

project



# The only possible revolution in education stems from creativity

## Design for Change brings design and creativity into the classroom



by Apurva San Juan Alonso and Miguel Luengo Pierrard

**W**e have always been told that creativity, more specifically imagination,<sup>1</sup> is a characteristic of children, artists or creators of large companies. But... have we really been told what creativity is?

In fact, one of the first premises to keep in mind is that creativity and imagination are not the same thing. Although the differences will be discussed in more detail throughout the article, there is one nuance that changes everything.

### A BIT OF HISTORY ABOUT CREATIVITY

If we go back 200 years to the first industrial revolution, we find a historical juncture of great changes where new tools and ways of thinking were emerging. One of the great global breakthroughs was the invention and development of the steam engine. This concept revolutionised the previously known way of working. We moved away from the world of craftsmanship and manual labour to a faster and more efficient assembly-line manufacturing process.

People who were engaged in manual labour and handicrafts went to work in specialised factories. This required the implementation of a modern education system, in which the new generations were taught how to perform these tasks.

So what were the skills that this educational system sought to enhance? Those needed to efficiently perform tasks in a factory: memorisation, repetition, obedience, discipline and even competition among peers, in case they needed to vie for a promotion in the future. From our current perspective, it might sound like a kind of 'education for robots'.

However, perhaps surprisingly, there are few differences between this educational system and the one we have known up to now: memorising facts, repeating them on a test, trying to be the best in class so as not to fail... and obeying. It seems that we are still being prepared to work in a factory like those of the first Industrial Revolution, although a study conducted by BBVA<sup>2</sup> determined that

only 36% of the jobs in Spain in 2018 fit this type. On the other hand, there has long been a machine, the computer, which is much better at performing these type of rote, repetitive tasks, leading to the automation of work.

Therefore, broadly speaking, the education system in recent years facilitates the development of skills that are needed in jobs that are doomed to disappear. Let's go back in time one last time: What skill did the creator of the steam engine, James Watt, use to develop his invention? Beyond the obvious ones, such as mathematics, there is an essential one: creativity.

### IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY

According to the official Spanish dictionary, imagination is the 'ability to form new ideas and new projects' and creativity is the 'capacity to create'. Thus, creativity needs imagination to dream; imagination needs creativity to make those dreams come true. Imagination is inherent to human beings, but creativity has to be worked on.

**Creativity needs imagination to dream and imagination needs creativity to make dreams come true**

Most of the progress that has been made so far has been achieved without the educational system training students in creativity. What if this skill had been encouraged in the past? What would today look like?

### WE STILL HAVE TIME

According to IEBS Business School, one of the ten 'soft' skills that are the most in demand by companies in 2021 is creativity.<sup>3</sup> At Design for Change (DFC) Spain, we have been working since 2011 with the conviction that children and young people are autonomous beings capable of taking action to change their environment. The DFC Methodology they use to achieve this allows them to develop creativity to provide solutions that they themselves implement. In addition, they strengthen their commitment to the environment, because from the outset they choose which problems they want to address. This characteristic makes the DFC Methodology an ideal complement for education professionals who already use other active methodologies such as Service-Learning or Project-Based Learning. With the implementation of the DFC Methodology based on 'Design Thinking' and entrepreneurship, which is simple, agile and effective, 100% practical and easily adaptable to different pedagogical models in both formal and non-formal education, children and young people are given the opportunity to design solutions to specific challenges.





In addition, the DFC Methodology is recognised by the Complutense University of Madrid as a tool that facilitates the empowerment of children and youth. There is also scientific evidence of its benefits thanks to studies from universities such as Harvard and Stanford.<sup>4</sup>

### REVOLUTIONISING THE CLASSROOM WITH I CAN

Applying the DFC Methodology turns a place where children are educated into a meaningful learning space. Building this safe environment where young people are responsible for their own ideas and the way to carry them out is based on several premises:

1. **We can all be creative.** Not only children but also the teachers and educators who guide and mentor them must be aware of their (infinite) possibilities when creating. What ingredients are needed?
  - **An attitude:** optimism, which is absolutely necessary to change the world.
  - **A method based on 'Design Thinking':** a succession of divergences, convergences and syntheses that avoids moving to the final solution too quickly. In this way, we go through the phases - of the DFC Methodology - that let our ideas take

flight.

- **Simple techniques** such as 'crazy ideas': use those ideas that are initially impossible but will not be judged, because they are valued as a starting point to help our imagination. Thus, they can be used as a trigger to achieve feasible ideas.
- **Elements such as prototypes**, whose rationale is 'get it wrong quickly and cheaply'. If we start from mistakes to learn, the fear of creativity and value judgments fades away.

### 2. The job of education professionals is to 'facilitate'.

This means listening, identifying what the students or group of young people need and offering them tools and suggestions. Sometimes facilitating also means doing nothing, just observing and being amazed at what they are capable of doing if given the right techniques and space. It consists of 'really

**The DFC Methodology gives children and young people the opportunity to design solutions to specific challenges**

seeing' the students in front of us; not the image of a passive student who in the future will be able to do something but right now only listens.

3. **The importance of the process.** If we focus on the result - which we take for granted has to 'turn out well' - we strip the students of freedom with the belief that adults have more experience and, therefore, know better what to do. Thus, creativity is reduced to copying. However, this premise does not mean that the result does not matter,<sup>5</sup> but rather that the adult guide has to learn how to determine when his or her involvements adds and when it subtracts.
4. **Ethics as a key factor.** In the Imagine Phase of the DFC Methodology, where creativity stands out as the main skill, it is important to be aware of the effect of the ideas we are putting forward.

By experiencing the DFC methodological process, the young people begin to discover their own potential and how it is magnified in a group. They discover that they have the real ability to change the world, their world. This helps develop the 'I CAN Mindset': a way of thinking that allows them to rise to challenges flexibly in any field, that invites them to be active agents of change and that happens 'Not by chance, by design'. At Design for Change Spain, we know that we are responsible for making change happen, for educating students to learn competencies to develop the skills that the job market is already demanding.

We need a change, a revolution in the way we teach. We need to stop creating memorisation machines and start teaching young people to foster creativity to change their world within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, furthering the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),<sup>6</sup> choosing where they want to act, choosing where and how they can contribute (fight) in the education revolution.

We at Design for Change Spain invite you to join the revolution, to be bold and to dare to make creativity a fundamental part of your daily life. We encourage you to try the DFC Methodology<sup>7</sup> with your children, with your nieces and nephews, with your students. We encourage you to give them the opportunity to use their imagination and equip them with the tools to be creative. In our organisation, we have been putting creativity at

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the service of young people for more than ten years, not only to prepare them for the future, but also so that they can provide solutions and change the rules of the game today. Because they are not the future, they are the present. And we have to listen to them. The most necessary revolution is the revolution in education, because it is the only basis for change, where everything begins. Let's be the education revolution we want to see in the world!

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the theory of Guzmán López, author of several books on the subject, girls and boys are actually imaginative, which does not mean that they are creative.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbvaresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Cuan-vulnerable-es-el-empleo-en-Espana-a-la-revolucion-digital.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.iebschool.com/saladeprensa/2021/02/04/las-10-soft-skills-mas-demandadas-por-las-empresas-en-2021/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://dfcspain.org/>

<sup>5</sup> The DFC Philosophy is born with the objective of fostering the will, commitment and HumanE™ values based on the 5 'E's': Empathy, Ethics, Excellence, Elevation and Evolution. We encourage this third 'E', 'Excellence', as a result of the process and the repetition of the process to master the technique, which involves focusing more and more attention on the result in a natural way. More information: <https://dfcspain.org/nuestro-metodo/>

<sup>6</sup> Design for Change is recognised by the United Nations as an organisation that promotes the SDGs. Each DFC project works on one or more SDGs.

<sup>7</sup> To use the DFC Methodology, you can download the Project Facilitation Guide at this link <https://dfcspain.org/guia-para-facilitar-proyectos-dfc/>

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