EDITORIAL

The future is not what it used to be

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> "The old dear stories of possibility. No-one wanted to hear them anymore, but nothing had replaced them." Joy Williams, *Harrow*

Eight years ago, in 2015, United Nations (UN) Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future" (UN 2015). Its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represented an "urgent call for action" to all countries, spanning a range of fronts – from climate change and poverty reduction to health and education – but also recognising their interdependence. Only by addressing these issues in the round, in an ambitious, inter-sectoral way, with partnership at its heart, the UN argued, could we hope to achieve the 17 goals and create a fairer, more just and sustainable future for everyone.

Now, a little over halfway to 2030, it is obvious that we are failing to achieve these goals and that the defining promise of the 2030 Agenda to "leave no one behind" is, as the UN itself puts it in a new report, "in peril" (UN 2023, p. 2). Its preliminary assessment of the 140-plus targets found that only 12 per cent were on track, with close to half, while showing progress, "moderately or severely off track" and 20 per cent either regressing or showing no progress (ibid., p. 2). On current trends, the UN estimates, 575 million people (almost 7 per cent of the world's population) will still be living in extreme poverty in 2030 (ibid., p. 7). Projections also show that approximately 670 million people will still be facing hunger in 2030; some 8 per cent of the world's population, the same as in 2015 (ibid., p. 8). Remarkably enough, this is not the worst news. Action to address the climate crisis remains insufficient, the UN says, with the world "on the brink of a climate catastrophe". Without "transformative action … to reduce greenhouse gas emissions deeply and rapidly in all sectors, the 1.5 °C target will be at risk and with it the lives of more than 3 billion people" (ibid., p. 19).

SDG 4 on education and lifelong learning has a special cross-cutting role in supporting the achievement of the other 16 Sustainable Development Goals. It has an important part to play in enabling action to combat climate change (SDG 13) and in ensuring the sustainable use of oceans (SDG 15) and forests (SDG 15), for example,

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as well as in lifting people out of poverty (SDG 1) and reducing inequality (SDG 10), and in ensuring sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12). More generally, it has a critical role in generating informed public support and civic action and in encouraging political action for change. As the final report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education (ICFE 2021) recognised, education can help build a supportive, cooperative and more just social fabric that repairs past inequalities and injustices while redefining our relationship with the natural environment (ibid.). However, this promise is far from being realised and it is important to recognise just how far. The UN report estimates that, by 2030, 84 million children will be out of school and 300 million children or young people attending school will leave unable to read or write (UN 2023). To achieve SDG 4, "education systems must be re-imagined, and education financing must become a priority national investment" (ibid., p. 10). A Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) Policy Paper, published in April this year, found that the 79 low- and lower-middle-income countries are facing an average annual national financing gap of USD 97 billion per year to achieve their reformulated and less ambitious national SDG 4 benchmarks by 2030 (GEMR Team 2023). In the unlikely event of this gap being filled, these countries would still be well short of the previous set of benchmarks, now understood to be unachievable.

The UN has put increasing emphasis on the need to "transform education", recognising not only its contribution to "upholding people's rights and human dignity and to the advancement of social, economic, political and cultural development" but also the certainty that this contribution would not be fully realised without genuinely "transformative action" (UN 2022a, p. 3). Education, it reminds us in its report of the Transforming Education Summit (TES) held in New York in September 2022, remains in "deep crisis", a "crisis of equity, quality, and relevance" through which "[h]undreds of millions of the most vulnerable children, young people, and adults remain excluded" (ibid.), thus denying them their right to education and limiting their "potential to achieve other rights and freedoms" (ibid., p. 6). The numbers involved are truly shocking: 763 million young people and adults without basic literacy skills; 244 million children and young people out of school (ibid.).

The UN Secretary-General's vision statement, "Transforming education: An urgent political imperative for our collective future" (UN 2022b), calls for a fundamental rethink of the purpose and content of education, grounded in the principles identified by the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education: ensuring the right to quality education throughout life; and strengthening education as a public endeavour and a common good (ibid.). The vision statement calls for more investment in education, targeting in particular "usually discriminated against" groups, such as "women and girls, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, and those in protracted crises amongst others", and for "the collective commitment and action of visionary political leaders at all levels, parents, students, teachers, and the public at large" (ibid., p. 32).

Few would deny that there is a pressing need for transformation, in education and in other areas where the actions of countries are out of step with their policy commitments. But the gap between vision and reality is so great that it must surely call into question the purpose of such ambitious overarching goals and the ways in

which they are useful. Do the Sustainable Development Goals, for example, represent an achievable framework for action by Member States or are they, rather, as the GEMR Policy Paper suggests (GEMR Team 2023), hopeful aspirations which, even if missed, will have served a purpose? Do reports such as *Reimagining our Futures Together* (ICFE 2021) create expectations of the future that have little or no chance of being realised? Their "promissory" or "anticipatory" nature, as it has been described,[1] offers hope, a kind of philosophical orientation and a means of motivating and lobbying for change and galvanising political will. The authority of international organisations could, as Jens Beckert's work[2] suggests, be said to rest on the credibility of the promises they make concerning future outcomes. If hope is exhausted, "disorientation and discontent will arise" and "promissory legitimacy fails", he writes (Beckert 2020, p. 3). Whether or not you agree that the frameworks of international organisations such as the UN, UNESCO or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) should be thought of as "promissory" in this sense, credibility is evidently threatened by commitments that everyone knows have little prospect of being delivered. The pledges made by nation-states will begin to look shallow and half-hearted, perhaps even dishonest. The interventions of international organisations will be seen as unrealistic and impractical, ill-fitted to the hard realities of real-world politics. Citizens will become sceptical and disaffected, more concerned with holding on to what they have, perhaps, than with creating something new and better – the essential task of our age.

Beckert shows how the promissory legitimacy of neoliberalism has been eroded by its failure to deliver the social, economic and, indeed, educational gains it claimed would be achieved through privatisation, an increase in competition and the strengthening of the role of markets in different areas of life. Neoliberalism's credibility is all but gone, kept alive only by a scattered group of zealots, gifted in magical thinking, who believe its failure can be explained by governments' reluctance to go far enough in the way of deregulation and privatisation and the dark machinations of a mysterious cabal they call the left-wing economic establishment (Smith 2023). This failure, and the crisis of legitimacy it has created, is, for many, a source of hope and has, I suspect, given international organisations the courage and confidence to assert different values and to renew the language of solidarity, democracy and the common good, notably in the ICFE (2021) report and the UN's *Common Agenda* (UN 2021). This is a gratifying and long-overdue turn of events, and it has been welcomed by many in the education community. However, it does not amount to (nor does it claim to be) a serious alternative vision to discredited neoliberalism.

While neoliberalism lost credibility because it does not work and has been seen not to work (or, at least, it does not do what we were told it would), I think the international community faces a different credibility problem that threatens, nevertheless, to limit its influence. Although the vision offered by the UN and UNESCO is a compelling and attractive one, there is no roadmap or plan, and to the minds of most people little chance of realising it. Furthermore, there is little attempt in any of

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[1] See, for example, Beckert (2020) and Robertson (2022).
[2] Discussed in Elfert, M. & Draxler, A. (2022).

these documents and frameworks to understand or face up to the causes of the crises we face, in education and elsewhere, still less to address them head-on. The ambitions set out by the UN and UNESCO and other international organisations make little acknowledgement of the entrenched systems of power and inequality that resist change and uphold the discredited promise of neoliberalism. This is understandable, given the remit of these organisations and their modus operandi. But it becomes an issue in a context in which countries routinely make commitments against which they have little chance of delivering, and private corporate interests exercise undue, usually undisclosed influence over how public money is spent and wealth distributed. It is hard to shake the impression that, set against these interests, national politics lacks both substance and power. What we see, for the most part, is smoke and mirrors.

There is an unbridgeable gulf between those who want to empower people to remake the world and those who wish to empower themselves to conserve their privilege and dominate others. Unhappily, it is the latter who direct national policymaking and shape the world in which we live. Even in countries in which representative democracy is quite well developed, party politics is distorted by the influence of wealthy donors and other interests, such as the media, still dominated by a few powerful individuals, and the formidably persuasive fossil fuel industry. Growing inequalities and the concentration of wealth have increased the influence of the very rich over domestic politics (Economist 2018). Kleptocrats act with near-total impunity, above the laws of nations ("[m]oney", as Rachel Cusk has one of her characters say in the novel *Outline*, "is a country all its own"; Cusk 2014, p. 7). There is little prospect of persuading these interests to change direction or do something else less harmful since their power and wealth rests on doing precisely the things they have been able to do to date, thanks, in no small part, to their ideological cheerleaders and apologists in national government. There is no conversation to be had because there is no common ground. This is a potentially fatal problem when hopes for change rest on asking those in power to behave differently or to be a bit nicer. And it is exacerbated when politicians put their names to commitments they do not think of as binding or of the first importance and which, in many cases, they know they will not be able to honour, often because they consider their hands to be tied by other interests or by their perceived lack of real power. Would another set of political leaders do better? In some exceptional cases, perhaps, but in general, I suspect, no. It is more a matter of how politics is done than of who does it.

If mainstream politics offers only roadblocks and resistance, where else might we look for the radical change of direction we so desperately need? There is a hint in the UN Secretary-General's TES vision statement, which appeals not only to politicians but to "parents, students, teachers, and the public at large" to come together and act collectively (UN 2022b, p. 7). The crises we face cannot be resolved through more of the same, that much is clear. They demand informed civic engagement, critical thinking, and active participation across society. The causes of the crises must be understood and challenged. Hope lies in people wanting a radically different future and in their being persuaded that it is possible. The problem, and the reason this is so difficult to talk about, openly at least, is that it threatens the dominance of the very powerful, whose grip on mainstream politics and the media seems unassailable.

ICFE's appeal to a social contract is perhaps also an implicit acknowledgement that conventional politics needs to be transcended, to some extent at least. We cannot afford to address ourselves only to governments. How else can we agree "a shared vision of the public purposes of education" (ICFE 2021, p. 2) other than through "inclusive and democratic public dialogue and mobilization to realize it"? (ibid., p. 15). That dialogue needs to be far-reaching, informed, critical, plural, and self-consciously challenging, going beyond the naturally limited remit of the report and its commissioners to confront the causes of these crises.

For real, sustainable change of the sort the ICFE report talks about, we need a society in which people find joy and fulfilment in civic participation rather than private accumulation. And we need education that promotes critical thinking and engagement and action in the public sphere and empowers people and communities. The public sphere has been hollowed out in many places in the world, with local democracy eroded and public activism discouraged and, in some places, criminalised. It is increasingly difficult to find spaces, physical or intellectual, in which to meet, think and act publicly, with others. Public discourse, for the most part, is animated not by hope and the expectation of a better world, but by fear of change and difference, ritual and idolatry, and a silly-sentimental attachment to an idealised past. Autocratic leaders conjure national mythologies and find in these myths the justification for contemporary crimes and incursions. While many people live lives of unbearable hardship, in other places ignorance and denial, and an attachment to a fantasised version of the past, have become badges of honour. Actions that silence dissent are applauded by the very people who stand to lose the most from the erosion of the right to protest and speak out publicly. We have become sluggish and introverted in defence of these rights, frequently thoughtless, and appallingly myopic, convinced that however bad things are they could not, in any case, be much better, whatever politicians did, and could almost certainly be much worse.

Such quietism is, of course, to a degree, understandable and not at all surprising. Millions of people lead lives in which despair and resignation have become ordinary. But it is also deeply pernicious. As Hannah Arendt observed, collective action – the expression of our care for the world – is possible only through thinking together, in ways that acknowledge both that the world is uncertain and that we have the power to change it. The *polis,* the "sphere of freedom", as Arendt describes it in *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1958), "is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be" (ibid., p. 198). This is territory into which the ICFE report tentatively ventures in its attempt to reframe education in terms of "a public endeavour and a common good" (ICFE 2021, p. 2) and to redefine pedagogy "around the principles of cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity" (ibid., p. 4). In the spirit of Arendt, we need to ensure that pedagogical approaches make room for difference and dissent and promote challenge and critique, and that curricula are open, adaptable, and co-created, shaped by a recognition of education as a public good aimed at promoting human flourishing in the widest civic sense.

In the preface to *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Arendt (2006 [1961]) describes the aliveness felt by members of the European

resistance during World War II – their "treasure", she calls it – as they stripped off their masks and began "to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear" (ibid., p. 4). They became actors, agents of change, challengers and disruptors, prepared to take the initiative and act together in the world, freely, as equals, and without direction from others. This hopeful treasure was fleetingly held by participants of the Occupy movement and animates the pages of Isabelle Fremeaux and Jay Jordan's brilliant and inspiring memoir of the occupation and defence of 4,000 acres of French wetlands – the ZAD or *zone à defender* – on which an international airport was to be built (Fremeaux and Jordan 2021), two exercises in direct action which had education at their heart. It is only natural that they should. As Arendt wrote, education is "the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable" (Arendt 2006 [1961], p. 193).

Collective solutions are elusive, however; they cannot be imposed and their legitimacy rests on the nature and extent of public engagement in their creation, as ICFE (2021) recognised in calling for public debate around the creation of a social contract. Much more important than the vision are the means. In the end, the future of humanity depends not on the creation of a vision to which the countries of the world can sign up but, rather, on the degree to which people feel a future different to the present is possible and are willing and empowered, through education, "to assume joint responsibility for the world", as Arendt put it (Arendt 2006 [1961], p. 186). Believing that change is possible is more important than being able to visualise what it will look like. Although the challenges of the time point to the necessity of different futures, most people experience the world as impervious to change. No matter how they might imagine their world as fairer, better or more just, there is, they recognise, really nothing they can do about it (and nothing that their politicians are willing or able to do either). Mainstream politics offers them vanishingly little in the way of hope. There was a moment, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, when it seemed that radical change might be possible. Much was said and much was promised. But it soon became apparent that promises to "build back better" really meant more of the same: more inequalities of wealth and opportunity, more strongarm authoritarian government, and more private-sector profiteering. Better for some, perhaps, but not for the many.

Nevertheless, the solidarity and agency fostered by the crisis offered some hope, highlighting not only our inter-dependency but also our capacity for active civic engagement and public-spirited sacrifice. People were able to embody the kind of change they would like to see in society, a change characterised by collective endeavour and civic action. What we need, more than anything, and in every area of life, from school to the workplace to government and the media, is a radical infusion of this kind of democracy, accompanied by a willingness to lead with and for others and for the common good. And for that, we need to see education not as a commodity or a private investment but as a public good without which we would be unable to think our way to any sort of worthwhile future.

The 10 articles in this double general issue of the *International Review of Education* amply demonstrate the public value of education and its wide, cross-sectoral

benefits, exploring its challenges and possibilities, notably for those groups typically excluded or marginalised, while taking in an exceptionally wide range of thematic and geographical areas.

The first article, "Literacy: A lever for citizenship?", authored by *Anna Robinson-Pant*, considers the important relationship between literacy and citizenship, finding it to be more problematic than is usually believed. While literacy is often thought of as a prerequisite for citizenship, the author attempts to go beyond conventional framings in terms of functional skills for civic engagement and knowledge of rights – literacy *for* citizenship – and instead analyses different models of citizenship to discern ways in which literacy learning can emerge *through* active citizenship. She draws on ethnographic studies of literacy in everyday life to analyse the symbolic and instrumental meanings of literacy in specific contexts, introducing a social practice lens to literacy and citizenship, and going on to explore the pedagogical implications for literacy within citizenship education, particularly in relation to informal learning of "real literacies", critical digital literacy, and literature as a way of entering someone else's experiences. She shows how "the notion of multiple and multimodal literacies can help to broaden and deepen understanding of hierarchies of literacies and languages in relation to people's multiple and changing identities", arguing that this stance focuses our attention on intersectionality and diversity, rather than assuming people have one dominant identity that shapes their aspirations and rights as citizens. In concluding her article, Robinson-Pant contends that the role of literacy within citizenship education "is not only to provide skills for representation, documentation and accountability, but also to bring people closer together by sharing experiences, values, voices and aspirations and facilitating deeper interactions through written, oral and digital texts".

The second article in this issue also explores the intersection between education, agency, identity and diversity. "Translanguaging as bona fide practice in a multilingual South African science classroom", written by *Erasmos Charamba*, responds to the call to improve students' academic achievement in science education in a context of increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom through a focus on "translanguaging", a pedagogical approach in which more than one language is utilised within a classroom lesson. While translanguaging is a relatively young field of research, interest in it has grown over the past decade. It has become clear that teaching children and young people solely in a language of instruction different to the one they speak at home inhibits their learning and leads them to attach less value to their home language and culture. The article explores the role language plays in the academic performance of multilingual students at a primary school in South Africa. Adopting an ethnographic approach, the author collected qualitative data through lesson observations video-recorded in a fifth-grade science class, supplementing these with several interviews with the teacher. Analysis of these data indicates the importance of translanguaging pedagogy for effective learning in multilingual classrooms. The use of multiple languages in this science classroom enabled multilingual students to engage in a practice of generating and creating scientific explanations in their own voice, resulting in better academic performance. Participants used their linguistic repertoire to clarify and review the scientific content, to construct rapport and to boost

their participation in the lesson, while also increasing their proficiency in the language of institution.

The next article, written by *Boadi Agyekum*, is likewise concerned with creating an enabling learning environment for students, this time with a focus on distance learning in higher education. The article, "Challenges of learning environments experienced by distance-learning higher education students in Ghana", explores the challenges experienced by distance-learning higher education students in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The author interviewed students in two University of Ghana distance-learning centres, where they attended weekend face-to-face sessions, asking them to share their experiences with respect to classrooms, learning facilities both inside and outside the classroom, and access to library support services. These data were supplemented with interviews with staff. The author's findings revealed students' struggle with poor infrastructure conditions, with most reporting lack of access to power sources in the classrooms, IT labs, library space, a student hub, and support services as barriers to experiencing meaningful higher education as distance learners. Students stressed the importance of infrastructural support and services tailored towards their needs as distance learners, with an emphasis also on students' physical, social and psychological well-being. The article concludes by calling for greater attention to be paid to students' "emotional learning environment": "Learning centres need to factor in the role that emotions play in the process of teaching and learning, to provide the opportunity for students to talk about their feelings and concerns, and to provide the resources that will enable students to develop their emotional or mental skills through interaction and collaborative learning."

The fourth article considers distance learning from a teaching perspective. "An exploratory study to understand faculty members' perceptions and challenges in online teaching", by *Tausif Mulla*, *Sufia Munir* and *Vivek Mohan*, focuses on the implementation of online teaching and learning in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where technology is one of the main pillars of the government's vision of moving to a knowledge-based society. E-learning has become a popular method of delivery across higher education institutions in the UAE, a response, on the one hand, to globalisation and the demand for information technology infrastructure and, on the other, to the accelerant of the COVID-19 lockdowns. The authors conducted a systematic literature review, encompassing the period from 1999 to 2020. They found that while existing literature on online learning focuses predominantly on student-specific challenges, there is little published work covering faculty members' specific challenges in facilitating online learning in the UAE. The second part of their study, based on semi-structured interviews with 15 faculty members, attempts to address this. It focuses on stakeholders' reflections on designing and delivering online courses, analysing faculty members' perspectives on online teaching and learning in the UAE. The authors identify a number of teacher-specific challenges, which they group into five themes: (1) learners' expectations; (2) culture; (3) lack of incentives for faculty members to engage in online teaching; (4) pedagogy; and (5) technology. Understanding these challenges, the authors conclude, will help academic institutions to better support their staff and improve the delivery of their online programmes.

The next article also considers the professional development (PD) support needs of teachers, this time in Quebec, Canada. "Effectiveness of professional development for teachers in French- and English-medium public elementary schools in Quebec, Canada: A first descriptive survey", written by *Marie-France Boulay*, *Christine Hamel* and *Sandra Hamel*, contrasts "effective" professional development with "traditional" professional development, arguing that the former employs elements known to support changes in teaching practices and in student learning. Characteristics of effective PD include collective participation, adequate duration, active learning, and specific content focus, all within a coherent development process. Based on these characteristics, the authors conducted a survey to assess the PD provided to Quebec elementary (primary) schoolteachers and to identify the content, the learning modes emphasised, the reasons why teachers participated, the perceived benefits and the impacts of participation, as well as the incentives for and potential barriers to participation. They found that teachers rarely participate in PD unless it has first been specifically offered to them. Although Quebec teachers have access to a relatively wide range of PD activities, through in-school or out-of-school workshops, conferences, teacher networks, professional learning communities, university courses, etc., the authors identify a need for improvement in terms of the inclusion of characteristics that are recognised as effective in changing teaching practices and bringing about student learning gains. They recommend the development of mechanisms to support a richer and wider variety of professional development activities that meet a range of teacher and school system needs and, crucially, incorporate effectiveness characteristics. Such mechanisms might include ensuring that information on effectiveness characteristics is more widely distributed; encouraging a collaborative examination of teacher professional development needs; supporting the development of structured long-term professional development plans; and emphasising teachers' professional autonomy.

Our sixth article, "Akan folklore as a philosophical framework for education in Ghana", by *Samuel Amponsah*, asks how Indigenous philosophies of education might enable Ghana to develop and promote lifelong education. The author argues that Ghana cannot pursue a lifelong education agenda by relying on education that is entirely centred on foreign cultural values and favouring Western educational philosophies to drive its educational policies and practices. Ghana, he contends, needs to incorporate more elements of an authentic Ghanaian framework and to strengthen the connection between education, culture and development. He thus analyses the educational strengths of African folklore from the Akan ethnic group of Ghana. He concludes that aspects of Akan folklore, including its stories and proverbs, its kinship rights and rules, its moral codes, its corporate and humanistic perspective, present a viable alternative and complement to the country's current westernised education. The author proposes an enhanced Ghanaian framework for education informed by Akan philosophy and pedagogy. This, he argues, will be beneficial in promoting quality and lifelong education in the country while enabling ordinary Ghanaians to make their voices heard.

The next article concerns gender equality and focuses on education in Ukraine. "A pedagogy of freedom as a viable basis for implementing gender equality in Ukraine's educational institutions", written by *Alla Rastrygina* and *Nadiya Ivanenko*,

reflects on the extent to which Ukraine has prioritised gender issues in education since the 1990s. In the three decades prior to the Russian invasion, independent Ukraine's efforts to integrate into the European community led it to engage in efforts to restructure its educational institutions and processes on the basis of democratic principles free from any form of discrimination, including gender-related discrimination. These efforts have been promoted through joint projects with UN Women and other international organisations, and gender equality improvement strategies are now reflected in Ukrainian legislation, though they are not yet fully implemented on the ground. The authors offer an analysis of the current state of gender equality in the Ukrainian system of education before presenting their own concept of the pedagogy of freedom as a viable basis for achieving gender equality in Ukraine's educational institutions. Analysing literature devoted to the problem of freedom and gender equality in educational policy, they argue that learners' free self-determination, self-development and self-realisation can only be effective factors in realising gender equality if pedagogical activity and learning spaces are designed to support the development of learners' full potential.

The eighth article of this double issue, "A tripartite understanding of experiences of young apprentices: A case study of the London Borough of Hounslow" by *Priscilla Hansberry* and *Trevor Gerhardt*, takes as its starting point a pledge, made by the London Borough of Hounslow in 2019, to create 4,000 new apprenticeships and training opportunities to help young people into work. The article investigates the experiences of young apprentices in Hounslow before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Exploring the perspectives of two apprentices, two employers and one training provider in a small-scale qualitative study, the authors identify the factors that hinder and support entry into and sustainability of apprenticeships, and progression towards professional employment. Their findings show that labour market entry was significantly hindered by *competition* (notably with peers who had better maths and English qualifications, for a small number of apprenticeships) and *organisational barriers* (such as managers with prejudices against young people and the still-prevalent stigmatising of apprentices and apprenticeships). Supportive factors identified include *maths and English qualifications* (critical in entry and sustainability, as well as in progression to work), *personal characteristics* (such as a positive mindset, enabling young people to persevere despite a disadvantaged socioeconomic background and lack of family support, for example) and *supportive relationships* (e.g., mentoring) between apprentices and their training providers or employers. The authors conclude their article by highlighting maths and English qualifications and a supportive environment as the key factors conducive to successful apprenticeship management.

The final two articles in the issue concern the experiences of refugees and migrants in accessing education. "North Korean women entrepreneurs learning from failure", written by *Jinhee Choi* and *Esther Prins*, focuses on how migrants learn from failure and how this shapes their social adjustment. The study examines, in particular, how North Korean migrants struggling for a foothold in South Korea sought to learn from failures in their workplaces and everyday life. The article draws on nine months of ethnographic research in South Korean restaurants and cafés employing North Korean migrants. Data sources include informal conversations

and loosely structured interviews with five women who started, or planned to start, their own enterprise. The findings reveal that these migrants perceived failure in five interrelated spheres: financial, relational, physical, psychological and professional. Participants developed perspectives to understand failure as an integral part of learning in a new society and adopting unfamiliar role expectations and responsibilities. They also applied knowledge they had acquired through their failures to change their approach to their career and to strengthen their personal and business capacity to obtain a legitimate social position. Paradoxically, failures that were beyond their control, such as legal problems, created opportunities to receive practical support from, and increase trust in, South Koreans. The article challenges the "pervasive view of migrants as incompetent, inferior workers, and a social burden", and shows how the predominant focus on migrants' acquisition of language, literacy and workplace skills ignores "their invisible learning about the self, others, and their host society through new social relations and practices such as opening a business and building trust with host citizens". The study offers a more nuanced perspective, demonstrating how migrants learn from failure – inevitable for anyone in this situation – and use these experiences as learning opportunities to transform themselves into active citizens able to contribute to their host society.

The final article of this issue – "Interventions to improve refugee children's access to education and quality learning: A scoping review of existing impact evaluations" by *Júlia Palik* and *Gudrun Østby* – addresses the challenges refugee children face in accessing quality education. These challenges are widely recognised, and numerous interventions have been promoted to address them. What is still lacking, however, is systematic evidence on what works to improve refugee children's enrolment and learning. The authors of this article set out to find what robust quantitative evidence exists regarding interventions that seek to improve access to education and quality learning for refugee children. They conducted a scoping review of quantitative peer-reviewed articles evaluating the effect of interventions which aimed to improve access to education and/or quality learning for refugee children. While their literature search for the time-period 1990–2021 resulted in 1,873 articles, only eight of these met the authors' selection criteria. This low number indicates the general lack of robust evidence as to what works to improve quality learning for refugee children. What evidence there is suggests that cash-transfer programmes can increase school attendance and that learning outcomes, such as second-language acquisition, can be improved through physical education, early childhood development programmes, or online game-based solutions. Other interventions, such as drama workshops, appear to have had no effect on second-language acquisition. The authors conclude their article by calling for more evaluation of educational interventions in an area where rigorous quantitative evidence is often scarce and inconclusive.

These last articles demonstrate the limitations of our knowledge of what works in certain key areas of policy in education and lifelong learning and in the context, in particular, of the educational needs of excluded, disadvantaged or otherwise discriminated-against groups. Understanding this is crucial if we are to do what the UN urges us to and prepare educational governance and institutions for "sustainable and inclusive transformation", while prioritising policies and investments with "multiplier effects across the goals". There is a crucial intersectoral role in this for

education, but it demands not only more and better evidence but also, as the UN indicates, a "surge" in financing and "an enabling global environment for developing countries" (UN 2023, p. 26). Getting there from where we are now seems almost impossibly difficult, but it is the minimum requirement if we are to "break through to a better future for all", as the UN says we must (ibid.).

As far as education goes, the main means of transformation is the "new social contract for education" (ICFE 2021). But we are left largely in the dark about the mechanisms through which this can be created or how we might challenge and overcome the forces responsible for current and past injustices. Of course, it is not the job of international organisations to do this. But the failure of nation-states to live up to their commitments or even to offer a roadmap as to how, at some future point, they might achieve this, is creating a gap in credibility and eroding people's confidence in both politics and future-making. I do not see that there is much chance of things changing, at least not in any substantive way. The centrist realism embraced by national politicians around the world will, I suspect, be looked back on by later generations as an extraordinary and extreme form of denial, as well as an appalling and unprecedented dereliction of responsibility to the future. The old stories of possibility are, for now, all we have. What hope there is lies not in convincing nation-states to do better, but in generating genuine public engagement in these issues and reviving spaces in which, as Hannah Arendt put it, freedom can appear. Education, reframed in terms of civic engagement and critical thinking for future-oriented collective action and social solidarity, has an important role to play in this, though it can do little alone, and we should not waste our time waiting for those with the least to gain from the transformation of education to facilitate it.

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