



# educatio *catholica*

## An introduction to Design for Change

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*Design for change designed a school capable of believing in the potential of each child, a school that provides opportunities for them to demonstrate this potential, a school with teachers capable of discovering the abilities of each of their students and of orienting them towards good, to know and want to improve the world. Through the four phases Feel, Imagine, Do and Share, children build empathy and other key social-emotional skills.*

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I had the opportunity to meet *Design for Change* in 2012, three years after it started in India, when my students from *Col·legi Montserrat* participated in this program and were selected to present their Project at the *Be the Change Celebration (BTC)* that was held that year in India. BTC is the international Gala that brings together the authors of the selected projects as the best from each country. I could not say what impressed me more: the organization of the International Meeting, all of it being managed by children, the strong and sweet personality of its founder, the enthusiasm of so many participants, or the variety and originality of the Projects presented. While I had been interested in this project because of the many possibilities it offered, now with the closer knowledge of its founder and promoters my enthusiasm grew much more so that I did not hesitate to bring the project to Spain.

The program can do so much good as it has already done for schools, cities and the world, because it is true that, as it is defined: “Design for change is an international movement that gives children and young people the opportunity to put their own ideas into practice to change the world, starting with its surroundings” (2009). It is not an utopia, it is not an illusion, it is a reality and that is how a 7-year-old student communicated it to his mother, excited, returning from school after beginning the *Design for Change (DFC)* challenge: “Mom, mom, I can change the world!”

I am concerned about offering the greatest number of opportunities to my students so that they can acquire global competence, which has to make them sensitive to the needs of their environment and foster a commitment to find solutions and put them into practice. I found in this Project a concrete way to offer each student, no matter in what place, at what age or from what situation, the possibility of making visible and real the “I can”. All students have the capacity to think, to say: “I am able to improve my environment, to do something good, to change the world”.

“What does a DFC-teachers believe to be the “*I CAN virus?*” The answer is very clear: because it is the children who do not hesitate to move from “Can I do?” To “I can”. In the website that presents this movement in Spain we can see the definition of the power of these two words. “Our spirit is to infect with the virus *I CAN / WE CAN*. If we infect more children, the better. This means that they are protagonists of their lives, that they set their own challenges, that they are sensitive to their environment and to the people with whom they live, that they trust in their abilities to solve challenges”. It is something “contagious”, because, as the founder states, it is a virus more than contagion and the evidence can be seen in the way it has expanded to so many countries. *I CAN/WE CAN*, in fact, infects.



*Design for change* designed a school with a different methodology, a school capable of believing in the potential of each child, a school that provides opportunities for them to demonstrate this potential, a school with teachers capable of discovering the abilities of each of their students and of orienting them towards good, to know and want to improve the world. In the words of Howard Gardner, it is a program that “motivates students to think boldly and broadly, and encourages them to work productively with others and, importantly, to prioritize what is necessary for the community and for the general welfare of society” (Preface, *Design for Change*, SM 2017).

What is revolutionary about this Program? Why is it striking? How do you implement it? For those of us who have been lucky enough to get to know it, a first sight it is clear that it is not a program like others. Of course it has many coincidences with different programs, but although it specifies some objectives to be achieved, what is surprising is that, the process is important in itself. There are only four phases, four moments, four simple steps that the children go through during the process; and to carry it out they need to develop many values and abilities such attention, admiration, cooperation, empathy, creativity, critical and creative thinking, along with shared leadership. What one could not do alone is made possible by the joint and excited work of the group. They do it alone, but they are not alone. The teacher who is always with the group, but who lets the group act, is a facilitator, who is always with them; this facilitator is someone who listens actively and permanently to detect the needs of the students and collaborate with the solution. He is a true “sherpa”, who knows that the undisputed protagonists are the children.

*Feel, Imagine, Do and Share* (FIDS for KIDS) the four phases to be covered are these four steps for which every child is given preparation, provided that we provide the opportunity and let him be the protagonist. From the beginning I was struck by the fact that the starting point is the reality of their environment. We learn for life and it is from life where you can best learn. For the first step of this process, FEEL, it is important that the students know their own environment, the real one, that they look at it with eyes different from the indifference with which they may see it every day. They have to look at it again with eyes of admiration, to discover what they would like to change, what they think they could improve, what they do not like, not to criticize it, but to change it. It is not enough that each one looks, they have to collect and organize the information of the whole group and, together, come to an agreement to prioritize the proposal that seems more relevant and / or more urgent and together set a challenge, which is then transformed into a concrete action. It is great to see the insight that children have when detecting needs and their great creativity when it comes to proposing solutions.

Once the goal has been decided upon, they enter the second phase, the second step, IMAGINE, in which all the members of the group are asked to propose the greatest possible number of solutions, no matter how unlikely or unfeasible they may seem at first sight. Children are masters in the art of finding possibilities; this is the opportunity for creativity. Once all the proposals have been collected, they have to choose the ones that seem to be the best, and then choose the one that the group sets as its objective. You have to do it and this is why they prototype. It is really a program that puts in action head, to be attentive and to think, heart, to feel, to vibrate, and hands to act.

Pope Francis expressed it on February 5th, 2015: “To educate is to be able to use the language of the hands, the heart and the head” I especially like the expression “*let the hands think*” to define this moment, to be able to move to the third step, DO. It is time to move from the merely notional to the real, to put into practice what has been designed. The dream always comes true, the project, the vision, never remains as a desire, as a conditional, “it would be ... it would be good ... it could be”<sup>1</sup>. There is no conditional in Design for Change. And, although some people think that it is impossible, children do it. It is understandable that all the DFC-teachers who have done it with the students get excited to see that they can, no matter how old they are, because they think they can and are willing to prove it.

At this stage and before moving on to the next step, there is a fifth moment introduced in the practice of Design for Change in Spain called “EVOLÚA”. It wants to show the need for a good feed back, the need to reflect in order to grow, that is, to dedicate a glance to the finished project to evaluate the experience, looking also towards the future to improve it, to evolve.

“Evolúa”, means to make your project evolve, check, reflect, evaluate in some way, but not just for a grade. This is why the word is modified to generate a new concept, evolve, that is, value and improve in order to grow, which is the goal of the assessment of any project.

Good is always diffusive, and as it grows when others are involved; the last step is to SHARE. To “spread this powerful virus”, to make it available to everyone, the projects are reflected in a simple video that serves to show what has been done. I recommend a visit to the website to see so many examples of projects carried out around the world. It is amazing because you can find a lot of projects carried out

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<sup>1</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address for the Closing of the Fourth World Congress Sponsored by “Scholas Occurrentes”*, 5 February 2015.



by children of all ages, it does not matter that they still do not know how to write, because they know how to see, analyse and suggest improvements. Take the example of the 3-year-old students of the *Nazaret School in Esplugues*, a town near Barcelona. These students found that the bins were not within their reach because of the height, which meant that the park where they were going often could not be cleaned. This project “Litter bins at our height” made the town council contemplate their request and solve the issue. There is no doubt that it is an exercise of responsible and active citizenship by 3-year-old children.

The list of projects from almost all over the world, committed to putting their “I CAN” into practice, is very long. I was impressed by the project that five students aged 13 and 14 carried out in Telangana, India. After detecting needs, they selected water saving, a project that anyone would have said would overtake them. And yet they managed to raise awareness and convince their friends families and all the people not to waste water uselessly and they also took responsibility for sealing well taps, tanks, toilets and monitoring even workers and the adult staff. This project has already benefited more than one hundred people. And it is amazing to see children of a village who have decided to teach their parents to read, to see my students proposing how to prevent and solve bullying, to see a municipality declare the official annual celebration of a day of good humour because a group of students asked officially for it ... and so on to the more than twenty-two thousand stories that have made humanity smile. The power of a group of children at the service of good is great. This work proves it. We can say that it is excellent Service-Learning.

The question that many people have asked when they hear about some of the projects carried out is always: How do they achieve it? There is a fundamental starting point that is the confidence in the possibilities of each child. There are also reasons in those values related to the development of each project. Encouraging students attention, surprise, admiration – which the Greeks considered the principle of wisdom – for what they see every day, is a good beginning, so they can discover what they do not like, what can be improved. Awaken empathy, which is not difficult because children soon tune in with the needs they see. And give them the initiative. Letting a child be the protagonist has always surprising results, because it sets creativity in motion and offers him the possibility of showing everything he can do. This methodology does not leave out the teacher, but the centre of learning is each student.

Another feature of *Design for Change* is the group work. When you add the initiatives of a group you get many more possibilities for action, although at first some

may seem irrelevant or even “crazy” and although some think that children do not know how to work together. When a group verifies that what they achieve are positive results for their environment, they will continue working to improve their world, because one of the values of this methodology is that in addition to infecting others, it generates the need to continue working for others, to continue collaborating towards the improvement of their world, and that means to improve as a person. Empathy is favoured and with this the sense of social cooperation is fostered, cooperation instead of individualism, competition instead of competitiveness.

Some parents and teachers are still scared of making mistakes, and of seeing their students being wrong. However, it is well known that error is a good teacher for any learning. Therefore prototyping, discovering that it does not work, looking for alternatives, is a good school in the Design for Change methodology to learn from mistakes and continue looking for the right solution. It is doing and undoing that all apprentices learn and that is what is not forgotten, because it is knowledge discovered and assimilated.

Many of the transformations for an innovative change in education are developed through Design for Change. For some time now, due to good results in the educational world, *Project Based Learning* has been particularly valued because of its effectiveness. Design for change is a great initiative that fits perfectly with project-based learning, where students are creating a group project with interdisciplinary and real aspects. The project has been previously analysed by the teacher, the guide that foresees what the student may need and that is at his side to facilitate it. A generating question starts the project and students have to find the solution and make it real, after searching the information needed which helps them develop critical thinking (Bottoms & Webb, 1998, Moursund, Bielefeldt, & Underwood, 1997, Kadel, 1999).

We can easily deduce that Design for Change is a methodology that promotes the acquisition and development of competences in students. (LOMCE 2006. Order ECD / 65/2015, of January 21). Students can acquire the competence of “learning to learn”, because the control and management of their own learning is fostered in each child, as they achieve metacognition and the development of critical and creative thinking, along with the ability to properly manage time. Linguistic competence finds a good ally in *Design for Change*, as every student needs to communicate with their group, communicate with others, convince and listen. At the same time, mathematical competence is developed because they have to solve real-life pro-



blems, and they need to reason and to argue and always act on the basis of estimates and calculations.

It also favours the development of competence in knowledge and interaction in the world since each student uses decision-making, and knows himself to be a responsible citizen of his small world and the world in general. Their social and civic competence is benefited by the development of assertiveness in the relationship with others, by the evidence of their ability to act thinking of the good of others, and it is obvious that the capacity for personal initiative and autonomy grows with this methodology. And we can also see the development of spiritual competence because students learn to respect everyone, value others and be at their service, in addition to getting a sense for their lives.

Global competence and digital literacy grows as the students carry out each project and this will help them later in their adult life. There is no doubt that both the Design for Change methodology and its goal favour each student, but it also favours their family, school, neighbourhood, town and, of course, the whole world that benefits from so many projects that improve the specific environment. Moreover, everybody benefits from the good spirit that sustains it, which is also a virus that infects.

### *Voices about Design for Change in the world*

There is great recognition and support received by Design for Change. Marc Prensky said about *Design for Change*, on November 11, 2017, that it had to be “placed in the DNA of the curriculum” because it helps to focus education on students and give them the prominence they need today<sup>2</sup>. After the research carried out by the Harvard team, *Good Project*, they came to the conclusion that: Design for Change (DFC) has simplified the Design Thinking process for children by breaking it down into the four steps of *Feel, Imagine, Do and Share* (FIDS). In 2014, DFC launched the *Design Thinking Guide* (DTG), a thirty hour curriculum to teach design thinking to middle school students and build empathy and other key social-emotional skills. DTG was piloted in 60 schools across India which included a diversity of public, private and affordable schools<sup>3</sup>.

The words of Howard Gardner are relevant: “Design for Change (DFC) is one of the most exciting and important educational programs that I know of, with the potential for impact in numerous countries around the globe... Our first wave of stu-

<sup>2</sup> M. PRENSKY, *Conference at the General Meeting of DFC in Madrid* (BTC 2017), 11 November 2017.

<sup>3</sup> L. EASLEY, P. DE, L. BARENSEN, M. HOE, *Design Thinking Guide Evaluation*, August 2015.

dies documents clear improvements in student empathy as well as challenges in enhancing problem solving abilities... DFC provides a valuable model for a wide range of educational”<sup>4</sup>.

With the support of Dr. Howard Gardner, Harvard Graduate School of Education, has included an investigation following the Design Thinking methodology in the framework of *Project Zero* research. Design for Change is also included in the *Global Education Innovation Initiative* (GEII), which is committed to innovation, training leaders and creating a learning network around the world of innovation. Due to the characteristics of Design for Change and its rapid spread in several countries, some people have wanted to verify the effectiveness of this methodology in comparison with other traditional ones.

The *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* (TTCT), created by Ellis Paul Torrance, is one of the most widely used creativity tests. Analysis of drawings created by 301 based on a single item of the Torrance Test showed that students who had participated in DFC demonstrated higher fluency (production of ideas), flexibility (production of different ideational categories) and originality (production of unusual ideas) of ideas. Anyone who is lucky enough to use it in their school will be able to verify it personally, because the results of this methodology are truly surprising.

In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis told us “The urgent challenge of protecting our common home includes the concern to unite the whole human family in the search for a sustainable and integral development, because we know that things can change ...” (LS, n. 13). We all can collaborate as God’s instruments for the care of creation, each from our culture, our experience, our initiatives and our capabilities”. Design for Change offers an answer to this concern. It is not surprising that DFC is one of the methodologies proposed to work on these urgent calls of Pope Francis with children and young people. The projects that children around the world generate through their initiatives can be those projects that create change, improving our Planet, the home of all, in addition to their people, their families and their own lives.

As schools are the best platforms for evangelization, *Design for Change* is a methodology that helps us to get closer to the spirit of the Beatitudes and the Works of Mercy, and all this with children, those of whom Psalm 8 declares “from the lips of children and infants you receive your praise” and those of whom Jesus said “Let the children come to Me” (Mark 10,14).

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.dfeworld.com/file2015/research\\_2.pdf](https://www.dfeworld.com/file2015/research_2.pdf) <https://www.dfeworld.com/SITE>; <https://www.dfeworld.com/VIDEO/ViewVideo/101>; <https://www.dfeworld.com/SITE/Research>; <http://www.dfespain.org/>





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