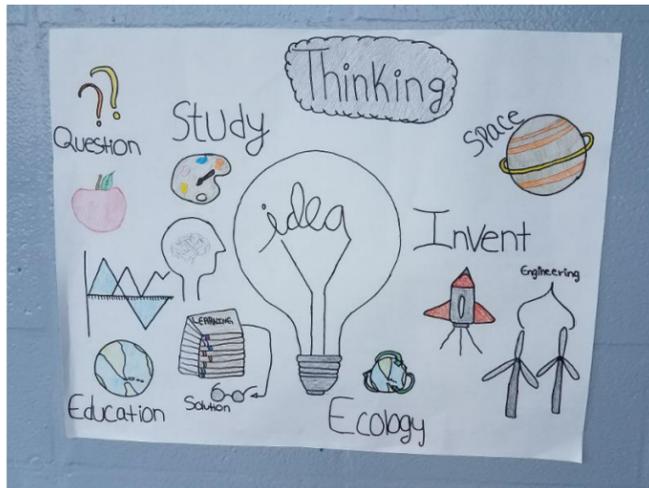




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## How Do We Tell the Children? Efficacy, Engagement and Resilience

By Maggie Favretti



Maggie has spent 33 years happily helping her students to ask, “what is our education preparing us for?” and “what is ‘the box’ and how did I get in it?” and “shouldn’t our education help ALL of us to achieve our potential rather than sorting us into those who will and those who won’t?” Having taught history and public policy for 25 years at Scarsdale High School, her connection to CELF evolved from the district’s multi-stakeholder School Sustainability Committee. Like CELF, Maggie’s work empowers young people by giving them the tools to engage deeply in authentic community-based problem solving.

This is one of many inspiring stories from Maggie’s transformative work in education for resilience.

### Efficacy, Resilience, and the Ripple Effect



Recently, I attended a meeting with climate scientists, one of whom asked, “how do we tell the children? I mean, we’re getting counseling to deal with the disconnect between what is happening and what we’re able to do about it. Wouldn’t it be better just to protect them from problems that are too big for them to solve?” I was struck by how clearly this moment illustrated exactly what we need to do--and how.

### Meet Jose Obregon

At age 11, Jose came to California, with no English and no confidence. By 14, Jose was learning in school (Design Tech) how to use a design thinking process to solve problems that mattered to his peers and his community. These years were transformative. At 17, just weeks after Maria devastated Puerto Rico, Jose and his classmates from Dtech High, along with innovative educators and students from Escuela Francisco Manrique Cabrera in Bayamon, created a design thinking exchange about how to make their schools and communities more resilient. They did all the planning, from creating a non-profit organization that could support the exchange, to arranging logistics. There were adults involved at the beginning, especially their teacher adviser Rob Bolt, and FMC principal Rebeca Fuentes, but they let the kids make the decisions and be the architects of their own learning experience.



### Teaching Design Thinking



After the first visit and co-created design workshop on community resilience, the students had the attention of the PR Department of Education, a number of innovation hubs in Puerto Rico, and the Mayor of Bayamon. When asked how many would like to go to California to learn how to teach design thinking and real-world problem solving, 100% of the students said they wanted to be involved. Jose has taken a gap year to coach students and teachers, help coordinate the design thinking projects, and build out community relationships. Fast forward to October 2018. As the first ever design thinking public school in Puerto Rico, Escuela Francisco Manrique

Cabrera hosted their first Design Thinking Expo.

## Implementing Design Thinking

Escuela Francisco Manrique Cabrera structured two weeks during each trimester for the whole school to work on deep design thinking projects. This first time around, they focused on school needs. Relationships were forged between the teachers, students, and local businesses, non-profits, and civic groups.

The projects ran the gamut from improving individual resilience with motivational statements painted on stairs, saving class time with a watch that syncs to open your locker and take attendance, a comfortable chair for all students with special computer access for blind or deaf students, improving flow in the school cafeteria, storm safe housing designs, upgrading the courtyard, and boosting the government lunch with fresh veggies and fruit from their new farm. Young entrepreneurs identified gaps in local businesses.



## Reaping the Rewards



During the design thinking time, there were no disciplinary or attendance issues. Students skipped their “class skip day” to attend team meetings or meetings with a pro-partner. “I used to hate school because it made no sense. Now I feel like I can use it to make a difference,” said one student. Another added, “I want to teach this to my uncle, and we can improve his business together.” A history teacher said, “I find design thinking in the back of my mind when I am planning the usual lessons. We are going to have some element of it, like empathy, observing evidence, collaboration, or defining a problem in all of the lessons, and the whole design process in our unit on colonialism and what to do about it. I finally feel like I can teach them something that matters.”

## Building a Design Thinking Community



Other community leaders, like Christine Nieves, in Mariana (in the hills near Humacao), have reached out to collaborate. Together their dream is to unite all the communities in Puerto Rico around design thinking for greater equity, sustainability, and resilience. Students and teachers, together with their communities, are building back their sense of efficacy by

bringing about positive change, and building their leadership, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement in the process. Students are becoming effective systems thinkers and decision makers, and they are already making a difference. [Click here](#) to learn more about Jose and FMC.

What do colonialism, natural disasters, traditional test-driven schooling, and our climate scientist's fears all have in common? All strip away efficacy. Teachers build efficacy capabilities every day, as they add to their students' capacities to influence the world around them. Using Design Thinking is not new to Puerto Rico or to the rest of the world. It is being used to build economies from Detroit to New Delhi; innovation from Melbourne to MIT. With the support of CELF, a community of empowered educators and students, we can do this intentionally in (and outside of!) our classrooms. We will graduate young adults who are already bringing about change as civic leaders, entrepreneurs, and climate change innovators. Why wait?



*This article was written by Maggie Favretti -Founder, [DesignEd For Resilience](#)*

For the past 6 years, Maggie dedicated her practice in using design thinking to solve complex problems to City 2.0, a public policy course that redesigns communities and infrastructures for greater equity, sustainability, and resilience. In 2017, the American School Superintendents Association invited Maggie to assist by means of education in disaster recovery and resilience in Puerto Rico. Maggie draws on her expertise in K-16 educational frameworks for recovery and resilience and in using design thinking/creative problem solving to help school communities connect with each other and replace old educational paradigms with new ones that give education meaning and purpose. Want to learn more about how to use design thinking to empower students and teacher to tackle complicated problems like sustainability and climate change? Write to [maggie@designed4resilience.org](mailto:maggie@designed4resilience.org)



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