

# UNESCO FRAMEWORK, POLICIES AND CURRENT DISCUSSION ON CURRICULUM ISSUES

## 1. UNESCO Framework, Progress and Challenge

### UNESCO Framework

1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education For All (EFA) – Holistic approach  
Dakar Framework of Action (2000) Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015  
Global Action Plan: Improving Support to Countries in Achieving the EFA  
Goals EFA Global Monitoring Report

### EFA Goals by 2015

- Expansion of early childhood care and education
- Provision of free and compulsory primary education for all
- Promotion of learning and life skills for young people and adults
- Increase of adult literacy by 50 per cent
- Achievement of gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015
- Improvement of the quality of education

### Progress in Attaining EFA Goals

- Nearly 20 million new students in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia entered primary schools.
- 47 countries achieved universal primary education.
- More girls are enrolled in primary schools.
- Number of secondary students rose substantially – more than four times the increase in the number of primary students. The impacts of an on-going democratization process.
- In about 70 of 110 countries surveyed, public spending on education increased as a share of national income.

### Challenges in Attaining EFA Goals

- Strengthen the policies and the programs of early Childhood Education and its positive effects on the primary level.
- The increase in formal schooling enrolment based upon different approaches and strategies.
- Make basic education free which will improve the learning opportunities of the poorest people. The challenge of recreating and renovating the objectives and the scope of Basic Education.
- Give adequate attention (in terms of policy, content and learning material) to adult literacy closely tied to the local community demands and needs.
- Remove obstacles to girls' access to schooling as well as approach issues of gender equity in schools.
- Improve the educational quality that could lead to valuable knowledge and the development of competencies. The goal of a high-quality equitable education.

### UNESCO Priorities

### Conditions for Quality Improvement

- Well-trained teachers
- Good and sufficient learning materials
- Appropriate languages for learning
- Adequate instruction time
- Emphasis on literacy as a tool of learning
- Structured teaching
- Clean, safe and child-friendly schools
- Good principal leadership

All six EFA goals taken as a whole form the Basic Education agenda.

Global Action Plan Advocates 3 shifts

- The right to Education, from access to success.
- From policies and programs mainly made by inputs to those based on processes of educational quality.
- From a curtailed vision of Basic Education assimilated to the primary level to one that encompasses Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education. The need of a more comprehensive and productive curricular and pedagogical articulation between Primary and Secondary Education.

Embedding a renovated concept of Basic Education

There is a need of embedding a new curriculum vision within a triad that we consider the pillar of change: 1) societal expectations and needs and its links to educational policy; 2) curriculum vision and quality inputs and processes and 3) teachers' profile and professional development.

The conceptual and the operational build up of this triad around children and youth expectations and needs could clear the way so as to foster real changes that can help implement EFA goals within a holistic approach.

## 2. Curriculum as a Strong Foundation and a Way of Attaining Quality

Why Curriculum Matters?

Juan Manuel Moreno (2006): Education reform all over the world is increasingly curriculum-based. The complex relationships between curriculum objectives and structures, democratization of educational opportunities and the attainment of social and pedagogical inclusion, is a key issue in Secondary Education.

Curriculum linked to core definitions of the role of education in society: as citizenship education, as balanced personal development, as a key economic and social policy and as an irreplaceable factor in improving the well-being of the poorest population.

Curriculum should respond to societal expectations and demands. There is a need of a feedback relationship between society and education.

What to include or to exclude from the curricula should be aligned with the role of education in society.

#### Difficulties in Curriculum Change

Historical, ideological and political arguments.

Disciplinary identities and boundaries.

Traditional forms and contents of knowledge organization.

Corporative interests.

Lack of visualisation of the learners' expectations and needs.

#### More problematic in Secondary than in Primary Education

#### Critical Issues in Teachers' Involvement in Curriculum Change

Change the frontiers between disciplines also implies redefining teachers' positions and identities.

Cultural and political resistance to face a reform.

Reform proposals based on training teachers mainly through a making-aware and sharing-information process have very limited impact.

The prescriptive top-down vision

Underestimating teachers' role in educational reforms.

Disregarding teachers' backgrounds, visions and feelings about educational and curricula reform.

#### IBE Vision of Curriculum

The curriculum is at the same time a policy and a technical issue involving a wide range of institutions and actors.

The interfaces are complex, dynamic, controversial and non-linear under the vision of curriculum as a continuous development of processes and outcomes.

A broad view of curriculum

Comprising values, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and competencies as well as social and cultural returns

Braslavsky: the curriculum can be defined "as a dense and flexible contract between politics/society and teachers"

Universal core concepts and real alternatives to choose.

#### What we Include under Curriculum

A comprehensive vision of curriculum should include: the learning outcomes, the pedagogical and the didactic strategies as well as supports, the disciplinary contents, the evaluation of the learning outcomes, and the management of the curriculum.

Under a comprehensive vision of curriculum, teachers are deeply involved in the process of curriculum change as curriculum developers.

#### Building up the Curriculum in Secondary Education

- There is no such “successful” international model to follow but there are plenty of visions, experiences and strategies to share.
- Attentive look to comprehensive secondary models (attain more equity and equality). Lessons from PISA outcomes. The European case.
- Equilibrium between global society and national needs
- Universalization of curriculum concerns and issues: for example, environmental and HIV&AIDS education
- Understanding and giving significance to national and local identities

Braslavsky: Moving Forward towards a “Glocal” Curriculum. Its importance for Secondary Education.

- Global comprehensiveness and core competencies. Objectives, content and scope of citizenship education.
- Openness to activities at the school and local levels (elective subjects for example). The school as the principal driving force for change.
- New approaches in teaching that are more inclusive of learners’ diversities.
- An increased concern for instruction hours of religious education.
- The emergence of multicultural education as a right and a learning context.

Curricular dilemmas in Secondary Education

- Early or later institutional and knowledge differentiation between Secondary and Technical/Vocational Education? The multiple track and comprehensive models (Benavot) and their impacts on democratizing opportunities. How to approach the challenge of motivating students?
- An early selection can contribute and consolidate separation and segmentation among students coming from diverse cultural and social contexts?  
Homogenous/heterogenous groups.
- Too early (grade 7) for students to make a decision on their future? Are the Secondary and the Technical/Vocational tracks sufficiently inter-related to facilitate mobility and navigability between them? Impacts on dimensions of equity and quality.
- Curricular approaches more based on information and knowledge transmission of traditional disciplines or more inclined towards assuming epistemological changes and interdisciplinarity as a challenge?
- The approaches by competencies contribute to effectively change the conditions, the processes and the learning outcomes? Some promising results in Africa.
- Key bottlenecks: conceptualization and selection of competencies relevant to a needed equilibrium between global/national/local challenges and realities, students’ assessments, teachers’ training and practices and availability of educational materials.
- The syllabus (the choice and the contents of the subjects taught) and the teachers’ practices tend to feed the processes of early selection and

segmentation? Are these factors more relevant than the type of model being selected?

- More freedom to the school to design and implement the syllabus? More elective subjects that allow to better contemplate students' interests and abilities?
- The « curricula engineering » is a tool that should be based on what we want to attain as the finalities and the objectives of youth education.
- Secondary Education (at least in the grades 7 to 9) as part of Basic Education with no differentiation between the secondary and the technical tracks?. Comprehensive models in the Nordic countries (for example Finland). The “college” in France. Common cycle made by core competencies? High equity and quality? Can be an universal reference? Provide conditions and opportunities for pertinent and relevant curricula?
- Technical and Vocational Education tends to differentiate in Higher Secondary Education (grade 10 onwards) based on a fluid communication with tertiary studies. The cases of Technological Bachelors and Polytechnic colleges. Examples of Latin America and Europe.
- The predominant world-wide trend is towards curricular designs build up around the students and their expectations and learning needs, openly relating to society and based on an epistemological renewal of knowledge boundaries aimed at generating a pertinent curricula. More curricular and teaching affinity between Primary and Secondary Education. Example - proposals for grades 7 to 9 in rural areas.

Factors associated to the success of the Finland case

- Equality of opportunity;
- Non-paying, non-selective comprehensive model of nine years basic compulsory schooling;
- Flexible administration that strongly supports the school;
- Confidence in the schools, the principals, the teachers and the students;
- Interactive forms of work; influence of local communities; individualised support centred on the learning and the well-being of the students;
- Ways of evaluation tailored to encourage the student's development (no examinations and no ranking) and
- The teachers are highly qualified and autonomous.

### 3. Some Key Questions around Secondary Education

Questions around challenges and options on expanding and democratizing educational opportunities in Secondary Education

1. Are we talking of a conceptual curriculum framework common to an expanded Basic Education – Childhood, Primary and first cycle of Secondary Education- and to Teacher Education made by foundations, objectives, approaches and

strategies around the concept of Education as both a human right and a pillar of personal and social development?

2. Are we willing to bridge the communitarian, curricular and pedagogical gap between a Primary Education think over and carried out for All, and a Secondary Education principally visualized as a trampoline for university studies which well suits the expectations and the needs of the better cultural and social equipped students?
3. Are we aware of the need of developing an interrelated curriculum structure for Secondary and Technical Education that establishes common core competencies, facilitates the navigability between the different tracks and promotes diverse strategies and options for students' learning contributing to ensure access, retention and success?
4. Are we thinking of a renovated teachers' personal, social and professional profile deeply embedded in key stakeholders expectations and demands as a way of fostering and consolidating the needed changes in school and classroom practices?
5. Are we open to know and understand more in-depth how teachers position themselves and apprehend the reform concepts, which type of content and by what ways they share it with their students? How do students position and act themselves, and how and what they effectively learn?