

Collaborative research and action for education systems transformation

Co-creating knowledge to drive collective, evidence-informed change



The need

Children and youth around the world navigate contexts shaped by rapid technological change, climate disruption, political uncertainty, conflict, historical injustices, and the legacies of colonialism. Yet too few education systems ensure that all young people develop the broad range of skills, knowledge, beliefs, relationships, and opportunities they need to shape their own lives, communities, and the world around them.

Education must foster (re)engagement, promote socio-emotional well-being, cultivate critical-thinking, creative, and collaborative skills, and build meaningful connections to peers, communities, and careers.

Achieving this will require collaboration to rethink purpose and rebuild systems.

Our Collaborative Research and Action Approach

Collaborative

building relationships and trust among people and organizations by sharing power and pooling diverse knowledge, skills and resources to work towards shared, collectively defined goals

Collaborative research and action (CRA) is a codesigned approach in which diverse partners across sectors and geographies **share power, expertise, resources, and lived experience to co-define questions, co-construct knowledge and tools, and work collectively** to drive equitable systems change across local, national, regional, and global contexts.

Research

co-designing research questions and methodologies that are grounded in context and respond to local priorities

Developed with partners across **six continents**, CUE's Collaborative Research and Action approach centers **local knowledge and priorities in research and policy development**, bridging education actors through communities of practice, networks, task forces, and coalitions.

Action

working together to use evidence to inform positive systemic change

These collaborative efforts have been brought together through the **Knowing Doing Network (KDN)**, a global, interconnected community of researchers, policymakers, practitioners, funders, educators, and young people working together to advance Collaborative Research and Action.

The KDN responds to the urgent need to fundamentally rethink how we work together in global education by bringing together people working across levels and contexts, using a wide-range of research approaches, incorporating diverse forms of knowledge, and promoting distributed leadership. What's at stake is not just what happens within education settings, but who gets to shape the broader conversation on education itself.

Driving education systems transformation



Education systems transformation goes beyond just changing the concrete or **visible elements** of an education system (such as budgets or curriculum) to also shifting the **invisible elements** (such as relationships, interactions, power dynamics, and mindsets). This requires working with people across geographies, sectors, experiences, generations, perspectives, and roles to develop a **shared vision of educational purpose** and then **rebuild systems** around that purpose.

The KDN works to **strengthen ecosystems** (people, communities, organizations, and institutions) for systems transformation using **a framework we call “the 3 C’s”**:

CAPACITY

Skills, knowledge, mindsets, resources, relationships, and opportunities needed to act in new ways toward desired change.

- Are relevant actors *able* to promote the change?
- What would help them do it?

COMMITMENT

Sense of ownership and responsibility to lead change; dedication of time, money, and other resources.

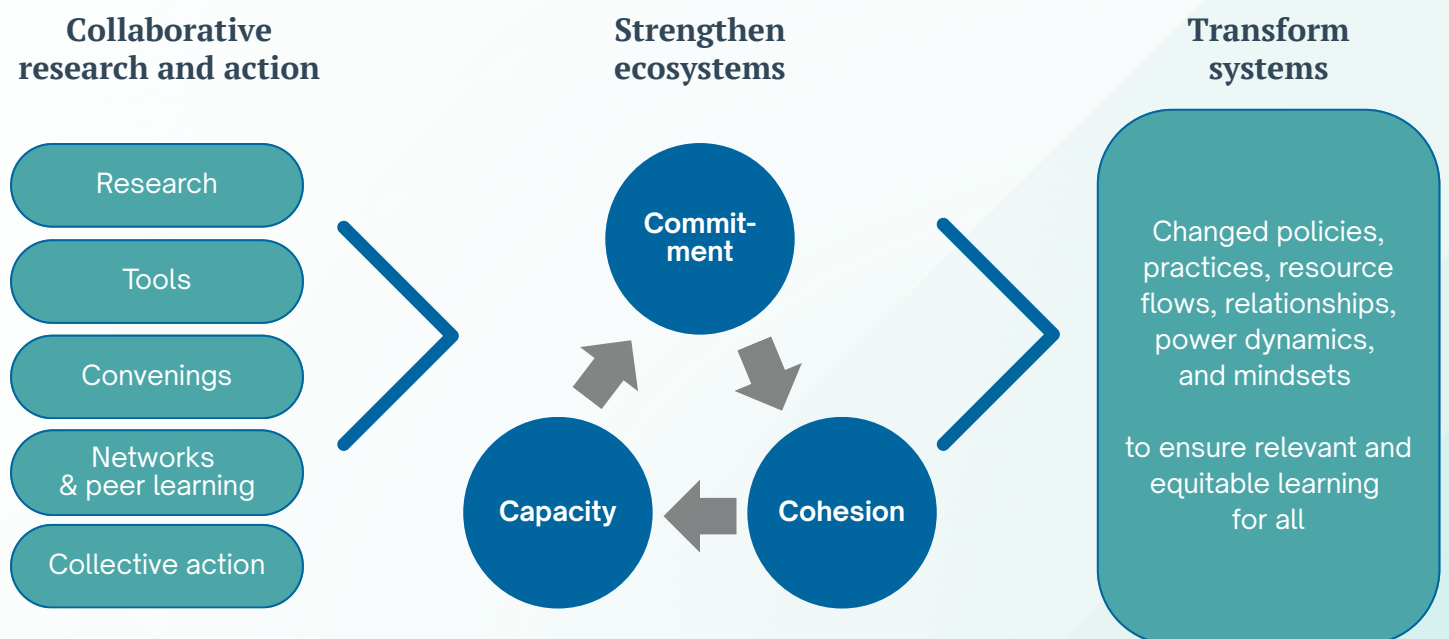
- Do relevant actors *want* to promote the change?
- What would motivate them?

COHESION

A clear and shared understanding of the desired change and coordinated action to align strategies and drive lasting change.

- Is there a clear and shared understanding of the change and what is needed to promote it?
- What would help strengthen this?

Putting it all together: Our pathway to change



Insights from CUE's "Field Guide" to collaborative research and action

We welcome your feedback on this initial sharing of the collective insights, tensions, and learnings from the KDN's journey of reimagining and reshaping education systems through collaborative research and action.

1 Purpose and Alignment

Collaboration requires continually **clarifying why people come together**, shaped by context and funding, but refined through dialogue, reflection, and adaptation to align diverse motivations and ground research and action in lived realities.

Promote shared vision across diverse actors

- Convene people with multiple perspectives, experiences, skills, and roles.
- Work at the intersection of individual motivations and collective purpose to build trust and strengthen alignment.

 **Whose perspectives, experiences, or voices are missing from this collaboration?**

Treat purpose as a dynamic practice

- Allow purpose to adapt to changing contexts and evolving understandings.
- Build in regular moments for reflection and redefinition of shared goals and direction.

 **How will we revisit and adapt our purpose as contexts and insights evolve?**

Allow roles and responsibilities to emerge

- Let roles take shape through shared work rather than fixing them early.
- Enable participants to step up or step back as the collaboration evolves.

 **How might roles need to shift as the collaboration matures?**

2 Power dynamics and Relationships

Collaborative research and action does not automatically shift power. **Without intentional design**, collaborative research and action can reinforce power imbalances through who sets agendas, whose knowledge is valued, and who benefits.

Build relationships and trust as part of the work

- Invest in long-term, reciprocal relationships rather than transactional collaboration.
- Co-construct clarity around roles, expectations, and ways of working.

 **How clear are we about how we work together and the impact of working in this way?**

Share power by widening participation and leadership

- Create space for critical questioning and open dialogue, even when it challenges assumptions.
- Design for inclusive decision-making that values lived experience alongside formal expertise.

 **Who gets to question, decide, and lead in this collaboration?**

Actively navigate structural barriers to equitable participation

- Surface institutional constraints that shape who can participate and with what influence.
- Proactively address constraints rather than treating them as fixed conditions.

 **What barriers are we treating as fixed rather than addressable?**

3

Structure and integrity

Meaningful collaboration depends on practical structures that support coordination and integrity in execution, ensuring contributions are valued, commitments are followed through, and shared goals are reached.

Design structures that support both action and connection

- Use practical, relational structures that enable coordination and meaningful engagement.
- Let coordination emerge from strong working relationships, not top-down design.

How do our structures support (or limit) meaningful relationships and action?

Build and maintain the supports the work depends on

- Build both tangible (systems, processes, resources) and intangible (trust, culture, relationships) support structures.
- Revisit structures regularly to ensure they still match the work.

How often do we pause to reflect if existing structures still match the work?

Use resources intentionally to reinforce shared priorities

- Align and manage resource flows to support equity and collective goals.
- Pay attention to how resources shape participation and influence over time.

How do resource decisions influence who participates, leads, or sets priorities?

4

Continuity and transformation

Long-term collaboration depends on staying connected to purpose and impact, designing for transition, and adapting as people and contexts evolve.

Connect learning, action, and impact over time

- Plan intentionally for the research-to-action continuum, linking knowledge, tools, and implementation.
- Treat impact and storytelling as shared responsibilities, while ensuring accountability.

How clearly does our work move from learning to action to impact?

Design for transition, and evolution

- Normalize change, including turnover, evolving roles, and exit strategies.
- Recognize when to evolve or sunset collaborations rather than sustaining them indefinitely.

What signals tell us it's time to transform or even let go of certain parts of this work?

Adapt structures to sustain engagement

- Build mechanisms that maintain engagement as participation and contexts shift.
- Revisit roles, relationships, and structures to support involvement across phases of the work.

What structures help the work continue when key individuals step away?

What have you learned from your own collaborative research and action efforts? We invite you to **provide feedback** on these lessons or **share your own experiences** as you explore similar collaborative research and action paths, within or outside of the KDN.

