**What happened to literacy?
Historical and conceptual perspectives on literacy in UNESCO[1]**

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At its founding in 1946, UNESCO put literacy at the top of its education and human rights agenda. More than 60 years later, UNESCO maintains (on its website) the mission statement: "UNESCO is at the forefront of global literacy efforts and is dedicated to keeping literacy high on national, regional and international agendas." This paper briefly describes how UNESCO has sought to accomplish this mission, and its prospects for the future. With its self-proclaimed status as *the* leader in international literacy work, what UNESCO does, and does not, achieve will no doubt have an important impact on the future of literacy, especially in the low-income regions of the world that are dependent on external funding and technical assistance.

*Literacy and UNESCO, 1946-2000.* As part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1946, UNESCO put literacy, at its creation, at top of its education mission. In the decades that followed, the United Nations and UNESCO reiterated support for literacy in the 1975 Persepolis Declaration stating that: "Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right" (UNESCO (1975; cited in UNESCO, 2005, p. 136); and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA; Jomtien, Thailand) declared that "literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving as essential learning tools that comprise the basic learning needs of every person … child, youth and adult" (UNESCO, 1990). Later, the 1997 Hamburg Declaration held under Resolution 11 that: "Literacy, broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly changing world, is a fundamental human right" (UNESCO, 1997). Over its first 54 years, UNESCO affirmed and reaffirmed its leadership role in the "battle for literacy."

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As is noted elsewhere (Burnett, this issue), UNESCO also drew the interest and attention of the international community through technical and conceptual inputs. Over the years, UNESCO generally adopted a 'two roads' model of literacy: first, promoting children's access to school for basic education, and second, by fostering programs for adults (and out-of-school youth) in non-formal adult education programs. Operationally, and in terms of visibility, UNESCO made one of its first major technical impacts by responding to increasing demand for comparative data on literacy. By the mid-1950s, and in the decades that followed, UNESCO produced a wide variety of empirical reports on literacy rates, and these data formed the basis for other UN and bilateral agencies to report literacy levels and consider regional and national literacy priorities, especially in developing countries. To obtain its data, UNESCO initially depended on national education authorities to provide statistics on basic education and literacy, most of which were initially derived from school or program attendance records.

The first major UNESCO international report on literacy in (UNESCO, 1978) was based on the following: "In the projection exercise, school enrolment ratios for the 6-11 age group were utilized for estimating future illiteracy rates for the 15-19 age group, and these in turn, together with the United Nations demographic projections, were then utilized for estimating future illiteracy rates for the population aged 15 and over" (Smyth, 2005, p. 12). Furthermore, numerous countries gathered information via national censuses; but "at any given year during the 1980s and 1990s, up-to-date data would be available for only a limited number of countries; there would be some countries for which recent census data (less than five years old) were available, others for which the most recent data were 10, 15, 20 or more years old, and some (including most of the industrial countries) for which no data were available" (Smyth, 2005, p. 21). In other words, even though census data became available, it was almost always based on self-enumerated "illiteracy," with little or no information on language of literacy, and with about half the countries using data that were at least one or more decades out of date. Language of assessment and language of instruction clearly play a major role in determining not only the status of national literacy rates, but also the success of implementation (Robinson, 2005).

In the 1980s, the UN Statistical office began to commission household surveys of literacy that used direct skill measurement (Wagner & Srivastava, 1989). By the 1990s, national governments (Canada and the United States, as well as OECD, began a series of adult literacy surveys that began to replace UNESCO's data in industrialized countries. This was primarily due to increased sophistication of *direct* measurement of skills, an approach that was designed to help move beyond UNESCO's dependence on national *estimates* of literacy levels (Wagner, 1990). Later, when literacy was 'measured' in national censuses in developing countries, national authorities often were satisfied with an individual's self-assessment response to such questions as: "Are you literate?" Yes or no. Questions about adult literacy were gathered by querying the head of household, while other assessments asked about educational levels and so forth. Some have suggested that such a movement toward multiple measures could be seen as an accomplishment of UNESCO, in that it moved beyond educational attainment by "facilitating the development of some limited set of operational definitions of literacy that enabled cross-national comparisons of literacy, even though questions remained about their reliability and validity" (Bevavot, personal communication, 2010). During this same period, the use of literacy statistics as part of the

Human Development Index by UNDP, and as part of Unicef and World Bank development reports put increasing pressure on UNESCO to provide reliable and comparable data on literacy, but little in the way of fiscal means was provided to do more than urge better approaches on its member states.[2]

During UNESCO's first half-century, there were also changes in the way it, and others, viewed literacy itself. These changes encompassed how literacy was defined – for example, as a cognitive and measureable skill (or skills) versus ways of 'understanding the world' (as in Paulo Freire's work on empowerment). During these years, UNESCO often found itself (as seen in its publications) adopting the exhortatory approach of literacy 'eradication' (of illiteracy as a disease), fighting the 'battle' against illiteracy, and literacy is like a 'light bulb' in that you are in the dark until liberated into the 'light' of literacy.[3] This metaphorical rhetoric dimension of literacy was not, however, the only way the literacy was promoted in UNESCO. During the 1960s, UNESCO (in partnership with UNDP) sponsored the Experimental World Literacy Program, which sought to foster 'functional literacy,' tied to jobs and economic growth. The 1990 Jomtien EFA Conference put most effort into primary schooling, and, for the first time, focused major attention on the *quality* of learning in the classroom, a topic that would wait nearly two more decades before it would become a central UNESCO educational concern. Yet, 1990 was also the UN International Literacy Year, where some progress was made in rethinking how UNESCO was going to foster literacy work in developing countries (Wagner, 1992). In the mid-1990s UNESCO began to engage in a number of applied research and development projects that were built on external partnerships with universities and NGOs.[4]

The first half-century of effort by UNESCO to keep literacy in the spotlight can be seen as the cup half-empty or half-full. On the one hand, UNESCO was nearly the only international agency champion of literacy, at a time when other agencies were focused much more on other dimensions of the international education enterprise – for example, Unicef on young children and primary schooling, and the World Bank on the formal school system and higher education.[5] With respect to the World Bank, Jones (1997) emphasizes its insistence on a human capital approach, tied to formal education and the global economy. Literacy – especially adult literacy – was seen there as too political and insufficiently linked to direct economic development. Jones sums up the Bank hesitancy on literacy as follows: "The answer might rather lie in Bank preference for schooling and learning systems which are easily controlled and managed, easily integrated with the formation of a citizenry and workforce unlikely to upset any political or cultural applecarts" (p. 374). Only UNESCO

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[2] See Smyth (2005) for a very useful review of the history of literacy data collection at UNESCO.

[3] For a review of UNESCO's changes in literacy conceptualization, see UNESCO (2005), p. 153. This rather 'political' approach was in part due to the campaign approaches urged by Socialist countries, such as the former USSR, Nicaragua and Cuba, which promoted a more political than technocratic approach to literacy development (Wagner, 1986). Jones (1990, p. 46) summed up this approach more generally: UNESCO was to be intergovernmental and functional, yet the rhetoric surrounding its program reflected the desire for high-level intellectual exchanges, focusing on moral issues and left untarnished by day-to-day political considerations."

[4] Significant among these initiatives was the 1994 establishment of the International Literacy Institute (ILI) at the University of Pennsylvania, initially co-funded by UNESCO. At its inception, ILI worked with the Literacy Section of UNESCO on a joint scope of work that covered training and professional development, innovation, regional and international conferences, and specific research projects, especially in the area of adult literacy assessment and monitoring; see the ILI website (www.literacy.org).

[5] And, there were several bilateral donor agencies (e.g., NORAD), and NGOs (e.g., Action Aid) which kept pressure on UN agencies to take literacy seriously, and which supported or collaborated with UNESCO.

kept a spotlight on literacy, but the intensity of the beam was limited by constraints on human and fiscal resources, and an uncertain uptake on new methods and concepts for literacy statistics and innovation. Yet, it seems that UNESCO never had sufficient (or sufficiently prioritized) resources that could support its programs, including leadership. This simple fact, and distinction, often led to confusion about UNESCO, which sought the responsibility of leadership without the means to control the outcomes of its approach. Further, UNESCO was constantly buffeted by its member states that pushed many education issues, not just literacy.

*Literacy and UNESCO, EFA-Dakar up to 2010.* In 2000, UNESCO and other agencies organized a second EFA conference in Dakar (Senegal), during which 164 countries agreed on the *Dakar Framework for Action,* including the goal to increase literacy levels worldwide by 50% in the year 2015.[6] This was also the occasion to take a new look at a number of key issues in literacy work, from definitions and measurement, to the role of mother-tongue education, the relationship between child and adult literacy, and new conceptualizations of literacy based on cultural variation (Wagner, 2000). Several years later, at the point when the United States (and some other nations) decided to rejoin UNESCO as a member states, the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD; 2003–2012) was launched, with the U.S. First Lady (Laura Bush) named as its honorary spokesperson. The UNLD mandate would focus on "literacy for all [since it] is at the heart of basic education for all … [and] creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy" (United Nations, 2002; cited in UNESCO (2005, p. 31). As part of the Decade, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) led a program called *Literacy for Empowerment* (LIFE), which sponsored a number of regional literacy activities, and has tried to serve as a "catalyst for planning, capacity development, partnership building" (UNESCO, 2009, p. 13).[7]

Four major activities during this decade merit further comment. Perhaps most important is the comprehensive 2006 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) entitled *Literacy for life*

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[6] It has been noted that this particular goal is mathematically impossible for countries with literacy rates above about 75%; a 50% increase would put them at *over* 100% literacy. Thus, this goal is usually interpreted as a 50% *reduction* of *illiteracy* levels across countries, which would mean that countries with a relatively high literacy rate, such as the U.S., would still be able to improve in the future. This mathematical error led to derisive comments about the organizers' limited *math* literacy skills.

[7] Using a rhetoric similar to that cited above, the UNLD sought to make the Literacy Decade "a rallying cry and banner for renewed international commitment to literacy." Based on UNECSO's 2009 review of LIFE, it is unclear how much UNLD have been able to accomplish, since many of the listed programs are still said to be beginning or in pilot phases, even though the Decade is approaching completion (2013). On the positive side, this UNESCO review document on the UNLD pushes the conceptual envelope by explicitly linking child-adult programs, conflict zones, poverty reduction, and more. It also, as with the 2006 GMR, pushes for more of what it calls 'benchmarking' of literacy programs. With respect to LIFE activities, UIL (2009) adopted language similar to UNLD, claiming that "altogether, LIFE has further enhanced UNESCO's comparative advantage in efforts to achieve literacy for all within the frameworks of UNLD, EFA and the MDGs" (p. 9); and "the vision of offering relevant learning opportunities of good quality to all youth and adults denied the right to education, building strong partnerships of collaborative action and implementing an effective strategy of resource mobilisation will enable LIFE to make a real difference to the lives of millions of learners" (p. 63). It is difficult to assess the quality and impact of the LIFE program since the reports written about it are internal and for public dissemination, rather than based on research and/or external studies.

(UNESCO, 2005).[8] This comprehensive review covered the major issues in literacy as understood by the best specialists in the world, and also raised many of questions that have troubled the literacy field since the beginning of UNESCO – including, for example, definitions of literacy, current statistics (and their problems), and innovative ideas for moving the field forward.

A second notable activity is the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Program (LAMP), designed to build on previous international assessment efforts, and which has coincided with the current growth in international educational assessments. LAMP is undertaken by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), and has based its approach methodologically on the on the earlier work of OECD in the IALS international survey (OECD, 2000). Some additional reference is made to the cultural dimension of literacy as in Street (2004) and others (UIS, 2009). According to UIS, "the ultimate goal of LAMP is not to produce an international report and an international dataset to be used for research purposes but to contribute to the development of national capacities" (p. 24). A recent evaluation of LAMP, commissioned by UIS, noted the problematically long time taken for delivery of implementation (from 2003 inception to 2008, only pilot work was achieved). In terms of implementation issues, this evaluation recommended that "within country priorities may require development of tests and instruments that are culture-specific, whereas cross-country comparability priorities require tests and instruments to be culture-free so that they may be used appropriately in all of the participating countries" (Ercikan et al., 2008, p. 5).[9] Improving the ability of developing countries to engage in literacy assessment is laudable, but it remains unclear whether this program, after so many years of pilot-testing, will be in a position to deliver meaningful results.

Third, the CONFINTEA VI conference was held in Belem (Brazil), and resulted in a reaffirmation of the importance of adult learning (and literacy) for the 21st century (UNESCO, 2009). The 2009 Belem Framework lays out the importance of adult literacy: "Literacy is an indispensable foundation that enables young people and adults to engage in learning opportunities at all stages of the learning continuum. The right to literacy is an inherent part of the right to education. It is a prerequisite for the development of personal, social, economic and political empowerment. Literacy is an essential means of building people's capabilities to cope with the evolving challenges and complexities of life, culture, economy and society."[10]

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[8] While undertaken at UNESCO premises in Paris, the GMR team is actually a unit that is independent of UNESCO. This independence carries the advantage of being less subject to political influence, but the disadvantage of leaving UNESCO staff largely disengaged from the substantive work of the GMR team.

[9] Similar conclusions were reached in earlier work for UNESCO by the International Literacy Institute (with its Literacy Assessment Project (1999), see: http://literacyonline.org/products/ili/pdf/OP9901.pdf ), which tried to blend both survey and cognitive testing measures. Other international assessments carried out of relevance to school-based early literacy include PISA, PIRLS, SACMEQ, PASEC, and others (for a review, see Wagner, 2010). Additional limitations of the LAMP work are provided by Lind (2008, p. 31).

[10] The Belem Declaration is very similar to the 1997 Hamburg CONTINEA V Declaration: "Literacy, broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly changing world, is a fundamental human right. In every society literacy is a necessary skill in itself and one of the foundations of other life skills. … Literacy is also a catalyst for participation in social, cultural, political and economic activities, and for learning throughout life." Though one could argue that there are few differences between the Hamburg and Belem final proclamations, one can detect a greater emphasis on the measurement (monitoring, evaluation and assessment) of adult learning and literacy in the Belem document.

Fourth, UNESCO published its 2010 GMR, entitled *Reaching the marginalized*. While focused on how to address the challenges of those individuals at most risk to not receive an adequate education, this GMR also paid special attention to problems of illiteracy and low literacy among ethno-linguistic minority groups. Indeed, the 2010 GMR broke new ground by its recognition that national literacy statistics (along with other educational statistics) often missed those most in need by virtue of data collection methods and concepts that systematically excluded marginalized populations. Hopefully, this message will receive increased attention by the literacy community in the coming years.

As mentioned above, UNESCO's literacy work is probably best known through the statistics that it has been providing on global literacy for a half-century, and that are widely cited by other UN agencies as well as the media. As has been pointed out often (see also Burnett, this issue), UNESCO is meant to serve member states (and concomitantly serves at member states' pleasure). Yet, UNESCO also tries to be a leader of ideas and of technical competence in key areas such as literacy. Thus, UNESCO serves, as it should, a much larger world of constituents than only member states when it publishes its reports and empirical findings. Even so, the statistics provided by UNESCO (now largely through UIS in Montreal) are still based today on the same methodology (national government estimations, mainly on schooling or indirect self-assessment surveys), and therefore suffer from the same lack of credibility (at least among experts) that has been the case over the years. This is one reason for the success of OECD and other agencies taking a leadership role in literacy assessment in adults and in schools.[11] One could argue, of course, that UNESCO cannot do everything and that its resources are limited. But the main problem is not that other agencies are implementing credible and professional assessment data; rather, it is that UNESCO continues to publish comparative statistics that few experts take seriously as reliable statistics of national literacy rates.[12]

The inability of UNESCO to readjust or recalibrate its work towards accepted professional practice on literacy measurement is a matter of substantive concern, and a reflection on the limits of scientific professional capacity that have troubled UNESCO's work. On the other hand, as Smyth (2005) credibly noted in defense of UNESCO's literacy statistics, UNESCO professionals were not unaware of the criticism of its data gathering, but simply had to balance both the multiple needs of nations and cultural perspectives, as well as the difficulty of focusing on *both* national and international policy needs: the former being more difficult for UNESCO to achieve than the latter (international) needs. Some of these limitations, it has been argued, are due at least in part to UNESCO's reorganization in 2006 – a change that effectively reduced political support and personnel in literacy in UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.[13] In addition, one could also argue that that other international stakeholders (such as

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[11] At OECD, this is most notably the PISA and PIAAC (Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) international assessments.

[12] As one notable example, the United States rate for 'illiteracy' in UNESCO was listed for many years as about 97%, – that is, until the U.S. National Adult Survey was undertaken, and found (as did OECD subsequently) that, by U.S. standards, the effective literacy rate was closer to 75%. UNESCO has, since then, ceased to provide literacy statistics on the U.S. and many other OECD countries. See UIS website: http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=125&IF_Language=eng&BR_Fact=L AAIT&BR_Region=40500 (accessed May 30, 2010).

[13] For a review of this reorganization, see Limage (2007, 2009). A substantial portion of the external action resources of UNLD came from the United States, which was influential in the design and operation of the UNLD. The early years of UNLD also coincided with the short-lived and troubled tenure of an ADG for

the World Bank and major bilateral donors) tended to push their own educational and statistical agendas, to the detriment of UNESCO's. This may be reflected in the United Nations MDGs, which do not mention literacy as a focus of any of the eight goals.[14]

Taken as a whole, the past decade of UNESCO literacy efforts have made some solid gains, particularly in a greater opening to new ideas[15] as well as in the area of producing highly respected GMRs that have advanced thinking on literacy and related areas. At the same time, promises for improved and credible literacy statistics, the improved science of literacy development, and innovative ways to implement literacy programs, have remained elusory.

*UNESCO's future in literacy*. If one looks back on the more than 60 years of work by UNESCO on literacy (both child and adult literacy), there is little question that it has been a major player and has kept itself at the "forefront" of policy debates and agendas, as stated on its website. However, the more difficult question is whether it has been able to play a true leadership role – in the sense of getting things done, providing conceptual guidance, and innovation – in the improvement of literacy throughout this same period. It is fairly easy to state that considerable educational progress has been made over the past half-century, but nearly all of this seems to have been achieved through the expansion of access to primary schooling across the globe, rather than through literacy programs *per se*.[16] Further, levels of low-literacy and illiteracy remain a significant problem in the 21st century, especially in developing countries, and with only modest implementation engagement by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2005). In the area of adult literacy, when considered in light of the larger community of actors (governmental, non-governmental, donor, etc.), UNESCO, even as an acknowledged institutional leader, is commonly perceived as an underachiever in terms of inputs, outputs, or innovative research and development. Indeed, as UNESCO itself has stated recently: "Literacy remains among the most neglected of all education goals. Progress towards the 2015 target of halving illiteracy [EFA Goal 4] has been far too slow and uneven" (UNESCO, 2010, p. 94).[17]

What should the field of literacy expect from UNESCO over the next decade? If its mission is to remain limited to its self-stated mission to be at "*the forefront of global literacy efforts and is dedicated to keeping literacy high on national, regional and international agendas*,"

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Education, who also took the significant intra-institutional step of reassigning many of the personnel and activities of adult literacy to locations outside of UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, substantially weakening core capabilities. This is similar to the comment in Benavot (this issue) concerning the establishment of UIS in Montreal, and its consequences for "weakened substantive and methodological expertise" in Paris. Some have argued that wealthy governments (as with prominent donors) play roles that overly influence UNESCO programs (such as literacy), leaving the organization with insufficient human resources capacity to stay focused on core goals.

[14] Of course, the EFA goals, where UNESCO plays a more central role, do include literacy amongst the targets.

[15] By "new ideas," one could cite a number of historical and self-reflective reviews, such as by Smyth (2005) on literacy statistics, as well as other various commissioned reports and workshops that have sought to reposition UNESCO in literacy and education.

[16] One could argue, in the case of increased primary schooling, that UNESCO played a supportive rather than leadership role. Most credit is given to national ministries of education in collaboration with most donors support coming from the World Bank, Unicef, and bilateral agencies. UNESCO has had only modest levels of funding for basic education, and much less for literacy.

[17] As noted elsewhere in the paper, it may have suited other international agencies to leave UNESCO with an what be termed as an 'unfunded mandate' in literacy; these other agencies invested have substantial resources in more 'attractive' and tractable areas (such as primary and secondary schooling).

then UNESCO will likely be able to meet this restricted goal, mainly because there are few other major institutional actors who would wish to assume it. On the other hand, as literacy is at the center of debates about the *quality of education*, it would seem that UNESCO could and should be able to offer considerably more. Evidence has accumulated from a variety of sources that economic growth, even in the poorest countries, is highly dependent on the learning and cognitive skills that children acquire in primary school, and that parents' literacy is one of the most important guarantors of children's success in school.[18] This puts UNESCO squarely inside the policy debate of the future of education.

What are others doing in literacy? In work on primary schooling reading, there is an increased effort to take a much closer look into the instructional process itself with young children. Through new methods like the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), there has been a growth of interest in how best to consider, and act upon, learning outcomes of children in primary school, in (nearly) real-time (Research Triangle Institute, 2009). Similarly, in adult literacy work, as mentioned, OECD has taken the lead in adult literacy assessment.[19] And, there are methods for adult assessment that build off of EGRA-like assessment instruments, and that can help programs to be more accountable for the learning dimension of adult education programs, with less focus on international comparability and more focus on improving literacy in specific cultural contexts (Wagner, 2010).[20] Further, much is going on in the use of technology for education in developing countries that could be brought to bear on literacy improvement (Wagner & Kozma, 2005). These are a few of the areas where UNESCO could learn more from what others are doing and foster a stronger leadership and collaboration role.

On the policy side, there may be new partnerships that UNESCO could explore in literacy work, in particular in closer association with institutions of higher education and international agencies, in order to be a more credible thought leader.[21, 22] UNESCO could reconsider its global mission by building better bridges between the interests of both developed and developing countries (Heyneman, this issue). For example, all countries are interested in improving learning outcomes, providing better real-time information for policy-making, and deploying the effective use of new technologies. Finding common purposes among diverse countries – both rich and poor – would be an additional way to mobilize not only the needed fiscal resources, but intellectual ones as well. According to UNESCO (2005, p. 17), literacy programs receive only 1% of the education budget in many countries. A combined program between OECD and UNESCO, for example, might seem to be a natural option when thinking about programs that combine the interests of wealthy and poor countries. Of course, making partnerships work synergistically is always easier said than

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[18] See Hanushek and Woessmann (2009) for a recent analysis on cognitive impacts; see UNESCO's GMR (2005) and many others on the impact of parental literacy.

[19] OECD is, as mentioned earlier, in the process of undertaking PIAAC.

[20] Smyth (2005) made substantially the same point with respect to the 'national' problem of UNESCO statistics on literacy.

[21] Other agencies (e.g., World Bank), say that they won't 'do' literacy because UNESCO does it. Yet this is not an organized decision of the international community, in which there is an agreed sharing of work and appropriate resources are channeled towards the lead agency.

[22] This follows on the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, July 2009. See: http://www.unesco.org/en/higher-education/dynamic-content-single-view/news/world_conference_on_higher_education_closes_with_an_appeal_for_investment_and_cooperation-1/back/11995/cHash/e0b3d3a92e/

done. And, as noted earlier, it has appeared at times that some agencies, at least in the past, have made it difficult (or at least more complicated) for UNESCO to carry out its mission in literacy.

In the end analysis, UNESCO and literacy need each other. UNESCO's focus on poor countries and human rights requires that the agency keep literacy close, very close – probably back at Headquarters, many would say. Literacy also needs UNESCO. Serious concerns exist about UNESCO's literacy work, such as in the case of international literacy statistics, or delays in carrying out planned programs of work. These are not simply complaints about resources or institutional reorganization (two invoked rationales for such problems), even though they, too, seem to exist. Rather, there are issues of professionalism and scientific rigor that have difficulty in entering directly into UNESCO's programming. UNESCO can and must help focus professional attention on literacy that the field desperately needs. Two decades ago, it was said that UNESCO "pursues its intellectual, normative, and operational commitments in a way that virtually guarantees limited impact on all fronts" (Jones, 1990, p. 58). This comment is still made today.

The United Nations Literacy Decade will finish in 2013, fast approaching. Before reaching that point, there is time for a rededication of effort. UNESCO will need to reassert itself not only as the agency that keeps the literacy flame lit, but also as the agency to which the world turns for technical leadership, innovation, and access to expertise within and across nations. UNESCO is the only agency that can make this happen.

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