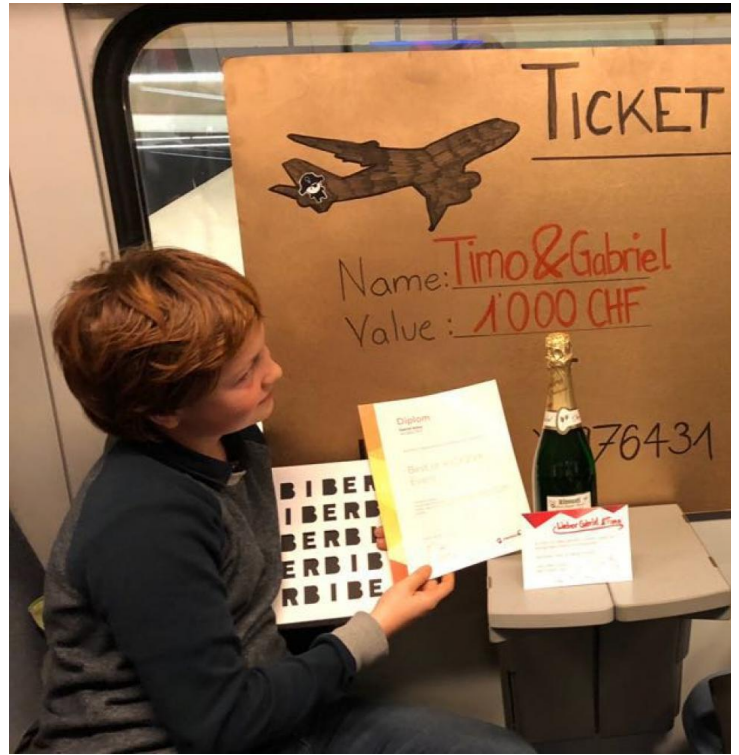




January 11, 2021

The Contagious Power of Changemaker Education: Timo's Changemaker Journey

Timo, a young changemaker from Switzerland, is on a path to reimagine education through design thinking and project-based learning. Embedded within his story are the early years of social entrepreneur and Ashoka Fellow Christiane Daeppe, an ally, and advocate for young people like Timo to be changemakers.



Timo, a young changemaker from Switzerland, is on a path to reimagine education through design thinking and project-based learning. Embedded within his story are the early years of social entrepreneur and Ashoka Fellow Christiane Daepp, an ally, and advocate for young people like Timo to be changemakers.

Perching his laptop on his bedroom desk, Timo sets up for another morning of digital learning.

“Coronavirus means a new way of learning, it has completely changed my everyday routine,” Timo shares. However, he is dismayed and impatient. Although education looks dramatically different for him than it did a year ago, he is still stuck with the same rote learning assignments and memorization-based tests as he was before the pandemic.

Like many education systems, Switzerland has a hierarchical structure in which teachers impart knowledge and children react passively. Within the current system, there is little room for students like Timo to work independently and make the best use of their creativity. Timo and his friends have been frustrated for years, and with virtual learning more commonplace than ever before, they see now as the time to change what it means to be a student in Switzerland.

Education reimaged

One day in Grade 6, Timo was introduced to what he considers to be the future of learning. Instead of his usual teacher, a woman named Christiane Daepp walked into his classroom. Christiane, an educator, social entrepreneur, and Timo’s future mentor, was not there to teach algebra or literature. Instead, she was at his school

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to launch Ideenbüro, or the “Office of Ideas” in English, which the students refer to as the “Idea Office.”

The program helps children use their creativity and idealism to become active problem-solvers in their communities. Timo’s class would be tasked with independently developing a solution to a problem faced by their younger peers, teachers, and neighbors to change their neighborhood for the better.

Timo’s eyes lit up with joy, eagerly stepping up to the challenge. Inquisitively, Timo and his classmates surveyed young students and teachers to express their concerns and dreams for their school. Analyzing the results, Timo’s class identified the need to address bullying to support the mental health and happiness of younger students.

The class imagined a space for children to converse candidly and listen to their challenges in peace, rather than taking out their frustrations through bullying. So, the class developed a mentorship program in which older students would be peer allies to young students, encouraging a culture of peer-to-peer problem-solving. They also held school-wide events to promote open dialogue and kindness amongst students and educators.

Their solution was welcomed and appreciated by students and educators alike. Within a year, Timo and his classmates felt like they had the power to create a positive change.

Learning from Christiane Daepf’s Story

One afternoon before the end of the semester, Christiane shared with the class how stoma-



Christiane shared with the class her story:



Christiane Daepf

Ashoka Fellow
since Aug 2008

📍 Switzerland

🏠 Ideenbüro

Christiane grew up in a small village with her four sisters, her father who was a priest, and her mother who was a stay-at-home parent. Her middle-class parents were both very socially active and often encouraged their children to express themselves. When Christiane was young, she loved to make art and write journalistic pieces, and her parents supported her endeavors by emptying the family cellar so she could have space to actively

pursue her interests. Her home environment sharply contrasted with the hierarchical school system she was a part of that did not allow for any input from the students.

Wanting to change the system from within, Christiane decided to become a teacher when she was sixteen. Her approach to teaching was apart from the Swiss norm as she let children participate in lessons. During her examination placement, the university threatened to hold back her diploma because of how much she strayed from conventional teaching. Put off by this lack of openness, Christiane set out at the age of twenty to travel for several years, living in Greece, Italy, and Egypt.

At twenty-five, Christiane was back in Switzerland and looking for a job position that allowed her to implement her ideas and was hired by a small



implement her ideas and was hired by a small primary school as the only teacher of children aged six to ten. She soon began to weave participatory methods into her teaching, and her ideas were considered so interesting that the largest TV station in the country produced two documentaries on her.

When the community was forced to close her school down for financial reasons, Christiane took up work in a larger educational institution. Unable to continue with her participatory teaching, she created an “alternative school system” in which parents would bring their children in their free time to learn collaboratively, express their creativity, and initiate projects. In 2002, Christiane ideated and established the Bureau of Ideas, which was enthusiastically received by children and supported by a handful of progressive teachers.

“ The Idea Office is not just about solving problems. It is a free space to let our dreams come true. If I had a plan to build a rocket and fly to the moon, a normal teacher may be dismissive. But Christane, she would be very open to the idea.”

When Christiane finished sharing her story, Timo was amazed by her journey leading up to Ideenbüro. He felt that ideas like Christiane’s were exactly what was missing from education and implementing solutions like hers was exactly what he wanted to do with his life, too. He saw a future for himself through Christane’s story and was determined to continue driving change.



determined to continue driving change.

“She is a really special adult because she is open to the ideas of children and young people. That is different from any other teacher I have ever had,” Timo shares, “The Idea Office is not just about solving problems. It is a free space to let our dreams come true. If I had a plan to build a rocket and fly to the moon, a normal teacher may be dismissive. But Christane, she would be very open to the idea.”

Breaking down invisible walls

The following year, Timo graduated from his primary school and enrolled in his town’s secondary school. In his new school, the environment was much different. This school was much more socially and ethnically heterogeneous with German and French-speaking students now attending the same school.

Switzerland has various language regions, with French speakers often living in the west and German speakers living in the central and eastern parts of the country. Timo lives in a town that is a linguistic intersection of German and French, often referred to as Rostigraben. This name is an idiomatic expression, representing both an invisible linguistic and cultural border between German-speaking and French-speaking Swiss.

Despite linguistic barriers, Timo befriended a boy named Gabriel back in primary school. Gabriel’s family is French but attended a predominately German school with Timo growing up. They both participated in the Ideenbüro together and were eager to “help other students make the world a better place” at their new school.



“ Gabriel and I saw a completely different kind of education system. The Idea Office is like a school subject called ‘Life.’ Sometimes we learn so many things in schools, but in this class, we learned how to learn.”

At school, both Timo and Gabriel noticed the rising tensions between French and German-speaking students. Itching to creatively design a solution, the pair found a professional co-working space outside of school to develop their own ideas. Timo reflects, “The co-working space felt like an ecosystem of so many different ideas and mindsets.”

With the help from those they collaborate with at the co-working space, Gabriel and Timo decided to host “intercultural exchange days” at their school. These days were meant to bring students together through shared activities. “We imagined a future where French and Germans were friends,” Timo smiles, “and to realize those friendships, we wanted to create a day at school where people do activities together – cook together, eat together, have fun together – an entire day to celebrate the relationships between people.”

Timo and Gabriel, after weeks of planning, successfully launched and ran an intercultural exchange day at their school for several years. With time, they passed on the responsibility to other students to lead.

Activating the next generation of educators and

... .



students

Today, Timo and Gabriel are working with Ideenbüro to spread the wisdom and practice to other schools. They are visiting schools of education across Switzerland to speak with teachers-in-training about how they can integrate design thinking, project-based learning, and changemaking into their future classrooms.

As Timo describes, “Gabriel and I saw a completely different kind of education system. The Idea Office is like a school subject called ‘Life.’ Sometimes we learn so many things in schools, but in this class, we learned how to learn.”

Timo goes on to say, “In our generation, there is so much information available, and this might not be the right way to put it all in our head, so we have a lot of critiques about education today. So, we are talking to teachers about adults about how we feel. We want classes that will give us the spaces to change the world with our ideas.”

Timo and Gabriel also attend conferences and workshops with Ideenbüro. Last year, the pair spoke at the Pädagogische Hochschule in Zürich and presented to important education leaders from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Inspiring greater youth action, Timo says, “Last year we helped organize events for climate change and environmental pollution. We talked about what we can all do in school for a greener future.”

A bright path ahead

Looking towards graduation, Timo is eager to take Ideenbüro international. “There is so much freedom to say what I think. Students can be so honest with their ideas. There are many countries



honest with their ideas. There are many countries where this is not possible [in education] and where children are not taken seriously. Something like this program could make a huge difference,” Timo proudly states, “I want to be an international ambassador for the Idea Office.”

Christiane has been consequential to Timo’s confidence and grit, but Timo also attributes the role of his parents in shaping his journey. Timo shares, “My parents never judged what I do with my time. They let me do what I want – they do not hinder my freedom. I can decide for myself and have my experiences for myself. I am so appreciative of them.”

“It’s good to start small and don’t have too many expectations. Just start, do not think too much,” Timo says, “That is a problem of adults – every time they start a project, they think about all the problems they will face. But this is the strength of young people.”

Once young people have the space to create, Timo encourages everyone to take advantage of it. “It’s good to start small and don’t have too many expectations. Just start, do not think too much,” Timo says, “That is a problem of adults – every time they start a project, they think about all the problems they will face. But this is the strength of young people.” Instead, Timo advises all young people to “not think too much and just start.”

However, Timo is not shy to ask for help. “Don’t be



afraid to ask for help – ask for feedback on everything you do.” And with the help of supportive adults like his parents and Christiane, his peers like Gabriel, and the encouragement from his school, Timo is on a path to reimagining education for a world where everyone has the skills they need to work together, to solve problems, and to change their world.

Nicole Pagan contributed to this story.

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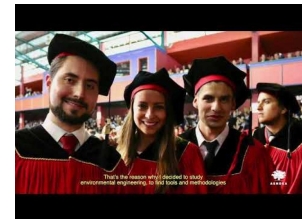
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