

The role of education in addressing future challenges



Learning to become critical global citizens

This report, *'The role of Education in addressing future challenges'*, was prepared in response to UNESCO's *Futures of Education* consultation. We live in a complex, uncertain and fragile world. The current COVID-19 pandemic has increased and deepened the global challenges we face.

Through this initiative, UNESCO proposes to consider the role of education as a common good in 2050 and beyond. In other words, education is key to building a more sustainable planet and equal societies. In this report, Bridge 47 will focus on the role of education that is transformative and value-based to adapt and respond to the multiple challenges the world is currently facing.

Bridge 47 considers as transformative any education that fosters global citizenship, sustainable development, human rights, equality, peace and cultural diversity, as captured in Target 4.7. of the Sustainable Development Goals. Bridge 47 sees education from a holistic perspective, ie. learning that is lifelong and extends beyond formal learning, and life-wide, that takes place in a multitude of contexts and environments. Formal, non-formal and informal learning all have a key role to play.

Who are we?

Bridge 47 was created to bring people together to share and learn from each other. We mobilise civil society all around the world to do their part for global justice and eradication of poverty with the help of Global Citizenship Education (GCE).

We believe everyone can change the world. With the help of Global Citizenship Education, we can learn to do things better, to live by values that make a difference. Global Citizenship Education encourages us to reflect upon our assumptions, make informed decisions and demand policies that create a fairer and more equal world. Global Citizenship Education is one of the key types of transformative education and therefore an integral part of Target 4.7. of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Challenges

Listed below are some of the key challenges the planet and our societies are facing.¹ Without a transition into more sustainable approaches and practices, these challenges will continue to hinder the fair and sustainable development of our societies and our planet as we move towards 2050 and beyond. Education, and in particular transformative education, as described in Target 4.7. of the Sustainable Development Goals, plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges.

Transformative education is one of the few things adaptable enough to help tackle the challenges that the world is facing now and will continue to face in 2050, as it builds the capacities of learners of all ages to critically engage with and positively impact their societies and the world.

Inequalities

The last Sustainable Development Goals report² underlines how long the road is to reduce all forms of inequality within and among countries. It appears that the COVID-19 global crisis has further exacerbated these inequalities. The current and future effects of the pandemic will particularly impact the most vulnerable communities all over the world. Inequalities may continue to increase by 2050 and beyond. Education that focuses on reducing inequalities, such as education for gender equality, human rights education and global citizenship education, are crucial in responding to these challenges, as they allow citizens to explore the root causes of global inequalities.

Climate change

In a report, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) discussed the Environmental outlook to 2050.³ A series of alarming facts on the disastrous effects of climate change were formulated such as a 10% loss of Earth's biodiversity and a 13% reduction of forest areas. The environmental impacts of climate change show profound regional differences both within and between regions. Sectors that rely on certain temperatures and precipitation levels such as agriculture and tourism are particularly affected. In 2015, most of the world governments acknowledged the danger of climate change when signing the Paris Agreement. However, still a minority of them have developed ambitious policies that will enable them to adapt and prevent the planet and our societies from experiencing the worst effects of climate change. In view of the accelerated negative climate impact we are experiencing at a global level, governments need to rethink our socioeconomic systems: the world needs fairer and more sustainable systems and approaches. Education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles has a crucial role in achieving this, by helping citizens of all ages make better informed decisions and lead more climate-neutral lifestyles, and by helping decision-makers to take the decisions that are required to respond to the climate crisis.

Health

Health is a fundamental human right and Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights provides for a right to health and social services for everyone.⁴ Yet, many people around the globe do not have

¹ This is not an exhaustive list. The thematics were identified by Bridge 47 Network members during an online Focus Group meeting on the Futures of Education, held on September 2nd, 2020.

² See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>

³ OCDE (2001), OECD Environmental Outlook, Éditions OCDE, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264188563-en>.

⁴ Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of human rights states that *'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care*

access to primary healthcare services. Lancet's report on the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD) published in 2019 tackles the question of global health in the 21st century.⁵ The report reveals that health of the world's population has improved since 2020. However, inequalities have been observed as health narrowly depends on health systems. Global health challenges, such as the global pandemic, require global responses, as they reveal the interdependent nature of the world. Transformative education, such as global citizenship education, can play a crucial role in responding to these challenges.

Education to foster active citizenship and participation

Through this Futures of Education consultation, UNESCO raises the question on the purpose of education by 2050. This question is of crucial importance. In this fast-evolving world, Bridge 47 supports the idea that education should foster active citizenship, justice, sustainability, equality, peace and human rights. The education we need should help learners of all ages to *learn to become* active global citizens and thus contribute to building a more just and sustainable world for all.

Everyone, including generations yet-to-come, need to adapt in order to face the 21st century global challenges, and be equipped with the appropriate tools to address those challenges. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides many signposts and guidelines for what choices must be made for a more holistic vision of education. Bridge 47 considers value-based, transformative education, as captured in Target 4.7. of the Sustainable Development Goals, a fundamental element to achieving Agenda 2030 and more just and sustainable societies.

Target 4.7 specifies that by 2030, all learners should acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.⁶

GCE and other types of value-based education captured in Target 4.7. have to be transformative in order to meet the global challenges and contribute to building a more sustainable planet and more equal societies. Jack Mezirow has developed the notion of transformative learning 40 years ago. Mezirow defined transformative learning as "*the process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revisited interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action*".⁷ He looks at learning as a means of transformation if it results in a form of emancipation.

In this context, we understand Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as education that helps learners of all ages to assume active roles in building more just and sustainable societies, or as defined in the Maastricht

and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.'

⁵ The Lancet, *Global Burden of Disease 2019*, Oct 17, 2020, Volume 396, Number 10258p1129-1306.

⁶ <https://www.globalgoals.org/4-quality-education>

⁷ Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to Think like an Adult. Core Concepts of Transformation Theory. In J. Mezirow, & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as Transformation. Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (pp. 3-33). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Global Education Declaration, as “education that opens people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all.”⁸

In the report *GCE for Unknown futures*⁹, Rene Suša shares three narratives to explain the benefit and the impact of Global citizenship education to our societies. GCE allows learners to understand better our shifting world and its complexities. It raises learner’s awareness on the interdependency of our societies and the socio-economic mechanisms that lead to the global challenges such as inequalities, climate change and extreme poverty. By applying active pedagogical approaches, GCE fosters critical thinking. Suša notes that research has demonstrated the effects of GCE on learners: when understanding better the complexities of the world, learners acquire the tools to identify, design and implement transformative actions at all levels. The reflection on the effects of GCE can be extended to the broader notion of transformative and value-based education, as captured in Target 4.7. of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Bridge 47 recommendations for the *Futures of Education*

The International Commission appointed to the *Futures of Education* initiative should acknowledge the importance of transformative education and highlight it in the forthcoming report. Bridge 47 recommends that the power of education to promote change and the necessary development of individuals, communities and systems is included and highlighted in the report. Bridge 47 has formulated a number of recommendations in order to strengthen transformative education in the future.¹⁰

Policy for transformative education

UNESCO is a long-term supporter of transformative education through the Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development programmes. In the same spirit, the *Futures of Education* report should encourage all actors:

- To create a strategy for transformative education, as captured in Target 4.7. of the Sustainable Development Goals, at all levels.
- To ensure a coherent approach to transformative education by integrating its principles into all relevant policy areas. Particularly educational policies should take into consideration the need for formal, non-formal and informal education to have a coherent and inclusive approach emphasizing intergenerational and intercultural learning across all levels of education.

⁸ <https://www.bridge47.org/resources/12/2018/maastricht-global-education-declaration-and-council-europe-policy-framework>

⁹ (2019) Rene Suša, *Global Citizenship Education (GCE) for Unknown Futures. Mapping Past and Current Experiments and Debates*. P21-25

https://www.bridge47.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/bridge47_gce_for_unknown_futures_report-compressed_0.pdf

¹⁰ In November 2019, Bridge 47 gathered around 200 national, European and global stakeholders along with academics, politicians and government representatives. Together, they laid the foundations of a multi-stakeholder’s vision to support transformative education: *Envision 4.7*. This call initially directed to European institutions and countries, presents recommendations that can be applied to the *Futures of Education*.

(2019) Bridge 47, *Envision 4.7: Roadmap in support of SDG 4.7*.

https://bridge47.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/envision_4.7_roadmap_0.pdf

Cross-sectoral cooperation

The Envision 4.7 Roadmap stresses the need to bring together and engage local and national governments, members of national parliaments, the private sector, civil society, regional actors, the United Nations system, academics, media, youth and educators, among others. The Roadmap highlights that only through this approach will it be possible to promote, strategise and mobilise adequate resources for the implementation of transformative education. This kind of multi-stakeholder engagement will address the need for improved cooperation and coordination at all levels and across different policy areas.¹¹

The process of this consultation gathering global collective intelligence under the Futures of Education initiative is a welcome example of engaging stakeholders.

The Futures of Education should encourage:

- The creation of cross-sectoral and multilateral or multi-stakeholder groups or alliances linked to transformative education at national, regional and global levels. Such groups should initiate and support the co-creation of relevant policy proposals linked to the implementation of transformative education.

Competencies frameworks

It is crucial that both learners as well as teachers and educators acquire competencies related to the skills, knowledge and attitudes promoted by transformative education. Such competencies enable people to play active roles in the transformation of society at the global, national and local levels. They also permit learners of all ages to rethink our current social paradigms, global structures and relationships that have contributed to the challenges our societies are facing.

The International Commission warned against the side-effects of digitalisation and prioritises value-based education and a holistic approach to learning. Transformative competencies and skills related to GCE are fundamental, more than ever, in supporting a transition into a future that can be more digitalized.

The Envision 4.7. roadmap encourages recognition and implementation of competencies connected to transformative education through all forms of life-long learning, including formal and non-formal education and informal learning. UNESCO has developed global competency frameworks for different components of transformative education.¹² Based on these existing frameworks and others, such as the OECD Global competence framework¹³, the *Futures of Education* report should encourage:

- Comprehensive global competency frameworks that are necessary to support sustainability, including dealing with uncertainty, the transformation of unequal power relationships and the establishment of inclusive and democratic societies.
- Recognition and implementation of competencies for transformative education through all forms of life-long learning (including formal, non-formal education and informal learning).
- Inclusion of competencies for transformative education into pre- and in-service training for teachers and other formal and non-formal educators and development of formal sector curricula

¹¹ An example of Cross-sectoral cooperation from Estonia: (2020) Building Cross-Sectoral cooperation. Estonian coalition for Sustainable Development. AKÜ

https://www.bridge47.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/estonian_partnerships_web_book.pdf

¹² UNESCO: 'Sustainable Development Goals Learning Objectives'

<https://www.sdg4education2030.org/education-sustainable-development-goals-learning-objectives-unesco-2017>;

UNESCO: 'Global Citizenship Education topics and learning objectives'

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232993>,

¹³ OECD: 'PISA 2018 Global Competence'

<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2018-global-competence.htm>

from primary school to higher education levels that include the teaching and learning of relevant competencies.

Indicators to measure transformative education progress ¹⁴

Measuring progress against transformative education through Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.7 has proven to be challenging, but it is essential. The multidimensional nature of the target is what complicates measurement efforts: definitions of ‘sustainable development’ vary widely across different subject areas, and the implementation context, be it global, national or local, influences interpretations.

UNESCO has developed the global indicator framework 4.7.1, which measures the extent to which global citizenship education (GCED) and education for sustainable development (ESD) are mainstreamed in national policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment. The Futures of Education report should encourage:

- Multi-stakeholder process that supports dialogue between key actors in order to maintain that measuring frameworks on education remain relevant and consistent and reflect the conceptual shifts within the fields of ESD and GCE.
- That [measuring framework](#) for 4.7 acknowledges the connection between non-formal education and formal education and their importance in supporting GCE and other forms of value-based education captured in 4.7.

¹⁴ <https://www.bridge47.org/resources/10/2019/sdg-target-47-characteristics-monitoring-and-measuring-progress-mission-possible>



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