



Empathy Maps and Personas

Situation/Statement:


Students will create an original fashion design for a formal event based on a specific client

Say explain design elements, describe events, describe formal events, describe the client, academic vocabulary like textiles, ask questions to client		Do draw by hand, Use digital websites, apply elements of design, write, fine motor skills such as cutting, drawing, coloring, researching clients on digital resources
Think what is a formal event? who am I designing for? what are the needs for my design? How will I use my cultural definition of fashion? what is formal to my family? who is my client? how do I know what they like?		Feel what do I think looks good? How do I know what is appropriate for formal events? what materials should I use? how do I plan for the client's ethnicity and gender?

personas

<p>Student living in poverty</p> 	<p>Personal Background:</p> <p>Students who are socio-economically disadvantaged living in smaller, rented homes with more mobility and less parent involvement. Experience with formal events is limited. Students may also come from culturally diverse backgrounds and may not have the means to provide new clothing items.</p>	<p>Academic focus:</p> <p>Student is taking the course to complete the required credits for electives. Student does not plan to pursue post secondary education, and has limited English fluency in writing or speaking.</p>
<p>Interests/Motivations:</p> <p>The student is very proud of their cultural background and prefers to create products that are culturally relevant. Student has an interest in fashion but little experience with design or technology tools for design.</p>	<p>Frustrations, Primary Challenges, Roadblocks:</p> <p>The student has little experience with design or technology tools for design. As an English language learner, academic vocabulary is a challenge, as is the interview or research process to obtain client needs. Challenges include lack of prior knowledge and experience with formal events and protocol, cultural differences and language barriers. Frustrations include finding methods of communication for clarifying questions and peer support or group work</p>	

personas

<p>Student with intellectual disability</p> 	<p>Personal Background:</p> <p>Student has an intellectual disability with limited fine motor control. Student is supported by a para-professional. The student has a small, very involved family who travel often and bring him to events, some of which are formal. The student speaks fluently, and uses assistive technology to type and read.</p>	<p>Academic focus:</p> <p>Student is enrolled in this elective course as a break from an inclusive environment. Social emotional development goals are the primary focus, aligned with supporting any relevant IEP goals</p>
<p>Interests/Motivations:</p> <p>The student is an avid sports fan and enjoys drawing. He enjoys working in groups, but requires frequent breaks. He is very social.</p>	<p>Frustrations, Primary Challenges, Roadblocks:</p> <p>Primary challenges include tasks that involve fine motor skills, or silent individual tasks. Frustrations arise with prolonged tasks that involve unfamiliar technology. The student prefers to sit with a group and work with a general education peer. Primary challenges include initiating a performance task and following multi-step oral directions without visuals.</p>	

The process of creating an empathy map and corresponding personas has been impactful in identifying personal bias and identifying opportunity gaps for traditionally underserved students. The academic content is focused on Fashion Design 1, a high school course in Career and Technology, available for students in ninth through twelfth grade. Students will be instructed to create an original design for a formal event, based on a specific client. Differentiation is built into this assignment, allowing for the choice of event and client, as well as working in groups or individually. The process of instruction for the academic vocabulary required to complete this task will be taught via nearpod, small group with direct instruction, or video depending on student preference and learning style. The assignment listed on my empathy map serves as a formative assessment.

The process of completing the empathy map was enlightening as I reflected on the individual needs and challenges for the two chosen subgroups. When considering the specific needs of students living in poverty, it is pertinent that we apply sensitivity and understanding as we require students to work within a potentially unfamiliar scenario. In addition, many students in lower socio-economic living situations may have high rates of mobility and limited parent involvement and support. Physical needs such as food and shelter may not be consistent and mobility may cause additional absences or gaps in learning. Language barriers may exist and cause frustration with verbal or written instructions, as well as written feedback and collaborative group work. We must also consider the motivations and interests of the students, and the depth of knowledge required to fulfil their personal and academic goals (Valenzuela, J, 2021). For a student struggling with food insecurity or housing issues, grace must be applied when assessing, especially in the case of extended absences. A focus on the essential standards and their connection to student values, interests, and goals is pivotal to ensure engagement and motivation.

Allowing the student to access multiple means of engagement, representation and action, and expression through Universal Design for Learning increases engagement, supports connections between curriculum and culture, and encourages student autonomy in the classroom. Many of the bilingual students I have worked with in the past are proud of their cultural heritage and desire to make connections between learning and their specific ethnic group. In a course such as Fashion Design, students have the ability to design using a number of variables, and are encouraged to include components of design that have personal significance to them. Students with limited prior knowledge of the specific content or language barriers should be provided opportunities to work in groups, write or speak in their native language or use translating tools, and choose alternate methods of assessment. These students must also be given equitable access to technology and design tools; for example, if a student in a low socio-economic group wishes to use digital tools but does not have a 1:1 device, one should be provided for them to complete this learning task.

As an electives teacher, another persona we often design classroom instruction for are students with intellectual disabilities, oftentimes with additional physical disabilities or challenges. Considerations should be made to enhance inclusiveness, not just by simply providing access to seating amongst general education peers, but providing opportunities for collaboration within rich and immersive learning experiences (Burch and Munoz, 2023). The student should be given opportunities to orally participate in discussions and debates, and written tasks should be limited due to fine motor difficulties. Collaboration with special education teachers and paraprofessionals ensures that the student with an intellectual disability can participate to the maximum extent with their peers. For example, if one

of the student's interests is drawing, adaptations should be made to the formative assessment to include student strengths and interests. Accommodations provided in the student's Individualized Education Program may include shortened assignments, reading assistance, assistive technology, or extended time to complete the assessment.

The impact of creating an empathy map truly lies in the shifting of perspectives to student-centered learning based on the unique skills and abilities of specific students. Gronsbeth, Michela and Ugwu describe the learner profile for each student as individual as DNA or a fingerprint; the best practices for instruction and assessment will always begin and end with the individual student's needs (Gronsbeth, Michela, and Ugwu, 2025). The empathy maps guide educators to plan and create the most inclusive and safe environment for learning, ensuring that each learning experience is culturally competent and authentic.

References:

Burch, A. and Munoz, K. (2023, February 7). *Amplify Student Voices by Journey*

Mapping Their Experiences. Global Online Academy. Retrieved from

<https://globalonlineacademy.org/insights/articles/amplify-student-voices-by-journey-mapping>

Gronsbeth, S., Michela, L. and Ugwu, L. (2025). *Designing for Diverse Learners*.

Edtechbooks. Retrieved from

https://edtechbooks.org/id/designing_for_diverse_learners

Valenzuela, Jorge. (2021, April 12). *How a Simple Visual Tool Can Help Teachers*

Connect with Students. Edutopia. Retrieved from

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-simple-visual-tool-can-help-teachers-connect-students>