

Foreword

2020, this evocative year of hindsight and foresight, has humbled us with a global shock: the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been reminded that, despite the best laid plans, the truth is that the future likes to surprise us. To prepare our education systems for what may come, we have to consider not only the changes that appear most probable, but also the ones that we are not expecting.

There are always multiple versions of the future – some are assumptions, others hopes and fears, or even signals that something is already changing. *Back to the future of education: Four OECD Scenarios for Schooling* provides a set of scenarios on the future of schooling to support long-term strategic thinking in education. These scenarios, which build on the 2001 edition, show us that there is not a single path into the future, but many.

This volume is a companion volume to the *Trends Shaping Education* series, a triannual publication that highlights key global megatrends and their potential impact on education. While megatrends focus on patterns from the past to inspire thinking about the future, scenarios allow us to consider newly emerging patterns and possibilities.

A key question for thinking about the future of education is: To what extent are our current structures helping or hindering our vision? Put another way, if today we were to meet with a Martian, freshly arrived on planet earth and looking for tips on designing their own education system, what would we suggest?

Would we suggest starting with schools and schooling as we know them now and advise modernising and fine-tuning the system, the conceptual equivalent of reconfiguring windows and doors of a house? Or would we rather recommend an entirely different way to use the people, spaces, time and technology? Who would be involved in these processes of transformation, and how much of the lifespan would it encompass (infancy? early childhood? adulthood, aligned to labour market? Or lifelong, including learning for our eldest seniors at 80 and 90+ years, a growing cohort as our populations age?)?

The path forward is likely a combination of these two approaches. Revisioning and transforming education is a powerful tool, pushing us to think outside of the box and to go beyond our current limitations. So too is building on what we have, modernising the trusted institutions that play such an important role in the social fabric of our communities and societies.

By using schools and schooling as a starting point, this volume and the four scenarios within it open the door to both approaches. They can be used to inspire, to dream, to transform. They can be used to future-proof systems and stress-test against unexpected shocks. Above all, they push us to move beyond complacency and easy solutions, presenting us with the tensions and paradoxes inherent in all our systems and which we must address. We hope you enjoy the journey. Use them in good health.

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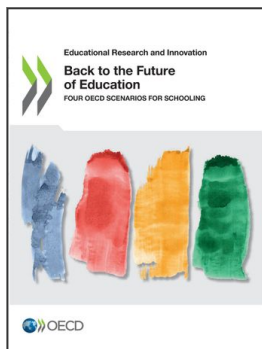
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