Schools

Schools as drivers of innovation

Official Launch and First Global Community Meeting, OECD Schools+ Network

22-23 May 2023

## Summary and Next Steps

OECD

On May 22-23 2023, 181 participants representing some 40 countries and 22 organisations came together for the launch of the Schools+ Network at the OECD Headquarters, and over 300 followed the event in livestream. The meeting focused on the following objectives of this new 'network of networks':

- put schools at the centre of education improvement,
- learning from each other on GenAI, a new and common challenge,
- building evidence on the implementation of effective pedagogical practices,
- enhance schools' engagement in research evidence, and
- better understand how to scale up effective practices.

Putting Schools at the Center of Networks of Education Improvement

The opening session outlined how innovation in education often begins small, as illustrated by leerKRACHT which has grown from an initiative of one passionate parent to a programme rolled out across 1,300 schools in the Netherlands with support from the Ministry. Panel members also shared how innovative approaches are also fostering student-centred learning experiences, such as through care and community engagement in a high school in Helsinki, Finland, or by empowering teachers to learn – including from their mistakes - in the Lindsay District in California, USA. In all these examples, schools have the power to be responsive to learners' holistic needs, and these responses can be taken to scale and play a central role in educational reform and improvement.
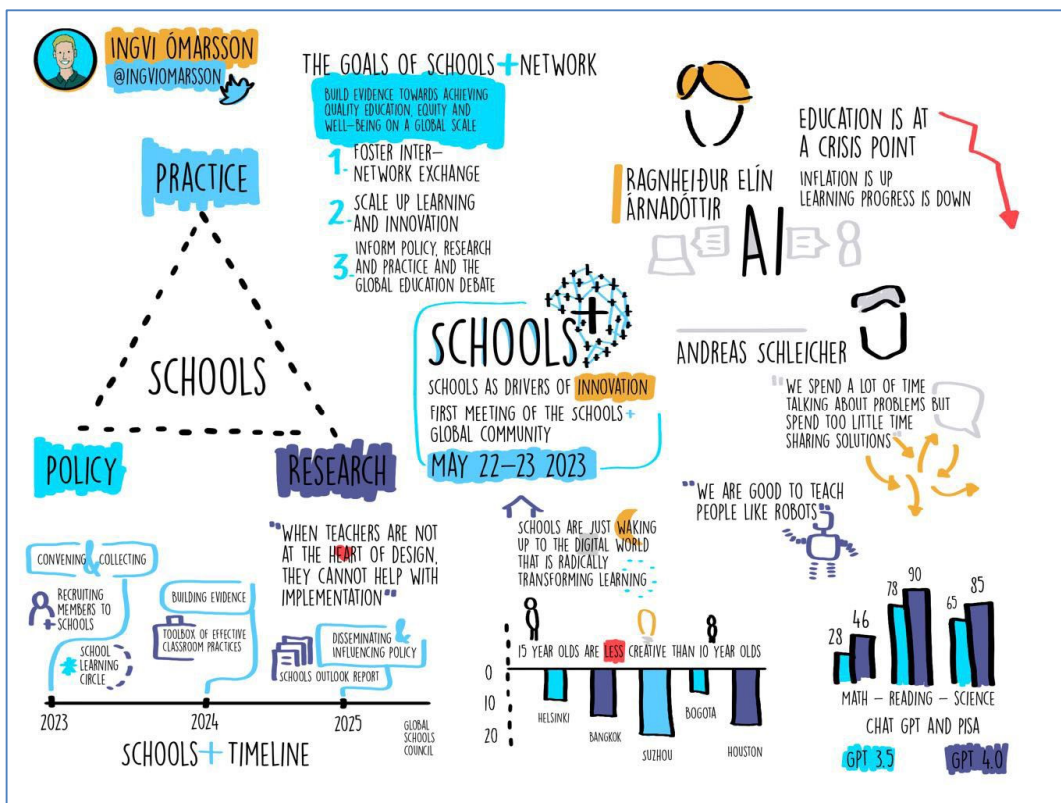
However, change in the education sector is slower than in other sectors and promising initiatives often go unnoticed. Yet, the power of global networks and crowdsourcing is clearly illustrated by organisations such as the Wikimedia Foundation and iNaturalist. Networks can provide a powerful space to connect at 'the meso level', for those driving change both vertically and horizontally, as suggested by the Brookings Institute, and provide new insights to inform both policy and practice. However, even when teachers and schools do want to work together and innovate, the system needs to allow for it, and schools often have

to figure out creative ways to redefine what is possible to do as illustrated from several initiatives in the United Kingdom. Drawing on the OECD's experience in convening a wide array of stakeholders, Schools+ establishes a space where educators, researchers and policy makers can work together to foster exchange between networks, scale up evidence use and learning and inform policy, research and practice across borders.

Learning from each other on emerging challenges: GenAI

The new opportunities and challenges raised by Generative AI (GenAI) highlight the value of the Schools+ Network in bringing different actors together to share and learn from their respective approaches and responses. With Generative AI now at the fingertips of every educator and student, some school systems have been caught off-guard, while others have begun to explore ways to leverage its potential. GenAI can facilitate collaborative learning, amplify the depth of whole-class conversations, and potentially change classroom dynamics, although the importance of teacher-student interactions and dialogue should not be overlooked. GenAI has the potential to significantly impact the teaching profession and change how teachers teach and students learn both within and outside the classroom.

After a presentation of a draft OECD framework and reflections by Professor Rose Luckin from University College London on potential pedagogical implications, participants heard from a range of practitioners: Daniele Barca, a principal from Italy, shared how his network of schools is using GenAI to teach critical thinking skills to students; Pati Ruiz from Digital Promise in the United States shared school initiatives in using GenAI to cater to diversity in the classroom and advance equity; Sandra Schaffranietz, from the German lander of North Rhine-Westphalia, showed how governments can provide direction in this rapidly evolving space to support schools in safely introducing GenAI; and, Yongzhi Li, from the National Academy of Educational Sciences in China reiterated the need to embrace experimentation and innovation, such as through their initiative to develop digital assistant teachers.

Rich discussions among participants highlighted the complexity of what could be a major disruption for education systems: from issues of teacher preparation and ensuring pedagogical value, to a myriad of societal and ethical issues. The questions raised will form the basis for the revisions of the Schools' Spotlight on GenAI to be released in Q4 2023.

Building evidence on the implementation of effective pedagogical practices

The meeting continued on the second day with a focus on laying the foundations for the next biennium of work of the Schools+ Network, namely to build greater evidence on the implementation of effective pedagogical practices. The Secretariat outlined the objectives, activities and planned outcomes for the Schools+ Network, with a particular focus on the thematic focus on pedagogy during the 2023-2025 period.

The Network will aim to advance schools' knowledge by identifying evidence-informed practices that can work at scale and facilitating evidence-generation on critical aspects in their implementation. In the Schools Learning Circle, schools will come together to work with existing research and evidence, as well as insights and examples from practitioners, to advance the frontiers of policy and practice on common challenges in teaching and learning. Given the focus on teaching and learning in the first biennium, the main output will be a **Toolbox of Effective Classroom Practices**.

The development of the Toolbox will be a collaborative endeavor, and the engagement and ownership of all the Schools+ partners will be critical to its success. The challenges related to it became visible in the break-out sessions:

- Policy-makers highlighted the need to rethink teaching and learning in light of the needs of the 21st Century, and how to bring greater coherence across policies to effectively support the profession, and the needs for adaptability and implementation challenges across contexts.

- Evidence brokers and researchers stressed the importance of taking stock of the areas where evidence is strong and weak, and furthering our understanding of the mechanisms behind effective practices and what helps teachers in changing their mindsets.

- Practitioners raised the question of changes in classroom practice and the factors which need to be considered, including the actual context, need to meet teachers where they are, and importance of ensuring that resources are as accessible as possible.

Bridging the gap between research and practice

A major goal of Schools+ is to strengthen the links between research, policy and practice, with a focus on increasing school engagement in research evidence and scaling of effective practices. The meeting provided an opportunity to explore ways to overcome the disconnect between research and practice. In particular, a panel discussed different approaches to evaluating practices and roles that schools can play in research evidence generation, use and dissemination.

John Kay from the Education Endowment Foundation shared that a rigourous evidence base has grown, but that challenges remain: only one out of three funded randomised controlled trial studies show similar results when replicated. Patricia Watson from Education Scotland underlined the importance of building a culture of evidence in schools by encouraging in-school evidence generation and self-evaluation processes. Heini Karppinen from HundrED, together with Peter Kent from the International Confederation of Principals, also showed ways to engage schools in action research and gather examples of promising practices and how these need to be meaningful and accessible to them.

Overall, there was a shared sense of the complementarity of these different approaches, and also great potential for engaging with teachers in building evidence around not just *what* works, but also *how* it works across contexts.

Scaling Effective Practices to the Entire Education System

In the final breakout discussion of the meeting, participants were encouraged to identify the main enablers that can facilitate the scaling of effective practices. Several supporting factors were identified, including putting teachers and school leaders at the centre of change processes; developing bottom-up approaches based on actual needs and not imposing top-down initiatives; using networks; and creating a learning culture that promotes trust and a 'safe space' to make mistakes. The importance of teachers 'unlearning' old practices was also noted. Creating stronger collaboration among different stakeholders, such as policy-makers, researchers and educators is critical to take effective practices to scale.

Going forward

Overall, the discussions emphasised the key role of schools as centres of educational improvement and as catalysts for positive change in the education system. The launch meeting was a first step in the activities of the network, with the two main strands of work kicking off for the next two years, notably the network learning within the Global Community and building evidence on innovations within the Schools Learning Circles. As for the next steps, all the participants are invited to:

- Submit comments, input or case studies for the Spotlight publication on Generative AI in the Classroom. Deadline for submissions – 5 July 2023.

- If not already completed, identify and nominate schools to be part of the Schools Learning Circle and provide the Schools+ team with more information.

- Ensure that the nominated schools receive the invitation to attend the schools-only information session for the Learning Circle work to develop a Toolbox of Effective Classroom Practices. They can sign up for the information meetings here:

June information meetings

Date	Time	Link to register
Tues, 27 June	13:00 PM-14:00 PM (Paris time)	Register here
Thurs, 29 June	10:00 AM-11:00 AM (Paris time)	Register here
Wed, 5 July	16:00 PM-17:00 PM (Paris time)	Register here

September information meetings

Date	Time	Link to register
Tues, 12 Sept	16:00 PM-17:00 PM (Paris time)	Register here
Wed, 20 Sept	13:00 PM-14:00 PM (Paris time)	Register here
Thurs, 28 Sept	10:00 AM-11:00 AM (Paris time)	Register here

Annex. Breakout Discussion Group Leaders and co-Leaders

We acknowledge with thanks the contribution of the leaders and co-leaders of the discussion groups:

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Keep in touch

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Visit: **www.oecd.org/education/school/oecdschoolsnetwork.htm**
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