



Childhood Education
International™

Education Leaders Embracing Change

**A guide for using
disruption and
innovation to
transform schools
and school systems**

Educators, families, and communities dream of a world in which every child has access to a quality education that develops their skills and abilities so they can thrive and positively contribute to building a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. Never has the fulfillment of this dream been more critical.

Change is difficult, but necessary.
This guide helps education leaders to consider the possibilities presented by disruption and then plan and implement a path to sustainable, positive change.

Throughout this guide you will find prompts and activities to help you reflect on your own context and areas for growth and determine the next steps to transform your education space.



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Leaders Embracing Change -

Leaders can step forward to build support for the actions needed to ensure every child receives a quality and equitable education.

Introduction

Disruption and Innovation

Crisis and Disruption

Educators and advocates around the globe are deeply interested and invested in advancing education to help children thrive and positively contribute to a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. Our hope is to provide every child with access to a quality and equitable education. Unfortunately, we have been falling short of achieving this goal.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, incorporate a specific goal dedicated to education—Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all. As a global education community, we hope to make significant gains toward attaining Goal 4 targets by the 2030 deadline.


However, the COVID-19 crisis has caused enormous concern about how to position education globally in order to meet these important targets. Schools around the world, with little or no warning, have been severely impacted by the pandemic. In March and April of 2020, at the beginning of the crisis, 90% of schools worldwide had to close their facilities to curb the spread of the virus and school facilities remain closed in many countries. This massive disruption forced schools to move quickly to find alternative ways to address children's learning. Schools, school leaders, teachers, parents, and children are facing unprecedented change and uncertainty.

Almost all schools and school systems were unprepared for this type of large-scale change and did not have time to plan for, reflect upon, or test the best approaches to employ as they heroically tried to keep children engaged in learning through distance education—offering lessons via computer, radio, television or delivering learning materials and packets to homes. This was a moment when innovation in the form of creativity and ingenuity was greatly needed.

Because the crisis was both unexpected and unprecedented, most schools did not have plans in place to mitigate the disruption. School system administrators, school leaders, teachers, and learners were navigating uncharted waters. Innovative thinking was needed in order to find alternative ways for teachers to stay connected with children and support their continued learning. Today, many education leaders and teachers are faced with the equally difficult challenge of deciding how and when schools should reopen. The disruption continues and innovation, creativity, and ingenuity are required to meet these new demands.

“The art of life is a constant readjustment to our surroundings.”
—Kakuzo Okakura

Innovation Leads the Way



Moments of great disruption often present opportunities to consider new ways of doing things. Schools, school systems, administrators, and teachers must balance the desire to return to “normal” ways of teaching and learning with the constraints dictated by the COVID-19 crisis. At the same time, all educators should take the opportunity to question whether returning to “normal,” the status quo way of doing things, is the best outcome to seek.

Some of the most creative, unique, and innovative solutions to challenges emerge amid disruption. Innovation is possible in many education areas and is not confined to the use of technology in education. In its purest form, innovation is about solving challenges using creativity and experimentation and coming up with new and better ways of doing things. In this case, finding new ways to design and deliver education can shape a new “normal” and bring about transformation.

Disruption can actually stimulate innovative thinking, as it forces us to come up with ways to deal with sudden change. Without chaos or disruption, we would likely make only incremental changes as we stay on the path of predictability.

Of course, none of us wanted to be faced with a global pandemic and the tragedies it has brought about. However, within the immense challenge posed by crisis, there are glimmers of hope—opportunities to use the disruption to make real and lasting positive change in our schools and school systems based on innovations and innovative thinking.

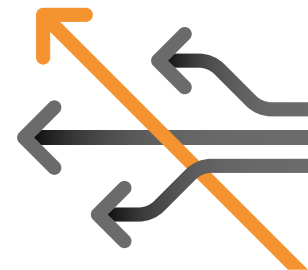
Embracing Change

This crisis offers communities unique opportunities to take stock of their current situation and then take action toward developing the schools and school systems we all dream of—ones that promise and deliver more engaging and equitable education experiences that prepare every child to reach their full potential. Undeniably, we will face many barriers and challenges during unsettled times, but we should not be afraid to embrace the change that disruption presents.

Even the most enthusiastic of education leaders and teachers can be skeptical of change. And yet, responding to crisis requires change and the ability to dream of a better way to design and deliver educational experiences for children.

Changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have caused schools and school systems to fundamentally alter their approach to education. The time has never been so opportune to bring change to schools and education systems. The current and potential future disruption associated with the pandemic makes a compelling case for the immediate, and perhaps urgent, need to not only respond to crisis and make necessary changes, but also seize the moment as an opportunity to improve, reform, and transform education.


This guide has been developed to encourage and inspire education leaders as they consider ways to transform teaching and learning in schools, re-envision school systems, and find opportunities during disruption to produce innovative, scalable, and sustainable change in education.



Reflect and Transform

- How has your school or education system responded to the changes needed during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures?
- Which of the changes would you consider to be innovative practices that you could share throughout your school system?

Changing Schools and Transforming Systems



“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.” —Socrates

Changing schools is inherently about transforming entire school systems. Most schools are a part of some larger school system, with an administering group or body that coordinates and oversees the implementation of education laws and policies, oversees resource allocations, determines funding levels, considers facility needs, sets standards for school operation, supports teacher and staff hiring, and generally oversees the services schools deliver.

These administering systems vary in how they interact with schools. Some are intimately involved with schools, while others are more distant. In large systems, there may be a network of local offices that feed into the larger systems of an overall administering body. The administering bodies for each jurisdiction are known by different names. Some systems may be called local education agencies, while others may be called school district offices. In this guide, we will use the term “school systems” to refer to the administering body of a grouping of schools.

School systems need to ensure the quality and equity of the education children are receiving. In education, both quality and equity are critical. Quality refers to effective and useful learning experiences. Equity means ensuring that all children have the ability to access education and an equal opportunity to learn.

When working to reform and transform schools, school systems are critical to success, as they can champion and coordinate widespread change among school clusters. They serve as important positive forces in supporting and adopting the innovative changes that advance teaching and learning.

Making positive change in individual schools is vital and important, but in order for effective changes at the school level to make a real difference to children’s schooling on a broader level and for that difference to be sustained, we need to ensure that we consider how proven, positive changes are understood, accepted, and embraced by whole school systems. Like the teaching profession itself, school systems are extremely complex and multifaceted, and the challenges entailed in reforming or improving them can be similarly complex and multifaceted.

In many communities and nations, school systems are large, complex, and provide many administrative services, which can mean that change is difficult and slow. In other communities and nations, education systems are small and understaffed, which can mean change is challenging to implement. The size, level of complexity, and the resources that school systems possess are in themselves either supports or barriers to change.

However, the schooling disruption due to the COVID-19 crisis has shown that schools and their counterpart systems can in fact shift and change quickly to meet the needs of their learners and their communities. While it is a truly tragic and difficult time, this pandemic has proven that change can happen more rapidly in schools and systems than was ever thought possible.

Steps in the Change Process

In order for positive change and improvement to take root, we must follow a path that guides us in adopting and sustaining change. The following steps provide a simple way to think about the change process.



Step 1: Establishing the Need

The disruption created by crisis offers opportunity for broader conversations about the necessity of change, and positive aspects of it.



Step 2: Breaking Habits and Beliefs

The disruption in schooling from crisis has suddenly broken many of our ineffective, inefficient, and harmful habits, creating opportunities for newer ways of doing things.



Step 3: Creating a Vision of Change

Disruption gives schools and school systems the opportunity to innovate and think about alternatives to the current way that schooling is designed and delivered while focusing attention on education for the future.



Step 4: Innovate, Implement, Iterate

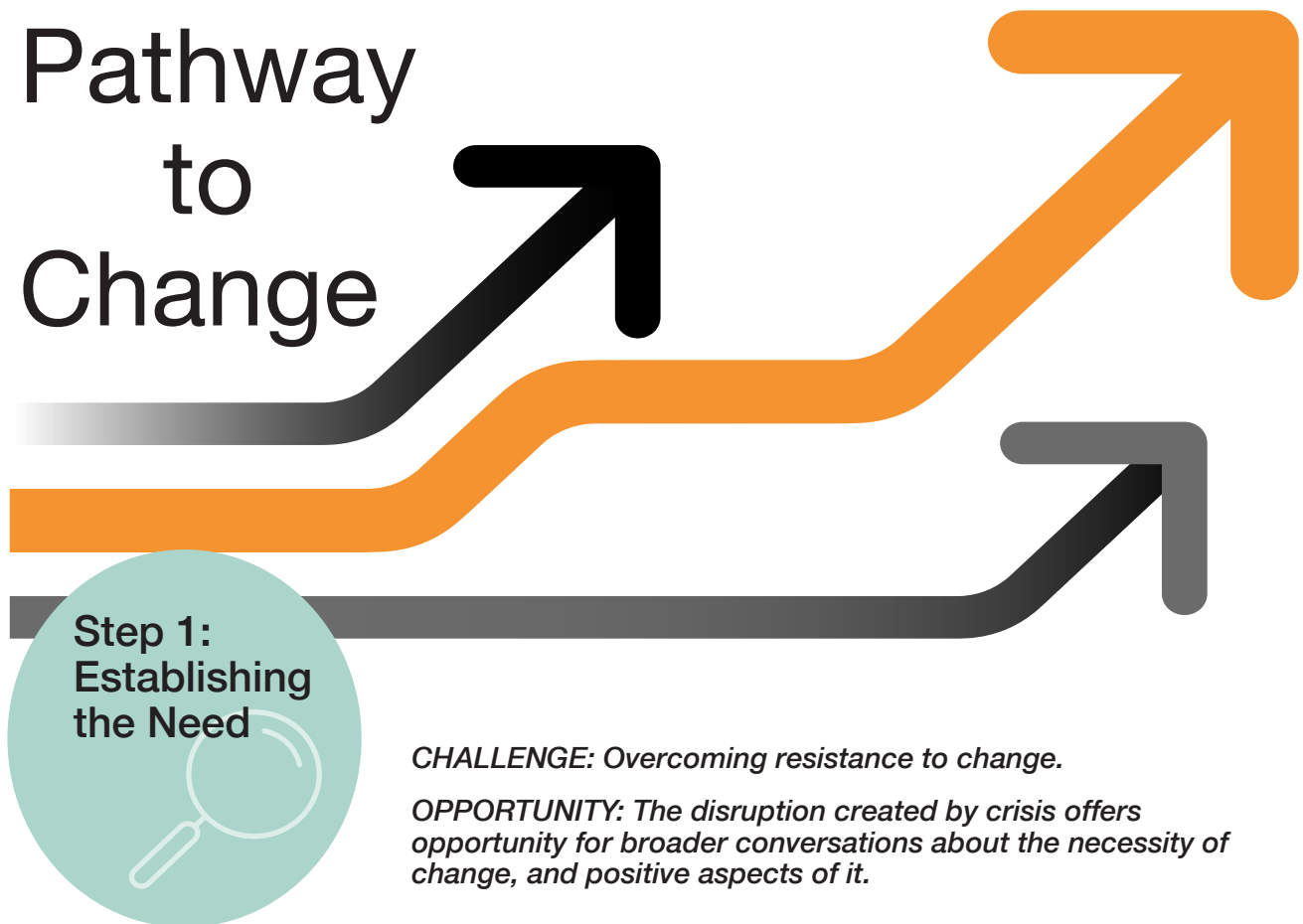
Use crisis-inspired problem-solving skills and empower local schools and teachers to innovate and use iteration to find an approach that pragmatically serves the needs of students.



Step 5: Scale and Sustain

With education stakeholders searching for new solutions in response to crisis, there may be more support for scaling effective innovations.

Pathway to Change



Step 1: Establishing the Need

CHALLENGE: *Overcoming resistance to change.*

OPPORTUNITY: *The disruption created by crisis offers opportunity for broader conversations about the necessity of change, and positive aspects of it.*

“You will either step forward into growth, or you will step backward into safety.”
—Abraham Maslow

Before change can happen, there must be consensus that it is necessary. Sometimes, this process happens organically, but leaders often need to help construct an understanding of the necessity for change. This requires thoughtful and clear explanations about why the existing system is lacking. Bringing together key data and research on the areas being addressed can build a common language and understanding of the issues. Reaching out to stakeholders and holding open discussions is crucial to establishing the foundation of the reason for change. Responding to the resistance to change will be essential.

Building a Common Understanding

Establishing a common understanding of the need for ensuring access to a quality and equitable education for all children is the first step along a pathway to change. Each school and school system has their own set of unique challenges; in most cases, they face a combination of equity and quality concerns.

The challenge of equity encompasses difficulties in all students equitably accessing education. Issues of access can be physical, financial, or social. Physical barriers can be a matter of trying to reach school for students who live in conflict-affected zones or inaccessible areas. Financial barriers can be a matter of affording school fees or giving up time that could be spent earning money in order to get an education. Social barriers can be a matter of racial discrimination or a cultural bias against girls continuing with their education. When considering how to establish a common understanding of the need for change, schools and school systems must guide community members to consider problems of equity.

The challenge of quality encompasses the learning experience and outcomes for each child. Although children may be physically present in school, they may not be learning and growing the way they should. Understanding what is meant by a quality education is particularly critical and has been the center of numerous discussions in education for several years. Quality education considers the needs of the whole child, the skills they will need to thrive in the 21st century, and the competencies needed to become active contributors to their communities. These broad goals may look different in different spaces and community members should be guided by their cultural and contextual circumstances as they consider what a quality education should be.



Reflect and Transform

- How does your school or school system encourage and support equity of access to education and the equity of learning experiences?
- How can you encourage a common understanding of the quality of education?

Overcoming Resistance to Change

Even after discussing the need for change and building a common understanding, a lot of resistance to the idea that change is necessary may remain.

Many of these barriers are rooted in fear, exhaustion, and lack of awareness, which are not helpful to the decision-making process. However, the emotions stakeholders experience and their attitudes toward the process of change are very real and need to be addressed. A lack of consensus that change is necessary can be created through five reactions that create barriers to change—complacency, uncertainty, fatigue, lack of awareness, and distrust.

Resisting Change:

- Complacency: “This is the way we have always done it, so that’s good enough.”
- Uncertainty: “What if...”
- Fatigue: “Too much effort.”
- Lack of Awareness: “Not knowing what you don’t know.”
- Distrust: “Are decisionmakers really considering my interests?”

During the pandemic, resistance to change was not an option. These reactions and barriers all had to be put aside.

In a crisis, the urgent need to solve a problem overrides negative or unhelpful reactions to change. The COVID-19 crisis sent shock waves throughout the entire education sector; new ways of reacting and experiencing change had to emerge.

Resistance to change actually becomes more difficult when change is the only way to move forward. Those common reasons for resistance to change—complacency, uncertainty, fatigue, lack of awareness, and distrust—have all been challenged as the need for change was urgent.

Consider complacency—the belief that the way schooling has been conducted in the past is good enough and there is no need to change. This is no longer a tenable position. The COVID-19 crisis is requiring schools and school systems to consider new methods to address public health concerns, and that will necessitate changes to many aspects of the school day. “The way we’ve always done it” is no longer the way we can do it; therefore, we must innovate to find new ways for teaching and learning. We have all been startled out of our complacency.

We also now have a higher tolerance for uncertainty. During the COVID-19 crisis, we have had to accept not knowing what next week or next month might bring. The entire rhythm of our daily lives has been disrupted and we have had to cope with rapidly changing guidance, news, and directives. Although this has been extremely challenging for many, it also increases our ability to deal with uncertainty. Developing a tolerance for uncertainty can open the door for exploring new ways of doing things. Being adaptable and resilient is important for everyone, and so it is important to model those dispositions to prepare learners for going out into a world that is constantly changing. How we face adversity, uncertainty, and change becomes a model for them to follow. In order to grow, we must all learn to try new things.

Fatigue is a very real concern in education. New policies and programs, new curriculums and pedagogical approaches, and myriad new initiatives and directives can become a revolving door that is exhausting for school system administrators, school leaders, and teachers. Despite concerns about educator fatigue, change must and will happen. Taking advantage of the opportunity to go beyond just responding to the crisis and creating a positive way forward may help to combat fatigue by focusing on hope for the future. Building and strengthening connections is another way to help address fatigue. School and school system leaders must create opportunities to hear and empathize with educators and community members. Fatigue in the education sector has been more pronounced in the COVID-19 environment. Leaders may be wise to use the current fatigue to set a new direction for change that will include educators in decision-making to renew their energy and focus on the future.

Leaders can be particularly helpful when addressing lack of awareness and distrust. Families have been discovering just how unaware they were about the process of learning. Likewise, educators struggling to reach children in novel ways, such as online or other delivery mechanisms, may be more aware of what skills they need to improve. The good news is this change in awareness, when directed appropriately, creates an appetite for professional growth. School leaders can help address this gap by clearly articulating ideas about the best way to reach children and give them a quality, 21st century education even during the COVID-19 crisis.

Ongoing issues of distrust about education change do need to be addressed. Many years of top-down changes have left educators and families skeptical about the intentions and effectiveness of changes promoted by leadership. Rather than ignoring this distrust, leaders should consider how to incorporate the voices and thoughts of stakeholders. Practices such as

Tips for Leaders:

DO:

- ✓ Combat community and educator fatigue by providing hope and connection to decision-making
- ✓ Share information to raise awareness about better ways to educate
- ✓ Build trust by open consultation, active listening, and transparent decision-making
- ✓ Communicate consistently, directly, and thoughtfully

DON'T:

- ✗ Be discouraged by the enormity of disruption; view it as a growth opportunity
- ✗ Forget to share data and resources with communities to help them understand the necessity for change
- ✗ Let everyone's opinion sway you; balance what you hear from others with your own knowledge

holding school and community meetings, being transparent about decision-making processes, sharing statistics and data, and closely listening and responding to concerns are necessary for decreasing feelings of distrust. Leaders are responsible for building trust within the community.

Establishing the need for change is the first step toward accomplishing it. Education leaders need to be thoughtful communicators and directly address reasons stakeholders should engage in change as well as their potential resistance to it. The COVID-19 crisis may offer an opportunity to lean into change through disruption in order to advance positive transformations.

Reflect and Transform

- Which of the five barriers to change have you encountered when you have tried to implement systemic changes in the past?
- What are the main concerns that your school community is experiencing right now? How can you meet people where they are?



CHALLENGE: *Eliminate existing, ineffective, inefficient, or harmful habits in how we think about schools and education. These can include outdated, invalid beliefs; explicit or implicit biases; or behaviors, practices, or routines that do not lead to successful learning.*

OPPORTUNITY: *The disruption in schooling from crisis has suddenly broken many of our ineffective, inefficient, and harmful habits, creating opportunities for newer ways of doing things.*

“If you do what you always did, you will always get what you always got.”
—Albert Einstein

Once we have established the need for change, we must take a look at how we can break current ineffective, inefficient, or harmful habits that may be holding us back.

Many people have formed habits in how they think about teaching methods and expected outcomes, based on their prior experience with schooling. There is a comfort level with continuing schooling in ways that are known and familiar. Teachers have formed teaching habits over the course of their training and careers. They may find it easier to continue practicing in customary ways. Children also have formed habits and expectations over their years in school. They understand the routine and the requirements of schooling. Families and communities have beliefs based on their experiences, both as past students and as family members. Breaking these ingrained habits in order to innovate is extremely challenging. Just as with breaking personal habits, real impact starts with consistent changes, not just change for one day or one week.

Habits can be long-held assumptions, ways of thinking, or methods of teaching and learning. Current education design and practices were largely created for children during previous centuries and may not be the approaches needed for educating children today or in the future.

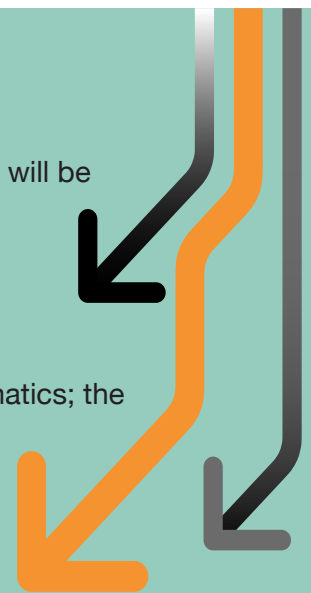
Some people still have an image of the teacher standing at the front of the classroom delivering content to children in rote ways. Some may believe that certain children just cannot learn. Such images and ideas can stand in the way of thinking innovatively about education and building more dynamic models for teaching and learning.

Moving away from thinking about education as the traditional passive, teacher-led, content-driven experience is crucial if we are to set the stage for real and meaningful change in education and meet the future with a new vision. It seems obvious, but to have space and time to do new things, you must stop doing some of the old or ineffective things.

Yet habits can be difficult to break; the longer we have the habit, the harder it is to stop. In education, habits are more than just daily actions, they are also beliefs, behaviors, practices, routines, and ways of thinking about schooling.

Do you ever find yourself thinking . . .

- Learning works best when specific subjects are studied separately.
- If students are allowed to take the class in unplanned directions, nothing will be learned.
- Having students up and moving around the classroom or other spaces wastes time and creates disorder.
- Creativity is only important in the arts and literature, not in other areas.
- The most important education subjects are reading, writing, and mathematics; the rest are nice to have, but not crucial.
- Some students just don't have the capacity to learn or succeed.
- School is about teaching children skills so they can get a good job eventually; teachers don't have time to waste on students' personal character or involvement with their community.



These negative thought habits can inhibit innovation and prevent positive change

As education leaders, it is important to take the time to question what you do and how you do it. Are the ways that you interact with children and teachers really the most effective ways or are they just the most familiar? What processes are in place in your education system that prevent both educators and children from realizing their full potential? When are children most engaged?

The learning disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis halted certain routine habits.

- Teachers who had been using ineffective or outdated teaching techniques often were unable to continue using them as school moved to alternative learning formats.
- Parents who may have not attended closely to their children's learning found themselves challenged to take a more active role, as distance learning requires parental facilitation.
- Students accustomed to a model in which they passively remember information provided to them were forced to take a more proactive approach to their own learning.

Tips for Leaders:

DO:

- ✓ Embrace humility when examining your own attitudes and habits
- ✓ Share resources with educators and families to help them reflect on how they could do better
- ✓ Act now, before bad habits are reestablished

DON'T:

- ✗ Make educators feel bad or guilty for their previous mistakes; improvement is a process
- ✗ Become too negative; keep focused on the idea of rooting out bad habits to make space for better habits

A danger exists, however, that without recognition of new ways to teach and learn and some intervention to break ineffective habits, those ineffective habits may re-appear as teachers and students return to classrooms.

Breaking ineffective habits is critical. If we are to leave space to imagine and build new practices, routines, beliefs, and ways of thinking about designing and delivering education. By disrupting schooling and schooling habits, the COVID-19 crisis has provided the opportunity to develop new ways of doing things to enhance children's learning and meet their needs.

Reflect and Transform

- What are some habits of thinking about education that you or those around you have that might need to change?

- How did the COVID-19 crisis affect your education habits? What opportunities does this present?



Step 3: Creating a Vision of Change



CHALLENGE: *Visions for education are often based on the needs of previous generations and the desire to continue the same approach and maintain the status quo.*

OPPORTUNITY: *Disruption gives schools and school systems the opportunity to innovate and think about alternatives to the current way that schooling is designed and delivered while focusing attention on education for the future.*

Once we have established the need for change and broken ineffective habits, we are ready to create a vision for change.

As times change, how we educate children also must change; schools must design models that can be flexible and adapt to the needs of learners who will live in a fast-moving and rapidly changing world. Schools must create environments where ALL children can thrive and flourish. This requires a vision of change—a clear goal.

“To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.” —Anatole France

What children learn at school represents what is valued in the society. The ideal function of school is to build the best future possible—for individuals, societies, and our world. In the video below, Dr. Nandini Chatterjee from the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education for Peace and Sustainable Development shares how learning can be reshaped with these ends in mind.



Watch video at
vimeo.com/452917274

To accomplish these goals, we must take a moment to dream—to envision what schooling could be. If schools are to prepare the children of our world for the future, they cannot be institutions that were designed for the needs of the past.

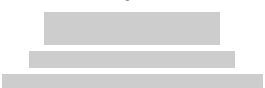
A Better Education

The 1996 UNESCO publication, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, proposed the following “Four Pillars of Education” as critical for all schools to embrace as a framework for children’s learning experiences.



Learning to Know

Combining a broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects



Learning to Do

Acquiring not only occupational skills but also the competence to deal with many situations and to work in teams



Learning to Be

Developing one’s personality and being able to act with growing autonomy, judgment, and personal responsibility



Learning to Live Together

Developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence



Constrained by rules, resource issues, varying needs of children, and old or ineffective habits, many schools spend the bulk of their time focused on achieving and assessing “learning to know.” The current crisis has made it clear that “learning to know” is only part of what schools can and should provide to children.

In addition to specific content knowledge (learning to know), during the pandemic students needed to have:

- The inner strength and resilience to cope with change and challenging experiences (learning to be)
- The skills to independently manage work and collaborate (learning to do)
- The ability to understand and empathize with others while feeling a new sense of interconnectedness through crisis with their local, national, and global communities (learning to live together).

Take a moment to imagine what education would look like if children left school proficient in all four areas of learning.

How can we innovate to bring the Four Pillars of Education into our current ways of designing and delivering education?

Partnering to Create Vision

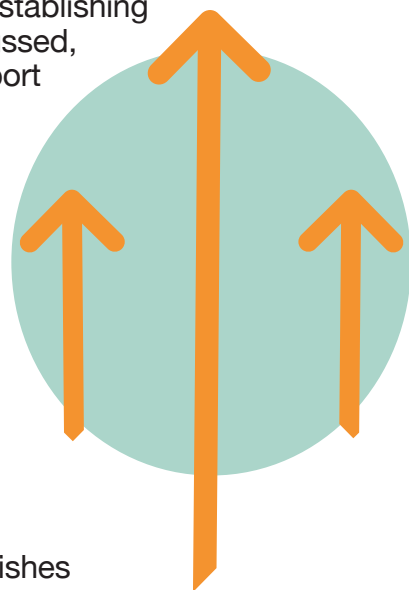
Education reforms often ignore the beginning steps of change—establishing the need for change and breaking bad habits. As previously discussed, this is problematic because it does not establish community support for change or create the space to build new habits.

To succeed, education leaders need to build, rather than impose, a new vision. Leaders need bottom-up support from on-the-ground innovators—teachers, school leaders, families, and community. The vision needs to feel like it belongs to the community—it is our vision, rather than the school leader’s vision.

Leaders are responsible for communicating to teachers, families, and community members the reasons for change, as discussed in Step 1, and they must communicate the importance of having a vision. Continuing to share the vision of where the school or school system is going helps to prevent ineffective habits and old attitudes from reemerging. It also establishes the foundation for implementation of the vision.

When leaders, educators, and communities co-create, a world of possibilities can open up. In order to realize sustainable progress, communities and educators must feel ownership and believe potential changes will lead to better outcomes.

The process of change requires vision—ideas that bring people together for a common cause. This vision includes the desired outcomes for students. Schools and communities often focus on outcomes that are too narrow. A view of schools as solely places to receive academic knowledge ignores their potential to develop all aspects of children and shape their attitudes about themselves as people and learners, their life skills, and their connections to others and to the world around them.



We encourage you to set aside ingrained, ineffective habits and all the reasons to avoid change. Take a moment to lean forward into change and dream about possibilities. Determine where you and your school should be going. Consider what could be done if barriers did not exist and use this opportunity to remake your school and your education system into something better for all children. Lean into and embrace change.

Visioning Activity:

Divide a piece of paper into three sections: past/present/future. In each section, write your answers to the following questions:

Past

- What work and life situations and problems have you or family members and friends faced that you or they felt unprepared for?

Present

- What are the types of needs and skills learners will have after returning to reopened schools?
- What words would you like someone to use to describe your education space?
- How does a quality education look in your own space?
- How would a truly equitable education for all change your system?

Future

- If someone was fully prepared to thrive throughout the rapidly changing future, what knowledge, skills, and attitudes do you think they would need?
- What are the other attributes important for individuals finishing school to have?

If possible, share these questions with other stakeholders. Considered together, your answers can start to establish the characteristics of your collective vision for education in your context.

Tips for Leaders:

DO:

- ✓ Allow yourself to dream without considering constraints
- ✓ Take a broad view of education; think beyond “learning to know”
- ✓ Consider the ways that education can help create a better world
- ✓ Partner with educators, families, and community members to create a vision that reflects the direction you want to go as a community

DON'T:

- ✗ Get focused on “why not”
- ✗ Impose your own vision without building a sense of what your community wants
- ✗ Be too conservative; exciting visions inspire change!



Reflect and Transform

- How do schools help build better societies?
- Who needs to be part of building a vision in your context?

Step 4: Innovate, Implement, Iterate



CHALLENGE: Experiencing rapid, unprecedented change and disruption with no road map or best practices to follow.

OPPORTUNITY: Use crisis-inspired problem-solving skills and empower local schools and teachers to innovate and use iteration to find an approach that pragmatically serves the needs of students.

“Failure is so important. We speak about success all the time. It is the ability to resist failure or use failure that often leads to greater success.”—J. K. Rowling

In Steps 1-3, we established the need for change, discussed how to break old or ineffective habits, and emphasized the need to create a vision for change. Now we are going to look closely at three key concepts of change—innovating, implementing, and iterating.

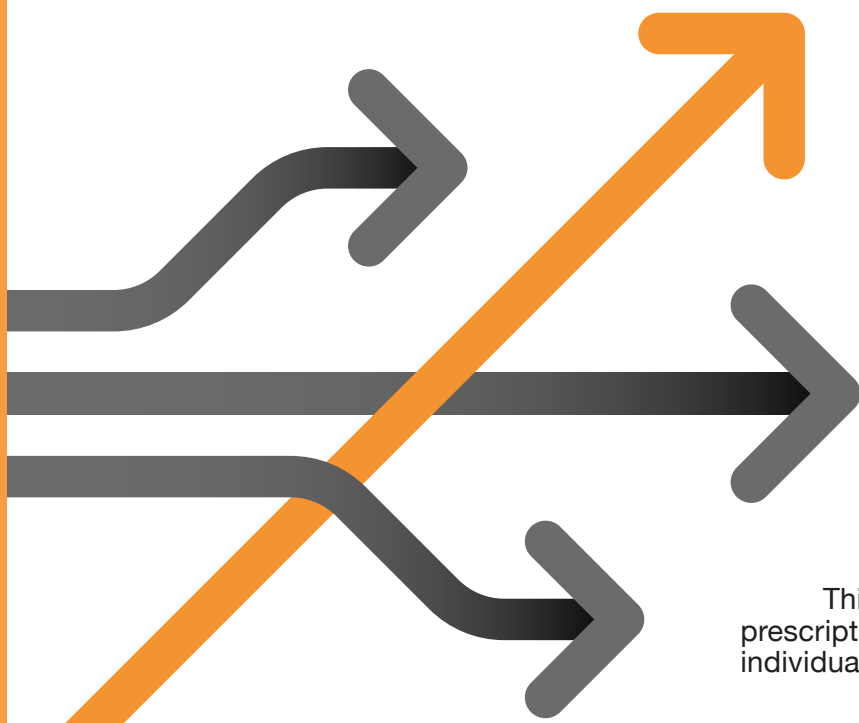
The COVID-19 disruption created turmoil for education systems. Schools, school leaders, teachers, and communities had to figure out how to respond to an unforeseen crisis and previously unconsidered constraints. No one person or organization got it right all the time. The most successful school and system leaders came up with innovative new ideas, implemented them to see what worked, and then continually employed a cycle of fast iteration to repeat and refine the response to make it better.

Within a rapidly changing education landscape, schools need to respond nimbly and rethink how to educate. Although stressful and far from ideal, the sudden onset of the COVID-19 crisis prompted educators to use innovative thinking to solve problems. They were required to experiment; when they met with less than optimal results, they learned from those experiences and improved their practice.

In a perfect world, education researchers could take the next several years to investigate different responses to the current education crisis and make data-driven decisions based on impacts. Unfortunately, a widespread and urgent crisis requires quick action to ensure children continue their learning.

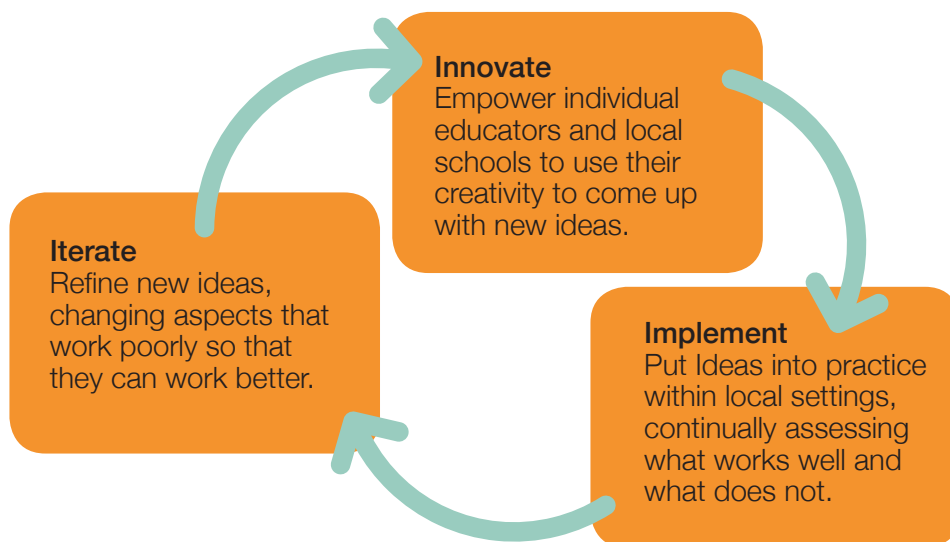
Schools and school systems in the current crisis do not have the luxury of implementing new programs over a period of years. We need to transform our risk-adverse education systems into lean-forward startups—organizations willing to try new things and use each failure as a lesson on the way to success.

This is not a time for a top-down, prescriptive approach. Rather, every individual school leader, teacher, parent, and



community member must take the opportunity to let their creativity shine. Let us focus on the opportunities we have, not the barriers.

We need to innovate, implement, and iterate, employing a continual cycle of learning and advancing education.



Tips for Leaders:

DO:

- ✓ Allow space for ideas that may seem very different from what you are doing
- ✓ Trust and encourage innovators—trying new things is hard!
- ✓ Dedicate enough resources to show if implemented ideas really work
- ✓ Encourage educators to keep iterating, even when problems occur

DON'T:

- ✗ Put up too many policies and processes; innovators can get discouraged if they need to go through too much of a formal process
- ✗ Try to control implementation; let practitioners use their own professional judgment to enact the innovation in their own space
- ✗ Think all innovations are created equal; give innovations time to succeed, but eventually decide whether they work or not

The ability to quickly prototype new methods and adjust to get better results are skills critical to any improvement process.

- Innovating uses the creativity of teachers, students, families, and community members to find the best solution in a short period of time.
- Implementing helps practitioners apply the solutions in the real world, discovering what works well and where changes are needed.
- Iterating refines the ideas, using the implementation problems and failures as data to continually improve the innovation.

Together, using the innovation, implementation, and iteration cycle, schools and school systems can quickly find effective solutions and move toward systemic, sustained change.

Leaders play a critical part in this process. Explicit encouragement to try new methods and approaches is a necessary condition for educators to feel comfortable exercising their creativity to innovate. Depending on the innovation, resources needed for implementation must come from the school or school system. Finally, leaders must model tolerance for failure and problem solving. As the inevitable issues with innovations and new ideas arise, leaders must continue to demonstrate support for change and iteration. It should be noted here that we are not advocating risky experimentation, but rather keeping an open mind to trying and testing new, grounded

ways of designing and delivering education. The COVID-19 crisis created the need for rapid response; however, innovations moving forward should be selected carefully. Ensuring the quality and equity of the learning experience is critical and we must secure this for all children.

The pandemic put schools and school systems in a situation where they must think quickly, act nimbly, and make changes readily. Using these problem-solving skills and a growth mindset, systems can innovate, implement, and iterate a model that helps them quickly arrive at the best possible solutions to ensure a quality education for all children. A remarkable outcome of the COVID-19 crisis would be for schools, teachers, and students to use this disruptive change as a catalyst to help achieve an education system that truly builds skills students need for the future.

Reflect and Transform

- What innovations are already taking place in your local education space?
- How can you create a system that rewards a growth mindset?
- How can you encourage others to use their professional judgment and creativity to respond to education challenges in innovative ways?



Step 5: Scale and Sustain



CHALLENGE: *Innovations in education often are tied to one person or place, but equity and quality demands that effective innovations are spread evenly and are consistently supported.*

OPPORTUNITY: *With education stakeholders searching for new solutions in response to crisis, there may be more support for scaling effective innovations.*

“One’s got to change the system, or one changes nothing.” — George Orwell

We have one more step to examine in this change process—how to scale and sustain change, converting effective changes in education to systemwide habits.

Innovation often takes place in small pockets, but equity demands taking these small areas of excellence and scaling them to the entire system. The process of scaling takes deliberation and care. Sometimes, educators or communities not involved in the original innovation are less willing to change and more skeptical. Making the case to these audiences and continuing to support them in making changes is very important to success. In addition, changing innovations into habits requires long-term investment and attention. Leaders must continue to focus on, support, and periodically review progress on the new changes.

Classrooms and schools are the perfect environments in which to try out and perfect new ideas. Once found, effective innovations need to be shared across the education system. Otherwise, some children receive a better education than others and the system as a whole cannot improve.

Education leaders need to consider how to identify effective innovations, whether through a self-reporting mechanism, formal identification, or another method. Then, these effective innovations need to be supported and scaled to benefit the whole system.

This process involves preparation and advocacy. By using a prototyped innovation from a local education space, leaders can use the early innovators and adopters to help tell the story of the innovation to new adopters. Support and training for educators on new approaches ensures understanding and builds community. One of the keys to building positive changes is making people feel valued and supported during the process.

Leaders also need to consider what resources are necessary to scale innovations. Often, planning time and professional development need to be considered. Some innovations require dedicated time for staff members to collaborate with each other.

After scaling, the final hurdle for education changes is sustaining them. Any educator will tell you that fads and trends come and go in education. Often, sustaining a change for just a few years is not enough to make the institutional and cultural shift that ensures an innovation continues. Effective change happens when groups share the same vision and understanding about the work. This takes time and must be supported in order to ensure the changes stick.

Before beginning the scaling process, leaders should consider how long they will need to explicitly support the change and provide resources. Sustaining the change and assessing the process of implementation must be part of the scaling plan.

We suggest using the checklist below to make sure you have considered all aspects of the scaling and sustaining process.

Scaling and Sustaining Checklist:

- ✓ Has the innovation been prototyped and perfected in a smaller setting?
- ✓ Have early adopters shared the story of the implementation and iteration with new adopters?
- ✓ Have early adopters been asked to serve as mentors and experts about the new change?
- ✓ Do educators understand why the change is being made?
- ✓ Do educators feel they have been taught the skills necessary to implement the change?
- ✓ Have educators been given sufficient time to plan for the change, both alone and, if necessary, with colleagues?
- ✓ When things go wrong, do educators know who to consult and how to find new solutions?
- ✓ If there are ways to make the change more effective, is there a method for educators to communicate those ideas to leadership?
- ✓ Have communities and families been told about the change and been given a clear explanation about how the innovation relates to the vision of equitable, quality education?
- ✓ Have communities and families been asked explicitly for their support and understanding?
- ✓ Is there a method to assess the implementation of the change?
- ✓ Is there a method to continue assessing the impacts of the change?
- ✓ How frequently will the implementation and impacts of the change be assessed?
- ✓ At what point will the innovation be considered in its entirety to ensure that it is contributing to the realization of the initial vision?

Scaling and sustaining changes to education systems requires attention, planning, and resources. Leaders should use individuals or groups who have already implemented the changes as guides. Scaling plans should include ongoing assessments and plans for long-term support.

Reflect and Transform

- Does your school or system have any initiatives that can be scaled? Are there any unique innovations that can be highlighted and shared?
- Where are the potential pitfalls of scaling within your context? What type of long-term support will the changes require?
- How will your scaling plan account for the challenges you identified?



Tips for Leaders:

DO:

- ✓ Use your most important resource—your early innovators—to provide encouragement and expertise
- ✓ Dedicate the necessary resources and give appropriate professional development to set up the innovation for success
- ✓ Set up good channels for communication and make sure problems that arise can be dealt with quickly
- ✓ Assess the implementation and effectiveness of the change

DON'T:

- ✗ Expect the scaled version of an innovation to look precisely like the prototype; implementing the idea systemwide may require modifications
- ✗ Expect a quick impact; lasting change requires effort and investment over a long period of time
- ✗ Forget to measure the impact of the change



Leaders Embracing Change

“Change is inevitable, growth is optional.” — John Maxwell

Change happens all the time, all around us. Sometimes it can be so gradual that we hardly notice. However, the COVID-19 crisis certainly has increased the rate of change for many schools and education institutions.

Rather than weather through this change and then return to your previous habits, you can take advantage of this opportunity to create real, lasting change and experience rapid growth.

Remember, at this moment in time, consensus exists that change is necessary and many educators and communities have become comfortable with the idea of uncertainty. Schools and school systems have been increasing their flexibility and using their problem-solving abilities. Parents and communities are engaged and interested in finding a solution and they may have a greater tolerance and openness about new ways of teaching.

Thus, we have an opportunity to move toward realizing a positive vision of what education can and should be. Leaders can step forward to build support for the actions needed to ensure every child receives a quality and equitable education.

Educators can use shifting situations to innovate and iterate, determining what really engages children in their context and helps them build the skills they need for long-term success in their careers and in life.

We encourage you to use the information from this course to help you plan for the necessary changes in schools and school systems in your own context and lean forward into the possibilities for creating change to achieve quality and equitable education for all.

Tips for Leaders:

DO:

- ✓ Start working toward systemic change immediately
- ✓ Reach out to others; change is most effective when people work together
- ✓ Be patient; sustainable change takes time
- ✓ Encourage and empower innovators

DON'T:

- ✗ Wait or expect an easier time; although the COVID-19 crisis has been and continues to be difficult, the disruption provides many opportunities for positive systemic change
- ✗ Take a top-down approach to change
- ✗ Immediately dismiss new ideas



Reflect and Transform

- How should you start your change? What are the first three actions you need to take?
- Who can you recruit to help you create the change you want to see?