



**Ashoka**

We bring together social entrepreneurs, educators, businesses, parents & youth to support a world in which everyone is equipped & empowered to be a changemaker.

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## What does a global education look like?

What is the UWC (United World Colleges) movement?

UWC makes education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future. UWC deliberately selects students of different ethnicities, religions, nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds to live and learn together through an intensive academic and experiential education program. UWC students are selected by national committees in over 150 countries, based on their demonstrated promise and potential to become changemakers.

Founded in 1962, UWC now has 15 schools and colleges on five continents, the majority of which are two-year residential colleges following the International Baccalaureate

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Diploma.

Currently, 75% of UWC students receive full or partial financial assistance. UWC also has a network of short courses, often held in regions of political, economic, ethnic or environmental tension on themes such as conflict management or environmental awareness.

The UWC movement aims to inspire a lifelong commitment to social responsibility and to creating a global fellowship for international understanding among its alumni, now numbering more than 55,000. [www.uwc.org](http://www.uwc.org)



### **Jens Waltermann in discussion with Ross Hall**

**Ashoka's Ross Hall caught up with Jens Waltermann**, Executive Director of UWC International, to discuss how UWC prepares young people to be changemakers and why their definition of success is so central to the demands and opportunities of the modern world.

**RH: At Ashoka we increasingly strive to ensure that each young person in the world is equipped with the skills to become a Changemaker. The UWC schools and colleges offer an educational model where teaching young people those skills is very much at the core of the mission. Can you tell us a bit more about why and how?**

**JW:** Yes, at UWC we aim to support and nurture students from very diverse backgrounds to make the world a better place. We want them to question the status quo, to question the inequalities they experience, to develop empathy towards other ways of living and seeing the world—and not to be complacent but to bring about the change they want to see.

At UWC, we believe that a self-empowered person—or somebody you would refer to as

a *changemaker* is a person who has the energy to change things and the inclination to use that energy in the right way and for the common good. It's also somebody who understands and can navigate the complexity of life and who reaches beyond easy answers.

**RH: The world today is defined by accelerating volatility, complexity and hyper-connectivity—forces that make our tangle of social, economic and environmental problems *everyone's* problems—and increasingly difficult to solve with traditional approaches that rely on top-down and centralised decision-making. We can no longer afford to be *compliant*—or simply follow the rules—or do what we have always done. For humans to thrive together, people need to become *self-empowered* (to live for our collective wellbeing)...**

**JW:** What you're describing is a reality. But what's most troubling to me—given these challenges—is how easy it is to over-simplify, to provide or accept easy answers that lead us in the wrong direction—answers that take us to a place where people are worse off and not better.

Changemaking is about using your energy and your skills—entrepreneurial skills and skills for assessing your community's needs. It's about relating to people and putting empathy into productive action. It's about continued openness. Curiosity is an essential quality, because if you're not curious, your creativity will be limited, and you will likely settle for the first answer that you find. A person who is self-empowered will never say, "I've climbed the mountain. I've found the truth. All I need to do now is take it down to the people and tell them what's right."

**RH: That's a helpful perspective on what it means to be a self-empowered human being. But it seems to me that the perspective which dominates the provision of education—and the *experience* of school—is, for the vast majority of young people around the world, much more individualistic and economic in nature—and this mindset does not lead to the sort of self-empowerment that we now need...**





**JW:** At least in the West, formal education started as a system of *power projection*: it was a system to sustain the powers that were in place. The King needed administrators, the Prussian empire needed able soldiers and administrators. That's what Western schooling was initially built for: it was a system motivated by economic interests and power projection.

More recently, we've moved into a new paradigm which is much more individualistic and motivated by the idea the education equips young people to be *the best that they can be*. And *being the best you can be* is typically measured through exam results that help you go to a good university and get a great job.

At UWC, we believe this self-centered mindset is the wrong thing to buy into and especially so in a world that is changing in very fundamental ways. Our philosophy is not about *being the best that you can be*, but rather *doing the best you can do*, which is a different paradigm that takes you from just optimizing *yourself*, to optimizing your *impact* in the sense of positive, value-based impact on society.

So we educate for empathy and connections between people so that they can mobilize others and inspire them to join you. We optimize for seeing where there are problems and trying to do something about them. Rather than observe and record, we want to help our students observe and then act. And this is the powerful middle ground with Ashoka because Ashoka is so much about taking action continuously and for the common good.



**RH:** Your work is highly compatible with the work of Ashoka. We both share the vision of a world full of changemakers. And we both have in

**SHARE THE VISION OF A WORLD FULL OF CHANGEMAKERS. AND WE BOTH HAVE IN common the desire to create this kind of world through pioneers. But your work at UWC is not exactly the same as Ashoka's work. Whereas our strategy is to find existing pioneers — connect them — and help them collaborate to transform the experience of growing up, your priority at UWC is to nurture young pioneers who will go on to make a better world...**

**JW:** Yes. We believe we can contribute to changing the world through the strength of the students we send out into the world. Let me share one example. We know we need to change the way universities organise their intake so that schools are more incentivized to nurture changemaking skills. We have been very lucky to have had a great supporter in Shelby Davis who was willing to start a scholarship programme for our students at around 100 US undergraduate colleges — and our impact on university admissions has, therefore, not come through lobbying but directly through our students. How? Because when universities accepted the first UWC graduates, they saw the immensely positive impact of these students on their campuses. They brought with them the idea of global citizenship — of caring about what happens in far-away places — and of celebrating diversity. They inspired other students and positive action multiplied.

And so the universities came back and asked for more — and more — and more. And now this is the biggest undergraduate scholarship programme to US universities, exclusively focused on UWC alumni. We believe fundamentally that our students can change the way systems work — and not so much by calling out what's wrong with the existing norms but by modeling a new culture of changemaking.

**RH: UWC started as the initiative of a visionary educator, Kurt Hahn, so the direction you describe is no surprise — and your impact is now increasingly significantly...**

**JW:** Yes, we are facing an exciting moment with our 15 schools and students of over 150 nationalities. In the last two years we've opened three new schools and our latest addition is UWC Changshu in China. Demand is high and when we look at the pipeline of new projects looking to become UWCs, we see that it's critical to get the right schools to join the movement so that UWC preserves its distinctive educational mission and values.

And in fact a very important part of the distinctiveness is the scholarship aspect. UWC has an aspiration to become fully needs blind, with scholarship provision for all those who need it, because we don't just want to serve the global elite. The UWC schools and colleges are independent schools that are not built on economic privilege. We want students from very privileged backgrounds, students from underprivileged backgrounds and everything in-between. This diversity is the source of our strength and is central to generating the changemaking mindset that we're here to nurture.

**Ross Hall** leads Ashoka's education strategy for ensuring that every young person becomes self-empowered to live for the common good. Ashoka and UWC are partnering to define new norms in education in order to prepare all young people to thrive and help others to thrive in a rapidly changing world.



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