



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Nicholas Burnet,
Assistant Director-General for Education,
to the Centre for Studies on Policies
and Practices in Education,

*“Education policy in times of crisis:
less inequality, better quality”*

Santiago, Chile, 29 July 2009

“Education policy in times of crisis: less inequality, better quality”

Speech to the Centre for Studies on Policies and Practices in Education,
Santiago, Chile, July 29, 2009

Nicholas Burnett, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Buenos días y muchas gracias a Christian Cox y al Centro de Estudios de Políticas y Prácticas en Educación de la Universidad Católica por la oportunidad de estar hoy aquí junto a expertos en educación de las universidades chilenas y también a quienes siguen este evento en línea.

Como muchos de ustedes probablemente saben, la UNESCO organizó a principios de este mes en París la Conferencia Mundial sobre Educación Superior, con la asistencia de unos mil quinientos participantes de más de ciento cincuenta países. La conferencia abordó una serie de nuevas dinámicas que están afectando la educación superior y puntualizan la responsabilidad social de las instituciones en un contexto de desafíos globales. En una declaración los participantes de la conferencia hicieron un llamado a que la educación superior considere a la formación docente, tanto a nivel inicial como en servicio, y enfatizaron la importancia de desarrollar un currículo que entregue a los estudiantes conocimientos y herramientas relevantes a nuestros tiempos. Esto es aún más imperativo en el contexto de la crisis económica y financiera mundial, ya que proporcionar una educación de calidad a las personas en todas las etapas de su vida es parte integral de una recuperación sustentable.

[Good morning and thank you very much to Mr Christian Cox and the Centre for Studies on Policies and Practices in Education for the opportunity to be here today with leading experts from the education colleges of Chilean universities and others beyond.

As many of you probably know, UNESCO organized a World Conference on Higher Education in Paris earlier this month that gathered close to 1,500 participants from over 150 countries. The Conference looked at a series of new dynamics affecting higher education and highlighted the social

responsibility of institutions in addressing global challenges. In the final communiqué, conference participants notably called for higher education to scale up teacher training, both pre-service and in-service, and stressed the importance of developing curricula that provide students with relevant knowledge and skills for our times. This is all the more imperative in the context of the global economic and financial crisis because providing good quality education to individuals at all stages of their life is an integral part of a sustainable recovery.]

This is why from the outset of the crisis, UNESCO and other partners have been forcefully advocating for sustained investment in education. Today I would like to briefly draw attention to the significance of the internationally agreed development goals and where the region stands on them; stress the need for policies that promote equity and improve quality, and speak to you about the International Task Force on Teachers for EFA. One of the missions of this task force is to promote more sharing of research and knowledge of policies that have been tried out relating to teachers. It is particularly appropriate to discuss this together as it is crucial that we strengthen the links between country experience, research evidence and policy-making.

Our top priority centers on achieving the Education for All goals. These goals were adopted by 164 governments in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. In a nutshell, they involve expanding learning opportunities at all levels. They set targets to be reached by 2015, in particular universal primary education, gender equality and a 50% increase in literacy rates. They cover a wide learning spectrum by emphasizing the importance of early childhood care and education programs as well as meeting the learning needs of youth and adults. Finally they call for qualitative improvements across the board. Goal 6 clearly specifies the need for “recognized and measurable learning outcomes to be achieved by all especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills”. Teachers, of course, have a lead role to play in this endeavour but I will return to this later.

Education for All relates closely to the Millennium Development Goals, probably the most ambitious set of targets ever endorsed by the international community. These goals call for dramatic reductions in poverty, hunger, and infant and child mortality. They include a specific target on universal primary education. Education, however, matters for each one of the eight MDG goals because without basic skills and knowledge, individuals will be

severely limited in terms of lifetime opportunities. All evidence clearly shows that lack of education correlates with poverty, exclusion, poor health and social injustice.

It is important to restate these commitments not only because governments have endorsed them, but because the economic crisis is putting them into jeopardy. Latin America and the Caribbean is the region most on track to achieve the MDGs. But not a day goes by without news of mounting job losses, sharp drops in remittances – that account for 15 to 40% of GDP in several countries of the region – and announcements about the bleak economic outlook. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – CEPAL – foresees an important economic slowdown in the region, with a GDP growth of 2% after five years of constant expansion.

The crisis is global: no country is isolated from it because our economies are so interdependent. But the social consequences of the crisis are profound. Earlier this month, the UN Secretary-General launched a report on the MDGs stating that major advances in the fight against poverty and hunger have begun to slow or even reverse as a result of the global economic and food crises. It is projected that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of people living in extreme poverty in 2009 will be higher than anticipated before the crisis. Like in other parts of the world, the economic growth of the past decade had led to a reduction in the number of those living in extreme poverty, but today, 8 percent of people in the region live on less than \$1.25 a day. According to the World Bank, there will be an additional six million people in the region living in poverty as a result of decreased economic activity.

What are the implications for education and for us as a community of researchers and policymakers? It is too early to accurately assess the impact on Education for All but we do know that the most vulnerable – the poorest families and the most marginalized groups – are the first to be hit in such a crisis. If education becomes too expensive for households to afford, if poor families require their children to work, the right to education could be thwarted for the continent's poorest children. Past crises have had a mixed effect on enrolment ratios – during the Peso crisis of the mid-1990s for example, school enrolment rates actually increased in Mexico – but negative effects including school drop out, late entry and child labour increases have been concentrated in poor countries and households.

Against this backdrop, we are encouraging thinking along three main lines. First a concern for equity: building inclusive education systems that protect the most vulnerable and ensure all learners, regardless of their circumstances, have opportunities to learn. Second, we need to give full attention to policies that improve the quality of education, with a particular focus on the recruitment, training and status of teachers. Third, policies must be adequately funded and anchored in a comprehensive learning throughout life perspective.

The region is witnessing a tremendous expansion of education. It is close to achieving universal primary education with an average net enrolment ratio of 94%. It has achieved gender parity at the primary level. A fairly well established system of pre-primary education exists, with a gross enrolment ratio of 65%. Driven by increasing numbers of students finishing primary school, participation at the secondary level increased from 80 to 89 percent between 1999 and 2007, and from 21 to 34 percent at the tertiary level. Demand will continue to increase at the post-primary level given the sheer size of the youth population.

This expansion reflects the commitment of governments to education. But regional averages conceal disparities both within and between countries. It is always perilous to generalize. After all, this region is home to strong middle-income economies, a number of small island states and Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world.

The concern for equity stems from the simple observation that education systems do not serve all learners in the same way. Strong and persistent disparities exist not only between but also within countries of the region based on factors such as wealth, place of residence, ethnicity and language. Rural and indigenous populations are less likely to attend school and more likely to drop out. In Bolivia, 68% of Spanish speakers aged 16 to 49 have completed some secondary education, compared with one-third or less of Aymara, Guarani and Quechua speakers. Working children in Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama face an attendance disadvantage of at least 30 percent. These inequalities are more acute at the secondary and tertiary levels.

As education systems expand, they face more complex and more specific challenges. Reaching the last 10 to 20 percent calls for innovative, more tailored, more flexible and sometimes more costly policy approaches. Equity

in education calls for inclusive policies that address the diverse needs of student populations and take into account factors such as poverty, language and location. Such inclusive policies are not only important for education systems, but more broadly for creating greater social cohesion.

We find household poverty addressed in the region through, for example, well-developed conditional cash transfer programs to the poorest families – Bolsa Familia in Brazil and the Oportunidades in Mexico being prominent examples. We also find certain governments allocating additional tax revenue to the poorest states and municipalities. Policies can also address inequalities well before primary school: early childhood care and education programs not only have an impact on children’s well-being but also on their subsequent performance in primary school, all the more so for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The Chilean government has given priority to expanding such programmes but they are also well developed in Mexico, Cuba and several Caribbean islands.

Policies must address inequalities in terms of access but also in qualitative terms. National, regional and international learning assessments all point to low achievement in the region. You will be familiar with these figures but I have selected a few. Six Latin American countries participated in the OECD’s PISA in 2006. All scored below the OECD average in science, mathematics and reading. In several countries, more than half the students scored at or below level 1, the lowest one. SERCE – the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study published in 2008 – found that more than 40% of students in the region do not perform beyond Level 1 in grade 3 mathematics and science. Inequalities are mirrored in learning outcomes. The higher the income distribution inequality, the lower the average student performance by Latin American and Caribbean students. Such data surely provide reason for designing policies that place top priority on overcoming inequalities and ensuring that all students acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills. This is not sufficient but it is essential to enable all further learning.

There are many dimensions to improving quality encompassing school climate, infrastructure, the availability of textbooks, governance and other matters, but let us start with the most essential human factor of all for education – teachers.

Teachers have long been a priority for UNESCO. The 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers provides comprehensive guidance on a range of teacher policies, rights and responsibilities. It is as relevant today as then. We know that Education for All will simply not be reached without a resolute focus on teachers – their status, recruitment, training and professional development. Globally, 10.3 million teachers are required just to reach universal primary education by 2015. According to updated projections by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, most Latin American countries will *not* need to expand their teaching force between now and 2015 although there are a few exceptions such as Guatemala. But teachers will essentially need to be hired and trained to compensate for attrition. Still, this represents 27% of the current teaching force – close to 780,000 teachers.

Training is obviously key. It seems somewhat anathema for a teacher to be considered as such without any training but unfortunately this is a reality in many developing countries. Latin America and the Caribbean has a relatively high median share of trained primary teachers – 80% in 2006 – but only 66% in secondary education. Untrained teachers tend to be concentrated in poor rural areas, accentuating the risk that the poorest children will receive a low-quality education or drop out early.

Other factors affect the quality of teaching and learning. UNESCO's Institute for Statistics published a study on primary schools in eleven countries in 2008, including six in Latin America. In several, more than one out of four teachers works in more than one school, with workloads stretching between 41 and 59 hours. Teacher absenteeism and low teacher morale, often related to low salaries and poor working conditions, is also a foremost policy concern. A 2007 CEPAL report showed that salaries in Latin America compared unfavourably with similar professional and technical occupations. The SERCE study indicated that some 28% of sixth grade teachers hold a second job. Such realities negatively impact on student learning.

Finally, we cannot speak about teachers, nor about the role of higher education, without attention to pedagogical practices and to curricula that is relevant to the world around us, promotes democratic values and respects cultural diversity. Bilingual education for example is of particular relevance for indigenous communities across Latin America. Education for sustainable development matters for promoting values, knowledge and skills that enable

people to find solutions to environmental and social concerns. We continue to view the four pillars of education – learning to know, to do, to be and to live together – as core missions of education.

Because the need for qualified teachers is so critical in many countries, UNESCO has taken steps to raise the profile of the issue, scale up efforts and promote better policy coordination. In September 2008, UNESCO was instrumental to the launching of an ad-hoc task force on teachers comprising willing partners from countries, international and regional governmental organizations, international NGOs and civil society coalitions including Education International and the Global Campaign for Education. The Task Force developed an action plan identifying three major challenges: a policy gap, a capacity gap and a financing gap. Without evidence-based teacher related policies, without adequate capacity to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate such policies and without the necessary financial resources, the Task Force argues, we will not be able to provide the world with the teachers it needs. In each of these areas, main lines of action were defined for different constituencies, with the Task Force taking on an important coordination, advocacy and support role, with a particular focus on knowledge sharing and policy dialogue.

The annual Education for All High Level Group in Oslo last December endorsed the creation of the International Task Force on ‘Teachers for Education for All.’ It requested the Task Force to continue its work, notably to explore the possibilities for cooperation, both South-South and North-South with regards to teachers. It recommended that the Task Force focus more specifically on those countries furthest away from reaching the EFA goals and those with the largest teacher gaps, and to report to the next High Level Group in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in February 2010.

It has taken little time for the Task Force to find a place on the broader international policy agenda. G-8 leaders gathered in L’Aquila, Italy earlier this month welcomed its creation in their final Declaration, a particularly encouraging fact.

The Task Force is a voluntary global alliance of EFA partners. I have personally written to ministers of education across the world encouraging their engagement and requesting them to designate national focal points. As recommended by the High Level Group, a dedicated secretariat supported by

willing donors and located at UNESCO will be operational in September, under the guidance of a Steering Committee.

The response from Latin America has been very encouraging. The region is currently represented on the Task Force by Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras and Peru, with Brazil having played an important role in the initial stages. Membership is still expanding. We are receiving a lot of interest from a wide array of constituencies, from teachers' unions to regional organizations, and of course governments.

We are looking for tangible outcomes. One of the priorities for the Task Force will be to encourage more policy dialogue on what is happening in different countries, and more sharing of what works and doesn't work, even though every context differs. We will disseminate relevant information and research, and step up advocacy targeting both national governments and development partners. We plan to create a data bank of senior resource persons from all regions in order to provide ad-hoc support to countries upon request. The potential for multi-stakeholder partnerships and innovative financing to bridge the teacher gap for EFA will be actively explored and an e-network created to allow for exchange among a wide array of constituencies.

We would like to encourage you, as experts, researchers or members of specialized organizations, to keep abreast of the activities of this Task Force and to eventually join the e-network. For now we have a simple email address at teacherstaskforce@unesco.org but our communications will be further developed when the Secretariat is formally in place.

I have insisted on teachers but the quality of education obviously encompasses the school climate, school governance, and other issues. According to the UIS study on primary school cited above, more than 20 percent of pupils in Peru attended schools without electricity while in four countries, more than 10% of pupils were in schools without running water. Here we are talking about missing basics.

A comprehensive approach that looks at the effectiveness of education systems at all levels and learning opportunities in formal and non formal sectors is essential. Let us not forget that there are close to 37 million adult illiterates in Latin America and the Caribbean. Nor that student attrition remains a major issue in some countries, notably in Central America, nor

that there is a gender gap at the expense of boys at the post primary level that is particularly salient in the Caribbean. While the priority should remain to provide all children with good quality basic education, it is timely and relevant to set up skills and vocational training programs for youth who leave school early. All studies show that they are more exposed to unemployment and marginalization than individuals with higher learning attainment.

Financing is key. The first measure is to ensure that education budgets are not cut even as economies contract; the second is to view education as part of the economic recovery. Cutbacks in education have long-term consequences. According to the first results of a preliminary survey that UNESCO is conducting on the impact of the financial crisis on education, public spending on education as a share of GDP and domestic revenue is likely to remain stable in the ten countries surveyed in this region. But public education expenditure measured in US dollars is expected to decline in two countries out of eight that responded – Mexico and St Vincent. A study of six Latin America countries by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs finds that the cost of achieving the MDGs will rise by 1.5 to 2.0 of GDP in required additional public spending per year between 2010 and 2015.

Several countries have positively included education in their stimulus packages. The Mexican government has launched an investment plan to expand and improve educational infrastructure. Furthermore, some \$600 million will be disbursed to the Oportunidades program that seeks to improve nutrition, health and education among the poor. Chile has created a contingency fund to preserve social sector spending. These are promising signs. They show a commitment to education and to protecting the most vulnerable. But in the current economic climate, it is clear that public spending will come under intense scrutiny. It is more crucial than ever to ensure that policies are based on strong evidence.

Hoy hemos hablado acerca de las economías, inversiones, gasto público y el impacto de la educación en el desarrollo. Quisiera terminar con la noción más fundamental que sustenta nuestros esfuerzos. La educación es antes que todo un derecho humano, un derecho que habilita, empodera y amplía los horizontes. Parte de ese derecho, obviamente, tiene relación con buenos profesores, un currículum ad hoc y un ambiente adecuado para el aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

[We have spoken today about economics, investment, public spending and the impact of education on development. But let us end on the most fundamental notion that underpins all our efforts. Education is first and foremost a human right – a right that enables, empowers and widens horizons. And part of that right is of course about good teachers, relevant curricula and quality learning environments for every student.]

Gracias/Thank you