

Climate justice and education equity

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Research agenda contribution proposed by:

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This proposed agenda contribution focuses on three related ideas at the nexus of climate change and education.

1. First, as climate change impacts escalate, the potential for human societies to respond in educated and informed ways will be diminished. This is because climate change impacts cascade across scales and sectors, manifesting in many and varied ways, including as reduced educational access, participation and attainment by students in formal and informal education contexts. This is particularly worrying given that equitable and just responses to climate change require educated and informed actors making those responses.
2. Second, climate change will impact on education experiences and outcomes commonly but unevenly. One example is disruption to formal education. Disruption to formal education is a significant cause of students' educational disadvantage, and can be understood at scales ranging from individual students (e.g., many days of missed school retarding individuals' learning potential) through to larger groups (e.g., children from refugee experiences having limited access to adequate education for long periods). As climate change increasingly disrupts formal education systems, we expect that already disadvantaged and underrepresented students will be impacted more heavily, and over longer periods of time, than their more privileged counterparts.
3. Third, the pursuit of equitable and just climate change mitigation and adaptation provides an urgent core purpose for all formal education. We propose this fundamental repurposing of formal education at all levels (primary, secondary and post-secondary), and across all fields and disciplines, from humanities through social, technological and physical sciences. This proposition operates in the context of long-standing and widespread handwringing about the purpose of education systems in the modern era. Increasingly, public discourse and relevant literatures recognise that the dominant education structures that emerged from an industrialising Europe - where mass education was established initially to provide competent and compliant workers for factories - are under considerable pressure in terms of their ongoing relevance and value. Education is increasingly being commodified and marketized across the globe and, simultaneously, claims regarding the broad intent of education systems are framed in terms of individuals' (comparative) benefits (e.g., building social and emotional skills, career paths and orientations, gaining 'a good life') or states' needs (e.g., productive citizens, knowledge economy participants, growth producers). Perhaps pre-empting any other claim, education could be *about* pursuing climate change mitigation and adaptation responses grounded in commitments to equity and justice that recognise climate change as a planetary emergency with challenging spatial and temporal dimensions.