



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

In partnership with  
**UNESCO**



**Center for Intercultural Dialogue**

# Center for Intercultural Dialogue

## Focus Groups

for the UNESCO Futures of Education Initiative



#FuturesOfEducation

LEARNING TO BECOME

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## Center for Intercultural Dialogue

The Center for Intercultural Dialogue operates under the auspices of the Council of Communication Associations, an umbrella organization for national and international communication associations based in the USA. The goal of the CID is to encourage research on intercultural dialogue, and to do so through bringing international scholars and practitioners interested in the subject together in shared intercultural dialogues about their work.



## Futures of Education: Learning to become

The International Commission on the Futures of Education was established by UNESCO in 2019 to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet. The initiative incorporates extensive public and expert engagement and aims to catalyze a global debate on how education needs to be rethought in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and fragility.



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# Center for Intercultural Dialogue

## Focus Groups

for the UNESCO Futures of Education Initiative

## PREFACE

UNESCO invited the Center for Intercultural Dialogue to participate in the Futures of Education Initiative by holding focus groups on how education needs to evolve today, in order to be more relevant tomorrow. Three sessions were convened, on January 28, 29, and 30, 2021. This report is the result of those consultations.

It quickly became obvious that intercultural dialogue is not included in the documentation already produced by the Commission, such as *Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action*. Group members therefore worked together to elaborate upon a 10<sup>th</sup> idea for consideration.

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## 10. LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER REQUIRES INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

A global pandemic makes clear just how reliant we all are on others. Even those we have never met, those who live in different countries and in other parts of the world, can influence something as basic as our ability to survive. We have been reminded that we must learn to communicate with those having different cultural backgrounds and different assumptions. Intercultural dialogue occurs when members of different cultural groups, holding diverse opinions and assumptions, build common ground. Cultural differences may be based on nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, or, most often, a combination of multiple identities (intersectionality), but the critical fact is that they often serve to divide people. Intercultural dialogue encourages us to pause and listen to one another, to understand one another's concerns, and then to begin to work together.

Intercultural dialogue typically requires training or experience, and often both; good will alone does not suffice. Thus we need training and coaching of teachers, so that they will understand the concept and how to help their students learn it. Teachers prepare the next generation, so enriching the learning of future teachers expands the reach of a new idea considerably. Teachers already in the classroom could benefit from coaching to ensure that they know how to help their students engage in intercultural dialogues. Empathic, inclusive, and collaborative teaching methods for coping with cultural differences must be better integrated into teacher training. This implies an educational philosophy where the process of learning moves beyond classroom settings, with a dialogic relationship between teachers, learners, and other agents in society.

Intercultural dialogue could support and facilitate teaching and learning, in and outside of school contexts, whether face-to-face or online. Students and teachers both need to catch up to the reality of the global village. Hearing about it is one thing; experiencing it is another. The world is multilingual and multicultural, with multiple perspectives on any topic, and so learning contexts should be as well. The issue is how best to bring people together in such a way that they discover shared goals and assumptions. Rather than permitting stereotypes about cultural others, we must recognize the value of diverse points of view. Interpretations and understandings develop from experiences, so we must expand the transnational experiences available to more of the world's population, so more of us become truly global citizens. Education can promote socially engaged citizenship, including eliminating discrimination and creating a safe environment prioritizing non-violent communication.

Just as students will benefit from belonging to a transnational community of inquiry, so will their teachers. In this case, teaching itself becomes the shared experience, and the goal of helping students to successfully manage intercultural encounters becomes a shared endeavor. As different cultures employ different ways of knowing, joint projects could be

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incredibly productive. The pandemic has demonstrated the need and value of creating and maintaining transnational connections, in education as in other contexts.

The types of interactions students experience matter, so establishing an ongoing transnational community of inquiry will more likely be successful than arranging a single brief encounter. Students need to jointly pursue common educational goals, develop collaborative projects answering common questions, and learn to manage intercultural dialogues as part of their activities, not as a separate, occasional endeavor having little impact on their daily lives and future endeavors.

Once the pandemic is under control, investment in a wide variety of international travel experiences can expand and enrich education. Just as the Erasmus programs have encouraged international encounters and resulting individual connections across the European Union, comparable global programs could expand such links, serving as a base upon which to build a stronger transnational network of understanding incorporating a larger population.

The pandemic has demonstrated that physical co-presence is not essential to developing transnational links; teleconnection can substitute. But if we are to rely upon digital means, relevant technology must be distributed to parts of the world currently underserved. This should occur even before the pandemic is under control, lest digital inequality be expanded rather than erased, dividing us into those who can and cannot connect to the world from the safety of home. If technology permits us to learn about and from one another, it is valuable. Digital intercultural interaction is not ideal, but it is a substantial improvement over zero intercultural interaction, with the advantages of being sustainable and scalable. If connecting the world means virtually rather than not at all, then so be it.

UNESCO has previously established *learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together* as significant goals. It is perhaps possible that one can learn to know and do and to be without coming to terms with cultural differences but learning to live together absolutely requires intercultural dialogue. Building a shared world implies communicating with the multiple others sharing our world, jointly co-creating the knowledge and ideas we will need to survive the next global crisis. Luckily, intercultural dialogue is a renewable resource: the more it is used, the stronger it grows. Intercultural dialogue permits not merely living together with a wide range of other people but living together with (and despite) our differences, taking empathy, compassion, and respect for all as a given.





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## Education in a post-COVID world:

### 10 ~~Nine~~ ideas for public action

International Commission on the Futures of Education

Decisions made today in the context of Covid-19 will have long-term consequences for the futures of education. Policy makers, educators and communities must make high-stakes choices today—these decisions should be guided by shared principles and visions of desirable collective futures.

1

**A STRENGTHENED PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION  
AS A COMMON GOOD**

2

**AN EXPANDED UNDERSTANDING OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

3

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION AND  
TEACHER COLLABORATION**

4

**AN EMPHASIS ON STUDENT, YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION  
AND RIGHTS**

5

**PROTECTING THE SOCIAL SPACE OF THE SCHOOL IN THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION**

6

**FREE AND OPEN SOURCE TECHNOLOGIES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS**

7

**SCIENTIFIC LITERACY WITHIN A CURRICULUM BASED ON STRONG PURPOSE**

8

**THE NEED TO PROTECT DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL FINANCING  
OF PUBLIC EDUCATION**

9

**A GLOBAL SOLIDARITY THAT DOES NOT ACCEPT CURRENT LEVELS  
OF INEQUALITY**

10

**LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER  
REQUIRES INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE**