

## Designer Session Report

### What was done:

The workshop was a 120-minute participatory session designed to explore how children understand changemaking and to identify barriers that prevent them from engaging as changemakers. The session involved a series of interactive activities, including brainstorming, debates, individual reflections, and group ideation.



### How it was conducted:

The session followed a structured schedule starting with a warm-up and culminating in ideation and sharing solutions. A variety of facilitation tools were used including videos, post it notes, flipcharts, barometer worksheets. Activities ranged from individual reflection to group collaboration and discussion. Children were prompted throughout with open-ended questions to facilitate deeper thinking and engagement.

### Who it was conducted with:

- **Target Group:** Students aged 12
- **Number of Participants:** 23 students (12 years old)
- **Facilitators:** Green-Schools staff members Birgit O'Driscoll and Siobhán Hughes (experience in child-led education and participatory methodologies)
- **Setting:** Classroom environment with standard workshop materials (flipcharts, post-its, stickers, markers / pens)

### Reflection on workshop

Facilitating the "Changemaker Workshop" with 23 twelve-year-old students provided profound insights into the perceptions and aspirations of young people regarding societal change. The participants demonstrated a keen understanding of the attributes of a changemaker, emphasising qualities such as helping others, initiating positive change, resilience, and inclusivity. A significant revelation was the students' recognition of the disparities in how their opinions are valued across different environments. While they felt heard within their families, there was a noticeable decline in perceived agency within school

settings and the broader community. This highlights the necessity for structured platforms and initiatives that can amplify children's voices beyond the familial context. The "Moving Debate" activity further highlighted the students' awareness of systemic barriers. Despite these challenges, the students exhibited a strong belief in their capacity to understand complex issues and contribute meaningfully to solutions. This experience reinforced the importance of creating platforms that acknowledge and actively incorporate children's perspectives in local decision making.

## Report on workshop

Our recent 'Designer Session' explored the concept of changemaking, with 23 twelve-year-old students sharing their thoughts on what defines a changemaker as well as reflecting on their own roles in decision-making processes at home, in school, and within their community.

## Brainstorming 'What is a Change Maker'?



The brainstorming activity, which asked students to write down one or more words they associate with being a change maker, showed us that students most frequently associated changemakers with helping others and making a difference. Words like "help," "helpful," and "trying to help everyone" appeared repeatedly in student responses, highlighting their strong belief that changemaking is rooted in compassion and support for others.

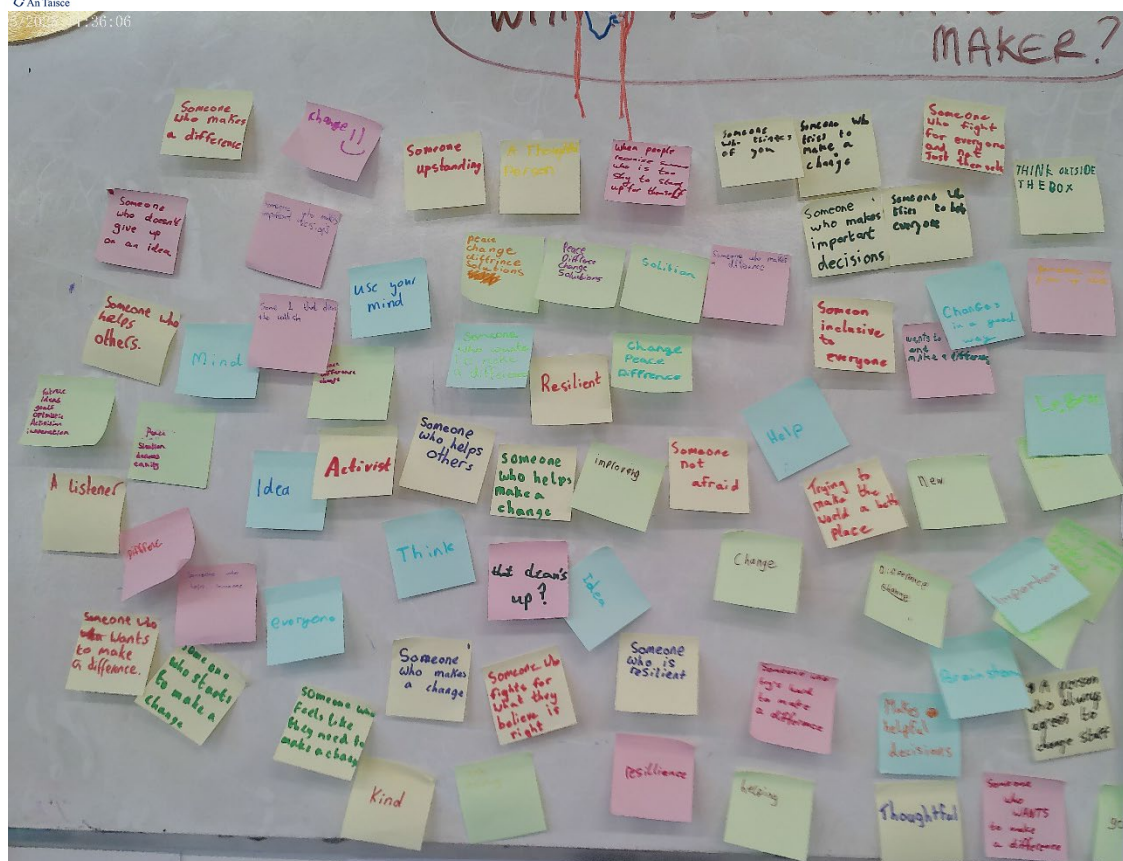
Closely tied to this was the theme of initiating change, with many students describing a changemaker as someone who wants to make a difference and is actively trying to create positive outcomes in the world around them.

Beyond these core themes, students also identified resilience and determination as important traits. They valued individuals who don't give up easily,

show courage, and keep trying despite challenges. Peace and unity were also emphasised, with terms like "inclusive," "fights for everyone," and "peace" reflecting a desire for harmony and social cohesion.

Students appreciated the importance of creative problem-solving and innovation, noting that changemakers often think outside the box and come up with solutions.

Positive character traits such as kindness, optimism, and being inspirational were also commonly mentioned, as was the belief that changemakers are action-oriented e.g. individuals who take concrete steps toward their goals and engage in activism.



Through these insights, students painted a clear picture of a changemaker as someone who is helpful, brave, and kind, who thinks critically and creatively, and who actively strives to make the world better for others.

### Barometer Activity – individual task with group discussion afterwards

In the barometer activity, students reflected on whether they feel their opinions are considered in decision-making processes that affect them. Most students (19 out of 23) felt that they are listened to at home. They cited reasons such as the smaller number of people in a family, the presence of love and trust, and a sense of equality in family decisions. Home was described as a safe and inclusive space where children feel respected and where their voices matter.

In contrast, school was seen as a more restricted environment for children's participation. Sixteen students said they were either unsure or felt that they were only sometimes heard. Many explained that teachers and adults make most of the decisions, and that children are only allowed input on smaller matters, like social interactions. A lack of trust in children's ability to contribute seriously, along with concerns about disorder or conflicting opinions, seemed to limit their influence in the school setting.

When it came to the community, children felt even less heard. Sixteen students said they were not consulted at all, and seven were unsure. They perceived that adults are seen as more experienced and mature, and therefore more likely to be trusted with serious matters. Students believed their ideas were often overlooked or seen as adding unnecessary complexity to already difficult issues. This highlighted a strong sense of exclusion from

community-level decisions and a belief that their voices are not valued in public or formal spaces.



### Moving Debate – what are the barriers

#### BARRIERS FOR 12 YEAR OLD STUDENTS TO BE A CHANGEMAKER



##### RELiance ON ADULTS

All agreed that they rely heavily on adults for basic needs such as food, shelter, and education, which limits their independence.



##### CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY

Many also felt that, while they may not yet be able to make a fully impactful contribution due to their age and limited life experience, their ideas still hold value and deserve to be heard, especially since societal decisions impact them directly.



##### UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL ISSUES

The students unanimously rejected the notion that they are too young to understand global issues. They demonstrated confidence in their ability to grasp complex topics like climate change and global conflict, and they believed they could contribute great solutions.



##### NEWS COVERAGE OF CHILDREN

Students felt that news focuses mostly on adult leaders, politicians and their opinions. While children are mentioned in the news, it is usually in the context of being in need, not as leaders or change-makers.

In a follow-up moving debate, students explored the barriers to their own participation in society. All agreed that they rely heavily on adults for basic needs such as food, shelter, and education, which limits their independence. Many also felt that, while they may not yet be able to make a fully impactful contribution due to their age and limited life experience, their ideas still hold value and deserve to be heard, especially since societal decisions impact them directly.

Students also discussed how the media often ignores or marginalises child-led movements. They noted that news coverage tends to focus on adult leaders, with children often portrayed only as victims or those in need, rather than as capable agents of change. The inability to vote and lack of political power were seen as contributing factors to their invisibility in public discourse.

Despite acknowledging their reliance on adults, students expressed a strong desire for greater inclusion in decision-making processes. They felt that their voices, while often undervalued, could offer important insights and solutions. Their reflections indicate a need for schools and communities to create more structured and respectful opportunities for young people to participate meaningfully in shaping the world around them.

#### Introduction to Change maker activity – how do children see themselves make a change?

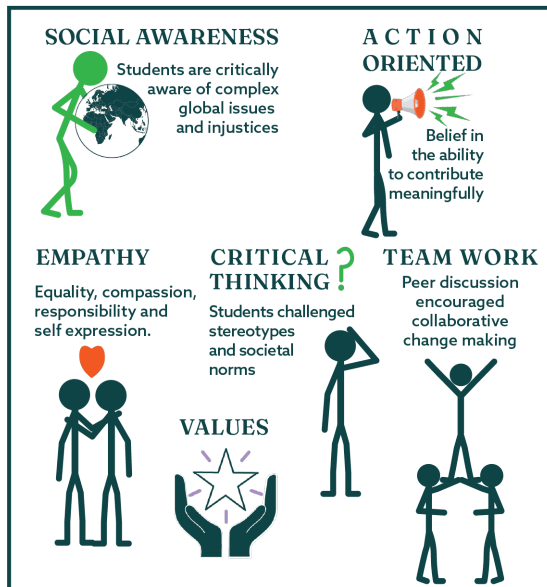
Students were shown a video of local children who are perceived as Changemakers <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njE3EknkkBY&t=1s> they were then asked to identify characteristics of the changemakers they saw.

Comments they made included; *They are truly being themselves, they are confident, they are resilient, they are crazy, they don't care what others think!*



## Think – Pair – Share Activity

### how 12-year-olds view themselves AS CHANGEMAKERS



Identifying an issue, envisioning action, and imagining the emotional impact of change.

Students were asked to think about a time they stood up for what they felt was important, or something they would like to stand up for and consider the following:

*What was/is the issue?*

*What did/can you do?*

*What was/could be the result?*

*How did/will it make you feel?*

This activity provided deep insight into how 12-year-olds view themselves as changemakers. The students showed strong awareness of global and local issues—like war, poverty, climate change,

gender inequality, and children's rights—and demonstrated early signs of empathy, leadership, and civic responsibility.

### Key Findings:

1. **Social awareness:** Students are critically aware of complex global issues and injustices. They exhibited a high level of awareness around complex social, environmental, and global issues. Their responses were rooted in values of fairness, empathy, equality, and justice.
2. **Action orientation:** Despite their age, students consistently showed a belief in their ability to contribute meaningfully. They proposed realistic, age-appropriate strategies (e.g., donating, making posters, speaking up) and showed an emerging understanding of civic engagement.



3. **Empathy:** Emotional responses like pride and happiness show strong moral engagement.
4. **Values:** Themes of equality, compassion, responsibility, and self-expression emerged.
5. **Group Identity:** Peer discussions encouraged shared purpose and collaborative changemaking.
6. **Critical thinking:** Some students challenged stereotypes and societal norms.
7. **Barriers to Inclusion:** Students recognised external barriers to changemaking—particularly adult control, lack of trust, and media invisibility—and want more opportunities to be included in decision-making spaces.

### Educational Implications:

These students are ready for meaningful, issue-based civic education. Schools should use empowering language and provide real-world engagement opportunities. Emotional literacy and guided reflection should be central to such programs.

### Recommendations:

1. **Celebrate Changemaker Moments:** Use displays or blogs to share student actions.
2. **Turn Ideas into Projects:** Support student-led teams on real issues.
3. **Connect with Real-World Partners:** Bring in NGOs or mentors.
4. **Structured Reflection:** After each action, debrief to reinforce learning.
5. **Amplify Student Voice:** Provide platforms to present ideas to school leadership.

### Conclusion:

This workshop has revealed that 12-year-olds are deeply thoughtful, capable of identifying significant social issues, and motivated to create change. They are beginning to understand not just what needs changing, but also how to go about it, and most importantly, why it matters to them personally. Their responses show early leadership, empathy, and a readiness to be guided into more structured forms of civic action. With the right support, they have the potential to grow into empowered, effective changemakers.

By mapping their concerns, proposed actions, anticipated impacts, and emotional stakes, you can see that these twelve-year-olds already grasp the essence of changemaking: identifying a problem, envisioning a solution, acting on it, and reflecting on the outcome. Structuring a follow-up around project-based learning, real-world partnerships, and reflections will help them transform these insights into sustained civic engagement.