



Wellbeing in Developing Countries

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**Schoolchildren's wellbeing and life prospects:
Justifying the universal tax on childhood**

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Schoolchildren's wellbeing and life prospects: Justifying the universal tax on childhood

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Abstract

A comprehensive and child-focused 'wellbeing' approach to schooling is compared here with other approaches that emphasise poverty reduction, human rights, or capabilities, and which fall short of recognising the full range of wellbeing effects of school. Schooling is expected to optimise prospects for good lives and good societies, not just minimise ill-being and social injustice and fulfil the right to education. A capability approach takes wellbeing much more seriously, yet still falls short of recognizing the role of schools in facilitating directly the happiness of pupils. It is imperative that affordable and simple methods are developed to assess and analyse links between schooling and children's wellbeing and life prospects. Expanding on the WeD approach, a fourfold analytical framework is recommended here for exploring this theme by looking at *resources, motivations, achievements, and meaning*, plus *minimizing avoidable harm*.

Key words:

1. Introduction: Schooling, wellbeing and the tax on childhood

A quality education is one that satisfies basic learning needs, and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living. (UNESCO/World Education Forum, 2000, *Dakar Framework for Action*, Goal 6)

Development activities all envisage net improvements to human wellbeing. Yet many take this for granted and instead emphasise interim goods rather than the quality of people's experiences. This paper imagines major improvements that could be made to the understanding of relationships between schooling and wellbeing, by taking pupil experiences seriously as well as exploring the full range of direct and indirect effects of schooling on individuals and society. Development policy and practice often has to prioritise activities which minimise or respond to harm rather than positively promote goods, and the more minimalist our approach to governance or the more stretched our resources, the less we are likely to seek policies and learning strategies focused positively on promotion of wellbeing.

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Schooling, however, is surely one development domain which must transcend clinical minimalism and promote good lives. We expect schools not just to help children avoid pathologies and escape from ignorance, but to help them enjoy their childhoods, aspire towards excellence, and develop capabilities for lifelong happiness and active citizenship.

In rich and poor countries, but particularly in the latter, education policy discourses and learning strategies remain embarrassingly uninterested in the wellbeing effects of schooling. Most education policy analysis focuses on inputs (funding, training), processes (school attendance, teaching), and outputs (schools, completion rates, test scores) but not on pupil experience or life outcomes. Discussion of school effectiveness, quality, and even 'educational outcomes' in poorer countries is mainly focused on academic test scores which are pitifully inadequate as indicators of even cognitive development, let alone the development of capabilities and dispositions for living good lives or being well or happy. Research on 'returns to education' is excruciatingly reductionist and under-theorised, consisting mainly of ill-justified number-crunching of correlations between years of schooling and subsequent income, and even less plausible hypotheses (often presented as facts, slipping from correlation to presumed causation) about the effects of schooling. The stultifying influence of naïve econometrics is all-pervasive (Palmer et al, 2007:44-49; Hannah and Buchmann 2004; Bennell 1996, Appleton Balihuta 1996).

In rich countries, thankfully, there are some incipient research and policy discourses on education and wellbeing, life skills, emotional and social intelligence, school satisfaction and enjoyment, and the quality of the school 'climate' (see e.g. Noddings 2003; Konu and Lintonen 2005, 2006). Yet even here they remain marginal to mainstream educational discourse and to the assessment of pupils' progress and school performance. There are academic journals on 'school disaffection,' and on educational philosophy, psychology and sociology, but these carry much less policy influence than statistical analyses of test results and earnings.

UN agencies have often defined development in terms of the freedoms and the 'expansion of choice' that are expected to follow from the improved capabilities that schooling delivers. Ironically, however, those capabilities are deemed so important that they justify enforcement: UN agencies and governments promote the 'right to education' as a specific set of *restrictions* on choice. Universal *compulsory* basic schooling involves mass-scale restrictions on the

choices that might otherwise be available to states and parents in how they promote good upbringing, and to children in how they choose to spend their time. The very idea of making schooling compulsory confirms that promoters of schooling believe there are significant numbers of parents and children who would otherwise prefer other ways of enjoying or ‘spending’ childhood. One rationale is that compulsory schooling produces public goods, reducing social inequalities by increasing everyone’s range of opportunities in adult life, and developing national and cosmopolitan values that facilitate solidarity and peaceful coexistence. Another is that children need to be protected from parental exploitation and allowed to attend school rather than being deployed directly in family livelihood strategies.

The crucial ethical issue here is how such trade-offs are justified, including the question of whether it is justified for all kinds of people and situation, rather than being an example of the tyranny of the majority. In practice, however, schooling is largely justified on *a priori* grounds as a tax on childhood in favour of adulthood. Pro-schooling literature has in general been astonishingly inept at providing evidence-based justification in terms of real benefits for real people in specific kinds of context. One does not need to be a ‘post-development’ or ‘de-schooling’ sceptic to recognise that schooling must be justified through ongoing *empirical* research on whether and how schooling actually improves children’s wellbeing during their school years, and their future life choices.

2. A wellbeing approach to schooling and development

The University of Bath ESRC research programme on wellbeing in developing countries (WeD) has helpfully devised a three-fold framework for understanding wellbeing as an interplay between *resources*, *achievements*, and *meaning* (of goals and processes) (McGregor 2007). Since the inclusion of resources and meaningful processes in this framework reminds us that wellbeing is a dynamic process and not an end state, I would add *motivation* as a distinct aspect of wellbeing analysis. Whereas resources are inputs, achievements are outcomes, and meaning is the dynamic context, motivation cross-cuts all three. It is distinctive as the driving force that facilitates human agency (individual and collective), while also being part of the good life, an outcome of good development. People who are unmotivated are not living well, regardless of their resources and achievements. Meaning is a necessary but not sufficient condition for motivation: alienated people lack motivation, but even people whose activities may seem to offer ‘meaning’ may not be motivated if they have no faith in the possibilities of self-efficacy.

Regarding the links between schooling and wellbeing, we must look separately at the role of schooling in helping children develop resources (knowledge, skills, social networks, physical fitness, etc) and motivations (the will to learn in the first place, and the belief that learning may improve prospects for living a good life). We also, sadly but realistically, must look at the ways in which schools can harm both resources and motivation. That is, wellbeing analysis includes the analysis of harm and trade-offs. Local and traditional knowledge, and social links with home communities, can be damaged through denigration or neglect. Physical integrity and social confidence can be damaged through corporal punishment, sexual violence, and bullying. The opportunity cost of children's labour may reduce their current ability to pay for food and medicines. Children can either become generally demotivated through academic failures, or can develop unrealistic aspirations that will damage their prospects for future life satisfaction.

A wellbeing approach to schooling would try to improve understanding of how schooling affects pupils' immediate wellbeing and their prospects for life-long wellbeing, as well as contributing to public goods such as solidarity and tolerance at local, national, and international levels. While the wellbeing of pupils is the most obvious of these intended benefits, it has been given scant attention in the ambitious drive to meet targets for Universal Primary Education (UPE). Once enough people believe in school attendance and completion rates as indicators of progress, the fact that these might be dangerous proxies for child wellbeing seems to get forgotten when assessing a nation's health, so information about school inputs, attendance and completion rates may well give a dangerously misleading picture of educational performance.

Even where such concerns are expressed, where they lead to major reviews of school quality and to evaluations of the outcomes of schooling, pupil wellbeing rarely gets systematic attention. Even if the global UPE drive has in general been good for children and good for society, it has not been pursued in a socially responsible manner. If we argue that the social responsibility of profit-making businesses must be monitored, we must do the same with all schools and school-related institutions in private and state sectors alike.

There are innumerable ways in which schooling affects wellbeing. A useful classificatory start can be made by making two distinctions: effects during and after childhood, and effects at the

individual and societal levels. We are interested in the both the *wellbeing and well-becoming* of pupils. And we hope that schooling helps people to live *good lives* in *good societies*. We pursue these private and public goods by producing capabilities (not just the narrow ‘human capital’ that economists focus on) and through social and cultural development (or ‘social capital’ as economists would have it). Table 1 represents the contributions of schooling to wellbeing diagrammatically.

Table 1: Expected benefits of schooling

	Good lives (personal benefits through human capital)	Good societies (public benefits through social capital)
During childhood	Pupil well-being (health, enjoyment, etc), and children’s benefits from parents’ (and other adults’) schooling	Public benefits directly derived from schooling: e.g. children’s social networks, childcare, use of school facilities
During adulthood	Lifelong wellbeing derived from schooling, e.g. productivity, creativity, motivation, meaning, life skills, health	Lasting social benefits derived indirectly from schooling: e.g. knowledge, solidarity, tolerance

Of course, schooling can also cause harm, so all of the above must be also examined as risk factors. It also incurs costs, including opportunity costs, so any benefits need to be evaluated against counterfactual estimates of benefits foregone. The failure to take pupil wellbeing and the opportunity costs of schooling seriously reflects an implicit assumption that we already know that the tax on childhood is justifiable in terms of life-long benefits. But if such assumptions were formed on the basis of evidence from different countries in different eras, they need to be retested. For example, in schools in poorer countries, are the harms that pupils suffer (bullying, sexual abuse, tiredness, boredom) outweighed by childhood benefits or are they only justified if at all in the longer term?

In practice, evaluative literature on educational outcomes has tended to focus on part of the lower left quadrant in this diagram, on a small set of interim goods (income, knowledge) which are presumed to promote good adult lives. A comprehensive wellbeing approach would explore various aspects of all four quadrants in Table 1, looking at schooling’s effects on children and adults, and on personal as well as public goods. Such an approach compels us to ask cautious questions about school quality and effectiveness before herding all of the world’s children into compulsory and ‘free’ schooling. And in terms of ethical and pragmatic priority, we ought to start by looking at the upper left quadrant, asking whether schooling *directly* improves the quality of children’s lives. With children’s wellbeing in mind, we ask whether children are well enough to enjoy and to benefit from schooling, whether schools are good

enough to make good contributions to children's and adults' enjoyment of life in and out of school, and whether social and physical environments are conducive to translating good schooling into good life outcomes.

We must also note that if good schooling enhances wellbeing, it also relies on wellbeing in order to function. Wellbeing affects schooling in the following ways:

- *Children's wellbeing* (health, wakefulness, knowledge, social capabilities) directly affects their school attendance, motivation, and performance;
- *Parental and sibling wellbeing* affects schooling indirectly via their effects on pupils' wellbeing, and affects children's ability to attend school and to do homework;
- *Socio-economic contexts* affect children's and educationalists' capabilities and motivations – both directly by influencing the quality of schooling and pupils, and indirectly by shaping pupils aspirations and their understanding of the prospects of translating learning outcomes into real-world benefits;
- *Macro-economic and macro-political contexts* affect the affordability of education systems, and shape overall policies for education.

3. Comparing the wellbeing approach with other developmental approaches

The wellbeing approach looks so much like ordinary common sense that it could easily be assumed to be the only game in town. But there are other approaches to development in general, and to schooling in particular, that seem inadequately focused on wellbeing. In an earlier paper (Thin, 2007) I argued that both rights-based and poverty reduction approaches to schooling assume too much about the intrinsic merits of schooling (and the intrinsic deficit of non-schooling), and consequently paid inadequate attention to quality and enjoyment of schooling.

The rights-based approach to schooling, being in theory *child-centred*, promises but rarely delivers an insistence on pupil wellbeing by taking pupils' views on schooling seriously. Poverty reduction approaches are prone to two kinds of weakness: the uncritical celebration of getting children into school as if this counted intrinsically as poverty reduction, and the reductionist and instrumentalist view that schooling is good because it is likely to lead to the reduction of poverty.

Perhaps a clearer way of distinguishing the wellbeing approach is to note how it avoids two kinds of flaw in development analysis and policy:

- *Apriorism*, whereby some kind of change, such as economic growth, formal democracy, or the introduction of formal schooling, is simply assumed to be intrinsically good, without justification in terms of human wellbeing; and
- *Pathological minimalism*, whereby developers' attention is confined to the reduction of harm and injustice, to the exclusion of the constructive promotion of good lives and good societies.

The human rights and the poverty reduction approaches both share these two flaws. Human rights are a set of aspirations and claims defined in the 1940s. Sanctified in the Universal Declaration, their ethical justification tends to be taken for granted. To some extent this puts rights-based approaches beyond the critical scrutiny that is needed for a wellbeing approach. The human rights approach has also been largely pathological and minimalist, focused more on wrongs than on rights. Its policies have focused on meeting minimum standards of decency, and its evaluative efforts have been almost entirely focused on the cataloguing of harms.

The poverty reduction approach has been more obviously characterized by pathologism than apriorism, focusing developers' attentions on poor people and on dimensions of poverty rather than on actual or possible good lives. But when its intentions become enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals, restrictive and uncritical apriorism quickly sets in. It has become normal to confuse schooling with education, and progress towards targets for Universal Primary Education and gender equity in schooling have become treated as ends in themselves rather than proxy indicators for a much broader set of desirable changes.

Much more promising from a wellbeing perspective is the capability or human development approach associated with the work of Amartya Sen and the Human Development Reports of the UNDP.² In theory, this rather loose-knit set of approaches ought to avoid both apriorism (the goodness of capabilities is justified in terms of their being valued by people) and minimalism (capabilities are positive components of the good life not just tools to avoid the

² For an overview, see e.g. the excellent website of the Human Development and Capability Association at <http://www.capabilityapproach.com/>

bad life). The approach also incorporates but extends well beyond the ‘human capital’ approach which treats learning as a private good, emphasising individual or family-level investments and rewards, and private wellbeing, and which restricts its value to the status of strategic means for achieving a restrictive set of so-called ‘economic’ or ‘productive’ benefits. The capability approach looks at a broad spectrum of goods, pays attention to intrinsic values rather than just strategic means, and includes respect for ‘social’ rather than just private goods (Sen 1997; Robeyns 2006). It also explores people’s ‘agency’ as well as their ‘wellbeing’ (Unterhalter 2003:7).

Schooling rose to prominence in international development co-operation largely through the ‘human capital’ research of the 1960s which identified schooling as a critically important investment for development (Becker 1964). Despite treating schooling instrumentally as a means to achieving other ends, this approach was doubtless a benign force, paving the way for the later ‘Human Development’ movement which championed both the intrinsic value of good schooling as well as its instrumental value in developing capabilities. These values were later enshrined in both the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which for all their weaknesses have surely made important steps towards rallying a global consensus on meaningful and achievable social progress. The ‘Human Development’ concept broadens the attention span policy-makers to include not only the means for development (such as GDP and school enrolment) but also the ends (such as longevity and the capabilities that schooling enhances).

But to take wellbeing seriously, the capability approach will have to fight against the pervasive influence of Sen’s anti-utilitarian philosophy (e.g. Sen 1993). Sen denies the ethical importance of the enjoyment of life (and by implication the enjoyment of components of life such as schooling), regarding happiness as an adaptation to conditions which may be morally unacceptable. If the happiness of pupils becomes ethically suspect, like the happiness of poor people and slaves, schooling becomes reduced to the status of a means for enhancing capabilities, and especially life-long capabilities. But if schooling is to be both compulsory and good, it must allow children to enjoy better childhoods than they would without it. This would not, of course, mean valorising any old kind of silly fun that pupils might enjoy, nor would it mean downplaying the importance of children learning to defer gratification and to work hard for life-long rewards. But the happiness of pupils must count, just as the capability for life-long happiness must count among the capabilities developed through schooling.

Most advocates of the capability approach would probably not only reject the restrictions of the human capital framework but also agree that despite Sen's reservations the happiness of children is ethically important. As Deneulin warns (2002), insofar as the capability approach is guided by a perfectionist conception of the good, it inevitably espouses the paternalist position that some people know better than others what is good for them. This is good common sense, but doesn't seem to provide an ethical excuse for ignoring happiness altogether. In practice most literature on schooling treats children instrumentally as proto-adults and hence their future wellbeing takes precedence over their happiness as children. For example, a review of literature on schools and educational outcomes in poorer countries opens by arguing that 'the important policy questions stem from the potential role of education in improving the welfare of the 5 billion people living in developing countries' (Glewwe and Kremer 2005:1) yet the authors seem to have forgotten that many of those 5 billion people are children: they don't discuss children's views on schooling, and their only attention to children's wellbeing is in a brief section on children's health as a factor affecting educational performance. Similarly, Boissiere's review of factors influencing outcomes of primary schooling in poor countries defines 'desirable outcomes' as 'completing primary school with the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills' (Boissiere, 2004:1).

These authors, like many others, may simply be forgetting to include the enjoyment of schooling in their assessments of the goods that schooling ought to deliver. But such omissions are quite deliberately claimed as a virtue in a paper by Madoka Saito on the relevance of Sen's capability approach to education. Arguing unconvincingly that Sen's is the 'the most comprehensive framework for conceptualising well-being' (it is hard to see how any well-being concept can be comprehensive if the value of enjoyment is deliberately excluded), she proceeds to report her conversations with Sen in which both agreed that the capability approach can usefully be applied to children provided that we treat them as future adults. For example, concerning the role of schooling in developing children's capability for autonomy, 'it is the freedom they will have in the future *rather than the present* that should be considered' (Saito 2003: 19,26, emphasis added). Sen and Saito are right to insist on a life-span approach to understanding schooling's contributions to well-being, but quite wrong to deny the *intrinsic* importance of school enjoyment. While no serious utilitarian would deny that trade-offs must sometimes be made between short-term and long-term happiness prospects, it is equally true that no serious ethical or practical guidance on good schooling

would deny the value of pupils' happiness. The fact that children (like adults) sometimes don't want things that are in their long-term best interests is no excuse for claiming that their present feelings have no ethical relevance.

Similarly, Boissiere's review of factors influencing outcomes of primary schooling in poor countries defines 'desirable outcomes' as 'completing primary school with the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills' (Boissiere, 2004:1). This adult-centred approach implies that for adults, it is enough that their children satisfy the aesthetic requirement of a childhood spent in school, and the instrumental requirement that they acquire capabilities for later life. By contrast, a child-centred approach sees childhood as an inherently valuable period of life (Ben-Arieh, 2006:7). Schooling in that perspective then becomes important for the part it plays in facilitating good childhoods, not just good adulthood. Or, with reference to the above classification of influences on wellbeing, it becomes important for its *direct* influence on pupil wellbeing, and for its *indirect* influence on childhood wellbeing more generally. As Leanne Johnny points out in her review of children's voice in education policy (2006), Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child holds that young people have a right to participate in matters affecting them, yet this participatory principle has proved difficult to implement in schools worldwide.

Arguably, in poorer countries a child-centred approach is all the more important because much higher percentages of the population are children. Further, the grim truth is that for individuals in poorer countries, childhood (or at least chronological childhood rather than culturally-defined childhood) is a much higher percentage of life than is the case in richer countries. Where the years from 0 to 18 are 30-45% of an expected life in poorer countries, the moral case for treating childhood as intrinsically valuable is still more compelling than it is in richer countries where these years are just 20-25% of an expected life. Yet literature on school satisfaction and school enjoyment pertains almost entirely to schooling in richer countries where an ever dwindling percentage of the world's children live.

Perversely, then, despite intentions to highlight the ends of development rather than the economic and technical means, the human development and capability approach has drawn the attention of development agencies to the *means* for achieving wellbeing (literacy, years of schooling) rather than the *enjoyment* of schooling and to its impacts on childhood wellbeing. The capability approach does indeed imply, in theory, greater policy recognition for the

qualities of schooling and the capabilities it confers (Unterhalter 2005), in practice most macro-evaluation of educational progress looks at investments and school enrolment or attendance rather than life outcomes or, still less, school enjoyment. Evaluations very occasionally focus on the quality of schooling, but hardly ever on the quality of school *experience*. Responsible promotion of human development must surely treat childhood with more respect as a vitally important phase in a human life.

Another crucial change of emphasis needed in research on schooling effects is to increase attention to the social development processes through which schooling interacts with wellbeing. A huge percentage of research investment into the effects of schooling has been wastefully spent on economic 'returns to education' research which has remained strictly within the restrictive confines of the human capital approach. Much of this literature is unreadable for non-economists, but more importantly its relevance to understanding the real world and to shaping policy is greatly reduced by its sociological naïveté. Some of this has been offset by the widespread recognition of the need to control data analysis for the effects of family background and broader social influences on educational performance and outcomes, and of the need to be aware of 'credentialism' whereby schooling outcomes are achieved more by formation of queues for jobs than by improvements in capabilities. But much more needs to be done to link human capital research with understanding of broader social processes.

In one of the better examples from the rates of return genre, Kingdon and Unni (2001) offer econometric analysis which, they argue, demonstrates 'that women do suffer high levels of wage discrimination in the Indian urban labour market, but that education contributes little to this discrimination'. They freely admit that 'our estimates of returns to education may suffer from omitted family background bias due to data limitations, this drawback applies to most studies of returns to education' (2001:190-191). What they do not consider, however, is that schooling may have important effects on gender discrimination beyond the relatively direct effects through improvements in the individual earning potential of schooled women.

This is a crucial omission, and it is entirely attributable to the dominance of the individual-centred human capital approach. Schooling, like education more generally, is not just a training-ground for employment. Schools are increasingly the most salient context for socialization worldwide, with important social effects through not only curricula but also

through teacher-pupil and peer group socialization. Thus from a human capital perspective, gender-segregated schooling, for example, may well be beneficial to the individual women schooled in girls-only schools. From a social development perspective these same gender-segregated schools may be harmful to society and thus harmful to both women's and men's collective interests, by perpetuating gender-segregation, inhibiting the development of cross-gender friendships and empathy, and allowing wage discrimination to persist. It is not unreasonable to speculate that men who were schooled in mixed-gender and non-discriminatory schools are less likely to discriminate against women in later life. It is therefore not true to assert, as Kingdon and Unni do, that education is innocent of any substantial influence over wage discrimination. Investigating such influences would require mainly qualitative research and analysis, but it should not be entirely beyond scope of econometric analysis either.

A *wellbeing* approach requires that schooling demonstrably contributes to better lives. On the one hand, this is 'instrumentalist' in that schooling becomes a means for achieving something else and is no longer seen as intrinsically good. On the other hand, if we combine the wellbeing approach with a child-centred approach we remember that children are not just future adults, and we see the enjoyment of schooling as intrinsically valuable, since children's quality of life matters and school experiences are a major component in children's quality of life. In poorer countries and in educational strategy documents drafted by international development agencies, it is extremely rare to find any reference to children's views on schooling, let alone to children's enjoyment of it. School enjoyment and pupil satisfaction would become paramount evaluative criteria in a pedagogical regime informed by a wellbeing approach, although without sacrificing attention to objective criteria for assessing educational value.

4. Recognizing and understanding the lack of wellbeing analysis

People will not want to bother investing in analysis of schooling and wellbeing, however, unless there is a substantial public appetite for debate about the costs and benefits of schooling. There must be recognition that different approaches to schooling might have radically different well-being implications for various kinds of people in various kinds of context. A key reason for inadequate wellbeing analysis is the truly remarkable global consensus on the core modernist assumption that universal basic and compulsory schooling will be good for the wellbeing of humanity. The 'de-schooling' or 'unschooling' movement

remains a minority fad in a few richer countries where schooling can be taken for granted and therefore subjected to more radical critique. And while there is considerable debate about the balance of investments in different levels of formal education, the consensus on the universal value of universal primary schooling is truly remarkable, and makes it hard to develop critical analysis which might question this 'schooling is good, more is better'. Those who have highlighted the possible harm that schooling may do at individual and collective levels (Illich 1973, Willis 1977, Harber 2004) are not taken seriously in global analysis of educational policy.

Along with the consensus, schooling has also become much more standardized than it might have been, to judge from the historical diversity of education systems (Benavot et al, 2006). Compared with the diversity of economic, political, and health systems, the world's education systems now appear very uniform at least in terms of policies, structures, training systems and assessment regimes, even if the quality of provision and of educational experience is cruelly non-uniform within and between countries. Uniformity stifles debate about the merits of different approaches.

Since nearly everyone wants to see more schooling in poorer countries, most of the policy debate concerns the relationships between quantities (of access and investments), qualities and outcomes. In poorer countries, this mainly focuses on primary schooling and on the challenges of achieving UPE without compromising on quality. The relations between quality and outcomes, and between school quality and children's quality of life, seem not to get the attention they need. Nor is there even, in these heady days of UPE target-chasing, much debate on the purposes of schooling (Cohen et al, 2006:6-7, 12): if schooling is for schooling's sake, why worry about the balance of emphasis on schooling for paid work, for domestic work, for health, for social and emotional competence, or for citizenship? As John White noted in 1991, citizens in rich Western countries are 'often faced with systems where the wellbeing of the pupil is not the foremost concern of governments, but rather the strengthening of the economy or the preservation of the privileges of the upper and middle classes' (White 1991:4). Most policy and analytical literature produced by international agencies and governments in poorer countries focuses on access to schooling, and to a lesser extent on school quality but without reference to wellbeing.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is both an intrinsic good and a crucial pathway towards better outcomes, including personal and social life outcomes that tend to be ignored in educational evaluation. Despite the prominence of claims about the benefits of education in all aid donor literature, even the relatively trivial amount of aid-related literature on educational outcomes pays little heed to wellbeing other than in the fields of health and income. Social outcomes, and personal development outcomes other than cognitive capabilities, are almost entirely ignored (Hannah and Buchmann 2004). So fervent has become the drive to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) that even the basic qualities of educational provision receive pitifully little systematic attention, let alone the joyfulness of school experiences or the influences of education on happiness or wellbeing. The global Education For All (EFA) agenda, agreed and refined in the UN world education conferences in 1990 (Jomtien) and 2000 (Dakar), put considerable emphasis on the quality of education, yet this aspect becomes all but forgotten when EFA is reduced to UPE.³ It often seems as if in operational terms the 'birthright of every child' in poorer countries is schooling *per se*, not the enjoyment of schooling or the enjoyment of the well-being that schooling is expected to contribute towards. Even the 428-page UNESCO *Global Monitoring Report 2005*, all about the theme of quality education, manages to omit any reference to children's enjoyment of schooling or to questions about whether schooling actually enhances their potential to lead happy lives (see also Stephens, 2003). As Alexander argues (2007:3-4) there is a dire need to find common ground between the evaluative criteria used by those directly involved in educational practice (teachers, parents and pupils), and those who inhabit the domains of policy, accountability and funding. The latter focus on easily measurable indicators like enrolment, attendance, textbook availability, and test scores, whereas the former are just as concerned with qualitative matters concerning the felt experience of learning and teaching.

Educational investors, policy-makers, and implementers would soon despair if we asked them to give full consideration to the full range of aspects of wellbeing and of educational links to wellbeing every time they had to make a decision. Nonetheless, if in general there is a deficit of adequate attention to these links, researchers must do their best to alert policy-makers to ways in which better knowledge of the links might lead to practical improvements. Take for example the basic question of pupil wellbeing: no reasonable person would argue against the

3 The target for UPE is simply '2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.' Nothing is said here about quality. By contrast, quality is one of the EFA targets.

intrinsic importance of this (it is in general better for pupils to be well and happy than ill and unhappy) or against its instrumental value (well pupils will study harder and get more out of school). Yet in poorer countries there has been very little research on pupil wellbeing or on their satisfaction with various aspects of schooling. Knowing about pupil wellbeing surely cannot be seen as a luxury that cannot be afforded: precisely in those countries where pupil wellbeing is most at risk, it is surely most important to find out what works, at what costs, to enhance pupil wellbeing.

Concerning post-school outcomes, there is something perverse about the continued huge investment in narrowly economic rates of return analysis. Very little of this has produced plausibly useful findings: the empirical evidence, the statistical analysis, and the meaning of financial information will all continue to be very debatable, and in the end even if rates of return were proved poor or negative it is hard to imagine what policy-relevance it would have in an era when there is in any case no prospect of governments giving up on schooling, and little prospect of them letting educational research guide their educational investments. Why continue to invest in such economic analysis, when so little is understood about the non-monetary ways in which schooling influences people's life-long wellbeing (Bloom, 2006)?

5. Aid-related educational policies and learning strategies

The emphasis on education in general, and on primary schooling in particular, rose steadily in international aid priorities from the 1970s and further accelerated post-2000 in light of the prominence of schooling among the Millennium Development Goals. This expansion has not been accompanied by significant advances in the ethical or pragmatic justifications for schooling, or in better understanding of how schooling interacts with wellbeing.

Most donor statements on education include reference to both the right to education and to the Dakar EFA goals and the two education MDGs, as well as general statements about education and poverty reduction, economic growth, health, and democracy. Most betray aprioristic assumptions about the intrinsic merits of schooling, and therefore show at best tokenistic interest in discursive justifications and debates about different educational approaches. Instead they promote bureaucratic approaches to schooling, with an apolitical and non-discursive emphasis on costs, institutional processes, plans and quantifiable targets rather than nuanced qualitative analysis. Bureaucratism is encouraged both by the MDGs and by the trend towards sector and budget support programmes combined with rapid rises in aid to basic education, all

of which results in disbursement imperatives that leave little time for debate on questions of rationale and policy choice. In policy documents, even quite lengthy ones, there is little discussion of how the different rationales for education carry different implications for investments, and woefully little reference to evaluation and research, let alone serious engagement with analytical literature.

The Education for All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative (2006) epitomizes the bureaucratic approach to educational expansion, and is worryingly inadequate on questions of school quality and contextual issues. UNESCO's Dakar Framework (2000) set out the six EFA goals, all of which assume that education (mainly schooling) is beneficial and so are about delivery rather than outcomes, although the last one is about quality. Similarly, a World Bank document on primary schooling (Bruns et al, 2003), asserts that primary education (again, actually schooling) is 'a goal in and of itself' as well as helping improve capabilities for leading a better life. So while it also recognises contributions of primary schooling to other developmental objectives such as reducing poverty and inequality, economic growth, health, nutrition, and democracy, it makes little attempt to analyse these processes, ignores the question of whether 'better life' includes better enjoyment of childhood, and focuses largely on the executive challenges of getting children through school. The UK Department for International Development, a leading educational donor and funder of educational research, asserts that 'primary education is a right' and uncritically presents unreliable 'evidence' of health and income effects of schooling. DFID claims that 'in Africa, children of mothers who received five years of primary education are 40% more likely to live beyond age five,' and offers no discussion of whether this correlation is likely to be in any way causative: there are of course many other factors that correlate with school attendance that may be much more significant influences on child mortality (DFID, 2006).

Donors have not, of course, ignored learning outcomes altogether. McGrath plausibly argued that throughout the 1980s and 1990s there was among donors a 'concerted questioning of the very purpose of education with debates on the vocational-instrumental versus the liberal-intrinsic functions of education, and a growth of competency/outcomes-based learning (McGrath 1999:68-9). Heyneman (1999) identified 'three overall stages' in purposes and rationales for educational aid: manpower planning from 1963 to 1980, then from 1980 to 1996 an emphasis on earning functions and some other benefits such as health and family-planning, and since 1996 a shift of attention from education's effects on individuals towards

its effects on society at large, especially on social cohesion, strongly related to post-Soviet need for stability and cohesion during a phase of decentralization and civil unrest among literate but repressed ethnic groups. Tabulawa (2003) endorses this latter assumption of a shift in the post-Soviet era towards donor emphasis on learner-centred pedagogy, as a means of achieving democratization. Still, schooling in poorer countries has been rapidly expanded with minimal attention to the various ways in which different approaches to schooling imply different kinds of social and psychological outcome.

Perhaps more than any other development sector, investment in education has been justified a priori with minimal reference to supportive evidence from research or evaluation studies. Even synthesis reviews on the possible usefulness of educational evaluation seem to have little to say about real evidence on educational outcomes. Bettinger's (2006) review of education project evaluations in developing countries discusses contextual effects on schooling such as nutrition and parasite infections but makes no attempt to review the evidence on the outcomes of education in general, or the real-world outcomes of educational interventions. Braun and Kanjee's (2006) review of the relevance of assessment to educational improvement uses a framework which explores access, quality, efficiency, and equity in the education system but *explicitly* excludes effectiveness from the analysis, on the implausible grounds that this 'refers more to micro-level factors within any education system'. Without micro-level analysis of educational outcomes it is impossible to interpret the highly polarized macro-analyses which show educational investments to be either highly beneficial (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004) or ineffectual (Pritchett, 1996; Bennell, 1996).

Most educational evaluation and research work is focused on educational inputs and cognitive or quantitative processes, not on the full range of learning experiences, nor on outcomes and particularly not on social and psychological outcomes. These are of course hard to measure, but this is not a good reason for ignoring them since qualitative changes can be assessed, discussed and attended to without being measured. A multi-donor evaluation study of aid for basic education in Uganda, Zambia, Burkina Faso, and Bolivia, found that while there were clear links from aid to increases in the quantity of education, mainly in the form of enrolment rates, there was much less evidence on quality and particularly weak evidence on the full range of qualities that schooling is expected to consist of (Freeman et al, 2003:xvii). Even when outcomes are assessed, the attention to well-being is minimal. A DFID-funded report on experiences worldwide in educational impact assessment (McKay and Treffgarne, 1999),

though focused on participatory methods for assessing impact, shows no interest in children's and their families' views on quality and effectiveness of schooling, or in school enjoyment, satisfaction, or wellbeing. A DFID-funded synthesis review of studies on numerous primary education programmes 1988–2001 in six countries complains of insufficiently wide-ranging approaches to schooling quality but commends the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project, which did assess learning outcomes and pupil satisfaction. Yet this review stops short of arguing in favour of the evaluation of learning outcomes, let alone wellbeing, and instead commends DFID's emphasis on assessing aid's influence on teacher competence (Al-Samarrai et al, 2002:37).

The recent World Bank evaluation of its support for primary education (Nielsen, 2006) criticises the Bank's inattention to learning outcomes: only three of its 89 sectoral reviews focused primarily on learning outcomes (2006:18). The report rightly criticizes donor emphasis on UPE rather than the more substantial and sensible insistence on educational quality in the Education For All agenda. Still, this critique does not go far enough, since the quality of educational experience and the ultimate value of education do not lie just in measures of educational performance but in the wellbeing of pupils during and after school, and in the overall well-being of humanity.

Most of the literature examining links between schooling and wellbeing focuses on well-becoming, on the effects achieved through human capital formation. As has been frequently argued by child rights advocates, 'if the child is respected, it is a fundamental mistake to reduce childhood to a period of preparation for adult life' (Hammarberg, 1997:2). Even this narrow focus tends to be further narrowed down to a focus on links from schooling to employment and wages. Narrower still, much of that literature considers only the links between quantities rather than qualities – years of schooling correlated with income, ignoring quality of schooling and quality of employment both of which are critically important causal variables as well as being important aspects of wellbeing in their own right. And to compound the problem still further, even the quantities used are unreliable, given the highly variable attendance rates in poorer countries (Glewwe and Kremer, 2005:21).

A DFID-funded study on poor people's access to education in three Asian and three African countries highlights the essential inseparability of access and quality issues. It shows not only how parental perception of quality influences choices about schooling and hence influences

access, but also how children's assessment of quality reveals disturbing aspects of quality which are all too rarely addressed in education policy literature, and which clearly must affect not only access and performance, but also enjoyment and outcomes. Reviewing evidence of violence and sexual abuse in schools, it notes that these issues tend to be highlighted by children even if they are often played down by parents and teachers. Contrary to official myths, parental apathy is not the key problem: parents and pupils, they found, see schooling as a 'dispensable commodity to be reckoned against more important survival needs such as food and health' (Boyle et al 2002:ix-x, 2).

These brief examples indicate how crucially important it is for educationalists to consult with pupils and parents on educational quality and outcomes, soliciting their views on how currently available schooling affects children's current and future prospects for achieving wellbeing.

6. Schooling and harm: Violence and lost learning opportunities

Another useful addition to the WeD's 'resources, achievements, and meaning' framework would be an explicit emphasis on *avoidable harm*. Good lives include suffering, just as good societies include inequalities, but wellbeing promoters must explore what kinds of harm can realistically be eliminated. While the positive emphasis on wellbeing approaches is contrastable with the pathological clinicalism of poverty reduction, human rights monitoring, and most 'health' and 'mental health' work, wellbeing approaches still need to pay attention to harm. Since schooling can be harmful, promoters of schooling have a clear responsibility to include the assessment of harm among their efforts to assess school quality and educational outcomes.

The author of a recent review showing shocking levels of gender-based violence in schools in Africa (Leach 2006) claims that this is the first piece of systematic research into this despite the fact that the media and common discussion shows widespread awareness of its prevalence. Other reports have similarly advocated more substantial research on school harm and how it affects attendance, performance and social outcomes (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Mirsky, 2003; Dunne et al, 2006). These claims are valid: this literature is largely ignored in policy literature.

Ironically, however, pupil ill-being seems to have received more attention than pupil wellbeing. Many studies have portrayed the widespread suffering of schoolchildren worldwide, and particularly in poorer and less democratic countries where there are few systematic controls on the abuse of power by teachers or on bullying. Human rights researchers have shown that brutality is often institutionalized in schools and explicitly or implicitly condoned by educationalists. A report on corporal punishment in Kenyan schools found that most Kenyan children regularly suffered violence at the hands of teachers, often resulting in severe injury (Human Rights Watch, 1999). The 2006 *World Report on Violence against Children* notes that more than half of the world's states lack laws against corporal punishment in schools, and that in many of these countries schoolteachers are perpetrators of 'cruel and humiliating forms of punishment or treatment, sexual and gender-based violence, and bullying', resulting in lasting physical and psychological harm. A highly critical review of school harm in nine countries argued that 'it is almost certainly more damaging for children to be in school than out of it' (2000:12) and that children who attend school are missing out on crucial opportunities to learn about their environments and to develop cultural knowledge and social capabilities relevant to local contexts.

Donors' and governments' lack of interest in the various forms of harm that schooling may do is symptomatic of a larger problem of aid agencies' bias towards investigating the *intended* benefits of development efforts, largely ignoring *unintended* and adverse consequences of development. A wellbeing approach to schooling, then, would start with a basic requirement for *socially responsible* development: expanding schooling without adequate quality controls to inhibit harm to children during and after school is simply not a socially responsible approach to development.

7. Conclusions: Learning about quality and outcomes

This paper has argued that a wellbeing perspective would enrich educational policies and learning strategies, and increase the chances of socially responsible promotion of schooling. It would do this by complementing rights-based and poverty-focused policies, avoiding a priori assumptions about the benefits of schooling as well as the minimalist assumption that mere provision of schooling counts as development. More importantly, a wellbeing approach treats childhood wellbeing as intrinsically valuable, and hence requires us to take pupil wellbeing and school enjoyment seriously, rather than assuming that the compulsory tax on childhood is morally justified. I have also argued that the capability and human development approach,

which does take wellbeing seriously, needs to overcome Sen's moral objections to the value of happiness: the possibility that people can be frivolously happy or can enjoy themselves in abject conditions is no excuse for neglecting to assess whether people, including children, are happy.

I have also recommended two modifications to the initial WeD wellbeing framework. In a wellbeing approach to schooling, attention to *resources* would explore educational processes as part of the constitution of wellbeing in childhood, as well as looking at reciprocal relationships between schooling and other factors influencing children's wellbeing. A focus on *achievements* would constantly query the relevance of the proxy indicators that are used to measure educational achievement and outcomes, and explore possibilities for cost-effective ways of assessing the many other dimensions of wellbeing that are not well represented by those indicators. A focus on *meaning* would look at the role of schooling in enabling children to develop a life-long sense of the possibilities for living well and contributing to society. It would also be worth considering complementing all three of these dimensions of wellbeing with two further wellbeing rubrics: a *motivation* rubric which recognises that being motivated is part of wellbeing as well as being a source of it (and in this instance, that schooling is crucial to the development of motivation as well as being dependent on the motivation of children and parents); and a *harm* or *ill-being* rubric which recognises that living well includes suffering, but requires elimination of avoidable harm (and in this instance recognises that schooling may have harmful outcomes, that schools may provide locations for harmful practices, and that school attendance and outcomes are affected by various forms of avoidable harm).

It is of course difficult and expensive to assess the full range of wellbeing effects of schooling. When something is hard to assess directly or with any degree of certainty, it is standard practice to assess a proxy indicator which is believed to reflect it reasonably well. So while any teacher knows that the qualities of teaching and learning are diffuse and hard to assess directly, they agree to use test scores as proxy indicators of these qualities. In effect, they are agreeing to use a small subset of learning outcomes as a proxy for not only a much broader range of learning outcomes but also for the quality of educational processes. In some situations the most readily available indicator of school quality may just be attendance and drop-out rates, supplemented by local people's views on why some children do not go to school.

To learn about the various life outcomes from schooling presents enormous challenges in the form of information-gathering, let alone the heroic assumptions that must be made when estimating causal pathways from schooling to life outcomes which are influenced by a wide range of factors many of which are much stronger and more direct than schooling. For most purposes it may not make much sense to even try to conduct research on outcomes from schooling. Better, perhaps, to research the more knowable aspects of educational quality if these are plausibly linked, even if only hypothetically, to desired life outcomes. Two sources of cheaply available information which seem to be remarkably little used in educational evaluation are the views of parents and pupils on whether schooling is directly contributing to children's wellbeing, and whether and how it is likely to affect their future wellbeing.

This paper has raised issues largely from an a priori logical perspective, with only limited engagement with the detail of actual policies, programmes, and educational processes. Further generic background research and analysis on these themes does seem merited, and might in the first instance go in the following directions:

- *Analytical:* Further analysis of the various kinds of educational outcome covered by wellbeing, leading to more explicit recommendations about the various kinds of wellbeing outcome that do not currently get enough attention.
- *Empirical:* Deeper exploration of donor-recipient policy dialogue and grass-roots dialogue with parents and communities on educational priorities, perhaps through country case studies. This would enable us to say more interesting and plausible things to back up my apriori claim that the balance of emphasis on different educational purposes actually matters in terms of things like resource allocation and programme activities.
- *Methodological:* More careful exploration of the available literature on research and evaluation methods and indicators, so as to produce some kind of practical guidance on affordable information gathering that would help educational planners and policy-makers transcend the limitations of the very basic data currently used on educational inputs and outputs.

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