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Schooling for Tomorrow in Developing Countries: Post-Millennium Development Goals Schooling

Editorial

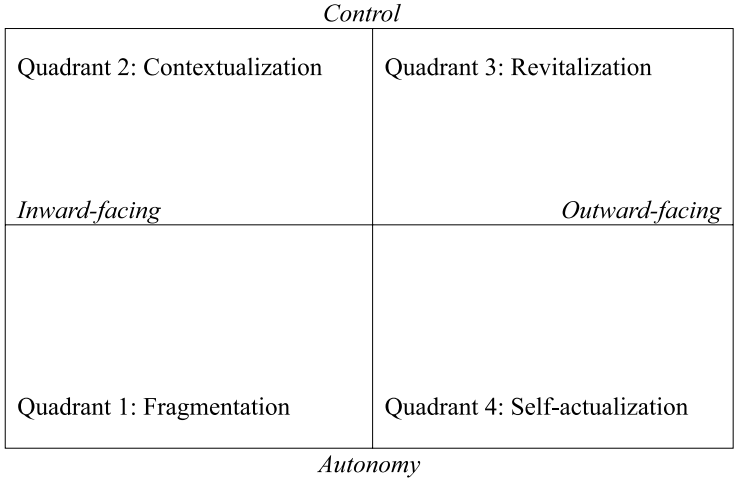
> What happens in education today profoundly influences the lives of individuals and the health of whole communities for decades to come. Yet, educational decision-making is mostly about dealing with pressing immediate issues or seeking more efficient ways of maintaining established practice, rather than thinking about the long term. (OECD 2006, p.11)

This is the challenge that opens the pages of a recent OECD publication, *Think Scenarios, Rethink Education*. It highlights a key conundrum in education, that is, how to deal with the urgent problems of the here and now yet take time to imagine and plan for an idealized future. The OECD Schooling for Tomorrow project encouraged educational leaders and policymakers in its member countries to take time to imagine what some possible futures might be. The results are published in *What schooling for the future?* (OECD 2001) and described in more detail in Chapter 1 of this issue. While this project excited the imaginations of many policymakers and scholars it had some limitations. One limitation was its scope – although this is understandable as it was funded by and organized through OECD/CERI. That it only included OECD members meant that there was a wealth of perspectives on schooling for the future that remained unexplored. Another limitation, and this links to the first, was that because the scope was limited, the six scenarios that were devised by OECD were based on the assumptions of strong national systems of education with long-standing bureaucratic machineries, detailed curricula and trained teaching forces. This special issue of the *Journal of International Cooperation in Education* provides an opportunity for scholars and policymakers whose countries fall outside the scope of the six possible OECD scenarios to reconsider their current situations and, indeed, imagine their future possibilities.

Within the possible range of systems that could have been investigated, this issue has tried to give voice to the perspectives of a selection of developing countries from across three regions of the globe – Africa, Asia and Latin America. Whereas the countries that participated in the development of the original OECD scenarios face issues such as national testing, international benchmarking and school review, the countries in this special issue are generally more concerned with universal access to primary education, gaining funding for adequate facilities and resources, removing discrimination and building a competent teaching workforce. As the official OECD Schooling for Tomorrow project reaches its conclusion, it leaves a legacy of theoretical tools and practical case studies to support other countries and regions as they take up the challenge of envisioning future schooling. This collection of articles aims to build upon the growing body of literature in futures thinking, especially as it relates to the important issue of schooling in developing countries.

As the countries in this issue tend to fall outside the scope of the OECD scenarios, it was necessary to find a conceptual framework that might give coherence to both the existing scenarios and the variety and complexity of cases in this special issue. In a reflective piece based on the 2004 Toronto Schooling for Tomorrow Forum, Tom Bentley of the London-based Demos think-tank, talked of "inward and outward-facing processes" (OECD 2006, p.196). In inward-facing processes, policymakers focus on the range of internal contextual factors, such as changing demographics, which could influence policy directions and their possible success. In outward-facing processes, a wider range of stakeholders and participants are engaged in order to tap into creative and innovative solutions. These concepts resonate with the problems facing those making educational policy decisions in developing countries. In order to move from a fragmented, inequitable, often chaotic situation, a country may need to take stock of its current situation to produce a stable, coherent and more inclusive education system. From an inwards-facing perspective, it can gain knowledge and strength to move forward. As it moves forward, it needs to involve more participants in the process, both from within its own system and from the experiences and expertise of other countries and systems. At this stage, a country is more able to face outwards, confident in the knowledge that it has assessed and analyzed its own needs but yet open to new ideas and perspectives in order to solve current problems and seek innovative solutions. Initially, the editors saw this conceptualization as moving along a single linear continuum from inwards to outwards-facing, however, further discussion attempted to reconcile this with the movement of schooling systems from strong centralized control to more local autonomy, as in the self-managing schools model. In order to express both sets of ideas, a conceptual diagram emerged with two intersecting lines producing four quadrants (See Figure 1). At this stage, the conceptual framework is still very much a working hypothesis but further testing of this model against case studies, such as those in this special issue, could confirm or refute its worth as an explanatory tool.

Figure 1. Conceptualizing Schooling for Tomorrow



The conceptual model has four key elements. The first is a horizontal axis which goes from *inward-facing* on the left to *outward-facing* on the right, with the possibility that countries could be located along the continuum depending on their focus. It is not meant to imply that one end of the continuum is better than the other but that a decision is made according to the needs of a country at any one time, and that this could change according to circumstances.

The second element is the vertical axis which goes from *control* at the top to *autonomy* at the bottom. Again, it is seen as a continuum, and again, countries might move along this as is relevant to their situation. By plotting a point from both the x and y axes, at any point in time, countries could be located on a grid in relation to each other.

This leads to the third element of the diagram. The lines divide the model into four quadrants, beginning with Quadrant 1 in the bottom left corner then moving around in a clockwise direction. Quadrant 1 is tentatively named: **Fragmentation**. This quadrant reflects a situation, where, perhaps after war, civil unrest, colonization or newly gained independence the schooling system might have fallen into disarray. It is characterized by fragmented pockets of schooling, organized by the remnants of prior systems, funded by aid agencies with their own agendas or cobbled together by local communities. While it is highly autonomous and localized, it is not equitable or universal. In order to move to a more inclusive system, a country needs to conduct a highly inwards-facing needs analysis to determine priorities and chart directions. In all probability, the next step is to move to Quadrant 2: **Contextualization**. Quadrant 2 has a more centralized schooling system, focusing on the needs of the country, perhaps with a strong identity-building agenda. A school curriculum will be developed that builds on local values and knowledge. Many currently developed and/or Western systems have moved through this quadrant as they "modernized" or developed post-colonial systems and curricula. A centralized, bureaucratized system has played a useful role in strengthening schooling systems but, as signaled by the six OECD scenarios, there are other possibilities, especially if countries wish to prepare children and young people for a future that bureaucrats can barely imagine. The third quadrant, Quadrant 3: **Revitalization**, takes up this challenge. It is characterized by education systems that undergo self review leading to possible reform or restructuring. A wider range of stakeholders have their say in developing new structures and approaches. The impact of international trends and comparisons is more evident. Curricula undergo review in line with international theories and research. The fourth quadrant, which is tentatively named Quadrant 4: **Self-actualization** has systems that are both at the high end of outward-facing processes and of autonomy. This implies a "high-trust" decentralized model of schooling where community involvement, local school-based decision making and a light hand of government are the norm.

The fourth element of this conceptual diagram can be envisaged as an invisible open circle that moves in a clockwise direction from Quadrant 1 to Quadrant 4 as countries move from the inward-facing autonomous ends of the axes through inward-facing control and outward-facing control to outward-facing autonomy. The editors consider that their own countries fit well with this model, with Japan in Quadrant 3 (moving to less control and more outward facing processes) and New Zealand in Quadrant 4 (keeping an outward-facing

process and increasing local school autonomy) and that the countries described in this special issue could be placed in a relevant quadrant (probably Quadrants 1 or 2) according to their current situations. Further discussion with key scholars is needed to verify these positions but the model provides a reference point for discussion and debate and a way of theorizing current and future schooling possibilities.

This issue of the *Journal of International Cooperation in Education* opens with a contextual chapter written by the co-editors, Akira Ninomiya and Carol Mutch. These two scholars have worked on several projects focusing on schooling for tomorrow and bring this expertise to bear in the opening chapter. After describing the OECD project and its applications, they introduce an Asia-Pacific study that sought to gauge the relevance of the OECD scenarios to a broader range of countries. The chapter then uses Japan as a case study to give some specificity to the intersection of global forces and local factors when visioning future schooling scenarios. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the nature of the issues facing developing countries as they look towards the future. Against this backdrop, the six developing country chapters are now briefly introduced. The chapters are arranged in geographical clusters – Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is hoped that this will provide a geo-political context to the chapters so that similarities and differences might be more easily identified and considered.

Pierre Kuraogo and Ambroise Dianda give an insightful look into a little known country in West Africa, Burkino Faso, with a low human development index rating and limited school enrolment. The authors outline the history of educational reforms and the inability of these to move the country to the level envisaged. They outline the barriers within the current system and the tenuous nature of existence in their geo-political setting. Despite these barriers they take a “mildly optimistic” view of Burkino Faso’s future. From the scenarios devised by a multi-disciplinary team that surveyed the views of the nation’s people and which ranged from optimistic (“the galloping stallion”) to pessimistic (“the ghost village”), they chose the moderate scenario (“the albatross takes flight”). They extend a challenge to those who will determine which scenario is ultimately enacted. They ask, “Will the governments who will run the country for the next twenty years have enough political will and courage to initiate deep changes in the system?” It is the question on which the future of this country hinges.

Jennifer Rault-Smith also takes an optimistic view of the South African situation by outlining how she considers that the “Class of 2020”, who will have entered the education system in 2008, will fare. The author is at pains to point out the issues that South Africa currently faces but she does not feel that the country is in crisis. Instead, she feels that there is governmental will to address the problems of a two-tiered system (a “first economy” and a “second economy”). She also sees that the National Curriculum Statement, which articulates the kinds of learners South Africa needs, will provide a strong platform for achieving the country’s goals. Her scenario resonates with elements of the OECD “re-schooling” scenarios (see Chapter1) where various agencies, services and levels of schooling work together to create a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable system. It is a bold but worthy ambition.

To conclude the trio of African examples, Mary Goretti Nakabugo, Albert Byamugisha

and Justus Bithaghalire outline the case of Uganda. As with the prior African cases, developments in education are set against a difficult and sometimes violent recent past. Yet, the Ugandan authors also speak with optimism and take a positive slant on their future scenario. The link between investment in education and outcomes such as improved community health and economic productivity are strongly made. The authors raise some of the tensions that are apparent in education policymaking, in particular, achieving a balance between centralization and decentralization. The chapter concludes with an illuminating case study of remote Ugandan fishing settlements which highlight the fact that education policies cannot take a "one-size-fits-all" approach but must look closely at the local context and adapt policies to suit – in this case strengthening non-formal education so it can complement formal schooling. The authors outline the importance of a strategic, coherent, multi-faceted approach to achieving Uganda's goals.

The first of the two Asian case studies is Indonesia. The authors, Harry Firman and Burhanuddin Tola, base their discussion around the far-reaching reforms of the Indonesian schooling system as outlined in Law Number 20: The National Education System (2003). The reforms are based on the notion of "school-based management" which provides more autonomy to schools and more direct involvement of key stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, students, staff and society in general). As well as focusing on reforming the management of schools, the chapter outlines several key aspects that need to be attended to: a school-level curriculum; the use of ICT in schools; teacher certification; standardizing international schools, teacher professional development and national examinations. The authors predict that if things go according to plan, education will be characterized by autonomy, democracy, community collaboration, innovation, international standards and quality management.

In the second of the Asian chapters, Tran Khanh Duc, explains Viet Nam's historical development and current situation, interspersed with discussion of the goals of Doi Moi, an approach designed to build "market-oriented socialism" which combines traditional values with modern trends. Education and training is given high priority in enabling Viet Nam to reach its social and economic goals. To conclude the paper, the author examines five of the OECD Schooling for Tomorrow scenarios (omitting the meltdown scenario) and extrapolates the aspects of each that can enhance Viet Nam's vision for an education system that sees each Vietnamese school as "a modern centre of culture, science, and education for the communities it serves".

The final chapter takes us to Latin America. Although Mexico is an OECD country it still faces many of the problems of developing societies. Sylvia Schmelkes first paints a realistic picture of the problems faced in developing an education system that provides equitable access to schooling and produces high quality students. In order to reach these important goals, the author then creates three scenarios – conservative ("more of the same"), moderate ("equity as a priority"), and radical ("four fundamental differences in the way we understand education"). The author's passion for improving education in her country comes through strongly in the second and third scenarios which will require focus and commitment

to come to fruition. As she states in her conclusion, “There is a basic paradox in education. Education is impossible if educators do not look towards the future because they are preparing students that will be parents, citizens and productive members of society in many years to come.”

This set of case studies outlining how six developing countries envisage and plan for their educational futures gives an insightful look into balancing economic and social realities with optimistic hopes and visions. One interesting commonality is that although the OECD scenarios offered several “de-schooling” options (See Chapter 1) this is not how these authors see the future. Meltdown is a scenario they wish to avoid at all costs and, while a totally networked society has interesting features, it also has practical and social limitations. The writers of the developing country case studies and the editors of this special issue all see the continuing value in schooling as a concept, albeit an expanded and complex one with multiple contextual meanings. The conceptual model outlined earlier in this editorial aims to find a balance between the extremes of some the OECD scenarios and the practical realities of implementing the Millennium Development Goals. It is hoped that reading each of these case studies and mapping the country’s current situations on the conceptual framework will give policymakers in developing countries the confidence to continue with their visioning but in a broader international context – facing inwards and facing outwards; from control to autonomy.

References

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