

# A Mindset For Co-Creation

**Takeaways from the project DOCK for Change**  
#ClimateEducation #DemocracyEducation #FuturesLiteracy

## Process clarity: Structure generates trust

An open process requires framework conditions.

## Subject-matter expertise: A basis for the ability to act

Co-Creation calls for professional depth.

## Diversity as a motor for innovation

Co-Creation means building something new together.

## Sense of Purpose: Participation requires relevance

Co-Creation works, when participation is experienced as meaningful and significant.

## Opening up physical, social and emotional spaces

Co-Creation only succeeds in an environment that provides safety, appreciation and orientation.

## Equity between generations and experts

Real Co-Creation consciously challenges hierarchies.

## Self-efficacy and societal impact

Co-Creation does not end with the development of ideas.

## Safe to fail, free from judgement

Creativity requires trust.

## Positive spirit and future optimism

Confidence is a “character muscle” that grows with practice.

## Openness and agility

Co-Creation is not a linear process.

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# A Mindset For Co-Creation

## Takeaways from the climate education project DOCK for Change

This position paper synthesizes key insights from the co-creative project DOCK for Change and outlines the factors that make participatory processes effective, inclusive and sustainable.

These fundamental approaches are relevant not only to Climate Education but also to a wide range of transformative educational approaches – spanning Democracy Education and Education for Sustainable Development to Futures Literacy, Global Citizenship Education and Entrepreneurship Education. They empower children, teenagers and adults to actively envision the future, constructively navigate uncertainty, and help shape processes of societal change.

DOCK for Change is a three-year, co-creative learning process that integrates Climate Education with Democracy Education, Science Mediation and Entrepreneurship Education. At its core are the concerns and ideas of children and teenagers. Supported by professional partners from business and scientific fields, they seek solutions to protect the planet and our future in the face of climate change.

Further Information: <https://dock.at/dockforchange/>

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## 1. Sense of Purpose: Participation requires relevance

Co-Creation works, when participation is perceived as meaningful and significant. People – especially children and teenagers – start engaging when real issues affect their own lives, and futures are at stake. When it is clear that their contributions have consequences. A sense of commitment emerges as participation visibly shapes decisions, attitudes, or strategies.



At DOCK for Change, this sense of purpose becomes tangible through collaboratively developed visions of the future and associated actions. Each project cycle produces an image that translates key climate and democracy issues into concrete, positive, and age-appropriate terms – covering everything from fair resource distribution and green cities to education and participation for all. These images serve as a common thread connecting the classroom, workshops and conferences, right through to political handovers. This makes clear: Engaging with climate action is not merely an abstract learning exercise but an active contribution to shaping a positive future.

## 2. Subject-matter expertise: A basis for the ability to act

Co-Creation requires subject-matter depth. Solid knowledge drawn from both academia and experience provides orientation, strengthens judgment, and helps participants contextualize and further develop their own ideas. When combined with practical, experiential knowledge, this may lead to solutions that envision the future while remaining highly feasible to implement today.



DOCK for Change approaches sustainability and climate protection from a broad, interdisciplinary perspective – covering everything from energy, mobility, and biodiversity to consumer issues, urban planning, environmental psychology, and social justice. Expert insights from academia, business, politics, public administration, education, and NGOs are integrated and presented in a playful, engaging way. In this process, children and teenagers develop a good basic understanding of ecological and social interconnections and discover how knowledge opens up new possibilities for action. Skills such as the ability to engage in dialogue, creativity, and problem-solving are deliberately combined with subject-specific learning.

### 3. Diversity as a motor for innovation

Co-Creation means creating something new together. Curiosity, openness and trust in collective intelligence are crucial to this process. The more complex the issue, the more important a diversity of perspectives becomes. Varied lived realities, experiences and forms of expression expand the scope of possibilities, and lead to solutions that are more equitable and relevant.



Diversity is not an "add-on" but the core of the method: DOCK for Change deliberately engages children and young people from diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Change Agents are selected based on criteria such as sociocultural diversity, gender balance, need for support and the motivation for long-term collaboration. In Future Labs, WebLabs and Focus Groups, young perspectives meet experts from academia, business, politics and civil society. The experience of belonging and being taken seriously strengthens motivation, a sense of responsibility and the capacity for innovation.

### 4. Process clarity: Structure generates trust

Open processes require clear frameworks. Defined roles and procedures, transparent decision-making, and reliable time management foster trust and participation. Transparency ensures that even undesirable outcomes can be understood and accepted.



DOCK for Change has developed a clearly structured annual cycle that encompasses the entire co-creation process, from identifying themes to the final public presentation. In the Theme Lab, children and teenagers democratically decide on the key annual focus. They help develop the formats and actively share the results with the public. The process is divided into phases and is well documented, replicable and scalable – a model that can also be applied to other educational and participatory contexts.

### 5. Opening up physical, social and emotional spaces

Co-Creation succeeds in an environment that conveys a sense of safety, appreciation and orientation. The atmosphere, furnishings, opportunities for movement, refreshments and well-designed work materials all send the message: "You are welcome and valued." The attitude of the hosts plays a decisive role in shaping the process: Through their presence, appreciative communication, check-in and check-out rituals, and the creation of a safe, judgment-free space, they foster an atmosphere in which participants can act creatively, openly and with a sense of agency.



At DOCK – the Future Laboratory for children – the mindset of the hosts is a prerequisite for successful Co-Creation. To this end, sufficient time is allocated during event preparation to design the space, define procedures and ground rules for conversation, and create an inviting atmosphere (e.g., through lighting, seating arrangements, music, and refreshments). DOCK offers settings tailored to diverse needs and forms of interaction: plenary areas, conversation clusters, spaces for movement and retreat, and both indoor and outdoor areas.

### 6. Equity between generations and experts

Genuine Co-Creation consciously challenges hierarchies: Children, teenagers, professionals and decision-makers engage with one another on an equal footing: This leads to new processes of learning, thinking, and decision-making. In such a framework, participants can develop solutions that are both substantively relevant and socially just.



DOCK for Change considers all participants to be experts on their own experiences. In intergenerational settings, children contribute their perspectives, while adults share specialized knowledge, personal experiences and practical tips. Methods such as consent-based facilitation and Art of Hosting-Approaches support this exchange among equals, ensuring collaboration is productive and respectful.

### 7. Safe to fail, free from judgement

Creativity requires a sense of trust. When judgment and hasty criticism are consciously set aside, people can think boldly, ask questions, and try out new roles. In such an environment, children, teenagers and adults can experiment playfully, learn from one another, and collaboratively develop solutions that previously seemed impossible.



DOCK for Change formats – such as Future Labs, Focus Groups, or conferences – are designed as safe spaces for learning: mistakes are viewed as opportunities to learn, and unconventional ideas as valuable sources of inspiration. Hosts model an open, non-judgmental attitude and encourage participants to share their own perspectives. This fosters processes in which learning and personal development go hand in hand.

### 8. Positive spirit and future optimism

Confidence is a "character muscle" that grows with practice and can be actively cultivated. Humor, a sense of wonder, and positive visions of the future motivate one to take action and prevent feeling overwhelmed by complex crises. Optimism is contagious; it spreads to others and creates a snowball effect that amplifies creativity, engagement and collaboration. This approach aligns with the concept of Futures Literacy: The future is not merely predicted but utilized as a shared space for thinking and shaping, opening up new possibilities.



At DOCK for Change, children, teenagers and adults experience themselves as "Competent Rebels" who leave the sessions with concrete missions. They hand out "Clean on the Go" certificates, take on tree adoption, or make their causes visible through stickers and sidewalk messages. Public-facing activities – such as climate festivals or climate walks – carry this spirit into the community, inviting others to join the conversation and help shape the initiative.

### 9. Self-efficacy and societal impact

Co-Creation does not end with the development of ideas. Participation becomes effective when it leads to concrete action and visible results. Participants need to experience that their ideas are heard, can be implemented, and influence decisions – for instance, through municipal strategies or public presentations. This fosters motivation, engagement and confidence in one's own abilities – which is fundamental for a sustainable culture of participation.



Co-creative conferences, policy handovers and public presentations are central elements of DOCK for Change. Children plan and facilitate events, present manifestos containing concrete demands to experts and decision-makers. They confidently champion their causes on stage, in workshops and in public spaces. The visions for the future, manifestos, and guides for "Competent Rebel Actions" developed through the project are available for download online – boosting the visibility of the messages and enable independent action in and out of school settings.

### 10. Openness and agility

Co-Creation does not follow a linear path. Learning emerges through experimentation, adaptation and reflection. Iterative work, minor detours, the courage to fail, playful experimentation, and a willingness to remain flexible regarding goals are key elements for the success of co-creative processes. Futures Literacy is based on the premise that the future is open and cannot be fully planned; it views uncertainty not as an obstacle, but as a resource for learning, innovation and societal development.



DOCK for Change is conceived as an ongoing learning process: Formats are developed interactively, tested with target groups, and continuously refined. Powerful questions and an attitude of optimism regarding the future open up new horizons, inspire fresh perspectives and foster a collaborative search for creative, effective solutions. Regular reflection, feedback loops and team development keep the process dynamic – ensuring that the future is not merely discussed but explored through action.

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