

# THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL **TAKES ACTION** IN THE CARE OF THE COMMON HOME. **The Project “I CAN!”**

Juan Antonio Ojeda Ortiz, fsc.

Responsible for Education at the OIEC (International Office of Catholic Education) and  
Consultor to the Congregation for Catholic Education.

“...our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world” (LS, 161). “We have to transform ourselves at a profound level, that is, change our hearts and consciences”(Pope Francis, July 6, 2018).

“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change...

Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home... Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded” (LS, 13).

**The Project “I CAN!”** consists in **facing the challenges that the LAUDATO SI'Encyclical** (Pope Francis, 2015) proposes and doing it from the children and young people’s point of view, empowering them so that, with their freshness and originality, free of selfish conditions and interests, they take the initiative and respond in a committed, creative and collaborative way; for which the **Design for Change methodology** will be used. This methodology guarantees that it is really children and young people who take the lead and act, working together, and it is the tool that facilitates creating and sharing the stories of change. To make a project of change, four phases need to be followed:

1. It is about that they **feel**, empathize and identify a problem of their concrete realities;
2. **Imagine** the possible solutions and choose the one that you consider most viable, significant and lasting;
3. **Act** by building together with others and thus create projects of change that contribute to improving their local contexts, also global; and,
4. **Share** all these stories of change with others, to inspire them, pass on to them and create a global chain of children and young people, contributing millions of small actions that change the world.

**It is an open and collaborative initiative, elaborated and proposed with humility, so that all feel authors and participants of the same.** All of us, educational institutions of the highest level, we have coordinated ourselves for the first time in history to respond as one voice of “education” to the call of LAUDATO SI ', with the urgency that requires the great deterioration of the planet and humanity ... The Pope does not stop to repeat that *“we cannot afford to waste time in this process.”* For this reason, the **Congregation for Catholic Education of the Vatican** supports and endorses the present Project, which was designed by the **OIEC** (International Office of Catholic Education); and benefits from the collaboration of the **Education Commission**

of the **USG-UISG** (Union of Superiors and Superiors General); the movement of **Scholas Occurrentes**; the **OMAEC** (World Organization of Alumni) and the international movement of the **Design For Change** methodology. Along the way, many institutions and entities have been incorporated, and many others that want to join this global call continue to be invited or welcomed. We are all invited to empower children and young people and co-create stories or change projects with them. You are all welcome, everyone has a lot to contribute to this project. Let's be one, let's work together, let's complete each other, with respect and admiration towards everyone ... let's give voice and decision to children and young people, trust them and let ourselves be surprised by them. All schools in the world, Catholic or not, are invited.

### **Main features that make up the project ¡I CAN !:**

- **It contains a TEACHING GUIDE**, which defines the what and why of the Project, the what for and how of it; as well as who we are willing to respond to these challenges. This Guide has been published in five languages (English, Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese); It is also being translated into German, Arabic and Chinese. In addition to the schools and universities, all those who carry out non-formal education actions may participate (Catechetical groups, meetings of coexistence or retreat, youth forums, etc.).
- In this Guide the Pope tells us that "education will be ineffective and its efforts will remain unsuccessful if it does not also try to spread a new paradigm about the human being, life, society and the relationship with nature," and invites children and young people to "respond to challenges" and "make some noise". Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, invites teachers to take a step back, to say less and listen more to children and young people, to understand that education is much more than teaching. For his part, Msgr. Angelo Vincenzo Zani, Secretary General of the Congregation, addressing children and young people, invites them to let themselves be impacted by the reality in which they live, near or far, to sympathize with them and to take action, telling them that they can trust in themselves and that they infect each other, sharing their stories of change.
- **It is an ecclesial, social and ecumenical project**, addressed not only to Catholics, but **which seeks the participation and collaboration of all**, believers or not, regardless of the faith of their creed and whether they believe or not. All children and young people are invited to feel, imagine, act and share.
- **Working on the challenges of LAUDATO SI'**, we are also addressing the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, promulgated by the UN, thus helping to eradicate poverty, achieve zero hunger, improve health, achieve quality education, achieve equality, saving water and energy, caring for the oceans, protecting the life of ecosystems, etc. Therefore, it is a Project for both the Catholic school and the rest of the schools. Thus, all schools, universities and other educational works, formal or not, are invited to join the project ¡I CAN! with their convictions. **LET'S WORK TOGETHER.**

- In this Teaching Guide **the METHODOLOGY of Design for Change (DFC) is described** clearly and briefly. It explains the phases and the steps to follow in each of them. In each country, the head of DFC can provide you with manuals or other tools that extend what appears in the Guide. These manuals and the guidance and support that they can provide you, will greatly facilitate the implementation and realization of change projects.
- **The projects or change stories** to be co-created by children and young people can be done from three years of age onwards. Trust them! They will surprise us!
- **All educational works and each classroom or student group should be involved.** That each classroom or group carries out one, two or three change projects, inside or outside of the official curriculum; integrated in a curricular subject or in an interdisciplinary way.
- The Teaching Guide also offers some **guidelines**, which indicate some of the steps to follow when carrying out change projects with Design for Change. It is important that **previously the teachers are trained** in the methodology, to empower children and young people, to understand and implement it correctly, focusing on them and carrying out the role of the teachers, that new role that is required. Therefore, to really empower children and young people and to manage the methodology well, it is advisable to follow the guidelines given in the **Teaching Guide, on pages 10 and 11**, in the **ORIENTATIONS** section: contact the person responsible for *Design for Change* of the country, training and self-training, carrying out projects and infecting others in order to involve the majority of students and centers.
- **IT IS HIGH TIME TO PASS TO ACTION. We are running late ...** let's start making change projects.
- Finally, a **TIMETABLE** has been set, **which invites you to create projects from now on**, and throughout 2018, 2019 ... On **November 20 - 23, 2019, a World Meeting of Children and Youth** arriving from more than a hundred nations and welcomed by Italian children and young people, will take place **in Rome**. The delegation of each country will be hosted by an Italian school. The opening ceremony will be celebrated in the Vatican City, during the General Audience on Wednesday 20, which coincides with the International Children's Day and will end with a Special Audience of the Pope in the Paul VI Hall. Thousands of children and young people of the world, of the age of five years and older, will be in Rome to share and celebrate the projects of change conceived in their schools participating in the project **¡I CAN!** They will shout to the world their commitment to create a new, more human, solidary, just and sustainable society. It is not the end of the road, but a milestone to show, celebrate and share the projects carried out, as well as to inspire and infect others so that we all continue to carry out change projects.