

# **Educational Challenges of the Post 2015 – What does a Vision for the Near Future Tell Us?**

## **A conceptual framework to explore a vision for the near future**

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### **Introduction**

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 and immediate issues or seeking more efficient ways of maintaining established practice, rather than thinking about the long term (OECD, 2006, p.11).

With this quote, we (Professor Ninomiya and myself) opened the editorial to a recent issue of the *Journal of International Cooperation in Education* (Vol. 11, No.1). In this editorial we aimed to provide a conceptual framework for thinking about education in and for the future, in particular, in developing countries. We were very familiar with the OECD scenarios for schooling for tomorrow. In 1996, the Ministers of Education in member countries of the OECD raised questions about how education might look in the coming century. OECD/CERI was commissioned to gather examples of good practice, including visions of the school of tomorrow. From this evolved five years of intensive consultation and, in 2001, the report *What schools for the future?* (OECD, 2001) was released. Six scenarios were created within three overall trends. The first trend saw the continuation of the status quo by either maintaining the robust bureaucratic organisation of schooling or by extending the market approach to education. The second trend re-visited schools as either core social centres or focused learning organisations. The third trend shifted the focus away from schools as we know them and offered de-schooling scenarios that were caused either by a meltdown of confidence in the system and teacher exodus or by the move to a networked society.

While the report excited the interest of many educational policymakers and scholars, there were limitations. Firstly, it only explored the ideas of OECD countries and mainly those in the Western world. Secondly, it was based on the assumption that the schooling systems of the member countries had long-standing bureaucratic machineries, detailed curricula and trained teaching forces. The scenarios did not cover alternative perspectives from countries not within the OECD or whose starting point might not be from a strong and stable national educational system. Whereas the countries who participated in the original scenario development face issues such as national testing, international benchmarking and school review, developing countries are more likely to be faced with trying to establish universal primary education, adequate facilities, a competent teaching workforce and to be removing discriminatory practices.

In the issue of the *Journal of International Cooperation in Education* (JICE) cited above, scholars from six countries (Burkina Faso, South Africa, Uganda, Indonesia, Viet Nam and Mexico) provided insightful discussions of the problems they were facing and how they might solve these. In order to allow dialogue between countries such as ours (Japan and New Zealand) and countries such as those in the special issue of JICE, we needed a framework that included countries at various stages of development.

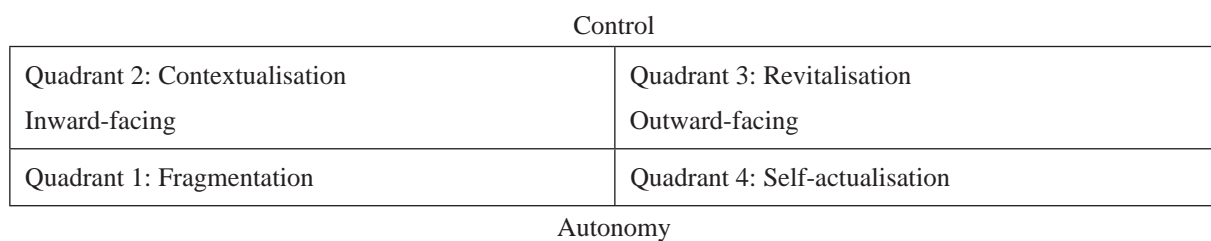
### **A conceptual framework to explore alternative future scenarios**

We were struck by two different sets of tensions that face educational policymakers. Firstly, there is the tension that Tom Bentley of the London-based Demos think-tank describes – between inward and outward-facing processes (OECD,

2006). In inward-facing processes, policymakers focus the range of internal contextual factors, such as changing demographics that 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 educational policymakers in developing countries. In order to move from a fragmented, inequitable, often chaotic situation, a country needs to take stock of its current situation in order to move to a stable, coherent and more inclusive education system. From an inwards-facing perspective it can assess current strengths and weaknesses and determine priorities. As it moves forward, it needs to involve more participants in the process, from within its own system and from the experiences and confident in the knowledge that it has assessed and analysed its current situation, yet willing to seek new ideas and perspectives in order to solve current problems and seek innovative solutions.

Initially, we saw this conceptualisation moving along a single linear continuum but after further discussion and an analysis of the experiences of the countries represented in the case studies in the JICE special issue we tried to reconcile the inward-outward continuum with the tension how much centralised control there should be versus how much local autonomy. In order to express both sets of ideas we developed the conceptual framework below. At this stage, it is still very much a working hypothesis but we see it as a valuable explanatory tool for in-depth discussion and debate.

Figure 1. Conceptualising Schooling for Tomorrow



The conceptual model has four key elements. The first is a horizontal axis 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 at the time. 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 the 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 and moving around in a clockwise decision.

We have named Quadrant 1: Fragmentation. This quadrant reflects the scenario where, possibly after war, civil unrest, colonisation or newly-gained independence the schooling system might have fallen into disarray. It is characterised by fragmented pockets of schooling, organised by the remnants of the prior systems, funded by aid agencies with their own agendas or cobbled together by local communities. While it is highly autonomous and localised, it is not equitable or universal. In order to move to a more inclusive system, the country needs to conduct a highly inwards-facing needs analysis to determine priorities and chart future directions. In all probability the next step is to move to Quadrant 2.

Quadrant 2: Contextualisation has a more centralised 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 developed and/or Western countries have moved through this quadrant as they “modernised” or developed post-colonial systems and curricula. A centralised, bureaucratised system will have played a useful role in strengthening schooling systems but, as signalled by the 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: Revitalisation, takes up this challenge. It is characterised by education systems that are undergoing review leading to possible reform or restructuring. The impact of international trends and comparisons is more evident. Curricula and pedagogy undergo review in line with international theories and research.

Quadrant 4: Self-actualisation has systems that are at both the high end of outward-facing processes and of autonomy. This implies a “high-trust” decentralised model of schooling where community involvement, local-school-based decision making and a light hand of government are the norm. In order to gain and maintain public confidence there might be a highly professional teaching force, quality school leadership and rigorous self-accountability, for example, through self review or a mixture of self review and light touch external review.

The fourth element of this conceptual diagram can be envisaged as an invisible open circle that moves in a clockwork direction from Quadrant 1 to Quadrant 4 as countries move from the inward-facing autonomous ends of the axes through inward-facing centralised control and outward-facing control to outward-facing autonomy. We considered that our own countries fitted well with this model with Japan in Quadrant 3 (moving to less centralised control and more outward-facing processes) and New Zealand in Quadrant 4 (keeping an outward-facing process while increasing school-based autonomy). The case study countries in the JICE special issue could also be located on the grid (probably Quadrants 1 or 2) according to their current situations.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this conceptual model offers a starting place for considering the current state and future direction of a country’s schooling system. While it is yet to be fully tested empirically, it does resonate with the experiences of its two authors and the countries in the JICE special issue. It reminds us that educational systems need to make decisions about the appropriate levels of autonomy and control to suit their circumstances. It encourages educational policymakers to look both inwards and outwards for ideas and solutions.

This framework is useful to students or scholars, for example, when undertaking comparative studies as it provides a reference point for beginning a discussion of where various education systems might be located in relation to these concepts. Further analysis of individual countries or grouping of countries can follow.

This framework can also be of use to policymakers as it charts the typical progression of countries through a series of stages. Knowing more about where a country might be located on this conceptual grid can ensure that the activities that are best suited to that stage are undertaken and that reforms are not pushed too quickly, for example, from inward-facing autonomy to outward-facing autonomy without going through periods of centralised system building and stability.

We offer this conceptual framework as a tool for considering the very important work to be done by schooling systems in determining and meeting their long-term goals.

Kimihia te kahurangi;  
ki te piko tōu mātenga,  
ki te maunga teitei.

Seek above all that which is of highest value;  
if you bow, let it be to the highest mountain. [Maori proverb, N.Z.]

### **References**

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2001). What schools for the future? Paris: OECD.  
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2006). Think scenarios: Rethink education. Paris: OECD.

## Japan Education Forum VII

### Greater Autonomy in Educational Development

A conceptual framework to explore a vision for the near future

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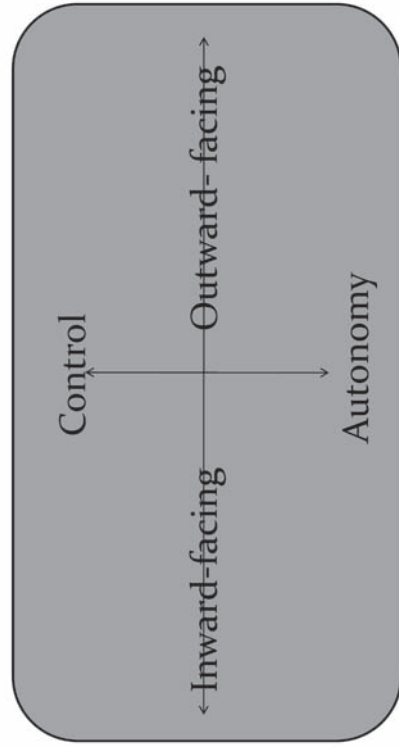
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## This presentation

- Aims to provide a conceptual framework for thinking about where education systems are currently located in terms of their development, where they have come from and where they might go to
- It is based on the work of Professor Akira NINOMIYA and Dr Carol MUTCH who have worked on *Schooling for Tomorrow* projects for over a decade
- The framework is based around two important tensions that face education policy-makers: the balance between *autonomy and control*; and how much to look *inwards* and how much to look *outwards* for solutions

2

## The conceptual framework



3

## Inward-facing processes

- At one extreme end of the educational developmental continuum, schooling is characterised as being chaotic, inequitable and fragmented
- At the other end it is stable, inclusive and coherent
- In order to move along this continuum, it is important to seek solutions from both internal and external sources
- In order to facilitate the moving process, policymakers first look *inwards* – for example, at the political, economic, social, cultural or religious context; at historical events and future trends; at the knowledge and strength already within the system; at visions, goals and aspirations; and at available resources and personnel in order to assess needs, determine priorities and plan for short, medium and long term action

4



## Outward-facing processes

- Once internal sources have been scrutinised and short term stability has been achieved, there is much to be gained from looking outwards. This includes:
  - Engaging a wider range of stakeholders at community and national levels;
  - Forming partnerships and building networks;
  - Investigating overseas/international ideas and trends;
  - Conducting research and evaluation
  - Disseminating findings of research and good practice
  - Participating in international comparative studies
  - Fostering innovation and creativity

5

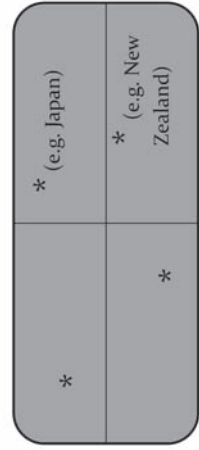
## Autonomy and control

- Another tension faced by policymakers is what is the best balance between centralised control and school-based autonomy
- Localised autonomy can happen when schooling is in a precarious situation (for example, during wartime, following a natural disaster or in a time of break down of law and order) or when an education system is extremely stable and has wide popular support as in a self-managing model
- Centralised control over education policy and delivery is often important when establishing (or re-establishing) a national identity or a nation-wide schooling system with a shared vision and set of expectations and can continue as systems maintain their status as “world-class”

6

## Plotting a country’s position

- If the two lines of tension (inward/outward and autonomy/control) intersect at right angles it is possible to plot a country’s system on a graph according to perceived levels of inward/outward facing processes or autonomy versus control



7

## Four quadrants

- Four quadrants are also created
- Each quadrant represents a different general scenario



8

## Four scenarios

- Scenario 1: Higher *autonomy* with more focus on *inward*-facing processes
- Scenario 2 Higher *control* with more focus on *inward*-facing processes
- Scenario 3: Higher control with more focus on *outward*-facing processes
- Scenario 4: Higher *autonomy* with more focus on *outward*-facing processes

9

## Scenario 1: Fragmentation (Autonomy/inward-facing)

- This scenario reflects a situation where after war, disaster, civil unrest, colonization or newly gained independence the schooling system has fallen into disarray
- It is characterized by fragmented pockets of schooling, organised by the remnants of prior systems, funded by aid agencies or cobbled together by local communities
- In this scenario there are often high levels of local autonomy but at the expense of coherent strategy and equitable delivery
- Much energy is expended in just surviving but there is a focus on moving forward by looking inwards to assess needs and priorities

10

## Scenario 2: Contextualization (Control/Inward-facing)

- In scenario 2 there is a strongly centralized schooling system focusing inwards on the needs of the country, often with a strong identity-building agenda
- In situations where a national vision is being established this is usually supported by high levels of centralised control over policy and expectations (for example, curriculum and assessment)
- A centralized bureaucracy helps strengthen the system and the delivery of more equitable resources
- Schooling reasserts itself as a key aspect of the country's economic and social development

11

## Scenario 3: Revitalization (Control/Outward-facing)

- Over time a schooling system becomes more stable
- This can be seen by some as a period of inertia
- At this stage, there could be calls for review and reform
- Policymakers look further afield for ideas
- A wider range of stakeholders is encouraged to contribute their thoughts on the direction of change
- The impact of international trends and comparison becomes more evident
- Curricula and pedagogy are changed in line with current theory and research

12



## Scenario 4: Self-actualization (Autonomy/Outward-facing)

- At the high end of both autonomy and outward-facing processes, a schooling system has a high level of popular support from the public and confidence from the government
- It is more decentralized, as in the self-managing school model, with community involvement and school-based decision-making
- Teachers are professionalized and the curriculum is developed locally at the school level
- It requires a high-trust environment with in-built systems of accountability (e.g., school self review)

13

## What can we learn from this framework?

- Educational systems make decisions about the appropriate levels of *autonomy* and *control* given their circumstances
- Educational policymakers look both *inwards* and *outwards* for ideas and solutions as their needs dictate
- Currently education systems can be mapped as to their position in relation to these issues on the *conceptual map*
- Based on the current state of education in a country its system can be located in one of the frameworks *four quadrants* or *scenarios*
- Many systems appear to go through (or aspire to go through) the four scenarios in a *clockwork direction* on their educational development journeys
- An understanding of the *typical pathways* can assist educational policymakers and planners to make sound choices

14

## Reference

- Ninomiya, A., & Mutch, C. (2008). Editorial. Schooling for Tomorrow in Developing Countries: Post-Millennium Development Goals Schooling. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education II* (1) pp. 1-6.

15