

# Young Children as Program Co-Designers:

Using Design Thinking to  
Tackle Wicked Problems

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**Handout for this session**

**<http://dlab.us/decwicked2015>**

*"Every problem interacts with other problems and is therefore part of a set of interrelated problems, a system of problems...."*

*...I choose to call such a system a mess."*

Ackoff, 1974

PART I

wicked problems

problems you can't understand  
until you try to solve it

problems that have solutions  
that aren't right or wrong

problems that are essentially  
unique and novel every time



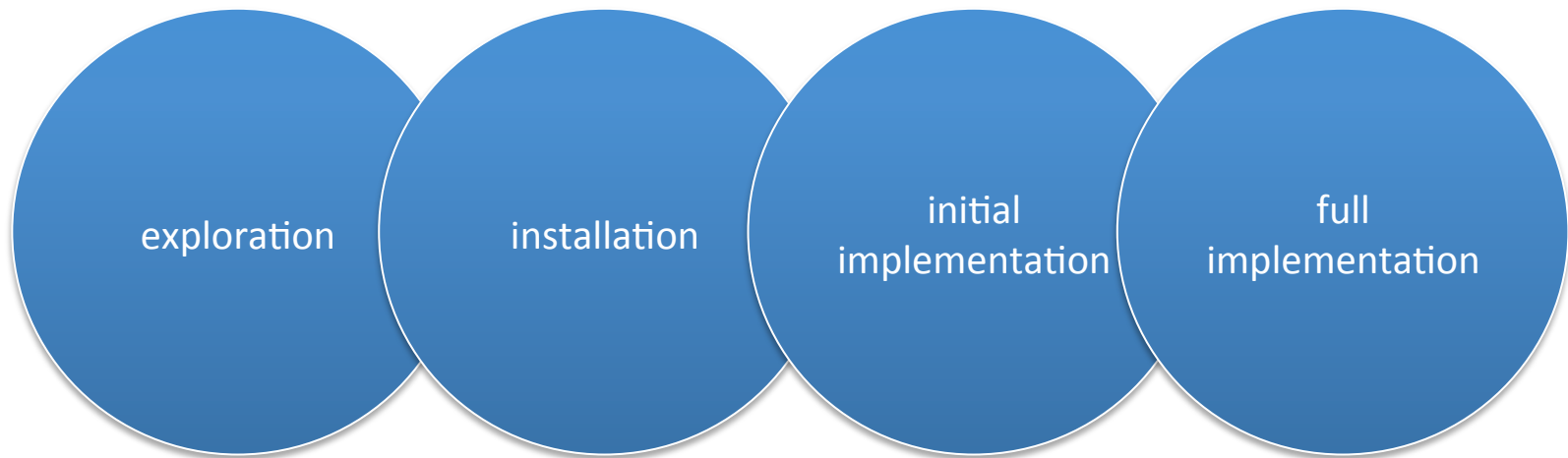
do you face problems like these?

how have we addressed wicked problems?

# implementation science

**NIRN, 2013**

# implementation science





design thinking

design thinking

human centered design

early childhood settings



are filled with humans



**HUMAN  
CENTERED**



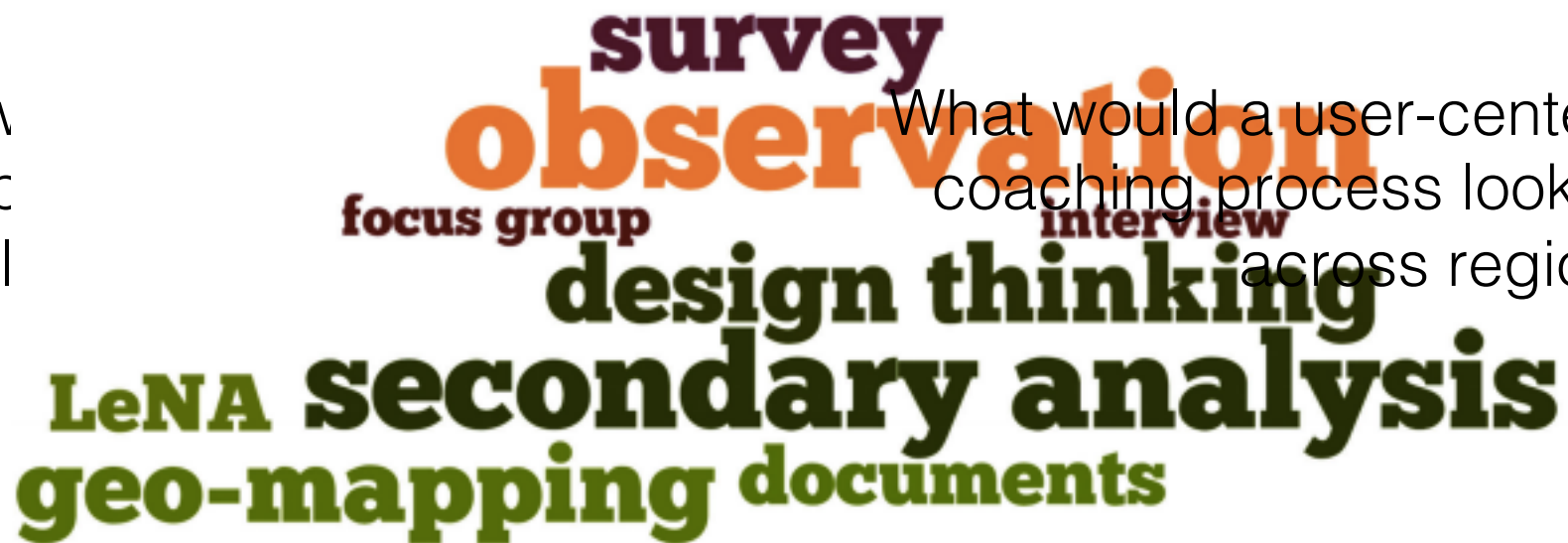
**RADICAL  
COLLABORATION**

# PART II

design thinking in action

# Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge

How  
can  
children



A word cloud of research methods. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, with 'observation' being the largest and most central. Other words include 'survey', 'design thinking', 'secondary analysis', 'geo-mapping', 'documents', 'focus group', and 'interview'. The colors range from dark purple to green.

**survey**  
**observation**  
**focus group** **interview**  
**design thinking**  
**LeNA secondary analysis**  
**geo-mapping documents**

What would a user-centered  
coaching process look like  
across regions?

University of Colorado-Denver

change

making people's lives better

social justice

honoring perspectives

action research

practice





$$2 + 2 = 5$$

④ child-centered

↓ family  
educator  
school  
community

④ who is  
at the  
table?  
collaboration  
educational  
actors

Nat'l  
④ just do it  
Prototype something  
↓  
get feedback







Why design thinking at CU-Denver?

let's try it out

Whose Life?

Assume a  
beginner's mindset

Don't judge  
Question everything  
Be truly curious  
Find patterns  
Lose your agenda  
What are they doing?  
Why are they doing it that way?





# Gerry

**Age and Education-Stage:** 5 years old, transitional kindergarten – could have attended regular kindergarten.

**Family Situation:** adopted; lives with 2 moms, younger brother (biological and adopted as well), 2 dogs.

**Hobbies and Interests:** Just started piano classes and seems to really enjoy them.

**Key Values:** Being liked by others, being valued and cared for.

**Books:** He loves pretty much any book, loves to be read too! Creepy Carrots is a favorite! Loves books on CD or listening to stories on headphones.

**Music:** The GoNoodles website.

**Personal Strengths and Personal Challenges Strengths:** Social, Enjoys learning, affectionate, good sense of humor.

**Challenges:** Extremely Impulsive, Has a hard time sitting still, needs space, can be quick to anger.

**Sources of pleasure:** Loves playing with water! I think this is because he is an extreme sensory seeker and loves anything that is messy. If he doesn't have a cognitive piece to go with the messy play it can rev his engine up quickly!

**Habit He Wants to Kick:** Impulsivity...I think he would like to kick this because it sometimes causes issues with others and causes friends to not want to play with him. Gerry has such a need to be accepted that he gets disappointed when others voice a desire to not play with him.

## PART III

discussion: walking in the shoes of children