

Report of the UNESCO International Commission on Futures of Education

Reimagining our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education

Some perspectives and questions for discussion

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UNESCO and lifelong learning

This report follows a line of important UNESCO reports on education and lifelong learning. The best known are the Faure report *Learning to be* (1972) and the Delors report *Learning: the treasure within* (1996). The Delors report is best known for the four pillars of education – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to live with others, and learning to be. These broadened the objectives of education in important ways.

Reimagining our Futures Together

The latest, important UNESCO report on education and learning was released in November 2021 after an extensive enquiry over a year and a half by the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education. It followed the earlier global reports with the objective to rethink the role of education at key moments of social transformation (2). The report may be read on the UNESCO website (<https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/>).

Some key themes

1. The world is in a state of crisis and needs to change course

The survival of humanity, human rights and the living planet are at risk (8)

If the report teaches us one thing, it is this. We need urgent action to change course because the future of people depends on the future of the planet, and both are at risk. (v).

2. A new social contract for education is needed

The report proposes a new social contract for education – one that aims to rebuild our relationships with each other, with the planet, and with technology.

*A new social contract for education needs to allow us to think differently about learning and the relationship between students, teachers, knowledge, and the world.
(3)*

3. Redefining the purposes of education.

A new social contract for education must be anchored in two fundamental principles: the right to education and a commitment to education as a public societal endeavour and a common good. (11).

4. We need to act together and reimagine our future together

This act of reimagining means working together to create futures that are shared and interdependent. (2).

The potential of engaging humanity in creative futures together has never been greater. (7).

5. We need to use technology in new creative ways

There is tremendous transformative potential in digital technology, but we have not yet figured how to deliver on these many promises. (3).

6. Learning throughout life in many ways should be promoted.

We should enjoy and expand the educational opportunities that take place throughout life and in different cultural and social spaces. (4)

7. Fresh approaches to pedagogy is needed in improving education

Pedagogy should be organised around principles of co-operation, collaboration, and solidarity. (4)

8. Curricula needs broader relevant objectives

Curricula should emphasize ecological, intercultural, and interdisciplinary learning that supports students to access and produce knowledge while also developing their capacity to critique and apply it. (4)

9. New models of economic success are needed that support a just sustainable future

Climate and environmental disasters are accelerated by economic models depending on unsustainable levels of resource use. Economic models that prioritize short-term profits and excessive consumerism are tightly linked with excessive individualism, competitiveness, and lack of empathy that characterize too many of our societies around the globe. (8)

This is a personal selection of important themes in the UNESCO report. There is much else in the report that merits careful study and discussion. I have listed below some innovative approaches that are currently addressing a number of these themes. There is much that

networks of learning cities and communities can do to reimagine our future in collaborative ways, and then taking steps to build a just sustainable future.

Some innovative responses

Raworth, K. (2018). *Doughnut economics*. London: Century-Trade.

James, P. (2015). *Urban sustainability theory and practice: Circles of sustainability*. London: Routledge.

Kearns, P. *Connecting people and planet for a sustainable future: The EcCoWell3 approach to a sustainable future for learning cities*. Accessible at: <http://pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/pascal-activities/news/new-briefing-paper-connecting-people-and-planet-sustainable-future>.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. (2021). *UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities: Strategy 2021-2023*. Accessible [here](#) .

For discussion

1. What can learning cities do to contribute to addressing the big issues identified in the UNESCO report?
2. What contribution can learning cities make to the development of a new social contract for education?
3. How can learning cities use technology in creative new ways?
4. Can learning cities make a distinctive contribution in the transition to a longevity society with ageing populations?
5. Do you agree that new models of economic success are needed that support a just sustainable future? What steps can learning cities and communities take?
6. What distinctive contribution can networks of learning cities and communities, such as the ALCN and the UNESCO GLCN, make in addressing the big issues identified in the UNESCO *Reimagining our futures together*?
7. How can learning cities and communities be made more creative?

Reference:

UNESCO, *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*, in *Report from the International Commission on Futures of Education*. 2021, United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation: Paris, France. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/>