

The Quality Debate

A thought-provoking
essay by
Patrick Watkins





The Quality Debate

Contents

Glossary

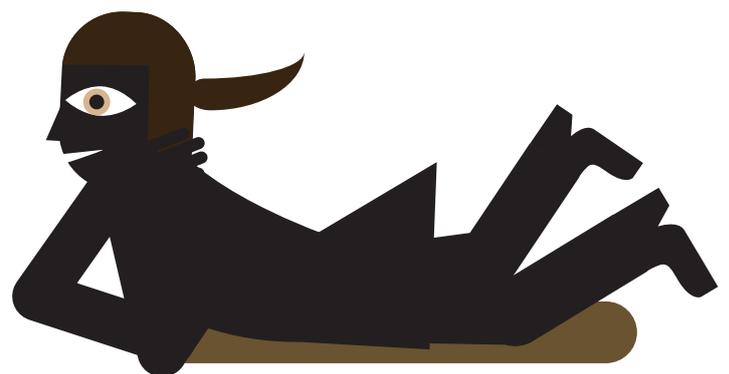
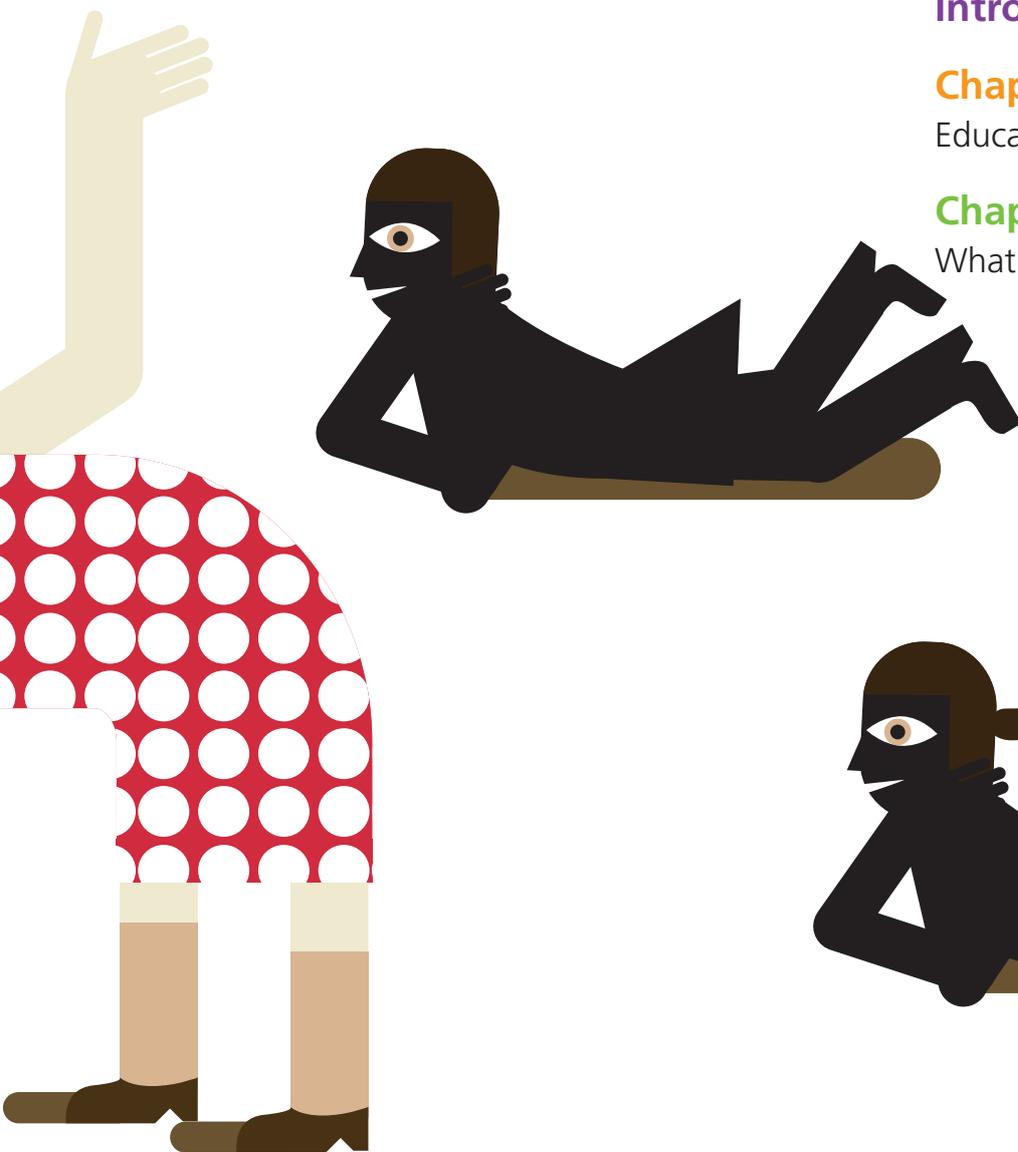
Introduction: page 1

Chapter 1: page 37

Education for what?

Chapter 2: page 51

What is quality education?



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Glossary

AAI:	ActionAid International
ANCEFA:	African Network Campaign on Education For All
CBO:	Community Based Organization
CSO:	Civil Society Organisation
ECCE:	Early Childhood Care and Education
EDUCO:	Education with Participation of the Community (El Salvador)
EFA:	Education For All
EFA-FTI:	Fast-Track Initiative
EI:	Education International
ESP:	Education Sector Plan
Eurodad:	European Network on Debt and Development
GCE:	Global Campaign for Education
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GMR:	EFA Global Monitoring Report
GNP:	Gross National Product
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT:	Information and Communication Technologies
IFI:	International Financial Institution
ILO:	International Labour Organisation
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
INGO:	International Non-Governmental Organizations
ISO:	International Organization for Standardization
MDG:	Millennium Development Goals
NFE:	Non-Formal Education
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA:	Official Development Assistance
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRA:	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRGF:	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility
PTA:	Parents Teachers Association
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Program
SBM :	School Based Management
SMC:	School Management Committee
TIMMS:	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNDP:	United Nations Human Development Programme
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPE:	Universal Primary Education
WB:	World Bank
WTO:	World Trade Organisation

The Quality Debate

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by Patrick Watkins

Introduction

With the deadline for the achievement of Education For All (EFA) just five years away, marked disparities in learning achievements both between and within countries have become a priority issue for campaigners, academics and many others in the education policy community. Yet the quest for quality education is not a new subject or even a steadily growing concern only recently making it to the top of the international community's attention. In the global education compact, quality started off as a central element of the Jomtien declaration, before becoming a specific and central goal at the [Dakar World Forum](#). But the talk about quality was soon to be placed in the shadow of a new millennium mission which proposed a narrowed version of the education goals, deprived of any specific reference to quality. Now the pendulum is obviously swinging back to the point of giving this term celebrity status, quality education being made the prime focus of attention by all the major education players, with a special and noticeably fresh interest manifested by the World Bank. As with all buzz and fashion words, it is today actually almost impossible to write or speak about education in the EFA arena, without adding quality to education, an operation which unfortunately also increasingly involves the diminution of the "For All" dimension of Dakar's educational vision.

PART 2

Quality & the
EFA vision
Page 9

So what is this quality education which everyone is referring to and why has it suddenly become such an urgent issue? The obvious answer is linked to the numerous studies highlighting some countries' very poor educational achievement levels essentially measured in terms of reading and numeracy skills. In terms of measuring worldwide progress in the educational field, this means that nations which have reached or are at the point of reaching the celebrated albeit limited MDG goal of UPE, are nonetheless delivering vast cohorts of illiterate and socially marginalised pupils. Many analysts share the view that the quality crisis is a logical consequence of the emphasis on [access](#) to Universal Primary Education. Some take this argument one step further, however, implicating EFA activists (or expansionists as they are sometimes labelled) as being partly responsible for the situation through their calls in favour of education for all (and particularly free education).

PART 2

Quality and
Access
Page 22

But there are other issues at stake in the quality debate, as witnessed by the strategy developed by the World Bank and many rich donor countries to shape the political agenda and national educational policies according to their own perception of the factors conducive to the development of quality education. Applying the [service-provider/client](#) concept

PART 2

The service provider/ client relationship
Page 37

to the educational field, the IFIs and donors have equated quality with market-oriented views of quality control, where productivity and performance are the ultimate indicators of success. With this perspective in mind, it is easier to understand why they have become focused on quality: winning the battle for the definition of quality is a strategy bringing education one step closer to being considered a commodity, an investment solely for the development of human capital which should abide by all the laws ruling economic growth.

Perhaps also to justify the stagnation of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and broken commitments, the Bank and many donors are increasingly developing the argument that quality education is not so much dependent on resources as it is on efficient management and institutional reform. The four principal (and closely interlinked) strategies for “cost effective” quality management are: choice and competition between schools, school-based management and autonomy, accountability for outcomes (with performance based incentives) and formal calls for community participation. All these formulas are of course closely connected to the push for **decentralization**, which constitutes the single most important component of all the Education Sector Plan (ESP) investment programs (a record 90% of World Bank loans are directly or indirectly linked to decentralization). At certain levels, at least in terms of the discourse on choice and competition, the underlying thrust towards privatization is apparent enough for most civil society organisations to easily challenge this so-called quality factor. However, more problematic and worrying is to witness the

PART 2

Decentralization
Page 40

active endorsement of strategies and terms to promote education quality which belong to our own constituency’s lexicon, such as participation and accountability, for example. The danger also lies in the fact that while many of us are advocating governance reforms for quality, internal debates have not always been sufficiently large or seriously led to clear all the uncertainties or to analyse all the implications, particularly when it comes to the adverse effects that reforms such as decentralisation and school-based management have on equity, as highlighted in the latest Education for All Global Monitoring Report (GMR).

It is within this general context that we must analyze the challenges related to the theme of quality education: a very crucial strategic battle for meaning at the global level, which goes far beyond the important but limited scope of the validity of the standards used to measure learning outcomes. Although we will of course touch upon how quality education for all implies a **multi-dimensional approach** to the learning process which must include the large and multi-faceted sphere of Non Formal and alternative education, the resources presented here will primarily centre on the issues at stake in schools. This does not in any way signify that GCE equates education to schooling. Quite to the contrary, many if not most of the challenges and recommendations apply in full to the parallel and often neglected EFA missions of adult and youth education, literacy and early childhood care. Nevertheless, today’s debate around quality education being undeniably, and unfortunately, clearly focused on the situation prevailing in primary schools, it appeared important to bring a strong critical

PART 2

Quality and the other EFA goals
Page 32

analysis to some of the more dominant views and strategies. This momentum should pave the way for further discussions and tools addressing aspects of our vision for integral education which would have deserved more space than was possible here. Indeed, the attempt to define and discuss the concept of quality education has no meaning if it is not organically linked to a broader vision of education itself and of its social and political role in our increasingly complex and challenging contemporary world.

There are many more pragmatic objectives linked to this process, which this resource pack will attempt to address, such as efforts to build consensus around a civil society approach to quality education founded on the inextricable notions of rights and equality. A very practical component is aimed at education civil society

groups, especially national coalitions eager to organize quality workshops for the purpose of developing tools, data and indicators with their constituencies (and beyond) to build autonomous evidence-based campaigns targeting measurable and attainable positive changes. The various experiences and steps we take, in very diverse national contexts, all contribute to the process of building and consolidating a democratic environment in which education is not just about schooling, social reproduction, human capital and system management, but is also an active and unique ingredient which could help transform this world into a better place.



Education for What?

Conflicting visions and definitions

Before engaging in any serious attempt to unravel the meaning of quality education, one must first stop to reconsider the contours of our shared vision of education. The basis of our engagement in favour of the EFA goals is firmly grounded in the definition of education provided by the Dakar World Education Forum Declaration. However, as we are quickly moving closer to the 2015 deadlines and therefore leaving Dakar further behind us, it can be worthwhile to recall the initial terms of our collective commitment, especially when applied to the ongoing struggle for quality education. Indeed, the quality debate constitutes quite an extraordinary indicator of the varying and often conflicting perspectives on the role of education itself, and a lingering reminder of our common philosophical basis can serve as a very useful beacon to guide our choices among all the policies and strategies promising to lead to quality education. In fact, one of the dangers of the quality debate itself is its potential capacity to steer the education issues so far towards specific impact levels, methods and strategies, that the latter become disconnected from our general political and social vision of education, to the point of setting aside or even forgetting some of the fundamental reasons why education is worth fighting for.

A very striking illustration of the profound and

diverging differences of interpretation on the role of education can be found in the simple exercise of comparing a few key definitions of education, representative of different social perspectives at play today.

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), extract of article 26.

“Investment in education contributes to the accumulation of human capital, which is essential for higher incomes and sustained economic growth”

(Priorities and strategies for education, A World Bank review, 1995).

“We re-affirm the vision of the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien 1990), supported by the Universal Declaration of

seen the showcasing of a very strong coalition of international stakeholders, including the World Bank, united around a solid rights-based declaration which firmly established the participation of CSOs at all stages and levels of education planning. However, this apparent unity behind the global compact was quickly put to test. With the advent of the new Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the same group of players rallied around a pro-growth framework which promoted only two of the Dakar goals, dissociating the latter from the integral EFA objectives. Despite the official discourse of complementary and/or synergy between the EFA and MDG platforms, many CSOs did underline the risks involved with this focus on primary education and gender, as the role of education increasingly narrowed down to its economic and less often social value in the “global struggle to combat poverty”. The launching of the Education For All Fast Track Initiative (FTI), representing the only real global funding mechanism for education plans, presented the international community and CSOs in particular with a dilemma. Although via its financial incentives, this EFA misnomer clearly contributed to a process of side-lining

ECCE, adult learning and life skills from the education plans which would be deemed “credible” by the World Bank, civil society groups opted to rally round the “low-hanging fruit” strategy created by the potential financial windfall. Most of the education CSOs supported this pragmatic option (with varying degrees of enthusiasm), with the hope that it would only constitute a first step in bringing the Dakar agenda closer to the attention of the main bilateral and multilateral donors. Even though the inclusion of the whole EFA agenda is still on the programme of many international NGOs, there is ample evidence that education for growth has largely replaced the rights and equity based approach which characterized the Dakar framework of education. Which makes it all the more important to unpack the whole spectrum of dimensions that education could, should or does play in contemporary societies.



Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual's talents and potential, and developing learners' personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies."

"Education For All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments"; article 3, World Education Forum Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000.

"While government determines priorities for many reasons, economic analyses of education - in particular rate of return analysis - is a diagnostic tool with which to start the process of setting priorities".

(World Bank, 1995)

Between these two sets of definitions, one emanating from an international alliance of various stakeholders (governments, multilaterals, CSOs, etc) founded on a rights based perspective, and the other expressing an analysis of investment benefits in purely economic terms, it should not be very difficult to determine which is more closely tied to a progressive education agenda. Although the basic concept underlying EFA can be described as a comprehensive vision based on cross-cutting and complementary objectives, it is also deeply-rooted in one non-negotiable fundamental: education for all throughout life is a right and not an economic variable to be adjusted to market requirements or available resources. The two respective definitions of education's role are therefore not only very different in terms of their philosophical approach, but many argue that these ideological differences render them irreconcilable and even fundamentally opposed by nature. Which makes it all the more worrying to note how much the "rate of return analysis" of education seems to have taken the upper hand in the development debate today. This can of course be partially explained by the world's general political history, with the fall of the Eastern Bloc countries being interpreted as the definitive demonstration of the neo-liberal economic model's superiority and only viable scenario for humanity in general.

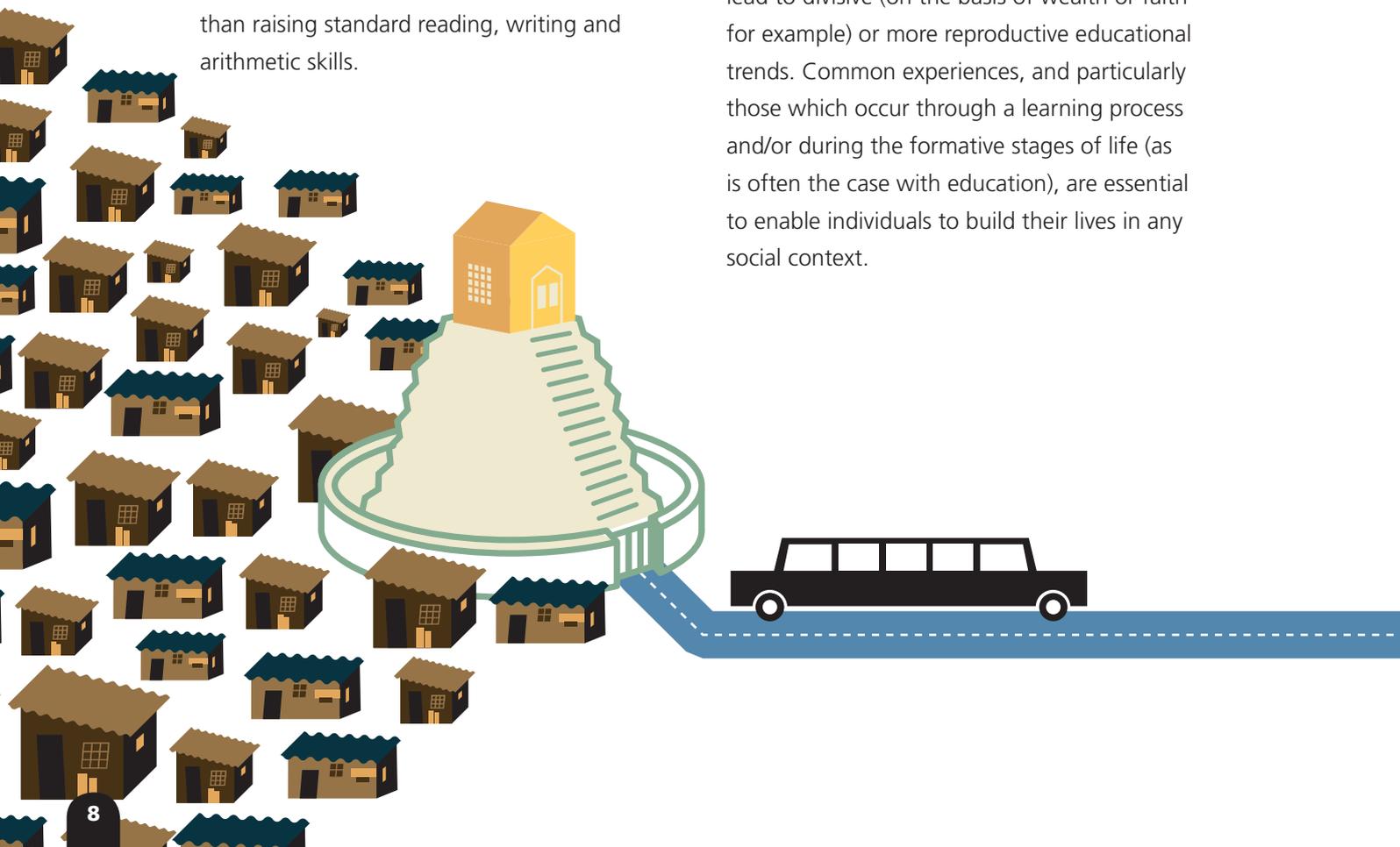
But in the educational arena in general and the EFA field in particular, some analysts point out to indirect effects of the strategic choices made by the international civil society. The 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar had

The multi-dimensional role of education

Because of the standardizing effect of dominant stereotypes, many people's first reaction, when asked to define education, is to assimilate it to schooling and academic achievements. But education is an omnipresent social activity which extends far beyond the confines of the classroom. From time immemorial, education has been an ongoing human concern, conducted in various environments (family, community, formal structures, etc.) in order to share and transmit values, skills and norms that individuals need to develop in harmony with others and contribute to society. In the EFA arena, Formal, Non-formal, Special needs, Alternative and Popular education all contribute to identify various complementary roles to education outside the specific classic or academic learning objectives, and certainly more than raising standard reading, writing and arithmetic skills.

Socialization

One of the most important roles of education is socialization. Indeed, when formal or non-formal education does not help learners to meaningfully interact in a complex and diverse society, then one can safely contend that it is failing to address one of its main objectives. In other words, education should be teaching us to live together in spite of our socio-cultural differences. This implies the possibility for educational institutions to allow learners to temporarily escape their familiar environments and backgrounds in order to be confronted with social diversity. In this aspect also, competition between schools and parental freedom of choice in a strongly unequal society, are not necessarily conducive to this aim of socialization and can, to the contrary, lead to divisive (on the basis of wealth or faith for example) or more reproductive educational trends. Common experiences, and particularly those which occur through a learning process and/or during the formative stages of life (as is often the case with education), are essential to enable individuals to build their lives in any social context.



Nation building

With the movement for political independence launched at the end of the Second World War, many countries developed inclusive wide-ranging educational policies designed for the whole nation rather than only catering for the co-opted urban elite as had been the rule during colonial times. Indeed, the newly independent States of Africa and Asia were aware of the need to arouse national sentiment if development programs were to succeed. This could not be done without tackling one of the main obstacles to any nation building project, the illiteracy affecting the vast majority of rural citizens. In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, this literacy aim was strengthened by the necessity to develop a sense of national identity in spite of the uneasy mosaic of cultures and languages arbitrarily compounded inside the countries' artificial colonial boundaries. Up until the end of the 70s, many African countries resolutely committed themselves to policies of education for all, with a consequent increase in resources earmarked to the educational sector. This often earned them significant results in terms of education access and literacy levels. Some of the best known examples are the Kenyan Ujamaa movement inspired by Nyerere, the Tabancas developed by the freedom fighters in Guinea Bissau, and Thomas Sankara's "Literacy Commandos" in Burkina Faso.

Citizenship

All political systems carry a certain vision of education built on the nation's specific references. The corresponding educational system is designed to allow the integration of

individuals in the social and political structure of society, usually in order to ensure continuity and stability. Totalitarian, feudal, or aristocratic societies each have their own methods and views on both the method and content of education: obedience and submission to the dominant order, initiation to cultural traditions, learning how to perform according to rank, etc. The development of the concept of democracy gives education an even more fundamental role, as the people are supposed to have a much greater power of decision, through peaceful means, such as free speech or voting rights. But this greater responsibility raises the issue of competency: do all citizens have the capacities to understand and formulate an argumentation, a judgment, and participate in decision making? Do individuals automatically become citizens or do they need to follow a learning process? In the latter case, what are the necessary skills that individuals must acquire to become "good citizens"? Various answers have been given to these questions with specific concrete applications depending on time and places. From the Athenian Forums to the present day, democratic systems have often chosen to restrict citizenship, such as voting rights, to supposedly more competent social groups: through property qualifications reserving the right to vote for the rich, male only, age restrictions... Limitation of voting rights was not only advocated by reactionary forces who firmly believed in race, caste, or gender predestination and superiority but also by some progressive thinkers who wanted to radically change the system. The latter thought that giving the right to vote without education was

going to play into the hands of the power of the wealthy and the dominant, through manipulation and coercion: peasants would vote as their masters and women would follow their husbands. In modern days, most developed countries have adopted what is called representative democracy, systems where citizens mandate delegates (professional politicians who usually come from the social elite), who are supposed to be more informed and able to take the right decisions. Direct democracy (citizens exercise power without intermediaries) and participatory democracy (citizens are represented but closer and more frequent channels of interactions exist) rely even more heavily on inclusive and emancipatory approaches to education.

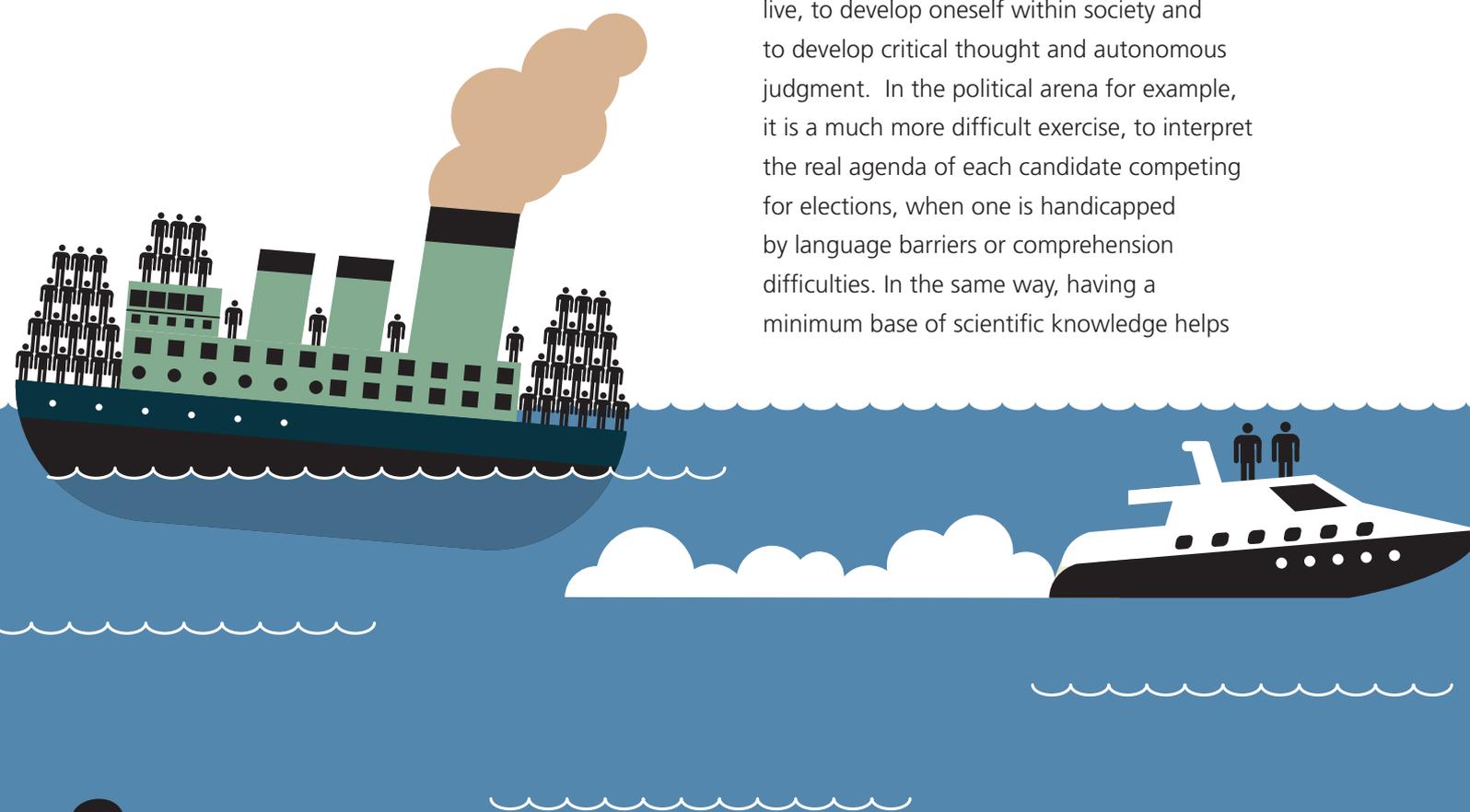
Public policies of Education For All have been developed as a solution to ease the tension between competency and democracy. Only by educating all individuals so as to allow them to fully exercise their role as citizens, can the legitimacy of the state truly claimed to be based on the sovereignty of the people.

Democracy

Education for democracy is a particularly fundamental mission for both developed and developing countries. The common task is to allow citizens to fully participate in shaping the future of society. This responsibility implies the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and critical understanding of the demographic, economic, political, scientific... processes which contribute to structure the world. This is why learning to read, write, understand a text or a speech, communicate and be understood are prerequisites to being able to fully comprehend the world in which we live, to develop oneself within society and to develop critical thought and autonomous judgment. In the political arena for example, it is a much more difficult exercise, to interpret the real agenda of each candidate competing for elections, when one is handicapped by language barriers or comprehension difficulties. In the same way, having a minimum base of scientific knowledge helps

PART 2

Education for a
democratic society
Page 28



to understand the current debates on global warming, genetically modified organisms or nuclear energy and to develop an individual position on these crucial social and political issues. The same applies to the widely debated questions related to globalization, governance and public institutions (such as education, health) which cannot be fully understood without some firm knowledge or understanding of history, economics and politics. To the contrary, most totalitarian regimes have sought to maintain the people in relative ignorance of their history, of their origins and their culture, usually choosing to develop hierarchical non-critical and pseudo-scientific “truths” as well as promoting sports and physical rather than intellectual exercises.

Although civic education and general knowledge are essential to developing common understanding and collective identities, they cannot on their own guarantee that society is on a path to democracy. The fact that citizens have been through school and have benefited from social and collective knowledge does not automatically make them more performing than others in their capacity to communicate and become active participants in the development of an open society. History has seen many highly educated crooks, dictators and even war criminals. Hitler was legally elected to power in a country previously renowned for its high cultural and philosophical values. A healthy democratic society depends on many other factors, such as the concrete means and effective channels to express one’s beliefs and convictions. This is why education for democracy depends as much on process as it does on content.

Schools must therefore also be places where children learn to debate, to argue and to build autonomous thought. Unfortunately, in far too many instances the dominant learning format remains a largely vertical, hierarchical and one-way process where the teacher delivers the knowledge and the child is asked nothing more than to receive and regurgitate it for control purposes.

Emancipation

Several schools of thought have worked to develop new forms of education entrusted with a much deeper transformative and revolutionary role. Essentially based on models of Popular, Alternative and Non-formal education, the theoreticians of these “emancipatory schools” sought to confront traditional notions of expertise, hierarchy and rely very firmly on participatory methodologies, involving not only the teachers and the learners but the community at large. The most well know and influential of these thinkers was certainly Paulo Freire, who, through his book entitled “The pedagogy of the oppressed”, had a particularly strong influence on educational practices in developing countries (other interesting radical education trends were developed by Ivan Illich, Maria Montessori or Rudolf Steiner). During the liberation struggles and in the euphoria of independence, many educationalists and even political leaders turned towards these new principles of popular education as they could be easily and convincingly adapted to the backdrop of most countries’ traditional and rural community base. Many African countries tapped in the Freire ideology to develop “education-promotion-participation”

PART 2

**Participation
Page 43**

programmes aimed at educating rural masses formerly excluded from democratic dialogue. By proposing new models and relationships between the centre and the periphery, the old and the young, the poor and the powerful, men and women, these experiences paved the way for attempts towards endogenous development based on the institutionalization of participation in the education sector. Most of the large scale attempts incorporating the formal education system were short lived. But in the Non Formal Sector in general and in the literacy field in particular, Freire's and others' popular education methods are up to this day successfully implemented by CSOs worldwide.

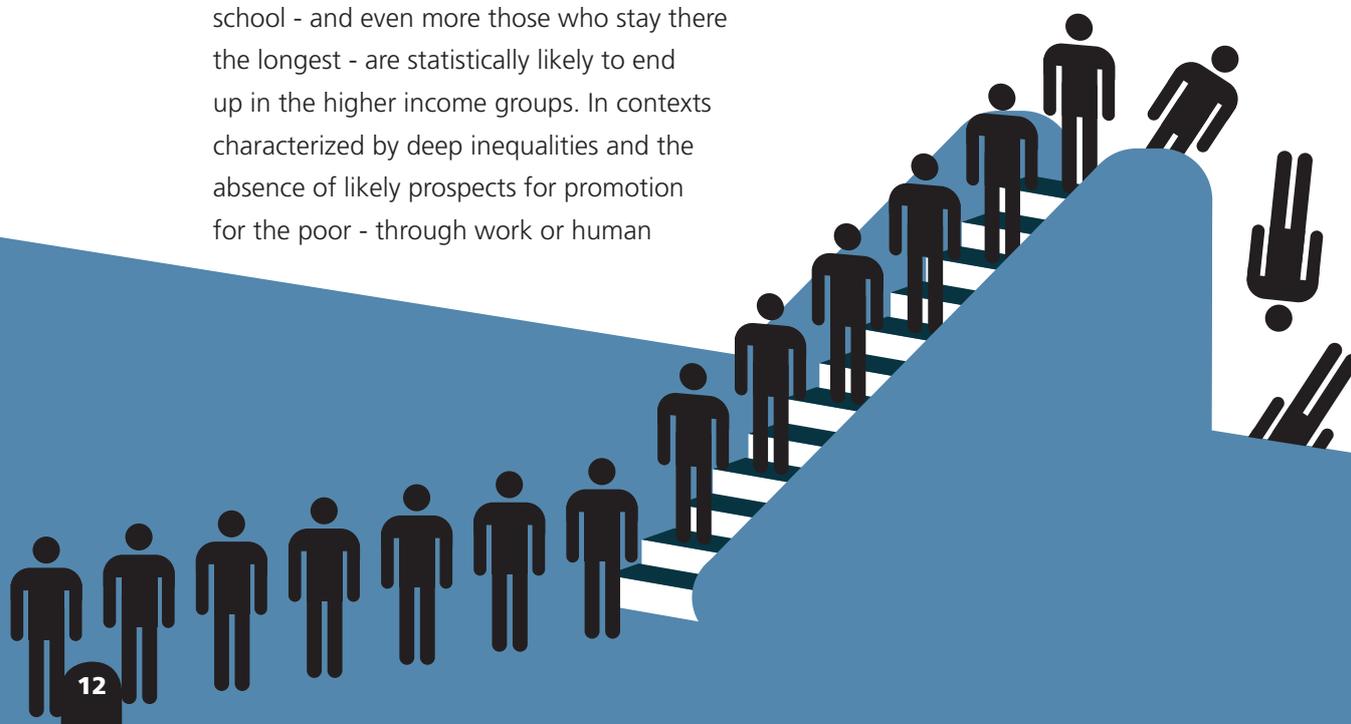
PART 2

Quality and
Equity
Page 24

Social development & Equity

Education has always been seen as a formidable vehicle for the emancipation of the less fortunate classes and communities. National as well as international programmes, such as EFA, often highlight the potential (usually above all other affirmative action plans or redistributive policies) education has to enable people from poor social backgrounds access to higher standards of living. And indeed studies show that those who go to school - and even more those who stay there the longest - are statistically likely to end up in the higher income groups. In contexts characterized by deep inequalities and the absence of likely prospects for promotion for the poor - through work or human

relations - education is often the only "social ladder" available to escape one's milieu. However, if no one can deny that going to school generally helps get "a better life" compared to those who are totally denied access, education cannot on its own mend pre-existing social injustice. The first obstacle to social development through education is of course the strong inequalities in the quality of schools that confront children from different environments. Hollywood stories excepted, it is highly unlikely that a child from an urban slum of Mumbai will be able to compete with the lucky few who have been taught in private schools of excellence equipped with extensive libraries and highly qualified teachers. But even in countries where access to quality public education of similar standards is a relatively well enforced right, education's role as a motor for social development and equity is often deceitful. Most studies led in the countries known for their relatively egalitarian public schooling systems have shown that education is much more a reproductive factor of the social status quo than a stimulus for social emancipation. Statistics gathered for the last



30 years in developed countries consistently show that a very large majority of school children will belong to the same social class as their parents (in France, 70% of children whose parents are manual labourers will end up with similar socio-economic status and only 6% will get the chance to go to university). This is of course due to the fact that the learning process is not only affected by the quality of schooling, but also heavily influenced by the socio-economic background and environment (health, books at home, help from the community, to name but a few ingredients). So, when it comes to education (as in many other fields) equity is not enough. Quite to the contrary, giving everyone the same amount and quality of education regardless of children's backgrounds is profoundly unjust and a recipe for reproducing inequalities. A few countries have tried to limit the conservative effect of education by developing strong affirmative action policies to correct the cultural and economic imbalances weighing on education equity. In several countries, for example, extra financial support is given to teachers working in difficult areas or students living there, while other policies include more tuition time, lower pupil teacher ratios, zoning obligations to ensure social diversity and so on. Redistributive policies are however being currently threatened by the global move towards deregulation and privatization.

From Multi-dimensional to Uni-dimensional: education as a tool for growth.

The relation between education and development objectives has always been a strong one. Nations have understood the need to push forward educational policies that might respond to their economic and political needs, whether in terms of specific research (applied scientific studies for military purposes for example) or an adapted labour force which would contribute to specific development objectives. And just as research conducted in the military field occasionally leads to useful civilian applications (e.g the internet, laser technology) purely nationalistic, capitalistic or economic targets can also produce significantly positive side effects on the educational level.

Nation states and the “free market”

The industrial revolution of the 19th century for example, which irreversibly transformed the European economic and social landscape, gave rise to the first educational programmes making primary education compulsory. To meet the new requirements of the employment market (workers with enough basic knowledge to adapt to the new technological environment), ambitious national education projects supported by powerful, centralized Ministries provided access to primary schools for all children and succeeded in “rolling back” illiteracy in all Western

nations by the early part of the 20th century. However, with the rise of transnational corporate power, globalization, open markets and deregulation, the “nation states” are no longer the only, nor the most dominant force determining the agenda for development goals. It is therefore highly instructive, in order to understand the nature and origin of various educational policies (especially those advocated by institutions linked to the “free market” ideology), to follow the evolution of the global economy and challenges at stake for the various private sector stakeholders.

Adjusting the education offer to market needs

A look at the economic trends over these last 50 years reveals a marked evolution of market needs which can be summarily characterized by three main historic phases.

Phase 1: skilled workers in the framework of national economies

The 1960s were a time of economic growth in which the only obstacle was the shortage of skilled workers. To attract students to longer studies, including free education all the way to university, employers were very willing to contribute through tax income to the public education budget as this was in their own interest. At the time, the private sector accommodated itself quite well with government intervention, and such features as centralized administration and 100% public financing of education were praised by many. Indeed, the OECD was even showcasing France and the USSR in their reports for the exemplarity of quality education in those countries.

The public education system was then based on the **school management formula of “obligation of resources + trust”**. The obligation of resources part of the equation meant that the government was entrusted with the centralized delivery of inputs to ensure the availability, quality and quantity of material and human resources for the schools to run. This role covered the certifications and qualification ratings, salaries grid for teachers and other school staff, curriculum control, school calendar, budget approval, etc.

The trust side of the equation was mainly intended for the educational professionals at the heart of the school system. The teaching profession was readily accessible through state-run training institutions and academic certification. Being a teacher brought with it a certain number of advantages usually enforced by collective bargaining rights such as job security, guaranteed career progression and social rewards. In this context, albeit within the centralized input constraints, the learning process relied to a large degree on self monitoring. External supervision was essentially of a quantitative nature and limited to internal efficiency control. Trusted on the basis of their qualifications and professional experience, school teachers would be submitted to occasional inspections, but the education system relied mainly on school participation statistics (enrolment ratios, repetition, drop-out, exam success) to ensure schools were performing to purpose.

This “obligation of resources and trust” based school system performed very well. In a relatively short period of time, the national

public education systems actually produced an excess of qualified workers.

Phase 2: An abundant low-skilled labour force for the global market

The acceleration of globalization deeply affected the corporate sector's strategy to maximise profits, changing both the nature of their relation with the state and their interest in maintaining the tax related costs and general support for public services in general and education in particular.

New information and communication technology as well as the successful lobbying for deregulation and open borders accelerated the global deployment of transnational firms. Countries and their fixed assets (such as labour forces and institutions) in both the developed and the developing world, which the private sector played as economic rivals, were increasingly forced to compete with each other to attract volatile capital investments of corporate firms. For most nations, and particularly for poorer countries, the only credible attractive assets that can be leveraged are fiscal advantages and above all human resources: offers of an abundant cheap labour or a skilled workforce.

The private sector, the IFIs and some governments supported poor countries as a means to develop this labour force through political and financial support to primary and basic education (though in a very restrictive understanding of what basic education meant). Parallel to the obvious market interest, the political motives prompting support by leaders of the developed world, was for those

low income countries (of which a great deal are ex-colonies belonging to their traditional sphere of influence) to provide alternative cheap labour market reservoirs for their industries to face the menacing emerging economies of China and India. This collusion of interests partly explains the united Dakar front between the rights based advocates of Education and the education economists motivated by human capital and return on investment theories. Although this alliance around the 6 EFA goals was short-lived, support for the primary enrolment dimension was efficiently recycled in favour of the newly adopted MDG education goals. This meant that the donors and IFIs in theory committed to co-ordinating their ODA support through the FTI process to achieve basic education, understood as access to primary schooling. Most donors have not, in fact, adjusted their programmes accordingly.

Following the 1980s and 1990s, which saw an adjustment period with calamitous consequences for public service provision, the focus on UPE produced significant results in terms of raising the basic education levels conducive to the constitution of market reserves of a global work force. Abundant and cheap labour is no longer a scarce resource in many countries, which now have sufficient numbers of literate people to provide a source of labour for low-qualification jobs.

Phase 3: Low cost skilled workers in a globalized economy

The rise in enrolment at primary level does pose some new challenges for those whose interest lies only in delivering 5 or 6 years of mass education. Naturally, it opens the door for more entrants at the secondary level as well and therefore raises fears of overcrowding and added demographic pressure on already stretched resources and infrastructures. It is also more directly an issue for the private sector, where strong concerns are raised regarding the “employability” of the pupils who exit the school system. As far as market needs are concerned, an abundant and cheap work force isn’t so much of a problem anymore. However quality concerns remain, as firms are also dependent on skilled workers to develop their delocalized national productive bases. Indeed, transnational corporations are increasingly engaged in short term strategies relying on workers who will be productive at short notice and with low training costs. To be effective, this global strategy is therefore highly dependent upon the existence of a system enabling the international comparison of educational “skills” in order to assess the relative advantages of each national job market. This new concern has again been fundamental in reshaping the private sector’s agenda for public education. There is now growing interest in the private sector in influencing the assessment of learning outcomes, to test the skills they prioritise and smooth the way for an easy selection of optimally “productive” employees.

This concern, partly echoed by the discourse

in favour of international norms for **standardized testing**, is not only defended by the World Bank and the IMF, but has been increasingly accepted as a quality education goal in itself as demonstrated by the appeal made by the Director of UNESCO’s International Institute of Education Planning, Jacques Hallak:

*“Certification of skills by an international system constitutes a real opportunity for education if the move towards excellence effectively means an improvement in education quality and transparency in learning achievement evaluation. This improvement will only take place if the skills acquired at school and different forms of NFE **answer as precisely as possible to the market needs.** The necessary skills will increasingly be non-cognitive (personal development, autonomy, participation and integration abilities). These skills are difficult to quantify and standardize. We must therefore find ways to standardize and evaluate not only cognitive skills but those that are not. Failure to succeed in this mission would lead to the inefficiency of any quality system since it would not answer the market needs which depend on a reliable information source on which to base its recruitment criteria”.*

Guided by these new imperatives, **a very specific system of standards and indicators must be developed** to inform the “clients” (pupils, parents) on “quality” and performances of the schools, as well as to provide guidelines for the shareholder (stakeholders, donors) on questions of accountability.

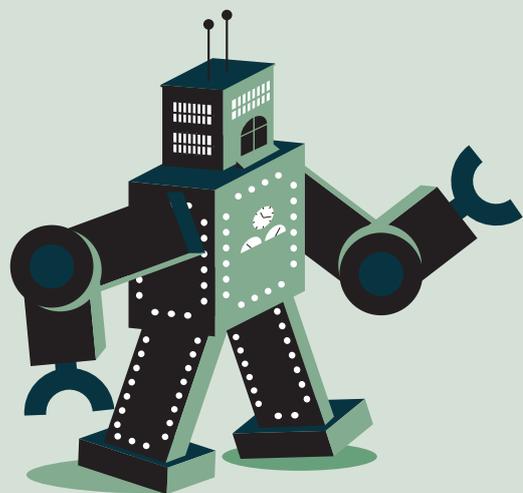
ISO 9000 : A quality label for education?

The international reference in terms of quality measurement is the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Developed since 1947 to facilitate international exchange through standard setting for products, in 1987 a new certification ISO 9000, was developed to **establish a minimum quality standard in the production process** (rather than the finished product). The aim of this quality assurance is to “prove to the client his know how and skills concerning the quality level of the service or product, and to show control of the delivery process without dwelling on the products or services performance. The same norms can be applied to any organization, large or small, whatever its product – which can be a service – independently from its activity sector and whether the organization be a business, a public administration or a governmental bureau.”

Quality, here is defined as “fitness for purpose”, so it is not concerned with the extrinsic quality of the product or service. In the case of education however, there exists a specific output which applies to another much more demanding “client”, the labour market which is of course highly interested in the worker’s productive capacity. The education service providers, public or private, are therefore encouraged towards the competitive comparison of their merits and reputations which are officially measured by “quality

certifications”. The ISO 9000 quality assurance on process works on the hypothesis that for the client (student or employer) the quality of the production process guarantees the quality of the product.

Once again, this certification does not give any guarantee whatsoever to the actual extrinsic value of the service. A famous example is the quality assurance certification given to an educational institution in the US which was delivering Numerology diplomas. In response to the very negative reactions from some education professionals, the accreditation organism answered that “in a free society its role was limited to verifying “fitness for purpose” and not the “purpose’.



Privatization from within and without

While they were advocating the lifting of border restrictions, the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO) were also busy orchestrating unregulated market access to sectors which were previously protected from “free trade” rules (social security, health, education). Organized resistance by CSOs and some low and middle-income countries did manage to temporarily stall WTO’s GATTs agreement (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs in Services) which was threatening governments the mandatory liberalization of their services or risk being subject to heavy fines and penalties.

But another major obstacle to this privatization drive is to be found in the specific and less attractive nature of education services.

Contrary to other public services such as health, water or transport, the profitability of private investment in education services is quite low: recurrent costs are high (teachers, infrastructures, etc.) and returns (dependent on pupil completion) are long term. This partly explains why, until now, the “education business” has been mostly limited to the periphery of the not for profit system such as distance teaching, software, teaching material, school books, etc. For this same reason, profits in this sector are still very dependent on Public finances.

A further complexity for the private sector was to overcome what might appear as an ideological contradiction. Since the early 70s, the right wing UK & US think tanks had been busy developing a new neo-liberal policy to guide their approach to public

administration. By the middle of the 80s, the whole perspective towards the state and public services had changed. The dominant discourse characterised the state as the source of many evils and openly described it as monopolistic, bureaucratic, inefficient and corrupt.

However, private sector stakeholders were not incentivised to make the minimum investments necessary to build a credible alternative, presenting a dilemma for those who wished to see their participation in education increase.

An important corollary was to figure out a way to deregulate education - that is officially give more choice, diversity and autonomy in terms of input and process - while at the same time making sure that the education system delivered market “needs”. The answer to this double enigma was to be found through government reforms which promoted not only the classic but costly privatization of education services (exogenous privatization) but also and more covertly to push for privatization in Public education (endogenous privatization). The basic concept relies on importing ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector (with some lexical variations intended to make these terms less aggressive) in order to make public schools more “efficient” and suited to the needs, without incurring the direct investment costs. Quality management of education (often voluntarily mistaken for quality education) was the perfect policy tool to further this aim.

PART 2 Quality Management of Education

Quality management of education
Page 37

Under this new model, **a very specific system of standards and indicators must be developed** to inform the “clients” (pupils, parents) on quality and performances of the schools, as well as to provide guidelines for the shareholder (stakeholders, donors) on questions of accountability.

The impact of quality management reform on education policies is deep and extremely widespread. The priorities imposed on governments in Asia, Latin America and Africa are nearly identical, blueprints for “governance” all listing identical strategies as highly conducive and necessary to achieve quality education. Policies calling for decentralization, choice and competition between schools, autonomy, performance and accountability, and even participation, all underpin the school-based management model. This managerial concept seriously undermines a progressive vision of education, which is no longer allowed to be a multi-dimensional process but is progressively reshaped to fit the “service provider” market rules. “Quality” management of education has already managed to subvert the previous school governance formula based on the State’s redistributive role as well as on the reliance on competent professionally-trained teachers. From our previous model of “obligation of resources + trust” public education has now entered the era of **“obligation of results + mistrust”**.

PART 2

School based management and Autonomy
Page 41



What is quality education?

Language and meaning

“Language is the mother, not the daughter of thought” Karl Krauss

History and language are two crucial levels of human consciousness which are very often lost, marginalized, manipulated or censored.

Social systems that control these two elements are in a very good position to strongly influence our perception of the world. One of the most famous literary examples is George Orwell’s visionary novel 1984, where new language forms (novlang) are used to distort reality and manipulate consciences. More recently, the mass audio-visual media plays an increasingly dominant role in setting agendas, entrenching status-quo, propagating consumerism and promoting a-historical individualistic concepts and world views.¹

Language and power

Analyzing society without deconstructing the language on which it is built is an impossible task. Each and every ideology, consciously or unconsciously produces its own language.

¹ It is not surprising that the US’s first export industry is not cars, planes, computer technology or even weapons (although they do deal a lot of that around), it is culture, if one can use that term for what is more often called popular culture which covers most of the entertainment industry such as TV

Deliberately manipulated by some, unwittingly or naïvely used by others, language is never without consequences on society. Those who enjoy political, financial or social power also have the power over words: a specific advantage which serves to further consolidate and strengthen their political, financial or social control. For readers who will hopefully be or become ardent EFA supporters, it is fitting to underline here that the highest form of resistance in this power struggle, is the simple ability to read. But this capacity has to be guided by the will to read between the lines, off track and outside the official guided tours where the visits are limited to where the speaker or writer wants you to go. This school of resistance definitely has an ambitious role to play against the permanent aggression represented by phraseology, lies, and manipulation through discourse, sure signs of a corruption of thought and society itself.

programs and film. It can be argued that television, as an open screen for the masses worldwide, from the Amazonian rain forest to the desert environments of Sahel, is presently playing a much more effective role in shaping the world’s social, cultural and consumer habits than schooling.

CHAPTER What is quality education? TWO

In the field of education and development, as in all others, it is always crucial to start a subject by paying attention to what is signified by the words we use. The first obvious reason is that just as two people who don't speak the same language will have serious communication problems, discussions around words and concepts without common definitions or meanings will inevitably result in deep misunderstandings. When using words or an association of terms which stand for ideas or a multiplicity of mental representations, such as concepts, a common understanding is even more complex and crucial to grasp the stakes, challenges and power relations at work behind the various interpretations. One can say that an advocacy campaign on quality education which is not based on a firm knowledge of the different interpretations (as well as identifying what and whose interests are served) of the concepts of quality and education as well as quality education, has almost lost the battle before it has even started.

Buzz words

Although we have seen that the issue of quality education is hardly new on the development agenda, the added attention recently received from a very wide variety of stakeholders as well as its frequent and sometimes unconsidered use, has promoted this term to buzz word status. The buzz word club carries specifically designed membership characteristics which many critics dismiss as a collection of hollow but fashionable words for empty concepts, which, because of their dull, vague and uncontroversial nature are easy to use in any imaginable context without the necessity to define precise contents. Some buzz words, such as holistic or paradigm, often try to conceal opacity of meaning through intimidating, pseudo-scientific vocabulary while others such as participation, empowerment or quality are chosen for a simplicity, accessibility, and universalism aimed at gathering consensus, but frequently without substance. On the other hand, buzz words can occasionally also be precise terms



whose meanings are transformed to cover the exact opposite of their literal acceptance. An illustration of this particular buzz word variation can for example be found in the increasingly recurrent use of the “pro-poor” formulas used in their various declinations to describe policies, projects and activities, who, as the 2008 GMR has largely illustrated, are in fact best described as being strongly pro-rich.

Buzz words in the development arena

So buzz words, even if they do sound very empty, are definitely manufactured, used, and promoted for a purpose. As such they should therefore never be considered as innocent or objective terms: they convey ideological symbolism and serve political aims. In the development field for example, many of the most fashionable words tend to belong to the friendly/positive vocabulary with the effect of depicting a “pro-active” international community vigorously engaged in concerted efforts pulling humanity towards social and economic progress in an increasingly democratic environment. Unfortunately, this image is as misleading as were the adjectives officially defining some of the most totalitarian states of the ex-Eastern bloc. The more the “Republics” resorted to an accumulation of adjectives like “popular or democratic”, the least likely the people or glorified workers in these countries were likely to have any say in the affairs governing their future. In the same way, some popular developmental terms also serve to cover up many of the very real and recurrent contemporary horrors (famine, poverty, oppression, wars) plaguing the planet in stark contrast to the advertised promises of progress in science, technology, resources

and universal human rights which should render global poverty, violence and injustice all the more unacceptable. Not only has the history of humanity clearly demonstrated that progress is anything but a linear road leading towards universal emancipation, many social researchers argue that the macro-economic frameworks behind the development concepts such as growth, governance and stability are directly organized to perpetuate and consolidate unjust systems of oppression which maintain such a large percentage of humanity in bondage and misery. One additional purpose of the unifying terms – partnership and participation for example - used to highlight the international community’s engagement and efforts towards global peace and harmony is to give the artificial impression that we are all equally concerned or affected by the issues facing the development agenda, irrespective of gender, class, wealth or culture. In other words, this vocabulary also strongly underplays any of the very real and fierce power struggles directly affecting people’s lives while portraying a common identity of purpose and destiny. But can we really convince the starving rural populations of Africa or the slum dwellers of South East Asia that they have the same interests and concerns as the wealthier citizens of Europe’s capital cities, indeed to a certain extent, do they live on the same planet? Even on the level of the most obviously global ecological disasters which threaten our very existence, such as global warming, who can seriously uphold the argument that, short of a millenarist-“end of the world” scenario, we are all equal in face of the menace climate changes bring on our everyday lives.

Empty and full of meaning: quality education

Quality: a battle for meaning

Outside these common traits, some specific buzz words can carry even more direct political weight and meaning in serving to define the development agenda and objectives. Such is the case with quality, a term so vague and subjective that it is wide open to be filled with the most persuasive and dominant meaning among a wide variety of different and often openly conflicting interpretations. Another added advantage of quality is that as a “soft” notion opposed to quantity, when applied

to the education agenda, this word can conveniently serve to deflect the debate away from some crucial “hard” or concrete issues linked to **resources** (finances, infrastructure, teachers, etc). Without restricting the challenge of education to one exclusive perspective, these input level items do indeed primarily concern quantity issues, which many stakeholders often like to steer away from, as easily quantified matters constitute areas more liable to expose their lack of commitment or general lack of political will to honour

PART 2

Quality
and Resources
Page 11



the EFA engagements. This issue positions quality education at the heart of a strategic semantic battle for meaning. As we shall see, the importance of the stakes has not escaped the attention of the IFIs who have spared no efforts to use the definition of quality to re-align a vision of education that meets the market oriented macro-economic strategy.

Origins and evolution

The word quality first appeared in the French language (*qualité*) in the middle of the 12th century, and derives from “*qualis*”, a Latin term meaning “of what kind”. In common language, the noun served to describe the nature of things or, closer to our subject, to express the value of an entity within a general and broad spectrum of evaluation. In this sense, the quality of education in a given context could very well be judged very positively but also used to describe the exact opposite, in negative terms. More recently, however, quality has been increasingly associated with a positive meaning through its frequent use as a defining adjective. A commercial application of this version of quality has further linked the identification of this word with the description of services and products in a positive and even marketing-oriented light (quality watch, quality hotel, quality chocolate). It is this second function the term quality usually plays when applied to education: quality education is synonymous by default of good quality education, unless explicitly introduced by an adjective to the contrary (bad quality education). As a very prevalent buzz word, it is actually almost impossible to write or speak about education in the EFA arena, without systematically adding

on the quality adjective, for fear of appearing as a person liable to be advocating bad education.

A very efficient indicator of what has now become the dominant signification of quality and the terms most frequently associated with it, is obtained by putting this vocabulary to the test of the meta-research engines so popular in this electronic communication age (at least for those who have access to electricity). At the date of writing these lines, the automatic associations computed by the most famous search engine on the market, list 122 million “hits” for quality centres, close to 71 million for quality management and more than 53 million for a specific brand of chocolates (quality education is not yet automatically generated but does lead to 6 million web links).

History of quality education

So where does this quality education topic come from and why does it appear to have suddenly become such an urgent issue? One of the most commonly given explanations is that the new focus on quality is a natural development springing from the global progress registered on the access to education front. We are told that the world community, including civil society, has fixed their priorities on the issue of school participation with the expected but unpremeditated consequence of neglecting the quality issues, linked to school governance, learning process and schooling outcomes. Some push this argument a step further, discreetly implying that ill thought campaigns by EFA activists, pressing for more resources and more teachers and especially

CHAPTER TWO What is quality education?

advocating for free education, have led to dramatic increases in access which have submerged the education systems' capacities and therefore led to a radical deterioration of the quality levels.

When one considers the very real problems plaguing the quality level of schooling, whether measured in terms of difficult learning conditions (overcrowded classes for example) or learning outcomes (high illiteracy rates after primary completion), these explanations do appear quite straightforward and reasonable. When put to the test of history however, this recent and causal discovery of the quality perspective theory is much more difficult to uphold. Indeed, if we accept the very minimal definition of quality as referring to good education, one can very easily find numerous examples proving that this concern is as old as the initial idea of setting up education systems aside from the tutoring ensured by the parents and family. Although, there are still debates as to locating the exact place and birth date of the ancestor to our modern education systems, most European historians point to the Ancient Greek civilization where the first public schools were founded. Other researchers point out that formal schooling systems can be traced back to as early as 3000 BC in Egypt. Without going back to the Greeks or the Pharaohs, let us remember that the subject of quality education was very much at the centre of the challenges facing most countries on the eve of their independences. In a bid to overthrow the specifically designed bad-education which had been developed by the colonial powers for the indigenous people – quality education was occasionally available for the co-opted

urban elite – ambitious and innovative national education plans were initiated, often incorporating some of the new participatory and emancipatory methods developed during the liberation struggles by the popular education figures such as Paolo Freire.

Closer to our specific EFA agenda, the very first international conference of Addis Ababa in 1961, where nations, perhaps over ambitiously, pledged to resolve the education crisis in Africa by 1980, included explicit calls to the importance of the quality imperative. Among the stated objectives, the text of the declaration recalls that "At present, African populations everywhere are eagerly seeking to benefit from more and better quality education; this wish must be honoured, and it will be." The text goes on by stressing the importance of improving all aspects of quality in schools with a specific and somewhat premonitory mention to the dangers "of sacrificing quality teaching to policies based on reduced spending". Finally, most of us are old enough to remember that quality was not only a very strong element of the 1990 Jomtien conference but also a specifically central issue of the Dakar declaration as well, to the point of becoming one of the six main and clearly spelt out goals for 2015. One is of course entitled to question the degree of commitment most stakeholders and co-signatories demonstrate to these declarations outside rhetorical calls for quality. But this legitimate criticism applies to all periods of history, including our most recent one, and does not invalidate the fact that the issue of quality was already high on the agenda and based on concrete observations of the challenges

involved. Commenting on the quality crisis apparent more than 13 years ago for example, the EFA monitoring structure pessimistically concluded: “In such a context, and with a curriculum which fails to relate to the lived experiences of the majority of children, schools often succeed in little more than producing unemployed and poorly adapted young people” (Education for All 1996, 29).

New players in the quality education debate

If quality isn't a new challenge recently revealed and highlighted by a sudden deterioration of the educational environment provoked by recent progress in access to UPE, one cannot deny that this issue has recently been given added attention by powerful and vocal stakeholders: the World Bank and major donors. Until quite recently, these actors were largely silent on quality issues. The biggest lenders to education were actually closely associated to the regressive and disastrous Structural Adjustment policies, which through deficit and inflation control policies, seriously undermined public spending in all sectors except defence but including education. This macro-economic policy based on privatization, deregulation, and commercial liberalization also resulted in a massive increase in poverty and internal differentiation with exponential hikes in wealth inequalities between the rich and the poor. Even in the institutions themselves, very few voices plead that this “lost decade” had anything but purely negative impact on quality education. Another past trait which seriously contrasts with the present pro-quality stance is the way in which the World Bank declined to

support the multisectoral EFA Action Plans, favouring sectoral primary education plans instead, where investment in schoolbooks and buildings were considered the main factors for quality education, not teachers or class sizes. Finally, the choice to reduce the EFA agenda to a UPE policy specifically stripped of any of the Dakar goal references to quality, did not establish the World Bank as the strongest advocate of quality education. As heavy weight stakeholders in the development field, having now joined the international concern on quality education after what can be leniently described as a most hesitant start, the IFIs have certainly contributed to giving this issue a higher profile. Although, the IFIs openly acknowledge the fact that their policies have taken a new direction thanks to lessons learnt, the concrete translation (substance of and motivations behind this new concern are examined separately) of these evolutions in terms of education financing is still very fragile: a 2006 report by the Independent Evaluation Group found that only 20% of all World Bank assistance to education had children's learning as an explicit objective.

The “quality” focus on outcomes

That the new discourse on quality education hasn't, however, resulted in any noticeable increase in the volume of aid to education budgets in developing countries should not come as a surprise. Quite to the contrary, by shifting the focus towards institutional reforms and outputs rather than qualified teachers and sufficient resources, the recent quality dogma has furnished the donors with a political justification for their recurrent lack of financial support, or at the very least a distraction from the main issue. However, if the quality focus hasn't affected, other than negatively, the level of financial support to the education sector, the quality management strategies are having some very serious and far reaching impacts on the quality and content of the pedagogical process at all levels of the public education system.

PART 2

Competition
and Choice
Page 48

Schools

As stated by the OECD, institutional reforms initiated at school level are aimed at encouraging “managers to focus on results by providing them with flexibility and autonomy in the use of both financial and human resources”. Apart from the significant lexical evolution transforming the head-teacher into a school manager, this job description does indeed come with added responsibilities. However, the newly provided “flexibility and autonomy” are very clearly limited to finances and human resources and do not include additional creative independence in terms of curriculum or pedagogy. In fact, the overall autonomy of the educational field

has been considerably reduced since the 60s, mainly through the increasingly close links developed between economic and educational frameworks (the quest for higher integration between what people learn and what the labour market needs). The prospect that greater autonomy and school based management enable more flexible, responsive and innovative teaching has not been demonstrated by any concrete evidence on the ground. Because of their increased logistical responsibilities, head teachers often end up spending more time on administration than on leadership, and are consequently less available to support pedagogical initiatives and quality improvement by teachers who are increasingly directed to focus on exam results.

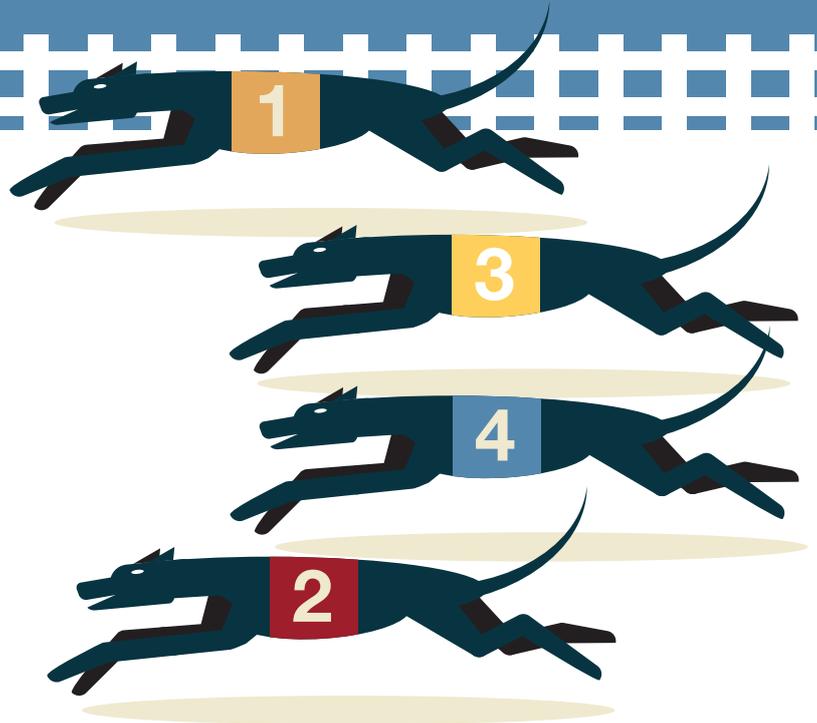
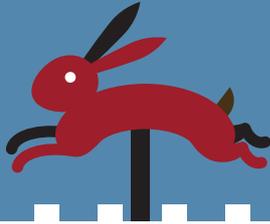
The combined effects of increased flexibility in enrolment regulations on one side, and publication of ‘performance outcomes’ as a form of market ‘information’ for parents/clients on the other are highly conducive to competition between public schools themselves. As evidenced by numerous examples cited by the GMR, this competition does nothing to ensure equal access to quality education, quite to the contrary, it systematically sharpens regional or wealth-based inequalities. Rewarding those schools who perform well on test scores ends up penalizing the few “good” schools that accept to enrol the poor.

Teachers

One of the main intended effects of quality

PART 2

Quality
Teachers
Page 15



management is to re-orient the work of schools and teachers towards outputs as measured by test performance. This primary aim profoundly changes the values and content of the teacher's mission and his educational methods, process and even syllabus. At the classroom level, the most commonly observed impacts include the pressure to focus on the narrow range of subjects and skills needed to pass tests. Of course this also means that extensive teaching time will be devoted to those specific issues, as well as exam rehearsals. The competitive nature of testing and the output-based educational aim can also have

some significantly negative effects on the inclusiveness of the teaching itself. Children are no longer brought into the collective learning process on the basis of their individual and differentiated characteristics and progress rhythms but all submitted to an identical evaluation grid.

Students

On a psychological level, the observed collateral effects of these new educational targets and teaching practices can involve a lowered self-esteem of poorly performing students. At the school level, this can encourage teachers and schools to exclude

PART 2

Quality learning
process
Page 26

from tests children who are least likely to do well, a practice which is likely to be reinforced by the introduction of systems of appraisal and performance review of teachers based on student outcomes. As all studies demonstrate that academic performance is often related to wealth, the focus on test scores also carries a strong tendency to replicate social inequalities and disadvantage those who are under or out of the “norm”, a standard which can often be conservative and even discriminatory against cultural minorities, migrants, girls and other marginalised groups.

Government

Outcomes performance and accountability strategies impose a different type of relationship between the government and its educational staff characterized by low-trust contractualisation. As seen above, this not only means evaluating teachers on the basis of their students’ performance but can increasingly cover tying teachers’ pay to student outcomes (performance-related pay). Pay levels and contract conditions are increasingly outsourced to be fixed at school level, while qualification, training and experience, as the basis for employing teachers, are replaced with notions such as adaptability, performance, flexibility and compliance with objectives. Finally, the outcomes-based education reforms encourage governments to set targets for school performance levels which are frequently published in order to be rewarded or penalized by parental choice. In some cases, exam success ratios can even be tied to the level of funding the school is liable to be granted by the Ministry of Education. By developing an educational policy based on rewarding

success, even under the name of transparency and accountability, the direction taken is the exact opposite of an equitable system, where allocation of education finance would be inversely related to outcomes, with those experiencing the greatest needs receiving the most support.

As the GMR and all serious research have repeatedly demonstrated, competition in the educational framework, whether between students, teachers or public schools is a recipe for inequality, discrimination, and denial of every child’s fundamental right to free quality education.

If one is to believe the World Bank’s recent report on Quality and economic growth, this hard evidence is not enough to invalidate the fundamental “free-market” concept which apparently overrides any other reality. According to the authors, in the educational field « not many examples of operational, large-scale attempts at competition have been evaluated. Nonetheless, the benefits of competition are so well documented in other spheres of activity that it is inconceivable that more competition would not be beneficial. »

The financial crisis and collateral damage in the education field

This resource was written during early 2010, as the Education For All project faced the devastating fall-out from the economic crisis that has followed the most severe financial meltdown since the Great Depression. Education budgets, already stretched to the limit, are beginning to come under intolerable strain. Education ministers at a variety of

PART 2

Financial
Crisis
Page 13

education policy fora have called (with increasing desperation) for outside support to make good on anticipated shortfalls. Poorer countries' ability to make the investments necessary to ensure quality with equity seem slim indeed in this context.

One might have expected that the crisis would lead to a serious re-examination of the market model being applied in so many spheres of life, including the education sector. Indeed, most richer countries of the developed world have resorted to government intervention to salvage their economies, a strategy that represents a dramatic departure from the ideas that have dominated the economic agenda in recent years. Unfortunately, while these governments managed to react with speed and collective determination to gather the huge budgets needed for their recovery plans, most of this money has been injected to save the banks and financial institutions that were primarily responsible for the crisis in the first place. It remains to be seen whether the crisis will lead to any serious questioning of the capacity of the neo-liberal economic model to address the urgent and critical human, social and environmental issues that are threatening our livelihood as well as the future of our planet.

What we already do know, is that those who are the least responsible for this crisis, the poor and particularly those living in developing countries, will pay the highest price and suffer the most dire consequences from the unfolding social and economic collateral damages. The rise in unemployment levels worldwide and expected decline in remittances, among other factors, will plunge

hundreds of thousands more into poverty and a projected billion (according to World Bank estimates) could go chronically hungry. We have seen the devastating effects of poverty on education access in the past. We are indeed once more at risk of wiping out some of the fragile EFA gains being made in the developing world, as education becomes a cost and a luxury for those struggling to survive.

One can only hope, that the rich countries of the world will not use the excuse of this home-made financial crisis to break their commitments and decrease the already largely insufficient level of their aid to education. The 2010 Global Monitoring Report has revealed that the external financing required to reach the EFA goals by 2015 is US\$16 billion. Although leaders of the most powerful nations may claim that this amount is difficult to raise in the present economic context, it represents just 2% of the rescue money offered to four banks by the US and UK alone. Education campaigners will continue to hold governments, especially those in richer countries, accountable for the denial of access basic human rights that their decisions might cause.

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