

# 4 QUALITY EDUCATION



## CO-MODERATORS

**Elizabeth King**, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Center for Universal Education, The Brookings Institution

**Urvashi Sahni**, Founding President and CEO, Study Hall Educational Foundation and Nonresident Fellow, Center for Universal Education, The Brookings Institution

**17 ROOMS GLOBAL FLAGSHIP**  
**2021 ROOM DOCUMENTS**  
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This document summarizes the ideas and actions that emerged from Room 4, a working group for Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education, that convened as part of the annual 17 Rooms global flagship process in 2021. The [17 Rooms initiative](#) is co-hosted by the Center for Sustainable Development at The Brookings Institution and The Rockefeller Foundation. Each Room, one per SDG, was asked to identify actionable priorities that can be advanced by the end of 2022 to improve some component of 2030 outcomes for its respective Goal. Corresponding documents prepared by the other flagship Rooms are available [here](#), alongside a synthesis report prepared by the 17 Rooms secretariat.

## **Room 4**

### **Learning teams: A reimagined education workforce**

The COVID-19 crisis, now more than a year long and still in full force in many parts of the world, has created a long-lasting learning crisis—with significantly worse effects for poor and marginalized students.<sup>1</sup> Worldwide, parents, communities, and educators are rising to the challenges and have adapted as quickly as they could, but many do not have adequate resources and skills to do so. Girls from marginalized communities have been particularly hard hit: many pulled out of school, [married off early](#), or put to work. Regaining learning losses and reclaiming students who have dropped out calls for urgent action. Even prior to the pandemic, many students were not learning foundational knowledge and skills, so recovery will be difficult without new thinking about teaching and learning systems.

Although disastrous in so many ways, the pandemic has offered valuable lessons about resilience, recovery, and reimagination. When schools closed, communities and educators used alternative learning spaces and accessed many “teachers”, engaging parents, older siblings, community volunteers, and educated youth, supported by smart technologies to access knowledge from distant professionals. These demonstrated how a more distributed teaching model might work; instead of students relying on only one professional teacher, there emerged *learning teams* with several “teacher allies” from within the community.

There are programs that have already been using learning teams successfully around the world. They operate in ways that are contextualized and adapted to local circumstances and needs. Consider the following which are being embedded into education systems:

- In five African countries, CAMFED (Campaign for Female Education) partners with ministries of education and communities to improve their school systems’ ability to serve the most marginalized children, especially girls. Learner Guides are recent female graduates who volunteer in their local schools as members of school learning teams. They identify girls who have dropped out of school or are at risk of doing so; mentor them to navigate the challenges of school; deliver a life skills curriculum that complements the academic curriculum and is integrated into the school timetable.
- In India, Pratham engages the community to support early childhood education and foundational learning. It mobilizes community volunteers who are trained for this work; engages mothers of children in Pratham’s programs; and uses “Teaching at the Right Level” which groups children by ability rather than by grade. Also in India, Study Hall Education

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<sup>1</sup> Donnelly, R., & Patrinos, H. (2021). Learning loss during COVID-19: An early systematic review. *Covid Economics*, 77(30 April 2021), 145–153; Onyema, E.M., Eucheria, N.C., Obafemi, F.A., Sen, S., Atonye, F.G., Sharma, A. and Alsayed, A.O. (2020). Impact of Coronavirus pandemic on education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(13), pp.108-121.; Kaffenberger, M. (2021). Modelling the long-run learning impact of the Covid-19 learning shock: Actions to (more than) mitigate loss. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 81, p.102326.; Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E. and Liu, J. (2020). Projecting the potential impact of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement. *Educational Researcher*, 49(8), pp.549-565.; Reimers, F., Amaechi, U., Banerji, A., & Wang, M. (Eds.) (2021). *An educational calamity: Learning and teaching during the covid-19 pandemic*. Independently published.

Foundation's (SHEF) Digital Study Hall program and Digital Saathi program enable local volunteers/paid facilitators and remote teachers to team up with skilled, expert teachers virtually, using low tech videos and online platforms. Local volunteers are trained in domain knowledge and better pedagogy by professionals digitally. Girls, who drop out of school because of travel in unsafe rural areas, can access learning in their communities through local community-based, technology-enabled learning teams.

- In Kenya, the Education Development Trust (EDT) works with a learning team of community health volunteers, parents, teachers and instructional coaches as part of distance learning support for marginalized girls during the pandemic.
- In the U.S., Arizona State University has been placing more than 400 teacher candidates in team-based models across school districts, helping to transition schools and school systems to team-based models for *all* educators. In Fall 2021, schools across five school districts will be moving toward whole-school implementations of the Next Education Workforce team-based models. This work in Arizona has captured the attention of systems-level leaders in other states (e.g., California).

Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be defined more holistically, including not only the development of foundational basic literacy and numeracy skills, and learning of content across domains, social, emotional and political learning, but also the development of students' skills to care for self, others and the planet and to engage in lifelong learning. To achieve this vision for what learning should be, **Room 4 proposes that education systems worldwide adopt the Learning Teams approach of distributed teaching and learning.** This approach allows education systems to mobilize a broader set of expertise, professional skills and socioemotional support in schools than the current model of one teacher per classroom. It is particularly successful in keeping girls in school and enabling their learning.

Specifically, Room 4 proposes:

A Global Coalition on Learning Teams that would bring together NGOs, development agencies, donors, private sector, research partners, and civil society organizations, to support governments interested in using a *learning team* approach. It would develop a multi-year agenda for supporting efforts and finding resources to pilot new models and generating robust evidence on how these models can be scaled and embedded in education systems. It would play an advocacy role to promote existing evidence on learning team programs so that learning teams can be a priority on the international education agenda. The Coalition would support:

- An investment program to pilot learning team models in interested countries in order to generate cross-country evidence on the impact of learning teams and to codify its key elements. Institutional partners would jointly identify countries, secure funding, play a role in capturing the learning across countries, and amplify the lessons.
- A future UNESCO Global Monitoring Education Report, in the next 2-3 years, focused on the rationale, experience, and impact of learning teams. The learning team approach should be an element of the strategies to achieve the SDGs for education.
- Engagement with prominent education organizations to promote the diffusion of findings from research and evaluation evidence. This could include seminars or symposia, co-sponsored by the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution with members of Room 4, on the design of and experiences with learning teams. It would foster ties with education leaders in other sectors (e.g., public health) to exchange ideas about best practices for professional development of non-traditional sector workers.

- A global photo contest (*The Many Faces of Learning Teams*) as an online campaign to promote the learning team approach. Together with a photo, contestants would submit a description of their learning team's value and impact in the community or country.
- Partnership and coordination, as appropriate, with other coalitions devoted to better learning, such as the Global Coalition for Education Data (UNESCO Institute of Statistics), the Global Coalition on School Feeding (World Food Program), and the Global Compact for Foundational Learning.

Efforts to recover from the pandemic present a unique opportunity to adopt changes that address the longstanding challenges in school systems which have left us with millions of children not learning worldwide. Our vision for the future is an effective education workforce of *learning teams* that would consist of professionals with diverse expertise and community participants who can contribute meaningfully to learning in schools. These teams would also have the resources and skills to use technology that could give students, parents, and the learning teams access to the knowledge of a broader set of domain experts and practitioners.