



# GCE 7th WORLD ASSEMBLY

22 - 24th November 2022  
Johannesburg-South Africa

The Future of Education Re-Imagined

#EducationReImagined

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR  
**EDUCATION**  
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## Discussion Paper 1:

### Transforming Public Education Systems

#### 1. Introduction

This discussion position paper looks at the idea of transforming public education systems. More specifically, it discusses how the Global Campaign for Education understands the notion of transformative education and its implications for education policy at the national, regional and global levels.

Following this introduction, section 2 provides a general overview of the aspects that need to be transformed within and around education systems to make the right to education not only possible but education policies sustainable. Issues of how those transformations are related to GCE's advocacy, policy and campaigns work are also discussed. Section 3 identifies some of the most critical areas in which positive transformative policies should be undertaken to advance towards achieving SDG4 and securing everyone's right to education. They are expected to inform the work of GCE membership in all regions and countries, depending on the dynamics of the problem in each cultural setting. The paper ends by providing a set of questions to motivate discussion during the World Assembly and to identify key priority areas of work in the broader field of transformative education for the forthcoming four years.

#### 2. Context analysis and its relation to GCE's advocacy, policy and campaigns work

Contemporary debates in education policy have embraced the idea of transformation as a key feature to advance our education systems and to fulfil the promises of both SDG4 and international human rights law related to the right to education.

Although multiple stakeholders rely on different concepts to call for change in the current education systems, i.e., transformation, transformative, transforming, what is important to highlight here is that governments, civil society organisations, students and families, and the international community as a whole are calling for a positive change in the world education systems. What needs to be changed and how is still unclear and it is somehow very context specific. In order to set the discussion, however, it is worth explaining here how GCE understands the notion of transformative education and making explicit its connections with ideas of transformation and in particular with the idea of transforming education systems, which is the term being used in ongoing debates around the Transformative Education Summit.

The idea of transformative education unfolds from two different and somehow interrelated disciplines: development studies looking at ideas of justice and positive social change; and transformative learning theories addressing questions around how and for what people learn. Concerning the former discipline, pioneering development economists, notably Amartya Sen (1997), have highlighted the intrinsic value of education for the satisfaction of all human rights



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and its role in bringing positive social change. Sen has stressed the value of education for reducing poverty, inequality and making societies fairer and his work has contributed to broaden the ways in which education, as a human right, can be integrated into international policy frameworks.

Concerning the second discipline, most contemporary debates on transformative education are inspired by Mezirow's (1991, 2004) transformative learning theory (see also Hoggan & Kloubert, 2020). Mezirow's notion that the initial stages of one's life is the time for formation, and further stages, for transformation, has been inspiring the search for positive change in education systems worldwide. The overall ambition is to make them respond better to the multiple ways individuals learn and to address the barriers they face to effectively learn, achieve educational outcomes and above all, contribute to the positive transformation of our societies. In short, the notion of transformative education is closely related to all the educational practices and education environments that need to be questioned and redesigned to reimagine the role of education in our societies. Thus the idea of transformation should depart from the very questions of what education is for, how people learn and how our education systems can contribute to all students to perform their potential to positively transform their lives as well as those of their families and communities.

These conceptual debates are at the core of any education policy GCE may want to advocate and campaign for. In conclusion, it is possible to argue that embracing the notion of transformative education for our movement is not simply rhetoric. All the multiple dimensions of the notion of transformative education have a practical implication for how GCE advocates for education systems that respect, protect and fulfil the right to education for all. The following section summarises some of the critical aspects GCE suggests to its members to advocate and campaign to contribute to the positive transformation of education systems all across the world.

### **3. Advocacy and campaign work around transformative education: Key themes for GCE members to consider**

This section provides a list of some of the critical themes GCE members can engage at regional and national levels to advocate for the positive transformation of education systems. The list is not exhaustive. It only provides some of the key examples identified in recent research on transformative education and the recommendations which emerged from the national and international commitments to transform education (United Nations, 2022)<sup>1</sup>.

- Questions of power and power distribution within education systems are still very central in education policies. In line with human rights law, notably the United Nation Rights Convention, children are not only the holders of the right to education but also individuals with the power to decide what education system works for them and how it has to be transformed to attend to their specific needs. This very general idea has policy

<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2022). Transforming Education Summit 2022 - Concept and Programme Outline.



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implications for making education truly inclusive for people with different disabilities and talents, for out of school children who abandoned school because it did not fulfil their expectations or did not match the ways they learn.

- Colonialism plays a fundamental role in the way education systems in the colonised world have been organised. Colonial practices can be perceived in the structure of education systems (i.e., number of years for each level), curricula design and management of schools. Although discourse around the need to decolonise education systems has permeated contemporary policy debates, colonial practices in the ways schools are managed and power distributed are still significant in former colonies.
- Patriarchalism influences education practices and policies in many contexts of the world, being Afghanistan only a worthy example. Patriarchal practices not only validate and reproduce stereotypes, prejudices and inequalities throughout generations, but left millions of people, especially girls, women and students with disabilities out of school.
- TES identified four main areas in which change is needed to positively transform the world's education systems: educational exclusion; safety and health (especially mental health); the teaching profession, curricula and pedagogies; and digital transformation for just and equitable learning (United Nations, 2022:6)<sup>2</sup>.

#### 4. Leading questions to support the discussion at the World Assembly

##### General questions

- Whether and how a transformative educational approach is needed for your country? What aspects of your country's education system need to be transformed?
- What changes need to be undertaken in the country's education system to make curricula and pedagogies in line with human rights standards and to update them to address the needs of students, families, communities and the society as a whole?
- What progress has been made in the country – if any, to include climate change and sustainable development in the curricula?
- What changes need to be undertaken in the country's education system to steer the digital transformation for just and equitable learning? What are the main factors leading to the digital divide in the education system (availability of devices, lack of electricity and internet connection, teachers training)?
- What domestic and public financial transformations are required to undertake the changes needed for the education system in your country?
- What actions will undertake GCE national members to engage and follow the country's plans for transforming the education system?

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page. 6.