

Children as (social) changemakers

'The article 'Children as (social) changemakers' is a translation of the article 'Kinderen als (sociale) changemakers' which was published in October 2021 in the Dutch-language magazine JSW, a magazine for educational professionals.

KEVIN MOL & STELLA VAN DER WAL-MARIS





Social entrepreneurship education

Children as (social) changemakers

Primary schools face the challenge of shaping citizenship education: preparing children to participate in and shape society. Many schools are looking for the best way to address this content. Social entrepreneurship education is a social and sustainable approach.

KEVIN MOL & STELLA VAN DER WAL-MARIS

Schools were already obliged to include citizenship education in their program, but until recently the task was very unspecific. With the ratification of the 'Wet verduidelijking burgerschap' (citizenship clarification act) (August 2021), a more specific content has been established. For primary schools it means that they have to provide education about the democratic constitutional state and human rights and freedoms. The development of social and societal competences is also part of the task, so that pupils can be part of and contribute to the pluralistic, democratic Dutch society (Rijksoverheid, 2019).

Many schools are still exploring 'the how'. One way to address this subject is by social entrepreneurship education. In this way pupils interact with the real world and with issues in the field of sustainable development, and they learn to contribute to the solution of problems by developing products or services. Think of, for example, reducing the plastic soup and global warming, but also think of improving the quality of life in a neighbourhood and reducing prejudice, discrimination and poverty. All these aspects are reflected in the sustainable development goals, formulated by the United Nations (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Sustainable developments goals

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

When children are enrolled in social entrepreneurship education, they learn to contribute to sustainable development actively and entrepreneurially. They learn how to develop initiative and take action. The foundation of social entrepreneurship education consists of pedagogical, societal and action-oriented dimensions. The pedagogical dimension is aimed at being a subject. Personal development and the discovery of one's own motives and passions are central to this. It is also about the question of how you relate to other people and the world, and about discovering perspective together (De Winter, 2017). It is about searching for a good balance between what is desirable for yourself, others and the world (Biesta, 2018). The societal dimension focuses on social action and contributing to sustainable development. Education is seen as a crucial factor for achieving sustainable development (Leicht, Combes, Buyn, & Agbedahin, 2018). The action-oriented dimension is directed to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is about taking action, seeing and exploiting opportunities, and thereafter adding something and thus creating value.

Definition of social entrepreneurship education

'Learning to recognize opportunities for contributing to sustainable development, based on compassion, empathy and care, in order to subsequently generate ideas and develop initiatives that contribute to sustainable development (Van der Wal-Maris, 2019). The definition is visualized in figure 2 (p.8).

Social entrepreneurship education comprises a number of components that can be indicated with symbols, see figure 2. The heart symbolizes being engaged. Engaged with yourself, other people and the world. Developing compassion, empathy and care, and based on such an attitude, explore a problem or challenge and commit to it. The exclamation marks represent recognizing opportunities. If there is something you would like to change, what opportunities do you see to contribute? What opportunities do you see to realize a change? What ideas do you have for that? The lights symbolize those different ideas.

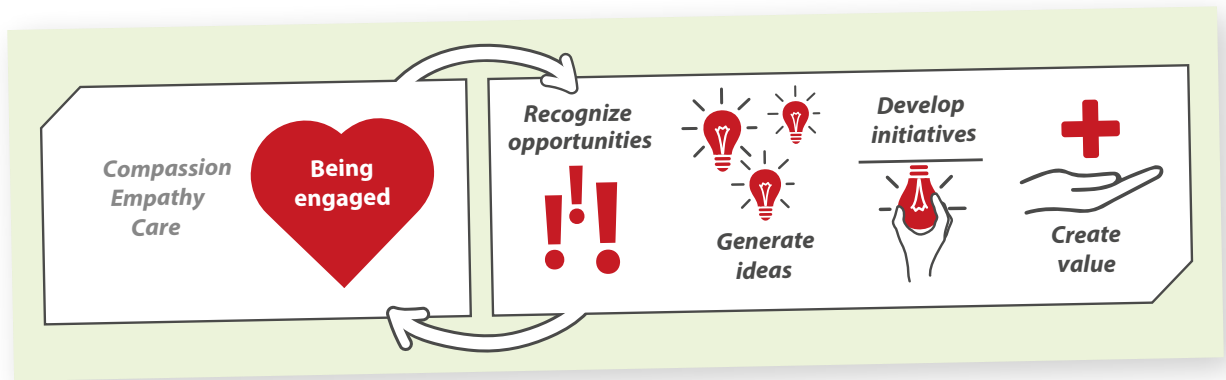


Figure 2 – Learning to be a social entrepreneur

Thereafter, you ask yourself which idea you are going to implement. This leads to action, often together with others: turning the light on. When the action has been carried out, you have added something, created value, the plus. You have undertaken something with the intention of making a positive contribution to sustainable coexistence and development. The arrows represent looking for- and backward. Are you satisfied, do you want to adjust an elaboration a bit? Do you want to scale up, broadly share your action and the outcome in order to increase the impact? Or are you going to work out another idea? What does social entrepreneurship teach you about yourself, others and the world? The different components of social entrepreneurship education are clearly shown in

a practical example taken from the European Erasmus+-project UKids. In the Netherlands, Het Drieliuk, a primary school in Almere and the Marnix Academie, an institute for primary teacher education in Utrecht, are involved in this project. Within UKids, educational materials for developing social entrepreneurship are designed for both primary and teacher education.

CASE STUDY: HOW DOES THE EARTH FEEL TODAY?

At Het Drieliuk, pupils work in projects with a cross-curricular theme two afternoons a week. Once a year there is a project in which the children practice with social entrepreneurship. At the beginning of 2019, the theme is: 'How does the earth feel today?' Children aged 10-12 explore

When children learn to become social entrepreneurial, they learn to contribute actively to sustainable development



the problem of plastic waste. The pupils explore questions such as 'What is plastic soup?' and 'Why do we use so much plastic even though it is so polluting?' The pupils collect plastic waste at home for a weekend to find out how much plastic they use themselves. On Monday morning a huge mountain arises in the hall of the school and they experience: the problem is clearly affecting ourselves (being engaged).

The teachers instruct pupils to look for opportunities to reduce the amount of waste in their environment. The pupils immediately see opportunities (recognizing opportunities). It is important not to immediately take action, but to first brainstorm about possible actions (generating ideas). What is feasible, promising, has an impact? The children form groups around an idea that they want to implement, after which they develop initiatives. Some pupils collect plastic bottles, others contact a supermarket and try to convince the manager not to use plastic bags in the vegetable department anymore and propose an alternative as well. Another group makes artworks from waste. Three students write a letter to the mayor of Almere. They want to invite as many residents as possible to join a major clean-up campaign for cleaning up litter, and they ask the mayor to help spread their message.

The artworks, the alternative to plastic bags and the cleaning campaign are examples of creating value. The pupils really made a difference. It is important that the children themselves realize what added value they have delivered and that they celebrate the results. This can be achieved by asking questions. How have you contributed to sustainable development? What added value have you provided? At the end of the project, artworks are exhibited and the students present taken actions, explain why they have taken these actions and present the result. The clean-up campaign even gets attention in the local newspaper. During the project, the students interact with the real world and consider the needs of their fellow human beings and their environment. They also get to know

themselves better. They participate in the surrounding society and thus become part of the community.

MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

When children learn to engage in social entrepreneurship, they investigate issues from 'the real world'. In the case described, this is the huge amount of plastic waste, but it can also be about loneliness, poverty, quality of life in the neighbourhood or discrimination. By becoming involved in and taking action on these issues, children develop social entrepreneurship competences. They experience that they can contribute to a better world: the children are empowered, experience that they are part of society and experience that they can make a difference. In this way they practice their role as responsible citizens in a democratic society, one of the tasks schools are facing.



The bibliography can be found at: www.jsw.nl/artikelen

Powerful learning environment for social entrepreneurship education

- School-wide approach aimed at a culture of compassion, empathy, care and entrepreneurship.
- Embedded in other educational content, for example language education: practicing written communication by writing a letter to the mayor.
- Pupils own the process; the teacher facilitates, guides and organizes feedback.
- Space for meeting and dialogue, inside and outside the school.
- Attention to conflicting needs and views; challenge to change perspectives.
- Learning by doing.
- Short cycles of 'action-feedback-reflection'.

KEVIN MOL

is a teacher at Kindcentrum Leeuwesteijn in Utrecht and has been involved in researching social entrepreneurship within the UKids project

STELLA VAN DER WAL-MARIS

(s.vdwal@hsmarnix.nl) is professor of Future-oriented Education at the Marnix Academy and directs the research group Education & Social Entrepreneurship