

**As a Society, We Are Running Out Of Time to Address Sustainability Challenges -
Educators Can Train Students to Develop the Skills to Become
Entrepreneurs For a Green Future**

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“It was just the right timing,” was one of the responses we heard when we looked at how students managed to bring new startup ideas to life. Looking more closely at their journey, we learn that educators should be training students in problem-sensitivity rather than entrepreneurship education. The role of universities in society should shift to solving the pressing issues of our time in an effective and timely manner, to produce responsible leaders of tomorrow.

So far, entrepreneurship education has failed to facilitate the successful rise of innovative and brilliant ideas that address ESG (environmental, social, and governance) issues. Rarely does an idea make it out of the classroom and into the real world. Our research shows that four out of five students do not follow up on their ideas.

What makes a difference for those who succeed in addressing ESG issues? It is a skill to sense issues in everyday life and a decent amount of time to let them sit. One of our students developed an organic fertilizer from coffee grounds:

“I love drinking coffee. And it was two years ago that I wondered what happens to the coffee grounds. Why is it a waste product that ends up in residual trash? What if we can make use of this waste? So, one of these very simple things that accompanied me my whole life turned into something great.”

For some students, it is these simple everyday encounters that matter. However, the majority of students fails to recognize these daily encounters as potential business ideas. Our research shows how educators can help: They need to train students in problem-sensitivity long before they teach entrepreneurship education. Our study finds that students manage to move a business idea out of the classroom only if they had experienced social or environmental problems **one to five years earlier** in their lives. These students have been sensitized to recognize ESG issues in their environment.

Turning the story on its head, we see that educators need to incorporate awareness and problem-solving training into their curricula very early in college. It takes years for students to connect everyday problems with a potential business idea in the classroom.

We call on educators to catch students before they leave the classroom with their ideas. Influencing students before they embark on a career path other than entrepreneurship requires a shift in curriculum.

Key takeaways for educators include:

- Develop skills to increase sensitivity and awareness of ESG issues.
- Train problem-based thinking in an interactive classroom context.
- Provide frequent exposure to ESG issues in the curriculum.
- Include a learning series at the beginning of degree programs.

In this sense, educators are equipping students with the necessary skills to become aware of problems in their own environment, and later to link them to potential business ideas in the

classroom. More frequent exposure to ESG issues in the curriculum at the outset can enable students to become self-aware through knowledge acquisition.

We can help give individuals the space and time to decide when it is "just the right time" to pursue ESG issues. As a society, we need to use education effectively and in a timely manner to move ideas out of the classroom and into practice, to train entrepreneurs for a green future.

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