Design Thinking Guide Evaluation

Laura Easley, Paromita De, Lynn Barendsen, Michael Hoe   August 2015

WHAT IS DESIGN THINKING GUIDE

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.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

A partnership was built with Good Project at Harvard Graduate School of Education to assess the impact of DTG.

KEY FOCUS

To gain evidence of children building empathy through the DTG

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

DTG and the DFC classroom process increase students individual and group empathetic abilities.

Every subskill under empathy showed a statistically significant shift:
- **Choosing problems that affect others**
- **Describing multiple viewpoints**
- **Keeping the stakeholder in the center of designed solutions**

THE RESEARCH

The Good Project Team created a strong assessment tool that connected specific SES traits to behaviors and measured those behaviors: a 30 minute survey in which students individually identify problems, form a group to choose and solve the problem using FIDS process and then individually reflect on their understanding of the solution and their confidence in their solution.

The research data was collected by conducting a pre and a post-test to measure the changes in the students. The answers were interpreted and marked using a rubric that was created to assess the skills. The data were analyzed through a two-tailed, paired dependent T-test which showed statistically significant results for empathy and the sub-skills under it.

FINDINGS

The curriculum has been able to increase average student empathetic ability, as measured by choosing problems that affect others, describing multiple viewpoints, and keeping the stakeholder in the center of designed solutions. Empathy was the area where every single subskill under it showed a statistically significant change in this research study. And finally, the clearest finding is that students improved in their ability to design interventions that keep the stakeholder in the center.

The research also tried to find a correlation between the economic resources available to a student and the development of empathy through DTG curriculum, and no correlation could be established. This shows that the curriculum is inclusive and can be implemented with success in any context to build empathy in children.

Design for Change represents a significant departure from a traditional classroom where students compete instead of cooperate and there is always a right or wrong answer – and this departure is one students should practice frequently to be equipped to contribute to 21st century society.