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Conclusions

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The results of the past four years of work can be expressed at four levels, all of which contribute to strengthening the capacity of the education specialists in charge of curriculum development and implementation for basic education. The first level concerns the acquisition of new knowledge or the systematization and more detailed analysis of existing knowledge. The second relates to the design of theoretical and practical tools for change, both of which are action oriented. The third level has to do with realizing genuine changes through the accomplishment of various goals of the project. The final level concerns the establishment of a network of expertise and dynamic, shared learning developed throughout work done together.

A first conclusion concerns the need to tackle the issue of curricular innovation and the quality of education in poverty alleviation and peace-building from more than just a technical point of view. To obtain useful results, we should also look at this issue at the philosophical level, more precisely at the values transmitted and to be transmitted. We should consider both the policy and strategic levels, as decisions involving the government should be taken into consideration, as well and the resources made available to all stakeholders. We should also examine the theoretical and pedagogical levels of change, in order to develop new ways of working in the classroom, throughout the school and within the relationships between the school and the local community. Finally, we should consider school administration and management so that administration and pedagogy work and move forward together in an articulated way.

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Building a common, shared vision of the goals relevant to this school for the future and what it should be able to offer and achieve is essential in orienting the changes. To achieve this we should be able to question our own expectations and the taboos that make school as we know it today seem "natural". These expectations and taboos have been identified as potential obstacles to building a school able to handle the diversity of contexts and the connection between quality and quantity. In fact, they have often been seen to contradict the vision of quality we have started to build.

Examining the practices described in this special issue of *Prospects* and identifying the aspects that contribute to achieving the vision of a quality school were also found to be crucial to understanding the minimal conditions for the success of these good practices, and also how to mobilize them as levers for changing and transforming the traditional school.

The analysis of these good practices has shown the importance of working with all the education stakeholders in order to enable them to support and contribute, each in their own way, to the development of an inclusive school. It is obvious that special attention should be given to the teachers, examining the deeply-rooted taboos and expectations about their roles, and what constitutes quality pre-service and in-service training. The practices examined in this issue have also revealed that we should not neglect the linkages between all the levels mentioned above if we want to make the best use of all available resources. Finally, it is our capacity to work out strategies for change that are both diverse and flexible and our willingness to assume our responsibilities that can make the difference and help transform schooling.

Box 1. Four levels of results (2004–2007)

(1) Knowledge:

- better understanding of the links between curriculum and poverty;
- awareness of the need to build a shared vision of school (Which school for which Africa?);
- capacity to think in terms of challenges rather than obstacles and to question the taboos of the traditional school;
- awareness of the processes at work and the tools needed to achieve change (policy dialogue);
- better understanding of the needs of learners and other stakeholders in contexts of poverty;
- need to articulate curricular development and teacher training;
- importance of the good practices and of analysing them in real-life situations to think about change;
- close links between poverty alleviation and education for peace: *they go together and are two sides of the same reality, which the school must approach in a transversal manner.*

(2) Developing tools for change:

- tool for analysing the set curriculum (strong points and points needing attention);
- tools for policy dialogue for change;
- tools to analyse the good practices (to go beyond the model, widen the range of possibilities, show the path to follow and overcome the obstacles);
- strategic tool: Roadmap for change (seven levels of action);
- tool to re-think the role and training of teachers as key school players in poverty alleviation and peace-building.

(3) Concrete changes:

Due to the capacity of the country teams to use the lessons learned in the project and to apply them to specific national concrete situations:

- at the level of processes for curriculum design (policy dialogue);

- at the level of the set curriculum (goals, content and organization);
- at the level of conditions for implementation.

(4) Gradual implementation of a dynamic network of expertise and shared learning:

- continuous sharing of experiences and expertise;
- establishing a community of reflection and practice on curriculum reform;
- learning processes at work among group members during and between project seminars;
- giving value to and mobilizing existing expertise in the countries;
- prospects and opportunities for implementing south-south and north-south collaboration.

A common, shared vision of quality education

Building a common vision involves asking questions about the meaning of the reforms and of school itself. What sort of school do we want, and for which Africa? What education for what development? Which categories of citizens to train? What do we mean by education quality? What issues would the learners have to face?

It became apparent first of all that this common vision had to be placed within the context of sub-Saharan Africa, where quality education for all should be built around poverty and conflict—which are at the centre of life in most countries in the region.

The vision of quality that gradually took shape within our research group is one of an inclusive school that combines quality with quantity, as two sides of the same coin. From here we tried to track down the traditional practices that cause exclusion and examine any innovative practices, in order to better understand how improving quality and quantity could be done simultaneously. In an inclusive school it is essential that learners' needs are taken into account in a differentiated manner. Thus, we also need to question the idea that a uniform education system, which, for example, takes the form of standardized national examinations, is bound to be egalitarian. Equality cannot be synonymous with equity when the needs and possibilities of the learners vary so much between the most and the less fortunate. Equality can actually generate exclusion if it is not carefully implemented.

In the vision of an inclusive school, the education system should be able to welcome all children and retain all of them, which means that every child can and should succeed. By success we mean that all children should be able to receive an education that enables them not only to get by in life, but also to think about their future in order to change and improve it, using knowledge and skills they have acquired, and to take their destiny into their own hands for a full life and active participation as a citizen. With respect to peace-building, quality education should place at the centre of its schools the transmission of the values "respect of others" and "justice and equity", and foster cooperation and sharing of knowledge rather than diehard competition. This means a vision of school as a place for individual learning, where the needs of each individual are taken into account in a differentiated manner, and collective learning, where interaction between different individuals can be experienced with respect to their differences and generate shared knowledge.

This vision is built by all education stakeholders, including parents and local communities, together with different ministries in a multisectoral approach and with various financial and technical partners. Above all, together we should revisit the vision regularly, after each improvement or blockage, asking whether we are going in the right direction or whether we still want to go in that direction.

Thus, prepared with a clear, reasserted vision, it is possible to move in the right direction, whether we take small steps or big ones, and correct the path should any missteps arise. The major difficulty is to maintain that vision over the long term, in situations of discontinuity at the level of the political powers, with the differences between the lengthy time needed for changes in education and the much shorter, more urgent election time frame.

Examining the expectations and taboos of the traditional school

We realized that "we had to see school in a different light", as one participant in the project put it. To do so we needed to examine our own expectations, some of which were deeply rooted, and look at our value systems and taboos, acknowledged or not, which lie at the heart of the traditional school and the exclusion that it generates. We identified ten key expectations, of which we were more or less aware, which we have inherited and internalized, and which in the end can become obstacles to success at school and children's learning, in all their economic, social and cultural diversity (Benavente 2006). The first of these expectations envisages school failure and repeating a grade as processes that demonstrate the seriousness and legitimacy of school requirements. This amounts to recognizing that not all children can learn in the same way or at the same time, which is a reasonable belief. However, what actually happens in schools is exactly the opposite: by proposing rigid curricula and a singular path, without much flexibility to adapt to the diversity in the methods and pace of both the individual and collective learning, schools advance the idea that everyone must learn at the same time and in the same way.

We then identified the internalization of the system of teaching classes by year, which is considered to be "natural" because "it has always been that way" and also because it is more practical and easier to organize. Moreover, strong resistance is encountered whenever organizing compulsory education into stages or cycles is suggested. In spite of the social diversity and the different living environments of the pupils, the uniformity of the curriculum comes next. Consequently, a school through its "indifference to differences" in fact produces inequalities, as well as the still widespread belief that a democratic school is a school that is equal, or the same, for all. This expectation leads to another one, related to the rigidity and uniformity of the national calendars and timetables. At a pedagogical level we noted the uniformity of teaching methods, which are reinforced by the pre-service training of teachers, who receive no training that would be critical to producing change, and the textbooks that help reinforce this uniformity. The expectations of the teacher's role should also be examined. We anticipated working with teachers on the defensive, in the face of the demands, directions and instructions from the education authorities and their work conditions, but we still posed the question whether everything that could be done in each school was really done to foster children's learning, or whether we are looking at blinkered attitudes and circles of impossibilities on the part of the teachers in situations where some leeway exists and could very well be used.

The belief that learning depends only and above all on the willingness and the capacity of the pupils comes down to ignoring the difference and the contradictions between the "language of school", and its logic, and the learners' world, which is also that of their family and local community. Not taking into consideration the conditions of poverty in which a part of the population lives and their impact on school life and on the children's receptiveness to learning, particularly about "another world", is another obstacle to transforming the school. Finally, traditional schooling tends to overlook the value of manual and artistic work and the needs of the pupils, and instead enhance the status of

academic knowledge and a "single type of school intelligence". This hinders the promotion of the diversity of expertise, which the African societies desperately need in order to fight against poverty and develop relevant skills. It also halts creative thinking about the relationship between general secondary education and technical education, which in turn results in the training of far too many generalists and not enough technicians.

Therefore, in order to change school we should question our own practices and expectations as education specialists and then ask ourselves what we mean by pedagogy for change. Are we really consistent with what we say are the limits of the traditional school? Do we have a clear vision of what we want? Does what we are proposing correspond to this vision?

Good practices that examine the expectations of the traditional school in order to build the inclusive school

At each group meeting related to our project we also had the opportunity to visit schools and talk to those involved in running them. Each visit and the discussions that followed were extremely informative, as a result of examining and questioning the expectations, and even the taboos of the traditional school, proposing suggestions that make it possible to overcome them and get closer to an inclusive school. Moreover, when we analyse the types of resistance to change within the framework of one of these examples, we often come across one or more of these expectations.

In this way we came to see that a more flexible curriculum is not only possible, but, by taking account of the local or individual needs, it also restores value and meaning to education and enables existing resources, teachers, local community and even students themselves to be mobilized. It enables a dialogue to be established between the world of the learners and that of the school, and to give value to and integrate non-academic knowledge and competencies into general education. Similarly, whenever the way of handling large classes is reviewed, the teaching methods and content, the way that the school is organized and how the teachers are trained are completely revised. Schools with single, mixed-ability and mixed-grade classes, which enable children in remote rural areas to attend school,[1] give rise to a renewal of pedagogies, ways of learning (such as shared learning and self-learning), teacher training (with an emphasis on flexible in-service training on site) and the role of the teacher, which varies depending on the age of the learners—remedial for the older children, more direct for the younger ones. The priority education zones (ZEPs), involving school projects, pedagogical teams, links with the private sector and the local community, and solutions to the specific and diversified needs of the learners call into question the way that the other schools function. The same holds for organizing schooling into cycles, mixed-ability classes, differentiated school calendars and timetables. All of these examples, which enable both quantitative and qualitative long-term advancement, show that such practices are possible outside the framework of exceptional pilot projects. They also demand that the expectations of the traditional school are called into question.

Taking all the players in the school into consideration

Although they are the principal actors, teachers and students are not entirely responsible for the learning process. Other stakeholders contribute to its success, or its failure, such as the,

[1] Such schools exist in Niger, but the example is too recent for it to be recorded here.

family and local community, for whom the school ought to be a resource and not a burden or an obligation. These stakeholders should also contribute to the school through their practical knowledge to enrich it qualitatively and to supplement the public resources. But to do so, the school should open up to the local community and make communication easier with everybody involved, especially those who have not mastered the culture and language of school.

Head teachers, provincial directors and other responsible parties all have their role to play in ensuring successful learning to promote and support the teachers in their work to improve the quality of teaching. The issue of curriculum flexibility should be examined closely, since it is critical to the integration of all the learners. Other sectors could also be mobilized, such as the health and social services, to help meet the needs of the underprivileged and vulnerable learners.

With respect to the teachers, it is very clear that their sphere of immersion and activity is not limited to the physical boundaries of the school; rather, it should be widened to include the community in which the school is located if the teachers want to achieve sustainable and useful results of their work. Rethinking, redirecting and reorganizing the school necessarily implies rethinking and redirecting the teachers' role and training. A strategy to review and reorganize the current subjects and statuses must be worked out so that the teachers can play their important role in transforming education. It will be necessary, in particular, to review the linkages between pre-service and in-service training, as two sides of the same coin, which leads to the absolute necessity of designing and developing each one with respect to the other. It would also mean managing the teaching posts differently—especially the competitive selection system—to enable and foster the establishment of stable teaching teams or to develop mechanisms for pedagogical exchanges and a more flexible, daily sharing of information to circumvent the sometimes extreme isolation of the teachers.

A strategic approach to educational change

Innovation and change are not easy tasks to accomplish. It takes courage on the part of both practitioners and policy-makers to face the risks inherent in any change and the forms of resistance that it generates. In addition, redirection and reorganization often entail going against common expectations and taboos.

The curriculum, because it gives some sort of concrete expression to a shared agreement on the role and goals of education, the types of knowledge and the values to be transmitted within a given society, is an extremely sensitive area, the more so if the proposed changes appear to question the dominant expectations of society. We are convinced that sustained dialogue and agreement between all of the stakeholders involved should continue, so that the curriculum meets in the best possible way the expectations and needs of all, which will also ensure more effective pedagogical implementation in the classrooms by the teachers and better understanding and participation on the part of the parents.

Thus, the dialogue between all the actors involved in the change processes is crucial. The implementation of the curriculum in school also requires a multisectoral approach: the school itself and the education system, more generally, cannot put an end to poverty each on its own. It is equally true that quality education, as we have tried to define it in the course of the project, cannot be achieved without the support of the other sectors. We should also start thinking about change by simultaneously considering three levels of time, and the synergy among these different levels. The *short term* level concerns qualitative changes that can take place immediately because they do not need any structural reforms to

do so, even though their consequences can run deep at the practical level. Their effects are felt in the daily lives of the schools—for instance, changing the school timetable to allocate half a day to practical activities. The changes to be made in the *medium term*, such as introducing a local curriculum for a given percentage of the teaching time, make possible a gradual yet profound change in pedagogical practice. Building a shared vision and its attendant effect at the policy-making level relates to the *long term*, to enable management without changing course too frequently.

Our responsibility to continue building quality education

To make change possible, we have seen that we need to "know" (training, state of situation, analyses, assessment, critical analyses of practices, etc.), "want to" (work together and agree to add the emotional dimension) and "be able to" (decisions and minimum resources made available or mobilized for action). This trilogy is not new as it is at the centre of any strategic reflection. We could also express it in more operational terms, first as *anticipation* of the forward-looking reflection needed to build a vision of the type of society we want and the mobilization of knowledge that must be constantly updated to be able to understand the changes in society. Second, *action*, supported by strategic will, falls within the field of reasoning, relies on the dynamics of experiments carried out in structured time frames that move from one scale to another (short, medium or long term) and covers the definition of profiles and developing partnerships. *Taking ownership* is the third, uppermost angle of this triangle. For change to happen the players must become involved, and be able to take ownership of the practices and question their expectations. (Mbeki 2003)

To continue the work and prepare for the future we should also adopt a forward-looking, introspective attitude, as others have suggested, but without applying it specifically to school (Mbeki 2003), in order to complete and broaden what has been done so far, regularly bringing it up to date and sharing it with everybody involved.

Complete and broaden our expectations

We should continue to question our expectations, which prevent us from progressing beyond an education model that is ultimately limited. "Doing more of the same" will not enable us to build an inclusive school. Instead, together we must starting with the practice and consider, already known or completely new solutions, or those that already exist in social but not in school practices, and examine the taboos, for example by asking about the conditions for the success of an inclusive school or about shorter but more relevant pre-service training for teachers instead of extended training programmes that are less in line with the school practices and the needs of the learners.

We also ought to ask ourselves about our own practices, so we can properly understand them and are able to defend their innovative potential, while insisting on the minimal conditions for their implementation. We believe that we should start changing our practices without waiting for external reforms, as this would help us initiate steps in the right direction. This dynamic, however, should be accompanied by a reflexive analysis to draw out all the lessons to be learned which would enable the practices to evolve in depth and apply them to other contexts.

We also should create links, even if they are sometimes a little strained, at all levels and between the different worlds that live side-by-side without necessarily meeting or

understanding each other. Among the most obvious ones are the world of the learners, which is also that of their family and community, diverse and unequal, and the world of the school, with its own language and logic, tenets and rituals. Then there is the world of the policy and decision-makers as well as that of the practitioners. There is also the world of pre-service teacher training and that of in-service training, which are only barely connected. Finally, there is the world of the primary school and that of the secondary school. At another level, we should also link what is relevant and necessary at the local level with that at the global level.

We have gradually understood that we need to communicate with those responsible for developing or managing policies, to explain our vision to them, and with the local communities, so that all of them can take part in a broad dialogue. We should pay attention to information circulating among various sectors to ensure a productive intersectoral approach. The education sector should have the necessary information and also communicate what is needed so that the other sectors also understand this need. To do so, we must not forget that different cultures and languages exist and that we need appropriate tools to help us explain, share and convince. We should also consider the reasoned analysis of the good practices as a communication tool.

Constantly updating our education practices

We should constantly revisit and question our knowledge and vision yet again. Is yesterday's knowledge still valid? Is new knowledge available and how can it be mobilized? Do we still want to go in our initial direction? Is our vision sufficiently rooted in practice to take account of what is necessary and feasible at all strategic levels, as defined in the article Roadmap for Action? These questions also have profound implications for policy dialogue, since we realize that we cannot answer them on our own and, even less so, take action without the involvement of the other players. We should also check our decision-makers to see whether they have a clear notion of what quality education is and convince them that it has evolved since the World Conference on EFA in Jomtien in 1990 and Dakar in 2000, respectively, and that it is this revisited definition that should influence policies.

Taking ownership of the reflections

A good understanding of the long-term benefits to be gained from an education system that meets the expectations and needs of a community has unsuspected mobilizing powers. When parents wait for a bilingual school to be opened before sending their children to school, when they rally around and contribute to the local curriculum, when the results of children attending one-class schools covering all of the levels get better results than the others, when even illiterate adults want to enrol in a remedial course designed for out-of-school children, it means that these innovations not only have something different or more to offer than the traditional school, but also that they have won, or have the means to win, approval by the quality of what they have to offer and by their results.

Taking ownership of the reflections on the vision of the school and its relationship with local practices is a key step in involving all the actors concerned, without whom change is not possible. The mobilization of the local community around the school is essential and depends to a great extent on making the benefits of education visible to the children in their daily lives and, in a context of poverty and conflict, showing that "those who have learned at school" manage these situations for the good of the community and not just for themselves.[2]

[2] This last remark related to teacher training, but it can also apply to education as a whole.