Encountering my creativity

An experience in Cyprus for learning and developing projects using the Design Thinking Process

THIS IS THE TEAM!

For one week we were a beautiful, international family coming from NYC, Hungary, Cyprus, Spain, Galicia, Lithuania, Afghanistan/ Germany, Russia/ Germany, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey.

On march 2022 I had the opportunity to attend a Training Course in the beautiful island of Cyprus. There, we learnt about the process of creating projects through a journey of personal and professional connection with ourselves. The first step on this life-changing experience was reconnecting with my creativity, letting go of mental blockages and raising my identity through the question: *Who am I?*

The aim of this material is guiding you through the process of Design Thinking and giving you some ideas that you can implement in Early Childhood and Primary Education in order to create meaningful projects for both teachers and children. Let's start!
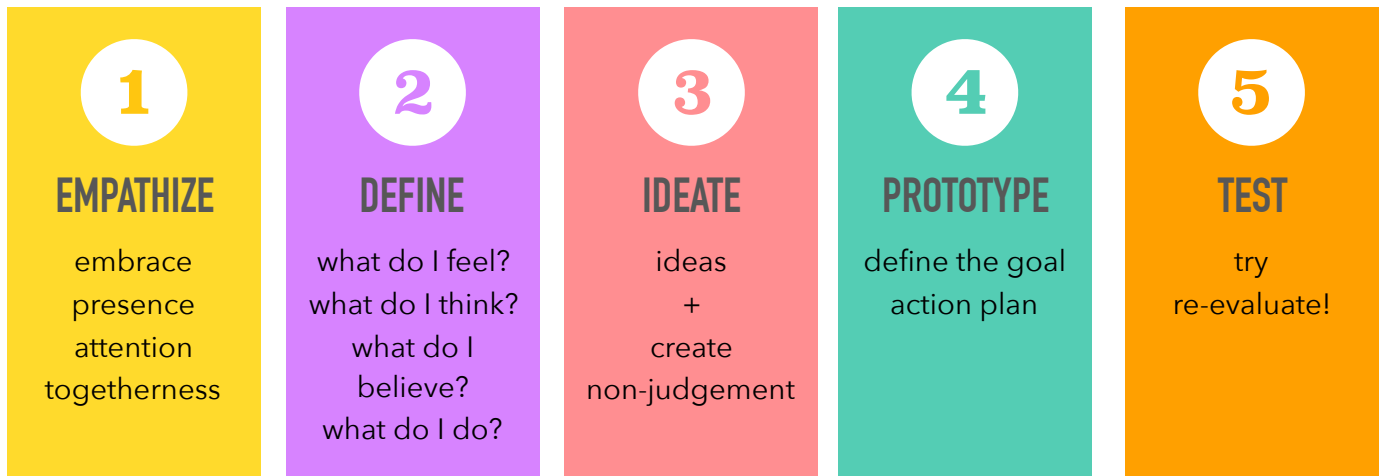

Hi! This is me!
My name is María and I come from Spain. I am an Early Childhood Educator. I am very interested in creative education, positive psychology and upbringing in contact with nature.

Why Design Thinking?
In order to come up with innovative solutions, one must adopt a designer's mindset and approach the problem from the user's perspective

First, let's take a look to the five steps of Thinking Design and some of the key ideas:

1 EMPATHIZE	2 DEFINE	3 IDEATE	4 PROTOTYPE	5 TEST
embrace presence attention togetherness	what do I feel? what do I think? what do I believe? what do I do?	ideas + create non-judgement	define the goal action plan	try re-evaluate!

Let me tell you a story…

In one of the first workshops, we had to imagine how it would look like to reconnect with our creativity. Here's what I came up with:

The door is there. I still do not know what is inside neither of the passage or of myself. I come to approach the door as a blank space. Then my imagination starts to paint, build and reframe this door which is starting to become more and more tangible.

There is a mirror.

At first I am afraid to even get close to this wooden door. There is an energetic force which is pushing me towards it. I finally feel the handler and I open it.

Empty space.

And then, a warm light starts to fill up the space. It is filled only by my own energy: nothing that has to do with the power of others over myself.

It is an infinite space.

Suddenly, an eagle comes directly towards me in a very determined and confident way. I was not expecting this presence. It flies to a nearby olive tree. I am very expectant of what will happen next.

An olive tree is rooted on the ground for a very long time before its branches even start to develop. The growth happens under the surface before we, as humans, even call it a tree.

Before it is just a plant, something we do not give as much importance as the final result: the olives.

But before olives, branches, leaves and growth there has to be a comforting and secure soil to attach the roots to.

Same with humans.

I came to the realization that we are closer to trees than to computers. We are not separated beings from trees, animals or land: we are nature.
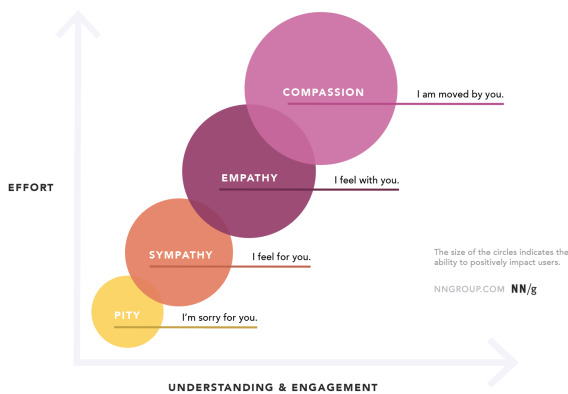

Sometimes, we forget our roots and believe that our life is all about tasks, cables and screens when, in reality, is about **roots, branches and olives.**

(1) EMPATHIZE

What is empathy?

from the Greek word empatheia ("physical affection, passion, partiality") which comes from en ("in, at") + pathos ("feeling")

COMPASSION — I am moved by you.

EMPATHY — I feel with you.

SYMPATHY — I feel for you.

PITY — I'm sorry for you.

EFFORT

UNDERSTANDING & ENGAGEMENT

The size of the circles indicates the ability to positively impact users.

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Empathy has four main characteristics:

| PERSPECTIVE TAKING | STAYING OUT OF JUDGEMENT |

| RECOGNIZING THE OTHER PERSON'S FEELINGS | COMMUNICATING THE OTHER'S FEELINGS BACK |

How to nurture empathy with children

#1 SUPPORT
Provide children with the support they need to develop strong self-regulation skills

#2 UNDERSTAND
Understand how feelings of guilt and shame can affect a child's empathic responses

#3 OPPORTUNITIES
Seize everyday opportunities to switch on the child's empathy mode

#4 HELP
Help kids discover what they have in common with other people

#4 OPENESS
Talk openly about biases and injustice

#5 PRACTICE
Nurture perspective-taking through exercises and group discussion

"Empathy has no script. There is no right way or wrong way to do it. It's simply listening, holding space, withholding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of 'You're not alone.'"

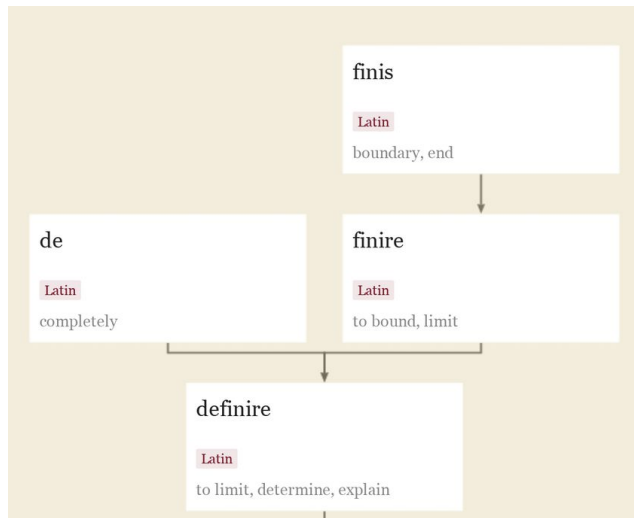BRENÉ BROWN

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE…

Brené Brown, an american researcher known in particular for her research on shame, vulnerability, and leadership explains the difference between empathy and sympathy on a short video.
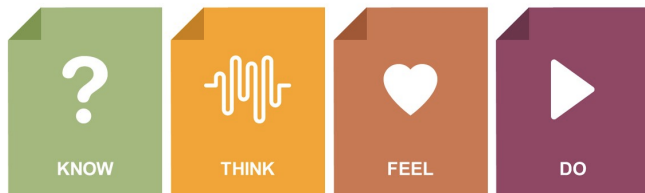
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw

2 DEFINE

What is defining?

	finis
	Latin
	boundary, end

de	finire
Latin	Latin
completely	to bound, limit

	definire
	Latin
	to limit, determine, explain

Defining is all about understanding what it is that you know, you think, you feel and you do.

?	⁓	♥	▶
KNOW	THINK	FEEL	DO

In this part of the process...

First, we had to delineate what makes us who we are.

Second, we had to think about what is it that we want to keep, transform and get rid of.

Third, with the information we had gathered about ourselves we had to determine:

I NEED TO FIND A WAY TO...

BECAUSE...

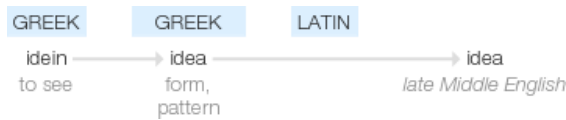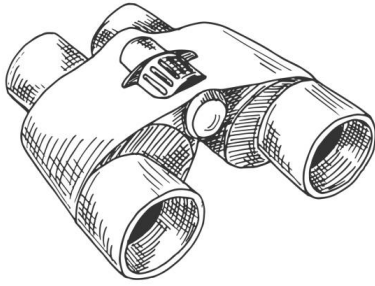## Why is it positive that children learn to set goals?

It teaches them to take responsibility for their own behaviors and learning

It promotes a "can-do" attitude

It forms a powerful lifelong habit

How to help children set effective goals?

LET THEM CHOOSE — What's something you wish you could achieve?

DISCUSS THE PURPOSE — What do you think is the greatest benefit? How can this help others?

BREAK IT INTO SMALLER STEPS — Use a "goal ladder"

BRAINSTORM POTENTIAL OBSTACLES — If you feel like giving up, what will you do instead?

Goal-setting for kids by Big Life Journal

3 IDEATE

What is ideation?

GREEK   GREEK   LATIN

idein   →   idea   →   idea
to see   form,   *late Middle English*
            pattern

This part of the process is about seeing and *creating, generating and communicating* ideas

First, we had to contemplate and think about the situations that:

Killed our creativity

For me, it was judgement, stress, strict timing and overcrowded situations.

Awakens my creativity individually

Personally, I feel like nature, walking, music and art, as well as having time for myself awaken my creativity.

and in a group

I chose environment without technology, time to discuss, trust and cooperation and active listening.

What kind of ideas did we come up with?

what I already had in mind

a similar alternative

if I had zero restrictions

if I was unable to do the previous ones

wild card! I choose

How to build ideation with children

by Rebecca Berry, director at Developmental Pathways for Kids

practice visualization

story-telling

describing stories, environments, etc.

making pictures using blocks

imagining situations with closed eyes

asking questions about making object or activity changes

4 PROTOTYPE

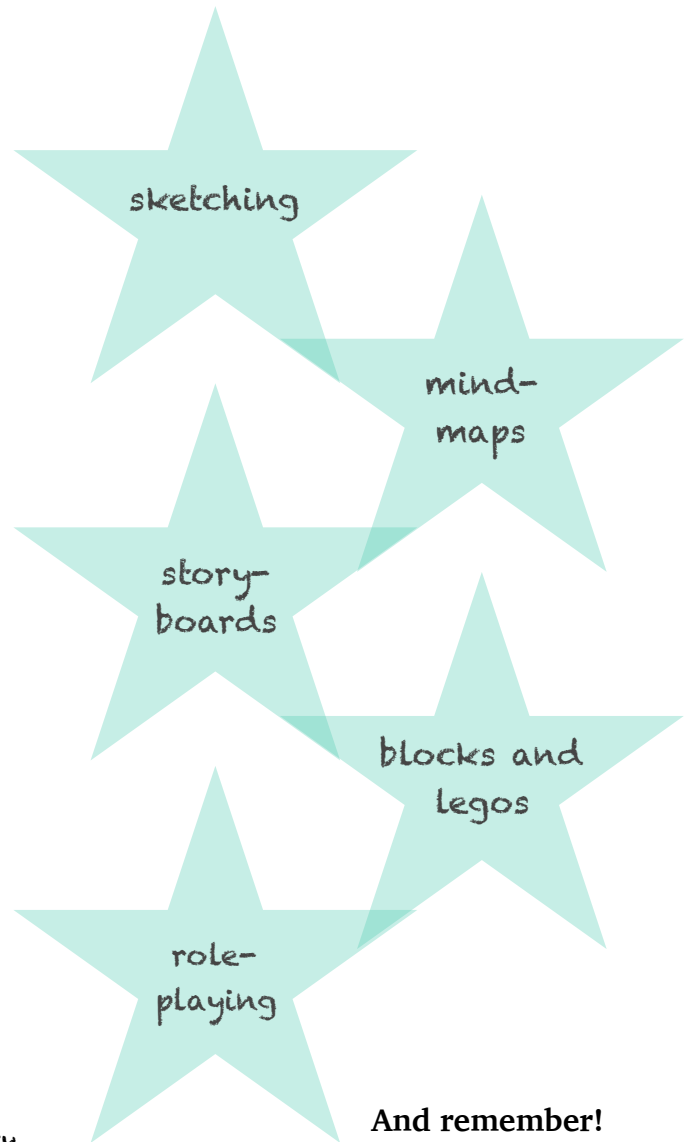## From **fixed mindset** to **growth** mindset

Often times we struggle with fears and insecurities when making changes.

All these anxieties, fears and struggles keep us in our own *cocoon,* away from growing and learning. For example, mine looks like this:

anxiety about the future

lack of self-confidence

fear of judgement

"grown-up" way of living

expectations from society

expectations from my family

What methods can we use with children to prototype?

sketching

mind-maps

story-boards

blocks and legos

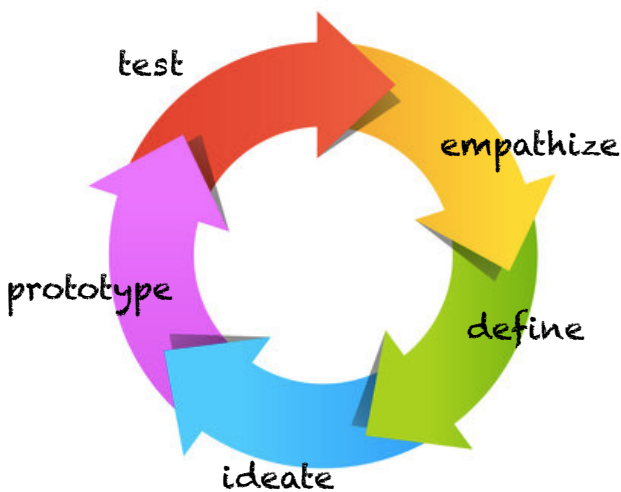role-playing

And remember!

There's no such thing as a bad idea!

5 TEST

How does testing look like?

Remember the process is not linear and you can always go back to the previous steps.

It looks rather more like this:

test
empathize
prototype
define
ideate

Design Thinking is a flexible and iterative process that can be messy and disorienting to those who are unfamiliar. While there are no fixed, sequential steps to follow, there are nonetheless basic building blocks behind each stage that help you build human-centered solutions to the problems your users face.

Teo Yu Siang and
Interaction Design Foundation

Planning a Test for/ with children

which one they prefer?

compare alternatives

avoid over-explaining

let them experience

what are you thinking right now?

ask them to talk through the experience

observe

mistakes are valuable learning opportunities

what do you mean when you say...?

ask follow up questions

how did that make you feel?

why?

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You can also participate in Youth Exchanges, Training Courses and Voluntary Opportunities thanks to the Erasmus + program!

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Resources used

1 Teaching empathy: evidence for fostering empathic awareness in children

2 4 Steps for Helping Your Child Set Effective Goals (Plus a Bonus Tip).

3 Ideation by Rebecca Berry (2020) http:// www.developmentalpathways.com/ ideation

4 Teo Yu Siang and Interaction Design Foundation Prototyping: Learn Eight Common Methods and Best Practices

5 Teo Yu Siang and Interaction Design Foundation Stage 5 in the Design Thinking Process: Test