have you considered X? Have you thought about this in another way?" Or it gives you a

chance to take that trigger and go deeper to uncover a deeper why, that again, may not be seen or even known on the surface.

Monica:

Yeah. I love that connection to empathy too. Krista Leh was on the podcast a few weeks ago and we talked a lot about SEL and what it means to embed some of those skills, not as something that's a standalone or just during one part of the day, but within some of these types of activities that you're talking about today where kids can take on the role or think behind the scenes about what someone might be facing as they go off to solve a particular problem. So before we talk a little bit about the technology connection or where technology might play a role within a design thinking process, a lot of the listeners of the podcast work in K-12, so working with a wide range of educators, they're in a coaching role, or they might be in an elementary or secondary position. Does design thinking look different in different places or in different content areas? Does it look different with a fourth grader than an 11th grader or are there some common threads between all of those experiences?

Sabba:

Of course, it's going to look different and different scenarios in terms of the depth of conversation, perhaps that you might be able to have, or some of the tools you might use or how you might facilitate and start the conversation. We're not going to bring fourth and fifth graders around the table to have a formal meeting per se. It might be a bit more casual. But one of the things that I think it shares in common is the art of conversation. It's forcing us to step back and instead of judging a situation or instead of, again, projecting our own solutions, which is something we're just naturally taught to do. It's, "Problem solve this, Problem solve it." It's just how we're trained to do things. It really, I think, no matter what situation you're in hasn't pressed pause. Right? And I think, Adam Grant's latest book, *Think Again*, I think he makes a beautiful case for how we do this.

Sabba:

I love his analogy that he gives where he says, "We are either preachers or politicians," and I forgot the last one he says, but there's these three groups of people and if you think about it, it's like, "Wow, it's actually kind of true." We're always advocating for what we think is right. Not out of maliciousness or out of anything awful, but just because that's what we're excited about. And really what design thinking does is allows you to build momentum and capacity, but creating a culture of enthusiasm that takes into account everyone's needs. At the end of the day, most people share the same vision, they share a lot of the same goals, they share a lot of the same desires, what we want life to look like, learning to look like, all these types of things, yet, how we get there is different. And I think that's the unifying factor that design thinking has. It allows us to better understand one another so that we can come together to create that alignment.

Monica:

I like that idea of pressing pause to listen so much. I was working with a group of educators earlier this week talking about persuasive writing and opinion writing and all the things that we know students love to share. "I feel this way, I think this thing, or this is the best, or this is my favorite." And even within those sorts of situations we can get caught up with the sharing piece as opposed to the listening piece. So I think in having that culture of, we question things, we listen to each other, we really pause to think about those different perspectives, just checks so many boxes. So I love that framing that you just shared. The podcast we often are looking at technology strategies, or tools, or resources, and we're talking today a bit with a bit of technology or an EdTech lens. So I'm wondering what role does technology play in design thinking? Is it part of the process? Is it adjacent to the process? Is it essential or not necessary all the time? Where does technology really come into play when design thinking is happening in a classroom?

Sabba:

Yeah, I think that's one of the most interesting parts of this. It's like we're talking about how might we do these things, yet technology doesn't necessarily play an integral role in the design thinking process. I always like to recommend that people check [inaudible 00:08:55]. I think a lot of us fall into what I call like the hexagon mentality. Design thinking is just jumping through these six hexagons, empathy, defining ideation, prototyping, testing, but really design thinking is about building a mindset towards becoming comfortable with ambiguity. And I think it's something that we all really can share and relate to now, given everything we've been through last year. We all went through a similar health pandemic. We all went through the same health pandemic, yet we each felt it so differently. So one of the things that design thinking I think gives you is that empowerment to not feel so helpless in your situation.

Sabba:

And really where my work in design thinking was inspired was from a quote by Erik Brynjolfsson. He's the coauthor of *The Second Machine Age*. But in his TED Talk, he says, "Technology is not destiny, we shape our destiny." So the question that my research examines is if we have the power to shape our destiny, what does that look like? Because technology really is a little bit of the afterthought. Yes, it's there and yes, there are tremendous opportunities that just the internet alone has opened up, yet only a segment of the population actually knows how to take advantage of those.

Sabba:

So that's really the gap that I think design thinking fills in is, "Okay, I have all of these things around me, but how is that actually changing the way I live, the way I work, the way I spend my time and who I'm spending my time with, where I'm spending

my time? And just, am I doing things that bring me joy?" I think design thinking gives you the luxury to re-examine your life and say, "What is it that I actually want to do?" Which is such a vague overwhelming question is so hard to answer, but gives you the structure, the guidance and the mindset development to actually take a bit more ownership over not feeling so helpless as you ride these waves of change.

Monica:

Yeah. And that idea of technology being the tool, not necessarily driving what you are doing or dictating the process, or the steps or how it needs to happen. I like that idea that technology being a tool or the vehicle to help get there, or get to that next step as opposed to really letting it take over and just having those kind of big questions I think is so important.

Sabba:

Yeah, absolutely. And speaking of students, I'd really love to focus in for a moment just on the high school student. Obviously I shared with you, I just graduated. So I went back to school, got my doctorate. And it was really fascinating to me how school back when I was getting my undergrad and masters back in 2007 was absolutely not that much more different than what school was like a decade later in 2018. But one of the really interesting things, I obviously wasn't really thinking about design thinking or any of these things and a lot of these technologies even that we have like social media and whatnot, we're all just starting up. You could just start to register for an account when I was graduating.

Sabba:

But one of the things that design thinking really allowed me to do was take that traditional experience, but say, "Oh, this is what I'm interested in doing. How am I going to design that process for myself to reach the goals it is that I have?" So again, I think especially if we're looking at high school students, just even giving them the confidence to know how to compliment their traditional experience without having to wait for somebody to provide it to them is probably one of the biggest gifts that it gives you.

Monica:

Yeah. Especially for students where when you gave this example with the social media piece, we don't know what it's going to be available 5 or 10 years ago. If you had said to me, "Monica, will you jump in a Clubhouse room with me in the first week of May?" as we're recording this last year, I would've said, "What is Clubhouse? Are you okay? What's this app? What's going on?" But using the transferable skills that we want high school students want all students to have really sets them up for being in these different spaces. I love that example of just wanting them to make sure that they have those experiences or us wanting to make sure they have those experiences so they can take into a lot of different situations.

Monica:

So thinking about this concept of the process behind design thinking, brainstorming, project planning, asking for feedback and input are all parts of the design process. And there's plenty of tools that allow us to jump in, and give a comment or add in that way. But do you have any tech-friendly strategies or tools to use during these parts of the process?

Sabba:

Yeah, absolutely. I'll share two that I feel if somebody was like, "Huh, let's give this a try at our next meeting," or, "Yeah. I have something. Let's play around and see how this works." I have two that I'll share. They're super specific. Number one is Mural. I think there are so many digital whiteboard tools out there. I absolutely love Mural for its simplicity and its ease of use. A lot of times when you see a blank canvas, it can be so obviously endless in terms of possibilities, but also really overwhelming because it's like, "Well, what do I even start?" And what I love about Mural is they have a library of templates. So you mentioned brainstorming. If I wanted to do a brainstorming activity, I could go into Mural, I could go into the library, I could search out brainstorming and it would give me these templates that I can modify.

Sabba:

So I could be like, "I love this piece. I'm going to leave all of this, my people aren't ready for this quite yet." And I'm going to start there. So Mural would absolutely be the number one tool that I would recommend for facilitating this. The second one I'm going to recommend is an actual activity. I know a lot of times people will do the wallet activity and things like that, but those don't necessarily always relate to the challenge at hand. So one of my favorites is something called the Lightning Decision Jam and it's by a company called AJ&Smart. And within an hour you can go from challenge to action plan. And I always challenge people to try it because people are like, "In one hour what's going to happen?" But that to me is the beauty of the design thinking process is that it gives you that step by step by step framework to take what's in your head and to put it out into the world.

Sabba:

And I think that's really where the biggest roadblock is for so many of us when we're thinking about challenges or opportunities that we're excited to explore we get stuck in our head with fear, with doubt and just it takes a little train of thought to get you so overwhelmed that you're just like, "Oh, I can't do this right now." But what the Lightning Decision Jam does is it step-by-step lays out a map for you to go and answer very specific questions. And when you've gone from listing out the problems like what's not working, what's working to having an action plan... You will... Go try it for yourself. It's a really fantastic tool.

Monica:

Oh, that's wonderful. That's one I haven't tried out before. So I know with all the resources and ideas that you're sharing everything we'll put links to in the show notes so that people can click and go out and try it if they haven't seen Mural in action before. I think that's a great one. So I'm so glad that you mentioned that because sometimes when we tackle something new or something that feels... we've used terms like ambiguity, right. There's a lot of flexibility within this idea of design thinking. So, I think giving people some resources, going through the process, looking at a framework and deciding, if we're tackling this problem as a class, if students have something that they've shown they're really interested and excited about, there's a way for us to really thread in some of those transferable skills, some of the SEL components that we know are so crucial, especially now with many schools making more of a commitment to that.

Monica:

So just such great action items for people to consider. Sabba, I want to make sure people know more about your work, where to find you, where to listen to you, where to connect with you. Can you share with us a little bit more about anything you're working on now or the best place for listeners to go to stay connected with your work?

Sabba:

Absolutely. I want to share just one more thing if I could. I think a lot of times when we hear these strategies, our immediate reaction is to be like, "Okay, how can I go apply this to what I'm teaching?" How can I go apply this to, you mentioned SEL and all these areas? The one thing I do encourage people to do is to first try it for themselves. So if you are a teacher listening, one of the things I always encourage people to explore is this idea of collaboration. Right now, this way in which we are so often working in isolation, it was one of the most interesting pieces that came out of the research was how Design 39, the school that I spent three years for the researching, one of the fundamental changes they made was how they work together as educators.

Sabba:

So instead of teaching in isolation, they really use the design thinking process to be like, "Okay, can we use our time to do things together?" So I just really encourage people, first examine your own problems. Use this for yourself, make your situation one that's bringing you joy and then look at how you can pass it on to other people. So that's just one to add in there. But I think the one resource I would share, because it's probably the one that I'm most excited about, it's an extension of my dissertation I knew a couple of things. Going back to school was really like an empathy experiment for me in part, wanting to explore what it was like to be a student with all of these new tools and everything we have access to.

Sabba:

So obviously I was like, not everyone's going to be into reading a dissertation, but I created a podcast that is a compliment of the dissertation where I go in and I interview the people that I cited. And it's just a Testament to the world that we live in today that you don't just have to read about something or just cite somebody in a paper. You can reach out to these people online and interview them and go deeper with them. So the podcast really is an exploration of looking at how people are using design thinking in the business world, in the research world and just in different areas of their own lives as entrepreneurs, as practitioners, as people from all walks of life. But one of the great things that I always love to ask people in the podcast interviews is what advice they would give to young people. And I think it's really fascinating to hear from individuals that a lot of times at conferences that we go to and whatnot, we don't always get these voices. So that's sort of the one thing I might recommend is those stories are pretty awesome.

Monica:

Oh, that's wonderful. So I will make sure to link out to that podcast. What a wonderful format for just going deeper with some of the people whose things I know from my background in doing my dissertation all that. Sometimes things feel a little dry or two dimensional, but that idea that you could have those conversations with people whose work you spend a lot of time looking at. It's just so wonderful and what a great format and saw that I will make sure to link out to all the resources we talked about today where people can stay connected with you. And I just really appreciate your time and your generosity with sharing these ideas with listeners today.

Sabba:

Yeah. Thanks for having me Monica. So great to catch up with you.

It was so wonderful to have Sabba on the podcast today and I loved the stories she shared and the insight she provided. Let's finish up the episode like we always do, by making this EdTech easy.

So let's make this EdTech easy...

First, take a step back.

Next, press pause to listen.

Then, build a mindset that embraces ambiguity.

Finally, use collaborative online spaces.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode on classtechtips.com/podcast including all of the ways to connect with Sabba!

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Outro

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Episode Resources

- Check out Dr. Sabba Quidwai's [website](#) and [podcast](#)
- Follow Dr. Sabba Quidwai on [Instagram](#)
- [Mural](#) (Visual digital workspace)
- Try out the [Lightning Decision Jam Activity](#) (See it in action [here](#))
- [Social Emotional Learning in the Digital World with Krista Leh](#) (Podcast Episode)
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