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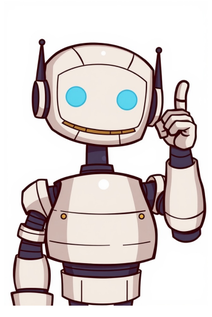

Education is a human right, a powerful driver of development, and one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equality, peace, and stability. It delivers large, consistent returns in terms of income, and is the most important factor to ensure equity and inclusion. For individuals, education promotes employment, earnings, health, and poverty reduction. Globally, there is a 9% increase in hourly earnings for every extra year of schooling. EDUCATION FACTSHEET (PDF) The pandemic has exposed many of the challenges facing women working in education. Yet, Jennie Weiner, Ed.M.'03, Ed.D.'12, an expert who studies how to create a more inclusive and equitable education field, acknowledges that many of the gender disparities in the education profession have long existed. Across the sector, women make up a majority of the education workforce but occupy barely a quarter of top leadership positions. This is not by accident, she says, but by systemic design.“We've had a highly feminized profession, but feminized means both that women do the work, but also that it's devalued because it is women's work,” Weiner says, pointing to many issues that exist in education, such as underpaid teachers, buildings in disrepair, and even an “inverted” pyramid where men hold far more leadership positions than women.“Many people would rather believe that hard work and being really good at what you do could outperform bias, and that's a lie. No matter how good you are, if we live in discriminatory system, that discrimination will raise its head," she says.In this episode the EdCast, Weiner, an associate professor at the University of Connecticut, breaks down the gender issues in the field and suggests ways to push toward equality.TRANSCRIPTJill Anderson: I'm Jill Anderson. This is the Harvard EdCast.Jennie Weiner knows the pandemic has exposed gender inequities that don't often get talked about in education. It doesn't matter whether women work in early childhood, or higher education, or somewhere in between, these inequities play out similarly across the field. Jennie is an associate professor who studies how to make education more inclusive and equitable through educational leadership. Although females have long made up the bulk of the education workforce, they barely represent a quarter of top leadership roles. She says there's many reasons for how we've ended up with gender inequity in the field and society. I asked Jennie to tell me more about the unique challenges facing women in education.Jennie Weiner: There are a number of challenges facing women in leadership generally, and then within the context of K12 specifically. Some of these challenges exist outside of the role, which are really about how our society frames the role of women and socialize us to understand what women should and shouldn't be doing within the space. Right? So for example, the idea that we should be the primary caretakers for our young children, which, of course, then creates complications if you don't have paid family leave, or access to reliable, cheap, and effective care for your children, and are attempting to work full time. Which was true in our context of our society prior to the pandemic, but of course has been exacerbated by the pandemic. We also have issues around who becomes caretakers, even if you don't have children for elderly parents, or for other kind of tasks within the context of a family, or an extended family.So you have all that external socialization. And then you also have, what I would say is role socialization in leadership specifically, which is the way leadership is constructed in our society, and in education specifically, still really focuses on this idea of a lone hero, or heroic person, and I would argue, a white man, with characteristics that are stereotyped as masculine characteristics. So being very strong, or ambitious, or innovative, or aggressive, right? And we see this through our political cycles and in other spaces. So what happens is women may not be considered the best candidates for these positions because they hold other kinds of stereotyped ideas, right? So if you are more communally oriented, which should be a stereotype female, you're softer, you're emotional, you may not be seen as having leadership potential, right? And there's a lack of female mentors and women who are in charge in the first place to tap people along the trajectory.But also if you exhibit traditionally, or stereotypically male characteristics that are more aligned with leadership, let's say being quite aggressive, or being innovative, we know that women often get criticized for exhibiting those behaviors. So I talk a lot about this idea of a double bind. So you have these externalized pathway issues and things that keep women from having full access to leadership that exist because of, again, our societal structures, and who gets to do what roles, and why, and how we think about that. But then we also have these internalized structures about how we understand and perceive what leadership is, and hence, who should be able to do it, and be successful, and thrive in the role. So it's a lot to say the least.Jill Anderson: It is a lot. I think it's something that you can easily look at and see in K through 12.Jennie Weiner: Right.Jill Anderson: You look and you see a lot of females, predominantly females in education, but you don't often see them in roles of superintendency or principalship.Jennie Weiner: So right now about 83 to 86% range of teachers are women. About 54% of principals are women, predominantly in elementary schools, and that's not an accident because elementary schools don't have after-school activities to the same extent. There's also ideas about women and their ability to facilitate, let's say discipline for older boys, and what they can handle. Also, women's willingness to blend their life and home life with their work life. So if I am a mother, am I willing to bring my kids to a bunch of basketball games, or activities at school consistently? If I'm a man, am I willing to do that?And then at the superintendent level, it's been around 23% since the last 15 or 20 years. So, if you inverse that it's even more bananas, right? So you have, what is that then? 16% or so of teachers are men, about 50% of them are principals, and about 74% are superintendents. So, it's jarring in either direction, but I sometimes ask people to think in the reverse, right? But you have this teeny tiny pool at the bottom of the pyramid for men who are situated in schools and they're overwhelmingly more than 75% of the superintendents, the people in charge.Jill Anderson: Right. And is it the same when you get into higher ed and you start looking at careers [crosstalk 00:05:16].Jennie Weiner: Yes.Jill Anderson: ... in academia, the same reflection.Jennie Weiner: Right. And I think what's important to remember too, is historically it was built this way on purpose, Michael Apple, a scholar who studies the history of the profession, talks a lot about the ways in which we had to fill these common schools with an available workforce, people who could read and didn't have a lot of other options, and that was primarily women. So we've had a highly feminized profession, but feminized means both that women do the work, but also that it's devalued because it is women's work.So that helps to explain why we have, for example, still issues around teachers being substantively underpaid, why buildings are in disrepair, and why we say we value education, but we consistently underfund it, and do not treat teachers with the respect I think that they deserve. And I think it's partially because it's mostly women who do that work over time, but it's also why we've created elaborate evaluation techniques to watch these women who need to be controlled and evaluated and observed to ensure they're doing the right thing within the context of schools. But teaching itself has been really situated as primarily a profession of women, and also then around caretaking as a primary driver as opposed to let's say high skills, knowledge capabilities. And academia is the same way. So it was created primarily for men, and therefore not surprising that it's very hard to break in, or deconstruct those ways of thinking about the work.Jill Anderson: How has the pandemic really shifted this? Because this has been a long existing problem, but now we're hearing about it on so many levels and it's getting a lot of attention.Jennie Weiner: Yeah. We're looking at somewhere between 2.5 and 4 million women leaving the workforce between the beginning of the pandemic and February of this year. So just that number is just breathtaking. Now, why? And it's intricately related to the things that we're discussing, right? So if you have professions, and you have, let's say a heterosexual couple, one is a man and one is a woman, and they both were working prior to the pandemic, it is highly likely because of the way discrimination works that the woman was in a lower paid field, or if she was in the same field, she was in a position in which she made less money than her husband.In addition, many of the caretaking responsibilities within the context of the home that are considered to be stereotype female work, childcare, cleaning, scheduling, cooking, are usually taken up by women. So then the school is closed, there's no caretaking, you have young children, somebody has to give up their work in order to make that happen. If this is the parameters under which we make decisions, who's more likely to leave? Clearly the spouse who makes less money is more comfortable, or has been socialized to take on those roles within the context of the house before. And we see that, right? In fact, we actually saw quite a few women who made more money, or had their own professions and jobs, even those women leaving in favor of staying home.And then we also, of course, to talk about this without talking about races, not really appropriate because most of the women who lost their jobs are women of color who were also in service industries, primarily in work that was most risk for catching COVID, whether that be home health care, the service industries, restaurants, cleaning services. And now they're also home and are unable to work, or have to put themselves at risk to facilitate their child, and their family having enough money to survive. So it exposed, I think things that were already there, but that we just never talked about in the public space.Jill Anderson: There were mothers I know who were working in education, who were working as early childhood educators and decided to leave their jobs to be able to accommodate remote learning, or being home with their kids through this time. So definitely hearing that in my own world.Jennie Weiner: Yeah. I think what you're saying is really powerful too, which I think people don't talk about, which is, if you have a profession, both early childcare providers and let's say any kind of childcare provider, and educators who are not childcare providers, but children go to school, is predominantly female. We can imagine that many of them probably have young children themselves. And yet the rhetoric has really been to not discuss that as if these are separate identities. So we say, why aren't the teachers, or the childcare providers doing their job? They should be open, without paying any attention to, if I'm a teacher and I'm supposed to be attending to my class full time, and I have a three-year-old, who's taking care of my three-year-old?Jill Anderson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).Jennie Weiner: And I just feel like in the public discourse around school opening, they're not opening the idea, or understanding that many of these are young women with families who are facing the same challenges that I'm facing is not discussed. And I would just put that to people about how that reinforces our lack of discussion about women's rights and gender equity within the context of our society when we do not attend to that as part of the problem of schools reopening.Jill Anderson: Well, since you've mentioned the, what you've just written about, which is your own experience, in a collection of essays being released looking at pandemic parenting, you talk about that experience of juggling the challenges of parenting while working in academia. So what has it been like for you?Jennie Weiner: Dislocating, discombobulating. So I have twin nine year old boys, both of whom have been home with me for over a year now, now they've had full-time learning, but not in person. I think one of the things that's been so terribly difficult is so much of the gymnastics that I've had to do over the course of my career to simply persist and thrive in a space that's not made for me. So to constantly be in spaces and having to make really tough choices about, should I go to a conference? And then when I get to the conference, people say, well, who is taking care of your kids? Or I'm missing something that's happening at home, and I'm feeling that's really difficult and hard. And I've made so many, what I perceive to be sacrifices in a system that is not made for working mothers, or for people from non-traditional backgrounds in that space. And then to be home all the time and feel like some of that is slipping away, my identity and my ability to thrive in my workspace just gone.And even though I think externally there's a sense that everybody's going through it, and I should just not be so hard on myself, I don't believe that the system will actually excuse women who have taken this time. I think that I have a lot of fear that if I don't keep juggling and pretzeling, that's not something I'm ever going to be able to make up, because, again, I've had to fight so hard just to feel like I had a space at the table. It's difficult to lose something that you feel like you've fought so hard for.Jill Anderson: Yeah. You raised an interesting point because there have been some predictions made about how far this pandemic will definitely set women off course, and it's alarming. We're talking not just like, Oh, this is going to set women off by a couple of years, this is decades of setbacks from just this one year, year and a half, whatever it ends up being.Jennie Weiner: Yeah. Basically like 1970s or something, yeah.Jill Anderson: Which is crazy.Jennie Weiner: It is really crazy. I think it tells you how precarious everything was, and on whoms back the progress had it been made. So because there haven't been attention to, let's say structural and systemic changes to our policies, to issues a place like the ERA for example, the Equal Rights Amendment never passed. The fact that many black and brown women are in low wage jobs and we can't pass a decent minimum wage. The fact that we don't have universal childcare, or universal pre-K. So what happens? Well, women behind the scenes address all those issues behind the scenes. And so every success to a large degree has been on the backs of the people who have been discriminated against, we've elbowed, and we've worked, and we've suffered, and we've done what we needed to do, but individual hard work is not a way to fix systems of oppression, it helps, but you can see, right? Once that fell down and we didn't have any systems to support us, the marbles all fell out of the bag.I only hope, perhaps, that people will remember and understand the veil is off, that depending on women to just do more is not a way to create a just society. And we have to fight for these kinds of systemic changes that are going to make things different regardless of what the future holds in terms of calamity, or change, or whatever the fact may be.Jill Anderson: We've heard a lot about the glass ceiling, especially even recently with Kamala Harris being elected, and a lot of us have heard of that term before, what is the glass cliff?Jennie Weiner: So the glass cliff was brought about by some research by Haslam and Ryan, and they're British researchers. And I read in the newspaper, there was an article about how the FTSE Index, their publicly traded companies, how women were in charge of all the ones that were doing poorly, and therefore women must be poor leaders. They did analysis, and basically what they found was that women were more likely to be leaders within the context of companies that were not doing well, but they were hired once they started to decline. So the idea is that women and people of color, people who are traditionally marginalized from those kinds of leadership opportunities, are given the opportunity to lead, but only when an organization is in decline. And now, of course, that comes with a bunch of other parameters, right? So usually that also means often that you have a highly activist board.So women who end up taking these positions spend far more time catering and having to deal with activist board members than do men. Additionally, when women start to improve the organization, they're not given credit for that. Alternatively, if something that looks like it's doomed to fail, and then they take over fails, they're blamed, and most often a white man is put back into the position after them. I'm actually studying this within the context of education superintendents, but I noticed, for example, I work in Connecticut, there are very few black women principals in a place like Hartford, but when you look at where they're placed, they tend to be placed in most of the turnaround schools, which are the chronically underperforming schools. April Peter speaks about how they're positioned as cleanup women to come in and mop up and clean up the mistakes others have made, but instead of being lauded for that, even when they have success, they're vilified as being difficult, or hard to work with, or aggressive in ways that are not valued, even when they have success in addressing the problems of the organizations. So it's pretty tricky.Jill Anderson: What is the most important thing for a female in education leadership, whether it's K through 12, whether it's in academia?Jennie Weiner: I'm often in places with women leaders, I'm often asked to speak and I facilitate a women superintendents group for the state of Connecticut, I'm so proud and privileged to have that opportunity. I think one thing that often happens is people are upset by hearing these truths. At the same time, because we'd all rather believe, or many people would rather believe that hard work and being really good at what you do could outperform bias, and that's a lie. No matter how good you are, if we live in discriminatory system, that discrimination will raise its head. Now, of course, there's exceptions, there's always exceptions, but on average, across, right? Most women are not exceptions. So what's the benefit of doing it then? Well, the other piece of this is, if you don't have language and understand that there is something systemic happening, then when someone says to you, you don't really have leadership capabilities, or you're not really leadership material, you might believe them. You may actually begin to feel that the problem is you, because you look around and you're not seeing that happening to other people, or nobody's talking about it. And you internalize those feelings of shame and ineffectiveness, and you lay the blame on yourself. And that is terrible. And it's going to get us to come together, it's not going to help facilitate change, it's not going to move us to press, and push, and fight for something better on the horizon for us and other generation of women leaders.And so I think it's a misnomer to say that liberation comes without pain because facing her truths is painful. It is painful to see that I can't out run discrimination, but I cannot be free. I cannot be liberated if I don't see how the system operates, because individuals cannot by themselves change discriminatory systems, we need each other. And the only way we can find each other is if we own up and talk about these experiences and connect them to something larger than ourselves.Jill Anderson: But it doesn't feel like the conversation about gender bias happens as often, which is interesting in lieu of all of the information that we have about females in education.Jennie Weiner: I am concerned about the ways in which gender identity and other forms of identity have not been taken up as part of the larger conversation about DEI efforts, and I wonder how we can have an anti-racist society without addressing patriarchy and vice versa, because patriarchy and white supremacy are intricately linked and both need to be addressed simultaneously for justice to come forward. I do not place one above the other, but I do think we can do hard things and we should, and need to talk about them as intricately linked, and when we don't, we miss quite a bit of the conversation.Jill Anderson: To just backtrack on that, is that intersectional feminism?Jennie Weiner: Part of the critic of the feminist movement was that it was predominantly women like me, upper-middle-class white women, who did not attend to the fact that they have particular privileges regarding that status, right? I'm not a low wage earner. I have documentation, I have particular freedoms and abilities to assert myself in spaces without the same repercussions, and that needs to be owned and understood. So intersectionality is really, really linked with black feminist thought, critical thought, and legal work as well. But the idea is that we have to attend to multiple forms of identity at once, and how that discrimination manifests across the spectrum.So a really concrete example, I think that's useful to think about within the context of education is, we still have very low numbers, but only 6% of principals are black women, which is just crazy, and much of this is actually a result of what happened in the post-brown era when schools integrated and they fired in mass something like 40,000 black educators, because when they integrated schools, they shut down black schools and fired black teachers and administrators, and replaced them with white administrators and teachers, which many people don't talk about, but it's important to our legacy and why we are where we are.So if I was somebody who was interested in trying to recruit more people of color and women into, let's say administrative ranks, the reasons why they are not accessing those historically are different. So if I try to just do it through a white lens, right? So I'm addressing gender, but if I only do it through a white lens, I may not be attending to the ways in which racial discrimination and this legacy is impacting black women's ability to access, feel successful, and how they're treated in the role, right? So the solutions may look different, and the ways in which I engage and think about them may look different because I understand that both of those things matter as do potentially other things that are the ways in which discrimination operates to allow them to have access and thrive in those positions. So I think the lack of attention to that is really, really problematic. And again, those are just a few, right? We could talk about LBGTQ. We know that immigration status, other things that bring about different ways of interacting with systemic oppression, and then, again, how we might attend to that and think about it if we really want things to change.Jill Anderson: So it feels so huge that it can almost feel like it's difficult to know how to take a step toward change. And so even in lieu of the pandemic, which is almost like this dark cloud lingering over it. So what about next steps?Jennie Weiner: On one hand you could say, I feel really overwhelmed because of all the things that you just said. On the other hand, you could say, wow, there's so much work to do, and there's so many different, based on my skills, capabilities, orientation, understandings, I could get involved at so many levels, right? I could get involved in my intimate relationship with my partner and discuss about the balance of work and why things are, and start begin to question that, and that would be, I think, a feminist action. There are ways to be engaged in sisterhood to support women in your place of work, for example, here's just a small one. You go to a meeting frequently and your female colleagues said something, and then five minutes later your male colleague says it and everyone says, Bill, that's a great idea. Thank you for sharing that. I think a lot of women, if they're listening to this, may have had that experience.So you may be with women in your group and speak to them and say, whenever someone says something, we're going to amplify it. So now this time Jill says something wonderful, and then Bill says it, and Bill repeats it, and I said, yes, I loved it when Jill said it five minutes ago. These are small, but I think if we first name things as problematic and situated outside of ourselves, and two, come together around them, right? We can run for office, run for office, if you're listening, run for office, run for your school board, put that in your pocket, understand that issues around fair pay are feminist issues, issues around childcare are feminist issues. Access to healthcare is a feminist issue. Read, study, affiliate, fight.I'm working really hard to try to imagine a future that doesn't look just like trying to get more women look like men, in the sense of, I don't want our future to have to be that women have to take on the attributes of men to feel successful and gain access. I want us to begin to think about a future that's not imagined, or created yet, but to do that, we have to talk to each other like we are now, and tell the truth about how we feel, and about what's hard about it, and that these things are happening to all of us, and that we're in solidarity, and I think that's where change starts to happen.Jill Anderson: Well, thank you so much, Jennie.Jennie Weiner: Thank you. It was so fun.Jill Anderson: Jennie Weiner, is an associate professor of educational leadership at the University of Connecticut. She authored an essay in the forthcoming book, Pandemic Parenting: The Collision of Schoolwork and Life at Home. She will also teach in the upcoming Women in Education Leadership Program as part of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, professional education. I'm Jill Anderson. This is the Harvard EdCast produced by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Thanks for listening. Writer and scholar Eve L. Ewing, Ed.M.’13, Ed.D.’16, wants people to talk, not just about how American schools started, but also how that can inform the future of schools, especially for Black and Native children. She argues that Black and Native children’s schooling experience is more than just a footnote, but a central narrative in history.“From the very first classes that I taught, I always began by telling my students, you cannot understand the history of schools in this country if you don't understand schools for Black people and schools for Native people,” she says. “Those are foundational to understanding the history of American public schooling.”Those historical foundations of American public schooling are the focus of her new book, Original Sins: The (Mis)education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism. Ewing explains that her book was born from a need to unify discussions on these histories, structured around three themes: discipline and punishment, intellectual inferiority, and economic subjugation.The University of Chicago associate professor highlights how the education system has been shaped by racist ideologies, many envisioned by Thomas Jefferson, and have only strengthened racial divisions. Those legacies continue today, with curriculums that downplay darker aspects of American history, and raise deep questions about what is the purpose of school. “There are a lot of unspoken assumptions, uninterrogated assumptions about what makes great education for Black and Native kids in particular, for kids of color of all income backgrounds, that sometimes isn't actually great for them,” she says.She hopes that educators can find meaning by understanding history and possibly find ways to create a new future for schools. “These are long and old systems, but they were created by people, and we are also people, right? And it is also within our power to examine and critique those systems and create new ones,” she says.In this episode, Ewing calls for honest conversations about history, a reevaluation of education’s purpose, and collective action to challenge systemic oppression in schools.TranscriptJILL ANDERSON: I'm Jill Anderson. This is the Harvard EdCast.Eve L. Ewing wants people to recognize the history of education in America is deeply rooted in systems of control, exclusion, and inequality, particularly for Black and Native children. But, she argues, history doesn't have to determine our future. She's an associate professor at the University of Chicago, where she studies schools as social institutions, examining how they construct, normalize, and reinforce social inequality.Her new book, Original Sin, explores how the U.S. school system has reinforced racial hierarchies, conditioning children for inequality. I spoke to her about why schools were designed the way they are and why reforms seem to fail while wanting to know if we can break free from the past. First, I asked what led to this work. EVE L. EWING: I started teaching classes on education in academia about 10 years ago. From the very first classes that I taught, I always began by telling my students, you cannot understand the history of schools in this country if you don't understand schools for Black people and schools for Native people. Those are foundational to understanding the history of American public schooling.And in a lot of classic history of education curricula and books and things like that, people of color in general were kind of like the sidebar or the special chapter or the footnote. And my argument is, this is not just like a separate history; this is the main story, this is the main throughline. And you don't really get the system if you don't get this.I, every year, would teach my courses with these opening sections. And eventually on the syllabus, I started calling them original sins. So, I would say, original sins week 1, original sins week 2. And every year as I revised my curricula, I would ask colleagues, hey, is there a great book or an article or something I can assign that really unifies these topics and brings them together in a coherent way? And there wasn't. And so eventually I said, well, I guess I should write it myself.JILL ANDERSON: How did you approach writing this about both Black and Native experiences in education, given that there are distinct yet interconnected histories of oppression there?EVE L. EWING: The way you put it is a great way to put it-- distinct but interconnected. I think it was very important for me to at no point act as though these histories are interchangeable or the same, or can be kind of blended together, nor do I want them to feel like they're in competition with each other. A lot of times in academic spaces, we get into this competitive sort of scarcity mindset of saying, whose history is the worst? That's not a race to the bottom that I find to be really productive or helpful.And so throughout the book, I knew that I had these kinds of pillars that structure the book. One is the idea of discipline and punishment, so the idea that some people, some children, their bodies require control and that school has to exert control over them. One is the idea of intellectual inferiority, the idea that some people are inherently less intelligent than other people. And the third is the idea of economic subjugation, that some people are always going to be destined to occupy the bottom of the capitalist economic ladder and that school reinforces that and normalizes that.I knew I had these kinds of three tracks, three pillars. I tried my best to draw connections where I saw there as being complementary connections, while never aligning them or mushing them together in a way that felt disrespectful. And I really hope that that is a space to begin a conversation, for people of many different backgrounds to come in and say, wow, I really see these connections here, and let's use that as a basis for action. Let's use that as a basis for political solidarity or for transforming schooling spaces together.JILL ANDERSON: You open with, what's the purpose of schools? And it's simple when you think of it on maybe a personal level, but more complex when you frame it in society. How do you think the historical experience of Black and Native children challenge conventional answers to that question?EVE L. EWING: I love that deceptively simple question. You're someone who's based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and having gone there myself for my doctorate and interacted with lots of different education scholars there and people you have on this podcast and people I see at conferences, it's interesting how different our approaches are to how we think a good school comes into being in ways that often don't really interrogate what we're actually trying to do. And so sometimes we haven't actually answered that question for ourselves. What is the purpose of school? What is a good school? What does school reform mean? What are we actually striving towards? And I think that there are a lot of unspoken assumptions, uninterrogated assumptions about what makes great education for Black and Native kids in particular, for low-income kids of all racial backgrounds, for kids of color of all income backgrounds, that sometimes isn't actually great for them, right?And so to give you an example, let's say that there is a really good school by many metrics. It has a really high graduation rate and really great test scores, and the kids have all kinds of amazing extracurricular activities and whatever the case may be. And if the Black kids in that school are every year more likely to be suspended, more likely to be expelled, or if they're very isolated, or if they never read about their own history in the curriculum, can we fairly say that that is a good school for those students? Hard to say. Just by sitting down and asking yourself, asking people in your community, what is the purpose of school, it can be a really helpful place to begin a conversation. That's where I start my classes every year, is just to have students brainstorm, like, why do we do this? Right? Why do we-- this is one of the few kind of mostly universal, compulsory institutions that people really interact with in our country. So what is it all for?JILL ANDERSON: Your book suggests this idea that no matter how much time goes by, we're still tied to the ideologies of early American leaders like Thomas Jefferson and almost that there's this continuity by design. Why haven't we been able to break free?EVE L. EWING: Yeah, I mean, that's a question that keeps me up at night. But I think that history is very instructive, but it's not predestination. And so a lot of my work is about really trying to fudge the boundaries between the past, present, and the future. And I'm not a big believer in linear time. A lot of my work is in the tradition of Afrofuturism. And so I really think that a lot of our assumptions about time as being inherently progressive are not real, are not true, are not borne out by evidence. But that being said, I don't think that it means that we're doomed to always repeat the same ideologies of the past. I think that how we break free, number one, I think there are always people, always places, always spaces where those acts of resistance and really transformation, ideological transformation are happening all the time, all around us. And so how do we elevate, amplify, join, empower that work? How do we look for it? How do we find it? How do we see it, and how do we strengthen it, I think, is really important.And the other thing is, like, I think we have to have ugly, hard conversations about history, right? I'm clearly not the only one who has that belief, because I also think that if you were to try to mount an authoritarian government and you wanted to disempower people to be able to challenge you, it turns out one of the first and most effective things you do is try to exert really strict controls over what and how and who they teach.I think that people that are not in favor of a more just society, not in favor of an equitable and participatory democracy, not in favor of a transformed social world, they clearly think schools are very powerful. They clearly think educators and students are very powerful because they're trying to do a lot to control them. So I think that that in itself is instructive about the power of beginning with history.JILL ANDERSON: I want to dive in a little bit more about something you write about, which I was really struck by, which is the comparison between many early immigrant groups to America and the Black and Native experience. I think oftentimes, especially from white people, you will hear comparisons to racism-- well, you know, the Irish experienced the same thing, or whoever who came in experienced some discrimination. And you talk about that in the context of schooling and assimilation into white mainstream. Talk about that a little bit, about the differences between this historical immigrant assimilation into American schooling versus what Black and Natives experienced.EVE L. EWING: If you look back historically, you can find evidence of Benjamin Franklin complaining about all the German immigrants, right? Like, oh, there's so many German immigrants that soon we're all going to have to learn to speak German, right, in this disparaging way. And then once the Irish immigrants come, it's like, oh, well, the Germans are great, and they were good and they followed directions. But now the Irish are the foreigners.And when people from Eastern and Southern Europe start coming, it's like, oh, these Italians, they're not the good ones, like the Germans and the Irish were. So there's these successive waves of what Nell Irvin Painter calls these expansions of whiteness, these broadening of whiteness over time.And by the way, many people, myself included, have been taught at different points in their schooling that that path of, like, first you're discriminated against, then you work hard and you assimilate, and then you are like fully participatory in the American project, that that is the natural stepwise order of things. So then the question becomes, why are the people who have been here the longest not included in that same process of belonging?And I think that the reason is that the United States now, in the present, as you and I are having this conversation, is still a country that is founded on racist, genocidal, and enslaving principles and actions. Right? And that is the land that we dwell on, the ongoing exclusion and discrimination of people, but also the ongoing profit motive of companies and people that have benefited from not only formerly enslaved people, but also incarceration as one of the afterlives of slavery.Many people, as we looked recently over the absolutely tragic fires that have happened in California, have started some tough conversations about why the people that are fighting those fires are often incarcerated people being paid so little that it is tantamount to being enslaved, working for free, and then not eligible to come out and get a regular firefighting job after they've been incarcerated. And so our country still is benefiting, resting on the edifices of these thefts. And so therefore, it's really dangerous and kind of inimical to the country itself to potentially include the people who have been victims of that theft. If you tell those people, yes, you are humans just like us, and you have rights, and you belong here, then there are a lot of questions you have to answer about a lot of things and that would erode, again, not only the foundation of the United States of the past, but the United States of the present. So that's very dangerous. And I think that that is the material reason why we don't see some of those same patterns of assimilation.JILL ANDERSON: Many people believe public education has been this great equalizer. But the data we have on school funding, on discipline, on access to resources, on almost everything tells a very different story. What do you think is fueling the disconnect there between perception and reality?EVE L. EWING: I think that people want to believe that the systems that we're a part of are fundamentally just. Because it is discouraging to believe otherwise, and also because the idea of meritocracy and of earning what you have through your own strivings is so deeply baked into American culture and so, so crucial and fundamental to how people think of themselves that it's very frightening to face the contrary possibility.One of my favorite pieces of research, that I was actually first introduced to by John B. Diamond when I was in graduate school, is a work by a sociologist named Thomas Shapiro. He's a white dude, and he interviewed people from many different backgrounds, especially white and Black people from different class backgrounds, about the issue of inheritance. And one of the things he found that's so interesting is he would ask people-- almost exclusively white people who are middle class or affluent, who had inherited something from a family member. He'd ask them, what are some of the things that you inherited? And people would list all these things. Well, my parents helped us pay for law school. They gave us a down payment on our house. They paid for my child's childcare. They paid for my phone. All of these things, sometimes just large cash sums, right? They didn't want me to go into debt, and so gave us this, my mother, my grandmother, my father, and so on and so forth.And we know from all kinds of history that everything from redlining to employment discrimination to the GI Bill to "insert historical fact here," has contributed to the fact that some people have wealth to leave to their heirs and some people don't. And he would then ask them, OK, tell me about how you succeeded in law school, or tell me about how you got this beautiful house that you have. And people would tell him within seconds, oh, we just worked really hard. [LAUGHS] We just worked really hard for it, seemingly unaware of this pretty obvious dissonance between the story that they just told, which is, somebody in my family had some money and they helped me out, and then their own narrative that they worked hard. And it's because it's considered to be immoral, or that you're a bad person or a lesser person if you didn't strive and work for everything that you have. That's so much part of this self-made American mythos.I think that that is really challenging to people. And I think that it's scary and upsetting to think, maybe this isn't all entirely based on my own efforts. And I understand that. But the thing is, the flip side of that is that if we have that illusion, if we have that myth, number one, it's not grounded in fact. But number two, we're lying to people and telling them that their persistent poverty, that they are persistent failures to experience social mobility, are failures of themselves, right? Individual failures, interpersonal failures.And that's something that, in different ways, we give that message to kids at a really young age. And it's messed up, you know? And so I think that even if it's uncomfortable, we have to get a little bit more comfortable with talking about how the system is not equal. It's not fair, and that's OK. It's not OK that it's not fair, but it's OK that you got some privileges that other people don't have. Doesn't make you less of a person.JILL ANDERSON: I find it really interesting when you get into the throes of testing, all the education research, all the data supports that things are inequitable in our schooling system. But you push back a little bit about the testing movement.EVE L. EWING: Well, I think that tests are one tool that we can use to assess what people know in one very limited, one very time-bound context, right? Part of the problem with testing, that people have talked about for a couple generations at this point, is the incredible high stakes that are attached to those tests that disproportionately harm often the communities that have the least resources. But in my book, I wanted to extend the conversation a little bit further back and to say, what are we including in these tests? Why do we do them? What is the actual purpose? And what are some of the presumptions about knowledge, about forms of intelligence, about what we're trying to do when we send kids to school every day, that go uninterrogated and unexamined?One of the things I talk about quite a bit is the IQ test, which people of many different political persuasions and different ideological beliefs often talk about IQ kind of nonchalantly, as though it's just like an objectively real thing. People talk about the notion of giftedness or genius as though these are objectively real things. And once you start learning the history of these tests and looking at some of the content of these tests, it just becomes really hard to defend that argument.One of my favorite things I like to do with my students is to show them examples from the Army Alpha and Beta tests, which were essentially the first standardized tests in the United States. And I include some of the photos and images from them in the book as well. And you see really quickly how some of what is being presented as, quote unquote, "intelligence" is such specific cultural knowledge. And that becomes more obvious from our 21st century vantage point, because we would get a lot of the questions wrong, right? Like question like, what do you do if you're carrying a load of coal on your wagon and your wagon gets stuck in the mud? Like, I don't know, you don't know, but also somebody that just immigrated to the United States from a place where they didn't haul coal, maybe that person also doesn't know. A lot of these things that get passed off as general knowledge or common sense are not so much.And furthermore, one of the things I really think is important to realize is that the people who were the creators of the tests also did not believe that Black and Native people were equivalent in intelligence-- the histories, the predecessors of the contemporary testing movement. And so I just think, again, that's something that we have to talk about. And we have to ask ourselves, what does it mean to continue to be enacting a regime that was created by people that were doing so with often explicitly eugenicist beliefs and aims?JILL ANDERSON: Your work presents a difficult but necessary history, and it may leave many, I'm going to use the word "good faith" educators feeling trapped within an entrenched system. How do you think educators can navigate the tension between recognizing their role in the system and working to change it?EVE L. EWING: I was a classroom teacher. I was a middle-school public school teacher. And so I know what it's like to have to compromise your beliefs. I know what it's like, first of all, to not even have a lot of time to read a long 400-page book and then talk about it with people. It was really important to me to not be wagging my finger at educators or at community members or parents. And also, I don't want people to feel like, OK, well, we're all just doomed from the start and there's nothing to do.Part of why I didn't want to end the book with, like, here's your 10 easy steps that you can take in your school to fix racism, is, number one, to understand that these are long and old systems, but they were created by people, and we are also people, right? And it is also within our power to examine and critique those systems and create new ones. But what I really hope is that educators will start with something specific, something small, and that if there is just one chapter, one page, one paragraph of the book that you read it and you think, ‘Oh, my gosh, I really see the connection with this thing that we've been doing in my school right now-- like the way we line up, the way we do lunch, the way we do homework, the way we do detention, whatever the case may be’-- and to have that as a departure, a point of departure for a conversation and to do that work collectively.In our culture, there's often the myth of the super teacher who comes in and saves everybody's life by themselves, you know? And I really think that this is collective organizing work. And so I understand that feeling of being trapped. But the people who created these systems, they were not gods. They were not special or different than us. They were regular humans just like us. And so if they could create these systems collectively, we have to think about what we are able to create collectively. And we have to start somewhere.JILL ANDERSON: Thank you so much.EVE L. EWING: Thank you. Thank you for the lovely questions.JILL ANDERSON: Eve L. Ewing is an associate professor in the Department of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity at the University of Chicago. She's the author of Original Sins: The (Mis)education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism. I'm Jill Anderson. This is the Harvard EdCast, produced by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Thanks for listening. Context Strategy Results Partners Education is the foundational infrastructure for good jobs and the surest way out of poverty. High-quality early childhood development investments in basic numeracy and literacy, and socio-emotional skills provide the best possible start in life.For individuals, education promotes employment, earnings, health, and poverty reduction. Globally, there is a 9% increase in hourly earnings for every extra year of schooling. For societies, it drives long-term economic growth, spurs innovation, strengthens institutions, and fosters social cohesion. Education is further a powerful catalyst to climate action through widespread behavior change and skilling for green transitions.Developing countries have made tremendous progress in getting children into the classroom and more children worldwide are now in school. But learning is not guaranteed, as the 2018 World Development Report (WDR) stressed.Making smart and effective investments in people’s education is critical for developing the human capital that will end extreme poverty. At the core of this strategy is the need to tackle the learning crisis, put an end to Learning Poverty, and help youth acquire the advanced cognitive, socioemotional, technical and digital skills they need to succeed in today’s world.In low- and middle-income countries, the share of children living in Learning Poverty (that is, the proportion of 10-year-old children that are unable to read and understand a short age-appropriate text) increased from 57% before the pandemic to an estimated 70% in 2022.However, learning is in crisis. More than 70 million more people were pushed into poverty during the COVID pandemic, a billion children lost a year of school, and three years later the learning losses suffered have not been recouped. If a child cannot read with comprehension by age 10, they are unlikely to become fluent readers. They will fail to thrive later in school and will be unable to power their careers and economies once they leave school.The effects of the pandemic are expected to be long-lasting. Analysis has already revealed deep losses, with international reading scores declining from 2016 to 2021 by more than a year of schooling. These losses may translate to a 0.68 percentage point in global GDP growth. The staggering effects of school closures reach beyond learning. This generation of children could lose a combined total of US$21 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value or the equivalent of 17% of today’s global GDP – a sharp rise from the 2021 estimate of a US$17 trillion loss.Action is urgently needed now – business as usual will not suffice to heal the scars of the pandemic and will not accelerate progress enough to meet the ambitions of SDG 4. We are urging governments to implement ambitious and aggressive Learning Acceleration Programs to get children back to school, recover lost learning, and advance progress by building better, more equitable and resilient education systems. Last Updated: Oct 28, 2025 The World Bank’s global education strategy is centered on ensuring learning happens – for everyone, everywhere. Our vision is to ensure that everyone can achieve her or his full potential with access to a quality education and lifelong learning. To reach this, we are helping countries build foundational skills like literacy, numeracy, and socioemotional skills – the building blocks for all other learning. From early childhood to tertiary education and beyond – we help children and youth acquire the skills they need to thrive in school, the labor market and throughout their lives.Investing in the world’s most precious resource – people – is paramount to ending poverty on a livable planet. Our experience across more than 100 countries bears out this robust connection between human capital, quality of life, and economic growth: when countries strategically invest in people and the systems designed to protect and build human capital at scale, they unlock the wealth of nations and the potential of everyone.Building on this, the World Bank supports resilient, equitable, and inclusive education systems that ensure learning happens for everyone. We do this by generating and disseminating evidence, ensuring alignment with policymaking processes, and bridging the gap between research and practice.The World Bank is the largest source of external financing for education in developing countries, with a portfolio of about $26 billion in 94 countries including IBRD, IDA and Recipient-Executed Trust Funds. IDA operations comprise 62% of the education portfolio.The investment in fragile, conflict, or violent (FCV) settings has increased dramatically and now accounts for 26% of our portfolio.World Bank projects reach at least 425 million students -one-third of students in low- and middle-income countries.The World Bank’s Approach to EducationFive interrelated pillars of a well-functioning education system underpin the World Bank’s education policy approach:Learners are prepared and motivated to learn;Teachers are prepared, skilled, and motivated to facilitate learning and skills acquisition;Learning resources

effectively.The World Bank supports initiatives to help countries effectively build and strengthen their measurement systems to facilitate evidence-based decision-making. Examples of this work include:(1) The Global Education Policy Dashboard (GEPD): This tool offers a strong basis for identifying priorities for investment and policy reforms that are suited to each country context by focusing on the three dimensions of practices, policies, and politics.Highlights gaps between what the evidence suggests is effective in promoting learning and what is happening in practice in each system; andAllows governments to track progress as they act to close the gaps.The GEPD has been implemented in 13 education systems already – Peru, Rwanda, Jordan, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sierra Leone, Niger, Gabon, Jordan and Chad – with more expected by the end of 2024.(2) Learning Assessment Platform (LeAP): LeAP is a one-stop shop for knowledge, capacity-building tools, support for policy dialogue, and technical staff expertise to support student achievement measurement and national assessments for better learning.Supporting Successful TeachersHelping systems develop the right selection, incentives, and support to the professional development of teachers.Currently, the World Bank Education Global Practice has over 160 active projects supporting over 18 million teachers worldwide, about a third of the teacher population in low- and middle-income countries. In 12 countries alone, these projects cover 16 million teachers, including all primary school teachers in Ethiopia and Turkey, and over 80% in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Vietnam.A World Bank-developed classroom observation tool, Teach, was designed to capture the quality of teaching in low- and middle-income countries. It is now 3.6 million students.While Teach helps identify patterns in teacher performance, Coach leveraged these insights to support teachers to improve their teaching practice through hands-on in-service teacher professional development (TPD).Our report on Making Teacher Policy Work proposes a practical framework to uncover the black box of effective teacher policy and discusses the factors that enable their scalability and sustainability. Supporting Education Finance SystemsStrengthening country financing systems to mobilize resources for education and make better use of their investments in education.Our approach is to bring together multi-sectoral expertise to engage with ministries of education and finance and other stakeholders to develop and implement effective and efficient public financial management systems; build capacity to monitor and evaluate education spending, identify financing bottlenecks, and develop interventions to strengthen financing systems; build the evidence base on global spending patterns and the magnitude and causes of spending inefficiencies; and develop diagnostic tools as public goods to support country efforts.Working in Fragile, Conflict, and Violent (FCV) ContextsThe massive and growing global challenge of having so many children living in conflict and violent situations requires a response at the same scale and scope. Our education engagement in the Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) context, which stands at US$5.35 billion, has grown rapidly in recent years, reflecting the ever-increasing importance of the FCV agenda in education. Indeed, these projects now account for more than 25% of the World Bank education portfolio.Education is crucial to minimizing the effects of fragility and displacement on the welfare of youth and children in the short-term and preventing the emergence of violent conflict in the long-term. Last Updated: Oct 28, 2025 Support to Countries Throughout the Education CycleOur support to countries covers the entire learning cycle, to help shape resilient, equitable, and inclusive education systems that ensure learning happens for everyone. The ongoing Supporting Egypt Education Reform project, 2018-2025, supports transformational reforms of the Egyptian education system, by improving teaching and learning conditions in public schools. The World Bank has invested $500 million in the project focused on increasing access to quality kindergarten, enhancing the capacity of teachers and education leaders, developing a reliable student assessment system, and introducing the use of modern technology for teaching and learning. Specifically, the share of Egyptian 10-year-old students, who could read and comprehend at the global minimum proficiency level, increased to 45 percent in 2021.In Nigeria, the $75 million Edo Basic Education Sector and Skills Transformation (EdoBESST) project, running from 2020-2024, is focused on improving teaching and learning in basic education. Under the project, which covers 97 percent of schools in the state, there is a strong focus on incorporating digital technologies for teachers. They were equipped with handheld tablets with structured lesson plans for their classes. Their coaches use classroom observation tools to provide individualized feedback. Teacher absence has reduced drastically because of the initiative. Over 16,000 teachers were trained through the project, and the introduction of technology has also benefited students.Through the $235 million School Sector Development Program in Nepal (2017-2022), the number of children staying in school until Grade 12 nearly tripled, and the number of out-of-school children fell by almost seven percent. During the pandemic, innovative approaches were needed to continue education. Mobile phone penetration is high in the country. More than four in five households in Nepal have mobile phones. The project supported an educational service that made it possible for children with phones to connect to local radio that broadcast learning programs.From 2017-2023, the $50 million Strengthening of State Universities in Chile project has made strides to improve quality and equity at state universities. The project helped reduce dropout: the third-year dropout rate fell by almost 10 percent from 2018-2022, keeping more students in school.The World Bank's first Program-for-Results financing in education was through a $202 million project in Tanzania, that ran from 2013-2021. The project linked funding to results and aimed to improve education quality. It helped build capacity, and enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in the education sector. Through the project, learning outcomes significantly improved alongside an unprecedented expansion of access to education for children in Tanzania. From 2013-2019, an additional 1.8 million students enrolled in primary schools. In 2019, the average reading speed for Grade 2 students rose to 22.3 words per minute, up from 17.3 in 2017. The project laid the foundation for the ongoing $500 million BOOST project, which supports over 12 million children to enroll early, develop strong foundational skills, and complete a quality education.The $40 million Cambodia Secondary Education Improvement project, which ran from 2017-2022, focused on strengthening school-based management, upgrading teacher qualifications, and building classrooms in Cambodia, to improve learning outcomes, and reduce student dropout at the secondary school level. The project has directly benefited almost 70,000 students in 100 target schools, and approximately 2,000 teachers and 600 school administrators received training.The World Bank is co-financing the $152.80 million Yemen Restoring Education and Learning Emergency project, running from 2020-2024, which is implemented through UNICEF, WFP, and Save the Children. It is helping to maintain access to basic education for many students, improve learning conditions in schools, and is working to strengthen overall education sector capacity. In the time of crisis, the project is supporting teacher payments and teacher training, school meals, school infrastructure development, and the distribution of learning materials and school supplies. To date, almost 600,000 students have benefited from these interventions.The $87 million Providing an Education of Quality in Haiti project supported approximately 380 schools in the Southern region of Haiti from 2016-2023. Despite a highly challenging context of political instability and recurrent natural disasters, the project successfully supported access to education for students. The project provided textbooks, fresh meals, and teacher training support to 70,000 students, 3,000 teachers, and 300 school directors. It gave tuition waivers to 35,000 students in 118 non-public schools. The project also repaired 19 national schools damaged by the 2021 earthquake, which gave 5,500 students safe access to their schools again.In 2013, just 5% of the poorest households in Uzbekistan had children enrolled in preschools. Thanks to the Improving Pre-Primary and General Secondary Education Project, by July 2019, around 100,000 children will have benefitted from the half-day program in 2,420 rural kindergartens, comprising around 49% of all preschool educational institutions, or over 90% of rural kindergartens in the country. Last Updated: Oct 28, 2025 In addition to working closely with governments in our client countries, the World Bank also works at the global, regional, and local levels with a range of technical partners, including foundations, non-profit organizations, bilaterals, and other multilateral organizations. Some examples of our most recent global partnerships include:UNICEF, UNESCO, FCDO, USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation: Coalition for Foundational LearningThe World Bank is working closely with UNICEF, UNESCO, FCDO, USAID, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as the Coalition for Foundational Learning to advocate and provide technical support to ensure foundational learning. The World Bank works with these partners to promote and endorse the Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning, a global network of countries committed to halving the global share of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10 by 2030.Australian Aid, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Canada, Echida Giving, FCDO, German Cooperation, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, Conrad Hilton Foundation, LEGO Foundation, Porticus, USAID: Early Learning PartnershipThe Early Learning Partnership (ELP) is a multi-donor trust fund, housed at the World Bank. ELP leverages World Bank strengths—a global presence, access to policymakers and strong technical analysis—to improve early learning opportunities and outcomes for young children around the world.We help World Bank teams and countries get the information they need to make the case to invest in Early Childhood Development (ECD), design effective policies and deliver impactful programs. At the country level, ELP grants provide teams with resources for early seed investments that can generate large financial commitments through World Bank finance and government resources. At the global level, ELP research and special initiatives work to fill knowledge gaps, build capacity and generate public goods.UNESCO, UNICEF: Learning Data CompactUNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank have joined forces to close the learning data gaps that still exist and that preclude many countries from monitoring the quality of their education systems and assessing if their students are learning. The three organizations have agreed to a Learning Data Compact, a commitment to ensure that all countries, especially low-income countries, have at least one quality measure of learning by 2025, supporting coordinated efforts to strengthen national assessment systems.UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS): Learning Poverty IndicatorAimed at measuring and urging attention to foundational literacy as a prerequisite to achieve SDG4, this partnership was launched in 2019 to help countries strengthen their learning assessment systems, better monitor what students are learning in internationally comparable ways and improve the breadth and quality of global data on education.FCDO, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation: EdTech HubSupported by the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the EdTech Hub is aimed at improving the quality of ed-tech investments. The Hub launched a rapid response Helpdesk service to provide just-in-time advisory support to 70 low- and middle-income countries planning education technology and remote learning initiatives.MasterCard FoundationOur Tertiary Education and Skills global program, launched with support from the Mastercard Foundation, aims to prepare youth and adults for the future of work and society by improving access to relevant, quality, equitable reskilling and post-secondary education opportunities. It is designed to reframe, reform, and rebuild tertiary education and skills systems for the digital and green transformation. Last Updated: Oct 28, 2025 The Ph.D. in Education requires five years of full-time study to complete. You will choose your individual coursework and design your original research in close consultation with your HGSE faculty adviser and dissertation committee. The requirements listed below include the three Ph.D. concentrations: Culture, Institutions, and Society; Education Policy and Program Evaluation; and Human Development, Learning and Teaching. We invite you to review an example course list, which is provided in two formats — one as the full list by course number and one by broad course category. These lists are subject to modification. Ph.D. Concentrations and ExamplesSummary of Ph.D. ProgramDoctoral Colloquia In year one and two you are required to attend. The colloquia convenes weekly and features presentations of work-in-progress and completed work by Harvard faculty, faculty and researchers from outside Harvard, and Harvard doctoral students. Ph.D. students present once in the colloquia over the course of their career.Research ApprenticeshipThe Research Apprenticeship is designed to provide ongoing training and mentoring to develop your research skills throughout the entire program.Teaching FellowshipsThe Teaching Fellowship is an opportunity to enhance students' teaching skills, promote learning consolidation, and provide opportunities to collaborate with faculty on pedagogical development.Comprehensive Exams The Written Exam (year 2, spring) tests you on both general and concentration-specific knowledge. The Oral Exam (year 3, fall/winter) tests your command of your chosen field of study and your ability to design, develop, and implement an original research project.Dissertation Based on your original research, the dissertation process consists of three parts: the Dissertation Proposal, the writing, and an oral defense before the members of your dissertation committee. Culture, Institutions, and Society (CIS) Concentration In CIS, you will examine the broader cultural, institutional, organizational, and social contexts relevant to education across the lifespan. What is the value and purpose of education? How do cultural, institutional, and social factors shape educational processes and outcomes? How effective are social movements and community action in education reform? How do we measure stratification and institutional inequality? In CIS, your work will be informed by theories and methods from sociology, history, political science, organizational behavior and management, philosophy, and anthropology. You can examine contexts as diverse as classrooms, families, neighborhoods, schools, colleges and universities, religious institutions, nonprofits, government agencies, and more. Education Policy and Program Evaluation (EPPE) Concentration In EPPE, you will research the design, implementation, and evaluation of education policy affecting early childhood, K–12, and postsecondary education in the U.S. and internationally. You will evaluate and assess individual programs and policies related to critical issues like access to education, teacher effectiveness, school finance, testing and accountability systems, school choice, financial aid, college enrollment and persistence, and more. Your work will be informed by theories and methods from economics, political science, public policy, and sociology, history, philosophy, and statistics. This concentration shares some themes with CIS, but your work with EPPE will focus on public policy and large-scale reforms. Human Development, Learning and Teaching (HDLT) Concentration In HDLT, you will work to advance the role of scientific research in education policy, reform, and practice. New discoveries in the science of learning and development — the integration of biological, cognitive, and social processes; the relationships between technology and learning; or the factors that influence individual variations in learning — are transforming the practice of teaching and learning in both formal and informal settings. Whether studying behavioral, cognitive, or social-emotional development in children or the design of learning technologies to maximize understanding, you will gain a strong background in human development, the science of learning, and sociocultural factors that explain variation in learning and developmental pathways. Your research will be informed by theories and methods from psychology, cognitive science, sociology and linguistics, philosophy, the biological sciences and mathematics, and organizational behavior. The most remarkable thing about the Ph.D. in Education is open access to faculty from all Harvard graduate and professional schools, including the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the Harvard Kennedy School, the Harvard Law School, Harvard Medical School, and the Harvard School of Public Health. Learn about the full Ph.D. Faculty. The role of artificial intelligence (AI) in education continues to change as teachers and parents learn how it can be used in classrooms and other learning environments. For Assistant Professor Ying Xu, studying its impact and possibilities has become essential to her research.Xu, who believes this is a “critical moment for us to emphasize evidence-based research,” has delivered new research in recent months regarding AI’s impact on children and learning. She recently co-authored a study detailing how children perceive their interactions with generative AI, and another exploring how AI-powered chatbots can help bilingual student learning and parent-child dialogues.While AI’s advances can create enormous potential for learning, the goal for Xu is to explore how the technology can make better use of existing learning time rather than replace other activities.“Rather than aiming to ‘introduce’ AI to children — which could take away from valuable time with their families or outdoor play — our starting question is always, Can AI make the time children already spend on media more enriching and engaging?” says Xu, who joined HGSE in 2024. One recent study looked at how AI-enabled TV characters can interact with students and how digital media use impacts language development in early childhood. As that work has weighed what’s possible with AI and how these students perceive the tools they’re learning with, Xu points more to what AI can enhance in a student’s learning ecosystem.“I think that a lot of the worries and concerns we have are mostly based on replacement. We think about what kids lose if they engage with AI: They’re losing out on interacting with students, they’re losing out on this productive struggle,” explains Xu. “But what I see is addition, and what AI could add to students’ everyday learning landscape.”Below, Xu details how her educational research began to explore how artificial intelligence impacts learning and why she feels the technology can be harnessed to improve student outcomes.When did AI become the focus of your educational research?I started doing research on AI’s impact on education before it became as prominent in the public sphere as it is today. It stemmed from my earlier research on how children learn from educational media in general, including television, interactive apps, and electronic books. I observed how children interacted with these technologies, measured their learning, and explored if these technologies brought about meaningful benefits.I walked away feeling that there was still room for improvement — I wondered whether technology could better support the rich, interactive learning that happens in natural social settings, such as with teachers, caregivers, or peers. That was why devices powered by conversational AI, like Siri and Alexa, caught my attention as they introduced technology capable of enabling natural dialogue. What if we could leverage this capability and turn it into focused educational opportunities? We used evidence-based instructional approaches to explore this question, to see if AI could simulate those instructions in reading, science learning, and creative activities. And we found that in many cases, AI could be quite effective. "That’s why we need to shift the narrative — not by asking how we can fit AI into education, but by starting with the end goal: What learning outcomes do we want to achieve, and can AI meaningfully contribute to them?" Then, as you know, the introduction of ChatGPT brought AI to the forefront of public discussion. On top of that, the most widely used AI products are typically designed for general purposes rather than being specifically created for education or children. This has added urgency to the research, as families, educational systems, and policymakers now face many pressing questions. At the same time, it has pushed much of the research beyond lab settings and into real-world environments that are evolving rapidly.How do you navigate the question of the possibilities of AI to aid learning versus what the technology can do right now?I think this is a critical moment for us to emphasize evidence-based research more than ever. With all the excitement around AI, it’s easy to get caught up in using it just for the sake of it. That’s why we need to shift the narrative — not by asking how we can fit AI into education, but by starting with the end goal: What learning outcomes do we want to achieve, and can AI meaningfully contribute to them?Most of my research has focused on children. Rather than aiming to “introduce” AI to children — which could take away from valuable time with their families or outdoor play — our starting question is always, Can AI make the time children already spend on media more enriching and engaging?Let me give you an example: Think about television. On the one hand, TV is one of the most accessible educational resources for children. On the other hand, it may not be the most effective way for them to learn, as it primarily delivers information in a one-way format, while research consistently shows that children learn better through interactive engagement. To bridge this gap, we collaborated with PBS Kids to integrate AI into their programs, allowing children to have science-related conversations with media characters as they watch TV.When evaluating whether this approach works, we focus on the important learning outcomes: Are children acquiring science concepts? Are they developing a curiosity-driven mindset to explore the world around them? Through a series of studies, we found that AI can, in fact, amplify learning opportunities in everyday media use. For example, by enabling interactive dialogues with TV characters, we observed significant improvements in children’s scientific reasoning and engagement. These findings reinforce the idea that AI’s role in education should not be about replacing traditional learning experiences but about enhancing them in ways that are backed by research.That speaks to something you mentioned at the Askwith Education Forum last fall, which is that AI is just another tool, one that can bring positive change when used correctly.Yes, there has been much debate — and even fear — about whether AI will replace educators. To be fair, these concerns are not unfounded. Data shows that AI tutors can indeed successfully mimic certain behaviors of human educators. In some cases, evidence suggests that children achieve similar scores whether coached by an AI tutor or a human tutor. However, while this evidence highlights AI’s potential, it does not justify the conclusion that AI can replace human teachers.We need to recognize that learning and development occur through a long and complex process. It is not just about receiving information — something AI might be good at — but also about social interactions, building trust, and forming relationships, all of which are crucial to a child's growth. These fundamental aspects of education are challenging for AI to replicate. "Yes, there has been much debate — and even fear — about whether AI will replace educators. To be fair, these concerns are not unfounded." Ultimately, the question is not whether AI or human teachers are better but how they can work together to improve education. AI could bring automation, access to information, and efficiency, while human educators offer subject matter expertise, experience, and personal connection and support that students need to thrive.It’s a really fascinating time to study AI and how it can have an impact on students. What kinds of questions are you trying to answer when you pursue research on how AI impacts education?There are different layers to how we can approach this issue.The first area is to understand the phenomenon — how students are engaging with AI, what specific tasks they use it for, and under what circumstances. This also involves exploring questions such as what motivates children to use AI and what goals they seek to achieve. Such research could provide a baseline description of how AI is integrated into students' learning experiences.The second layer of research focuses on the impact of AI on student engagement and learning. The key question is whether AI improves learning or developmental outcomes compared to traditional methods or other educational resources. To answer this, we need comparison studies where one group of students uses AI while another learns without it. We can then determine whether AI provides measurable benefits and in what ways. We should also focus on potential negative consequences, such as over-trust or reliance.The third layer focuses on how we can maximize the benefits AI can bring, including different ways AI is designed and implemented. For example, questions arise about whether AI code-switches based on children's home language or engages them in multimodal interactions that encourage multiple forms of engagement. It also involves considering instructional activities that complement AI usage — for instance, determining at which stage of learning AI might be most beneficial. This line of research has direct implications for both design and practice.I think that by addressing these issues, we will be in a good position not only to significantly deepen our understanding of AI’s role in education but also to identify actionable strategies for its effective implementation. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the federal government's first general foray into public K–12 education. Since then, the government's involvement in education policy has come to seem a given, part of a recognizable landscape marked by familiar signposts such as Head Start, Title I, and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Tracing ESEA from its earliest days through its various reauthorizations over the years (of which NCLB is the most recent) reveals a rich history of debate around education issues that continues to capture headlines. And it would be impossible to tell the story of ESEA without citing the involvement of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, beginning with the act's architect, U.S. Commissioner of Education Francis ("Frank") Keppel. A Time cover story from October 1965 describes Keppel as a "dark, slight, intense bolt of activity. In three short years in Washington, [he] has changed the Office of Education from custodian of highly forgettable statistics to the nation's most energetic nerve center of academic ferment." Before serving in Washington, however, Keppel was appointed dean of the Ed School in 1948 at the unheard-of age of 32. He lacked a graduate degree, or any coursework in education, but that mattered little to James Conant, Harvard University's president. In Keppel, Conant saw an innovative thinker who would bring a new direction to the School."Education is too important to be left solely to educators," Keppel once said, and his tenure at the Ed School was marked by a number of faculty appointments from disciplines outside of the field. Keppel remained dean of the Ed School until he was called to Washington in 1962. "Frank put the School on the map," says Ted Sizer, a former HGSE dean himself who is currently a visiting professor from Brown. "With Conant's help he raised money and attracted good people by being unconventional. Frank recruited people who were not predictable, who were interested in education and had a kind of chutzpah." That same creative approach would mark Keppel's work on crafting ESEA, as well as the political maneuvering required to make it a reality. Appointed Commissioner of Education by President John F. Kennedy in 1962, Keppel entered an office that, in his words, "was regarded as a scut job with low standing and low reputation.The Office of Education was seen as a place to collect statistics and crank out a few formulas." He made the move to Washington nonetheless, where a political environment suspicious of any federal involvement in education confronted him. "The most significant condition that existed when Frank went into this was a state of gridlock," says Gordon Ambach, M.A.T.'57, C.A.S.'65, whose five-decade career in education policy includes posts in the state and federal government from the Eisenhower Administration onward. "There were very strong conflicts among the different advocacy groups about what should be done in the Kennedy years," he adds. Some feared that federal funds would be directed to parochial schools, a concern heightened by the fact that Kennedy was Catholic.The second battle, Ambach notes,was over the use of federal aid in districts with segregated schools. "This was after Brown v.the Board of Education but before the Civil Rights Act of 1964," says Ambach. "One of the key Congressional leaders on this matter was Adam Clayton Powell, who was chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Education. He added a ‘Powell amendment' to any piece of legislation that specified that federal money could not be used to fund segregated districts.The Senate would not accept any legislation with that provision. So it was a stalemate." Aside from being an "intense bolt of activity," Keppel by all accounts was gifted at building coalitions and putting people at ease. "He was a marvelous raconteur, he had a wonderful sense of humor, and he could charm the socks off you," recalls Patricia Albjerg Graham, a historian of American education and dean of the Ed School from 1982 to 1991. "Yet all of that charm covered a steely commitment to improve the circumstances of children who were not born as fortunately as he." After Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson made education and civil rights the foundation of his War on Poverty. Johnson promised Powell that the Civil Rights Act would be enacted in the spring of 1964; with that commitment in hand, Congress swiftly passed the Vocational Education Act and the Higher Education Facilities Act in December 1963.The legislative logjam was broken, clearing the way for further policy innovations. Mandating desegregation neutralized some of the controversy around federal aid to segregated schools--if the law was upheld, it was just a matter of time until schools were somehow integrated. The other sticking point--funding for sectarian, non-public schools--was circumvented through the creation of Title I, "Education of Children of Low Income Families." In a complex yet constitutional process, Title I funds provided services to students in parochial schools through funds granted to the public school districts.The public districts--in addition to taking care of their own students--also purchased books and hired teachers for the parochial school students. Due to the fact that publicly elected officials controlled the federal monies at all times, the separation of church and state was maintained. "Title I was clearly one of the most significant provisions of ESEA," says Gordon Ambach. "That legislation was designed so that children in need at both public and nonpublic schools were served.That central concept is on the books today, 40 years later." In addition to Title I, four sections of ESEA directed funds to school libraries, supplemental services, research, and state departments of education. "ESEA was a political masterpiece, outside of its effect on education," remarks Sizer. "Everybody had a finger in the pie." The Senate approved ESEA on April 11, 1965, without proposing a single additional amendment. In the two years following the passage of ESEA, the U.S. Office of Education's annual budget for some 27,000 school districts jumped from $1.5 billion to $4 billion, marking the federal government's definitive entry into public education. While Keppel designed and built ESEA, the commissioner who succeeded him in late 1965, Harold ("Doc") Howe II, oversaw the complexities of its administration. Howe, later a senior lecturer at the Ed School from 1982 to 1994, and his colleague, David Sealey, faced the daunting task of verifying that schools receiving federal aid were indeed abiding by desegregation laws. Howe's strong stance on enforcing desegregation earned the ire of more than a few politicians who didn't care for what they saw as outright government interference in local matters. In a speech on the House floor, Representative L. Mendel Rivers of South Carolina said Howe "talks like a Communist. That's why some of us who know him call him the Commissar of Education. The President should fire him." Other derisive terms used by Howe's detractors include: "unwarranted," "illegal," "highhanded," and "tyrannical." By all accounts, however, he weathered the storm with admirable resolve. In a 1966 address before the Alabama State Advisory Committee's Civil Rights Commission, Howe said: "We are not bent on withholding or deferring funds. Any district that is not in compliance seems to us to represent a defeat. Our failure arises from our inability to have helped achieve voluntary compliance under the law of this land. The failure of the schools arises from their determination to cling to a position--a position clearly prohibited under the Constitution of the United States--that threatens the opportunities of children to receive the best possible education." Gary Orfield, professor of education and social policy at HGSE, worked closely with Howe on the desegregation of the San Francisco school district. Orfield, who is codirector of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, recalls Howe as "a person with deep ideals and a passionate commitment to civility and thoughtfulness. He listened and tried to bring people together, but there was a strong resolve underneath all of that." "Keppel and Howe were absolutely central to the desegregation of the South...The South had the stick of the Civil Rights Act but they also had the carrot of ESEA, which was a huge boon to poor southern school districts."–Gary Orfield, professor of education and social policy "Keppel and Howe were absolutely central to the desegregation of the South," continues Orfield, whose book The Reconstruction of Southern Education: The Schools and the 1964 Civil Rights Act chronicles that period. "The South had the stick of the Civil Rights Act but they also had the carrot of ESEA, which was a huge boon to poor southern school districts." Today, Orfield's work with the Harvard Civil Rights Project seeks to keep civil rights issues front and center at a timewhen many desegregation orders are being slowly phased out. "My concern is that we've gone from a period from the 1960s to the 1980s when issues of poverty, race, and educational opportunity were tied together effectively and we were seeing a decline in the achievement gap between white and minority students to a time when we're creating policy as if race doesn't exist. We're putting more demands on the schools as they're becoming more segregated." Not long after ESEA was enacted, Congress commissioned the Coleman Report, in which Johns Hopkins professor James Coleman studied 600,000 children at 4,000 schools in order to understand the extent of education inequality in the United States. Coleman's 1966 report concluded that a child's early years at home had a significant impact on later performance in school and that an achievement gap existed between blacks and whites despite similarities in their teachers' training, salaries, and curriculum. Coleman's findings created immediate reverberations in the world of education policy.At the Ed School, a University-wide faculty seminar launched by Professor of Education and Urban Politics Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Harvard social psychologist Thomas Pettigrew sought to analyze the report with an eye to how the information could be used to shape future policy. "It was an extraordinary body of data we were looking at," says Marshall ("Mike") Smith, Ed.M.'63, Ed.D.'70, a former Ed School faculty member who now serves as program director for education at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. "People were fascinated. At that point Title I was seen as the real savior of ESEA, although the report raised some questions as to its effectiveness. We were hopeful that its importance would bear out." In 1968, building on the foundation of the Coleman seminar, Smith, Christopher Jencks, and David Cohen became the core faculty for the Center for Educational Policy Research, one of the School's first formal initiatives in the field. While Title I remains a central tenet of ESEA, various reauthorizations over the years have modified the legislation or incorporated entirely new objectives.Tracing a few of the policy developments in ESEA reveals the living, breathing quality of education policy--as slowly as it may seem to take shape for those laboring over the minute details of its construction.As the primary policy contact for the education commissioner, then as undersecretary of education, Smith worked on the 1978 and 1994 ESEA reauthorizations under the Carter and Clinton administrations. Smith recalls that the 1972 reauthorization over-legislated against a misuse of funds that occurred after passage of the original ESEA, which resulted in the evolution of Title I into a pullout program. "Kids who were identified as in need of help were being pulled out of classes to get special instruction by an aide, who was often less well trained than the teacher," he says. "The teacher wouldn't know how the student was doing, and the program was having negative effects." As part of the 1978 reauthorization, Smith and others rewrote the legislation so that a significant portion of Title I funds were dedicated to a whole school program that would improve the overall quality of instruction. "That was an important movement," notes Smith. "It presaged the work on effective schools that started in the late 1970s and 1980s and is still taking place in many cases." Johnson, Gardner, Keppel, and Howe Smith and other Democrats successfully fought attempts to transform ESEA into a block grant program in the 1983 and 1989 reauthorizations under the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations. The Clinton era saw the early development of standards-based reform through bills like Goals 2000. "At that point most states did not have anything in place that we now think of as standards," Smith says. "The fundamental idea was that in order to have an efficient system, it was necessary to align resources around some goals, and that the standards would set the goals so that some measurement of progress could take place. This is not rocket science. The extraordinary thing is that now all states have standards and it's completely accepted." The 1994 reauthorization rewrote ESEA with the idea that every state would create a standards-based system applicable to all students, including those who qualified under Title I. "The new version made it explicit that Title I kids would be measured by the same standards as others," notes Smith. "If a teacher walks into a classroom with lower expectations for certain students, there's no chance." Boston Public Schools Superintendent Thomas Payzant, Ed.D.'68, worked on the 1994 reauthorization as Clinton's assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education. As a firsttimer in Washington, Payzant knew his arrival would be greeted with some skepticism; after getting into the nitty-gritty of policy work with various staffers and committees, however, his particular strengths became clear. "People appreciated having a practitioner take a leading role in the development of legislation. I used my experience to explain the impact particular legislation would have on schools and districts," says Payzant, who began his teaching career at Belmont (Mass.) High School and went on to serve as superintendent of four districts across the country. Payzant recalls plenty of push-back on Goals 2000, despite the fact that it placed responsibility for setting standards with states, not the federal government. "It's ironic to think about that now, given the approach the current administration has taken with NCLB," he remarks. "The underlying policy direction of NCLB is consistent with the 1994 reauthorization, but there's a level of prescription with respect to implementation that we would have been soundly criticized for trying to accomplish, had we done so." "Originally, ESEA said that states should pay attention to poor children and work with their parents, which was a big change, but it didn't say,‘Teach such-and-such and we're going to test you on such-and-such.' NCLB is a much more radical intervention," notes Gary Orfield. "ESEA and the Civil Rights Act forced a change in terms of who could get into which school--but they did not determine what a student would learn inside that school." As the former executive director of the Tennessee State Board of Education, Douglas Wood, Ed.D.'00, spent a great deal of time fielding questions about NCLB from teachers, parents, and legislators. Aside from explaining the legislation to others, Wood and his colleagues were charged with bridging the gap between Tennessee's current standards-based testing requirements and those of the federal government. "It was a very complicated process, but it was a tremendous opportunity to get involved in complex policy issues," says Wood, who now serves as executive director of the National Academy for Excellent Teaching at Columbia's Teachers College. "The ethos and rationale behind NCLB is a good thing, because it places a higher degree of focus on the issue of educational equity...But the way it's been implemented is a different story. The fact of the matter is, it's easier to base an entire accountability system on a test; but that's not necessarily the best policy."–Douglas Wood, Ed.D.'00 "The ethos and rationale behind NCLB is a good thing, because it places a higher degree of focus on the issue of educational equity," adds Wood. "But the way it's been implemented is a different story. The fact of the matter is, it's easier to base an entire accountability system on a test; but that's not necessarily the best policy. It's much more difficult to develop a comprehensive approach that really gets at what kids know and are able to achieve." Wood, who began his career as a social studies and history teacher in South Carolina, says he didn't really understand the impact of policy on what he did in the classroom until U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley invited him to Washington in 1993 to write the guidelines and serve as chief reviewer for the department's new Technology Innovation Challenge Grants program. His interest piqued, he applied to the Ed School for further training. "What drew me to the Ed School was that it focuses on bridging practice, research, and policy," Wood says. "It was a three-pronged view that I didn't see in many other places, and when I got to Tennessee as a policymaker that preparation served me very, very well." The question of whether NCLB will remain in its current format or undergo further revision is open for discussion. If ESEA's history is any indication, however, it would seem that some amount of tinkering with the act's regulations will take place in the future. Being part of that process is no doubt foremost in the mind of any Ed School graduate involved in education policy. Given the often frustratingly slow pace of policy work, however, what rewards can it offer over the more immediate, day-to-day feedback of the classroom? "The common denominator I see in my students is that they're impatient--they realize that they can only affect one wave of kids at a time in the classroom," says HGSE lecturer on education Robert Schwartz, director of the Education Policy and Management Program. "They see the larger social inequalities in society and want to find a role with the leverage to affect more people. You give up the satisfaction of affecting lives in a direct and visible way in return for having an impact--even if it can be slow at times--on larger groups of people." Schwartz, who has served in government as an advisor to Boston mayor Kevin White and Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, has also worked as director of education grants at The Pew Charitable Trusts and as president of Achieve, Inc., a nonprofit organization created to help states improve their schools. One of the biggest changes in education policy since ESEA was enacted is that there are many more actors in the field, says Schwartz. "It's a more complicated system, with more points of leverage," he remarks. "You can work for a big-city mayor, a governor, a legislative committee, the Department of Education, or a whole array of local and nonprofit organizations. So it's a much richer field today. And there's still a lot to do." About the Article A version of this article originally appeared in the Summer 2005 issue of Ed., the magazine of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Listening to the CommunityAt another municipal school, Criança Feliz, there is another monitoring system called Indique, which caters to early childhood education and is also supported by Salvador Social. Indique is a self-assessment tool that brings together teachers, principals, and families to foster collective reflection, address demands, make decisions, initiate change processes, and solve problems, all with the goal of improving the quality of care for children."Indique was created by the Ministry of Education, Salvador adapted it to its reality, and now, after the pandemic, this work is spreading throughout Brazil," says Salles proudly.In 2024, about 220 schools participated in the assessment, and another 150 are expected to join by 2026.According to the students' families, Indique offers the opportunity to be heard. "We are participative. Indique asks meaningful questions and gives us the chance to talk about what we need," agree housewife Carine Gonçalves and security guard Paulo Victor Souza (pictured above), parents of 4-year-old Yuri. "My son came from a private school, where he faced prejudice for being autistic. Here he was very well received and is even developing more than in therapy," says his mother emotionally.To further improve the school, Carine and Paulo Victor proposed a multifunctional room with specific equipment and services for neurodivergent or disabled people, showers, and air conditioning."I consider Indique very important for the network and the school because it is the moment when we can be evaluated. We have to be open to criticism because we are constantly learning," says Lídice Vilas Boas Rodrigues, principal of the Criança Feliz Municipal School. "It is not always up to us, the school, to solve the demands raised by parents, but we forward them all to the Education Department," she adds."A common denominator in all of Salvador's initiatives is the following: actions in primary education mainly aim to develop students' potential, either through identification (PROSA) or by addressing learning gaps (PAAP, 'Chegando Junto'). Meanwhile, actions in early childhood education, by strengthening quality monitoring, lay the foundation for children to be literate at the appropriate age and have a successful school trajectory," comments Louisee Cruz, World Bank education specialist.There is still much to be done, but now Salvador and its families have a solid set of data and information, as well as support programs that allow them to act with specific goals and help each student develop their potential. The world is facing a longstanding global learning and skills crisis. Over half of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand an age-appropriate text, and 87 percent of them are in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2024, 251 million children and young people were out of school, and as of 2023, 468 million lived in a conflict zone (UNESCO UIS). Two thirds of school age children (approx. 1.3 billion globally) do not have access to the internet at home. Skills mismatches are increasingly evident in a highly dynamic labour market.Concurrently, digital technologies are permeating education at unprecedented speed and scale. The possibilities of using digital solutions to enhance teaching and learning, and to revolutionise educational processes are attractive. At the same time, the related systemic investment needs are substantial, evidence of effectiveness is scarce, and risks abound. Policymakers face formidable, multi-faceted opportunities and challenges in designing and implementing digitally enabled education services at scale.In this state of play, how can countries leverage digital solutions to build equitable, relevant, and resilient education systems with a positive impact on learning outcomes?What can policymakers do to leverage digital solutions for better learning outcomes?Keep a steady focus on the vision of providing equitable, relevant, and resilient learning for all.Recognise that each country’s unique contextual conditions and vision for its economy and society will drive its digital pathways for education and skills development.Play a strategic and hands-on role in shaping evidence-based policies that drive the integration of digital technologies in education.Recognize and support the role of teachers as cultivators, coaches and critical pedagogues to help students build the 21st century skills required to survive and thrive in the digital eraTailor digital pathways – deliberately consider and fine-tune strategies and policies which address the diverse and dynamic needs within each specific country context.Proactively tackle the inherent trade-offs when taking decisions on digital investments. Figure 1: Potential Digital Pathways for Equitable, Relevant and Resilient Education SystemsHow can countries make a digital transition in education?Policymakers, the private sector, civil society, and academia can use the following architecture as a framework to think through their country’s digital transition in education and define their unique trajectory.Overall, digital pathways in education and skills development can be seen as the interplay of two dimensions: (1) depth of digital transitions, the extent to which public policy efforts take a systemic approach in the strategic governance, infrastructure, policy design, and government-level implementation and (2) scale of digital transitions, the extent to which digital transitions are supported by strong and learning-centred private markets, research and innovation ecosystems. Figure 2: Enabling Architecture for the Digital Transition of Education SystemsOutline of the PublicationChapter 1: Introduction | Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework | Chapter 3: Opportunities & Risks, and Shaping the Future of Evidence | Chapter 4: Contextual Preconditions | Chapter 5: Tailoring Digital Pathways and Navigating Trade-Offs | Chapter 6: ConclusionDownload the full