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THE SALUTOGENIC STUDIO

A design thinking framework for health-promoting design education

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SALUTOGENESIS

Theory is present

Design education increasingly addresses health and well-being, with salutogenesis offering a rigorous theoretical foundation.

THE GAP

Students lack a structured *process* for translating health theory into into concrete, defensible design decisions.

DESIGN THINKING

Design thinking's limitation

Design thinking is human-centered and iterative but it is not, by itself, a theory of health.

How can salutogenic theory become a process students can understand, apply, test, and evaluate?

COHERENCE: THE CORE OF SALUTOGENESIS

Health is supported when the world makes sense, feels manageable, and matters.

01

COMPREHENSIBILITY

Can I understand what is happening? happening?

Clear · structured · predictable · legible

02

MANAGEABILITY

Do I have the resources to respond? respond?

Control · resources · adaptability · support

03

MEANINGFULNESS

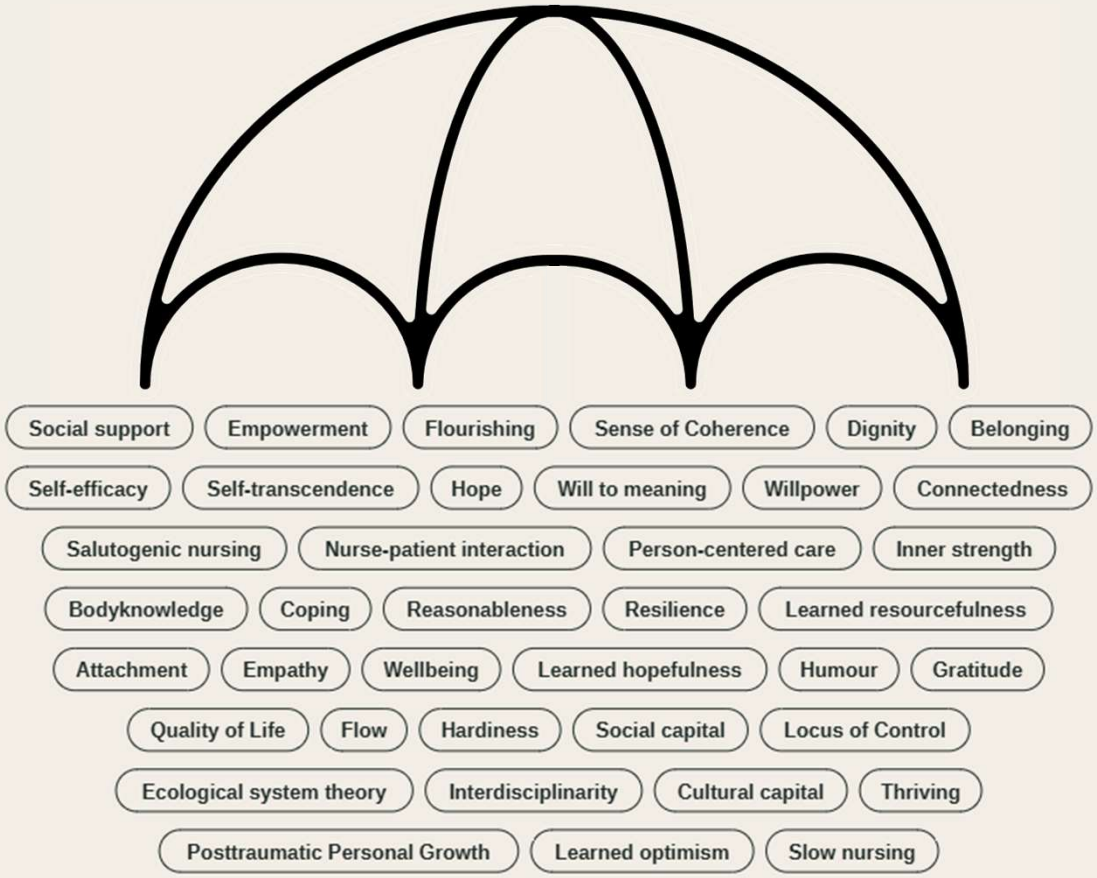
Is this worth engaging with?

Purpose · identity · belonging · significance

Antonovsky, 1979, 1987

THE SALUTOGENIC UMBRELLA

Assets for health beyond SOC



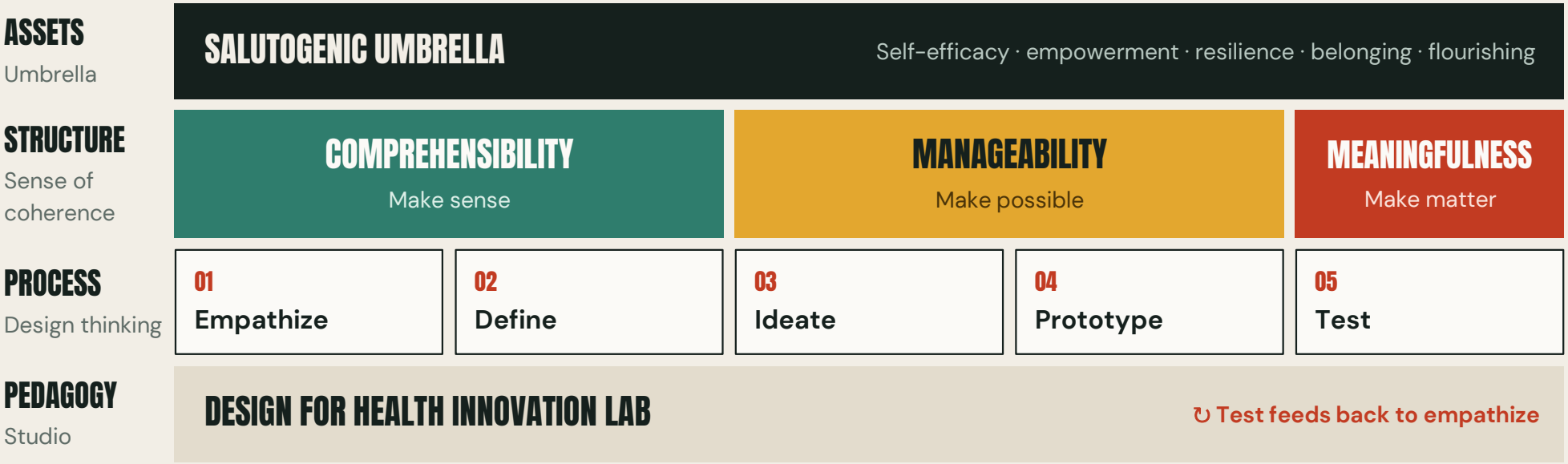
Lindström & Eriksson, 2010

THE PROPOSITION

SALUTOGENESIS × DESIGN THINKING

Design thinking can act as the translational mechanism that turns salutogenic theory into studio practice.

THE SALUTOGENIC STUDIO FRAMEWORK



> *Design thinking provides the process. Sense of Coherence provides the theoretical structure. The salutogenic umbrella identifies the broader health-promoting assets toward which design may contribute.*

EACH STAGE BUILDS ONE DIMENSION

SOC DIMENSION | DESIGN THINKING PHASE	FOR THE USER	FOR THE LEARNER
COMPREHENSIBILITY Empathize + Define	How can we understand the user, context, and health challenge?	**UNDERSTAND** Making an ambiguous problem legible
MANAGEABILITY Ideate + Prototype	What resources, choices, supports, and design responses can address the challenge?	**ENABLE** Iteration builds confidence to act
MEANINGFULNESS Test	Does the intervention matter to users and support engagement, identity, or purpose?	**MEAN** Seeing real impact on users

Meaningfulness surfaces in empathize, when users' values emerge, and is verified in test.

MAKE SENSE → MAKE POSSIBLE → MAKE MATTER

THE PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT

01 **IDENTIFY**

A health-related problem beyond healthcare settings
Grounded in evidence and population research

02 **INVESTIGATE + DESIGN**

Develop an innovative, human-centered design response through iterative inquiry.

03 **DISSEMINATE**

Communicate the work as scholarship through research presentation and critique.

Health is the problem space.
Innovation is the vehicle.
Design thinking is the process.
Salutogenesis is the lens.

FROM FRAMEWORK TO SYLLABUS

COURSE PHASE		DESIGN THINKING STAGE
UNDERSTAND	Population, problem statement, research, goals, precedents	→ Empathize + Define
IDEATION	Brainstorming, mind mapping, storyboarding	→ Ideate
SOLUTION	Concept development, prototype, VR and visualization	→ Prototype
TEST	Target population, stakeholders, feedback, analysis	→ Test
FINALIZE	Iterate, retest, refine	→ ↻ Return loop

> *Students defend the decisions made in every phase, which makes the studio inquiry-driven rather than product-driven.*

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION APPROACH
Examining the pedagogical model

QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

CASE: Design for Health Innovation Lab
N: 39 students within 3 different cohorts
- 2023, 2024, 2026

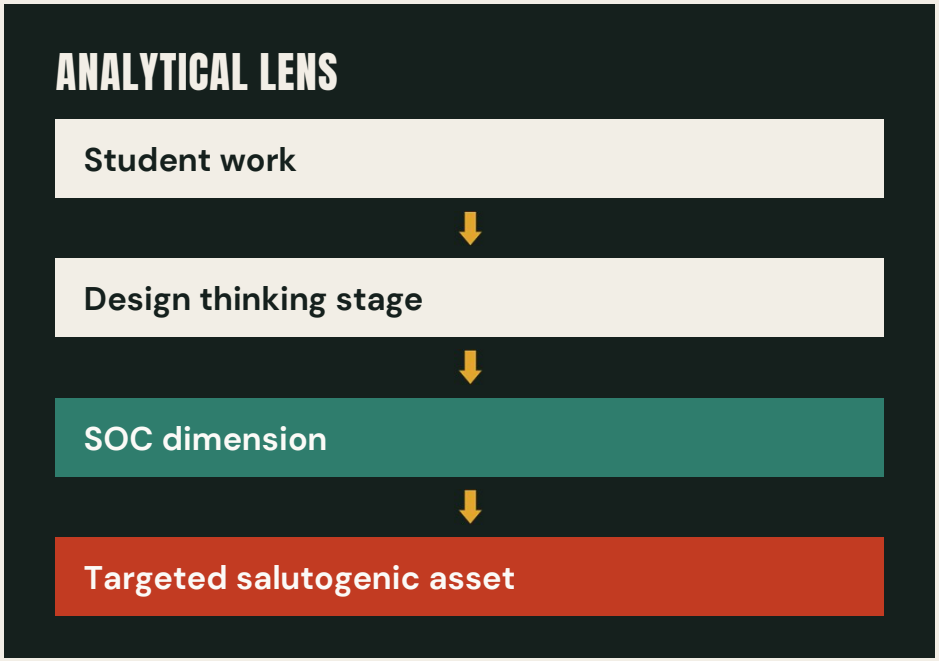
DATA

- Student design artifacts and process documentation
- Prototypes and testing/feedback records
- Final presentations and critique feedback
- Rubric-based assessment across five process dimensions

ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis: SOC dimensions as a priori codes, plus inductive themes

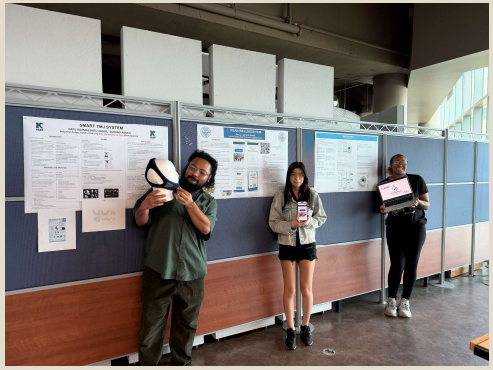
ANALYTICAL LENS



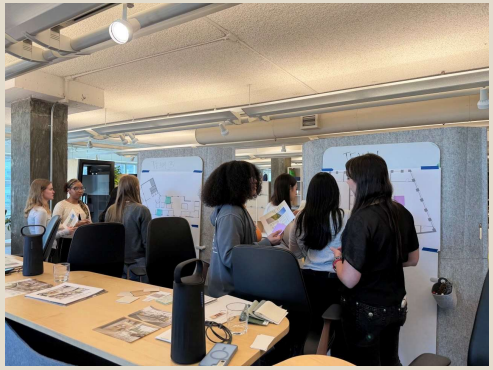
This analytical path explains how teaching artifacts connect systematically to the conceptual framework, moving from observable student work to salutogenic theory.

PROCESS

From brainstorming to mock-ups








THREE PROJECTS, THREE SCALES



SPATIAL

My SELA Playhouse

Akeela Jefferson & Allison Sowyer

Interior Design / Senior



PRODUCT

Smart TMJ System

Amal Abdul

Industrial Design / Junior



DIGITAL / UX / SERVICE

Med Connect

Semyra Stepney

Industrial Design / Senior

CASE IN FOCUS

ONE PROJECT, THREE LENSES

COMPREHENSIBILITY

Makes everyday tasks and information easier to understand and organize.

MANAGEABILITY

Provides resources, flexibility, and control for managing everyday activities.

MEANINGFULNESS

Supports autonomy and personal relevance through individualized organization.

TARGETED SALUTOGENIC ASSETS

Empowerment | Self-Efficacy | Locus of Control

iStart

Chloé Speas & Morgan Waldner / Interior Design - Senior

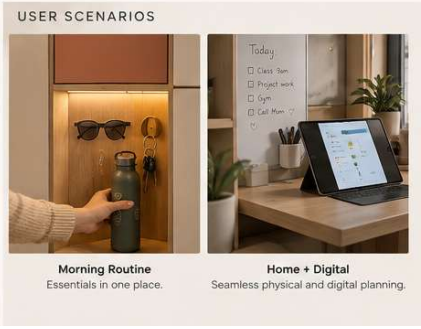












FOUR SHIFTS IN STUDENT THINKING

WHAT DID THE STUDENTS LEARN?

01

COMPREHENSIBILITY

RESEARCH-INFORMED PROBLEM FRAMING

Students move from assumptions toward understanding populations, contexts, and evidence before proposing solutions.

"We started by discussing different reasons why people can struggle with organizing... we focused on the reasons why people with ADHD struggle with organizing."

02

COMPREHENSIBILITY

SYSTEMS THINKING

Health is understood as an interaction among people, environments, resources, and lived experiences.

"We realized stress wasn't just about having a quiet room. Students needed choice, privacy, sensory control, and a way to reconnect when they were ready."

03

MANAGEABILITY

ITERATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Testing transforms design from a linear solution into a disciplined process of inquiry and refinement.

"Our first prototype looked good, but testing showed that children didn't use it the way we expected. We changed the layout, tested it again, and the second version gave them much more choice."

04

MEANINGFULNESS

DESIGNING FOR MEANING

Students evaluate design through agency, belonging, experience, and well-being — not only aesthetics and function.

"We stopped asking only how the space could be accessible and started asking how it could help people feel useful, connected, and part of a community."

CONCLUSION

WHAT IT OFFERS

01 **Salutogenesis** gives design education a health-oriented theoretical foundation.

02 **Design thinking** provides a structured method for translating that foundation into action.

03 **Studio pedagogy** creates the environment in which students investigate, prototype, test, and critically evaluate interventions.

04 Alignment with CIDA expectations for human-centered design, design process, and health and wellbeing

FUTURE RESEARCH

WHAT COMES NEXT

01 Extend to other institutions and programs

02 Pre/post SOC-13 with students to test the learner level

03 User-level evaluation of targeted salutogenic assets

04 Track transfer into later studios

CLOSING THOUGHT

The goal is not only to teach students to design healthier environments, but to make health an integral dimension of how they think about design.

THANK YOU!

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