



2026 SNAPSHOT

TEACHING AS COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

How to Develop Students Holistically So They Can Shape a Better Future for Themselves, Their Communities and Our World

This 2026 TACL Snapshot summarizes the latest insights from our collective studies of transformational classrooms around the world, linking to a robust collection of actionable resources for teachers, students, school leaders, and others committed to developing students holistically so they can shape a better future.

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Global Institute
for Shaping a Better Future

An initiative of
Teach For All

INTRODUCTION

Transformational Classrooms Are Showing Us How To Develop Students Holistically So They Can Shape a Better Future



Children all around the world face uncertain futures as they navigate emerging influences from AI to climate change to growing inequality to political polarization. Yet our inherited classroom and school models were not designed to foster the collaborative creativity and critical thinking students will need to address those technological, environmental, political, and economic pressures so they can improve the world around them. Instead, well-intended people and institutions have replicated industrial-era education models to impart the knowledge, skills, and capacities students need to improve their own futures in the world we have, not to improve our collective futures in the world we want.

But what if the purpose of education was not to help each student rise above society's challenges but was instead to help all students to solve them? What if the purpose of education was to develop students holistically so they can shape a better future for themselves, their communities, and our world?

In communities and countries worldwide, a small number of outlier, transformational classrooms are reorienting their efforts to prepare young people as the leaders we need for that uncertain future. Innovative teachers and students are showing us what it takes to develop the critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration students need to collectively shape a better future for themselves and all of us.

Teach For All's Global Institute was created to learn with and from those forward-looking educators, students, families, school leaders, and community leaders. We aspire to share knowledge, generate insights, and grow the collective leadership that will put the next generation on a path to becoming the leaders we need for a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.



Most schools teach students to sit still, be quiet, and follow rules. And yet what the world needs is students who will stand up, speak out, and take action toward change. Our educational institutions must move out of the Industrial Revolution days of growing obedient factory workers, and instead learn to unleash the individual and collective leadership of our students so they can lead the world into a better place.

Sanaya Bharucha
Global Head, Student Leadership & Voice,
Teach For All

Teach For All is a network of independent organizations in 63 countries and a global organization learning and working together to develop collective leadership to ensure all children fulfill their potential.

An initiative of Teach For All, the *Global Institute for Shaping a Better Future* contributes to the learning and leadership development of people committed to reshaping education, and in the process generates new insights, evidence, tools, and resources to accelerate progress.



To that end, over the past eight years, we have hosted over 6,000 people from over 30 countries to virtually visit and learn from transformational classrooms across the globe. Through online and in-person learning experiences, we have collectively explored the common attributes of those classrooms that are having the most meaningful impact on students' lives and futures.

These transformational classrooms, and the provocative cross-cultural discussions they are generating, are beautiful, inspiring, and hopeful. They offer tangible guidance not only to a more meaningful, fulfilling way of teaching and learning, but also to the systemic changes necessary to make transformational classrooms the norm instead of the exception.

With the help of a global advisory council of students, educators, researchers, and policymakers, we have synthesized the insights from those crowd-sourced studies to make them accessible and actionable for all of us.

We call this emerging map of distinguishing patterns in transformational classrooms around the world Teaching As Collective Leadership (TACL). In these classrooms, teachers, students, and families are determining purpose and learning *together* in pursuit of not just individual attainment but also the common good.

This document is an introduction, a doorway, and an invitation to engage with and contribute to this global learning about one of the most important questions of our time:

How can we grow all students holistically so they can shape a better future for themselves, their communities, and for all of us?



Imagine the possibilities if we have students alongside us to reimagine education. Imagine how much more quickly we will grow and learn and make real change. But right now, classrooms and schools are not recognizing the power in our children to lead us. Classrooms and schools and how we think about what “education” really means will need to radically change.

Shaheen Mistri

Founder and CEO of Teach For India

PATTERN #1: COLLECTIVELY REIMAGINING PURPOSE

Developing Students Holistically To Shape a Better Future

What is the purpose of education?
Developing students holistically so they can shape a better future

How should a community's history, culture, values, challenges, assets, and future inform its long-term hopes for students?

How should global aspirations, economic trends, technological advances, and innovations inform long-term aspirations for students?

In and around transformational classrooms, we find teachers, students, and families interrogating the “why” of education. We see communities weighing local history, culture, values, and challenges alongside global economic, environmental, and education trends to envision what it means to develop students holistically so they can shape a better future.

The specifics of these collectively emerging visions of student success vary across diverse geographies and cultures. In some communities the vision is to develop students who can rebuild a nation after conflict. In others it could be to create a climate-resilient economy, or to restore indigenous wisdom and practices. And in others it may be to create new businesses and economic opportunities.

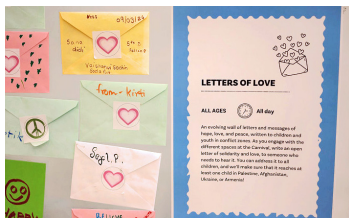
Explore More

To explore some of these conversations, check out [this compilation](#) of video clips from communities around the world, or virtually visit a collective exploration of purpose in [Nepal](#), [Haiti](#), or [China](#).

Follow this [link](#) or the QR code below to visit the rich mosaic of insights, perspectives, resources, and videos in the PURPOSE chapter of the [Teaching As Collective Leadership Digital Guide](#).



In **Armenia**, some educators, students, historians, and community leaders are reimagining education's purpose to develop entrepreneurial leadership that will shape a new Armenia.



In **India**, some students, educators, and community leaders are shifting classrooms and schools away from preparing students for outdated, industrial-era careers and toward developing the critical thinking and collaborative, creative leadership necessary to create an India free of poverty and full of love.

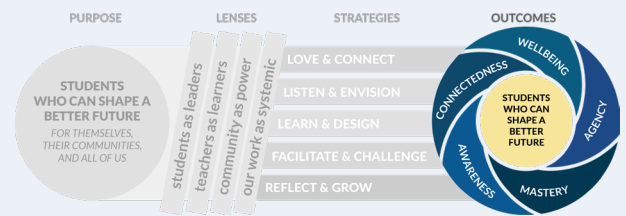


In **Haiti**, grandmothers, teachers, and students have come together to imagine how classrooms and schools would be different if they were designed to nurture in children the values inherent to the country's proud history of Black independence.

A common theme is emerging from these locally rooted and globally informed reconsiderations of education's purpose. Across cultural contexts, they suggest education should shift from a focus on individual attainment toward a focus on developing students' collective purpose, rigorous knowledge and skills, and beliefs and attitudes that will allow them to work together to shape a better future for themselves, their communities, and our planet.

PATTERN #2: EXPANDING STUDENT OUTCOMES

Integrating Students' Holistic Development of Mastery, Agency, Awareness, Connectedness, and Wellbeing



Explore More

Check out our [Holistic Student Outcomes Measurement Toolkit and Library](#), see how [these](#) indicators of student leadership development show up in young people around the world, or use this [link](#) or the QR code to explore a rich mosaic of related insights, resources, and videos.



How do the teachers, students, and families in and around transformational classrooms know that students are actually developing holistically so they can shape a better future for themselves, for their communities, and for the world? Our global, crowd-sourced studies suggest five critical indicators of student progress:

- **Mastery**
- **Agency**
- **Awareness**
- **Connectedness**
- **Wellbeing**

The educators leading these transformational classrooms view these outcomes as interdependent and integrated, not as separate or parallel areas of growth. They do not create one lesson for mastery and another for connectedness. Rather, they help students attain mastery alongside and *through* exercising agency, for example, and they attain agency by *working toward* rigorous mastery.

Indicator	Concept	What we see in classrooms
MASTERY	<i>Students attain a higher-order command of knowledge and skills as a means to create new opportunities and solutions to challenges.</i>	Students are eagerly and productively working with challenging and relevant content at the edge of their abilities.
AGENCY	<i>Students believe they can influence their lives and communities, and they develop the skills and confidence to take individual and collective action toward shared goals.</i>	Students are finding their voice, leading learning, and connecting daily efforts to their aspirations for themselves and their communities.
AWARENESS	<i>Students are aware of injustices around them and celebrate their and others' unique strengths and identities.</i>	Students explore their identities and strengths as they recognize, question, and disrupt deeper causes of injustice around them.
CONNECTEDNESS	<i>Students feel deep connection with and responsibility to their classmates, their communities, and their planet.</i>	Students seek and value the perspectives and experiences of others as they work collaboratively to learn new content.
WELLBEING	<i>Students feel secure and loved, empowering them to be themselves, try new things, and make mistakes in ways that foster deeper learning.</i>	Students are joyfully taking risks and learning together, sometimes through stress, hardship, and change.



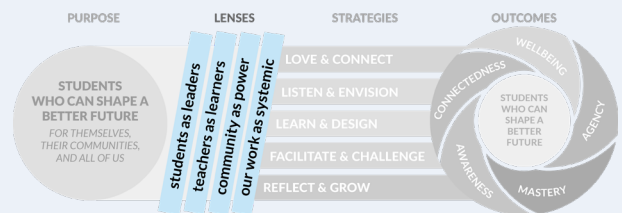
Our classrooms and the model of teaching has to change in a manner that children don't just come to school to acquire knowledge but rather come to school to try out the knowledge. Our schools must become hubs of solving community problems rather than just teaching about problems.

Charles Obore
Teach For Uganda Alumnus

Educators in transformational classrooms are developing new ways of measuring these integrated student outcomes with innovative student surveys, performance-based tasks, and classroom observations.

PATTERN #3: SHIFTING LENSES

Seeing Students as Leaders, Teachers as Learners, Communities as Power, and Our Work as Systemic



A third striking pattern in transformational classrooms appears in the perspectives that the teachers bring to their work and operate from. Because these represent ways of seeing ourselves, others, and the world around us, we are calling these “lenses.” Four purpose-driven lenses enable transformational classrooms:

Students as leaders	Teachers as learners	Community as power	Our work as systemic
<p>We see our students as whole people capable of shaping their own lives and the world around them</p> <p>... instead of passive “vessels” to be filled with knowledge.</p>	<p>We see ourselves as lifelong learners who respond to challenges with curiosity, humility, and creativity</p> <p>... instead of the sole source of knowledge and skills that students need.</p>	<p>We see communities as sources of power and wisdom and recognize that lasting change requires authentic partnership with students, families, and other educators</p> <p>... instead of places with difficult challenges and unaddressed needs.</p>	<p>We see our work as challenging the root causes of injustices that inhibit students’ potential—the systemic barriers around us and limiting beliefs inside us</p> <p>... instead of assuming and addressing inherent weaknesses within children and communities.</p>

Our crowd-sourced studies suggest that teachers’ lenses occupy a pivotal (and often underappreciated) role in students’ holistic development. These are not small shifts; they invite an entirely different way of seeing the world and fundamentally change how teachers act. Lenses are, in essence, the link between purpose and action: teachers’ clarity of purpose shifts how they see the world, and their lenses enable the innovative actions that foster student progress toward holistic leadership outcomes.

In the next section, we explore the common teaching practices in transformational classrooms, but consider how lenses enable educators’ actions. A teacher who sees *students as leaders* might, for example, set up her classroom for active debate where students learn from one another, rather than looking to herself as the sole expert. A teacher who sees his work as *systemic* might, for example, recognize that a student’s behavior reflects an underlying nutrition or sleep issue that will not be successfully addressed with classroom rules and consequences.

The critical role of teachers’ perspectives has profound implications for how teachers are trained and coached as well. Skills and actions are often (but not exclusively) developed by watching someone model the skills and practicing the skills ourselves. By contrast, our lenses most often shift when we have the opportunity to reflect on disorienting experiences or relationships. The importance of teachers’ lenses suggests that teacher development programs be calibrated to foster these common “ways of seeing” in transformational classrooms.

Explore More

Explore how [these](#) four lenses show up in students’ daily experiences, or experience the role of perspective shifts in transformational teaching and learning in [Spain](#), [New Zealand](#), and the [United States](#).

Follow this [link](#) or the QR code below to view the rich mosaic of insights, resources, and videos illustrating the pivotal role of Lenses.



Lenses give not only a language but a perspective that we can bring into reflection, to coaching, to training—to all that we do. A unifying language that is more aligned with our vision.



Maria Azevedo
Co-founder and Co-CEO,
Teach For Portugal

PATTERN #4: REHUMANIZING TEACHING & LEARNING STRATEGIES

Shifting Classroom Practice To Love & Connect, Listen & Envision, Learn & Design, Facilitate & Challenge, and Reflect & Grow



The fourth consistent pattern in transformational classrooms relates to what the teachers are actually *doing*. Five families of actions distinguish classrooms where students are developing holistically as leaders of a better future. These practices are more relational, student-led, and discovery-oriented than are often found in conventional classrooms.

LOVE & CONNECT to build culture	LISTEN & ENVISION to co-create purpose	LEARN & DESIGN to plan learning experiences	FACILITATE & CHALLENGE to inspire learning	REFLECT & GROW to fulfill potential
Caring and authentic relationships foster the trust, understanding, and honesty necessary for my students, their families, my colleagues, and me to work together toward meaningful aims.	Perfecting current ways of learning and teaching will not fulfill my students' potential as leaders of a better future, so we collectively question and reimagine the purpose and goals of our classroom.	Careful planning ensures that learning experiences align with my belief in students' potential as leaders, students' needs, and how students best learn.	Our classroom creates opportunities for students and teachers to joyfully and productively work with rigorous and challenging content at the frontiers of students' knowledge and abilities.	Learning is a lifelong journey fueled by humility and curiosity, as we strengthen our knowledge and skills and grow our capacity for understanding ourselves, each other, and the world.

Each of those general strategies involves five specific actions. *(The bold actions below are great places for new teachers to start.)*

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS	BROADEN PERSPECTIVES	BUILD CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE	FACILITATE EFFECTIVELY	TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
FOSTER BELONGING	HOST DIALOGUE & DISCUSSION	PLAN BACKWARDS	MANAGE NORMS & RITUALS	PAUSE & REFLECT
NURTURE CULTURE	PARTNER WITH FAMILIES & COMMUNITY	VALUE LEARNER VARIABILITY & OWNERSHIP	FOSTER COLLECTIVE DISCOVERY	FIND & FOSTER ALLIES
KNOW YOURSELF	CRITICALLY EXAMINE HISTORY	EXPECT HIGHER-ORDER THINKING	FLEXIBLY ADJUST COURSE	SEEK FEEDBACK
BE HUMAN	COLLECTIVELY ENVISION SUCCESS	LEVERAGE LEARNING THEORY	MONITOR LEARNING & PROGRESS	LEARN & UNLEARN

The transformational educators we are studying insist that this approach to teaching and learning is *not about teaching more; it is about teaching differently*. And many of them report that they find their work more fulfilling and students find rigorous learning more joyful with this approach.

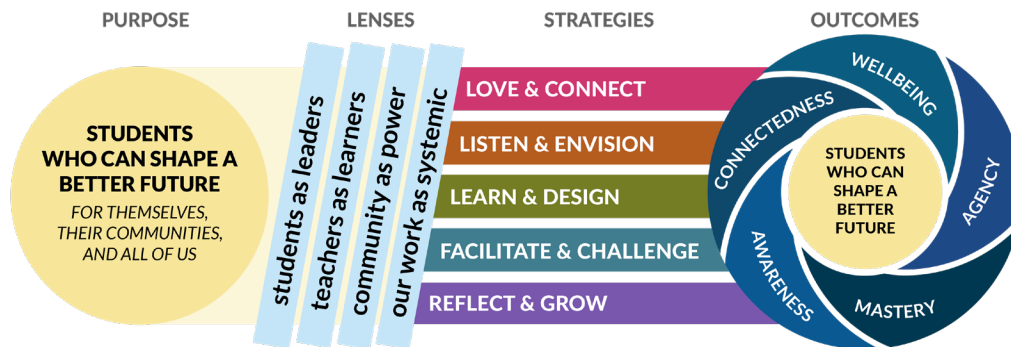
Explore More

[Explore](#) a montage of clips from transformational classrooms to see common actions in classrooms where students are developing holistically, or virtually visit classrooms in [India](#), the [United States](#), and [New Zealand](#). Use the QR code or this [link](#) to visit a rich mosaic of insights, perspectives, resources, and videos.



CONTEXTUALIZED IMPLICATIONS

Using These Global Patterns To Reimagine Classrooms, Schools, Teacher Development, and Education Systems



Teaching As Collective Leadership is a snapshot of the purpose, lenses, strategies, and outcomes emerging from our collective, crowd-sourced studies of transformational classrooms around the world.

We try to avoid calling these patterns a “framework” because that suggests a universally applicable tool, ready to apply to any classroom, school, or education system. Local aspirations and context, however, should inform decisions about whether and how those global patterns inform teaching students, developing teachers, or designing programs. *What about these global patterns validate or challenge what’s happening in your classroom, school, community, or education system? What do you think about those validations and challenges? What parts of these global patterns do the students you work with need?*

We are watching and learning from teachers, students, teacher developers, program designers, researchers, and policymakers who are using Teaching As Collective Leadership to provoke critical self-reflection about their own work. We have seen, for example:

- New teachers in Kenya reflecting on their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to these transformational teaching practices, and then adopting those practices that align with their strengths in their first months of teaching
- Teacher trainers in Portugal rethinking their pre-service training to focus more on shifting the perspectives teachers are bringing into the classroom
- Program designers in Paraguay using the five TAFL student outcomes as a “critical mirror” to rethink the student outcomes they seek in their classrooms

You can find many examples of ways students, teachers, teacher developers, and others are using Teaching As Collective Leadership to generate new insights, resources, and strategies. We look forward to learning about and learning from your own contextualized variations on these global patterns through the Global Institute’s interactive learning experiences.



If we want students to learn differently, then teachers must learn differently. If teachers are going to learn differently, they may have to unlearn some of what they think they know about learning.

Laurelin Whitfield
Leadership Coach and Facilitator, Teach For All

MAKING EXCEPTIONAL CLASSROOMS THE NORM

Transformational Classrooms Show the Need for Systemic Change

What will it take for all children to experience teaching and learning that prepares them not only to navigate but also to shape the future? What will it take for these “positive outlier” classrooms to become the norm?

One way to view Teaching As Collective Leadership is as a practitioner’s guide. We want to ensure all teachers, teacher developers, program designers, and students can access actionable insights from transformational classrooms. To that end, [Teach For All’s Global Institute](#) is developing and offering online resources and cross-border learning experiences to support anyone who is reorienting their efforts toward developing students holistically so they can shape a better future.

Another way to view Teaching As Collective Leadership is as a map for transforming our education systems. It shows the purpose, progress, perspectives, and practices that must be established at a system level to enable transformational teaching and learning for all students.

The truth is that the outlier teachers in the classrooms we studied are often working in tension with the systems around them. They spend enormous energy navigating mindsets, structures, and incentives that inhibit this more relational, exploratory, student-centered approach to teaching and learning. *How do education systems need to change so that the purpose, progress, perspectives, and practices found in transformational classrooms are the reality of every classroom?*

The Global Institute is working to leverage insights from transformational classrooms, systems, and communities to advance our understanding of how we can create conditions that enable this paradigm of teaching and learning for all children. *How can communities interrogate and reimagine education’s purpose? How can education systems define and measure rigorous mastery AND students’ agency, awareness, connectedness, and wellbeing? How can teacher training and support focus as much on shifting teachers’ lenses to enable more student-centered teaching practices? How can classrooms and schools be redesigned to encourage joyful, rigorous, collaborative student-led learning?*

These are the questions we hope you will join us to explore in the Global Institute.



A BEAUTIFUL SYNERGY

Teachers Who Develop Students To Shape a Better Future Are Themselves Agents of Systemic Change

There's a final reason we call these patterns Teaching As Collective Leadership. The educators we have studied grow into powerful agents of systemic change. The same purpose, outcomes, lenses, and practices that distinguish transformational teachers are found in leaders who are successfully shifting the structures, incentives, and conditions *around* those classrooms. And at the same time, those same collective leadership qualities are increasingly seen in students in these classrooms, as they build the capacity to exercise collective leadership for a better future themselves.

Our studies of [transformational systems](#) reveal that systems change when a small but critical mass of people inside them work together toward a shared purpose. Teachers who embody the purpose, outcomes, lenses, and practices of Teaching As Collective Leadership become part of that small but crucial group of people exercising this collective leadership.

This synergy gives us enormous hope that a paradigmatic shift in education is within reach. We have the great privilege of working with and learning from people all over the world who are leading or have led transformational classrooms and, because of that growth experience, are driving meaningful lasting systemic change. Consider a few examples:



Edson Dongo (Zimbabwe), whose **purpose-driven** work with his students on climate change has led to purpose-driven collaboration addressing environmental challenges in their community in Zimbabwe.



Richa Gupta (India), whose experience navigating dehumanizing, narrow academic **progress** as a teacher led her to found Labhya, a wellbeing program now reaching 2.7 million students in India.



Chris Fairbairn (UK), whose work as a classroom math teacher employing **practices** that holistically marry rigorous mastery with students' agency and wellbeing development led him to create an award-winning school.



Roger García (Perú), whose **understanding** of the power of the community around his school has led him to create opportunities to amplify student and family voices with a prime time radio show.

Across and beyond the Teach For All network, we are seeing leaders like Edson, Richa, Roger, and Chris working in partnership with students, parents, teachers, fellow system changers, governments, donors, and others. Each of them began their journey in a classroom as a teacher, working to develop their students holistically far beyond the expectations and incentives of their current education system. Each of them demonstrated that teaching is an act of collective leadership. And each of them developed—through that experience—the collective leadership capacities that we need to transform our education systems to holistically develop all students so they can shape a better future for themselves, their communities, and our world.

AN INVITATION

Join Us To Learn Our Way Forward Together

Humanity's future depends on a paradigmatic shift in teaching and learning around the world. Across the globe, teachers and students in transformational classrooms are showing us the way. Thousands of educators, teacher developers, program designers, researchers, and policymakers are helping us make the patterns in those classrooms actionable, contextualizing those insights into powerful local innovations and systemic change.

[Please join us.](#)