

Five years left until 2015: What should be our priority?

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Education is every individual's right and is seen to be essential to alleviate poverty. The focus in this paper is on what we can do in terms of providing international educational assistance and cooperation to achieve the goals of 'Education For All' (EFA) and what might be our immediate priorities. In terms of international educational assistance, I will discuss two aspects. The first will be based on Knowledge Exchange amongst academics, teachers and other relevant practitioners, and educational policy makers, as I think it is an important way of moving towards our goals as well as learning from each other. The second will focus on the work that has been done by the UK Government, voluntary organisations and individuals to provide international educational assistance to help achieve the goals of EFA and also the 'Millennium Development Goal'. As an academic and practitioner, I will focus more on the former. Then I will focus briefly on my suggestions for our priorities.

International Educational Assistance in the form of Knowledge Exchange

In the UK, as in many developed countries, the issue is not about providing schools or making education available for all. The issue is of retention in schools and sustaining student motivation to achieve. (This perhaps is an issue for all the countries in the world.) As an example, I would like to discuss recent work I have been involved in with international collaborators. We have found that one of the key periods that has an impact on students' motivation, self-esteem and achievement, is the transition from one stage of education to another, e.g., starting primary school, moving from primary to secondary school and so on. It seems that despite the variation of educational systems, country or student's age, when they face these transitions the pedagogical, social and emotional challenges which students, parents and professionals undergo are quite similar (see for example Adeyemo, 2007; Akos, 2004; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Mac Iver, & Feldlaufer, 1993; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). In other words, these various transitions in the students' learning path significantly impact on their every-day life. In this context various researchers from around the world have been making an attempt to understand the reasons behind the problems and ways to resolve them. For example, Jindal-Snape and Miller from Scotland have looked at the role of self-esteem and resilience. Adeyemo from Nigeria has looked at the impact of emotional intelligence intervention on secondary school pupils and higher education students' ability to have a successful transition. Research in the USA looked at what provision can be put in place, especially prior to formal schooling, to support families and communities (especially the ones in poverty), to provide a child with rich experiences that can support his/her learning and readiness to learn in a formal context (Mayer, Amendum, & Vernon-Feagans, 2010). In Japan, Yaeda (2010) has focussed on systematic, planned transition for people with disabilities starting three years prior to leaving secondary school and carrying on for another 3 years post-secondary. All these collaborators and others have brought together a wealth of knowledge into how to sustain motivation, self-esteem and achievement which will hopefully result in student retention and also lead to better practices and better participation of students across the world.

Still in the context of supporting transitions, several countries such as USA and Finland have aligned their educational system and curriculum to the individual's developmental stages and needs within the context (Vernon-Feagans, Odom, Panscofar, & Kainz, 2008). New Zealand has moved to competencies, giving an opportunity to celebrate and build on the diverse strengths of the learners. Similarly, e.g., in Scotland, there is an emphasis on

the involvement of parents in their child's education and the life of school through the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 (Scottish Government, 2006). It goes without saying that we can learn from each other's educational policies to see how they might be applicable to our own context.

Another example, which is pertinent to the goals of EFA, is related to readiness to start school. For a long time there has been a debate regarding the best age to start school. Research has been inconclusive about the appropriateness of age as a predictor for readiness to start school (Ford & Gledhill, 2002; Stipek, 2002). Elsewhere the focus seems to have moved to readiness to learn as well as social and emotional readiness. The overarching debate is whether it is about the child being ready or is it about the schools being ready to work with every child as an individual recognizing his/her unique differences and building on his/her strengths (see Hannah, Gorton, & Jindal-Snape, 2010). Mayer et al. (2010) suggest that readiness is at levels beyond the child, and includes the community, school, and family, and that readiness is the interaction and fit between the child and his/her family, and the readiness of the school to teach that child. Regardless of the country, researchers have emphasized that smooth transition depends on the quality of preschool experience. Therefore, it is important to ensure that all children get good quality preschool provision either through formal preschool systems or through a supportive family and community. Hannah et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of involving parents in the education of the child and the transition process. From the above examples, it is evident that in every country, irrespective of the stage of development, work is still required to get the educational system right for the children so that we can achieve the aim of education for all.

In another way collaboration can be seen in the form of educational assistance through capacity building, for example through educational programmes. In several countries entire generations have missed school education due to war. We have, for instance, collaborated on Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes in Eritrea where their highly experienced senior health care managers were able to get accredited qualifications. This was through a blended learning approach: distance learning, ICT based support (although this became minimal at times due to the lack of appropriate resources), and in-country visits. We as tutors learned a lot about health care in Eritrea and the dedication to work for the good of every member of the society. They learned research, reflection and management skills from us.

Therefore, I would like to assert that Knowledge Exchange through collaborative research, CPD, reciprocal visits, etc. plays an important role in international educational collaboration and assistance.

International Educational Assistance in the form of resources

In this section, I will briefly discuss examples of other forms of international assistance. At a national level, for example, in April 2006 the UK Government committed to spending £8.5 billion over 10 years to support education in developing countries (DFID, n.d.). The Department for International Development has also reiterated its commitment to providing international assistance to work towards the EFA targets and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG).

People have shown their commitment to Education For All through campaigns, where world leaders, celebrities and common people have come together to support it. An example is the recent launch of the football strand of the 'Class of 2015' campaign '1 Goal: Education For All', which saw sports personalities and other celebrities come together at the Wembley Stadium in England (<http://www.join1goal.org/en/about-us>).

Along with this, there are voluntary organisations who are working in different countries by providing books, furniture, blackboards, etc. or by sending volunteers to teach in schools in developing countries. For example, READ International, a charity organised by students at Nottingham University since 2004, has 20 book projects across the UK and has sent over half a million books to countries in east Africa along with sports kits, science equipment and stationery (<http://www.readinternational.org.uk/>).

As can be seen, it is not only the responsibility of the Government to meet these targets. Individuals from all walks

of life are working in their own way to assist with this. The important thing to remember is that these activities are of mutual benefit. One country might benefit in terms of obtaining resources but the other benefits through increased global awareness.

Priorities

Regardless of whether a country is seen as a developed or developing country, education for all is an important target. We are all committed to that. However, the reasons behind our commitment, especially in our own country, might be different. It is difficult to look at a universal priority for Education For All. The priorities might have to be decided at a regional level and there will be differences in these. In all of this, the most important pre-requisite for success is that all countries work together and learn from each other. The specific nature of the problem might be different but there might be similar solutions. For example, school retention might be a problem in a developed country due to lack of motivation and in a developing country due to the impact of poverty. However, the solution might be the same; for example by involving parents in the education of their child, or for example by creating a motivating learning environment to suit the needs of those children.

We know that we have a long way to go till we can achieve the targets. The priority for me has to be to make sure that we do not lose momentum once we get to 2015 or be disheartened about what we have not been able to achieve. Therefore, on-going international educational assistance has to be an important commitment and global priority in the bid to achieve Education For All, one that *cannot* and *should not* stop at 2015!

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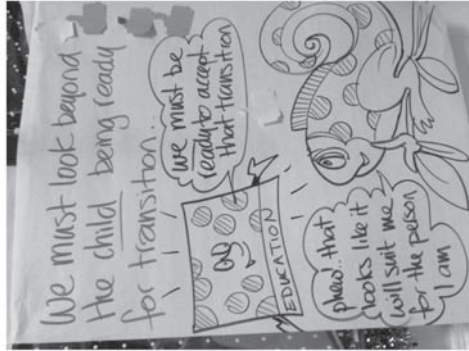
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Example of Knowledge Exchange Ready Children/Ready Educational Institutions



- Maturation v/s Interactionist Approach
- Vernon-Feagans and colleagues (2008) provide a way to conceptualize readiness which puts the definition of readiness, not within the child but at the "interaction and fit between the child and his/her family and the 'readiness' of the classroom/school to teach that child" (p. 63).

Example of Knowledge Exchange Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes



Example of International Educational Assistance in the form of resources

Free education for all boosted by \$4.5 billion pledge

25 September 2008

Government announces \$15 billion to deliver education for all

10 April 2006

UK and France deliver on promise to support education in Africa

07 February 2005

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Media-Room/Press-releases/?q=education+for+all>

Example of International Educational Assistance in the form of resources



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCs5vwrV5EM>

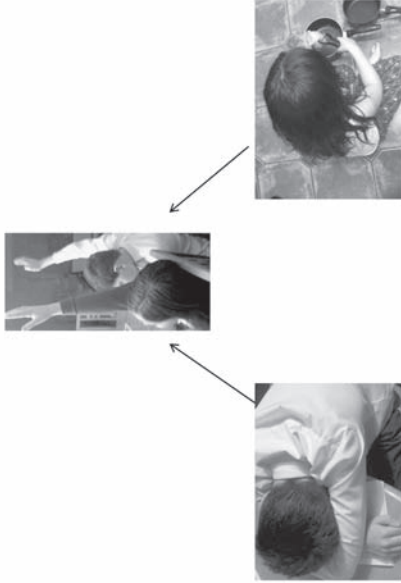
Example of International Educational Assistance in the form of resources



<http://www.readinternational.org.uk/>

Priorities

Different Reasons-Similar Problems?
Same Goals?



Priorities International Collaboration



Finally, we cannot slow down!! Gambarimashou!!



- consolidate what we have achieved
- to make sure that we do not lose momentum once we get to 2015 or be disheartened about what we have not been able to achieve
- on-going international educational assistance has to be an important commitment and global priority in the bid to achieve Education For All, one that cannot and *should not* stop at 2015!

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