# Reimagining the Future: Developing Teachers’ Research and Collaborative Capacity through Teacher Education Curriculum Reform

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Global disruptions – whether technological, economic, social or ecological – present a challenge to sustainable education. To meet the challenge, new thinking is needed on how to organize and deliver education. In response, the International Commission on the Futures of Education has produced a critical report, [*Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*](https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/), which brings together inputs from students, teachers, governments and civil society. With a spirit of optimism and possibility, the report calls on societies to act urgently to guide education transformation, now and into the future.

The role of teachers in reimagining education

The report points out the transformative work of teachers in reimagining education. Teachers play a central role in the embodiment of pedagogy and curricula, as well as acting as mediators of educational opportunities toward inclusivity and sustainability. The report calls for reinforcing teaching as a profession and for teachers to ‘take up their roles’ by:

1. Working collaboratively to provide each student with the support they need to learn;
2. Enacting the curriculum using participatory and cooperative pedagogies while managing digital technology; and
3. Engaging with educational research to reflect on their practice and produce knowledge.

To support teachers in playing this key role, the report advocates for teacher development as a rich and dynamic continuum of learning and experiences. It calls for public solidarity on much-needed changes to the policies that govern the selection, preparation, career trajectories and organization of teachers and the teaching profession.

Teaching as a collaborative and research-based profession

The reports’ priorities are commendable and urgently needed. However, some other considerations could provide additional nuance to the Commission’s report, if given greater weight. The report could note that teacher education curricula will need to be reformed, to align better with new expectations for teacher knowledge and roles. It is also important to recognize that teaching is intrinsically collaborative, and the role of students in this collaboration should be considered. And more thought needs to be given to what is required to properly equip teachers for a critical role in knowledge production and educational research.

Reforming the teacher education curriculum

The report rightly recommends that teachers should more often work in teams, to better engage in knowledge production, reflection and research, and further suggests that teachers should participate in public debate, dialogue and education policy. But to achieve this, a [deeper cross-national examination of teacher education curricula](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-92144-0_4) may be required. This could help to unpack what learning opportunities exist in teacher education programmes that can support teacher agency and solidarity as a new [foundation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349745711_Comparative_research_on_teachers_and_teacher_education_global_perspectives_to_inform_UNESCO%27s_SDG_4_agenda) across a number of different geographies. Research can illustrate how, where and whether future and current teachers are prepared to engage deeply in this critical work during their [initial teacher training](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348463848_Professionalism_in_teaching_and_the_role_of_teacher_education), [continuing professional development](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355490813_Teaching_as_a_Knowledge_Profession_Studying_Pedagogical_Knowledge_across_Education_Systems), and beyond. Promising examples include empirically tested approaches in developing contexts, such as the [Escuela Nueva Activa](https://escuelanueva.org/en/evaluaciones/) (ENA) and other [active learning models](https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/active-learning) like flipped classrooms.

Moreover, given that teachers need to be ready to incorporate a variety of new competencies in their professional profiles, other forms of teacher support need increased attention. For example, to challenge the prescriptive lists of ‘must do’s’ that have in the past characterized top-down teacher policy, teachers must be enabled to use their voices, agency and social dialogue through their official representatives or unions. Teachers must increasingly become leaders as administrators and as professionals in pedagogical autonomy, research and public participation.

Recognizing the importance of teacher-student collaboration

By definition, teaching has never been a solitary practice. Teachers typically not only collaborate with each other – they also do so with their students. Previous [research](http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487115614617) shows that teaching is inherently interactive and collaborative with students. Not all teachers manage this resource effectively, but successful teaching requires alignment with standards of good practice such as ‘achieving and maintaining classroom order and purposeful activity, gaining pupils’ attention and interest, ensuring that pupils know what they are expected to do, that they understand the content of the lessons, etc.’[[1]](https://teachertaskforce.org/blog/reimagining-future-developing-teachers-research-and-collaborative-capacity-through-teacher#_ftn1) While recognizing the importance of teacher–teacher collaboration, the report does not consider students as a fundamental resource and leaves out the important finding that [students can and often do teach and assess each other](https://cuspbeb.com/en/the-impact-of-peer-assessment-on-academic-achievement/), improving academic achievement. Able teachers can use formative assessments to support this practice, thereby developing authentic learning communities in their classrooms. This aspect of education could become another dimension of the new social contract for education: *supporting student agency in their learning and collaboration with teachers* *and other students in fostering better and wider learning networks*.

Developing teachers’ research capacity

Collaborative research on a global scale, in which teachers, teacher educators, and researchers in different disciplines explore diverse education models, is also essential and should be a first step to enact a new social contract for education. Action research in the classroom for agentic and effective change should be emphasized: this refers to evaluative, investigative and analytical research methods designed to diagnose problems or weaknesses and help educators to develop practical solutions. Meanwhile, teachers also need to be more involved in systematic academic research in order to maintain appropriate scrutiny and enable educators to influence policy. Since both types of research are essential to help practitioners—including teachers—to reimagine a better education future, building [practitioners’ capacity to engage in action and systematic research is critical.](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348679198_Developing_teachers%27_research_capacity_the_essential_role_of_teacher_education) These skills are different from those needed to ensure reflective teaching, but they will be no less essential to teachers’ professional work for developing flexible, context-sensitive teaching practices.