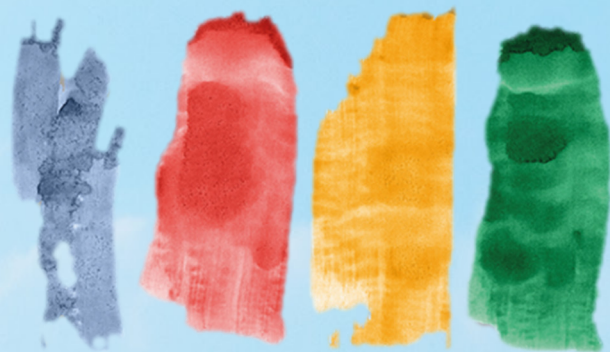


Four OECD Scenarios for the Future of Schooling








Multiple futures

Despite the best laid plans, the future is inherently unpredictable. This message was brought home forcefully in 2020, as countries scrambled to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To prepare for the future, we have to consider not only the changes that appear most probable, but also the ones that we aren't expecting. In addition to plausibility, the impact of an event is also a key dimension.

Trends not yet shaping education?

Potential future shocks and surprises, plausibility and impact

	Plausibility	Impact
 Natural disasters	High	Potentially very high, depending on severity and duration of the shock
 Economic shock / Crisis	Increasing in an interconnected global world	Depending on severity duration of the shock
 (Cyber) War	Depending on context	likely high depending on type of warfare
 Internet disrupted / Communications cut	Low	Extremely high, particularly if it coincides (accidentally or intentionally) with one of the other shocks
 Human – machine interfaces / General Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Still unknown	Still unknown

Source: OECD (2019), Trends Shaping Education 2019, https://doi.org/10.1787/trends_edu-2019-en

Why do you need scenarios?

Scenarios are a good way to think about multiple futures systematically. Structured as snapshots or stories, what might happen in the future, scenarios are constructed for the purpose of learning and taking action in the present. Scenarios allow for:

Exploration

A scenario is not a future we expect to occur. It is not possible or desirable to be 'right' about the future in a scenario discussion.

Exploring the future allows us to let go of our deeply held assumptions which may be proven unfounded and harmful if left unchallenged.

Context

Scenarios encourage us to consider what the future will feel like.

Whereas forecasting and predictions tend to focus on individual metrics or events, scenarios allow us to consider the future as a whole: 'the big picture'.

Narrative

Scenarios can be powerful tools for creating shared understanding within an organisation on how to act.

Good scenario narratives are memorable enough to become part of an organisation's way of thinking.

Scenario 1 | Schooling extended



Goals and functions

Qualification, care, credentialing, socialisation

- Participation in formal education continues to expand. Academic certificates continue to be the main passports to economic and social success.
- The curriculum rises to the fore, with countries operating a common curriculum and assessment tools.



Organisation and structures

Spaces, content, time, relationships

- International public-private partnership powers digital learning environments. Learning resources and data are shared across countries.
- The organisation of instruction and student-teacher interactions remain mostly unchanged, although there is room for innovation.



The teaching workforce

Professional status, tasks, certification

- More personalised learning alters the nature of teachers' work, with subsequent impact on teacher education and professional development.
- There is marked division of tasks and greater diversification of professional profiles in school networks, which now benefit from larger economies of scale.



Governance and geopolitics

Actors, power relations, participation

- Strong role for traditional public administrations.
- Increased emphasis on partnerships and international collaboration.

Scenario 2 | Education outsourced



Goals and functions

Qualification, care, credentialing, socialisation

- Driven by greater parental involvement, diverse forms of private and community-based initiatives emerge as alternatives to schooling.
- Choice plays a key role: of those buying educational services and of those, such as employers, giving market value to different learning paths.



Organisation and structures

Spaces, content, time, relationships

- As education outsourcing expands, traditional bureaucratic governance and system-wide accountability shrinks.
- Greater choice in learning programmes (length, scope, cost, etc.) provides learners with flexibility to move at their own pace.



The teaching workforce

Professional status, tasks, certification

- There is greater variety of teaching profiles and working arrangements, with implications for professional and reputational status.
- Learning networks, such as massive digital learning platforms, bring different human resources together according to perceived need.



Governance and geopolitics

Actors, power relations, participation

- Greater reliance on societal self-organisation.
- Schooling systems as players in a wider (local, national, international) market.

Scenario 3 | Schools as Learning Hubs



Goals and functions

Qualification, care, credentialing, socialisation

- Schools retain most of their functions, but new forms of competence recognition systems liberate them from pressures of credentialism.
- Move away from uniformity: Local actors develop their own initiatives to realise the values they consider important.



Organisation and structures

Spaces, content, time, relationships

- Experimentation and diversity of pedagogies are the norm. Personalised pathways are strengthened within a framework of collaborative work.
- Activities are planned in the context of broader learning ecosystems, mapping opportunities across an interconnected network of educational spaces.



The teaching workforce

Professional status, tasks, certification

- Knowledgeable, networked teachers coexist with diverse individual and institutional players offering a variety of skills and expertise.
- Strong partnerships leverage resources of external institutions, such as museums, libraries, residential centres, technological hubs and more.



Governance and geopolitics

Actors, power relations, participation

- Strong focus on decision making at the local level.
- Self-organising units in diverse partnerships.

Scenario 4 | Learn-as-you-go



Goals and functions

Qualification, care, credentialing, socialisation

- Digitalisation has made it possible to assess and certify knowledge, skills and attitudes in a deep and almost instantaneous manner.
- Learning opportunities are widely available for "free", marking the decline of established curriculum structures and dismantling the school system.



Organisation and structures

Spaces, content, time, relationships

- Education builds on digital technology and artificial intelligence to leverage collective intelligence and solve real-life problems.
- Dismantling of schooling systems and repurposing of its infrastructure. Distinctions between education, work and leisure become blurred.



The teaching workforce

Professional status, tasks, certification

- Difficult to envision the role of governments vis-à-vis markets and civil society. Data ownership and its geopolitical implications are key.
- Traditional teaching professionals vanish as individuals become "prosumers" (professional consumers) of their learning.



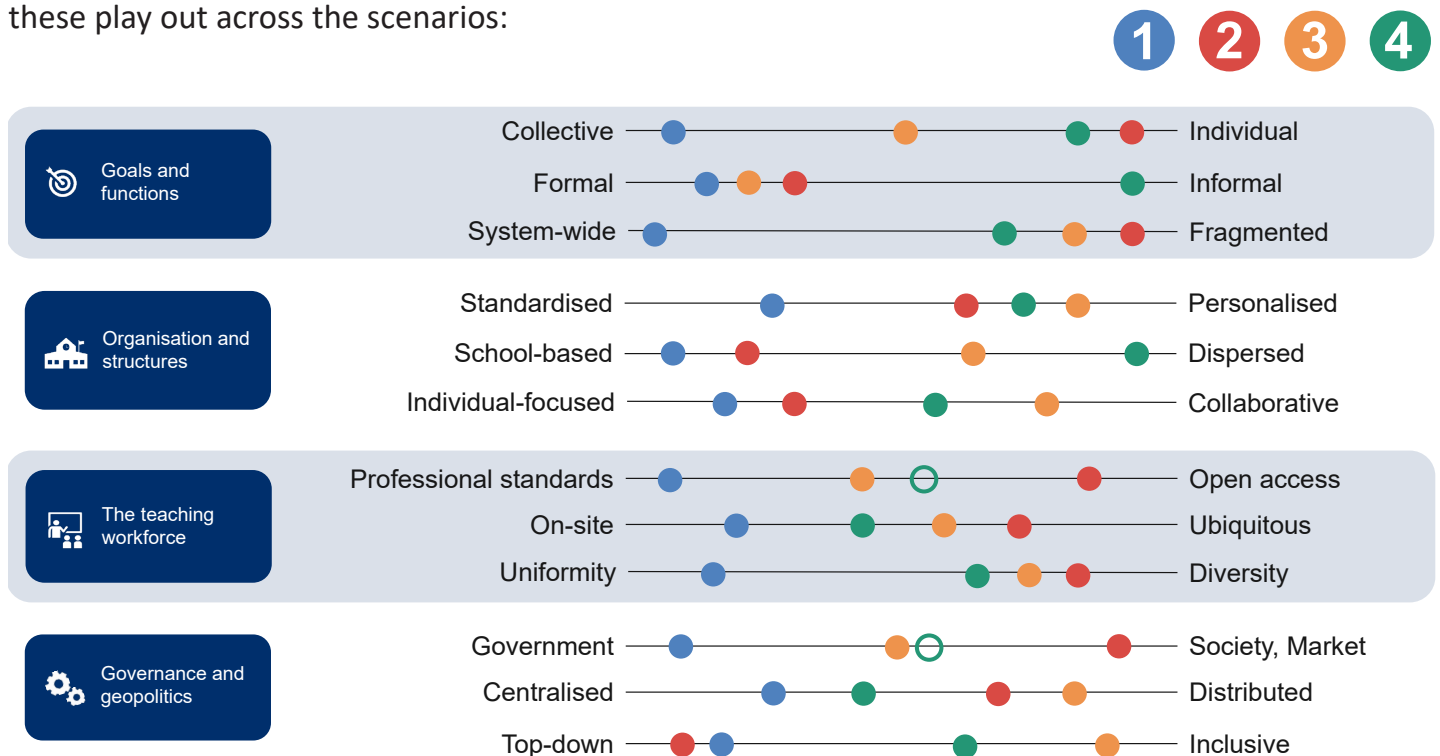
Governance and geopolitics

Actors, power relations, participation

- Deinstitutionalisation of public education, dismantling of schooling.

Mapping the scenarios

The scenarios are built around four common design principles. The figure below maps visually how these play out across the scenarios:



Questions for discussion

- How could potential shocks and surprises (natural disasters, economic shocks, cyber war, etc) impact the functioning of education under the different scenarios? Can you identify something that your education system should start doing differently / preparing for?
- What are the main factors behind the persistence of the massive schooling model? In the next 20 years, can we imagine that formal education could be considered less important?
- What are the ultimate goals and functions of education? Are the goals and structures in your schooling system aligned?
- Looking at your education system, what can be incrementally improved and what needs fundamental transformation? What is the strategic inventory of actions available (funding something, banning something, promoting a new practice, forming a partnership, etc.)?
- What is the right balance between digital environments and old-fashioned physicality?
- What do the scenarios imply for teachers, teaching and teacher policies (human resources in schools; professional status, certification and collaboration, accountability, etc.)?
- Does the system allow for the failures that come with trying out new things?

For more information:

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See: OECD (2020), "[Back to the Future of Education: Four OECD Scenarios for Schooling](#)", OECD Publishing

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