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ETF YEARBOOK 2008
POLICY LEARNING IN ACTION

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HELPS TRANSITION AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES TO HARNESS THE POTENTIAL OF THEIR HUMAN RESOURCES THROUGH THE REFORM OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND LABOUR MARKET SYSTEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EU'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS POLICY

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ETF YEARBOOK 2008
POLICY LEARNING IN ACTION

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FOREWORD

As we put the finishing touches to this fifth and final ETF Yearbook, it is interesting to reflect on the way the publication has evolved. We started in 2004 with a very straightforward aim: to give ETF operational staff the opportunity to present analyses and insights based on their project or country experience. Not only would this encourage colleagues to reflect on their work but it would also provide readers with an insight into critical issues related to the reform of vocational education and labour markets in transition countries.

Over the following two years, we decided to focus that reflective practice on a specific theme. In the 2005 Yearbook we chose to write on the dual role of teachers and trainers in reform; while in 2006 we switched our focus to the contribution that skills development can make to poverty reduction. Through these themes, we continued to approach the writing of the Yearbook as an opportunity to bring into focus the ETF's particular approach to working with our partner countries through the methodology of policy learning.

Perhaps it was inevitable therefore that the 2007 and 2008 Yearbooks would look more deeply at that methodology to the extent that policy learning itself became the theme, albeit in the context of the ETF's continuing work in education, training and labour market reform. In the 2007 Yearbook, having given examples of the methodology in action in a variety of settings, we concluded with a foretaste of the 2008 Yearbook, promising a more practice-oriented type of publication, based on systematic enquiry of an empirical or analytical nature always referring to the concept of policy learning. And this is what I am pleased to present to you in this Yearbook. I feel that we have come a long way in five years, from a publication that aspired to providing some insight into our work, to one which can examine dispassionately and with rigour a methodology on which we have increasingly based our work and promoted ourselves to others in our international community.

The process of producing the Yearbook has been a developmental experience for the ETF and could be said to chart our progress from that of a technical assistance body to that of a recognised centre of expertise in human capital development. The lessons we have learned along the way are ones which have much wider application than the sphere in which the ETF works and so we hope that our readers will be able to benefit by applying the reflections on our experience to their own working contexts, different though these may be.

One aspect of the ETF's evolution in recent years has been our increasing engagement with other multi-lateral institutions and with the community of thinkers who inform their work. Therefore it was appropriate that we should invite colleagues from the international community to contribute their reflections on policy learning. I would like to thank our four external contributors to Part 2 for accepting the invitation and thereby adding to the value that this publication brings to our collective thinking.

Although this may be the final edition of the Yearbook in its current format, our plans at the ETF are to continue to produce high-quality, thought-provoking publications which will be of interest to our wide range of stakeholders, both in Europe and beyond. Our objective is to be an international reference point for human capital development specialists and our publications will reflect that. Please enjoy reading this Yearbook and look forward to further publications on the ETF's activities and research.

Muriel Dunbar
Director, ETF

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Part 1

INTRODUCTION: MAKING POLICY LEARNING WORK

Debate is increasing among donors and recipient countries on the need to secure ownership of development policies by supporting local policymakers and other stakeholders in leading policy development and implementation. At the same time, concern is growing about the capacity of government (and other stakeholders and institutions) to design and lead reforms.

Several approaches in the European Union and elsewhere attempt to theorise and provide methodological tools for investigating the process by which governments can better inform policy development. In the EU context this has raised interest in what has become known as the Open Method of Coordination, defined by the Lisbon European Council in 2000 as 'a means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals […]'.

In the context of the ETF's partner countries, the European Commission is progressively adopting new instruments for supporting reforms based on the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp), which requires a stable macro-economic situation, realistic sector strategy and coordination of external support by national governments. All these developments have led the ETF to adopt policy learning as a major principle of cooperation with partner countries.

Policy learning emphasises the active engagement of national stakeholders in developing their own policies and implementation plans. It also emphasises the active engagement of the international community in helping countries to help themselves. The challenge for local policymakers and for international assistance is to find a balance between the urgency of policy development and the necessary time for learning and informing policies.

The main assumption of the *ETF Yearbook 2008* is that policy learning – considered as the ability of governments, and other stakeholders, to inform policy development by drawing lessons from available evidence, experience and their own past –

can lead to sustainable development policies in partner countries.

The first part of the *Yearbook* draws lessons from an unprecedented and systematic approach to putting policy learning into action. It is particularly unprecedented in that, first, it covers countries in transition whereas international literature on policy learning refers mainly to Western countries; second, it covers a wide range of countries and regions (Morocco, Kyrgyzstan, the Western Balkan countries, and Turkey) with different contexts and governance systems.

The particular focus of all articles in this first part of the yearbook is on vocational education and training (VET). Initial experiences are presented from ETF attempts to facilitate VET reforms using policy learning principles in a number of countries. The authors invited to contribute to this volume are representative of that larger group in that they see the decisive influence of policy learning principles on their work in and with partner countries. They were all directly involved in the projects and initiatives described. Some chapters are the result of collective work involving colleagues from the ETF and experts from partner countries.

In the opening chapter, Borhène Chakroun presents a synthesis of policy learning from theoretical and practical perspectives. He argues that policy learning inevitably sets up different kinds of tension: between the process and the end result, between the time needed for learning and the urgent need to develop policy and between the role of facilitator and advisor. He concludes that policy learning is a complex process which supports the emergence of new models of governance and capacity building but that often takes more time and resources than planned and that its real impact is difficult to measure.

In Chapter 2, Gérard Mayen, based on his experience in Jordan, considers policy learning as a process where policymakers progressively learn to take full and conscious account of the importance of the role of social partners in the reform process. He also examines, as a reflective practitioner, the tension between facilitation and advising roles.

In Chapter 3, Søren Nielsen, Recep Varcin, Outi Kärkkäinen and Arjen Vos adopt the Greek concept of ‘agora’ – a place where market and politics meet and blend, where private emotions and opinions meet public opinion and political consensus – to argue that an innovative evaluative approach with a sharper focus on organising policy learning platforms may facilitate stronger stakeholder involvement and horizontal network learning, leading to more consistent follow-up decision-making.

Margareta Nikolovska and Arjen Vos offer another angle from which to interpret policy learning in Chapter 4. The ETF peer learning projects provide further insight into how policy learning principles can be applied from international experiences. The chapter examines several peer learning activities in the Western Balkan countries. The peer learning process is taken a step further by critically questioning the link between peer learning and policy change in the countries concerned.

In Chapter 5, Vaclav Klenha, Anar Beishembaeva and Søren Nielsen describe an attempt to support structural vocational training reform in Kyrgyzstan through a policy learning approach facilitated by the ETF. They focus specifically on three elements of policy learning facilitation: (i) rationale behind the application of policy learning principles in the context of Kyrgyz VET reform; (ii) main challenges to policy change; (iii) lessons regarding the facilitation role of the ETF. This chapter illustrates the complexity of policy learning and suggests that external cooperating partners also need to be sensitive to their own approaches and intentions.

In Chapter 6, Mounir Baati and Peter Schuh provide an example of their own role as policy learning facilitators in Morocco. They describe how the participatory approach initiated by the ETF to develop a strategic plan for strengthening apprenticeship training in agriculture and crafts is viewed by local experts and policymakers. The conclusion is that policy learning does not always work in practice as it has been designed in theory.

In the final chapter of Part 1, Jean-Raymond Masson and Slava Pevec Grm apply the policy learning perspective to analyse ETF experience in new EU member states. The authors first look at common definitions used in EU policy messages and how these match the reality of partner countries, identifying misconceptions and ambiguities that can degrade the effectiveness of support. They then examine more closely the experience of Slovenia, which received EU support throughout the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium, in an attempt to distil lessons which are then fed back into a general conclusion and a set of recommendations for EU assistance for VET reform and for ETF work in general.

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1. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM POLICY LEARNING?

Borhène Chakroun

1. INTRODUCTION

This yearbook takes a close look at the strategic approach the ETF has adopted for its interventions in partner countries: policy learning. It is also an attempt by a team of believers to define what is meant by the term and what it can offer to policymakers. This effort is necessary if we are to save the concept of policy learning from becoming a mere buzzword used indiscriminately in all situations.

This opening chapter aims to draw lessons from the attempts to put this pioneering approach into practice in transition countries. Thus I rely heavily on what others have written while discussing the implications of their approaches for the body of knowledge on the policy learning process as well as placing them in a broader perspective. I also rely on published writings on policy learning, taking into account theoretical discussions (Bennett and Howlett, 1992) and more empirical literature (Raffe and Spours, 2007; Grootings, 2004).

This chapter attempts to answer two key questions about policy learning:

1. What can we learn from attempts to put policy learning into practice in a wide range of partner countries? and
2. To what extent does policy learning lead to policy change in partner countries?

The first section explores the theoretical basis of policy learning and the reasons why it can sometimes fail to deliver. It continues with a look at how the ETF has come to adopt policy learning as an approach for intervention before going on to discuss how policy learning ideas and principles have been applied on the ground. It sums up the lessons learned so far and finally looks at policy learning within a wider context of policy change.

1.1 Conceptual framework of policy learning

Bennett and Howlett (1992) provide an interesting, although already somewhat dated, review of literature on theories of policy learning. They link the emergence of policy learning to the desire to challenge conflict-oriented theories. The review takes in the following concepts: "political learning" developed by Heclo (1974), "policy-oriented learning" developed by Sabatier (1987), "lesson-drawing" analysed by Rose (1991), "social learning" discussed by Hall (1988) and "government learning" developed by Etheredge and Short (1983). Bennett and Howlett conclude that the concept of policy learning has been "overtheorised and underapplied" and that "the relationship between policy learning and policy change contours and components has only begun to be investigated and understood".

Although it is useful to refer to the ideas of the above mentioned authors, I would like to retain another perspective, put forward by Raffe and Spours (2007) and Grootings (2004), that sees policy learning as a way for governments or systems of governance to inform policy development by drawing lessons from available evidence and experience.

In the context of the ETF's partner countries this means examining to what extent policy learning approaches have helped those countries to inform policy. This includes the capacity of partner countries to learn from their own experience and from that of other countries. Thus policy learning should lead to policy change and increasing policy effectiveness (Grootings, 2004).

Although the words policy and learning are by no means newcomers to the debate on how to reform VET systems, in recent years they have moved from the periphery to the centre of the discussion on policy development. The question of how policy learning can lead to policy change has occupied many researchers and practitioners, particularly in countries such as the UK and Sweden. Some authors attribute the failure to produce good policy to failures in the policy learning process (Raffe and Spours, 2007).

In partner countries, policy learning has not received as much attention. Nevertheless, there are signs of an increasing awareness of its importance for policymaking although it may not always be named as such. For instance, many donors are abandoning a piecemeal approach involving individual projects in favour of a sector-wide approach. This aims for greater sustainability and ownership of domestic policies (Europeaid, 2007). The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectivenes [1] provides a recent example of this trend; on page two of the declaration, ministers of developed and developing countries pledge they "will be guided by development strategies and priorities established by partner countries" when it comes to choosing the most effective ways of delivering aid.

I consider it useful to explore the reasons for what we can call policy learning failure in partner countries before explaining why the ETF decided to put policy learning into practice and to use it as a guiding philosophy for its interventions in partner countries.

1.2 Policy learning failure in partner countries

Policy learning failure in partner countries, in part, reflects the failure of both policy borrowing from abroad and the desire of policymakers to find fast solutions to urgent problems (see Philips, 1989 for a more detailed discussion). Sultana in Part 2 briefly discusses the failure of the earlier model of supporting policy development in less developed countries through the direct transfer of knowledge and expertise.

John Dewey's theory of experience could perhaps throw some useful light on our efforts to understand policy learning failure (Dewey, 1938, p.28). He argued that "any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience". Dewey believes there are several ways in which prior experience can be counterproductive. It can engender callousness or cause a lack of sensitivity and responsiveness which can make people less open to new experiences. Different experiences may be so disconnected from one another that, while each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they do not teach us anything. The very disconnectedness of these experiences also runs the risk of artificially generating dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits.

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[1] See www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf

International development aid provides a wealth of examples of these kinds of experiences. How many countries, for example, have benefited from the generous gift of a ready-made curriculum and skills needs analysis when their ability to make good use of it is extremely limited? How many countries have decided to import the foreign VET model only to find it so alien to their specific context so as to be practically useless? How many ministries have been plagued by infighting between different project management units so that every donor-funded project ends up being totally disconnected from the rest?

In their discussion of policy learning failure in secondary education in the UK, Raffe and Spours (2007) found that it was caused by the inability and unwillingness to learn from past experience and by learning from the experience of other countries but only superficially. Chapter 5 mentions the loss of policy memory in Kyrgyzstan that occurred after the DACUM curricula reforms. Chapter 6 also mentions the difficulties in helping the Moroccan team learn from past experience in spite of the policy learning nature of the whole process.

Policy learning failure is also linked to the model of governance in place in each partner country (see for example the discussion of the Arab Human Development Report, 2005). In most partner countries, the process of policymaking is far from transparent. Policymakers often work with little coordination or recourse to policy analysis and with a low level of consultation and involvement of social partners and civil society. In almost all partner countries, accountability is to the state rather than to the general public (World Bank, 2008). This aspect is discussed in more detail in the final section.

Even when policymakers do try to learn from previous experience, the lessons may be very difficult to spot due to their limited knowledge base. Such problems will be familiar to many international organisations and to the ETF in particular with its long experience of establishing observatory functions in most partner countries (see Chapter 7 for a detailed discussion of this). Three important elements tend to be weak or missing in almost all partner countries: a tradition of systematic data collection and analysis, policy evaluation studies and research. While the first two points are systematically highlighted (see Sweet, in press), the research dimension has almost always been ignored. In almost all partner countries, research capacities are weak or totally lacking, thus depriving education policymakers of a vital source of knowledge and expertise.

Therefore it seems there are at least three overlapping factors that lead to policy learning failure in partner countries: misleading experiences caused by donor intervention, highly politicised models of governance which are not conducive to policy learning and the limited knowledge base.

2. THE ETF’S APPROACH TO POLICY LEARNING

The beginnings of policy learning as an intervention approach for the ETF can be traced back to the ETF Advisory Forum meeting in 2003 where the concept attracted considerable attention. As a result, the ETF and its partners agreed to adopt policy learning as a tool for supporting national reforms (ETF, 2003a). The rationale given was that “systemic reforms of vocational education and training will only be successful and sustainable if policy development, formulation and implementation are firmly based on broad ownership and embeddedness in existing institutions” (Grootings, 2004). Thus policy learning is viewed as a source of policy change and ownership and as a way of making policy more effective.

The decision to adopt policy learning as an intervention approach was based upon several assumptions. The first was that learning paradigms could be used to organise policy learning approaches.

The second was that partner country institutions could engage in a policy learning process by involving new stakeholders and making use of their policy memory as well as international experience in the field. The third was that the role of the ETF would be to facilitate this process.

2.1 Learning paradigms

Analysis of policy learning generally focuses on the process of policy change rather than the underlying process of learning. The challenge for policy learning was how to get policymakers actively learning from local and international experiences. Grootings (2004) summed up the main characteristics of the learning paradigm as "active learning". Recent theories on learning argue there are many ways people learn apart from simply receiving information from a teacher. These hold that learning is first and foremost a situated social activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), that a lot of tacit learning takes place which is not easy to define or quantify but which is there when needed (Schön, 1983) and that learning is dynamic and that good learning depends on experiential learning (Kolb, 1984).

Once again Dewey's theory of experience can provide useful insight. By seeing experience as a continuous and highly interactive process of exchange between individuals and their environment, Dewey argued that people assign their own meaning to information. They do so based on what they already know and only retain what is relevant for them. By so doing, they construct their own understanding of reality as a basis for action. Different people will therefore form different interpretations of the same event and may act differently on the basis of the same information.

Theories of learning also argue that learners are more successful at acquiring and using knowledge, skills and attitudes when they have been actively engaged in the process. This active involvement also helps increase their motivation to learn, making it easier for people to take responsibility for their own learning.
So active learning creates conducive learning environments and produces good learning outcomes (Grootings, 2004).

2.2 The role of partner countries

Following several initiatives (see ETF Yearbook, 2005), the ETF decided to launch a new generation of policy learning projects in 2007. The idea was to test the policy learning approach and see how far it could contribute to VET policy change in partner countries. Three countries – Morocco, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey – agreed to participate.

An initial problem was how to translate and explain the concept of policy leaning into different languages. Mapping the connection between policy learning and the process of making policy in each of the partner countries constituted a second hurdle. Chapter 6 explores the relationship between the policy process and policy learning and puts forward some reasons why the actual experience can often fail to live up to expectations.

3. THE ETF'S ROLE AS A FACILITATOR

Although there was a general agreement that facilitating a policy learning approach should be the guiding principle of ETF interventions (Grootings, 2004, Grootings & Nielsen, 2006, recent ETF Work Programmes), the question of exactly how the ETF should go about this was not specified. A critical issue for the ETF is that many people see the concepts of policy advice and policy learning as interchangeable. I believe there is a tension between the two concepts and what they can offer partner countries in practical terms (Chakroun, 2007).
Although resolving this tension is not a question solely for the ETF, the question of whether it is best to use a policy learning approach or offer policy advice is crucial: in my opinion, the former can build a strong sense of ownership and deliver empowerment as well as learning whereas the latter runs the risk of proffering ready-made analysis and, in some cases, unsolicited advice.

This volume as a whole presents a strong argument for continuing to change the role of the ETF from delivering policy advice and providing policy solutions to policy learning interventions that help partner countries to help themselves.

3.1 Key lessons

There are of course many lessons to be learned from the analyses and findings in the following chapters. However some key points stand out and could provide inspiration for future ETF work with partner countries. Four key questions must be considered when undertaking a policy learning process:

- Who are the policy learners?
- What is the content of the learning?
- What are the key actions or processes of learning?
- What is the impact of policy learning on resulting policies?

3.1.1 Policy learners

In his discussion about policy learners, Peter Hall (1988, cited in Bennett & Howlett, 1992) suggests that both state and societal actors are the main actors of policy learning.

In Chapter 5, the authors give a broad description of what they call the stakeholder working group and the range of actors – government officials, school managers, local experts and social partners – involved in the policy learning process in the project featured.

Chapter 3 mentions the important role played by practitioners and researchers in the steering committee involved in impact assessment. The role of the newly re-established Turkish National Committee of Teacher Training – a network of key policymakers and practitioners – is likely to be even more significant.

Thus when policy learning is put into practice it brings together a wide variety of learners. In the some of the most advanced cases such as Turkey, it has managed to bring together policymakers, practitioners, representatives of civil society and researchers. This trend could herald an emerging new form of governance of the VET system in several partner countries. I will return to this idea in more detail later.

3.1.2 The content of learning

Several researchers have mentioned the difficulties of pinning down the content of learning in policy learning processes (Freeman, 2006). In their analysis of several policy learning approaches, Bennett and Howlett (1992) stressed that "[…] existing theories vary on what this object is. While all see learning as the general increase of knowledge about policies, some see this in terms of instruments, some in terms of programmes, and some in terms of policy goals or some combinations of these three elements". Heclo (1974) and Grootings (2004) believe that to a certain extent what is learned is policy itself. For Grootings, "the basic assumption underlying the concept of policy learning is not so much that policies can be learned but that actual policies are learned policies". Rose (1991, 1993) thinks of it in terms of "lesson-drawing", where the lesson is "an action-oriented conclusion about a programme or programmes in operation elsewhere" (1991, p.7).

Several chapters in Part 1 provide examples of two types of learning contents which broadly correspond to the ones outlined above. The first, closer to the definitions of Heclo and Grootings, refers to the actual processes of policymaking. The second suggests that the content learnt consists of mastering capacity building instruments such as scenario building, VET policy building blocks and how to design VET policy in the case of Kyrgyzstan or how to design an apprenticeship strategy in the case of Morocco.

The facilitator's decision to use capacity building instruments works on the assumption that institutions lack the capacity to produce the desired policy or are unable to do so fast enough. The observations of the authors of Chapter 6 would seem to back this up. "While the

Task Force members were excellent in their analysis, interaction and involvement, it was difficult for them to move from a research format to the actual formulation of the policy and strategy paper, in spite of the facilitating efforts of the ETF", they note.

Finally there is also evidence of learning from past failures from the new Member States (see Chapter 7). Some of this evidence is direct from the horse's mouth. In Part 2, Slavko Gaber, a former Slovenian education minister, draws extensively on his first hand experience of policymaking and highlights several reasons why it was difficult to apply lessons from other EU countries.

3.1.3 Learning actions and processes

Two processes – problem solving and reflection – are to be found throughout this collection of articles. Although both are integral parts of the process of learning, they are of a very different nature.

Problem solving

Learning is embedded in complex, real-life situations: The learning occurs as an attempt to solve a real-life problem. The needs to design (Kyrgyzstan), develop (Morocco) or evaluate policy (Turkey) are what drive the policy learning process rather than the desire to apply abstract concepts and principles. As Chapter 4 shows, real collaboration calls for a shared task where the partners can work together to produce something none could have produced on their own.

Use of a wide range of communication and collaboration tools: These tools are introduced by policy learning facilitators, experts and peers or are already available in the workplace or the learning environment. These include scenario building, computer-based policy analysis (Kyrgyzstan), meta-plan tools and objectives-based planning (Morocco) and self-study documents (the Balkans).

Taking part in social dialogue and negotiation: The idea put forward by most of the authors of this collection is that policy learning is situated learning. It also involves participating in collaborative activities which in turn involve social and intercultural dialogue (Kyrgyzstan) and negotiation (Morocco). In Chapter 4, the authors state that peer learning as it is practiced in the Balkans goes much deeper than policy borrowing and that the resulting knowledge consists of a great deal more than merely identifying which policies work and which do not. A last point concerns what motivates the learners to engage in such participatory processes and what do they hope to gain from it. Chapter 5 provides some insight into this by looking at the opinions of different members of the national policy task force. One declaration in particular provides a good illustration of the team's motivation - "When we are established by the presidential decree, it will give us authority and influence, but also a big responsibility".

The role of policy learning facilitators: Some general observations can be made on how the policy learning facilitator can help establish a system to support the policymakers of partner countries in policy learning. I would argue that almost all chapters show that this system of support will only work if local teams are able to take control over the policy development process. Therefore a successful facilitation is one where the facilitator gradually relinquishes control. The facilitator introduces the learners to new strategies for solving problems. He or she asks questions that the team would not otherwise ask, thereby encouraging them to expand their horizons. However several chapters reveal clear tensions between the role of facilitator and advisor. There is also a contradiction between the time needed for learning and development and the urgent need to develop policy in partner countries.

Reflection

Exposure to different points of view and broadening of own viewpoint: There are several reasons why policy learning can be seen as a thought-provoking exercise. As has already been mentioned, the process of policy learning encourages people to question their preconceived ideas by contrasting them with fresh ones. Policy learning, particularly when it takes place as part of a peer learning event, is a matter of understanding other systems to better understand your own[2]. This comes over strongly in Chapter 4; where the authors affirm that paying attention to the type of policy to be implemented in a particular country context and to the people involved in implementation increases policymakers' understanding of how different aspects of policies, people and places interact and combine in particular ways to shape implementation processes and outcomes. Feedback and observations from policymakers from neighbouring countries on national policy issues in VET support self-reflection and better understanding of the specificities of their own systems.

Dismantling myths: Participants in the Balkan case see the policy learning exercise as a way to dismantle the myth of the superiority of EU VET systems and to learn from neighbours. This was not the case of the Kyrgyz team who had access to "too many visions" when they drafted their policy paper. In this case, as pointed out in Chapter 6, looking at too many policies prevented them from seeing the characteristics of their own system "It starts and ends with visions and principles spiced with different concepts taken from documents related to the EU VET policy framework, and fails to integrate and build on available national evidence," note the authors.

3.1.4 The impact on policy

Bennett and Howlett (1992) believe the impact of policy learning should be measured in terms of change to policy. They note that most people believe that policy learning does not occur "unless there is some kind of policy change which results from that learning process" (p.285). Other academics (Olsen and Peters, 1996 cited in Raffe and Spours, 2007, p.4) find it easier to look at policy learning in terms of the outcomes of resulting policy and infer that successful learning has taken place if these policies produce good results. Both perspectives see policy learning as instrumental for policy change. For Raffe and Spours (2007), policy learning has an impact not only on the policies themselves but also on the way they are designed.

As the following chapters show, it is hard to identify or quantify how much policy change is due to policy learning. However, I would argue that the evidence on how it changes the way policy is made is much clearer.

- *Kyrgyzstan:* Chapter 5 provides clear evidence of changes to the method of policymaking. In Kyrgyzstan, as in other former Soviet republics, there was little experience of policymaking as this had previously been done centrally in Moscow. As a result of policy learning, a new VET policy task force involving new stakeholders was set up by the Kyrgyz government.
- *Morocco:* In spite of the negative verdict on some of the political dimensions of the work done, the depth of consultation and cooperation established between departments represents a major achievement for the policy learning initiative.
- *Turkey:* The main conclusion of Chapter 3 is that policy moved, through the impact assessment approach to a space – the agora – where not only politics are important but practitioners' actions and research activities are too.

The present discussion is still ongoing. This volume is based on a small number of examples, some of which are still underway. It is also true that more time must pass before we can really assess the results of policy learning processes. What then is needed to reach a more definite conclusion? I believe there are many grounds for suggesting policy learning produces a better outcome than conventional policy advice.

First, using a policy learning approach sets the scene for a collaborative model of policymaking, as described by Raffe and Spours (2007). Most chapters in this volume highlight the ability of policy learning to engage a wide range of stakeholders from the public sector (including policymakers and practitioners), the private sector and civil society in general. To varying degrees, all chapters share a view of policy learning as a collective enterprise which leads to a more democratic process of consultation and greater ownership.

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[2] As Goethe said on learning languages, "Who does not know a foreign language does not know anything about his own language", *Kunst und Alterthum*

Second, policy learning is also about developing national capacity to lead reforms. Capacity building occurs through learning to use different instruments such as scenario building or impact evaluation. It can also draw in new stakeholders such as social partners, researchers or practitioners and help them move from the periphery to the centre of policymaking (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Third, it would seem logical to expect that an active learning process which encourages interaction, collaboration and reflection will also promote a better understanding of policy issues and lead to better designed policies.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Policy learning processes are powerful tools for promoting collaboration between different stakeholders and sharing experiences. As we have seen, they also encourage situated problem solving and reflection. This is especially important when the aim is to develop national capacity to lead processes of reform.

Nevertheless policy learning inevitably sets up different kinds of tension: between the process and the end result, between the time needed for learning and the urgent need to develop policy and between the role of facilitator and advisor. Several chapters call for longer timescales for policy learning or, as Raffe and Spours (2007, p.226) put it, “recognition that policymaking schedules should reflect the needs of policy learning as well as political and administrative imperatives.”

As for the relationship between policy learning and policy change, the different chapters do not provide conclusive evidence that participating in policy learning processes causes policy goals to change. However they do describe clear changes in the way policies are made. Among these are including new stakeholders, promoting more democratic decision-making and collaboration and introducing new tools to support policymaking.

Policy change is difficult to achieve and difficult to quantify. The strength of policy learning interventions in the cases described was that in some cases it encouraged stakeholders to get actively involved in steering the process and develop their own understanding of policy issues. Using a policy learning approach paves the way for a new model of governance. By promoting the kind of active learning which is an intrinsic part of a policy learning process, it also helps to build national capacities. It is clear that policy learning has plenty to teach us here at the ETF and that we still need to further explore its richness. It is also clear that it can make a valuable contribution to facilitating the policy debate in partner countries.

2

2. THE ETF’S INTERVENTIONS IN JORDAN, A FINE LINE BETWEEN ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Gérard Mayen

1. INTRODUCTION

“Policy learning refers to a ‘change in thinking’, not just any change in thinking, but a structured, conscious change in thinking about a specific policy issue.” This definition provided by René Kemp and Rifka Weehuizen (2005) refers mainly to the process that governments (meaning the public sector) may develop to deal with policy changes.

In this chapter, the term ‘policy learning’ is understood as a process where policymakers progressively learn to take full and conscious account of the importance of their own role including the role of newcomers meaning the social partners, in the reform process. Hence, the extent to which new stakeholders are involved in the management of sector reform is a reflection of how policy learning is happening. ‘Policy learning facilitation’ is taken to be the process in which international assistance genuinely helps countries to develop and implement their own reform policies.

A brief description of the Jordanian education landscape and reform efforts is followed by a section on the increasing role played by social partners in the design of new policies in technical and vocational education (TVET). Next, the ETF’s role as policy learning facilitator is described along with a comprehensive picture of the work it is doing in Jordan, particularly though the identification of critical factors and reflections on action (Schön, 1983). There are several tensions in the policy learning facilitation processes, such as that between process and products, and between advising and facilitating. The final part looks at the role of the ETF in the landscape of donors intervening in Jordan.

2. THE TVET POLICY AGENDA IN JORDAN

Jordan is engaged in a set of policy initiatives grouped under one policy umbrella, the National Agenda *The Jordan we strive for*, which aims at modernising the public sector and administration to make Jordan a knowledge society able to cope with the effects of globalisation. This ambitious reform programme set targets for the period from 2006 to 2015.

The National Agenda identified, among other issues, several labour market and TVET challenges and targets that cover:
(i) reducing unemployment; (ii) absorbing the annual inflow of new job seekers (projected to grow at 4% per annum); and (iii) increasing the participation of women in the labour market. This is combined with the need to develop the capacity of enterprises (particularly small and medium sized ones) to adapt to technological changes and provide quality products in a globalised market. In this context, the Ministry of Labour has been given the mandate to lead the employment and TVET strands of the National Agenda.

In parallel, the Ministry of Education through the Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy project (ERfKE) and the Ministry of Higher Education through the Higher Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy project (HERfKE) are engaged in wide scale reforms. Both ministries deal with the segments of technical and vocational education within their jurisdictions.

3. EMERGING NEW GOVERNANCE MODEL

In Jordan, the development of human capital is now considered in a lifelong perspective. The main challenge of the reforms is the development of individual competences that respond to the needs of labour market. Leading the reform is seen as the collective responsibility of a large set of actors ranging from policymakers, funders, employers and employees, and training, information and guidance providers.

The core assumption is that human capital development can no longer remain only in the hands of public decision-makers. Hence, consensus among the main stakeholders has been reached to pursue a TVET sector reform that gives more responsibility to the private sector and social partners. The argument developed is that a demand-driven TVET system has to ensure that its drivers (particularly new drivers such as social partners) are where they belong: in the driving seat. Furthermore, to extend the analogy, they also need to have a suitable driving licence.

This poses two major challenges: first, the resistance of the public system to accept the new stakeholders as drivers, and second, their lack of capacity to take on this responsibility. Both of these challenges have been considered and are now at the heart of the policy learning activities initiated by the ETF in Jordan. These activities are carried out in the form of a cascading participatory approach of stakeholders from a wide arena (public, private, non-governmental sectors and to some extent, donors).

4. POLICY LEARNING PROCESS

Policy learning activities were developed to serve the parts of Jordan's reform agenda that aimed at developing a knowledge economy based on the quality of its human capital.

4.1 Task forces

The first step in this process was to ensure that participants would, as much as possible, be those who have a direct impact on institutional and sector policies. Continuity was an important consideration because understanding and knowledge had to be shared by each party at every step of the process.

The participatory approach had a twofold objective. The first was to build partnerships among people with different backgrounds and views so that they could learn to work together. The second was to build a common vision on the basis of past experience, new ideas and strategic plans.

4.2 Subjects and objects of learning

Together with the Ministry of Labour and under its leadership, the ETF developed and delivered several forms of learning activities targeting different types of learners and aiming at different types of learning.

1. *Technical learning.* These learning activities have led to the development of instruments needed to better govern TVET sector reform (such as monitoring indicators, a mid-term expenditure framework and others), and awareness raising about the sector-wide approach. The primary targets were operational staff from the Ministry of Labour and system governors.

2. *Conceptual learning.* This was directed at a very wide range of stakeholders. It included the presentation of the major concepts and strategies needed to manage a sector reform where the private sector and social partners play an important role. It helped learners to identify the crucial elements required by a strategy to create a quality-oriented TVET sector.

3. *Social learning.* This primarily targeted newcomers such as social partners and, to some extent, private sector and public training providers who had to learn to take new responsibilities, adopt new ways of interaction, and become familiar with policy approaches.

These different learning processes were organised taking into account the main principles of policy learning as applied by the ETF. It helped partners in Jordan to learn from their past experiences, learn from other countries and learn from *doing* (Grootings, 2004).

4.3 Learning from the past to inform the future

At the request of the EC Delegation in Amman, in 2006 the ETF prepared a report called *TVET in Jordan, areas for development cooperation* (ETF, 2006). The purpose of this report was to assess the system of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Jordan, learn from past experience, identify the main challenges, and suggest priorities for external cooperation. Based on the findings of the report considered as a key background document by stakeholders, the ETF facilitated a series of workshops in 2007 where stakeholders revised a strategy that was prepared by the National Centre of Human Resources Development in the late 1990s. Participants included donors and public, private and social partners who interacted in round table discussions.

This exercise had a double objective: to provide stakeholders with strategic information and regional and international experiences in shifting from a supply-driven to a demand-driven TVET model considering employment as a key issue, and to incorporate their views (thus strengthening their ownership) in the development of a new vision in a participatory process.

A team of ETF experts facilitated the technical proceedings and the introduction of current reform concepts, such as quality assurance, qualification frameworks and information systems, which were rather new for some of the stakeholders. However, policy learning facilitation involves more than this. It also involves linking these new concepts to a national institutional context. The ETF team helped Jordanian counterparts to look at new concepts in the context of their own national system, assessing the role of stakeholders as well as the technical processes and the implications of the envisaged change.

The following vision was elaborated:

> The vision for the Employment and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (E-TVET) sector is to raise the efficiency of the sector in accordance with the government vision to develop Jordan as a knowledge economy to meet the needs of the labour market, to secure the employment of the Jordanian workforce and to contribute to the development of Jordan's human capital in line with lifelong learning principles.
>
> The overall objective of the E-TVET sector reform is to provide the Jordanian labour market with the required competences to support the growth of the economy and enhance the competitiveness of Jordanian enterprises[3].

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[3] Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council, Employment-Technical and Vocational Education and Training (E-TVET) Sector Reform Document, May 2008

Subsequently, based on the same partnership approach and directly connected to the strategy, a five-year sector reform action plan (2007-2012) was elaborated in the form of a logical framework.

4.4 Learning for the future

Following the workshops, a Technical Committee composed of public and private representatives was formed which reviewed in detail all expected sector reform results and translated them into a detailed action plan with a number of activities linked to each of the stakeholders. The ETF supported their work with regular review meetings that continually emphasised the implications of the new vision and action plans on the work of different institutions and stakeholders. The sector reform action plan was presented and approved by the TVET Council in August 2007.

All public institutions then set-up their own technical committees to translate the sector reform action plan to their own situation. One interesting result of the entire exercise is the way in which the participatory process initiated by the ETF has taken hold in Jordan. It is now common to invite other stakeholders to review plans and actions, while referring to the sector reform action plan has become second nature. The social partners themselves are showing increasing interest in discussing the issues linked to human capital development, to the extent that two of them (the Chamber of Industry and the General Federation of Jordan Trade Unions) have now asked the ETF for support in internal capacity development.

5. DONOR COORDINATION

Donors are now asked to match their planned support to the reference numbers of the sector reform action plan. Encouragingly, they have appeared more than willing to do so. This significantly improves coordination and generates more effective support to commonly agreed priorities. As one example, the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency[4] have aligned their activities to the sector reform action plan which they had thoroughly contributed to through the process explained above. The ETF's role in sector reform is regularly mentioned in World Bank documents[5].

6. POLICY ADVICE AND POLICY LEARNING FACILITATION

At the beginning of this chapter, the ETF's role was described as the facilitator of a policy learning process. This does not cover the ETF's work in Jordan entirely though. A 'companion' principle was applied: the learning process was mutual and, if policy learning activities have had some impact on the system, the ETF as a whole has gained considerable knowledge of the sectors, culture, society and people of Jordan.

The ETF team's role in Jordan was heavily influenced by earlier experiences working alongside diverse 'companions' in different contexts. The basic assumption was that ETF support should be inversely related to the competences of the Jordanian counterparts: the more difficulty they had in achieving a goal or delivering a product, the more ETF support was needed and vice versa.

This introduces the interesting metaphor of 'scaffolding' that was first used by Bruner (1985). He described scaffolding as a type of support that enables an individual to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his abilities without assistance.

Bruner proposed scaffolding as an important tutoring function. Of course, policy facilitation is not tutoring of students, but nevertheless the concept of scaffolding has been used by several researchers when analysing adult training (Mayen, 1999; Kuningel, 2007) and might be an appropriate frame in which to analyse the activity of ETF staff and experts in charge of facilitating the learning process. Policymakers in partner countries can be regarded as policy learners (Grootings, 2004) and policy learning can be facilitated by creating a relevant support system. Bruner et al. (2006) developed detailed descriptions of an interactive system of exchange in which "the tutor operates with an implicit theory of the learner's acts in order to recruit his attention, reduces degrees of freedom in the task to manageable limits, maintains 'direction' in the problem-solving, marks critical features, controls frustration, and demonstrates solutions when the learner can recognise them" (p. 207).

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[4] The World Bank through the implementation of its Jordan Employer Driven Skills Development Project that started early in 2008 and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through the implementation of the BEST project.

[5] See Jordan Employer Driven Skills Development Project, World Bank preparation and pre-appraisal mission, 22 August-20 September 2007.

Bruner and his team (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976; Wood, 1980) demonstrated that where support is contingent on the activities of the individual and related to what the individual is currently trying to do, then considerable progress may be made.

7. POLICY FACILITATION AS A SCAFFOLDING PROCESS

In addition to and in parallel with the support provided to the participatory discussions described above, the ETF contribution to policy learning also included capacity building activities for Ministry of Labour staff, developing a management structure within the ministry to deal with the reform process, contributing to policy document preparations and participating in a large number of technical committees.

As agreed between the ETF and the Ministry of Labour, an ETF staff member (the author of this chapter) was seconded to the latter as a policy advisor to share and transfer knowledge for the benefit of a wide range of audiences: on one hand high level policymakers (the minister and secretary-general, but in practice also executive staff of other stakeholders institutions, key social partners and donors), and on the other hand staff in charge of implementing the reform process.

This coincided with other ETF interventions through different projects such as the Observatory Function, the National Qualification Framework Project, Social Partnership, and MEDA-ETE[6] activities that all contributed to the policy learning process among stakeholders. The key challenge was to apply the same principles of policy learning to all interventions. This required the coordination of all activities as well as close communication with local and international consultants working on behalf of the ETF.

By contributing to the development of policy papers for the minister and preparing conceptual steps to develop the new governance model mentioned above, ministry staff became involved in all steps. They also gradually became more involved in drafting the actual documents.

ETF interventions looked at process and staff skills, as well as the constraints of the policy agenda.

The process aimed at creating a support system for staff to help them to develop and master new concepts and develop their capacity to manage teams to discuss those concepts and turn them into action. The Jordanian staff have taken increasing responsibility for the process including presenting at and facilitating meetings. The ETF's initial role is now entirely in the hands of the team members. A direct positive consequence is the improvement of staff skills in drafting policy documents.

As an example, during a two-day Stakeholder Workshop in Aqaba in May 2008, several staff members prepared and made their own content-related presentations to a high level stakeholder audience (including the minister), facilitated all workshops and reported back using computerised tools. Also by being invited to participate in donor missions, meetings and stakeholder working groups, staff had more and more opportunities to deliver presentations, provide information and contribute to the knowledge building of stakeholders themselves – both on specific concepts and general reform issues.

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[6] More information on these initiatives is available on ETF website: www.etf.europa.eu

A pressing policy agenda meant that learning activities were combined with the production and delivery of policy notes, policy presentations and discussions both with national stakeholders and international donors. Again, the skills of the Jordanian colleagues and the quality of the deliverables they produced improved to the extent that they became self-sufficient.

For example, one urgent and fundamental task was supporting the ministry in defining the new governance and sector reform management structure, based on a process calling for more effectiveness in decision making. This ranged from describing the sector to defining in detail the mechanisms that govern the implementation and monitoring of the sector reform. This process required broad consultations with public and private stakeholders and donors before results were presented to decision makers. Throughout this iterative process, knowledge was shared with ministry staff regarding new concepts. Views of stakeholders were seriously taken into consideration to ensure that a smooth implementation of the process would be in line with local traditions. A collaborative approach was initially adopted for certain matters so as to gradually develop a body of knowledge that eventually enabled the Jordanian counterparts to deal with policy issues in a more constructive way themselves.

Another example concerns unemployment data analysis followed by the publication of a report that was co-published by the ETF and the National Centre for Human Resources Development[7] in the context of a project called the Observatory Function project. A permanent Technical Committee has met for several years now and after having defined the indicators and collected the necessary data, it finalised the above-mentioned report. The Technical Committee is currently in the process of finalising two reports on key indicators (quantitative and qualitative) for the TVET sector expected to be used by the E-TVET Council as decision-making support tools. It is expected to become a regular publication that serves the decision-making process. The ETF now acts only as a supporting agent, with most of the work prepared by Jordanian contributors.

8. THE EFFECTS OF POLICY LEARNING

Evaluating the impact of learning activities is always critical. This article has neither the space nor the intention of doing this. Nevertheless, some elements give an indication of how the processes presented above have contributed to the reform.

- Previously not considered new concepts are now embedded in the strategy documents, conceptually shared by stakeholders and put into action. These include concepts such as information systems, social partnership, quality assurance, entrepreneurship, a national qualification framework, public-private partnership and centres of excellence. Their adoption is illustrated by the fact that policymakers are openly mentioning their willingness to implement them and better connect with other actors (other ministries) at the same political level.
- Participatory methodologies introduced by the ETF are now in place in most institutions. This indicates the change in the way public institutions look at the role of social partners and their potential contribution to the reform process.
- Social partners are progressively being granted new powers in policymaking and the implementation process. Nevertheless, they are not yet prepared and lack the adequate support for their new roles. Moving from the periphery to the centre of the reform process entails several steps: they must learn to conceptually clarify new concepts and develop their own (conscious) representation of what they can contribute. They also need to develop the instruments and mechanisms to deal with this new mandate. A key

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[7] *Unemployment in Jordan*, by Gérard Mayen, Christine Guégnard, Xavier Matheu and Musa Shteiwi, ETF, 2005.

private sector social partner said that his institution "had understood the crucial role of human resources development and its readiness to adapt its structure to deal with it". Another example comes from a key representative from the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, who questioned why his institution had not been invited to the Parliament to discuss the TVET law. Both of them are members of the Reform Steering Committee and have participated in an ETF study visit to the EU to learn more about social partnerships. A final example concerns the awareness among social partners of the need for further capacity building before a place in the 'driving seat' can be legitimately claimed. It is illustrated by a request to the ETF from three social partners to be supported in building internal capacities.

9. LEARNING BENEFITS FOR THE ETF

Policy learning is not a 'one-way trip'. It is about collective learning. It should aim to be, and thought of afterwards as a win-win experience. A number of positive returns on investment for Jordanian stakeholders have been outlined above. For the ETF the learning process has been a rich experience which provides a deeper knowledge of the internal functions of a partner country TVET sector (the technical learning). It has given an increased understanding of strategy and coordination mechanisms among stakeholders and an indication of subsequent levers to act on (the conceptual learning). It has and will help to build initiatives with a good knowledge of the cultural environment and relationships (social learning). It also provides opportunities to support the development of tailored solutions built on the latest and most advanced concepts. It opens the door for new networks and partnerships. Through the exchange of experience and conceptual confrontation the ETF is able to participate in the development of models which are truly targeted to the specific needs of a country.

The purpose of this chapter was not to portray the ETF as a lone advocate of policy learning. The ETF is only one of the contributors to this process. Policy learning is a long-term process that has now been launched and will be improved through a large variety of interventions and mechanisms. Many other interventions contribute to policy learning and help Jordanian counterparts to build the human resource development system that works best for them. Compared to technical assistance from donors, the ETF contribution is very limited in terms of resources. Nevertheless, the ETF has added value that few other institutions can demonstrate: the broad expertise of its staff and the thorough knowledge of EU policies in the sector.

10. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, 'policy learning' has been considered as a process where policymakers have progressively learnt to take account of the importance of their own role including the role of new comers meaning the social partners, in the reform process. It has enabled the social partners to move progressively from the periphery to the centre of decision-making processes. The effect of policy learning on policymaking processes has been described while the difficulties of such a learning process both for government and social partners has been highlighted.

Although identifying and analysing effects of policy learning on policies is difficult, there are several indicators of a change in the policy goals through the linking of TVET with socio-economic development and competitiveness. Furthermore, there has also been a change in the way policies in TVET are informed and led particularly through the systematic participatory approach and increased involvement of social partners.

'Policy learning facilitation' has also been described as the process whereby international assistance genuinely helps countries to develop and implement their own reform policies. Beyond suggesting that support must be tailored to the needs of partner countries, the facilitation role has been portrayed using the scaffolding metaphor. Facilitators should regulate their support in terms of their counterparts' abilities and capacities.

It has been the policy learning approaches which have led the ETF to look more carefully at the processes of policymaking in Jordan and to pay attention to its role as policy advisor with the aim of helping people help themselves. In the end, it is a question of moving from the position which acknowledges the need for policy advice to one which actively recognises the importance of collaboration and learning.

3

3. POLICY LEARNING – THE EXPERIENCE OF IMPACT ANALYSIS IN TURKEY

Søren Nielsen, Outi Kärkkäinen, Recep Varcin and Arjen Vos

1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey has undergone tremendous changes in recent years and the education system in particular is undergoing radical reform. Many foreign donors are active in the country and there is a wealth of policy proposals available for policymakers and stakeholders. But ongoing change processes are so dynamic that valuable achievements risk not being taken forward. The challenge for policymakers is to establish policy chains that can transform policies into new practice. The fundamental question, however, remains: how do we get things to happen on the ground?

This chapter discusses whether new forms of evaluation of major foreign donor-financed projects can help to ensure that reform achievements are consolidated, taken forward, and translated into improved decision-making with a potential for changed practice within a national policy learning perspective. It is argued that an innovative approach that combines a sharp focus on the organisation of policy learning platforms with the facilitation of wider learning processes around an evaluation activity may create enhanced ownership and horizontal network learning. It may lead to a policy process that yields more consistent follow-up decision-making with stronger stakeholder involvement.

The concept of policy learning was developed in a critical discussion about more traditional approaches to policy transfer and policy copying (Grootings and Nielsen (eds), 2005). It emphasises not only the involvement but the active engagement of national stakeholders in developing their own policy solutions based on the understanding that there are simply no valid models but a wealth of international experience in dealing with similar policy issues in other contexts. The concept has major implications for foreign assistance and in particular for the role that individual and institutional policy advisers can and should play in their cooperation with colleagues in partner countries.

Policy learning is sharing experience from the past to develop knowledge for the future. It also covers the distillation of knowledge from other countries and knowledge that is produced locally into new knowledge. It contributes to creating coherent system-wide reforms that fit into a local context and it facilitates system-deep reforms of VET systems because it enables all stakeholders to learn new roles and develop new working routines. Developing concrete approaches that can make policy learning work in practice is a challenging task. The ETF, working in a privileged position at the interface between research and practice, can take such approaches forward as a mediating agency between the two fields. Targeted impact analysis could be yet another tool for policy learning, if properly designed and conducted in a participatory approach.

Reform of the organisation of vocational teacher education is an essential part of overall VET reform in Turkey. The design of such systemic vocational teacher education reform offers many angles for discussion. For analytical purposes, we will approach the activity from two perspectives. Both are central to the argument developed here. First the innovative design and results of an impact analysis of the EU-funded vocational teacher training reform project, Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training (MVET), is analysed. Then the extent to which evaluations can provide a meaningful and proactive contribution to policy learning, rather than serving merely as accountability functions delivered *post festum*, is discussed.

The rationale behind the choice of the evaluation model is examined, then the specific impact assessment model is spelt out in detail. Selected findings and recommendations on vocational teacher training policy are presented, leading to the description and analysis of learning platforms that are deliberately built into the impact analysis design, along with an assessment of their potential for policy learning. Finally, the chapter sums up the arguments developed and lessons learnt for future work towards a more dynamic and proactive use of project and programme evaluations.

2. THE MVET PROJECT: REFORM OF THE OVERALL ORGANISATION OF VOCATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING IN TURKEY

As one among very few transition countries, Turkey has perceived the reform of its vocational teacher training system as a central part of general VET reforms. A project focussing on general VET reforms (SVET) and the Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training (MVET) project sought synergy through a common monitoring committee.

The MVET project focused on the improvement of the quality and relevance of vocational teacher training in Turkey and was designed to address the following needs:

- to strengthen cooperation between the employer of vocational teachers (the Ministry of National Education) and the provider of vocational teacher training (the Higher Education Council in charge of university education, known as YÖK);
- to ensure that vocational teachers have relevant pedagogical skills as well as skills related to the world of work;
- to link vocational teacher training to an overall framework for human resources development in Turkey, including pre and in-service training;
- to align Turkish vocational teacher training more closely to the EU.

The EU funded project, implemented from July 2003 to December 2006, had a total budget of €14 million.

The project had three key outputs. Firstly it produced ten occupational standards and modular curricula for pre-service technical priority areas and a teacher qualification framework based on five in-service modules. Secondly, the staff of 14 vocational teacher training faculties were trained to introduce and implement the

Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Teacher Training (QATT). Furthermore, the project also contributed to the development of the “policies and strategies of vocational teacher training”, which identified the need for significant changes to the structure of vocational teacher training courses. The strategy recommends a move towards a one year consecutive pedagogical course for prospective vocational teachers who have the minimum qualifications and experience identified by the Ministry of National Education. Moreover, vocational teacher graduate qualifications need to be clarified and linked to the labour market, because at present only 5% of graduates get jobs as vocational teachers. The paper also proposes reviving the ‘sleeping’ vocational teacher training committee as an advisory body that should link the policies of YÖK and the Ministry of National Education.

3. KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND THE USE AND MEDIATION OF KNOWLEDGE – A CHALLENGE FOR EVALUATIONS

What really matters in countries in transition is supporting and encouraging initiatives and organising change processes. Open approaches to understanding change are therefore important as these may better help us to assess development oriented practices and design future policies that are adequate for the country in question.

Traditional evaluation projects run by external education or VET scientists will not by themselves be of sufficient help in the dynamic processes of transition if they are based on linear thinking about theory and practice. Indeed, the links between scientific research, development work and practice have been called into question in recent years. During the last decade, the OECD has made critical assessments of educational research pointing out that its relevance for practice and policymaking is often too modest (OECD, 1995 and 2004).

Science and practice often don’t talk the same language. They have different codes. Practitioners are mostly concerned with practice, educational science is mostly concerned with theory, and therefore scientists and practitioners often find it difficult to communicate. The task of scientists is to produce new knowledge or new recognition – they seek the truth. The task of educationalists is to qualify lifelong learners who can master and accumulate important and valuable knowledge and skills as defined by society. In practical terms, they seek to make things work.

Researchers, policymakers and practitioners share a common commitment to developing more efficient education systems, however they have distinct knowledge needs. Interaction between and within the three communities is made complex by their different priorities, agendas and time perspectives. Practitioners typically look for empirical evidence offering clear and precise answers that can be applied. Politicians typically look for research results that are presented in such a way that they can be used for politics and decision-making[8]. In educational policy and practice we need to reduce the ‘application gap’ that separates theory from practice and devise new mechanisms for the implementation of research findings by policymakers and practitioners[9].

In recent years attempts have been made to overcome this challenge. In “Re-Thinking Science: Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty” (Nowotny et al., 2001) a distinction is made between ‘mode 1’ – research corresponding to traditional scientific knowledge production and ‘mode 2’ – research which is a new way of producing knowledge. It is argued that the ‘mode 2’ concept is expanding because of the increasing need for interaction between science and other social sectors such as economy, politics, education etc.

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[8] These key challenges to improve the relationship between research, policy and practice in education and training within the European Union and to improve the effectiveness of the knowledge ‘continuum’ cycle is a concern of all EU countries. See: Commission Staff Working Document, Towards more knowledge-based policy and practice in education and training, SEC(2007) 1098.

[9] Symposium “Knowledge for Action – Research Strategies for an Evidence-based Education Policy”, 28-30 March 2007 in Frankfurt/Main, during Germany’s EU Presidency.

‘Mode 2’ research emphasises the involvement of both researchers and practitioners in the knowledge production process. The authors argue that ‘mode 2’ research is contextualised in a new public arena which they call agora[10]. Research has moved from operating in isolation to the agora – a place where the market and politics meet and are mixed, and where private emotions and opinion meet public opinion and political consensus. Such contexts, which the authors call ‘transaction spaces’, have many similarities to the field of educational research, and the concept has also found considerable resonance in education[11]. This ‘school’ is very interesting for the ETF, as its main target is not to produce new knowledge per se but to build on, communicate and increasingly ensure that knowledge is a guide for practice.

It is argued that in many applications the former hard truth ideal of science is no longer functional because today knowledge production is distributed widely among an increasing number of knowledge environments.

From this it follows that a lot can be gained by stimulating local capacity for carrying out ‘accompanying’ research that is closely related to policy learning activities. We will have to accept the – in principle – open-ended nature of this research as a consequence of the complexities of countries in transition. Such research must be inclusive and involve practitioners as well as researchers in social learning processes as they are all involved in producing knowledge.

There is an echo of this approach in the evaluation experiences that derive from the work carried out by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (Stern, 1989), which has been described as ‘developmental evaluation’. It seeks to carry out evaluative activities in a way that can also contribute to the development of a particular scheme, programme or policy. The purpose of developmental evaluation is learning, improvement and development rather than generating reports and summative judgments for external audiences and accountability[12].

A developmental approach to evaluation involves a number of components. First, it offers those evaluated a voice in shaping the evaluation agenda. It is important that those directly involved are able to see the contribution that evaluation can make to their future development. Second, it involves an active feedback policy: feedback should be provided and discussed on a regular basis throughout the evaluation process. Third, a developmental approach incorporates implementation. Experience shows that unless early decisions are made about how to use the results, follow-up actions cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, the eventual implementation is considered from the outset and built into the design of the evaluation. Fourth, it requires a commitment to action research, where the process of undertaking an evaluation is itself seen as a legitimate subject for study, because the actual transactions among evaluators and programme participants may often affect the findings. Patton (2002) argues that in many cases the specific findings can be secondary to the more general learning that results from being involved in the process. He calls this “process use” as opposed to “findings use”.

Against the backdrop of this discussion, an agora model in line with ‘mode 2’ research will be developed and applied to a specific and concrete case, the Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training (MVET) project in Turkey. In the efforts to enable the use of new knowledge produced and effective mediation, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, beneficiaries and donor agencies are brought together in the arena – the agora – where each has something to learn and teach.

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[10] In the ancient Greek city-states, the agora was the place of public (political) assembly, typically a market square or another central location.

[11] Learning Lab Denmark is inspired by the ‘mode 2’ concept and its annual conference is called *Agora*.

[12] Formative and summative are the most basic and classic distinctions in evaluation. “Developmental evaluations” can be regrouped under formative evaluations. Formative evaluations, in contrast to summative ones, serve the purpose of improving a specific programme, policy or product and aim at forming (shaping) the thing to be studied. In developmental evaluation the use of the process of evaluation for capacity building is given a particular emphasis.

4. THE APPROACH TO THE MVET IMPACT ANALYSIS

A fundamental question that affects many evaluative assessments is: who is the client? The approach to the impact assessment of the MVET project in Turkey was therefore carefully discussed with the EC Delegation, key Ministry of National Education (MONE) actors and senior representatives from the Council for Higher Education (YÖK) at meetings in Ankara between 7 and 10 May 2007. It was agreed that the activity should be development oriented and focus on how MVET project results can be taken forward by the Ministry of National Education and YÖK in their development of further policies and in ensuring that valuable results are actually implemented.

The approach was based on a policy learning philosophy, where national ownership, fit into context and sustainability are important. The current situation, the next targets, and the kind of support needed to reach these targets were focal points. Within the spirit of the agora as outlined above, the ETF and all project stakeholders and shareholders worked together step-by-step.

To ensure national ownership, a Steering Group was set up that could link the assessment to other planned national vocational teacher training events, known as VET TT events, such as the ETF development project on teaching and learning, the ETF Peer Learning Activity in Turkey and the development of a national vocational teacher training network that helps Turkey to play a stronger role in Cedefop's similar network.

Another strategic choice agreed with Turkish key players and the EC Delegation was to use the impact analysis as a learning platform for launching a policy learning activity by building the analytical focus of the impact analysis on a 'policy' logic and not on the MVET pilot project logic.

Policymakers and practitioners in Turkey pointed out that one possible hurdle was the fact that the Ministry of National Education does not have a developed vocational teacher training policy. This applied to the evaluation as much as it had to the actual implementation of the MVET project. The main emphasis therefore had to be put on the project's policy and strategy component (component 4).

Key players in Turkey suggested structuring the impact analysis around the policy and strategy paper, starting from the practical, pragmatic MVET white paper recommendations and involving key policymakers and stakeholders in forward looking discussions. The entire process was anchored around the Steering Group.

However, a short, descriptive, analytical and evaluative survey of the project design and its achievements also needed to be produced. This was mainly done by local experts who worked together with ETF staff using questionnaires, interviews, observations and semi-structured panel discussions. These tools were designed and developed together with the Steering Group members, most of whom were key project beneficiaries in technical education faculties. The data collection process itself was also meant to constitute a learning arena where researchers, teacher trainers, project implementation units and administrators put forward their ideas on the objective of the project and on the future policy development and implementation.

5. THE IMPACT ANALYSIS MODEL

Education evaluation comprises different disciplines. It often has many masters to serve and encompasses different approaches. Monitoring has a chronicling and appraising function, while evaluating ex-post involves making a retrospective judgment, measuring already existing phenomena. Impact analysis is a forward looking activity based on retrospective analysis with a prospective purpose. This is a particular type of assessment whose results are meant to be taken forward.

The following understanding or definition of assessment was used for the MVET evaluation task: Impact analysis is carried out to determine the significance or value of something by careful appraisal and study. It is a development process that enlightens the specific policies, processes and practice of its stakeholders and contributes to collective learning.

Two general objectives of assessments or evaluations can be differentiated: accountability and improvement. Accountability relates to inspection exercises, which seek justification for the activities undertaken. They should look at whether best value was achieved for the money invested and provide a measuring stick for judging the activity. The objective of improvement, in contrast, aims to provide the actors with a thorough review of the achievements against the potential of an activity. An impact analysis aims at providing recommendations for further activities and should promote instruction and development.

Turkish policymakers and practitioners shared our view that the improvement dimension in this phase of rapid reform was the most important. Whatever excellent or disappointing results a project or programme has yielded, policy development and reform must go on and the added value of the project needs to be utilised in present and future contexts. Education in Turkey is indeed changing fast in these years. A traditional evaluation of the MVET project would therefore be complicated as a number of other projects have simultaneously impinged on the same set of institutions. Untangling the effects of these different programmes and assessing the effectiveness of just one of them could be difficult. Interaction between projects is often a major barrier to drawing reliable conclusions from evaluations which focus on single projects.

Knowledge of what actually happened in a project is above all a resource for useful input into its ongoing development. The systematic follow-up of project results (sustainability) and the programming of the next phase of activities (strategic planning) are therefore clear priorities for Turkey.

The impact analysis approach can be illustrated in the following model:

What is the project about?	What are the project results?	What follows from the project?
Aims (needs indicators) **Objectives** (performance indicators)	**Outputs** (output indicators): ● Targets ● Results ● Products/ Deliverables	**Consequences** (impact indicators) ● Impact analysis ● Policy learning options ● Follow-up

Although they were covered, the MVET project impact analysis did not concentrate on the links between aims, objectives and outputs. The main emphasis was on the links between outputs and outcomes and what follows from the project.

The purpose of the activity was thus to register what differences the project results could produce in the future. The impact and sustainability aspects of the project were the main focus since the intention is to move from project results to policy formulation in Turkey’s efforts to reform VET and higher education systems. The evaluative approach is based on a policy learning philosophy where national ownership and sustainability are key to consolidation and defining the next policy steps.

The specific objectives of the impact analysis were therefore (i) to contribute to national policy discussions on the reform of vocational teacher training in Turkey, (ii) to identify the next strategic policy steps in this reform, and (iii) to enhance national ownership and ensure the sustainability of such reforms. This was achieved by establishing a Steering Committee that would oversee the actual assessment, organising meetings with university faculty staff, carrying out dissemination events, and presenting findings and recommendations at a national event in January 2008.

6. FINDINGS AND POLICY OPTIONS FOR FUTURE REFORM INITIATIVES

Less than 5% of teacher training graduates end up as vocational teachers. Graduates are underrated when offered alternative jobs. Vocational teacher training faculties need restructuring to become technology faculties as part of the higher education reform. And the relations between YÖK (the Higher Education Council in charge of universities) and the Ministry of National Education are problematic. These factors set the scene for policy development, for the ministry, for universities and for students.

The MVET project achieved most of its objectives (Kiraz et al., 2007). The recommendations on the components of curriculum, teaching methodologies, student-centred learning, pedagogical equipment and quality assurance pose a heavy menu for follow-up policy decisions. However, the in-depth interviews carried out in 14 university environments through the impact analysis indicate that most of the activities can now be delivered by Turkish institutions and experts. Conceptual understanding and methodological expertise are available. Therefore, the move from pilot projects to systemic generalisation now mainly depends on policy decisions, allocation of resources, strategic organisation, local experts trained by the MVET project, and incentives for change agents.

The MVET project identified a number of systemic obstacles which need to be tackled. Following the logic of the forward looking strategy the impact analysis report puts the following issues on the agenda as policy options for Turkey[13].

1. At the VET system level, the policy proposed to solve the problem of huge vocational teacher overproduction and underrated employment upon graduation is two-fold: (i) restructuring university faculties into technology faculties providing the higher level VET qualifications needed by the Turkish labour market; (ii) a complete revision of technical qualification levels to bring these in line with European standards. It is proposed to make this part of a national qualifications framework development process and at the same time provide an input to feed into the restructuring of higher education in Turkey in the spirit of the Bologna process. Due to the fact that this overhaul of qualifications and restructuring of faculties has not yet been undertaken, it has been very difficult to reform vocational teacher training in isolation.
2. The relationship between the Ministry of National Education and YÖK needs to be reinforced. YÖK is responsible for vocational teaching qualifications at the universities, while the Ministry of National Education is its client. This situation is similar in many countries but in Turkey there must be a much stronger interface between demand and supply. The outcomes of the MVET project and the development of vocational teacher training can improve only through agreements at the highest level. So a top priority is to establish platforms and modalities for this cooperation. A revitalised national committee for vocational teacher training could be a potential institutional home for such collaboration, if properly equipped with a professional secretariat.
3. Another strategic choice for the Ministry of National Education is to set up a vocational teacher training policy unit, formulate a coherent teacher training policy and set aside the necessary resources for implementation. The Ministry of National Education needs the impact analysis documents to

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[13] The policy issues listed follow the findings of the impact assessment report (Kiraz et al., 2007).

change focus from a pilot project logic to a policy logic. According to policymakers and practitioners in Turkey, the Ministry of National Education does not have a developed vocational teacher training policy and strategy and therefore finds it difficult to cope with the implementation of new donor-led initiatives while at the same time allocating the necessary funds for broader implementation.

4. There is a need to establish a specialised VET centre in Turkey which also covers vocational teacher training. There are 25 university-based vocational teacher training institutions, but there is no institution that can ensure that conceptual, methodological and organisational learning is consolidated, institutionalised and taken forward in a routine way. Vocational teaching and learning is a rich research field that needs to be developed. International expertise is not optimally used and institutional capacity has to be created to consolidate and cascade MVET outputs to accumulate new ‘home-grown’ expertise in the field. A national VET centre should accumulate expertise and focus on research, innovation and development. Also in Turkey, there is a lack of didactical thinking on vocational subjects which can best be developed in centres of expertise. A VET centre should be placed in one of the universities involved in vocational teacher training. It could start by taking the strategic lead in the broader implementation of the MVET project results, accumulating all international and national donor-driven project outcomes and serving as a policy learning and development centre.
5. The project documented that university faculty staff still need considerable competence development, both in terms of vocational and technical skills, and didactic and pedagogic skills. Networking the 14 faculties and supporting the continued professional development of faculty staff should be a priority for YÖK in pre-service vocational teacher training, and for the Ministry of National Education in in-service vocational teacher training. The impact analysis documented that there are differences in capacity among departments and faculties. However, among all MVET project components we can identify the expertise development needs at different universities. Horizontal learning in networks is recommended but needs to be structured. Therefore, YÖK should develop initiatives to implement horizontal learning networks through which faculty staff share experiences and engage in capacity development efforts.
6. There is a need to open teacher training in two directions: towards the work environment that will absorb the vocational students and schools. To be a professional, competent vocational teacher today means being familiar with the demands of the employment system, having the necessary vocational knowledge and skills and understanding of how these may develop in the future. As far as links with schools are concerned, the challenge for vocational teacher training is to produce teaching competence that is relevance for vocational schools. While initiatives have been taken in some universities towards nurturing faculty-company links, this is not the case with faculty-school partnerships. The easy solution for the Ministry of National Education would be to ask vocational school leaders about their teacher competence needs and consult with the faculties to see how they might respond to these needs.
7. There is a huge demand for in-service teacher training courses in VET. On average, current courses only allow teachers to attend one course during their entire careers. The existing model for continuing teacher training is supply-based. Provision procedures are dictated from above and only partly successful. Continuing vocational teacher training targets individuals and not groups and does not take into account institutional and organisational development needs. There is a need for demand-led training that is delivered close to or within schools. Pilot projects could start immediately where, on an experimental basis, those faculties and others providing continuing vocational

training initiate the training process by going to the vocational schools and, together with teachers and principals, identify the actual training needs. Learning partnerships between training providers and vocational schools could probably emerge. For vocational teacher training faculties, feedback mechanisms would allow experiences to be channelled back and used as input into ordinary teacher education programmes.

8. In Turkey, as in most other countries, the concept of continuous professional development of teachers is almost exclusively seen as continuing training provided by centralised delivery systems. In reality, continuous professional development is a much more promising strategy, it is much cheaper, and it re-establishes the recognition of teachers as professionals and stakeholders of reform. It introduces action learning principles, horizontal learning from each other, and on-the-job learning supported by external consultancy. Such activities can be coordinated by schools and can fit into individual schools' year plans where time is set aside for these purposes. This will require a decentralisation policy with more freedom for schools to organise their own staff competence development on the basis of locally identified needs and without central approval procedures. An approach along these lines could lead to innovative local initiatives which will in turn foster professional development efforts.

7. ORGANISATION OF POLICY LEARNING PLATFORMS AND NEXT STEPS

It is a foregone conclusion that policy recommendations like the ones mentioned here do not just come about by themselves. They would often probably not even be taken into account when an evaluation report is delivered. This is the reason why the impact analysis design is built in 'transaction spaces' along with an infrastructure for policy reflection by establishing learning platforms that enable key actors and stakeholders to discuss future issues before, during and after the evaluation. The ´mode 2´ based agora model outlined earlier has enabled the effective creation of a participatory processes at every stage of the assessment. The following instruments were incorporated in the impact analysis design. Under each heading we sum up possible next steps.

7.1 National Steering Group

To ensure true national ownership, the MVET impact assessment set up a national Steering Group that was involved from the outset, taking part in initial discussions of the evaluation design, monitoring the assessment activities and linking the results from the impact assessment with challenges for future policy design and implementation. The Steering Group included representatives from the Higher Education Council (YÖK), the Ministry of National Education, the Turkish Employment Organisation (ISKUR), the new Vocational Qualification Authority, university faculties and the EC Delegation. They met in October 2007 to discuss the design and organisation of data collection in university faculties, and in December 2007 to discuss preliminary findings and recommendations. The Steering Group members also took part in the final conference on 24 and 25 January 2008 and gave feedback on the impact assessment. Important issues were discussed at these meetings and the findings were thoroughly analysed. These included some serious institutional and political barriers determining various stages of project implementation which had not been fully covered. The Steering Group did, to some extent, take ownership of the impact analysis.

Next steps

The ETF was positively surprised by the commitment shown by members and concluded that this model should be used more often in the future, as it enables ownership, embeddedness and has the potential for enhanced sustainability.

7.2 Data collection initiating dialogue in all university vocational teacher training faculties

An initial assessment activity focused on the review of all available project documents. A survey instrument was prepared, containing qualitative and quantitative questions. A draft of the questionnaire was mailed to all beneficiaries for comments. Then a site visit schedule was prepared for 14 faculties at 11 locations, in all covering 36 departments/training programmes that had been supported by the MVET project. In each faculty two days were spent on average. In each department, a joint meeting was organised with faculty staff explaining the purpose of the study. Rather than selecting a sample, the assessment team carried out face-to-face sessions with 195 interviewees in the departments.

The two days spent in each environment lead to in-depth discussions with numerous staff members and, equally importantly, raised awareness among faculty staff of impending changes.

Next steps

Due to the design of the impact analysis the evaluators helped to create stronger interaction and networking between the faculties. Such embryonic networking is a strong asset for Turkey and should be strengthened and better structured in the future, also in the areas of policy design, implementation and monitoring.

7.3 Regional workshops

During the policy impact assessment, targeted workshops were organised at university faculties in Elazig, Ankara and Sakarya. Participants were faculty members (of both supported and non-supported universities), social partners, vocational school teachers and principals, students and local administrators. The participation of local stakeholders in the regional workshops provided invaluable and insightful feedback on the outcomes of the project as well as on future policy actions. The workshops brought together the demand and supply sides of local vocational teacher training. After a short introduction of the MVET project impact analysis, the future of teacher training policy was openly discussed in line with an agenda set by the key issues raised in the MVET policy and strategy paper.

Next steps

Fundamental reform and changes to the existing conditions are needed. Independent from (but inspired by) the MVET project, YÖK is in the process of reforming vocational teacher training faculties. The graduate employment problem is broadly acknowledged. The common view is that students who want to be teachers should take a year or a year and a half of additional pedagogical training after graduation. Therefore, all faculties should be involved in the process of change. Faculties claim that their graduates are furnished with all the necessary credentials and have more practical training, which in turn, increases their employability giving them a proper title and job profile.

7.4 Policy agenda setting

The MVET impact analysis had a broader focus than just consolidation of the valuable results of the project. It was also designed in a forward looking perspective to influence the vocational teacher training policy agenda in Turkey by singling out neglected or ineffective conditions or programmes and by bringing new policy options to the attention of policymakers, providers of vocational teacher education, school principals and teachers, students, social partners and the general public. This focus on innovation and improvement was agreed with the national Steering Committee during the impact analysis design phase. The ETF followed up on this ambition by organising presentations and discussions of the key findings with the new President and Vice-President of YÖK and with the Ministry of National Education Deputy Under-Secretary during separate meetings in February 2008.

Next steps

The ETF contributes to the Turkish education system by offering public advice regarding future policy directions. This advice takes the form of policy learning workshops, structured discussions with key policymakers, country analyses and an annual country plan. The wider circle developed around the impact analysis – the strategic learning platforms – has created a common language, understanding, and departure point for future activities.

7.5 Dialogue among authorities

The MVET project was long and sometimes difficult before and even during its implementation. Although it targets the modernisation of vocational teacher training at higher education institutions which fall under the jurisdiction of the Higher Education Council (YÖK), the main formal beneficiary is the Ministry of National Education because it is the prospective employer of vocational teacher training graduates. The relationship between these two entities has remained weak but has improved during the project. The Ministry of National Education is not in a position to develop or implement higher education policy. The project has helped to open up dialogue.

The ETF has tried successfully to gather both parties around one table. It has proposed reviving the vocational teacher training committee as a tool to implement the necessary reforms. The formal approval by the Ministry of National Education and YÖK of this committee is a promising first step.

Next steps

The ETF takes advantage of its neutral status to facilitate policy learning meetings by periodically gathering major policy actors, practitioners and interest group representatives around the table. These meetings are organised as ad-hoc events and during missions to the country. The purpose is to promote an open exchange of ideas among policymakers and interest groups in a setting where trust and communication can occur without direct policy implications. The broad experience from the impact assessment activity has shown its value as a vehicle for such policy learning events. Especially high-level talks between YÖK and the Ministry of National Education have been and are continuously facilitated. Partly as a consequence of our convening efforts, YÖK has initiated higher education reforms and embraced the significance of VET for producing innovative and talented human capital as a prerequisite for coping with the knowledge society.

The national Vocational Teacher Training Committee met for the first time on 5 June 2008. It is a unique platform where the Ministry of National Education, YÖK and social partners will discuss new vocational teacher training strategies. The challenge will be to move from a discussion platform to action that will lead to changes in the vocational teacher training policy and system. The ETF will monitor and where necessary promote progress.

7.6 National conference with international networking opportunities

A national conference was convened in Ankara on 24-25 January 2008. Its main aim was to discuss vocational teaching and learning and the new role of teachers. It centred around three questions: Where is Turkey now? What will be the next steps? How do we get there? The conference discussed challenges, such as the new learning paradigm, and the current situation in Turkey, with findings from the MVET project impact analysis of vocational teacher training reform. Next steps were discussed in functional working groups. Network learning in national and international teacher training networks, such as the Cedefop and ETF vocational teacher training networks, was on the agenda too, as was horizontal learning in in-service vocational teacher training (the ETF Learn project). Strong participant activity in the workshops produced valuable new proposals.

Next steps

Participants judged that, just after the finalisation of the MVET project, the time was right to join international networks. The Ministry of National Education supports this idea and will see how a national vocational teacher training network can be set up and financed. In his final comments on the MVET impact analysis, now taken forward by the conference, Dr. Abdullah Sönmez, Dean of the Technical Education Faculty of the University of Gazi, summed up the policy learning implications by underlining that MVET is much more than a project: it has provided a new awareness and a new policy platform for Turkey, on which ongoing discussions on the reform of vocational teacher training can now take place. Engaging the national Vocational Teacher Training Committee and the Turkish network linked to the EU-level Cedefop vocational teacher training network (VET TTnet) could become an important ‘driver’ in shaping and implementing the necessary policy reforms.

8. CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed an approach to impact analysis based on a policy learning logic. We have tried to use the policy learning philosophy as a guideline for the design of evaluations of donor-led projects. A lot of effort and money is spent on evaluations in transition countries and the chapter has demonstrated that, rather than just serving an accountability function, evaluations can be used to generate proactive contributions to policy learning. Forward looking impact analysis which is organised as development evaluation and has improvement as its main objective can provide national policymakers and stakeholders with a review of the main achievements against the potential of an activity and as such facilitate future continuation of reform initiatives. The specific example outlined in this chapter has been welcomed by the Turkish authorities and the EC Delegation.

It taught the lesson that impact analysis should not be carried out by a single evaluating body if it is to generate learning opportunities. ‘Transaction spaces’ must be established which involve researchers, policymakers as well as practitioners in the process. From the very start dedicated learning platforms must be designed and set up that engage national key actors and stakeholders in dialogue during and after the assessment. This ETF impact analysis therefore incorporated instruments such as a national steering group, data collection as a collective learning process, regional workshops, policy agenda setting, dialogue among authorities, and a broader final conference as strategic learning platforms.

This method worked well and has been instrumental in overcoming some of the barriers in the knowledge continuum cycle. It has brought together policymakers, providers of vocational teacher education as well as establishing a new platform for vocational teacher training policy discussions in and with Turkey in the years to come. The Ministry of National Education and the EC Delegation in Ankara therefore asked the ETF to undertake a similar impact analysis of the EU funded VET reform (SVET project) in 2009.

The approach to the analysis provided us with much contextualised knowledge and an array of policy options for VET reform in Turkey. Its results confirm that new forms of evaluation of major foreign donor financed projects can help to ensure that reform achievements are consolidated and taken forward and that they may result in improved decision-making with a potential for changed practice within a national policy learning perspective. We believe that such a policy learning tool could be used with positive results also in other transition countries.

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4. ETF PEER LEARNING: FROM POLICY LEARNING TO POLICY CHANGE IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

Margareta Nikolovska and Arjen Vos

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we reflect on the ETF's two-year experience with the methodology of peer learning and its impact on participants, national policy and policy change. We argue that the ETF methodology makes peer learning a powerful policy learning tool for the participants – policymakers and VET practitioners – and leads to greater understanding of the policy process and its impact on national policies for educational change and VET reform. Although it is widely believed that the potential impact of peer learning largely depends on the individual participants, it is important not to underestimate national political priorities or, in a broader context, the presence of a donor support framework or specific provision for policy-relevant work in the countries concerned. We address a set of key questions to guide our discussion:

- What are the specific features of the ETF peer learning methodology and which factors are important for the policy learning process?
- How successful has the ETF peer learning approach been?
- Has the learning experience of the policymakers, education and VET practitioners who participated had an impact on their organisations or on policy change?

In 2006 the ETF decided to shift the emphasis from making policy recommendations based on *peer review* (ETF, 2001) to policy learning based on *peer learning*[14]. In 2002 and 2003 a first round of peer reviews took place in South Eastern Europe, where a group of international experts met with a wide range of key stakeholders to develop policy recommendations to strengthen their countries' VET systems.

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[14] The reasons behind moving from the peer review to the peer learning approach are discussed in detail by Grootings et al. (2006).

Evaluations of peer reviews (Gordon and Thompson, 2005) indicate that policy recommendations are not much used and have little influence on the policy process. The same evaluations confirm that the learning experience of peers matters most – all participants concurred that individual knowledge creation and the learning process itself are the most important outcomes of the peer review project. The ETF concluded that its peer reviews can still be a useful instrument for policy learning where there is a strong commitment on the part of the national government and the reviews are carried out every four or five years.

The ETF peer learning methodology has thus not been developed to replace peer reviews, but as an attempt to find another pragmatic and efficient tool that will build on existing local knowledge and capacities integral to the specific environment of partner countries' education reform policies, and to local education and VET systems. Learning and policy are central to this new approach[15].

Peer learning is a modest and flexible instrument which recognises that the learning process may be more effective than policy recommendations in report form where the objective is to strengthen the capacity of policymakers and VET experts to develop and implement policies.

The first ETF peer learning exercise in 2006 concentrated on the policy issue of VET financing in Albania, Kosovo[16] and Montenegro. Policymakers and VET experts from Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro were brought together to discuss approaches to governance and finance. In 2007 another peer group, in this case policymakers and school directors from Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Turkey, analysed the impact of education and training policies on schools and school management in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey. These two rounds of peer learning contributed to policy discussions in the countries concerned and also to ETF work on policy learning. The ETF is now in a better position to strengthen the links between policy learning and ongoing policy processes in countries reforming their education or VET systems.

The ETF sees policy learning as an instrument to support stakeholders in partner countries to achieve sustainable change in their education and VET systems. Policy development, formulation and implementation should be firmly based on broad ownership and fit within the institutional structures that allow the stakeholders to participate (Nikolovska, 2007). However, as the purpose of the ETF programme is not simply to create policy learning environments for individuals but to enable them to formulate reform policies as a result of their learning, there are at least two issues to be addressed in this chapter. The first is the challenge of being able to retain an environment conducive to learning for all participants as part of the ETF peer learning methodology. The second concerns the potential of the ETF role as policy learning facilitator to make policy learning instrumental in policy change – and this is much more complex (Grootings, 2007). Both issues are directly connected to how the ETF can improve its knowledge of how to facilitate policy learning that will lead to sustained policy change.

2. THE CHALLENGES OF POLICY LEARNING AND POLICY CHANGE

Within the international community there is no single definition of peer learning as an instrument. Aiming to 'strengthen mutual learning and deepen the exchange of good practice between countries sharing similar concerns, in order to develop common understanding of success factors for the improvement of policy making and the implementation of reform', the European Commission has launched a series of peer learning activities in education and training (European Commission, 2005). Similar activities are taking place within EU social inclusion policies, where peer learning is defined as 'mutual learning processes based on the systematic evaluation of good practice and assessment of selected policies or institutional arrangements coming under the various National Action Plans' (INBAS/NIZW, 2005).

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[15] For more information about the ETF role in policy learning processes see Chakroun (2007).

[16] Under UNSCR 1244

The framework of ETF peer learning broadly follows the logic of the EU approach to the concept. However, given the fact that the ETF's role in South Eastern European VET reform is to facilitate policy learning by making available instruments and sources for education and training, and by assisting and guiding stakeholders' participation and interaction, ETF peer learning is based on the principle of a learning platform carefully created and facilitated around major policy issues of concern in the participating countries. By involving policymakers and VET experts/practitioners as peers, conditions are created for better targeted capacity building around the policies in place and policy outcomes.

The direct involvement of both policymakers and VET experts was introduced in 2006, using the following methodology:

1. A common issue for policy learning is decided in cooperation with the countries involved.
2. A country background paper is prepared by the participants in the form of a 'self-study' document.
3. A thematic concept paper is elaborated by the ETF on the selected topic for peer learning.
4. Peer learning events are organised in the participating countries.
5. A cross-country synthesis report is prepared on the state of the art and findings of the peer learning exercise.
6. Dissemination activities are organised in various forms – articles, country workshops, regional conferences.

Four main goals underpin current ETF activities in peer learning in the pre-accession region:

- improved mutual knowledge and understanding of VET systems, issues and developments;
- promotion of networking, exchanges of experience and cooperation among VET experts, stakeholders and policymakers, leading to an analysis of policy options suitable for local systems and traditions;
- increased awareness and expanded opportunities for learning from VET reform experiences in EU Member States and (potential) candidate countries;
- linking national policy reform initiatives to the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) programming cycle.

The peer learning approach can be seen as a tool to reinforce stakeholders' capacities to formulate and implement systemic education reform policies. The added value of this approach is the organisation of a concise regional learning platform for country stakeholders, the enhanced potential for reflection on country reform activities as well as a more targeted debate on the EU Education and Training 2010 agenda. The two rounds of ETF peer learning activities have focused on system-level problems – VET financing in 2006 and policy impact on schools in 2007 – as experiments in both the process of policy learning, and how policy learning can contribute to policy change.

Nedergaard, in an article on mutual learning processes in which he attempts to clarify the learning process in international communities, refers to policy learning as a gradual process of realisation, where cognitive categories are redefined on the basis of new knowledge. In addition, policy learning often implies that the actors (policymakers and other stakeholders) involved are assumed to be learning something (Nedergaard, 2006). The ETF peer learning concept reflects this concept of policy learning. The ETF concept notes on peer learning[17] make clear that policy learning emphasises the active engagement of national stakeholders in developing their own policy solutions. This assumption is based on the principle that VET reforms in transition countries will only be successful and sustainable if policy development, formulation and implementation are firmly based on broad ownership and fit within the existing country contexts and policies.

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[17] ETF concept notes on peer learning, unpublished, 2006 and 2007.

The ETF peer learning methodology assumes that learning is as much a social as an individual process. The participating group of selected policymakers and VET experts and practitioners benefit from mutual insights and opinions. Although the greatest impact of peer learning activities has been on those directly involved in the ETF exercise, it is also important to understand the related aspect of the significant role that this methodology can play in the policy process in partner countries, and how it can be embedded into comprehensive policy learning strategies that include a series of mutual knowledge sharing activities[18].

To expand on this, we simply need to ask to what extent the policy learning incorporated in the ETF peer learning methodology is likely to be used in the policy cycle and for systemic reforms in the countries that have taken part in the exercise. To understand this we need to delve deeper into the various aspects of policy learning and policy change.

3. ETF PEER LEARNING METHODOLOGY: ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY LEARNING PLATFORM

What are the major attributes of the ETF peer learning methodology that bring knowledge creation and policy learning a step closer to the requirements of partner country reform agendas? After two cycles of ETF peer learning it is increasingly evident that this tool helps policy learning to flourish within the teams working on reform agendas. A few of the elements integral to the methodology bear this out.

The first of these is the **selection of the policy issue** around which the ETF peer learning exercise is structured. Usually, this focuses on an important topic in the agenda of the participating countries, to which ministries of education are committed. The VET financing topic in 2006 was perhaps not given enough attention in planning reforms, but awareness of the need to link finance to new reform plans has increased. In 2007 the focus was on the relationship between policy development, school practice and the effective transformation of policy proposals into practice. Early stakeholder involvement in policy design pays off at the implementation stage. Both topics attempted to advance policy dialogues that were not, or not sufficiently, addressed in the countries concerned. At the same time these policy issues were of major interest in the daily work of the participating policymakers and VET experts. Their learning could have an immediate effect – an important motivating factor.

A second element, the **composition of the peer learning team,** was carefully constructed in discussions between the ETF and partner countries. The core principle on which the team philosophy rests is, as mentioned earlier, that learning and knowledge creation is a social as well as an individual process. Each member of the team is an individual with specific life and professional experience and responsibilities. At the same time the participants each represent part of the policy cycle. The selection of peers is crucial. Policymakers need to have direct influence on or responsibility for policy developments, but it is often difficult to engage deputy ministers in a two-week peer learning exercise. In most countries we succeeded, in others we found good substitutes. For VET finance in 2006, policymakers and VET experts were brought together. Among the policymakers there was one parliamentarian, and most of the VET experts had experience in international cooperation. In 2007 policymakers and school directors met. Most of the directors had at least some experience in implementing donor projects in their schools. A basic knowledge of English was required for effective communication, although arrangements for some translation within the team have been necessary[19].

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[18] Different aspects of the advantages and disadvantages of peer learning as a method for policy learning are discussed in Part 2 of this Yearbook.

The way in which the peer learning team interacts and the relationships that emerge between its members help to create a platform that unleashes some specific life and professional experiences. To create an effective learning environment, trust and a certain level of informality within the peer team have to be built up. The members have different experiences and different perspectives on the selected policy issue. Policymakers expect that new policy reforms will be implemented in the way they have planned them, whereas school directors are inclined to implement reforms according to the needs of their school. These differences in perspective play an important role in the creation of rich policy debates.

Thirdly, the **peer learning events in the participating countries** are the core of the ETF peer learning methodology. Each country hosts a peer learning event, so the participants are successively hosts and guests. The peer learning events are carefully planned and structured around the concept of stakeholder involvement in the policy process in the country visited. The list of stakeholders in education is very long and includes the parliamentary education commission, ministers and deputy ministers, heads of department in the ministry, legislative bodies, teachers unions, social partners, companies, various associations of parents, teachers, students, etc. The question of how different stakeholders have treated the topic from their respective positions is important to the policy learning approach. In real life situations, ministries of education do not operate on their own, or in isolation from other interested parties. In a complex environment, stakeholders at different levels often have to make decisions quickly against an already complex political and managerial background. Peer learning events in the different countries make it possible to experience this at first hand. More importantly, moving from one country context to another, gives dynamism to the learning experience and shows that the context is very much coloured by the key stakeholders in the policy process. Participants feel responsible, as the host of a peer learning event, of trying to explain the situation in their country, whereas in other countries they are the ones with critical observations and questions. This combination gives them a strong commitment to policy issues and peer learning, using comparisons between countries as a crucial driver in the learning process.

4. IMPORTANCE OF THE POLICY ISSUE

As mentioned above, the **selection of the policy issue** is crucial for linking peer learning to policy discussions in partner countries and for stimulating the interest of the peers representing different stakeholder groups. The common denominator is the rationale of 'appraisal' firmly embedded in practice. This is how the ETF peer learning methodology approaches the practical aspect of the policy process, observed through the lens of a problem which is highly relevant to the policy agenda.

This focused approach starts with the development of a so-called self-study document, which usually provides a short overview of the major developments in the country relating to the policy issue. The intention is also to include a problem analysis, a stakeholder analysis and to identify the objectives and implementation issues that are of most interest to the participating country. The country peer team has full ownership of this national background document, and they are responsible for producing it in the form of a 'self-study'. The self-study should inform peers about issues in the country concerned, and in particular should provide a basis for discussions during the peer learning event.

A peer learning event of three days would not be fruitful without advance knowledge of the facts and discussions on policy issues. Through systematic preparation, the peer learning events can go below the surface of

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[19] The choice of participants and the problems associated with it are discussed in Part 2 of the Yearbook.

Box 1: Peer learning methodology in practice

In the 2007 ETF peer learning exercise, the policy issue selected was ‘Implementation of education polices: impact on schools and school management’. This policy issue has been applied in different contexts in relation to the countries involved, Albania, Kosovo and Turkey. Each of these countries selected a country team of a policymaker, two school principals (one from a pilot and the other from a non-pilot vocational school), as well as a VET expert. The team consisted of peers from the three countries and one ‘guest peer’ from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and one from Montenegro[20].

The team moved from country to country and took part in the three day peer learning events to observe and discuss the policy issue from different points of view. A deeper understanding of how policies ‘travel’ up and down the various intermediary levels between the centre (i.e. ministry of education as main ‘policy designer’) and the school (major unit where policies are implemented), was the main topic for the 2007 ETF peer learning team. A powerful way of understanding the implementation process was to ask two related questions:

- How do reforms change schools?
- How do schools change reforms?

Other questions that guided the exercise included:

- How do school-level actors and stakeholders make sense of new policies, and how do they interpret them?
- Do they faithfully implement policies that have been centrally determined to the letter, or do they transform them, possibly by adapting them to suit the school environment, the school’s institutional culture and the surrounding community’s needs?
- What opportunities exist for school-based actors to contribute to the improvement of the policies?
- Are there cases where school-based actors subvert policies that have been decided at a higher level than the school? If so, how and why does this happen?
- Are such transformations and adaptations, accommodations and resistances educationally sound, or are they problematic?
- How do new policies implemented in pilot schools travel to non-pilot schools, if at all?
- Who decides when a policy has been successfully implemented and disseminated, and on what grounds?[21]

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[20] On the people’s role in reform see Sultana (2008).

[21] These questions helped the team to stay focused on the selected policy issue. In addition, two ETF staff members, the authors of this chapter, acted as facilitators of peer learning. An EU VET expert was also involved whose task was to prepare a concept paper on a selected topic – in this case on policy implementation issues in the education sector – but also to act as a resource person during the visits and subsequent discussion sessions.

asking questions, while at the same time it builds up commitment on the part of the hosts. The purpose of the self-study document is thus to have team members analyse national policies, legislation or programmes that have been implemented. It should identify the key problems, key indicators and qualitative information, describe the formulated policy intentions, priorities, barriers and the effects of implementation, and set out the most important tasks and decisions still pending.

Although the self-study country report is an essential part of the peer learning project, providing background information for the discussions and creating strong stakeholder involvement, the ETF's two years of experience shows that the country teams do not always succeed in developing the paper beyond the level of a simple policy report and a (self-)critical analysis. The focus is normally clear and targeted, but often the report is quite descriptive and too open about the challenges of policy implementation and policy objectives. As policy analysis is the beginning, not the end, of efforts to improve policymaking and support partner countries in formulating policies, there is ample opportunity for the ETF to support the improvement of these self-study documents.

5. POLICYMAKERS PLAY A KEY ROLE

ETF peer learning has systematically brought together policymakers and another group of stakeholders, indicating that the focus is on the transition from policy development to policy implementation, a process that involves many stakeholders. The main idea of the approach is that the policymakers learn from the self-study of the topic and from being part of a peer team, as well as from the visits to policy arenas in different countries. This approach may be considered as transitional, moving away from an expert-driven knowledge-transfer model towards participatory forms of policy learning in which policymakers and other stakeholders consolidate their learning.

Box 2: The self-study approach

The self-study document in 2007 focused on ‘Managing the teaching and learning process in schools: opportunities and barriers’ in participating countries. Each team developed two case studies of recent VET policy reforms that have had an impact at school level. For example, one of the case studies of the Albanian country team focused on the modularisation of the curriculum, as one of the earliest education reforms that still poses a challenge for implementation. Modularisation introduced new VET concepts and practices in Albania, and possibly more than any other reform has had important implications for the role of the teacher and the teaching/learning process. Education policy and practice have also been influenced through the introduction of protocols which have had an impact on the curricular structure, content and methodology in several different areas.

The short and focused self-study aims at providing background information and analysis that should stimulate the interviews and debates during the peer learning events. In writing up these case studies, the teams provided information on the following:

- the broader context of the policy reform;
- the key actors involved;
- the process that led to the development of reform objectives;
- the changes in roles and new capacities required by school-level actors; and, most importantly
- the current state of reform implementation, together with the factors and issues that account for successful implementation or obstruct the reforms.

More effective policy design and implementation may result from closer confrontation of policymakers with the realities of policy implementation in schools, as in the 2007 peer learning project. The ETF experience is that policymakers are aware of the potential impact of their reform initiatives. At the school level, however, there are differences in perception that affect the outcomes of the reform. Policymakers in practice have to act, and the political scene, especially in environments undergoing radical change such as transition countries, does not always leave much space and time for careful and gradual learning. On the other hand, policymakers need new learning, which very often contradicts established knowledge and routines. They have to engage in daily political decision-making and, depending on their position in the system, active engagement may often take priority. For them, perhaps even more so than for other learners, learning is more than merely a cognitive process: learning is practice.

Policymakers, like everybody else, learn from experience. The importance that they give to experience depends on their concerns about feasibility: Can a proposed policy be carried out? In reality, policymakers face two major problems: setting priorities for the interventions they are going to make, and choosing the right instruments for the implementation of priorities and interventions[22]. Policymakers everywhere in the world often 'take action' to solve a problem, i.e. they show dissatisfaction with existing policies. They try to solve so-called ill-structured public policy problems[23]. In the centre of any attempt to solve an ill-structured problem is the complex stakeholder relationship that exists in education and training. Even assuming that the policymakers know what they wish to achieve, it is not always clear how they can do so.

In trying to solve these types of problem, policymakers have little interest in discussing measures that have never been put into effect. The experience of seeing a measure in effect elsewhere demonstrates that it can be realised (Rose, 1993). Rose points out that in the effort to reduce dissatisfaction with existing policies, policymakers have three alternatives: to turn to their national past, to speculate about the future, or to seek lessons from current experiences in other places. Learning involves scanning programmes elsewhere, producing a conceptual model of a programme of interest, and comparing it with the existing programme that has caused dissatisfaction. Once this has been done, various kinds of lessons can be drawn (Bennett and Howlett, 1992).

Therefore policymakers are increasingly looking across the borders, seeking information, examples of best practice and policy or peer advice, in order to launch, develop or implement policies in the national context. One way of developing awareness on the importance of key issues in education and training is to let policymakers see, talk with and hear from people involved in developing strategies for these policy issues or implementing them. Attention to the type of policy to be implemented in a particular country context and to the people involved in implementation increases policymakers' understanding of how different aspects of policies, people and places interact and combine in particular ways to shape outcomes (see Part 2).

It is important to take into account that those who are involved in ETF peer learning are seen in the double role of learners and experts. While the expert role of policymakers is clear, the challenge is to understand what they can learn from the peer learning exercise. The 2007 exercise should be seen as a process in which policymakers, together with school directors, had the opportunity to learn from:

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[22] On the complexity of the education reform environment in partner countries see discussion on policy tensions in Nikolovska (2007).

[23] The ill-structured nature of a public policy problem refers to its complexity. Dunn (2004, pp. 75-76) points out that policy problems are complex because they are interdependent, dynamic, subjective and artificial. These characteristics make it necessary to structure policy problems carefully and with the participation of stakeholders.

- interaction with their school director peers in the team about their perceptions of initiated or new reforms;
- feedback and observations from neighbouring countries' policymakers on national VET policy, which could act as a mirror for self-reflection;
- experience from VET reforms in other countries that may be different or similar to own country policy problems;
- exchange of opinions among peers and direct feedback from others' experience in VET reform;
- reflection on the potential relevance of the policy/programme/problem elaborated in the 'self-study' document[24].

6.THE IMPORTANCE OF PEER LEARNING EVENTS

With growing importance attached to education, it increasingly attracts the interest of many different lobbies and parties. The days when education policies were developed by the ministry alone and implemented by schools, teachers and learners are coming to an end. Policy implementation is not a linear, rational process, but usually involves complex mediation between competing interests. This is one of the main reasons why modern reform approaches are broader in scope – they seek ways of involving various stakeholders. An important conclusion from the ETF peer learning experience is that the early involvement of stakeholders in the development of policy strategies will lead to stronger ownership and therefore facilitate implementation. How stakeholders in various positions have treated the issue of policy change is an important question for policy learning.

Addressing the diversity of the key stakeholders of partner countries through a well-balanced programme is therefore critical to the ETF peer learning approach. The country host peer team prepares the learning event in close consultation with the ETF. Over the three days, participants have the opportunity to discuss the thematic issue with a wide range of stakeholders. The programme includes discussions with central, regional and/or district-level education and local authority officials, social partners, companies, international donor representatives and visits to several vocational schools (formal education sector) and adult training centres (non-formal education sector).

In 2007 both schools piloting the VET reforms referred to in the self-study documents were visited, as were some non-pilot schools. Interviews were held with key policymakers, principals and teachers. Separate focus groups were organised to encourage spontaneity in response to questions.

Debriefing 'wrap-up' sessions were held at the end of each day with each sub-group reporting on the day's events and impressions, sharing insights and revealing tacit knowledge underpinned by deeply (and often unconsciously) held attitudes, beliefs and values, with a view to developing clear, explicit, reflexive and nuanced thinking on implementation. The fact that team members had experienced reforms from different perspectives – policymaker, VET expert and school director – enriched the debate by approaching the themes from different angles. As the interviews progressed, the analysis of the theme assumed a more comparative nature, as participants identified similarities and differences in the three territorial contexts observed.

The challenging tasks for the participants during the 2007 exercise, closely linked to stakeholders, were to:

- hold in-depth discussions at different levels covering the wider policy issue;
- relate discussions to policy targets set by national policies as analysed in the self-study documents;
- analyse the teaching and learning processes at school level from different stakeholder angles;
- identify policy and implementation issues that have an impact at school level and open them up for possible consideration by the countries where peer learning takes place;

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[24] The ETF facilitation approach of the peer learning discussion forums in particular tries to build in elements that will actively stimulate reflection on the self-study document

- agree and formulate recommendations and specific policy guidelines for improvements to be presented and further discussed with national authorities. This is how the ETF attempted to strengthen the policy learning part of the exercise, particularly linking the self-study document findings to findings on the ground.

The interviews with stakeholders during the country peer learning events are a very important aspect of peer learning. Stakeholders are part of the policy process – they shape, they lead, they retreat, they chop and change the policies in sometimes unexpected directions. Comparing the opinions of different stakeholders on the same topics helps towards a deeper understanding of the issue and their way of thinking. The impression is that the policy process is ‘hidden’ and not very clear to outsiders. The complexity of the process is greatly influenced by the complexity of the stakeholders. Therefore it is very likely that a better understanding of the stakeholder relationship in a given country context will throw light on its policy processes. Although the ETF methodology pays significant attention to stakeholders, this aspect can still be improved. For example, the policy learning exercise could include stakeholder analyses for each particular country to give an impression of their power relations and specific roles.

7. THE IMPACT OF PEER LEARNING AND THE CHALLENGE OF POLICY CHANGE

The key questions about peer learning are whether it leads to any change and what impact it has. The impact of peer learning is considered to be a weak point according to the European Commission evaluations. In its report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme since 2006 (European Commission, 2008), the Commission states that ‘the impact of the outcomes on national policy development and policy implementation needs to be strengthened’ and ‘the impact of peer learning activities is greatest on the individuals who participated in them, but these are not always the people who are involved in making policy decisions’.

The main aim of peer learning is to have an impact on policy development and implementation; however, policies are made by people and institutions. Taking curriculum reform as an example, we stipulate that it implies policy choices about new subjects competing for space in the curriculum, new knowledge and skills to be attained, new student assessment methods, new textbooks and teaching materials. Curriculum goals have to accommodate national, regional or local priorities, a range of social concerns, and the demands of industry and other sectors of employment. The new curricula should meet the education needs and aspirations of teachers and students. Policy choices about curriculum reform ought to be the result of compromises of various kinds and reflect the assumptions and values of those who construct them. As a result, specifying curriculum reform is a highly contested and complex process which involves a number of key actors that are affected by the reforms[25].

Implementation of these reforms is a very challenging task – no other part of the policy cycle risks failure to such an extent. Failure to implement a policy and therefore to argue that certain selected policies have no impact on solving a problem may result from different kinds of underestimations. Four key dimensions – policies, people, places and pace – have an impact on implementation, both individually and in interaction with each other. The unpacking of elements in these four dimensions and consideration of how they interact in particular ways, leads to a better understanding of how implementation unfolds in education systems (Sultana, 2008).

The position of the participants and their proximity to policy decision-making are determining factors in the potential impact of the peer learning exercise. The most immediate and successful impact of peer learning is on the individuals themselves. The project has allowed them to compare practice and experience in different countries and have discussions with a wide variety of stakeholders who might be difficult to meet in their own countries. The value of learning lies particularly in the possibility of mirroring foreign experience in the daily work of the peers. The wrap-up sessions of the peer learning exercise concentrate very much on sharing views on this.

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[25] For a more detailed analysis of the tensions during the reform cycle between policymakers and practitioners, which are emerging at school level, see Nikolovska (2007).

In partner countries in which ETF peer learning took place, policy formulation is seen as a prestigious task, reserved for those with high status, in contrast to the much less prestigious task of implementation. This is strengthened by the belief that there is an inherent resistance in schools against change and that, therefore, change is only going to happen when decisions are in the hands of policymakers. Consequently, change has usually been viewed by schools as something ‘done to’ them as opposed to something ‘done with’ or ‘done by’ them, which, of course, has not encouraged their commitment (Fullan, 2001). As the composition of ETF peer learning teams ‘mirrors’ these confrontations, this has created lively debates among the peers.

Learning does not automatically mean that individual behaviour will change, but awareness of new issues is a condition for initiating change. As one of the participants stated: ‘The sub-systems that we visited are confronted with similar problems [to those] my country is confronting as well; [but] the approach and the dynamics of the problem solving is different.’ Another said: ‘In Turkey teaching staff are more involved in modular curricula, more motivated and more interested to continue working in the education system than in Albania and Kosovo’. Where the first statement is an expression of the benefit of the learning process in general, the second may lead to quicker action if the speaker is in a position to influence behaviour and action within the organisation. The ETF can encourage peer influence, but it is impossible to control this process closely. The impact depends on the responsibilities of individual peers in their own working situation. The intensity of the peer learning events promotes a stronger ownership than normal study visits and therefore increases opportunities for action.

The impact on organisations is a more difficult matter. Above all, the organisations that peers represent are more likely to benefit from the peer learning project than other organisations. Again, it depends on the individuals, their position and their desire to share their learning with colleagues and promote action within the organisation. Interestingly enough, some organisations that have been interviewed gave feedback that the discussions and questions raised during the visits were also of benefit to them and led to some self examination. However, this impact should not be overestimated. Organisations participating in the dissemination conferences may pursue as many issues as they would in other conferences, with perhaps the difference that national representatives play a more important and active role.

The direct impact of the ETF peer learning exercise on policies is difficult to measure. The 2006 ETF VET financing policy issue certainly created stronger awareness of the need to include financing in all discussions of the design and implementation of reforms. In Albania it led to a feasibility study on VET financing models, implemented through the EU CARDS project in 2007. In Kosovo the results of the discussions were included in a project proposal for EU funding. The Kosovar Ministry of Education finally decided on a different topic. The donors have picked up on the issue, although this is not necessarily the result of the peer learning project. It is important to point out that decisions are influenced by a wide variety of factors (including ministerial values, experience and political judgement); which means that even for individual policy areas peer learning must involve tools that will allow a wide range of policy options to be developed, and must be detailed enough for those options to stand up to intense public scrutiny.

To increase the impact on policies, the ETF together with key stakeholders from the countries has developed national action points based on the outcomes of peer learning. During the final conference of 2007, a substantial amount of time was spent on organising discussions between national stakeholders on the conclusions and the next steps, and this was followed up during national dissemination events. The impact of these events is difficult to assess. It will largely depend on the quality and relevance of the action plans, available resources and commitments of the countries and donors, and on ETF country managers' ability to use the results in cooperation with the partner countries.

Because the ETF peer learning project has focused particularly on the development of the methodology and on stimulating innovative debates in partner countries, the thematic cycle was limited to around one year. The following year there was a new topic. At the same time it has been argued that to increase the impact, on policies in particular, more knowledge-sharing activities and follow-up of the results of peer learning should be undertaken. One year is not enough. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that the ETF peer learning methodology would meet with more success if it was embedded in a multi-annual project, where more time could be devoted to selecting and networking the most appropriately positioned peers and much more time and resources to follow-up actions.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The ETF peer learning approach has proved to be a powerful learning tool for the participants, all of whom indicated in the evaluation sheets that they learned a great deal from discussions with peers, sharing experiences from different countries and meeting a wide variety of stakeholders. Most found significant learning benefits in the broader conceptual framework and better understanding of the importance of the country context. They were also ready to commit themselves to knowledge sharing meetings in the countries concerned.

We have argued that the ETF approach towards peer learning is a specific one. Each peer learning project lasts one year and brings together a group of 10 to 15 peers from three or four countries of South Eastern Europe. The focus is on a specific topic agreed with the countries, which is relevant either because it has not received much attention or because it is of an innovative nature. Peer learning events take place in all the main participating countries. Each of these countries is represented by one policymaker and one or two other stakeholders, such as VET experts or school directors. The national representatives prepare for peer learning by drafting a self-study document identifying key issues for discussion in their country. They host a three-day peer learning event and in turn are guest peers in the other countries. In each country around 15 stakeholders are interviewed on the topic. They represent national, regional and local authorities, specialised institutes, schools, social partners and companies, which allows views and opinions on the issue to be compared from different angles. Each day ends with a 'wrap-up' session where the participants share their experiences and have in-depth discussions on the selected topic. A cross-regional report is written at the end of the visits, reflecting the findings of the participants and presenting a comparative analysis of practices in the countries concerned. The conclusions are presented at a final conference for around 100 stakeholders from all South Eastern European countries and proposals are developed for national actions on the basis of the outcomes. These outcomes are finally presented in national seminars to a wider group of stakeholders.

This approach has several strengths and a number of weaknesses. The main strength of the approach lies in the organised preparation of the study documents. These national studies often function as the starting point for reflections which are further developed throughout the peer learning events in the countries. For the peers, they are a source of information and identification of the perceived key problems. Another strength is that each country 'defends' its education practice and is challenged to give opinions on other countries' practice. This balance of 'attack' and 'defence' leads to discussions about the local context. A very important third strength lies in the comparisons between countries. Mirroring experience from others is essential for a better understanding of one's own national education practice. No less important is the 'stakeholder clash' between policymakers and school directors or VET experts or social partners. This brings different perspectives into the peer learning discussions, also allowing analysis of the dynamics of policymaking and implementation in partner countries.

The role of individual peers seems to be a decisive factor, but achievements will largely depend on their position and attitude. An influential and active peer will be in position to change policy, organisation or behaviour more than someone with no decision-making power. We have also mentioned that the duration of ETF peer learning is approximately one year and as education changes are made slowly, the future challenge for the ETF will be to look for appropriate ways to further develop the methodology as part of wider reform initiatives. In this way sufficient time and resources can be devoted to in-depth analyses of a policy issue, in order to use peer learning for reflecting on policy options while benefiting from others' experience. This would also allow for a more structured follow-up which would substantially boost the potential impact of peer learning. Finally, peer learning is a flexible instrument that can enhance the quality of policy development and implementation at partner country level. It could be used in many circumstances where policy options are formulated. Its use is not restricted to a particular phase of the policy cycle – both in the early phases of policy development, as well as during implementation. Above all, it is about learning from the experiences of others, and it is therefore of greatest benefit when used in a multi-country setting.

The major weakness is that the impact of peer learning remains rather vague. The extent to which individual peer learning becomes collective or organisational learning, or how much policy will change as a result of peer learning, depends on different factors. Although peer learning can influence the actions of governments or donors, this is not enough to make a firm, positive evaluation on the impact. This is one of the fundamental challenges for the ETF in the future – given the fact that peer learning is one of the ETF's tools for policy learning, it is important to bear in mind approaches that can help to better understand its impact on the policy making process. This certainly has some similarities with the EU's Open Method of Coordination. The Open Method of Coordination largely depends on the policy areas in which it has been applied, on the different actors involved in the reforms and on the selection of a proper set of indicators for measuring the impact of the policy reforms.

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5. DEVELOPING KYRGYZ VET POLICY AND STRATEGY – THE CHALLENGE OF FACILITATING POLICY LEARNING PROCESSES

Vaclav Klenha, Søren Nielsen and Anar Beishembaeva

This chapter describes and analyses an ambitious attempt to facilitate structural VET reform in Kyrgyzstan through a policy learning approach organised by the ETF. It aims to provide evidence from which the ETF can draw lessons for future policy advice provision to partner countries. The case is set in the landscape of Kyrgyz education and training modernisation efforts, focusing in particular on new knowledge and lessons learnt by all parties involved. The Kyrgyz reform process, still full of uncertainties, is now gathering momentum thanks to a combined endeavour by national and international actors.

Against the backdrop of a description of reforms towards a well-defined and nationally owned VET policy and strategy, we raise three substantial questions about the policy learning concept and methodology applied in Kyrgyzstan:

1. What can be learnt from a quite radical attempt to make use of policy learning approaches in Kyrgyzstan?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the policy learning intervention strategy and how can tensions in the methodology be overcome?
3. What have we learnt about the specific demands on international experts in policy learning?

The chapter starts with an introduction of choices made. Next there is a description of the context of VET policy development in Kyrgyzstan, followed by a section on how policy learning ideas and principles were applied on the ground. In the final section we sum up the lessons learnt and set out some guidelines for refining the ETF approach.

1. WHY DID WE APPLY POLICY LEARNING PRINCIPLES IN THE VET REFORM CONTEXT IN KYRGYZSTAN?

VET reforms in transition countries often depend heavily on the presence and contribution of international donors, resulting in a mix of positive and less positive experiences. Especially in initial phases of transition but sometimes also long afterwards, donors have played a key role in developing awareness of the need for VET reforms, influencing the reform policy agenda and providing resources for strategy development and implementation. In turn, many national policymakers were more interested in receiving funds than in policy making. They were convinced that the key problem was the impoverished state of their education infrastructure. They have often lacked the capacity to assess the appropriateness of donor proposals for the institutional context of their own VET systems.

This mismatch of donor and recipient expectations and behaviour has thwarted the sustainability of many donor-supported reform initiatives. Much of the earlier assistance to VET reform in transition countries was guided by principles of policy copying and policy taking (King and McGrath, 2004; Grootings, 2004, King, 2005; Ellerman, 2005). Stakeholders and policymakers in transition countries have not been able to learn much about their new roles in a changing VET system, although they may sometimes have become experts on the systems of other countries.

These are the main reasons why in Kyrgyzstan the ETF argued for a new approach to VET policy reform. The key issues have thus become the identification of priorities and strategic planning by national stakeholders themselves, with the ETF acting as facilitator of the process aimed at consensus building in support of national ownership. The approach also attempts to build on and integrate the rich donor project experience accumulated over the last decade and continuing in selected sub-sectors of VET. Though our target has been facilitating the work of national stakeholders, the key international donors are regularly updated on progress. They will play an important part in reviewing and consulting the resulting strategic document, which may finally become a gateway to better coordinated donor assistance for modernising VET in Kyrgyzstan. We are still in the middle of this process, at a stage when the draft policy and strategy is to be presented to the national VET community and to the donors active in this area.

2. NATIONAL CONTEXT OF VET POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The political situation in Kyrgyzstan has been volatile with frequent changes in government, including changes among ministry officials. There is limited continuity among those attached to the policy development process.

Although its economy is still weak and vulnerable, the country maintained its macroeconomic stability, improved the business and investment climate, and managed the growth of services and small enterprises.

The level of democracy is the highest of the Central Asian countries, with general freedom of expression and a strong civil society.

Major social issues, like poverty, still need to be addressed. With a GDP per capita of USD 542 in 2006, the Kyrgyz Republic remains one of the poorest of the CIS[26] countries. In 2005 an estimated 43% of the population lived below the national poverty line with 11% in extreme poverty. The incidence of poverty is higher in rural areas. Unemployment and migration are serious challenges.

Moreover, education is negatively affected by poverty. The social and economic situation in the country has led to a noticeable reduction of funding for the education system (only 3.6% of GDP in 2006), which impacts on the budgets of education institutions and especially on the salaries of teachers which stand at only 60% of the national average.

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[26] The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) covers Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

An overall strategic framework is set by the Country Development Strategy (CDS) 2007-2010, which is structured around four pillars: developing the economy, good governance and financial transparency, human and social development, and environmental sustainability. Sectors with economic potential are the energy sector, mining, the agriculture and processing industry, small and medium-sized enterprises, construction, tourism, as well as transport infrastructure. For human and social development the priorities are poverty reduction, education and health care, as reflected in the Millennium Development Goals. Education itself is expected to provide outcomes in terms of increased productivity and economic competitiveness. Basic, secondary and higher professional education have to respond more flexibly to labour market needs. This is to be achieved by improving the status and performance of teachers and by combining increased state funding with private resources.

Donors have played an important role in assisting the country’s development since it gained independence almost two decades ago. A Donors’ Coordination Council (DCC) has been established and a group of five donors[27] developed a Joint Country Support Strategy (JCSS) to align their approaches.

The International Advisory Committee for Education (IACE) was established in 2003 by the Ministry of Education and Science jointly with multilateral and bilateral agencies working in the education sector. Interrupted in 2005, IACE activity resumed in June 2007, and the Ministry of Education and Science started to act as a donor coordinator.

3. THE CHALLENGES TO POLICY CHANGE AND REALITIES ON THE GROUND

In Kyrgyzstan, as in other transition countries, there is still little experience of and a low capacity for national policy making. Policies used to be developed in Moscow and Kyrgyz authorities administered them under tight central control, with little freedom for policy initiatives. The centralised administrative role of government is still more or less preserved, and the new and understaffed strategic planning units in the ministries have to cope effectively with their new policy making role.

Regional and local authorities are slow to change and so are schools. Former roles and relations still tend to persist as they are deeply rooted in old times. By and large, effective interaction between schools and their communities mainly takes place where they have been empowered by donor projects. Some schools do their best to innovatively engage with local businesses, partner organisations and potential new client groups but there is little capacity and know-how in other schools. There is not much incentive for the low paid headmasters, teachers and trainers to do so either.

Institutionally, VET presents a fragmented picture of two sub-systems: basic (primary) VET with its vocational lyceums (formerly *prof-tech-uchilishte* or PTU) administered by the new State Agency for Vocational Education (SAVE)[28], and secondary VET in *technikums*, now also called colleges, under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science, but with a number of line ministries running their own secondary vocational schools. Both systems are very impoverished, with run-down facilities and obsolete equipment for learning. There are many relatively small and isolated schools, left on their own in terms of additional funding, methodological support and in-service training.

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[27] The Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank Group and the United Nations Agencies. The EC and Germany, which had not initially been part of that strategy, took steps in 2007 that aimed at joining the JCSS.

[28] Until the beginning of 2007 the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection was responsible for basic VET.

After years of neglect VET is now in focus again, due to the sharply increased need for a skilled work force at medium qualification levels. There are six times more higher education students (with economy and law as most favoured subjects) than students in vocational education. This is seen as an obstacle to economic development, now emphasised by the government and increasingly also by the employers and entrepreneurs, who experience a growing gap in the supply of skills.

Though employer representation is still fragmented, it is becoming a potential driving force in Kyrgyz VET reform. The trade unions are getting involved as well while they work on a better understanding of their role and capacity. The growing NGO sector steps in as another social partner.

In addition to the split governance of VET, there is a significant policy influence of the president's and the prime-minister's (government) administrations. Recently also the *Jogorku Kenesh*, (the Kyrgyz Parliament) has shown increased interest in VET through its Committee for Education and Science. Amid the multitude of players there is a growing sense of urgency but so far it is not clear who will take the political lead.

Development assistance is a major source of funds for the reform of Kyrgyz VET. A number of donors have been active in the area, with many achieving good results at pilot school level (such as GTZ and Helvetas) but so far without system-wide impact. They have now formed a round table (including the ETF) and produced a common position paper (*A Donors' View of the Kyrgyz Vocational Education System*[29]), and GTZ and Helvetas have taken initiatives to work on policy development with national stakeholders. According to a recent ETF review of donor projects in VET, approximately USD 36 million was disbursed between 1998 and 2007 in VET-related projects. This is equal to around 10% of annual government support to the entire education sector and is more than the annual national VET budget. The ETF itself has implemented more than 30 projects since 1996, including the establishment of the National Observatory for VET (which later became an independent Forum of Education Initiatives), over 20 seminars or workshops, and study visits to nine EU countries. All in all there has been quite extensive project input, the outcomes and impact of which are neither easy to trace, nor systematically evaluated.

The most significant donor initiatives today are the Asian Development Bank USD 10 million grant project for primary VET, and the European Commission initiative to prepare a sector policy support programme (SPSP) in education. The former funds practical immediate modernisation steps, such as school rehabilitation and integration, curriculum innovation and more flexible financing of basic VET. The latter provides a new perspective of a major innovation programme for the whole education sector.

4. ETF VET POLICY LEARNING PROJECT IN KYRGYZSTAN

The ETF has run its Policy Learning Project in Kyrgyzstan since 2007. It helps the Kyrgyz authorities define VET priorities and identify policy options. The project is designed as a social learning process where local actors gradually learn to take over full responsibility and make consensual decisions on the future of VET. The project facilitates the learning needs of national policymakers.

The main principles of the ETF policy learning approach included tools and instruments, such as the logical framework, scenario techniques, stakeholder analysis, brainstorming, priority setting, IT supported decision-making, and a review of past experiences.

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[29] Asian Development Bank (ADB), Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia (EFCA), European Training Foundation (ETF), Forum for Educational Initiatives, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Helvetas (Swiss Association for International Cooperation), International Labour Organisation (ILO), Intercooperation, InWent, Tempus, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), USAID, University of Central Asia, World Bank Rural Education Project.

While this was designed as a learning process, the focus shifted to a product orientation when the need appeared to feed into the planned EU Sector Programme in Education, to be started in 2010[30]. Both the Commission and the Kyrgyz Government recognise and put demands on the ETF-facilitated preparation of a national policy and strategy for VET. It is part of an overall national policy and strategy for the education sector, which will become the basis of the Sector Programme.

Although the Sector Programme will cover the whole education system, it will focus on development priorities as they will be defined in the overall education policy and strategy. Thanks to the VET policy initiative, which was well underway when the idea of the Sector Programme emerged a year ago, VET became a major component of the preparation process. The VET Policy Task Force, set up by the ETF and formally endorsed by a Presidential Decree on 15 May 2008, is in a very good position to ensure the integration of the VET policy and strategy in the overall education policy and strategy, and to help VET to become one of the key priority areas in the sector programme.

5. THE POSITIONS OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

Already in 2006 and with the help of the ETF, the idea of a joint VET policy was agreed between the basic and secondary VET administrations. It receives a new impetus from the EU's Sector Programme initiative and also from the increased attention of the president and government to VET after years of prioritising higher education.

So far, neither the Ministry of Education and Science nor SAVE have taken an effective lead in the joint policy development. Verbally the ministry agreed to take the initiative but each party continues to build reform strategies for its own sub-sector, even though the Country Development Strategy (CDS) speaks of one VET system. Both institutions have recently established strategy units and there is continuing tension between the two bodies for a leading role in overall VET system administration. It is hoped that the Presidential Administration can build a bridge between them and possibly take up the leadership role.

Social partners, in particular employers, are expected to play a role in VET and even contribute to its funding. The Government would like the employers to 'order' workers from the state and employ those with formal VET qualifications, rather than hiring people from the street. The employers argue that they have to be guaranteed a return for their investment, in the sense of getting productive VET graduates with the right skills and competences. Labour migration is another factor that influences the funding of VET, because well-trained people often leave Kyrgyzstan for better paid jobs in nearby countries.

The perspective of vocational schools (and of municipalities or regions as their immediate administrators) is largely framed by the perceived opportunity to improve their status in terms of physical infrastructure, better salaries for headmasters, teachers and trainers, and a more positive public image. They are less concerned with their potential new role of opening up to serve different groups of learners, becoming innovative and developing their staff accordingly. Regions, municipalities, schools and teachers are still seen (and see themselves mostly) as implementers dutifully following centrally adopted policies and strategies, rather than as active stakeholders on whom the success of the reform depends and who can contribute to policy development.

Individuals, such as students, their families and adult learners, who often bear a substantial part of the costs of education and training, would like to see VET as a viable livelihood or career option, providing adequate returns in terms of better chances for (self)-employment. One VET policy Task Force member quoted a rural parent: "I have sold my cow to be able to send my children to the vocational school.

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[30] Kyrgyzstan Sector Policy Support Programme in Education 2010.

I want the state to make sure that they receive a good quality training, which would help them get well paid jobs".

Donors are increasingly aware that the outcomes of their aid should finally have an impact on national policies. Kyrgyz officials are increasingly interested in having a system-wide impact. The sector-based approach, such as that adopted by the EU 2010 sector programme now offers the perspective of a better coordinated effort, shared between donors and the Kyrgyz authorities, and among the donors themselves as confirmed by their ongoing discussions about a proposed joint trust fund for education. The VET donors round table initiative and the Asian Development Bank in its current project may also positively influence VET policy and strategy development, while the EU Sector Programme will give the Kyrgyz government a prominent role in coordinating donor intervention in the sector.

6. KYRGYZ VET POLICY TASK FORCE

In the course of the past five years and through different projects, the ETF team has tried to familiarise its Kyrgyz partners with new concepts and developments, support their understanding against the background of their experience and the national context, and mobilise their own strategic planning capacity. This work is far from finished.

In the process the focus was gradually moved from the two leading institutions towards a multi-stakeholder task force or working group, taking care to involve also schools and NGOs alongside the top level institutions. The national VET policy Task Force, established in early 2007, consists of the following key stakeholder representatives:

- Head of Social and Gender Policy Sector, Administration of the President
- Head of Department, Ministry of Education and Science
- Head of Strategic Unit, Ministry of Education and Science
- Director of Kyrgyz Academy of Education
- Director, State Agency of Vocational Education
- Head of Strategic Unit, State Agency of Vocational Education
- Head of Department, State Committee for Migration and Employment
- Director, Vocational Lyceum
- Director, Construction College, Chair of Board of College Directors
- Director of a private school and NQF Coordinator
- Head of Forum for Educational Initiatives
- Head of Department, State Agency for Tourism
- Vice President, Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

This group, working for more than a year now, has gone through a development process, moving from individual and organisational self-protection and defensiveness to active listening, understanding and sharing. In the box below we list some of the noteworthy points made by the Kyrgyz working group members during the discussions at the workshop in November 2007, which illustrate their self-awareness and perceptions of the task.

- "We are stakeholders with different backgrounds, which is healthy but quite new for us – we need to share opinions, complement each other and agree on solutions."
- "We need to move from our post-Soviet administrative system to a more liberal model of flexible VET, the question is how quickly or slowly can we do that."
- "When we are established by the presidential decree, it will give us authority and influence, but also a big responsibility."
- "Our group is now a team which can develop productive and creative relations and we can work as partners with the help of consultants and experts."
- "We need to focus on what is the product (result) of our education and training, given that 80% of young people aged 17 enter the labour market."
- "Our current laws are not a barrier to modernising education and training, changes are needed in the legal regulation of lower levels."

- “However, the entire legal base follows the old paradigm – it is input based, not outcome based.”
- “We do not know how our economy will be doing and where we are going – a good policy for continued uncertainty will be needed.”
- “We need to understand that if the schools and teachers remain poor, we will not be able to do much.”
- “We do not want to destroy the current system, we aim at parallel developments.”

7. EXPERIMENTS WITH GROUP DISCUSSION SUPPORT SOFTWARE SYSTEM

One of the tools used for policy facilitation was an IT-based group discussion support system used during the workshop organised for the Kyrgyz VET Policy Task Force and hosted by the ETF in November 2007. The system takes comments from individual participants, which can then be rated by each participant using multiple criteria, with statistical results displayed immediately after each round. Using the system required networked computers for each of the twelve group members and arrangements for using both Russian and English during the half day session (simultaneous interpretation, immediate translation of written outputs, and two beamers – one for showing the results in Russian and one in English).

The results were achieved through the following steps:

1. Identifying the most urgent issues of the Kyrgyz VET system = 46 items.
2. Rating the 46 issues, their sequence, their average scores and standard deviations.
3. Subjecting the VET policy building blocks identified to multi-criteria analysis and arranging them on the basis of their average scores.
4. Combining the outputs of steps 2 and 3 in which process VET policy building blocks were filtered down to nine priority building blocks:

VET policy building blocks

Qualification structure
Professional teachers
Modern infrastructure
Good curriculum and textbooks
Open exams
Involvement of social partners
Necessary information about labour market
Professional ministries, good coordination
Open education system
Management of the educational system
Adequate financing
Motivated students
System of monitoring and assessment
Good legislation
General upbringing and education
Accreditation and state attestation
Social protection taking into account regional interests

Priority building blocks

Qualification structure
Professional teachers
Good curriculum and textbooks
Involvement of social partners
Necessary information about labour market
Professional ministries, good coordination
Management of the education system
Motivated students
System of monitoring and assessment

5. Generating the most important components and their rating for each priority block, thus setting priority areas for action for each of the nine priority building blocks.
6. Discussing the outcomes.

The nine VET policy building blocks were processed in three smaller, mixed groups, each producing drafts for three priority building blocks, using the results of the computer-supported brainstorming sessions. There were three rounds of group work, each followed by plenary feedback and discussion, producing nine strategic drafts, one for each building block. The agreed structure of the drafts was as follows:

1. problems related to the building block;
2. what has already been done (or will be done) to solve the problems;
3. organisations involved (stakeholders);
4. possible solutions/strategy, describing two options:
    a) minimum solution,
    b) maximum radical solution;
5. time frame;
6. other related issues;
7. risks and obstacles.

The exercise proved to be quite a success. The group clearly enjoyed its high-tech innovative nature and gave it top marks in the final satisfaction sheet. And indeed, the enormous field of discussion was narrowed down considerably, decisions could be taken quickly on much of the content by twelve equally weighted voices, each and everybody contributed to and acknowledged the outcome which was seen as their collective result.

However, such an exercise should be viewed with caution. Different groups in different settings can provide different outcomes – in our case we could assume a certain validity of results because the group was a mature one and the exercise was done in the middle of a five-day workshop, which allowed both conditioning the group beforehand and proper follow-up. Still, some of the ‘filtered off’ building blocks had to be restored later to keep the strategic framework complete.

8. DRAFT VET POLICY AND STRATEGY PAPER NOW READY

By mid-2008 the draft policy paper became available and thus the Task Force had finished its work. The draft Kyrgyz VET policy and strategy (24 pages) follows a structure defined by the ETF.

1. Main issues common to basic VET and secondary VET (3 pages), using analytical parts of existing documents and ensuring that the issues are all addressed in the following sections.
2. Vision and principles of reformed VET (1 page), starting from the vision and principles and elaborating these in agreement between the Working Group members with a view to incorporating principles applied in donor projects.
3. Position of VET in an education system with a lifelong learning perspective (2 pages), trying to outline a desirable structure of VET in terms of levels, governance, types of schools, pathways, and links to general and higher education.
4. Strategy for developing VET (2 pages), describing briefly the strategic direction for VET as laid out in the Country Development Strategy, including economic and social development and their implications for VET, and subsequently broadly outlining how the desired changes in VET towards the vision and principles can happen in that particular framework.
5. Measures to be taken (12 pages), using the drafts produced through group work in Turin on 26-28 November 2007 as a basis and detailing what, how, who and when. This includes thoughts on what and how donor project experience can be used, trying to foresee obstacles to the process and offering ways to overcome them. Costs are also included, with suggestions indicating who could contribute what.

The drafting process, however, did not go as smoothly as had been expected by the ETF. It revealed a number of tensions and obstacles in the organisation of policy learning arrangements which deserve more in-depth analysis. We will make a preliminary analysis here and present guidelines for overcoming some of the barriers identified.

While the Task Force members were excellent in their analysis, interaction and involvement, it was difficult for them to move from a research format to the actual formulation of the policy and strategy paper, in spite of the facilitating efforts of the ETF. We had to organise an additional workshop and help members to commit the main sections of the text to paper. After that, the ETF team had to shorten the text and edit a considerable part of it to fit into the agreed structure and the format. This was considered problematic due to the risk of losing national ownership of the strategy.

9. LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS FOR ETF FACILITATION

What are the reasons for the discrepancy between active and lively interaction in learning *processes* and hesitation when it comes to formulating *products*? Where are the barriers?

Policy learning versus product expectations

The activity in Kyrgyzstan had been planned by the ETF as an experiential learning project (Kolb, 1984) with space for creativity and an open horizon. Although not altogether neglected, the result orientation was not so prominent. However, the Task Force members were high-level people and the policy dynamics in the country raised high expectations about the outcome of the learning activity. Expectations from national authorities and stakeholders, the EC Delegation and the international donor community increased sharply during 2008 when a whole new education sector policy was suddenly to be informed by the VET policy paper. With the formal Presidential mandate given to the Task Force in May 2008, the stakes increased even further.

This tension between process and product is fundamental for understanding how policymakers in countries in transition develop new policies in education and training. Indeed, for us policy development is policy learning (see *ETF Yearbook 2004*).

Policymakers are not only policy learners, they also have to act, and acting on the political scene, especially in environments that are undergoing radical change, does not always leave a lot of space and time for careful and gradual learning. But policymakers in transition countries engage in systemic, radical reforms and are in need of new learning which very often contradicts with established knowledge and routines. They have to engage in daily political decision-making and, depending on their position in the system, that active engagement may often take priority. For policymakers therefore, perhaps even more so than for other learners, learning is more than merely a cognitive process: learning *is* practice. Their learning, following Lave and Wenger (1991), is situated learning as it is an integral and inseparable aspect of their social practice.

- ➤ In its facilitating role, the ETF must realise that free learning spaces barely exist for policymakers and key stakeholders. Demands for concrete results will have overriding importance and such results must thus be ensured from the start of policy learning activities.

Policy is new to participants

As we wrote in the first line of the chapter, the policy learning activity defined in Kyrgyzstan was highly ambitious. It was ambitious in the sense that in any country it is very difficult to formulate a vision, define principles and give strategic directions for achieving stated goals. It was ambitious also when compared to other and more developed transition countries where this task is normally done by foreign VET policy experts. Finally, it was particularly ambitious in the national Kyrgyz context.

In the area of policy development, even the term as such may have been new to the

Kyrgyz participants. Instead of a VET policy and strategy there were only legislation and decrees. Suddenly the new political environment forced people and institutions to change their thinking in the direction of designing policies rather than laws.

Apart from this shift from administration to management in ambiguous conditions, new qualities became important such as subject-related excellence, perseverance, courage and diligence. The ability to get the others behind you and the capacity to steer a course suddenly became crucial competences. Such issues are encapsulated in the term ‘good governance’, a phrase that was hardly heard 15 years ago. The word ‘governance’ comes from the Greek for ‘steering’. For a boat to be steered safely it needs not only a good captain and crew. It also needs reliable measures and instruments to gauge its progress. But exactly these tools were not available in a country like Kyrgyzstan, where policymakers suddenly faced a range of players who all tried to influence policy: national academics, politicians representing different parties, foreign consultants, EU and World Bank officials, bilateral donors, teachers, parents and employers all pulled in sometimes very different directions. This was the political environment for policymakers and civil servants who had to cope with the complexities and tried their best to guide a policy development and approval process.

➤ In its policy facilitation role, the ETF will have to dig even deeper into an analysis of institutional dependency and mental echoes of the past and always reflect on the context in which policy formulation is to take place. It may be on the right track as far as the organisation of learning environments and processes is concerned, but it must be constantly mindful of the local policy formulation phases.

Balancing local commitment with intercultural understanding

Throughout the process the Kyrgyz participants have shown an incredible commitment to all stages of the project cycle, including the final text formulation phase. The group members contributed to the content of the document but there was no clear agreement in the group on how to divide responsibilities for delivering the final version. We did not succeed in setting up, as foreseen, an editorial team of two or three Task Force members who, together with ETF staff, could finalise the policy paper. It has also been difficult to establish cross-sectional critical commenting on other members’ work, and any justified criticism from the ETF team made the group very unhappy. We need to understand better the nature of this resistance towards delegating (and accepting) responsibility, structuring the group and acknowledging criticism, which was on a concrete text and not on people. Is this a fear of criticism, a high and polite respect for each other and an unwillingness to give and to accept criticism? Or is it something else rooted in the Soviet past? Without a proper understanding, it might become a quite destructive barrier in a policy learning arrangement, because we put ownership at risk when we, in the final stage, had to pursue the quality and relevance that is necessary for a text of this calibre and did not get the full support of the learners.

There is a challenge for inter-cultural understanding which we will have to grasp better. Policy teams consist of experts and specialists who bring their emotions, dreams, values, norms and traditions with them to the situation. We must understand them better and find ways to cope with the reality in countries like Kyrgyzstan. It may be conditioned by a deeper layer of the national culture and traditions. Whatever the reason is, if we want to pursue these activities we need to know why such problems arise.

➤ In its policy facilitation role, the ETF will have to develop a higher level of intercultural competence in its interactions with countries in transition. An immediate and direct lesson to be learnt is the need from day one to get a ‘psychological contract’ with participants of policy learning groups and to agree on: (a) the result is a product of quality, (b) the necessity to structure the group, with an editorial responsibility clearly defined, and (c) the requirement to lay down some ground-rules for articulating comments from 'critical friends'. The Kyrgyz experience demonstrates that this has to be written down in a document that is repeatedly brought to the attention of participants to ensure results.

Organise learning environments which train local analytical skills

The experience from Kyrgyzstan shows that while there is no lack of vision and interesting discussions, the realities in the country and the fit into context must never be allowed to go out of sight. The different versions of early drafts of the VET policy and strategy make clear that there is an acute lack of analyses of the local context and already existing policy documents and other available resources. It starts and ends with visions and principles spiced with different concepts taken from documents related to the EU VET policy framework, and fails to integrate and build on available national evidence.

➤ In its policy facilitation role, the ETF should invest more in training the capacity of policy learners to undertake analytical work based on the available national policy documents, thereby paving the way for embeddedness and sustainability. For the same reason, it may have to tone down the focus on advanced new concepts. As it is, participants can hardly see the local wood from the trees of these foreign constructs.

Didactic lessons for developing the ETF policy learning facilitation role

The policy learning concept is important for the ETF's work in and for the countries in transition. One clear message from the facilitation of policy learning in Kyrgyzstan has been that all participants articulated the desire and need to acquire skills and competences themselves in order to take full responsibility for developing their education and training system. While the ETF methodology of facilitation has been taken a step further and has proven successful for organising learning platforms and processes, we may risk having to pay a considerable price if we don't find convincing ways of ensuring national ownership, and thereby sustainability, also of the final product if this needs to be adapted to live up to the demands on quality and relevance of a national policy and strategy paper. The final stages of the work in Kyrgyzstan demonstrated that we need to find solutions which can balance the quest for the organisation of huge social learning processes with the concurrent production of substantial policy papers. This tension between process and product will need to be solved.

➤ In its policy facilitation role, the ETF could probably capitalise on refining its facilitation of the final 'result' phases of policy learning approaches by making use of didactic instruments developed by educational science and practice in problem and project-based learning environments in higher education. There are many similarities. We also start from a joint identification of a 'problem' in a Task Force, and work is organised as a 'project'. We find it difficult to bring the processes to a constructive result, so the question to ask is: which supportive didactic mechanisms facilitate this task elsewhere? In the next phase the ETF should develop a set of guidelines to this purpose.

10. CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this chapter we raised three questions:

1. What can be learnt from quite a radical attempt to make use of policy learning approaches in Kyrgyzstan?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the policy learning intervention strategy and how can tensions in the methodology be overcome?

3. What have we learnt about the specific demands on international experts in policy learning?

From our work with the Kyrgyz VET policy task force we learnt that our attempt to employ policy learning approaches can lead to the expected result – a comprehensive strategic document developed and owned by a group of national stakeholders in the transition country context. Even though at one stage we had to intervene to help structure the document, members of the group generated and built upon their own strategic thinking which is embodied in the material.

The strength of the policy learning intervention strategy was in drawing on the knowledge and wisdom of key stakeholders, building trust between them, and using their networks to build the information base, discuss and develop a final product. The consequence and partly the weakness of such a strategy is the vulnerability of results, and the huge effort and input required in the short-term period to develop capacity and organise relevant processes.

The main lessons learnt for our policy facilitation role are that we must be better at calculating in the high product expectations, we must better analyse the influence of the past and present national contexts, we must further develop our intercultural competence, we must focus more on training policy learners in analysing their national policy environment rather than international approaches only, and we must make better use of didactic instruments from educational science and practice.

6

6. LEARNING FROM FAILURE: HOW EFFECTIVE IS A STANDARDISED POLICY LEARNING APPROACH?

Mounir Baati and Peter Schuh

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading policy learning literature, we can identify two models of the relation between policy learning and effective policy making. First, policy learning appears to increase the effectiveness of policies by incorporating lessons that can be drawn from evidence available to policymakers – it emphasises the influence of external and past experience. Second, policy learning takes place through policymaking processes with the collaborative and active participation of different stakeholders – it emphasises the impact of the participatory process.

This chapter argues, however, that in some partner countries there are factors within current policy making contexts that mitigate against a model approach to policy learning. Based on an ETF intervention in Morocco, this chapter highlights the gaps between the expectations raised by a standard approach to policy learning and the realities on the ground. It explores the reasons for the limits of such standard models when put to work in a partner country context. It then goes on to look at the options for the further development of policy learning approaches in the partner countries.

2. ORIGINS OF THE POLICY LEARNING INTERVENTION IN MOROCCO

Early in 2007, the Moroccan government – represented by the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MEFP) – asked the ETF for assistance in developing a strategic plan aimed at expanding apprenticeship schemes in two sectors: agriculture and handicrafts[31]. The project started in autumn 2007.

From the outset, the ETF team has had major concerns about the intervention: First of all, the time allocated to developing the strategic planning for the two selected sectors was very short (September to December 2007). Second, the policy had already been defined and specific and very ambitious targets for both sectors had already been fixed.

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[31] In Morocco, the term handicrafts covers so-called ‘production craftsmanship’ (carpenters, joiners, plumbers) as well as arts (jewellery, decorated pottery, souvenirs).

Nevertheless, there were several arguments in favour of ETF intervention to support the Moroccan government in this endeavour. These included the fact that the ETF was already providing support for the involvement of new stakeholders in the policy making process in other sectors through the sectoral observatory function and that the new initiative would have brought a more collective policy process. Furthermore, it was considered that policy learning could have led to a less politicised policy process by highlighting the limits of top-down target setting and the importance of the links with labour market needs. Third, and linked to this, the process proposed by the ETF would have led to the development of an implementation strategy shared across the different ministries involved and would have provided the necessary conditions for policy learning which in turn would lead to a greater degree of consensus through dialogue.

The ETF intervention was designed in cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training. The main objective was to support the Moroccan authorities in developing their own strategy for promoting and expanding the apprenticeship scheme. This meant that the activity would be led by the Moroccans, with the ETF playing a supporting role. The ETF would be the facilitator.

The design of the intervention took into account the policy learning principles outlined by Grootings and Nielsen (2005) which entail the active engagement of national stakeholders in developing their own policy solutions based on the wealth of national and international experiences while taking into consideration the fact that there are no ready-made models that can simply be borrowed from abroad.

A local team was formed by grouping participants from the ministries and associations concerned with the development of apprenticeships[32]. This team was headed and coordinated by the Head of the Work-based training Directorate[33] at the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training.

Before discussing the policy learning process and outcomes we will briefly describe the vocational education and training system and the political context of the Moroccan request.

3. CONTEXT OF THE POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

During the last decade, the Moroccan vocational training system has evolved from a system that was oriented towards social demand to a system more oriented towards actual labour market needs. This reform has been supported by many donors, including the European Union, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). The main pillars of the reform were the introduction of competency-based training and the dual system, both of which allow more involvement of employers in the design of curricula and training delivery.

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[32] As specified in the ToRs, the Moroccan team included representatives from the following ministries and organisations:
- The Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training
- The Ministry of Agriculture
- The Ministry of Tourism and Hand-made Craft
- Office de la Formation Professionnelle et de la Promotion du Travail (the main public training provider)
- The High School for Clothing Industry
- Regional academies for education and training
- NGOs active in vocational trainings in the two sectors
- The training commission of CGEM (an employers' organisation)
- Sectoral employers' organisations
- The Ministry of Finance.

[33] Directeur de la formation en milieu professionnel.

Training is provided in three main ways:

- residential, where the training takes place mainly in the vocational training centre;
- the dual system where half the training takes place in the centre and the other half in companies; and
- apprenticeship, where apprentices spend most of their time (up to 90%) in companies.

In terms of qualifications, apprenticeship leads to the two lowest levels of the Moroccan qualification classification. These are 'specialisation' and 'qualification'. The latter is just a certificate issued by the training centre and is not recognised.

Although the total capacity of the training system has increased by more than 50% over the last six years[34], it can absorb only a small number of the students leaving school.

In 2000, the Moroccan government launched a national economic and social development strategy in which it prioritised human resources development. It came with a *National Charter for Education and Training* (CNEF, December 1999)[35]. One of the main components of this Charter was the development of apprenticeships and the alternance system to increase the employability of trainees and improve the absorption rates of a large number of school leavers.

This charter had the training of 50,000 apprentices in 2005 as an objective, but this was never achieved[36]. Participants at a national conference[37] organised in October 2006 to assess the implementation of the charter's recommendations identified a number of causes. One of these was the high dropout rate[38], which was blamed on poor equipment at training centres, and low participation of enterprises probably due to a lack of incentives for them to do so.

Another point was related to the management and follow-up of apprenticeships. The many consulting bodies and commissions that were established to coordinate apprenticeship training were for the most part inefficient.

Furthermore, the apprenticeship funding scheme was mentioned as one of the key hurdles. The government budget remains the main source of funding for apprenticeship training and it was reported that current funding mechanisms are causing a lot of problems in terms of allocation efficiency.

It was in order to respond to these critical observations that the Moroccan Ministry of Vocational Training requested ETF support to develop a strategy for the development of apprenticeship training.

Given that the Moroccan government had already fixed binding quantitative targets for the expansion strategy and that the period of time available to develop a plan was very short (three to four months) the planning procedure had to be very effective. Under these circumstances, the 'planning by objectives' (PBO)[39] method was deemed to be the most promising as it is a very time-efficient method that nonetheless emphasises broad participation in decision making.

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[34] *Etat et perspective du système d'éducation et de formation, volume 2 – rapport analytique*, Conseil Supérieur de l'Enseignement, 2008.

[35] http://81.192.52.38/NR/rdonlyres/CAF0FEC1-2E4D-4A54-9C6A-9CB26780C33F/0/Chartenationale.htm

[36] In 2007, the total number of trainees enrolled was 233,000. Of these, 20,000 were in apprenticeships, which remained well below the original government objective of 50,000 apprentices in 2005.

[37] Les premières assises nationales de la formation professionnelle.

[38] Indeed, the education system is characterised by a high dropout rate. According to statistics of the Ministry of National Education, 410,000 students from the primary and lower secondary levels left school in 2004/05. The internal efficiency of the education system is low: only 76% of the students attending primary school (six years) finish it successfully, while only 47% of the students attending the last year of the lower secondary level succeed to enter the upper secondary level.

[39] 'Planning by objectives' (PBO), in its original form, was developed by and for the American space programme as a straight-forward and goal-oriented planning method. 'Metaplan', a variation on PBO, was developed by a German consultancy firm as a collection of methods of effectively orienting group discussions towards participation and consensus. The fact that today GTZ actually uses a new method of project planning ('planning by chains of intended effects') does not indicate that PBO has proven its failure. In fact, the new method is quite demanding. It requires discipline and persistence in planning workshops and a lengthy discussion process before the final planning document can be passed. Neither of these two conditions could be met in this project.

Planning by objectives is certainly not the only way of implementing a project using the policy learning approach but it is quite well suited to supporting national experts to develop their own project. All steps of the project development have to be worked out by the national working group which always needs full internal consensus. This may lead to lengthy discussions but it also leads to solutions which everyone involved will have to be engaged in implementing afterwards. The fact that all these discussions are strictly oriented to formulating objectives and activities in a step-by-step and consensual way is one of the major advantages of the PBO method. It helps to avoid unstructured quarrelling over details.

Planning by objectives enabled the Moroccan team to reach a common understanding of the problems related to apprenticeship training, establish objectives, and seek possible solutions and action plans in a participative way. The method gives the facilitator (in this case the ETF expert) the function to encourage the group and to ensure that good communication, cooperation and a high level of mutual understanding are achieved.

However, the outcome of the planning process is, in its first stage, only a *suggestion* of how to implement the strategy– neither more nor less. The main reason for this is the difference of opinion between those who take part in the planning process and those who will be in charge of its approval and steering its implementation.

To overcome this problem a tight feedback process was agreed with the Moroccan team.

- The results of the planning workshops were regularly reported to the main decision makers at the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training.
- Workshops were organised with high ranking and executive staff from the sectoral ministries involved.
- Internal and external workshops were organised to validate the strategy plan.
- A dissemination seminar rounded off the process.

4. THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

The ETF and Moroccan partners agreed to organise a series of a two-day planning workshops each month.

The first planning workshop (October 2007) focused on the overall process to be implemented for the design of the strategic plan, the ETF's role in the process and the analysis of current situation of apprenticeship schemes in various economic sectors – not just the two sectors involved. While the main inputs to the discussion were presentations prepared by the different actors involved in the management of apprenticeship schemes in Morocco, not all were based on background analysis, studies and evidence.

It was only at the very end of this workshop that participants, having become acquainted with the Moroccan situation in apprenticeship, were asked to express their opinions concerning the specific shortcomings in the two sectors involved and to provide suggestions as to how to improve them. The main problems and issues identified and addressed by the participants were related to governance, funding, human resources (in vocational schools but also in the workplace), regulation, involvement of enterprises and the way in which they cooperate with vocational schools, and quality.

The major outputs of the first workshop were:

- a problem tree reflecting a shared diagnosis regarding the problems and issues facing the apprenticeship scheme in Morocco;

- a shared concern regarding the absence of evidence and key lessons from earlier policies and strategies;
- agreement among a selected number of participants (split into working groups) agreed to explore local experiences particularly in the selected sectors (agriculture and handicrafts) and in the related subjects: governance, funding, human resources, regulation, involvement of enterprises and quality of training.

The second workshop took place in November 2007 and was devoted to the discussion of papers and analyses performed by the working groups in the period between the two workshops. Among the papers presented, a recurrent argument regarding the negative impact of regulation on the development of apprenticeships can be detected. Again, the arguments introduced were not supported by evidence and no conclusion was reached on amendments to be introduced into the relevant legislation. In addition, new participants joined the group and there was a need to explain the overall process, the objectives and the principles of the policy learning approach. During the workshop, a major concern of participants was related to the link between the quantitative targets set by policymakers, labour market skills needs and the capacities of enterprises to provide quality training places.

The major outputs of the second workshop were:

- a definition of a specific development objective for each sector;
- elements of the strategy plan;
- a reflection on the link between the quantitative targets set by policymakers and the needs of labour market.

The third planning workshop, arranged in December 2007, aimed at producing a preliminary overall planning document. This document identified:

- the specific objective of each sector in terms of the development of apprenticeship training;
- indicators to measure progress towards these objectives;
- results to be achieved;
- activities to be carried out.

Following this workshop, validation seminars were organised with stakeholders from the ministries. The documents produced by the working groups were presented at seminars attended by all the departments in the ministries that will be involved in the implementation of the strategy plan as well as a couple of institutions that will cooperate with those ministries.

Finally, a seminar was organised in March 2008 to validate the document with external stakeholders, particularly employers’ organisations. During the sessions the employers’ representatives welcomed the involvement of the three ministries but they asked for support to be able to play a more important role in apprenticeship training.

5. POLICY LEARNING: DID IT WORK?

Failure of double loop learning

Although the strategic plan was approved by the two ministries in charge of the development of apprenticeships in the two sectors, officials from the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training were less committed, arguing that it did not meet their expectations, especially in view of the fact that it didn’t provide a short-term solution to their immediate problems (identify a strategy for increasing the number of apprentices in both sectors). They also argued that the strategic plan addressed qualitative rather than the quantitative aspects. In fact, at this stage, it is not clear if the Moroccan government is prepared to go as far as reconsidering the fixed targets (50 000 apprentices) and promoting policy levers that will significantly strengthen the quality of apprenticeships in the selected sectors and take into consideration the necessary balance between economic demand and the social driven approach.

In the following paragraphs, we discuss the reasons for failure of a normative policy learning process through the following elements: relationship between policies and politics; the learning process; the policy learners; and the relationship between policy learning and the policy process.

Tension between vocational training policies and politics

As mentioned above, the first workshop was dedicated to collecting information from stakeholders about apprenticeships. The group did not manage to find any documents, analyses or studies that could form the basis of reasonable objectives. Apprenticeship seems to be considered more as a response to the problem of dropouts from the education system rather than a way of providing skills to meet labour market needs. As an example, according to a recent[40] study carried out by the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training on the qualification needs of the agriculture sector, it appears that the qualifications required by employers are at technician level[41] rather than semi-qualified worker level towards which apprenticeship training is currently geared and for which the expansion policy has been established. This created a difficult climate for the policy learning process. Moreover, the time constraints meant that reflection and feedback from local and international experience remained at a minimum.

The learning process

Our second observation relates to the scope of the policy learning exercise. The support requested by the Moroccan authorities concerned the design of a strategy for a policy which had already been decided. The government asked only for support to implement the policy in the best way possible. The use of policy learning was related to the choice of means to achieve politically determined goals.

If policy learning “includes ‘experiential learning’ from history, learning from other countries and learning from local innovations and experiments”[42], then, for many reasons (lack of relevant knowledge base, few experiences from which to learn, weak research and reflective capacities, etc.), major sources of learning were missing and the activities undertaken within the ETF intervention (presentation by practitioners and policymakers, introduction of international and regional experiences, analysis by participants of the few available resources) to fill the gaps had limited success.

Nevertheless, the documents were produced by the Moroccan team without being pressurised by external experts. The overall quality of the documents depended heavily on the capacity of the participants to analyse the system and produce proposals. An external expert may have been able to produce a better document, but as it would be produced by someone from outside, the Moroccan colleagues may not have felt ownership towards it at the end of the process. Furthermore, the two validation seminars involving internal and external stakeholders collected comments and observations in order to strengthen and broaden the sense of ownership.

Policy learners

As mentioned above, the composition of the Moroccan team was agreed with the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training and was even specified in the terms of reference of the project. For the first time ever in Morocco all stakeholders involved in the development of apprenticeship schemes in the two sectors were included. However, the composition of this team evolved a lot during the workshops. Fortunately, the representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture and the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts participated actively in all of the workshops and showed continued commitment to the project activities.

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[40] *Portrait du secteur de l’agriculture*, Département de la Formation Professionnelle, Maroc, 2007.

[41] Technicians in the Moroccan Qualification Framework correspond to levels 4 and 5 of the European Qualification Framework.

[42] Idem.

Another caveat is the fact that when designing the project we expected that decision makers representing the different ministries and departments would take part in the planning exercise. In practice this was not the case, and we did not manage to get people of sufficient political calibre involved. This became particularly clear during the internal validation seminar for strategic planning in the handicraft sector when we realised that the director in charge of training within the ministry had not been informed about the project at all. He did not take part in the external evaluation seminar either. Thus, we have reason to believe that only practitioners already involved in improving the vocational education and training system learnt from this policy learning exercise, rather than the policymakers.

Connecting policy learning and the policy process

With the support of the ETF, the Moroccan team succeeded in producing a strategy plan for the development of two selected sectors. The Director for work-based training at the Ministry of Vocational Training declared that he now has a clear idea on how to achieve the objectives set up by the government, both in terms of activities and in terms of responsibilities and resources needed. However, the working group did not manage to break down the overall quantitative objectives set by the government for each occupation and region. As mentioned above, this objective was heavily criticised during the workshops. Moreover, the absence of information and analysis about the skills needs of the market meant that the participants were unable to obtain such a breakdown during the planning workshops.

Nevertheless, in line with the ETF intervention, the Department of Employment and Vocational Training launched a huge study with a budget of €300,000 to provide a breakdown of the potential apprenticeship places offered by region and occupation. The study was performed by a local consultancy that conducted several surveys and took part in one of the validation workshops. Their representative was very active during the meeting and found that the teams' analyses of the current situation in apprenticeships were relevant. This suggests that even though there is no clear evidence of any links between the workshop outputs and recommendations and the decision to undertake a labour market analysis, there is evidence that the labour market analysis developed as a result of the ETF intervention helped in building a rationale for the collection of relevant information.

6. CONCLUSION

Having argued that the policy learning process didn't meet all the expectations either in terms of process or outputs, we close this article with a discussion on important issues to be taken into account for future interventions.

In this chapter, we have explored the limits of a normative approach to policy learning as mentioned in the introduction. We can come to a conclusion that in countries where the actual processes of policymaking is complex and where policy learning is subordinate to the ruling political project, where policymakers and other stakeholders have access to a limited knowledge base and where the links between learning and policy development is inhibited, a normative policy learning approach is not effective. Of course the solution is not to return to the old expertise-driven approaches but rather to identify barriers to policy learning and to adopt more realistic approaches and allow more time for policy learning.

We have identified several barriers to policy learning in our specific context. Although we cannot pretend that these barriers are easy to overcome, we can suggest five considerations that might help to produce better results in a similar situation.

Policy memory and evidence

If policy learning is about learning from experience, then any policy learning process should cover concrete actions for collecting and analysing evidence and data. Documenting, analysing, evaluating and drawing lessons from previous experiences are crucial for informing new policies. Still, lessons may be very difficult to draw due to political instability or limited local innovation. The experience from which to learn may be inadequate and capacities for research and reflection weak.

Mobilisation of policymakers

Policy learning processes mobilise many people from different ministries and institutions and are quite demanding in terms of human resources. The prominence of national stakeholders determines the quality of the policy learning results, which depends both on their understanding of the vocational education and training system and the role they play in the policy making process. Policy learning interventions should take into consideration (and organise the policy learning process according to) the availability and time constraints of policymakers. It should also focus on developing their capacity both in action and formal learning settings.

Timescales and policy learning

Longer time frames are needed for the design and implementation of policy learning processes. At the very minimum there is a need for recognition that policy making schedules should reflect the needs of policy learning as well as political agenda imperatives. As Raffe and Spours (2006, p.227) put it: “Effective policy learning requires time to develop mutual understanding and trust, time to develop learning partnerships, time to accumulate policy memory, time to identify and assemble relevant evidence and time to deliberate and learn.”

Policy learning culture

The need to develop conducive conditions for policy learning entails supporting a policy making culture that promotes informed policies is an important and urgent task. It will depend on progressive shifts that can be facilitated by international organisations. First, partner countries must be supported in developing a greater awareness about past and local experiences. Second, this should be combined with an awareness of other systems that can encourage a deeper questioning of policy options. Peer learning and other initiatives that bring together policymakers from different countries can help them as individuals to reflect on their own national systems.

Policy learning and politics

The various symptoms of politicisation (socially oriented targets, power games between ministries, etc.) and the ways in which this constrains the policy learning process call for more reflection on the links between policy learning processes and politics. Nevertheless, we can argue that policy learning is not entirely absent but as Raffe and Spours put it “ It is dominated by political learning derived from political experience and the need to ensure personal political survival within the higher echelons of government” (2006, p.20). Policy learning is subordinate to these objectives.

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7. EU POLICIES AND VET REFORMS IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES – WHAT MORE TO LEARN?

Jean-Raymond Masson and Slava Pevec Grm

1. SUMMARY

This paper discusses how ETF partner countries can best learn from EU policies in education and training. It deals with two questions. The first is to what extent EU policy developments can inform policymakers in those countries and how they can contribute to effective reforms in education and training, particularly in vocational education and training. The second question is what kind of activities the EU and in particular the European Training Foundation (ETF) should promote to support this endeavour.

As a stepping stone towards these objectives, the paper first looks at common definitions used in EU policy messages to overcome misconceptions and ambiguities that could negatively influence the effectiveness of the EU policy messages.

In the second part, the paper looks more closely at the experience of one of the new Member States which received EU support throughout the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium. It draws conclusions from the learning processes that were at work in Slovenia during this period and tries to distil lessons from this which feed back into a general conclusion and set of recommendations for EU assistance to VET reforms and for ETF work in general.

2. INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the lessons learned from ETF experience with the use of EU tools in partner country VET reforms, a recent paper (Masson, 2007) identified three complementary aspects that concern the EU messages and tools used in reforms, the process of dissemination/ implementation and learning processes.

- Messages and tools from the Copenhagen process and more widely from the Education and Training 2010 work programme have values outside the EU. Indeed, most of them are quite useful in countries that the ETF works with as demonstrated through the work done about transparency, quality assurance, counselling and guidance and qualification frameworks in a number of countries. However, they can act as catalysts only under certain conditions. Since they all interact, they should not be promoted in isolation. In order to fully exploit their potential for systemic impact, it is essential not to detach any message from its global strategy context and background.
- With regard to the process of dissemination, the paper highlighted the difficulties of implementing such policy tools and messages when they unsettle or even contradict the practice and work routine of their administration. This applies in particular to heavily politicised education systems such as those in the Western Balkans (ETF, 2007 and Sultana, 2008). Fortunately, many actors (often at intermediary level in the administration), but also social partners and regional and local actors have a genuine interest in seeing reforms introduced. Therefore, it is necessary to involve a core group of key actors in the introduction of such reforms and also to associate a range of other actors, at all levels and from a range of sectors, in setting up a learning community (Nielsen, 2008). Effective decentralisation and greater autonomy for local actors will be key to successful implementation of the reforms.
- During reform, special attention should be given to the learning process of policymakers and actors. Although candidate countries can benefit from the EU peer learning approach under the Open Method of Coordination (European Commission, 2002), other ETF partner countries cannot at this moment. But the Helsinki Communiqué[43] promotes “the exchange of information, expertise and results with third countries, particularly those countries covered by the ‘enlargement’ policy and by the ‘wider Europe neighbourhood’ policy”. Therefore, the ETF has a key role in supporting relevant exercises and dedicated approaches.

3. MISUNDERSTANDINGS BETWEEN THE EU CONCEPTS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND LIFELONG LEARNING AND THEIR USE IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES

3.1 The definition of vocational education and training in EU policy documents

As defined by Cedefop (Cedefop, 2004) and the European Commission (2007), “[...] VET comprises all more or less organised or structured activities that aim to provide people with the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to perform a job or a set of jobs, whether or not they lead to a formal qualification [...] VET is independent of venue, age or other characteristics of participants and previous level of qualifications [...] VET takes a variety of forms in different countries and also within a given country. It can be organised as prevocational training to prepare young people for transition to a VET programme at upper secondary level [...] VET at post-secondary level provides access to higher skilled jobs and can also open the way to higher education [...] Continuing vocational training takes multiple forms, ranging from short training courses to participation in advanced and longer programmes [...]”.

The Copenhagen declaration and the Maastricht and Helsinki Communiqués do not provide a more precise definition. They also refer to a broad definition of VET when they describe the impact of VET on economic growth, employability and social inclusion. “VET constitutes a major part of lifelong learning. [When] lifelong learning covers learning in all forms and in all settings [...] VET is an integral part of this. It plays a key role in human capital accumulation for the achievement of economic growth, employment and social objectives. VET is an essential tool in providing European citizens with the skills, knowledge and competences needed in the labour market and knowledge based society. The fact remains that VET caters for a major part of learners in Europe and a significant share of the future workforce will need vocational skills and competences"[44].

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[43] The Helsinki Communiqué, 5 December 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/vocational_en.html

These definitions are very broad and rather vague and hide some key questions for the design and the implementation of education and training reforms in the ETF partner countries: the differences between vocational and technical routes, the ways those routes can prepare for higher education, the development of post-secondary and short vocational higher education, the levels of qualification provided and more widely the role of VET in lifelong learning strategies.

3.2 Vocational and technical routes

A serious ambiguity in EU definitions of vocational education and training comes from the lack of a clear distinction between *technical* education and *vocational* education. Indeed not all EU countries have three distinct routes (general, technical and vocational) at upper secondary level. Recent trends show significant differences between technical and vocational routes, with the latter leading predominantly to the labour market while the former tends to lead to higher education. These differences are often more significant than differences between technical and general routes. Trends also show considerable transfers between the routes, and an analysis of this is essential in order to correctly understand the changes in the education systems and in particular the transition between VET and higher education such as in the new Member States (ETF, 2005).

Few documents (Leney, 2005; Cedefop, 2004) identify this difference but their analysis does not go into sufficient depth because of a lack of relevant data. Eurostat statistics (European Commission, 2007) that try to show the breakdown of participation of students into general and vocational education are difficult to interpret. A minority of countries count technical routes with general routes, while the majority does not. This can lead to an overestimation of the importance of vocational education and to misleading conclusions about its impact on issues such as early school leaving. It also negatively affects the analysis of countries in transition such as the new Member States (and the ETF partner countries) where changes strongly affect those routes, with rapid growth of enrolment in technical routes and even more rapid decline in vocational routes (ETF, 2005).

3.3 Post-secondary VET and higher education

Another ambiguity regards post-secondary VET. Although the definition of VET explicitly refers to secondary and post-secondary VET in Cedefop's analysis of the attractiveness and image of the role of VET in fighting early school leaving in particular, the Maastricht Study and Cedefop synthesis of it only consider enrolments in VET at secondary level. Of course they complain about the lack of relevant data and indicators which hamper a more broad assessment of progress but they fail to analyse the important changes and developments at post-secondary level and this contradicts with the broad definition given above.

In fact, the entire definition of post-secondary VET is ambiguous and variable. As noted by McCoshan (2008, p. 88), "one of the key features of recent trends in the labour market is the emergence of demand for workers skilled to a level between upper-secondary and tertiary level, often taking the form of a demand for high levels of occupation-specific skills coupled to increased levels of underpinning theoretical knowledge. The ways education systems answer these needs is often termed 'post-secondary non-tertiary' (PSNT) education, but there are definitional issues with how the educational world defines it [...] Thus, what some countries classify as PSNT others classify as upper-secondary or tertiary".

Indeed, higher education is also increasingly developing vocational pathways of short and longer duration, under bachelor and master programmes[45], and the distinction between post-secondary and non-tertiary, and short higher vocational programmes is not always clear. In total, it can be argued that borders between VET and higher education are becoming increasingly blurred[46]. However, the implementation of the Bologna and the Copenhagen processes are not yet coordinated and may follow different logics. Furthermore, VET national stakeholders and higher education stakeholders remain separate in most countries. Therefore, more and more questions arise about how to ensure a smooth transition between both worlds while answering the needs of the labour market, and about the distinction between medium and high level qualifications.

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[44] The Helsinki Communiqué, 5 Decembre 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/vocational_en.html

3.4 Education and qualification levels

Other issues arise from the references to education and qualification levels. In EU documents, VET is often associated with *medium level qualifications,* while *high level qualifications* are supposed to be provided by higher education. But the broad Cedefop definition introduces the idea that VET, when developed at post-secondary level, would lead to *higher skilled jobs.* This is of course closely linked to recent trends in the labour market noted by McCoshan (2008). The ambiguity is about the way those new qualifications as well as the programmes preparing for them will be classified.

These distinctions are not just rhetoric. Rather than ambiguities, they reflect real difficulties, since they are embedded in the ways labour markets are structured and regulated, and differ among EU countries[47]. Moving from the ISCED[48] classification to the EQF[49] levels, EU policy towards qualification levels is moving towards a mixed approach with some consideration of labour market issues. There is already a serious debate between VET and higher education experts and stakeholders concerning EQF level 5 (Calleja, 2008).

3.5 VET and lifelong learning

Thus, the Lisbon Agenda and related EU policy developments in education and training have widely broadened the scope of VET which prevailed during the nineties. VET is increasingly seen as a key component of an integrated vision of lifelong learning. Moreover, as developed in the EC Communication (2001), lifelong learning is used with three different meanings: (i) as an objective for individuals and society, (ii) as a policy objective for policymakers who have to develop appropriate strategies and facilitate universal access to lifelong learning, and (iii) as an analytical framework for education and training policies set up by countries, as in the context of the regular *Joint Reports* on progress towards the Lisbon Objectives for education and training (Council and Commission, 2008). This threefold meaning nurtures ambiguities, particularly since countries may have lifelong learning strategies even when lifelong learning is far from reality for most citizens.

Another ambiguity comes from the fact that the EU benchmark covering the participation of adults in education and training is commonly called the ‘Lifelong learning benchmark’, thus promoting the idea that lifelong learning is only about adults.

In total, although the EU has a broad definition of VET, this means a lack of precision as far as the different components are concerned, some ambiguous definitions, and real difficulties arising from the changing demands of the labour market and recent trends at the borders between VET and higher education. The consideration of VET as a masterpiece of lifelong learning strategies gives new insights and allows for a better integration between all VET components and between VET and the whole education and training processes. The question is to know how far these elements are taken into account in the ETF partner countries when dealing with VET reforms.

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[45] One particular example is France which developed the *licences professionnelles* in addition to the academic *licences.* Another example is Germany which set up the grade of *Applied Bachelor* in addition to the *Academic Bachelor.* More widely, in France, apprenticeship is now a complete route parallel to the traditional education route, going from the lowest to the highest qualification levels.

[46] As advocated during the Cedefop agora on higher education and VET in 2007 (Dunkel and Le Mouillour, 2006) and more recently by the ‘Helsinki’ Study (McCoshan, 2008).

[47] The strong distinction in the collective agreements in France between *cadres* and *non-cadres* supposes that qualifications provided at post-secondary level and also in the context of short courses in higher education remain at lower level than the ones provided at the end of (long) higher education.

[48] International Standard Classification for Education.

[49] European Qualification Framework.

3.6 VET and lifelong learning in ETF partner countries

In fact, when ETF partner countries initiate VET reforms they generally address only a narrow part of it, typically just initial vocational education in secondary schools. In most ETF partner countries, VET still takes in a high percentage of secondary students and in fact the differences between general, technical and vocational routes are still very strong with no or few pathways between them. Post-secondary education barely exists. Higher education is still very academically oriented with, again, pathways between secondary VET and higher education more the exception than the rule. In the Western Balkans adult training barely exists, except in the context of limited labour market training. In general, businesses show little interest in skills development because very high levels of unemployment offer the possibility to hire cheap labour. In most MEDA countries, VET is not well developed and housed in specific institutions under specific ministries, separated from mainstream education and its ministry.

More often than not, lifelong learning is seen as training provision for adults, comprising labour market training for unemployed people, and adult education, to give adults access to the diplomas of the education system. Formal education is considered as being provided exclusively by the public education system while qualifications provided by private training providers are seen as non-formal. In addition, social partnership is often reduced to partnerships between ministries, demonstrating the lack of interest among many policymakers for partnerships with employers' and workers' unions, and the lack of interest among those unions in issues related to education and training. Instead of seeing VET as embedded in a broader lifelong learning concept and framework, several ETF partner countries tend to view VET and lifelong learning as two parallel but separate concepts, mainly under the responsibility of the ministry of education.

While VET reforms are on the political agenda in these countries and are supported by EU programmes and other donors as well as by ETF policy advice and other projects, international donors, including the EU, follow compartmentalised approaches that follow existing administrative divisions. This can be observed in the Western Balkans today, just as it could some years ago in the candidate countries that are now Member States. When policymakers (mainly at education ministries) design and implement such programmes, their first objective is to sustain and modernise what they call VET, but what is most often limited to the VET component of regular public secondary education.

Typically, these education reform programmes start with the adoption of laws specifying the different components of education and training: general education, VET, adult education, and higher education. The VET component often continues with the design of new curricula in pilot schools supported by adequate teacher training and the provision of modern equipment. This is complemented by a national VET strategy, typically supported by a dedicated national VET agency and national VET council. Later on or in parallel, a provision is made for developing an adult education strategy, again supported by a (usually separate) dedicated agency.

In parallel, there are reform programmes in higher education and employment with provisions for labour market training. It is important to highlight the fact that these countries are fully involved in the Bologna process which is now a well adopted benchmark for reforms in higher education, while they follow the Copenhagen process through limited exchanges of information and practice with EU Member States. This situation potentially widens the gap between approaches to medium and higher qualification levels.

Furthermore, as a result of the high level of centralisation that still characterises most of these systems, VET reforms are typically implemented from the top down, with little consideration for the real needs and situations on the ground and with little partnership and cooperation with local actors.

4. RISKS AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Thus, it seems that the ambiguities related to some key EU concepts such as VET and lifelong learning may influence the ways EU assistance to reforms is provided in the context of education and labour market systems in transition countries. This can lead to negative consequences in the design and the implementation of education and training reforms:

- excessive focus on existing VET components to the detriment of newly emerging VET profiles and providers;
- lack of consideration for adult training, particularly on the job training;
- fragmentation and possible contradictory approaches to curriculum development and teacher training;
- widening gap between VET and higher education;
- inadequate response to the needs of the labour market;
- ineffective use of public resources.

One example of this in the Western Balkans is the design of modern curricula for new occupational profiles (in the context of donor supported projects) to be implemented in four-year secondary technical routes when there is empirical evidence that most graduates from those routes will continue into higher education afterwards.

In such contexts, the impact of the messages and tools from EU policy in education and training could be biased and limited and risks yielding only rhetoric, reinforcing existing administrative barriers, and acting against the principles of the EU messages that are the basis of these tools.

Particularly problematic is the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) based only on the narrow provision of secondary vocational training as is the case in some Western Balkan countries, without having worked seriously with social partners and employers on the development of alternative forms of learning and qualification, liaised with the world of higher education, or the development of true lifelong learning strategies taken into consideration. Instead of being a tool aimed at broad objectives, such as lifelong learning and more specifically the recognition and validation of prior learning or the development of better links with the labour market and the setting up of private training providers, establishing a NQF risks becoming an objective in its own right. Even if there is some added value in structuring and designing existing formal qualifications, there would still be a risk that a lot of energy and resources would be used for the development of a rigid framework which might end up contributing to fragmentation.

The same is valid when the EU approach to quality in education and the Common Framework for Quality Assurance in VET are promoted in countries where VET is entirely detached from general and higher education, administrative and political divisions prevent the development of a comprehensive lifelong learning strategy, it is not possible to identify criteria for the quality of the overall system, and therefore, there is little consideration for the role of VET in the global education and training system.

In fact, all EU tools and messages are complex and demanding, developed over years by teams of experts and practitioners, based on the experience of numerous countries, and aimed at contributing to overall national and European education and training strategies. Furthermore, they were developed in the context of VET systems that are firmly rooted in the cultures and socio-economic traditions of more mature market economies and political democracies. In these countries, VET has reached a rather stable and secure role in the whole education and training system. The situation is totally different in the ETF’s partner countries.

Thus, several difficulties have to be met and several obstacles have to be overcome in the processes of designing and implementing VET reforms in line with EU policy in education and training. They have to be overcome first by national policymakers, with the support of the experts familiar with EU assistance. There are interesting lessons to learn from experiences in the new Member States and particularly in Slovenia where a wide and dynamic learning process towards EU policies has developed since the transition.

5. LESSONS FROM THE VET REFORMS IN THE NEW MEMBER STATES

The new Member States have been exposed to rather similar forces to those currently at work in the Western Balkans. VET reforms started in the first half of the 1990s through EU assistance following the same kind of compartmentalised approach as presented above. Although impact was significant in the pilot schools where programmes had been implemented, the overall assessment was often disappointing because little dissemination had taken place, support by ministries had been insufficient and achievements only rarely became embedded in national policies (ETF, 2003b). Furthermore, EU technical assistance had most often been brought by EU experts who exported different models with little consideration of the suitability of new policies in the context of partner countries (ETF, 2004).

However, EU assistance in general and ETF activities in particular exposed policymakers to the EU policy debate about education and VET. This was the start of the development of policy learning in the ETF's partner countries. The activities of the National Observatories which acted as clearing houses between the EU and the beneficiary countries in the field of VET were particularly useful, as were the seminars and projects developed involving the ETF Advisory Forum (ETF, 2003b). Even if the *acquis communautaire* in education and training was limited to issues linked to the recognition of qualifications for regulated professions and preparation for the European Social Fund (ESF), debates about the transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning had been substantially promoted in the EU with the involvement of candidate country policymakers in the debates.

The situation changed dramatically after 2000 and the development of the Lisbon Strategy. The 2001 Commission Memorandum on lifelong learning was disseminated in all candidate countries after which they were gradually involved in EU policy developments in education and training and fully associated with the Copenhagen Process and the Education & Training 2010 work programme. All new Member States and the remaining candidate countries, Turkey and Croatia, participate actively in the peer learning process on education and training. Overall, a significant learning exercise has developed since the beginning of the transition process.

6. THE SLOVENIAN APPROACH TOWARDS LIFELONG LEARNING

The progressive approach towards lifelong learning in Slovenia can be seen as a learning process where VET has become gradually integrated into the whole system.

Four main steps can be identified:

1. The education reform (1996): a strong focus on horizontal and vertical bridges in secondary education.
2. National Vocational Qualification Act (2000): qualifications can also be acquired outside the education system.
3. New VET Act (2006): more flexible and outcome-designed VET qualifications and curriculum reform (2001-2007).
4. Lifelong learning strategy (2007).

The education system has been inspired by the underlying principles of lifelong learning since 1980. It was embedded in a special type of 'unified' secondary school with the goal of offering all young people common standards for further education in the first year and then supporting their orientation towards appropriate branches of technical and vocational education. However, the unified basis of the system was too demanding for some pupils, which resulted in low grades, dropouts and poor vocational qualifications (Pevec Grm and Zevnik, 2008).

6.1 First phase of the reform

Independence in 1991 and the transition to a market economy gave a great impetus for change. A conceptual plan for a new system of vocational education and training was prepared (Mursak, 1992), which was summarised in a white paper (1995) and in the reform of Slovenian legislation on schools in 1996. It reflected research efforts and debate from the 1980s among a large number of experts, where developments in other countries were analysed.

A key objective was to build strong horizontal and vertical pathways[50]. Thus, in secondary education, dead ends were systematically eradicated. Education pathways now enable advancement right from ISCED level 2 up to levels 5 and 6. As such, building a professional career is now possible with full recognition of earlier achievements. Different education and training opportunities after compulsory school were prepared with a choice between vocational training programmes, more technically oriented ones, and general education. Most important was the option for vocational education students to continue their education in vocational-technical education programmes (+2 years) and the possibility of obtaining a secondary school technical education certificate. Master craftsmen and foreman exams were introduced, offering the possibility to continue education in post-secondary vocational education programmes. Bridging courses were introduced between the different pathways. A dual system similar to the German model was implemented to enable students to choose between two tracks: school-based or dual, but it did not meet expectations. In 2001 only 3% of students enrolled in the dual system.

Moreover, at the end of the 1990s, the whole VET system remained heavily centralised with little involvement of social partners, especially at the local level, and weak collaboration between vocational schools and companies.

6.2 National Vocational Qualification Act

The main objective of the National Vocational Qualification Act of 2000 was to allow for qualifications to be acquired outside the education system. It enabled adults without formal education but with proven knowledge and skills to gain a recognised national vocational qualification. This was a very important step towards the creation of a more coherent and comprehensive national approach to lifelong learning.

In fact, structural changes in the economy after independence had caused unemployment to grow very quickly from 2.2% in 1988 to 14.4% in 1992. This, combined with the fact that 45% percent of workers in the labour market did not have a formal qualification (Ivancic, 1992), spawned a first set of projects (Ivancic, 1995) that analysed the possibilities for the development of a certification system which would enable the validation of knowledge and acquisition of vocational qualifications regardless of the way the knowledge was acquired. The main driving force behind these projects was the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. There were numerous debates and many education sector representatives warned that the certification system would become a parallel way of acquiring qualifications, which could undermine formal education and threaten the transparency of qualifications[51].

In spite of these concerns, procedures for the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning were put in place between 1998 and 2000. They were supported by the Phare MOCCA programme (Svetlik, 2000). The National Vocational Qualifications Act governs the procedures, bodies and organisations that oversee occupational and assessment standards, as well as conditions and procedures for assessing and awarding national vocational qualifications.

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[50] The most important principles and goals were: initial VET for all, the development of alternative pathways, setting up the complete VET vertical pathway up to post-secondary and tertiary education, the elaboration of programmes that match the qualifications and the needs of the vocational field, social partnership, comparability and greater compatibility of vocational education and training and its qualifications with European systems, introduction of external examinations, and obligatory external monitoring of the new programme implementation.

[51] Validation of non-formal learning and work experience was already used in the Slovenian labour market in the 1970s, but there were no pre-set common standards. This development had negative consequences for the education system and labour market in terms of extremely high rates of educational mismatch of the workforce in the beginning of the 1990s and mistrust – especially in the education system in any type of recognition of non-formal learning and work experience. For more information see Pevec Grm, 2007 or OECD, 2007.

Integrating the validation of non-formal learning into the national qualification system was a long process. The MOCCA programme helped with background studies and pilot projects. Many workshops and conferences were carried out between 1998 and 2000 that were supported by the ETF and other partners. The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education also played an important role.

6.3 New VET Act

The third key milestone was the adoption of the new VET Act in 2006, which followed the intensive pilot phase of the preceding years and was based on national and international evaluations. New ways of preparing education programmes in lower and secondary vocational education and secondary technical education were adopted in 2001 by the Council of Experts for VET.

- Social partners were included in the preparation of occupational standards that became the compulsory basis of all VET programmes.
- Programmes were modularised to allow for more flexible and open curricula aimed at allowing individual learning pathways for students and adults.
- Learning outcomes were introduced in the national framework curricula.
- Providers were given increased responsibility for the preparation of the school curriculum. They became involved in setting out the development vision, establishing indicators, monitoring the process of self-evaluation, and developing new methods of teaching and learning. The aim was to adjust programmes to employers' needs, keep common minimal standards and enable curricula to change quickly when needed.
- Schools and social partners were given the right to determine 20% of the national objectives and contents in the regional and local curricula.
- The difference between programmes used in dual and school-based systems was abolished with a minimum of 24 weeks practical in-company training.
- A new type of financing was introduced to support increased school autonomy.

These principles became embedded in the new VET Act that was adopted 2006. The reform was given a strong impetus by an increased involvement in European learning processes. In 2001, the EC Memorandum on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2000) was broadly discussed and disseminated among different stakeholders. In 2002 Slovenia joined the Education and Training 2010 work programme and became actively involved in the Copenhagen process. This was an intensive period of learning, embedding and mirroring national developments in a broader context. The transparency of the national system was increased through the implementation of Europass, the learning outcomes approach, and quality standards inspired by the Common Framework for Quality assurance in VET. Currently a credit accumulation and transfer system which aims at bridging the different certification systems is being implemented.

6.4 The Lifelong Learning Strategy; new challenges

Finally, in 2007 a Lifelong Learning Strategy was prepared which provided an external impetus to strengthening efforts, better linking different initiatives and systems in a more coherent and comprehensive way, and developing a platform for inter-ministerial cooperation. A master action plan is now being drawn up.

The strategy is very much in line with EU priorities. Key points include the coherent linking of initial and further education, a flexible and open system of vocational and technical education which enables the evaluation and certification of knowledge acquired through different pathways, and a strong emphasis on learning in the workplace and motivating employers to invest in education and training.

At present, the majority of students opt for technical qualifications which give access to both the labour market and higher education. The number of students in technical and higher vocational education is increasing but in the past five years, enrolment in three-year vocational education programmes has almost halved and 60% of those who do enrol continue their education in two-year programmes. As a consequence there is a lack of skilled workers in many sectors, such as construction and manufacturing. Decreasing the gap between supply and demand will be a huge challenge in coming years. It is, however, expected that through an enhanced transition to the knowledge-based economy, the demand for higher qualifications will increase, particularly in the field of information and communication technologies. The development of new attractive qualifications at the medium level in these sectors is therefore a challenge too. Enhanced local and regional cooperation with companies is now taking place, as a result of which common issues and challenges may be addressed in the years ahead.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Slovenian case provides some lessons and raises new questions.

Even in a country where lifelong learning has provided guiding principles since the 1980s, VET reform has been a long, complex and indeed continuing process. Many key issues still remain at stake. The lifelong learning perspective has been very helpful in the design of more flexible VET which is integrated in the education system but the implementation of a comprehensive strategy that follows the EU model is still pending. Some building blocks, such as effective stakeholder partnership and student-centred learning are still insufficiently developed.

The links developed between VET and the labour market and the cooperation between ministries were at the heart of the reforms in Slovenia. Moreover, the need to recognise and validate qualifications developed through professional experience was a key driver in the change process. It offered a rationale for the development of a qualification system which could become a framework that integrated qualifications from both the education system and the labour market.

However, new problems also emerge from the difficulty to answer the immediate needs of the labour market and prepare for the knowledge economy and society. As demonstrated in Slovenia (and confirmed in all new Member States) rapid increases in enrolments in higher education go in hand with increases in skills shortages in many industries, particularly at the mid-qualification level. Here EU messages (such as those from the Helsinki Communiqué) that plea for increased participation in both VET and higher education seem to be difficult to implement if we do not refer to the broad concept of VET as outlined above.

Policy learning has developed throughout the Slovenian reform process, revealing the importance of national debates based in particular on research outcomes and the role of the inter-ministerial coordination, particularly between the ministries of education and labour. It reveals the influence of labour market considerations and the need to develop evidence about the results of reform projects, but also the importance of viewing national experiences in a broader international context. This reinforces the key role of EU programmes, both in terms of assistance before accession and now the open method of coordination through peer learning and benchmarking.

8. LESSONS FOR THE WORK OF THE ETF

The first section of this chapter shows that VET reforms are too often designed and implemented with a narrow orientation to upper secondary education and with little consideration for adult learning. This differs from concepts used in the EU in the context of the Copenhagen process and hampers the effective use of EU tools and messages. But analysis of the new Member States indicates that the scope of VET is changing very rapidly in countries moving from planned economies towards free market economies and democracy. It also shows that less and less VET takes place at upper secondary level, moving increasingly towards post-secondary and higher education levels and adult learning.

It therefore is crucial not to limit VET to the VET routes in upper secondary education and not to consider VET reforms in isolation from the whole education and training system. The different components of the education and training system must be identified, with their individual characteristics and their internal relationships, and the focus must be directed towards (a) horizontal pathways between general, technical and vocational routes, (b) vertical pathways between secondary, post-secondary and higher education, and (c) transition pathways from school to work and professional pathways through work and adult learning where effective counselling and guidance systems must develop.

In that perspective, the EU lifelong learning framework has already lent strong support to reforms in countries like Slovenia. It is now a reference for all ETF partner countries, with the aim of analysing where each country is and identifying the obstacles and the steps to be achieved gradually. It needs substantial clarification combined with an active promotion of changes in the governance patterns, partnership and cooperation approaches at all levels. This in turn requires decentralisation, increased autonomy and a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

A number of conclusions for EU assistance in VET reform and ETF work can be drawn.

- Ambiguities and misconceptions should be avoided as much as possible by clarifying concepts and going through a comprehensive presentation of EU concepts, tools and messages, including presentations of policy contexts and practices.
- Exclusive work with ministries of education and their staff in charge of secondary VET should be avoided. A broader scope for work with VET in the context of lifelong learning[52] must be considered for reforms in close partnership with all relevant ministries, including ministries of finance, social partners, and teacher and regional and local institution representatives.
- The involvement of the higher education community in the VET and lifelong learning reforms, in order to create comprehensive routes to vocational qualification at all levels, making the best use of integrated national qualification frameworks.
- The promotion of a broad coverage of labour market needs analyses and forecasting, making clear the different contributions of the various components of education and training systems and in particular the differences between vocational and technical routes.
- The involvement of social partners and the business community with specific approaches linked to their own agendas and linked to their need to understand how qualifications and competences are changing and developing, and how they should become drivers of the reforms. This also means developing local and regional approaches.
- The development of evidence about reform processes, outcomes and impact, in particular by involving national researchers and universities in the design and the implementation of VET reform programmes.

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[52] In reference to the broad definitions of VET highlighted in Section 3.1.

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Part 2

INTRODUCTION: HOPES AND PROMISES OF POLICY LEARNING

The main theme of this *ETF Yearbook* revolves around the question: How do the thinking and practices of education reform change in a globalised world? Part 1 presents examples of how the policy learning approach works in situations where international agencies and experts are helping governments to improve their education strategies and practices. The common conclusion is that helping officials in education ministries and other government institutions to craft their own intentions, policies and reform plans is a demanding and complex task that often takes more time and resources than are available. Metaphorically, most governments and international development agencies also find learning difficult in a similar way as students do. However, the policy learning philosophy promises improvements in the implementation of the necessary changes as education reforms become rooted in the soil of national culture and traditions.

Educational change is a poor traveller, as Andy Hargreaves writes later in this part. Supranational education policies and reform recommendations made by international development agencies often lead to confusion and undermining a country's own opportunities and will, according to retrospective reflection by Slavko Gaber. There are case studies and vivid descriptions of efforts to transfer ideas or models for education reform from one country to another. Some of these examples will be discussed in the following chapters. Globalisation of information and ideas often promotes the transfer of education policies rather than the creation of situations where new ideas are shared and learned. Indeed, some countries suffer from these same deficiencies through their own fault, having devised home-grown applications of international education reform policies without proper research and modification to their own circumstances. A typical example of this is the tendency to 'standardise' education systems using standards for teaching, learning, assessment, professional development, school facilities and so on. Therefore, the global education development movement today counts more on policy transformation than on policy transmission.

The sector-wide approach, development policy programmes and policy learning are some of the most common alternatives to traditional education policy borrowing and lending.

This part of the Yearbook is a collection of essays by authors who each have a different perspective – often a combination of academia, policy practice and educational change – on the world of education policies and how to change them. All but one are written by distinguished university professors and atypically to mainstream academic writing, all these chapters are short and offer a window to the personal view of the authors, often emotionally and passionately. Authors in this section express their own views and not necessarily those of the European Training Foundation or any of the European Union institutions.

Professor Ronald Sultana (University of Malta) shares his personal experience as a consultant, researcher and expert on policy learning. He builds a bridge between hopes and realities whenever policy learning principles are put into practice, concluding that awareness of the challenges involved in peer learning is critical in order to ensure that learning targets are attained and benefits maximised.

Former Slovenian education minister, professor and member of the Slovenian Parliament, Slavko Gaber (University of Ljubljana), paints a portrait of realities of a top-level policymaker. Using examples from his own experience as a top level policymaker, he insists that we should thoroughly rethink our Eurocentric approach to education and try to see its limits. He warns readers of fashioning individualism and favouring instrumental orientation, putting work and market competitiveness at the centre of the education arena at the expense of critical thinking, joy in exploring and knowledge, and becoming a member of the human global village.

Professor Louise Stoll (Institute of Education, University of London) invites readers to consider leadership as an important dimension of policy learning. Her essay explores the potential that learning communities offer for capacity building, illustrating this with three examples. She concludes that the decision to develop policy learning communities requires formal leadership that endorses values, promotes and models collaborative learning, enquiry and knowledge animation, and builds networks to support learning connections across different policy areas.

Professor Andy Hargreaves (Boston College) claims that the theory of change should influence what is borrowed. However, readily available policies that can easily be borrowed often distort the theory-in-action that policymakers hold about how people can be induced to change. He provides three examples of lessons in change, concluding that the transfer of policies between two systems is difficult and often doomed to failure.

‘Are governments and their policymakers really learning from each other?’, asks Pasi Sahlberg in the closing chapter of this section. His essay, written in a form of a letter to a fictitious new education minister, brings the metaphor of ‘policy epidemic’ to the discussion of policy change. His conclusion is that the less we are able to characterise our education policy changes through the metaphor of an epidemic, the more they resemble mutual learning, the closer we are the dream of understanding the primary problem of our education systems.

About the authors

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Louise Stoll is a past president of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and School Improvement, researcher and consultant and Visiting Professor at the London Centre for Leadership in Learning at the Institute of Education, University of London. She is interested in how capacity for learning is created at all levels of systems, with a particular focus on learning communities, leadership and the relationship between research, policy and practice.

Andy Hargreaves is the Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education at the Lynch School of Education, Boston College. His most recent books are The Fourth Way (with Dennis Shirley, 2009), Change Wars (edited with Michael Fullan 2009), and Sustainable Leadership (with Dean Fink, 2006).

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8. THE PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF PEER LEARNING

Ronald G. Sultana

1. INTRODUCTION

In this short paper I would like to reflect on a number of peer learning events that I have been involved in over the past decade as a facilitator, and sometimes as a participant. These experiences have involved leading groups of policymakers and/or policy implementers from developing countries to observe ‘best’ practice either in more industrially advanced countries, or in countries at a similar stage of development as their own. In the latter case, despite sharing similar constraints, the host country showcased initiatives which were deemed by the organisers of the peer learning exercise to have been sufficiently successful as to deserve wider attention and possibly emulation. I have also led or participated in peer learning teams made up of policy staff from a number of different EU Member States where, despite somewhat different dynamics, the process and intended outcomes were similar: policy learning.

My aim in this paper is not to describe these experiences with peer learning events in any great detail, but rather to examine some of the promises and pitfalls associated with them and to question some of their underpinning assumptions. Several of the issues raised in this chapter reinforce points made in Chapter 4, where some aspects of peer learning are mapped out in more detail. My main argument here is that while much learning may take place during such events, the outcomes should not be taken for granted. There are pitfalls that should be avoided. Examples from my involvement in peer learning events will be used to illustrate such pitfalls, as well as other general points I would like to make. Peer learning has many forms – some of them may be different to those described here.

2. PEER LEARNING AND THE BROADER DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

It is important to situate peer learning strategies in their broader context. The earlier model of supporting policy development in less developed countries through the direct transfer of knowledge and expertise came into crisis in the mid-seventies (UNCTAD, 1999). By then, many international aid and donor agencies had learnt that policies cannot be uprooted from one context and transplanted into another since each environment is shaped by a complex array of variables, each of which can interact with others in ways that significantly transform policy intentions when attempts are made to implement them. The politics underpinning development had also changed, from a rather brash assumption that industrially developed countries could show the rest of the world the path to prosperity, to a more circumspect and prudent approach which recognised that those most familiar with a particular context were best placed to act upon it in ‘ecologically’ sound ways. The role of donor and aid agencies increasingly became re-articulated in terms of offering support to the process of development through capacity building, and through establishing North-South, and eventually South-South knowledge networks that – at least in principle – left the beneficiaries in the driving seat. In the best of cases, the new model also challenged the notion of one-way knowledge transfer, suggesting that all those involved could in fact learn from each other.

Peer learning and knowledge networks are two of the better known offspring of this newer approach to supporting policy development. The latter has had an impact not only on countries in the economic ‘South’, but has also been adopted as a key plank in the EU strategy to enhance policy learning and achieve a greater degree of policy harmonisation in its Member States. Indeed, the so-called ‘Open Method of Coordination’ relies heavily on peer learning activities to ensure that so-called ‘best practice’ is shared between Member States (Dale, 2004).

3. PEER LEARNING: PROMISES AND PITFALLS

Most peer learning events are structured in quite similar ways and, despite some variations, are underpinned by a shared understanding of how people learn. In some cases, the pedagogical elements of the peer learning events are articulated in a more overt or theoretically sophisticated manner. However, even when the assumptions remain tacit, a careful analysis of the peer learning experiences reveals a set of approaches to learning that are interesting, but also worth unpacking. What I will do in the next sections is to outline briefly some of the features of a peer learning event, taking care to problematise the different elements with a view to facilitating a deeper understanding of the processes and dynamics involved. I will organise these different elements into three sections: the preparatory phase, the peer learning visit, and the post-visit phase.

3.1 Preparing for the peer learning event

In the preparatory phase a number of choices are made that can have a major impact on the peer learning event itself. Four choices seem to be particularly important: (a) the choice of thematic focus, (b) the selection of participants, (c) the choice of countries and sites to visit and (d) the choice of cases of ‘good practice’ to focus on for policy learning purposes. In all four cases, the organiser’s intention to create a powerful, experiential learning environment for the participants can easily be jeopardised if certain considerations are not taken into account.

Let us first look at the *choice of theme* to be focused on by those taking part in the peer learning visit. Education development literature is replete with examples of how donor and aid agencies have thematic and policy priorities that fail to resonate with the target country. Such priorities may be chosen for reasons that have little to do with what recipient countries want, or what they feel they need at a given moment in time. Indeed, such priorities may reflect values, concerns, existing expertise, strategic niche and even economic or political interests of the donor/aid agency.

A case in point is the recent policy interest in career guidance at the World Bank, the ETF and the ILO – a focus that was triggered by a high-profile OECD review of the field that started in 2000 (OECD, 2004). Policy and research networks, together with policy entrepreneurs came together to influence donor and aid agency investment in the field, even though several of the countries that were targeted had labour market, socio-economic, political and cultural peculiarities that limit the relevance of career guidance. If policy leaders from these countries do not see the theme as relevant or as a priority, they may still opt to play along with the promoting agency. They may want to maintain good relations to ensure that they can benefit from other, more appealing projects that may come along in the future. They may also see it as an opportunity for capacity building or for infrastructural resource acquisition, which they quietly transfer to areas and services that are considered to be true priorities. Such dynamics and processes are easy to understand, and suggest that it is critical that decisions about learning targets and priorities are made by both the peer learning organisers and participants together.

Linked to this is the *choice of participants*. This goes beyond ensuring a suitable mix which furthers the learning goals of the peer learning exercise. If, for instance, the intended outcome is increased sensitivity to the dynamics of the policy implementation process, it can make a lot of sense to have teams made up of policymakers and policy implementers at the different levels of the school system, possibly from both the state and non-state sectors. Problems arise, however, when the agency organising the peer learning event depends on ministries to select participants. I have been quite surprised at times by the profile of partners joining peer learning visits, as well as their motivation for doing so. In one case, for instance, it became obvious that a senior staff member from a minister's policy unit was using his privileged position to ensure that he was first in line for several study visits abroad. In another case, it was clear that ministers were using study visits to reward loyal or favoured civil servants, irrespective of whether or not the latter had formal responsibilities in the thematic area or an interest or expertise in it. Donor and aid agencies are of course not unaware of such dynamics, and some have developed diplomatic but firm ways of ensuring that those who join peer learning events have an appropriate profile. At other times, however, such control or discretion cannot be exercised, seriously jeopardising the learning outcomes envisaged.

The *choice of country or countries* to visit to encourage peer learning and emulation is also far from being a straightforward one, and the wrong selection can severely limit the effectiveness of the whole exercise. If peers consider that the resource gap between their countries and the host context is too wide, they may very easily conclude that success can be explained away by the access that the showcased initiative has to funds, staff, technology, and so on. They may fail to dig deeper to understand why others who have similar or even more resources have nevertheless failed to achieve the same results. They may also remain unconvinced that institutional cultures and work protocols impact on motivation in ways that shape outcomes, and may therefore be unwilling to see what lessons they can learn from the visit. A less often mentioned obstacle to policy learning during peer visits occurs when participants are invited to consider the achievements of countries (or regions in their own country) that they consider to be at the same or even lower levels of economic development than themselves. South-South learning partnerships may thus suffer from a misguided sense of pride.

Finally, there are a number of issues to consider when *choosing the practice* that will be focused on during the peer learning visit. The trend is to showcase those policies and practices which key stakeholders consider to have been successful. Clearly, one can also learn a great deal from practices and policies that have been less successful — though many ministries will understandably be reluctant to be used as an example of what *not* to do. Some countries or agencies are particularly aggressive in marketing their policy 'products', often presenting an excessively positive picture of 'best practice' in the hope that visitors might 'buy' the product and the services that go along with it. What constitutes 'best practice' is also problematic, and indeed in such a complex field as education, where the appropriateness of action is determined by context, it is probably incorrect to refer to 'best' or 'good' practice (King, 2007). What is successful and laudable in one context may very well be inappropriate, dysfunctional or even damaging in another. In my view, policy *learning* (i.e. not policy *borrowing*) is enhanced if the focus is on the *process* rather than the *product*. The effort of participants to compare and contrast what they see in another context with what they are accustomed to helps them to imagine and consider policy alternatives, provides them with yardsticks by which to evaluate their own systems, describes what might be the consequences of certain courses of policy decisions, and lays bare the complex dynamics that shape education systems. In short, it strengthens the basis for intelligent problem solving. The goal of building up such skills might be easier to achieve in a 'foreign' context because the peer visitors are not personally implicated in the change forces and power structures that shape this context. When such an exercise is ably supported by facilitators, who help tacit assumptions come to the surface, and who connect context-specific observations to broader frameworks that deepen the understanding of educational phenomena, then policy learning is much enhanced. It is also a good antidote to the depoliticising and disempowering effect that the notion of 'best practice' can encourage: when policy options are presented as 'best', irrespective of context, the underlying message is that local implementers are exonerated from making difficult choices from among the alternatives that are present, or that have to be creatively – and not infrequently painfully – imagined. Why should they do this if international 'experts' have concluded that a particular course of action is 'best'?

3.2 The peer learning visit

There are many issues that can be raised in relation to the peer learning event itself. In some cases, participants have been 'primed' for the visit through set reading tasks. They may have been asked to analyse policy documents or articles that provide a useful theoretical framework. They may also have had a say in the organisation of the programme of events or been given a template that helps them structure their observations, thus keeping them on task and on target throughout the different activities. The best peer learning visits make sure that the learning and observations are articulated in ways that render them subject to individual and group discussion and debate, so that the deeper meaning of a particular policy, and the implications this has for practice, are made sense of and co-constructed between peers. Various methods are used, including the keeping of reflective journals, and debriefing sessions at the end of each day.

A major challenge and pitfall here is the struggle to ensure that participants are nudged from their epistemological, ideological and cognitive comfort zones. As cognitive and constructivist learning theory approaches have emphasised, we tend to approach new phenomena through the lens of our prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences (Coburn and Stein, 2006). We 'read' what we see in ways that sift out the cognitively unfamiliar and challenging. Indeed, we actively transform the context in front of us to make it more congruent with our prior practices, routines and convictions. We tend to do this by focusing on surface manifestations rather than deeper pedagogical and educational principles. This is why it is not uncommon for participants to claim, when confronted with what is clearly innovative practice that contrasts with what takes place in their own context: "But we are already doing this!" The ability of peer learning events to create powerful environments that shift participants from previously held views depends on several elements, not least the skill of the facilitators leading the group discussion. Other contributing factors include the knowledge that participants have of educational issues: as mentioned earlier, it is not uncommon for policy staff to be political appointees who have little technical mastery of the field.

3.3 Post-peer learning phase

One important aspect of the post-peer learning phase is the evaluation that is carried out both by the participants, and by the hosts. Usually, such evaluations seem to be most effective and useful when they are built into the group reflection and feedback at the end of each day. This reflection not only enhances learning, it also encourages ownership of the peer learning experience, which in some cases can be flexibly shaped to respond to emerging needs. Articulating perceptions of both the outcomes and the processes that led to them can also develop important insights among both guests and hosts.

Earlier we noted that both peer learning and knowledge networks are strategic responses to advances in the politics of development. Indeed, peer learning events that bring together policy staff from the same or different countries often have a secondary aim: that of creating a group that gets to know each other personally and professionally, developing a shared vocabulary and understanding in relation to specific policy issues. The intense interaction during peer learning events can lead to the establishment of ‘epistemic communities’ and ‘policy communities’ where participants commit to the continuation of the learning and sharing experience *after* the structured peer learning event is formally over. The organising agency may support such interaction in various ways. It may, for instance, provide a communications infrastructure, or it may employ an expert to animate a virtual community by adding value to the deliberations of the policy consultation network. Some networks manage to remain functional over time, and organise virtual or face-to-face meetings on a regular basis to ensure effective dissemination of ideas, to share policy experience, and to enhance mutual capacity-building.

In my experience, such staying power is rare: the attention and energy of policy staff are generally absorbed by the daily demands of office, where immediacy and crisis management determine priorities. Resolutions made during relatively peaceful peer learning visits often fail to survive into the hectic daily routines of life back in the office. In most cases, the agency that invested in the peer learning event pays little attention to ensuring continuity, other than to perhaps making sure that the same people are involved in other, related peer learning events. I have seen little evaluative research that strives to find out what *remains* after the peer learning experience, and the extent to which new insights are indeed integrated in policy and practice. As a consequence, our understanding of the way good practice is recognised, understood, and adapted in other contexts remains somewhat weak and superficial.

4. CONCLUSION

Peer learning events hold much promise in creating powerful, experiential learning environments that help educators deepen their understanding of the complexity of the policymaking process, and of the ways in which they can intervene in order to bring about positive and meaningful change. However, awareness of the pitfalls and challenges involved in peer learning is critical for ensuring that learning targets are attained and for maximising the benefit from peer learning. In the pre-peer learning visit stage a series of appropriate choices must be made in relation to the thematic focus, the selection of participants, the choice of countries and sites to visit, and the choice of cases of ‘good practice’ to consider. Other challenges arise during the peer learning visit itself, with the likelihood of nudging participants from their epistemological, ideological and cognitive comfort zones being enhanced if they have been properly prepared for the event, and if a range of strategies are used to intensify and structure the reflective process. Such learning can be extended beyond the visits themselves if these lead to the development of ‘epistemic communities’ and ‘policy communities’ that nurture and organisationally sustain the powerful notion of learning from peers.

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9. SNAPSHOTS OF POLICYMAKING IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Slavko Gaber

Change in education is a structured development. In Slovenia as a newly established country, it was a challenging, enriching, conflicting and demanding endeavour. Looking back, sound changes as well as misconceptions and illusions can be viewed in a different light. With the benefit of hindsight, many of the misconceptions now appear as damaging – some even dangerous – in the long term. Yet some of them were needed and had their purpose.

Slovenia declared independence in 1991 and struggled to be recognised. But when, in May 1992, I became a member of the cabinet responsible for education, recognition was only one of many topics on the agenda. We somehow knew that in due course we would be recognised. Many other and often more pressing problems were mixed and intertwined: growing unemployment, striking workers, the loss of traditional markets in the former Yugoslavia, tens of thousands of refugees pouring in from the former Yugoslavia and future-oriented projects.

In the field of education, a group of relatively young researchers and university teachers had been invited to conceptualise and take over the management of education and initially the focus was specifically on the quality of education.

Enthusiastic and with illusions about the pace, time and financial resources available, we started to implement changes in education in Slovenia.

In the present essay's limited space, I will present a few personal snapshots and reconsiderations related to these first years of education reform in Slovenia.

SNAPSHOT 1: CONSERVATIVE REFORMS

From the very beginning we avoided the word 'reform'. For one thing, both citizens and us were afraid of yet another experiment in education. A fear of making new mistakes made us opt for a careful comparative step-by-step reform. One of the hypotheses (which proved to be true) was that the existing system formed a sound basis that we could develop further without overly radical change. The old regime had started Tocquevillean changes some years before that we could build on. Teachers, school heads, universities, chambers of trade and commerce began with a number of innovative projects. One of the most important "projects" of the opposition to the former political leadership was to re-establish formerly abolished grammar schools (*Gymnasium*).

Although reform efforts took place in an environment which demanded change[53], the changes that were actually launched did not face a "lack of opponents to them, whether among politicians or teachers or parents themselves" (European Commission, 1996, p.7).

SNAPSHOT 2: WELL-INFORMED ILLUSIONS

Several demands beset us. Some were conflicting. And it is fair to say that we put a number of them down to a lack of comparative knowledge and judgement. Some really stemmed from a lack of comparative knowledge and judgement. Yet today it seems obvious that changes in society – including "dramatic swings in political ideology and leadership, [...] eroding consensus about societal values" (Leithwood, 2002, p.8) – had raised expectations of the education system, which by many was considered to be far more than just one small part of the solution to many social and economic problems. Citizens had their misconceptions, we had ours too. One was that reform would run smoothly if it were well-informed, inclusive and financially supported. Our misconception was profoundly biased by an over-rationalistic and meritocratic concept of education which had, in the last few decades, reappeared in new clothes[54]: the notion that the global and increasingly complex society and markets require educated citizens who can continuously learn and fight for their place in the labour market.

SNAPSHOT 3: HEGEMONIC STRUCTURE

Comparing reform in Slovenia with the reforms in the region – and even judging by the country's results in the OECD PISA studies – we were relatively successful. The questions are: why and how?

Experts dealing with reforms would usually blame conceptual incoherence, impatience of the reformers, lack of money, and lack of involvement of teachers and parents for unsuccessful reforms that trigger reforms of the reforms. Of course, all these factors are important but they matter very little if there is no consensus about concepts, beliefs, values and interests – in other words, if a new hegemonic structure – is not in place[55]. Without the latter, even the best informed step-by step reform, with teachers invited to be genuine partners and with sufficient financial resources is deemed to be a failure. In Slovenia this new hegemonic structure was in place. We wanted to become part of a free Europe with a high standard of living. We saw education as an important tool to reach this goal. A combination of justified expectations and illusions – that were yet to be exposed as such – provided a solid foundation for the reforms. As the data comparing trust in institutions in the country demonstrate, huge enrolments in education thus producing hope for the future[56] and relatively successful reforms brought education to a high position on the ladder of trust in Slovenia.

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[53] "Recent demands for changes in the education system in Slovenia had been expressed in evaluation studies at the end of the 1980s. However, the change of the social system meant that changes in the education system became a necessity. Thus at the start of the 1990s Slovenia joined the European trend towards reforms of education systems." (Svetlik and Barle, 1999)

[54] For more about the changing faces of meritocracy and the concept itself, see Young (2001 and 2006), Goldthorpe (2003), Tašner (2007).

[55] "For it is no use trying to conceal the fact that [...] education finds itself intellectually disoriented between a past which is dying and the future which is still undecided [...]" (Durkheim, 1977, p.8).

[56] In the period of economic recession and unemployment that went from 1.3% in the time of socialism to more that 13% in the mid-1990s, opportunities for a younger generation brought back hopes for better future.

The level of trust in institutions in Slovenia in 1991-2003 (frequency of "high level of trust" and "substantial trust"[57]

	1991	1995	1998	2000	2003
God	30.3	32.1	33.5	44.0	38.9
Education institutions	52.7	71.6	76.1	82.7	82.4
National currency		55.2	63.3	69.2	64.4
Enterprises	16.8	28.8	32.8	53.2	50.0
Family	87.9	89.7	89.0	93.6	94.1
President of the state	67.8	36.3	44.0	59.2	41.0

SNAPSHOT 4: RECONSIDERATION OF THE CONCEPTS

Reform as an intentional and far-reaching process started with the reconsideration of concepts.

Following a variety of theories and philosophies, experts had different views even on some of the essential new issues, such as the introduction of compulsory education at the age of six. Svetlik and Barle (1999) suggest that "it was perhaps the euphoria following the changes in the social system that created the illusion that it would be possible to formulate a concept for reforms to the education system directly from various academic discussions and conferences involving a large number of experts, educators and parents."

Looking back we can claim that numerous academic discussions and conferences with teachers, parents, and economic partners largely paid off and were a necessary part of reforms. But at the same time, strangely enough, our misconception or lack of recognition of the dependence of education on the structure of society allowed us to conceptualise, legislate and implement a number of solutions that were not easily accepted by all stakeholders in the country.

Knowing that the field of education is at the same time specific and – as is true for other spaces in society – a field[58] for positioning and validating cultural and symbolic capital, we overestimated the common and general interest. The ideology of meritocracy and the universal value of knowledge became our ideology too. Today it is obvious that:

a) the time of transition was a time of relative openness;
b) the euphoria of a new beginning was an opportunity for all;
c) a condition of national common purpose existed in the general desire to join the European Union; and,
d) a relatively unstructured political system and ideological divisions, together with political stability are to be credited for the relatively smooth and successful reform of education in Slovenia.

At the end of the day, this was more important than the inclusive management of the reform and the substantial increase of public resources invested in education that took place in the decade of reform[59].

We began to reform education from the perception that it was the most important way towards the prosperity of individual citizens and the country. Even when the danger appeared that the ideology of the Catholic Church would simply replace the former Marxist ideology in state schools, and even when members of parliament pushed for radical external differentiation at the age of 12, we just followed the final goal: modern, inclusive and competitive education.

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[57] Summarised from Rus (2005, p. 346).

[58] We are using here the concept of field in the Bourdieuan sense of the term.

[59] The amount of public money invested in education increased from 0.7% of GDP to 6.1% between 1995 and 2005. A substantial part of this increase was for teachers' salaries.

SNAPSHOT 5: ENTHUSIASM WITH CONSERVATISM

Enthusiasm for change combined with some kind of conservatism probably made things easier. While some parts of the system changed profoundly (such as when state-financed private education was introduced), others stayed as untouched as cathedrals in a newly built city. This divergence points to the pragmatic philosophy of the reformers and to the fact that parts of the Slovenian education system had been adequately reformed in the years before independence. In general, despite the new codification of the entire education system in 1996, important parts of today's education system derived from the elements built into it before the transition from socialism to representative democracy. Even dissidents, those who fought for systemic change, were aware of the changes that had taken place in the last decade before independence[60].

A typical example is the reintroduction of grammar schools – the *gymnasiums*. The socialist authorities considered grammar schools elitist and abolished them at the beginning of the 1980s[61] and along with them, the traditional *matura* school-leaving examination. Academic circles developed resistance which resulted in one of the most productive examples of establishing new structures inside old ones. In the late 1980s, before representative democracy, resistance resulted in the general liberalisation of the field of education. School control was substantially reduced and inspection no longer interfered with either the content or the methodology of school syllabuses. The criteria of political irreproachability and membership of the League of Communists as conditions for taking the position of head teacher disappeared. The victory of the new approach was reflected in a number of areas. One of these was that in education the preparations for the reintroduction of the grammar schools started. In 1990, the Council for Education of what was still the Socialist Republic of Slovenia decided to reintroduce grammar schools.

While *grammar schools* were left relatively untouched in the years following independence, primary schools received a lot of attention. The experimental stage of introducing nine-year comprehensive primary education started in 1999. An external baccalaureate was introduced in 1995; vocational education changed substantially and the dual system of vocational education, combining German and Danish experiences, was introduced. Adult education was restructured by combining public institutions and a market-oriented education supply. Higher education, which grew very fast after independence (from approximately 33,000 students to more than 90,000) was restructured and programmes were renewed. Salaries of teachers were increased substantially, teacher education (both pre-service and in-service) changed significantly. Curriculum renewal from pre-primary up to upper-secondary education took place between 1996 and 1999. During this period more than 75% of teachers responded to the invitation from a national commission to participate in the proposal and revisions of the proposed subject curricula documents. This, indeed, was profound reform with elements of conservatism.

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[60] In some respect Tocqueville's deliberation on the necessity of the French Revolution can be applied to the transition of Slovenia from socialism to representative democracy. The difference lies in the revolution in France having occurred despite the fact that the new was already contained in the old and that it would have surfaced even without radicalism and bloodshed, while Slovenia, with a great deal of luck and a bit of wisdom, succeeded in undergoing a "velvet" transition to a new system. See de Tocqueville, 1967.

[61] "The Board of Education [...] in February 1975 drafted the *Theses on Careers-Oriented Education in the Field of Secondary Education*." (Cimperle and Vovko, 1987, p.104). Within the concept of education which should be connected with industry and prepare students for a vocation, the abolition of grammar schools was the most discussed issue. The authorities at that time reproached grammar schools for their "elitist character, causing dualism in the secondary school system, which takes away the possibility of further education from vocational school students " (ibid.). Elements of careers-oriented education were introduced in the 1975/76 academic year for first-year grammar-school pupils. The abolition of grammar schools took place in the 1981/82 academic year after the adoption of the Careers Education Act in April 1980. For more on this issue see Milharčič-Hladnik and Šušteršič, 1986.

SNAPSHOT 6: ACCOMMODATING EUROPE

We drafted a *White Paper on Education* while the modernisation of school systems in Europe was guided by the UNESCO paper of Jacques Delors, *Learning: The treasure within*, and the European Commission White Paper entitled *Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society*, both of which brought into play an additional interest in making comparisons.

Both reports stressed the significance of education for the future of humankind. The UNESCO Commission emphasised “its belief that education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development” (Delors 1996, p.13). *Learning: the Treasure Within* focused on education as one of “the principal means available to foster a deeper and harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war” (ibid.). The European Commission’s *White Paper* stressed in particular the importance of education for Europe and its capacity to face the rest of the world. It stated: “[...] the countries of Europe today have no other option. If they are to hold their own and to continue to be a reference point in the world, they have to build on the progress brought about through closer economic ties by a more substantial investment in knowledge and skills” (*Teaching and Learning,* 1995, p.15).

Both elements – the first a reminder of the humanistic part of our being, and the second a warning to prepare for increased competition – are also woven into the *White Paper on Education in Slovenia* (1996). While not yet a Member State, we wanted our education to “enable inclusion in the European distribution of labour” (ibid, p.165). To accommodate the transfer of the newest European ideas, reform structures invited review teams (OECD) and experts from France, England, Scotland, Germany and Nordic countries for consultations. During this process we learnt that while we needed permanent structures for the international transfer of knowledge and good practice, only we ourselves could raise the quality, equity and efficiency of education in Slovenia.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the present I can see two major mistakes we made in reforming education in Slovenia.

First of all, in a time we considered as the end of history, we believed that Western rationalist concepts of society and education were universal. Secondly, the market, competition and work-orientation that aimed at inclusion in the European distribution of labour received overdue attention.

Sticking only to the second, I have to admit that we didn’t understand the opposing and mutually constitutive nature of instrumental (work and vocation-centred) education on one hand, and non-instrumental (knowledge and joy-centred) education on the other. Following the European Union political *mantra,* which was formulated a few years later as *Europe as the most competitive knowledge-based economy*, we wrongly tried to reduce or even eliminate this inherent contradiction built into education.

By reducing education largely to a work and market-oriented concept, we limited it to an important but incomplete part of present and future realities. In the times of the *end of work* (Rifkin, 2004) we are trying to reduce learning and teaching to instrumental (useful), market-oriented forms. As such, it forces schools to struggle with additional unpopularity. As may seem strange, in this way not only non-instrumental but also instrumental education (i.e. the work-oriented part) lost its call and potential.

In the time ahead the contradicting and complementing elements of instrumental and non-instrumental education should combine into an education that accommodates the demands of the global markets while paying due respect to experience and knowledge that are essential for personal and social development.

Education that teaches us to compete – to leave behind, to win, to change the way we tackle problems – can only benefit from parallel concepts that understand ‘competition’ as a *common* search for the better. It will also benefit from persistence of our traditions as values which shelter us in liquid societies. Effect-oriented education is what is needed. But competitiveness can be enhanced by knowledge for the sake of knowing – knowledge that will help to explore different and equally important fields. This is something we did not understand.

We Europeans, when working in policy development with other countries, should thoroughly rethink our own Eurocentric approach to education and try to see its limits. Indeed, fashioning individualism and favouring market competitiveness at the centre of educational endeavours at the expense of critical thinking and joy in exploring and knowing has its limits. By changing our approach we would come closer to a just and fair system of education. Despite democratisation and increased enrolment rates at all levels of education, there is still too much social reproduction of inequalities through education in Slovenia today.

10. LEADERSHIP AND POLICY LEARNING COMMUNITIES: PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE ANIMATION

10

Louise Stoll

Over the last decade my research attention and development energy have been devoted to the issue of creating capacity for learning to support educational improvement. By capacity, I mean the power to engage in and sustain the learning of people at all levels of the education system for the collective purpose of enhancing pupils' learning (Stoll, 2009). This includes policy learning. In this piece, I explore the potential that learning communities offer for capacity building. I illustrate this with three examples. I then examine the processes involved and conclude by considering implications for leadership.

1. LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Creating, developing and sustaining learning communities lies at the heart of capacity building (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000; Stoll et al., 2006; Louis, 2008). Relationships are critical to social learning. The quality of social learning is greater when social capital is high (Mulford, 2007). My initial interest was in how school leaders create and develop professional learning communities: inclusive, reflective, mutually supportive and collaborative groups of people who find ways, inside and outside their immediate community, to investigate and learn more about their practice in order to improve all pupils' learning (Bolam et al., 2005). But learning communities don't have to be confined to individual schools or organisations. Broadening membership of learning communities facilitates the extension of the available knowledge base. Involving agencies from other public sectors brings different professional knowledge that can support improvement (Cummings et al., 2007), while parental involvement adds intimate knowledge of individual children. Connecting with colleagues in other schools through participation in learning networks adds to the existing pool of professional educational knowledge and builds wider commitments as colleagues learn not only with and from each other but on behalf of others (NCSL, 2006). Such collaboration across schools and districts has been described as lateral capacity building (Fullan, 2005b). If these colleagues' schools are located in different countries, this brings opportunities for intercultural knowledge.

Core to the concept is the notion of community. The focus isn't just on individuals learning but on learning within a collaborative community context. Appreciation of diversity is particularly relevant – it is recognised as essential for new learning and development. Diversity pushes people to contemplate new ideas and possibilities and challenges them to stretch their repertoire beyond usual, habitual, or comfortable ways of acting. It often provides the dissonance necessary for learning.

How does the idea of learning communities apply to policy learning? Let's look at three illustrative examples.

Example 1: The Rotterdam Programme for Educational Underachievement (ROAP)

Local policymakers in the Dutch city of Rotterdam engaged a team of international experts to make formative evaluation visits twice a year between 2002 and 2006 related to the Programme for Educational Underachievement. As members of an international team with diverse, carefully selected research and policy experience, we had knowledge of education reform in a number of countries, had been teachers, and were engaged in applied research, working with policymakers and practitioners. Some of us were also change facilitators. Our role was to act as critical friends (Costa and Kallick, 1993), asking provocative questions, feeding in ideas from research and our other experience at appropriate points, examining the situation through different lenses, while taking time to understand the context of Rotterdam's work and the outcomes that policymakers were seeking. Two policy leaders participated in all sessions, with other policy colleagues, politicians and practitioners involved in various meetings. The stance was 'evaluation for learning'; maintaining an external, independent and unbiased orientation, sometimes validating, at other times challenging models of working, but always with the intention of supporting the Education Department in designing the most effective strategies for enhancing achievement and the leadership and implementation of change. The collaborative process involved dialogue and inquiry as we explored intentions, actions and impact; offered feedback and sought suggestions from their experience; engaged in mutual problem solving; provided input into their processes of monitoring developments; and, together, generated new knowledge. This was a two-way process; we, too, had to be open to learning.

Example 2: The OECD Improving School Leadership activity and development of a related 'toolkit'

The Improving School Leadership activity was third out of 29 most important activities for the OECD Education Directorate's Programme of Work in 2006-07, and 22 education systems in 19 countries decided to participate in this project. Its purpose was to provide policymakers with information and analysis to assist them in formulating and implementing school leadership policies for improved teaching and learning (Pont et al., 2008). In common with many OECD activities, the objectives were to: synthesise research on related issues; identify innovative and successful policy initiatives and practice; facilitate exchanges of lessons and policy options among countries; and identify policy options for governments to consider. Conferences provided a forum where policymakers shared and reflected on their experiences, and engaged in dialogue about key topics stimulated by presentations from experts. Connections were formed and some policymakers made visits to colleagues in other countries to learn more.

Conventional outputs of the activity were the country reports, final report, case studies (drawn together in a further publication highlighting a common theme of system leadership) and executive summary. The final conference in April 2008 suggested that action had been, or was being, undertaken or planned in several countries. But how do countries go about designing, promoting and implementing reform based on a set of recommendations in a lengthy report? Discussions with policymakers showed that securing the support of colleagues and practitioners with the findings of such reports frequently proves a challenge. This was the basis for my proposal to the OECD to develop a learning resource (Stoll and Temperley, 2008) to aid the process of engagement. It would enable policymakers and practitioners to explore reactions and responses to the findings in ways that connect with their own experience, practice and context. It would also help them to debate implications of the findings, prioritising amongst these for their own policy formulation and/or practice development. Finally, it would help them to identify possible steps for action.

A ‘toolkit’ has now been developed. Although this term suggests simple, mechanical action, the collaborative learning processes involved are obviously intended to be significantly deeper, involving frameworks for analysing and contextualising report findings, questions promoting reflection and discussion, activities to explore implications, and writing and thinking frames for planning future development. The emphasis is on understanding and analysis, self-diagnosis and auditing, prioritising and taking action, and communicating and connecting. One country, for example, is planning a conference in which key stakeholders from across the policy and practice spectrum will work together using the survey in the toolkit and other materials in a learning process leading them towards consensus on policy, procedural and practice-oriented priorities.

Example 3: The Austrian Leadership Academy

An example of innovative practice in leadership development that was one of the Improving School Leadership activity case studies was the Austrian Leadership Academy (LEA, 2007; Stoll et al., 2007). In 2004 the Austrian Minister of Education, Science, and Culture founded this academy in association with the Universities of Innsbruck and Zürich. Its initial intent was to prepare school heads – who had recently acquired autonomy but had little experience in operating outside a hierarchical, bureaucratic structure – with the capacity to act more independently, take greater initiative, and steer their schools through a stream of government reforms. The benefits of involving a wider group of participants became apparent very quickly and the Leadership Academy (LEA) began including district inspectors, staff of teacher training institutes, and executives from the national and provincial education authorities. These participants learn together in four forums, where a range of creative pedagogical techniques introduce them to research on leadership for learning, school development and personal capacity. They are invited to explore this and reflect on it. They also select a learning partner and a collegial coaching team and work with these in and between the forums, focusing on a development problem that each brings to the group. The change in relationships, attitudes, and orientation to leadership for the vast majority of Academy participants has produced a groundswell at the various levels of the system where people have been involved – schools, districts, regions, teacher training institutes, and parts of the ministry. Ministry leaders who have participated generally find the programme and experience powerful and some particularly value the connections they make with school and inspector colleagues. The involvement of the head of one ministry directorate had a particularly powerful effect on the system when he followed up his participation by replicating LEA learning processes with all of his directorate’s staff.

2. KNOWLEDGE ANIMATION AT THE HEART OF POLICY LEARNING COMMUNITIES

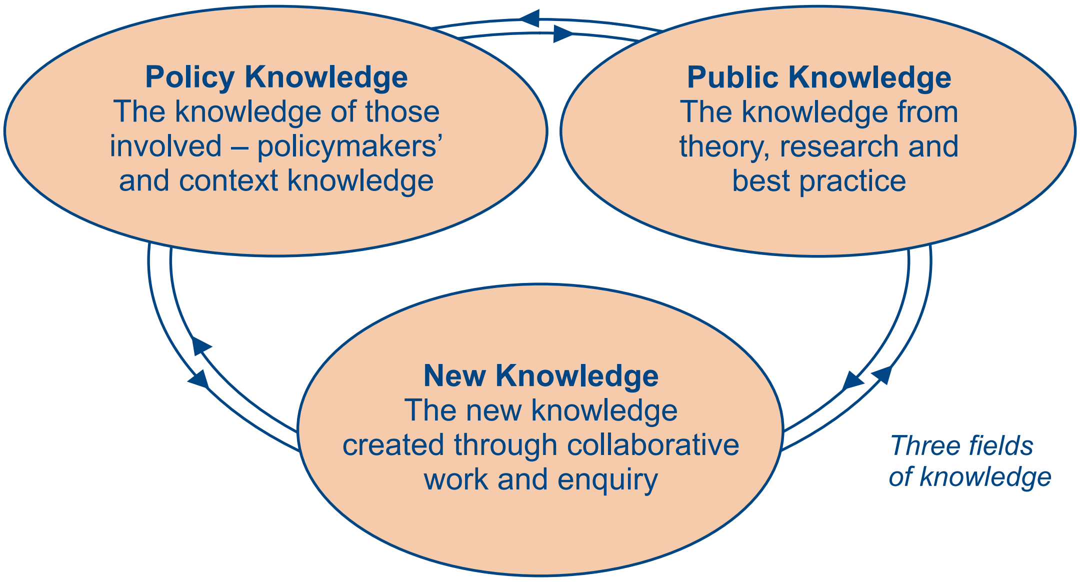
In the examples, policy learning occurs through a community-based approach. The community also extends beyond the policymakers concerned. This is important.

Learning occurs as a result of engaging with external ideas and people from different contexts. Many of the ideas in the examples are research-based but they are generally not 'delivered' through the usual channels of a heavy report or a keynote speech. Policymakers often get frustrated when research does not appear to be relevant to their government's concerns. Even when it is relevant, it can be presented in such a way that learning from it is difficult, inhibiting the implementation of potentially valuable findings. Research is usually 'disseminated' – the term often used is *knowledge transfer*, suggesting a one-way flow of knowledge and a transmission style that we know doesn't make for powerful learning. We need ways of bringing knowledge to life so that policymakers can engage with research in a way that helps them locate it within their context and in relation to prior experience and learning, make it meaningful, and construct new knowledge out of it. This learning is also social as learners test the veracity of their own beliefs and knowledge by comparing them to the beliefs and knowledge of others around them and together they relate this to other external knowledge, processing it jointly and thereby creating new knowledge. A model of *three fields of knowledge* from England's National College for School Leadership's Networked Learning Communities programme (NCSL, 2006) captures this relationship. I have adapted it here to apply it to a policy learning situation (see diagram).

I describe this process of making connections as *knowledge animation*. The focus of knowledge animation is on helping people to learn how to use knowledge generated elsewhere for creating their own new knowledge. Knowledge animation can be seen as a way of making knowledge accessible and mobile so that people can make the necessary learning connections that help them to put knowledge to use in their own contexts.

The purpose of knowledge animation in education is to improve policy and practice so that it will lead to enhanced pupil learning and social outcomes. The intermediate outcome is collaborative knowledge creation: new ideas generated that will help solve the specific problems that need addressing. To achieve this, a range of strategies must be developed that aim to bring researchers, policymakers and practitioners closer together and that help policymakers and practitioners engage with research findings and generate new ideas and strategies to improve learning in their schools and systems. Knowledge animation, as illustrated in the above examples, has several interconnected features and processes.

a) *The focus is on learning*, mutual learning indeed, which means that the process involves the co-construction of knowledge and respect for the perspective and context of those who might traditionally be seen as the recipients of knowledge (Levin, 2007).


Policy Knowledge
The knowledge of those involved – policymakers' and context knowledge
Public Knowledge
The knowledge from theory, research and best practice
New Knowledge
The new knowledge created through collaborative work and enquiry

Three fields of knowledge

b) *Interdependence*. Without a connected approach, less can be achieved, along with a genuine desire to collaborate.
c) *External knowledge* is an essential feature. It includes high quality research, best practice and new trends presented in different ways to stimulate possible areas of development.
d) A *diversity of perspectives,* based on mutual respect, will lead to more powerful learning as well as bridging social capital between key partners in the education reform.
e) *Dialogue*, as a process of connecting that involves the suspension of judgement, openness and flexibility, is essential.
f) *Joint enquiry* is a collaborative process with questions at its core that are underpinned by a need or desire to know and to dig deeper for greater understanding, avoiding short-term shallow solutions.

3. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR LEADERSHIP?

This chapter's title is Leadership and Policy Learning Communities. While the three examples focused on leaders or leadership, they do not explain how leadership might relate to policy learning communities and the knowledge animation process. Kotter (1990) distinguishes leadership from management in arguing that management is about producing order and consistency while leadership is about generating constructive change. Most definitions of leadership emphasise that it involves direction setting and the process of influence that helps to lead people in the desired direction (Yukl, 1994). What does existing research tell us about leadership and learning communities?

All the signs suggest that the challenges of educational change are too great for any one leader to handle alone (Ancona, 2005). This is endorsed by the findings of research on professional learning communities within schools and networked learning communities between schools where both formal and distributed leadership are important (Hargreaves and Fink, 2007; Earl and Katz, 2006; Lieberman and Wood, 2003). Formal leaders create the conditions in which learning communities thrive. They model learning themselves and ensure that the culture and structures are supportive of collaborative learning. Furthermore, they value enquiry that embodies the knowledge animation features and processes outlined previously. As such, formal leaders must find time, space and resources to support learning community development and activity, which should include knowledge animation, and pay attention to monitoring and evaluating the development of the learning community. The distribution of leadership ensures that those with expertise lead different aspects of the community's development, and that opportunities exist to build the leadership capacity of many individuals who influence others towards improved practice by animating their knowledge, experimenting with new ideas and strategies, and motivating others yet again. Building leadership capacity throughout and between organisations by distributing leadership is a powerful way to ensure the sustainability of learning communities. It also helps to engender the collective responsibility that is a key characteristic of learning communities, so that members are not just concerned about their own learning or piece of the puzzle. Instead, they focus on everyone's learning and help to put all the pieces of the puzzle together to promote system-wide improvement and transformation.

What does this imply for leadership and policy learning communities? The decision to develop policy learning communities which seek out knowledge animation opportunities is a leadership decision that cannot be left to chance. It also depends on informal, distributed leadership that helps deepen learning in specific policy areas, underpinned by the willingness and desire not only to learn with and from others, but also *on behalf of* others so that wider benefits of policy learning may be achieved.

In a spirit of promoting collaborative reflection and enquiry, I conclude with questions for you to consider with colleagues.

a) What examples of policy learning communities exist in your system?
b) Who do they involve? Is anyone excluded?
c) What conditions facilitate their existence?
d) What are the barriers that inhibit the development of policy learning communities in your context? How can these barriers be removed?
e) Are you a leader of any policy learning communities?
f) How is leadership distributed in your policy learning communities?
g) What are the most powerful forms of knowledge animation you have come across? Why are they powerful?
h) How might you extend these to other policy areas?

11

11. ENGAGING POLICY: NEITHER A BORROWER NOR A LENDER BE

Andy Hargreaves

Education policies are developed to benefit children and other learners, advance the learning that it is believed society will need to secure its future, respond to crisis, appease special interests and satisfy the electorate. Education policies should promote prosperity, equity, inclusiveness and cohesion as well as the capacity for continuous improvement, human betterment and the ability to deal with change that outlasts any particular party or coalition in power. Whatever the emphasis, all policies are based on a theory of action of how people change and are borrowed in whole or in part from another time or place. Ideally, the theory of change should influence what is borrowed; but unfortunately, readily available policies that can easily be borrowed often determine and distort the theory-in-action that policymakers hold about how people can be induced to change.

1. THEORIES OF CHANGE

All efforts to bring about personal, organisational or social change are predicated on more or less explicit beliefs and assumptions about how people change and what induces them to do so. Reality TV shows that turn around failing restaurants or ineffective parents involve initial evaluation, public humiliation, coaching and practice, more humiliation and final success as people progress through the stages of imposed change. Policies that emphasise failure more than success, and that impose stringent performance targets for improvement, follow a similar pattern.

Less spectacular efforts to improve are also based on theories-of-action about how people change. Identifying exemplary schools or programmes assumes that people can copy the best. Network-driven change assumes that change spreads like a benign infection that people catch from each other. Advocates of scripted curricula and imposed performance targets assume that people cannot be trusted to improve by themselves and need others to monitor and micromanage their actions in detail. Highlighting exceptions of schools or districts that perform against the odds either assumes that if one can be exceptional, anyone can; or that conversations with those who are exceptional can spread modified changes around a system. Technology buffs imagine that gadgets alone will alter how people learn and teach. Coaches suppose that people trying new practices require support and also supervision in order to succeed. And leadership theorists either search for charismatic heroes who can bring about miraculous change or invest in wider distributions of leadership that are able to sustain change over time.

How do we choose between different theories-of-action in developing new policies for improvement and change?

2. SOURCES OF CHANGE

There are many ways in which policymakers appropriate changes from past experience or other arenas.

a) Policymakers can be drawn to adopting strategies from systems that are seen as ideologically compatible, as in the spread of the market-driven reforms across many countries and through international organisations in the 1990s.
b) Some are connected to countries that are culturally, socially or linguistically similar: the Nordic countries communicate closely about policy strategy, as do Anglo-Saxon nations.
c) Comparable capacity in terms of financial resources and teachers' levels of training often draws many less-developed nations to, for instance, the relatively stable and successful context of Chile and the promising example of South Africa but, for ideological reasons, less to the high literacy performer of Cuba.
d) High performing exemplars on international tests such as Japan, Singapore and Finland have received a lot of attention, though some, like Belgium, have proven baffling, and others, like Russia, too ideologically divergent from the Western democratic norm.
e) Attempts at selective appropriation of particular policies such as teachers' masters degrees from Finland or lesson study from Japan can seem more practical and promise to be more implementable too, but tearing them out of context usually undermines their eventual impact.
f) Policymakers can find sources of inspiration in other sectors, such as performance indicators in business, evidence-based practice in medicine or zero tolerance for failure in the high reliability organisation of air traffic control.
g) Last, ministers and prime ministers have been known to draw on their own decades-old experiences of schooling as students to use policy as an instrument for nostalgic revival or for purging biographical demons.

Transpositions of policies often simplify or idealise the times, countries or sectors from which they are drawn. They fail to grasp that past educational experiences are outdated and partial, that doctors and dentists use craft knowledge as well as hard evidence to guide their practice, or that providing masters degrees for all teachers may reflect the high calibre of people a country is able to attract rather than being a way of creating that level of quality. Similarly, running a school or classroom is more like operating a complex travel service or geriatric clinic for vulnerable people than being specifically concerned with the life and death moments of plane landings or brain surgery.

3. CHANGE TRAVEL

Reform is like ripe fruit. It does not usually travel well. In a classic set of studies, Mary K. Stein and her colleagues (Stein et al., 2009) have examined the destinations and destinies of successful reforms originally designed for New York District 2 in the 1990s. With a tight and detailed design focused on specified literacy instruction, learner-centred leadership, intensive coaching and a relentless preoccupation with results, a successful reform in New York District 2 was transposed, along with some of its architects and implementers, to the city of San Diego. After some initial increase in measured attainment, the attempt to impose an instant solution on San Diego that had been developed over many years in New York was then declared a failure. The researchers identified many reasons for this, including:

a) Military-based and larger San Diego was more conservative yet had less local capacity than smaller District 2 within high-capacity, chutzpah-like New York.
b) San Diego's reforms were imposed in two years, whereas New York's had been developed over a decade.
c) Large and complex secondary schools were included in the San Diego reform, unlike District 2.
d) As San Diego's reform mill became increasingly gruelling, resentment grew against the interlopers responsible for its implementation.
e) Understandings of literacy and instruction that had taken a decade to develop in District 2 were interpreted more superficially in the fast-track reform environment of San Diego.

Stein and colleagues go on to document that a little less was lost in translation with a further attempt at implementation in Philadelphia as implementers tried to be more sensitive to differences of context.

Despite these documented difficulties, reasons of ideological compatibility and cultural affinity, along with the physical travel of a very small number of international consultants, have led to other reform initiatives being exported impulsively. One key instance concerns the transposition of national policy strategies from England to other English-speaking countries. These policy strategies centre on setting imposed targets in tested literacy and numeracy at different age points along with curricular and training emphases in these core subjects. Strangely, while England ranks relatively poorly on international tests in literacy, and while the record of its literacy strategy has been labelled as unsuccessful, contrived, or stuck, the country's emphasis on testing and targets has been eagerly adopted by both Ontario and Australia, even though they already rank among the world's leaders in literacy attainment (OECD, 2007; Levin and Fullan, 2008). The ready-made solutions that are advocated by international travelling consultants seem to be going in search of problems or making up ones that aren't there, rather than local problems giving rise to their own solutions.

4. CHANGE LESSONS

This does not mean that we cannot or should not learn from other contexts. But we should do so intelligently in relation to clear principles, sensitively in relation to differences in context, and interactively through dialogue among educators at all levels within and across the respective systems. I will provide three examples with which I have been closely involved by way of illustration.

4.1 Finland

Finland receives a lot of international policy attention. It ranks No. 1 on most PISA[62] assessments, has the narrowest achievement gaps in the developed world and is a world leader in corporate transparency and economic competitiveness. In 2007, I took a team there for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development to examine the relationship between leadership and school improvement. (Hargreaves et al., 2008). Drawing on our evidence and on the growing body of other literature on the Finnish experience (Sahlberg, 2006; 2009; Aho et al., 2006; Castells and Himanen 2003; Grubb, 2006), this is what we concluded.

a) After being one of the most backward economies in Europe in the 1950s and after an international banking crisis, the loss of its Russian market, and the escalation of unemployment rates to almost 19% in the early 1990s, Finland consciously connected economic transformation towards being a creative and flexible knowledge economy to the development of a significantly more decentralised education system.

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[62] Programme for International Student Assessment – a triennial world-wide test of 15-year-old students' scholastic performance coordinated by the OECD.

b) This effort has been coordinated at the highest political level where CEOs from leading companies like Nokia meet regularly with university presidents in a science and technological development committee chaired by the prime minister.
c) The coherence is not merely bureaucratic and governmental, but visionary and inspirational. Finns have a common vision that connects their creative high-tech future to their past as creative craftspeople. There are more composers per capita in Finland than in any other developed country, and all young people engage in creative and performing arts to the end of their secondary education.
d) This vision is shared at every level among Finns since teachers create their country's future as a creative and inclusive nation. Though paid only at the OECD average, teaching in Finland is highly competitive with only a one-in-ten chance of acceptance. Retention is high among Finnish teachers because conditions are good and trust is high. All Finnish teachers are awarded masters degrees. Finns control quality at the most important point – the point of entry.
e) Within broad guidelines and with minimal steering by the state, highly qualified teachers create curricula together in each municipality for the children they know best. Curricula and pedagogy are not separate – they are in a common tradition of what continental Europeans call "didactics". The sense of delivering a curriculum devised by others from afar is utterly alien to Finnish educators.
f) In small classes rarely larger than 24 students, and with generous definitions of special educational needs, the push for quality is driven largely by quietly lifting all children up from the bottom, one at time, through knowing them well in small classes, having specialist support as needed, and not having to deal with excessive paperwork and endless external initiatives.
g) Principals work across schools, sharing resources where they are needed, and feeling responsible together for all the children and young people in their town and city, not acting competitively only for the children in their own school.
h) Assessment strategies are largely diagnostic forms of assessment-for-learning and internal to the school. External accountability is confidential and undertaken on a sample basis for monitoring purposes only, not as a census of everyone.
i) Principals are seen as being part of a "society of equals" in their schools, not as line-managers. They are often recruited from within their schools and they engage in considerable informally distributed leadership with their colleagues. Principals may not be recruited from outside education, and many principals teach for at least two hours per week. Teachers say that if the principal is indisposed or ineffective, they take over the school as it belongs to all of them.

Some market-oriented advocates dismiss the high-performing Finnish example as simply too different (New American Commission, 2007). Or they highlight weaknesses such as Finland's impending generational crisis of leadership succession, as a way of occluding the strengths (Fullan, 2008). Or they choose single items such as awarding teachers masters degrees, that are applied and imposed in isolation and disembodied from the democratic and inclusive context of the rest of the system and society (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Or they overly celebrate how the system succeeds without Anglo-Saxon systems of standardised testing (Sahlberg, 2006).

What might more intelligent engagement with Finnish strategies look like? The most transferable (but not necessarily most ideologically amenable) aspects are the broad principles of developing an inspiring and inclusive mission that attracts into the profession high calibre people capable of creating curriculum together for children they know well in smaller classes.

Without an inspiring and inclusive mission, other less successful measures such as market incentives have to be used to attract and retain highly qualified professionals. Without highly qualified professionals, teaching cannot be trusted so much, which increases the argument for external accountability, standardised curriculum and government intervention. But these measures then destroy nations' capacities to be competitive and creative knowledge economies. Last, without small classes in which teachers know their children well, individual knowledge of children's needs has to be developed in other ways, through batteries of data on standardised tests.

At the same time, contextual differences must also be considered. For instance, it is easier to recruit principals externally and develop most curricula locally in societies of relative low internal mobility such as Finland, compared to those with higher geographic mobility. However, the more general case for paying more attention to succession planning and more decentralised capacity for curriculum development among highly qualified professionals applies everywhere where this calibre exists.

4.2 Raising Achievement/ Transforming Learning (RATL) in England

With Dennis Shirley, I recently evaluated the performance of more than 300 secondary schools in the Raising Achievement/ Transforming Learning (RATL) project of the English Secondary Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT). Two-thirds of the schools improved at double the rate of the national average over two years by:

a) schools helping schools in peer-driven networks of lateral pressure and support;
b) combining outside-in knowledge of experts at conferences, with inside-out knowledge of successful and experienced practitioners;
c) offering mentor schools to lower performing peers (rather than mandating them) in cultures of strong expectation for improvement within transparent lateral systems of involvement;
d) supplying modest amounts of additional resourcing to facilitate these improvements and interactions;
e) providing clear, practical menus of short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies for improvement and transformation with proven success among experienced administrators.

In terms of general principles, this policy initiative points to the success and promise of a professionally peer-driven strategy of the strong helping the weak in cultures of committed and transparent improvement. At the same time, it also shows that where legacies of standardisation continue to linger in the surrounding policy environment, lateral network activity focuses disproportionately on short-term improvements in delivering existing learning rather than long-term transformation in teaching and learning.

Again, in terms of intelligent policy engagement this project points to the power of lateral professional peer interaction and collaboration as a way to bring about large-scale improvement. It also highlights the strengths as well as difficulties of combining short-term and long-term perspectives in improvement efforts. And it signals the danger of committing to innovative efforts within unchanged standardised systems. It does not, however, demonstrate the power of professional networks in general as a simplified theory of action – for RATL has a very specific network architecture of strategies and supports, which took its evaluators many months to decode.

4.3 Performing beyond expectations

Alma Harris and I are currently examining unexpectedly high performance in other sectors and its implications for education improvement. One of these sectors is sport, which we are investigating with team-member Alan Boyle.

Sport has started to undergo a revolution in evidence-based improvement. In Moneyball, Michael Lewis (2003) describes how the Oakland Athletics baseball team of the 1990s managed to outperform most competitors, even after its financial backers had pulled out by paying relentless attention to the statistic that best predicts season-long high performance: on-base percentage (the percentage of times a player can reach first base from the plate where he bats). "The most important, isolated offensive statistic is the on-base percentage", Lewis notes (p. 58). So Oakland Athletics set about recruiting players who had a high on-base percentage and batters were urged to attend to it – to do anything it took to get on base, even drawing a "walk" or being hit by a pitch. Systematically attending to this single statistic throughout the club's selection, organisation and playing strategies, got it into the playoffs season after season, despite falling levels of investment. Before, coaches had recruited players who reminded them of themselves – big guys who could hit a ball hard. Now, Oakland Athletics had some of the most peculiarly built players in baseball, but what they could all do was get on base consistently!

The parallel in football is Prozone. This is not the latest banned substance of sporting preference! Prozone is a computer program that can track players' performance throughout a game – monitoring and measuring energy levels, areas of the pitch covered, and number of successful and unsuccessful passes made – backwards, forwards and sideways.

An English Championship football club we have been studying employs a single Prozone Director. Many Premiership clubs have entire Prozone analysis teams while at the other end of the scale, one low ranking Second Division team's Prozone analyst fell off the floodlights in a rainstorm while recording the game with his camera! The Championship Prozone director we interviewed, who made the program the subject of his MBA, described how multiple cameras are typically positioned around the ground to track players during each game. Individual player patterns and profiles are subsequently compiled from the accumulated data. The key question, though, is how are the data used to improve performance?

In the extreme case, our interviewee described how some managers had tried installing electronic chips in their players' boots to measure the number of steps they took per game as an indicator of energy expenditure. Some managers then set "step" targets to increase the energy that players used. However, players got around this by taking extra little steps off-field when they were retrieving the ball and the camera couldn't follow them. The same kind of cheating occurs in education when targets for increased test scores are imposed on teachers who take their own extra little steps such as teaching to the test, in order to produce the necessary numbers.

By comparison, the Championship club Prozone director invites players in to discuss their data. At first, only a trickle of players come to see him, but as players' subsequent performance improves, their peers take notice and are very soon following in their team-members' footsteps to join this intelligent community of soccer learners who analyse data to improve performance together. Whether they concern individual student achievement, or comparative international performance, the most productive uses of data in education, similarly occur not by imposing unwanted targets that lead to unnecessary expenditures of energy on superfluous extra steps, but by building intelligent communities of professionals and policymakers who look at data together in shared commitments to improvement.

5. CONCLUSION

All policies start somewhere but most of them travel poorly. The past is a foreign country and too much nostalgia or amnesia about it impairs the intelligent immigration of its policy strategies into the present. Other countries and other sectors that seem to show exemplary success can be sources of disappointment if their strategies are adopted inflexibly and simplistically because of cultural familiarity or political plausibility.

Policy principles are much more transposable and transportable if they are interpreted intelligently within communities of practice among and between those who are their bearers and recipients. Indeed, it is these communities of practice and the ways they engage with past policies and comparative policies elsewhere in order to make committed and sincere efforts to improve together, that will prove to be the ultimate test-bed of effective as well as sustainable policy development and implementation. Seeds travel better than ripened fruit and so does the germination and cross-pollination of policy change.

12. LETTER TO A NEW EDUCATION MINISTER[63]

12

July 2008
Dear Minister,

As a frequent visitor to your country and an admirer of its cultural richness, I was delighted to read of your recent appointment as minister of education. In your previous job, you often voiced your concerns about the state of your country's education system. I have also read your writings where you call into question old ways of thinking about education and are highly critical of how education policy has been put into practice in your country. In a recent interview you spoke passionately of your sense of frustration and even anger that past efforts to improve the education system for your country's young people have achieved so little. You also expressed your concern that international cooperation has not helped find lasting solutions to the most pressing problems in education.

With this letter, I feel compelled to do more than simply wish you a successful term of office. You are in a key position to make a difference. Friends of mine have warned me that there are more productive ways of spending my time than writing this letter to you. It is wildly optimistic, they told me, to imagine that an education minister would take the risk of publicly acknowledging that there are major problems with the education system. Instead, they urged, I should seek out your advisors and let them know my thoughts.

Ministers, like many of us, are well-meaning individuals, but experience has shown that good intentions are not always enough. It is also clear that improving an education system is not just a question of money. If it were, surely the billions already spent would have stimulated measurable improvements by now. Money has rarely been the solution to the problems of education systems; ironically, it is often a part of the problem. So let us look at your time as education minister openly and courageously, while recognising past educational achievements.

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[63] I was inspired to write this fictitious letter by my old friend, Seymour Sarason, who wrote a collection of letters to a fictitious future president of the United States. I also owe him the story about the man who went to the doctor which he told on one of his visits to work with me in Helsinki. You can read these letters in his book *Letters to a Serious Education President*, Corwin Press, 1993. The idea of the policy epidemic is from another friend, Benjamin Levin, presented in "An epidemic of education policy: (what) can we learn from each other?" in *Comparative Education*, 34(2), 131-141. Any lack of clarity, errors and omissions in this chapter are entirely my responsibility.

In my time, I have met many people in your situation. As you will soon see for yourself, institutions, interest groups and individuals, among them your colleagues, students, teachers and parents, will all come to you with their suggestions about what you should do. Some will come bearing promises of political or financial support for your work, others will offer to help you fix those parts of the education system that work improperly. Then there are those who will want your support for their own political agendas.

I know you are probably well aware of this. However, allow me to say that you may not be aware of the sheer variety of ideas on education you will encounter during your time as minister. Two considerations may help shape your response. It is vital to be absolutely clear about the exact nature of the problems facing your education system. In your previous job, you declared that "education is not just an important issue, it is *the* issue because the future of our people and our culture are at stake." But giving education top priority does not constitute a diagnosis. You may find it useful to think about the education system and its problems in the same way a doctor thinks about a patient. If someone has a serious illness, diagnosis is not always easy even for the most experienced of doctors. A correct diagnosis often begins with the realisation that the patient is not suffering from one ailment but rather a complex mix of ailments. There is no need to worry about how complex these problems are, but you must avoid being influenced by the urgent nature of the problem so that your diagnosis misses the real cause of the sickness and ends up only treating the minor symptoms.

Your opposite number at the ministry of health can tell you better than I can how doctors treat their patients but the relevance of this analogy to the education sector is obvious. A friend of mine, who has spent the best part of his life working for educational change, told me a story that I find very relevant to the question of how to heal an education system. It goes like this:

> "One day a normally fit and healthy man felt unwell. He soon started to feel so bad that he went straight to his doctor and told him that he was losing his strength and finding even the basics of daily life very tiring. The doctor could not see any signs of illness but gave him a check-up anyway. Everything seemed normal and he told the man he was perfectly healthy. But this was not what our man wanted to hear. He knew he was unwell and asked the doctor to examine him again. The doctor, somewhat annoyed at having his professional judgement doubted, took another look. Again, he found no signs of illness but the man continued to insist on treatment. After thinking for a while, the doctor said: "I want you to do the following routine six times a day for the next two weeks. Take off all your clothes, stand in front of an open window and breathe deeply for 20 minutes." "But doctor, it is January and freezing cold outside," said the man, "if I do as you say, I will surely catch pneumonia." The doctor replied "In that case, come back and I will cure you because I know how to treat pneumonia!""

For me the irony of this story is not the fact that this is so often what happens in real life. It is the fact that in the world of education reforms we so often end up doing what we can do rather than what we should be doing. But we can only do something about the real issues if we have understood what they are in the first place. Clearly I am not telling this story to illustrate the failings of the medical profession. For me, this story poses an important question: how can you go about identifying what is the biggest issue facing your education system? This first question raises more questions such as – how well equipped is your administration to understand the real nature of the problem? How willing are you to rein in the instinct to adopt "solutions," including those put forward by your international colleagues, if they are not relevant to your main problem? To what extent will you and your team be influenced by fashionable ideas on education reform that have become common currency at international conferences and workshops? Will you be able to convince your partners, and your own citizens, that the problems of your education system cannot be solved by simple “solutions,” like fixing a broken window? What do you think a good education system should look like? How do other education ministers go about gathering evidence and making decisions that will improve their schools?

Discussing these issues with colleagues from other countries may cause you to conclude that many themes of education policy are the same from one country to the next. This might lead you to believe that governments learn how to reform their education systems from each other. How else it can be that two nations as different and distant from each other as Canada and Britain have chosen to implement education reforms that are identical? In the same way, education reforms in many Eastern European countries look very similar, focusing as they do on educational standards, assessment systems and information and communication technology.

Before giving my opinion on whether the spread of common themes in education reform is really the result of mutual learning between governments or the result of something else, I would like to offer some personal observations about some of the current trends in education. There are many ways to describe global education policy trends; I will highlight only a few major ones, both desired and worrying ones.

1. Education policies in many countries, on paper at least, value learning over teaching. Many countries have redesigned school curricula and the content of qualifications according to descriptions of the knowledge and skills students must acquire rather than what teachers must teach. There has also been a change of emphasis from requiring students to master specific knowledge to helping them learn to solve problems and deal with real life situations.
2. Education reforms in many countries aim to improve education for all, not just for some. This principle has become more important as social and cultural diversity in many countries has increased. Equality of opportunity in education, as you point out in your interview, is a good way of building social cohesion and stability. Policies that give priority to equity tend to advocate having the same schools and classes for all, using unified curricula without ability groupings and moving students up a grade automatically rather holding them back as a cure for poor performance.
   These are all welcome changes, but there are others which are less so.
3. Believe it or not, schooling in many countries is becoming like a market commodity. This trend is based on the assumption that competition and information are the primary drivers of improvement. The logic is very simple; competition is the driving force behind efficiency and economic growth, therefore competition between schools and students must be the best way of improving student performance. In this emerging education marketplace, parents are free to choose which school they send their children to. In order to do so, parents need comparable data on student achievement and school performance, based on a national curriculum. As a result of this thinking, education systems in many countries have been ‘standardised’ by creating common standards for teaching and learning and for teachers and heads of schools.
4. An economic rationale and the preparation of individuals for workforce and international competition are commonly cited reasons for education reform. Education, as you well realize, is, indeed, an important driver of a country’s economic welfare. But an interesting shift in education policy discourse has occurred over the last 30 years. Social promotion and individual well-being appear less often than before in contemporary education policy

> agendas. Education reforms still aim at equity goals, and social mobility is mentioned, but not as they were once. And reforms are, to be correct, also based on other points than just economic arguments. If I, or better still, you, examine education policies in randomly selected countries, we would both readily note a change in how the need for education reform is expressed.

So if education policy themes are common to many countries across the world, is this the result of a process of mutual learning? I would suggest a different metaphor to explain the global transfer of education policies. But first, let me explain why I think learning is difficult for governments, and even more so, dare I say, for individual ministries as they suffer from specific problems that often prevent them from learning from others.

You, and certainly your advisors and technical experts, have access to global education data and to some of the most brilliant researchers on education. You also interact with other ministers and their advisors and researchers. But at the end of the day, you are dealing with political issues, since most education reform is all about politics. Technical rationality and problem solving – familiar to anyone who works in public administration – rather than posing problems take up the time of most ministers and their staff. However genuine learning thrives on the exchange of ideas, innovation and opportunities for reflection. A second problem is that access to superficial information and ideas through the media and the internet often acts as a substitute for real learning.

The way education policies emerge around the world, I have concluded, is not best described as a process of mutual learning. In your statement of intentions as education minister, you suggest that the work of your predecessors with the international education community, especially with foreign consultants, has not always helped your fellow citizens understand the fundamental problems facing education. Indeed, they may even have triggered new ones, as you claim. Seen from afar it can look as if many countries are adopting a similar approach to education reforms. But a closer look shows this is not necessarily the case. What actually happens is that ideas are borrowed from one education system then applied to another as though the culture, people, teachers and pupils were all interchangeable. A friend who served as a deputy education minister once told me that rather than carefully selecting the most appropriate blueprint for reform, his ministry seemed to be suffering from a kind of policy epidemic.

Although this may seem distasteful, there may be similarities between how education policies and diseases spread. Epidemiology uses three terms – the agent, the host and the environment – to describe how severe infections move from place to place. People become ill as a result of interactions between all three. Not everyone gets infected, even though they may have been in the same place as someone who actually caught the disease, because some people have more resistance to the same agent than others.

Just for the sake of interest, may I invite you to consider how the global education reform movement (or germ) behaves like a germ in an epidemic. Just like diseases, education policy ideas spread quickly around the world but whether they “infect” governments or not depends on the needs for reform and the level of awareness of the education expert communities in each country. Several governments may be infected by the same germ, but the severity of the infection will vary greatly.

I would like to offer you two moral imperatives you may find useful in your work and these are prevention and repair. What I mean may become clearer if you think about these two words in the context of an epidemic. When you are worried about your child’s health in the midst of a dangerous flu epidemic, the first thing you think about is how to prevent him or her becoming infected. Only if the worst happens do you look for a cure, namely the repair. Simple enough. But I dare say that up to now, education policies in both your country and mine have concentrated much more on repairing than prevention. With health care reforms, in contrast, the idea of prevention has long been seen as a cheaper and more effective alternative to the cure. I feel sure you will agree with me on this.

What you need to know as you move the emphasis from repairing to prevention in education reform is that prevention has two separate but interconnected strands. First, education policies must effectively prevent your schools, teachers and students from getting into serious trouble, such as students dropping out due to lack of motivation or good teachers leaving their jobs due to poor working conditions. Second, you must be sceptical and question the policy ideas and information that the global education reform movement will bring to you and your staff. The best preventive strategy, in my modest opinion, is ensuring that your best technical education experts available are constantly advising you and collaborating with you – and, of course, that you carefully listen to their suggestions.

The aim of this letter is to wish you good luck in this important mission. It is also to provide some ideas on how to be well equipped to receive, process and act upon the flood of education policy advice that will reach you through many channels. You may view policy development and education reform in your country through an epidemiologist's eyes; an awareness of the role of agents, hosts and environments related to improving the performance of your education system. Another strategy might be to work like a medical doctor who diagnoses already-occurring illnesses and set about to cure them.

But there is another, even better, strategy – becoming a serious leader in education, someone who can show the way and install an authentic passion for getting involved in education reform in your citizens. You may wonder – how do I go about energising public thinking on education to strengthen its "resistance to infection" by policy ideas that may be popular but are not effective? What I am suggesting, to be sure, is not easy. However, encouraging participation by your citizens can only make your education system stronger and more responsive.

I also encourage you to engage in mutual learning with your colleagues in other countries. As you have stated many times, there is no point in blindly copying policies and ideas from other education systems. The less your education policy changes resemble an epidemic and the more they are the result of mutual learning, the closer you will be to the goals you have set yourself.

In his famous speech "Beyond Vietnam: a time to break silence" delivered at Riverside Church, New York City, in April 1967 Martin Luther King Jr. said, "a time comes when silence is betrayal". But all too often those who speak truth to power come to regret it. The way I see it, time is now. With these thoughts, let me wish you good luck once more and assure you that I will be following your leadership in education with great interest.

Yours faithfully,

Pasi Sahlberg
Education reformer

AFTERWORD

Peter Greenwood

This book closes a cycle of reflection and development on the concept of policy learning which began in 2003 and which has been a consistent focus for our work since then. The conclusions and lessons in this book and the commentary from the international experts in Part 2 are particularly timely as they coincide with the initiative taken by the European Union institutions to amend the ETF's mandate. Through this process, our remit is expected to evolve from the current exclusive focus on vocational education and training (VET) to the more encompassing concept of human capital development in a lifelong learning context.

In practice, the broader mandate recognises that VET should not be considered in isolation from other sub-sectors of education and the labour market. This change in perspective is expected to have a significant impact on the policy dialogue which the ETF holds with its partner countries. From an exclusive focus on the specificities of the VET sub-system, over the next three to four years, the ETF's support to partner countries will increasingly link reform in vocational education and training to developments in the general and higher education as well.

The new mandate is also likely to confirm that the ETF should support its partner countries principally by:

1. providing information, policy analysis and advice on human capital development issues and their links with sector policy objectives in partner countries;
2. supporting relevant stakeholders in partner countries to build capacity in human capital development;
3. facilitating the exchange of information and experience among donors engaged in human capital development reform in partner countries;
4. supporting the delivery of Community assistance to partner countries in the field of human capital development;
5. disseminating information and encourage networking and exchanges of experience and good practice between the EU and partner countries and amongst partner countries on human capital development issues;

6. contributing to the analysis of the overall effectiveness of training assistance to the partner countries at the request of the European Commission.

The amendment of the ETF's regulation can be considered as recognition of changes in the agency's external environment and lessons learned through the ETF's own operational work presented in this book. While the changes to the ETF's regulation will set the ETF new challenges, they will provide the opportunity to build on the experiences gained through its action research into policy learning to become a more effective support for the partner countries, contribute to EU assistance and operate as a technical reference for the international community.

This book contains lessons for the ETF's primary function of policy analysis and support. Although the chapters in this book do not provide a common definition of the term ‘policy learning’, the contributors are unanimous in advocating that the fundamental approach to policy support which gives the partner country policy community the lead role goes in the right direction. While frustratingly hard to measure and evaluate, a policy learning approach is essential for the ownership of the process and the relevance of the final product, as emphasised by many authors in this book. Alternative approaches based on short term policy borrowing – even of recognised EU policy frameworks – are seen as counter-productive with a high risk of failure.

It is perhaps understandable, given the precondition of contextualisation of reform, that this book does not provide a single standard definition of policy learning. Indeed, one of the most repeated lessons across the different chapters is that it is primarily the process of structured policy reflection by the partner country community supported by insights from the international community which leads to the most valuable new knowledge, rather than the resulting formal policy document. This volume is, at least to me, particularly helpful in systematising the process and identifying its specific added value in terms of the new knowledge that can be generated through self-assessment and peer review of a vocational education and training system illuminated by insights from other systems and experiences.

A number of practical steps in the preceding chapters are suggested: one proposal calls for measures to enhance the impact of peer learning on the national reform process – appealing for consideration not only of policy design, but also of policy implementation. Similarly, it is important to avoid normative approaches to policy learning that would lead to identical policy development procedures in different countries. These lessons provide a stronger framework for our future work.

This book is both a timely and useful source of learning for us and our partner countries and together we will apply its lessons in the years to come.

Peter Greenwood
Head of Operations, ETF

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