Education in a post-COVID world: Additional considerations

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Abstract

This discussion document analyses some implications of the ideas proposed in the seminal document "Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action" (2020) produced by The International Commission on the Futures of Education. The documents' contributors included prominent figures with a wide range of professional and policy experience who hail from various regions of the world. The set of nine interconnected ideas illuminates the way forward toward the transformation of education and education systems and a reimagined future seen through a progressive lens. On one hand, it reaffirms basic principles, understandings, and commitments with regard to education as a global common good and universal human right; it also articulates the need to both reinvent multilateralism for a new global order and, crucially, to mobilize ideas and funding for transforming education. On the other hand, the document advocates for a comprehensive educational agenda, including the following critical issues: (i) visualizing educators as decision-makers in educational systems; (ii) appreciating students as active actors with rights; (iii) recognizing the value and specificity of the school space; (iv) addressing the dilemmas around technology's ability to serve as an equalizer of opportunities; and (v) revisiting educational content for the sustainability of younger generations.
We look at each of these interrelated nine ideas in turn.

First idea: Commitment to education as a common good

The global pandemic highlights the need to strengthen trust and collaboration among regions and countries as a key factor in the search for collective responses to shared global challenges. Moreover, it is becoming ever clearer that sustainable responses that enhance the wellbeing of individuals and societies cannot be based on isolationist views that reject the sharing of expertise between scientific communities. These communities know no boundaries or borders as they produce, discuss, validate, and, crucially, democratize the use and appropriation of knowledge.

The revitalization of multilateralism can play a key role in enhancing collaboration among countries insofar as it is proactive, purposeful, and rooted in a clear willingness to revisit our thinking and ideas in order to effectively address the development of a new generation of public policies. An encouraging sign at this time is that countries and international organizations appear to be more open to exploring public policy options that in the past might have been dismissed or even stigmatized as unthinkable and inappropriate or postponed for the long term. Fortunately, there is now less dogmatism, more intellectual openness, and a greater commitment to understanding the complexity of problems and challenges in the process of debating and implementing public policies.

The purpose of The International Commission on the Futures of Education (hereafter called "The International Commission") document is clearly to provide and disseminate a series of key ideas that we see as central to rethinking education, a global effort to build a world that is envisioned and structured very differently from the current one. The paper is appropriately oriented more toward envisaging future and emerging landscapes in order to develop policies based on a transformational, progressive perspective than it is toward compiling, recapitulating, and describing normative international agreements in a so-called "neutral, politically correct" language.

The first idea refers to "strengthened public commitment to education as a common good." We wish to make five observations about this. First, as the International Commission notes, this kind of commitment—inspired by the values of inclusion, solidarity, and individual and collective progress—means that a diverse range of actors both within and outside of the educational system must be involved in debating, coming to agreement on, and expressing societal and developmental worldviews that embody the roles and responsibilities of education as a cultural, citizenship, social, economic, and communitarian policy. This commitment requires the involvement not only of the state but also the patchwork of affiliations and traditions woven through society, allowing for a wide range of abilities and talents to be expressed freely in a robust framework resting on universal values. If societies deny or downgrade or hide their diversity, they will find it difficult to strengthen education as a common good grounded on the appreciation of commonalities and differences.

Second, as the International Commission declares, progress must be made on renewed relational frameworks and synergies between health and education, "deepening human empathy, progressing in science, and appreciating our common humanity." This means enhancing a strategic alliance between health and education as a foundation for expressing a holistic vision of human and social wellbeing to avoid reducing people to the "goals and objectives" of sectoral interventions, as well as to avoid potential conflicts related to resources the state and society allocate to health, education, and other sectors. It is not a matter of prioritizing one or the other goal but of deepening the understanding and commonalities between education and health with

the aim of guaranteeing the wellbeing, protection, and holistic care of individuals and communities.

Third, the International Commission notes that the pandemic has highlighted "the central role of adult education and lifelong learning, as people of all ages now need to learn to create new ways of (re)organizing social, economic and political life." Educational systems are facing the challenge of designing robust and flexible formats from the ground up for lifelong education and learning for the population as a whole. This means ensuring that workers have access to more and better opportunities to branch out and/or refine competencies and knowledge that will enable them to make a decent living amid shifting jobs, careers, work modalities, and tasks.

As the International Commission notes, a fundamental challenge lies in recognizing that "public education" is occurring in a variety of formal, non-formal, and informal spaces. It is no longer possible to conceptualize education solely in reference to younger generations being educated in person; we must also coin a broadened view to incorporate a wide range of opportunities and experiences that span all age groups.

Fourth, the International Commission states that "the social has been rediscovered," which entails an intense mobilization of energy, ideas, and proposals springing from civic and community concern at the grassroots level. Global thinker Edgar Morin, quoted in the report, refers to an awakening of solidarity that stems from the pandemic and from isolation and that can be seen most clearly in the least advantaged neighborhoods. As International Commission states, "We are safe when everybody is safe; we flourish when everybody flourishes."

Regarding education in particular, it would seem that the period of isolation has strengthened cooperation and understanding among educators, students, families, and communities, which has led to greater awareness of the value of education and of educators as well as to a healthy reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities among those key stakeholders.

Fifth, the pandemic has made it even clearer that schools need dynamic and ongoing community relationships in order to expand learning opportunities, spaces, and experiences. As the International Commission notes, the closing of public museums, libraries, and community centers has left schools unable to fulfill their crucial role as "our most important vehicle to ensure individual and societal flourishing."

In short, the International Commission document places central importance on the relevance and urgency of reaffirming and advancing a view of education as a global common good, as well as on the roles and responsibilities of educational systems in putting that view into practice. Seeing education as a common good lead us to a healthy, urgent, and unavoidable debate about what kind of education, pursued for what kind of person, citizen, and society.

Second idea: Education as a universal human right

We turn now to an analysis of the second idea, which concerns the meaning, scope, and implications of the right to education.

First, the International Commission clearly and persuasively discusses education as a universal human right, which represents a principled reaffirmation of a comprehensive understanding of human rights encompassing cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions. This idea clearly pervades the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2015), which argues that

education is fundamental to designing and achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Second, the International Commission declares that states "bear the responsibility to facilitate and provide education, as well as respect and protect the right to education." This statement is significant in that it positions the state as the guarantor of twinning quality and equity in the provision of services by educational institutions. The right to education is not conceptual and abstract; equity and quality must be balanced in implementation, even in the face of adversity, such as the current challenges stemming from the global pandemic.

In fact, the International Commission warns of the possibility that the 2020s could "become a decade of lost opportunity." Advances made in equity and quality in different regions prior to the pandemic should be seen as a foundation for continued progress. Due to a variety of circumstances, these advances have not been robust and widespread enough to ensure an equitable, high-quality education for vulnerable individuals and communities. Indeed, the pandemic has revealed the weakness of educational proposals that seek to compensate for vulnerabilities only through assistance programs that are not rooted in thorough, ongoing transformations regarding the why, what, and how of education.

Third, the International Commission argues that education and knowledge should both be seen as global common goods. This would involve, among other things, the democratization of access to and enjoyment of knowledge based on a culture of collaboration and knowledge-sharing across countries and regions so that individuals, citizens, and communities have access to conceptual and operational frameworks for independent and responsible analysis and decision-making. Knowledge, in effect, makes us freer and equips us with more antibodies for prevention and defense against various kinds of manipulation driven by the illegitimate purposes and uses of human and artificial intelligence.

Moreover, as the report notes, we must focus more on "the ways that the production and circulation of knowledge intersects with the right to education, whether this takes the form of a right to research or the imperative to respectfully engage with indigenous and local knowledges." The production, circulation, and discussion of knowledge without barriers or restrictions increases personal liberty and is a sign of democratic vitality. The right to carry out research from a variety of perspectives, unfettered by narrow disciplinary boundaries, must be enhanced not just as a right but as a fundamental competency fostered among all students, starting at the earliest levels of education.

It is also essential that we appreciate the existing knowledge in each setting and community in order to build "glocal" education characterized by ongoing exchanges of insights, perspectives, and experiences at different levels. Educational proposals are broad-minded and globally oriented but locally and culturally grounded. It is not a question of whether education should be more or less centralized. Rather, each community should have the mandate and be empowered for localizing educational proposals—a process that brings together the perspectives, views, and knowledge of many different institutions and actors both within and outside of the educational system.

Fourth, the International Commission sees the right to education and the right to learning as inseparable, interrelated, and mutually reinforcing. The right to education is expressed in visions, strategies, and practices that produce a variety of learning experiences without labeling them as more or less relevant or as hard or soft. Learning as a whole yields an integrated vision of the person, in which emotions, contexts, circumstances, and capacities interact in quite unique ways.

Furthermore, learning occurs in different spaces at all life stages, which calls into question the educational philosophy that schooling is the only model, that teaching takes place only in person, and that homogeneity is the guiding principle of educational proposals. In this regard, the International Commission states that "we are seeing a move towards fluid approaches to learning," in which there exists more openness and understanding among institutions that have traditionally been labeled according to the formal/non-formal dichotomy, when in reality they are complementary in facilitating and democratizing learning opportunities.

Fifth, the International Commission warns that "the Covid-19 crisis has shown us that the right to education needs to be flexible and adapted to different contexts and to the needs of changing societies." Given that education will necessarily have to assume a proactive role in helping lay the foundations for a realignment of harmony, development, and wellbeing at a global scale, a forward-looking and progressive perspective—cultivated by education—will be key to enabling the younger generations to build, take care of, and take responsibility for a sustainable world.

Sixth, the document notes the necessity of broadening our view of the role and uses of educational technology without falling into the temptation of believing that cutting-edge technology holds "the solutions,". the International Commission states that "the deployment of radio and television to support the continuation of students' academic learning during Covid-19 school closures reminds us of the importance of these media for education, culture and general knowledge, especially for students who lack access to online materials and smart devices."

A renewed appreciation for what could be called traditional teaching methods is key to expanding educational opportunities, primarily in the most vulnerable areas, supported by the production and dissemination of educational materials that effectively connect with the expectations and needs of vulnerable populations and allow teaching, learning, and assessment processes to be broadened.

Some students may feel more comfortable with certain devices than others, which may have to do with a constellation of factors that go beyond purely technology-driven decisions. It may be that what is missing in these debates are societal and cultural perspectives, which ultimately give meaning and substance to education.

Finally, going beyond a well-informed understanding of the uses and impacts of different technologies, it is important to reiterate that the right to education entails ensuring equitable access to connectivity and online platforms, which brings us back to the critical role of the state in guaranteeing four inextricably linked rights: education, information, knowledge, and learning.

Third idea: Educators as decision-makers in educational systems

In this section, we address the third key idea proposed by the International Commission (2020), "the importance of the teaching profession and teacher collaboration." Let us examine some of its points and implications.

First, the International Commission notes that "Today it is clear that nothing can substitute for collaboration between teachers, whose function is not to apply ready-made technologies or pre-prepared didactics, but to fully assume their role as knowledge enablers and pedagogic guides." We stand by the conviction and belief that educators are effectively decision-makers within

educational systems, regardless of which mode they are employing for instruction, learning, and assessment.

Second, the starting point for the International Commission is acknowledging that, at a global scale, the prioritization of educators' professional skills and knowledge is situated within a general trend toward renewed appreciation of occupations that are seen as essential for sustaining societies. This situation helps foster public debate on the question of how we as a society safeguard jobs that, as the International Commission states, are "often poorly remunerated but actually 'essential' and very necessary in society."

Fundamentally, this relates to how our societal worldviews are reflected in the appreciation of individuals, of education, and of work, among other things. It seems extremely concerning and unjust that the responsibility for biological, social, and cultural reproduction of societies, as well as for laying the foundation for a future of just and sustainable opportunities for the younger generations, falls to individuals and groups that are insufficiently recognized, empowered, and supported as professionals in their fields.

Third, the International Commission notes that "many parents now obliged to follow and supervise their children's learning at home have acquired a clearer awareness of the complexity of teachers' work." In effect, the global pandemic has led to a profound reconfiguration of the roles and responsibilities of educational institutions, educators, students, and communities.

Essentially, the foundation of the educational system rests in large part on the assumptions, content, and implications of physical presence—not just in education but also with regard to families, jobs, communities, etc.

The lack of physical presence provokes opinions and feelings that we consider central to a positive realignment of roles. First, schools play a central role in structuring our lives in society. To a great degree, as Dussel, Ferrante, and Pulfer (2020) note, "their role in the socialization of children and adolescents, both in relation to the adult world and among peers, has become clearer."

Moreover, as the International Commission affirms, it appears that awareness is increasing global among parents and communities with regard to the role of educators and the delicate, complex act of teaching. The role of educators as guides and facilitators in students' learning processes has become more apparent. One result of this is that new meaning has been given to the role of educators in matters that are fundamental to their vocation and their daily work, such as "explanation, organizing student work, and even grading" (Dussel, Ferrante, and Pulfer 2020).

In addition, parents are being called upon to find ways of guiding and supporting their children, which is now a more crucial and demanding task due to the lack of in-person instruction. Greater family involvement in the teaching and learning processes was certainly needed before the pandemic, going beyond merely helping schools mainly with non-educational tasks. Having the motivation to broaden their roles as well as the guidance necessary to do so will be a key issue going forward, and this is not just a short-term effect of the pandemic.

Fourth, the International Commission "underscores the importance of an overarching educational framework of trust and cooperation," which is leading educators and students to new ways of understanding and relating to each other. This has the potentially positive effect of bringing generations together and creating opportunities and spaces for sharing life experiences, facilitated by technology.

What is more, educators have become more resilient as they have faced a situation that is unexpected, complex, and unpredictable both in the present and over the long term. This means designing and implementing educational projects that the in-person formats—largely associated with conventional methodologies mainly focused on transmitting information and knowledge—tend to constrain. Many educators are daring to explore the unknown and are searching for solutions they can design, develop, trial, demonstrate, and evaluate in dialogue and collaboration with their colleagues.

Fifth, the International Commission emphasizes educators' capabilities—both creative and practical—as they "draw on their professional knowledge and collaboratively mobilize with a resourcefulness and creativity that could not have been achieved by a public authority simply issuing top-down orders." In fact, educational institutions, curriculum (essentially the why and what of teaching, learning and assessing), and pedagogy (the how) are being changed from the bottom up. This presents an urgent challenge for educational systems: understanding and supporting educational processes more effectively as they are painstakingly constructed through dialogue between bottom-up and top-down initiatives and activities.

As the International Commission rightly observes, "This is an important lesson from this crisis and one which should lead us to grant teachers greater autonomy and freedom." This does not mean the educational system should be absent, weak, or indifferent. Rather, it means accepting the challenge of transitioning from a centralized system that is, in overall terms, prescriptive, bureaucratic, and lacking in guidance to a localization of education within each community—regulated, evaluated, and guided by flexible national-level educational frameworks.

The transformational impetus among educators can thus be bolstered by facilitating innovation in schools within a robust, clear, and verifiable framework of objectives shared throughout the educational system while affording educational communities the flexibility to tailor methods to each school. Sustainable and highly effective innovations depend on bottom-up and top-down synergies.

Valuing educators as producers of learning opportunities for all students reminds us, as the International Commission argues, "that the real capacity for response and innovation lies in the initiative of educators who, together with parents and communities, have in many cases found ingenious and contextualized solutions." Perhaps these openings that have been growing within educational communities represent a window of opportunity to help sustain and support the transformation of education and of educational systems.

Fourth idea: Students as active subjects with rights

The timely look toward envisaging a better, fair, and sustainable future is especially reflected in the fourth key idea, which addresses "student, youth and children's participation and rights." Let us consider some of its details and implications.

First, the International Commission wisely and appropriately calls on "everyone with educational responsibilities, from government officials to teachers to parents, to prioritize the participation of students and young people broadly in order to co-construct with them the change they wish to see." In our view, this call raises several points for analysis.

To start with, it reaffirms the position that students should not be considered "learning goals and objectives" but above all as active subjects with rights. When respected at every stage of their development, as infants, children, adolescents, and young adults, they become protagonists, regulators, debaters, and disseminators of their own learning. Furthermore, their crucial participation in forging a sustainable way of life affects their very existence, as well as their chances at a future that now appears seriously threatened, primarily by the decisions and behaviors of the adult world. It is no longer merely a question of rebelling or questioning what could be considered tutelage or control by adults but of becoming aware that if they do not demand or become engaged in promoting lifestyle changes, prospects for the survival of the human race are dim. As the International Commission states, "The rights of children and youth to participate in decisions that concern them, particularly those about the future, must not be put on hold."

Second, the discussion about the global pandemic has highlighted ethically demanding challenges regarding how to go about ensuring, prioritizing, and accommodating rights while taking into consideration the expectations, needs, and circumstances of different generations. In this regard, the International Commission asserts that "in many Covid-19 responses children and young people are being asked to limit their freedoms and suspend their educations to protect adults and older generations." Without a doubt, the suspension of in-person schooling, prompted by a variety of epidemiological and other factors, seriously affects the right to education, learning, knowledge, and information.

The lack of in-person education is indicative of several things. To begin with, it leads us to ask how aware governments, political systems, the citizenry, and society as a whole are of the educational, personal, social, and economic impacts of interruptions in educational opportunities, which particularly affect the most vulnerable populations. Also, it exposes the weakness of education systems with regard to assuming the integration and complementarity of in-person and distance education. Rather technology is mainly used as a substitute for or as an adds-on to in-person instruction. This model falls far short of an educational vision in which in-person and virtual learning are interconnected modes of instruction designed to ensure robust, flexible, and comprehensive education.

Third, one of the most significant effects of the pandemic is the growing awareness both within and outside of educational systems that teaching and learning—inherently complex and delicate tasks—are always laborious, ongoing interrelationships between emotion and cognition that are permeated by ethical and other considerations, as well as by a diverse range of circumstances and contexts. As the International Commission asserts, "The mental health and wellbeing of children and youth have been greatly endangered, and in ways that could have lasting repercussions." This has led countries to deepen their understanding of and give a higher priority to the socio-emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing of students in their curricular, pedagogical, and instructional plans, as well as to endeavor to better understand and support students and educators in the reciprocal feedback between their emotions, perceptions, dispositions, knowledge, and skills.

Fourth, we find ourselves at a window of opportunity to lay the foundation for a new way to understand education, as well as to make progress in generating more and better learning opportunities. As the International Commission declares, "Not only do we have to reshape schools and the supports we provide them with so that students can resume their learning in classrooms and return to school activities as soon as possible, we also need to think in the medium term so that this extraordinary situation young people have experienced becomes an opportunity for

learning how to meet the challenges of our time, an opportunity to restore trust in institutions, and an opportunity to enact intergenerational justice."

The transformation of education and educational institutions becomes an unavoidable obligation that has, above all, an ethical undercurrent regarding what kind of society we ultimately want to build and live in. This is not about endogenous discussions behind the walls of the formal educational system; rather, the discussion must be opened up to new forms of dialogue and collective development of public policies among a diverse range of institutions and actors, including—crucially--local actors.

Clinging to understandings and modalities of sectoral intervention established by the prescriptive directives of institutions will not move the needle in terms of quality of life, of thought, and of opportunities for society as a whole. In this regard, the International Commission warns that the redesigning of public policies must take place according to "democratic principles and through civic engagement."

Fifth, there is an urgent need to reconnect with students and to value them as individuals in their respective life stages. Prior to Covid-19, we already knew that educational systems suffered from and exacerbated a severe empathetic, cognitive, social, and cultural alienation from the younger generations. It is not just a question of reshaping course content, as well as the ways we teach, learn, and evaluate, but also, as the International Commission argues, of "trusting young people and empowering them to think and act together." We must engage young people to assume the role of agents of change, bolstering their capacity for independent thought and for collaborative collective action so they can take charge of their lives and face competently a variety of situations and challenges.

It is not just a matter of educational systems building opportunities for students to gain life competencies for their individual and collective development, which can sometimes seem too abstract and general, but also of ensuring they have the ability to put those competencies into practice, live them, value them, and reflect on their relevance for their lives. This includes, for example, the capacity for independent thought that can question the denial of the basic rights of individuals and communities as well as their indoctrination through narratives that use history to promote ideologies and hegemonic political agendas.

In sum, students' agency in building their own futures cannot be delegated, nor is it solely the responsibility of the adult world. Adult generosity, wisdom, and expertise are needed, of course, in order to bring about fundamental transformations in course content and educational strategies, but such changes will be sustainable only if adults trust and support students to be protagonists and makers of their own future.

Fifth idea: The value and specificity of the school space

Among other features of the International Commission document worth noting is its detailed and fair look at the role of schools, which concerns precisely "protecting the social space of the school in the transformation of education." We discuss here six relevant points.

First, it argues for the need to "protect and transform the school as a separate space-time, specific and different from home and other spaces of learning, where there is as much growth and expansion of social understanding as there is the acquisition of skills, competencies and knowledge." One of the main reason's schools exist is that, in addition to being an irreplaceable

reference for cultural, social, and civic integration, they are also the principal means by which the younger generations acquire skills and knowledge that help open doors to true opportunities for collective and individual development.

This does not mean that schools should retreat into themselves and assume a hegemonic posture as the font of integration and knowledge. In fact, one of the implications of Covid-19 that the school's role is strengthened when it is open to new ways of cooperating with families and communities to expand and democratize learning opportunities. This does not entail a weakening of roles and responsibilities but rather an increase in mutual understanding and support among a wide array of actors for the wellbeing and development of students.

Second, the International Commission emphasizes that the pandemic has energized discussions and raised awareness of the relevance of education, especially "a new revival of public education, one that transforms the idea of schooling." It is understood that at the heart of a truly integrated society is a public school with the transformational will and drive to reimagine ways of teaching, learning, and assessing with a view toward including all students equally. Furthermore, the idea of public education must not be reduced to a state-centric vision because education as a common good presupposes a collective definition of its aims and purposes, encompassing a diverse range of people, groups, and communities, as well as affiliations and faiths.

Third, the International Commission argues that "the physical space defined by the school as the main locus of learning remains a central feature of formal education systems at all levels." In-person instruction is essential for schools to fulfill three basic functions: (i) ensure social protection through programs such as school meal provision, (ii) promote and model the role of "ecologically sustainable relationships with nature," and (iii) create spaces and opportunities to enhance harmony, dialogue, and mutual understanding as well as to build trust and social relationships between different individuals and groups.

Nevertheless, in-person learning must be reexamined to acknowledge the existence of complementary learning spaces. If in-person instruction is seen as sufficient in itself, we lose the opportunity to understand and improve other spaces in which students also learn. Even in distance-learning spaces, students have opportunities to develop personal and interpersonal skills that are key for independent learning, independent thought, and free choice, among other fundamental issues.

Fourth, the International Commission argues that we must continue making progress toward "hybrid forms of teaching and learning, in different spaces, inside and outside the school, at different times, synchronous and asynchronous, using a multiplicity of means and methods (among others: individual study, group work, one-on-one meetings with teachers, research projects, citizen science, community service, and performance)." Hybrid modes of teaching, learning, and assessing entail integrating in-person and virtual educational spaces to broaden learning opportunities for all students. This does not mean adding virtual instruction to in-person instruction or replacing the latter with the former. Rather, it means finding the most effective combinations of both for sustaining inclusive teaching and learning for all students.

Moreover, hybrid modes are a means of breaking with the homogeneous model of teaching and learning that is underpinned by a "one-school model." Because education must always be tailored to each student, uniformity clearly conflicts with the goal of addressing the diverse range of student contexts, circumstances, and competencies.

Fifth, the International Commission asserts the relevance of schools as "key places of becoming who we want to become," as well as "places where we can encounter others not like ourselves, others whom we learn from and with, others who expand our understanding of the global tapestry of ways of being human." Along this line of thinking, it is key to reposition the individual at the center of education and to prevent the individual from falling through the cracks or losing their individuality in educational activities. It thus becomes necessary to refine our anthropological, philosophical, and ethical perspectives and view the individual as the foundation for a new way of understanding the role of the school and its civic and community impacts.

Sixth and lastly, the International Commission highlights the need to design schools that grow in their ability to listen, adapt, and respond to the various needs that arise in professional and economic life. Indeed, schools can rest on a foundation of "flexible forms, flexible times, shared educational commitments, and an understanding of the ways that learning is broadly diffused across contemporary societies." This would involve, among other things, acknowledging clearly that not all students need the same amount of instruction or support, as well as delving into how to engage families as learning "coaches" for their children. It also means that educational systems must become culturally and intellectually open to other spaces and ways of learning beyond in-person education.

In short, valuing schools means much more than recognizing and understanding that in-person instruction is indispensable for guaranteeing the right to education and learning. Adopting an inflexible, defensive posture toward virtual learning risks a return to the pre-COVID-19 normal, ignoring the lessons learned during the pandemic. Alternatively, in-person education can be strengthened within a framework of reexamination and complementarity with virtual education, with the principal objective being to broaden and democratize learning opportunities on a foundation of valuing education as a social, cultural, civic, economic, and community policy.

Sixth idea: Technology as an equalizer of opportunities

Among other key ideas, the International Commission document makes the case for "free and open-source technologies for teachers and students," which ultimately leads to unavoidable and healthy debates on the intersections between education, politics, and society. Let us take a look at some of these debates.

First, the report reinforces a debate on the critical role technology plays, whether in democratizing and equalizing opportunities or in deepening gaps and disparities. No decision regarding the present and future wellbeing of our society can disregard the issue of technology—not as something that relentlessly controls our lives down to the smallest details, but as a possible foundation for building more just, inclusive, and sustainable societies. It is just as detrimental to human thought and action to fall into the temptation of technological determinism or fatalism as it is to dismiss or underestimate the use of technology as a powerful mean of improving the quality of life for individuals and communities.

We are placing more and more trust in technology to guide our daily lives, educate our children, and relate to each other, but at the same time, we must take precautions and inoculate ourselves against the use of technology to amplify dangerous, deceptive information, to incite social unrest, and to leave vulnerable communities even further behind (Heikensten, Mxnutt, and Rockströn 2020).

Second, the International Commission raises the question of what role a guarantor state should play in "developing and distributing open educational resources and open platforms, recognizing that much of what is currently provided by private companies should become a public undertaking." It is not a matter of reducing public policy to a state-centric view, presumably monopolizing the spaces of education and knowledge but rather of enhancing the role of the guarantor state, which is responsible for producing equal opportunities and outcomes for all students. This involves calling upon a diverse array of proposals embedded in society and rooted in a commitment to education as a common good.

Indeed, the absence or weakness of the guarantor state can deprive the most vulnerable populations of access to knowledge because, as the International Commission notes, "lightweight and portable digital devices have liberated learning from being restricted to fixed and predetermined locations, fundamentally changing the ways that knowledge circulates within societies."

Third, the International Commission notes that the use of technology by educators as a pedagogical resource underpinning learning opportunities and processes for each student "should focus on open licensing and open access policies that facilitate no-cost use, reuse, repurposing and adaption." This means that the guarantor state's sphere of action should include the facilitation of families' access to the connectivity trifecta: devices, platforms, and educational resources. Moreover, the educational system would need to promote the use of technology by educators to tailor the curriculum and the pedagogy to the expectations and needs of each student, while expanding opportunities, spaces, and strategies for learning.

Fourth, the International Commission advocates for teachers to have agency and responsibility in their role, which cannot be delegated, in selecting, producing, using, and disseminating educational materials according to the learning needs of each student. Education involves an ongoing, evolving process of mediation and development on the part of the educator, which must be weighed against "teaching and learning out of ready-made materials and content as this reduces and distorts the work of teachers and students."

If the development of educational proposals is largely restricted to the use of available resources, the risk is that this will limit educators' freedom, creativity, and boldness in designing, debating, and sharing resources that complement existing ones in order to strengthen teaching, learning, and assessment processes for each student. This is not a matter of underestimating or disregarding the wide range of educational resources available in various conditions and formats but rather of questioning the idea that the curriculum and pedagogy are a function of what already exists without teacher involvement, production, and debate, and without peer collaboration and learning.

The International Commission warns that "we must ensure that any digital transition is not just an effort pushed by technology companies but that teachers, students, governments, civil society representatives and privacy advocates are also represented and shape these transformations." It is not a matter of simply taking the "turn-key" digital curricula that are increasingly offered on the market and using them as they are. That would be to disregard the fact that education is simultaneously context, culture, and content, all of which must be locally grounded yet framed by openness to the world. In this regard, the International Commission states that "Public education cannot be defined and controlled by content and methods built outside of the pedagogical space and outside of the human relationships between teachers and students."

Fifth, one of the greatest challenges educational systems face globally is to adapt virtual instruction through a gradual transition toward hybrid modes of teaching, learning, and assessment, in which in-person and virtual spaces are interconnected and complementary. It is not simply an issue of digitalizing what had been done in person prior to Covid-19 and moving education ipso facto to the "distance" format. Rather, the challenge seems to lie in expanding the spaces and opportunities in which students can learn in a variety of ways and on diverse, interconnected tracks, supported in their proactive and responsible use of technology.

In sum, discussions about technology and distance education challenge educational systems with debates and decisions that can have lasting impacts on their will and capacity to reimagine the education of the future. In the first place, this would mean acknowledging that education plays a key role in helping to shape a societal worldview on a foundation of sustainability, inclusion, and wellbeing, which should be qualitatively different from the existing foundations. The repositioning of education as a source of social justice, universalism, humanism, and cosmopolitanism, is of the utmost importance for building a fairer, better future.

In addition, educational systems have the clear opportunity to design new ways of teaching, learning, and assessing based on the educational policy precept that in-person and virtual education go hand in hand to guarantee the right to education, learning, knowledge, and connectivity, enabling access to a variety of complementary educational spaces. The so-called hybrid modes balance a strong synergy between family, social, and educational policies to ensure equal access to distance-learning spaces, with a robust educational proposal that seamlessly connects the why, what, how, where, and when of teaching, learning, and assessing.

Furthermore, a thorough understanding of the uses of technology, including its premises, conditions, and consequences, is essential for technology to be a cornerstone of holistic education, fostering students' independent thought as well as their capacity to make informed decisions in order to take charge of their individual and collective lives. Lastly, viewing technology broadly as a set of curricular, pedagogical, and instructional resources helps us personalize teaching, learning, and assessment, keeping in mind that each person is a unique human being even if we all learn in more or less similar ways.

Seventh idea: Revisiting educational content for the younger generations

The International Commission highlights the relevance of "imparting scientific knowledge with a strong purpose," which places on the public agenda the need to revisit the foundations, objectives, content, and strategies that underpin the education of the younger generations. This is largely a matter of reaffirming our convictions, which have been tested by the pandemic, as well as our determination and capacity to transform education to sustain a better future. Let us examine some implications of this idea.

First, we must note the appropriateness of framing the debate on educational content as a linchpin of any transformational educational project. Two international forums have recently reported on this renewed concern. Within the context of the cycle of reflections organized by the Santillana Foundation (2020) on the school of the future, one issue mentioned is a renewed appreciation for curriculum as engagement and collaboration with the future and with society, in which the why, what, how, where, and when of teaching, learning, and assessment are interconnected.

Another example is the webinar on curriculum challenges faced by developing countries in light of lessons learned from Covid-19, organized by the International Bureau of Education (IBE) of

UNESCO (2020), which emphasized the need to rethink the curriculum as a fundamental component of an agenda that decisively addresses issues linked to sustainable development and citizenship education while balancing global and local expectations and realities. Participants in both forums clearly expressed concern about the need to reposition the curricular debate on what it is needed at present and future for societal sustainability.

Second, the International Commission reminds us to view education as a set of integrated parts, avoiding the fragmentation and disciplinary rigidities that impede an in-depth and well-informed understanding of the issues. In this regard, the document notes that education must "prioritize scientific literacy to ensure a curriculum with strong humanistic objectives that explores the relationship between fact and knowledge and is capable of leading students to understand and situate themselves in a complex world." Integrating different areas of knowledge, especially the humanities and the sciences (underpinned by ethics), is essential for the holistic education of individuals. It also helps strengthen the competencies linked to understanding, assuming a position, and taking action when faced with individual and collective challenges.

Third, the International Commission warns us of the danger that "the restriction of learning to curricular basics that we see occurring when schools close will limit the broad humanistic dimension of education that is of great importance for the flourishing of peace, democracy and intercultural understanding." Without a doubt, a distinctly instrumental and reductionist perspective on learning, centered on what is understood as "essential" and lacking a universal humanistic ethical grounding, could deprive future generations of frames of reference for understanding the fundamentals and of the ability to act consciously and competently as individuals, citizens, workers, businesspeople, and members of communities.

Fourth, the emerging global trend of prioritizing and distilling curricular objectives and content involves the challenge of achieving a satisfactory equilibrium between the different dimensions of wellbeing and holistic education of the individual. As the report notes, the goal is to prevent the humanistic dimensions of education from being "eclipsed by the emphasis on technical skills, curricular modularity and the numerical assessment of progress and benchmarks, which are natural parts of digital educational culture."

It would be necessary to enhance dialogue between physical and virtual identities and their implications in order to support teaching and learning processes and specially to foster greater closeness and trust between educators and students. We must also recognize that in-person and virtual education have complementary comparative advantages when it comes to engaging and supporting students in their own learning processes, as well as empowering teachers in their search for responses tailored to the needs of each of their students.

Fifth, we must reframe the discussion on the role of education with the aim of addressing issues that concern humanity as a whole. In contrast to curricular proposals designed and managed within narrow disciplines, we must emphasize, as the International Commission asserts, "themes and problems that allow us to learn to live in peace with our common humanity and our common planet." These themes run the risk of being trivialized, obscured, or simply ignored in curricula crammed full of content that is disconnected from the expectations and needs of society as a whole, as well as of the younger generations in particular.

Sixth, the International Commission returns to a recurring issue in the philosophy of education: the need to understand and balance the individual and collective dimensions of education. In this regard, it states that "it is important to develop a strong base of knowledge about one's self and

about the world—twinned objectives that allow each of us to find purpose and be better able to participate in social and political life."

Lastly, the International Commission underlines the importance of education for generating and developing within students the independent and critical thinking that enables them to process, assess, and take a position on many different kinds of information, with quite different aims, which they receive at exponential rates. The document goes further and notes that the proliferation of "misinformation and fake news" can be "fatal for social life and human understanding but is also literally destroying lives." Responsible management of evidence produced through the triangulation of perspectives and data is essential for individuals to be able to manage their own lives without their beliefs and opinions being manipulated, with the help of artificial intelligence, for the purpose of guiding, controlling, and commercializing what they build, do, and express in their daily lives.

Eighth idea: Twinned transformation and funding of education

The International Commission makes a broad appeal to national governments, international organizations, civil society, and citizens around the "the need to protect domestic and international financing of public education." Let us examine some implications of this idea.

First, the International Commission refers to the need to achieve a "just and effective use of these resources," which means reaffirming the idea that educational spending must be linked to a robust educational proposal that is clear in its goals, content, and pathways. The level of funding dedicated to education can be a good indication that there is political will to prioritize investment and spending on education, but in itself it does not indicate a willingness to transform education. An increase in resources does not translate ipso facto into diversification of education processes and improved outcomes.

Second, the document warns that worsening vulnerabilities can "have drastic consequences on the ability of children and youth to advance their education, both for the familial disruption it brings and because opportunity gaps will widen as families experience diminished capacities to support their children's education." At the same time, it is also necessary to take a more nuanced look at how vulnerability stems from a confluence of cultural, social, and educational factors that, even before the pandemic, were exposing the conceptual and practical weaknesses of social policies aimed at effectively addressing it. What is being stressed here is that rethinking education means rethinking social policies as a whole, and vice versa.

Third, the International Commission alerts us to the challenge governments face "to resist pressures to constrain education expenditures in the future. And even if the share of public expenditures allocated to education does not change, economic recessions will lower the overall base of public resources." Protecting educational investment and spending should not be seen as a capricious, rhetorical, or corporate issue but as a window of opportunity for in-depth analysis of the role of education and its various programs in improving the quality of services provided, as well as of its social, cultural, and economic returns. We must not "freeze" educational analysis with the aim of preserving the status quo. Rather, we must ask whether what is prioritized, managed, and implemented in education has positive, profound, and long-lasting impacts for effective and sustainable learning.

For example, the global pandemic has shown us that in general, educational content, as well as methods of teaching, learning, and assessment, as encapsulated in the curriculum and pedagogy,

do not sufficiently prepare the younger generations for a world of disruptive changes. Freezing the curriculum and pedagogy as "untouchable" could ultimately consolidate investments and spending that have very low returns for students and for society as a whole.

Fourth, the document helps reposition the debate on what our public policy priorities should be and how to engage society in legitimizing and sustaining them. Indeed, the International Commission asserts that "without necessary debt restructuring and support of new funding, there is the risk that countries will be brought to the precipice, to the point where they have to choose between funding essential services to sustain social and economic life and servicing these debts." That social services are essential is a foundational principle of public policy and, as such, must be non-negotiable. This does not mean, however, that we should stop searching for ways to improve the quality of those services.

Fifth, the International Commission warns that we risk losing "important gains in educational expansion and efforts to achieve educational equity." Undoubtedly, it requires determination to maintain educational investment and spending at least at pre-pandemic levels, but an equally significant effort is needed to review resources allocated to programs that are not yielding greater inclusion and equity and exist largely because of bureaucratic inertia and inflexibility.

Sixth, the International Commission stimulates national and international debate on the need to view education from a social justice perspective that balances a universalistic vision of public policy with initiatives targeting "those who have been hardest hit economically, socially and educationally" by the effects of Covid-19. We must not set universalism and focalization at odds with each other. Rather, we must recognize that the development of differentiated strategies reflecting the characteristics and needs of each population should be based on universal objectives whose aims and results are for the benefit of everyone equally.

Seventh, the International Commission asserts that "the leadership of UN and other international development actors will be essential to sustaining the fiscal commitments that will keep the SDG 4 Education 2030 agenda from being pushed back by a decade." For leaders to be successful in this, they will need renewed conceptual and operational frameworks that go beyond sets of recommendations filled with the usual platitudes and that instead delve more deeply into the development of new generations of educational policies. These policies must be more attuned to achieving true inclusion of the range of expectations and needs of students, who must be put first and respected as individuals in their respective life stages. This is a time to take risks and proactively rise above the dominant norm of prescriptions and declarations.

In addition, as many countries are adjusting their public policy priorities to develop a more effective, holistic approach to social policy, international lending agencies also need to delve into the question of how to improve the quality and relevance of country assistance while reducing project transaction and operating costs, as well as easing the burden of debt servicing. In the same vein, the International Commission makes "a request for greater efficiency and accountability of international education organizations, so they can continue to add value to national efforts to advance education for all that is relevant to a changing world."

In short, education financing is central to transforming the educational agenda at both the international and national levels, not just in order to counteract the most perverse and regressive effects of the pandemic but also to bolster a reexamination of the objectives, content, and strategies of education in its multidimensionality as a cultural, civic, social, economic, and community policy, with the aim of building sustainability in a post-pandemic world.

Ninth idea: Reinvent multilateralism for a new global order

The International Commission calls on governments to "recommit to multilateralism and [for] all education actors to revitalize international cooperation and global solidarity—with empathy and an appreciation of our common humanity at the core." Let us examine some implications of this idea.

First, it argues that we need a proactive and vigorous multilateralism underpinned by the irrefutable fact that "we are biologically all citizens of a single planet." There must be no loopholes or shortcuts in the effort to understand each other, collaborate, and act as one humanity to ensure global sustainability.

Unfortunately, some are trying to weaken multilateralism through national responses that contribute to and benefit from isolationism and that exploit the disenchantment and fear of communities, citizens, and individuals. This kind of approach is an indication of self-interest and an exacerbation of cruel and unjust competition between countries. However, as the International Commission states, it can also reflect "political extremism and autarchic disregard for democratic principles... when instead it is solidarity and cooperation that will most successfully lead us through the crisis." This is a powerful reminder that issues related to independent thought, liberty, and democracy need to be strengthened in educational proposals at all levels as crosscutting themes.

Second, multilateralism has been strengthened to a great degree on two primary fronts. National and international cooperation have certainly helped close gaps in the provision of basic social services, underscoring the role of the guarantor state both in equalizing opportunities and mitigating inequalities.

In addition, it is evident that, as the International Commission asserts, "The global scientific community is collaborating across national borders at a scale never seen before." We continue to see that production, discussion, and validation of knowledge that serves the purpose of improving collective and individual quality of life know no boundaries or limits of any kind. We can perhaps view it as a lesson learned that educational systems face the challenge of promoting the expansion and democratization of educational opportunities within a diverse range of settings and learning spaces, united in the goal of advancing education as a global common good.

Third, the renewed multilateral impetus prompted by the challenges of Covid-19 need to be accompanied by an in-depth review of the goals and mechanisms of governance and by cooperation to increase efficiency and effectiveness, as well as to strengthen their programmatic capacity and their ability to implement proposals that are more focused on integrated approaches and interventions. The degree of institutional, sectoral, and thematic soloing in national and international agendas is not conducive to in-depth understanding or to effective action in response to challenges that are fundamentally multidimensional.

In education specifically, this would mean taking on the challenge of making progress toward "glocal" education that acknowledges the necessary and healthy interdependence of countries to address issues of global sustainability, balancing a universal perspective with a locally relevant foundation. Among other things, this would mean prioritizing competencies and knowledge that cut across educational levels and link together in-person and distance education to address issues related to renewed ways of coexisting, social protection and development, health care and illness prevention, work, commerce, development, mobility, recreation, and wellbeing.

Fourth, the impacts of Covid-19 raise the issue of the "normal" we were accustomed to and that in one way or another we took as a given. The International Commission argues, "As children and entire families have been confined within homes, we starkly see ways that gendered expectations for childrearing often lead to curtailed opportunities for women." On one hand, gender inequality has become even more visible, exposing norms of cultural and social reproduction that are visualized as very difficult to challenge, much less change. On the other hand, we have seen a bit more openness in the debate on the role of families, especially mothers and fathers, in supporting their children's educational processes. This could spur more empathetic and complementary relations between communities, families, and education.

Fifth, the International Commission clearly states that "we cannot countenance the levels of inequality that have been permitted to emerge on our planet," which is a strong warning about a trend that could lead to global decay and destruction. Multilateralism must strengthen its capacity to address inequality by weighing crucial ethical considerations against possible ways of making progress toward greater equality, while avoiding reductionism, oversimplification, and naïveté. Combating inequality is essentially a political issue rooted in ethical and programmatic considerations, but it should not be politicized or manipulated in any way.

Transforming education is essential to the search for robust, sustainable solutions to inequality. We must examine more closely how the constellation of factors that cause inequality arise out of the interaction and juxtaposition of cultural, social, economic, communal, and familial factors that call into question determinism and explanatory monism. The impacts of Covid-19 allow us to see more clearly the importance of complementarity in family, health, education, and social policies as a whole for ensuring equality of opportunity for all students. In the same way, however, those impacts also expose the dysfunction of educational proposals that do not adequately prepare the younger generations to face a world of exponential change, systemic uncertainty, and recurring crises.

Curriculum and pedagogy in particular—that is, balancing the why, what, how, when, and where to teach and learn—are increasingly being analyzed as high-priority issues for reimagining education with a view to sustaining a world that is more sustainable, and just. Allowing discussions on educational content to stagnate or be only tangentially addressed not only makes education increasingly irrelevant, penalizing the most vulnerable students even further; it would also deprive the younger generations of frames of reference and tools for taking responsibility and managing their own lives in the future.

In sum, we are faced with the urgent necessity to revisit and reinvent multilateralism in order to lay the foundation for a new global order that will not be bogged down in excessive declarations or return to fragmented practices in which key players privileges their own "agenda."

Wrap-up of the nine ideas

The first idea concerns "strengthened public commitment to education as a common good," as the International Commission states. This kind of commitment, based on appreciating and balancing the values of inclusion, solidarity, and individual and collective progress, entails the involvement of a diverse range of actors both within and outside the educational system in debating, agreeing on, and expressing visions for society and development that, as a cultural,

civic, social, economic, and community policy, uphold the roles and responsibilities of education. This commitment requires careful balancing of, on one side, the role of the guarantor state, and on the other, the involvement of institutions and actors that reflect the patchwork of affiliations and traditions woven through society. The goal is to enhance the free expression of a wide array of skills and talents within a framework of affirmation and adherence to universal values.

The second idea clearly involves education as a universal human right within an approach that encompasses the interwoven cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions. This idea certainly pervades the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2015) and, in particular, the conception of education as a pivotal and cross-cutting issue for the design and achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, the right to education requires facilitating equal access to connectivity and online platforms, which leads us to a renewed appreciation of the indispensable role of the state in guaranteeing four inextricably linked rights: to education, information, knowledge, and learning.

The third idea rests on the firm belief that educators are decision-makers in educational systems regardless of the mode of teaching, learning, and assessment being used. Valuing educators as producers and managers of learning opportunities for all students reminds us, as the International Commission argues, "that the real capacity for response and innovation lies in the initiative of educators who, together with parents and communities, have in many cases found ingenious and contextualized solutions." Perhaps these openings that have been emerging within educational communities constitute a window of opportunity to help implement and sustain a transformation of education and educational systems as part of a progressive and forward-looking approach to society as a whole.

The fourth idea pertains to the International Commission's appeal "to everyone with educational responsibilities, from government officials to teachers to parents, to prioritize the participation of students and young people broadly in order to co-construct with them the change they wish to see." Students must not be considered "educational goals and objectives" but rather, above all, active subjects with rights. When they are respected as infants, children, adolescents, and young people, they can become protagonists, managers, debaters, and disseminators of their own education. Furthermore, their crucial role in building a sustainable way of life affects their very existence, as well as the possibility of a future that today appears severely threatened, in large part by the decisions and behavior of the adult world. We do, of course, need adult generosity, wisdom, and expertise in order to bring about fundamental transformations in education, but those transformations will be sustainable only if adults trust and support students to be protagonists and makers of their own future.

The fifth idea highlights the need to "to protect and transform the school as a separate space-time, specific and different from home and other spaces of learning, where there is as much growth and expansion of social understanding as there is acquisition of skills, competencies and knowledge." One of the main reason's schools exist is that, in addition to being an irreplaceable reference for cultural, social, and civic integration, they are also the principal means by which the younger generations acquire skills and knowledge that help open doors for true opportunities for collective and individual development. Valuing schools means much more than acknowledging and appreciating the fact that in-person education is indispensable for guaranteeing the right to education and learning. Moreover, in-person education can be strengthened within a framework of reexamination and of complementarity with virtual education, with the principal objective being to broaden and democratize learning opportunities.

The sixth idea addresses the debate on the critical role technology plays, whether in democratizing and equalizing opportunities or in deepening gaps and disparities. No decision regarding the present and future wellbeing of our society can disregard the issue of technology, not just as a phenomenon that relentlessly controls our lives down to the smallest details but as a possible foundation for building more just, inclusive, and sustainable societies. It is just as detrimental to human thought and action for us to fall into the temptation of technological determinism or fatalism as it is for us to dismiss or underestimate the use of technology as a means of improving the quality of life for individuals and communities. It is, therefore, essential that technology be a central pillar of the comprehensive education of the individual, which fosters the exercise of freedom, independent thought, creativity, and resilience, among other fundamental matters. Lastly, technology can help us personalize teaching, learning, and assessment, keeping in mind that each person is a unique human being, even if we all learn in more or less similar ways.

The seventh idea opens up a discussion of educational content as a linchpin of any proposal for educational transformation. The International Commission underlines the importance of education for generating and developing within students the independent and critical thinking that enables them to process, assess, and take a position on many different kinds of information, with quite different aims, which they receive at exponential rates. The document goes further and notes that the proliferation of "misinformation and fake news" can be "fatal for social life and human understanding but is also literally destroying lives." Responsible management of evidence produced through the triangulation of perspectives and data is essential if individuals are to manage their own lives without their beliefs, opinions, or actions being manipulated by the misuse of artificial intelligence, for the purpose of guiding, controlling, and commercializing what we build, do, and express in our daily lives.

The eighth idea refers to the need to reach a "just and effective use of these resources," which means reaffirming the idea that educational spending must be linked to a robust educational proposal that is clear in its goals, content, and pathways. The level of funding dedicated to education can be a good indication that there is political will to prioritize investment and spending on education, but in itself it does not indicate a willingness to transform education. Education financing is central to transforming the educational agenda at both the international and national levels, not just to counteract the most perverse and regressive effects of the pandemic but also to bolster a reexamination of the objectives, content, and strategies of education with the aim of building sustainability in a post-pandemic world.

The ninth idea addresses the need to reinvent a proactive and vigorous multilateralism underpinned by the irrefutable fact that "we are biologically all citizens of a single planet." There must be no loopholes or shortcuts in the effort to understand each other, collaborate, and act as one humanity to ensure global sustainability. Curriculum and pedagogy in particular—that is, balancing the why, what, how, when, and where to teach, learn, and assess—are increasingly being analyzed as high-priority issues for reimagining education with a view to creating a more sustainable and just world. Allowing discussions on educational content to stagnate or be addressed only tangentially not only makes education increasingly irrelevant, penalizing the most vulnerable students even further, it could also deprive the younger generations of frames of reference and tools for taking responsibility and managing their own lives in the future.

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