

PART III

What might schooling look like in the future?

Scenarios for further reflection

An infinite variety of scenarios could be generated from societal and educational trends, multiplied by different contexts, purposes, and stakeholders. The six scenarios of the *Schooling for Tomorrow* Project, therefore, are highly selective among possible futures.

They cover a range of extremes: from “stable bureaucratic systems” to “system meltdown”, from strong schools to disappearing schools. Each depicts a distinctive configuration resulting from societal change or failure to respond to such changes.

Bureaucratic system	One scenario depicts schools as unaffected by external trends and reforms. They are strong top-down bureaucracies, closed from outside pressure.
Re-schooling	Two scenarios depict futures where schools are strengthened by strong cultures of equity and by consensus about their value. They have undergone root-and-branch reform as systems and are dynamic. In one scenario, the school remains highly distinctive, in the other it becomes a leading feature of communities.
De-schooling	In two scenarios schooling moves from formal institutionalised systems into more diverse, privatised, and informal arrangements. Schools themselves may even disappear. These changes are demand-driven or result from the growth of alternatives which are more efficient for learning.
System meltdown	The last scenario depicts a crisis where the authorities have not been able to respond to a mass exodus of teachers, resulting in a breakdown of the system.

This Part presents first what is special about the *Schooling for Tomorrow* scenarios, and what they are not (Sheet III.2). After an overview of the scenarios and their shared framework (Sheet III.3), it presents each of the six scenarios, using the same matrix framework, while the narrative parts explain their main characteristics, and the likely features of the society in which the scenarios could occur (Sheets III.4-9).



Part III: What might schooling look like in the future?

Scenarios for further reflection

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The *Schooling for Tomorrow* scenarios

The *Schooling for Tomorrow* scenarios propose snapshots of six possible futures for schooling to help focus thinking on where we are going in education. They have been extensively used to inform policy debate and professional development in many countries.

➔ What is special about the *Schooling for Tomorrow* scenarios?

The *Schooling for Tomorrow* scenarios were designed to explore possible futures for schooling for use by different stakeholders in education – from policy-makers to teachers and parents. They cover organised learning from the primary through late secondary education, but not rigidly demarcated. The scenarios are set around 15 to 20 years in the future – long enough for significant change to occur, but not so far off as to be remote to any but futurists.

The scenarios are “ready-to-use” tools that can be adapted, combined or totally reinvented, using the same model as a point of departure.

The scenarios are “outcome-based” snapshots of the future, depicting possible end states of specific development paths. These outcomes might give rise to new developments, becoming starting points for new futures. The focus on education, rather than broader social or economic scenarios, has been deliberately chosen to give educators tools using variables with which they are familiar.

All the scenarios share the same five-dimensional framework, so that one can look at similar issues in different futures, “attitudes, expectations, and political support”, “goals and functions” of education systems “organisations and structures”, the “geo-political aspects” and “the teaching force”. The number of dimensions can be adapted according to the purpose in hand, but keeping the same dimensions in each scenario facilitates comparisons.

The scenarios are “ideal types” that are not expected to occur in pure form in the real world. They deliberately exaggerate features to help clarify options and choices. This makes them sometimes provocative, even alarming. This helps to galvanise attention.

PART III: WHAT MIGHT SCHOOLING LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE? – THE SFT SCENARIOS

➔ What they are not

In addition to understanding what the *Schooling for Tomorrow* scenarios are, it is also important to understand what they are not.

They are not *predictions* seeking to forecast futures as accurately as possible. Prediction is doomed to failure and this is not the aim. The value of *futures thinking* is in opening minds to consider new possibilities and to deal with change.

Secondly, these scenarios *are not visions* though others may use them to clarify their own visions. They are descriptive of possible futures, including those we may not like as much as those we may.

Thirdly, they refer to learning systems (schooling) not schools as organisations. They are not the “school of the future”.

Lastly, the *Schooling for Tomorrow* scenarios do not spell out all the steps that might lead to these futures. We leave that to users to work out for themselves.

➔ The scenarios presented

Scenarios can take various forms according to the method used and purpose of the exercise for which they are used. The *Schooling for Tomorrow* scenarios are presented in a matrix describing their features along key dimensions. This is accompanied by a narrative explaining the characteristics of each scenario and its likely social context.

Overview

→ Six scenarios

From “stable bureaucratic systems” to “system meltdown”

BUREAUCRATIC
SYSTEM

1 Schools in **Back to the Future Bureaucratic Systems**

This scenario shows schools in powerful, bureaucratic, systems that are resistant to change. Schools continue mostly with “business as usual”, defined by isolated units – schools, classes, teachers – in top-down administrations. The system reacts little to the wider environment, and operates to its own conventions and regulations.

RE - SCHOOLING

2 Schools as **Focused Learning Organisations**

In this scenario, schools function as focal learning organisations, revitalised around a knowledge agenda in cultures of experimentation, diversity, and innovation. The system enjoys substantial investment, especially to benefit disadvantaged communities and maintain high teacher working conditions.

3 Schools as **Core Social Centres**

In this scenario, the walls around schools come down but they remain strong organisations, sharing responsibilities with other community bodies. Much emphasis is given to non-formal learning, collective tasks and intergenerational activities. High public support ensures quality environments, and teachers enjoy high esteem.

DE - SCHOOLING

4 The **Extended Market Model**

This scenario depicts the widespread extension of market approaches – in who provides education, how it is delivered, how choices are made and resources distributed. Governments withdraw from running schooling, pushed by dissatisfaction of “consumers”. This future might bring innovation and dynamism, and it might mean exclusion and inequality.

5 **Learning in Networks** replacing schools

This scenario imagines the disappearance of schools per se, replaced by learning networks operating within a highly developed “network society”. Networks based on diverse cultural, religious and community interests lead to a multitude of diverse formal, non-formal and informal learning settings, with intensive use of ICTs.

CRISIS

6 **Teacher Exodus and System Meltdown**

This scenario depicts a meltdown of the school system. It results mainly from a major shortage of teachers triggered by retirement, unsatisfactory working conditions, more attractive job opportunities elsewhere.

PART III: WHAT MIGHT SCHOOLING LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE? – OVERVIEW

 The framework*Five dimensions for the six scenarios***1 Attitudes, expectations, political support**

This dimension covers public and private attitudes towards schooling, including the depth of political support for schools and learning in general. It looks at how schools are valued, and the roles they are expected to play in communities and society at large.

2 Goals, functions, equity

This dimension covers what schooling is meant to achieve. It outlines the main curricular and extra-curricular functions, accreditation arrangements, and the settings for learning both inside and outside schools. It also looks at social and cultural outcomes of schooling.

3 Organisations and structures

This dimension describes the formal and non-formal organisation of schooling. It covers the different roles for the public and private players in the delivery of education, the involvement of community bodies, as well as the extent to which ICTs are used.

4 The geo-political dimension

This dimension looks at the local, national, and international environment and arrangements for schooling. This includes educational governance, the nature of service providers, and responsiveness to external pressures.

5 The teaching force

This describes who “teachers” are – those responsible for “delivering” education. It considers working conditions, status, and careers. It includes networking, motivations and rewards, and the demarcations between teachers' roles and those of students, parents, and various others whose primary roles lie outside education.

Scenario 1: “Back to the Future Bureaucratic Systems”

National school bureaucracies are robust enough to resist pressures for change, despite the grumbling of parents and the media. The system is the key feature, relatively closed and top-down but with a large measure of autonomy for individual teachers in isolated classrooms.

➔ Characteristics

In this scenario, schools are anchored in powerful bureaucratic systems. Strong pressure for uniformity and the fear of change combine to make the schools resist fundamental transformation, despite criticism of the school system by the public and the media.

In this scenario, schools exist in relative isolation from the wider environment, and its major societal and technological trends. School reform cannot penetrate into the roots of the system and school practice remains essentially unchanged. How long can the system resist pressures from the changing labour market and increasingly visible social inequalities?

Decision-making is generally hierarchical, and “outsiders” have little influence on a system that is primarily organised by its own internal logic, within national or regional contexts.

Formal classroom teaching, with teacher-to-student learning settings, is the norm, with little room for non-formal and in-formal learning and community interaction. There is little perception of lifelong learning as schooling operates to its own self-contained conventions.

Education is solidly rooted in the public consciousness and traditional means of delivery, but its financial and human resources are stretched as the schools are assigned additional new tasks and responsibilities, given problems arising in families and communities.

➔ Their contexts

The bureaucratic model is consistent with a continued reliance on hierarchical decision-making and centralised sovereignty over education. It might also depend on a strong elite culture, with the diplomas of formal education continuing to dominate as the currency of social selection and recognition of competence.

This scenario assumes a degree of societal trust in public institutions – the powerful state system is preferred over the perceived risks of systems determined by diversity and autonomy, or by the market. Despite this trust, society is unwilling to make the large-scale investments that might be necessary for radical reforms as in “re-schooling”.

PART III: WHAT MIGHT SCHOOLING LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE? – SCENARIO 1

➔ Scenario 1: Schools in bureaucratic systems

In five dimensions

Attitudes, expectations, political support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Resistance to radical change despite parents, employers and the media expressing dissatisfaction with schools. ■ No major increase in overall funding – the continual extension of schools' duties stretches resources. ■ Education, especially schooling, is politicised and often at the fore of party politics.
Goals, functions, equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Much focuses on curriculum, enforcement of standards, and the promotion of formal equality. ■ Formal certificates considered the main passports to economic and social life, as well as next steps in the education system. ■ Inequalities of opportunity and results continue despite policy emphasis on formal equality.
Organisations and structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schools knitted together into national systems with complex administrative arrangements. ■ Dominance of the single unit – school, classroom, teacher – in relative isolation from each other. ■ No radical change in the organisation of teaching and learning despite greater ICT use. ■ Very patchy connections between schools and the community.
The geo-political dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The nation [or state in federal systems] still the main locus of political authority, even if under pressure. ■ The corporate world, the media, and multimedia organisations express interest in education markets, but their influence remains minor. ■ Pressure from globalisation, including international surveys of educational performance.
The teaching force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Highly distinct teacher corps, with strict rules of entry. ■ Strong unions and associations resist change. ■ In hierarchal decision-making structures teacher classroom autonomy may be strong.

Scenario 2: “Schools as Focused Learning Organisations”

Schools could respond to the demands of the knowledge economy by developing into “learning organisations” focused on diversity, experimentation and innovation. These schools would contribute to the development of a highly competitive society.

➔ Characteristics

In this scenario, education is focused on knowledge-building and laying solid foundations for lifelong learning. Schools are revitalised around a knowledge agenda: experiment and innovation provide the basis for students to develop academic competence as well as others such as artistic talents.

This scenario is consistent with the trend of a globalising economy, the growth of knowledge societies based on R&D, specialisation, and adaptability for lifelong learning, and the technological progress of the information age. But what are the mechanisms to transform schools into “linchpin institutions” that support both quality and equality?

There is a diversity of organisations and settings, and some schools develop close links and working networks with tertiary education, some with enterprises such as media and technology companies. This scenario demands far-reaching equality among schools – in status, conditions and prospects – for otherwise the focused learning organisation would not be the typical school.

ICT is prominent, and ICT use is evaluated regularly. New forms of evaluation and competence assessment flourish, reflecting the aptitudes and achievements of all learners.

Teaching professionals are motivated by highly favourable working conditions, such as small learning groups and a strong emphasis on team working and educational R&D.

➔ Their contexts

The scenario is demanding not only in terms of education, but in the broader social and economic environment that would support it. It assumes very high levels of public support and trust in institutions, and generous funding from diverse public and private sources.

The scenario also assumes an affluent, high-skill society with a strong sense of equity, where schools are expected to be at the forefront of new developments and knowledge, both nationally and internationally. Schools are therefore very open and responsive to trends in the wider environment.

The effects of an aging society on this scenario are difficult to predict nor is it obvious what kind of social mechanisms would favour the emergence of this scenario. It might arise from a high degree of social stability which provides the necessary levels of trust and support. Or, it might be a response to disruptions that shatter the “old ways” of traditional school systems.

PART III: WHAT MIGHT SCHOOLING LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE? – SCENARIO 2

→ Scenario 2: Schools as focused learning organisations

In five dimensions

Attitudes, expectations, political support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Wide political and public agreement on goals and the value of public education as a “public good”. ■ Generous funding and close attention to resource distribution fosters quality outcomes and equal learning opportunities. ■ Media supportive of schools, permitting freedom to innovate and individualise programmes.
Goals, functions, equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Highly demanding curricula as the norm for all students, in a wide range of disciplines and specialisations. ■ Continuation of school diplomas as the major currency, alongside innovative assessment modalities. ■ Lifelong learning functions recognised; extensive guidance and counselling. ■ Elimination of low-quality programmes, plus focused efforts for low-income communities.
Organisations and structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schools with distinct profiles based on non-hierarchical, team-oriented organisations; and professional development. ■ Focus on new knowledge in teaching and learning; strong links with knowledge-based industries; investments in educational R&D. ■ Mixing students variously by age, grade, and ability; links among schools, tertiary education, enterprises (local, national, international). ■ ICT for communication and networking and as a tool for learning.
The geo-political dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strong government frameworks and support, with focus on weakest communities. ■ Students and teachers use national and international networks to promote sharing and production of knowledge. ■ Countries with schools as learning organisations as the norm attract attention as world leaders in education.
The teaching force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Teaching corps with high status and working conditions under varied contractual arrangements. ■ Generous staffing promotes innovation in teaching and learning, professional development, and research. ■ Teaching moves away from being a lifetime career, with increasing mobility into and out of teaching. ■ Strong networking as the norm among teachers and with external sources of expertise.

Scenario 3: “Schools as Core Social Centres”

Schools could function as social centres in new community arrangements with learning at the core. These schools would have “low walls” and “open doors” and a very strong emphasis on collective and community tasks.

➔ Characteristics

The central goal in this scenario is to increase community development and social integration. As a shared responsibility of the entire community, schooling draws on expertise, interest and experience from sources ranging from business to higher education, from religious groups to retired people.

Schooling takes place under different organisational forms, which go beyond formal schooling. ICTs are part of the structure and are used extensively for peer-to-peer and cross-border networking, as well as for interactions between students and teachers, and between schools and parents/communities. A high level of participation by all in society, of all ages, blurs the boundaries between schooling and other ways of learning.

This scenario is consistent with the decentralisation trend, giving more power to local communities. It makes use of information age technology, and turns the aging of society to advantage through inter-generational learning. It could also occur as a response to the lack of social equality and changing family structures, given its emphasis on socialisation.

Both the cognitive and non-cognitive are prominent, with the goal of building a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Learning is driven by committed professionals many of whom do not pursue a lifelong career in education.

The sector enjoys generous financial support in pursuit of high standards and quality learning environments in all communities, both rich and poor, and to make teaching attractive to all professionals.

➔ Their contexts

Arguments in favour of this scenario are contradictory social conditions. It could arise in reaction to a loss of the social cohesion that traditionally comes through family, work, community, and church. Increasing strain on these structures could leave education as the primary source for fostering social capital. On the other hand, the wide-open school doors in this scenario may prove practicable only when there is ample family and community support.

Regardless of the cause, this scenario shows substantial blurring in the lines of demarcation between schooling and the broader environment. How far this goes depends on perceptions of stability, trust in public institutions, and belief in equity.

Local communities are empowered and governance is participatory, but this does not assume “small government” as this scenario might well depend on a flourishing public sector and regulation to reduce social inequity in education.

PART III: WHAT MIGHT SCHOOLING LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE? – SCENARIO 3

→ Scenario 3: Schools as core social centres

In five dimensions

Attitudes, expectations, political support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Wide political and public agreement on the goals and value of public education, generous funding. ■ High-trust politics: authorities, teachers, employers, and other community groups co-operate with schools. ■ Widespread recognition of schools as centres of community activity and solidarity. ■ Media support fosters freedom to develop pathways and partnerships.
Goals, functions, equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schools continue to transmit, legitimise, and accredit knowledge, but with intense focus on social and cultural outcomes. ■ Competence recognition also developed in the labour market, liberating schools from some credentialing pressures. ■ More non-formal arrangements and stronger recognition of lifelong learning. ■ Clear recognition of diversity and strong social cohesion goals.
Organisations and structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schooling in new organisational forms, less bureaucratic and more diverse. ■ General lowering of the “high walls” around schools increases student diversity, inter-generational mixing, and joint youth-adult activities. ■ Softening divisions between primary and secondary levels; re-emergence of all-age schools? ■ Strong ICT development with emphasis on networking among students, teachers, parents, community, and other stakeholders.
The geo-political dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strong central frameworks, catering particularly to communities with weak social infrastructure. ■ But also a powerful local dimension, developing new forms of governance. ■ Technological progress and a narrowing of the “digital divide” create virtual communities and give students widespread contact with the global world.
The teaching force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A core of teaching professionals with high status, but not necessarily in lifetime careers, with a variety of contractual arrangements and conditions. ■ A prominent role for other professionals, community actors, parents in various learning contexts and settings. ■ Teaching profession often combined with other community tasks and responsibilities.

Scenario 4: “The Extended Market Model”

A highly developed learning market for young people could be the response by stakeholders dissatisfied with the range of choice offered by uniform public education. This is demand-driven, with new providers emerging but also obvious risks to social equity.

→ Characteristics

In this scenario, education takes on market characteristics and choice becomes prominent. This is triggered by dissatisfied “strategic consumers” and by government authorities who encourage diversification and a reduction of their own involvement in schooling.

Schools do not disappear but become just one component in the diversity of educational systems, alongside privatisation and public/private partnerships. The decline of government involvement may vary between the primary and secondary levels of education, and between affluent areas and those with limited resources.

The education market attracts new professionals with diverse public and private profiles. The business environment fosters innovation through diverse training and accreditation arrangements. The diversity of the market creates comparable diversity in teaching careers, including a growing international market for teachers.

Diversified services and private providers come to the forefront as systems disappear and governments see a markedly different role for themselves in setting rules for markets to operate. Schooling responds to the *knowledge economy*, in which *lifelong learning* is a prerequisite. *Social equality* is at issue especially where learners do not constitute an attractive market.

ICT, powerful and indispensable, supports a range of virtual programmes, some traditional educational tasks as well as skills and learning for specific interest groups. Students take advantage of the education offered through the large market of community-inspired, grass-roots organisations.

→ Their contexts

Market solutions may require relative affluence and equality, as governments and citizens may only accept a new government role in education when traditional demands have been met.

Or else it may be associated with income inequality and poverty, as the ability to purchase becomes paramount and the state withdraws from decision-making.

Reduced public-sector involvement in education does not necessarily mean small government – the market model could expand because of different not less government activity. It could decide to radically change funding structures, incentives and regulation, while setting the rules for the “learning market”, overseeing quality assurance, and managing a potentially painful transition.

PART III: WHAT MIGHT SCHOOLING LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE? – SCENARIO 4

→ Scenario 4: The extended market model

*In five dimensions***Attitudes,
expectations,
political
support**

- Significant reduced belief in the value of public education and possible funding resistance by taxpayers.
 - Divergent and conflicting positions expressed by stakeholders; teachers' associations unable to resist greater privatisation.
 - Withdrawal of governments from their direct involvement in schooling, pushed by dissatisfaction of “strategic consumers”.
 - The stability of new market solutions dependent on how well they meet perceived shortcomings.
-

**Goals,
functions,
equity**

- Curriculum re-defined based on outcomes (compared with programmes and delivery), emphasis on values as well as cognitive outcomes.
 - New accreditation arrangements, and new information and guidance on educational choices – some organised publicly, much privately.
 - Lifelong learning becomes the norm for many, with diversified educational careers that go far beyond merely “staying in school”.
 - Inequality tolerated; perhaps greater homogeneity of learner groups.
-

**Organisations
and structures**

- Flourishing of privatisation, public/private partnerships, individualisation, and home schooling.
 - More experimentation with organisational forms; new learning settings soften the boundaries between teacher and learner.
 - Primary and secondary levels diverge in development, with quicker recourse to market solutions for learners of secondary age.
 - All stakeholders see gains from imaginative use of ICT and flourishing of networks.
-

**The geo-
political
dimension**

- Public authorities not active as education providers, but may remain responsible for assuring quality, providing incentives, and regulating the market.
 - Powerful international providers and accreditation agencies come into the market; as do players at local and national levels, many of them private.
 - Diverse stakeholders in educational governance, including community grass-roots organisations.
 - Funding arrangements, largely private, are crucial in shaping the new learning markets and ensuring quality.
-

**The teaching
force**

- The wide range of profiles and contractual arrangements in the new teaching force makes it a less distinct group.
- Teaching professionals are plentiful in desirable residential areas and areas of market opportunity but shortages may appear in disadvantaged communities, compromising quality.
- Rapid market adjustment is challenging, but flourishing accreditation arrangements pull new professionals into the learning market.

Scenario 5: “Learning in Networks”

Schooling takes a radical shift where conventional schools disappear, to be replaced by informal “learning networks”. It would be part of a burgeoning “network society”, with very different social arrangements in all spheres.

→ Characteristics

This radical, perhaps anarchic, scenario would see the replacement of school systems with universal networking instead. The abandonment of the schools might be driven by public dissatisfaction with available schools and the widespread access to powerful new learning media. As government involvement decreases, parents and students assume more responsibility for education.

Learner networks are an important part of the “network society”, based on interaction and cooperation. The networks form around diverse parental, cultural, religious and community interests; some operate

locally through home-schooling and small group interests, others through distance learning and international networking.

Powerful, inexpensive ICT is critical for innovative learning options to emerge. Educational tools enable learners to undertake complex assignments, evaluate their own learning, and share resources. Networks form around learning communities, and socialisation and affective development are also taken care of this way.

As the teacher disappears with the demise of the classroom, new learning professionals emerge. So do the major media and ICT companies become active in mediating the learning networks.

This scenario is a reflection of changing attitudes to public provision and organised services. It is a feature of the *information age* and new potentials in virtual and innovative learning. It mirrors the erosion of national borders in favour of the local and/or the international. The importance of ICT might mean that a *digital divide* increases the risks of exclusion.

→ Their contexts

The scenario assumes small government and the rejection of organised public institutions. It assumes that the networks based on diverse family, community and religious interests are strong enough, in breadth and depth, to form learning networks on a universal basis.

As a “universal” model, it would be most likely in affluent, high-skill, technology-intensive societies. However, powerful local networks could also be spontaneous reactions to chaotic social conditions and conflict.

Given the demise of institutionalised education, few boundaries would exist between initial education and lifelong learning. This scenario is consistent with a range of cultural and philosophical approaches, but it would be largely incompatible with strong elite cultures, partly because the education system loses its pre-eminent role in social selection.

While this scenario promotes diversity and democracy, it also runs risks of exclusion, especially for groups which have traditionally relied on the school as a vehicle for social inclusion.

→ Scenario 5: Learning in networks

In five dimensions

Attitudes, expectations, political support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Government less involved in educational governance, reduced public accountability. ■ Dissatisfaction with “school”, its bureaucratic nature, and its perceived inability to deliver learning appropriate to complex, diverse societies. ■ Communities abandon schools, supported by political parties, the media, and multimedia companies in the learning industry. ■ New methods of private and community funding consistent with development of a “network society”.
Goals, functions, equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Traditional curriculum structures decline as school systems are dismantled; new values and attitudes are key. ■ The schools' demise also brings new arrangements for child and youth care, through <i>e.g.</i> sports, cultural activities, and community groups. ■ Emphasis on the use of ICT for information, guidance and marketing, and on new ways to certify competence. ■ Possibility for inequalities between those operating within the network society and those left outside.
Organisations and structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Widespread use of informal educational settings such as small groups, home schooling, and individualised arrangements. ■ ICTs used extensively for learning and networking; the software market flourishes. ■ A few public schools may remain to serve those with no other access to network society. ■ If so, primary schools are more likely to survive (basic knowledge and socialisation) than secondary schools.
The geo-political dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Educational networks are based on diverse interests: parental, cultural, religious, community – some local, some national, some cross-border. ■ Local and international dimensions strengthened at the expense of the national; new forms of international accreditation emerge for elites. ■ The role of education authorities shifts toward bridging the “digital divide” and regulating education markets. ■ Community players and aggressive media companies help drive the dismantling of national school systems.
The teaching force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Most classrooms disappear, replaced by diverse community-based settings and experiential learning. ■ Blurring and disappearance of the boundaries between teacher and student, parent and teacher, education and community. ■ Learning networks bring together new clusters of learners and interests. ■ The profession of “teacher” disappears, but new “learning professionals” may emerge to support informal networks.

Scenario 6: “System Meltdown”

Fragile school systems could break down under a major crisis of teacher shortage. Such a “meltdown” could lead to a vicious circle of school decline or it could be a kick-start toward radical change.

→ Characteristics

This future is constructed around one main parameter – teachers – in elaboration of a “worst case” scenario – a crisis triggered by longstanding and worsening teacher shortages causing the school system to break down.

The crisis results from an outflow of teachers, leaving early on, mid-career or through retirement, that far outstrips the inflow of new recruits in a tight market for skilled labour. The crisis is recognised too late. The policy measures that might rectify it take too long to show results. Social inequalities are exacerbated by the disparities in the depth of the crisis especially between different socio-geographic areas.

Meltdown is triggered by a combination of factors - declining belief in the education system, the *aging society* meaning aging teachers, and a buoyant job market offering attractive jobs to would-be teachers. The *information age*, with self-study ICT solutions, might help to counterbalance the chronic teacher shortage.

Reactions to “system meltdown” could vary. There could be a downward spiral of conflict and retrenchment, with further declining quality or interruption of educational delivery. Or it might spark emergency strategies with stakeholders joining forces to build a new system.

In all cases, ICT plays an increasingly important role by performing some functions traditionally provided by teachers, e.g. virtual-reality devices, distance learning modalities, on-line evaluation systems, and interactive television.

→ Their contexts

“System meltdown” is more likely in affluent, high-skill societies, where teachers have more attractive job alternatives. In poorer societies, the teaching profession will remain relatively attractive and high-status.

On the other hand, system meltdown in rich societies could attract an influx of trained teachers from poorer countries, with damaging consequences for them with their limited resources for retaining or replacing qualified much-needed teachers.

Educational meltdown could be associated with catastrophes such as wartime destruction or drastic epidemics. Or it could happen in calm conditions through the combination of causes and the lack of anticipation regarding problems in the teaching profession.

PART III: WHAT MIGHT SCHOOLING LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE? – SCENARIO 6

→ Scenario 6: System meltdown

In five dimensions

Attitudes, expectations, political support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Intense public and media dissatisfaction with education in a vicious circle of declining standards and a crisis in teacher recruitment. ■ The scale and long-term nature of the teacher recruitment crisis overwhelm possible policy solutions. ■ Policy initiatives and measures to rectify the situation are either too late or take too long to show results. ■ The crisis either increases political conflict over education, or leads to a consensus on emergency strategies.
Goals, functions, equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Established curricular structures are under intense pressure, especially in subjects where qualified teachers are in short supply. ■ The shortage might stimulate positive change – reviews of curricula, a shift from supply- to demand-oriented education. ■ It might lead to strengthening testing, examinations and accountability mechanisms in reaction to sliding standards. ■ Inequalities widen between groups divided by residential location as well as social and cultural affiliation; affluent families desert public schools.
Organisations and structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public pressure in response to declining standards and large classes drives some schools back to highly traditional methods. ■ Others respond with innovations utilising expertise from sources such as tertiary education, enterprises, and communities. ■ Emergence of diverse mix of learning settings: lectures, student groupings, home learning. ■ ICT used to replace teachers, with technology and media companies active.
The geo-political dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The crisis initially strengthens the powers of central authorities but their position weakens in proportion to the duration of crisis. ■ Communities that are not in crisis seek to protect themselves by increasing their autonomy. ■ Corporate and media interests in the learning market intensify, offering new alternatives. ■ International initiatives to “lend” and “borrow” trained teachers between countries multiply, including between North and South.
The teaching force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Initiatives seek to bring retired teachers back to the schools; teaching posts are created for semi-professionals, possibly compromising quality. ■ Teaching conditions worsen as the ratio of teachers to students falls, with acute problems in the worst-affected areas. ■ Rewards increase for teachers; the home-tutoring market flourishes. ■ The role of unions/associations increases in face of their relative scarcity but weakens as the profession goes into decline.