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Transforming Children's Lives Through
Innovation in Quality Education:
Implications for Policy and Practice

Katy Oswald and Kathleen Moriarty
December 2009

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Summary

This report argues for an expansion of the understanding of quality basic education, to be education that empowers students and addresses the inter-generational transmission of inequality and poverty. It argues that what is needed is an understanding of quality education that combines behaviourist and humanist approaches, infused with transformative education (TE) approaches. This report provides a framework for this broader understanding of quality education. It highlights evidence that shows transformative education approaches can help stimulate economic development, increase learning retention, lead to better cognitive performance and retention rates; increase civic engagement, raise human rights awareness to address discrimination; and promote reconciliation and reintegration. Most importantly, transformative education approaches are aimed at empowering students and can contribute to addressing inter-generational transmissions of inequality and poverty. It concludes with three recommendations for policymakers: (1) to expand the assessment of 'effective' education to include broader education outcomes, including individual and social transformation, empowerment and learner's retention rates, rather than simple test scores; (2) to include transformative education approaches in pre- and in-service training and as part of the mainstream teacher training curriculum, and; (3) that donors need to increase long-term and predictable funding to meet the existing annual \$7.2 billion gap in education financing globally.

Keywords: education; quality; transformation; empowerment; innovation.

Katy Oswald is a Research Officer in the Participation, Power and Social Change Team at the Institute of Development Studies. She has ten years' experience as an international development practitioner and policy analyst, including three years working for DFID as a Social Development Adviser. She is a political sociologist, with an interest in education, learning and capacity development for social change, with a particular focus on the potential of education and learning to transform. Katy has worked on education policy and practice and capacity development in Cameroon, China and Bangladesh.

Kathleen Moriarty at the time of writing was the Education Advocacy Advisor in the Policy Department of Save the Children UK, where she had responsibility for international advocacy on education in conflict affected fragile states and humanitarian emergencies. Kathleen has a BA in Sociology from the London School of Economics, an MA in Latin American Development Studies and a PGCE specialising in Sociology and Special Education Needs. Kathleen has lived and worked in Latin America and conducted research on popular education in Central America. Kathleen is now working as a freelance consultant in the field of education and international development.

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This Practice Paper represents the views of the authors only.

Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	United Kingdom's Department for International Development
EFA	Education for All
FyA	<i>Fe y Alegria</i>
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GYFA	Gulu Youth for Action
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
LIC	Low Income Countries
PROPAZ	Programa de Promoção da Paz
SAQMEQ	South African Quality Monitoring and Evaluation Consortium
TE	Transformative Education
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1 Background and context

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this practice paper is to contribute to and stimulate current debates on quality basic education. It aims to generate reflection among policymakers and practitioners on differing approaches to quality and to broaden discussion on how to ensure that all children receive quality education.

The paper starts from the premise that there is a crisis in quality in many countries in the global South, with poor quality education being the norm for many children. Although no agreed global figure exists on the extent of this crisis, it is widely recognised that large numbers of children are experiencing education in unsatisfactory conditions, with limited resources, often without the support of qualified teachers (UNESCO 2007). For these children, education is failing to support even the most basic learning and in the majority of cases is not enabling them to reach their full potential.

The paper does not attempt to argue that all problems facing quality can be overcome easily or quickly; it does, however, propose that only by widening aspirations of what quality education can and should do, and embracing innovation in our approaches (to achieving quality) education can contribute to the reduction of persistent patterns of discrimination, inequity and violence that impact the lives of millions of children across the world.

The Education for All (EFA) global initiative, which began in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, and was reaffirmed in the six EFA goals in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, continues to be the primary framework for education policy in developing countries. This was reiterated in the second of the Millennium Development Goals which calls for Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015. Huge gains have been made in increasing access and approximately 40 million more children have gained access to school since 2000; however, 75 million children still remain out of school. Hidden behind this welcome success story though, is the issue of quality. Education is failing many children. Children are not learning what they should at the primary level, leaving them unprepared for the requirements of secondary curricula (Hanushek and Wößmann 2007). Evidence from macro-level studies also suggests that little correlation has been found between the number of years spent in school and the economic return from schooling for the individual or for the individual's country (DFID 2008).

Real constraints exist in resources and capacity, and the crisis in the quality of education will not be resolved overnight, however, current approaches to quality education are not delivering for many of the world's most marginalised and disempowered children. Millions of children throughout the world experience disempowerment as a consequence of their identity, and as a result of prejudice and discrimination in the system or in the classroom. Other children experience marginalisation and disempowerment as a consequence of poverty, disasters, conflict, and environmental change. Education, which is widely understood as a social good and a basic human right, is failing them.

Overcoming these challenges and addressing deeply engrained patterns of exclusion and poverty transmission across generations requires a re-thinking of how to achieve quality and the function of education within society. This paper seeks to push the boundaries of current debates on the pursuit for quality by arguing that quality education should be understood as that which helps to reduce injustice, marginalisation and disempowerment, and helps fulfil children's rights. Quality education should contribute to the significant changes needed in the lives of children who suffer marginalisation and disempowerment.

This practice paper will do this in two ways: firstly, it provides a critical reading of the prominent discourse on 'quality' as it is applied to the EFA movement. The paper demonstrates the extent to which this term is used with a multiplicity of, and sometimes inconsistent, meanings. Further, the paper argues that none of the dominant interpretations of quality include an operative framework that links quality education directly to reducing injustice, and promotes empowerment and social change, particularly of a kind that could improve qualitatively the life experience of marginalised and disempowered children. Given that the majority of EFA programmes are directed at developing country contexts, this seems a significant omission.

Secondly, this paper assesses whether transformative education approaches can augment current EFA programmes by making empowerment and social change a more central aim of pedagogy and the curriculum, through the development of students as active citizens. The paper includes evidence from around the world, which demonstrates that transformative education approaches have led to empowerment and social change in a variety of contexts and dimensions worldwide. The paper therefore also explores the policy and practice implications for integrating Transformative Education approaches into the concept and practice of quality education, and makes some practical recommendations for funding, capacity, assessment and the policy environment.

This practice paper draws on two sources:

- 1 A literature review undertaken on 'Quality Education for Social Change' (Bivens *et al.* 2008).
- 2 Research carried out in Colombia in August 2009. The research was undertaken in two locations, one rural, one urban: an *Escuela Nueva* school in the village of Combia Chiquita, in Fredonia; and Learning Circles in Commune IV, Soacha, in Altos de Cazuca municipality, located 1 km west of the city of Bogotá.

The drive to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) has resulted in an increase in the number of children in school, and subsequently impacted on the quality of education they receive. Ongoing resource constraints continue to hamper progress. This paper acknowledges the reality of those challenges and the efforts that have been made to date. It asks policymakers and practitioners – at this critical juncture on the road to 2015 – what type of outcomes do we want education to provide for children, and how can quality education support a path towards justice, empowerment and social change?

1.2 The ‘quality’ context

Quality is at the heart of education, and what takes place in the classrooms and other learning environments is fundamentally important to the future wellbeing of children, young people and adults. A quality education is one that satisfies basic learning needs, and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living.

Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO 2000: 17)

In the nearly ten years since this statement was written, the reality for those children lucky enough to be in school has not matched the aspiration set out above. Beyond the 75 million children excluded from the opportunity to go to school because of poverty, conflict and prejudice, millions more are crammed into overcrowded classrooms without basic teaching and learning resources, being taught by under-qualified and if qualified, poorly paid teachers who lack the motivation or capacity to help them achieve even their basic learning needs, let alone enabling them to enjoy an education that enriches their lives (see UNESCO 2007: 34). The crisis facing the quality of education is real, and the significant progress that has been made in increasing enrolments will be undermined if education continues to be irrelevant and of poor quality. Poor parents will continue to question the value of sending their children to school and children themselves will fail to see the relevance of attending school if their experience is one of lack of learning, discrimination or even abuse.

As access to basic education increases, international attention has turned towards quality. As a consequence a debate around improving the quality of education has gained increasing amounts of attention in recent years, as a means of addressing not only the challenge of getting children into school and enhancing the educative experience that they receive over the years but also to reduce dropout rates and encourage completion of a full course of primary education. Poor quality and irrelevant education is often cited by parents and students as a reason for dropping out of school. However, the debates over how to define, improve and measure ‘quality’ in practice continue.

The 2005 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) which focused specifically on quality stated that two principles characterise most attempts to define quality in education: ‘...the first identifies learners’ cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems. The second emphasizes education’s role in promoting [the] values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development’ (UNESCO 2005: 15). These two principles can be characterised as the behaviourist approach and the humanist approach respectively.

The humanist approach, informed by constructionist learning theory derived from the works of Dewey and Piaget (*ibid.*: 32), adopts a broad definition of quality in education, emphasising the role of education in human and social development. The humanist approach can be seen to support the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – the most widely ratified international human rights treaty –

that affords all children the right to quality education. Article 29 sets out ‘the need for education to be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering and it highlights the need for educational processes to be based on the very principles it enunciates’ (UNCRC 2001: para 2).

The report acknowledged that the humanist approach is harder to assess and compare across countries. Partly because of this, the focus on behaviourist understandings of quality has become dominant within the quality debate as governments and donors alike seek to quantify improvements in quality. This drive for easily measurable quality indicators may be, or is, in danger of distorting the focus of quality education and limiting education’s potential to enable children who leave school with a range of outcomes including new knowledge skills, attitudes which reflect human rights values, and an ability to question and make informed decisions. As research funded by DFID states:

[...] a focus on a simple measurement of cognitive learning may be detrimental to learning more broadly conceived as acquiring a balanced skill set and attitudes that will extend what learners can do and be [and] that they have reason to value [...]

(Barrett 2009)

A key question is what is considered an ‘effective school’. ‘Effectiveness’ functions as a rubric for assessing quality; however, this assessment of ‘effectiveness’ often takes test scores to be the primary measure for assessing educational quality. As argued by Barrett, this could be detrimental to supporting broader learning objectives.

Both the behaviourist and humanist approaches to quality have validity. Cognitive development, stressed by behaviourists, is of course central to any definition or approach to quality; equally, the creative, child-centred approaches advocated by the humanists are important to the experience of education and learning. However, returning to Article 29 of the UNCRC, this leaves the ‘empowering’ element of education out of the quality definition. The question still remains, as to what type of quality education can help empower students and address marginalisation? While there is a wealth of literature on quality – and increasingly sophisticated debates on the use of international assessments such as the South African Quality Monitoring and Evaluation Consortium (SAQMEQ) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), for example – there is less discussion on the contribution that ‘quality education’ has made to the significant changes needed in the lives of children who suffer marginalisation and disempowerment.

The 2005 GMR does refer to ‘critical approaches to quality’. The report recognises that critical approaches share some similarities with humanist approaches. However, in addition, critical approaches are concerned with ‘inequality in access to and outcomes of education and on education’s role in legitimising and reproducing social structures through its transmission of a certain type of knowledge that serves certain social groups’ (UNESCO 2005: 34). Accordingly, critical approaches equate good quality with: ‘education that prompts social change; a curriculum and teaching methods that encourage critical analysis of

social power relations and of ways in which formal knowledge is produced and transmitted; and active participation by learners in the design of their own learning experience' (*ibid.*: 34).

Importantly, advocates of this approach argue that quality education should 'empower marginalized students by helping them analyse their experience – and thus redress social inequality and injustice' (*ibid.*: 34).

Despite appearing in the 2005 GMR report, the report does not include critical approaches in its definition of quality. This report argues that it is precisely this understanding of quality education that is missing from the current dominant discourse and debate. Whilst humanist understandings of quality do focus on rights and citizenship to some degree, both school effectiveness studies and learner-centred approaches focus on learners as individuals and generally fail to locate such learners in larger social and global contexts. Neither approach may be sufficient to provide a framework which helps us understand an educational approach where quality is measured by the extent to which learners are empowered, or may exert agency upon the prevailing inequity and injustice in their lives and in society. This understanding of quality could be strengthened by drawing on transformative education approaches that have an explicit aim to enable students to acquire knowledge and skills that are relevant for their lives, enabling them to take an active part in all areas of community life. Transformative education is concerned with changing the situation of marginalised groups and to contributing to equitable and sustainable development.

This paper will argue that transformative education approaches (as defined in the next section) are able to support this kind of empowering education and thus address marginalisation and injustice in ways that more traditional approaches cannot.

2 What is transformative education?

Transformative education (TE) has its origins in adult education, although there are examples of TE approaches being used in primary and secondary education, some of which will be described in Section 4. Whilst there are different forms of transformative pedagogy, Grabov (1997) suggests that there are a number of commonalities including 'humanism, emancipation, autonomy, critical reflection, equity, self-knowledge, participation, communication and discourse' (p90). There are other types of pedagogy that include some of these elements, but a broad TE approach is pedagogy that combines all the following basic principles:

Critical reflection and action

The combination of critical reflection and action is sometimes referred to as 'problem posing' pedagogy. Students are encouraged to think critically, challenge their own and others assumptions, and reflect on inconsistencies in what they have learnt and what they have experienced. This is not a one-off event, but an ongoing process of continuous reflection and action, described by transformative

educators as praxis (Freire 1970) and leading to sustained personal and social change.

Context-relevant pedagogy and active citizenship

The curriculum should be designed around the local context, using real problems as the starting point for critical reflection. Education must start where the students are (Horton and Friere 1990). The emphasis is on connecting knowledge with community issues and action, and this requires students to undertake learning projects beyond the school so that they can actively learn by investigating issues in their community. A TE approach is designed to open up democratic spaces for participatory construction of curricula and learning outcomes. This not only encourages the engagement of students but can also heighten community participation, creating community-wide coalitions for learning and action regarding pressing local development issues. Participatory curricula development and linking the curriculum to local contexts is gaining popularity; the uniqueness of a TE approach is linking this to critical reflection on local realities and active citizenship.

Mutual learning

The TE approach values students existing knowledge and conceptualises learning as a two-way dialogue between the 'student-teacher' and the 'teacher-students' (Friere 1970) to demonstrate that teachers and students can learn from each other. This requires a different mode of preparation and pedagogical methods from teachers. Instead of giving information directly to children, teachers encourage them to actively discover ideas and information and aggregate their collective knowledge to reach conclusions, rather than only expecting the 'answers' from the teacher. The teacher is very much a facilitator, rather than a custodian of knowledge.

Psycho-social support

As well as using rational critical reflection, TE approaches should encompass an 'intuitive, creative, and emotional process' (Grabov 1997: 90). Therefore, TE approaches place an emphasis on supporting emotional development alongside cognitive development.

TE approaches fit easily within a development paradigm that stresses contextualised and participatory processes. They are also compatible with the humanist approach to education quality. What they add is a concern with issues of power, and the requirement to rethink the dynamics and practices in the classroom. Moreover, TE approaches are concerned at the macro-level with equitable social change and enabling all children (and adults) to be active participants in the life of their communities, economically, socially and politically. Bivens *et al.* (2009) argue that good quality, transformative education has a key role to play in overcoming inter-generational transmissions of inequality for children and their communities, with positive outcomes not only for the individuals themselves, but also for wider social processes. Through applying the principles

of critical reflection and action, developing context-relevant pedagogy, encouraging mutual learning and providing psycho-social support, a TE approach supports students to understand their own problems and then act in ways that can address those problems as active citizens, thus empowering them.

3 Can transformative education approaches improve our understanding of quality?

In developing contexts – especially given that half the world’s out of school children live in fragile, conflict-ridden circumstances – the need for education to be extremely contextualised and relevant to daily life, and survival – is enormous (Taylor and Mulhall 2001). It is important to examine other innovative approaches to achieving quality education and integrate these into the policy and practice as we move to 2015 and beyond. TE approaches can reinvigorate the quality debate, and the evidence documented in Section 4 suggests that they are viable approaches for governments and donors to support.

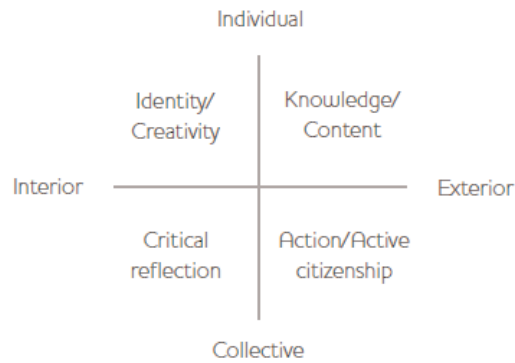
This paper argues that if the behaviourist approach was coupled with a humanist understanding of quality education, that was infused with TE approaches (as defined in the previous section), the combination could facilitate the fulfillment of children’s right to quality education as understood in the UNCRC. Quality education would be understood as that which is empowering as well as being child-centred and child-friendly. As described above, TE approaches are concerned with and aim to redress traditional inequitable power relations and have a role to play in overcoming inter-generational transmissions of inequality and poverty (Bivens *et al.* 2009).

Bivens *et al.* (*ibid.*) have developed a visual representation of what this expanded understanding of quality education would entail which is shown in Figure 3.1.

The behaviourist approach to quality is the *upper right* quadrant. This incorporates ‘core’ elements such as literacy and numeracy into the curriculum as central elements. Cognitive development remains a central aim, but content is appropriate to the context. The *upper left* quadrant incorporates much of the humanist approach to quality with learning focused on students’ personal growth and development. Humanist and TE approaches to quality overlap in the *lower left* quadrant, both understanding personal critical reflection as being part of quality education. Finally, the *lower right* quadrant is unique to TE approaches, as it envisions the outcome of education as action/active citizenship. After serious reflection and questioning, learners are encouraged to test their evolving world views outside the classroom by taking action to address inequalities and injustices in the community. In TE, action/active citizenship is the indicator of effectiveness because action demonstrates that empowerment has taken place and that education has led to social change (*ibid.*).

Figure 3.1 Graphic description of quality education with transformative dimensions

Figure 1 Graphic description of quality education with transformative dimensions



Source: Bivens *et al.* (2009), reproduced with permission.

TE approaches are clearly distinctive from both the behaviourist and humanists approaches to quality. TE approaches call for a rethinking of the dynamics and practices in the classroom, and regard the purpose of education to be social transformation as well as individual transformation. TE approaches imply a change in process: more participation, more reflection, more critical analysis and more engagement with the realities just beyond the classroom (*ibid.*). However, TE approaches do not imply a radical re-formulation of every aspect of current approaches to quality. In fact, TE shares a number of characteristics in terms of both methodology (i.e. child-centred learning) and outcomes (i.e. cognitive development, life skills).

Writers like Cowhey (2006), hooks (1994), Sotto (1994) and Palmer (1993) (discussed in the next section) demonstrate clearly that TE approaches are fully compatible with quality, and formal educational contexts. Indeed, these educators have become widely-known and influential because of their innovative techniques for embedding transformative approaches within mainstream teaching spaces. Neither does it mean sacrificing curricular content; rather, it encourages and enables learners to use this basic knowledge as a tool for addressing immediately their most pressing needs. Rather than being objects of educational goals, students become the subjects of education, transforming their learning into a vital resource to meet their needs and achieve their objectives, thus transforming the educational sector into a tremendous engine for social change.

There is increasing evidence that cognitive development and students' learning is inextricably linked to the emotional and social development that TE approaches support. For example, Daniel Goleman (1996) has provided evidence from pilot programmes in schools from New York City to Oakland in the USA that suggests that if students are encouraged to find the information themselves with the teacher as a guide or facilitator in their information-finding venture, then they will learn more and be much more empowered. Neurologist Damasio (1994) argues that rationality stems from our emotions, and that our emotions stem from our

bodily senses. Feeling is an indispensable ingredient of rational thought. Therefore, supporting emotional development will actually contribute to and enhance the development of cognitive and rational intelligence as well.

A review of existing literature commissioned by IDS and Save the Children UK (Bivens *et al.* 2008) cautions that current approaches – even if resourced fully – will not lead to inclusion of the most marginalised groups or deliver change for children in the hardest to reach contexts. Continuing to pursue a narrower understanding of quality will fail to bring about the changes so desperately needed in the poorest and most fragile states. While a few sections of the population will progress, too many will remain excluded. Of course, there are always exceptions and some children will flourish against the odds, however, the majority will leave school without the benefit of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for them to reach their full potential and to be active citizens in their societies. Education will run the risk of continuing to be seen as irrelevant, and children will either not enrol or drop out before completing even basic education. TE encourages learners to take control of their own circumstances, as they learn to perceive how their power and field of action has been limited.

Although within formal education TE approaches are still relatively under-used, evidence does exist to warrant serious consideration of their potential incorporation into the concept and practice of quality education (see examples in Section 4). Furthermore, many practices not specifically named as transformative share many common principles of TE approaches. For example, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) minimum standards, widely accepted as a core text for education in humanitarian crisis outlines a number of principles that are shared with TE approaches. Many emergency education programmes inherently include transformative approaches, emphasising learners' psychosocial health, self-expression, identity and confidence which have long been initial steps of transformative education (Mezirow and Associates 1990). The aim of helping disempowered victims of conflicts come to envision themselves as future participants in national rebuilding is, by definition, a transformative process. As such, it becomes evident that some elements of transformative education have already been endorsed as part of a quality approach to education within the small but growing literature on education in emergencies.

If we understand quality education as one that empowers students, addresses inequality and also develops the core attributes of active citizenship, we need to include TE approaches in the existing concept and practice of quality education. TE approaches would support this through the inclusion of locally relevant knowledge and the emphasis on empowering children to take action to improve the world around them, and to facilitate social change. It encourages the child to put their learning to direct use, to take their new knowledge into their everyday lives where they can share ideas on health, nutrition and peace, and challenge conventional wisdom on gender stereotypes and other issues of social exclusion.

The end goal of quality education should not be measured in purely individualist terms – high examination results, completion and higher wages – it should widen aspirations, beyond the individual, to society at large, to overcome existing patterns of poverty and social exclusion. TE approaches encourage this wider social change, imbuing children with an inherent knowledge of their right to

participate and have a voice in society. The nearer the world comes to achieving Education for All, with millions of new students of all ages entering educational programmes, then the more opportunity arises for each of them to become a change agent and to work within their communities to carry forward development processes in a pertinent, locally knowledgeable and effective manner.

4 Transforming children's lives through TE approaches: the evidence

This section draws on evidence from a review of literature on TE approaches from around the world and a Colombian case study of two examples of primary schools using TE approaches: an *Escuela Nueva* school and a Learning Circles Programme. This case study is based on research carried out in Colombia in August 2009 commissioned by IDS and Save the Children UK.

The evidence from the wider literature makes a compelling case that the introduction of TE approaches into mainstream education can support improvements in quality education. TE approaches appear to contribute to many of the quality outcomes associated with the behaviourist model, such as increasing learning retention and cognitive development, as well as supporting education outcomes that help fulfil aspects of the UNCRC; for instance, participation, rights awareness and empowerment. The evidence from these case studies demonstrates that TE approaches can have an impact on the inter-generational transmission of inequality and poverty. Whilst not all the case studies meet the definition of a TE approach outlined in Section 2 of this paper, all of them combine two or more of the principles and serve to demonstrate that by adopting these principles we can improve our understanding of quality education and the contribution education can make to challenging inequality and social exclusion.

The Colombian case study describes what using TE approaches in primary education entails in practice, and demonstrates that it is viable and realistic for governments and donors to support such approaches at the primary level.

Further in-depth research is undoubtedly required; however, governments and donors should consider the evidence already available as they develop policies for improving quality in education.

4.1 Evidence from the wider literature

4.1.1 *Stimulating economic development*

Mayo (1999), using evidence from case studies from around the world, has explored how Transformative Education at the community level can stimulate

social change and strengthen local economic development. This is particularly significant as research from DFID suggests that the fastest growing labour markets in the developing world are those that require skills and ways of thinking that 'equate to 2 to 3 years of (good quality) secondary education' (2007). Given that so few students in the developing world have the opportunity to make an uninterrupted journey through the many years of primary and secondary school, Mayo's ideas on how TE approaches can empower communities to re-educate community members are incredibly important for local and global processes of development.

4.1.2 Increasing learning retention

Sotto (1994) makes a detailed case for how TE approaches not only empower students but fundamentally help them to learn better, with far greater knowledge retention than occurs in passive learning situations. Sotto demonstrates from his own practice, both in primary schools and as a consultant for businesses, how to facilitate active, engaged teaching and learning that improves the retention of knowledge, creates energy in the learning space and taps into the curiosity of students. He demonstrates that not only can participatory methods work in discussion-based classes, such as for literature, but also for those such as maths that have been traditionally associated with top-down pedagogies. He demonstrates how to structure classroom time with challenging activities that ask learners to put their knowledge into use in the classroom immediately, in collaboration with other students or participants.

4.1.3 Better cognitive performance and retention rates

Forero-Pineda *et al.* (2006) found that *Escuela Nueva* schools (which practice TE approaches across South America) have an impact on cognitive and democratic behaviour, which suggest better cognitive achievements and civic behaviour. Using quantitative data comparing *Escuela Nueva* schools to conventional schools in six municipalities in Colombia, the study found that the use of *Escuela Nueva* methodologies has a significant positive impact on the peaceful social interaction of children as well as better effects on family and community perceptions and behaviour. They draw on Rojas and Castillo (1988) to explain the possible reasons for the better cognitive achievements of *Escuela Nueva*, which include: free study guides; better endowment of textbooks and libraries; group learning; teachers playing a role as facilitators; a flexible promotion system to the following levels; students' participation in school organisation through student governments; and the role of the school as an information centre for the community. UNESCO's First Comparative International Study on the Quality of Education (1998) found that Colombia was the only country in Latin America where rural schools obtained better results than urban schools, except in large mega cities. It also found that only Cuba was above Colombia in maths achievement results in rural areas, and concluded that this was mainly because of *Escuela Nueva*. It went on to argue that *Escuela Nueva* demonstrates that it is possible to improve the coverage, quality and equity of basic education in low income schools. A detailed case study on an *Escuela Nueva* school in Colombia was commissioned for this paper and is outlined below.

Fe y Alegria (FyA) is a movement and a network of schools started in 1955 in Venezuela by a Jesuit priest, providing quality education to students in poor rural areas and slums across South America and several other Spanish speaking countries, with the aim of empowering them in their personal development and in their participation in society. Currently, it runs a network of schools with formal programmes, as well as non-formal and alternative education for street children and other vulnerable children and adults in poor city slums and rural and Native American zones, at pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary (technical education) levels. In 2003, there were over 1.2 million students in the FyA network – up from just 220,000 in 1980. Usually under FyA model, the Ministry of Education pays the salaries of teachers while FyA trains and supervises teachers and assists the school as a community development centre. Montoya (2004) reviewed the quality and cost efficiency of FyA schools, in the context of public-private partnerships. He drew on a previous evaluation study (Swope and Latorre 1998) and suggests that FyA schools have lower repetition and dropout rates than do other public schools, even though FyA schools are located in poorer areas. Yet, he argues that FyA schools that emerged as a popular education movement driven by liberation theology and the left-wing social movement most notably in Brazil under the influence of Freire, have been reconfigured to fit the neoliberal framing of public-private partnerships.

4.1.4 Increasing civic engagement

Furin (2003) reviewed the transformative aspects of *Fe y Alegria* schools. This paper highlights ‘a Pedagogy of Community’ adopted in primary and secondary FyA schools for the indigenous population on a high Andean plain in Bolivia. ‘A Pedagogy of Community’ is based on a philosophy that: recognises the uniqueness of each person within the community, in which individual and cultural differences are celebrated; promotes a community of cultural synthesis; is democratic in nature; encourages the development of shared leadership responsibilities; utilises ongoing dialogue to identify a common, living mission; and manifests a unifying ethical and moral philosophy that guides individual and group actions dedicated to principles of social justice through education. *Fe y Alegria* celebrates both cultural and individual differences.

4.1.5 Increasing human rights awareness to address discrimination

Through a process of critical reflection and action, students in Senegal, upon learning in their school that education is a human right, began to question why so many of their neighbours were not allowed to attend school. The students learned what was needed to register the other children for school, collected the appropriate forms and canvassed door to door through the neighbourhood until the entire community was eligible to enrol. This action resulted in adding 4,500 students to the school system (Bivens *et al.* 2009).

Through Children’s Clubs formed at Nepalese schools, students have become active campaigners to improve the quality of their education. They have held rallies to encourage enrolment of marginalised castes and they have spoken out against both caste and gender discrimination. When school teachers themselves

have acted in a discriminatory manner, the clubs have taken public action and had the teachers censured. Some clubs have also become active in combating community practices of forced marriage and have intervened in cases where their classmates have been involved (Pradham 2008).

4.1.6 Promoting reconciliation and reintegration

The Education for Peace programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina brought together schools across ethnic groups and former battle lines to encourage students to take part in community theatre programmes that addressed specifically issues of the war, discrimination and distrust. Public performances of the student shows brought divided communities together for the first time since the conflict and provided a basis for dialogues on reconciliation (Clarke-Habibi 2005).

A variety of TE programmes within informal education have been successful in helping former child soldiers find ways of supporting one another. The *Programa de Promoção da Paz* (PROPAZ) programme in Mozambique helps former combatants reconcile across former battle lines and encourages them to help one another with processes of reintegration. Participants are also trained in mediation with a wider purpose of using their experiences to sensitise communities to the threat of future conflict. Since the beginning of the mediation campaign, PROPAZ participants have been responsible for the resolution of 347 documented local conflicts. Similarly the Gulu Youth for Action (GYFA) group in Uganda has been created by female ex-combatants and works with former female soldiers to develop their leadership skills. GYFA members organise and educate in refugee camps to increase knowledge of human rights, mediation skills, gender-violence prevention and sexually transmitted infections.

4.2 TE approaches in the Colombian case studies: the Escuela Nueva model

The *Escuela Nueva* programme and Learning Circles (which are based on the *Escuela Nueva* model) are examples of primary schools using TE approaches effectively.

The first *Escuela Nueva* school was established in 1975 and now they reach more than 5 million children worldwide. *Escuela Nueva* schools provide child-centred, community-based education led by teachers who are facilitators for active, participatory and cooperative learning. Previous research has suggested that *Escuela Nueva* has not only achieved goals of making students more socially conscious and engaged with their communities, but it has also enhanced cognitive development (Forero-Pineda *et al.* 2006).

Learning Circles arose as a strategy in the 2002 Colombian education policy to serve internally displaced and vulnerable children, particularly in urban areas. The model provides temporary, flexible education at the primary level, adapting *Escuela Nueva* TE approaches to urban areas. It seeks to provide children who have previously had to drop out of the formal education system with access to schooling and prepares them to re-enter the formal system. The system is

supported by the government in a geographical location where there is a high population of Internally Displaced People. Although the programme is relatively new, indications are that it is proving highly successful and is ensuring that there is a pathway into education for these children.

The TE approaches used by both *Escuela Nueva* and the Learning Circles appear to be effective not only from a humanist and a TE perspective, but also in terms of the expectations associated with the behaviourist approach. Consequently, organisations such as the World Bank, are long-standing supporters of *Escuela Nueva*.

In order to gain a better insight into how the TE approaches used by *Escuela Nueva* schools and Learning Circles are applied at the primary level, Save the Children Colombia commissioned research undertaken in two locations, one rural, one urban: in an *Escuela Nueva* school in the village of Combia Chiquita, in Fredonia; and in a Learning Circle in Commune IV, Soacha, in Altos de Cazuca municipality, located 1km west of the city of Bogota. Both *Escuela Nueva* and the Learning Circles teach primary and secondary age children using transformative approaches and techniques. The research was an exploratory qualitative study, drawing on a review of secondary data and primary data obtained using qualitative and participatory research techniques in August 2009. This included interviews, focus groups, participatory workshops and classroom observation. The researchers interviewed four teachers, 32 children, eight parents, three community leaders and observed nine classroom sessions across the two schools. The findings were collaborated using triangulation techniques.

The *Escuela Nueva* approach has five components which are implemented in all schools: child-centred, active, participatory and cooperative learning; innovative flexible curriculum relevant to children's daily life; effective, practical and ongoing teacher training; strategies for community participation and involvement in the learning process; new roles for teachers as facilitators of learning.

Free and non-selective

All *Escuela Nueva* schools (including the one in Combia Chiquita) are state funded and free for children to attend, there is also no selection criteria. This is the same for all the Learning Circles in Colombia.

Multi-grade system

Both the *Escuela Nueva* school and the Learning Circle in this study, use a multi-grade system, with children of a variety of ages in each class. This is something that many schools have to do out of necessity and find difficult to implement; however, the *Escuela Nueva* model has developed innovative ways of addressing some of the difficulties associated with multi-grade systems. Through using child-centred pedagogy that emphasises flexibility and personalised attention, rather than working as a single class, with everyone learning the same lesson at the same time and pace, classes are broken into small groupings of four or five students who work collaboratively on projects that have been assigned to

them. Such scenarios allow flexibility in learning; and take into account each child's individual learning pace.

Participatory curriculum design

In both schools in the study, much of the curriculum is designed in conjunction with the local context. Learning programmes are designed to be carried beyond the classroom, into the home and community. As *Escuela Nueva's* President, Vicky Colbert, has said of the *Escuela Nueva* curriculum, 'anything the child learns has to be relevant and applied with the family and the community. That way, you ensure that the child becomes an agent of change in his or her family' (Nee 2008). This strategy is intended to improve coverage and completion rates within all *Escuela Nueva* schools, as well as learning outcomes for children in rural communities, because the children and their family regard the education as useful and relevant to their lives. Beyond the typical subjects, children are also encouraged to think about rights, ethics and cooperation. They learn about peace issues and expand on these ideas through role-plays that are performed in front of parents and communities to heighten awareness of the importance of these issues.

Flexible and personalised evaluation

Both schools use tools for self-evaluation which are managed by the students. For example, the Learning Circles use both self-evaluation and hetero-evaluation. Self-evaluation is performed by the student. Based on self-reflection and comments from the teacher on his/her work, the child evaluates themselves on a scale: Excellent, Outstanding or Acceptable. Hetero-evaluation involves the teacher evaluating the student's work in parallel, followed by a discussion between the student and teacher as to why they have both chosen the level they have, and a consensus is found between them on the final level. They also agree individual commitments to improve performance. Every two months the teacher checks whether the child has reached the milestones set for each period and assigns the child a score. Such an approach encourages the student to engage in critical self-reflection on their own learning, and also provides an individual and contextualised form of assessment that takes into account a child's individual circumstances.

Community engagement

Outside the classroom, students in the *Escuela Nueva* school are active in the life of the school. In Combia Chiquita they had established a student council to make democratic choices about how to improve the school. The emphasis on connecting knowledge with community issues requires students to undertake learning projects beyond the school so that they can actively learn by investigating issues in their community. In Combia Chiquita this had included working with the local Federation of Coffee Growers to encourage families to return to coffee growing and investigate why families were abandoning this tradition. The children encouraged to be agents of change to make their communities better, through

tackling important and unaddressed issues. The school in Combia Chiquita also provides literacy classes for adult community members to encourage a sense of ownership of the school and spread the benefits to the wider community.

5 Implications for policy and practice

Quality is a contested notion, however, the policy requirements for any improvement in quality are largely similar and all include the need for increased funding; capacity development; effective systems of monitoring and evaluation and an open and flexible policy environment. If children's right to quality education is to be realised and if societies' underlying inequity – expressed in discrimination, disempowerment, poverty and violence – can begin to be challenged, then the inclusion of progressive and innovative education practices, such as TE approaches, can make a contribution.

The biggest obstacle to the incorporation of transformative education into mainstream education is not capacity or resource constraints – although these are real and need attention – but a change in the attitude and mindset of politicians and policymakers.

While literacy and numeracy are indicators of one aspect of the quality of education, on their own they are not sufficient. Children need to leave school with the ability to critically analyse their surroundings and make informed choices about their lives. This means education must address inequitable power relations and prepare children to become active members of their community and wider society. This requires a shift in commonly held views about the nature and function of education, to ensure that education's central role is to address discrimination, exclusion and inequity. A concerted effort to advocate for the benefits that TE approaches can bring to solving the crisis in quality education is required. Policymakers and practitioners will also need to be persuaded that it is a workable solution which does not require a revolution, rather a reform and rethinking of current policy and practice.

Barrett *et al.* (2007) have argued that whilst increased inputs into education will be enabling then they can only be discussed meaningfully in terms of *who* they enable (context, knowledge and experience of teachers and learners) to do *what* (literacy, Life Skills etc.) and *how* (participatory, learner-centred, inclusive etc.). Therefore, adopting TE approaches have implications for who, what and how the various inputs (such as finance and capacity) enable quality education.

5.1 Financing

In policy terms, improving access to quality education requires increased investment by governments and predictable external aid for education. The current estimated cost of achieving UPE by 2015 is US\$11 billion annually, with the largest share – estimated at over 70 per cent – needed to support the

recurrent costs of teachers' salaries. This requires governments to increase allocation for education to at least 20 per cent of national budgets (which in some instances will require externally imposed constraints, such as wage bill caps to be lifted). Donors will also need to increase long term predictable aid for basic education to meet the current \$7.2 billion annual funding gap.

To date no large scale global estimate has been made on how much achieving full access to quality education would cost, although work in Latin America has been developed to cost out the basic minimum requirements for quality education (Carreira and Pinto 2007). Equally, no large scale study for global costing of TE approaches exists; however, analysis of the *Escuela Nueva* in Colombia – the longest running large scale TE programme at primary level – suggests that TE may be more cost beneficial in the longer term than regular public provision because there is far less repetition in this programme than in the public model, thus making the transformative model cheaper over the lifetime of the student (see McGinn 1996).

5.2 Capacity

In many countries, particularly in fragile contexts, years of neglect and under-investment due to conflict or corruption have left education systems weakened, and in many countries there is a lack of capacity from the ministry downwards. Whether or not TE approaches are used within an education system, substantial increased investment is needed to address gaps in capacity across the education system in most developing countries.

The introduction of TE education practice on a large scale would, of course, require capacity building to support the core strands of the approach – such as child-centred pedagogies, curriculum revision, and supporting parental and community engagement in education design and governance. This would have implications for education officials at national, district and local levels, and for school staff.

As the McKinsey report (2007) noted 'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' and a sufficient number of teachers trained in TE teaching and learning methodologies is vital for quality, transformative education. In addition to the increases in funding, already outlined above, incorporating TE into mainstream approaches has implications for pre- and in-service training of teachers. Governments will need to strengthen current teacher training policies and programmes through the inclusion of TE in teacher training institutes. Teachers will need to be competent in and comfortable with these approaches, particularly existing teachers (and/or those training the teachers), who are accustomed to more traditional approaches, and who would require a shift in thinking about classroom relations. TE methodology is not highly theoretical and in-service training for existing teachers who may lack formal qualifications would be possible.

5.3 Monitoring and evaluation

A recent review of the literature on quality education found that the dominant discourse on school effectiveness is intensively quantitative and relies heavily on testing and test scores to verify effectiveness and hence quality (Bivens *et al.* 2009). The perceived needs for measurement and assessment of learning are powerful drivers in education, influencing, for example, the World Bank's reliance on rates of return on educational investment. This quantitative framework does not appear to support or promote pedagogical approaches that focus on learner transformation and empowerment, or approaches that engage directly with processes of social change within communities. Although testing produces measurable outcomes that are clear and easily analysed at one level, Goldstein (2004) points out that even high test scores sometimes do not equate with observed learning outcomes among students. Goldstein's research also describes how curricula built around testing outcomes undermines teacher professionalism by necessitating highly structured learning modules that emphasise 'teaching to the test' and that leave little room for teacher autonomy and creativity in the classroom.

There is nothing wrong inherently with measurement and testing, since there is no doubt that learning is enhanced when learners understand how they are progressing and appropriate support is then provided. It is important that those who plan and fund education should know to what extent they are contributing to different sets of development goals and aims. A problem lies, however, in the way that the increasing dominance of the behaviourist model has led to an over-reliance on testing and measurement. This ignores the wider outcomes education can contribute to, such as significant changes within individuals *and* within society more widely.

The introduction of TE into mainstream primary education has implications for changes in how children's development and progress is assessed, with a move away from standardised testing and the necessity for developing increased capacities among teachers, school management and local authority staff. This requires a shift in thinking on the part of policymakers and politicians to consider sustainability and value for money in the medium to longer term. While short term improvements in literacy and numeracy test scores can act as a proxy for cognitive development and education improvement, they do not necessarily reflect a child's ability to comprehend or apply the knowledge and skills they have learnt.

The self-assessment models used by *Escuela Nueva* offer an alternative to traditional measuring and testing. Currently few schools are able to offer that level of expertise and resources needed to implement self-assessment methods. An investment by the Ministry of Education in a well trained school inspectorate to help monitor progress and support in-service training programmes for key staff would also be necessary.

5.4 Policy environment

Change requires time but as international debates turn from access to intensifying efforts on quality, TE approaches could be smoothly incorporated from the outset.

While further investigation into TE in the formal school sector would be beneficial, evidence from non-formal youth and adult TE (Bivens *et al.* 2009), are sufficiently compelling to suggest that TE should be part of future policy and practice on quality education. Even so, there seems to be under-utilisation of the capacity of TE to amplify and accelerate the positive social impacts of education at all levels and ultimately to drive forward the wider processes of development, by nurturing the critical participation of children in the classroom, their school and wider community.

Policymakers find themselves under a great deal of pressure to achieve the goals set out by the EFA framework. TE approaches may help to provide an effective way to move students through the system more rapidly and more economically. The *Escuela Nueva* model was recognised by the World Bank in 1989 as one of the best innovations in global development. The model has been praised for simultaneously addressing issues of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and equity through changes in pedagogical processes at the classroom level rather than through significant changes at the other levels of the educational system (Kline 2002).

6 Conclusion

This practice paper has argued that the international community needs to adopt a broader understanding of quality education. Quality education should be education that empowers students and addresses the inter-generational transmission of inequality and poverty. Only then can education contribute to the overarching development goals of reducing poverty and inequality.

It has argued that by developing an understanding of quality education that combines behaviourist and humanist approaches, infused with TE approaches, the international community could support the delivery of this kind of quality education. The paper has presented a suggested framework for this broader understanding of quality (see Figure 3.1).

This paper has argued that TE approaches can make personal and social transformation a more central aim of pedagogy and curriculum, through the development of students as active citizens. The paper has illustrated, using evidence from existing literature, that TE approaches have:

- Stimulated economic development;
- Increased learning retention;
- Led to better cognitive performance and retention rates;
- Increased civic engagement;
- Raised human rights awareness to address discrimination; and
- Promoted reconciliation and reintegration.

The expansion of an understanding of quality education has some implications for policy and practice, and this paper has made some recommendations:

- 1 Quality education should be education that empowers students and addresses the inter-generational transmission of inequality and poverty. Therefore, the assessment of 'effective' education needs to be expanded to include broader education outcomes that reflect this goal, including individual and social transformation, empowerment and learners' retention rates, rather than simple test scores.
- 2 In order to ensure TE approaches are integrated into the mainstream curriculum, TE approaches need to be included in pre- and in-service training and be part of the mainstream teacher training curriculum.
- 3 Donors need to increase long-term and predictable funding to meet the existing annual \$7.2 billion gap in education financing globally.

It is essential that policymakers look beyond current policies which could limit the potential of quality education, and refresh their approaches through the inclusion of new innovative approaches such as TE. It is better to lay the groundwork even in the most resource poor and crisis affected settings, to enable education systems to develop which are capable of including all children and enabling them to leave school with a broad set of capabilities that support their rights.

The aim of strengthening education quality should be to build education systems that promote skilled, equitable, stable societies. There is an imperative to find solutions and educational outcomes that transform the lives of all children. In all environments, even those currently furthest from the MDG and EFA goals, quality education must offer children the opportunity to learn in a safe and supportive environment, where inclusion and respect for their rights will help them overcome experiences of trauma, displacement, and social marginalisation. If experience is a foundation for learning, then the children that experience transformative quality education in the classroom and school environments will be more likely to become active citizens – economically, socially and politically – now and in the future.

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