

60 MILLION TEACHERS AND 1.2 BILLION STUDENTS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD FOR THE BETTER

In 2015 the UN published the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

They define aims like **fighting poverty and hunger world-wide, providing good health-care and quality education for all**, achieving gender equality, clean water and affordable, clean energy as well as decent work and economic growth, progressive innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production.

If we don't achieve these goals, people will die, animals will be extinct, living conditions will spiral downward, and conflicts will increase.



It goes without saying that to reach these goals – and other goals that students and teachers define for making the world a better place, **humankind needs to strongly support awareness for human rights**, empathy, creativity, cultural understanding, transversal skills, problem-solving skills, critical thinking and media-literacy as well as participation.

I provided a lesson plan for The World's Largest Lesson, an initiative that tries to introduce the Global Goals to our classrooms. On their websites, plenty of material for teaching about the Global Goals can be found.

Taking into account what is at stake for humankind, I want to challenge all teachers to join the movement and connect as much learning as possible to the Global Goals and not only to learning about them, but also to taking action towards achieving them. We are 60 million teachers in the world, and 1.2 billion students – more than one sixth of the world population. We can take on a key role in achieving the Global Goals. Our students have the potential to

come up with solutions or part-solutions for the goals. And student numbers are growing.

Think about this: On average, our kids spend **7,000 hours** in school. If we spend this time mostly with tasks that have no purpose, we teach our children not to care, not to be active and not to have an impact.

Instead it is the aim of Global Goal Education to **show them that their actions matter**. This way, our students have plenty of possibilities to experience that social activities are appreciated. They'll want to help shape a world in which the **actions of social activists and social entrepreneurs are valued**.

Using education to strengthen **social participation as well as academic skills, creativity, critical thinking and transversal skills** will help prepare our students for a quickly changing future with unpredictable expectations in the professional and private world.

In a world which is likely going to be dominated by Artificial Intelligence replacing many of the jobs we currently prepare our students for, we need human beings to be particularly humane: **creative, socially-minded, active, purposeful, and dedicated to good actions**.

I personally know many teachers who connect the learnings in their classrooms.

Their students work on projects that help raise awareness for overfishing in their community in Morocco.

Their students help provide education videos for students in countries that have less learning equipment, their students.

Their students grow urban gardens in their poor communities and bring home tons of fresh fruits and vegetables for their families.

You can't do this at your school?

Here is a six step plan of what we can do even in the most restricted learning environments.

ESTABLISHING THE GLOBAL GOALS AT YOUR SCHOOL

1. If you are in a school background in which you are forced to follow a curriculum that leaves no flexibility and doesn't contain any curriculum content that could be linked to the Global Goals: Hang up a poster in the hallway, mention the Global Goals in breaks and

after school activities and encourage your students to contribute. At the same time: Connect with like-minded educators and advocate for more flexibility with regards to curricula and testing.

2. If you teach in a context in which you have a strict curriculum, but you can make decisions about didactics and material, check your curriculum for anything that can be connected to the Global Goals. Your curriculum has the topic “water quality” for Biology or Science classes? Connect your work with students to SDG 6.
3. Check, if there is enough flexibility in your curricula to not only study SDGs but also take action. Let them brainstorm what they could do. Let students invent a solution for cheap water filtering. Let them develop a plan for their own or someone else’s health improvement. Show them how to give a speech about better conditions for their own learning or how to make a video that can be used as an education research for someone else’s learning.
4. Encourage your school to have one week a year, which can be dedicated to projects that help achieve a Global Goal. Students can choose which Goal to work on and can come up with their own plans of how they want to achieve their goal. They can work on their own or in groups of several and get their teacher’s support. If you have plans for a school festival: Why not make the topic “The Global Goals”. What used to be the school fair or summer party now becomes a celebration of the Global Goals. Maybe you can have 17 or more booths that provide information about each goal and offer something related to the goal: For example clean water (SDG 6), something to eat (SDG 2), something educational (SDG 4), or decorations with symbols for peace (SDG 6). You could donate (some) of your profit to charity or a partner school.
5. If you can: Combine subjects for bigger projects over a few weeks or a school year. In their Science classes they come up with the idea for a filtering system. In their English classes they can provide an appeal for funding for the water filtering system, or an advertisement. In their Music lesson they could study how music supports the ad and helps raise awareness for a campaign. In their Politics lesson they could learn which areas of the world might be in need of their device. In Economics they could make a plan of how to fund the project or become social entrepreneurs. Mix the curriculum in with the projects. And if it’s possible: Combine subjects on a structural level too. Combine hours, let students choose which aspects they work on and which teacher could give them the support they need.
6. If you are a really free spirit and you are in a context in which testing and curricula don’t play a role: Let your students lead their own learning and activity! Ask your students: “What do you think are the biggest problems in the world”: Let them make a mind map. Turn the question around: If these are the problems: What would be the solutions? Let them compare their goals with the Global Goals and let them do the research and create action plans! Just stay on their side and encourage them to keep broadening their horizons and introduce them to experts inside or outside the school who can help. Their self-direction and your support will lead them to fantastic development and great results.

A NEW SCHOOL CULTURE

Education is innovation. Over the last years we have seen numerous education reforms and numerous movements within the education world. What most of them have in common is the intent to fix a system that is itself causing most of the flaws that it tries to eliminate. If we judge our students by standardized measurements, make them competitors for the best grades, value all competences higher than social competence, and deprive them of the chance to make an impact and find their purpose in life, we make learning and life difficult for them. Then, we try to work with them against bullying to fix what we and the media have taught them. This requires an enormous effort from our educators and often doesn't lead to the results we would like to see.

If we teach towards the Global Goals instead, it will be obvious that we need every student to contribute the best they can and support their individual strengths and their progress rather than measure their "talent" or shortcomings. We will automatically focus on a growth mindset. It will also be obvious that we can't afford to leave any child behind, because our goal, the common good, is far too precious to exclude anyone. We will naturally work with our students' interests. We will have a chance to praise them for relevant achievements. We will make them proud of supporting others and their world.

Fellow educators, please get on board: The world needs you!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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She is a UNESCO delegate for the role of teachers in Peace and Sustainable Development, a member of TeachSDGs and the Pestalozzi Programme, the Council of Europe's programme for the professional development of teachers and education actors. As a top 50 finalist in the Global Teacher Prize 2015 and Teacher Prize Jury Member 2017, she supports an education that fosters intercultural competences and active citizenship. Mareike is a Fellow for the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes in Kansas. Her ideas are published in articles and public speeches such as "Teaching - The Most Important Profession in the World", given at TEDxHeidelberg.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u50cbNTqbM4>

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