

# Innovative solutions for education:

Insights and reflections from the  
Changemakers Dialogue! Initiative

Final Report 2022





## Foreword

The last three years have shown us how change is dramatically accelerating and the consequences of that. New problems are emerging, multiple crisis situations are impacting our world and we can see an ever-increasing gap between those who do have the opportunity and the abilities to be part of change – and those who don't. Now, more than ever, we need to create new solutions and answers in order to find joint solutions against the emergence of these new inequalities. In the field of education, it requires us all to work more systemically together, to reframe and discuss the very purpose of our educational systems, to learn from one another in order to steer a new course for social change. Solutions are out there, if you know how to find them. Ashoka Europe, more specifically our European Fellowship program, hosts a safe space not only for the more than 500 Social Entrepreneurs, our Ashoka Fellows, in Europe but for changemakers in our community. It is a laboratory for a Changemaker Europe. In the last 40 years we have found thousands of change leaders in more than 80 countries who are paving the ways for creating educational systems which respond to the need for relevance, quality and inclusion. Giulia Detomati, Matti Jänkälä, Elena Ruda, Miguel Luengo, Shaun McInerney, Gaia Longobardi, Steffi Biester, Ana Barroca, Emilia Pinho, Marie Madeleine Gianni, Vilma Rimpela, Mauro Spicci, Celmira Maceido, Francesc Sistach, Hakaroa Vallee, Jimmy Westerheim, Noor and Susana Caires are some of them. We want to spark our collective intelligence, hosting dialogue, co-learning and co-creating ideas for educational transformation. This report contains all the insights and system changing ideas collected during our “Changemakers Dialogue!” series in 2022 on how to redefine our educational systems. We encourage you to apply the learnings from these amazing changemakers in your own community and work. Enjoy reading it!

**Marie Ringler**

**Ashoka Europe Director**

## Executive summary

Changemaking can be a lonely path to take, especially in a period of uncertainty and complexity like the one we are living in. In 2021, Ashoka and other 15 networks of social innovators worldwide, conducted a large survey, interviewing 791 social innovators in 137 countries. What emerged quite clearly was the need to “build upon the strong local-international connection of social innovators “in creating effective and impactful social change” (Ioan, A., *The Possibilists*, 2021). In light of this, Ashoka Italy, in collaboration with the Ashoka Europe Fellowship Program, co-created a learning journey called Changemakers Dialogue! to navigate the most pressing educational challenges in Europe, where peer-to-peer learning could animate motivation, inspiration and innovation sharing.

In the Changemakers Dialogue! Learning journey, we selected a multi-stakeholder cohort of participants composed by social entrepreneurs, students, teachers, school directors, researchers, funders, and non-profit practitioners working in different countries in Europe who attended 6 thematic online meetings from January to June 2022. Every gathering started with three inspirational presentations from an Ashoka Fellow, a Young Changemaker and an education practitioner who would then start interacting directly with the participants in smaller and interactive working groups.

In gathering these individuals, Changemakers Dialogue! had the objective of fostering cross- sectorial, inter-generational and diverse conversations to sparkle and aliment innovation in education. Finally, the initiative aimed at creating a tangible community of like-minded and like-driven individuals that could fuel systemic change. This report introduces the innovations in education presented during these online gatherings and the individuals behind them, reporting the key insights of the conversations and group reflections.

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The image features a sunset over the ocean with three people's silhouettes in the foreground. A large, semi-transparent orange shape is overlaid on the left side of the image. The word "Introduction" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the center of the orange shape.

# Introduction

*“Changemaker journeys are often very lonely. One of the biggest sources of support from Ashoka is being the ‘unlonely planet’ where I can connect with people who have equally lonely journeys.”*

*(Paramita Banerjee, Ashoka Fellow from India stated in “The Unlonely Planet” (2018) report)*

High level complexity is what really shapes the modern world challenges. The pace at which the world is changing not only makes it difficult to navigate this complexity in the first place, but effectively transforming systems in a fast-paced changing world seem to be a possibility for only a few. Only those individuals who are able to comprehend the hidden dynamics that generate the complexity and find innovative ways to twist them according to their vision of change can successfully navigate modernity and contribute to create social change. The ability to be an actor of change, or a changemaker, depends on the possibility to acquire some extremely sophisticated skills that make human beings able to adapt and contribute to an ever-evolving complexity. Skills such as empathy, critical thinking, new leadership, problem-solving constitute the competitive advantage of today’s society, and they are a prerequisite for unlocking one’s potential for the good of all.

The new inequality is what Bill Drayton, founder and CEO of Ashoka, defines as the phenomenon that sees the global population being divided into two large groups: those who are equipped with the right skills set to cope with modernity and those who are not, these being inevitably left behind. This inequality in accessing the right skills leads to an unequal income distribution across the world.

Working towards enabling everyone to have equal opportunities in accessing what Ashoka calls a Changemaker education requires three key ingredients: innovation, to twist and solve extremely multi-faceted system dynamics, leadership, to maintain a clear vision even in hard times, and community, to feel the sense of belonging to something bigger than one’s aspiration.

If any of these three elements is overlooked, system-level efforts hesitate, and frustration and loneliness can hinder the act and purpose of changemaking. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, changemakers worldwide must rethink the way they were operating, juggling between difficulties, emergencies, hybrid spaces and uncertainty. The school closure and the forced transition to online classes left many teachers, school leaders and students alone in their living rooms while trying to adapt to unexpected circumstances.

In this moment of uncertainty, we decided to create a space for innovation, vision, collaboration and connection to be nurtured. Where everyone could beat the loneliness and feel part of a community of changemakers in Europe working to innovate the educational system. Changemakers – from all over Europe and from a wide array of ages, backgrounds and visions – periodically gathered in an online space to be inspired, to find useful tools that they could apply to their own contexts and to establish meaningful connections with changemakers working on similar matters.

The dynamic structure of the sessions allowed participants to learn peer to peer and converse with Ashoka Fellows, Young Changemakers, and teachers – school leaders of Changemaker School in Europe – or education specialists whose work and vision were aligned on the topic of the month. Furthermore, every month this community of changemakers explored the most pressing educational challenges of the XXI century.

To start off, the month of January was dedicated to exploring ways in which changemaking skills can be leveraged to unlock students' leadership and their civic engagement. In February the attention was paid into disclosing how to craft a positive self-perception of teachers and school leaders' changemaking role to make them re-discover their purpose in teaching. March was the month of understanding how to ensure that every child is enabled to access changemaker education regardless of the vulnerability of their backgrounds.

In April, the community of changemakers in Europe deconstructed unconscious biases and gender stereotypes in the school contexts and in May we discussed the need to unravel the narrative surrounding the disability discourse to ensure that children and young people with disabilities are given the opportunity to unlock their potential through changemaker education. The concluding appointment explored the different dimensions of students' mental health and wellbeing to make sure that, especially after the COVID-19 crises, these topics will no longer be overlooked.

In this report, we present the key insights of the 6 conversations as well as the game-changing solutions in education to showcase the power of a community of practice that comes together to co-create, disseminate and innovate for the good of all.

## **System Changers in Education in Europe**

Ashoka has created an inspired and diverse community of social entrepreneurs in education in Europe, working to reshape the educational systems and create the next generation of changemakers.

Out of the 600 Ashoka Fellows in Europe, at least 150 of them are working on education related issues. During the last 20 years, Ashoka engaged with more than 300 Changemaker Schools worldwide, 120 of which are in Europe, and worked with thousands of other educational institutions. We also promoted youth programs in 8 countries in Europe engaging 50 young changemakers who are at the front of innovation in education systems.

Changemakers Dialogue! saw the participation of 7 Ashoka Fellows, 6 Young Changemakers and 5 education practitioners as speakers from the European community. Out of the 129 registrants from 22 countries, an average of 30 individuals participated in each of the 6 appointments.



# Chapter 1

Unlocking students'  
leadership and civic  
engagement:  
changemaking skills  
as means to  
empowerment

Fostering the youth leadership discourse is now, more than ever, at the center of international agendas, political debates and educational discourses for its intrinsic link to democracy. The UNESCO and The Council of Europe Report (2021) suggests that after the COVID-19 pandemic, a greater investment in student voice is necessary to counter the erosion of democratic values and promote trust in government institutions.

Educational institutions play a key role in ensuring that young people grow up as global citizens, as schools are places where the youth can be involved in decision-making processes and become active in society. To do so, it is important that educational systems equip young people with critical skills, values and attitudes that support them in becoming autonomous in making their own choices, critical in exploring reality and entrepreneurial in their willingness to address modern challenges.

To achieve this objective, teachers, educators, parents and the larger educational community should focus not only on teaching what civic participation and engagement is, but also on providing students with the opportunity to directly engage in their own classrooms, schools and even communities.

Creating a bridge between school and territory, finding ways to connect the local needs to educational actions as well as opening dialogues with local NGOs, firms, community representatives and policymakers can be powerful ways to make sure that students' voices are stimulated and heard in the educational processes.

## Changemakers from Europe



**Giulia Detomati** is an Ashoka Fellow and founder of InVento Lab – an organization that puts youth at the center of addressing issues related to the environment, such as climate change, by creating the relational infrastructure, skills, tools, and knowledge that promotes civic participation in their communities. By leveraging their interests, connection and affection with their local area, Giulia sparks passion about environmental issues in the youth and equips them with the right competences that enable young people to navigate the complexity of social issues. InVento Lab adopts a collective impact approach, bringing together cross-sectorial stakeholders in support of those groups of young people who want to ameliorate their territory.



**Matti Jänkälä** is a Young Changemaker and founder of **You Tell Me Collective**. This initiative is made up of a group of students and young architects working on a paradigm change in the field of construction. Built environments play a great role in the challenges the world faces, from climate change and biodiversity loss to resource exhaustion and inequality. Tackling these challenges requires a shift in thinking which the collective is working on through peer learning, knowledge sharing and activism. In this way, You Tell Me Collective aims to strengthening both technical and global competences in making sure that the next generation of architects grows aware of environmental impact that their future choices can have on the planet.



**Elena Ruda** is a Young Changemaker and founder of **Luz Azul**, an NGO that looks at strengthening XXI century skills to unlock the potential of young people and spark passion for the social sector. Focusing particularly on two competences, empathy and critical thinking, Luz Azul offers international trips for social purposes and volunteer experiences where the youth actively participate in the community.



## Key takeaways from the conversation

Giulia pointed out that change takes time and failure is part of an innovation journey. Make sure that you carefully report the path you are embarking on and the impact you are generating. This process is essential in involving different actors in the education landscape, especially the institutions!

Matti made us realize that we do not need to ask for permission or wait for others to start changing things. If you identify a problem in your community, start doing something to address it. Most importantly though, do not do it alone, there is something extremely powerful in working collectively towards a shared vision.

With Elena's inspiring personal path, we had the chance to understand that leveraging young people's passions and personal interests is an incredibly powerful step in unlocking their leadership and activism and contributing to create a new generation of changemakers.

The group also envisioned that, now more than ever, enabling intergenerational, cross- sectorial and international conversations is truly important in creating systemic change.



# Chapter 2

Re-discovering the purpose in teaching: crafting the positive self-perception of teachers and school leaders' changemaking role

Although the role teachers and their implications and functions in society may vary across time and space, the importance of teachers creating a next generation of changemakers is well established. If in the past, children were often preferred to pursue informal education paths, with the ever-changing evolution of the last 50 years, there is an increasing dependence upon institutions of formal education (UNESCO, 1977).

In primary school, children in Europe spend on average 862 hours at school every year, giving teachers a large responsibility in being central in the growth of pupils. Despite this awareness, data shows that the social role of teachers is being devalued (Katsarova, 2020), resulting in a sharp drop out of teachers from the profession (The Guardian, 2020) as well as decreasing attraction of teaching as a career option (The Varkey Foundation, 2018).

To counter this trend, it is imperative that educational systems support teachers in rediscovering their purpose in teaching, dive deep into the intimate question of why they have decided to dedicate their life to it as well as crating a positive self-perception of their role in society.



## Changemakers from Europe



**Miguel Luengo** is the president of **Design for Change España**. As a replication of an initiative founded in India in 2009 by Kiran Bir Sethi, Design for Change spread design thinking tools to allow both children and teachers to transform the world in how they envision it, empowering them to create a more compassionate, empathetic world. Design for Change really works on awakening the motivation, positive attitude and passion of teachers to make education an effective tool to change the world.



**Shaun McInerney** has taught and led schools in the UK and at the international level for 25 years. As founding Principal, he established The Studio, an innovative, tech-focused state school for 14-19 year olds living in Liverpool, UK. Shaun pioneered a Changemaker curriculum at UWC Atlantic where he was Director of Learning Innovation. Both The Studio and UWC Atlantic are Ashoka Changemaker schools and Shaun has been actively involved in this network of 15 schools from across the UK. He is Senior Project Coordinator: Changemaker Education a role that focuses on helping Greater Manchester become the first Changemaker City Region in the UK. Shaun sees changemaking and the addition of a changemaker curriculum in schools as an opportunity to help teachers re-discover and elevate their sense of purpose that led them to teaching when they first chose their career path.



● ●  
**TEACH FOR ITALY**  
Insegnare per L'Italia

**Gaia Longobardi** is a Teach for Italy Fellow. Teach for Italy is a replication of Teach for All, an initiative that was founded by the Ashoka Fellow Wendy Kopp. Teach For All is a global network of over 50 independent, locally led and governed partner organizations and a global organization that works to accelerate the progress of the network. Teach for All worldwide channels a stream of passionate, diverse, skilled people to become teachers, thus providing a critical source of excellent teachers for today's most disadvantaged students and ultimately building a leadership force of individuals who will work to reform both inside and outside of education. Teach for Italy's teachers go through a rigorous recruiting process, and if selected, participate in a summer-long training program which is followed by a 2-year incubation period in which they are placed in some of the most economically challenged schools in Italy to teach, in addition to training with TFI. In doing so, TFI makes sure that it equips the young teachers with useful tools, such as the "contextualized student vision" to maintain the sense of purpose, motivation and a clear vision that helps them in becoming changemaker teachers.



## Key takeaways from the conversation

Gaia shared the importance of spending time on drafting a contextualized student vision that can drive you through the most difficult times. In addition to reflecting on your own and your students' goals in 10 years, it is also key to set annual objectives that make your vision more concrete and tangible.

Miguel asked us to completely change our perspective of education, pushing teachers and schools leaders to adopt an I CAN mindset that moves away from projecting children and teenagers in the future, while focusing on them in the present. This approach gives teachers and school leaders the urgency and the motivation to act and work daily WITH the students to achieve a common goal.

Shaun talked about the dissipation of energy that is spent by teachers on surviving rather than thriving. In the UK, although 94% of teachers go into the profession to make a difference for young people, shockingly, one third of the teachers change their job within 5 years. Shaun argues that the reason why teachers leave may be because they go into teaching with a strong sense of purpose which, in reality, gets channeled into helping individual children. However, the system does not really prepare teachers to support young people in being successful and does not help them either in shifting the direction that might do that. In addressing this issue, seeing changemaking as a new literacy, for both teachers and young people, could be key for making schools happier places, teachers more satisfied and young people more life ready.

As a group, we also outlined the importance of placing young people at the center of the discussion about teachers and school leaders' purpose and motivation. Key to this mindset shift is to take the time to actively listen to young people, trust them and give them permission to make mistakes. This way, we can make them aware of their changemaker potential, to thrive in this complex world and keep us all motivated.



## Chapter 3

Not a privilege for the few but a good for all: making changemaking education accessible for the most marginalized youth

Access to changemaker education is an extremely multi-faceted topic that sits at the center of many different global conversations as it touches several areas of youth development and carries implications of social and cultural aspects. Although innovation in pedagogy – Montessori approach for example – seems to break down barriers in education, in reality, innovative schools seem to be predominantly accessible for privileged children and their families, leaving behind the most disadvantaged students (Beard, 2020). Having “transforming education” at the center of the international discourse by way of SDG4 by 2030, it is imperative to make sure that every child is placed in the conditions to access changemaker education.

In doing so, changemaker education can be seen as a methodology to tackle the challenge of access: any teacher, any school, in any context can practice innovation and contribute to unlocking every child’s potential to become a changemaker.



## Changemakers from Europe



# KICKFAIR

**Steffi Biester** is an Ashoka Fellow and founder of **Kickfair**. By reshifting the focus of the educational system from a deficit-frame of defining someone's potential based on their background, Kickfair uses learning modules rooted in street football to sustainably change the DNA of schools. Street football provides a powerful frame for young people to engage with others across racial lines, reducing prejudice and developing intercultural appreciation and skills,- in that way – it enables the development of competencies critical for engaged, democratic societies. Steffi accompanies young people through a multi-annual process of gradually taking over responsibilities and ownership over their personal and professional future.



**Ana Barroca** is the director of the changemaker school **Scholé** in Portugal. In this school, projects allow young people to explore, experiment and experience learning following the triple H pedagogy which entails that children and teachers engage their hands, heads and hearts throughout the whole learning experience. To make sure that the 3 Hs are used and engaged, Scholé is a school that converses openly with the territory and the local and international community that surrounds it. Building curricula starting from real experiences and embracing inputs coming from the community into pedagogy is a core principle for Scholé to grow children as aware and happy citizens and hence tackle social inequality.



**Emilía Pinho** is a Young Changemaker from Portugal. Being able to take part in a summer course throughout her teen years to acquire XXI century skills, such as empathy, critical thinking and problem solving was a turning point in the life of Emilía. Suddenly, she was more aware of global dynamics, improved her ways to connect with her peers, was more agile at moving through life's every day complexities. She decided to found **Outro Mundo** to enable every young person, especially those with vulnerable backgrounds, to access the opportunity to be equipped with these competences. Outro Mundo organizes 2-week in-person and online summer camps for young people to learn skills, connect with peers and explore their full potential.




## Key takeaways from the conversation

Steffi opened up the session asking us to completely rethink the way we usually understand and comprehend the concept of talent and deconstruct how it gets measured at school and in society. The complexity of the XXI century urges us to embrace a multi-dimensional idea of success that is not only focused on skills and capacities but also considers performance, diligence and effort. This broader conception of success and talent can truly help in including and valuing the diverse set of talents that get often lost in the current social and economic system.

Ana made us reflect on the importance of building open schools that act as catalyst for social inclusion. For many years, schools have been built in walls and education has been taught in classes, but if we open up the class doors to the local and international community and incorporate the countless opportunities that they offer in the learning design, we can really rethink pedagogy as a powerful tool to hinder inequality.

Emília invited us to a call to action: even if we are not victims of inequality first hand, we just need to open our eyes and we will see it everywhere. We can all leverage our stories, experiences and opportunities to address a pressing societal issue in our means. Like creating a summer camp where marginalized young people are equipped with changemaking skills!

As a group, we reflected on the controversy of the topic, as access to changemaker education is an extremely multi-faceted and contextual matter. Something that the group noted, in a time where educational systems are in need of reconstruction after the health crisis, we find ourselves in front of the unique opportunity to rethink, broaden and enrich long-established concepts such as the one of access, growth and success.



# **Chapter 4**

**Gender and  
changemaking: how do  
we ensure equal  
opportunities in  
unlocking the  
changemaker potential  
in young girls through  
education?**

In the attempt to support human beings in making sense of the complexity of reality, unconscious bias shape our perception of reality, influencing our judgment and greatly impacting our decisions. Gender bias refers to prejudiced actions or thoughts based on the gender-based perception that women are not equal to men in rights and dignity (European Institute for Gender Equality). It is often converted into judgments and expectations about children and teenagers, according to dominant conceptions of men and women, which prevail over their own individuality and their human potentials (Alvarez, 2014).

In educational contexts, the Council of Europe's Survey (2015) finds that teachers (both male and female) interact differently with boys and girls: for instance, boys receive a disproportionate percentage of teacher-student interactions; boys are praised more often than girls; boys are asked more questions than girls; boys' contributions are more frequently accepted by teachers; the school textbooks used in European countries include stories and images that reflect a stereotyped portrayal of the role and activities of women and men, boys and girls. Schools are in a privileged position to reverse this trend and unlock the potential of boys and girls from a very young age.

Combatting gender bias at school requires expertise, training and the support of the whole education community. The key within this process is to ensure that teachers are aware and willing to deconstruct their ways of teaching, and as a result boys and girls are presented with equal educational opportunities and representation in educational resources and activities is aligned with the principles of gender equality.



## Changemakers from Europe



**Marie Madeleine Gianni** is an Ashoka Fellow and founder of **Bet She Can**. She is working to overcome and knock down gender-based stereotypes and barriers. She is empowering girls to allow themselves to dream with no bias like their male counterparts. She does this through innovative training and active learning experiences that engage young girls, young male teenagers, schools and teachers, and companies – as well as running communication campaigns for the broader audience. The peculiarity of her model lies in its ability to operate at pre-teens year, expanding the self-awareness of the limitless potential of young boys and girls as well as providing them with the tools they need to develop the skills that will help them unlock it, before gender bias can have an impact on their aspirations.

## RARE



**Vilma Rimpelä** is a 24-year-old Young Changemaker and CEO of **RARE**, a next-generation media company that creates journalistic and impactful content on social media platforms, inspired by the UN's Agenda2030 SDGs. RARE'S goal is to have a positive impact on the youth and society through the tools of media. Currently, they create and share publications and campaigns to Instagram and TikTok based on the UN's 17 goals. They do research to make a handbook for more sustainable and diverse media (RARE X Diversity, funded by Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland) and create workshops for young people about influencing in social media. In particular, Vilma and her team worked on a comprehensive research project on the representation of women in Finnish media and is keen on continuing her work on this matter, possibly working to raise awareness on how young girls and women are represented in textbooks.



**Mauro Spicci** is the School Leader of the **Bilingual European School** and a researcher at the University of Tampere (Finland). His work has focused on developing professional paths for teachers and educators on critical skills and transdisciplinary teaching, and additionally explores gender dimensions in educational contexts. Mauro's work and ongoing research dives into finding metacognitive strategies that can help both teachers and students in deconstructing unconscious biases and gender prejudices at school. In doing so, Mauro has developed several tools to be used in class such as "The Understanding Map" and some Thinking Routines that can help sharpen both teachers and students' critical thinking skills needed to unveil gender dynamics that they may encounter inside and outside the classroom.



## Key takeaways from the conversation

Marie opened the discussion pointing out the importance of acting quick, through empowering young girls even before the gender stereotypes come in the way. It is important to make sure that young girls grow up by freely choosing what they want to be and do!

Vilma brought us to understand the importance of talking about inclusive and aware representation of young girls and women in Media and journals but also on textbooks and images used at school. Representation often involves power dynamics that are enforced over the subject. Making young people aware and discussing these dynamics in class can be a powerful way to open an infinite range of possibilities for young girls and young boys at and after school.

After a quick energizing moment, Mauro told us that we can use metacognitive strategies to address gender bias. There are two really important things to keep in mind: the first is to slow down! Unconscious bias gets in the way in the attempt to make sense of a complex reality as quickly as possible. So take your own time and allow others to think through, reflect and deconstruct gender stereotypes. Mauro's second big piece of advice is to train your mind in recognizing we are (and others are!) caught up in gender bias or stereotypes. Like many forms of training, the more we think in that way, the better we become!

We collectively reflected on the importance of preparing the soil every day, so that once the seed is planted, it can grow strong and bloom. One thing we can do from tomorrow in addressing the issue of gender bias and stereotypes at school is to make sure that the problem is seen, felt and perceived, so that we can quickly act upon it.



# Chapter 5

Empowering children  
with disabilities to  
become changemaker

With regards to education, accessibility is still a key concern. In fact, almost 25% of the billion children in the world are still out of school (UNESCO, 2020). Among them, at least 50% of children with disabilities are excluded from education, in low- and middle-income countries. In some contexts, the figure is closer to 90%. (Handicap International, 2020). In addition to the problem of access, Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities establishes a strong link with the individualized support to enjoy the right to education, explore one's full potential and participate effectively in the society (2006). Among the key obstacles and barriers for children with disabilities to enjoy their right to education, in addition to the issue of access, there is a lack of training for teacher as well as a lack of knowledge about and sensitivity to disability issues on the part of some educators, staff and students. This can make it difficult for students with disabilities to access educational services equally (OHRC).

In addressing the matter of access and the quality of education that children and young people with disabilities are facing, a narrative shift is required, one that looks at disability as a spectrum of diverse abilities rather than focusing on the weaknesses and the inabilities of individuals.

Schools should focus on the abilities of young people, tailor making the curricula for the diverse abilities that they find in a class and making sure that no one is excluded from the learning process.

## Changemakers from Europe



**Celmira Macedo** has created **EKUI** (Equality, Knowledge, Universality, Inclusion), a disruptive, inclusive learning methodology that stimulates multiple communication channels and enables all children to learn reading and writing together equally. EKUI is generally used for children in early-stage learning and its universal design applies to everybody, including children with or without special needs, children with a disability, and children with phonetic articulation or speech difficulties, among others. It is a multi-sensorial methodology, centered around a simple idea of a deck of 26 unique playing cards that include four forms of communication: Braille both in texture and visual version, Sign Language, Portuguese spelling, and the phonetic alphabet. The same card therefore responds to different approaches of learning and communicating.



**Hakaroa Vallee** is an 18-year-old Young Changemaker and founder of Just Did It. JUST DID IT is a non-profit association, exclusively made up of volunteers (about fifty) whose objective is to raise awareness and inform the public, schools, and all types of administration connected to youth on Type 1 Diabetes. For this, JUST DID IT organizes challenge-based events throughout the year engaging the public and several stakeholders, with particular regards to schools, to raise awareness about type 1 diabetes and the most recent medical advances in terms of care to make sure that it does not prevent young people from enjoying the right to participate in the society.



SPECIALISTERNE 

**Francesc Sistach** is the Director of **Specialisterne España**, an organization that was originally founded by the Ashoka Fellow Thokill Sonne in Denmark that turns the handicaps of autism into a competitive advantage in business and opens up new opportunities for autistic adults. Specialisterne has created a for-profit software testing company, which assesses and employs high-functioning autistic adults and uses their special skills to out-perform the market and offer an often-isolated group of people opportunities for active, productive lives. Attention to details, precision, and unerring focus are qualities that come bundled with the disabilities of autism and make autistic people particularly adept in certain fields. Specialisterne is shifting the narrative surrounding autism, aiming at changing the ways in which people perceive autism as well as the self-perception of people with autism. Specialisterne has also started working with schools, carrying out project with students, teachers and school leaders to operate for a cultural shift.




## Key takeaways from the conversation

Celmira started off highlighting how crucial it is to be creative prototyping solutions to support the learning process of children and young people. By simply teaching the alphabet through multi-sensorial experience guided by a simple set of cards, EKUI changes the way ALL children learn to read, write, or communicate, without the need to make differentiation on the basis of physical, cognitive specificities.

Francesc truly made us understand the importance of broadening our understanding of ability in today's world, in particular when dealing with young people with autism. While working in class, it is essential that we allow every child to feel ABLE to do what is in their ability spectrum and make sure that they talk about their feelings and can narrate them. disabilities. It is only by supporting these voices that we can counter the overwhelming disability narrative that gravitates around the inability of people with Hakaroa's changemaker journey made us reflect that **despite the invisibility of certain disabilities, discrimination is rather observable**. Entering the job market for someone who has Type 1 Diabetes can be tricky as, for the society, you are unable to perform well in certain jobs such as the army or the police. So why not show everyone the capabilities of people with Type 1 Diabetes to raise awareness about it? That is what Hakaroa does since he was 13!

In a wonderful moment of personal sharing and bonding, the group reflected on the need to make sure that **the experience of disability is told and advocated by people with disabilities**, that their experience is explored in full, without attempting reduce it to a simplistic narrative, and that we, as a society, need to focus what people with disabilities want and not on who they are.

A photograph of two young girls blowing bubbles. The girl on the left is holding a blue bubble wand and blowing into it. The girl on the right is holding a red bubble wand and blowing into it. They are standing in front of a wooden structure, possibly a playhouse or a shed. The background shows trees and a clear sky. A large, semi-transparent red shape is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the chapter title and subtitle.

# Chapter 6

## Taking care of young people' wellbeing and mental health in creating the next generation of changemaker

Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and substance misuse can have a devastating effect on children, young people and their communities. If not addressed early, they can impact a person's ability to work, socialise and function throughout their life. The UNICEF report (2021) finds that almost one in five European boys aged 15 to 19 suffer from mental disorders, followed by more than 16 per cent of girls the same age. In addressing this emergency, the provision of mental health support can be part of the solution but the ARACY report (2015) report states that prevention and early intervention approaches are more effective and less expensive than intervening later in life and are key to enhancing mental health across the lifespan.

Educational institutions not only are key places where it is possible to prevent and promptly detect mental health conditions, but they are also well-placed to connect children and families with local support services.

To make sure that schools are well equipped to face this increasing threat to student's wellbeing, WHO European Framework for Action on Mental Health 2021–2025 (2021) points out two key recommendations: 1) leverage the power of digital technologies that are increasingly accessible to the public to address mental health matters in young people; 2) support the increase of mental health literacy and wellbeing awareness in young people

## Changemakers from Europe



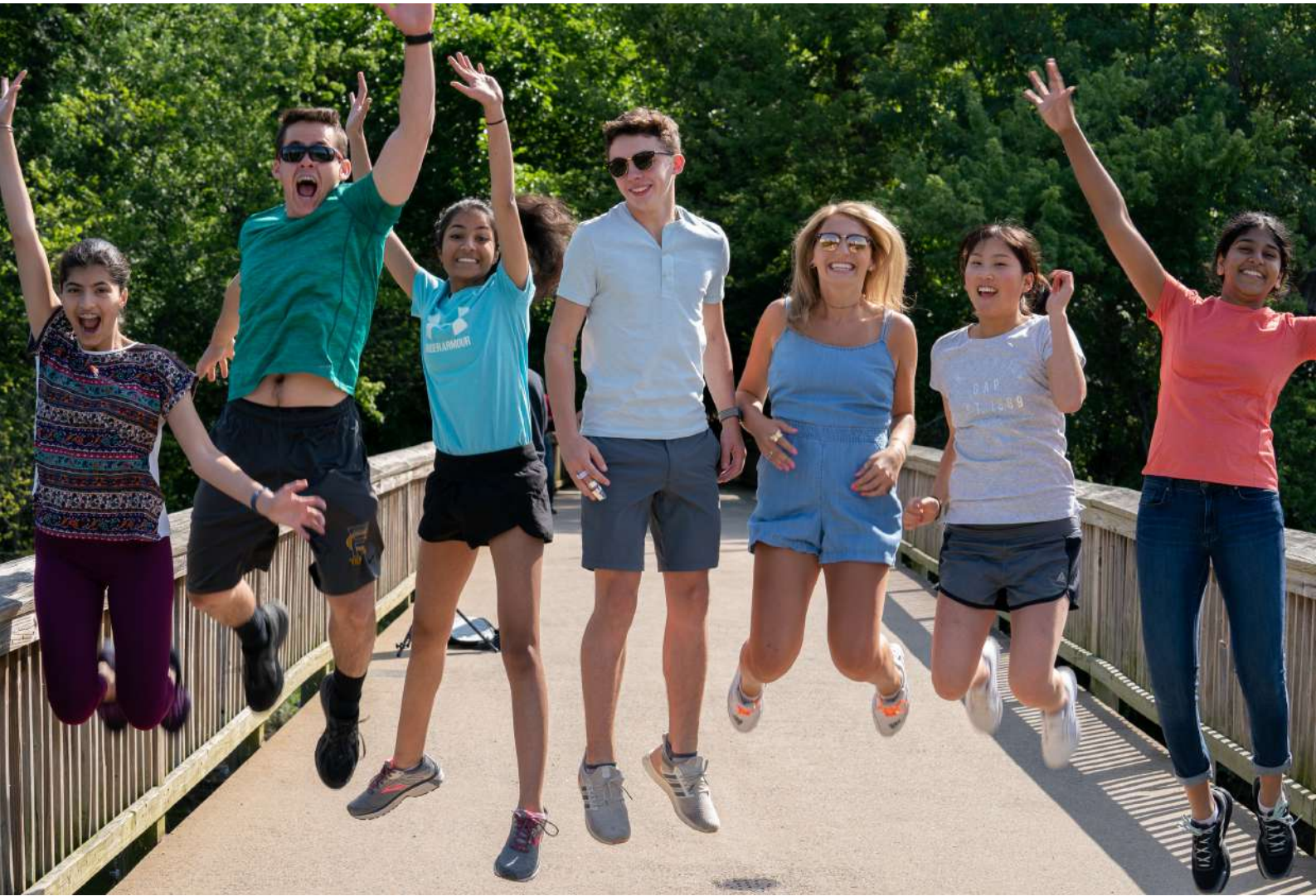
**Jimmy Westerheim** is an Ashoka Fellow and founder of **The Human Aspect**, an organization that works to democratize the conversation about mental health and recovering strategies through impactful digital tools. In fact, the Human Aspect has digitized human-to-human support through structured video recordings of in-depth lived experiences of mental health challenges that are available online, for free, to viewers and listeners around the world. With this versatile digital model, Jimmy's organization is in continuous evolution, working cross-sector to equip young people with an emotional vocabulary that will help them in labelling their feelings and, consequently, communicating them. In doing so, Jimmy works on several levels, engaging also different actors in educational institutions in providing teachers and schools leaders with mental health backgrounds that can support them in interacting with students in need of support as well as inserting mental health in the school curricula.



**Noor** is a Young Changemaker and founder of the **Feel Good House**. Having suffered from health issues when she was little, she had trouble interacting and playing with her peers. Thankfully, her teachers were a great help and restored her self-confidence. Learning from this and motivated by the certainty that young people should have a space to learn and be heard, she started to create different questionnaires regarding the wellbeing of students around her. She also began to train teachers to speak about those topics. As a true leader, Noor sincerely emphasizes inclusion and is not afraid to start conversation on less known issues such as autism.



Susana Caires is a mental health and student wellbeing specialist whose work has covered several areas of students and teachers' wellbeing. Having a clinical background, Susana has deepened the issue of humanization in healthcare (healthcare clowning, paediatric hospitalization, parenting and family psychosocial processes in child cancer). Later, her interest has focused on topics such as emotional health and wellbeing in educational settings and emotional education in Initial Teacher Training and Healthcare. She recently co-founded an association of research and intervention on emotional education called "Núcleo de Investigação e Intervenção em Educação Emocional" (on Education, Health, Justice and Multi-challenged Systems and Communities).



## Key takeaways from the conversation

Jimmy explored the need to work on the provision of systemic mental health support in school to empower peers to gain an adequate emotional vocabulary so that they can be aware of and able to deal with their feelings. With The Human Aspect, Jimmy works on multiple levels to reach this goal. In its latest project, Jimmy's organization is working toward empowering teachers to embrace the mental health discourse from a multi-disciplinary perspective, incorporating "the subject" horizontally in the curriculum, rather than having a specific class about it.

Noor made us realize that thinking and operating systemically can transcend age specificity. After leveraging the motivation coming from a personal story, she carefully studied how the system operates formally and informally, mobilizing diverse resources and bringing aligned partners along the way. In this way she managed to design (and soon to be built!) a unit in the playground of her school where a peer-to-peer mental health support can be offered, for free, to all students.

Susana helped us map the problem of the increasing number of young people being affected by mental health conditions. She made it clear that every actor in the education community is important to work on the prevention of the mental health conditions in children and young people. Key in creating such an environment is the broadening of our understanding of education from what happens solely INSIDE to what happens even OUTSIDE school, as children and young people enter classes with diverse personal backgrounds that may influence their education experiences.



# Conclusions

Over the course of the six appointments, the need to converse, debate, confront and co-create with like-minded and like-driven individuals emerged as an urgent matter to counter the uncertainty of the historical moment we lived in. Not only the speakers were keen on seeing how their stories and models were perceived by a European community of education practitioners, but the diverse range of age, country of origin and background of a group of individuals who have embarked on a 6-month learning journey helped create a safe space where meaningful, intimate and valuable conversations could flourish.

In the kick-off meeting in January, *Giulia, Matti and Elena* brought the attention to ensuring that young people are always involved in the decision-making processes and are given the trust and the opportunity to invent, create, fail and succeed.

*Miguel, Gaia and Shaun* mapped the complex reality of being a teacher in Europe and how this role is progressively losing its value in society. To counter this trend, the speakers suggested that it is imperative to introduce the concept of *changemaking* in teachers' work and in their perception of themselves, with the aim to become changemaker teachers.

*Steffi, Ana and Emilia* drew on the need to rewrite certain narratives that are intrinsic to education, such as the idea of success while growing up, enriching it with performance, diligence and efforts. Further, on the concept of school itself, making sure that it becomes an "open school" that engages and responds to the needs of the local community is of paramount importance.

*Marie, Vilma and Mauro* enthusiastically explained that in order to deconstruct unconscious bias and gender stereotypes at school, actions need to be taken as early and as consistently as possible. Countering unconscious bias requires training and perseverance from all members of the education community.

*Francesc, Celmira and Hakaroa* agreed on the need to bring the attention of the disability discourse to the ability spectrum of children and young people with disabilities rather than focus on what they are lacking. It is only by changing this narrative that we can aim for a more inclusive and fairer world.

In last meeting, the personal stories of *Jimmy, Noor and Susana* expanded on the need to enable the whole education community to have an emotional vocabulary that can help them detect, label and counter mental health conditions and discomfort, with particular attention to training for teachers and appropriate mental health curricula in schools.

*Changemakers Dialogue!* has worked as a platform to share ideas, exchange models, confront experiences and nurture a sense of belonging to a European community of changemakers in education. Changemakers can feel lonely sometimes, however, the important thing is to connect with equally lonely journeys and continue to create systemic change.



# Suggested next steps

With the Changemakers Dialogue! initiative, a very diverse and multi-faceted cohort of participants met on an online platform for 6 months. In this period, the 2-hour sessions became a safe space for like-minded and driven individuals, who brought their personal experiences to the table and openly decided to share their tools, strategies, difficulties and successes in working to innovate education. The inspirational talks from the speakers and the peer-to-peer learning that was facilitated in the group discussions allowed for connections, inspiration and knowledge sharing to spark. In particular, the presence of Young Changemakers as speakers was deeply appreciated by their peers as well as by teachers who were astonished by their work, vision and skills. We believe that this inter-generational and cross-sectorial methodology can be applied to any topic and context, to facilitate fruitful and valuable collaborations for systemic change.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a light blue surgical mask and a dark blue jacket, is looking down at a wall covered in numerous yellow sticky notes. Her hands are visible, touching one of the notes. The scene is partially obscured by a large, semi-transparent orange circular overlay on the left side of the image. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and what appears to be a meeting or workshop environment.

# Key learnings & Messages

**Failure is part of an innovation journey**

**We do not need to ask for permission or wait for others to start changing things. Start doing something to address it. Most importantly though, do not do it alone.**

**Leveraging young people's passions and personal interests is an incredibly powerful step in unlocking their leadership.**

**Spend time on drafting a contextualized student vision.**

**Pushing teachers and schools leaders to adopt an I CAN mindset that moves away from projecting children and teenagers in the future, while focusing on them in the present.**

**Seeing changemaking as a new literacy, for both teachers and young people, could be key for making schools happier places, teachers more satisfied and young people more life ready.**

**Placing young people at the centre of the discussion about teachers and school leaders' purpose and motivation.**

**Rethink the way we usually understand and comprehend the concept of talent and deconstruct how it gets measured at school and in the society: embrace a multidimensional idea of success.**

**Building open schools that act as catalyst for social inclusion**

**We can all leverage our stories, experiences and opportunities to address a pressing societal issues in our means**

**We find ourselves in front of the unique opportunity to rethink, broaden and enrich long-established concepts such as the one of access, growing up and success**

**It is important to act quick, through empowering young girls even before the gender stereotypes come in the way**

**Pay attention to inclusive and aware representation of young girls and women in media and journals but also on textbooks**

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## Author: Ludovica Tramontin



*Ludovica is a dynamic professional with a passion for creating and enabling others to create social impact. After working as a research assistant in international education policies and project assistant in the innovation team of UNAIDS, Ludovica came back to her home country and works with Ashoka to create what she believes to be key for systemic change, synergies between the education and innovation space.*

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**ASHOKA**