

# School Effectiveness: Pursuing Excellence and Inclusion

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## Abstract

With explosion in educational services to all eligible people in all countries of the world there is a serious concern about the quality of education. The global knowledge economy demands educated citizens, and a skilled and innovative workforce. But the quality of schools is deteriorating and education is unable to produce the workforce needed for the rapidly advancing technology and the world market. The focus has therefore turned to effective schools that will bring countries to the forefront of the global market through its educated citizens. Despite a variety of empirical and analytical research studies, there are no criteria that enable schools to identify factors that will improve the effectiveness of schools.

This brief paper is based on a keynote address given at the 2012 World Global Forum in Taipei and argues that in a world with globalization and rapid movement of populations, excellence in education must go hand in hand with educational inclusiveness. School effectiveness cannot be measured through international tests alone. Effective schools will use teaching strategies that are needed for students with diverse abilities, cultures and backgrounds for strong achievement in academic and other areas, but at the same time empower them with interpersonal/intercultural skills to face rapid change and life-long learning. To be effective, schools must strive for excellence with inclusion because excellence is enhanced and enriched by diversity.

**Keywords:** effective schools, inclusion, equity, excellence

## 1 The Urgent Need for Effective Schools

It is now globally recognized that education is an important policy objective, one that is essential for economic and social development as well as for enhancing individual capabilities. In the immense competition for globalization, education is seen as a product that can be traded. On the one hand, educational institutions are mushrooming in every country at all levels, from pre-school to university, due to the revolution of rising expectations and the increase in demand by individuals. On the other hand, knowledge is linked to improvement in productivity -- and in a

knowledge economy, education is the primary tool used by states to get a competitive edge in economic development. Global competition for political and economic power has led to demands for improvement in the quality of what is offered in educational institutions. School effectiveness research is premised on the belief that the basic goal of the school is to improve learning outcomes for students; and student performance and teacher quality are most frequently taken as measures of effective schools.

## 2 What is an Effective School?

In general, the public view of an effective school is one that produces excellent results and is ranked high in assessment tests. The idea of excellence is evident. However, with the democratization of education the focus has moved to promoting the progress of all students in a broad range of intellectual, social and emotional outcomes. An effective school then, is one that enhances the learning of all students. More attention is being paid to a flexible curriculum with clear goals (*what to teach*), and differentiated instruction (*how to teach a range of learners*) with fair assessment for the benefit of all students recognizing that each learner is unique. The issue of equal opportunity, and fairness or equity is also apparent. So, there are two concepts that appear conflicting to those who see excellence and equity in binary terms.

A major policy incentive of governments has been increase in student enrolment, especially in countries of the South (for example, the Education for All movement; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2000a). The Education for All (EFA) movement is a global commitment by 164 countries to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. The Dakar Framework for Action was announced at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2000b). Six goals were identified for achieving Education for All by 2015. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was mandated to coordinate the efforts of governments, development agencies, and the private sector. The UNESCO Statistical Institute (USI) based in Montreal,

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produces the Global Monitoring Report each year providing an account of the world's progress in meeting education for all citizens in 200 countries. It includes countries of the North and South because in the North many marginalized and vulnerable groups of students drop out of school; in the South governments need to expand opportunities but even when students are enrolled the challenge is to keep them in school and sustain their learning. The 2005 Global Monitoring Report focused on school quality in order to emphasize the need for students in the North and in the South to stay in school long enough to acquire the learning outcomes, values and skills needed to cope with the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Over the past "Literacy Decade" (2003-2012) the UN Commission on Human Rights has urged members states to implement the right to education and also guarantee that this right is exercised free from discrimination. Although the Educational for All (EFA) movement continues, spurred by considerable success in enrolment levels in most countries and intense competition at the global level, more recently the focus has turned from increasing enrolment to improving school quality. And quality of education is usually measured in terms of excellence in student performance and quality teachers. Research on effective schools has therefore tended to revolve around identification of indicators that are necessary for a high level of student achievement, as measured in international student examination scores.

School Effectiveness research emerged from the debate created by a path breaking study funded by the U.S. Office of Education and done by Coleman et al. (1966) who looked into the effectiveness of American public education and the nation's public schools. The Coleman Report was published in 1966 with the title: *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Extensive studies, theories, and models, as well as meta-analyses of empirical research on effective schools and effective school leadership, have developed a large body of literature on the topic. *The International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* (Teddle & Reynolds, 2000) provides an international and broad perspective on effective schools research. In a major study published by UNESCO, Shreeves (2000) does a meta-analysis of empirical research to identify factors that enable schools to attain the educational goals that will make a school effective. Ministries of Education have developed evidence-based indicators of successful practices in effective schools for educators. In Canada, for example, the Ontario Ministry of Education has identified evidence-based indicators of successful practice for effective schools for educators.

Various definitions of effective schools have emerged. Effective schools are defined in terms of student outcomes

such as achievement levels, content or organizational factors, and process factors. Organizational factors of an effective school include a high level of effective teaching strategies, strong school leadership, and strong relationships with the home and community. Process factors are clearly articulated goals and an inclusive school culture and environment with collaborative decision-making with stakeholders.

Despite a variety of empirical and analytic research studies, there are no criteria that actually enable schools to identify factors that will improve the effectiveness of schools. Moreover, there has been debate over whether there can be a universal definition of effectiveness that is applicable to all societies -- which have different cultures, histories, and needs, and are faced with different degrees of economic development. Needless to say, can there even be a single definition for all schools within the different regions of any one country?

### 3 International Tests

The current trend in the global competition for excellence in education is to benchmark a country's educational system through its ranking in international tests and to focus on high value added (HVA) teachers. Large-scale international assessment tests have been taken as measures of "high quality" teaching and learning practices in educational systems in competing countries. PISA which is the Program for International Student Assessment for Reading, Math and Science for 15 year old students is conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); PIRLS or Progress in International Reading Literacy Study conducts Reading for students in the 4th grade and is coordinated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). TIMSS stands for Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study for students of 4th and 8th grades and is conducted by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education. Results from assessments such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS are used to measure educational effectiveness and establish "normal" standards as countries are ranked in competition with one another (Creemers, 2006; Pongratz, 2006). In such assessments, school effectiveness is measured through student performance or achievement in subject areas such as math, science, and reading. But international tests create global standards for a global economy rather than for the needs of national curricula. The media sensation created by the publication of country ranking perpetuates "international standards," and the search for "best practices," "best educational systems," and "teacher quality."

Furthermore, the international tests as we know them today measure only two intelligences (linguistic and logical-mathematical) on Gardner's (1983) list of intelligences he proposes that children have and through which they understand the world. Gardner caused a paradigm shift in the theory of intelligence by questioning the idea that intelligence is a single entity that can be measured simply through tests. His proposition that people possess multiple intelligences has tremendous implications for education and how educational excellence can and should be measured.

## 4 Impact of International Tests

Although the test results are unable to distinguish which factors account for differences in results, and are unable to identify causal relationships between variables (Galczyński, 2010), educational reforms are influenced by policies of highly-ranked school systems of countries and externalization (import/export) of educational policies occurs (Schriewer, 1989, 2006). This happens even though the historical and economic conditions or the specific traditions and cultures of the ranked countries may be very dissimilar, and the conditions for teaching and teacher education are vastly different, especially between countries of the North and of the South.

## 5 Teacher Quality

Reforms identify teachers as a major factor in increasing learning and quality of performance. And international concern on teacher quality is focused on the key role of teachers in knowledge production. Widely cited by the media, a recently published study on high value added teachers asks the important question: Is the impact that teachers have on students' test scores ("value-added") a good measure of their quality? (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011). Do high value added (HVA) teachers improve the long-term achievements of students? HVA teachers are those successful in raising test scores. Furthermore, do test scores indicate teachers' impacts on student success in tests?

Mentioned by President Barak Obama of the United States in his 2012 State of the Union Address, this 20-year longitudinal study on one million American students (<http://www.columbia.edu/>) indicates that elementary school teachers have an impact on how much their students earn as adults and, by extension, on the nation's economy. While the new research may identify HVA teachers, it does not indicate what constitutes good teaching. Teacher quality may be the key to improving underperforming schools in poor neighborhoods but it is still not clear what teacher qualities make schools effective.

## 6 Societal Goals

In a technologically advanced global knowledge economy, the market-driven goals of a society are to have a competitive edge by achieving excellence, innovation, and creativity. Following the example of the business world, the most well-known educational institutions are putting emphasis on diverse school populations and interdisciplinary teams to get innovative ideas. Their aim is that a diverse student population will enrich the environment and lead the innovations. They will be empowered to deal with change and diversity as well as have the ability to define a future with societal peace and national security. With international migration, access to education for a variety of groups, and implementation of the right to education for every individual, schools are now more diverse than ever before.

Yet, notwithstanding the push to enroll all children in schools all over the globe, economically advanced and lower income countries alike are faced with high dropout rates, and many students find their educational options are either irrelevant to their lives or worthless for getting them jobs so that they fill the ranks of the educated unemployed. The problem is two-fold: First, there is the issue of marginalization when students drop out of the system causing wastage; second is the problem of tremendous expansion in schools at all levels due to unmet demands, mostly by private providers that are not subject to quality control. Expansion of education at all levels must be done with quality and relevance in mind because there is no point increasing access to a process that lacks standards and usefulness, and therefore will not result in benefits either to the individual or the society. On the contrary, worthless credentialing may lead to social unrest.

## 7 Educational Inclusion

Various groups of students are at risk of dropping out and being excluded from the educational system. Students from vulnerable groups drop out at the school level in economically poor countries for economic reasons but also because they do not see any relevance of education to their lives. In industrialized countries, schools are often seen as not being "safe" or "welcoming" to marginalized groups of students (such as socially or economically disadvantaged groups) who feel excluded from the process of education.

The move for an inclusive education was given legitimation at the Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994, when it was stated that the best way to achieve education for all and combating discrimination was to build inclusive societies (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994). The meaning

of inclusive education was broadened from special needs education to a process which eliminates social exclusion resulting from negative attitudes and responses to diversity not only in physical and mental ability but also in race, social class, ethnicity and culture, religion, gender, and other differences.

Thus, an effective school would pursue excellence in the context of diversity -- all students must be prepared to deal with change and a life of learning with intercultural, interpersonal skills that will enable them to compete with diverse people and situations. The underlying philosophy must be that diversity is valued: that classroom dynamics offers greater learning opportunities for all to achieve their maximum potential. Schools must be inclusive. As Ainscow (2005) points out, educational inclusion, not merely inclusive education, means that effective schools are inclusive schools: it implies that inclusion is a process; it suggests identification and removal of barriers to education for some students; it involves the achievement of all students but places emphasis on students at risk of marginalization, exclusion, and underachievement.

## 8 The Complexity of Diversity

Inclusion implies making diverse groups of people part of the educational enterprise. The concept of diversity implies multiple differences. People are different from each other in different ways and simple classifications of people as black or white, as male or female, are crude and incorrect. For example, it would be incorrect to attribute gender characteristics in terms of what can be expected of boys and girls in school performance because there is as much variation among each group as between them. Moreover, a diversity of perspectives is derived from multiplicity and multidimensional differences and this is essential for innovation. Diversity is influenced by a variety of factors such as how an individual is located (country, region) and positioned (in terms of race, gender, religion, language, socio-economic class, and so on). But these are not fixed categories. Not only are they complex because they are crosscutting and overlapping; they are also fluid and changing.

## 9 School Effectiveness Is Linked to the Goals of Society

Despite the move through international testing for a world education standard, school effectiveness will ultimately be defined by the goals of a society and its resources. While each society will strive for a better standard of living for its citizens, egalitarian societies also strive to provide equality of opportunity to meet the

economic and social needs of each citizen. So, schools must strive for high quality education for all its students, and management for school effectiveness will mean providing equal learning opportunities to all students to achieve their maximum potential. This implies an inclusive school culture and worldview that pursues excellence by responding to the variety of intelligences, emotional and academic needs of all students irrespective of differences in intellectual ability, gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity, and culture.

## 10 Equal Opportunity and Equity

What does equal opportunity mean? Does it mean treating all children the same way? No, equality implies similarity rather than "sameness." Equal opportunity does not imply equal treatment; rather, it is equity and means fair treatment (Ghosh, 2012). Treating everyone the same would be blindness to differences. But human beings are diverse, not only in their inherent characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, age, physical and intellectual attributes and aptitudes, but also in their locations such as place of birth and socioeconomic background -- which result in unequal power relations (Ghosh, 2002, 2011). The effect of ignoring such differences, in fact, may be unjust and inequalitarian (Sen, 1992). Equal opportunity implies fairness, which is a fundamental principle of justice (Appiah, 1996).

At the policy level, issues of diversity, equity or fairness, and excellence are complex, and reforms aimed at equity clearly upset the status quo. At the management level, fundamental challenges of implementation involve all stakeholders. With the tremendous expansion of educational opportunity to diverse social and cultural groups and the democratization of education, questions arise regarding a conflict between equity and excellence. Is quality inevitably diluted when schools become socially and culturally inclusive? Can equity and excellence be pursued simultaneously without compromising one for the other?

## 11 Excellence and Equity

What is meant by the concept of excellence? First, excellence refers to quality and is a comparative term. In the public view it implies a standard and is the opposite of mediocrity. Furthermore, it can be defined both at the individual and collective levels. Western thinkers according to their values and characteristics have defined excellence subjectively. But definitions and meanings of words change with times, and post-colonial writers have raised the possibility of viewing Western and non-Western traditions and cultures on the basis of equality and



interaction. We now accept that cultures and people have multiple perspectives, multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), and many ways of knowing, doing, believing and valuing. Standards are of utmost importance, but definitions of excellence must represent plurality because the norms in use come out of the particular experiences of those who have the power to define standards and make the rules (Ghosh, 2012).

Excellence is often presented as conflicting with equity policies although there is empirical evidence indicating a positive correlation between the two (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Decline in the quality of education has been sometimes linked to the democratization of educational opportunities and the influx of diverse groups of students with difference in abilities. Both in countries of the North and of the South, a general deterioration in educational standards has focused attention on effective schools -- those that produce the best results. There is a competition to achieve "excellence" as seen in international tests in some countries. But how is excellence defined?

By its nature, excellence is a comparative term and is generally viewed as the opposite of mediocrity. There is the assumption of qualitative difference between what is excellent and what is average. So is excellence a mark of quality or a mark of privilege? In their book *Privilege and Diversity in the Academy*, Maher and Tetreault (2007) make the important point that excellence is not so much a mark of quality as a mark of privilege, as the elites who "control the norms of the scholarly enterprise (p. 4)" use their power to keep historically acquired group privilege at the expense of groups whose positions of race, color, class, gender and sexuality put them at a disadvantage. Those who have power and privilege define the standards of quality: they are the elites who shape the norms. In modern times, knowledge and standards of quality have come from European cultures in Western countries largely through colonization and imperialism. But in post-modern times, against the backdrop of international migration of knowledge workers, this definition cannot be fixed when we deal with diverse cultures which have multiple perspectives and different kinds of knowledge. In education, excellence should represent plurality, not only because of the idea of multiple intelligences but also because diverse representation enriches the educational environment. Not only is diversity of representation being now recognized as a defining feature of excellence, but there is also a shift towards interdisciplinarity because of the need for innovative approaches to solving problems (Maher & Tetreault, 2007).

## 12 Conclusion

Effective schools will surely strive for excellence, but an essential feature will be educational inclusion. Analysis of large cross-national, achievement data such as PISA and TIMSS indicates that nations with lower education inequalities (such as tracking or unequal funding) have higher overall achievement (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). On the other hand, teachers undoubtedly have a positive, significant, and wide-ranging impact on students. Strong leadership in schools is essential in creating inclusive school cultures. To be effective, schools must strive for excellence with equity because excellence is enhanced and enriched by diversity.

In 2012 we are confronted with the breadth and pace of change and democratic shifts. Furthermore, the present economic crisis has gripped the world making interdependence among nations and people even more meaningful. Globalization is now more than ever intimately connected to diversity, inclusion, and multicultural values and perspectives. Not only must schools cultivate educational inclusiveness, we need inclusive ways of conceptualizing school effectiveness. Keeping a post modern society and inclusion in mind, we will need to redefine excellence, re-examine what our goals will be for our future schools, and creatively measure the effectiveness of our schools.

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