# Lessons Learned Report

## Author: UPF, SDS, Newschool, KEF, Teach the Future

# Content

# About the project

The D-TIPS project – Design Thinking In Primary Schools – aims to equip primary school teachers with the appropriate tools and methods to convey the design thinking approach to primary education students in Europe. The development of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, such as critical thinking, reflection, self-regulation, and collaboration, are high on the agenda of all schools. Through developing these skills in students, schools can contribute to mitigating significant challenges in society.

During the implementation of the project, we understood that we had learned many valuable lessons that could be useful for other organisations working with experimental and innovative activities in education and design thinking.

Lessons learned are divided into three parts:

1. Development of the Intellectual Output (DTIPS Toolbox);
2. Partnership with stakeholders;
3. Strategic Partnership – lessons learned as Consortium.

Be inspired by reading this report, and may it bring you ideas on how to implement your projects more efficiently.

# 1. Development of the Intellectual Output (D-TIPS Toolbox)

**Design thinking as our own methodology**: as a project, we have applied design thinking to empathise with our main target (teachers) to understand their needs. We have been able to iterate, define and test our ideas in different cycles during the 3 years duration of the project. This iterative approach has allowed us to refine our ideas and develop more concrete tools. During this learning process, we also improved some ideas that did not work as expected.

**Apply a human-centred approach when designing and building an educational digital platform**: The ILDE+ D-TIPS platform (https://ildeplus.upf.edu/DTIPS/) has been built considering the importance of the following teachers' needs: (1) having a digital space to build a community; (2) having a digital repository of projects integrating the DT methodology; (3) having access to the D-TIPS tools; (4) providing interactive guidance to support the creation of Design Thinking projects to be applied in primary education contexts. Something that we have observed after using the platform with teachers in training sessions is that it seems to be more effective as a tool to support training sessions (guided by a trainer) than during self-regulated activities. Therefore this platform can be handy for trainers to teach educators the topic/methodology of design thinking.

**Useful tools beyond the context of primary education**: educators from other levels of education (secondary education, university levels and nonformal education) have shown their interest in our results. Having a toolkit of tools that teachers can easily customise facilitates their adaptation to other educational levels.

**Tools that can facilitate the creation of solutions for complex problems**: as shown in the examples of projects created by teachers (https://www.dtips.eu/training), our toolbox facilitates the management of complex issues. In concrete, it has been observed that teachers find the toolbox and the DT methodology to discuss with teachers about problems related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Provision of different formats**: both online and offline, off-the-shelf tools for teachers with little to no experience in project-based or competencies-based - from ready-to-use tools to possibilities of advanced customisation of tools.

**Using the term design thinking has both advantages and disadvantages**: it attracts curious teachers that have heard of the concept before, but it also can seem a bit too foreign even to try to engage and find out about it for more traditional teachers. Alternative names should be considered.

# 2. Partnership with stakeholders

**The flexibility of training formats**: We have seen the importance of offering flexibility in the format of training resources and educational materials. In general, teachers prefer to attend face-to-face sessions. However, especially after the pandemic, teachers highly value having online materials, especially if the materials are related to specific examples they can apply in the classroom.

**Ongoing support for teachers in applying a new methodology**: Initial training is necessary to introduce the overall approach and the benefits of using the design thinking methodology. However, it is crucial to support teachers throughout the application of the methodology for the first time, as it requires navigating comfortably through the many moments of uncertainty in the process. The project team providing support at these moments is crucial to ensure that teachers have a positive first experience so that they repeat the process.

**Building trust in relationships with teachers**: one of our goals has been to consider the needs of teachers as a priority. For this, we have organised meetings (individually and as discussion groups) with teachers where we had the opportunity to directly discuss their needs, questions, concerns and barriers when applying design thinking in the classroom. The fact of having direct contact with them has facilitated the understanding of their needs and the communication process.

**A deeper understanding of the needs and expectations of the target group**: in addition to more common teacher surveys on their needs, the consortium has developed teacher personas. Teacher personas allow us to see diversity in a broad target group, "teachers". It elaborates on the needs and expectations of particular subgroups. Based on these persona's, the consortium has developed a "teacher personality test". It was used as a gamified tool to evaluate how different teachers like to perceive new knowledge, and based on the persona, they received personalised suggestions on how they should engage with the D-TIPS project results.

**Importance of systemic incentives to foster the application of design thinking in schools**: synergies with other ongoing initiatives or organisations allow exponentially exploiting D-TIPS results. Partnerships with organisations involved in teacher training (universities, non-profit organisations) enable them to share an ownership hand over project results so they could improve their activities. Being open to different collaborations outside the initial project idea might add value to the project, i.e. renewal of educational curriculum or integration with other communities of practice.

**Having associate partners** (i.e. Newschool collaboration with Teach for Romania) increases outreach, but it is much more challenging to manage since there is different ownership of the problem.

# 3. Strategic Partnership – lessons learned as Consortium

**Consistency**: the key to a successful and fruitful partnership.

**Adaptability**: embracing constant change and reacting to new needs and challenges in each work domain, whether working on 3rd iteration of a particular tool or restructuring information on the website. Understanding that the final result might never be "final" leads to increased quality of the outputs, especially when such thinking is shared among all partners.

**Commitment**: the reliability and dependability of each partner in contributing to the project by reacting to its different modules, even if they weren't the leading partner. This showed a high commitment to achieving the best outcomes for the project as a whole.

**Communication**: Constant communication with the different partners and the active participation of each one of them.

**The added value of meeting in person is to stimulate commitment**. We were lucky to have completed at least once in real life at the project's kick-off before moving to mainly online teamwork, which enhanced team bonding between project partners.

**Clear working together rules** have made it very easy to progress in crisis times.