Outcome of Part A: What Teaching and Learning for the Future?

This text summarizes common understandings on teaching and learning for the future in the Asia-Pacific region, which emanated from discussions held on 16-17 October 2013 at the High-Level Expert Meeting Beyond 2015: Transforming Teaching and Learning in the Asia-Pacific Region, organized by UNESCO in Bangkok, Thailand.

The participants of the meeting, fully recognizing the diversity among countries in the Asia-Pacific region and the diverse contexts in which teaching and learning take place in the countries, share the following observations.

1. Various shifts in focus are occurring in approaches to teaching and learning in the region along with broader social transformations. They include the following shifts:

   i) from the promotion of access to education to the improvement of the quality of education for all;
   ii) from teaching to learning;
   iii) from teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred approaches;
   iv) from examination oriented teaching and learning to whole person development;
   v) from textbook dominated classrooms to multi-media/source/method learning environment;
   vi) from subject-based knowledge only to the inclusion of skills for life and lifelong learning;
   vii) from national relevance only to local and global relevance also; and
   viii) from uniformity to diversity.

   These shifts do not imply a drastic change from one approach to another. Instead, they invite a vision of transformation as a process of bringing together the two ends of a continuum.

2. While national policies in many countries promote such shifts in focus, it is often the case that prevailing teaching and learning practices are still far from reflecting these conceptual shifts. There are challenges and constraints, commonly found in many countries, in transforming teaching and learning practices in the realities of schools and classrooms. These include:

   i) a lack of political will, long-term commitment, and sustained action with monitoring;
   ii) a gap between policy and practice in terms of resources, capacity and know-how;
   iii) a lack of efforts to build consensus among the government, teachers, teacher organizations, parents, and communities on the directions of education reform and policy changes;
   iv) a lack of community empowerment and “bottom-up” strategies to implement changes;
   v) a lack of systematic teacher training and development and an insufficient number of qualified teachers;
   vi) non-conducive work environments for teachers, such as overloaded work conditions, a lack of autonomy and empowerment, and a lack of incentives for change; and
   vii) social pressures to focus on the results of high-stake exams.

3. In order to facilitate and support the transformation of teaching and learning for the future, we recommend the following:

   3.1. Governments should demonstrate a clear political will to transform teaching and learning and commit resources to this end. They must go beyond policy statements and ensure that the implementation of transformational teaching and learning is well-planned and resourced.
3.2. Transforming teaching and learning requires collective efforts of all stakeholders. Governments should take bottom-up approaches to education reform, involving parents, communities, teachers and teacher unions in policy discussions and reform implementation processes, and mobilize their support and partnerships for change.

3.3. Any education reform measure must be evidence-based to be successful. Linking research on teaching and learning with policy-making should be encouraged and supported. Investments should be made to support research into understanding contexts, constraints, relevance and outcomes of policy implementation, and in building local capacities to undertake such research.

3.4. Policy directions that are seemingly dichotomous, e.g. centralization and de-centralization, top-down and bottom-up reform, standardization and creativity/innovation, can be mutually supportive in transforming teaching and learning; thus there needs to be a balance of both in the implementation process.

3.5. Teachers must be supported, empowered and incentivized to be able to respond effectively to diverse teaching contexts, to be innovative and to act as change agents.

3.6. Transforming teaching practices requires the transformation of pedagogical approaches used in teacher education. More research on teacher development should be promoted as it can shed light on teachers’ needs and development in a broader context.

3.7. While increasing attention is paid to the outputs of teaching, learning and assessment at national and international levels, equal attention should be paid to teaching and learning processes and their outcomes. Classroom assessments, in particular, require more attention and should encompass a greater range of outcomes. More emphasis should be placed on the assessment of comprehensive educational experiences, including non-academic skills and competencies. Assessment practices also need to be re-engineered so that “assessment for learning” and “assessment as learning”, rather than “assessment of learning”, are the focus.

3.8. Well-balanced, implementable, relevant, integrated and flexible curricula need to be developed. Such curricula should enhance transversal competencies and focus on learning for lifelong and life-wide purposes.

3.9. While ICTs have the potential to assist in the transformation of teaching and learning, more research is needed on the pedagogy required for their effective use and how they can be embedded in pedagogy in the most effective manner. Furthermore, methods that can be effective in under-resourced contexts need to be explored.

3.10. Equitable access to relevant and effective learning experiences that develop every learner’s full potential and ensure that no learner is excluded should be the key principle to guide our deliberations on teaching and learning. Particular attention should be given to learners in disadvantaged situations, such as those living in poverty, in remote places, those with disabilities, or those from ethnic, linguistic and/or religious minority communities.

4. Above all, transforming teaching and learning requires a shared vision for education in the future. We need to collectively ask the question: “What transformations do we want?” We need to be aware of how various contexts might shape these transformations, sharpen our foresight to anticipate the future, and collectively and continuously search for, develop, and share visions for education and learning that will benefit learners wherever they are. Such collective efforts and collaboration towards a shared vision among a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, schools, teachers, teacher organizations, parents, communities, civil society organizations, the private sector, and international organizations, are essential for defining the transformations we need in the Asia-Pacific region.