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Reconceptualizing and Repositioning Curriculum in the 21st Century

A Global Paradigm Shift

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**INTERNATIONAL
BUREAU
OF
EDUCATION**

A world where
each and every person
is assured quality and
relevant education and
lifelong learning



This is the first of a series of normative documents intended to guide the future of curriculum at a global level. This first Document calls for a global paradigm shift for curriculum. In the new paradigm, curriculum is reconceptualized and repositioned to best meet current and future challenges and opportunities. This first Document also anchors the rest of the Documents in the series, which seek to guide the operationalization of the new paradigm.

Executive Summary

This is the first of a series of normative documents intended to guide the future of curriculum at a global level. Other documents so far prepared for the series focus on: *future competences and the future of curriculum; transforming teaching, learning and assessment to suit competence-based curricula; and creating enabling systemic environments for effective implementation of competence-based curricula*. More operational documents will be prepared in the course of 2018 to guide the application of the normative ones.

This first Document calls for a global paradigm shift for curriculum. In the new paradigm, curriculum is reconceptualized and repositioned to best meet current and future challenges and opportunities. Key drivers of change in the 21st century that impel the reconceptualization and repositioning of curriculum are outlined. The Document sets off with an acknowledgement of existing conceptualizations of curriculum, but argues that they understate its significance, role, and potential impact in the 21st century. It notes that current conceptualizations position curriculum almost exclusively within the education sector; tightly associate it with general education (K-12), with children of K-12 age, and with schools. This further limits the significance, role, and impact of curriculum. Curriculum is much more than that. This Document therefore offers a new definition of curriculum that rids it

of its current limitations and better aligns it with the new paradigm. Curriculum is herein defined as *a dynamic and transformative articulation of collective expectations of the purpose, quality, and relevance of education and learning to holistic, inclusive, just, peaceful, and sustainable development, and to the well-being and fulfillment of current and future generations.*

The Document underscores that attaining and sustaining current and future relevance demands curricula to set out competences that learners (both young and old) require to thrive, to be fulfilled, and to drive individual, national, and global development within fast changing and mostly disruptive 21st century development contexts. It notes that the fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) is an unstoppable accelerant to the complexity and velocity of change in the 21st century. This places more demands on curricula to sustain the relevance of competences within contexts of rapid change. The second Document in the series therefore presents in detail future competences and the future of curriculum. It argues that sustained development-relevance of competences demand curricula to not only adapt to contextual changes, but more importantly, to stimulate and lead change. It also broadly conceives development as holistic, inclusive, just, and sustainable.

This Document acknowledges that the articulation of curriculum is both a political and technical process that engages a broad base of stakeholders, and engenders stakeholder support and ownership. Credible curricula processes are necessarily inclusive and consultative. Involved stakeholders reach far beyond the boundaries of the education sector and of technical experts in education. They include professional, local, national, and global communities at large. This is because curricula determine the fate of individuals, communities, countries, and the world, by determining what, why, when, and how people learn.

The new paradigm recognizes curriculum as a more dynamic, complex, and multi-dimensional concept than its current conceptualizations portray. It therefore calls for a reconceptualization of curriculum along the following key dimensions:

- the first operational tool for ensuring the sustained development-relevance of education and learning systems;
- a catalyst for innovation, disruption, and social transformation;
- a force for social equity, justice, cohesion, stability, and peace;
- an integrative core of education systems;
- an enabler of lifelong learning;
- a determinant of the quality of education and learning;
- a determinant of key cost drivers of education and learning systems; and
- a lifelong learning system in its own right.

This document points out that each of the eight dimensions implies a repositioning of curriculum at a sectoral, national, and global level. It cautions that some of the dimensions have potential risks, and outlines necessary considerations and potential risk mitigations.

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