

**A new  
politics for  
transforming  
education:**

**Towards an  
effective way  
forward**

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# Prologue

In the period November 2022–January 2023, an international enquiry was conducted through a series of interviews with distinguished ‘actors’ who have been at the interface of politics and education for the last 20 years, in either elected ministerial or senior political adviser roles.<sup>1</sup>

They cover the jurisdictions of Australia, New Zealand, the UK, US, Canada, Finland, Portugal and Greece, together with a cross-jurisdictional perspective from OECD. This is not a random sample, but a group chosen because of

1. the interviewees’ deep knowledge of and engagement in political processes in relation to education, and
2. their own commitment to the need for profound change.

**Unless otherwise designated, all quotations in this paper are from transcripts of our conversations with these interviewees.**

We have restricted our attention only to systems in democracies, and we are of course aware that they are in advantaged economies in the global north. The extent to which the conclusions may have any value for other contexts is not for us to judge.

The following analysis is, however, entirely the responsibility of the authors.

# 1

## The issue: Failing the future

Debates about the future direction of education have, for the last 30 years, been dominated by narratives of reform and improvement. It could be argued that this was largely a debate controlled by actors outside education itself, particularly those in politics who perceived the need for education to shift: primarily, to become more accountable and to serve the needs of economies better. In the age-old fashion of educators, they sought to take ownership of this movement, and subvert it to some degree, in order both to serve wider objectives and to insert a sound pedagogical element into what might have been a technocratic exercise.

This reform agenda carried with it an acknowledgement of the need to invest in innovation and technology; the need to think increasingly in systems terms; the growing synergy between the needs of the new economy (jobs, skills and competencies). Whilst broadly recognised as necessary but not sufficient, the enabling role of education in addressing these objectives was a centre piece of improvement efforts.

However, today, the debates amongst educators have taken a very different turn. Without looking to abandon the undoubted improvement that has taken place in many school systems – for the reform agenda had many beneficial outcomes – there is now a powerful strand of thinking which suggests that a new approach, more adequate to the times, must be developed. The reasons for this include

- the increasingly powerful analyses and critiques<sup>2</sup> that cite the failure of statutory education systems to address the key issues of our time: equity, climate justice and sustainability, learners empowered to shape their future, democracy under threat, and the contestation of knowledge and truth – to name but a few
- the realisation that the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> do not go far enough as overall objectives to address these profound issues
- despite innovative activity to create multiple ‘beautiful exceptions’, modelling different approaches in schools, the realisation that these are failing to ‘cut through’ in terms of shifting systems. The maintenance and resilience of prevailing mass models of compulsory education remains the political priority, and
- whilst the COVID pandemic disrupted schooling as it was known, and created a space for experimentation (particularly with technology), it has failed to leave a legacy of innovation or significant change. The urge has been to get back to ‘normal’.

The sense of urgent need for a refreshed approach has been growing in educational debates (see Appendix 2 for examples). In political terms, it surfaced fully in the UN’s Transforming Education Summit 2022.<sup>4</sup> The shift in language was significant. It recognised that we need to be in the space of **transformation**, and not merely improvement of the old model.

However that is a rare surfacing, in the public conversation about education, of a different kind of debate. Generally speaking, the language of politics is dominated by levels of funding, structural arrangements and accountability measures – and, where politicians do engage with a wider set of considerations, global windy rhetoric is rarely matched by domestic policy making or concerted efforts at change; rather like the approach to the climate emergency. This is an analogy to which we will return.

Currently, there are few signs that political agendas match either the aspirations of educators or the real needs of learners. A repeated lament from the educators with whom we have worked for the last ten years is that they want to engage in different approaches, but ‘the system’ will not let them.

This is the starting point from which we launched an international enquiry with a group of remarkable individuals who are distinguished by having been at the very heart of the politics of education in their various jurisdictions; whether as elected politicians with ministerial responsibility, or as advisers at the highest level, working in the political theatre. We set before them the above account, and invited them first to respond to that.

# 2 Two paradigms



We would argue there are now two paradigms in play. There is, first, a 20th century paradigm, which actually conditions arrangements in most education systems.

## 20th century paradigm

- Education's purpose is economic growth and individual advancement.
- Its function is to transfer knowledge and sort/sift individuals into tracks.
- Its means are teacher-centred, academics-focused, with terminal assessment.

In contrast there is the following emergent alternative, which is fast gaining traction amongst educators.

## 21st century paradigm

- Education's purpose is thriving people, places and planet.
- Its function is to empower learners and release human creativity.
- Its means are personalised, competency-based and real-world.

Whilst educators increasingly are adopting the 21st century paradigm, politicians almost invariably speak in the language of the former – and with good reason.

If you are a politician with only a tiny bit of bandwidth to get messages into the media in a way that doesn't take too long, it's hard. Obviously you've got the whole weight of most of the media against you, who will denounce you straight away. ... I remember in Obama's team, they said: If we start talking about wellbeing in anything, ... let alone education, we're finished. That just becomes the signal that we're not serious; we're not talking about jobs and economy.

Geoff Mulgan

To some extent, that culture has shifted a little, especially post-pandemic. However, there remains a lack of political leadership to create a different kind of debate: to create the conditions for change – not to mandate or require it, but to enable it. This view was widely shared by our interviewees. For example,

The new paradigm is humanity's – and collective; old schooling was solely individualistic. The old paradigm was bloodless. We should recognise that you can team up with technology on the 'humanity' paradigm – in service of all living things.

Michael Fullan

There now exists a strong and well-articulated case for change – the 'push'.

There are plentiful examples of successful new approaches, and many promising instantiations, and ideas awaiting trialling and experimentation – the 'pull'.

However, system change across the UK, US, Australia and many parts of Europe is not seen other than at the incremental edges. So, the issue is not one of a lack of evidence, nor of professional disengagement. Privately, politicians who engage seriously with educators claim to appreciate the need for more fundamental change; but this does not surface in manifestos, nor in policy agendas. Promising initiatives modelling a transformed approach are not just ignored but subjected to even more controlling scrutiny, deploying the old metrics and criteria. Whilst endorsing this analysis, some interviewees sounded a note of caution about overgeneralisation, as indicated in the following comments from Schleicher and from Knight.

The world is an amazing laboratory – what you say is true in some places but not true in every place. And I do think that we see some system leaders who have been able to change the needle, and align a political discourse with the reality at the frontline ... I think people are clear that the current system has sort of exhausted its possibilities. The biggest threat to education is no longer its perceived inefficiency. It's really the loss of relevance that is visible. ... The old industrial system cannot deliver on what is needed.

Andreas Schleicher

I moved from Minister for Schools to Minister for Employment, and I could see the problem of the lack of real-world education – especially a problem for those I was trying to save from long-term unemployment. So I very abruptly saw the failings of the system that I've been advocating for three years.

Jim Knight

A further nuance was the degree to which there is aspiration towards the new 21st century paradigm amongst the teaching profession. This was remarked on as follows in the case of England, where the rhetoric has been around the primacy of knowledge.

This argument is not won amongst educators. In England the emphasis on subject 'ownership' has been welcomed – it speaks to a sense of pride in professionalism. We cannot be too complacent about where the profession is at.

Peter Hyman

Moreover, the recent past of 'standards-based reform' has much to teach us about system change methods – if we can learn them.

To get system change, you can't power your way through. You need to engage with those you disagree with. We have to have empathy with 'people in our way'. ... Politicians have less and less power to get things done – how do you use the power you do have to get things done? You have to combine humility and courage. (Leaders who do this) don't just use power, they're quite humble. To do this work, you have to be more humble in order to be more effective

Michael Fullan



There has been a push towards consistency. And when you are in politics, that sounds like a good thing. Yes: consistency and measurement. But they are also constraining of any further change or innovation in the system. The political challenge is really how you give school leaders more power to innovate whilst not appearing to go soft on standards. Standards are the traditional values of education.

Jim Knight

As indicated in the following comments, the view that there is a failure to address the future was widely shared by our international interviewees.

Education ministers see themselves as outside the system: on top of it, fixing it. It's a closed system. It's all inform or reform, not transform.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

What I see are politicians grasping increasingly extreme versions of effectively the same, very tired narrative on each of their respective ideological sides, which for us [in the US] is a very binary system. And it means that the right is increasingly reliant in education on Old-style Reagan, that right kind of market type solutions. And on the left there's more identity politics than there was in the Clinton and Bush years.

John White

Set against this is the emergent set of international dialogues being held at global level where politicians might be exposed to a strand of thinking which does challenge – in a way they might take seriously – the old narrative. The UN Summit on Transforming Education has already been mentioned. The latest initiatives of the OECD – despite its identification with the PISA testing structure – are firmly addressing the future and the need for a new paradigm: in particular, *Education and Skills 2030*<sup>5</sup> and *Education for Human Flourishing*.<sup>6</sup>

The Education 2030 (project) – the Learning Compass, brought people together and created a shared language. Some interesting changes around this – looking beyond cognitive skills.

Andreas Schleicher

... when we say there is lack of political leadership, I would perhaps rather say that, for now, there seems to be developing a new global leadership around education that we have never seen before.

Pilvi Torsti

If there has been a failure to address the future in terms of education, what accounts for this? Emerging from our enquiry was a picture of misalignment: a tragic one.

# 3

## A tragic misalignment



Those who have never been within the political process can only make some informed guesses about the factors that give rise to the misalignment. However our interviewees consistently identified the following features.

## Misalignment of timescales

The very essence of life in the political domain in democracies is election. In addition, for obvious reasons, the timescales for facing the electorate are very different from those entailed in systemic change. This also involves political churn. There is very little continuity in the political leadership of systems; and, in the short time they have, politicians need – somehow – to make their mark.

Elections are everything. And that means that there's a time phase of an election period which is usually four to five years. And that creates the frame where the action happens. It takes a year to learn what they are dealing with and get things going. Success means making reform decisions.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

The time frames that we are dealing with for a politician, you know, if you do something well, you're going to see the fruits in many years down the road. When you make a mistake, the media are after you the next day. I think that makes it really difficult for politicians to take that risk. There is an asymmetry of costs and benefits. Things are seen as important but not urgent.

Andreas Schleicher

The Minister would ask 'When will this be done?' 'When can we take credit?'

Rod Allen

You have to look at how parties develop their policy agendas. It is ultra short-term. How could it be with a longer time frame?

Pilvi Torsti

Education is a low political priority: the benefits too far away. Reward is distant; the pathway unclear. You have to intrigue those people that this will produce great yield for society. And I'm not talking theoretically and I'm not talking in the distant future.

Michael Fullan

The older I get, the more I am stunned by how few people view it as their role to say: let's stop and let's ask where is the world really going to be in 50 years, not the next few months, and let's build our solutions to suit.

John White

## Misalignment of cultures

We know culture eats strategy for breakfast. If cultures are misaligned between two domains, how can progress happen? Consider our interviewees' comments.

In the education system and in the political system, they have a different kind of functioning logic. And you have to understand the logic – how both parts are needed in order for a functioning education policy to be in place. What is the logic behind them? I would say that the political logic, at the end, is very simple. In reality, it is to get voted into power again.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

People who succeed in politics and also the people who succeed in journalism – who are politicians' intermediaries with public opinion – are, by and large, success stories in education. That is: education as it's been constructed in the academic model, and so they find it harder to see any problems with it. We need to see more diversity in politicians who come through a different route.'

Jim Knight

Quite simply, education ministers are not trained to be systems thinkers in general. The agenda of system transformation actually requires thinking that is deep and wise; and an embrace of a transformation strategy across wide-ranging, half-hidden connections. That doesn't cut with political culture: it won't come naturally to many, or to most political practitioners.

Tom Bentley

I was unusual – I wasn't really a politician: I actually WANTED to be Education Minister. I literally ran for Parliament on the basis that I wanted to become the Minister of Education and argue why this is important. I don't think that's the imperative of most ministers of education around the world. It is not a popular portfolio!

Hekia Parata

Of course, there are always exceptions and outliers. In Portugal, it is not unusual for academics to become ministers – *'and their expertise is recognised and respected'* (João Costa). Also, this is the case in Finland, where Pilvi Torsti has been intimately involved in creating an agenda for her party for future-focused education.

...it really required that there were a few of us in the sort of leadership positions in the party that weren't too much worried about our own political future, but rather actually that 'we want to get this one thing done and then we will perhaps do other things in life'. ... It needed enough people not worried about their political future.

Pilvi Torsti

## Misalignment of incentives

Given all this, a politician contemplating formulating an agenda more geared to the future than to the past needs strong supporting evidence and some confidence it won't destroy their career.

There are no incentives at all for a politician to focus on the long-term future.

John White

The currency of politicians is popularity.

Hekia Parata

(Politicians are) ... influenced by evidence. The Head/Heart/Hand agenda is hard to evidence. Simplicity wins out. Head/Heart/Hand is a different order of complexity; it's harder to comprehend, to deliver and to get evidence of. So why should a politician risk that?

Peter Hyman

In terms of a politician's career path, it is a risky space for advancement.

Many education ministers are junior to rising. It's a fact about the education portfolio that it can be seen as a make-or-break, or it's something that ministers do on their way to the 'great' offices of state. It has hugely more potential and impact than it does on long-term societal outcomes. But there's a fact about the political ladder, where it's a relatively rare experience that a minister could bring about education system change after an apprenticeship as a junior minister. So, do they delegate to experts? What risk are they prepared to take with their own political trajectory?

Tom Bentley

It's also a risk. Every politician, I think, wants to leave his or her mark, but they also want to make sure that they don't, you know, have some riots or be considered to have made some really stupid mistakes. So it's the risk factors there too.

George Papandreou

## And societal dynamics

Of course, none of these ‘misalignments’ can be detached from the societal dynamics in which these political cultures grow up. John White sees the situation in the US as intimately related to nostalgic craving (as is possibly the case in the UK). He commented as follows.

Education is part of a wider political gestalt. If you think about education as a function of the larger politics, I would call it a kind of decadence and polarisation that manifests in intellectual nostalgia. ... In the US specifically, different jurisdictional governing and political models. We have a different system here partially because of our anti-intellectualism, because of our tradition of pragmatism, of individualism. We are late to global affairs almost always: slow to recognise existential threats, but then doing so with great force.

John White

Equally, in Canada, Rod Allen commented as follows.

It's not just a political desire to go back to the way it was before COVID, but it's to go back to a place that never was: it's dreaming to go back to a place that's simpler and predictable and you can sort of get your hands around it. Not that the world ever was that way, but perhaps it was more that way a while ago. I think there is a sense around the world that things are – if not out of control – at least out of a single person's grasp. Like climate.

Rod Allen

A further factor is the degree to which education is in fact a low political priority. Our interviewees had mixed views on this question and, of course, there were many differences between jurisdictions and historically. They pointed out that in two instances – the Blair years in the UK and the 1980s in the US, education did become a ‘Tier 1’ political issue. In White's view this was clearly linked to broader social dynamics.

(There was) a recognition of the limited reach of the social reforms of the 1960s, but a faith in their moral underpinnings; there was the rise of social science and data as a kind of vehicle for scaled reforms. And there was a deep, deep existential fear of being outcompeted by the Soviets on skills and economics and politics and space and everything else.

John White

In any reference to social dynamics, the role of the media – primarily mass media, as opposed to social – must be taken into account. A view emerged from our interviewees that, in general, the media need simplicity; they feed on conflict and/or on relatively trivial diversions from the major issues.

# 4

## What is to be done?



In the face of these formidable problems, it is understandable that one hears from time to time the cry that education should be taken out of politics and politics out of education. In our view, this is both misguided and unachievable. It is unachievable because, since we are talking about a huge investment of societal resources in a universal, mandated service, it cannot be the case that elected governments would outsource the distribution and focus of those resources to an unelected, apolitical body. We cannot give up on politics: moreover nor should we. It is, after all, through education (still) that a society transfers, indeed recreates, the notion of who and what it is; what it stands for.

You can never kind of depoliticise education, definitely not. It's all about values and that's what education is. Learning is very social: it's about bringing societal values to the piece. It is an absurd idea to separate them.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

(NB: this from a former Minister of Education in Finland, which is widely misunderstood as having de-politicised education.)

The default position among educators is that everything will be fine if the government gave us the money and left us alone. And whenever politicians do anything they're interfering, or they're top-down ... And that is a completely unrealistic position.

Michael Barber

If we don't keep our politics and accountability healthy, then we know – as we have seen over the last decade – what will follow. Responsibility for education has to be a task of democratically elected government.

Tom Bentley

Nor does it seem a very promising approach to devolve decisions more and more to localities – whilst high degrees of autonomy, community engagement and diversification are desirable, as Schleicher noted, certain things cannot be devolved.

I think that's really where, for me, the political dimension comes in: it's the framework that public policy needs to set, to ensure that we reconcile the personalised adaptive way of learning with the equity in opportunities now. I think there is a great risk our societies will atomise, amplify the polarisation: everybody creating their own world, their own ideas, and then we will not have any kind of common space. ... I think the risk of local fragmentation is very real, not just local in local and geographic terms: also local in political and cultural and social terms. I think there's a great risk that our societies will atomise. And hyper-localisation is not a solution – look at the US. You know, you've rolled down educational responsibility to a very final level without solving any problem. It hasn't solved the problems.

Andreas Schleicher

That being the case, what strategies look promising?



## A strategic alignment

Amongst the big political thinkers we interviewed, there emerged the notion that a different kind of alignment needed to be forged.

You need social power, social salience. If you want to bring about transformational change ... it actually has to resonate and generate political traction and sustained support through the wider community. And then align with the interest-based politics and a professional mobilisation; with a broader social campaign and alliance that's needed to diversify the renewal of education and bring professional interest and bureaucratic strategy into alignment with that bigger picture.

Tom Bentley

I think to expect politicians to lead, and use up huge amounts of their political capital in a hostile environment, against hostile timescales and incentives in the absence of a massive social movement, is quite difficult. ... One of my great disappointments in education is how weak the business voice has been on all this and especially on the future of work. There are those who say all the right things in private but, as an influence on government, almost zero. However, now, business has started being a lobby on government on the sort of stuff that wasn't really even talked about 10 or 20 years ago and they're doing it purely for self-interest. They need reasonably motivated people who turn up to work. So I wouldn't underestimate a narrow self-interested strand of the argument. And in a way, that relates to climate, because any coalition is going to be a hybrid of different registers of argument, which will be slightly in tension with each other. But that's always been true of the green movement, which has had its extremes. That's how movements work: they are not necessarily logically coherent. They're assemblies of alignment.

Geoff Mulgan

## Enlist technology as a change force

On this view, big change most often arrives as a result of massive global events, such as war or revolution; or as the result of disruptive technological change. Manifestly, we are going through the latter. The question is: how far will we be able to control it, especially in relation to the achievement – or otherwise – of greater equity?

Repeated studies make it clear that high-quality educational technology in AI and machine learning (now including generative technology), if well-harnessed, can provide potentially enabling breakthroughs in learning (curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, recognition and credentialing). But it must be well-designed, well-used and well-governed, if all learners are to benefit.<sup>7</sup>

Time will reintegrate the learning and assessment and the examination process. And that will make high school experience very different. You're no longer learning for an exam: your exam is part of your learning process and so it will lose its power. It will lose its grip over the system. The old industrial system cannot deliver on that, but I don't think there's an automaticity in this. The new system could super-empower those who have the right dispositions, the right resources, and leave others behind it. I think that's really where the political dimension comes in. That's the framework that public policy needs to set, to ensure that we reconcile the personalised adaptive way of learning with equity in opportunities.

Andreas Schleicher

## Take the climate crisis movement as our guide

On this analysis, there is a startling congruence between the fight for climate justice and the fight for a new education agenda. Ask yourself: can you remember when you were vaguely aware that there might be an issue with climate – but that it was not a big deal, someone would see to it, and it certainly was not a major political priority? Arguably, that is where we are now in the case of education. The new paradigms in both cases are strikingly aligned.

They both involve a re-examination of our purposes as humans – and they are **mutually interdependent**. Quite literally and unequivocally, neither new paradigm – in climate or education – can succeed without the other. Each depends on the other for successful resolution. Clearly, if the climate crisis is unsolved, humanity has little future. Education will be impossible – and a truly transformational resolution of it would create a value frame for a profoundly different approach to learning. Conversely, to transform our approach to the climate crisis, education of a completely different order is essential, and the prevailing short-termism (complacency around business-as-usual) is the profoundest enemy of them both.

In the public consciousness, we are where the climate and biodiversity crises were 20 years ago. Perhaps we are seeing the beginning of the equivalent of the COP process for education.

There are of course important differences, and not just in terms of the stages these immense shifts are at.

**The ‘burning platform’ is apparent in one but not in the other.**

The crisis, which I absolutely consider education to be in worldwide, does not have that visible visceral profile that these other crises do have. We see them being responded to because we see (a pandemic) and vaccines being flown in. We see (war break out) and missiles being shared. And we see new energies being invested in. So in education, it's not a visible train wreck and nor would we want it to be. But unfortunately if we are to get the attention needed, then it needs to be understood that it is a crisis and it's not just a crisis for the students who happen to be in the system at the moment. It's a crisis for our future.

Hekia Parata

**Education lacks a ‘net zero’: a clear target that is scientifically demonstrable to be a precondition for survival.**

On the climate agenda, the international community got together and agreed – this is what we know and this is what we need to do – and then established the shared vision and created political momentum around this. I think that's often the precondition. If you do not align the different actors and the different perspectives and you do not have a kind of shared goal and metric, it's very hard to institute change.

Andreas Schleicher

Whilst there is currently little sign of a ‘popular campaign’ on the agenda for a new future focused education – save the spike in public commentary on acceleration in advances in technology and the consequent disruption to places of learning – the UN's Transforming Education Summit has been accompanied by a strengthening of network and movement activity with civic engagement.

# 5

## What has the climate movement to teach us?



The consensus appears to be that there is a delicate dance between political leadership and the pressure of social movements to create change. There are undoubtedly numerous lessons to be learned from a wide variety of campaigns across history.

There's lots of reasons to be terrified. Why be an optimist? Because there are campaigns. There are social movements that have changed human action: the abolition of slavery in the US or, in our lifetime, attitudes to gay and lesbian people ... And then you look at how those campaigns eventually shifted the politics. Learn from that.

Michael Barber

However, it seems to us that the campaign addressing the climate crisis is particularly relevant, given

- the close relationship between the two crises: in a sense the solutions are interdependent, and
- the acceleration of progress in the case of climate, and the success in inserting consciousness and purpose into the broader public/political domain.

So what can we learn?

## LESSON 1: Focus on purpose

Just as the climate and biodiversity crises have required people to face big questions – ones that in general we have preferred to ignore – so, in seeking the educational paradigm shift that we need, we too must focus relentlessly on purpose.<sup>8</sup>

You have to start the discussion with the purpose. You really have to. That's where we have to concentrate because that's where the leveraging power is. In aligning the actors, it needs to start with the purpose. Not a hijacked or hidden purpose, but a truly openly discussed purpose. This is important, because understanding that we live in promethean times changes what has been seen as the purpose of education and school. If there is no clarity with the purpose, there will be a lot of polarised discussions, without understanding what is beneath the disagreement.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

The outcome could still be profound disagreement, of course, but perhaps it would not all be negative. In effect, this is to require that we face up to the question of 'what will be a good life?' since ... *although we have material abundance we do not in fact have emotional abundance. Most people are deprived of what really matters.*<sup>9</sup>

The multiple ways in which the two new paradigms support each other become apparent here. Of course our maintenance of some form of civilisation is essential for the continuance of education. Also, the new education, and all it entails in terms of values, dispositions and competencies, is essential for the success of a sustainability paradigm. Education can be seen to be a regenerative tool.

## LESSON 2: Understand denial psychologically

Climate activists have learned to adopt a kinder stance to those whose denial springs from a place of fear and misunderstanding (if not towards those whose egregious denial springs from threatened profits and ego). Activists have identified a set of common reactions: distancing, dissonance, denial, accepting doom, threatened identity.<sup>10</sup>

We have heard how, in education, nostalgia drives change-resistance – and the easiest thing is to ‘other’ those who disagree.

To get system change, you can't power your way through. You need to engage with those you disagree with. You have to have empathy with 'people in our way'.

Michael Fullan

They (politicians) have had the courage to stand for election, to put up with the bear pit of politics, deal with all the media pressures. They are people we should respect and admire for their choice to do that. But if you start with, 'they're all on-the-make charlatans' (which I don't think is true) you get into completely the wrong mindset. You go there thinking that they're all cynical on the make and you're right and you're good. These are people who chose to stand for election, that's courage.

Michael Barber

I actually think the big political challenge for us is to connect with strangers, to connect with people who think and work and live in different cultural traditions: to think as a scientist. And as an artist, all at the same time!

Andreas Schleicher

## LESSON 3: It's about systems AND individual action

The climate change movement now repeatedly stresses that change depends on both system action – work beyond the power of ordinary people or even communities – as well as action at the individual level. Neither can be let off the hook.<sup>11</sup> And of course, at the systemic level, the movement is leveraging the power of international dialogue, pressure and debate. Whilst the Climate Conference (COP) processes have been a disappointment in terms of ensuring collective and cohesive action, nonetheless, arguably they have moved the needle in a way that nothing else could have; have provided unique fora in which young people can be heard; introduced and prosecuted the notion of climate justice and reparation; and insisted on the issue being in the public eye (despite the undermining tendencies of most mass media).

Still, the climate movement insists on the importance of individual action and responsibility: how you vote, how often you fly, how you purchase and invest. This in spite of the fact that systems do lock in, or reinforce certain individual behaviours. Individuals may prefer to pollute less by using public transport but, if there is none to be had, what option do they have? Making the connections – and using restricted personal choices as catalysers of public protest and action – is the lesson here.

## LESSON 4: Get smarter about messaging

It is fair to say that the messaging around the climate emergency in the early days was unhelpful if not disastrous.<sup>12</sup> It made people feel helpless, guilty, doomed and stupid all at once. Slowly it has been grasped that the message or ‘the story’ must not just catastrophise and blame. Whilst being unrelenting about urgency, it must offer hope – not just of survival, but of what could actually be a better future. It is not all about loss – things can be different and better. Also it needs to be emotional, not just cognitive.

(In education) ... It has to be deeply relational and deeply felt emotionally. ... Either you're fighting the top all the time or you just give up on them. Either of those is dysfunctional. So how are you going to get engaged with them? (It's) no good to go to leaders and say, 'You've got it wrong. Please do it right'.

Michael Fullan

Furthermore, some fresh approaches to the messaging are needed. When positions are entirely predictable we fall into false dichotomies and binaries.

We need a bit of political creativity (on messaging). The test is whether it's slightly surprising, unpredictable. It needs to be a different combination, not what you would expect. ... I'm struck by how much the global education conversation is now about democracy. Ten years ago that wasn't on the agenda. But now (the talk is) of the duty of an education system to prepare young people to spot disinformation; to be active citizens – and that you can't do through classroom pedagogy. It has to be the exercise of real power, which could be, say, participatory budgets. But it's got to be exercising the muscle for real.

Geoff Mulgan

## LESSON 5: Mobilise young people

Surely the clearest lesson from the progress of the sustainability agenda has been the immense power of mobilising young people. From the classroom strikes to the stunning articulacy of youth denunciations of our current path, we have seen how the mobilisation of young people – who, moreover, are steadily acquiring the vote – can change the game.

## LESSON 6: Understand the methods of mass media

Whilst it is doubtful whether any climate activists might claim that they have cracked the code of how to deal with the general hostility of mass media, they are nonetheless generating some useful insights. The mass media standard operating procedure is to attack, vilify and belittle those who suggest alternatives. They conjure and magnify conflict. They distract with trivia, creating noise around irrelevancies.<sup>13</sup> The lesson must be to acknowledge and avoid these pitfalls.

## LESSON 7: Build alliances and people power

Activists' own analysis<sup>14</sup> shows that, in general, social movements succeed when they deploy the following four key strategies: continually expand in size and diversity; secure key defections from key power brokers; deploy mixed methods (from protests to boycotts); and stay the course.

Further to that last point, no movement has failed when either it gets 3.5 per cent of people on the streets, or 25 per cent accept new social norms.<sup>15</sup> The former is an unlikely scenario for education – but now not impossible to imagine in relation to the climate emergency.

However, on the latter insight, COVID has shown us how very possible it is for significant numbers of people to accept new social norms, sometimes quite rapidly. Consider this in relation to the role of a teacher and a parent/care giver.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, none of this is to suggest that the climate movement has got it all right. Manifestly this is not the case. Sub-sections of the movement are constantly revising their strategies and approaches in the light of new learnings.<sup>17</sup> So must education activists. The business of constructing alliances of disparate actors is messy, but essential.



6

**Some ways forward –  
applying these lessons**



Might these insights, from a movement that is entirely aligned and integrated with a transformational shift in education, help us to sketch out a more powerful strategy? We offer the following, again drawing upon the wisdom of our interviewees, in the light of the lessons above.

## Talk about it!

We need to take every opportunity, at whatever level (the school gate, the national conference, the staff meeting, with political candidates) to talk about this agenda as the most exciting, positive and responsive educational development in our lifetimes. That means finding fresh ways to talk about purpose (perhaps ‘thriving’, not succeeding); outcomes (for everybody, not just those who get into university); and processes (not either/or, but both/and).

A public narrative is called for that encourages a deeper community conversation, a national discourse – what some jurisdictions are convening post UNGA (United Nations General Assembly, 2022) – namely a Big Education Conversation.<sup>18</sup>

One needs to create a powerful societal vision, a strategy to change the consensus. For Julia Gillard (former Australian Education Minister and then PM) it was the Gonski reforms and what lay behind them. You need to create the umbrella of a wider vision.<sup>19</sup>

Tom Bentley

Taking the ‘lessons’ set out above, we need to avoid appearing to mount a full-frontal attack that detracts from everything that has been achieved in the last 30 years; but rather, represent it differently. We have not yet found the new narrative in a sufficiently nuanced way that is persuasive.

I don’t believe we have yet found the right set of narratives. We have to start with the fact that we have an education system that achieves its objectives (pretty much to get as many kids as possible through a bunch of tests and get them into university). As a result, though, we spend so much resource of time and money on testing our kids, to filter them out and to brand too many as failures; but the objective is now woefully out of date – it is not the solution. We could be spending that same amount of time and resource on a more personalised, competency-based real-world education. Now we have to add in a changed economy and fulfilling lives. It’s not that we want to dump the core competencies: it’s that we want to amplify them. My best version of a new narrative is to credit the teachers with what we have at the moment. It is doing what it was designed for, really well. It’s just that we’ve moved on.

Jim Knight

This approach entails reframing the whole standards-based agenda.

We have to reframe the whole idea of ‘standards’ – traditionally that meant well-functioning schools and core literacies as outcomes. Now, we need to broaden them so they mean MORE. The story can’t be one-dimensional; it has to be nuanced.

Peter Hyman

It is not part of winning political strategy to get stuck in that zero-sum game, saying it's either an incremental agenda, or it's a transformational agenda. You have to put it in terms of educational value and community value, and not just in terms of technological modernisation.

Tom Bentley

We need to devise a smarter communications approach – and in terms of style and channels, not just content.

Let's get together and figure out how to be more persuasive. You can only get that if you interact with people. You only get that if you connect to emotions. You only get that if you're seductive, in the best sense of that word.

Michael Fullan

It's as much about the language you use. If I were advocating (for a broader curriculum), I'd say this is about character: you're creating these opportunities in sport and art and music and mountaineering to generate character. And I think that would play well – testing people's resilience as opposed to snowflakes. And then when you talk to The Guardian's reading public, you talk about how we're creating the opportunities for every child that only exist now for those with the will and the means. You would have to think (the strategy) through and you might still get torn to shreds – and obviously if you screw up the implementation.

Michael Barber

Also, since there are great stories to tell – of powerfully engaged young people, of inspiring outcomes, and of more profound professional satisfaction – they need to be told. In addition, they need to be told not just to ourselves.

Amongst other approaches, this requires a media – both electronic and print – to exercise responsibly the role that broadcasting can play in enabling an informed public discourse on significant change. The problem is how do we get the media to change? By what means? As examples to consider, there is the case in British Columbia, of a fundamental rethinking of the assessment and reporting of student progress, or the case in Portugal, of a national campaign on New Roles for the Teaching Profession.

Some overall lessons are clear.

It's probably not smart to be talking about 'transformation'... it's better to say 'The world has moved on'. It's better to speak of 'more than'; rather than just 'instead of'.

Peter Hyman

In parallel with the climate movement, we need to refuse to be parodied as 'woke'.

Don't get stuck in the culture wars, what's included in this or that academic subject. Be more ruthless in saying: fundamentally we need to have a curriculum and a pedagogy and an assessment system and therefore an accountability system that recognises the need for our children to thrive in this 21st century and that requires some significant shift.

Jim Knight

However, the new media need to be embraced too.

The education community has a huge power to be catalysts in society. If you can have influencers who, for no reason, have millions of followers, why can't schools be that? The school could become the crucial bold centre for discussions on these issues.

George Papandreou

## Show, don't (just) tell

We need many more exemplars and prototypes that demonstrate the new practices and approaches, preferably in a wide range of different contexts. Currently, too many of the instantiations of real 21st century practice in schools are in the independent (fee-paying) sector, where there are resources and – perhaps more critically – freedoms to make change.<sup>20</sup>

So two things are necessary. One is a '*localisation strategy for achieving critical mass*' (Tom Bentley).

And, secondly,

We need a step-by-step plan – 'boulders across the river'. Assessment is a great place to start – to free up the curriculum. And 'bridging practices' – like the introduction of personal extension projects.

Peter Hyman

For all this to happen and the politicians to be willing to take the risk of acting differently, you must be able to show there is a better way, to show success. Doing pilots, sandboxes, experiments that engage local community creates advocates to support the different way. It must be evidence-based and value driven. That gives the tools for politicians to make the arguments in public.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

The objective here is to grow the movement to tipping point – the point where politicians have to become followers.

## Leverage the international dimension

At jurisdictional level, there is surely much to be achieved by leveraging the work going on internationally: using its findings, thought leadership, examples and innovations. It gives politicians cover for taking on a fresh agenda.

Education typically is a very domestic field of policy. We do not naturally look beyond our own little ecosystem, whether it's the classroom, the school, the local community or the country. ... International activity creates a social licence. Look at the Education and Skills 2030 project. (The idea of) the 'Learning Compass' and 'the future we want' brought people together and created a shared language. Some interesting changes arose around this – especially people looking beyond cognitive skills. The 'Learning Compass' brings people together, it makes variation visible that you usually do not see. And I think that actually did create, in many countries at least, an aspiration for change.

Andreas Schleicher

One example would be the revived OECD Ministers of Education meeting held in Paris in December 2022, which resulted in a Declaration on Building Equitable Societies Through Education. Another is the annual International Summit on the Teaching Profession, a joint initiative of Education International and OECD – the most recent of which was held in Valencia, Spain, in 2022, addressing the theme 'Excellence and Equity for All'.

(Creating) international licence is part of the answer. You know, these very big international fora that we have been to, the negotiation and agreement of declarations (around education transformation) aren't just something we point at, but do nothing about. How are they practically applied? How do we ensure that monitoring agencies are keeping countries accountable?

Hekia Parata

Some of our interviewees went further and suggested the need to begin to contemplate broader international collaboration on future-focused education.

(The) previous consensus was that education systems served nation states, but now we need ... some global elements in our curricula, in the 2030s and the 2040s, around topics that touch on shared issues, whether it's digitalisation, climate change, inequality – you name it – and we are also proposing some pilots of that perhaps. COVID made people understand that they are part of a global education community – beyond the nation state. And maybe the growth of the IB (International Baccalaureate) schools indicates the possibility.

Pilvi Torsti

François Taddei, founder of The Learning Planet Institute<sup>21</sup> argues that we now need to become 'planetizens' instead of citizens. Perhaps a collective global sense can only be created when we abandon old ideas about nationhood and exclusive identification with it.

## Attack the metrics

In the context of the climate emergency, an important step forward has been to problematise the taken-for-granted metrics for assessing national ‘progress’ or prosperity.<sup>22</sup> Since the 1930s these have hinged around GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as an indicator of ‘growth’. The higher the better. Now it is more widely understood that this not only ignores the limitations that the progenitors of the measure identified, it also perverts our concepts of progress; and indeed is driving us in the wrong direction. Infinite growth on a planet with finite resources is impossible. The ensuing debate is really important. Can there be ‘green growth’ and what does that look like?<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in education, the assessment systems in most countries (with some notable exceptions) drive the system in the wrong direction; inadequately serving societies or individuals.<sup>24</sup> This is an area where there is really high potential for alliance between providers and users of the system. Teachers, colleges, learners and parents are making common cause in identifying the inadequacies in the embedded conception of assessment in the old paradigm: as ‘judgement’; and as filter.<sup>25</sup>

Assessment is the place to start. It can really free up the curriculum.

Peter Hyman

The good news is that there are now smart, organised campaigns in many countries looking to take up this challenge, such as Rethinking Assessment<sup>26</sup> in the UK, the Mastery Transcripts Consortium and Education Reimagined in the US,<sup>27</sup> Learning Creates in Australia, and the New Metrics Project at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne.

Further, there is growing international activity in the development of indices of transforming education systems. Yidan’s *Worldwide Educating for the Future Index*<sup>28</sup> 2019 and Fadel’s *Assessing countries’ competencies*<sup>29</sup> fit this category of activity. The current ambitious R&D work of the Jacobs Foundation in association with Economist Impact – *The Learning Ecosystems Framework* – takes this direction further.

These initiatives involving international collaboration are contributing to the building of the future of education – advocated by OECD and UNESCO – and have implications for a future PISA roadmap.

## Involve (more) young people more

The weak notion of ‘learner voice’ that has characterised some education debates needs to take note of how young people have elevated the climate movement into a completely different level: not least in terms of the power of its leadership. This is not to say that action to give voice to learners in their schools has been mistaken – on the contrary, it has just not gone far enough. The assumption that they are not fitted to participate fully in the debate around the future (**their** future) of education needs to be challenged. Strength can be drawn from the growing number of examples where systems have not just given voice to young people, but empowered it.

Many countries have experienced the depth and intensity of youth participation and leadership – for example in RewirED; Learning Planet’s Young Gamechangers, the Salzburg Global Seminar, Youth Wise via OECD, National Geographic’s youth pioneers, WISE ALL-IN, Teach For All consultation forums, and many more initiatives – including leadership development programs focused on applying learning and solution-seeking to local and global challenges.

The OECD's work in the *Education and Skills 2030* project showed how powerful a curated international video library of young people setting out their views of **the future we want** can be.<sup>30</sup>

The problem is students and young people haven't had an opportunity to work on the inside of the system on changing the system. And we haven't gone young enough: 3–12 year olds can be mobilised. We need to be empowering the voice of more disadvantaged kids. ... Through the pandemic some people have discovered who their best allies are – that students, teachers and parents are each other's best allies.

Michael Fullan

COVID amplified the voice of learners. It made them more assertive about what they could do.

Andreas Schleicher

We need to be alert also to the fact that this is one of the most divisive of the issues at stake. Some (primarily on the political right) perceive talk of learner agency, for example, as indicative of a desire to breed a generation of lefties and trade union activists. Consensus on this one may be hard to find.

## Attractive development opportunities for politicians

Lest this paper be taken as a diatribe about the failings of politicians, traducing their efforts to improve their societies, we should observe that it is becoming very clear what an enormously challenging enterprise it is to take on the mantle of public leadership in contemporary democracies. It is a more subtle, more dangerous, and more thankless task perhaps than ever. For a start, the sheer volume and difficulty of the work needs to be understood.

A big part of the task that they (ministers) inherit – you could call it their day job – is the management of a status quo with vested interests. It takes 80 per cent of their bandwidth. That neutralises many efforts.

Tom Bentley

(For a) new government and ministers, it takes a year to learn what they are dealing with and get things going. And the last year is all about getting ready for the elections. So, the real time available is very short. And that's when all the actions should be done, so it means there's always a run. And the rush is such that you have to deliver something that is visible, fast: and that leads to ... You want to make decisions and legislation. And get them through. Which also means that the interest in implementation is very weak.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

We thought it was about getting the right policy and promoting it. Actually the job is to catalyse possibility – but then you do need a standards safeguard, and an ecosystem of support.

Peter Hyman

It should also be stressed that we do not disregard the importance of civic participatory movements (the pressure of a demand-side) in influencing the policy proposals of politicians. In education, as noted earlier, there are signs of life at the civic and community levels – certainly involving young people, First Nations peoples and the influence of catalytic philanthropy particularly amongst marginalised constituencies. The potential impact of evidence-informed, feasible policy proposals – with clear objectives and an aligned agenda for action – can generate public confidence, stakeholder engagement and thereby political commitment.

However, on participatory movements in particular,

Participatory movements are so important. But I struggle to think of anywhere where they've really gained critical mass in terms of educational practice and their application. And that points back to one of the dilemmas ... a kind of chicken and egg thing. There are probably many education ministers, aspiring leaders who would like to embrace a more network-based and more capability-driven approach and ... to help to build strategies for educational thriving. But they don't necessarily have the complete infrastructure or the suite of tools. (So we need) a range of leadership initiatives focused, not so much on the future generations of educational leaders, ... but more on global civic leaders who are also rethinking the future of democracy. (We need to be) training political candidates of all parties, to get them ready to be good ministers and better citizens.

Tom Bentley

So, if this is the case, how can politicians – or perhaps, more realistically, aspiring politicians – be supported to champion and lead a new era for education, one that is adequate to the future our young people face? What processes could be designed to enable this; to give aspiring politicians the right experience and knowledge to pursue an agenda different from the 'exhausted' old ideas? Some possibilities might be developed from innovative initiatives. The first is from Finland (see Box 1).

The second is the City Lab Initiative for mayors, organised by Bloomberg Philanthropies, in partnership with the Aspen Institute. Whilst not specifically focusing on education, it aims to enable political leaders to develop genuinely innovative solutions to contemporary problems, appropriate for their context (see Box 2).

Other examples include the Athens-based progressive leadership centre, supported by the Andreas G Papandreou Foundation: the planning for Project Demos with Indian partners INK; the Young Leaders Program (for early career leaders in politics, local government, NGOs, private and social enterprises), linked to Harvard's Adaptive Leadership Network; and participatory Democracy Labs.



### **Box 1. Finland example of an innovative initiative**

The Sivistys-Academy was created in 2017. The founding organisations were the Teacher Union of Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Agency for Education in Finland and the Academy of Finland (responsible for allocating the research financing in Finland). There are now five cohorts that have graduated from the academy. It is meant for people who have, or will have, influential power in Finnish society. They are politicians, business leaders, media editors. Each participant is handpicked to make sure there is a lot of diversity in each course. Those invited have been very positive to take part and, for the MPs, the Parliament has given permission to be absent from parliamentary work during the course. The first two days to have some presentations (what Sivistys is all about, the history of it, what are current challenges) and a lot of shared discussion to prioritise what are the most burning questions to be answered. One day is spent in an educational, research or culture institute to take part in the reality of that institute, seeing it from the inside. Then the last two days are spent sharing their experiences, solutions to the challenges, theory of change, and reflecting what they have learned and what should be included in the next government program in the fields of education, research and culture. The leadership of the founding organisations are present throughout the whole process. There are no rapid changes occurring with this approach, but the organisers believe that this is the best way to make the culture change needed to make sure education policy will be coherent and fit for the future.

### **Box 2. Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative**

The Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative is designed to equip mayors with the leadership and management tools to tackle complex challenges in their cities and improve the quality of life of their residents. The private sector invests more than US\$42 billion each year in executive development but there is no equivalent in the public sector. The flagship program of the Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University, the Initiative is a collaboration between Bloomberg Philanthropies, Harvard Kennedy School, and Harvard Business School that aims to provide a world-class learning experience for mayors and their senior leaders to help equip them with the tools and expertise to effectively govern cities. Harvard faculty, staff and students, alongside experts from Bloomberg Philanthropies' global network of experts, work with the mayors and senior officials over the course of one year in the classroom, online and in the field, to foster professional growth and advance the necessary capabilities to drive innovation and deliver results for residents. Launched in 2017, the Initiative has built an alumni network of nearly 200 global mayors from 24 countries. Mayors themselves report that the program helps them to

- build and support high-performing teams
- increase leadership and management capacity in their area
- communicate with constituents and key partners
- use data to increase transparency, make better decisions, and manage performance
- effectively innovate by prototyping, implementing quickly, and learning from failure, and
- work across silos and break down barriers to collaboration within government and across their area.

(See [bloombergcities.jhu.edu/citylab](http://bloombergcities.jhu.edu/citylab))

What if every jurisdiction set out to create attractive developmental experiences for aspiring politicians to inform and inspire their imaginations? Might this go some way to overcoming the dearth of political imagination that Mulgan identifies in *Another World is Possible: How to Reignite Social and Political Imagination*?<sup>31</sup>

## A 'trusted convenor' role?

In our previous paper<sup>32</sup>, we argued that bringing education into a new relationship with the economy and work – with technology; with the broader society; and with our planetary survival – required multiple forms of learning. We suggest now that the political shift required to enable this agenda will entail a new politics: the politics of participative democracy, of community action and the power of networking – the exercise of New Power.<sup>33</sup>

The role of system brokers and intermediaries is attracting increasing attention. However, from a system governance and government perspective, this work 'on behalf of the system' needs to be legitimised and authorised.

In Finland this process is being modelled and enacted in the explicit and visible political appointment of 'System Convenors'. This role has a history of creating spaces for deep dialogue, for conversations between people from multiple perspectives, and multiple cultural, political, class and social backgrounds – coming together to learn across boundaries, to create new collaborative solutions.

You need a system convenor getting people around the table; convincing them you don't have an agenda; so that people don't stay in their own bunkers and start kind of throwing grenades when somebody proposes something. Bring the different actors together and create trust for them to have shared leadership of committing to the changes and giving up something that has been important to each one of them to achieve something better together ... (you need) someone who is a trusted referee to bring and keep the actors together – to start the campfires that lure the actors to come around them and create shared meaning of abstract terms that the aims of education and curriculum are full of.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

There are many who might play the broker, enabler or orchestrator role, serving a new politics for education, including: statutory bodies; politically neutral agencies; and individuals with insight and experience. In England, the Federation for Education Development (FED)<sup>34</sup> is seeking to play precisely that role, in search of a long-term approach to education's evolution.

The potential is considerable for the 'trusted convenor' role to be tasked by government, to deploy legitimacy in different worlds and to have the convening power to bring the diversity of actors to a joint conversation. In short, this approach – advocated by many 'expert witnesses' – is certainly not an abdication of, nor a substitute for, a politically responsible representative government – but it could be a gamechanger in the New Politics for the transforming education endeavour, as system change is pursued and politically forged.

## The profession must step up!

Arising from this unique set of interviews, at this snapshot in time, was a feeling that the profession – both leaders and teachers – needs to step up. In addition to what, of course, are their core conventional foci, there emerged a sense that the profession of **educator** needed to (re)acquire a broader meaning: as civic actors and influencers.

We basically say the bottom and middle have to think of themselves as part and parcel of the system that they're changing, including the part that they don't live in. That is the top. So, we've expanded the terms of reference of those at the local middle level to say: I have a responsibility to influence the next level up. That's part of my job description. We have to work on increasing the capacity of the bottom and the middle to be persuasive to each other and upward. ... you've seen this kind of stirring of the bottom, with some agencies like ourselves cultivating that and empowering that mobilising. So we've got to do more if we're interested in system change – there's more happening than just the minor number of innovations.

Michael Fullan

If the educational community really felt that things were changing and this became part of a movement talking to parents, talking to the local government, the business community – then that would I think also be strong.

George Papandreou

The key thing is for the professional part of the education system to have a view about the future ... about how you want the system to improve. Not just waiting to see what government does, but advocating for what you believe in, and having a vision. And remember to communicate outwards to the public, the taxpayer, the parents, whoever it is. Don't just argue with the government.

Michael Barber

This may be a step too far for many educators (especially classroom teachers), feeling this is not what they signed up for – and that is perfectly understandable – but leaders cannot have it both ways. You cannot deplore the direction and constraints of a system you feel to be failing to serve the interests of your learners, your society and the planet, and expect that system – or its political leadership – to do all the work of change. Politicians need educators' help, as well as their pressure.

To quote from our sister-domain of the climate emergency,

*Are you prepared to change – in whatever way you can? Are you prepared to step outside your comfort zone and become part of a movement that will bring about the necessary systemic transformation?*

Thunberg, 2021

# Final thoughts

Perhaps after all, what we are seeing in education is nothing other than a broader malaise of contemporary democracies. Across the board, commentators note the primacy of short-termism, and the failure to pursue bolder, identified strategies and solutions.

*So what is holding them back? The answer is simple: fear. ... Fear is not an ignoble sentiment. Evolution has made it part of our human armoury for a reason. But we have reached the point where political fear has become the enemy of good government and rational debate. Which is why my new year wish – OK, fantasy – is that we copy COP, and create arenas where we, and especially our leading politicians currently too scared to come clean, can ask big long-term questions ... debate them openly and feel our way towards big answers.*

Peter Kellner<sup>35</sup>

Whilst Kellner's observation relates to political agendas across the board, this malaise is now being felt keenly in the domain of education. We know we are not behaving as 'good ancestors'.<sup>36</sup> Our short-termism, our 'borrowing into the future', aside from giving humanity a mere 1-in-6 chance of avoiding extinction in the next century<sup>37</sup> excludes the interests of young people in the creation of the future. Of all the domains in public policy, failure on this front in education is the most irresponsible. We have an intergenerational responsibility of the highest order. Our purpose in undertaking this work has been to grow understanding of what is needed to address this failure. Our hope is to see a movement gather momentum, and for politicians to be key actors in shaping a Learning Future of meaning and hope for all humanity.

# Appendix 1

**Rod Allen** was Assistant Deputy Minister/Chief Superintendent of Learning for Education in the Province of British Columbia 2010–2015. Rod was a School Superintendent in three BC districts.

**Sir Michael Barber** has advised governments in over 60 countries on issues of public policy and delivery. In the UK he was the founder and first head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, and later served as Chief Education Advisor at Pearson, and as a partner at McKinsey, where he was head of the global education practice. He is author of *How to Run a Government* (2016) and *Accomplishment* (2023), both published by Penguin.

**Tom Bentley** was political adviser to two Secretaries of State for Education in the UK 1998–2000; and then Executive Director in the Department of Premier and Cabinet in the State of Victoria, Australia 2006–7. He was Deputy Chief of Staff for the Federal Minister for Education 2007–2010; and to the Prime Minister of Australia 2010–13.

**João Costa** has been Minister of Education in Portugal since 2022. He was Director of the Nova University of Lisbon Faculty of Social and Human Science until November 2015, President of the Scientific Board of Social Science and Humanities of the Science and Technology Foundation until November 2015, and Secretary of State in Prime Minister António Costa's first and second governments.

**Michael Fullan** was Education Adviser to the Premier of Ontario 2003–2013. He is the former Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto, and co-leader of the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning global initiative.

**Olli-Pekka Heinonen** was Minister for Education and Science in Finland 1994–1999. He has also been the Director General of the National Agency for Education in Finland. He is currently Director General of the International Baccalaureate.

**Peter Hyman** is co-director of Big Education and co-founder of Rethinking Assessment. He was co-founder of School 21, an innovative 4 to 18 school in the UK. From 1993 to 2003 Peter was a political advisor to Gordon Brown, then Donald Dewar and for seven years to Tony Blair.

**Lord Jim Knight** served as Minister of State for Schools in the UK 2006–2009 and then attended Cabinet as Employment Minister 2009–2010.

**Sir Geoff Mulgan** is Professor of Collective Intelligence, Public Policy and Social Innovation at University College London (UCL). Prior to that he was Chief Executive of Nesta, the UK's innovation foundation, between 2011 and the end of 2019. Between 1997 and 2004 Geoff had roles in the UK government including director of the Government's Strategy Unit and the Performance and Innovation Unit, and head of policy in the Prime Minister's office. From 2004 to 2011 he was the first Chief Executive of The Young Foundation. He was the first director of the think tank Demos.

**George Papandreou** served as Prime Minister of Greece 2009–2011 and as Minister of Education 1994–1996. He is currently serving as an MP for the Panhellenic Socialist Movement.

**Hekia Parata** was Minister of Education, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2011–2017.

**Pilvi Torsti** was State Secretary for Education for Finland 2013–2015, Member of the Parliament 2017–2019, and State Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office 2019–23 negotiating the government's program for education.

**John White** has been Deputy Chancellor, New York City Department of Education; Superintendent, Louisiana Recovery School District (New Orleans); and Louisiana State Superintendent of Education.

## Appendix 2

To maintain focus on the interviewee material in the text of this paper, quotes were restricted to their comments. However, although not cited explicitly in the text, a number of other books and articles were consulted in preparing for publication. This appendix provides a selected list of material consulted, together with relevant extracts that the reader may find of interest.

Barber, M (2016) *How to Run a Government So that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers Don't Go Crazy*, Penguin, New York.

*... it's the moral purpose that really matters, not the target. Lose sight of the moral purpose and the edifice begins to crumble. So if a given target has perverse or unintended consequences which might defeat the wider moral purpose, it's a genuine problem.* p 17

Burns, T (2022) *What schools for tomorrow? Futures thinking and leading for uncertainty*, CSE Leading Education Series Paper 08, April 2022, Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne.

*Education systems already face multiple pressures including international tensions, economic disruption, polarisation and declining trust, large-scale migration and ageing populations. The future will be no less challenging; inequality; climate-related crises; digitalisation of economies and societies; and new forms of political turbulence, are only expected to increase (OECD, 2022).* p 5

CSE WISE (2022) *Education Reimagined: Leadership for Transformation. Leading into the Emerging Future*, Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne.

*While our world's future may seem increasingly uncertain, volatile and complex, we are also able to increasingly benefit from the insights and impact from pioneers exploring effective strategies and pathways to new learning environments and educational ecosystems for our modern world.* p 67

Giridharadas, A (2022) *The Persuaders: Winning Hearts and Minds in a Divided Age*, Allen Lane, 1st edition, New York.

*They [people working to deliver meaningful change through electoral politics] also confronted, within their own spaces, the challenge of a pessimistic and factional political culture that threatened their great ambitions. Their work – for racial justice, for a humane economy, for planetary sustainability – required attracting more people to a given cause today than believed in it yesterday. But the reigning culture often discouraged the work of changing minds and sometimes isolated those who pursued it.* p 7

Goddard, C, Chung, C K, Keiffenheim, E, and Temperley, J (2022) *A New Education Story: Three Drivers to Transform Education Systems*, Big Change. [neweducationstory.big-change.org](http://neweducationstory.big-change.org)

*To change the purpose of education means challenging the collective assumptions – unquestioned widely held beliefs – that inform and reinforce the current purpose and making explicit new assumptions that do the same for the new purpose. To challenge collective assumptions requires first to reveal them, then to question their legitimacy and challenge their power.*

Heimans, J and Timms H (2019) *New Power: How Anyone Can Persuade, Mobilize, and Succeed in Our Chaotic, Connected Age*, Anchor Books/Doubleday, reprint edition, New York.

*Old power models ask of us only that we comply (pay your taxes, do your homework) or consume. New power models demand and allow for more: that we share ideas, create new content (as on YouTube) or assets (as on Etsy), even shape a community (think of the sprawling digital movements resisting the Trump presidency).* p 9

Kogan, M (1978) *The Politics of Educational Change*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

*The interplay between the larger political parties and the working out of solutions by the schools, colleges and public authorities are no longer the only sources of change. Important new attitudes have started at the fringe of politics and have increasingly entered the main fabric of the system.* p 21

Putnam, R D and Garrett, S R (2021) *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*, Swift Press, 1st edition, UK.

*The virtuous cycle among the elements of the movement towards an expanding 'we' suddenly reversed and became a vicious cycle. Now, growing polarization produced growing individualism, which in turn produced growing inequality, which produced growing social isolation, which produced in turn more polarization, in what seemed to be an endless downward spiral.* p 312

Schleicher, A (2018) *World Class: How to Build a 21st-Century School System: Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

*Over the years, PISA established itself as an influential force for education reform. The triennial assessment has helped policy makers lower the cost of political action by backing difficult decisions with evidence. But it has also raised the political cost of inaction by exposing areas where policy and practice were unsatisfactory.*

Scott, A and Campbell, R (2021) *The Nordic Edge: Policy Possibilities for Australia*, Melbourne University Publishing.

*... amongst many Australian politicians and other policy practitioners, the idea that countries can never get off particular policy trajectories remains widespread. Many policy makers cite path dependency to explain their reluctance to advocate for policies that have worked elsewhere. The misuse of this concept serves to limit their consideration of reforms, trapping them, and all of us, in a self-fulfilling and tragic fatalism.* p 18

Sengeh, D and Winthrop, R (2022), *Transforming Education Systems: Why, What and How*, Center for Universal Education at Brookings, Policy Brief, June 2022. [brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Transforming-education-systems\\_Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Transforming-education-systems_Brief_FINAL.pdf)

*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.* p 10

## Endnotes

1. See Appendix 1 for the full list of interviewees and their designations.
2. See Appendix 2 for a select list of additional readings. Also see key references: OECD (2016) *Governing Education in a Complex World*, OECD, Paris; OECD (2023) *Building the Future of Education*, OECD, Paris; and UNESCO (2021) *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*, UNESCO, Paris.
3. See [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf)  
In summary, the goals are:  
Goal 1: No poverty  
Goal 2: Zero hunger  
Goal 3: Good health and well-being  
Goal 4: Quality education  
Goal 5: Gender equality  
Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation  
Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy  
Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth
4. [un.org/en/transforming-education-summit](https://un.org/en/transforming-education-summit)
5. [oecd.org/education/2030-project/](https://oecd.org/education/2030-project/)
6. See, for example, [oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Draft\\_Papers\\_supporting\\_the\\_OECD\\_Learning\\_Framework\\_2030.pdf](https://oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Draft_Papers_supporting_the_OECD_Learning_Framework_2030.pdf)
7. Loble, L (2022) *Shaping AI and Edtech to Tackle Australia's Learning Divide*, Paul Ramsay Foundation, Melbourne.
8. See Hannon, V with Peterson, A K (2021) *THRIVE: The Purpose of Schools in a Changing World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
9. Gerhardt, S (2010) *The Selfish Society: How We All Forgot to Love One Another and Made Money Instead*, Simon and Shuster, UK.
10. Thunberg, G (2021) *The Climate Book: The Facts and the Solutions*, Allen Lane, London.
11. Thunberg, G (2021) *The Climate Book: The Facts and the Solutions*, Allen Lane, London.
12. Thunberg, G (2021) *The Climate Book: The Facts and the Solutions*, Allen Lane, London.
13. Thunberg, G (2021) *The Climate Book: The Facts and the Solutions*, Allen Lane, London.
14. Chenoweth, E and Stephan, M (2011) *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Columbia University Press, New York.
15. Centola, D, Becker, J, Brackbill, D and Baronchelli, A (2018) 'Experimental evidence for tipping points in social convention', *Science*, 08 Jun 2018, 360, 6393, p 1116–1119. DOI: 10.1126/science.aas8827
16. Over the past few years the COVID-inspired innovation role of teachers has received considerable attention in cross-country OECD case studies, Education International reports and World Innovation Summits on Education. The Brookings Institution's Center for Universal Education has been documenting heightened levels of parent participation in their young people's learning through the Family Engagement in Education Network.
17. See, for example, the decision of the Extinction Rebellion movement in the UK to refrain from the disruptive action that characterised their action, in 2021.
18. See Hannon, V and Mackay, A (2021) *The future of educational leadership: Five signposts*, CSE Leading Education Series Paper 04, Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne, on the leadership art of the public narrative.
19. For a more detailed understanding of Prime Minister Gillard's vision see *My Story*, by Julia Gillard, 2014, published by Random House, p 244–268.
20. Hannon, V and Temperley, J (2021) *FutureSchool: How Schools Around the World Are Applying Learning Design Principles for a New Era*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK. Also see NAE (2021) *Educational assessments in the COVID-19 era and beyond*, National Academy of Education, Washington DC, US.
21. [learningplanetinstitute.org/en/](https://learningplanetinstitute.org/en/)
22. Raworth, K (2018) *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*, Random House, New York.
23. Thunberg, G (2021) *The Climate Book: The Facts and the Solutions*, Allen Lane, London.
24. Lucas, B (2021) *Rethinking assessment in education: The case for change*, CSE Leading Education Series, Paper 02, March, Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne.
25. [morethanascore.org.uk](https://morethanascore.org.uk)
26. [rethinkingassessment.com](https://rethinkingassessment.com)
27. [mastery.org/](https://mastery.org/) and [education-reimagined.org/](https://education-reimagined.org/)
28. [educatingforthefuture.economist.com/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMipP6Au5mF\\_QIV3ZhmAh0fOgJQEAAAYASAAEgK8kFD\\_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds](https://educatingforthefuture.economist.com/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMipP6Au5mF_QIV3ZhmAh0fOgJQEAAAYASAAEgK8kFD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds)
29. See for example the discussion between Charles Fadel and Anthony Mackay at [vimeo.com/566642934](https://vimeo.com/566642934)
30. [search.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/well-being/](https://search.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/well-being/)
31. Mulgan, G (2022) *Another World is Possible: How to Reignite Social and Political Imagination*, Hurst Publishers, London.
32. Hannon, V and Mackay, A (2021) *The future of educational leadership: Five signposts*, CSE Leading Education Series Paper 04, Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne.
33. For further discussion of New Power see Heimans, J and Timms, H (2019) *New Power: How Anyone Can Persuade, Mobilize, and Succeed in Our Chaotic, Connected Age*, Anchor Books/Doubleday, reprint edition, New York.
34. [fed.education/](https://fed.education/)
35. [prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/fear-holds-our-politicians-back-from-meaningful-change](https://prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/fear-holds-our-politicians-back-from-meaningful-change)
36. Krznaric, R (2020) *The Good Ancestor: How to Think Long Term in a Short-Term World*, W H Allen, London.
37. Ord, T (2020) *The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity*, Bloomsbury, London.



## About the authors



**Valerie Hannon** is a global thought leader, inspiring systems to re-think what ‘success’ will mean in the 21st century, and the implications for education. The co-founder of both Innovation Unit and of the Global Education Leaders Partnership, Valerie is a radical voice for change, whilst grounded in a deep understanding of how education systems currently work.

After a distinguished career within education, Valerie now works independently to support change programs across the world. She has advised governments and worked with systems and schools on every continent, working with some of the most challenged, as well as the leaders in education innovation.

Valerie advised the OECD on its *Education 2030* project, and is now expert adviser on its *High Performing Systems for Tomorrow* program. She is a regular keynote speaker and facilitator at international conferences and workshops, drawing upon her substantial research and publications. Her best-selling book *THRIVE* has been highly influential.

Valerie was the Australian Learning Lecturer for 2020 on the subject of The Future School. The resulting book, *FutureSchool*, is published by Routledge. In 2021 Valerie was given the Outstanding Achievement in Education Award by EduFuturists.



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