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*Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality*

**Quality of basic education**

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Quality of Basic Education

By

November, 2003


Paris
Introduction

The World Education Forum (2000) agreed on six Education For All (EFA) goals. The sixth goal concerned Education quality, ‘…improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.’

The purpose of this paper is five-fold:

- to review the concept of ‘quality’ in education and establish some clear working definitions for its meaning,
- to examine the relationship between the quality of education and gender equality in schooling, with a particular focus upon the values education should seek to encourage in promoting gender equality,
- to look at the various modes of delivery (e.g. curriculum content, pedagogy), assessment of student performance, and evaluation of the education system,
- to review the best indicators for monitoring progress towards education of acceptable quality and,
- to provide examples of strategies or initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education in different national settings, with a particular focus on gender issues, and, more generally, lessons to be learned.
1. The concept of Quality in Basic Education

Defining the concept of quality is a little like trying to define ‘motherhood’ – it is clearly a ‘good thing’ but elusive and likely to be dependent on the perspective of the person attempting the definition. For many parents, for example, it may well relate to the learning outcomes, particularly end of cycle examination results, of their respective child; for the school manager or inspector quality may well embrace improved general standards of reading, or handwriting, or mathematics; for the classroom teacher a definition of quality linking closely to improved conditions of service.

What is clear, however, is that there is a broad consensus in the international community on two points. First, challenges to quality have gone hand-in-hand with the rapid expansion of primary school systems in many parts of the world. Second, girls and boys in the same classroom do not typically receive the same education. Throughout the world, boys consistently receive more (and more challenging) instruction from teachers. Curricula typically feature strong role models for boys but few or weak models for girls. In mixed-sex classrooms, girls often suffer harassment.1

The reason for this state of affairs is complex, though it is generally agreed that whereas classrooms are important venues for change, very often what occurs there mirrors and reinforces external, social values.

Quality is therefore directly related to what occurs in two educational contexts: firstly in the more focussed environment of the classroom; secondly in the wider context of the school system and social context in which the classroom is embedded. Both environments have a reciprocal relationship with each other.

In 1990 we attempted a definition of the quality of Basic Education which focussed largely on the former, more focussed context of the classroom. Quality, for us, meant,

- relevance to context, to needs (both ‘needs now’ and ‘needs later’) and to humanity.
- efficiency in setting standards, in meeting standards set and in improving standards.
- and as something special…which goes beyond normal expectations of a school2

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Reviewing the concept 13 years on we would argue that, for us, a working definition of quality is still fundamentally concerned with these three pillars but that a fourth be added – quality as inclusion. A relevant, efficient and ‘special’ education must, in other words, be available to all children irrespective of gender, ability or wealth. Combining ‘more-with-better’ and not ‘more-with-worse’ is perhaps the single most critical challenge facing us all.

School and classroom is also the focus of two other complementary definitions of quality which, though, like us, acknowledge the importance of the external world on the classroom, stress the importance of key classroom variables e.g. the relationship between the teacher and the student, time on task, the quality of the classroom milieu, and effective school management.  

As we strive to improve the delivery of education these characteristics of a quality learning environment will change over time, and as such will pose challenges in the development of indicators of quality and the monitoring of school improvement. We will return to this issue in section four of this paper.

Boxed insert 1

Towards a working definition of quality education

‘Quality education is a learning situation which vibrates with positive energy and where the learner and the learned both are eagerly absorbed in understanding and communicating through a knowledge construction process. The emphasis lies with the learner.’

Source: Nagel,T ‘What is quality of education and why is it important for development?’  Keynote address. International Conference on Quality in Education. 11-13 June 2003. Oslo Norway

When we shift our focus away from the classroom and out towards the school system and the broadly social context of schooling it is equally clear that quality is also concerned with a vision of the kind of society we want.

Such visions implicitly address the question, ‘What is education for?’ Here the bigger issues of society such as democracy, freedom, equality and human rights or

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4 For an historical overview of the concept of quality see Liston,C (1999) Managing Quality and Standards. Open University Press. Buckingham Ch.2 ‘Historical aspects of the quality debate’
conversely, exploitation, oppression, and inequality are embraced along with good classroom results and the personal and social development of the child.

The Save the Children Alliance – an umbrella organisation - bringing together all the various constituencies of the Save the Children movement world-wide – define quality as education characterised by, ‘relevance; participation; flexibility; appropriacy; and inclusiveness’ with ‘inclusion’ as the central ‘cementing’ goal for raising quality in education. Kissack and Meyer, researching in South Africa (1996), share these aspirations extending the notion of quality as empowering or transforming, introducing the concept of ‘empowering agency’.

These broader, holistic definitions of quality are echoed by UNICEF in their call for ‘rights-based, child-friendly’ schools in which ‘five dimensions of quality’: learners, content, processes, environments; and outcomes are pursued.

It must be stressed, however, that whatever vision or definition of ‘quality’ we subscribe to, as educators we would argue that it is the minute-to-minute processes of education in the classroom that are the most critical element. In other words we believe that by working to make classrooms and schools ‘better’ in terms of relevant, efficient, creative and inclusive learning environments we are, in turn, contributing to broader, social efforts to improve the quality of life.

To some extent this interest in quality as improved classroom teaching-learning processes is mirrored in the shift from a general focus upon school effectiveness to a more institutional focus upon school improvement.

What is required, therefore, is an holistic model which stresses the reciprocal relationship of the classroom and society, balancing concerns for equity in society with quality in the classroom, rather than making them mutually exclusive. We will return to this issue in part two of this paper when we discuss quality in relation to inclusion and gender equality.

**Quality and School Effectiveness**

Two major frameworks for studying quality and school effectiveness have evolved since the 1960s: the policy mechanics approach which puts the emphasis upon universal determinants of effective schools, and the classroom culturalists, who stress...
definitions of quality and effectiveness in relation to particular national and institutional cultures.\textsuperscript{11}

These two approaches – which are not mutually exclusive – also differentiate the level at which quality, effectiveness or improvement is described and evaluated: the first viewing the national educational system as the unit of analysis, the latter tending to focus at the level of the school and individual classroom, where it is argued the twin aspects of culture and context are more strongly felt.

The first approach, which is characterised by a more technical-mechanical definition of effectiveness identifies specific factors or indicators,

\begin{quote}
‘The ‘technical efficiency’ orientation focusses on the provision of basic school inputs (especially teachers, educational materials and learning time), their effect on academic achievement and the consequent priorities for investment. This orientation is characterised by positivist assumptions and by attempts to measure production functions through large-scale surveys.’\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Such surveys by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), the Educational Testing Services’s International Assessment of Educational Progress (IAEP), and the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) contain information that is useful for the development of a set of internationally comparative indicators, especially with respect to outcomes, inputs, and process indicators such as time and opportunity.\textsuperscript{13} Quality here is seen less in terms of place or context and and more in terms of comparable disaggregated variables.

The problem with this approach is that it tends to focus almost exclusively upon cognitive outcomes of schooling with a neglect of the affective and social outcomes of the schooling process, and secondly to ignore possible variation in factors associated with learning within different cultural contexts within countries, preferring instead to use ‘whole sample’ analyses which aggregate and look at relationships across schools.\textsuperscript{14}

A notable example of this kind of analysis is provided by Fuller & Heyneman (1989) who attempted to identify effective and ineffective factors that influence school achievement, reducing an initial list of 27 factors to a more manageable.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Creemers & Reynolds (1996) op.cit.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective parameters</th>
<th>% of Studies showing Positive effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of instructional Programme</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Feeding Programmes</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Library Activity</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years of Teacher Training</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks and Instructional Materials</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ineffective Parameters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Grade repetition</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Class Size</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers salaries</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Laboratories</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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If quality is concerned with qualities such as relevance and efficiency then, we would argue, such qualities are only meaningful when interpreted in a particular context. ‘Years of Teacher Training’ and ‘reduced class size’ may well provide us with general ideas about desirable inputs to an education system but can mean very different things when interpreted in context.

Recent multi-site research on teacher education in five national settings\(^{16}\) shows clearly that it is not the quantity of teacher education that matters but its quality and the relationship between pre- and in-service teacher training that has a positive impact upon learning outcomes.

Similarly, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that although class size has a limited affect on the learning outcomes of the majority of pupils it does have an effect on levels of literacy and numeracy of the pupils with particular learning needs. The primary and secondary pupil-teacher ratios in Norway, for example, of 12:1 and 10:1 respectively have contributed significantly to their high positions in international comparisons of performance in reading and mathematics.

More recent educational effectiveness models\(^{17}\) have attempted to provide a more sophisticated approach and have integrated the factors at school and classroom levels into multilevel models that provide a theoretical basis and might enhance the explanatory power of research into educational effectiveness.\(^{18}\) Here a distinction is often made between ‘general’ and ‘differential’ effectiveness. The first concept refers to the achievements of all pupils in a school, the second to the achievements of specific groups of pupils, such as girls or boys.\(^{19}\) Though it is useful to have some

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\(^{16}\) See a range of publications from the Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER) based at the University of Sussex Centre for International Education. The discussion papers are downloadable from the following web address: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/usie/muster/list.html


\(^{19}\) Van der Werf, G et al. (2000) ‘Evaluation of School Improvement through an Educational Effectiveness Model: The Case of Indonesia’s PEQIP Project’ in *Comparative Education Review* Vol. 44 No. 3.
general idea of what parameters are worth considering in efforts to raise quality, there
is a strong case to be made for multi-level models to be much more rooted in the
recognisable realities of classroom life. It is here where most, though not all, learning
takes place.

We will return to the issue of differentiation when looking at quality and gender in
part two and the question of best ways to develop useful indicators of quality in part
four.

The classroom culturalist approach, with its stress upon the classroom or learning
environment as the unit of analysis, attempts to understand quality in terms of the
‘black box’ educational process areas at the school and, importantly, classroom level.
Here quality and effectiveness are viewed holistically with indicators ‘joined up’ and
analysed qualitatively and in situ. Quality here is viewed through the lens of the local
and particular learning environment and nuanced in terms of culture and context.
Examples of this approach, discussed later in this paper, include the District Primary
Education Project (DPEP) in India and the work of the Bangladesh Rural
Advancement Committee (BRAC).

The relationship between school effectiveness and school improvement approaches to
issues of quality, to some extent mirror the shift in focus from a technical-efficiency
approach to a more culturalist perspective in which the focus is placed on the school
and individual classroom.

From School effectiveness to School Improvement

Of significance since the early 1990s is the emerging school improvement movement
which attempts to understand quality through reviewing the processes of teaching and
learning in the school context. Developing the school effectiveness approach, which
reviews the key elements of ‘good’ schools and ‘best’ practices, the school
improvement approach aims to understand particular classroom processes within the
school which lead to improved student outcomes.  

The term ‘school improvement’, then, is used as shorthand for an international body
of research and an associated approach to school development, concerned with raising
the quality of education in all schools.

School improvement in Britain and elsewhere has recently started to draw on the
school effectiveness research base. School effectiveness research provides a ‘vision of

appraisal’ in International Journal of Educational Development Vol. 21 No.1
21 SIN Research Matters No.1 Understanding School Improvement Summer 1994 University
of London Institute of Education. London
22 See for example Black, H et.al. (1993) School Improvement in the Developing World: An
Evaluation of the Aga Khan Foundation Programme. The Scottish Council for Research in
Education. Edinburgh. In this evaluation five categories of factors that contribute to quality are
a more desirable place for schools to be but little insight as to how to make the journey to that place.’

A current feature of the ‘School Improvement’ approach is to focus on the relationships between children and teachers, classroom decision-making by teachers and children, and the development of critical thinking skills. Here relevance and efficiency as qualities, for example, are translated into the following questions: ‘what relevant knowledge do we bring to this learning task?’, ‘Is this the most efficient way of going about solving this problem?’, ‘What relevance does this activity have for us now … and in the future?’

The OECD-sponsored International School Improvement Project defined school improvement as,

‘a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively.’

Quality can therefore be viewed as both an understanding of what is effective and a variety of approaches or strategies to achieve improvement in the quality of education provided.

If we accept the view that it is at the level of the school and classroom where we are to determine the quality of education, then we are faced with two further problems: first, how can we assess the relative quality of one school over another given that all schools differ in terms of context, pupil intake, etc. and secondly how can we gain some sort of measure of how well a school or particular classroom has improved over time?

One strategy for addressing the comparative strengths and weaknesses of schools is to examine and quantify the differences which seem to exist between successful and unsuccessful school environments. Such assessments, commonplace in the United Kingdom, might well focus on a range of commonly agreed indicators of quality e.g. the relationship of educational resources to learning outcomes, time on task in the classroom, the relative involvement of girls and boys in different class activities, the quantity and quality of in-service training provided for a school’s staff. Turning these desirable aspects of the school environment into guides for the monitoring and sustainability of quality is something we will return to later when discussing best indicators of quality.

In terms of gaining an understanding of how a school has improved over time, the concept of value added has been developed since the 1990s to provide ways to investigate the relationship between measures of school performance and the conditions that appear to enhance or hinder school effectiveness in different types of school context.

listed as: material inputs, teacher quality, school management and structure, implementation strategies, and factors specific to the education of girls.


A major challenge in the development of value-added measures has been the problem of developing models which allow the statistical analysis to separate out the effect of the school experience on individual pupil outcomes (what pupils achieve) and the extent to which pupil intake characteristics (those things the pupils arrive at school with e.g. the level of attainment they have already reached when they enter school) affect pupil outcomes.\textsuperscript{25}

On a more practical level such an approach to assessing change within a school’s life will require accurate baseline information about pupil’s prior attainment in order to calculate the value added component.

A modest way forward in operationalising such an approach to assessing change over time would be for schools to pilot schemes in which baseline data on selected new entrants to the school is built up over the child’s career in the school. Such data might include an initial diagnostic test to measure literacy and numeracy, internal class-based assignment scores, and teacher assessments of the changing strengths and weaknesses of the selected pupils.

In Norway, where the author of this paper works, government is about to establish a National Quality Assessment System which will monitor quality of the next generation of primary school children through national tests in Norwegian, English and Science, at three stages of a pupil’s life within the first school. Such a move has resulted from an analysis of PISA data which indicates that in spite of high levels of educational expenditure, Norway lags behind in terms of pupil learning outcomes, compared to countries such as South Korea, Finland and the United Kingdom, whose expenditure is less per child.\textsuperscript{26}

Quality, then is a matter of identifying:

a) the systemic factors or variables that generally seem to make one school more or less effective than another e.g. relevant resources, levels of reading, writing and numeracy;

b) the manner in which these factors or variables are played out in relation to each other in a particular learning environment with a view to improving that environment; and

c) the value-added dimension which represents changes in quality between and within schools over a particular period of time.\textsuperscript{27}


\textsuperscript{27} Usually this is from pupil entry to the school until public examinations at secondary level or over particular years in primary schools. See SIN Research Matters No. 7 ‘Value Added Approaches: Fairer Ways of Comparing Schools’ University of London Institute of Education. Summer 1997. London
How to develop best indicators for measuring these components will be discussed in part four of this paper.

Quality and School Culture

Finally a word needs to be said about quality in relation to societal and school culture. It is clear that any discussion of quality must take seriously the contextual and cultural landscape within which improvement is to be implemented and interpreted. Agreed or contested notions of quality reflect not only what a society wants in terms of an educated citizenry but, at a deeper level perhaps, shared visions of what it means to be human.

Understanding a school’s culture is equally an essential pre-requisite for any internal or external qualitative change. It can be argued that real improvement in quality cannot come from anywhere other than within school themselves, and ‘within’ is a complex web of values and beliefs, norms, social and power relationships and emotions.

Quality and changing schools is not just about changing curricula, teaching and learning strategies, assessment, structures and roles and responsibilities (see part three of this paper for a discussion of this). Quality does not happen just by producing plans as a result of external pressure. Nor does it happen just by setting targets and extolling pupils or teachers to do better. It requires an understanding of and respect for the different meanings and interpretations people bring to initiatives to improve quality, and work to develop shared meanings underpinned by cultural norms that will promote sustainable improvement.

Our four pillars of quality: relevance, efficiency, ‘something special’ and inclusivity have different meanings and weightings when understood in a particular context, in relation to each other, and when directed to improving a particular educational problem.

One such problem – improving gender equity and educational quality simultaneously is central to our concern for an inclusive education system and it is to this we now turn.

2. School Quality and Gender Equity

‘Ensuring access is not enough. The quality of education is also a significant issue, closely linked to the state of girls’ education’

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Boxed insert 3:

UNICEF (2002) identify five key quality issues facing girls at school

1. What learners bring  
   Girls are more likely to be discriminated from the beginning…Their schooling is often sacrificed for their labour at home and beyond…Adults frequently expect less of girls.

2. Quality Learning Environments  
   Safety and security in the learning environment are essential…these vary from making girls (but not boys) do school maintenance tasks or personal chores for teachers at the expense of learning…to sexual harassment.

3. Quality Content  
   Girls are often invisible in curriculum content and images…girls are often told to take certain courses and not others e.g. science and maths…learning to identify gender bias in the curriculum (and teaching methods) is a critical component of quality education for all

4. Processes that Support Quality  
   Within the same classroom, girls and boys often have very different and unequal learning experiences…boys called upon more than girls…girls’ learning styles may be different from boys’ and should be respected…

5. Outcomes  
   Giving girls’ education increased support and recognition has an inter-generational impact…literacy, numeracy and other skills for life…opportunities for lifelong learning, empowerment and positive participation in society.


Improving girls’ educational opportunities is critical to achieving the Education For All targets. This development discourse is characterised by expressions such as ‘from women in development to gender and development’, ‘closing the gender gap’ and ‘mainstreaming gender’.

It is also important to understand the dynamic relationship between increasing access and maintaining quality. The ‘flight’ of children who can afford to pay, from the public to the private school sector in many countries, may well have something do

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with parental perceptions that ‘more’ actually means ‘worse’ and that for schooling to be relevant, efficient, and ‘special’ schooling it must also be exclusive.\textsuperscript{34}

When addressing the relationship between gender equality and quality education it is important to remember that this is a reciprocal relationship in that schooling possesses the ability both to reinforce and challenge existing gender relations.

However considerable attention has been given to strategies for increasing female access to quality education\textsuperscript{35} An OECD DAC report, Reaching the goals on gender equality and education (1999) examines a number of donor practices on gender mainstreaming in aid to education. The report identifies two ‘good practice principles’:

- The need to adopt an holistic approach to gender, education and development
- The need to address quality and universal access simultaneously.

\textit{Adopting an holistic approach to gender, education and development.}

In terms of school improvement in practice, an holistic approach necessitates making linkages both at the level of school, home and community; and cross-sectorally linking programmes, for example, in education, health and employment rights. In terms of simultaneous action on access and quality it means paying much more attention to the content and processes of education, something we will return to in the next section of this paper.

Current research supports this call for educational initiatives to embrace the principles of holism and a stress upon quality.\textsuperscript{36} Studies from Ghana (Stephens,D 2000), Iran (Mehran,G 1997) and Latin America (Stromquist,N 2001), for example, accord particular importance to the relationship between the macro worlds of culture and economy, and the micro world of the classroom. Relevance, here, is concerned with bringing issues of curriculum content, classroom activities and the language of instruction closer to the needs of children now and in the future. There is also a case

\textsuperscript{34} Commonwealth Secretariat (1999) Improving the Quality of Basic Education. Commonwealth Secretariat. London : ‘A lay view is that ‘more means worse’ and there is likely to be a sense in which the average student performance may drop on a standard range of tests when education is extended to the whole population. Against this more students may obtain the highest grades, and what is sometimes called the ‘achievement yield’ (how many achieve how much) may well have risen.’


for saying that using the mother-tongue as the language of instruction in the first three years of schooling is ultimately more efficient in terms of enhanced learning outcomes and reduced drop-out and repetition.\textsuperscript{37}

**Boxed insert 4:**

*What has been done to close the gender gap?*

Our research suggests that the countries which have made the most progress in eliminating gender inequalities have four main things in common. First and most important, there has been strong political commitment to women in both development and education. Related to this, policy development has been informed and influenced by the demands of strong women’s networks and other key stakeholders such as teachers and parents. Third, in tandem with overarching efforts to provide free and universal access for all groups, comprehensive strategies have been implemented that specifically tackle the key causes of gender inequalities in education. Each strategy comprises a package of inter-related measures rather than isolated and ad hoc interventions. And finally, both governments and donors have been willing to allocate the resources necessary to sustain implementation.


*Addressing quality and universal access simultaneously*

What are the best ways to help girls receive and complete a quality education?\textsuperscript{38}

There is encouraging evidence of success in delivering quality education for girls, particularly at the level of the classroom and the school. Developments in India, Malawi, Guatemala and Bangladesh provide good illustrations of ways forward at school and community level to promote gender equity and school quality:

- The District Primary Education Project (DPEP)\textsuperscript{39} established in India in the early 1990s has directed attention specifically at girls and children from the Scheduled Caste or Dalit. This is the first large-scale effort since the introduction of Gandhi’s notion of Basic Education in the mid-1900s to transform teaching and learning in classrooms in India. A particular success of the project has been changes in teacher behaviour towards greater inclusivity and impartiality towards female and scheduled caste children. The Loreto Day

\textsuperscript{37} Stephens, D (2000) *op cit*.
\textsuperscript{39} Clarke,P (2003) ‘Culture and Classroom reform: the case of the District Primary Education Project, India’ in *Comparative Education* Vol. 39 No 1
School in Calcutta⁴⁰, referred to later, is another example of ‘best practice’ at school level where an effective balance is maintained between equity and quality. These projects also exemplify ways in which quality can be improved through more culturally relevant classroom activities, a detailed engagement with teaching-learning processes, and a focus upon the teacher making more efficient use of his or her preparation and teaching time.

- Increasing the number of female teachers and headteachers is a particular feature of several initiatives world-wide both to provide greater equity for women in accessing teaching as a career but also in providing female pupils with positive role models. The Malawi Integrated In-Service Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP)⁴¹ and the Basic Education Strengthening Project (BEST)⁴² in Guatemala have both succeeded strengthening the position of women within the teaching profession.

- Bangladesh is a good example of a country where an holistic and committed approach has been taken in mainstreaming gender equity. With pressure from groups such as BRAC a raft of measures e.g. social mobilisation campaigns in support of girls education, fee-free education for girls extended to grade 10, a focus on early childhood education, have improved both access and quality simultaneously. It is also notable that the Government of the country has consistently allocated 46% of its education budget to Basic education and mass education since 1990, with 16 of the total budget being allocated to education.⁴³

Success stories such as these have a common narrative:

1) The education of women and girls is taken seriously by policy makers within countries and by the donor community. In India and Malawi, for example, gender advocates from the NGO sector have been co-opted into influential policy-making positions in government.

2) An holistic, integrated and inclusive approach is taken, mainstreaming gender within sectors of education, health, micro-financing, civil rights etc. In Cambodia, for example, a ‘package’ of initiatives includes scholarships for poor girls, board and lodging with local female teachers, and efforts to make the school curriculum more relevant to the particular needs of boys and girls.

3) Particular attention is paid to ensuring that schooling for girls is a relevant, safe and flexible. Evidence can be drawn from the Oxfam-supported Winter Schools Project in Afghanistan with its recognition of the needs of poor girls particularly to balance learning and economic activity; the development of ‘girls clubs’ in Ethiopia to combat sexual harassment; and the involvement of the community in

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⁴² O’Gara, C (1999) op.cit.

⁴³ Global Campaign for Education (2003) op.cit.
raising awareness of the importance of female education, as in the work of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).

4) **A focus on improving the teaching-learning process in the classroom.** The DPEP, the Loreto Day School and BRAC projects mentioned above, the establishment of a Gender Appropriate Curriculum unit in Malawi; and the development of ‘girl friendly’ learning materials in Guatemala are positive ways forward. The USAID-funded *Nueva Escuela Unitaria* programme in this country successfully demonstrated that quality improvements and active learning methods especially benefited girls. This was in part because classroom processes had been monitored and studied but also because *irrelevance* and *inefficiency* had been targetted and turned round.44

5) **Issues of equality and school quality are closely intertwined with cultural ideas and practices.** Studies by Colclough, Rose and Tembon in Guinea and Ethiopia,45 for example, show that what they call ‘adverse cultural practices’ impact not only upon enrolment trends but also the experiences of girls in school. In many cases schools reinforce the disadvantageous gendered roles in society. And as we said earlier when efforts are made to make learning more inclusive the benefits are felt by all those involved in the educational process. The we have a learning environment that is ‘something special’, a place where children, like flowers, can grow.

We can conclude this section by imagining what a gender-sensitive inclusive learning environment might look like. In the classroom boys and girls would be using and discovering knowledge and skills that were relevant to their current and future needs. The development of gender-awareness and inclusion would be a central part of the curriculum; teachers would be encouraging girls to take the lead in classroom activities, and the children would be using learning materials that were gender-sensitive and challenging discrimination and marginalisation.

In the school female teachers would be visible and promoted to senior positions on grounds of merit; whole-school policies would be in place to combat sexual harassment and appropriate facilities would be provided for women and girls. Finally, the school would set itself the task of becoming a model of gender good practice – a beacon and resource for the wider community and society.

### 3. Delivering Quality Education

It is clear from the efforts to reach quality through improvements in gender equity work at the classroom level must be supported by changes in the social and cultural milieux. It must also be remembered that quality education does not solely occur in the formal school setting. Efforts to improve the educational opportunities of street children and school drop-outs, and children in Southern Africa, for example, denied a schooling because of the HIV/AIDS crisis and their duties as carers and bread-winners are as important as those directed at the formal school sector.

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But, as we said earlier, a major challenge is to understand and improve quality in the classroom, for it is here that a majority of children meet together with adults with the expressed purpose of receiving an education.

With this in mind let us examine the three central components of delivering quality education here: pedagogy, the curriculum and language of instruction, and assessment and evaluation.

*Pedagogy* or the teaching and learning process is currently the focus of important research into raising the quality of learning outcomes.

Robin Alexander’s study\(^{46}\) of primary education in five national settings: France, Russia, India, the United States of America and England explore the ways in which children’s educational experiences are shaped not just by classroom circumstances and the decisions of the teacher, but also by school values and organization, by local pressures, national policies and political control and – suffusing all these – by culture and history.

By focussing on the micro-processes of pedagogy – teaching and learning – in a range of particular but ‘real’ learning environments it is possible (though with some difficulty) to generate both a set of indicators of *effectiveness* e.g. teacher-talk/student-talk and models or examples of school and classroom *improvement* in practice. It is also possible to focus attention upon particular groups of children – girls, those with learning difficulties, those learning in a second language – and then institute often small but *relevant* changes to the micro teaching and learning processes that benefit both them in the short term and the whole school in the long run.

This research has a great deal to tell us about quality but not in the sense of league tables measuring various inputs and outputs across national boundaries. Rather it makes the case for quality to be defined in terms of values, aspirations and actions taken by individuals, notably the teachers, that have a positive effect on the learners. An example: it is clear that Alexander and his team, accord the *pedagogy of spoken language* as a key component of a quality curriculum.

By valuing pupil talk more in France and Russia than is done in England, ‘*the quality and power of children’s spoken language gains immeasurably from this approach*’ In taking a cultural approach this research reminds us that quality is very much concerned with the visions and values we want from our education system e.g. in this example do we – in our culture - actually value pupil talk or wish to encourage it? Is it a component of what we, as parents, consider a *relevant* education? Is it more *efficient* – in wanting our children to do well in academic examinations – to encourage them to talk *less*?

Clarke’s (2003)\(^{47}\) research in India – referred to earlier - adopts a similar approach, exploring the ‘impact of the *reform* process on teacher thinking and classroom

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practice’ in the large multi-donor supported District Primary Education Project (DPEP) in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, selected because of its low levels of female literacy. There are two significant lessons we can learn about efforts to improve pedagogy in the classroom from this project:

First, that we need to take much greater account of cultural constructs, particularly with regard to teacher thinking and teacher behaviour when designing and implementing reform programmes. In this case teachers’ responsive attitudes to the innovation (the introduction of ‘minimum learning levels’ in literacy) reflect cultural values of openness to regulation and the perceptions of their task as duty. Teachers’ classroom behaviour are also powerfully shaped by cultural constructs. This research is also a good example of where one quality aspect i.e. a teacher’s understanding of relevant classroom behaviour can be improved in situ to bring it into line with the another i.e. the authorities desire for an efficient school system which produces learners who are independent, happy and productive members of society.

Boxed insert 5

‘The role of hierarchy and collective decision-making is particularly evident in the interaction between teachers and students in the observation of classroom practice. Only teachers ask the questions implying the importance of teachers’ authority and command over all valid knowledge. Teachers tend to begin the class by asking whole class questions and then move on to directing questions to individual students. Their questions are usually ‘how’, ‘when’, and ‘what’. Teachers’ interactions with students rarely contain ‘why’ questions’.

The reasons described for thinking of the methodology as different coincide with trainers’ perceptions of the uniqueness of the new method conveyed during instruction. Interview transcripts suggest that teachers perceive this method as different because it seeks to dispel fear among children, and because the method insists on the use of demonstration and instructional aids during instruction. The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate these views:

‘Now, understanding is improving. Before, children were frightened when they saw the teacher. By using teaching aids we get children involved-fear runs away. They are happy. They were frightened because we were not using teaching aids. Now children are coming to class regularly with interest.

Before we followed the lecture method-we were teaching from the textbook. After the DPEP programme, children can understand very quickly because we are demonstrating in class. So even if children do not understand the language, from the demonstration he or she can understand very easily.

MLL is very different. In the previous method of instruction, we were not following the method of teaching through instruction. Now, we are using activities for every subject. We allow students to participate in the activities. Before, in mathematics, we were required to write exactly as it is in the textbook. But now, while taking

48 Karnataka has a population of 45 million and the literacy rates are 73% and 52% male and female respectively (Clarke,P 2003) op.cit.
mathematics we are counting objects like flowers, leaves and marbles. After the child counts these objects we get the answer from the child.


Anyone who has spent time in a primary classroom will recognise this style of pedagogy. Turning mediocre learning environments into places where ‘something special’ occurs can be done, as the above research shows. Good intentions, however are not enough. What we need is more evidence of classroom strategies that translate irrelevance into relevance, exclusion into inclusion, and inefficiency into efficiency.

Second, that recognition be given to ‘appropriately designed in-service programmes and continuous support for teachers’. Research here, and elsewhere reveals that for in-service training to have any impact upon the quality of education delivered it must challenge the teacher in a much more critical fashion. In the DPEP project insufficient attention was paid to the influence of culture on the teacher trainers and the creators of the in-service modules. As a result ‘trainers appeared to select dimensions of the reform that they understood and could fit easily into their own world views’. Teachers here (and elsewhere) it is argued will need to be supported in moving further along the ‘continuum of reform to consider the quality of student learning that nurtures student thinking, transfer of skill and creativity’.

When Fullan (1993) advocates the importance of changing mindsets in the ‘change process’ it is clear from the work of Alexander and Clarke that understanding the cultural construction of teaching and learning could contribute to improved quality of teaching and learning.

Quality is also delivered through the curriculum and language of instruction.

The school curriculum, as we have said, has an important bearing on educational outcomes. It defines what is to be taught and gives general direction as to the duration of instruction. Weak curriculum design can prevent children from realising their full educational potential. Problems in this respect range from inappropriate content to inadequate consideration for the needs of children who speak minority languages.

A central plank of our definition of quality - relevance – is clearly an issue here. In many Southern countries curricula and learning materials are geared towards preparing pupils for secondary and tertiary levels of education than local realities and the fact that many children will not progress further than the first level of schooling.

In sub-Saharan Africa, vocational subjects account for less than 5% of the curriculum, although these subjects are likely to represent better vehicles for transmitting literacy.

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50 Clarke, P (2003) op.cit.
51 ibid
and numeracy skills than rote-learning does. \(^{54}\) Topics such as health, water and sanitation, and protection of the environment are dealt with only as marginal subjects, despite their obvious relevance to the lives of children from poor households.

The Alternative Basic Education (ABEK), Karamoja programme in Uganda\(^{55}\) is making some headway in delivering a relevant education focussing on livestock education, flexible study time that does not interfere with children’s domestic duties, and the location of community learning centres near the manyattas or homesteads. Learning still tends to be viewed as the memorisation of factual knowledge than the acquisition of skills and the development of critical thinking.

Recent research\(^{56}\) into teacher education suggests that an important area of reform is in the pre-service training of teachers. Currently many teacher training colleges operate more like secondary schools and offer poor quality instruction in areas of pedagogy and children’s learning.

Currently some of the most effective work in curriculum reform is characterised by a classroom culturalist whole-school approach.

Studies which report ‘best practice’ in situ but which also identify generalisable practices beyond the particular setting of the case are particularly useful in the transfer of such practice from context to context.

A good example of this is a recent study of Loreto Day School in Calcutta\(^{57}\) where a school-based model of ‘good practice’ (e.g. shared vision, freedom and responsibility to affect curriculum reform delegated to the school authority, strong community linkages) is reported with clear implications for policy and practice elsewhere. Interestingly the school has taken an institutional approach to raising levels of school quality. Starting with our dimensions of quality - relevance, efficiency and ‘something more’ - the school has succeeded in improving itself by developing ‘six criteria of best practice’. These are phrased as questions:

- Is the teaching and learning stimulating, motivating and challenging?
- Is the curriculum appropriate to the needs and context of learners?
- Are the resources used imaginatively and to the best capacity?
- Are the relationships between all the members of the school community open, productive and relatively happy?
- Does the school make explicit the values upon which the entire educational process is based, thereby contributing to a shared vision and purpose?
- Does the school make a contribution to society which is beyond the norm?

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\(^{54}\) ibid

\(^{55}\) Okurut-Ibore,C (Undated) ‘A Community Initiative to the Education of Pastoralists in Uganda’. Pamphlet Save the Children, Norway/UNICEF, Kampala


Though schools in other countries will be different in terms of context and culture such a ‘tool set of criteria could well form the guiding principles of other schools wanting to transform themselves.

The question of language of instruction is a complex issue and arguably at the heart of efforts to improve the quality of learning. Many parents, however, seeing instruction in the dominant language as an important gateway to more relevant employment possibilities, negotiating with traders, and dealing with local officials. However evidence from a large number of countries\textsuperscript{58} suggests that school performance improves where the first three years of instruction are carried out in the child’s mother tongue with the dominant language introduced first as a subject of study and later as the medium of instruction.\textsuperscript{59} This tension between educationists and many parents about what constitutes the best means for the most appropriate ends of schooling illustrates the inherent diemmas in delivering an education that is both of quality and democratic in character.

\textit{Assessment and Evaluation} is the third key quality factor in the delivery of learning.

There is a strong case that at the heart of the improvement of school quality is an effective relationship between assessment and evaluation. A school improvement approach to raising quality necessitates that assessment data i.e. pupil learning outcomes are used not only as ways to monitor individual progress but also for evaluation purposes: to measure and monitor the quality of the educational system, particularly if value-addedness is to be accounted for.Crudely it is also a way to ensure that we make the most efficient use of our scarce resources.\textsuperscript{60}

The link between the quality of children’s learning and how they are taught is well put by Mamadou Ndoye in a recent Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Newsletter (2002) suitably titled, ‘Reaching Schools: Where Quality Starts’,

‘teaching differently and better is the main change, but it is also the most difficult to achieve in the search for quality. The process cannot get underway without a critical examination of academic results. One cornerstone is the feedback provided by evaluating what pupils have learned. However, more importantly, a culture of evaluation, follow-up and recognition of academic progress in the school and in the classroom helps us to ensure that the approach and activity of teachers will continually promote quality. In this respect, the transition from a normative evaluation – classifying pupils as ‘very good’, ‘good’, ‘average’ ‘poor’, ‘hopeless’ – to other types of evaluation – criteria-based, formative, diagnostic, predictive – will inspire teachers with new approaches to analyzing and handling the obstacles to learning...Quality for all translates into success for all’

Knowing more about where we have come and where we want to go necessitates attention be paid to the development of useful indicators for monitoring quality education.

\textsuperscript{59} Watkins,K (2000) \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{60} Hawes,H & Stephens,D (1990) \textit{op.cit.} See in particular Ch. 8 ‘Evaluation and Assessment’
4. Best Indicators of Quality Education

We need to be clear about the difficulties in developing and using indicators of quality education. One particular difficulty has been well put: ‘Are we valuing what we evaluate, or evaluating what we value?’

Boxed insert 6

‘They [the OECD] usually start from indicators that have featured in earlier studies, often for no reason other than that such indicators have been shown to be technically feasible. These indicators are then built into new research designs, and thence provide frameworks for further research, which in turn consolidates their position. Thus, what happens to be within the bounds of statistical computation comes to define the very nature of teaching itself, and armed with such definitions of ‘quality’ policy-makers, presumably, can simply touch the relevant input, process or output key and feel they have the entire system under control. Note the way, incidently, that all the OECD indicator studies have ‘quality’ on their covers but inside are all about ‘quantity’’


Measuring or producing indicators of quality is therefore, at best, difficult. If a working definition of educational quality is to be rooted in school improvement within cultural and contextual realities, indicators will need to be not simply guides to quality but as tools for operational purposes. As such it is important indicators of quality are valid representations of the values they stand for, with care taken that they are not manipulable by schools and teachers.

Relevance, Efficiency, ‘Something Special’ and Inclusivity will need to be translated, therefore, into factors or criteria that are useful on different levels and for different audiences, particularly: at the level of the classroom, for the purposes of improving teaching-learning processes and at the level of the system, for the purposes of comparison and contrast between schools at a national and international level.

A further note of caution needs to be given concerning the importance of evidence and judgement in relation to a reliance upon indicators. No one denies the importance of evidence of performance: it is a sine qua non of evaluating any professional practice. Part of the professional role, however, is to make judgements and decisions in complex situations, and there is a strong case for classroom teachers being supported in understanding more about the relationship between evidence of learning and decisions concerning subsequent action. We also need to be clear in our minds the difference between indicators i.e. indications based upon evidence be it

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63 Stephens, D (1990) ‘The Quality of Primary Education in Developing Countries: who defines and who decides’ in Comparative Education Vol. 27 No. 2
quantitative or qualitative, and goals or targets i.e. future-oriented positions we aim to arrive at.

Though the Jomtien Conference laid stress on the view that appropriate indicators should be based on enrolments, the concern for quality of education also led to a rhetorical interest at least on the developing indicators that go beyond simple numbers of children in school.

‘The focus of basic education must...be on actual learning, acquisition. It is therefore necessary to define acceptable levels of learning, acquisition for education programmes to improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement.’ (Education for All Conference, 1990)\(^64\)

‘Actual learning’ and ‘improvement’ mean that indicators of quality will need to be school and classroom focussed i.e. where learning occurs, and ‘developmental’ or ‘value-added’ i.e. inputs, outcomes and processes of learning used formatively and summatively for the purposes of student assessment and system evaluation.

*Inputs* in education include the obvious factors such as school buildings, teachers and materials and it should be possible to devise some indicators of quality in connection with these, around for example qualities of *relevance*, *efficiency* and impact or use.\(^65\)

The most important input, however, is the learner. At Jomtien the WCEFA laid great stress on learning readiness, on proper nutritional and health care for very young children and on early childhood education. Qualitative indicators of input therefore need to be child and parent centred and holistic in embracing health and community factors. They need, in other words, to look outwards and inwards from and to the classroom.

Process indicators, ‘*refer to the interactions in the school and classroom between the pupil and the learning environment: ...interaction with the teacher but also with other pupils and with learning materials; and it includes the various experiences provided by the curriculum.*’\(^66\)

Outcomes indicators centre upon pupil learning outcomes. The APDPEP project in India, for example, focusses on the following ‘*outcomes of impact: evidence of change in children’s behaviour, pupil enjoyment of school, data on levels of attendance and absenteeism, routine test scores, and a variety of learning assessment data.*’\(^67\)

\(^64\) Carr-Hill, R et al. (1999) *Monitoring the Performance of Educational Programmes in Developing Countries*. Serial No. 37 Department for International Development. London

\(^65\) The Andhra Pradesh District Primary Education Project, for example, considered using process and ‘qualitative’ indicators such as those concerned with ‘delivery of inputs’ e.g. support of colleagues as reported by teachers; and ‘effectiveness of inputs’ e.g. pedagogical group work and questioning and pupil involvement’. Cited in Carr-Hill, R et al (1999) *Monitoring the Performance of Educational Programmes in Developing Countries*. Serial No. 37 Department for International Development. London

\(^66\) Commonwealth Secretariat (1991) *op.cit.*

\(^67\) Carr-Hill, R et al. *op.cit.*
Perhaps what we are looking for is the development of *composite* indicators that take account of school and class contexts. Oakes, J (1989) proposed that ‘three general constructs of significance (all seen as *enablers* rather than causes of student learning): access to knowledge, press for achievement, and professional teaching conditions’ be used as the basis for developing ‘more tangible school characteristics’ which will have valuable explanatory power, especially for teachers and parents, but which can be used ‘across different institutions’.

For us it does not seem too difficult to start to develop sets of *enablers*, perhaps related to those suggested by Oakes, and to ‘flesh’ them out around our four pillars of quality e.g. do all children have access to *relevant* knowledge? Are opportunities for achievement *inclusive* and transparent? Are professional teaching conditions in school (a) more conducive to teacher *efficiency* e.g. use of preparation time than in school (b)?

**Developing indicators of quality education**

Current work on the implementation and evaluation of Basic Education strategies in a number of national contexts suggest that that ‘appropriate indicators’ will be characterised by the following qualities:

- *They will be based on quality basic and holistic data.* Recent research from London University’s Institute of Education reviews the use and abuse of educational performance indicators, drawing on lessons from case studies of Andhra Pradesh, Kenya and South Africa to show how broader – more holistic – social indicators have been used to assess the impact of education on health, employment and well-being.

- *They will largely draw evidence from the classroom.* The focus upon pedagogy or the day-to-day processes of classroom teaching and learning is well illustrated in the recent study by Alexander, R (2000). Such research establishes a useful basis for the development of indicators – be they composite or disaggregated - of quality learning and teaching.

- *They will be concerned with learning performance processes and outcomes.* Roy Carr-Hill’s (1999) study, for example, makes a number of recommendations for policy makers in the development of such indicators, arguing that the activity of measurement itself is a potential agent of change.

- *They will be negotiated.* There is increasing evidence e.g. from Indonesia, that the following classroom-level quality variables in both developed and developing countries should contribute to a negotiated set of indicators: an active approach to teaching, particularly in countries where, traditionally, passive learning takes place; the frequency of observations in classrooms by the principal, and more generally the quality of educational leadership of the

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69 Reported fully in Carr-Hill et.al. *op.cit.*
school. A teacher’s subject knowledge was also found to be significant in explaining differences in student achievement at school level.\(^{72}\)

- They will comprise tried and tested and innovative approaches to data collection and indicator construction. Here we are applying questions of relevance and efficiency to the development of indicators themselves.

Improvements in the collection of quality data to support the development of indicators of quality education may come from the adoption of innovative approaches to evaluation of implementation. What has been called a ‘backward mapping’ strategy as part of India’s Operation Blackboard\(^ {73}\) and in a number of girl’s education projects in Zambia’s\(^ {74}\), has resulted in the collection of useful data which begins with intensive participant observation in the schools and then moves up the education hierarchy informing stakeholders and policy-makers realities of learning and teaching at the classroom level. Such an approach also helped develop teachers as ‘reflexive practitioners’ able to relate their teaching to student learning outcomes.

- They will be centrally concerned with issues of gender and inclusion. The development of indicators of quality that pay particular attention to gender is being taken more seriously. The European Union’s Co-operation and Gender issues paper (1999), for example, calls for the institution of a monitoring system with gender-sensitive indicators.\(^ {75}\) Particular mention is made of the need to collect disaggregated data on the enrolment and performance of girls at basic education level.

The School Improvement for Inclusion (SIFI) project in some of the most deprived areas of Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestinian refugee camps is adapting the British ‘Index for Inclusion’ as a quality monitoring and planning tool.\(^ {76}\) Through 45 indicators, and over 500 questions – many devised by the pupils themselves – the school community is invited to identify the barriers to participation and aspects of the teaching-learning process that is relevant, efficient, enjoyable etc.

In terms of gender-specific indicators - projects in Pakistan (North West Frontier Program) and Malawi (Girls’Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE) Project) have in part succeeded in developing ‘gender-specific quality improvement’ indicators. These include: levels and amounts of gender-balanced curriculum development and instructional materials production; gender-awareness training; and ‘crash’ training in gender-awareness for teachers.\(^ {77}\)

\(^{72}\) Van der Werf, et.al. (2000) op.cit.
\(^{75}\) Cited in Eurostep (2000) op.cit.
\(^{76}\) Williams J (2003) op.cit.
\(^{77}\) O’Gara C (1999) op.cit.
In developing an effective and fair indicator system to monitor and improve the quality of education it is worth remembering that at the heart of the exercise are teachers - and children - who, as part of their own professional and personal development, should play a central role in the assessment and evaluation of their work. Good quality teacher evaluation strategies coupled with continuous and peer forms of assessment can both empower and improve what goes on in our classrooms.

5. Strategies for improving the Quality of Education

A cursory examination of the discourse of quality in education reveals encouragement for and concern about the delivery of educational programmes that are not only relevant, efficient, and creative but holistic, equitable and empowering.

There is general agreement that investment in primary education in the South does pay off more than other sectors of education. There is optimism too that sufficient research evidence exists to provide a basis for improving the quality of primary education. There is no doubt, though, that we need to know much more about what works and doesn’t work at the classroom and school level; and to learn from models of best practice, particularly those that take issues of culture and context seriously in the design and implementation of quality improvement programmes.

The 1990 World Bank Policy Paper on Primary Education made six major recommendations that capture well much we have learnt from the multiplicity of government initiatives and donor-led projects from around the world. In making use of these six recommendations we will also endeavour to relate them to our four pillars of quality:

- **Emphasise learning**. The education process must ensure that pupils – and that includes all pupils - successfully complete the primary cycle and acquire the skills set out in their national curriculum.

There are many examples of school improvement projects that have learning as a central focus: The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) which has since 1972 been working with some of the poorest communities in the country has evidence from external evaluation that learning acquisition in the BRAC schools exceeds that in the public school system.

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79 Black,B et.al. (1993) op. cit.
80 A useful summary of key elements of effective learning and ways it can be promoted in classrooms can be found in The National School Improvement Network Bulletin No.17 Effective Learning by Watkins,C et.al (2002) and published by the University of london Institute of Education
81 ‘Lessons from Abroad’ in Vol. 13 No. 4 October-December The Virtues of Policy Dialogue. Paris
In the 1980s, international cognitive research on teaching and learning found that student learning outcomes significantly increased after students had been taught the skills necessary to monitor and regulate their own learning.82

The Child-to-Child Movement, established in the early 1980s, and working still in many countries North and South pioneered and built upon educational initiatives that put the child at the centre of the learning process83. A particular feature of this approach was to combine relevance with inclusivity i.e. strategies to link relevant learning in school to those excluded.

An emphasis on learning – and particularly active learning – is not to say that one particular approach e.g. child-centred learning is necessarily the best approach in all circumstances. Quality is also about the empowerment of teachers to decide what works well for which children under which circumstances.84 Such an emphasis will, of course, have implications for the kinds of indicators we will need to develop to assess progress. The SIFI project mentioned earlier may teach us useful lessons in measuring and sustaining quality.

- Invest in what works cost-effectively. Evidence from research and evaluation studies world-wide shows that resources invested in the primary sector must concentrate on inputs which enhance learning.

A good example of this focus on cost-effectiveness – and here we are including time and human resources – is the Oxfam winter schools initiative in Hazarajat Province, Afghanistan.85 By concentrating teaching and learning during the winter lull in economic activity poor families are able to balance the economic with the educational.

The ‘900 Schools Programme’ in Chile, initiated in 1990, and covering approximately 10% of the country’s schools, has focussed very much on cost-effective lines of action: learning workshops for children with learning difficulties, a focus on language and mathematics, ‘active learning’ in-service workshops for teachers, and – a priority since 1994 – family participation in the programme.86

Both these programmes illustrate the case for advances in relevance and efficiency to be framed in terms of contextual and cultural realities.

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84 Stephens,D (1991) ‘The Quality of primary Education in Developing Countries: who defines and who decides?’ in Comparative Education Vol.27 No. 2


86 Voccaro,L (1994) ‘ Improving the Quality in Primary Schools: A Focussed Educational programme in the Poor Schools of Chile (the 900 Schools Programme)’ in Takala,T (ed.) Quality of Education in the Context of Culture in Developing Countries. University of Tampere. Finland.
The development of *school effectiveness* measures and their use as guides to what to prioritise in subsequent *school improvement* projects will also be of particular value here.

- **Improve the next generation of teachers.** It is clear that the general education, pedagogical training and motivation of teachers all impact on the levels of pupil’s learning.

Getting more women into schools, particularly at senior management levels, is a major task if gender equity is to parallel quality improvement.

Clarke’s (2003)\(^\text{87}\) work on teacher thinking and behaviour in India, findings from the University of Sussex’s (2003) five-country *Multi-Site Teacher Education Project (MUSTER)*\(^\text{88}\), and the launch of the Guinea programme for continuing teacher training that places the teachers as central actors in their own professional development (2002) are good examples of country-specific ways forward but with generalisable policy implications.

- **Improve management.** School improvement depends on an adequate administrative and management structure.

Evidence from India (the loreto Day School) for example indicates that quality management and leadership requires: a shared vision and explicit collective values as a catalyst for profound changes within a school setting; the power of ideas in school leadership is able to drive change; decision-making devolved to school and community level is able to effect massive local change; and the desire for educational transformation is crucial to its execution. Emphasis is also given to incremental change – the balancing of stability and change – and the acceptance of agreed and negotiated levels of risk\(^\text{89}\).

In Senegal a unique school management programme has been set up based on the use of job specifications. Results so far are promising with increased job satisfaction of school leaders and managers which in turn has led to a rise in end of primary test scores from 39% to 48%, a fall in the average repetition rate from 15.6% to 14.8%, an increase in enrolment of girls from 40% in 1995 to 63% in 1999, and an increase in the number of teachers inspected and supervised\(^\text{90}\).

- **Expand equitable access.** As we have seen efforts to expand the number of school places available, particularly to girls and children from rural areas, whilst at the same time improving the quality of education provide remains a challenge.

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\(^{87}\) Clarke, P (2003) *op.cit.*


One reasonably successful approach is to ‘mainstream and institutionalise gender issues’ in government programmes. The Punjab Middle Schools Project and the Nepal Secondary Education Development Project are examples where efforts to increase access have gone hand-in-hand with a quality improvement focus on enhancing teacher and headteacher effectiveness and competency through training; improving learner assessment and examinations; and the development of supplementary readers.\(^91\)

Research in Ghana, which adopts a cultural and holistic approach to combatting drop out and repetition of girls in school, finds that to improve the quality of schooling for girls entails a much more realistic understanding of the impact of home and economic ‘worlds’ upon school life. Flexible school hours, more women teachers in educational leadership positions as role models, and recognition of the significance of traditional gendered cultural attitudes and values in the classroom, suggest lessons to be learned there and elsewhere.\(^92\)

- **Finance improvements.** National and donor resources for quality-enhancing inputs to primary education should be increased. At the end of the day quality costs money and that means for minimum levels of quality education to be provided donor aid to education has to increase.

It now seems necessary to add a seventh recommendation: that particular attention be given to our fourth pillar of quality - the development of inclusive education, particularly in relation to both widening access for girls whilst improving the quality of education at the same time. The pioneering work of the Forum of African Educationalists (FAWE) in sub-Saharan Africa and more widely the work of UNICEF, are examples of organisations committed to promoting both gender equity and quality.

**Boxed insert 7**

*To improve the quality of something as important as education requires a delicate balance, it seems, between improving the quality of both ends and means of achieving change, between those at the centre of affairs and the needs and wishes of recipients living in towns and villages throughout the country, between a number of objectives, some quantitative, other more qualitative; and between a wish to preserve what is best from the past and to act in the service of the future.*

*Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (1991) Improving the Quality of Basic Education. Commonwealth Secretariat. London*

**Conclusion**


In reviewing quality it is worth remembering that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. To improve the education of our children intentions are not enough. We need a combination of vision, commitment and professional and research evidence upon which to guide our endeavours.

At this point we would like to offer some final reflections on our preferences drawn from more than 30 years work in classrooms in a number of different cultural and national contexts.

First, that for us, quality remains centrally concerned with ‘questions’ of relevance, efficiency, and that ‘something more’ which seems to have something to do with creativity and Tove Nagel’s ‘learning situation which vibrates with positive energy’. Since we wrote about quality in the early 1990s a further ‘question’ has emerged: that of inclusivity, particularly with regard to the education of girls. By aiming to include girls, the poor, the children of the scheduled caste, disabled children, those affected by illness and war, it is clear we are benefitting the lives of all children.

Second, that quality cannot be reduced to ‘factors’, ‘indicators’, or ‘fragments’. Though there is some value in identifying aspects of the system that seem to be more effective in raising quality (particularly in relation to each other), for us what is meaningful is to retain the complexity, the situatedness and the fact that at a fundamental level quality is concerned with what happens when people interact in a learning environment. Successful initiatives, such as those in India and Bangladesh reviewed in this report, are testament to this view.

Third, that the core venue for quality improvement is the school classroom. It is here – at the chalk-face- that professional, relevant and outward-looking learning occurs. A classroom culturalist approach to quality improvement, however, needs to be guided by broader, comparative evidence of what does and does not work in other contexts.

Fourth, that little can be achieved without an effective and relatively easily understood system for monitoring changes in quality over time and from school to school. We need to know why a combination of indicators produces desirable results in one setting and not in another. Such evidence will come from large-scale studies like the PISA project and in-depth school-based research. Participatory Action Research and the involvement of pupils in monitoring their own work, as illustrated in the SIFI project are interesting ways forward.

Fifth, that dialogue needs to be strengthened between policy-makers and teachers, parents and community leaders.

And finally, that quality and education are essentially concerned with moral questions: the rights of the child to an education that is fulfilling and participatory. Democracy, inclusivity, justice and respect are not alien concepts plucked out of the air to guide us in the development of our societies and nations. They are learned and practised in our classrooms and schools. By improving the teaching-learning process we can not only raise the quality of education but the quality of life.

David Stephens,
Oslo and Brighton        August, 2003