Uniting Generations and Sharing Power to Transform Education

A guide to more inclusive and intergenerational convening

> **Youth participation in global decision-making processes must be the norm and not the exception.**
>
> UN Secretary-General António Guterres

About

One year on from the Transforming Education Summit and the launch of the Youth Declaration, this guide offers a starting point for all those committed to sharing power and taking an inclusive approach to transforming education. It has been developed through the collaborative intergenerational efforts of more than 10 organizations, led by Salzburg Global Seminar and Big Change. Whatever your role in shaping change in education, whether you are a teacher, activist, student, government or community leader, researcher, innovator, or funder, this guide is for you.

1. Why?

1.1. The case for uniting generations and sharing power to transform education

> "Education is the key to a better future, a better life, to better opportunities. We have to ensure education is for everyone, not only those who have the resources."
>
> – Sofía Bermúdez, Education Activist

Young people across the globe are part of education systems that too often fail to prepare them for complex challenges within their local communities and our global society. Education systems must change to meet the disruptions we all face, and making incremental improvements will not be enough. We need transformed education systems that are inclusive and enable all learners to thrive.

In May 2022, united in the intention to accelerate global efforts to transform education systems, 51 Salzburg Global Seminar fellows built on global research by Big Change and UNESCO's Futures of Education and called for action towards the three drivers of transformation: purpose - the goals and outcomes of education; power - expanding who has voice and agency; and practice - unlocking innovation that has transformative potential.

In the following months, leading up to the UN Transforming Education Summit, organizations such as the Center for Universal Education at Brookings and Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) also acknowledged that unlocking education transformation requires people from across systems and contexts to come together to redefine and expand the purposes of education.

Changes in purpose and power within education are deeply interconnected. And, while the global dialogue has recognized the importance of expanding the purposes of education, there is a need for greater understanding and commitment to the idea and practice of sharing power within education systems. New goals for education must not be defined by those who have decided on the old or current purpose. Yet young people continue to be excluded from spaces where important conversations and decisions about their education are made – a problem echoed in the UN Youth Declaration on Transforming Education and the statement of the Secretary-General.

All young people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Uniting generations and sharing power to transform education is not an option but a necessity.

> "A new approach from the government requires a new approach from all of society, demanding transformative education. Young people will be the heartbeat of this effort, leveraging their voices, experiences, knowledge, and agency. Inclusive and participatory mechanisms to accompany and guide national transformation efforts are also critical. Students, parents, teachers, unions, employers, academia, and civil society must take up their respective roles – with an openness to change."
>
> – Vision Statement of the Secretary-General on Transforming Education

"Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example, during immigration proceedings, housing decisions, or the child's day-to-day home life."

– UN Rights of the Child - Article 12

1.2. The intention of this guide

While sharing power to transform education must happen at every level – from classrooms, throughout schools, to government – this guide is focused on how to share power in convening spaces and events where change in education is being discussed. With every education convening that excludes young people, existing power imbalances are perpetuated.

This guide makes the case for uniting generations and sharing power, explores definitions, provides examples, and offers a co-created checklist for organizations and leaders to consider in their events. When enough organizations commit to uniting generations – moving beyond stereotypical divisions and attributed be havior of "older" and "younger" people and paving the way for sharing power – we can shift both conversation and action to be more intergenerational, enabling the process of education transformation to be not just inclusive but also more resilient and adaptable.

2. What?

What do we mean by **"uniting generations"** and **"sharing power"** in **"convening spaces"**? This glossary is included to help create a shared understanding and language to underpin changes in behavior and practice.

Generations

Generation refers to groups of people born in the same time frame who went through similar formative experiences - events, trends, and developments that can shape worldviews. These generational cohorts often share similar values, behaviors, and influences, although individual variation always exists. While the boundaries for generational categories are not scientifically defined, generational cohorts often include the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. Uniting generations implies moving beyond stereotypical divisions and attributed behavior of "older" and "younger" people.

Power

Power can be tangible and intangible, it influences culture and rules, and can be used for the greater good or personal gain. Often, an individual's perception of their own power may differ from how others perceive it.

Power dynamics, relationships, and resource distributions are intertwined and often hinder system change. Those in power can manipulate the system's purpose to benefit their interests and perspectives. There are several ways to look at power – system change occurs when this established pattern is challenged and broken apart, systematically addressing underlying structural inequalities.

OVER

WITHIN

TO

WITH

Power over

Having power over someone else and using it to dominate and prevent others from gaining it. This understanding of power may involve paternalistic displays of authority, assuming what is best for youth despite their opinions.

"Power over" comes from position and hierarchy, and may involve paternalistic displays of authority.

Power within

An individual's personal relationship with themselves, encompasses cognitive and social skills contributing to their sense of empowerment. It is the confidence to stand up for what you believe in, even when it is difficult.

"Power within" comes from a deep sense of self-worth and self-respect.

Power to

The ability to utilize one's skills, knowledge, and resources to effect change. It is the power to make decisions, to take action, and to influence others.

"Power to" comes from a sense of agency and empowerment.

Power with

Collective action, synergies, and community involvement, highlighting the strength that arises when individuals come together and work collaboratively towards shared goals.

"Power with" comes from a sense of shared purpose and solidarity.

Convening spaces

Convening spaces are platforms, environments, or settings where individuals come together for dialogue, discussion, and decision-making. Convening spaces are more than physical areas – they often highlight power dynamics and hold memories that affect how people act in them.

Closed convening spaces

Closed spaces refer to decision-making settings where individuals exercise "power over" and make choices behind closed doors. These spaces typically include only a select group holding societal power, even when the decisions impact a broader range of stakeholders.

Invited convening spaces

Evolving from the exclusivity of closed spaces, invited spaces emerge with individuals being asked to participate for specific purposes and within certain limits. This is often promoted as a form of inclusion.

For example, young people may be invited to panels, forums, meetings, and consultations, while the real power remains with those who invited them. Invited spaces, though better than closed spaces, still hinder effective engagement and fail to create genuine partnerships with young people.

Inclusive convening spaces

In inclusive spaces, individuals come together, setting their own agenda with equitable power distribution, recognizing each person's contribution to the common good. In inclusive spaces, including created or shared spaces, power is shared, and a collaborative "power with" approach is embraced. Young people often create and claim these spaces through movements.

For power to be shared, it's crucial to co-create spaces where youth are fully engaged, act as partners, and are valued, not merely invited for the sake of inclusion.

2.2. Intergenerational Collaboration & Leadership (ICL): The practice and principles of an age-inclusive paradigm

"Creating a true intergenerational group means engaging people with different experiences, in different stages of life and from different contexts. You can classify people easily into age groups, but their personal experiences and background determine more who they are."

– Jorina Sendel, Student, Lern-Fair

If generations define the groups of individuals who share similar formative experiences and values, and power is the capacity to effect change in various forms, then spaces are the arenas, physical or symbolic, where different generations and power dynamics intersect and interact. In this context, Intergenerational Collaboration and Leadership (ICL) emerges as the 'how' – the practice of a paradigm in which people of different ages share power to transform education systems. What follows are the principles and practices that underpin ICL, guiding us toward an age-inclusive paradigm that has the potential to redefine societal norms and reshape our collective journey.

Principles of Intergenerational Collaboration

Generational Division	Intergenerational Collaboration
Power is concentrated Power in the hands of a few based on seniority and status. Empowerment is seen as a favor, 'giving' agency to the younger individuals, reinforcing a savior mentality.	**Power is equitably shared** Intersectionality and the spectrum of power is considered, both inter and intra-generationally. Regardless of age, everyone holds inherent power and agency. However, positional power to access spaces may vary even among those of the same age. Cultural contexts also play a role, making some ideals more challenging to realize in specific settings.
Age as a divider Humans are divided into categories such as "young" and "old," "experts" and "young people"; into "seniors" and "juniors," dividing individuals based on their biological age and justifying power imbalances, neglecting that seniority doesn't always equal insight and wisdom.	**Age as an axis of diversity** Every human, independent of age, is seen as a potential learner and leader. Perspectives and insights from all people are equally welcome and heard, recognizing that every age brings unique insights and experiences, and combining them can lead to richer outcomes.
Tokenistic engagement Including younger individuals for the sake of optics without genuine power sharing. Collaboration is hierarchical, with limited cross-generational exchange.	**Collaborative engagement** Creating spaces for meaningful dialogue, mutual respect, shared decision-making, and collective action across age groups, emphasizing mutual growth and knowledge sharing.

An evolving dynamic framework

At its core, ICL reframes the way we view age and experience. It champions the perspective that everyone, irrespective of their age, can be both a teacher and a learner, a leader and a follower. It doesn't position youth only as beneficiaries of systems crafted by older generations; it's about recognizing every individual as an active designer, contributor, and stakeholder in societal constructs. ICL acknowledges that every generation offers unique insights into our ever-changing world, and that transformative ideas are yet to emerge.

Reimagining power distribution

ICL fundamentally alters the traditional power dynamics that often operate in generational contexts. Rather than a one-sided power flow – typically from older to younger – ICL calls for reciprocal, equitable, sharing of power. It encourages environments where decision-making is a level of the playing field that allows all individuals to contribute effectively. Ultimately, ICL transforms formerly closed spaces into inclusive, equitable spaces that mirror the diverse tapestry of lived experiences and where each thread is integral to the overall narrative.

Beyond age – recognizing the many sides of who we are

ICL goes beyond redefining how we view age; it's about seeing each individual in their full spectrum of identity, from gender to citizenship, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status. Just as age should not be a barrier or an advantage, neither should any of these aspects of identity. People may face challenges or enjoy privileges based on these multiple, overlapping aspects of who they are[1]. By recognizing and valuing this rich tapestry of identity, ICL ensures that everyone feels seen, heard, and valued. Age becomes an axis of diversity, akin to ethnicity or gender, rather, than a dividing line. ICL, when viewed through an intersectional lens, advocates for acknowledging these overlapping identities, ensuring that power-sharing doesn't inadvertently sidestep any particular group.

From tokenism to true integration

In an ICL paradigm, there is a genuine, trusting partnership among generations. Older generations do not solely serve in mentorship roles, or young people only get included tokenistically, but youth voices are 'integrated' and woven into a fabric of dialogue and decision-making that is richer and more resilient for its diversity. Tokenism might look like inviting only a single youth representative to sit on a panel, given a few minutes to speak, not involved in shaping the panel's agenda or in any form of decision-making. This inclusion is symbolic, merely to state that "youth were represented".

Toward resilient and adaptable education transformation

When power is collaboratively redefined and redistributed by practicing ICL, we pave the way for an education transformation that is not just inclusive but also inherently relevant, resilient and adaptable. It acknowledges the wisdom and insights that both youth and elders bring to the table, asserting that innovation isn't the exclusive domain of the young, nor wisdom the sole purview of the old. By intertwining the strengths and perspectives of all generations, ICL serves as a compass guiding us toward inclusive education systems that are not just about surviving the challenges of today but thriving in the complexities of tomorrow.

¹**Examples of intersectionality in the context of ICL**:

Age and Ethnic Identity: Young individuals from marginalized ethnic groups often confront layered prejudices in educational spaces. Their insights, based on lived experiences, can offer invaluable perspectives in reshaping and decolonizing curricula.

Age and Gender: Young girls in many societies may face double discrimination - for their age and their gender - affecting their educational opportunities and outcomes. They might be excluded from leadership positions in student bodies due to these intertwined biases.

Age and Socioeconomic Status: Socioeconomic status intersects with age in complex ways. For instance, young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds might face barriers to accessing quality education, technology, or even spaces where their voices can be heard.

3. How?

3.1. Case studies and examples of sharing power in convening spaces

"Fresh eyes are always important regardless of age. It's really terrific to have a lot of knowledge and experience in a field. But very often, real advances come, real progress comes when someone takes a fresh look. They don't just assume that the way it is today is the way it always was and the way it always will be."

– William Pollard

From grassroots community gatherings to global summits, the following case studies exemplify sharing power and practicing intergenerational collaboration and leadership.

Sharing Power Across Generations in Cajamarca, Perú

The district of San Marcos has close to 5 thousand students aged from 13 to 17 years old. They wanted to expand the purpose of education beyond getting good grades and securing financial stability for the future, and grow into an ecosystem where students become agents of change for their communities and the world: education for student leadership.

They set up a coalition composed of students, teachers, parents, district officials, and Enseña Perú. In the following weeks, both students and adults developed a new process of gathering data (through surveys and interviews run by students for students) and used it to learn the perceptions of leadership and civic engagement of nearly 2000 students of the district. They also collaborated to build and run the first San Marcos Student Leadership Conference, which gathered inter-generational groups from 11 schools that were committing to develop student leadership. A five-point plan for student leadership - built by this coalition - was launched: school transformation, network of student leaders, adult allies, student leadership annual survey, and opportunities for human flourishing.

Following the launch, both students and adults have been collaborating further, and initiatives have emerged: a school has formed a student leadership council that has a formally recognized plan to improve education in their institution; 13% of schools there are now spaces for students to talk about leadership and civic engagement (run by students and adults), there is now a network of student leaders with more than 100 from 25% of schools, and close to 30 students are enrolled in WhatsApp leadership micro-courses.

For more information visit https://ensenaperu.org/

Big Education Conversation: Intergenerational Conversations about the Purpose of Education

The Big Education Conversation was started in the UK by Big Change and is now a global initiative that supports communities to come together to talk about what education is really for (the purpose of education) and to generate ideas and commitments for change. Big Education Conversations are intergenerational and include different stakeholder groups (e.g., parents, students, teachers, employers, and government leaders) to ensure diverse perspectives are heard.

In 2022, a global group of partners partnered to pilot the Big Education Conversation in their communities. The initiative was formally launched at the UN Transforming Education Summit with a live BEC to model how it works as a vehicle to shift power dynamics. With direction from an intergenerational pair of co-hosts on stage, the audience of 400 stood up from their rows of seats and reorganized into small groups, disrupting the hierarchical panel session format. Youth Delegates volunteered as BEC Facilitators and received a short virtual +/ in-person training session in advance that empowered them to lead meaningful conversations about the purpose of education, sparking new connections, and ensuring everyone's voice was heard in the auditorium during the session.

Today, Big Education Conversations are happening in over 33 countries, involving thousands of people according to the interactive map. The BEC model has been brought to life and iterated into many formats reflecting the diversity of the communities hosting them.

For more information visit www.bigeducationconversation.org

Bringing Youth at the Centre of Celebrating Learning

The annual LearningPlanet Festival, hosted around the International Day of Education (24 January), is a global celebration of rethinking education to take care of oneself, others, and the planet. With over 600 events worldwide created by 500 partners, the 2023 edition gathered close to 60,000 online participants from 191 countries, as well as local events from Delhi to Phoenix through Paris, Dakar, and Bogotá.

The celebration is intergenerational at heart, with young game-changers co-organising and sharing space alongside universities, social enterprises, global networks, and more. Youth-led sessions highlight their genuine talents, values and their incredible energy towards policy decision-making and system change in the rethinking of education. There is no barrier to the type of events hosted; young people organise hackathons, model UNs, conferences, round tables, open houses and much more.

The LearningPlanet platform also hosts a range of youth-driven events and projects over the year: a global Youth Council invited to co-design future developments of the Alliance, 400 Youth Fellows involved in other emblematic events (e.g., UNGA, ECOSOC, COP28, etc.), as well as in innovative programs to transform education (e.g., Planetizen University).

For more information about the LearningPlanet Festival, visit: www.learning-planet.org/about-festival/

Discover some of the events hosted by youth partners last year: https://www.learning-planet.org/events-for-young-gamechangers-lpf23/

More info on the Alliance here: https://www.learning-planet.org/

Derived from the collective, intergenerational efforts of pioneering organizations and dedicated individuals, this checklist emerges as a practical tool for those ready to champion intergenerational collaboration and leadership. When the conventional ways of convening perpetuate power imbalances by sidelining the youth, this tool challenges and redirects the narrative. Whether orchestrating a global forum or facilitating local engagement, this checklist can be the guide away from age-bound stereotypes and towards a more age-inclusive future for education.

What do you think about the checklist? Share your feedback here.

General

Resources
Budget & allocation of funds

Questions
Did your organization budget for collaboration, meaningful participation, or co-creation process?

Are resources allocated to ensure full participation across generations?

Essentials ❗
☐ Allocate resources for accessibility, travel, visa, attendance time, post-conference participation and logistics, specifically for groups not funded through their jobs and education.

Remember: Some countries (usually less represented and marginalized in global convenings) have long and costly visa processes. Inclusivity takes more allocation of funds and time for these regions.

Extras ⭐
☐ Dedicated budget for commissioning youth-led initiatives to host convenings.

☐ Advocate with key decision-makers to streamline visa processes, ensuring equitable representation from marginalized regions in convening spaces.

☐ Start planning convenings with the profiles of those most significantly hindered by tangible and intangible barriers in mind first.

Before ...

Planning
Logistics & purpose

Questions
What is the purpose of the convening, and who established the purpose?

Are the groups impacted by outcomes from the convening represented (co-owners > co-creators > advisors) in planning?

Questions
How might you invite and include those voices who aren't usually heard?

Where can you look to invite people you haven't heard from before but have a stake in the outcomes of the convening?

Essentials ❗
☐ Clearly, articulated goals, objectives, and timings of the convening.

☐ Compensate people equitably (what they need) for their contributions, not equally (everyone the same) being mindful of whose job pays for their participation Compensation can include payment, volunteering documentation, named credit in public outputs, skills training, etc.

☐ Diverse representation of the groups impacted by outcomes from the convening in the planning process.

Extras ⭐
☐ Decide the dates of the event well in advance so people have ample time to apply for passports and visas.

☐ Designate a key point of contact from your organization proactively offering support (e.g., for letters requesting absence from ongoing education programs, and support on visa application processes).

☐ Reflect on your organization's identity – what are the generational roots? Which power imbalances are inherent to our organizational structure? What do we need to prioritize in order to ensure equal representation?

Extras ⭐
☐ Create and curate spaces that invite new thinking and behaving (e.g., in an amphitheater or outdoors).

☐ Host your convening in a space created by generations impacted through the convening (e.g., youth-created rooms) or a space that holds meaning for all generations that are involved.

☐ Connect people with different experiences in the same field to ensure diverse voices.

☐ Check for venue readiness, safety, and security by checking whether the venue is accessible to people with disabilities (e.g., does it have a ramp?), translation and interpretation facilities, safe for LGBTIQ+ participants, and hospital vicinity.

Essentials ❗
☐ Provide opportunities, time, and support for intergenerational planning, co-designing, and leading of sessions or workshops (e.g., through dedicating space and time for relationship building and a strong foundation of trust needed to enable ICL).

☐ Create space for people to share their ideas via multiple modalities and platforms (considering both online and offline), (spoken, written via Google Doc, etc.), with processing time and materials shared in advance for those who first language isn't the spoken language of collaboration.

☐ Ask people of all ages what they need to feel safe in this space and how we can all work to create that safety to enable healthy discussion and debate (e.g., making it safe for all people to agree and disagree with other generations).

☐ Implement safeguarding, safety and well-being protocols (example here): Ensure parental waivers are signed, require adults to adhere to a specific code of conduct around students, and establish clear guidelines on alcohol consumption.

Designing
Spaces & formats

Questions
How can spaces and formats support inclusive dialogues and decision-making?

What is needed regarding support, content, background context, to enable all participants to fully and confidently contribute to the next design phase?

Have you considered whether your space allows for people of all ages to feel safe, and talk honestly, openly, and freely?

Before ...

Preparing
Shared training, learning & collaboration

Questions

How can all participants feel prepared for intergenerational collaboration?

What is the role of all participants in the design of any training?

Essentials ❗

- ☐ Engage all generations in articulating how power-sharing will be practiced, and invite reflections on past experiences with ICL – both the successes and areas for improvement.

- ☐ Offer training to all participants, ensuring they are equipped to fully engage, recognizing the effort required for inclusive participation – instead of a one-way training, host sessions where participants co-learn.

Extras ⭐

- ☐ Raise participants' awareness about potential challenges of shared power across age groups and other identities (e.g., facilitate discussions where participants can express and navigate any discomfort they perceive in power-sharing across age groups and other identities, reassuring participants this is part of the process).

- ☐ Equip all participants with the necessary communication skills, fostering comfort and mutual understanding (e.g., reflect on jargon and co-create and share a glossary in advance or during a prep session).

- ☐ Create intergenerational pairs. The goal: creating confidence and comprehension between the different generations through an intimate and personal connection with someone not from my generation.

During ...

Running
Facilitation & safer spaces

Questions

How can facilitation ensure the practice of ICL and maintain safer spaces?

Have I included all inclusion considerations? Like language and sign language interpretation, disability inclusion factors, etc.?

Essentials ❗

- ☐ Articulate guiding principles/norms with all participants (e.g., see example on page 7 of this facilitator guide).

- ☐ Use clear language to help participants understand the context of the discussion and feel comfortable (e.g., any jargon and abbreviations should be explained, listed or left out → additional resource).

- ☐ Select venues that do not compromise the safety or accessibility of any participants.

Extras ⭐

- ☐ Create opportunities for expression that require all generations to think and behave in old and loved, and new ways, for example through writing or art.

- ☐ Remove potential barriers (e.g., by explicitly articulating responsibilities and roles, with participants explaining their roles not just by their name and position but also what their job is about).

- ☐ Incorporate formats and interactive activities that encourage intergenerational exchange (e.g., designate more time than you usually would to the intro section of your agenda so that each person can introduce themselves).

After ...

Evaluating
Assessment & reflection

Questions

How can we review the gathering to enhance practices related to ICL?

How will you communicate with participants after the event?

How can we support participants to bring the knowledge back to their communities?

Essentials ❗

- ☐ Collect preferred contact details at the event; set accurate expectations for when and how you will next communicate with participants.

- ☐ Ensure safety and well-being guidelines are followed so young people are not approached by adults separately or in unsafe ways.

- ☐ Ensure actions are recorded, shared, and followed up on; consistently engage participants with updates and future opportunities while prioritizing age-inclusive feedback mechanisms to build trust and foster collective action.

Extras ⭐

- ☐ Encourage discussions about power imbalances, historical decision-making approaches, and ideas for creating a more inclusive process.

- ☐ Build a learning culture and collect feedback from participants of all ages to identify areas of improvement (e.g., on the pace of the convening, and the inclusivity of the space).

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