

Quality Education UN Sustainable Development Goal # 4

The 21st Century NGO Perspective

By Dr. Linda J. Stillman

Part One

The Young Global Leadership Foundation (YGLF), in close partnership with the NGO Committee on Education: Learning and Literacy (CELL), and its member organizations, seeks to define Equality Education, UN Sustainable Development Goal # 4 -- from an NGO perspective. YGLF is an active member of CELL and CoNGO through its ECOSOC special consultative status.

The determined definition of quality education will also include our understanding of both learning and literacy in conjunction with the role and responsibilities of CELL to become the global center for educational development and advancement in alignment SDG # 4.

Next, we will address the characteristics, components and ethics of equality education from an individual and collective NGO perspective. These aspects are continually emerging and evolving, yet, we will present a substantive perspective of these 3 critical elements, to provide a productive and positive direction for educators in the 21st Century.

Then, our topic will compare/contrast these findings to major UN educational agencies, i.e., UNESCO and UNICEF as well as UNAI. Other UN divisions/departments also deal with educational and training initiatives, equally relevant; however, we have chosen to focus on UNESCO and its substantive global outreach program, UNICEF (primary and secondary education) and UNAI (higher level education) to delineate our definition.

Our conclusions will offer insight and information to connect the NGO community of educators to the UN and its extraordinary contributions to equality education since its inception in 1945. At the launching of the SDGs in 2015, many leaders from multiple

UN divisions and departments, together with the NGO community, emphasized that SDG 4 -- Quality Education is fundamental to achieve all of the SDGs: Agenda 2030. Through comparing meanings toward complementary understanding, NGOs, in particular, CELL will be better versed to advocate and collaborate to expand and elevate UN educational endeavors to contribute towards the achievement of Agenda 2030.

To define equality education terminology, individually and collectively, YGLF by administered a survey questionnaire to the members of CELL for their individual and organizational contributions. The results were clearly diverse yet, concurrently, dynamically connected. The CELL member contributors represent the following NGO organizations:

Young Global Leadership Foundation (YGLF): Dr. Linda J. Stillman

World Organization for Early Childhood Education: Donna - Akilah Wright

Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem (OSMTH):
George Platsis and Jerry Price

Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI): Dr. Joseph de Meyer and David
Livert

Universal Esperanto Association (UEA): Humphrey Tonkin and Jon Liechty

African Life Center: Ramatu Ahmed

Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI): Jeanne Carroll

Manhattan Multicultural Counseling (MMC): Carol Kennedy

Anne Frank Center (AFC): Shir Ugav Annenberg

Their important insights and perspectives are incorporated into the collaborative definition. YGLF extends its utmost appreciation for these invaluable contributions to define Equality Education from their expert NGO perspective for the 21 Century. Therefore, these contributors have been individually identified in the first section,

whereby they have also integrated, collectively and substantively, to the rest of the defining section of White Paper.

What does Quality Education actually mean for us as individual, educational experts and on behalf of CELL collectively ?

How do we incorporate equitable education as a complementary component into our definition?

To begin from a pedagogic perspective:

Quality Education fundamentally enables educators to teach and guide learners to understand and apply knowledge & skills.

The goal is quite fundamental:

To develop the learners' intellectual and ethical abilities to their fullest capability to contribute to a meaningful and sustainable life, also as contributors to the gestalt of global society.

To that end, society-at-large needs competent educators, with the capacity to communicate effectively & ethically, drawing upon their own education, experience and expertise to advance the lives of learners in their care.

Then, the settings are multiple and all matter to achieve Quality Education, including but not limited to:

Formal & Informal

Academic Classroom & Experiential Endeavors

Traditional & Progressive

Conventional & Unconventional

Most important, quality Education provides a peaceful, productive and positive setting to offer everybody the opportunity to achieve in an equitable environment. **Safe Space**, the theme of UN International Youth Day 2018 – 2019 also underscores the need for safe and secure surroundings to learn. Our young people can be particularly vulnerable from the physical environment and increased violence to the virtual world of mobbing and the derogatory impact of tidal wave communication through technology.

According to the CELL survey on Equality Education, the members presented the following input:

Young Global Leadership Foundation fundamentally states that **quality education**:

Enables learners to achieve their highest capacity in all aspects of life

Knows no borders

Represents a human right.

YGLF also emphasizes the Human Dimension to balance runaway technology

The student /teacher relationship must incorporate meaningful **human interaction** at all times to build **trust**, to create **confidence**, and to ensure full **commitment** □ to achieve the full **development** of all learners through competent educators.

Quality Education also embraces **Equitable Education** that is “Fair for All.” Equitable Education bridges a fair outcome in any given environment, for everybody, inclusively. It allows -- all involved -- the opportunity to identify and pursue their passions, concurrently, to explore and elevate their talents and skills.

CELL Chair George Platsis and Director Jerry Price emphasize:

Quality Education shall be based on honesty and integrity, illuminating the ethics element. It allows the learner of any background to development courage, self-control,

and commitment to their educational opportunities. It also assesses and addresses the gaps in curriculum and teaching methodology.

Dr. Joseph De Meyer (SPSSI) expounds:

Quality Education is not solely the accumulation of facts and dates, and not merely the necessary preparation of the individual to earn his keep in the world, Rather it is the transmission of our mental, moral, technical and aesthetic heritage as fully as possible -- involving as many as possible. It seeks to enlarge man's , woman's and children's understanding – control – embellishment - and enjoyment of life. In other words, the right to the pursuit of happiness.

To that end: Education shall be the transmission not only of knowledge and skills, but the transmission of CIVILIZATION to live a civil life in a civilized manner as a world citizen of a global community.

Jeanne Carroll (WFWPI) notes that *Quality Education* is a process by which the student, ensconced in a safe and supportive environment, can absorb new and useful information. This approach enables them to gain knowledge that supports them in their life as productive, self-supporting and responsible world citizens.

Dr. Carol Kennedy Ph.D. (MMC), emphasizes that *Quality Education* must be fully accessible to all learners, with qualified, competent educators teaching a core set of competencies in literacy numeracy, science, technology, history, civics, geography and the arts – It also means access to materials and an adaptable environment. She stresses the significance of multimodalities of learning and a Universal Design for Learning Principles.

Donna –Akilah Wright (WOECE) adds the inclusion of a feedback “loop” to *Quality Education* to inform and address gaps in knowledge and skills.

Ramatu Ahmed (ALC) proposes that *Quality Education* provides necessary tools equitably to improve the student's learning at every level of education, regardless of location.

Shir Ugav Annenberg (AFC) personalizes *Quality Education* as the best way she can teach a subject to achieve her goals, so whoever learns the subject can understand and implement it through achieved skills.

Finally, Humphrey Tonkin University President emeritus provided their Universal Esperanto Association position paper for achieving SDG # 4 Quality Education.

The Action Plan includes but is not limited to:

An education based on creative and critical thinking that enables all people to actively contribute to political and development process in a complex, interlinked and diverse global society.

More specifically, *Quality Education* curriculum includes but is not limited to:

An education that teaches conflict resolution, a deep appreciation for diversity, ethical reasoning, gender equality, human rights and responsibilities, interdependence, multilingual and multicultural competence, social justice, sustainable development...

Similarly, Jon Liechty (UEA) explains that *Quality Education* allows people to achieve their full potential as human beings, that is fair and equitable, taught by competent teachers under adequate conditions -- all inclusive.

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These diverse yet complementary NGO CELL perspectives of *Quality Education* are a composite of goals and objectives to achieve, whereby the sum is greater than the parts of the whole. It is not an exhaustive survey and rather a start to define and determine

relevant components to create and sustain *Quality and Equitable Education* across the spectrum of society -- worldwide.

The most mutually expressed NGO concerns – from philosophical, psychological to practical points of view - focus on equitable learning opportunities, safe environments, and competent educators of integrity to discern knowledge and develop skills. The goal clearly is to enable students to pursue their fullest capacity, to embrace meaningful and rewarding, lives – engaging individually, in community and globally.

Quality education must be viewed as a global goal, connecting communities, cultures, countries and continents – world-wide. Ultimately, these educational attributes would enable and enhance the heritage of civilization to make a sustainable impact on today's society to pursue a peaceful, productive and prosperous direction in the 21st Century.

Quality Education: Learning and Literacy

Having assumed an individualized approach to define multi-dimensional elements of SDG # 4 *Quality Education* from NGO point of view, we will now apply a collective perspective, derived from the same survey, to discuss the meaning and relevancy of *Learning and Literacy* in the context of acquiring *Quality Education*. YGLF is grateful to the previously noted NGO CELL members for these further contributions.

Quality Education Learning

From a collective NGO perspective, learning is the role and responsibility of the educator and learner, equally. The goal is to provide and acquire, respectively, a quality and equitable learning experience and environment, defined just previously as quality education.

Effective and ethical learning will open opportunities for a meaningful and sustainable life journey, professionally and personally, while contributing to a fair and just society. Effective and equitable, quality learning can and does successfully occur in formal and informal, conventional and unconventional environments, etc. The circumstances must be conducive to peaceful and productive interaction that provide accessible knowledge and tools to engage the learners to achieve their full capacity. It also entails the ability to apply information and skills to all realms of life and to retain the knowledge and understanding, long-term, for future experiences and endeavors.

Learning is also a dynamic process, active and reflective, that increases one's self-awareness and illuminates understanding of one's environmental surroundings, including other human beings, nature, the material and virtual spheres, and ultimately the universe. It involves the acquisition of new and accurate knowledge, skills, beliefs, multi-dimension thinking and perspectives, that did not previously exist, to reach full cognition and application.

Learning is most effective when connected to ethical interpersonal communication by well-prepared educators, enabling learners to achieve a healthy, productive and happy life. Ultimately, effective and equitable learning prepares people to become competent and confident contributors to the community and thereby society - at large, including the global community aspect.

Ultimately, quality and equitable learning leads to peaceful productive and positive change and transformation, benefiting both the individual and society.

Quality Education Literacy

Literacy means literally to be literate – through the ability to read, then to communicate with oneself and one’s environment in a comprehensive manner that includes thoughts, feelings, opinions and convictions. It is the ability to express and reflect whom we are as unique individuals. It is a one-time opportunity to assert our exceptional existence in the now and apply to the topics of the times, individually, collectively and globally.

Literacy is also the capacity to acquire fluency and comprehensive understanding that enables an individual to learn and apply knowledge and skills in a given field: e.g., reading, writing, culture and communication, etc., and today the emphasis on STEM: Science, Technology, Environment, Mathematics. Furthermore, literacy equally refers to linguistic literacy to express oneself clearly and concisely in the written and spoken word, also in the context of visual, audio and nonverbal communication.

Ultimately, literacy flourishes as a result of comprehensive educational and experiential dynamics, best achieved, again in the mother tongue, for sustaining impact and long-term results.

Several of the questionnaire NGO CELL responses showed similarities in describing the terms learning and Literacy. The responses emphasized that both are comprehensive and complex systems that require proper preparation, focused attention, and interpersonal connection between the educator and the learner to achieve best practices and sustainable results. Learning and literacy competencies both highly contribute to individuals reaching their full potential in all aspects of life.

Having defined three key educational components, *Quality Education, Learning and Literacy* through this collective NGO CELL effort, the participants’ contributions provide a foundation to develop other equally important educational aspects to identify and advance SDG # 4 Quality Education. Therefore, as the survey continues, we will now consider two vital complementary elements: Characteristics and Components.

Quality Education Characteristics

Quality education characteristics are all-inclusive and comprehensive, with equitable access, regardless of race, ethnic, migrant, refugee, gender, and economic and social status. It requires safe space in a peaceful and productive environment that encourages engagement and exploration. The teaching/learning experience must reflect relevant, reliable knowledge, informational sources and impact skills enabling conceptual and concrete thinking to apply successfully to life's situations and circumstances.

Equally important, *Quality Education characteristics* underscore outreach to as many people as possible, applying all means available. Respect is a premier trait toward each and every individual's unique existence, especially children – boys and girls – as well as men and women, across the spectrum of society.

Another strong characteristic is the lifelong support system to ensure sustainable development, prepare people for work and participation in the challenges a sustainable society. Quality education, characteristically, means to be inclusive and global, with equal access by gender, ethnicity, indigenous and migrant status, etc. Communication capacity development is at the heart of understanding at home, in community, cultures, and a global world. Education should be designed to embrace current knowledge regarding teaching and outcome assessment.

From an individual perspective, Quality Education respects the right of all people to receive an education appropriate to their abilities and needs, in an understandable language, with emphasis on language learning, to enable all an equitable opportunity to feel comfortable and flourish in their educational environment. It also provides the best teachers, employing the most effective and ethical styles and strategies that are pertinent to the students and the subjects for successful and sustaining results.

Finally, quality education at its best is a steady, time-consuming, interactive, life-long journey. A famous African saying:

If you want to go fast ~~ go alone

If you want to go far ~~ go together.

Quality education is, indeed, a - go - together journey!

Clearly, the list of Quality Education Characteristics is exhaustive -- even endless; however, our objective is to highlight key characteristics from a substantive NGO community perspective as a guideline towards achieving SDG # 4.

Complementing *Quality Education characteristics* are its components, similar to characteristics for some and yet distinctive for others. The ensuing comments illuminate NGO perspectives that delineate the two in shaping the dynamics and direction of Quality Education and advancing SDG # 4.

Quality Education Components

The survey indicates that this topic is particularly significant, given the in-depth responses that have been incorporated here.

To begin, there are multiple components that illuminate the SDG # 4 targets that include but are not limited to: access, equity and inclusion, quality, and lifelong learning.

Strategic approaches also seek to strengthen national policies, emphasizing inclusion and equity, focusing on quality and learning, and promoting lifelong learning.

Then, addressing education in emergency situations must be priority, today, given the many current, conflict-torn regions of the world. Each target within SDG 4 has a series of statements and goals to guide development of new programs and policies. Implementation vectors include governments and partnerships, coordination, monitoring and financing.

Specifically, well-trained teachers are a prevailing priority. The educators need to apply existing and emerging teaching methods, particularly the invaluable application of technologies, today. Concurrently, the human dimension must remain a priority in the educational profession as well. The two approaches and their complementary methodologies can be combined and integrated for reachable results for everybody.

Education styles and strategies should be based on proven evidence, experience and expertise to produce effective instruction, learning, and outcomes. Students are all always best served from mainstreaming classrooms and an extremely difficult role for the educator: the approach can result in tension between value added (advancing the knowledge of all students) vs. educational reduction deficit (favoring students who have special needs and left behind in various ways.)

Next, it is equally important to understand and implement multi-cultural styles and strategies, relevant to the realities of today's educational environments -- from impoverished refugee camps to elite private schools. Then, the use of language -- to build literacy in the student's "home language" -- represents another all-important component. Reality proves that this approach is not always available, so educators must be competent to use multicultural – communication styles and strategies to ensure equality and reciprocity.

Concurrently, the use of language -- to develop literacy and much more in the student's "home language" -- is another vital component. Experience illuminates that these ideal conditions are so educators and learners must adapt through expanding their own language capacity. English is today's dominant and dynamic language, utilized throughout much of the world; however, it is clearly not the singular solution to enable full inclusion.

Furthermore, in much of the world, populations speak more than one language and/or dialect that enrich understanding and engagement with one another from an intercultural and ultimately global perspective. Such interaction leads to a more peaceful and prosperous global society and a fundamental goal of SDG # 4.

Teaching environments, we stress again under components, must be accessible and safe space -- free from physical, psychological and/or emotional harm and hurt. Another priority, students need nourishment for the body and mind, so they have the capacity to focus and flourish to their highest capacity development.

Quality Educations components are also compromised of concrete elements. For example, knowledge, skills and training need to be relevant presented in a rigorous curriculum to expand and elevate, diverse individuals and educational communities. Administrators are responsible to guide the overall program and process, to provide accurate materials, to discuss appropriate teaching methodologies, etc.

Then equitably documented measures and feedback contribute to identify gaps in an educational program that can then be addressed and corrected to improve the learning and literacy approaches being applied. Finally, family and community need to be supportive and involved, regardless of the environment.

Clearly, *Quality Education components* are broad at best, individually and/or through cultural relevancy, even unique to given communities. However, this section does provide component aspect that we believe are applicable to all educational environments to further SDG # 4.

Quality Education and Ethics

Do global ethics exist and can we apply them to quality education across the spectrum of society in the 21st Century? According to the questionnaire responses, the answer is a resounding yes. Primarily, the *Golden Rule* resonates till today through philosophy, religions, beliefs and practice that permeate around the world the for centuries:

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is a starting place to determine the common dynamics of quality education and ethics.

Fundamentally, it is the respect for and implementation of human rights in education, i.e., with no discrimination and segregation. Collectively from the survey, others note that Quality Education ethics include but are not limited to the right to:

Acceptance
Compassion
Fairness
Honesty
Dignity
Integrity
Respect

Security

Tolerance

Understanding...etc.

Concurrently, every survey response has referred to the right to **ACCESS** and **OPPORTUNITY** for all individuals to develop themselves to the best of their capacity throughout their life journeys. Equitable access and opportunity require “safe space.” The environment must be free of physical, mental and emotional abuse – elements also stressed under quality education characteristics and components.

Furthermore, free and appropriate education for all should ethically apply, especially in vulnerable, war-torn regions, refugees in camp communities, victims of major disasters, migrants far from home, indigenous peoples in dominant cultures, etc. Access to and quality of education should be equitable regarding gender, ethnicity, race, religion, color or creed – based on individual merit and not entitlement – especially challenging towards these groups in society. Ultimately, *Quality Education* must be inclusive and available to all residents of a culture - country - community. It is equally imperative to be available to pre-school age children through senior citizens to encourage and enable a life-long, learning and literate journey to achieve one’s full capacity.