Conducting Empathy Interviews - A Resource

*"The main tenet of Design Thinking is **empathy** for the people you're trying to design for. Leadership is exactly the same thing - building empathy for the people you're entrusted to help."*

~David Kelley, co-founder of IDEO and author of Creative Confidence

*"Empathy must be the driving force behind changes made in our schools. To effectively move our organizations forward, we must be **willing to listen, compromise and meet people where they are.** Empathy allows for honest and transparent communication, which can be both frustrating and uncomfortable."*

~Design Thinking for School Leaders by Gallagher and Thordarson

Sample Empathy Interview "Script"

- Tell me about……
- What was your worst _____ experience this year? Why was it the worst?
- Tell me about a time when _____really helped you? What did that look like?
- Why? Why did you do/say/think that?
- How does this compare to other schools/programs you know of?
- What do you like about _____? What do you dislike?
- How would you describe this ____ to a friend?
- If you had 3 magic wishes to improve this product, what would they be?
- Really? And why was that? What do you think would help with that?
- Can you say more about that? Tell me more?
- What were you feeling then? Why?

Tips:

Consider "Designing to the Edge" or interviewing "extreme users"

Having a partner or two to help you record and take notes is helpful. More than 3 interviewers becomes overwhelming though.

Come with prepared questions but they are just ideas to get started - don't be afraid to deviate.

Start with broad questions - about the person's life, values, habits, etc before asking more specific questions that relate to your design challenge.

Make sure to write down what the person says - not what you *think* they mean. This process is about **hearing** what people are saying. If you are relying on a translator, make sure s/he understands that you want direct quotes (not the gist) of what people are saying.

What you hear is important - but be sure to observe the person's body language and surroundings and see what you can learn from the context. If you have permission, consider taking photos.