Teaching for Relevance in Changing and Challenging Times

LEARNING AS CONNECTION

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Background
Unsustainable Development models (Persistent Poverty, Growing Social Inequality, Economic Crisis)

Climate Change impacts (new risks and unknown impacts)

Loss of Ecosystem Services (erosion of the resource base & life support systems)

New teaching practices?

New concepts for development
Equity
Sustainability
Resilience
Adaptation

Different, creative and more powerful forms of agency (new learning & action)

The challenges are increasingly more complex, and difficult to reconcile – Are current conceptions of educational Quality adequate?
A short history …

- Education and the industrial revolution and the modernisation process (17th-21st century): *Education for economic development*

- Education and the expansion of democracy and human rights (19th-21st century): *Education for All*

- Education and capacity to deal with unsustainable models of human development and rapidly changing and challenging times (late 20th / 21st century): *Education for Sustainable Development*
SADC ESD Research Network Concerns

- Children in school, but not understanding their teachers & teachers not understanding what to teach
- Parents perceiving education to be irrelevant to life conditions and challenges
- Rewards of education are ‘delayed’ and uncertain (youth & graduate unemployment)
- Large numbers (60-80%) of children are ‘falling between the cracks’: not being educated for what is required for ‘high skill economy’ or for how to cope with / get out of poverty, unemployment and risk
- An increasingly divided system privileging the ‘have’s’ while the world around is getting more complex, uncertain, challenging and unsustainable

SHOULD WE RETHINK Relevance in relation to Quality in Education?
Teaching for relevance ...

Conceptions of Learning and Quality
Our First Question: How to understand educational quality and relevance

- **Conceptions of quality** - how are educational policy makers, teachers, learners and communities thinking about quality

- **Conceptions of relevance** – to learner, to community, to society, to economy, to environment, to changing context, to future ...

- What happens when one juxtaposes quality and relevance ... Does the concept of quality change?
Our research (2007-2010)

Finding in 1st phase: Efficiency, mastery, inclusion and participation are dominant discourses about quality from educational arena ...

In parent, learner and community discourses about quality we found a stronger emphasis on relevance to context, culture, future, livelihood opportunities & jobs, socio-economic realities, socio-ecological changes
Dominant Conceptions of Quality

Quality as Efficiency
Learning as Mastery
Teaching to ensure technical mastery, outcomes, performance

Quality as Inclusion
Learning as Participation
Teaching to include all learners, democratic classroom practice

Current Quality Struggles

Barret et. al, 2007
An expanded framework for thinking about quality education?

Quality as Efficiency & Learning as mastery

Quality as Inclusion & Learning as participation

A NEW SPACE TO RE-THINK QUALITY?

Quality as relevant engagement & Learning as connection

Indicators of Educational Quality?
Quality is like a rope ....

an integrated view...

Efficiency

Inclusivity

Relevance
Learning as Connection

Teaching for relevance ...

Quality as relevant engagement ...
Some examples of learning as connection & teaching for relevance

- Citizenship
- Life Skills
- World of Work
- Futures
- Values
- Sustainability
- Equity
- Adaptation
- Resilience

Soil Scientists
Agricultural Extension Officers

Water plant operators
Water quality scientists
Learning as Connection develops

- Life Skills
- Citizenship
- Values and Ethics
- Understandings of the society-environment-economy relation
- Understandings of the world of work
- Future’s vision & critical and creative thinking
- Capability to act and make choices

It requires mastery of subject knowledge and skills, and inclusivity, building on and extending current dominant concepts of quality
Implications for Teacher Education Policy and Practice
Learning as Connection can be practiced in Teacher Education (new TE practices)

Knowledge and practice questions

Enquiry based and deliberative

Solution seeking

Creative, critical thinking
Policy Dialogue: If I were a TE policy maker ...

I would encourage or require every teacher to examine at least three conceptions of educational quality in all three or four years of their initial training, and in–service TE thereafter: **efficiency; inclusion; relevance.**
I would ask all TE students to demonstrate and critically discuss and examine how these conceptions of quality shape teaching theory and practice – but most importantly, I would challenge them to develop teaching practices that bring these three conceptions of quality together.
I would build this understanding of educational quality into TE Norms and Standards, and assess this as a key component of all TE curriculum (i.e. I would make engagement with concepts of quality a foundation of all TE)
I would elevate ‘relevance’ to have the same status as ‘efficiency’ and ‘inclusion’ in education systems.

I would revise or develop indicators of quality, to be inclusive of relevance, and learning as connection.

Only then would I include specific courses such as Life Skills / Career Guidance / ESD etc. in TE to give further strength to the quality rope.
Some innovative work in this regard is being done under the banner of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in countries around the world and in many EFA quality education initiatives.

A UNESCO International ESD TE Network exists, where many of these approaches are being pioneered. Sub-regional networks also exist but need extending, and policy and research support.

(see www.unesco.org/desd)
“The responsibility of the educator is a responsibility for what is to come, without full knowledge of what is to come”
(Biersta, 2006 148)

This requires teacher education policies that strengthen ‘learning as connection’ and continuously focus teachers’ attention on the dynamic concept and practice of relevance … [as well as concepts of efficiency and inclusion …]