

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI)
New Professionalism and the Future of Teaching

An introduction to the ambition loops tool

What this looks like and how it could be used in the multi-national stakeholder study

A structured process to develop a shared vision for the future of the teaching profession

The CERI's New Professionalism and the Future of Teaching provides countries the opportunity to participate in a multi-national stakeholder study in 2023-24. Together with participating countries, the project team will adapt and tailor two research-based tools. This document provides an overview of one of these: the **ambition loops** tool. This type of tool has previously been developed in efforts to battle climate change (see Box 1). The ambition loops tool in our project supports the collection of input from multiple stakeholders from within the education sector and broader society; and forms the basis for a multistakeholder collective dialogue and effort to generate preferred scenarios for the future of the teaching profession that can add to the prosperity of students and communities.

The overall benefits of this exercise are that it:

- Allows the Ministry to engage with multiple stakeholders in the context of forward-looking research.
- Provides a medium/ longer term vision that anticipates future developments regarding teaching and teachers, with a focus on strengthened connections between school teachers and experts in other sectors and society as a whole.
- Creates space for a constructive debate on teachers and teaching, by thinking about the mid to long term and moving beyond shorter-term policy issues.
- Results in a co-constructed, shared vision of the future of teaching and teacher professionalism that can guide future developments and policy regarding teachers and teaching.

Box 1. Creating positive feedback loops to support connections among stakeholders

Ambition loops (Dagnet et al., 2019^[1]) were developed by (Metzger et al., 2018^[2]) to present positive feedback loops which support connections between business and government leaders to work collaboratively towards solutions to complex problems such as climate change. Ambition loops recognise that “policies that add clarity and build confidence are critical to driving action” (Metzger et al., 2018, p. ii^[2]), including developing long-term strategies. This includes a focus on identifying areas where policy objectives and stakeholder interests are mutually beneficial. In turn, support can take the form of identifying groups who can provide advocacy and constructive support for change.

The International Summit on the Teaching Profession in May 2022 (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training of Spain, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Education International, 2022^[3]) discussed the need to move from “leadership for reform and improvement to professional leadership for anticipation and uncertainty”, including valuing networked, multi-level learning and the importance of the local. Ambition loops have the potential to provide a way for all levels of leadership to explore anticipation as a mindset approach to engage with an uncertain future.

Source: McGrath (Forthcoming^[4]).

Why use the ambition loops tool?

Conceptual work in CERI's *New Professionalism and the Future of Teaching* during 2021 and 2022 notes the complex and multidimensional nature of teaching and how this is likely to evolve. Based on our findings and previous OECD work, we argue that the future 'new professional' will likely be an expert within a growing network of 'connective' professionals, collaborating with different colleagues with a multitude of responsibilities and roles in different sectors. A critical question to prepare for the future, therefore, is how to design and promote (cross-sectoral) collaborations that can strengthen the teaching profession?

The ambition loops tool organises in an accessible way a body of knowledge accumulated via desk-based research, secondary analysis of OECD data and interviews with experts to identify innovative and promising examples of professional collaboration. The tool allows this knowledge to be used and valued by the broader education sector within a national context.

The ambition loops tool can be used to explore and promote beneficial (cross-sectoral) collaborations to strengthen the teaching profession in the future. The OECD team argues that articulating clear, bold policy and actions by stakeholders can contribute to overcoming the challenges for achieving transformational change, such as the pull of previous experience of schooling by stakeholders.

The ambition loops tool can stimulate and guide a constructive discussion with multiple stakeholders. In essence, this can support a collective process to identify ways that different stakeholders can each play a role in shaping and co-constructing a strong teacher profession, now and in the future. It recognises the complex nature of society and education from the outset and looks for 'synergies', that is, what we can achieve together, over and above what each of us could do independently.

What does the ambition loops tool look like?

The ambition loops tool organises a body of research and ideas for next practice into readily accessible statements of ambition to strengthen connections between teachers and a wide range of stakeholders both within the education sector and in broader society. Its adaptable design means that it can be used to support more general discussions on meaningful collaborations or to focus on specific types of collaboration, according to the participating country's focus and interest.

At the most general level, a set of overarching principles can help guide and promote meaningful collaboration to support the teaching profession in the future. These guiding principles will be central in framing and developing ambition loops in participating countries and are presented in Table 1.

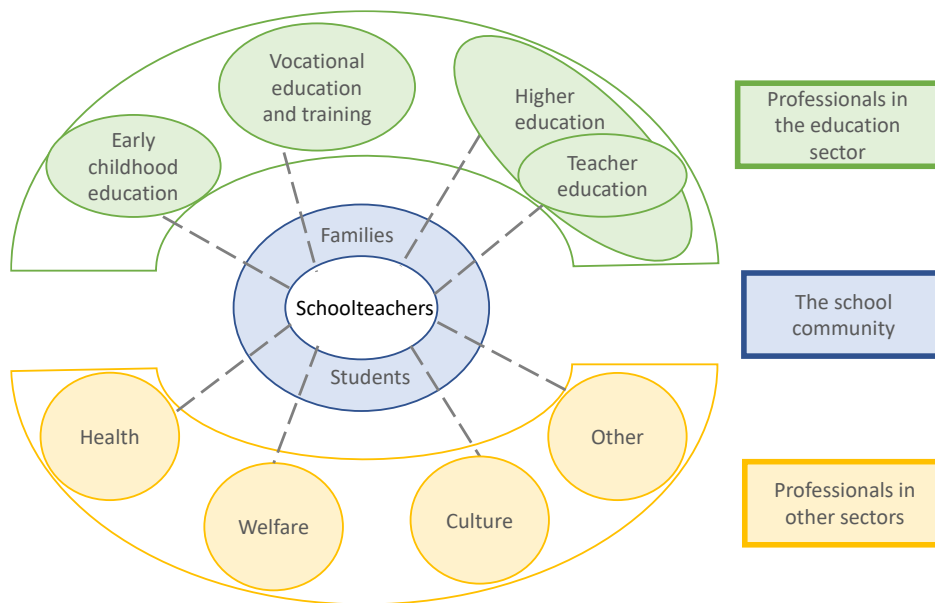
Table 1. Guiding principles for ambition loops

Principle one	Recognise the value of interactions across stakeholders
Principle two	Create space at all levels to reflect on the future people want to build together
Principle three	Support the role of "boundary crossers" and "bridge builders" to enhance partnerships
Principle four	Focus on long-term partnerships rather than time-bound projects
Principle five	Work collaboratively with colleagues and stakeholders, avoiding hierarchical relationships
Principle six	Develop collective action and support to address specific, complex topics
Principle seven	Clarify goals and opportunities for each stakeholder group as well as collective goals
Principle eight	Create space for transformation to take hold as part of aligning ideas (policy) with action (practice)

Source: McGrath (Forthcoming^[4]).

Now that we know the guiding principles, let's look at the different potential collaborations.

Figure 1. Three sectors of potential collaboration to strengthen the teaching profession



The ambition loops tool organises the forward-looking research into three broad sectors of potential collaboration for schoolteachers: within the school community, with professionals in other parts of the education sector, and with professionals and experts in other sectors (Figure 1). In all sectors and between these sectors, there are multiple opportunities to build connections and support schoolteachers' work in the future (Figure 2). What if we could build these connections?

Figure 2. What if we build connections to strengthen teacher professionalism in the future?

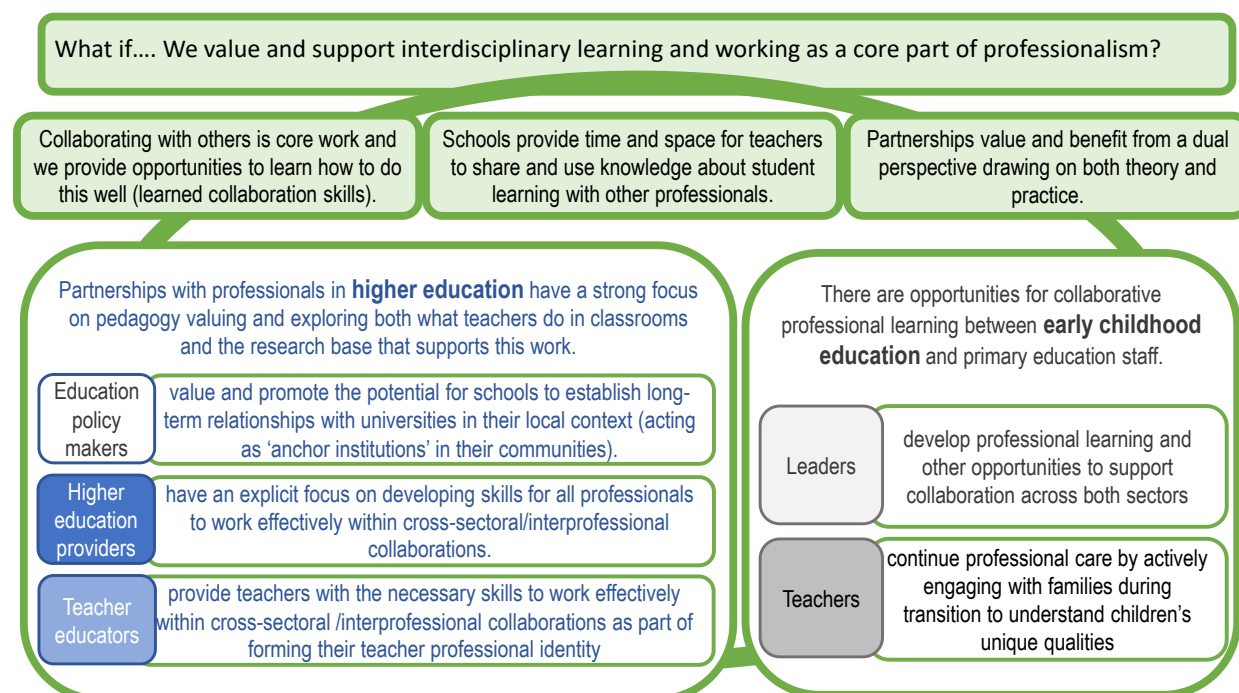
Education sector
What if.... We value and support interdisciplinary learning and working as a core part of professionalism?
What if... We think about "the learning journey" and accompany learners through formal education, informal learning and learning to learn?
What if.... We form partnerships to strengthen teacher leadership throughout the career span?
School community
What if.... We value schools as a physical place for interactions within the community for learning?
What if.... We create space to think collectively about the future and develop new ideas?
What if.... We value that all adults in the school community play a role in caring for children and youth?
What if.... We unlock student voice and involvement in decision making?
What if.... We reframe the roles of teachers and learners within a broader community of expertise?
Broader society and other sectors
What if.... We use learning partnerships for real-life experiences?
What if.... We see schools as a hub for learning and connecting with the community?
What if.... We see teachers as pedagogical innovators?

Source: McGrath (Forthcoming₍₄₎).

What does research tell us about how to support more meaningful collaborations? For each sector, we map out research findings into a set of clear statements of ambition for future practice. Here, let's look at a sample of some of the ambition loops to support schoolteachers working with other professionals in the education sector (Figure 3). As you can see, there are some shared ambitions for the education sector as a whole (see the three statements at the top of the figure), while other ambitions indicate how connections could be strengthened between teachers and specific stakeholder groups.

In Figure 3, we can see two small samples of ambitions for strengthening connections with professionals in higher education and early childhood education. Note that the tool provides several other ambitions. In this sample, for partnerships in higher education (left box), we can see a general ambition and also three specific ambitions for education policy makers, higher education providers and teacher educators to work toward this ambition. The sample also shows general and specific ambitions to strengthen connections between schoolteachers and professionals in early childhood education (right box).

Figure 3. A sample of the ambition loops for schoolteachers working with other professionals in the education sector



Note: The three light green boxes present shared ambitions to strengthen professional connections within the education sector. As an example, this figure presents a small sample of some specific ambitions to strengthen schoolteachers' connections with other professionals in higher education and early childhood education.

Source: McGrath (Forthcoming⁽⁴⁾).

Providing ambition loops for the school community, the education sector and other sectors in broader society, the tool presents a series of different research-based statements, aiming to open minds to different possible connections to strengthen teacher professionalism. It offers the possibility to collect feedback from many different stakeholders offering multiple perspectives. When engaging with the tool, we think about which of the ambitions resonate most with us. We then think about our specific roles, as well as the roles of others in helping to work toward these. How similar would our ambitions be?

Example of how to use the ambition loops tool to generate a preferred scenario

The ambition loops tool will be used to collect input from different stakeholders. The OECD will synthesise and present an analysis of the results as a core input to an OECD stakeholder workshop (Phase III of the multi-national stakeholder study). At the workshop, the OECD team will facilitate a collective discussion. Stakeholder representatives will work in groups to generate a series of preferred scenarios for the future of the teaching profession.

To illustrate this, the OECD team facilitated a test exercise with a small group of colleagues. The group worked with ambition loops for the school community and the guiding principles. Using this example, let's work through the three different steps of the exercise to create a preferred scenario for the future of the teaching profession.

Step 1 The group identifies areas of consensus and dissensus

Each group member (stakeholder) works through the set of ambition loop principles (Table 1) and ambition loops for the school community and highlights statements they see as valuable in their context and would like to use to create their vision for the future (preferred scenario for the future of the teaching profession).

A facilitator opens discussion and asks the group to share the principles and statements they have selected. Together, the group identifies the statements where there is strong consensus among members. In this example, the group achieves consensus on four of the eight ambition loop principles (Table 2) and on a selection of ambition loop statements for the school community with a focus on teachers, schools and policy makers (columns 1 and 2 in Table 3).

The facilitator initiates a discussion to collect different perspectives on why group members have selected these particular statements. The facilitator notes key points of the discussion (column 3 in Table 3) and this feeds into the creation of a preferred scenario for the future of the teaching profession in Step 2.

Table 2. Achieving consensus on ambition loop principles

In this example the group agrees on the importance of principles 2, 3, 5 and 8

Consensus on:	Short description of research
Principle two: Create space at all levels to reflect on the future people want to build together	Ideas sought from multiple perspectives and stakeholders are an important part of the process of developing a strategic response to new challenges or for transformational change. Anticipation of future-first challenges, such as the possible use of social robots in classrooms (Smakman, Vogt and Konijn, 2021 ^[5]), will lead to a spectrum of responses from within and across stakeholders. Future focused approaches benefit from multiple voices (Southgate, Reynolds and Howley, 2013 ^[6]) to shape responses that feature greater confidence in their resilience (Jordan, Kleinsasser and Roe, 2014 ^[7])
Principle three: Support the role of "boundary crossers" and "bridge builders" to enhance partnerships	The role of boundary crossers (Ko et al., 2020 ^[8] ; Harris, Azorin and Jones, 2021 ^[9] ; Mujtaba et al., 2018 ^[10] ; White, 2019 ^[11]) and bridge builders (Gordon and Louis, 2009 ^[12] ; DeMatthews, 2018 ^[13] ; Harris, Azorin and Jones, 2021 ^[9]), both formal and informal, are valued for the benefits they create from cross-sectoral partnerships. These professional attributes and roles play an important role to connect groups who might otherwise be working in parallel.
Principle five: Work collaboratively with colleagues and stakeholders, avoiding hierarchical relationships	Valuing the different roles of actors supports the development of meaningful change (Mezza, 2022 ^[14] ; Bain et al., 2022 ^[15] ; Mockler, 2020 ^[16])
Principle eight: Create space for transformation to take hold as part of aligning ideas (policy) with action (practice)	Space for transformation can involve identifying old practices that can be "abandoned" (Drucker, 2007 ^[17]). Unlearning can support creation of space for transformation when time or resources are added to what is necessary for the purposes of exploring new ways (Yang, Chou and Chiu, 2014 ^[18]).

Source: McGrath (Forthcoming^[4]).

Table 3. Achieving consensus on ambition loops for the school community and group discussion

In this example the group agrees on a subset of ambition loops statements for teachers, schools and policy makers

Consensus	Short description of research	Summary of group discussion
TEACHERS exercise professional autonomy to develop teaching and learning that is relevant and meaningful to their students	There is scope to consider ways to enhance autonomy (teacher leadership) in the area of teaching to benefit authentic and meaningful learning options for their students (Mezza, 2022 ^[14] ; Grice, 2019 ^[19]).	Professional autonomy will be even more important in the future because it leaves the top-down approach behind. One feasible way to support autonomy is through flexible curriculum where teachers are empowered to make choices to support their students. The teachers working with a particular group of students are the ones best placed to know what teaching and learning is relevant and meaningful to them.
SCHOOLS provide support to students who need specific assistance in making choices to help them lead their own learning	An important consideration when examining ways to empower support changes for students is to not assume that all students are motivated to the same levels. Some students will need greater support to be able to make choices or contribute ideas about their learning. (Charteris and Smardon, 2019 ^[20] ; Istance and Kools, 2013 ^[21])	Students who need support are given point-in-time support. Other students who demonstrate mastery have the space to unleash and develop their talents. Teachers should have the time to develop this or have others in the classroom assisting them to do it. We should not assume that all students are motivated to the same levels and respond accordingly.
When exploring new ideas, SCHOOLS seek multiple stakeholder views to provide richer responses for forward thinking	Ideas sought from multiple perspectives and stakeholders are an important part of the process of developing a strategic response for transformational change. Future focused approaches rely on the ideas from multiple voices to shape responses and feature greater confidence in their resilience). (Southgate, Reynolds and Howley, 2013 ^[6] ; Jordan, Kleinsasser and Roe, 2014 ^[7])	If we want new solutions we have to touch base with stakeholders as we go. This will make sure there is confidence when piloting new ideas. Given that it is not only the teaching that affects student outcomes, it is important to listen to experts in other aspects of the students developmental needs (a whole-child approach) when exploring new ideas.
SCHOOLS seek and secure ways to benefit from expertise of other professionals working within their communities to empower students and increase school and lifelong learning outcomes	The development of appropriate mechanisms from the perspectives of schools, working parents and employers, provides potential for teachers to harness the professional expertise of their families and communities to support learning as well as contribute to the building of communities. What if schools could build collaborations with the professional and contextual expertise within its community. This could include harnessing the expertise within the community directly or in a brokerage role with their work and community networks. New ways of rethinking community participation can both harness and develop social capital within communities that can extend to support with formal learning in schools as well as through informal learning approaches (Iyengar, 2021 ^[22]).	It is important for those working in schools to know how to engage in cross-sector collaboration to do it well. Technology and changing work practices (such as teleworking) bring new opportunities to tap into local expertise and beyond. This puts expertise closer to the school gate.
POLICY MAKERS strengthen support for teachers' collaboration with parents, starting in initial teacher education	Teacher capacity to work with families and other partners is an important feature of professionalism that did not exist in the same way when teacher work was seen as solitary and specialised work. Teacher learning must support working effectively with individual parents and developing an understanding about how the professionalism of teachers plays a role in creating a welcoming school (Epstein, 2018 ^[23]).	Schools need time and money to allow teachers to work more closely with parents. There are multiple benefits for students as well as parents and teachers from increased collaboration. Knowing how to collaborate well has to be learnt and cannot further intensify teachers' work.

Note: Column 3 summarises the group discussion as members work with the ambition loops tool. This example only looks at ambition loops for the school community. Ambition loops are also available for the education sector (early childhood education, vocational education and training, higher education/ teacher education) and for other sectors in broader society.

Source: McGrath (Forthcoming^[4]).

Step 2 The group creates a preferred scenario for the future of the teaching profession

Following Step 1, a facilitator helps the group to use the agreed ambition loop statements and the summary of their discussion to create a scenario. One member of the group is chosen as a note taker. The facilitator supports the group in elaborating a brief description of the scenario and a title for the scenario. In this specific example, the group creates the following preferred scenario for the future of teaching profession:

Title: Empowering teachers to work in strong professional communities in the future

Brief description: This preferred scenario describes a long-term vision of the teaching profession which values professional autonomy. There is a focus on trust that supports relationships with stakeholders and enhancement of the general culture. All changes are considered from the perspective of equity first. All stakeholders need to be involved to create this change for the future. To realise this vision, there is a focus on nurturing the role of bridge builders. We do not often explicitly value the role of bridge builders who can work across groups to build trust and co-operation that benefits individual stakeholders and the collective. Having dedicated formal bridge builders takes time and knowledge which should be deliberately planned. When designing transformation, it is also important to consider collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders that avoids hierarchical relationships, and approaches that clarify goals for each stakeholder group as well as collective goals.

Step 3 OECD drafts a set of full-text scenarios

In Step 3 the OECD summarises the findings of Steps 1 and 2 from the stakeholder workshop. The OECD team drafts a set of scenarios based on the previous steps. The drafting process uses both components of the ambition loops tool (e.g. Table 2 and columns 1 and 2 in Table 3) and the group's interaction with the tool during the workshop (e.g. column 3 in Table 3). There will be a series of scenarios generated by the different groups during the OECD stakeholder workshop. The aim would be to produce a set of up to five preferred scenarios.

Following the OECD stakeholder workshop

The OECD has a day working with the Ministry and a selection of stakeholder representatives (invited by the Ministry) to work through a 'back casting' exercise to support collaborative action. For each preferred scenario, we will answer the following:

- To realise this preferred future, what do we need to do in the next 10 years?
- What do we need to do in the next 5 years?

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