



## **WORLD BANK SYMPOSIUM: ASSESSMENT FOR GLOBAL LEARNING**

**November 7-8, 2013 – Washington, DC  
World Bank Headquarters, MC2-800**

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### ***Key points by session***

#### **Session 1: Thursday, November 7, 1-2pm. The Learning Crisis and Development**

**Moderator:**

***Keith Hansen, Vice President, World Bank***

**Keynote Address:**

***Rahm Emanuel, Mayor, City of Chicago***

**Presenters:**

***Dzingai Mutumbuka, Chair, Association for the Development of Education in Africa***

***Lant Pritchett, Professor of the Practice of International Development, Harvard University***

This session highlighted the need for a clear vision and strategy on the part of the international development community if we are to overcome the global “learning crisis”. This vision must place learning at the core of the post-2015 development agenda – as a tool that contributes to personal, social, and economic development. Many developing countries currently lack the vision and leadership required to overcome the learning crisis. If action is not taken, the situation will only worsen.

**Key points:**

- The city of Chicago implemented a successful education reform thanks to clear vision and leadership on the part of key individuals and groups. This reform was part of a broader economic strategy to develop the city. The mechanisms of reform included: aligning the high school and college curriculum with skills needed in the labor market, strengthening partnerships between education and productive sectors, and introducing economic incentives for educational institutions linked to the employment rate of graduates.
- While enormous progress has been made in enrolling children in school in many developing countries, learning levels are unacceptably low and show no signs of improvement. How can it be that many children are unable to recognize a single letter even after three or more years in school?
- Endemic problems behind this learning crisis include the lack of skilled teachers and the lack of incentives to become a teacher. Teaching is not seen as a desirable career. Oftentimes, individuals can earn higher wages fighting in the army than educating their community members. The lack of a skilled teaching force is impeding our ability to reach the education Millennium Development Goal.
- While the international community is generally aware that there is a learning crisis, there is little or no concrete information available on learning levels in many countries. By the end of the decade, we should at least know how much children are learning in *every* country. The learning crisis is not going to fix itself. There is an urgent need to intervene.

**Session 2: Thursday, November 7, 2-3pm. Technical, Political, and Institutional Challenges for Assessing Learning**

**Moderator:**

***Elizabeth King, Director of Education, World Bank***

**Presenters:**

***Rukmini Banerji, Director, Pratham***

***Ray Adams, Special Advisor of Global Educational Monitoring, Australian Council for Educational Research***

***Miguel Szekely, Director, Institute of Educational Innovation at the Monterrey Institute of Technology***

This session looked at how to ensure that learning data are used effectively. Several conditions must be met in order for this to occur. First, we need high-quality data on learning. A major limitation in assessment today is that we do not have global scales or “learning metrics” that describe the learning trajectories of all students in a particular subject area, including those at the lower end of the achievement distribution. We just know that they don’t know. This limits our ability to make use of assessment information to inform decision making at the policy level. Second, we need to measure learning in a way that is meaningful for all stakeholders, including illiterate parents; for instance, by assessing children at home using simple tools. Third, for assessment results to have an impact on learning, they need to be linked to action and reform. Otherwise, assessment becomes a punitive tool and does not lead to improvement in learning outcomes.

**Key points:**

- The Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF) has identified the goal of “improved access + learning” as critical to the next stage of the development agenda. This goal will require reliable, accurate, and relevant data on learning.
- Learning metrics or scales describing learning trajectories are important for making sense of, or giving meaning to, achievement scores, and for informing policy and pedagogy. Knowing where we are in terms of learning is not enough; we need to know how to improve learning based upon current levels. Otherwise, measurement becomes a punitive tool and does not lead to improvement in learning outcomes.
- The link between learning diagnosis and relevant actions/reforms is missing in many developing countries.
- We focus on what is easy to measure rather than on what is important to measure, which creates a gap in our data and related analyses.
- Despite all of the criticism, *not* to measure is simply *not* an option. The challenge we face now is improving our measures.
- Today’s assessment results and related policy implications are usually the consequence of previous governing parties who may no longer be making policy decisions. There is a time lag that we need to be aware of.
- Learning assessment is a political tool. We need to ensure political viability of assessment by ensuring that assessment is useful, transparent, easily understood, and linked to action and reform.
- Global indicators on learning should focus on consensus areas: for instance, numeracy and literacy skills.

## Session 3: Thursday, November 7, 3:30-5pm. What Does the Research Tell Us About How to Assess Learning?

### Moderator:

*Marguerite Clarke, Senior Education Specialist, World Bank*

### Presenters:

*Daniel Koretz, Professor of Education, Harvard University*

*Derek Neal, Professor in Economics, University of Chicago*

*Jishnu Das, Senior Economist, World Bank*

This session highlighted key features of effective assessment. Assessments should have clear intended purposes. At the education-system level, assessments typically serve the purpose of (a) monitoring policies or (b) holding key stakeholders accountable. Placing too much focus on accountability can derail us from the ultimate goal of improving learning. Assessment data should be used in ways that are congruent with the intended purpose of the assessment. In high-stakes contexts, assessment results are more likely to be distorted by corruption, cheating, and coaching. Assessment systems should have an “open data” policy.

### Key points:

- Campbell’s law basically states that attaching consequences to an indicator (e.g., linking teacher pay to their students’ test scores) distorts that indicator (i.e., the test scores) and what it is supposed to represent (i.e., student learning). We need to keep this in mind when using data from assessments for accountability purposes.
- Assessment data should be used in ways that are congruent with the intended purpose of the assessment. For example, if the intended purpose of the assessment is as a system monitoring tool, it might be used in any of the following ways (among others): tracking overall learning levels, monitoring achievement gaps among different student groups, identifying areas in the education system that may require more resources or support, and so on. All of these uses are in harmony with the general purpose of the assessment as a monitoring tool.
- The presenters noted the importance of having assessment systems that are transparent (have an “open data policy”), provide quality data, and have reasonable costs.
- The effects of high-stakes testing on educational practice are mixed. There tend to be some improvements, but many undesirable effects—bad test preparation, other “gaming.” Scores can become severely inflated (increase much more than actual learning). Overall improvement is exaggerated—often severely. Relative effectiveness is misestimated as are the effects on equity. Teachers and schools may be ranked incorrectly.
- How can we do better? Be cautious. Keep a broader focus: not just test scores. Avoid unrealistic performance targets. Design tests appropriately for use in accountability systems. Monitor and evaluate the system routinely, and be prepared to modify it. Find ways to make other goals *count*.

**Session 4: Friday, November 8, 9-10:30am. How Can International and Regional Large-Scale Assessments Inform Learning?**

**Moderator:**

***Alberto Rodriguez, Education Sector Manager for Europe and Central Asia, World Bank***

**Presenters:**

***Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, PISA for Development)***

***Andreas Schleicher, Deputy Director of the Directorate of Education and Skills, OECD***

***Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, pre-PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, TIMSS Numeracy)***

***Dirk Hastedt, Executive Director, IEA***

***Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación (LLECE)***

***Moritz Bilagher, Regional Coordinator of Evaluation and Trends Analysis, UNESCO***

***Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC)***

***Jacques Malpel, PASEC Coordinator, CONFEMEN***

***Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ)***

***Toziba Masalila, Acting Director, SACMEQ***

In this session, representatives of major international and regional large-scale assessment programs presented the key features of their programs.

**Common themes:**

- Assessment programs should serve the ultimate purpose of improving learning.
- Assessment data have been used in different countries to introduce reforms – e.g., curricular reforms, textbooks, teacher training, and support for low-performing students.
- There is a general commitment to produce high quality data.
- There is a recognized need to expand assessment scales to measure more basic/foundational skills, and to measure at earlier ages.
- Assessment programs should operate under an “open data” policy.
- We need to be flexible in order to meet the assessment needs of developing countries.
- At the country level, it is important to create and support local capacity to administer assessments. In addition, it is important to secure sustainable funding for countries to participate in international and regional large-scale assessments.
- Different assessment programs should collaborate in order to produce results that are comparable to some degree.

**Session 5: Friday, November 8, 11-12:30pm. How Can National Large-Scale, Citizen-led and Other Assessments Inform Learning?**

**Moderator:**

***Luis Benveniste, Education Sector Manager for East Asia and the Pacific, World Bank***

**Presenters:**

***Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA)***

***Penelope Bender, Reading Specialist, USAID***

***School Achievements Monitoring (SAM)***

***Andrei Volkov, Scientific Supervisor, CISED***

***Marina Vasilyeva, Professor of Cognitive Psychology, Boston College***

***Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)***

***Rukmini Banerji, Director, Pratham***

***Uwezo***

***Sara Ruto, East Africa Regional Manager, Uwezo***

This session highlighted the key features of EGRA/EGMA, SAM, ASER, and UWEZO.

**Key points:**

- Assessment programs need to “keep it simple” in order to ensure that assessment data are understood by all stakeholders, including parents and community members. However, there is a trade-off between simplicity and technical quality.
- Children, not only students, need to be assessed. It is for this reason that many of these assessments are conducted in the child’s home, rather than in school. In addition to ensuring that all children are assessed, this methodology allows for greater communication with parents regarding the importance of learning, about learning standards, and ways in which to support learning.
- Citizen-led assessments are strategically used to gain access to children and their families, and to circumvent the government and the school system. Community members are willing and able to be involved in these assessments and are capable of driving change.
- It is important to publicize and discuss success stories that demonstrate the positive impact that assessment can have on improving education.
- Learning goals have to be challenging, yet realistic. If learning goals are set, then countries will need to define learning rates to reach those goals.

**Session 6: Friday, November 8, 12:30-2pm. Key Note: How Can Classroom Assessment Inform Learning?**

**Presenter:**

***Lorrie A. Shepard, Dean of the School of Education, University of Colorado at Boulder***

This session emphasized the importance of classroom assessment to improving learning.

**Key points:**

- Classroom assessment should be embedded in the curriculum. There should be a symbiotic relationship between curriculum, instruction, and assessment, based on a shared model of learning.
- Standardized large-scale assessments should be separate from classroom assessment practices. If not, there is a risk of imposing undue standardization in classroom assessment practices, which should be adapted to meet the learning needs of each individual student.
- Qualitative descriptions and feedback based on classroom assessment can be more powerful than a score or number to promote learning. Teachers are very aware of how their students perform.
- In order to avoid the negative effects of “teaching to the test” that are detrimental to learning, we need to change the character of assessments to include conceptually rich problems that elicit the critical thinking that we want children to engage in. Teaching to the test can artificially inflate test scores.
- Providing children with feedback is a key aspect of classroom assessment.
- In developing an assessment, it is critical to have curriculum specialists and psychometricians working together.

**Session 7: Friday, November 8, 2-3:15pm. Turning Assessment Information into Indicators and Targets**

**Moderators:**

***Chris Thomas, Adviser, World Bank***

***Rebecca Winthrop, Director of the Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution***

This session discussed the idea of a global learning indicator: what should it measure, how should it be defined, and who should be involved.

**Key points:**

- In the post-2015 agenda, there will be a global indicator centered on learning. There is an urgency to decide: What is relevant for all children to learn? How are we going to measure that learning? At what age/grade level should we measure? Should we include early child development? What is reasonable and feasible to measure and track over time?
- If we are not able to come together as a community and decide what the goal should be, others will decide for us. The timeframe for providing inputs is within the next 6 months (i.e., by May 2014).
- This is the time to be ambitious, because any proposal is going to be cut down later. At the same time, we have to be realistic about what we propose.
- It seems reasonable to begin with a global indicator that focuses on areas of consensus, such as numeracy and literacy.
- It also might be beneficial to track whether or not countries already have systems in place that they can use to monitor learning. This effort also would require political and institutional support for countries that want to build or improve their assessment systems.
- The LMTEF proposed seven learning domains and six areas of measurement for global tracking. The latter include access and completion, opportunities to learn, early childhood experiences, literacy, numeracy, and skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Session 8: Friday, November 8, 3:30-4:45pm. What Can Governments Do to Implement Effective Learning Assessment Systems in the Post-2015 Context?**

**Moderator:**

***Harry Patrinos, Education Sector Manager, World Bank***

**Presenters:**

***SABER Student Assessment: Findings Across 29 Countries***

***Marguerite Clarke, Senior Education Specialist, World Bank***

***Country Case: Armenia***

***Armen Ashotyan, Minister of Education, Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia***

***Cristian Aedo, Senior Education Economist, World Bank***

***Country Case: Zambia***

***Shadreck Nkoya, Senior Research Officer, Examinations Council of Zambia***

This session presented findings from SABER-Student Assessment benchmarking exercises in 34 countries. The findings reveal that many countries have weak capacity and structures for collecting and using information from different types of assessments. Usually, public examinations (e.g., external tests for making decisions about graduation or entry to university) are the most developed part (in terms of policies, funding, institutional arrangements) of countries' assessment systems, whereas international large-scale assessments tend to be the least developed. The session also highlighted lessons learned by Armenia and Zambia through the development of their assessment systems.

**Key points:**

- There is a need to convince policy makers that assessment is an integral part of the learning process.
- Countries face several challenges in developing their assessment systems, including lack of infrastructure, institutional support, funding, and local capacity. There is a need to focus on classroom assessment in teacher training.
- There is a need to improve the sustainability of assessment exercises in countries so that they can be internally funded and run at the local level.
- Public dissemination of assessment results is critical to advancing the learning agenda. This will allow the public to see and understand that we are facing a learning crisis and that we need to act.
- End-of-school-cycle examinations need to be rethought. Are they helping to prepare our young adults to be active members of a workforce? Or are they having a detrimental effect on education, encouraging a mechanical "teaching to the test?"
- Classroom assessment should be a priority when introducing reforms at the country level.
- Developing local capacity for assessment and creating a critical mass of people that are assessment literate should be a priority.

**Presenter:**

***Elizabeth King, Director of Education, World Bank***

**Key takeaways from the symposium:**

- Simplicity. There is a need to keep assessments simple in order to ensure that all stakeholders understand key messages and can become engaged in finding solutions.
- Assessment should be an integral part of instruction. Assessment should share a theory of learning with curriculum and instruction, and must be consistent with learning goals.
- High-stakes assessments can undermine student learning. Teaching to the test, coaching, and cheating can easily arise in high-stakes contexts.
- We have to contribute to defining global learning indicators. These indicators must be simple, comprehensive, and easy to understand. We also need to define learning goals. There is an urgency to do this within the next 6 months.
- We need to agree on the features of a learning indicator, such as areas to be measured, and ages or grade levels to be measured.
- The aforementioned goals and indicators should contribute to education quality and development.