PROMOTING QUALITY EDUCATION:
EDUCATION FOR PEACE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY;
EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT;
CURRICULA, EDUCATIONAL TOOLS AND TEACHER TRAINING

SUMMARY

This document has been prepared by the Secretariat at the request of the Chairperson of the Executive Board for the thematic debate of the 166th session. It first presents a brief description of the relationships between quality and access in education. It outlines the need for a broader vision of the quality of education than is currently used to be consistent with a human rights programming perspective. The next part takes four components of quality education: education for sustainable development; education for peace, human rights and democracy; revision of curricula and learning materials; and teacher education, and presents key issues related to each in relation to quality education. The conclusion argues that while the challenge is great, quality improvements are attainable on a daily basis if there is the will. This is consistent with the approach taken in the Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007), in Strategic objectives 1 and 2.
Introduction

1. Quality education has always been a priority for UNESCO. Now, however, attention to the concept of quality education has come to the fore as learners, parents and communities, educators, leaders and nations acknowledge that what is learned and how learning occurs are as important as access to education. The age-old problems that have plagued educational quality remain, and are further complicated by new challenges such as the role of education in relation to sustainable development, peace and security, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for example.

2. One difficulty is that while most people understand intuitively what they mean by “quality of education”, there may not be a common understanding of the term. This is especially true now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when education is increasingly understood to be more than “reading, writing and arithmetic” and extends to the “expanded vision” of education as articulated at the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990) and reaffirmed at the World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000). There is a lively professional discourse on quality education that includes a growing consensus on the importance of aspects such as relevance, universal values, peace and security, and informed decision-making, for example. Thus, this debate is especially timely as it contributes to this global discussion and the evolving definition of quality education, as well as assisting UNESCO and its Member States to consider the orientation of education systems with regard to quality education.

3. This paper serves as background for a debate on the quality of education, with particular emphasis on the role of UNESCO in this very important area. It begins with a brief description of the relationship between quality and quantity so as to ensure that the debate focuses on quality. It then outlines how UNESCO might view educational quality as it reaffirms its stance as an organization that programmes from a human rights perspective. In light of the breadth of the topic, the paper identifies four critical areas of quality education where UNESCO has particular comparative advantage. While the more philosophical discussion at the start of the paper may seem very different from the concrete areas discussed in the latter part of the paper, they are, in fact, synergistic, the latter being an application of the former. The final section argues that quality improvements, because they are incremental, are possible on a daily basis.

The relationships between access and quality

4. There is a common misunderstanding that access to education must always precede attention to quality. This is not, in fact, the case. There is evidence from the field that, in some cases, learners are not taking advantage of school places even when they are available, and in other cases, learners drop out when what they are learning is not relevant to their current or future needs. The following points are now clear, however:

• educational access and quality are distinct concepts;
• these two concepts are intricately linked, especially when supply and demand are considered; and
• while quality is impossible without access, access without quality is often meaningless to those for whom access is made possible.

5. In the final analysis, our interest is in the outcome from education – in learning achievement. Thus, access is critical, but not very meaningful without evidence of learning. The complex interplay between access and quality is fairly well covered in the literature so this will not be discussed. Rather, a review of what is meant by “quality education” will be attempted.
A broader definition of quality education

6. As noted above, the definition of quality is evolving. The conventional definition remains important to understanding quality education. It includes literacy, numeracy and life skills, and is linked directly to such critical components as teachers, content, methodologies, curriculum, examination systems, policy, planning and management and administration.

7. There is a demand, however, for education to reflect upon its relevance to the modern world. While in the past much of the emphasis on education related to cognitive understanding and development, now there is a need to also address the social and other dimensions of learning. Education is expected to make a contribution to sustainable human development, peace and security, and the quality of life at individual, family, societal and global levels.

8. UNESCO promotes quality education as a human right and supports a rights-based approach to the implementation of all educational activities. Our work is based on a number of international instruments\(^1\) that identify education as a human right. Several of these international instruments indicate the desired nature, or quality of this education. When we look at these instruments together and interpret them we go far beyond single articles to a web of commitments that speak to the depth and breadth of how we must begin to understand educational quality.

9. Interpretation of the various instruments with regard to quality education must be embedded within the overall current local and world contexts and expectations of education. That is, education must be placed and understood in terms of the larger context. A quality education must reflect learning in relation to the learner as an individual, as a family and community member, and as part of a world society.

10. A quality education understands the past, is relevant to the present and has a view to the future. Quality education relates to knowledge-building and the skilful application of all forms of knowledge by unique individuals who function both independently and in relation to others. A quality education reflects the dynamic nature of culture and languages, the value of the individual in relation to the larger context and the importance of living in a way that promotes equality in the present and fosters a sustainable future.

11. What is important, however, is to have very practical ways to implement a human rights programming approach in education. This paper does this by looking through three different sets of lenses.

12. The first set of lenses is education as learning to .... A quality education addresses all aspects of learning and allows for learning throughout life. It attends to the four pillars of learning identified by the Delors report: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and with others, and learning to be.\(^2\) In addition, a quality education provides the tools to transform societies.

13. Learning to know acknowledges that each learner builds her or his own knowledge, combining indigenous and “external” knowledge to form new knowledge on a daily basis.

14. Learning to do focuses on the ability to put what is learned into practice, especially with regard to livelihoods.

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\(^1\) Including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

15. Learning to live together addresses the critical skills that are essential for a better life in a context where there is no discrimination and all have equal opportunity to develop themselves and to contribute to their families and communities. These skills are not specific, but generic – to be applied in different situations. Key among these are non-violence and peaceful negotiation, respect for and acceptance of diversity, problem-solving, understanding of human rights, universal values and democratic practice and the promotion of peace and intercultural understanding.

16. Learning to be assumes that each individual has the opportunity to develop her or his full potential. Thus, it is based on the precept that education is not just for purposes of the state or national development, for responding to globalization or for moulding thinking, but for enabling individuals to learn, and to seek, build, and use knowledge to address problems on a scale that ranges from the minute to the global and beyond.

17. And, it is in this last phrase that the idea of transformation becomes important. It is the recognition that individuals working separately and together can change the world, and that a quality education, because of the way it equips human beings, makes an important contribution to this.

18. The second set of lenses addresses several key dimensions of quality education from a rights perspective.

19. One, a quality education is one that seeks out learners and assists them to learn using a wide range of modalities, recognizing that learning is linked to experience, language and cultural practices, gifts, traits, the external environment and interests. We learn in different ways, each emphasizing different senses and abilities. A quality education is one that welcomes the learner and can adapt to meet learning needs. And, within the learning experience there are several components that affect quality: the learner, content, processes and environment.¹

20. Two, what the learner brings to her or his own learning and to that of a group is extremely important. It can vary from work skills, to traumatic experiences, to excellent early childhood development opportunities, to illness or hunger, for example.

21. Three, educational content is well understood as a component of quality, but this needs to be re-examined in light of the changes that have occurred in the world, and of information technologies and globalization processes that have brought societies closer together in some ways.

22. Four, the processes of education are a frequently overlooked aspect of quality. How learners are enabled to frame and solve problems, how different learners in the same group are treated, how teachers and administrators are treated and behave, and how families and communities are engaged in education are all processes that affect the quality of education.

23. Five, the learning environment itself is an essential component of quality. While the physical environment is better understood, the psycho-social one, which is at least as important, deserves serious attention so that practices such as gender discrimination, bullying, corporal punishment, and forced work are eliminated.

24. The third set of lenses relates to the importance of an enabling environment that is rights-based. A quality education must be offered within a managerial and administrative system that also supports effective learning. This presupposes a system that is well managed, with transparent processes guided by the implementation of good policies and an appropriate legislative

http://www.unicef.org/programme/girlseduction/papers.htm
framework. It also requires sufficient resources, recognizing the full range of resources that can be brought to bear in support of education.

25. UNESCO’s view of quality education can be monitored and measured. Many indicators of quality exist. There is already a number of activities that are engaged in measuring a wide range of life skills, for example, and these are directly relevant to this vision. This vision demands attention to additional indicators, however, as it goes beyond the conventional definition of quality education.

Key areas where UNESCO has a comparative advantage with regard to the quality of education

26. As noted earlier, there are many aspects of quality and the definition of quality in education is currently undergoing significant change because such education is no longer viewed as being relevant to fast-changing global contexts. As the United Nations lead agency in education, UNESCO must play a key role in the development of the notion of quality education.

27. UNESCO is uniquely placed to respond to this new demand, consistent with its 31 C/4 strategic plan. Four areas are singled out for particular consideration in the following pages. These are: education for sustainable development, education for peace and human rights, revision of curricular and learning materials, and teacher education. These are all components of quality education. These are all areas where UNESCO is active, and has been playing a leadership role for decades. These are areas where UNESCO has comparative advantage in relation to other partners, although this does not mean that UNESCO is, or should be, the only actor. It does mean, however, that in light of the discussion above on the need to reconceptualize and redefine quality more broadly, UNESCO has a responsibility to ensure that its work continues to be on the cutting edge of this topic.

28. Education for sustainable development. As the United Nations agency responsible for WSSD follow-up in relation to education for sustainable human development, UNESCO works under the principle that quality EFA is a foundation of poverty eradication, which is essential for sustainable human development. In linking EFA to sustainable development, it also assumes that quality education, at all levels and in all modalities, must include attention to the issues that have caused inequality, poverty and unsustainability.

29. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 26 August-4 September 2002, a more fully developed paradigm of sustainable development was endorsed at the highest political levels. The political declaration states that sustainable development is built on three “interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars” – economic development, social development and environmental protection – which must be established “at local, national, regional and global levels” (para. 5). The new paradigm establishes linkages among poverty alleviation, human rights, peace and security, cultural diversity, biodiversity, food security, clean water and sanitation, renewable energy, preservation of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources. This view of sustainable development seeks to ensure “a better quality of life for everyone now and for the generations to come”.

30. Education at all levels is a key to sustainable development. Educating people for sustainable development requires a balance among economic goals, social goals and ecological responsibility. Education should provide communities with the skills, perspectives, values and knowledge to live in a sustainable manner. It should be interdisciplinary, integrating concepts and analytical tools from a variety of disciplines. Education must be reoriented to include the changes needed to

promote sustainable development. Education for sustainable development must be attentive to developments and reforms in education, particularly Education for All, the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the International Literacy Decade, and vice versa. It is no longer just adding environmental protection to the curriculum.

31. The aim is not only for the educator and the learner to understand the issues of sustainable development but also to cope with and act upon the interdisciplinarity of the issue. This more dynamic meaning of education for sustainable development utilizes all aspects of public awareness, education and training as powerful instruments to create both understanding about sustainability, and also to develop the knowledge, skills, perspectives and values to participate in individual and collective decisions that will improve the quality of life in the short and the long run. This also means that while there will be overall agreement on “What is ESD?” there will be nuanced differences according to local contexts, priorities and approaches. This is a critical point. It means that there will be no single “right” definition of ESD, but there will be a general understanding of the concept of sustainable development that education addresses.

32. The goals, emphases and processes of ESD must, therefore, be locally defined meeting the local environmental, social and economic conditions in culturally appropriate ways. This can be facilitated through community involvement, which will enable community members to make informed decisions on issues affecting the quality of their lives. Exchange of relevant experiences of sustainable solutions from around the world would enrich options and promote diversity through international cooperation. In general, improving basic education and reorienting existing education have common end points of developing knowledge, skills, perspectives and values to enable citizens to continue learning after they leave school, to have a sustainable livelihood, and to live sustainable lives on a daily basis. But, sustainable development faces growing challenges. ESD must include attention to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, globalization as both a positive and a negative force, and the impact of conflict and war on the quality of human life, for example.

33. It is evident from the above that ESD, EFA and the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) are mutually supportive. All six goals of EFA and the objectives of the Literacy Decade are integral parts of ESD. In the same way ESD approaches must be incorporated within EFA and the Literacy Decade strategies and programmes in order for any one of the three interlinked movements to succeed.

34. **Education for peace, human rights and democracy.** The past decade has made it clear that education has a key, perhaps even leading, role in the long-term assurance that humankind can live in peace and dignity, and with a sense of security. In this regard, emphasis is given to respect for all human rights, democratic practice, elimination of biases (gender, ethnic, religious, language, for example), understanding of universal values, non-violence and conflict resolution, civics education, and the promotion of peace and intercultural understanding.

35. UNESCO has been active in human rights education (HRE) since its inception in 1945. UNESCO’s activities have been placed within the framework of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) and are based on different normative instruments adopted by UNESCO and the United Nations.

36. In today’s world, it is crucial to address HRE through a holistic perspective. This means that HRE should constitute the basis for the democratization of education systems in the context of national education reforms with a view to integrating the learning and practice of human rights. This includes not only the content of the curriculum but also the educational processes, the pedagogical methods and the environment within which education takes place, including management. Human rights education implies the learning and practice of human rights. Therefore,
HRE should not only be theoretical but should provide opportunities for learners to develop and practise the skills to respect human rights and citizenship through “school life”, i.e. all aspects of school as a living, social environment with its collective rules, interpersonal conflicts, time and opportunities for cooperation, and through opportunities for spontaneous initiatives by the pupils outside the actual teaching activities.

37. A significant challenge in all countries is to make the language and concepts of human rights accessible, relevant and applicable to real life situations, especially for younger children. The realization of this kind of HRE implies the following considerations when addressing national education reforms:

- improving the quality of the curriculum by integrating human values for the realization of peace, social cohesion and respect for human rights and human dignity. In this framework, a more participatory process of curriculum development is essential;

- changing traditional teaching methods in order to make them more participatory and democratic;

- making teacher training consistent with the educational objectives;

- democratizing the internal structure of the school and its management. In this context, the participation of children in school life, the creation of school communities and student councils, peer education and peer counselling, and the involvement of children in school disciplinary proceedings should be promoted as part of the process of learning and experiencing the realization of rights;

- increasing opportunities for parents and teachers to take decisions on school issues;

- creating mechanisms to foster cooperation and mutual appreciation among all members of the school community and thus promote better relations between teachers and pupils;

- ensuring constructive communication and appreciation of diversity; and

- providing the opportunity to practise through real life examples and activities. Thus, it is important to link the school with the local community and to promote extracurricular activities.

38. A quality education based on a human rights approach means that rights are implemented throughout the whole education system and in all learning environments. It means that appropriate legislation must be in place relating to the right to education as the basis for practising human rights education. It also means that the education system is oriented towards human values allowing the realization of peace, social cohesion and the respect for human dignity. This implies reforming national education systems to include fundamental changes in such areas as education structures, the management of the education system, the teaching/learning practices, the revision and adaptation of learning materials, and the adequate preparation of educational personnel.

39. Revision of curricula and learning materials. For centuries curricula and textbooks have been a key component of acquiring a quality education. Ideally they serve as a complement to a good teacher and an inquiring learner. Over recent years, and most particularly since the adoption of the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990, education is now perceived as being much more than just information and transmission of knowledge. Education has a vital role to play in bringing about, from childhood, the acceptance of the basic principles and values of respect for
human rights and understanding of others’ cultures. Moreover, education reforms and curriculum changes that are taking place in many countries, regardless of their stage of development, indicate that textbooks and other learning materials are key components to achieve this goal insofar as they can be used to foster trust, peace, mutual understanding, tolerance and respect for human dignity. Where education, and especially the availability or training of teachers, is greatly constrained by resources, textbooks and learning materials take on an even more important role.

40. The issue of curriculum, textbooks and learning materials revision is becoming a subject of increasing attention worldwide. The continuous debate on this issue at international levels reveals a wide range of approaches and practices. Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition that curriculum, textbooks and other learning materials are not totally free of bias and value judgements and that some may contain tendentious content and opinions that are likely to inflame passions and sustain hatred and distrust. While this is probably most easily recognizable in history, it is not limited to this subject. Considerations of geography, social sciences and humanities, for example, may also contain partial and biased information that could lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

41. The degree to which bias or value judgement are present in textbooks and learning materials varies case by case and depends upon the goals that are assigned to each country’s education system. Regardless of the context, however, from time to time it is necessary to review curricula, textbooks and learning materials to confirm their accuracy and ensure that they do not reflect negative bias, prejudice or stereotypes. In the current global context, characterized by increasing levels of complexity and strife which make the nature of textbooks and learning materials especially pertinent, calls for textbook review are increasing in both number and volume. Review of educational content is not easy, but a range of countries has good experience to share. In this regard, UNESCO has a key role to play in facilitating information exchange on international norms and standards, sharing examples of good practice in promoting research, and providing opportunities for bilateral or multilateral discussions.

42. In an era of growing regional, ethnic and religious tension, education is needed more than ever to promote, at its core, a dialogue that advances mutual understanding, tolerance and respect for human rights. Indeed, curricula and textbooks themselves, and the manner in which they are conceived, written and taught, contribute to building a culture of peace and to preventing conflict.

43. **Teacher education.** The changing global contexts and the emerging demands on the quality of education serve only to underscore the importance of teachers, their education and training, and their perspectives. This is paradoxical, because we find ourselves at a time of resounding global alarm about the growing shortage of teachers in general, let alone those who are adequately trained to meet the demands they are facing.

44. Thus, the problem has several dimensions: ensuring there are enough teachers, being able to train them, assisting them to maintain their effectiveness through regular professional development, and protecting the investments in teacher recruitment and education by providing working conditions that retain good teachers in the system. None of these is easy.

45. The availability of teachers who can uphold their part of the commitment to a quality education requires work on at least two fronts. The first is in having a profession that is attractive enough that talented people choose it. This has particular implications for teacher status and salaries, but also includes a visible career ladder that is built on performance as well as longevity. The second is being able to keep teachers in the system, and to keep them motivated and dynamic. In this regard, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is one constraint that cannot be ignored and that requires greater affirmative action. Other areas that contribute to teacher availability include status and
salary, and the often under-recognized importance of working conditions and job satisfaction, which are closely linked. Without teachers to train, investments in teacher education are meaningless.

46. Teachers and their education are among the most significant of government investments in education systems. In spite of the commitment to teacher education, there is evidence that it is often ineffective and very expensive when compared to the results. There is a clear need to improve teacher education on several fronts. Initial teacher training is important and the value of face-to-face learning between and among professionals should never be under-estimated. There needs to be a better balance struck between pre-service teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, however. Without the latter the former is often not contextualized, and often much of the early learning is lost because it is not reinforced. In this regard, there also needs to be a better balance in terms of the modalities of teacher development that are employed. A number of decentralized and distance-learning approaches, including the use of ICTs, could be usefully taken on.

47. The issue of salary and working conditions remains a constant concern. It is a pity that this key obstacle to changing education systems, and to many of the essential reforms that are addressed in the earlier parts of this paper, is a problem that has remained unsolved for so many generations. There is some evidence, however, that it may even be worsening in some contexts (such as conflict and severe economic hardship), which suggests that the barriers to improving the quality of education may be growing rather than diminishing. There are also some important good experiences that deserve more research and consideration for adaptation to other countries.

**Putting these ideas into practice**

48. The ideas and concerns to be discussed in the debate are very important. They are complex. They are also interrelated, so action on one front can serve to further action elsewhere. The ideas presented here may be considered daring, but, in fact, they are not. **There should be nothing less than a vision of quality education that is based on a human rights approach.**

49. Most important, however, is that this vision is practical – it can be put into practice in villages, in towns, in homes, in universities, in the North and the South. This vision can be implemented because it is an approach, not a recipe. Quality improvement is an incremental process. There is no single starting or ending point because there is no one “right” way to do it. What is important is to share the vision, to understand what it means in terms of a particular learning situation, and then to find places where quality can be improved in light of the existing context.

50. For example, an ongoing reform of teacher education would provide opportunities to address the processes of education; a food-for-work programme might address issues of hunger preventing learning. Another approach is to take a topic area (such as peace, non-violence and conflict resolution) and identify how it can be integrated into all aspects of a school, not just the curriculum. Or, a problem area can be identified, such as discrimination, and an analysis performed to determine how it might be addressed. UNESCO has already undergone a process of identifying and documenting many of the entry points to improve quality, such as teachers and textbooks.

51. This is not an impossible dream. Every learning environment can be improved with small changes on a regular basis. When maintained, these changes can build into major reforms that have a broad support base and, as a result, improved quality becomes the responsibility of everybody.

52. Quality improvement does not automatically require immediate and large financial resource increases. Some aspects are not very costly in terms of money, and there is reason to believe from
field observations that small changes in poorly resourced learning environments can make more noticeable improvements than even large financial investments in well-resourced ones.

53. UNESCO’s vision of quality is one based in human rights and an understanding of universal human values. It recognizes the cultural and historical roots of learning and knowledge, and the realities of the twenty-first century. It is a unifying concept that is not uniform.

54. It is not education about human rights; it is education for human rights.