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Education for a changing society

The future of schools

Key insights from the July 2021 SHAPE Education event

Opportunity areas
Shaping the future of schools

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Go agile

How can education systems and providers be more agile and respond quickly and effectively to new and ongoing changes in local and global landscapes?

Local and global value

How can education systems and providers deliver learning, assessment and teacher training of most value in local and global contexts?

Equity for all

How can education systems and providers enable more equitable access to and uptake of learning products and opportunities, and improve learning outcomes within them?
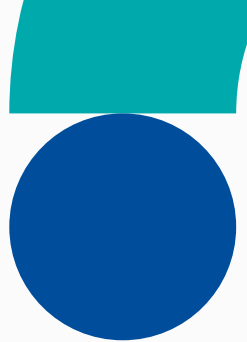
Watch your ethics

How can education systems and providers address ethical issues around data management in education?

These opportunity areas were identified through analysis of themes and insights emerging through the 2021 *SHAPE Education: The future of schools* event. They present areas of opportunity; where those invested in education can start (or continue) to make a difference.

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Introduction

If this last year has taught us anything, it is that education is acutely impacted and shaped by global, local and societal changes. As we look forward and envisage the educational needs of learners, it is essential that we consider the range of possible futures they will inhabit and identify ways in which we can meet emerging and unknown challenges.

Watch the recordings from the July 2021 SHAPE Education event ▶

Aims of the report

SHAPE events bring audiences together around specific themes to collaborate in discussion and design thinking, focusing on specific users, and identifying significant challenges, constraints and opportunities. This report aims to capture the predictions, ideas and opportunities generated at the SHAPE event held from 12 to 16 July 2021.

The report brings together key themes that emerged through discussions at the event. The infographic summary further refines these themes to present areas of opportunity, where those invested in education can start (or continue) to make a difference.

Context of the event

SHAPE Education: The future of schools sought to offer different visions of the future of education based on societal shifts, educational trends, workforce changes and technological developments. Fifteen experts from across different fields were invited to share their insights, predictions and visions of the future of education through short talks and fireside chats where panellists responded to ongoing audience interaction.

The event focused on five questions:

1. How will societies across the globe change in the next 20 years?
2. What will education look like 20 years from now?
3. What will individuals need to learn for success in work and life in the future?
4. How will tools, technology and pedagogy be shaping schools in 2040?
5. How will school-age students be learning and using English in 20 years' time?

Speakers

Mario Barosevcic
Principal
Emerge Education

Raya Bidshahri
Founder & CEO
School of Humanity

Teocah Arieal Ainka Dove
Social Innovator and Development Strategist

Mauro F Guillén
Incoming Dean
Cambridge Judge Business School

Conrad Hughes
Campus and Secondary Principal
International School of Geneva

Silvana Richardson
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Bell Educational Services

Nik Peachey
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PeacheyPublications Ltd

Gisella Langé
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Ministry of Education, Italy

Mike Solly
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The British Council

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How will societies across the globe change in the next 20 years?

Peering into the future and trying to predict how societies across the globe will change over the next 20 years, and the subsequent impact such change will have on education, is a challenge. Language education has long positioned itself among changing winds and shifting sands (Marckwardt 1972), and the COVID-19 pandemic has very much evidenced how social changes can revolutionise education (Väätäjä & Ruokamo 2021).

Pandemic or no pandemic, it has been clear to educationalists for a number of years that the future of education will require learners to be equipped to deal with social, political, economic and ecological challenges to address the unique concerns of the future (OECD 2018). However, COVID-19 has certainly accelerated this rate of change.

Based on discussion of societal shifts, among the key themes to emerge from the SHAPE Education event were:

- demographic changes
- questions of the commodification of education and ethics
- issues of equity and access to education.

Demographic changes

In terms of demographic changes, the way in which populations are envisaged to grow and age around the world is likely to have a critical impact on the future of education and schools. The rising populations in sub-Saharan Africa, discussed by Mauro F Guillén, reflect an emerging need for schools. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa over the next 10 years, approximately 450 million babies will be born. However, as there is limited space and infrastructure for physical schools, Mauro argued this specific demographic change will necessitate further and deeper engagement with digital pedagogies and online schools. Such a vision builds on current efforts to 'virtualise' schools during COVID-19 (Owolabi 2020). Although, looking forward, some reimagining may be in order, as Owolabi (2020) notes in reflection on online schooling in Africa that 'it is impractical to absolutely graft virtual learning into an existing rigid traditional education system and to continually premise teaching on learning theories and practices of the physical learning environment or contact methods'. Mauro also introduced the possibility of 'leapfrogging': in the same way that mobile phones allowed regions of the world to digitise without fixed phone lines, effectively leapfrogging their way to a connected society, perhaps the solutions we see emerge will do the same for the infrastructure we currently take for granted in education. Although use of and changes in technologies are unevenly distributed and a significant contributor to inequalities, tech is part of the solution.

As demographics change and lifelong learning evolves, so too will the nature of teaching. Learners will increasingly need to develop a wider range of skills and will want specialised input. Therefore, following Tuzlukova, Al Busaidi and Burns (2017), 'traditional ways of imparting knowledge are no longer adequate to ensure that students graduating

are able to meet the demands of the workforce'. With longer life spans and fast-paced changes in industry, career changes are also likely to require people to *unlearn* outdated models, practices and mindsets in order to move ahead. This resonated with the panel and attendees, echoing Reaves' (2019) view that '[unlearning] … could become almost as important as learning' in the future.

> *Demographic changes are so big that they're going to transform the educational landscape over the next 5 to 10 years.* — Mauro F Guillén

Commodification of education and ethics

A second theme emerged around the commodification of education and the ethics surrounding data management for teaching and learning. The role of technology and digitisation is becoming normalised in many societies around the world, and while this brings with it many advantages, it is not unproblematic. Neil Gibb discussed the ongoing commodification of education, where education is increasingly being seen as something tradeable, a notion that has been seen to 'permeate education reform and restructuring across the globe' (do Amaral & Fossum 2021).

Given the value of data to global commerce, Neil discusses the importance of considering the ethics of teacher and learner data, arguing that we will need to consider the impact this can have on learners. Of course, considerations surrounding data management and technology in education are increasingly common, with the likes of Sharkey (2016) signalling potential hazards in digital pedagogies in language learning for developing emotional awareness and intelligence.

Equity and access to education

In discussing the impact of social change on education, a key theme emerged that permeated throughout the event. This pertains to issues of access and equity in education. While much of the world moved towards online education in lieu of face-to-face teaching during the pandemic (OECD 2020), issues of education loss were also prevalent (The Edge Foundation 2020). Teocah Dove echoed this view in discussing the Global South, stating that globally, not all countries are equally equipped to foster educational change. Therefore, while the practices and online pivot in the early stages of COVID-19 very much reflect crisis pedagogies (Adedoyin & Soykan 2020), for many, the lack of infrastructure means that a sustained online provision will be challenging. Teocah noted that 'countries in the Global South would look to the Global North for support via development aid' to support educational reform. However, the complexity of the global landscape of education renders this challenging, and the issues discussed above under Demographic changes and Commodification of education and ethics further compound this challenge.

Countries in the Global South would look to the Global North for support via development aid. — Teocah Dove

What will education look like 20 years from now?

In the discussion of what education will look like in 20 years, a number of key themes emerged. These largely centred on:

- the future of English language teaching (ELT)
- reimagining education
- equality, diversity and inclusion.

… [it's] not really about getting it right. It's about starting a discussion. — Mike Solly

The future of English language teaching

Predicting the future of education is a challenge and getting it right is not so easy. In Graddol's *The future of English* (1998), he made a number of predictions about the future of ELT and Mike Solly reflected on these predictions, noting that few of them have come to pass. Mike noted, however, that making predictions is 'not really about getting it right. It's about starting a discussion' – this same notion was echoed in later discussion around what individuals will need to learn for success in work and life in the future, as Matt Finch discussed the importance of thinking about a range of possible future scenarios. That said, key predictions such as growth in the focus on plurilinguistic competences, English as an international language and English medium instruction build on recognised trends in the field (Manzano Vázquez 2018, Tan, Farashaiyan, Sahragard & Faryabi 2020, Curry & Pérez-Paredes 2021). One specific prediction that builds on issues of equity and access to education is the perceived and growing importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), which is evident in contemporary education research (Gerald 2020).

What will be the most important thing for children to learn in 2040?

- 3% Knowledge
- 39% Skills
- 52% Mindsets
- 6% Other
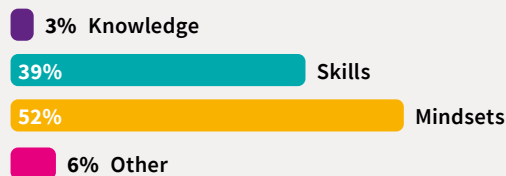
Poll of 193 participants at *SHAPE Education: The future of schools*, 2021

Reimagining education

A second theme that emerged focused on questioning practices that we take for granted. The future of education can be redesigned and could involve:

- no classrooms
- no curricula
- no exams
- no grades.

> *What if we started from scratch? — Raya Bidshahri*

In Raya Bidshahri's view, to prepare for the future, we need to let go of preconceptions and existing models to design an approach to education that responds to contemporary needs. In lieu of exams, she proposed formative assessments, and project-based and personalised portfolios that contribute to outcome-based and mastery approaches to assessment (Oates 2008). The idea of no classrooms makes room for online schools (Proshkova 2020) or co-learning where students can work towards skills-based, personalised and adaptive learning pathways at their own pace (Ott, McCane & Meek 2018). The main idea behind this theme is captured in Raya's closing argument, where she states that 'in a world where the only constant is change, we need moonshot ideas', not incremental changes.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The third theme that spanned Mike, Raya and Conrad Hughes' discussion was the importance of EDI for the future of education. This theme builds on issues of equity and access to education and relates to the discussion of what individuals will need to learn for success in work and life in the future. Conrad noted that he sees more and more students struggling with stress and wellbeing, and finds that sociological gaps can hamper access and equity, impacting efforts to improve EDI in education. The panellists discussed the important work taking place on decolonising curricula (e.g. Beacon, Berbain & Banegas 2021) and the importance of continuing to move away from native-speaker norms (Tajeddin, Alemi & Pashmforoosh 2018) to further develop EDI in education.

> *How schools are going to grapple with decolonising and indigenising the curriculum is going to have a massive impact on education. — Conrad Hughes*

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What will individuals need to learn for success in work and life in the future?

In the discussion of the future needs for the workplace, two key themes emerged:

- critical thinking and human capital
- preparing for uncertainties.

[The future needs people who] can not only answer the question, but can formulate the question, frame the question that needs to be addressed. — Heather McGowan

Critical thinking and human capital

A key theme that emerged throughout the SHAPE Education event was the importance of critical thinking. Glen Leadbetter noted in the discussion on societal shifts that, more than ever, there is a need to teach 'everybody to look at information and judge it for what it is'. The need to develop critical thinking in our learners is well espoused in the wider literature on education (OECD 2018) and Heather McGowan noted that owing to inevitable changes in working cultures, there will be an increased focus on learners' capabilities to apply knowledge and an even greater stress on their capacity to create it. She said the future needs people who 'can not only answer the question, but can formulate the question, frame the question that needs to be addressed', echoing the notion that critical thinking will be important for disaster management (Albanese & Paturas 2018) and business development (Calma & Davies 2020), for example.

Like critical thinking, the value of social skills and engagement played a critical role in the discussion of future work. Silvana Richardson supported Heather's view when she discussed the importance of 'uniquely human skills' in teaching and learning, noting that teachers will need to place increased importance on 'relational, social and dialogic aspects of education' to develop the communicative and intercultural competences in learners that are needed for the globalised world in which they will work. This echoes current work on dialogic education (Littleton & Mercer 2013), for example.

Preparing for uncertainties

The second theme builds on the notion of the unpredictability of the future. Matt Finch discussed the value of focusing on uncertainties. Thinking surrounding the future of education is directly concerned with preparing for the unknown (OECD 2018) and to do so, Matt proposed that we 'imagine plausible futures that challenge [our] assumptions about what will happen next' in order to 'try to get people to think bigger about the world they live in, the uncertainties that shape it, and how they might play out in the future'. This approach to unpacking uncertainties can help teachers and educationalists to prepare for the unknown, to anticipate challenges and issues that will need to be resolved, and to widen their perspectives. Arguably, this kind of thinking can help us, as educators, further develop our view of and approach to education and weigh on the importance of critical thinking, as Heather and Glen discussed in detail.

What will be the most in-demand skills for work in 2030?

13% **Specific technical skills**
Artificial intelligence, data science, security, etc.

42% **Transferable skills**
Effective communication, collaboration, critical thinking

41% **Attitudes**
Adaptability, grit, positive mindset

5% **Other**

Poll of 162 participants at *SHAPE Education: The future of schools*, 2021

Try to get people to think bigger about the world they live in, the uncertainties that shape it, and how they might play out in the future. — Matt Finch

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How will tools, technology and pedagogy be shaping schools in 2040?

Turning to technology, the key themes that emerged reflected a focus on:

- technology and pedagogy
- access to technology.

We are really still in the Stone Age of edtech. — *Mario Barosevcic*

Technology and pedagogy

The overarching message here is that educational technology needs to have pedagogy at its heart. Issues in the industry of educational technology arise where technologies are more focused on user experience (UX) and operational management of education than learning reflecting research, such as that by Bartolomé, Castañeda and Adell (2018) who find there to be a lack of underlying pedagogies in educational technology. This notion of pedagogy-informed technology was shared by both Mario Barosevcic and Nik Peachey who argued for a pedagogy-first approach, which largely aims to make sure that there is a pedagogical foundation informing the development of educational technology (Fullan 2013). Therefore, the call here is to engage with research and knowledge on education to ensure that products that are developed are useful to teachers and learners. Among the pedagogies considered here are connectivism (Gentner 2018) and learner-centred teaching (Bremner 2021), and Nik and Mario argued that these approaches offer pragmatic and realistic means to engage with technology.

Overall, technology was a key theme throughout the event, having implications in each discussion on society, work and education. Online schools, digital literacies, and issues of access and equity spanned the event and this discussion, and the critical perspective shared about technology was that it holds much by way of opportunities for developing and enhancing education. However, some cautionary perspectives also emerged, which are discussed next.
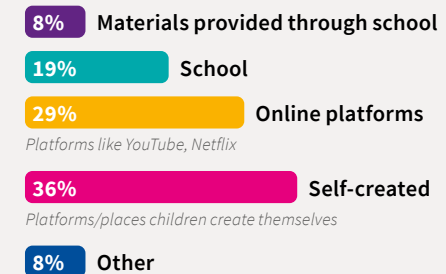
Access to technology

The second key theme in technology and pedagogy pertains to another recurring theme discussed throughout the event: issues of access to technology. For many in the field of education, technology can play a key role in the democratisation of education (Fensham-Smith 2019), as discussed by Mario Barosevcic, Jason Tan and Neil Gibb during the event. However, others, such as Teocah Dove and Gisella Langé, acknowledged that learning loss owing to the lack of access to technology is also very apparent in less digitally connected parts of the world (The Edge Foundation 2020). In Gisella's view, 'our conversation should not be how to better develop new tools but how to better use the tools in order that everyone can have access'. Such thinking will be critical to limit further technological divides (Hockly & Dudeney 2018) and respond to other themes such as EDI and equity, which, according to the *SHAPE Education: The future of schools* event, will play a critical role in shaping the future of education.

The role of different agents in shaping technological changes was also discussed, with Nik noting that schools, edtech companies and teachers are likely to be at the centre of educational technology development. McCarthy (2008) discussed the power that teachers have to effect change in education, signalling that stakeholders respond to teachers' needs and expectations when developing new products. Therefore, it will be important for teachers to see their capacity as agents of change for shaping the future of education, globally.

> *Our conversation should not be how to better develop new tools but how to better use the tools in order that everyone can have access. — Gisella Langé*

In 20 years' time, where will most school-age children go to learn what they need?

8% Materials provided through school

19% School

29% Online platforms
Platforms like YouTube, Netflix

36% Self-created
Platforms/places children create themselves

8% Other

Poll of 128 participants at *SHAPE Education: The future of schools*, 2021

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How will school-age students be learning and using English in 20 years' time?

The *SHAPE Education: The future of schools* event moved from the wider discussion of changes in society, education, work and technology, narrowing down to explore the implications for English language learning in the schools of the future. In this concluding section we bring together insights from the discussion around four key questions:

- What will learners be like?
- What will teachers be doing?
- What mode will be used in teaching?
- Who will have access to education?

What will learners be like?

With **changing learner profiles**, the rise in importance of **plurilinguistic and pluricultural competences**, and the need to develop learners' **critical thinking** as well as their capacity for **preparing for the unknown**, school-age students will likely be complex learners rather unlike the students we see in schools today. To rise to the challenge of effectively supporting learners of the future, teachers will need training and development that can equip them to respond to learner needs, engage with multilingualism, develop critical learners and foster competence development.

What will teachers be doing?

To support school-age learners of the future, teachers will increasingly engage in **specialised teaching**, offering more focused and contextualised learning. In **reimagining and redefining** education, teachers will play a critical role in rethinking how we best teach and develop our learners. This may mean moving beyond disciplinary boundaries of subjects towards mastery and **competence-based approaches**, which will mean that learners will learn within a wider thematic ecosystem and develop at their own pace.
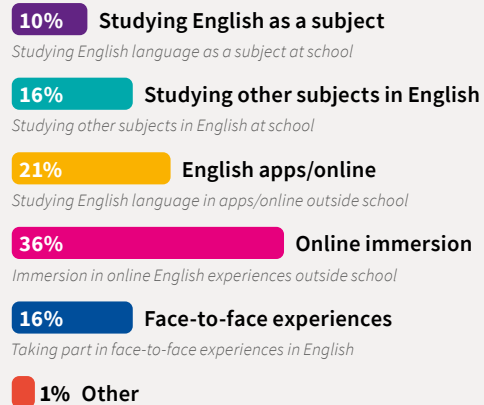
What mode will be used in teaching?

In the future, it is very likely that much of teaching and learning will take place **online**, with online schools potentially replacing physical schools in areas with limited resources. Furthermore, online schools may offer more global access to education, meaning that learners will be able to study in truly international and multicultural contexts. As such, the role of **digital literacies** will be heightened to ensure that learners have the requisite competences to navigate their educational landscape. Owing to this growth in online and digitally enhanced learning, learners will engage more and more with **pedagogically grounded educational technologies**, which will further shape edtech industry practices over the next 20 years.

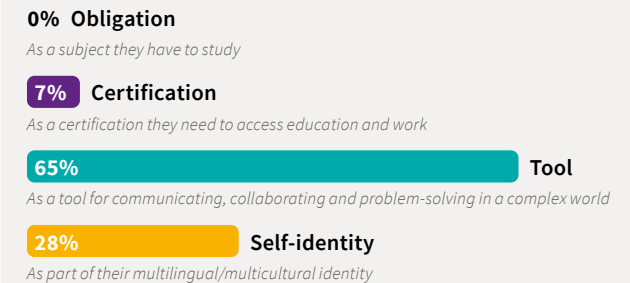# Who will have access to education?

While any future of education discussed here remains a prediction, it is clear that as it unfolds, education will develop in different ways and at different paces around the world. A clear challenge facing the learners of tomorrow is **access and equity** in education. Students will be learning in very different ways across the globe, and efforts will need to be made to support learners who wish to access education online or where this is their only means of access. Similarly, under the remit of **EDI**, localising and indigenising education to reflect home cultures and to decolonise content and approaches to teaching and learning will be increasingly important. This means that future learners will likely engage in more diverse and representative education.

In 2040, what will be the biggest contributor to English proficiency?

10% **Studying English as a subject**
Studying English language as a subject at school

16% **Studying other subjects in English**
Studying other subjects in English at school

21% **English apps/online**
Studying English language in apps/online outside school

36% **Online immersion**
Immersion in online English experiences outside school

16% **Face-to-face experiences**
Taking part in face-to-face experiences in English

1% Other

Poll of 92 participants at *SHAPE Education: The future of schools*, 2021

In 2040, how will people talk about English language learning?

0% Obligation
As a subject they have to study

7% **Certification**
As a certification they need to access education and work

65% **Tool**
As a tool for communicating, collaborating and problem-solving in a complex world

28% **Self-identity**
As part of their multilingual/multicultural identity

Poll of 102 participants at *SHAPE Education: The future of schools*, 2021

Opportunity areas: shaping the future of schools

As challenges emerge they also create space for disruptive innovation. Such innovation will undoubtedly continue to shape education as we rethink the roles of teachers and learners in developing curricula, the value of knowledge, skills and competences in education, and the focus and development of teacher training facilities around the world. This report brings together key themes that emerged through discussions at the event, and the questions below further refine these themes to present areas of opportunity; where those invested in education can start (or continue) to make a difference.

Go agile

How can education systems and providers be more agile and respond quickly and effectively to new and ongoing changes in local and global landscapes?

Equity for all

How can education systems and providers enable more equitable access to and uptake of learning products and opportunities, and improve learning outcomes within them?

Watch your ethics

How can education systems and providers address ethical issues around data management in education?

Local and global value

How can education systems and providers deliver learning, assessment and teacher training of most value in local and global contexts with respect to the following?

- supporting multilingualism
- preparing learners for uncertainty
- supporting lifelong learning
- helping learners and teachers examine beliefs, assumptions and knowledge to 'unlearn', relearn and create new value
- specialising to ever more specific needs of society, work and learners
- enabling competency-based learning and formative assessment
- developing learners' capacities to critically evaluate, create and apply knowledge
- encouraging learners to be content creators, not simply content consumers
- developing digital learning strategies and better use of tools that teachers and learners have access to
- putting pedagogy at the heart of digital learning design.

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Watch the recordings from the July 2021 SHAPE Education event ▶

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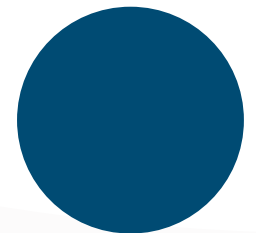
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About SHAPE

We are facing unprecedented challenges in society and the world of work which demand changes in the design and delivery of education. It is vital we ensure that education continues to meet the needs of young people, preparing them for the world they will face on leaving school. An education system designed for an industrial economy, now being automated, requires transformation from a system based on facts and knowledge to one that actively applies that knowledge in ways that develop human potential. However, many working to implement new education tools and models are working piecemeal in silos with solution-focused approaches that do not adequately address underlying pain points or connect with a clear vision.

SHAPE Education, an initiative from Cambridge University Press & Assessment together with Cambridge Judge Business School, seeks to connect complex real-world problems of education with creative educational ideas and research to build the next generation of educational solutions and thought leadership for the good of global education.

Watch the recordings from the July 2021 SHAPE Education event ▶

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