



Education Update

A Publication of the UNICEF Programme Division • Education Section

UNICEF Programme Division, Education Section
January 1999
Volume 2, Issue 1

For information, contact:
Elaine Furniss, Editor
Senior Adviser, Education
Eburniss@unicef.org
Fax: (1-212) 824-6481

CONTENTS

Editorial

New Chief of Education Section

Trends/Issues in Large Scale Student Assessment Programmes

MLA: The Joint UNESCO-UNICEF Project

MLA Assesses Young Students in Nigeria

Alternatives to Standardized Testing

Educational Assessments in Latin America: Lessons Learned in Six Countries

Assessing Learning Achievement: Lessons from South Asia

Resources

Consequences of Assessment: What is the Evidence?

Update

Events

What's happening in Education?

Education: Digitally

Coming soon ... a new online resource for teachers at the UNICEF site
<www.unicef.org> TEACHERS TALKING ABOUT LEARNING

[PAGE 1]

UNICEF Experience in Learning Achievement

Aster Haregot, Education Section, Programme Division, UNICEF New York

The importance of learning achievement was underscored at the World Conference on Education for All, where the definition of universal primary education included **a minimum level of learning achievement** as a dimension of universalisation. Few countries, however, measure student achievement to assess and improve their educational systems. Most rely on examinations for certification, selection and promotion.

Several projects supported by UNICEF aim to demonstrate how learning achievement assessments can benefit the decision-making processes responsible for universalizing primary education; how assessment data can be incorporated into educational management systems; and how assessing literacy, numeracy and life skills can improve the quality of education. Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA), a joint project of UNICEF-UNESCO, has been conducted in 25 countries (see page 5). Also underway is the Minimum Level of Learning project in India, the Bangladesh Assessment of Basic Competencies and the Continuous Assessment Project in Swaziland. These and other projects raise questions central to learning achievement and its assessment:

What learning skills must be acquired to fulfill the child's right to education?

How best can the acquisition of basic competencies be measured and monitored?

How can assessments improve education systems?

What comprises the set of desirable core competencies for basic education programmes in developing countries? Consensus is lacking, yet those working at community level seem to have a good sense of what basics are needed.

Can a model of continuous assessment be applied in some programmes? Unlike ad hoc evaluations after a programme has ended, this could provide school-based and out-of-school programmes with continuous quality control.

Where do children, youth and families most effectively learn what they need to learn?

From the learner's perspective, similar knowledge and skills can be learned in or out of school. One goal is to better understand which contexts for learning provide optimal access, quality and relevance.

How can life skills be defined, and to what extent can they be linked to the kinds of learning achievement measures already attempted? Life skills have been defined as coping or survival skills, but may also include knowledge and behavioral skills that enable children and families to “do better” at a whole host of tasks in their immediate environments.

This issue of Education Update is dedicated to learning achievement, opening renewed discussion on the future of this important area.

[END]

[PAGE 2]

New Chief of Education Section, Programme Division

Sheldon Shaeffer arrived in New York in November 1998 to assume the post of Chief, Education Section, UNICEF Programme Division. He served as UNICEF Regional Education Advisor in Bangkok for most of the past five years.

From my new desk at UNICEF Headquarters in New York, I am looking forward to working with the excellent team of education advisors in HQ and in regional offices and, through them, with the cadre of education officers in country programmes around the world.

UNICEF work in education has an increasingly important role in the organization. This can be seen in the achievements of the past few years, guided by Fay Chung; in reports on education in *The State of the World's Children 1999* and the new Global Agenda for Children; and in discussion at the recent Innocenti Global Seminar on “Basic Education: A Vision for the 21st Century”. But this role has responsibilities. We must work closely with other UNICEF sectors on issues of education and learning broadly defined. We also need to make clear that we know what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how to do it. We need to develop a clearer framework for our efforts and implement better-defined policies, strategies and programmes.

As a 'vision' of education is refined over the next few months, there are key questions to consider:

1. In early childhood care for survival, growth and development, how do we take an active role in further developing the new framework and programmes? This means focusing on education's contribution in a multi-sectoral process to the psychosocial, cognitive and linguistic development of children, and to their smooth transition into the early years of primary schools.
2. How can we work to get more children into school or equivalent education programmes, especially girls and other children suffering discrimination? This requires more explicit mechanisms to find and enroll these children.

3. How can we help to make children more 'ready' for schools and schools more 'ready' for children, especially for the young child just entering school from the home or from child care programmes? This means trying to improve teaching, learning, achievement, and assessment. One way is to help develop child-friendly schools that respect and help children realize their rights, are healthy and health promoting, are effective academically, and teach children the essential tools of literacy, numeracy and life skills.
4. How can we help teachers feel accountable to the community and to the bureaucracy in which they work? How can communities be encouraged to take joint responsibility with the school for enrolment, completion and quality? We need policies and programmes that encourage greater school autonomy (within government standards), strengthen school and community links, and help develop local initiatives for access and quality.
5. How do we work better for and with adolescents, to ensure they have basic education and life skills as well as expanded opportunities for personal development and participation?
6. How do we advance the role of UNICEF in promoting the EFA assessment process? Colleagues have worked hard with EFA partners to produce detailed guidelines for the assessment, which includes 18 core indicators. Agreement on these indicators represents an important achievement, as does the decision to focus assessment less on cross-national comparison and more on national capacity-building and collection of sub-national data.
7. How do we work in the new and exploding world of information and communications technology, to harness it for the disadvantaged who need it most and to use it to reduce disparities rather than increase them?

In the course of trying to answer some of these questions together, I look forward to getting better acquainted. Please let me know if we at HQ can do anything to make your work even more effective and rewarding.

Sheldon Shaeffer
Chief, Education Section

[END]

[PAGE 3]

Trends and Issues in Large Scale Student Assessment Programmes

Paul L. Williams, formerly of the Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey

When contemplating the implementation of an assessment programme, government leaders might ask themselves such questions as:

- What are the basic elements of an effective assessment programme?
- How do these elements fit together?
- How can my country get the best assessment for a minimum investment?

The goal of improving student learning is one of the most important goals of the educational process. National resources are committed to increasing the number and quality of instructional programmes – programmes that exist to improve learning, to improve the quality of life for all citizens, and to enhance the competitiveness of any nation's economic system.

Educational assessment programmes seek to determine the status of student learning and to identify those factors that have an effect on how much students learn. Armed with this knowledge, nations can make more informed policy decisions on programme design, resource allocation, and instructional practice in support of educational attainment.

Purposes of assessment

Perhaps the most overlooked component in the design of assessment programmes is a clear statement of the purposes for creating an assessment programme. Such purposes form the basis for all subsequent design and implementation activities. Different assessment purposes will result in different programme designs and expenditures.

For example, if a nation wishes to learn about the general educational achievement of its students at the national level only, then an assessment programme that fulfills that goal will have specific design features and costs associated with it. Alternatively, if a nation wishes to assess specific areas of academic strengths and weaknesses for each student, yet another design with different costs will need to be implemented.

Failure to design and implement an assessment programme that is consistent with national purposes will result in wasted resources and in the inability to make policy, resource allocation, and instructional decisions that will have the most educational impact.

The decision to move forward with the assessment must be followed by a definition of what to assess, and how to assess it. Each nation will have certain priorities for defining the subject areas to be assessed. Will the assessment focus on mathematics, science, literacy, or other areas of high national interest?

Content standards

Specific learning outcomes, known as content standards, will need to be developed within each subject area. Content standards are those outcomes that reflect what students should know and be able to do. The content standards may also provide suggestions on the types of assessment exercises that students will encounter on the assessment.¹

Practitioners may ask, "How difficult should the content standards be?" In an effort to improve instruction and learning, it is possible that the content standards could be defined

at such a challenging level that is impossible for most students to attain them. Conversely, content standards that are not challenging enough will provide assessment information that does not clearly identify students who are most in need of help.

The content standards will also provide direction on the types of assessment exercises that will be presented to students during the assessment. The content standards might specify a very high proportion of multiple-choice exercises, or they might specify that the assessment will contain a high proportion of exercises that require students to provide extensive written responses. Since assessments that are composed of a large number of written responses are much more expensive to score than assessments that are composed mostly of multiple-choice exercises, care must be taken to write content standards that are consistent with the resources that are available for the assessment programme.

Performance standards

In addition to content standards, assessment programmes must also set performance standards that represent how much learning is actually expected of students. Performance standards answer questions about how much learning is enough for the health of the educational enterprise.

The U.S. National Assessment has established performance standards at Basic, Proficient and Advanced levels, where Proficient is defined as solid grade-level performance. The policy goal is to have most American students reach at least the Proficient level of achievement. Results from the assessment suggest that the U.S. has a long way to go to meet this policy goal.²

Instrument design

There is a direct relationship between an instrument's quality and the capacity of educational leaders to make valid educational decisions. A poorly constructed assessment instrument can do much more harm than good when assessment results are used for policy making.

Assessment instruments must be designed to provide information on student learning that is consistent with the assessment programme's purposes. For example, if one of the purposes for an assessment is to provide diagnostic information, and a short assessment is developed instead due to a lack of funds, then the information obtained from the assessment would not be comprehensive enough to fulfill one of the programme's purposes.

Assessments must also be developed that are fully congruent with the content standards that have been adopted. This congruence contributes to the validity and utility of the assessment results when they are used for programme and instructional planning.

Summary

The critical need for consistency throughout the entire assessment planning and implementation process must be emphasized. The purposes established for the assessment will guide the development of content standards that, in turn, guide decisions

on performance standards and the design of the assessment instrument. All the phases of the process must be in close harmony if the goal of improving student learning is to be achieved. With the improvement of student learning comes a better educated populace and an improvement in the economic health of the country.

1. Williams, P.L., Reese, C.M., Campbell, J.R., Mazzeo, J., and Phillips, G.W. NAEP 1994 Reading: A First Look, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 1995. See: <http://www.nagb.org/>
2. Reese, C.M., Miller, K.E., Mazzeo, J., and Dossey, J.A. NAEP 1996 Mathematics Report card for the Nation and the States, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. See: <http://www.nces.ed.gov/NAEP/>

[END]

[PAGE 5]

"MLA"

The Joint UNESCO-UNICEF Monitoring Learning Achievement Project

Vinayagum Chinapah, Monitoring Learning Achievement and Quality Indicators Project Unit, Global Action Programme on Education for All, UNESCO, Paris, and Aster Haregot, Education Section, Programme Division, UNICEF New York

The Joint UNESCO-UNICEF Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) Project focuses on the strengthening of national capacity to monitor the quality of basic education programmes, particularly learning achievement. Its major objectives are to:

- Establish a mechanism for continuous monitoring of the quality of basic educational programmes;
- Periodically undertake assessments of learning outcomes;
- Provide interventions for observed disparities (regional, gender, socioeconomic) between the levels of learning outcomes;
- Establish common levels of learning out-comes; and
- Develop methods and indicators for long-term monitoring in order to formulate policies for improving basic education.

Twenty-five countries from all over the world participate in the project (11 in Africa, 5 in Asia, 6 in Arab States, 3 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1 in Europe). In every country, broad-based capacity building programmes are used to mobilise national expertise to form a critical mass of core trainers and peripheral trainees through national and sub-national training workshops. Sustaining the monitoring process depends on the involvement of representatives from ministries, research institutions, and educational practitioners at all levels.

National tests and questionnaires are developed to monitor the basic learning competencies (BLCs) of children and the factors influencing their learning outcomes in the areas of literacy, numeracy and life skills. The 12 countries that have completed their reports for the project suggest good news: targets are close to being met for the BLCs. The target set by the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990) was that 80 per cent of children would attain or surpass a defined level of learning achievement.

In-country analysis is a focus of the MLA project in the area of national design and instruments. The analysis and findings are broken down by region/location (urban/rural), gender (boys/girls) and type of school (public/private). Evidence from the participating countries clearly indicates the importance of the Life Skills approach in basic education, where structural disparities are minimized significantly.

In Africa, 8 countries are at various phases in the implementation of the project to develop a sustainable system for monitoring the quality of their basic educational programmes. They include the "least developed countries" of Angola, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Sao Tome & Principe, Sudan, Tanzania (Mainland) and Zanzibar (Tanzania). Mali, Mozambique and Zanzibar have now completed each phase of the project; i.e. finalisation of the project document, pilot testing, instrument construction, data collection, analysis and national reporting.

In **Mali**, the project included public schools, private schools, basic schools and *madrassa* (privately supported schools that have Arabic as their medium of instruction). Results showed public schools and *madrassa* to be the least efficient, indicating that the need for a policy for improving learning in these two school types. Tests also revealed that learning achievement is generally higher in schools situated in urban areas, compared with institutions located in rural communities. The analytical approach used to monitor BLCs indicated: (1) the importance of and need for different content-related strategies; (2) the importance of tailor-made measures in response to the differing needs of children attending different types of schools; and (3) the further need to critically examine performance across various learning sub-domains.

In **Mozambique**, findings revealed low achievement results in Portuguese, particularly in reading and writing skills. This was in comparison to numeracy and life skills. Pupils also demonstrated difficulties with problem-solving skills. Boys did better than girls, especially in rural areas. The project emphasized the need to improve teaching-learning processes in order to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

In **Zanzibar**, as in all participating countries, the strengthening of national capacity for monitoring was supported by several training workshops. Sixteen Task Force Members were trained in research techniques and instrument construction. Broad-based capacity-building was ensured by the participation of head teachers, primary school inspectors, curriculum developers and district education officers. Today in Zanzibar, the project is supporting the development of participatory and active teaching-learning strategies – an innovation recommended by the Ministry of Education that calls for a change in the traditionally teacher-oriented approach. Strengthening the “child-to-child approach”,

which develops the child's critical thinking and problem-solving skills, is seen as a basic requirement for improving the quality of basic education in Zanzibar, where the project also helps develop criteria for assessing cognitive skills and psychosocial skills.

The findings and recommendations of the MLA project are used to influence educational policy that will improve education systems and the quality of basic education. Results from the project have been used, for examples, in the reform and reconstruction of education systems from the curriculum to training of teachers and evaluators to the development of educational quality indicators. Overall, the lessons drawn from the project highlight the need to develop indicators to monitor and ensure the quality of education for all learners.

For more information, contact Aster Haregot at UNICEF New York, E-mail: aharegot@unicef.org, or contact Vinayagum Chinapah at UNESCO, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07SP.

[END]

[PAGE 7]

MLA Project Assesses Young Students in Nigeria

Ikem M. Chiejine, Education Programme Officer, UNICEF Lagos, Nigeria

Cognitive tests of literacy, numeracy and life skills of fourth graders were undertaken to assess the scope for a national survey of educational achievement in Nigeria as part of the MLA project. The findings indicated that performance in all three knowledge domains was generally poor. The mean percentage scores: 32.20% in Numeracy, 25.17% in Literacy and 32.62% in Life Skills.

The poorest performance was in Literacy. In one test item, students were instructed to copy a very short passage (about five lines) into a given space. Only 8.1 per cent of students copied the passage accurately. An alarming 39.6 per cent scored "zero": they were unable to correctly copy a single word or punctuation mark. The level of competence was also low in Numeracy, particularly in geometry and measurement.

The effect of language ability on the performance of students was demonstrated by the finding that the mean score on worded items (30.5%) was much lower than for non-worded items (42%).

Recommendations focus on the need to **improve learning achievement**. The very low level of achievement observed in this study was largely due to a very low level of literacy competence on the part of the students and, possibly, on the part of their teachers. It was recommended that, in the short term, a workshop be organized with successful primary school English teachers from public and private schools in order to examine the current

texts and official curriculum, and to prepare a supplementary teachers' guide for the purpose of assessing students.

To improve learning achievement in the long-term, for both literacy and numeracy, the solution may be a national campaign to **restructure the curriculum for the education of primary school teachers**. This approach would propose school activities for prospective teachers and define the competencies to be developed in students at the primary school level.

One of the most important lessons of this exercise resulted in recommendations on institutionalizing a programme for **monitoring** learning achievement and the educational system. Awareness could be raised with a national conference to publicize this first sample survey. Technical assistance and capacity-building training would further support State monitoring programmes. Additional recommendations for action are to:

- **Create a national technical group** (or state technical groups for state surveys) to conduct similar exercises;
- **Consider an upward extension of this exercise** to Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary schools;
- **Fully utilize the extensive network of community administrative linkages** established by such bodies as the National Primary Education Commission and the National Board for Educational Measurement;
- **Extend performance tests in the future to cover sub-samples of the selected students;** and
- **Make provisions to observe the class-room practices of a sub-sample of teachers.**

For more information, contact: UNICEF Representative, 30A Oyinkan Abayomi Drive, Ikoyi, P.O. Box 1282, Lagos, Nigeria.

[END]

[PAGE 8]

Alternatives to Standardized Testing: A Conversation with Howard Gardner

Howard Gardner is author of The Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Below are selected excerpts from the Harvard Education Letter Focus Series No. 2 (Motivation, Achievement and Testing), reprinted with permission.

How did you arrive at your theory of multiple intelligences?

My colleagues and I conducted a rather massive survey of a number of large bodies of knowledge: we looked at research on the development in normal children of very different capacities, the breakdown of these capacities under different varieties of brain

damage, the existence in special populations – like child prodigies or children with learning disabilities – of very uneven cognitive profiles, the sets of abilities found in individuals from different cultures.

As a result of this survey, I isolated seven different mental faculties or intelligences: **linguistic** intelligence as exemplified in the work of a poet; **logical-mathematical** analysis – and here you might look at a scientist or a mathematician; **musical** analysis; **spatial** understanding; **bodily** kines-thetic thinking – the dancer, athlete, surgeon; and two forms of personal understanding – **interpersonal** knowledge of other persons, such as a teacher or a salesman might use; and **intrapersonal** knowledge, which means knowing one's own strengths and needs and using that knowledge to act in the world.

What happened when you began to apply this theory to actual projects?

Seven intelligences was much too simple. Once you take a look at it there are a lot more that need to be taken into account – cognitive style and motivation as well as pure 'computational' or analytical ability. The second thing is crucial, but often overlooked: the notion of assessing 'pure' potential is ridiculous. You can only assess people in an area like art, music, chess, or history if they have had some exposure to that material.

We were driven inevitably from assessment in the pure sense to a combination of assessment and curriculum. Kids have to be given things that they find interesting and that nourish their problem-solving skills and their imaginations. Then we assess cognitive learning, the speed at which they are learning, the depth of the learning. If curriculum is good enough, assessment is built into it.

But we do not see ourselves as curriculum developers, handing teachers ready-made stuff for the classroom. We are trying to work in a more generic way, to figure out in general how to bring together assessment and curriculum and to come up with some prototype projects that teachers can draw upon to generate new ones. We want the teachers to have ownership.

If you were to give teachers a set of guidelines for assessment, what might you include?

I would say that assessment has to be intelligence-fair, which is another way to saying that you can not always look at a student's abilities through the lens of language and logic. If you are interested in spatial abilities, you have to ask people to solve spatial kinds of problems directly and not ask them in words about space.

Assessment should happen as much as possible in the course of the student's regular engagement in activities, rather than being sporadic and unnatural. It should be interesting and engaging. People do not learn from most tests. You should not use an assessment if it doesn't have motivating power. It should not only involve students in the sense of making them excited, but involve them in the actual assessment itself. Students

can be operating both on the performance level and on the reflection level – stepping back and saying, “How am I doing?”

Assessment should be multi-measured, in the sense that we never want to depend on a single index, but rather to look in a number of different ways at the student’s skills, deficits, and characteristic style of learning. It should fit into what we know about the child's history. An assessment should always include concrete suggestions of what to do next. Psychologists spend too much time ranking people and not enough time helping them.

What are some first steps teachers and principals can take towards this form of assessment?

Within the school you must have a conversation going on about what counts as competence and how to go about achieving it. Teachers have to decide through discussion what sorts of things are important in and outside of the classroom and think about what would be the best indicator of these. If you are trying to achieve something and you have no way of knowing whether you are achieving it, you either have to change the goal or think about better ways of finding out whether it is working.

Nobody can assess by himself. It is best when two or more teachers look at a group of students or their work. We have seen in our projects that even if the teachers can not reach complete agreement, the process of sharing perceptions sharpens their acuity as assessors.

Copies may be obtained for US\$ 9.95 from Gutman Library, Suite 349, 6 Appian Way, Cambridge MA 02138. Tel: 1(617)495.3432; Fax: 1(617)496-3584. ISBN: 1-883433-03-7.

[END]

[PAGE 9]

**Educational Assessments in Latin America:
Lessons Learned in Six Countries**

Educational assessment is an emerging issue in the education policy debate in Latin America today. Chile and Argentina have the most comprehensive and best-managed assessment systems in Latin America, and both countries have also made limited progress in integrating assessments into large scale monitoring and evaluation systems.

Notable innovations in the region include Brazil's attempt at assessing institutions of higher learning; Costa Rica's assessments of learning readiness among children entering primary school; Mexico's tests of teacher knowledge and skills; Colombia's emphasis on research; Chile's use of assessment for targeting resources; and Argentina’s efforts to apply its assessments to curriculum reform.

The key lessons learned and challenges for the future include: (a) the importance of national consensus and long-term commitment; (b) the importance of explicitly focusing on the use of assessment as a tool to improve learning; (c) the need for capacity building and technical competence; and (d) the importance of benefiting from developments and innovations coming from both within and outside Latin America, especially through international testing programmes such as those of the International Association for the Evaluation of Student Achievement (IEA), a worldwide assessment consortium headquartered in Amsterdam.

Among the problems that require greater attention are Mexico's reluctance to disseminate assessment results; Costa Rica's stop-and-go approach to assessment, and its excessive number of tests; and Brazil's slow progress in utilising assessments for curriculum and policy reform.

All six countries reported similar assessment results: students scored far below the expectations of professional educators and researchers. Students from urban and private schools, and those with more educated parents, had the highest scores.

The situation may be summarized as follows:

- The countries of Latin America consistently scored well below those of North America, Europe and Asia.
- In a 1991 study of mathematics implemented by Educational Testing Services (ETS), the Brazilian cities of Fortaleza and Sao Paulo scored lower than all other participating countries and cities, with the exception of Mozambique.
- Colombia also scored poorly in the most recent mathematics study conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Student Achievement (IEA). Among the 41 countries that reported their scores, Colombia ranked second last, just ahead of South Africa.
- Only 4 percent of all Colombian students scored in the top 50 percent of students in the world. None of the students in the Colombia sample scored in the top 10 percent worldwide.
- Countries with similar per capita incomes -- Bulgaria, Lithuania, the Philippines, Romania, Latvia, Iran, Slovakia, Russia and Thailand -- scored higher than Colombia.
- Mexico participated fully in the exercise, but decided not to release the results.

Source: Educational Assessments in Latin America: Current Progress and Future Challenges-by Laurence Wolff - Occasional Paper Series No. 11, PREAL - Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas. Inter-American Dialogue (Washington DC) and CINDE (Santiago, Chile).www.preal.cl

[END]

[PAGE 10]

Assessing Learning Achievement Lessons from South Asia

*Jim Irvine, Regional Education Adviser
UNICEF ROSA*

Learning achievement is one of the six target dimensions of the 'Expanded Vision of Education' spelled out at Jomtien in 1990, and is included as Indicator 15 in the 'Core' indicators to be reported for the EFA 2000 Assessment. As in other regions, a number of countries in South Asia made efforts during the past decade to measure more effectively what students in the education systems are actually learning. The outcomes of these efforts are as varied as the range of approaches used.

South Asia is in no position to make educationally valid comparisons of learning achievements between countries, or even across studies. Nevertheless, a range of South Asian initiatives meriting attention and providing useful lessons include: the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) study in Sri Lanka; Assessing Basic Competencies (ABC) (Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan); and aspects of the DPEP baseline studies in India. Some approaches will be replicated for the EFA 2000 end-of-decade assessment. Some countries have used a continuous assessment strategy (e.g. Bhutan), Minimum Learning Levels (MLL in India), and Essential Learning Competencies (ELC in Sri Lanka).

Jim Irvine, Regional Education Adviser, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), has prepared a six-page overview of this experience. The paper includes some useful references, which are summarized below.

Important lessons emerge from the South Asia experience:

- The studies suggest that in many countries, fewer than half the children sampled could demonstrate mastery of basic literacy, numeracy and life skills competencies, as defined by the studies, despite having experienced at least four years of schooling.
- There are often substantial inequities in learning achievement that reflect geographic, urban / rural, gender, school size and other disparities.
- Simple comparisons across subtests of the percentages who 'achieve' a certain level of performance are neither appropriate nor meaningful, since they take no account of the distribution characteristics of the variables.
- Studies that present a static analysis of learning achievement after a given period are of limited value. Studies of learning achievement that provide ongoing feedback to enable teachers and systems to identify problems and take remedial action are preferable.
- Most studies of learning achievement tend to focus on basic academic skills, and tend to overlook attitudes, values and higher level cognitive functions. What is measured

has a significant effect on what is taught, so that there is a risk of 'watering down' the curriculum or 'teaching to the test'.

- Continuous assessment of individual children's learning and effective use of this information for enrichment and remedial teaching as part of every lesson can ensure that instruction is planned, meaningful, relevant and interesting, thereby influencing the quality of what is learned. This can happen only if training and professional support are given to teachers and officials in how to use and interpret the information.

The article also suggests how the South Asian experience could be incorporated into the EFA 2000 Assessment that requires countries to reflect again on the whole issue of learning achievement.

This summary was prepared by for *Education Update* by Peter Buckland, Senior Education Adviser, UNICEF New York. To request the full article via E-mail, contact jirvine@unicef.org or aharegot@unicef.org. UNICEF staff may obtain a copy online at the Education page of the Programme Knowledge Network (PKN). Copies may also be obtained from the Editor of *Education Update*.

[END]

[PAGE 11]

Resources

Keying Into Assessment

Jeni Wilson and Heather Fehring, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne (Australia), 1995

Reviewed by Aster Haregot

This publication explores assessment evaluation and recording-keeping strategies that teachers can use, adapt and develop in the eight learning areas of English, mathematics, science, technology, studies of society, environmental health, physical education and the arts. The authors show that the paramount reason for monitoring students' achievements is to improve their learning.

Wasted Opportunities: When Schools Fail

Education for All: Status and Trends 1998

Reviewed by Mary Pigozzi, Senior Adviser, Education

This issue of Status and Trends focuses on school wastage in developing countries. It addresses the latest trends in repetition and dropout and three related questions: How extensive is school wastage? What are its causes? What can be done to make schools more efficient? The discussion is easy to understand, well-illustrated with figures and tables, and clearly defines terminology. This document also shows how to arrive at a number of efficiency measures. Available in French and English from: EFA Forum

Secretariat, UNESCO, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, FRANCE. Fax: 33 1 4568 5629. E-mail: efa@unesco.org

Reducing Repetition: Issues and Strategies

Thomas Owen Eisemon, UNESCO, 1997

Reviewed by Mary Pigozzi

The booklet focuses on repetition at primary, secondary and higher education levels. It goes beyond the issues of policy and investment choices to explore in some detail a range of strategies for reducing repetition. The author argues that "school only" strategies are not sufficient and that a combination of strategies is probably most effective. This combination might include targeting children and their home environment, the content and teaching methods in the educational institution, and overall changes in policy and the education system. Available in English and in French from UNESCO (see address above).

Together is Better: Collaborative Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting

Anne Davies, Caren Cameron, Colleen Politano and Kathleen Gregory, 1994

Reviewed by Elaine Furniss

A practical book, *Together is Better* shows how teachers, students and parents can evaluate learning together, and how students can learn to take ownership of their learning. The book is the result of work completed in schools and with students, teachers and parents of Tsolum Elementary School in British Columbia (Canada). Most teachers are required to provide one or more reports to their students' parents in the course of the school year. In the system developed in Tsolum Elementary School, the report that goes home to parents or caregivers is the end result of a conference between parent, student and teacher.

In a chapter about providing evidence of learning, the authors write: "**Everything that occurs in a classroom is potential evidence of student learning. Evidence consists of observations of children at work, the products they create, and what they communicate in conversations we have with them about their learning.**" Evidence of learning is: a student's journal; a student working with another student in the classroom; two students demonstrating a science project for a small group; a student telling what he knows about the number five." The book then lists 10 ideas for collecting evidence that teachers say have been successful for them.

If you are a classroom teacher, this is a practical book for helping you and your students and their parents to be better observers and reporters of student learning. Published by Eleanor Curtain Publishing, 906 Malvern Road, Armadale 3143, Australia.

Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessment

Early Childhood Assessment Resource Group, The National Education Goals Panel, Feb. 1998

Reviewed by Waheed Hassan

In 1990, the Bush Administration and the United States Governors set the following goal for children: All children in America will start school ready to learn by 2000. This booklet outlines the principles and purposes of early childhood assessment. It provides recommendations to policy-makers according to the following purposes of assessment:

- Assessing to promote children's learning and development;
- Identifying children for health and special services;
- Monitoring trends and evaluating programmes and services; and
- Assessing academic achievement to hold individual students, teachers and schools accountable.

For quick reference, there is a useful matrix on appropriate uses and technical accuracy of assessment across the early childhood continuum (0-8). This booklet will be useful to all early child development practitioners.

**Quality Issues in Basic Education:
Indicators, Learning Achievement Reports, and Monitoring Teaching/ Learning Processes**

UNICEF ROSA Report, No. 31, by Thomas Maguire, Professor Emeritus, Centre for Research in Applied Measurement and Evaluation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

Reviewed by Elaine Furniss

This report of a regional workshop in Kathmandu (Nepal) in June 1998 contains a number of interesting items. There is a review of the work completed by Vinayagum Chinapah in Monitoring Learning Achievement as well as a copy of the South Asia Classroom Observation Schedule (SACOS). Terms associated with quantitative research are defined in the report, which also points out problems resulting from the presentation of misleading data.

Progress Through Self Evaluation: The Path to a Better School

Resource Materials for School Heads and Class Teachers by Joe Hogan, The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, London

Reviewed by Elaine Furniss

For "all round school improvement", this book is one of eight modules prepared for schools in Africa to assist with self-evaluation. It contains a number of questionnaire outlines on key areas such as the school ethos, learning processes, management strategies, and curriculum. It also provides practical steps on how to conduct a school self-evaluation, with chapters specifically dealing with primary and secondary schools. Copies may be obtained from the Human Resource Development Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London, SW1Y 5HX. Fax: 44 (0) 171 747 6287.

[END]

Consequences of Assessment: What is the Evidence?

An abstract of the address delivered by William A. Mehrens of Michigan State University to the American Educational Research Association, April 1998, is reproduced here with permission from The Education Policy Analysis Archives, a peer-reviewed scholarly journal published on the World Wide Web (Volume 6 Number 13, <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v6n13.html>).

Abstract. Attention is here directed toward the prevalence of large scale assessments (focusing primarily on state assessments). Mehrens examines the purposes of these assessment programs; enumerates both potential dangers and benefits of such assessments; investigates what the research evidence says about assessment consequences (including a discussion of the quality of the evidence); discusses how to evaluate whether the consequences are good or bad; presents some ideas about what variables may influence the probabilities for good or bad consequences; and presents some tentative conclusions about the whole issue of the consequences of assessment and the amount of evidence available and needed. Some conclusions reached are:

A. Purposes and Expectations

1. There are a variety of purposes for and expectations regarding the consequences of assessment. Some of these may be unrealistic. "Evaluation and testing have become the engine for implementing educational policy" (Petrie, 1987).

B. Need for Evidence

2. Scholars seem to agree that it is unwise, illogical, and unscholarly to just assume that assessments will have positive consequences. There is the potential for both positive consequences and negative consequences.

C. Quantity and Quality of the Evidence

3. It would profit us to have more research.

4. The evidence we do have is inadequate with respect to drawing any cause/effect conclusions about the consequences. If instruction changes concomitant with changes in both state curricular guidelines and state assessments, how much of the change was due to which variable?

D. Evaluating the Evidence

5. Not everyone will view changes (e.g. reforming curriculum in a particular way) with the same affect. Some will think the changes represent positive consequences and others will think the changes constitute negative consequences.

E. Curricular and Instructional Consequences

6. High stakes assessments probably do impact both curriculum and instruction, but assessments alone are not likely as effective as they would be if there were more teacher professional development.

7. Attempts to reform curriculum in ways neither front line teachers nor the public support seems unwise.

F. Impact on Teachers

8. High stakes assessments increase teacher stress and lower teacher morale. This seems unfortunate to me, but may make others happy.

9. Assessments can assist both students and teachers in evaluating whether the students are achieving at a sufficiently high level. This seems like useful knowledge.

G. Impact on Test Scores and Student Learning

10. High stakes assessments will result in higher test scores. Both test security and the opportunity to mis-administer or mis-score tests must be considered in evaluating whether higher scores represent increased knowledge. If the test items are secure (and reused items are not memorable), and if tests are administered and scored correctly, it seems reasonable to infer that higher scores indicate increased achievement in the particular domain the assessment covers. That is good if the domain represents important content and if teaching to that domain does not result in ignoring other equally important domains. If tests are not secure, or are incorrectly administered/scored, there is no reason to believe that higher scores represent increased learning.

H. Impact on Public

11. The public and the press are more likely to use what they believe to be "inadequate" assessment results to blame educators than to use "good" results to praise them. They will continue to make inappropriate causative inferences from the data. The public will not be impressed by assessments over reform curricula they consider irrelevant.

I. Confounding Format, Content and Stakes in Considering Consequences

12. There has been a great deal of confounding of item format, test content and the stakes. Which format is used probably makes far less difference than how it is used.

[END]

[PAGE 14]

Update

25 October to 3 November 1998

Innocenti Global Seminar on Basic Education

Reported by Mary Joy Pigozzi, Senior Education Adviser, UNICEF New York

The Ninth Innocenti Global Seminar was held in Florence at the UNICEF International Child Development Centre on the theme "Basic Education: A Vision for the 21st Century". It was organized in cooperation with PD, EPP and DHR (divisions within UNICEF New York). Participants included approximately 30 UNICEF education staff in addition to a dozen counterparts and resource persons from outside the organization, among them the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education.

Topics included managing and financing resources, special concerns for adolescents, child-friendly learning environments and access to quality education. Participants agreed on the elements of a comprehensive vision document that will be proposed as the guiding document for UNICEF action on education in the new millennium. Maggie Black is preparing a report for publication.

21-24 September 1998 UNICEF Manila

Informal Network in Asia Meets on ECC-SGD

*Reported by Feny De Los Angeles Bautista, Director,
Community of Learners Foundation, Manila, Philippines*

Developmental assessment in Early Childhood Care for Survival, Growth and Development (ECC-SGD) is a priority item of the informal regional network for ECC-SGD in Asia. But it has taken a back seat to many other related activities in recent years. Today, however, many Asian countries are renewing their commitment and expanding programmes to serve the children who are at risk for developmental problems and delays. The crucial role of assessment is recognized in:

- Identifying young children 'at risk', as a first step in facilitating access to programmes;
- Defining school readiness, which is often emphasized as an important rationale for ECC-SGD programs in the region;
- Defining indicators for measuring programme effectiveness and impact based on child development indicators.

A small working group of ECC-SGD specialists was formed, including participants at the meeting in November: 10 international child development specialists in psychology, education, pediatrics, nutrition and program development. All are based in Asia or have provided technical support for ECC-SGD programs in Asia.

The workshop's objectives were twofold: to generate specific recommendations on developmental assessment of use in preparing guidelines for the use of practitioners; and to plan for regional activities that can follow through on these recommendations.

16-19 November Manesar, India

Young People's Voices on HIV/AIDS:

A Communication for Development Workshop

Reported by Andrés Guerrero, Education Section, UNICEF New York

As part of the 1998 World AIDS Campaign for and with young people, a global workshop was organized by the Education for Development unit, PD, and the HIV/AIDS Communication focal point of DOC, in collaboration with UNICEF Delhi. The workshop brought together young people from age 15 to 24 who are HIV/AIDS activists in 17 countries representing all regions. Media professionals focusing on HIV/AIDS also participated.

The purpose of the workshop was to develop strategies and guidelines on how young people can form partnerships with the media to promote effective HIV/AIDS

communication programmes involving young people, which should ultimately lead to behaviour change. The workshop also addressed ways to counteract discrimination against people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. The strategies and guidelines developed by the participants on how to make young people's voices heard on HIV/AIDS via the mass media will be included in a report that will serve as a resource tool for UN staff, the media and youth activists in the field of HIV/AIDS. The report will be available from Andrés Guerrero: E-mail: aguerrero@unicef.org.

[END]

[PAGE 15]

Events

28 January - 8 February 1999 Rajasthan, India

Capacity Building Workshop on Literacy Resource Centres for Girls and Women

This workshop of the ACCU (UNESCO) and the Rajasthan Adult Education Association (RAEA) will focus on networking and documentation of literacy data and literacy-related activities. It will feature 'hands-on' training in use of geographic information systems. For information, contact Mr. Muneharu Kusaba, Director General ACCU, Japan: Fax 81332694510; E-mail <literacy@accu.or.jp>. Contact RAEA at Fax 91141517464 or E-mail <rajadult@jp1.dot.net.in>.

3-6 February 1999 Maharashtra State, India

Asia & Pacific Regional Conference on Education for Human Rights

The conference will be held at the World Peace Centre of MAEER's MIT, Pune, Maharashtra State, India. For information, contact <wpcpune@hotmail.com>.

March 1999 Rajasthan, India

Lok Jumbish International Seminar

An international seminar is planned by *Lok Jumbish* ("Peoples' Movement") for late March in association with UNESCO. The seminar will include observation of work in the field, and will focus on the strengthening of community/NGO/government partnerships in support of improving educational access and quality of basic education. Dates and agenda to be confirmed.

1999 <<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>>

Celebrating the CRC on Voices of Youth

The UNICEF Internet forum for young people, Voices of Youth, welcomes opportunities to collaborate in broadening youth participation in discussion, learning and activism via the Internet. During 1999, the project will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by hosting activities on topics including HIV, disability, girls' rights and the environment. If you would like to collaborate or learn more about the 1999 programme, please contact the project coordinator at <voy@unicef.org>.

Early 1999 *Reported by Jim Irvine, Regional Education Adviser, UNICEF ROSA*

MLA studies and workshop on learning achievement

Several countries in South Asia intend to undertake a study of learning achievements of children completing the primary cycle, either through the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) methodology, or by redoing the Assessment of Basic Competencies (ABC) studies of the mid-decade, using nationally representative samples of children. These will provide comparisons over time on some components of functional literacy, functional numeracy and life skills, and should help UNICEF, education planners and curriculum developers to address issues related to the quality of learning in schools.

To support the study, a regional workshop on 'Monitoring Learning Achievement' is planned for the first quarter of 1999 to exchange information on strategies and methodologies (MLA, ABC, MLL, continuous assessment). The workshop will address EFA 2000 Assessment Core Indicator 15 (Learning Achievement). It will also consider the feasibility and desirability of locating some benchmarking items common to all assessments, should it be deemed useful to pursue issues related to comparative standards. A major concern is to identify within countries the variability in the performances of groupings of children as a basis for improved targeting of resources and attention to quality issues where the needs are greatest. Such groupings may include urban/rural, boys/girls, government/private/NFE/community schools, or small/medium/large schools and other on items/clusters/domains.

[END]

[PAGE 16]

What's happening in Education?

Sheldon Shaeffer has assumed the post of Chief of the Education Section, Programme Division, UNICEF New York. He served several years with UNICEF in Bangkok as Regional Education Adviser (see his letter on page 2).

Peter Buckland will represent UNICEF at the third meeting of the Steering Committee of the UNESCO Institute of Statistics in Paris in February. He will take the opportunity to have follow-up discussions with UNESCO on EFA, UNSIA and Education in Emergency issues.

Andrés Guerrero will work with PD colleagues and participating country liaisons to integrate an Internet component into the project "Meeting the Participation and Development rights of Adolescent Girls". The Voices of Youth team will also provide perspectives and experience on youth Internet participation to the Working Group for the International Workshop on Children and Media. A demonstration and discussion on Voices of Youth and using the Internet for learning and youth participation on global issues and human rights will be hosted at the National Education Exhibition in the Netherlands.

Mary Pigozzi and **Elaine Furniss** will work as facilitators with OXFAM Great Britain in Thailand in early February to support the development of OXFAM's Global Education Strategy.

Elaine Furniss continues to work on the development of the new Web site for teacher education and curriculum resources, entitled "Teachers Talking About Learning". A small group of dedicated EPOs and others will be reviewing the Web site and adding practical examples in January. Consultants Tom March and Ed Gaible are collaborating on the project. Please send an E-mail to efurniss@unicef.org if you would like access to the temporary site to give comments.

Aster Haregot will be updating the Country Education profiles database and will follow-up the work on the Alliance for Community Action on Female Education project.

Starting February, a mid-term review of Norwegian support to the Girls' Education Programme is planned. Regional Offices have been asked to coordinate input from WCAR and ESAR in terms of suggesting countries and review team members. **Mary Pigozzi** is coordinating the overall review.

[END]

[PAGE 16]

Education: Digitally

Elaine Furniss

More than 70 per cent of UNICEF offices will be linked to the Internet before May 1999. In this volume of Education Update, sites on the World Wide Web are related to **Learning Achievement**.

<http://www.mcrel.org>

The Web site of the Mid-continent Regional Lab contains detailed information on standards and benchmarks related to curriculum areas. You can also link from this site to other Internet sites dealing with education standards. UNICEF EPOs may be particularly interested in the standards related to literacy, numeracy and life skills at [<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/docs/contents.html>](http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/docs/contents.html)

<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/curriculum/benchmark.htm>

Hosted by the Curriculum Corporation of Australia, this site describes the benchmarks for literacy and numeracy that support achievement of the national (Australian) education goal: "every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level" and the sub-goal "every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years' recognising that a very small percentage of students suffers from severe disabilities."

<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kappan.htm>

Kappan Articles Online contains some useful articles related to international assessments of Learning Achievement and classroom-based assessment.

<http://www.ascd.org/services/library/outcome.html>

A list of resources about Outcomes Based Education

<http://www.educationprofile.com.au/>

Related to American Literacy Profiles, the Web site provides teachers with practical descriptors of reading behaviors for observing and documenting children's acquisition of literacy.

<http://www.qed.qld.gov.au/pdt/cte/pdf/frame3.doc>

Here you will find a standards framework for teachers that outlines standards and detailed possible observable behaviours for teachers who have achieved such standards. The site is maintained by the Centre for Teaching Excellence, Queensland (Australia), Department of Education (Submitted by Anna Obura, REA, ESARO).

[END]

[END]