

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION SYSTEMS WHY, WHAT, AND HOW

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Today, the topic of education system transformation is front of mind for many leaders. Ministers of education around the world are seeking to build back better as they emerge from COVID-19-school closures to a new normal of living with a pandemic. The U.N. secretary general is convening the Transforming Education Summit (TES) at this year's general assembly meeting (United Nations, n.d.). Students around the world continue to demand transformation on climate and, not finding voice to do this through their schools, are regularly leaving class to test out their civic action skills.

This brief is for any education leader or stakeholder who is interested in charting a transformation journey in their country or education jurisdiction, such as a state or district. It is also for civil society organizations, funders, researchers, and anyone interested in the topic of national development through education. In it, we answer the following three questions and argue for a participatory approach to transformation:



WHY IS EDUCATION SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION URGENT NOW?

We argue that the world is at an inflection point. Climate change, the changing nature of work, increasing conflict and authoritarianism together with the urgency of COVID recovery has made the transformation agenda more critical than ever.



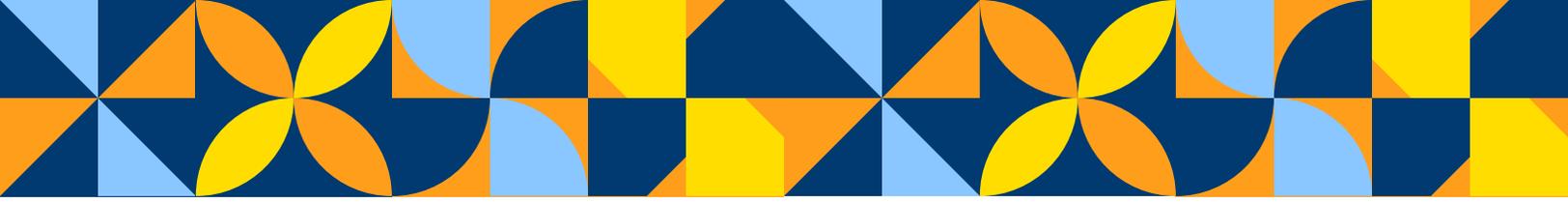
WHAT IS EDUCATION SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION?

We argue that education system transformation must entail a fresh review of the goals of your system – are they meeting the moment that we are in, are they tackling inequality and building resilience for a changing world, are they fully context aware, are they owned broadly across society – and then fundamentally positioning all components of your education system to coherently contribute to this shared purpose.



HOW CAN EDUCATION SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION ADVANCE IN YOUR COUNTRY OR JURISDICTION?

We argue that three steps are crucial: Purpose (developing a broadly shared vision and purpose), Pedagogy (redesigning the pedagogical core), and Position (positioning and aligning all components of the system to support the pedagogical core and purpose). Deep engagement of educators, families, communities, students, ministry staff, and partners is essential across each of these “3 P” steps.



Why is system transformation urgent now?

The world is at an inflection point and education systems need new approaches that address both equity and relevance. This is because:

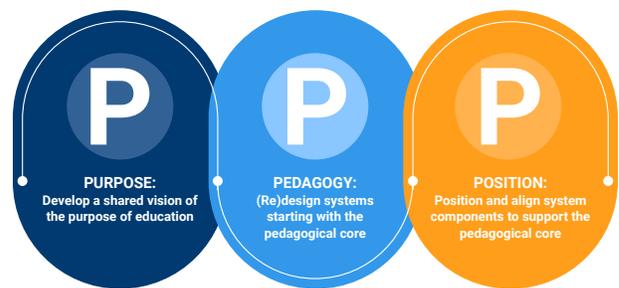
- **Education inequality** has grown due to the pandemic and the pace of recovery is so slow it could take more than 100 years in many countries for children who are poorly served by education systems to catch up to children who are well-served.
- **Climate change** is here and education systems need to both adapt to its impacts and help prepare young people to be sustainable stewards of the planet.
- **Automation is changing work** eliminating many routine tasks and requiring higher order thinking, interpersonal skills and creative problem-solving skills for many jobs.
- **Conflict and authoritarianism** is on the rise around the world, inflamed by an “infodemic” of fake news, requiring education systems to help young people develop critical digital literacy and citizenships skills.

What is education system transformation?

Education system transformation must entail a fresh review of the goals of your system – are they meeting the moment that we are in, are they tackling inequality and building resilience for a changing world, are they fully context aware, are they owned broadly across society – and then fundamentally positioning all components of your education system to coherently contribute to this shared purpose.

How can education system transformation advance in your country or jurisdiction?

The participatory approach to transformation includes three steps: Purpose, Pedagogy, and Position.



PURPOSE: DEVELOP A SHARED VISION OF THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Develop a vision of the purpose of your system that meets the moment we are in and is broadly shared in and outside of education.

- *Multiple studies in and outside of education have highlighted the importance of developing a widely shared understanding of a system's purpose and goals for enabling true transformation that endures over time and across political leadership changes and funding environments.*
- *Participatory policy design approaches—where teachers, community members, students and partners have a seat at the table alongside education system leaders— help cohere a broadly shared vision that supports system change efforts.*
- *In the policy dialogue process, education leaders should bring information from education debates and discussions that the broader community may not be able to access, such as data on inequality and competencies needed to meet the moment.*

COMPETENCIES NEEDED TO MEET THE MOMENT: GUIDANCE FROM THE UNITED NATION'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OTHER GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS



The foundations



21st century skills



Sustainable citizenship

- **The foundations:** Early learning experiences help children develop socioemotionally and master literacy and numeracy, all of which lay the strong foundations for students' successful educational trajectory.
- **21st century skills:** Higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and creative problem-solving, lifelong learning skills like metacognition, and interpersonal skills like collaboration and teamwork, are all needed for young people to thrive today in work and life.
- **Sustainable citizenship:** Knowledge, mindsets, and skills enable young people to actively engage in promoting planetary stewardship, social justice, and ethical technology.

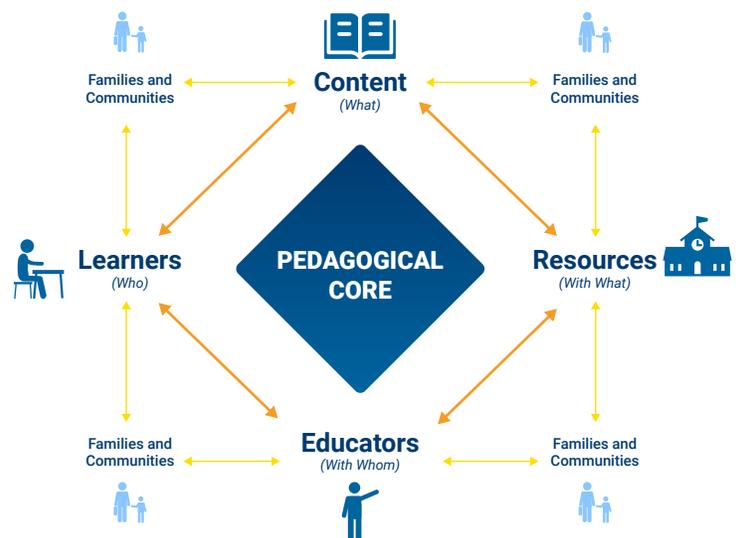
PEDAGOGY: (RE)DESIGN SYSTEMS STARTING WITH THE PEDAGOGICAL CORE

Redesign the interactions between learners (including those out of school), educators, content, and resources to deliver on your vision and purpose (Figure 1).

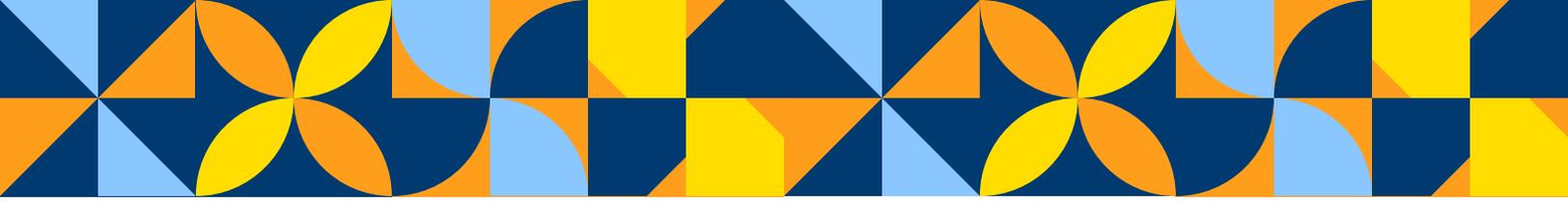
- Multiple studies show that starting with changes that are needed in the "pedagogical core" and mapping backwards, out and up into broader systemic reforms is the more fruitful approach to system (re)design.
- Identify who specifically is not meeting your system's goals and why. (If every child is meeting your system's education goals, although this is unlikely, then there is no need to transform!)
- Fundamentally redesign the pedagogical core to enable those children who the system is leaving behind to succeed and achieve its goals.

FIGURE 1

The pedagogical core



Source: Adapted by authors from OECD's "Innovative Learning Environments" (OECD, 2013).



POSITION: POSITION AND ALIGN SYSTEM COMPONENTS TO SUPPORT THE PEDAGOGICAL CORE

Fundamentally align the components of your education system to support the pedagogical core redesign and deliver on your vision and purpose.

- *Leverage systems thinking insights to develop system coherence by positioning system components to support the pedagogical core redesign. Multiple studies show the importance of aligning incentives, relationships, and mindsets across different parts of a system to achieve the identified purpose.*
- *There are certainly many dimensions to developing system coherence, but at a minimum assess the alignment of six components.*

SIX SYSTEM COMPONENTS TO POSITION AND ALIGN TO SUPPORT THE PEDAGOGICAL CORE

CURRICULUM

HUMAN RESOURCES

DATA AND ASSESSMENT

GOVERNANCE

FINANCE

ENGAGEMENT OF “WINNERS”
AND “LOSERS” IN THE
ALIGNMENT PROCESS

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THE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

“Starting with changes that are needed in the ‘pedagogical core’ and mapping backwards”

“fresh review of the goals of your system”

“should bring information from education debates and discussions that the broader community may not be able to access”

“Leverage systems thinking insights”

“Fundamentally positioning all components of your education system to coherently contribute to this shared purpose”

“importance of developing a widely shared understanding of a system’s purpose”

“who specifically is not meeting your systems goals and why”

“Purpose, Pedagogy, and Position”

“Fundamentally redesign the pedagogical core”

“Participatory approach”

“Participatory policy design”

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