The Role of Teachers, Schools, and Communities in Quality Education: A Review of the Literature

ELIZABETH LEU

AED GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER
ACADEMY FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AED
Global Education Center

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Elizabeth Leu

Academy for Educational Development
Global Education Center

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Executive Summary

This paper reviews a select body of literature that focuses on the role of teachers, schools, communities and process at the local level in creating quality education in less-developed countries. The review that understanding what is happening in the schools and the classrooms is a precondition for shaping more effective quality improvement strategies.

There is little agreement about the meanings and implications of the term "quality education," however, education systems are often structured around what is believed to be a shared vision of quality. Some agreement on the general principles of quality has been reached, but it is unlikely that a universally accepted definition of quality will be reached or that a checklist of quality factors will be developed.

Research has shown that one important feature of quality is that it be *locally defined*, at the school and community level, not just at the district and national level. Furthermore, the literature shows that policies and programs intended to improve education quality need to focus on schools and teachers, supported by strong supervision, flexible policies, efficient administration and community involvement, thus linking education quality to the concept of decentralization.

Another area seen as important to quality education is teachers. While dialogue at the national, district, school and community level should determine the qualities that an education system seeks in its teachers, defining quality in teachers highlights some shared perspectives, which are outlined in the review. The literature makes clear that the robotic approach to teacher development produces neither the teaching skills nor the attitudes required for improving classroom approaches and student learning. It stresses that if teachers are to become reflective practitioners and users of active teaching and learning methods they must participate in professional development programs that advocate and use these same models.

Content and relevance of curriculum is another element impacting quality. It is generally agreed that the Education for All (EFA) initiative to increase access brought about declines in quality—no matter the definition—as resources were stretched beyond effectiveness. Given the current situation of rapidly declining quality, the question of how much students are learning is critical. The data suggests that in many countries children are not acquiring even basic skills.

Equity is also an essential factor relating to quality. While equity concerns arise in relation to many groups this review examines only gender. The review found that despite national policies on gender equity, the involvement of local communities is essential in order to keep girls in school and that the perceived quality of education is more important to girls' retention rates than to that of boys.

Finally, measures that concentrate on providing improved infrastructure, more textbooks or better trained teachers will lead only to limited quality improvements. The review concludes that it is at the school level where all inputs come together and interact, therefore, understanding what is happening in schools and in classrooms is a necessary precondition for addressing quality and developing effective quality improvement strategies.

An Outline of Recent Trends

Three recent trends form the backdrop for this literature review. The first, a persistent tug between quality and quantity for the attention of policymakers, explains why quality is currently such a pressing issue. The two other trends—decentralizing authority and responsibility to the school and community levels, and recognizing the key role of teachers in promoting the quality of student learning—encompass two relevant areas of focus for improving quality.

Quantity and quality of education now vie for policy attention and resources as never before (UNESCO 2004, p. 115). While less-developed countries have pursued the goal of universal primary education (UPE) for decades, these efforts have been renewed in recent years through the U.N.-sponsored Education for All (EFA) initiative and the goals established at the EFA 1990 and 2000 conferences (UNESCO 1999, 2004). At the 1990 EFA conference in Jomtien, Thailand, representatives of 130 nations famously set the goal for worldwide literacy and the goal for an 85% participation rate in primary education by the year 2000 (UNESCO 1994). Although the Jomtien Declaration did not ignore quality, increasing the quantity of education was the priority at that time. Following Jomtien, most developing countries adopted policies promoting the rapid expansion of basic education as urgent. Significant growth in primary school enrollment took place, although all countries had fallen short of the Jomtien goals by the end of the 1990s. While progress in expanding the quantity of education is admirable, this success has been diminished by decreasing, in some cases plummeting, quality of education as enrollments grow well beyond the capacity and resources of national systems (ADEA 2004; Alvarez et al. 2003; Oxfam International 1999; USAID 1998, 2002; UNESCO 1999, 2004; World Bank 1995a, 1995b; UNESCO 2004, p. 15).

Extensive quantitative and qualitative assessments of progress in 180 countries toward EFA goals preceded the second EFA conference, held in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal (UNESCO 1999, p. 6). The Dakar Declaration EFA 2000 adopted six goals, in which quality was now a priority. Outlining elements of the quality agenda to be adopted by many countries, the Dakar Framework for Action states:

> evidence over the past decade has shown that efforts to expand enrolment must be accompanied by attempts to enhance educational quality if children are to be attracted to school, stay there and achieve meaningful learning outcomes . . . recent assessments of learning achievement in some countries have shown that a sizeable percentage of children is

acquiring only a fraction of the knowledge and skills they are expected to master. What students are meant to learn has often not been clearly defined, well-taught or accurately assessed (Objective number 6, Dakar Framework for Action, quoted in ADEA 2004, p. 11).

The growing emphasis on the need for quality to accompany the expansion of education, however, remains stubbornly secondary to the persistent drive for quantity of education. Countries' policies to increase gross enrollment rates as rapidly as possible have been prompted by many factors, including the 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration, which calls for UPE in all countries by 2015, with no mention of quality concerns (UNESCO 2003; UNESCO 2004, p. 28). More recent initiatives, such as the World Bank's Fast Track Initiative and USAID's Millennium Challenge Account, make quality a priority concern while keeping a strong emphasis on the continued rapid growth of enrollments. The tension between quantity and quality has characterized education in most developing countries over the last two decades, although the quality issue is now becoming so severe that it is described not as a choice but as an "imperative," borrowing from the title of the recently published *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005: Education for All—The Quality Imperative* (UNESCO 2004).

Decentralization is another important policy trend over the last ten years that has greatly affected quality of education. Decentralizing authority and responsibility to more local levels in education and other sectors accompanies a general trend toward democratization and strengthening of civil society. In education,

decentralization has had a significant impact by empowering communities to take increased responsibility for schools and empowering teachers and school leaders to take greater control of their practice and responsibility for their professional development (Ginsburg and Schubert 2001, pp. 17–20; Miller-Grandvaux et al. 2002, pp. 9–10; Muskin 1999; Muskin and Aregay 1999; Nielsen and Cummings 1997; Shaeffer 1999; Wolf et al. 1999).

Teachers and classroom process are now front and center, and they are generally agreed to be key to education quality. Although the observation that quality of students' learning occurs mainly as a result of interaction with teachers and processes that take place in classrooms seems to be a commonsense formulation, it has not received the attention from policymakers that it deserves until recently (ADEA 2004; Anderson 2002; Boyle et al. 2003; Lewin and Stuart 2003; USAID 2002; Verspoor 2004). The 2004 UNESCO report repeatedly emphasizes that teachers have the strongest influence on learning and on a wide variety of other quality factors within schools (UNESCO 2004, pp. 18, 161–168); however, the tension between quantity and quality returns when policies to improve teacher quality are considered. Dembele makes the following observation in a recent article outlining the scope of the problem:

> Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries are currently confronted with a formidable challenge: how to expand the size of their teaching force while improving its quality. In order to achieve universal primary education, SSA will need to recruit 1,361,000 new teachers between 2000 and 2015. . . . The critical issue is

how to ensure that the supply is of the quality desired. This, in turn, raises important issues of professional preparation of teachers. Furthermore, given calls for pedagogical renewal, the 2,491,000 practicing teachers will need to be provided with professional opportunities (Dembele 2004, p. 15).

Perspectives on Quality

Despite the prominence of "quality" as the motivating factor for education planning, reform, and practice throughout the world, there is little agreement about the meanings and implications of the term. In a large swath of the literature, the term *quality* is used in a detached way, assuming unanimity on what the term means and the desirability of the various educational aims and approaches promoted under the banner of quality without explicitly defining what it means. Whether quality is dealt with explicitly or not, however, the argument can be made that education systems are always structured around a vision of quality. Harvey (1995) underlines this point and describes five alternative conceptions of education quality:

1. Education quality as *exceptionality*: excellence is the vision that drives education, quality is education that is exemplary, schools should maximize the pursuit of the highest potential in individual students.

2. Education quality as *consistency*: equality is the vision that drives education, quality requires equitable experiences, schools and classrooms should provide students with consistent experiences across the system.

3. Education quality as *fitness-for-purpose*: refinement and perfection in specific subject areas is the vision that shapes the system, quality is seen as preparing students for specific roles, instructional specialization is emphasized.

4. Education quality as *value for money*: education reflects reasonable correspondence to the individual and societal investments it entails, quality is interpreted as the extent to which the system delivers value for money.

5. Education quality as *transformative potential*: social or personal change is the vision that drives education, quality education is a catalyst for positive changes in individuals and society, education promotes social change (Kubow and Fossum 2003, pp. 125–126).

Each of these conceptions of education quality has a distinct rationale and represents a plausible justification for educational change. They are not mutually exclusive; an education system can encompass several or all of these visions of quality, although they implicitly compete with each other for prominence. Although rarely the topic of public policy debate, the five visions compete for

emphasis and budget within education ministries. Donor support for education is often tied to the implementation of programs allied with one vision or another. Widespread support for educational improvement, therefore, does not ensure agreement about the desirability of various structures and practices or about the focus and direction that educational change should take (Kubow and Fossum 2003, pp. 125–134).

Harvey's five conceptions of quality are all based on particular visions of society or a notion of the way the education system can contribute to social goals. Harvey's delineation of social goals and quality is not far removed from different visions of quality in terms of learning. For example, Habermas, whose work provides the basis for much of present thinking about curriculum, outlined three ways in which humans know and construe the world: technical, practical (learners using and constructing knowledge for the analysis of their world), and emancipatory (Habermas 1972). Applying this to education, different visions of quality might value very different purposes: (i) empirical knowledge, facts, causal explanations; (ii) interpretation, understanding, constructing new meanings, situational knowledge; and (iii) critical reflection, knowledge, and thought that lead to action and create a strong relationship to oneself and one's social world (Hopkins 2001, pp. 21–25). Although, in practice, they are not mutually exclusive, each of these orientations to knowledge represents a different idea of quality of learning.

Using a similar analytical framework in a paper developed under the USAID-funded Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project, Ginsburg and Schubert outline approaches to inquiry about education quality that derive from the empiricist/positivist and the interpretivist/ constructivist conceptions of knowledge (Ginsburg and Schubert 2001, pp. 8–9). The paper emphasizes sets of choices confronted by those involved in efforts to improve education quality in less-developed countries that include, for example: (i) definitions of education quality, (ii) sources of knowledge to use, (iii) paradigms and approaches to use in undertaking research, and (iv) levels of the system on which research and activity should focus (Ginsburg and Schubert 2001, p. 21). The IEQ Project approached defining educational quality through activities "designed to promote dialogue about [the meaning of] educational quality in different social and economic contexts," while suggesting that quality can also be approached in a more structured way by focusing on inputs, processes, content, outputs, and outcomes (Ginsburg and Schubert 2001, pp. 4–5).

Perspectives on education quality from the vantage points of five academic disciplines make up a thematic series of papers published in two recent issues of *Educational Researcher* (Leonardo 2004a). The papers all emphasize the relationship, or potential relationship, between education quality and social justice.

- *Historians* Kantor and Lowe conclude that despite changing and shifting definitions of quality education, throughout history education has consistently favored the children of elites. They conclude that an important disciplinary lesson of history is that before access to quality education can be realized in the present, the basic condition of inequality must be confronted (Kantor and Lowe 2004).

- *Political scientist* Orr writes that recent articles on education in political science

journals have been concerned with the distribution of power in decision-making processes, the organization of educational governance, and the outcomes of education policy decisions. Orr concludes that education has differential outcomes depending on one's access to power since quality education is a matter of institutional conditions that either promote or stifle a group's ability to exert its power over the direction of education (Orr 2004).

- *Anthropologist* Gonzalez writes that her discipline has the ability to "complexify" the conversation on education quality, something needed, she claims, because of the multidisciplinary and multifaceted nature of quality (Gonzalez 2004).

- *Philosopher* Burbules writes that in his discipline education quality is viewed through teleological lenses that provide different perspectives on the ultimate ends of education. Teleological goals, whether "strong" or "weak," justify specific purposes of knowledge and learning. Burbules claims that dialogue on quality of education when guided by these purposes or norms tends to disguise imposition as consensus. On the other hand, anti-teleological goals, such as the postmodern and multicultural varieties, do not specify ends and emphasize the continuous interrogation of value systems (Burbules 2004).

- *Educator and critical social theorist* Leonardo argues that learning experiences are of good quality if students gain the intellectual capacity to understand social oppression and inequality. Critical social theory, so the argument goes, provides the analytical tools for this understanding and guides students in ways to counteract the

effects of inequalities (Leonardo 2004b).

From the perspective of various international organizations, two key elements tend to characterize approaches to education quality. The UNESCO *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005: Education for All—The Quality Imperative* identifies the two as cognitive and creative/emotional development. The first key element, cognitive development, is a major explicit objective of virtually all education systems, and the degree to which systems actually achieve this is a major indicator of their quality. However, the report provides the caveat that, "while this indicator can be measured relatively easily . . . it is much more difficult to determine how to improve the results" (UNESCO 2004, p. 29). The second key element of quality is learners' creative and emotional development, learning to support the objectives of peace, citizenship, and security and to promote equality. The report states that this element of quality is defined in diverse ways around the world and, compared with cognitive development, is much more difficult to define and assess (UNESCO 2004, p. 29).

The UNESCO report points out that "agreement about the objectives and aims of education will frame any discussion of quality and that such agreement embodies moral, political, and epistemological issues that are frequently invisible or ignored" (UNESCO 2004, p. 37). The report further emphasizes that different notions of quality are associated with different education traditions and approaches. For example:

- The humanist approach, one of the precursors of constructivism, focuses on learners constructing their own

meanings and integrating theory and practice as a basis for social action. Quality within this tradition is interpreted as the extent to which learners translate learning into social action.

- The behaviorist approach, heading in another direction, assumes that students must be led and their behavior controlled to specific ends, with quality measured in precise, incremental learning terms.

- Critical approaches, on the other hand, focus on inequality in access to and outcomes of education and on education's role in legitimizing and reproducing existing social structures. Quality education within this tradition is seen as prompting social change, encouraging critical analysis of social power relations, and ensuring that learners participate actively in the design of their learning experience.

- Indigenous approaches to quality reject mainstream education imported from the centers of power, assure relevance to local content, and include the knowledge of the whole community (UNESCO 2004, pp. 32–35).

The UNESCO report uses a framework for understanding, monitoring, and improving education quality that identifies five dimensions associated with quality. The framework provides a means for organizing and understanding the different variables of education quality, and its view of education quality encompasses access, teaching and learning processes, and outcomes influenced by the context and inputs available:

- Learner characteristics affect quality and include aptitude, school readiness, and perseverance.

- Context, which significantly affects quality, includes socioeconomic and cultural conditions, labor market factors, public resources for education, the philosophical perspectives of teacher and learner, parental support, and time available for schooling and homework.

- Enabling inputs are critical to quality and include teaching and learning materials, physical infrastructure, human resources, especially teachers, but also principals, supervisors, and school governance.

- Teaching and learning approaches are central to quality. They include learning time, teaching methods, assessment, feedback, incentives, and class size.

- Outcomes, which signal overall quality, include literacy, numeracy, and life skills; creative and emotional skills, values, and social benefits (UNESCO 2004, pp. 35–37).

Given the multiple perspectives on the notion of education quality, Adams, in a paper written as part of the IEQ Project, poses a comprehensive and challenging list of questions that provide an excellent framework for examining and understanding the complex meanings of quality. While not a perspective per se, the list includes questions that probe issues of politics and power in relation to differing conceptions of educational quality:

- What knowledge bases or theories can be of assistance in trying to define quality: social theories, learning theories, instructional theories, effective schools research, education production-function studies?

- Do various educational theories and paradigms generate different definitions?

- What is the relationship of politics and power to conceptualizations of educational quality? That is, it may be important to ask: quality for whom or quality according to whom?

- Who decides on the operational definitions of quality?

- Are there differences in definitions given by those at the "top," e.g., central ministries or national policy groups, and those at the "bottom," e.g., community leaders or teachers?

- To what extent can generalizations be made across nations, communities, schools, or even classrooms?

- When do tensions exist between the educational interests of the state and those of communities, families, and individuals?

- If different clientele have different definitions, how can policies be developed that address contradictions?

- In attempts to design better educational systems, how are size, selectivity, and diversity of student population related to quality?

- Do policies of equity and universal education lead to lower quality? If so, is this acceptable to the society as a whole, to the power elite? (Adams 1993, pp. 2–3)

Localizing the Definition of Education Quality

The discussion so far has stressed general perspectives and trends in thinking about education quality. This section of the paper discusses the local nature of quality as a concept-in-use, reflecting the argument that quality is inextricably bound to context and emphasizing new trends toward decentralization. By stepping into this thicket, we may have reached the point at which pursuing more precise definitions of quality may be hazardous. Fenstermacher and Richardson, in writing about perspectives on education quality, remind us that the hero of Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* is driven insane as a consequence of pursuing the meaning of quality (Fenstermacher and Richardson 2000, p.2).

As part of a series of studies on education quality carried out under the IEQ Project, Adams identifies multiple definitions of quality as a concept-in-use and concludes the following:

- Quality has multiple meanings.

- Quality may reflect individual values and interpretations.

- Quality is often multidimensional; it may subsume equity and efficiency concerns.

- Quality is dynamic; it changes over time and by context.

- Quality may be assessed by either quantitative or qualitative measures.

- Goals of quality may conflict with efficiency, equity, or other goals.

- Quality is grounded in values, cultures, and traditions: it may be specific to a given nation, province, community, school, parent, or individual student.

- Different stakeholder groups often have different definitions of quality; thus "winners" and "losers" may be associated with any particular definition (Adams 1993, pp. 12–13).

Although the above may suggest that the notion of quality is almost too complex to work with in a meaningful way, Adams also presents a more optimistic list of the characteristics of education quality, still avoiding general definition:

- Quality is definable in context.

- Under some assumptions quality can be measured "objectively."

- Quality often supplements, complements, or is integrated into interpretations of efficiency and equity.

- Quality is not necessarily associated with high costs.

- Given similar missions and goals and comparable contexts, educational

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quality can be evaluated across educational settings.

- Even if there is lack of agreement on what quality is, there often is agreement that it is a goal (Adams 1993, p. 13).

The message here, and in much of the more recent literature on education quality, is that quality must be *locally defined*, at the school and community levels, not only at the district and national levels. Although there is agreement on general principles, it is unlikely that there is a universal definition of education quality waiting to be discovered, nor is there a uniform checklist of quality factors against which all education systems can or should be measured.

In the ultimate "local" definition of quality, Green wrote provocatively that quality education is simply "the education that the rich provide for their sons" (Green 1980, p. 120). This idea, in fact, is not at all simple and it accords with the critical perspective that identifies the main function of education as an instrument to reproduce current class structure, a deliberate gatekeeper promoting elite, primarily male, privilege (Apple 1978, 1995, 1996; Carnoy 1974; Kubow and Fossum 2003, pp. 68-71; Nielsen and Cummings 1997).

The logical consequence of defining quality locally is not some kind of educational anarchy or fragmentation, with each school or community a law unto itself. District and national coordination of goals is necessary in any education system. The implication of the above is that, although agreement on the precise details of quality will never be found, policy dialogue on education quality issues is important at the local level to make schools more compelling to parents and

children and to inform policy development at the national level (Adams et al. 1993; Cummings 1997; Dalin 1994; Nielsen 1997; Nielsen and Beykont 1997; Nielsen and Cummings 1997; Prouty and Tegegn 2000; Schwille et al. 1992; Tatto 1997; Williams 1997).

Recent trends have brought the discussion of education quality closer to the local level, emphasizing the role of schools, teachers, school leadership, community members, and students in creating quality. The literature suggests that schools and teachers, supported by a strong system of supervision, flexible policies, efficient administration, and community involvement, should be emphasized in policies and programs intended to help improve education quality. The next sections of the literature review, trace and discuss these trends.

Quality at the School, Classroom, and Community Level

The increasing emphasis on quality at the local level was traced in an article by Muskin (1999) that gives an overview of three conceptual focal points on quality of education. The first two have been prominent for decades. The third, which locates the engine for quality in the school and community, emerged in the 1990s and is now prominent in the literature. The three points are:

1. One way of looking at quality, prevalent in both the research literature and reports of program implementation, concerns the relationship between different "inputs" and a measure of student performance, or "output." The outputs are usually students' results on achievement tests, assessments, or end-of-cycle examinations. The inputs include a wide variety of factors: infrastructure and resources, quality of school environment, textbooks, teacher preparation, teacher salaries, supervision, attitudes and incentives, school climate, curriculum, students' physical well-being, and family and socioeconomic context. This approach attempts to identify the inputs most highly associated with desired quality outputs, but it is relatively silent on the use of inputs, or process, at the school, classroom, and community level. The results are meant to help guide planners in allocating resources to support increased educational quality (Fuller 1986; Lockheed and Verspoor 1991; Muskin 1999).

2. Another way of looking at quality involves measuring the efficiency of the system. Educational efficiency is measured internally by the rates of completion, dropout, and repetition. Efficiency is also measured externally by looking at the outcomes of education or the productivity of school leavers. This is measured according to, for example, wages or agricultural yields associated with an individual's or a community's level of schooling. This literature has a long history, primarily in educational economics, and often concentrates on quantity of education as a proxy for quality. Studies of efficiency provide necessary information for planners, but this approach has relatively little explanatory power about school quality without an

accompanying analysis of the dynamics among the myriad school process factors that lead to students staying in school and learning something valuable while there (Cobbe 1990; Lockheed and Hannushek 1988; Lockheed and Komenan 1989; Muskin 1999; Windham 1986).

3. A more recently developed way of looking at quality focuses on the content, context, and relevance of the education provided. Although in some ways overlapping with the first area above, this approach to quality focuses on process within the school and classroom and relationships between the school and the surrounding community. Greater attention is given to the ways in which inputs interact at the school level to produce quality, defined as the elements of knowledge and character that a society values in young people. This approach more readily encompasses non-formal and alternative forms of schooling (for example, community schools or literacy programs) and programs for out-of-school youth, with purposes that may diverge from the customary educational aims of formal schooling and modern sector employment. This focal point is particularly important because it includes both school- and community-based participation in decision making about education, interactions within schools and classrooms, and issues of relevance (Carnoy and de Moura Castro 1995; Carron and Chau 1996; Craig 1995; Muskin 1999; Muskin and Aregay 1999; Prouty and Tegegn 2000; UNICEF 2000; World Bank 1994).

In describing the increasing interest in quality at the school and community level, Adams traces shifting points of focus over the years that follow the same pattern as the three points outlined above (Adams et al. 1995). Adams states that educational quality was once defined almost exclusively in terms of student achievement and the "manipulable" school inputs that can influence student output or achievement. An increasing emphasis on in-school factors, he says, has shifted the focus to the complex combinations of inputs, processes, and outputs associated with improved patterns of learning. The issue of *process* at the classroom and school level has become increasingly the center of attention in terms of achieving quality.

The concept of quality as defined locally usually contains both descriptive and normative characteristics. From a descriptive point of view, quality may be viewed as an attribute of a single school, i.e., one school has furniture in all classes, or most of the teachers in another school have diplomas. From a normative point of view, quality also may refer to the status or degree of worth of a school in relation to other schools, i.e., one school is better than another because it has higher scores on the leaving examination, or one school is the best in the district because it retains the most girls. Most discussions of educational reform and innovation at a national level will also assume both a descriptive and normative use of the term.

Quality is often defined as effectiveness, the degree to which objectives are met or desired levels of accomplishment are achieved. Higher quality thus typically means an increase in effectiveness, as locally defined. According to Easton, on the one hand, quality is defined as the embodiment or approximation of

characteristics accepted in a particular society as proof of excellence. Thus, if all teachers in a school have diplomas in a culture that values credentials, the group will be considered a high-quality staff. On the other hand, quality can be defined as the proven ability to produce results. Thus, if the examination results are high in a particular school where outcomes matter, that school will be considered high quality regardless of the academic qualifications of its staff (Easton, quoted in Burchfield 1991, p. 9).

Staff quality and students' academic results are always important, but a more complex understanding of quality includes an evaluation of the personal characteristics of teachers and students, not just qualifications or academic success. In this view, quality is influenced by local physical conditions and circumstances, but it also entails feelings, attitudes, values, and behavior appropriate within the local context. It is more, therefore, than the sum of objective indicators such as test scores or teacher qualifications (Schwille et al. 1992).

Shaeffer emphasizes that planners and managers will need to concern themselves with larger issues than the narrow focus on inputs and outputs in formal education systems. He notes the importance of incorporating lessons from a school's surrounding cultural environment as well as linking with non-formal education programs.

> They [planners and managers] will need to understand better the links between schooling and its social and cultural environment, the kind of socialization and informal learning provided to children both before school entry and outside of the classroom, and ways to

develop more literate and supportive environments in the family and the community surrounding the school. Thus, for example, they will need to link more closely the educational activities of the school with the more non-formal, frequently more innovative and non-governmental education programs often available for mothers, out-of-school youth, and adult learners (Shaeffer 1992, p. 2).

A study of the USAID-funded BESO Community Schools Activities Program (CSAP), in Ethiopia, offers an example of changing community attitudes toward and involvement in creating quality.

> Evidence indicates that CSAP schools have made a conceptual leap in their understanding of what contributes to improved quality. Although CSAP schools still maintained the common perception that a "better performing school" is determined by improvements in the physical plant or increased enrollments, school committee members' thinking had evolved to include changes like improved teacher skills, improved relationships and emotional climate between teachers and students and students with students, and increases in study time for students through decreased workload and formation of student study groups (Prouty and Tegegn 2000, p. 6).

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Decentralization and Education Quality

The emerging importance of the local level as the focus for education quality is closely related to simultaneous trends toward decentralization of decision making in education to the local level, including increased community involvement in school financial, curriculum, and personnel decisions. Decentralization has been a response to growing democracy in many countries and the strengthening of civil society; in the education sector it is a response to the relative ineffectiveness of top-down policies and centralized attempts at "expert-driven" educational reform.

For at least a decade, the trend has been away from reliance on detailed educational plans and mandates from the center. As an alternative, the center's (central ministries or district offices, for example) role shifts to one of providing technical assistance, support, and a flexible policy and management environment for schools. This is described in the 1995 World Bank review of education:

> Most education systems are directly managed by central or state governments . . . this central management, extending even to instructional inputs and the classroom environment, allows

little room for the flexibility that leads to effective learning. The main ways in which governments can help improve the quality of education are setting standards, supporting inputs known to improve achievement, adopting flexible strategies for the acquisition and use of inputs, and monitoring performance. Generally, however, these steps are not taken because of the weight of existing education spending and management practices and the vested interests associated with them (World Bank 1995b, p. 4).

The changed role of central institutions is associated with a reconceptualization of the process of planning educational change. According to Adams et al., there is an emerging view among educators that requires adding texturing to "technicist" approaches to change that emphasize traditional linear planning sequences (i.e., goal setting—needs assessment—program specification—target identification—evaluation). This view requires redefining the process of initiating and sustaining educational change as an iterative, participatory process that involves (and preferably begins with) critique,

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evaluation, analysis, and feedback *at the school and local levels*. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized since reform that a community helps to define and manage for itself is always more effective than reform that is imposed from outside. According to this approach, educational planning, or, more specifically, the planning of educational change (and improving quality), overlaps conceptually and operationally with notions of decentralized, school- and community-level empowerment (Adams et al. 1995).

Decentralization is not an uncontested area. It is promoted as being the only way to promote relevant change and democratic decision making at the local level and in schools. Ginsburg and Schubert, however, reviewing differing points of view on decentralization, point out that critics of decentralization argue that:

> decentralization initiatives tend to enhance centralized social and political control, pass the burden of educational reform to the local level without insuring decentralization in the context of globalization, suggesting that the key issues are who can and does participate in decisions about research, policy, and practice; who exercises more or less power in such decisions; and in whose interests power is exercised (Ginsburg and Schubert 2001, p. 33).

While decentralized control and community empowerment have undoubtedly contributed to improved quality of education, the picture is not unclouded. In addition to the Ginsburg and Schubert's points above, there are other areas of concern. First, decentralization has the potential to increase gaps between socio-economically different groups since the knowledge, experience, capacity, and access to resources of communities differ (Bray 1999). Second, communities' views of quality education may run counter to present government policies. For example, communities may favor practices that government policy defines as negative, such as rote learning or corporal punishment of students (Sayed 2001). Third, communities have been known to exploit teachers over whom they have newfound influence, for example, by demanding services to the community that are outside of the reasonable duties of the teacher. Likewise, communities may treat teachers unfairly if they are from a distant part of the country or from different religious or ethnic groups.

Effectiveness, Improvement, and Process in Teaching and Learning

Although the determinants of quality encompass myriad interwoven factors that are mutually supporting and dependent on context, most of the recent literature on education quality focuses directly on the school and investigates the complex interactions and *processes* that take place there.[1]

Some of the most influential work in this area in recent years, in both industrialized and less-developed countries, is based on the school effectiveness and the school improvement literatures—effectiveness and improvement acting as proxies for quality. Often used interchangeably, the two literature strains are technically distinct, the first focusing on research and the second on strategies to improve schools. They can be described as follows:

> The signal contribution of the school effectiveness research has been to identify and describe the characteristics of [effective schools]. It is the responsibility of authentic school improvement to

devise the strategies that can help the ineffective schools become less so, and the effective schools more so (Hopkins 2001, p. 51).

Within this literature, schools deemed to be "effective" are identified through a range of student outcome factors (participation, academic achievement, social skills, economic success), academic achievement being prominent. According to one wry interpretation, effective schools and classrooms are those "whose pupils progress further than might be expected from considerations of intake" (Mortimore 1991, p. 216). The lists vary, generally the schools identified as effective have been shown to have many of the following characteristics:

- Shared leadership (firm and purposeful, participative, headed by a leading professional)
- Shared vision and goals (unity of purpose, consistency of practice, collegiality and collaboration)

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[1] Examples of this literature include the following: Bah-Diallo 1997; Ball 1998; Boyle et al. 2003; Chung 1992; Cochran-Smith and Fries 2001; Craig et al. 1998; Dalin 1994; Darling-Hammond 1994; Darling-Hammond and Cobb 1995; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1995; Farrell 1989; Fuller et al. 1999; Fuller and Clarke 1994; Haddad et al. 1990; Heneveld 1994; Heneveld and Craig 1996; Hopkins 2001; Lewin and Stuart 2003; Lieberman 1995; Nielsen and Cummings 1997; Riddell 1997; Sugrue and Day 2002; Sunal 1998; Tatto 2000; Uganda Government 1999; UNESCO 1996; UNESCO 2004; Weis 1982; World Bank 1995b.

- A learning environment (an orderly atmosphere, an attractive working environment)

- Concentration on teaching and learning (maximization of learning time, academic emphasis, focus on achievement)

- High expectations (high expectations of all students, communicating expectations, providing intellectual challenge and support)

- Positive reinforcement (clear and fair discipline, feedback)

- Monitored progress (monitoring pupil performance, evaluating school performance)

- Pupil rights and responsibilities (raising pupil self-esteem, positions of responsibility, control of work)

- Purposeful teaching (efficient organization, clarity of purpose, structured lessons, adaptive practice)

- A learning organization (school-based staff development)

- Home-school partnership (parental involvement) (Berliner and Kasanova 1989; Blum 1990; Carasco et al. 1996; Chung 1992; Craig et al. 1998; Heneveld and Craig 1996; Hopkins 2001, p. 45; Levine 1991; Purkey and Smith 1983; Sammons et al. 1995; Shann 1990; UNESCO 2004, pp. 65–68)

The school effectiveness research has guided a great deal of work in less-developed countries in the last decade. For example, a comprehensive study of 26 World Bank–funded projects in Sub-Saharan Africa designed to improve the quality of primary education compared these projects to factors identified in the school effectiveness and school improvement literature. The factors identified in the literature are: (i) community support; (ii) teacher supervision; (iii) textbooks and materials; (iv) facilities; (v) school leadership; (vi) flexibility and autonomy; (vii) student assessments and examinations; (viii) school climate; and (ix) teaching/learning processes (Heneveld and Craig 1996).

The study of 26 projects offers two conclusions. First, the project designs under study addressed many inputs that are known to affect educational outcomes, such as community support, supervision, teacher development, textbooks, curriculum reform, and examinations. However, the focus in both project design and implementation was on these factors as *inputs*, not on their *integration*, *use*, and *significance* within schools. This important finding identifies an area of weakness in program design and implementation that, one hopes, was more typical of the early 1990s than of today.

The second conclusion identifies two other major areas of weakness in project or program planning. The designs tended to ignore the *process* factors that characterize effective education within schools—school-level autonomy, school climate, the teaching/learning process, pupil evaluation, and feedback by teachers. The designs also tended to treat inputs as discrete quantifiable instruments (number of textbooks and teacher's guides, weeks of in-service training for teachers, etc.) without taking into account how they interact with other inputs, especially at the school level.

The observations made in this almost ten-year-old study apply to many reform efforts and projects that have taken place during the intervening years. The growing realization of the importance of process in

successful education reform is not always matched by program design. The present quest for rapid results tends to squeeze out attention to the processes necessary for meaningful and sustainable results and other dimensions of quality.

School effectiveness and school improvement approaches are sometimes criticized for being overly prescriptive and assuming a rigid set of goals for students. Burbules, the philosopher cited above, would call them strongly teleological. Indeed, the foregoing may be said to contradict previous sections of this review that emphasize local definitions of quality, since the vision of quality inherent in the effectiveness and improvement literatures has a prescriptive core. However, when used as a guiding framework and not a prescription, this literature has been helpful in promoting thought about quality of education and structures to create quality. The 20-page matrix of "Factors That Determine School Effectiveness," an annex to the Heneveld and Craig study, has been used successfully as a guiding framework in many programs to do just those things (Heneveld and Craig 1996, pp. 67–86). LeCzel and Liman, for example, writing about school-based quality improvement programs in Namibia, state:

> the program design makes use of the theoretical framework from the World Bank study that synthesizes the findings of the school effectiveness and school improvement literature from the perspective of the needs of education systems in developing countries…in Namibia, the major components of that framework have informed many of the principles in the overall education reform effort and have guided the

design and implementation of the School Improvement Program (LeCzel and Liman 2003, p. 2).

In an observation contradicting the effective schools orientation, Roland Barth writes that the dominant approach to improving schools is predicated on a set of assumptions that has led to school reform based on the proliferation of "lists." There are lists of characteristics of the "effective" school, teacher, and student, lists of minimum competencies, performance indicators, and so on. Barth claims that what is dangerous and self-defeating about this view of the world is an inherent set of assumptions about people, how they feel, how they should behave, and how organizations work (Hopkins 2001, p. 12).

Barth argues for basing school reform on the skills, aspirations, and energy of those closest to the school: teachers, senior management, governors, and parents. He asserts that a "community of learners" approach to school improvement derives from a radically different set of assumptions from those of the "list makers." Outlined, also in a list, these assumptions are:

- Schools have the capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right. A major responsibility of those outside the school is to help provide these conditions for those inside.

- When the need and purpose are there, when the conditions are right, adults and students alike learn and each *energizes* and contributes to the learning of the other.

- What needs to be improved about schools is their culture, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the

nature and quality of learning experiences.

- School improvement is an effort to determine and provide, from without and within, conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning among them (Barth 1990, p. 45).

In fact, there is little in this list of contextual and contributing factors with which most school effectiveness or school improvement adherents would argue. Although based on different assumptions about human behavior, it is not difficult to see that the two approaches outlined above are not mutually exclusive in practice. The effective schools "lists" are clearly problematic if used rigidly. The focus that Barth advocates on communities of learners and, perhaps most important, on the *energy* of everybody engaged in helping students learn, can certainly infuse life and vision (and, yes, *energy*) into the lists of standards, competencies, outcomes, and indicators that increasingly dominate the professional lives of educators throughout the world and threaten to turn education from a human activity into a bookkeeping activity.

Teacher Quality

The Roots of Teacher Quality

School effectiveness and school improvement are concerned with raising student achievement and developing other desirable student characteristics by focusing on the teaching/learning process and the conditions that support it. Views on the nature of the process and conditions have changed significantly in recent years (Craig et al. 1998; UNESCO 2004, p. 108). New views on the nature of learning and the locus of authority and responsibility for education have combined to alter how teachers are regarded and how teacher support programs are designed and carried out. At the same time that increased authority and responsibility for school management have devolved to more local levels, there has been a strong trend toward the devolution to teachers of authority and responsibility for their practice (Ginsburg and Schubert 2001). A paper written for the USAID-funded EQUIP1 Program (Education Quality Improvement Program 1) argues that decentralization and widespread reforms in curriculum and instruction that emphasize active learning for students have combined to affect the content and structure of programs for teacher learning. Teachers now play a much more active role in their professional development, which takes place more frequently among groups of teachers at the school level (Leu 2004a).

In the past, in many countries, both less-developed and industrialized, teachers were treated as semiskilled workers unable to make responsible decisions about their practice. They were required to follow instructional prescriptions and highly scripted and rigid teaching procedures and, for their professional development, receive information on how to improve from higher-level education "experts" in centralized workshops. This approach to teachers and teacher learning was inadequate even when teacher-centered, one-way transmission of knowledge, positivist-oriented approaches dominated classroom practice (Craig et al. 1998; Schon and McDonald 1998).

In the present curriculum reform environment in most countries, constructivist, active-learning principles are advocated at the policy level for student learning. Many systems are starting to advocate matching active-learning approaches to teacher professional development, and significant changes are taking place, although the robotic approach to teacher learning ("teacher training") persists. This produces neither the teaching skills nor the understandings and attitudes required for improving classroom approaches and

student learning. If teachers are to become reflective practitioners who use active-learning approaches in their classrooms, where students learn through problem solving, critical dialogue, inquiry, and the use of higher-order thinking skills, teachers must learn and improve in professional development programs that not only advocate but also use and model these same methods (Boud et al. 1985; Boyle et al. 2003; Leu 2004a).

The latter approach is more correctly referred to as "teacher education" or "teacher professional development" rather than "teacher training." The critical difference between the two concepts, rarely observed within the international development community, is defined by their dissenting views of teachers—as incapable of acting as professionals and requiring scripted practice or as responsible professionals who will perform well in an atmosphere of trust and support.

In many countries, teacher professional development now takes place at the school level (UNESCO 2004, pp. 162–163). Support materials are used by teacher groups to introduce new ideas and stimulate experimentation with new approaches. In the best cases, teachers form genuine "learning communities" within their schools, or clusters of schools, in which they learn, process, reflect, and improve through collaboration and mutual support. This approach to professional development is a key element of what the literature refers to as *process* at the school level. A significant result of this new approach is growing trust that teachers can function as professionals and make responsible decisions when they have sufficient understanding of the reforms they are being asked to implement, and support in becoming familiar with a range

of effective alternative practices. Trust and support, in turn, often lead to an increased sense of professional identity and empowerment and more positive morale and energy (AED forthcoming; Boyle et al. 2003; Craig et al. 1998; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1995; Gidey 2002; LeCzel forthcoming; LeCzel and Liman 2003; Lieberman 1995; UNESCO 2004, pp. 161–168; Zeichner and Noffke 2001).

The emphasis on teacher empowerment has grown from a variety of roots. One is the literature of the "reflective practitioner" and the conceptually and operationally related tradition of "action research" (Boud et al. 1985; duPlessis et al. 2002; Hiebert et al. 2002; Kemmis 1994; Riding et al. 1995; Schon 1983). The idea of reflective practice assumes that teachers are professionals capable of reflecting on the school and classroom situation and, thus, capable of making a large number of instructional and classroom management decisions. Even in circumstances where the level of teacher preparation is low, this perspective rejects the notion that teachers must work according to rigid prescriptions, incapable of independent decision making. Although some challenge the notion that teachers in developing countries, with minimal preparation and minimal resources, can reflect on practice and make informed choice (Knamiller et al. 1999), the more widely held view is that the idea of "the teacher as professional" has reliably led to better teacher performance (Boyle et al. 2003; Craig et al. 1998; Hiebert et al. 2002; Schon and McDonald 1998).

Action research is closely related to teacher empowerment. Action or participatory research refers to teachers focusing on problem solving at the school level, and it most typically entails teachers

carrying out research on their own and their colleagues' practice, usually working collaboratively in research groups. Typical of action research is a circle-of-improvement process of identifying issues; collecting data through classroom observation or interviews with teachers, students, or parents; analyzing or processing data; and attempting to understand issues or resolve problems. In addition to mobilizing teachers to study and reflect on their practice, action research advances the professionalization of teachers by helping them develop and validate their knowledge (Hopkins 2002; Riding et al. 1995; Kemmis 1994).

The ideas of reflective practice and action research are important because they relate closely to recent thinking about education quality. An increasingly accepted position is that lasting improvements in educational quality, whether defined in terms of academic knowledge, basic skills, critical thinking, self-esteem, or other elements of student learning, must include an in-depth understanding on the part of all stakeholders of current conditions at the classroom and school levels—in other words, school and classroom *process*. Such understanding requires knowledge generated by those at the school level as well as the inclusion of teachers and community members in decision making over processes that affect them. Teacher quality, firmly planted in local process, prompts us to question the effectiveness of the top-down, expert-driven approach to teachers and teacher professional development of previous years (Adams et al. 1995; Hopkins 2001; UNESCO 2004).

Teachers as the Key Factor in Education Quality

If the school is the important functional locus of efforts for improving quality,

certainly the most critical factor within the school in facilitating student learning is the teacher and the ability of those in leadership positions to shape a collaborative, motivated, and effective teaching and learning community. Teachers' professional attitudes, energy, and motivation are critical, in combination with teaching skills, in creating quality of learning. These teaching skills include many interacting factors: knowledge of the young learner, appropriate and varied methodologies and subject matter knowledge, understanding of the curriculum and its purposes, general professionalism, ability to communicate, enthusiasm for learning, sensitivity to others, general character, discipline, ability to work with others, dedication, and relationships within the school and community (AED forthcoming).

The new UNESCO *EFA Global Monitoring Report* says:

> what goes on in the classroom, and the impact of the teacher and teaching, has been identified in numerous studies as *the* crucial variable for improving learning outcomes. The way teachers teach is of critical concern in any reform designed to improve quality (UNESCO 2004, p. 152).

The UNESCO report enumerates five areas critical to teacher quality: (i) finding the right recruits; (ii) initial teacher education; (iii) ongoing professional support; (iv) teacher earnings; and (v) teacher deployment and conditions of service. The point is made that, teachers being the largest public expenditure in budgets of less-developed countries, the central dilemma is paying teachers, expanding the teaching force to fulfill the demands of exploding enrollments, and

devoting resources to improving the quality of teachers (UNESCO 2004, p. 161). As with the provision of education itself, many countries need to address issues of quantity and quality of teachers simultaneously. Innovative ways of meeting both demands are urgently being sought; ideas include shorter preservice teacher education, recruitment of teachers with higher education qualifications, intensified in-service professional development, and increased school-based support (Mulkeen et al. forthcoming; Verspoor 2004, p. 6).

Teacher effectiveness is expressed most commonly in terms of student academic achievement, an element more easily (and less expensively) measured than some other essential outcomes of good education. Despite this, some research indicates that teachers may not be as concerned with student learning as they are with student behavior and motivation, managing activities and resources, and completing activities within the time available. Although many teachers would dispute this finding, Nuthall (2004, p. 276) cites studies suggesting that teachers believe that student interest and involvement automatically leads to learning, constituting both a necessary and sufficient condition for worthwhile student learning.

Although dialogue at national, district, school, and community levels should determine the qualities that a specific education system seeks in good teachers, a list of generally held perspectives on good teachers would include many of the following:

- Sufficient knowledge of subject matter to teach with confidence

- Knowledge and skills in a range of appropriate and varied teaching methodologies

- Knowledge of the language of instruction

- Knowledge of, sensitivity to, and interest in young learners

- Ability to reflect on teaching practice and children's responses

- Ability to modify teaching/learning approaches as a result of reflection

- Ability to create and sustain an effective learning environment

- Understanding of the curriculum and its purposes, particularly when reform programs and new paradigms of teaching and learning are introduced

- General professionalism, good morale, and dedication to the goals of teaching

- Ability to communicate effectively

- Ability to communicate enthusiasm for learning to students

- Interest in students as individuals, sense of caring and responsibility for helping them learn and become good people, and a sense of compassion

- Good character, sense of ethics, and personal discipline

- Ability to work with others and to build good relationships within the school and community (Chesterfield and Rubio 1997; Craig et al. 1998; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin1995; Fenstermacher and Richardson 2000; Fredriksson 2004; Heneveld and Craig 1996; Leu 2004b; Lieberman 1995; Tatto 2000; UNESCO 2004)

These teacher qualities thrive only in a positive and supportive environment. Although the qualities listed above are needed in each individual teacher,

teaching (like learning) is not practiced most effectively as an individual activity. The teacher is always functioning as part of a social network, either with his or her students or within the school community. Excellence at the school level means more than an individual excellent teacher or even a collection of excellent teachers. A strong school community and strong school leadership are of overriding importance in bringing teachers together to as a community of learning at the school level (Fredriksson 2004; Leu 2004b).

The literature indicates that a positive policy environment and adequate support for growth are essential for creating and sustaining teacher quality (Fredriksson 2004; Mulkeen et al. forthcoming). The research literature also strongly indicates that ongoing, relevant professional development activities are necessary for a teaching force to be effective (Craig et al. 1998, p. 13; Dalin 1994; Verspoor 2004). Adequate time and resources are needed for programs in which staff members have a say in the content of activities and in which new skills can be learned, practiced, reflected upon, and improved over time. An iterative teacher learning process of this kind involving all teachers takes place most effectively at the school level or in clusters of nearby schools working together (duPlessis et al. 2002; Leu 2004a; MacNeil 2004).

Teaching and Student Learning

The topics of students, student experience of education and learning, and student perspectives on teachers are not prominent in the literature on education quality. A recent article observes that much of the research on classroom teaching relates to the ways in which teachers experience and think about teaching rather than the ways

in which teaching relates to learning (Nuthall 2004; p. 273). Indeed, much of the literature on teachers and teacher quality described above is fairly silent on the topic of how students experience "teacher quality" or how changes in teachers' classroom approaches lead to changes in students and their learning, either broadly or narrowly defined (Munene et al. 1997; Weis 1982).

Nuthall discusses the abundant literature describing the characteristics of excellent teachers derived from classroom observation, reputation, or student achievement scores. A typical list of the characteristics of excellent teachers includes:

- Passionate commitment to doing the very best for their students

- Love of children enacted in warm, caring relationships

- Pedagogical content knowledge, e.g., knowing how to identify, present, and explain key concepts

- Use of a variety of models of teaching and learning

- Collaborative working style with other teachers to plan, observe, and discuss each other's work

- Constant questioning of, reflecting on, and modifying their own practice (Hopkins and Stern 1996, quoted in Nuthall 2004, p. 282)

Nuthall uses this list to observe that this and other research identifying the beliefs and practices of teachers who are thought to be effective usually offers no way of knowing in any precise way the relationship between these characteristics and student learning. What is needed, according to this analysis, is: (i) independent, in-depth assessment of what

students learn; (ii) data on individual student experience; (iii) data on classroom activities; and (iv) analysis based on the continuous connections among classroom activities, student experiences, and learning processes (Nuthall 2004, pp. 296–297). The call for increased emphasis on the *process* of student learning and the relationship between teachers' actions and students' learning, signals an important area for further research.

Teaching Approaches, Curriculum, and Quality

An earlier section of this review took up the question of quality in relation to different concepts of learning. Empiricist (positivist) orientations to learning emphasize the acquisition of facts, while interpretive (constructivist) orientations emphasize the interpretation of facts and the construction of new knowledge. Quality of education would be viewed differently depending on the learning goals underpinning a country's stated vision of education and subsequent policies in curriculum and instruction.

Until the recent past, education systems in most countries have been based firmly on positivist principles, featuring the teacher at the center of the instructional process transmitting information through "chalk and talk" to students, primarily for the purposes of memorization. Since memorizing information is no longer regarded as adequate learning, and analytical skills are increasingly in demand, many countries have recently adopted reforms or new paradigms of teaching and learning based on constructivist principles. Emphases vary, but these paradigms include active learning, problem-solving, learner-centered, and discovery approaches in which students not only acquire information but do something active with

it—analyze and use it to create more profound understanding and new knowledge (Bransford et al. 2000; Hopkins 2001; Stigler and Hiebert 2004).

Such "pedagogical renewal" may be explained in part by the increasing need of expanding labor markets in developing countries for critical thinking skills in workers. The shift to more active forms of learning has been promoted by international agencies as well (UNESCO 2004, p. 152). In many countries, however, implementing learner-centered policies in schools and in teacher education institutions has been problematic and difficult to realize in resource-poor, overcrowded classrooms with minimally prepared teachers (O'Sullivan 2004). Constructivist approaches ideally require more one-on-one attention from teachers, more materials with which students can work, and a greater variety of challenging learning situations for students. Teachers fall back on unstructured forms of "group work" as the only method of active learning with which they are familiar or that they think they can manage in large classes. "Go to your groups and discuss" is often all the direction that students receive from their teachers, leading to an aimless waste of learning time. The results of the trend toward constructivism have been

inconclusive, partly because active forms of teaching and learning have rarely been used on a large scale, beyond the symbolic use of "group work," in most classrooms.

The new UNESCO report raises the issue of the ineffective implementation of active learning approaches and suggests that a solution may be "structured teaching," something midway between traditional "chalk and talk" and more open-ended discovery teaching.

> Structured and systematic teaching consists of presenting material in small steps, pausing to check for student understanding, and eliciting active and successful participation from all students. It is a particularly appropriate method for learning reading, mathematics . . . structured instruction may be the more pragmatic option for providing satisfactory quality in education in situations of severe resource constraints, high pupil/teacher ratios . . . and underqualified or unmotivated teachers. With an approach to structured teaching that leaves space for individual discovery, good teachers can create a child-centered environment even in adverse circumstances. Child-centered in this context suggests respect for children and encouraging their involvement in their own learning (UNESCO 2004, pp. 153–154).

Although some of the elements of this approach might appear to undermine constructivist principles, it seems possible to combine constructivist views with other approaches, for example, using a form of Bloom's taxonomy to encourage the

development of higher-order thinking skills, or using a mixture of teacher-centered and learner-centered classroom approaches (Bloom 1956; UNESCO 2004, p. 68). The "structured teaching," "direct instruction," or "active teaching" approaches may prompt thinking about incremental ways of introducing active learning (O'Sullivan 2004). A step-by-step approach may be more effective than the present haste to adopt a new paradigm of teaching and learning before it is completely understood, or a system is prepared for it. This echoes Dalin's "obvious truths" about successful education system reform, the first of which is that "reforms should be incremental and gradual rather than wide-ranging" (Dalin 1994, p. xvii).

Another important aspect of quality is the content of learning, or the curriculum. "Curriculum," as used here, comprises all arrangements for students' education and includes three elements: (i) the general orientation or philosophical underpinnings of the curriculum; (ii) the strategic component, which includes the program or content and methods; and (iii) the application dimension, which includes language of instruction and textbooks. "Content" is used broadly to mean not just the subject matter in the curriculum, but also the ways in which students are meant to learn and the ways in which learning is meant to change students (ADEA 2004, pp. 17–18; ADEA forthcoming).

A prominent quality issue in recent years is that of curriculum and content relevance, or the relevance of what and how students learn. This review does not examine the highly complex curriculum area extensively, but does raise a few questions about the relationship between curriculum and quality of education. A

recent attempt to clarify this relationship states:

> Relevant curricula must ensure that the subject matter learned is meaningful. Learners are motivated to learn when they know what they are learning for and what use they can make of it, either for their individual development or to contribute to the development of their communities. In a rapidly changing, globalized world, one of the most vital characteristics of a relevant curriculum is flexibility, i.e., openness and adaptability both to local needs and to future trends (ADEA 2004, p. 17).

A frequently used indicator of curriculum relevance is the degree to which it prepares children for integration into their environment and into the labor force. This quickly becomes a highly contested area when young people are offered an education that limits their options, for example, by channeling some into vocational education and others into academic or pre-professional education. The question of "relevant for what and for whom" immediately arises because distinct social class associations are attached to each of these options, the children of elites being much more likely to survive in school in the first place and then study according to academic or pre-professional curricula. The issue of class reproduction as a function of education that tends to perpetuate social stratification is central to questions about curriculum and content relevance and quality (Apple 1978; ADEA 2004).

The overall question of how much students are learning, particularly in present conditions of rapidly declining quality, is critical. Data from national and international assessments suggest that in many countries children are not acquiring even basic skills (UNESCO 1998; UNESCO 2001; UNESCO 2004, pp. 44–48). In addition to strengthening programs in formal education to ensure better student learning, the new EFA Global *Monitoring Report* emphasizes the importance of two other dimensions of education that usually take place outside of formal schools: early childhood education and adult literacy/life skills (UNESCO 2004, pp. 56–59).

Gender and Quality

The previous section on curriculum and quality once again raises the question of the relationship between equity and quality of education. Much of the literature includes equity as an essential factor of quality, taking the stance that no system of education can claim to be of good quality if it serves different groups in a society in significantly different ways (UNESCO 2004). This particular perspective on quality corresponds to the second of Harvey's five competing conceptions of education quality discussed earlier. According to Harvey's "consistency" conception of quality, education must provide for "equivalent educational experiences for all implicated" (Harvey 1995).

Equity concerns arise in relation to many groups' full participation in education of good quality. This includes groups defined by socioeconomic status, location and proximity to schools, special needs, health status, religion, and gender. This review briefly examines only one of these critical equity areas: gender. In many societies females are among the most underserved groups. A large literature has appeared over the last two decades taking up this concern (Assie-Lumumba and Sutton 2004).

Although the arguments for educating girls and women are well known, they are worth repeating here. The most basic is that education for all, males and females, is a human right (UNESCO 2003). Beyond that, the advantages to developing countries of increased girls' participation in primary school have been well documented over the years and were highlighted in the last UNESCO *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/04: Gender and Education for All—The Leap to Equality* (Benavot 1989; Floro and Wolf 1990; Kane 1995; King 1990; King and Hill 1993; UNESCO 2003).

Economic benefits arising from increased education of girls and women include: (i) faster growth of gross national product; (ii) higher rates of return on girls' versus boys' education; (iii) higher family incomes; (iv) improved participation in wage employment and in-home and non-market production; (v) higher productivity, a more skilled labor force, better employment opportunities, greater occupational mobility, and improved earnings; and (vi) the possibility of improved participation in the more capital-intensive areas of self-employment and the information sector that require literacy and numeracy (UNESCO 2003; UNESCO 2004, pp. 40–42).

Social benefits also derive from educating girls and women, including: (i) lower fertility rates; (ii) lower infant mortality

rates; (iii) improved nutrition; (iv) increased life expectancy; and (v) better opportunities for children in the next generation.

Despite national policies of gender equity, the involvement of local communities is essential in the process of encouraging the participation and success of girls in education:

> At the macro-level, government policies generally favor and promote the equal participation of girls and boys. However, discrimination usually appears when policies are interpreted and put into practice at the lower levels of the education system. For this reason, improving girls' participation requires reliable partnerships between decision-makers and local communities, sensitization campaigns, continuous dialogue between parents, teachers and children, and the participation of local communities in all educational improvement programs. (Bah-Diallo, quoted in Smulders 1997, p. 11)

The experience of the BESO Community School Activities Program (CSAP) in Ethiopia underscores Bah-Diallo's point. Evidence reported in the results of a 2000 evaluation of the program indicates that CSAP has had a large impact on increasing girls' participation and retention and has been instrumental in raising awareness about the potential and value that girls' education can have to the well-being of the family and overall development. Central to this program is the Girls Advisory Committee (GAC) formed at each participating school. Usually headed by a female teacher at the

local school and composed of school and community members as deemed appropriate in each community, the GAC's aim is to: (i) raise awareness within the school and community about the value of educating girls; (ii) support girls in their school experiences; (iii) identify factors that impede girls' persistence and participation in school and develop strategies to respond to the problems; and (iv) provide extracurricular learning experiences on subjects that may not be in the mandated government curriculum, such as marriage and healthy relationships between the sexes, personal hygiene, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS (Prouty and Tegegn 2000, pp. 12–13).

A large literature on successful strategies that might be adopted in developing countries to encourage girls' participation in education suggests the following: (i) locate schools closer to communities; (ii) promote the hiring of female teachers; (iii) lower the costs to parents; (iv) develop relevant curricula; (v) increase community participation; (vi) promote localization/decentralization; (vii) promote advocacy and social mobilization; (viii) design systems that accommodate the needs of female students; and (ix) support multiple delivery systems (Kane 1995; Rowley and Nielsen 1997; Tietjen 1997; UNICEF 1992; UNESCO 2003).

The argument has been made that quality is an important gender issue since poor quality of education can have an even more negative affect on girls than on boys. For example, in overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms, with teachers who are poorly prepared, boys' traditional assertive coping skills enable them to gain and keep teachers' attention, while girls, who are taught to be demure and who often lack confidence, are silenced. To be

marginalized by classroom dynamics in this way means having diminishing access to whatever learning is taking place. This leads to ever-dropping participation, confidence, and achievement and is one factor leading to a higher dropout and lower achievement rates for girls (Leu 2002; Mukudi 2002; Parkerson 2004).

Conclusions

Considering the vastness and variety of the literature on quality of education, recent trends are remarkably clear. They emphasize a few interrelated factors: (i) the connection between quality and school-, teacher-, and community-level empowerment; (ii) the connection between quality and school-level process; and (iii) the connection between quality and teacher effectiveness. The effective roles of the school, teachers, and community as key generators of quality, however, cannot be fully realized without a democratized policy and planning process and the provision of supporting and efficient overall system management.

The shift of orientation from top-down, mechanistic, or "technicist" thinking about education is important in the discussion of quality. In its place, a process- and collaboration-oriented focus has emerged that emphasizes partnerships between the school and community, on the one hand, and a variety of more central supporting institutions, on the other. What was once called top-down or bottom-up has been replaced by language reflecting a much more complex and dynamic set of interrelationships that emphasize both a shift of authority and accountability to the local level and collaboration and partnership between local and central institutions.

An analysis of educational quality in different contexts published by IIEP/UNESCO serves well to summarize the trends running throughout this review (Carron and Chau 1996). Based on the work of research teams in China, India, Guinea, and Mexico, this study describes a growing recognition that overall measures concentrating on better infrastructure, more textbooks, or better-trained teachers will lead to only limited quality improvements unless complementary action is taken to improve process at the school level and in the efficient *functioning of the schools*. This research comes to the commonsense conclusion, emphasized repeatedly in this review, that since it is the school level where all inputs come together and interact, it is interaction at the school level that finally determines quality of education—or quality of student learning. Understanding what is happening in schools and in classrooms is therefore a precondition for elaborating more effective quality improvement strategies.

The UNESCO *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005: Education for All—The Quality Imperative,* written nearly a decade after Carron and Chau's book, confirms the importance of the latter's observations as well as the trends outlined throughout this review. In its concluding chapter the UNESCO report states:

Identifying the best ways of improving learning outcomes is not easy, and it has been tackled in many different ways. The learning process is very complicated, but at its center is the relationship between learners and teachers. Learning is smoother where there is close correspondence between the values and objectives of both of these groups. However, the relationship is strongly conditioned by the resources available to schools, by their curriculum objectives and by the teaching practices followed (UNESCO 2004, p. 228).

The literature reviewed here highlights promising areas in which to focus programs intended to improve quality of education: focus on the school and process at the school and classroom levels and learn how students experience this process, encourage the involvement of communities in the lives of schools, and emphasize teachers' roles, their knowledge, skills, morale, and professionalism. Although the trends identified in this review are clear, it is essential that a companion piece to this review be developed that surveys the literature on quality of education written by scholars, researchers, and education professionals in less-developed countries to understand similarities and differences in perspectives.

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For additional information, please contact:

AED Global Education Center
Academy for Educational Development
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009-5721
United States

Tel: (+1-202) 884-8030
Fax: (+1-202) 884-8408
E-mail: contactinfo@aed.org

AED web site: www.aed.org