

PANEL DISCUSSION

PUTTING THE VIEWS TOGETHER – A CURRICULUM FOR ALL LEARNERS

“Policy transfer internationally for ideas about learning outcomes and NQF”

Contribution from Kenneth King, University of Edinburgh & NORRAG

In South Africa, there has been good analysis of the challenge of importing learning outcomes approaches into resource-poor countries. In particular there has been a concern with the difficulty of implementing such approaches in schools with very poor teachers.

In China by contrast, which has become ‘the factory of the world’ over the last 10-15 years, and where the aspiration of provincial governments has been for up to 50% of young people to enter vocational secondary school, and high proportions to find work after school, it has been less clear why they should change their vocational training systems. If it works, why to fix it?

Nevertheless, in China there is some evidence of influence from Australia in respect of competency-based training (CBT). In particular there appears to have been claims of influence by the Australia-China Vocational Education and Training Project in Chongqing, 2002-2007. That project’s completion report makes very bold claims about the role of a national industry coordinating the association being set up with the Ministry of Education, as the first formal mechanism in Chinese VET history. The project claims also to have developed the first set of VET teacher standards for secondary VET schools to be endorsed by the Ministry and to be replicated nationwide.

Now 10 years later, World Bank colleagues tell me that three provinces, Guangdong, Shandong and Liaoning, all aspire to introduce CBT. Australia is the model these provinces were introduced to; and it is reported that the introduction came from Chongqing with an Australian Aid (AusAID) project. Apparently, the intention is to promote in these provinces, demand-driven approaches. But there are still many difficulties in implementation. For one thing enterprises are not willing to participate in TVET, parents are not keen on vocational schooling, and the curriculum needs renewal. It will be important to follow what develops from these small beginnings.

Still in the Asian region, we should note that a recent manual from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has commented as follows: ‘Virtually all ADB projects have provided for the development of competency-based curricula, but sometimes without sufficient analysis of its feasibility. Good examples are the recent projects for Bangladesh and Maldives. The difficulty of establishing NQFs and CBTs is typically underestimated’ (ADB, 2009: 56).

India, on the other hand, presents a very different situation from China in terms of formal VET education and training, and of the wider character of the labour market; and yet its plans to introduce a national vocational qualification framework appear to be going ahead at speed. In such a vast country, the government's own figures point to the formal sector of the economy being only 26 million, while the informal, unorganised sector has 433 million. The current state of formal skills development is that just some 2% of 19-25 year-olds have access to formal skills training. In this situation, the government's plans are to secure that training of no less than 500 million people by 2022, and to profit from what is called the 'demographic dividend' of its having a larger proportion of young people than countries such as China, not to mention the OECD countries. Its hope is that India can eventually profit from training for export and thus help meet the shortage of almost 50 million skilled people world-wide.

India's 11th Plan for 2007-2012 mentions the intention to establish a national qualification framework. Equally, its National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) (2009) has talked of the benefits to government, employers, VET providers and students. Currently there is talk about the importance of a nationwide awareness campaign to inform about the benefits of NQF and of the opportunities it will provide for individuals, organisations, industries, and for economic growth.

The sheer challenges involved in profiting from the NVQF where the informal sector and informal sector apprenticeship are so widespread are almost certainly being underestimated. Thus it may be easy to say that the mode of informal apprenticeship and learning will be recognised and accommodated in the NVQF to help in horizontal and vertical mobility; but it will be massively demanding to put this into practice. Similarly if the unorganised sector includes own account workers, apprentices, unpaid family workers, casual, home-based workers, migrant labourers, schooled youth, drop-outs, farmers and artisans in rural areas, then the challenge of covering these constituencies is vastly ambitious. It is one thing to assert that arrangements will be made for the testing and certification of skills acquired in non-formal and informal settings, and to claim that these can be integrated with the NVQF, but implementation will be something very different.

Again, the aspiration to learn from so-called successful models in designing skills development strategies and programmes for the unorganised sector; the reality is that there is very little relevant experience from which policy learning may draw. It is simple to say that competency standards and certification systems will be developed for unorganised sector work and will be incorporated in the national testing and certification systems. But none of the countries which have introduced the NQF have sought to cover such a vast and heterogeneous constituency.

These few examples, mainly from China and India, underline the prime importance of TVET experts, analysts and consultants taking great care and responsibility when offering advice and relevant experience to countries with very different mixes of formal and informal skills development. There is a clear need for all such to act as 'honest brokers' in the analysis of relevant

experience. Finally, there is a crucial need to emphasise that policy transfer is very different from policy learning.¹ The latter requires a very active and long-term engagement with a learning process in country. It is the very opposite of the 'quick fix' or the 'silver bullet'.

References

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¹ See the international workshop on policy transfer and policy learning (NORRAG 2009)