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**ETF YEARBOOK 2007  
QUALITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING: MODERN VOCATIONAL TRAINING  
POLICIES AND LEARNING PROCESSES**



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**POLICIES AND LEARNING PROCESSES**

*Søren Nielsen and Margareta Nikolovska (editors)*  
*With contributions from Jean-Marc Castejon, Borhène Chakroun, Peter Grootings, Gérard Mayen,*  
*Karl-Axel Skjølstrup and Evelyn Viertel.*

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## FOREWORD

Through its *Yearbook*, the European Training Foundation shares its knowledge and expertise on selected, current topics with colleagues and experts inside and outside the organisation.

In the years since the first *Yearbook* of 2003, these topics have covered such broad terrain as 'the double role of teachers and trainers' and 'skills development for poverty reduction'. But the theme that ran like a thread through all technical and professional reflection in the previous editions was the development methodology that has gradually become the guiding reference for all ETF activity in and with its partner countries: policy learning.

In the work of the ETF, the concept of policy learning first surfaced at the 2003 conference 'Learning Matters'. As a follow up to this conference, we published our first *Yearbook* which elucidated, both for staff and partners, the theory and practice of this innovative approach to safeguarding local relevance and broad ownership of reform initiatives.

Now, after three editions of the *Yearbook* and an equal number of years of fine-tuning their concepts and piloting their use in the field, we considered that the time was right to consolidate their collective content, plot our current position and examine how we can translate our theories into practicable innovation in human resources development in the partner countries.

In the European Union, such innovation is currently thrust ahead by reform needs resulting from the adoption of modern vocational training policies, such as national qualification frameworks. ETF partner countries are also increasingly exploring the potential of such policies in education reform. National qualification frameworks, for example, are turning out to be promising vehicles to promote broad stakeholder involvement in education development and reflection on the local perspectives and impact of reform.

Because vocational education and training policy development is so topical right now and because its impact is best felt in areas that our policy learning approach also aims at, we chose it as the theme through which this *Yearbook* would consolidate our methods of human resources development support and expertise sharing.

A small group of our experts have again given their best to highlight the theme and link it to policy learning, thus reminding us that we must continually query the local validity and our partners' understanding of the innovative measures we promote.

I believe they have again succeeded in this difficult task and I hope that in reading the following chapters you will be able to both enjoy the fruit of their efforts and learn from it in the way that I have done.

*Muriel Dunbar*  
Director



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## INTRODUCTION

*Søren Nielsen and  
Margareta Nikolovska*

### QUALITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: MODERN VOCATIONAL TRAINING POLICIES AND LEARNING PROCESSES

The topic of the 2007 Yearbook “*Quality in Vocational Education and Training: Modern Vocational Training and Learning Processes*” is chosen as a natural conclusion and consolidation of the first three Yearbooks: the first one on policy learning (content), the second one on teaching and learning (teachers) and the third one on poverty alleviation (participants) – thus in effect forming the three angles of the universal didactical triangle.

While taking stock of earlier Yearbook contributions, this 2007 volume brings a number of their themes together. This Yearbook is dedicated to bridging the gap between two key challenges for vocational training innovation in the EU and partner countries: national qualification frameworks and quality learning processes. There are, in our opinion, at least three good reasons to do so.

The first is that these themes link in very well with ongoing developments in national vocational training reforms in many EU countries where the shift from input to outcomes has now made room for increased attention to learning and teaching processes. The attempt to find a new balance between input, processes and outcomes is at the heart of the current generation of reform policies on national qualification frameworks and competence-based learning. By putting our expertise together we will be able to help our partner countries to be up-to-date, while at the same time supporting them to position themselves for the discussions on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The second good reason is that we hope that this Yearbook may help partner countries to avoid becoming victims of outdated competence and qualification framework approaches. Our National Qualifications Framework (NQF) projects in countries neighbouring the European Union provide a wealth of experiences. These are complemented by experience from ETF projects on teachers, learning processes and recognition of prior learning.

Thirdly, the themes follow more or less logically from (and add additional reflections to) the previous Yearbook themes of policy learning, the role of teachers in vocational training reforms and attention to learners (in this case impoverished people and their learning needs). By linking the (local and decentralised) organisation of learning processes to national qualification frameworks, we put issues such as quality assurance, funding, governance and access in a system perspective.

A key concept around which the analysis develops is “qualification”. In the world of education all talk is about teaching, lessons and examinations (“what we produce”). In schools, among principals and teachers nobody talks about qualification. “Qualification” could be the ‘hinge’ binding together the NQF, institutions, teachers and trainers, and learning processes. The chapters will reflect on the concept and practice of policy learning – and ask the question: how can we ‘translate’ new and innovative vocational training approaches into realistic partner country contexts and apply the changing learning paradigm for facilitation of policy advice on structural vocational education and training reform in transition countries?

## QUALITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The main challenge discussed in the 2007 Yearbook is how the architecture of a vocational training system that promotes quality in training in countries in transition can be designed. Quality is not a new subject in education and training but the concept is as slippery as a wet piece of soap. Policymakers, education institutions, administrators and teachers have always been concerned with quality in education provision.

Traditionally, quality has often been interpreted fairly narrowly as an absolute concept in the education world, even as something innate and not measurable.

Although this changed when, in the early 1990s, an apparently irreversible quality movement in education and training appeared, real consensus on an updated definition of education and training quality is still hard to find. Many challenge the idea that quality can be clearly defined in an education and training context. Others find that ‘effectiveness of learning’ is the concept which comes closest to most quality views. But this in itself is not a very operational definition; it may even suggest that quality of education is something that is merely the result of an individual’s learning.

The bottom-line of this all has less to do with any particular (economic, social, didactic, customer or management) quality approach than with the view on the nature and goals of education itself. There is indeed no simple definition of education quality available, given the complexity of the educational fabric and the variety of customers that may even have conflicting expectations of ‘their’ education. In this field, as in so many others, where you stand on an issue may depend on where you sit.

It seems problematic to talk about quality *assurance* when the condition to be achieved is not determined. But this is the reality almost everywhere. A good example is the national quality definition for vocational education and training<sup>1</sup> to be found in a key quality publication of the Danish Ministry of Education (1999):

“[...] it is not possible to say anything definitive and universal about quality in an education system. It is neither possible nor desirable to authorise one specific concept – be it in regard to methods or objectives and values. This is a basic democratic principle, which takes into consideration the fact that it is possible to achieve the same goals by different routes and with different means and methods.”

Education system specialists normally avoid this dilemma by busying themselves with the different elements that contribute

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<sup>1</sup> Denmark was one of the first European countries to design and implement a comprehensive, national quality system for vocational training in 1995. In Denmark, there is no single, nation-wide, quality approach, but there are common principles and measures at both system and provider level.

to education quality, rather than with the definition itself. When doing this, the dominant quality dimension tends to immediately transform itself into an issue of management. Several models focus on quality components to bring some order to the various factors that contribute to the (undefined) quality perception. A listing of such components is then chained together into a matrix and said to constitute *the* overall quality of education and training. This 'chained process' logic underlies the fundamental assumptions of what is called 'Total Quality Management' (TQM). TQM principles have vastly influenced designs of quality conceptions in education and vocational training.

The quality movement is also a driver in most ETF partner countries, in particular candidate countries<sup>2</sup> and countries which have been given a membership perspective<sup>3</sup>. This is conveyed through the Copenhagen Process which was initiated in 2002. One of the aims of the Copenhagen Process is to promote cooperation in quality assurance and development, in order to enhance mutual trust among Member States. The increased focus on quality in vocational training is today common across Europe, as framework governance and the decentralisation of training systems have become mainstream policies. Granting providers greater autonomy in adapting the vocational courses they provide to local needs and demands accentuates the need to implement national quality strategies which seek to find a balance between control and mutual trust among vocational training stakeholders.

The Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) is a tool developed in Europe to promote transparency and provide a common basis for quality assurance and development (European Commission, 2004). It aims to inspire stakeholders in vocational training at all levels in their work on quality. The CQAF describes the various elements in a quality model and raises a number of key questions to be considered by the major stakeholders. The four CQAF elements are

planning, implementation, evaluation and assessment, and review (feedback and procedures for change). Core quality criteria have been identified for each of these elements.

Quality approaches alone are not sufficient. They are, as argued above, tools or measures for attaining the overall objectives of a vocational training system. Therefore, besides the model, the CQAF also defines overall policy priorities and a set of reference indicators. The three overall policy priorities or goals of a vocational training system are defined as:

- employability
- matching
- access

These goals are quite restricted and analysing how partner country systems meet *only* the CQAF policy priorities comes at a price. Just ticking the boxes of the measurement tool that was developed as a set of indicators that help Member States to monitor and evaluate their own quality systems does not get partner countries very far.

The aims of a vocational training system need to be defined more broadly. As was argued in ETF Yearbook 2006 (Grootings and Nielsen (eds.), 2006a) a basic point of departure for most ETF designed vocational training reforms in partner countries in recent years has been the understanding that training systems should provide broad-based education, not only covering vocational skills and knowledge, but also offering good opportunities for social integration, access to further and higher education as well as the personal development of the students. This is often illustrated in the objectives laid down in the different legal acts on vocational training which now also include wider aims. They still specify references to satisfy the needs of the labour market for vocational and general skills and the competences necessary to contribute to the development of trade and industry. But today, they also specify that vocational training must seek to motivate young people to learn, that it must ensure that all young people who

<sup>2</sup> Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (as defined in UNSCR 1244), Montenegro and Serbia.

would like to undergo vocational training get a chance to do so, that it must provide education and training opportunities which form the basis for future professional careers and contribute to personal development and to an understanding of society and its development, and that vocational training must give young people seeking further education and training a basis for doing so.

Therefore, in addition to the employability aim that responds to vague emerging labour market needs, we have always stressed that any reform in vocational training should also make it more responsive to the learning needs of people, be they young or adult. In times of unpredictable change and high uncertainty this can no longer be achieved through a unidirectional top-down approach. Nor will traditional standardised one-size-fits-all programmes be helpful any longer. Thus, another ambition is to decentralise vocational training systems so that schools can have more freedom to innovate and respond dynamically to local community needs from learners and enterprises. Renewal and educational innovation represent the cornerstones of the education system. A decentralised approach to curriculum development implies that local education development work becomes a school responsibility – the schools are encouraged to take on responsibility for innovation.

The underlying educational approach also implies shifting towards new types of education and training which introduce key competences designed to prepare young people for the individual requirements of further education. Thus, the main objective of vocational training reforms is to strike a new balance between the two aspects: employability and a 'culturalisation' of a social, historical and cultural nature that cannot be understood from a strictly utilitarian point of view. Vocational students live "not on bread alone"<sup>4</sup> and we stress that vocational training is also a means of ensuring the well-being of students.

The key policies as defined by CQAF do not fully encompass the needs of the knowledge economy. Standardised reforms may have drawbacks. They may lead to automation ('de-professionalisation') in the work of teachers, and to a more narrow focus on basic skills in core academic subjects. They may underrate the importance of learning how to seek information, and how to use that information in problem solving. In the knowledge society, people need to be able to acquire knowledge, to use knowledge, to develop new knowledge, to apply it to new situations, and to share it. This implies risk-taking (Hargreaves, 2007). Innovation is an important element in the knowledge society too, and this can best be developed in an atmosphere of creativity and experiment (in the classroom). Although it may initially not be so certain what such learning leads to and where it ends, and although results in the first place may look poor, the learning from the experience could very well be extremely valuable.

In most situations in modern life, cooperation with other people is necessary to produce results. Therefore, communications skills, collaborative abilities, values and emotions that support cooperation are all valuable baggage in the knowledge society. It is for education and training to ensure that such elements are covered in education together with all the necessary subjects.

A last requirement of a quality education system is that it opens up for more elements, has more levels involved, and can serve as a guideline to encompass the emerging needs of modern society. David Hopkins (2006) argues that in transforming the education landscape one has to realise that much change cannot simply be effected by governments but must primarily build on a rebalancing of power in the system. Any analysis needs to state what the education system should deliver, and he formulates the following description:

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<sup>4</sup> Larsen J. E., "Not on bread alone", argumentation for "Humanities and the University in Norway, Denmark, Germany and the United States 1945-2005", PhD dissertation, University of Education, Copenhagen, March 2007.

“For a country to succeed it needs both a competitive economy and an inclusive society. That requires an education system with high standards, which transmits and develops knowledge and culture from one generation to the next, promotes respect for and engagement with learning, broadens horizons and develops high expectations. It needs to ensure that all young people progressively develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values in the curriculum, and become effective, enthusiastic and independent learners, committed to lifelong learning and able to handle the demands of adult life.”

Schools, school leadership, teachers and learning processes are very much at the centre of this conception, and it places the focus of education reform directly on enhancing teaching quality and classroom practice rather than on structural change. This is the reason why Hopkins talks about a rebalancing of power in the system. And this viewpoint will therefore be our approximation to a definition of quality in vocational training in this Yearbook.

## ACCOUNTABILITY IN ‘MODERN’ AND TRANSITION SOCIETIES

The quality discourse is very much connected with the quest for accountability. But we have to be aware that accountability may not signify the same thing in different societies. Whereas accountability in western European societies is linked with forms of quality assurance, in the legacy of post-socialist countries quality often also means compliance with rules. The quality concept therefore needs to be seen in its context.

In a paper for Unesco, Roberto Carneiro (1993) developed an approach to education cycles based on an evolutionary process separating five distinct stages: elite, production, consumption, client and innovation phases.

The table below (here adapted from Van den Berghe (1995) sums up the successive phases through which education systems evolve, along with their main driving forces and characteristics.

	Elite Phase	Production phase	Consumption phase	Client phase	Innovation phase
<b>Drivers of development</b>	<i>Ruling class needs</i>	<i>Economic growth Human capital development</i>	<i>Social demand</i>	<i>Client satisfaction School accountability</i>	<i>Management of change Competition</i>
<b>Dominant view on education</b>	<i>Knowledge diffusion</i>	<i>Employment possibilities</i>	<i>Student fulfilment</i>	<i>Student satisfaction</i>	<i>Functionality</i>
<b>Dominant quality dimension</b>	<i>Didactic Pedagogy</i>	<i>Economical</i>	<i>Social Cultural</i>	<i>Customer</i>	<i>Management</i>
<b>Dominant players</b>	<i>Elite Politicians</i>	<i>Teachers (unions) National Ministry</i>	<i>Students Regional planning</i>	<i>Parents, students, employers Local planning</i>	<i>Institutions (autonomy) Clustering</i>
<b>Basis for standards</b>	<i>Vaguely defined</i>	<i>Standardisation</i>	<i>National norms</i>	<i>Customising</i>	<i>Networking Bench-learning</i>
<b>Evaluation methods</b>	<i>Implicit</i>	<i>Student assessment</i>	<i>Formative evaluation</i>	<i>Outcome evaluation</i>	<i>Performance appraisal</i>
<b>Continuing education</b>	<i>Non-existing</i>	<i>Marginal</i>	<i>Separate development</i>	<i>Private sector involvement</i>	<i>Leading role in education</i>
<b>Production analogy</b>	<i>Craftsmanship</i>	<i>Assembly line</i>	<i>Economies of scale</i>	<i>Product customising Lean production</i>	<i>Innovation, continuous improvement</i>

Development stages of education systems

This simplified model<sup>5</sup> may help in understanding why education quality has recently become a point of concern and why the focus of the notion itself is changing. When moving away from the uniform mass education culture of the 'production' and 'consumption' phases towards the 'client' stage of education development, the quality issue quite naturally emerges as a concern of the citizen. The school is expected to deliver a professional education service. Entering the 'client phase' also changes the education paradigm from supply-driven teaching to demand-led learning, which is also likely to be the dominant characteristic of the 'innovation phase' of education.

In this phase, the quality and the innovative capacity of education providers will be the most important characteristic. Carneiro (2007) talks about "the changing canon of learning" in the innovation phase, where "new learning would rebalance the strengths between supply and demand, encourage the shift from a monopolistic and uniform provision to manifold providers focused on stakeholders, transform teaching institutions into learning networks, and also foster the move from objective knowledge transmission to personal and social learning".

Despite considerable differences between (and also within) EU countries, most education systems today are moving into the 'client' phase. It can even be argued that some have already reached the 'innovation' phase. The point here is to underline that economic, political and socio-cultural structures play a dominant role in the stages of development of education systems in any country, and that education systems tend to be very conservative. In ETF partner countries the legacy of the recent past plays a role in education systems (including vocational training), which still have many features characterising the 'production' stage of development. Consequently, quality and accountability mean different things.

One cannot just jump from one stage to the other overnight and quality at the input, process and output levels will probably be perceived differently. There are in reality two different discussions intertwined here:

1. the changing role of policy, administration/organisation, institution, programme, output and delivery, teachers and trainers, and students as highlighted in international debates and in national and international fora,
2. the existing roles and legacy of the same quality component levels in vocational training reform in transition countries.

It is not possible to separate one entirely from the other, but to just simply jump from the international discourse on quality and accountability to the challenges of transition countries without reflecting on these is not meaningful. Our ambition therefore in the following chapters is to concentrate on the sphere where these two discussions come together.

## THE CORE QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED IN THE 2007 YEARBOOK

There is an intense debate about the lack of real substance *per se* in standards and national qualification frameworks. The focus only on learning outcomes is now perceived as too simplistic and it is argued that the pendulum has swung too far and has led to the belief that it really does not matter at all how people arrive at certain learning outcomes. An increasing concern has also been articulated on whether or not this model sufficiently takes into account that rapidly changing and unstable labour markets require new kinds of competences based on being able to cope with increasing uncertainties. As a result there is a growing interest – also at the policy level – to pay more attention to the quality of learning processes, including the role that teachers and trainers play in helping people to learn<sup>6</sup>. Learners and learning

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<sup>5</sup> In sociology the model is described as an 'ideal type', which in its pure form may not be found anywhere, but which can be used as a measuring standard to position different 'living' social systems.

<sup>6</sup> Two examples are the European Commission's DG EAC Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes and the OECD project Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning.

processes are back in the spotlight. Vocational schools and teachers and trainers also become key factors. Research on good teaching and learning is urgently needed in an era dominated by political demands for accountability and efficiency. In a recent publication from the Swedish Ministry of Education (Gustafsson and Myrberg, 2002), which carried out a thorough study on contemporary international education research covering the causal links between financial inputs and student performance, the result is unequivocal: the competence of teachers is *by far* the most important individual resource (also Darling-Hammond, 2000).

An interesting development is noticeable in Germany where – as a consequence of unsatisfactory PISA results – German policymakers decided to introduce performance standards for education by describing content, scope and quality of learning outcomes as the steering principle in place of the traditional system of curricula and guidelines. However, the causal links between outcomes (learning results) and input and process are still not well understood. German educationalists (Meyer, 2004) are now busily trying to develop action-oriented didactical thinking through the creation of teaching standards ('opportunity-to-learn standards') because learning results cannot be achieved directly through the definition of learning outcomes.

This shift away from an almost exclusive focus on learning outcomes – and the related neglect of the role that teachers and trainers have in helping learners to achieve these – coincides with another important development: the internationalisation of vocational training systems and labour markets. National qualification frameworks not only have a role within national education and employment systems but increasingly also across borders, such as in the context of mobility and more generally in attempts to promote economic development and social cohesion in Europe.

Increasingly, the challenge to balance learning inputs, outcomes and processes has international dimensions as well. The 2007 Yearbook should be seen in this

broader context and the focus of the debate raised in the following chapters is:

*How do we re-balance the tensions in vocational education and training systems between input and outcomes and how can a renewed focus on substance and learning processes be fed into vocational education and training reform policy?*

The over-arching concept is strategic to achieving quality in training systems and five components for quality development are analysed with a view to assessing the extent to which they contribute to increased quality learning. These are:

- National qualification frameworks – facilitating policy learning in practice
- Vocational schools in transition
- Teachers and trainers
- The national qualification framework: a tool for relating learning and employability in the Mediterranean region
- Fostering key competences

The challenges for rebalancing the elements of vocational training systems in transition country reform contexts and a wider discussion on the options for policy learning in the political context of the partner countries will be analysed in a separate chapter which will evolve around the often neglected dichotomy between educational 'policies' and the reality of 'politics' in transition countries.

## OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER CONTENTS

Six interrelated thematic sub-issues are included. Each is covered by a review section that summarises the state of knowledge and experience and lessons that can be drawn for facilitating policy learning. In this way we deliberately build on expertise developed in previous Yearbooks. In this Yearbook, this expertise is put together in a publication which at the same time has the ambition to be comprehensive and practice oriented. Each chapter treats 'why', 'what', 'when' and 'how' questions on key policy issues which are very much interrelated.

Readers (ETF staff, EC colleagues in Brussels and the delegations, experts interested in working with us, and partners in the countries) should get a good overview of the current debate in each sub-theme on which they can base their own practice. In addition, they should find some experience-based information to guide them in how they could make good use of the existing knowledge for their practical policy facilitating work in the partner countries. This expertise should also be of use for stakeholders of various kinds (policymakers, advisers, researchers, social partners etc.) in partner countries for dialogue and communication.

The Yearbook will contain the following chapters:

**Chapter 1, *Discussing National Qualification Frameworks – Facilitating Policy Learning in Practice***, concentrates on three interrelated issues that are currently on the policy agenda in many countries:

- (i) the development from single qualification standards towards national qualification frameworks;
- (ii) the rediscovery of learning and learners and increased attention to learning processes, after the radical move from learning inputs to outcomes;
- (iii) the trend of putting national qualifications in an international perspective such as in the EU through the European Qualifications Framework.

The ETF national qualification frameworks projects in Eastern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia provide a wealth of experience, highlighting practical attempts to use the policy learning approach. The establishment of national qualification standards is seen by partner countries as a necessary step in making vocational education and training relevant for labour markets again. This is an important but complex exercise. Most importantly it begs for social partner involvement. Initial attempts at developing standards have built strongly on the existing approach of defining learning

outcomes. This has many advantages but there are also pitfalls. The chapter places these in a critical perspective. National qualification frameworks increasingly have an international function too. The chapter explains, that the reform of vocational training systems under increasing pressure from globalisation may now lead to more intensive knowledge-sharing and cooperation. For this to happen, pedagogical innovation needs to become part of the discourse on qualifications. The world of vocational training and the world of work need to listen to each other.

**Chapter 2, *Vocational schools in transition: Dead-end streets or the gate to prosperity?*** moves the focus towards the drivers for change in vocational schools and argues that strategic school development is the best way of responding to the need for innovation in vocational training. Examples are given of how to do it, when, by whom and using which stimuli and external support. Existing schools in partner countries are described as resembling traditional, Taylorised industrial production units with clear lines of command and control and very little room to manoeuvre for teachers. The chapter asks how school links with the community can be improved and how the internal organisation of schools can be restructured to enable them to become more dynamic. The chapter argues that increased school autonomy cannot function in isolation but requires different framework conditions for schools to become independent public organisations with increased capacity for educational, financial and managerial autonomy. An EU example of transforming vocational schools into regional competence centres, allowing them to play a role as key human resources development institutions in learning regions is discussed. Schools in partner countries, however, cannot yet play this role. The central level control side of more school autonomy, national quality systems, has been the main policy response to decentralisation while the transfer of financial responsibility, curricular development and governance tasks to strengthened school leadership is still only embryonic. A pragmatic and gradual approach to strategic vocational school development in transition countries is therefore proposed.

**Chapter 3, *Teachers and trainers in vocational education and training reform*** takes forward the key messages of the *ETF Yearbook 2005* (Grootings and Nielsen, 2005). Teachers are seen in their double role as professionals and stakeholders of vocational training reform. Initial teacher education is perceived as one among other levers to increase the professional performance of vocational teachers. However, the main emphasis is placed on the dynamic interplay between formal training and the huge variations as regards the real framework conditions of teaching practice in vocational schools. The schools where teachers work are a crucial factor shaping the quality of their work. Therefore, the institutional environments in which they work are seen as being closely interconnected with their professional practice. The main analytic emphasis in the chapter is put on the crucial role of the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers and trainers. CPD is much more than formal training, and experience from EU countries and pilot schools in transition countries indicates that it is both effective and affordable. The chapter raises three key questions and develops an almost 'programmatic' strategy for overall teacher education reform in transition countries. New 'professionalisation' strategies based on horizontal learning principles are discussed, including a new ETF project which establishes a 'community of practitioners' to nurture a culture where teachers may become professional innovation agents. The suggested approach requires teachers as well as leaders to be willing to cooperate on change, as well as enabling legislation, a governance culture, and a school autonomy that make it possible.

**Chapter 4, *National qualification frameworks: Tools for relating learning and employability in North Africa and the Middle East***, argues that vocational training systems in Mediterranean partner countries have to redefine approaches because of the existing mismatch between vocational training and employment systems. The region has experienced a surge in school enrolment but also persistently high levels of unemployment. Obstacles impeding

coordination and partnership with the private sector make it difficult to meet external demand for marketable skills. A national qualification framework strategy is advocated for the region as this would provide the ground and the rules for the game to be played and would promote a common understanding of key notions. The whole issue of recognition of qualifications (in particular concerning the recognition of prior learning) is important because it can help transform know-how from the prevailing apprenticeship systems into recognised skills. Codification and modelling creates relationships and a language with which stakeholders can readily engage. The chapter argues that a framework, which sets out the hierarchy of qualifications, the knowledge, skills and wider competences they testify to, and the horizontal equivalences between qualifications, would support the social recognition of learning outcomes that are today often not recognised by the existing qualification system. However, simply building on learning outcomes will not be enough. The whole meaning of learning has to be revisited, starting with direct observations of the classroom behaviour of teachers and learners.

*Fostering key competences through learner and work-based vocational learning processes* is the topic of **Chapter 5**. The starting point is a huge empirical body of recent findings from an ETF project on the state of play in five South Eastern European countries concerning two aspects of the organisation of teaching and learning in schools, namely stimulating the capacities of students to learn and develop their entrepreneurial skills. Findings are interpreted in the light of current learning theory and guidelines for action are derived from this. The chapter argues that key competences have only a very limited place in curricula and in learning methodologies; new pedagogical strategies will have to be developed to build institutional capacity in universities and to enable change in schools. The chapter describes how existing practices will need to be changed, making particular reference to learner and work-based approaches to the curriculum. The chapter highlights that learning to stimulate the

development of key competences must be organised so that it gives sufficient scope for reflection on and learning from experience, is grounded in real-life problem-solving and is a function of a collective activity situated within a specific social context. By referring to the need for a changed role of teachers and trainers and for schools as autonomous, self-managing learning communities, the chapter builds bridges to other chapters of the Yearbook.

**Chapter 6**, *How to achieve educational change in ETF partner countries: between dreams and reality*, is based on vocational education and training reform challenges from a partner country policy perspective. Why are parts of new vocational training policies so often lost in implementation? The disconnection between the macro (national agencies, ministries) and the micro (schools and teachers) in the policy chain processes is an important factor complicating implementation. The chapter describes three key tensions: (i) foreign donors versus the realities of national education policy; (ii) policymakers' policies versus school change actions; and (iii) 'policy' versus 'politics' in partner country contexts. It seems that policy is typically formulated at the top with limited stakeholder consultation. Often policy formulation is forced into the hands of national policymakers whose hands are tied by donor priorities. This leads to a constellation of interests where national policymakers face difficulties in balancing their own priorities and the priorities of donors. A good solution would be to strive for learning in partnership, which was also the key message of the ETF Advisory Forum 2006 conference, *Learning Matters*. However, this is never easy because the fundamental basis for all types of partnerships is self-interest. Success requires that partners share a common

goal and respect each other's interests. Do ETF designs and work in partner countries sufficiently reflect these policy-implementation links?

In the **concluding chapter**, *Towards policy learning in action*, the bridge is established between the 2007 and 2008 Yearbooks. Arguments and findings of the preceding chapters are briefly summarised. Key lessons for the ETF are highlighted, based on thematic and regional issues identified in the analyses of how to rebalance the tensions in vocational training systems between input and outcomes and how to promote a renewed focus on substance and learning processes in partner countries. The 2008 Yearbook will mark a new approach. After a phase of reflection *on action* we will concentrate on reflection *for and in action*. This is exactly what the ETF needs most now: frameworks, firmly rooted in up-to-date knowledge and experience that can help us to become more familiar with relevant professional and policy issues and at the same time guide and steer consultation work with our partners. We need to develop tools for policy learning facilitation and not handbooks from which the truth can be quoted. Such policy learning tools, based on the principle that people should be helped to help themselves, do not yet exist. This kind of publication, therefore, will not only help us to fill a niche in terms of content (truly international and focused on transition countries) but will also be highly innovative in terms of its underlying learning philosophy. The 2008 edition will operationalise the concept of policy learning and develop guidelines for the facilitation of policy learning in partner countries. It will be closely linked to the ETF development project on policy learning launched in four countries in 2007.

# **DISCUSSING NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS - FACILITATING POLICY LEARNING IN PRACTICE**

*Peter Grootings*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter<sup>7</sup> argues that a broad national debate on the advantages and disadvantages of a national qualifications framework (NQF) can steer and guide education reforms, even if introducing a national qualifications framework is not the short-term aim of this debate. Especially countries that face the need for fundamental reform in vocational education and training can benefit from such a debate.

NQF discussions place vocational training in the wider context of the overall education system. This can help to clarify the place and role of vocational education sub systems in the broader education system. NQF discussions can also help to link education and training programmes at different levels into learning pathways,

while this in turn can clarify connections between such pathways and qualification needs on the labour market. NQF discussions can introduce innovative thinking about learning methods and learning places. Above all, national qualification frameworks provide a communication tool to link the world of education to the world of work and create a platform to develop and maintain mutual trust concerning the value of qualifications.

Many countries are currently addressing these issues to prepare their education systems for the future and it is precisely for this reason that national qualification frameworks are so popular right now.

However, NQFs also have some disadvantages. They require a lot of resources to develop and implement. They

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<sup>7</sup> I am grateful for the comments given by Galina Borisova, Cesar Birzea and Munther Masri, members of the ETF Editorial Board, on an earlier draft of this chapter.

may result in excessive reform focus on the assessment aspect of learning rather than on providing good learning opportunities as such. A national qualifications framework is also not something that can easily be copied from one country to another; it needs to fit into a country's institutional context and, above all, it needs to be owned by its principal stakeholders. Furthermore, it also requires new institutions.

Focusing stakeholder discussions on the issues that are addressed by an NQF will take the reform debate beyond the immediate internal concerns of vocational education institutions (such as low salaries, outdated curricula and teaching infrastructures, irrelevant education standards, and inflexible standardisation of approaches). But a decision to introduce an NQF requires careful consideration of a number of additional factors, such as the resources needed for its development, implementation and maintenance, and the expected costs. A good understanding of the risks and opportunities of a national qualifications framework can be developed through a policy learning process. By learning from the experiences of other countries and being actively engaged in policy discussions and technical development work, key stakeholders at all levels can also achieve a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities that they must take on to make a qualifications framework work in practice. These experiences can then become the backbone for overall vocational training reform policy development and implementation.

Support for a policy learning approach is found in new learning theories which stress that learners should actively construct their own new knowledge. This is the second issue discussed in this chapter. Strong learning environments, in which learners are actively engaged in developing new knowledge in exchange with others, will yield outcomes that enable learners to take decisions competently.

Such policy learning needs to be well-organised. It will benefit from professional facilitation. The third section of

this chapter concerns itself with the organisation of policy learning.

Experiences from an ongoing ETF project on national qualifications frameworks in transition countries provide some initial lessons on making policy learning work in practice. In the last section of this chapter, these lessons will be used to see whether a broad NQF debate really has the assumed strategic value and whether a policy learning approach does indeed contribute to increased context relevance, ownership and sustainability of reform policies.

## NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS AND REFORMS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS

A national qualifications framework is a framework that links existing qualifications of different levels and types in a coherent and consistent way. It is based on a common and agreed set of qualification descriptors and criteria for deciding their level and type. Such a framework can provide greater transparency of what qualifications mean and it can offer a way of developing learning pathways that people can follow throughout their lifetime. As such, a national qualifications framework is potentially of great interest to everybody who is involved in education and training: policymakers and administrators, employers, teachers and other practitioners, and of course also students and their parents. The active involvement of representatives of these stakeholder groups in developing an NQF will also improve their trust in single qualifications and hence increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training. It is therefore no surprise that many countries are currently engaged in discussions about developing NQFs.

NQFs are part of the reform agenda in many countries but the process by which they are developed varies from one country to another (Coles, 2006). The differences are obviously rooted in existing national education and training traditions,

institutional contexts, labour market structures, and the immediate policy issues and system problems that an NQF is expected to solve. Some countries have chosen to go for comprehensive qualification frameworks that cover all levels and types of education and training. Others have limited themselves to one or a few levels only – often middle level vocational qualifications. Some countries base their qualifications on agreed occupational profiles while others go for single skills or competences. Indeed, some countries have classical (behavioural) skill-based qualifications frameworks whereas others are experimenting with broader competence-based ones.

Despite the differences among countries, some elements appear to be common to all NQFs. They all have reference levels describing the types of skill and knowledge in various qualifications, quality assurance principles and guidelines, and methods for recognising the results of learning in different programmes and contexts. But also in applying these common issues, countries differ widely: there are different reference levels based on different criteria, different quality assurance mechanisms, and different approaches for assessment.

Experience has taught that NQF discussions touch all key aspects of a country's vocational education and training system. They raise questions about the relationship between vocational training and other parts of the education and training system, about its connections with the labour market, about how different types of programmes at different levels can be linked in order to establish education pathways that provide relevant preparation for the different qualification types and levels on the labour market, and about how employers can be made to endorse the contents of recognised qualifications.

Such discussions also touch issues of student motivation and the attractiveness of vocational training. A national qualifications framework allows students to relate qualifications to their own interests: given my current knowledge, what do I still need to learn to get the qualification that is required for the job that I want to have?

And, what can I do with my qualifications if I want to study something else? NQF discussions also have implications for how learning processes are organised – especially, but not only, in schools. They guide decisions on what needs to be learned, where learning can take place and how the results from learning can be monitored and assessed. Finally, they stimulate reflection on how people can best be helped with learning, where learning means more than just providing access to learning opportunities (such as school networks, financial support and new e-learning infrastructures) but above all about the roles and responsibilities of teachers, trainers and learners themselves (Grootings and Nielsen, 2005).

Thus, NQF discussions can offer direction and coherence to national vocational training reform initiatives. This makes them a valuable tool for countries where systemic (system deep and system wide) reforms are due because vocational training has lost much of its relevance for employers and attractiveness for students (Grootings, 2004). NQF discussions call for dialogue and cooperation between the different education sectors and the world of work – a necessary condition for any change to happen and a guarantee that agreed changes are accepted and appreciated by key stakeholders. Since an NQF appeals to the fundamental interests of all major stakeholders in education and training, it is relatively easy to engage them in such a dialogue. This does not mean that there will be no problems and that developing a shared understanding and an agreed approach is something that can be achieved quickly. But it does have the important advantage that the reform of vocational education and training is put in a wider labour market perspective, and will address more than just the immediate concerns of the education and training community, such as modernising curricula and updating education infrastructures.

Discussing a national qualifications framework is not only a matter of agreeing on new technical and methodological issues but also of identifying and balancing different interests and views. As such, it is a profound political process. Apart from

questions as to 'how' to do it there will always also be questions as to 'why' it should be done at all and 'what' must be done in order to make it happen. These all need to be addressed. Because discussing the 'why, what and how' issues directly impacts on key features of the education and training system that should produce the qualifications, this process is best seen as a joint learning process. An NQF cannot simply be established by decree. Stakeholders have to become acquainted with new views and approaches. They must develop and endorse new roles and relationships among themselves.

Given its strategic nature and the fact that it needs to be firmly related to the specific institutional context of the country, a national qualifications framework is not something that can easily be copied from one country and then quickly implemented in another. Policy copying may at first seem a quick and efficient way of introducing reforms but it does not work for the simple reason that policies and institutions from other countries have developed in response to the specific problems, context and traditions of those countries. An NQF, like any other national institution, is nothing but a social construct put together by people who are themselves shaped by the time and place where they live, as well as by the positions they take in their society. An NQF that fits all countries does not exist. This strengthens the case for joint policy learning.

Qualifications will only be trusted when the key national stakeholders understand and accept them as their own and when they know that national qualifications have been negotiated and take into consideration the different interests of all groups involved. Employers will not use qualifications for recruitment if they feel that these qualifications cannot guarantee the knowledge, skills and attitudes – or competences – that they are looking for, even if educationalists present them as

being of world standard. Education and training institutions will not accept them if they feel they do not properly reflect entrance requirements for the studies that they offer, even if employers would argue that this is what they need and nothing more. Teachers and trainers, if excluded from the process, will not know how to translate qualifications into meaningful learning processes and they will remain pieces of paper that do not lead to actual change in the classroom. Students, of course, will not take qualifications seriously if they experience that employers, schools or their own teachers don't either<sup>8</sup>.

So, qualifications need to be elaborated at home and need to fit into a country's own context. Nevertheless, it has also become clear that a national qualifications framework cannot be developed in isolation from NQFs in other countries. The intended transparency – and underlying trust – should also serve the international mobility of students and workers and, indeed, the international mobility of capital investment. A quality education and training system is now seen as a key component of a country's international status<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, national qualifications also need to be recognised abroad and trusted by foreigners entering the country. Interestingly therefore, discussing the development of a national qualifications framework entails a lot of international information exchange and knowledge sharing.

Collecting and analysing information from other countries has yet another important advantage. It can help to introduce new points of view and alternative policy options. National discussions very often become 'locked' in old habits and traditions. International experience can be a useful eye-opener. It can help to redirect national discussions into unexplored territory. Indeed, exposure to international experience often helps national stakeholders to identify the strong and

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<sup>8</sup> See Raggatt and Williams (1999) for a detailed review of the fate of vocational qualifications during the 1980s and 1990s in the UK. In the Netherlands, the exclusion of teachers and trainers from the discussions about a first generation NQF in the early 1990s resulted in a lack of impact on teaching practice. The second generation of a competence-based qualification framework is now being implemented. It is based on close involvement and consultation with teachers and trainers.

<sup>9</sup> Against all odds, it is still often regarded as an important export article.

weak points of their own systems – points that they have simply become so accustomed to that they do not question them any longer<sup>10</sup>.

Many issues that are related to national qualification frameworks are quite fundamental to any education system. But initiatives for developing NQFs do not usually come from those working within education and training systems and they are usually not – at least in the initial stages – based on pedagogical or didactical views. Instead, pressure has come from elsewhere and for different reasons. In most countries, the two principal stakeholders driving NQF development are employers and national policymakers. Employers have typically lost trust in the value of existing qualifications, arguing that graduates may have learned a lot in school but that they are not really competent when they enter the labour market. In the case of national policymakers, the financial affordability of existing education and training systems seems to be what usually leads them to review their effectiveness and efficiency. But even though the initial focus is often on the financial dimensions, increasingly quality concerns about what and how people learn become important too. In trying to increase the relevance of education and training, governments have often sought to increase the financial contribution of other stakeholders, in particular of employers and learners. Indeed, it is the combined quest for relevance, effectiveness and efficiency that gives national qualifications framework discussions their strategic value.

More recently, these issues have been put in the context of developing lifelong learning systems. This has given even more weight to the need for transparent learning pathways that can be facilitated by national qualification frameworks (OECD, 1996 and 2007).

The experience of countries that have developed national frameworks for their qualifications shows that the process takes

time, requires considerable resources (human, organisational and financial), and needs thorough consultation with, and the engagement of, the various stakeholders. In many countries the debate about NQFs has at some stage been dominated by particular aspects. This could result in an emphasis on the interests and views of specific stakeholders at the expense of others. We have seen shifts in focus from learning inputs to learning outcomes; from a monopoly role of teachers towards recognition of informal learning; from learning processes to assessment institutions; and from the school as the preferred learning site to learning on-the-job. More generally, we have also witnessed shifts from so called supply-led to demand-led education and training. As always, none of these shifts from one extreme to the other have proven very useful. Increasingly, more balanced policies are being developed that are based on the advantages of each of these extremes while limiting their risks and disadvantages. In all cases this is the result of practical experience of working with qualifications frameworks for a longer time<sup>11</sup>.

The next section summarises the three major issues that have dominated the European discourse on qualification frameworks in the past. Section 3 describes in more detail how countries could learn from other countries in developing their own national qualifications framework and, indeed, in deciding whether they need one in the first place.

## NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK POLICIES: THE CHALLENGE OF BALANCING LEARNING INPUTS, OUTCOMES AND PROCESSES

There are three issues that have dominated the recent discussions about national qualification frameworks. Interrelated in many respects, they are:

- the development from single qualification standards based on

<sup>10</sup> Even though the effort is often wasted in trying to better understand the situation abroad in order to be able to copy it at home.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is this practical experience that may be of great help for third countries to avoid past mistakes.

education inputs to national qualification frameworks based on learning outcomes;

- the rediscovery of learning and learners as opposed to mere assessment of learning outcomes;
- the trend to put national qualifications in an international perspective such as in the EU through the European Qualifications Framework.

### **From single qualification standards based on educational inputs to national qualification frameworks based on learning outcomes**

For many years countries, including new EU Member States and other transition countries, have been engaged in trying to establish or modernise national qualification standards. Traditionally, most education and training systems were based on some kind of standards but often these were education standards that defined the numbers of teaching hours in certain subjects. They did not specify what graduates were supposed to know at the end of the learning process, when they entered other levels of education, or what they were expected to be able to do at work. Initially therefore, the stress was – and in some countries still is – on modernising standards because existing education standards were considered outdated and no longer in sync with international practice<sup>12</sup>. Increasingly, however, this also came to be seen as a necessary step to make vocational education and training more relevant to labour markets.

As a result, employers and trade unions became involved in discussing qualifications and curricula. However, matching input-based programmes with what employers need in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes of their workers is difficult. Employers do not find it easy to describe their needs in terms of

traditional education categories, such as the number of hours dedicated to certain subjects<sup>13</sup>. Professionals from the field of education, on the other hand, hardly know what their graduates are supposed to do at work and do not speak the language of work activities, tasks and responsibilities used in companies. Often, there is also a profound misunderstanding of what schools can really contribute. Employers expect workers who are ready and fully productive from day one. Schools argue that it is impossible to prepare their graduates for all the different workplaces that exist. They also strongly insist that their job entails much more than just preparing workers.

The task of vocational education and training is also to prepare graduates that can not only find a job or continue their studies but also are capable of acting as responsible citizens in society at large. Today, employers and education decision-makers increasingly try to agree on learning outcomes instead of education inputs. Discussing expected learning outcomes makes it much easier to relate education programmes to occupational profiles or job descriptions because learning outcomes describe what learners are expected to know and are able to do after completing a programme. As education professionals, schools and teachers can then be responsible for helping learners to achieve these expected outcomes, whereas employers know exactly what they can expect when graduates enter their enterprises. They will also know what they may have to contribute themselves to bring new workers up to the level that they expect from their workforce. The shift from learning inputs to learning outcomes is crucial for organising effective consultation and communication between the worlds of work and education.

The complexity of the process of launching a debate on NQFs in transition

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<sup>12</sup> In most transition countries this was seen as the result of a lack of investment in education and training in the past and not so much as one of the consequences of transition. As soon as labour market issues and stakeholders from the employment system became involved, wider and more systemic challenges for standards were quickly recognised.

<sup>13</sup> More fundamentally, of course, employers all over the globe are increasingly unable to predict what they will need in terms of qualifications at all and the key challenge for both educationalists and employers is to find alternative ways to secure the mid and long term relevance of qualifications in a context of rapid change and continuing uncertainty rather than trying to establish short term matching.

countries cannot be underestimated. First of all, it assumed the establishment of institutional platforms for communication and consultation between education authorities (often centralised national ministries of education) and enterprise representatives (in practice initially often university experts, as enterprises had yet to develop representative organisations and a real interest in engaging in education and training). Secondly, it assumed the development and introduction of new tools and methods to analyse job requirements, translate them into occupational profiles and education programmes, and prepare the materials and teaching staff to implement them in the classroom. Thirdly, it required the reorganisation of existing curricula and teacher training institutions to enable schools and their teachers to do what was now asked of them. And finally, this all had to be done in a context characterised by a dramatic year-long impoverishment of education infrastructure and intelligence, an acute lack of financial and intellectual resources, a continuing loss of status and appeal of vocational education and training among learners and enterprises, and education policies that favoured general and higher education. It cannot come as much of a surprise, therefore, that despite many years of donor-assisted modernisation projects, overall reform and modernisation of vocational education and training systems have seen very little progress<sup>14</sup>.

More recently, many countries have experienced that the elaboration of single national qualifications – even when based on learning outcomes – also carries many risks: disparate standards are developed for different sectors or occupations; there

is overlap between various qualifications developed in isolation from each other; there occurs an inflation of numbers of qualifications (in particular when the recognition of qualifications is connected to funding); qualifications that are crucial to emerging labour markets are not covered; and there remains ambiguity concerning the appropriate level of education or type of school that should provide the programmes that lead to qualifications. The need to develop national qualification frameworks that coherently and consistently link individual existing (or new) qualifications at different levels, based on a common set of descriptors and criteria, followed from these earlier experiences.

What appears to be needed in such a situation is a common ‘format’ for describing single qualifications within an overall ‘framework’ that different sectors can adopt for developing and presenting their qualifications. This requires the engagement of representatives from different levels of the education system. It also requires a better understanding of how qualification structures develop inside companies and on the labour market. Increasingly it is understood that the *production* of qualifications by the education and training system needs to be closely related to how qualifications are *allocated* through labour market mechanisms and *utilised* within companies in the way they shape their work organisations. Problems will occur when these processes of production, allocation and utilisation are not sufficiently aligned<sup>15</sup>.

The shift from education-based standards to learning outcomes has had many

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<sup>14</sup> This, unfortunately, is very much the case in the countries of the former Soviet Union. But in Eastern Europe, the situation was not much different for a very long time. See for example Grootings 1993, 1999a, 1999b.

<sup>15</sup> One emerging issue in countries of the former Soviet Union that has barely been discussed so far is the role of basic vocational schools and secondary technical schools in providing particular levels of qualifications. In most countries, secondary technical schools differ from basic vocational schools only in terms of the weight of their general education parts and not so much in terms of the level of their vocational parts. Most middle level qualifications, which provide for the vast majority in any modern economy, are therefore not covered at all by any education programme. To make things worse, universities in many countries – in order to attract students despite increasing university graduate unemployment – have also started to provide occupational worker qualifications, usually the same as those offered by basic vocational schools. In many countries university students can now combine academic study with a certificate for cook or waiter! The discussion about qualification frameworks has contributed to creating awareness of this situation and of the unintended consequences of letting individual education sub sectors solve their own problems in the absence of an overall education policy framework.

advantages. Among these is a growing understanding that learning outcomes can be achieved in different ways and not necessarily only through standardised formal schooling. Recognition of prior learning and the assessment of non-formal and informal learning have therefore moved up on the agendas of many countries. Also because this also suited the search for greater cost-effectiveness and efficiency. Learning outcomes make it possible to better align different levels of qualification and also greatly facilitate communication between the worlds of education and work.

There is, however, considerable discussion about which kinds of learning outcome are relevant for modern education and employment and there is a growing understanding that traditional concepts of knowledge and skills are no longer appropriate. Initial attempts to develop national frameworks have very much built on the behaviourist approaches for defining learning outcomes: graduates should prove that they are able to do what is required in various *pre-defined tasks*<sup>16</sup>. For a long time, learning outcomes referred basically to a set of separate knowledge packages or skills<sup>17</sup>. Later it was realised that even when people have the required knowledge and skills they may still have inappropriate attitudes towards the work they have to do<sup>18</sup>. The current discussion about competences is all about these issues, but its emphasis is now on the capacity to integrate skills, knowledge and attitudes in the application of learning for solving *work problems in unexpected situations*<sup>19</sup>. Obviously, this is quite a different approach to what students should be able to do as a result of learning. But it reflects fundamental

changes in employment systems and work organisation, where lifelong employment, job security and standardised production and services have been replaced by high levels of uncertainty, flexible forms of production and continuous innovation and change in products and services.

The discussion on competence-based education (and qualifications) is still very confusing because the concept of competence is interpreted differently among different countries and even among representatives of different academic disciplines or schools of thought within one and the same country. Some consider competences to be the same as learning outcomes with the latter still defined in terms of behavioural characteristics; others consider competences to be the personal attitudes that complement knowledge and skills; others again see competences as something else and something new. This discussion is still ongoing in developed countries but appears as yet to be little known in transition countries<sup>20</sup>.

### **The rediscovery of learners and an increasing attention to learning processes**

In several countries the shift towards learning outcomes may have extended a bit too far. It may even have led to the belief that it really does not matter at all how people arrive at certain learning outcomes. Here, investment in assessment procedures and structures has gone up at the expense of investment in education facilities and preparing teachers. There is increasing concern about this trend, especially given the understanding that exactly what people used to learn at school and the way they

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16 See Chapter 5 for an overview of learning theories.

17 This also explains why a modular approach to education and training became very popular at one time as it provided a flexible and efficient approach to offering separate packages of knowledge and skills.

18 Especially in the services sector of course – the classical example being that of the waiter – but with the introduction of the free market, the importance of the customer in other sectors has also increased, including in education and training.

19 See also footnote 13.

20 The international debate about competences again indicates how concepts are shaped by contexts. A similar situation existed in the 1980s with respect to the concept of qualifications. There were clear “national” understandings and definitions of qualifications which for a long time greatly confused the international discussion and exchange of information and experience. See Grootings, 1995.

learnt it may no longer be appropriate<sup>21</sup>. Rapidly changing and unstable labour markets may require new kinds of (key or core) competences with the help of which people will be able to cope with increasing uncertainties in their environments. Life-time jobs and stable long-term employment are no longer realistic perspectives for the majority of younger generations. Lifelong employment has been replaced by lifelong learning and employability has become a risk and a challenge<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, the dropout rate in formal education remains high in many countries and large numbers of the young and adult population in developed countries appear not to have managed to even reach agreed basic levels of qualification. There is something wrong if education and training cannot respond to the learning needs or harness the learning potential of so many people. Awareness of this is increasingly leading to the belief that it really *does* matter how people attain (or do not attain) certain qualifications. Learning is not a uniform process for everybody and can therefore not be completely standardised, nor does it occur automatically in the same way for everybody and certainly does not happen simply because of the availability of recognised qualifications<sup>23</sup>.

As a result of this awareness, there is a growing interest in many countries – also at the policy level – to pay more attention to the quality of learning processes, including the role that professional teachers and trainers can play in helping people to learn (OECD, 2005)<sup>24</sup>. Given developments in the nature of work and our improved understanding of how people learn best, that role can no longer be the traditional one of transferring standardised expert knowledge or skills to everybody in the

same way and at the same time. Teachers and trainers are now increasingly seen in a – more complex – role of facilitating learning processes for learners who may differ widely in terms of learning needs and learning styles (Grootings and Nielsen, 2005). The key issue is that learner needs and quality learning processes are back on stage again and not only to satisfy current labour market needs. This has tremendous implications for teacher training, the curriculum and the organisation of schools and other education institutions and processes<sup>25</sup>. It shows again that a wide range of fundamental aspects of education and training systems become part of the discussion on NQFs.

### **The need to put national qualifications in an international perspective**

This shift away from an almost exclusive focus on learning outcomes and their labour market relevance and the related neglect of the needs of learners and the role that teachers and trainers have in helping learners to learn, coincides with another important development: the internationalisation of vocational training systems and labour markets. National qualification frameworks not only have a role to play within national education and employment systems but increasingly also across borders. This can be in the context of international mobility but also, and more generally, in attempts to promote economic development and social cohesion in wider geographic regions. Thus, the challenge to balancing learning inputs, outcomes and processes has international dimensions as well. Different groups of stakeholders have different reasons to support the transparency and comparability of national qualifications. Policymakers are concerned about how 'their' qualifications relate to

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<sup>21</sup> Replacing the emphasis on learning with an emphasis on assessment is obviously easier when learning is about separate pieces of knowledge and skills and more complicated when a broader concept of learning and competence exists. See also the distinction between two major education and training scenarios in Europe by Rauner, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Obviously, this is how the discourse has developed in recent years in Western Europe. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the discourse was different and included ideas about the quality of working life and the humanisation of work.

<sup>23</sup> See for a more extensive discussion about the implications of this for modern future-oriented vocational education and training, Grootings and Nielsen, 2006a.

<sup>24</sup> For a deeper analysis of the changed role of teachers and trainers, see also Chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup> Section 3 of this chapter will discuss some of these issues as well. The new role of vocational schools under changed framework conditions is discussed in Chapter 2.

those that are produced, allocated and used elsewhere. Employers can use internationally transparent qualifications to attract foreign workers if they cannot find the right ones at home. Indeed they may decide to invest elsewhere, if they see that the qualified workforce they would need is not available. They can also put pressure on governments to improve the quality of the qualification system. Students can go abroad, provided they can afford to pay the fees of international education institutions. Unemployed workers, especially from impoverished countries, can migrate to other countries in search of employment and a source of income.

One important discussion in this respect is whether individual countries will still be able – as they have insisted on until now – to keep a national identity for their education system. Opinions differ. It is surprising to note that those who insist on the primacy of learning outcomes – no matter how they are achieved – also tend to argue most forcefully in favour of a convergence of education systems – understood, obviously, in the narrow sense of ‘systems that produce qualifications’. Others, however, see international qualification frameworks as reference systems to which national systems can compare themselves without necessarily having to converge. Proponents of this position usually take a broader view towards education systems as doing more than only producing qualifications. The European Qualifications Framework, for example, is defined as such a reference system, even though both hopes and fears of convergence remain present (European Commission, 2005d and 2006a)<sup>26</sup>.

As things stand, however, international qualification frameworks – such as the European Qualifications Framework for EU Member States – provide a pragmatic reference instrument for national qualification frameworks. They make it easier to compare national qualifications

with those of other countries. Individual countries will still need to develop their own national qualifications or qualification frameworks. (Or decide not to, of course.) However, just as is the case with NQF discussions, communication among countries (and their schools and companies) about how their qualifications relate to each other will undoubtedly lead to questions about exactly how these qualifications are achieved. As a matter of fact, this discussion has already started, particularly where it concerns the minimum amount of study time that needs to be invested in order to arrive at a certain learning outcome. Without any doubt, there will soon be questions about how those hours are filled. Vocational qualification systems – within and outside Europe – are different and continue to produce different outcomes in different ways (Green, et al., 1999).

In the past, this variety has often resulted in two, equally inappropriate, responses among countries: some insisted on the comparative superiority of their own national education and training system and refused to accept comparability of qualifications produced by other – considered inferior – systems. Others have instead tried to copy qualifications and programmes from apparently more successful systems abroad. The present situation, which forces all countries to face the challenge of internationalisation, may perhaps lead to more collaborative forms of policy learning and practical partnership. Such international cooperation would hopefully increase attention to the quality of learning processes and pedagogical innovation in the international discourse on qualifications and qualification frameworks. This would certainly benefit all national vocational education and training systems and should therefore be stimulated.

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<sup>26</sup> Discussions in EU Member States on the proposed EQF (the adoption of which is foreseen for late 2007) have also made several countries consider developing national qualification frameworks just to be able to relate their national qualifications to a European reference framework. In this case the EQF clearly steers the way these new national qualification frameworks are constructed. Since the EQF is built explicitly around (eight) levels of learning outcomes, which themselves are defined through a combination of knowledge, skills and personal competences, these features may also come to characterise these new national qualification frameworks.

## FACILITATING A POLICY LEARNING PROCESS ON NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

There is some debate about what and how countries can learn from other countries when developing NQFs. In many transition countries and other countries that have had to rely on international donor assistance for education reforms, this debate has taken an additional dimension. The question here is also how international assistance can really help countries in developing and implementing their own reform policies. The challenge is how to assist national stakeholders in learning from policy experiences from elsewhere for constructing a national qualifications framework at home, if after thorough reflection on international experience they have come to the conclusion that this may serve their needs.

Multilateral and bilateral donor agencies increasingly issue declarations that refer to the need to contextualise knowledge and secure ownership of development and reform policies by involving local policymakers and other stakeholders in policy development and implementation<sup>27</sup>. Yet, policy transfer through imposing or copying (selective knowledge about) policies and models taken from other contexts still dominates the day-to-day operational practices of the donor community (King and McGrath, 2004; Grootings, 2004; King, 2005; Ellerman, 2005).

International assistance agencies and their staff often act as classical school teachers who have the right knowledge and know best what has to be done. True knowledge just needs to be transferred (or made accessible) to partners who don't know the truth (yet) and partners should implement measures that are presented to them as

best practice. Local policymakers and local stakeholders are regarded as passive knowledge and instruction receivers who do not possess any relevant prior knowledge and experience. Development or reform is seen as a process of social engineering that will be successful if properly managed technically. In reality, as we know, most reform projects are short-lived exactly because they do not fit in their context and because there is no local ownership to secure that reforms are sustainable. Reform initiatives tend to come and go with donors and their agencies.

One reason for the gap between declaration and actual behaviour among many donors is a particular – some would say erroneous – understanding, often only implicit, of why and how people learn and develop new knowledge and expertise<sup>28</sup>. The standard assumption underlying most traditional learning approaches is that someone (in this case the donor representative) possesses the right knowledge and learners who do not have this knowledge (in this case the local policymakers and other stakeholders) should simply listen carefully and then do what they have been taught. Carrots and sticks are available in many variations to provide the incentives to make learners listen and do what their teachers tell them to do. Carrots, however, can be attractive in their own right and sticks do not always hurt, so they often fail to motivate learning. New learning theories argue that learners are more successful in acquiring, digesting, applying and retrieving new knowledge when they have been actively engaged in these processes. Facilitating active policy learning rather than policy transfer may therefore have better chances to lead to sustainably reformed systems (Grootings, 2004).

The behaviourist and cognitivist approaches, on which much standardised

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27 Most recently also the World Bank which, in August 2004, announced an overhaul of its guidelines for policy-based lending (*From Adjustment Lending to Development Policy Lending: Update of World Bank Policy*), in recognition of the fact that there is no single blueprint for reform that will work and that therefore governments must take ownership of reforms to develop a programme that the country needs. While this ostensibly puts borrowing governments in the driver's seat, to use a classical development aid expression, governments are still not asked whether they wish to sit in the car at all. See also King, 2005.

28 There are many other reasons of course and some of these may be even more important – at least in the short term – such as the fact that policy assistance is usually part of a large financial aid package and accepting and implementing policy advice is one of the conditions for receiving these funds. But even when conditions disappear the policy transfer approach risks remaining dominant.

(formal and non-formal) education used to be (and often still is) based, assumed that learning is basically a steady accumulation of discrete units of skills and knowledge that can be presented to learners as if filling empty vessels (Hager, 2004)<sup>29</sup>. More recent constructivist approaches see learning as a continuous – and highly selective – process of exchange between individuals and their environment. They argue that people give their own meaning to information. Individuals construct their own knowledge but they do this as social beings in an exchange with others. Their learning is based on what they already know and framed by how they have become accustomed to seeing the world around them. They select and retain what is relevant for them. In doing so they construct their own understanding of reality as a basis to intervene and act. Different people therefore may give different interpretations to the same thing. They may retain different aspects and may act differently on the basis of the same information<sup>30</sup>.

Constructivist learning theories also argue that there are many ways through which people can learn, other than someone else passing on pieces of expert knowledge; that learning is primarily a social activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998); that a lot of tacit learning takes place which is not easily categorised and demonstrated but which is there when needed (Schön, 1983); that learning is dynamic and very much context-bound and that good learning therefore depends on meaningful learning environments (Kolb, 1984; Simons et al., 2000). The new learning theories argue that learners are more successful in acquiring, digesting, applying and retrieving new knowledge, skills and attitudes when they have been actively engaged in these processes. Active involvement, cooperation with other learners and realistic contexts also help to increase the motivation to learn which, in turn, makes it easier for people to take the responsibility for learning into their own hands. In combining

all this, active learning therefore provides strong learning environments and produces good learning outcomes. The search is now for operational approaches that make active learning principles work in practice<sup>31</sup>. I will come back with some of our own experiences in a later section of this chapter.

With the growing attention for active learning, there is also a shift of responsibility from the teacher to the learner. The teacher becomes an organiser and facilitator of learning processes, rather than the transmitter of expert knowledge or skills. The learner is asked to actively participate in identifying learning needs and in managing the process of acquiring new knowledge. Teachers and trainers still need good knowledge and skills in technical domains but they must make these accessible to learners in different ways. Teachers have to be able to identify what learners already know and how they learn best and then to guide them to find the information that can increase their knowledge further. In terms of structure of the education system, active learning insights argue for creating open and flexible pathways in education, providing a rich variety of learning environments, and recognising prior and informal learning outcomes (Grootings and Nielsen, 2005; OECD, 2005).

The point that needs to be stressed here is that the constructivist learning paradigm is of relevance for any learning situation where people seek to acquire new knowledge and understanding in order to be able to act competently in a changing context, also for policymakers facing the challenge of developing and implementing reform policies. To bridge the gap between declaration and practice, international assistance agencies would therefore have to fundamentally change their approach towards providing assistance. But also local stakeholders need to change their roles and responsibilities if they are really interested in developing reform policies

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 5 for a more detailed presentation of learning theories.

<sup>30</sup> It is obvious that what people find important, give meaning to and retain will also be influenced by their position and the interests that stem from this. Interest and power relations need to be taken into account also when individuals, seen as stakeholders, engage in constructing new institutions, such as an NQF.

<sup>31</sup> See the various contributions in Simons et al., 2000 for an account of experiences from different education domains.

that will work. These arguments can easily be applied to international cooperation in the discussion about developing national qualification frameworks. They further strengthen the case for considering such discussions as part of a joint learning process that requires the active participation of key stakeholders.

A major challenge for countries facing systemic reforms of their vocational education and training systems is to build up and strengthen their own capacity to *formulate* reform policies, not just capacity to *implement* (imposed or borrowed) policies. Reforms of vocational education and training in transition countries (and indeed any kind of major reform in any country) will only be successful and sustainable if policy development, formulation and implementation are firmly based on broad ownership and fit within existing institutional contexts. The concept of policy learning reflects this understanding. Policy learning emphasises the active engagement of national stakeholders in developing their own policy solutions. It is based on the understanding that there are no universally valid models that can simply be transferred or copied from one context to another. But it also assumes that there is an accessible wealth of international, yet equally context-specific experience in dealing with similar policy issues<sup>32</sup>. The challenge for international assistance is not to sell prefabricated ‘what’ and ‘how’ solutions but to find ways of helping people to help themselves (Ellerman, 2004 and 2005)<sup>33</sup>. The discourse about national qualification frameworks can be understood as a policy learning process for the principal stakeholders. The decision to establish – or not – an NQF can be understood as the result of a critical mass of learning experiences. Facilitating policy learning would thus have to comprise the organisation of learning experiences that enable stakeholders to become confident

that they understand NQF-related issues and can take a position in the decision making process with others<sup>34</sup>.

In the following section, initial experiences from an ETF attempt to facilitate a process of vocational training reform policy learning in a number of post Soviet countries are presented. This project tried to use the international debate on national qualification frameworks as a guide for identifying critical reform issues in a more strategic manner than had been done so far.

## DISCUSSING NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS: POLICY LEARNING IN PRACTICE

### Background

In developing policies and strategies for the reform of their vocational education and training systems, ETF partner countries are facing the challenge of transforming vocational training systems that have traditionally been based on various forms of ‘input control’ (number of students, number of qualified teaching staff, centralised and uniform subject-based curricula, etc.) towards systems that are governed and funded largely on the basis of agreed learning outcomes and the quality of learning processes. Most countries have piloted standards for individual occupations but have not been able to develop overall coherent qualification frameworks. Similarly, most countries have piloted curriculum changes related to single occupations or programmes without being able to develop an overall and consistent curriculum approach. Moreover, most of the earlier work on standards and curriculum development, while seeking a departure from the former knowledge-based approaches, has been based on narrow,

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<sup>32</sup> See Grootings, 2004 for a longer discussion about the ETF’s vision and its role in fostering and supporting policy learning among its partners.

<sup>33</sup> Ellerman (2005) summarised this challenge into three “do-s” (starting from present institutions; seeing the world through the eyes of the client; respecting the autonomy of the do-ers) and two “don’ts” (don’t override self-help capacity with social engineering; don’t undercut self-help capacity with benevolent aid).

<sup>34</sup> We will argue in the conclusions that this does not automatically assume a role in the decision-making process as such. It does imply however that none of the principal stakeholders can be excluded from policy learning facilitation.

behaviourist skill concepts for simple and standardised occupations and tasks. These will soon be – or are already – obsolete as they do not properly prepare learners for employability in employment systems that are characterised by high levels of uncertainty and that therefore require broader competences enabling flexibility and further learning.

Building on accumulated experience with the modernisation of curricula, former Soviet Union countries are currently reviewing their so called ‘classifiers’, the lists of occupations for which recognised vocational education and training programmes exist. Classifiers, however, normally only include qualifications at certain levels of education<sup>35</sup>.

So, often there are separate classifiers for basic vocational schools and secondary technical schools. These include occupations and programmes that existed during the period of mass production in large state-owned industrial, administrative and agricultural enterprises. Many of these have become outdated and no longer reflect the need for qualifications on the labour market. While revising their national classifier systems, countries also need to streamline these with existing international classification systems, such as ISCED and ISCO<sup>36</sup>. Many former Soviet countries face qualification policy issues related to regional cross-border migration. Typically, this concerns well-educated workers from one country being employed in low-skilled jobs in another. Mutual recognition of qualifications of migrant workers puts high pressure on the quality, transparency and

portability of qualifications. Limited capacity and resources in all countries provide an additional incentive for regional cooperation despite the political tensions that have developed between some of them since independence.

In the European Union attempts are being undertaken to develop a voluntary European Qualifications Framework, a draft of which was consulted with Member States in 2006. The main aims of the EQF are to enable citizens to fully utilise the rich diversity of education, training and learning opportunities across the different Member States; to enhance communication and transparency between systems and providers; to facilitate recognition of qualifications; and to promote mobility<sup>37</sup>. While the EQF is meant to be a reference framework only, its structure and very existence may have an impact not only on individual EU Member States but also on partner country education and training policies, in particular in those countries included in the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (the Southern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, Russia and Ukraine)<sup>38</sup>. However, because of traditional and continuing education and labour market ties between Central Asian countries (who are not part of the EU neighbourhood policy) and other post Soviet countries there remains a strong interest in something like a ‘qualifications space’ in that region. Thus it would make sense to include as many post Soviet countries as possible in a policy learning process around national qualifications frameworks<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Educationalists in post Soviet countries distinguish diplomas (for general education) and certificates (for vocational qualifications). This makes it acceptable for them that a secondary school or even a university graduate (with a diploma) can acquire a certificate for an occupation that can also be provided by a basic vocational school which does not offer a general education diploma. This institutional setup and the mental model of a vocational training system that goes along with it create considerable communication problems. It is an illustration of the absence of a tradition in thinking in terms of qualification levels and pathways.

<sup>36</sup> ISCED is the International Standard Classification for Education developed by UNESCO and used for international education statistics; ISCO is the International Standard Classification for Occupations developed by ILO and used for international labour and employment statistics.

<sup>37</sup> The EQF has also prompted some EU Member States that did not yet have a national qualifications framework to develop one. Denmark is one example. Other EU countries have decided not to do so, however. Finland is one example of these.

<sup>38</sup> The ENPI foresees assistance to the countries that form a ring around the EU. It aims to share European Union achievements without giving any perspective of future EU membership.

<sup>39</sup> This chapter will only review experiences from the participating countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (since 2005), and the Russian Federation and Ukraine (since 2006). Since late 2006 Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have also been participating in the project, while from 2007 Turkmenistan is sending an observer. The project will come to an end in 2008. The experiences from a related NQF project in Mediterranean countries, while based on a similar philosophy, are not included here.

The ETF project on national qualification frameworks in the region is based on three key principles: developing awareness of learning outcomes, building capacity, and regional cooperation. In preliminary discussions with colleagues from the partner countries we stressed the role that NQF discussions can play as a strategic lever for overall national vocational training reform policy development. During these discussions it appeared that there is a lot of confusion about the difference between a learning outcomes-based qualifications framework and a curriculum-input based classifier<sup>40</sup>. From the beginning we have also made it very clear that the project aims at developing policy awareness and building capacity and not at assisting the countries in setting up the actual qualification frameworks. Indeed, the decision whether to do so or not would first have to be made by the countries themselves and this would require a broad consultation process which still has to take place. Finally, all countries indicated that they were also concerned about issues of transparency, comparability and portability of their qualifications within a regional context. Thus, special attention was given to fostering regional cooperation as a mechanism to promote policy awareness and capacity building. Regional cooperation will enable them to better understand the international dimensions of national qualifications frameworks in terms of transparency, portability and recognition.

#### **Facilitating policy learning: project approach, activities and outcomes**

Because of the important role of education classifiers in the existing vocational education and training systems of the region, and because of the urgency that is felt within the countries that the existing classifiers need to be modernised, the policy learning cycle of the project evolves around the attempt to relate existing work on modernising classifiers to the international discourse on national

qualifications frameworks. By assisting national stakeholders to go through key phases of developing an experimental NQF, many related policy issues such as those mentioned in the first part of this chapter will be addressed. Through the project we are trying to shift the focus of national policy discussions from the 'modernisation' of an input-based system (that is characterised by unconnected vocational training sub-systems) towards more fundamental 'reform' of the overall education system in which there is a balanced attention for input, process and learning outcomes. The perspective is obviously the development of a comprehensive lifelong learning system such as most developed countries are currently trying to put in place. In order to make this ambitious aim feasible we have limited our work to tourism as a pilot sector<sup>41</sup>.

Thus, the overall objective of the ETF NQF project is to facilitate policy learning on national qualifications frameworks. Activities supported by the project should contribute to developing:

- awareness of the international debate on the contribution of NQFs to quality vocational training;
- understanding of the context of national qualifications frameworks and the connection between framework design and overall characteristics of national systems of education and training;
- stakeholder consultation platforms within participating countries;
- platforms for regional cooperation and exchange of country specific experience;
- the initial technical and professional capacity for national qualifications framework design;
- experience-based evidence to underpin policy and design decisions;
- basic consensus among key stakeholders within individual countries about policy to be adapted concerning qualifications frameworks.

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<sup>40</sup> The classifier is traditionally the main control instrument in centralised vocational training systems, which explains why education ministries are often hesitant to give it up and prefer to speak about the need to modernise existing classifiers instead. It also explains why moving towards an NQF has such a profound impact on many aspects of the existing vocational training system.

<sup>41</sup> The most important argument in favour of this sector is that in all countries tourism has become a priority sector in national development plans.

The project will also assist in addressing concrete and urgent problems, in particular the modernisation of the classifiers, with a view to engaging national stakeholders in a recognised policy problem. In each country it will be closely related to other vocational training reform initiatives underway<sup>42</sup>. The project follows a clear policy learning cycle with the following phases:

- Clarification of urgent and practical problems (such as the classifier) (2005).
- Understanding the wider issues of the classifier problem (2005).
- Demonstration of and familiarisation with practical examples (2005-06).
- Application of new insights to re-analyse the home situation (2006-07).
- Drafting new policies (papers) that fit in the institutional and political context (2007-08).

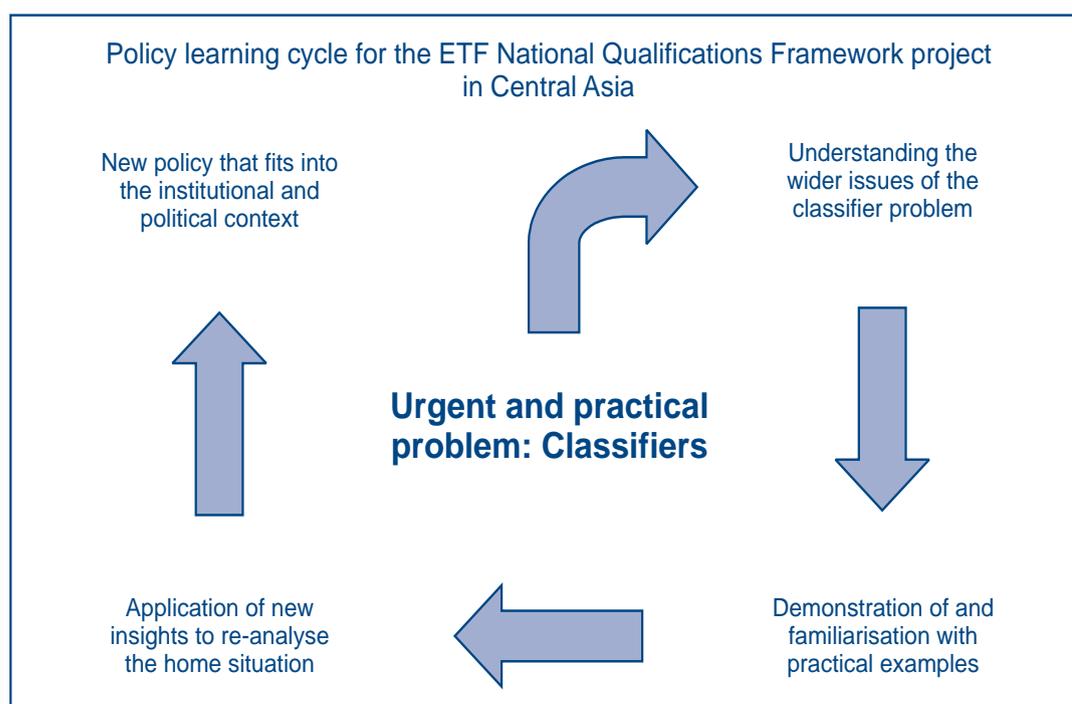
In each of the countries a stakeholder group of around 15 participants has been established. They take part in national

events, representing the various stakeholders in the area of qualifications in general, and of qualifications in the sector of tourism<sup>43</sup>. The groups include:

- policymakers from different levels of education and training (initial, secondary, and higher vocational and professional education);
- qualification experts or administrators from the tourism sector, including the sub sectors of catering, hotel and tourism itself;
- representatives of vocational schools, training centres, colleges or higher education institutions active in these sub sectors.

From this larger group of participants a core group of five has been appointed, consisting of:

- one representative of the Ministry of Labour;
- one representative of the Ministry of Education;



<sup>42</sup> Given the limited project resources, strong links to other work done by the ETF and others inside the countries has been promoted. This is also to ensure that the policy learning concerning qualification frameworks relates to overall vocational training reform in the countries. In the region, cooperation and alignment with various EU and other donor activities has been sought. On the whole, this dialogue and cooperation has been very successful.

<sup>43</sup> In most of the countries this was the very first time that representatives from these different stakeholder groups sat around the same table. All stakeholders participate on a voluntary basis.

- one representative of the Ministry (or state agency) responsible for tourism;
- one representative of private enterprises in tourism;
- one representative of a school.

The members of this core group take part in study visits abroad and other international events. They are responsible for drafting the sector national qualifications framework report, keeping other project participants informed on progress, and sharing their international experiences.

In the first year, activities focused on a clarification of the problems related to a revision of the classifier, developing an understanding of wider issues and familiarisation with practical examples related to national qualification frameworks abroad and at home<sup>44</sup>.

In Russia and Ukraine we have started to stimulate interaction with European discussions and developments concerning NQFs. Russia has profited from intensive assistance at technical and policy level leading to a real breakthrough in national vocational training reform policymaking. In Russia, one of the large employer federations has become involved in the project, first out of interest in improving qualifications in the restaurant and hospitality sectors, and later by taking the initiative for the establishment of a National Agency for Qualifications. This agency was created in 2007 and its existence was endorsed by the government. The ETF will continue

to assist in providing access to international experience for developing an NQF policy and institutional infrastructure. In the Ukraine, political turbulence hampered progress but also there, close cooperation between the ministries of education and labour and the confederation of employers was established with the employers clearly in the lead. With assistance from our Russian project partners the discussion in this country will be accelerated and first ideas concerning a National Qualification Agency have already been launched.

In Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) the project has led to the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms in the tourism sector and to a firm commitment for regional cooperation<sup>45</sup>. More specifically, work has focused on:

- the identification of, and agreement on key professional profiles from the tourism sector at different levels of qualification;
- piloting methodologies for the identification and definition of competence profiles;
- establishing synergy with related bilateral donor activities and the ongoing and forthcoming Tacis vocational training reform projects in the countries<sup>46</sup>;
- establishing lines of communication between the national teams;
- improving the understanding of NQF debates and issues in neighbouring countries<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Activities have included national kick-off workshops in each of the participating countries; the preparation of a draft inventory of national background with a special focus on the tourism and catering sector in each country (sector reports); study visits to the Netherlands and Estonia for Central Asian countries, Spain for Russia and Ukraine, and Italy and Spain for the Caucasus countries; follow-up debriefing seminars in each country; finalisation of the sector reports; regional seminars to exchange experience. In each country a local process coordinator has been contracted to assist the national working groups with organisational and logistic matters. Local process coordinators also communicate regularly with the ETF and keep an eye on progress and agreed deadlines.

<sup>45</sup> At a regional workshop in Astana (Kazakhstan) all delegations signed a joint declaration committing themselves to continuing and intensifying regional cooperation on issues relating to NQFs.

<sup>46</sup> In all Central Asian countries, in consultation with national stakeholders and the European Commission, new EU Tacis projects for which ETF staff have prepared the terms of reference have built on NQF discussions and will enable the continuation, with considerably more funds, of the development and implementation of NQF-based vocational education and training reforms.

<sup>47</sup> This was achieved through the first NQF workshop held in Turin with these countries in November 2006 and the launch of an NQF Electronic Communication Platform in Russian and English. The latter is based on a dedicated project website which is accessible to all participants in the project and which enables access to relevant NQF information and project documents, a discussion forum, and an information exchange tool.

Progress has been uneven in the four countries with Kyrgyzstan clearly in a lead position even though increasing political instability has caused delays in national policy formulation<sup>48</sup>. Political developments in the other countries, largely characterised by relatively stable regimes, have become more favourable after public declarations from their presidents requesting more attention to be paid to the improvement of vocational education and training systems<sup>49</sup>.

The three participating Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) were included one year later and the country teams have tried to catch up with the others in terms of preparing occupational and competence profiles for the tourist sector.

They have started to organise a more systematic exchange of experience and NQF knowledge between the participating countries. They have clearly stated their willingness and readiness to intensify reciprocal learning and the expertise that can be provided by EU experts (both at technical and policy level) now needs to be combined with expertise (especially on processes, capacity building and institutional development) from peers in the countries. Closer cooperation between selected countries from different sub regions will also have to be promoted.

From the middle of 2007 and onwards, in all post Soviet countries work will gradually move towards developing NQF policy papers based on the technical and policy experiences made by the teams in the tourism sector. While most countries have developed occupational profiles and standards for the tourism sector, these now need to be transformed into learning outcomes-based qualifications with a clear concept of levels and descriptors. Focus

will shift towards using learning outcomes as a base for curriculum development and assessment approaches. In parallel, countries are expected to reflect on their practical experiences and to draft informed NQF policy papers. Assistance for the identification and review of key policy issues will be provided based on international experience. Mutual policy learning will be promoted across the different sub regions. Policy learning facilitation will concentrate on drawing lessons from the experience accumulated so far. It will try to ensure that NQF policy papers will be more than simply well-formulated declarations and that they also pay attention to implementation strategies, resources, roles and responsibilities, and realistic timeframes. As much as possible this should all be based on the evidence produced in earlier phases.

#### **Some preliminary lessons learned**

From the description of the project it may be clear that policy learning in practice brings many new challenges to the ETF – or, for that matter, any organisation that has developed from a classical project-based management culture. Moving from simply transferring knowledge and experience to assisting partners in developing their own new knowledge and understanding of critical policy issues requires many other changes. Typical technical assistance tools and instruments must be adapted to facilitate policy learning, expectations and roles – both of the ETF and of colleagues in partner countries – must be aligned with this new form of assistance. Then, of course, there are new challenges pertaining to how organisational resources (staff and funds) are made available and how these can be put into action.

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<sup>48</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, in agreement with the Ministry of Education and the EC Delegation in Bishkek, the ETF has now incorporated NQF activities in a wider vocational training reform policy learning project. This prepares for a sector-wide assistance project, scheduled for 2009-10.

<sup>49</sup> In Tajikistan, basic vocational schools were recently placed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, improving the chances that they will again focus on their qualification role rather than the welfare functions they had acquired in the past decades, even though the debate on the modernisation of the classifier will perhaps have to start again. In Kazakhstan, vocational training has become a priority. In Uzbekistan, after having invested heavily (and exclusively) in vocational training infrastructures (by refurbishing and building new colleges all over the country), the government has now become concerned that the colleges should also attract students and offer them relevant qualifications.

These challenges, which in fact make the project itself a true organisational learning project for the ETF, are further compounded by the large number of countries involved, even though they all share a certain common history and institutional legacy. Because of this, the ETF project team also consists of a large number of country managers and assistants who all have other tasks and roles as well. The management of such a team implies experimentation with new ways of teamwork if the policy learning objectives of the project are to be kept in focus throughout. The geographical location of the participating countries – stretching all across the former Soviet Union – not only creates resource problems but also poses tremendous challenges for communication and knowledge sharing. Developing and sustaining an electronic communication and discussion platform proved to pose considerable problems, both technically and culturally.

But not only does the ETF have to work with the challenge of breaking with past traditions. The countries do too. In most countries outside Russia, the institutional system of vocational education and training was an imposed one. It only worked well as long as it was part of the overall institutional (political, economic and social) system of Moscow. To a large extent, these vocational training systems have always been artificial in terms of their importance within national education systems. They were developed to serve the Soviet economic system and not as the result of national economic development policies<sup>50</sup>. Thus, the very issues of 'context fit' and 'local ownership' that are so central to the policy learning approach and its claim to create better opportunities for sustainable changes and reforms, take on a very specific meaning in these transition countries. It is important to remember that the debate about national qualification frameworks does not occur in an institutional void and that participants in the debate do not enter it with empty heads.

Indeed, policy learning here is really not so much about learning something from scratch but about learning something that is an innovation of something that already existed and has become irrelevant. Developing reform policies in such contexts is as much about fundamental changes in institutional settings as it is about fundamentally changing the mental models that have developed in parallel. Even if the former were initially imported from the outside, people have gradually learned to live with them.

Obviously, a thorough reflection on these experiences needs to be done if the policy learning approach is to become a truly effective tool for reform. At this stage, however, we are limited to trying to answer the two key questions that were raised at the beginning of this chapter. It was argued that a debate on a national qualifications framework, itself seen as a social construct, can steer and guide national education system reforms, even if the immediate intention is not to introduce a national qualifications framework at all. It was also suggested that facilitating a policy learning process is one way of developing a good understanding of the opportunities and risks of a national qualifications framework. Policy learning cannot be organised in a traditional way through the transfer of expert knowledge and behaviour but only through broad participation in collective learning processes that include knowledge sharing with others. It also requires professional facilitation. What can we say about these two claims on the basis of our experiences so far?

### **Are national qualification frameworks strategic levers for vocational training reform?**

The question whether initiating a discussion between stakeholders on a national qualifications framework can act as a strategic lever for national vocational training policy reforms can be answered positively. In all countries, introducing the

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<sup>50</sup> This is illustrated by the fact that in many countries, in particular in Central Asia, after the exodus of "Europeans" in the early 1990s, a whole layer of skilled workers, technicians and managers suddenly disappeared from the national workforce, especially in urban and industrial centres. None of the countries have recovered from this yet.

concept of an overall framework that includes qualifications at different levels put in relation to each other has placed ongoing vocational training reform discussions and initiatives in a new perspective. It has clearly contributed to putting various singular reform issues such as standards, curriculum modernisation, school networks, teacher training, and the roles of various stakeholders in an overall comprehensive and consistent frame. Three interrelated developments are worth mentioning in particular as they may lead to a new dynamic in national vocational training reform discussions and a move forward from declarations to strategies supported by key stakeholders.

In the countries concerned, the concept of an overall qualifications framework has exposed the absence of many – if not all – of the middle level qualifications shown in the existing vocational training systems. Indeed, whereas emerging labour markets (as is the case in any modern economy) increasingly resemble onion-shaped qualification structures (wide in the waist), education systems are increasingly shaped as hour glasses (extremely tight in the waist) producing lots of low level and lots of high level qualifications but hardly any in the middle. At the same time, educational aspirations of young people look like an inverted pyramid: narrow at the bottom and widening towards the top, as everybody is striving for access to higher education. Moreover, existing qualification structures are not so much the result of an effective exploitation of the potential of talent in society but more a reflection of the distribution of wealth. Children from poor families end up at the bottom, i.e. in lower vocational education, because they are poor and not because they are less intelligent. Similarly, many children from affluent families end up in university education because they can afford it and not because they are more talented.

These trends have been reinforced by policies that bestowed preferential treatment upon higher education.

A discussion about these structural mismatches inevitably leads to some questioning of the current set up and the working of individual institutions that are part of it, starting from primary schools. Most of all, it mobilises the employers to push the case of vocational training reforms with the government. After all, they have to operate in an environment that is characterised by high graduate unemployment and an acute shortage of appropriate (middle level) vocational skills. In fact, where things have really started to move is where employers' representatives have lined up with ministries of education in some form of institutional consultation or dialogue on qualification issues.

The debate on national qualification frameworks has also sparked a discussion on a second key issue, namely who decides – and on what basis – on qualifications and the education programmes that lead to them. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, standards are traditionally defined by education authorities, typically the ministry of education. These have always been input-based – they defined what students were to be taught, when, where and by whom. Since progression within the education system towards higher education is dependent on achievements in general education and vocational parts of the curriculum were always considered to qualify for jobs after leaving the education system, the concept of a qualifications framework relating horizontal types and vertical levels of qualifications did not really exist. There were classification systems for jobs (under the responsibility of the ministry of labour) that acted as a base for the wage system and in some way also provided job information for the 'classifiers' of the education ministry. These classifiers were lists of recognised education programmes for each type of school (basic vocational schools and secondary technical schools) which specified duration, content (in terms of hours per subject to be taught), and the job specialisations the programmes would give access to<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Typically, many education ministry officials and school directors still consider the best solution for the current mismatch between school certificates and enterprise recruitment policies to be to force employers by law to hire only formally certified school graduates. The concept of "trust" which is so important for the functioning of any qualification system is still largely absent from most discussions.

The curricula further specified what should be taught when and how this should be taught during the course of a programme. Understanding the difference between *input-based classifiers* and *outcome-based qualification frameworks* has proven to be the key issue for changing mental policy models. Employers and staff at the ministries of labour were quickest to pick this up. Employers soon realised that the learning-outcome approach would give them an opportunity to be engaged in increasing the relevance of vocational education without having to deal with typical education issues such as curricula, equipment and materials. Ministries of education often still maintain that the discussion about national qualification frameworks is in fact about modernising their existing classifiers and, if at all, perhaps about integrating the separately existing ones<sup>52</sup>.

A third important issue that the discussions about national qualification frameworks have highlighted is the absence of professional research and development capacities and institutional arrangements for stakeholder consultation and decision-making that would be needed to prepare, implement and maintain a national qualifications framework. There is also no information on the financial resources that would be required to build these up. The institutional arrangements seen during the visits to EU countries and the professional capacities that are available to run the frameworks there are clearly beyond what the countries can afford, in particular against the background of the enormous investments that are still needed to bring education infrastructures up to acceptable levels and recurrent budget resources required to pay teachers and trainers vaguely decent salaries. This can lead to doubts about whether a national qualifications framework is necessary at all, whether there are perhaps less costly options that would better fit the resources of the countries or, indeed, whether the issues raised by national qualification frameworks can also be addressed in a different way. These discussions confirm again that national qualification

frameworks, as we have come to know them in the western world, are basically social constructs that have been developed by stakeholders in very specific institutional environments. They also confirm that some of the issues related to qualifications frameworks are certainly relevant for stakeholders in post Soviet countries to consider but that policy developments in response to them have not necessarily to lead to the establishment of national qualification frameworks. However, ideas concerning alternative policy options have not so far come forward. This can be seen as a confirmation of the strength of the qualifications framework concept but also as a reflection of the weak capacities for policy development.

### **Does facilitating policy learning work?**

Our second question was: does facilitating policy learning work in practice? This is not so easy to answer. We would go for a careful yes, but also add that there is still a lot to be learned to do it better.

In the ETF NQF project we have tried to create a learning environment in which participants representing major stakeholders from national vocational training systems can learn from each other, from the experiences of other countries, and from being actively engaged in policy discussions and technical development work. But was this environment strong enough? Do the participants reach a better understanding of the opportunities and implications of developing a national qualifications framework and of the roles and responsibilities that will be needed to make it work once decisions have been taken that an NQF should be implemented? Are they able to develop alternative, perhaps cheaper, solutions for the issues that NQFs in other countries seek to address? Part of the answer was already given in the previous section. Here, it has to be stressed that not all national working groups have developed the same kind of understanding and that within national working groups not all members have arrived at the same level of understanding. This is not surprising, since

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<sup>52</sup> The issue of integrating separate classifiers proves to be particularly difficult where different ministries or agencies are responsible for basic vocational schools and secondary technical schools.

we know that individuals give their own meaning to information. We should also say that progress in changing mental models has been slower than we expected.

However, since the purpose of our work is not simply to create policy learning environments for individuals but to enable these individuals to contribute to formulating reform policies as a result of their learning, there are at least two concerns that need to be raised. These are directly connected to how we are able to facilitate policy learning in practice. The first concern refers to the problem of being able to retain attention and motivation to learn from all the members of the national working groups. The second concern is about the possibilities that we have as policy learning facilitators to make policy learning instrumental for policy change. We will briefly present these issues and discuss the practical constraints we are facing to address them properly. This will on one hand lead us to take the rather pragmatic stand that policy learning is a resource-driven approach, while on the other hand our work can still be improved, even with limited resources.

Learning is not something that happens automatically after a confrontation with new information. Neither is policy learning. That is why it is considered so important to create strong learning environments, in which learning is facilitated on a continuing basis until the desired learning outcomes are achieved. By definition, at least in the constructivist approach, final learning outcomes are difficult to define in advance as these depend so much on the participants in the learning process. The same information and the same learning activities may have different learning effects on different people. In our project we have seen this among individuals within national groups and groups from different countries. Actually, the participants themselves are the ones who define their desired learning outcomes during the process of policy learning. We have also noticed that different people are differently inclined to conceptual learning (the 'why' and 'what' questions) or more technical

learning (the 'how' questions). Both kinds of learning are part of the project. We have also noted that many participants found it difficult to draw lessons from practical experience and that others found it difficult to project experiences from other countries onto the situation at home.

This serves to illustrate that there is still considerable potential for the further development of analytical, reflective and policy formulation skills. It also shows that the concept of policy learning is apparently still too general and too broad to guide policy learning facilitation in practice: we need to better specify which policy aspects are relevant for which people, and exactly how we can facilitate the learning process for mastering these issues. We would also need to better understand which learning methods best serve each part of the learning process: what can be done through workshops and what through study visits, even if the first are interactive learning events and the second some kind of peer reviews<sup>53</sup>? This would imply a far more rigorous assessment of the policy learning needs of the people involved in our project. It means greater flexibility in project implementation based on the results of some kind of continuous formative assessment. Clearly, a multi-country programme, as useful as it is in providing knowledge sharing opportunities, cannot be designed to achieve the same outcomes for all participating countries, within the same time frame and with the same kind of activities and resources. However, current project design and management approaches do not easily accommodate such flexible policy learning needs. There is a need to be much more creative in developing alternative ways of working.

A second point of concern is the likelihood that investments in policy learning will also lead to policy action. Elsewhere we have already indicated that a direct connection between the two does not exist: policy learning, even if we don't restrict the concept to individual learning, is above all about changing mindsets that can lead to good ideas, policies and strategies and to

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<sup>53</sup> Obviously, the role of ETF country managers, international experts and local coordinators is crucial here. A detailed discussion of the role of these facilitators will have to wait for another occasion.

the development of the capacity to transform new ideas into new policies and effective strategies (Grootings and Nielsen, 2006a). But even so, policy learning does not happen in a vacuum and certainly not in a political or power vacuum. The political environment and the position of a person in the power structure will influence what will be (allowed to be) learned and especially what will be (allowed to be) expressed as results of new learning in policy proposals. Obviously, we have had little influence on the selection of the people who became project participants. We have merely tried to make sure that the various stakeholders are well represented. Participation has been on a completely voluntary basis and basically because people have been interested themselves, or because they recognised the (international) learning opportunities offered by the project. There may be a need to be more careful and more strategic in the selection of participants in policy learning projects but getting the right people interested to participate remains a challenge. And the question as to how to achieve that is still open.

The transformation of new ideas into policies and the effective implementation of new policies are true political processes. They are dependent on the operation of the political institutions of a country. This does not mean that no attention should be given to the policy process. On the contrary, it is just to say that policy learning is one thing and policy action quite another. Facilitating policy learning is not the same as facilitating policy action. We think we should remain very ambitious about facilitating good policy learning and be very modest about our role in facilitating policy action. That said, we also believe that good policy learning facilitation does in the end contribute to developing capacities for policy formulation and policy implementation. If we are right, then at least policy implementation capacities will relate to policies that are owned locally and fit with national contexts, instead of having been formulated by outsiders or copied from elsewhere.

## CONCLUSIONS

Reforming education and training systems in countries facing systemic reform needs implies combining old and new knowledge in rapidly changing contexts. This holds true for local stakeholders as well as for international advisers. Policy learning is not just about learning the policies that other countries have developed but rather about learning which policies can be developed locally by reflecting on the relevance of other countries' policies for the situation at home. Policy learning in this sense can only happen when information and knowledge is available and shared. The principal role of international assistance would be to *enable* a reform policy learning process by providing access to such information and experience and by facilitating a critical reflection on their relevance.

Policy learning is sharing experience from the past to develop knowledge for the future. It is also about sharing and processing knowledge from abroad and knowledge that is locally produced. It is therefore about developing new knowledge as well. It contributes not only to creating coherent, system-wide reforms that fit but also facilitating system-deep reforms of vocational training systems because it enables all stakeholders to explore new roles and develop new working routines. Combining the discourse about national qualification frameworks with a policy learning approach promises not only to give a clear strategic direction and coherence to overall education reform, it also gives better guarantees that policies and strategies fit into their context, are locally owned and, therefore, are sustainable in the long term – provided of course that capacities for policy formulation and implementation can be developed as well.

However, practical experience with this approach indicates that the implications of facilitating policy learning as a way 'of helping people to help themselves' still needs to be further developed and better understood. One of the challenges of this approach is its apparent conflict with the traditional technical assistance and project

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management approach. International donors as well as partner countries have become accustomed to this approach and both may find it difficult to move away from it for the purpose of policy learning. Another factor that hampers the potential of policy learning is that local stakeholders

are still locked in mental and policy models that have become obsolete. In short, international donors and partner countries still have much to learn. In order to do our work better we have to review our experiences together and create space for further experimentation.

## **VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS IN TRANSITION: DEAD-END STREETS OR THE GATE TO PROSPERITY? KEY ELEMENTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROVIDERS**

*Karl-Axel Skjølstrup and Gérard Mayen*

# 2

### INTRODUCTION

*'Learning is no longer restricted to what goes on within the school walls. Schools must relate well to the surrounding community if they are to be effective [...] Schools need to relate directly to what goes on around them'*

These observations related to school leadership (Mulford, 2003) state clearly why it is necessary – particularly in vocational schools – to develop new models for community-focused schools and effective school management. The requirement for schools today is that they are able to develop partnerships with the surrounding economic and social environment, but also to nurture an internal environment which is flexible and dynamic enough to meet the needs of a wide range

of stakeholders and increasingly demanding clients.

Many development projects in ETF partner countries cover a mix of supporting pilot schools in key sectors of the economy, proposals on how to redesign systems (green/white papers), institutional development, etc. These elements are incorporated in the design of projects to varying degrees. Among the things often ignored is the internal organisation of schools, the training of school managers, ensuring the system-wide effect of projects, and mechanisms to develop quality, implement school autonomy and design support tools for these approaches.

There are many plausible explanations for this, but this chapter argues that it is high time to start introducing measures that will

secure reform initiatives. Projects are needed that take a more holistic and *realistic* approach to the development of local and regional labour markets and the interests of the individual learner.

This chapter will address some of the key issues related to transforming centrally managed vocational training institutions into centres for initial education, continuing training and re-qualification serving local or regional labour markets. These key issues include:

- the need to see quality as the glue that secures durable results and value for money for all stakeholders;
- the need to empower vocational training providers to take a proactive role in the development of relevant qualifications;
- the need for training providers to develop forecasting and strategic management tools;
- the increasingly important and rapidly changing role of school organisation and school leadership.

The chapter will highlight examples of school development initiatives in an EU Member State and in partner countries where the thematic issues mentioned above are being approached by policymakers and practitioners.

## THE CHALLENGE FOR VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

One issue that occupies the minds of education planners and policymakers is how to make vocational schools more responsive to the needs of the local labour market – both in initial training to attract young people and in lifelong learning provisions to retain them.

The question of quality in vocational training is an essential element in these system coordination processes. Applying effective quality assurance measures helps to develop the trust between labour market partners and vocational training providers. Without this trust, progress towards enhanced relevance and attractiveness will be almost impossible. The issue is also highlighted by the drive within EU countries

for higher quality in vocational training related to the Lisbon Strategy, the related Education and Training 2010 work programme, and the Copenhagen Process. These initiatives have been developed by the European Commission to facilitate implementation of the Lisbon goals. Key elements here include the development of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a European Credit Transfer System (ECVET) and a Common Quality Assurance Framework for Member States (CQAF).

A key element in the vocational school autonomy debate in decentralised vocational training governance systems is the concept of partnership. It has become popular to talk about partnership. An almost universal understanding that partnership is a modern and successful way of tackling joint challenges has dominated policy development in general during the last years. Somehow this is the result of a learning process. As many public monopolies – particularly in transition countries – have been broken down, new organisational and management concepts have proliferated and many types of experience have been made with strategies for interaction between previously unthinkable partners. The classic notion that what is a gain for one is generally a loss for the other has been seriously questioned. Instead, partnership has moved to the core of new types of policy development, where cooperation and competition take place at the same time. The idea is that actors will learn from both success and failure. This is probably not always the case and it is still early to say if partnership is just a current trend or a lasting new strategic tool for policy development and innovation.

It is important here to mention that partnership is not a concept with only one face. After the breakdown of monopolies, decentralisation has diluted power – though typically more so in EU Member States than in partner countries. It has become a commonly used expression to say that the private and public sectors must enter into partnerships in relation to e.g. vocational education and training, both at secondary and continuing education levels. In such ‘public-private

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partnerships' roles or contractual relationships are defined.

Another type of partnership focuses on how public institutions interact in order to develop and find solutions to policy development issues. In principle this is a voluntary cooperation between institutions with a background in several different domains or policy areas. Such partnerships must focus on an activity directed towards solving issues related to both the private sector and citizens. It defines ways in which public institutions and political actors choose to enter into obligations, commitments and alliances – being aware of the dangers and benefits involved.

Many of the ETF's partner countries have a poorly organised private sector. In relation to education, this second type of partnership is perhaps the most relevant to support in the short term. Turning vocational training institutions into local centres for development of competence or qualifications in a lifelong learning perspective will require that the actors – public and private – are fully aware that partnership is a process, something to be developed over time and not a ready-made construction that can be imposed by outside interests.

Vocational training systems in most of the partner countries still have a long way to go in transforming their schools into competence centres and in introducing school autonomy under changed framework conditions. Vocational training has, in most cases, a deteriorating image and status and is criticised for ineffectiveness and poor quality training. In North Africa and the Middle East<sup>54</sup>, for example, it is characterised by a number of common factors which have an impact on quality delivery. Vocational training institutions are experiencing increasing social, economic and institutional pressure on their capacity to provide quality services to a wide range of stakeholders.

On the social side, families generally consider academic streams more attractive for the future of their children. Generally,

vocational training institutions attract students with low academic skills and from groups in society with a low social status. Vocational training is characterised by a cultural mindset which considers that not all occupations are equally accessible to men and women. Students and families are not considered as influential actors in the system and they are given little space in the management and development of the institution. They have to comply with the rules without being able to discuss the objectives and the means to achieve them. Although unemployed and non-qualified workers are looking for training that can suit their needs, there is little or no capacity in vocational training institutions to develop such services.

As regards the economy, the evolution of globalisation and free-trade agreements have put a burden on local economies and labour markets which are mainly driven by small informal enterprises. These enterprises are not able to be competitive and adapt to technological evolution, and they also lack the capacity to analyse their needs. By tradition, they recruit in their close circle without much regard for qualifications. Competences are acquired at work. In countries where enterprises are able to identify their needs, they tend to look for new competences and a quality level that the vocational training system cannot provide. At the same time enterprises and, more widely, social partners are not very active in the management of vocational training institutions. In this context the example of Tunisia may be considered very advanced. Through the MANFORME project, a strategic development component and policies involving social partners in vocational training management and quality delivery have been implemented.

Institutionally, vocational training providers in transition countries primarily act in the public sector. They are subsidised by the government on a student ratio basis. They operate in a very rigid institutional environment where they have little management autonomy and little capacity to generate alternative forms of revenue or

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<sup>54</sup> The ETF's partner countries in this region are: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza Strip.

develop innovative training. By and large, they focus on initial training. They deliver formal training based on outdated curricula. There is little activity in continuing training and the assessment of non-formal training. They lack the resources and the competences (human, technical, managerial) needed to adapt to change. The rigidity of the overall governance system limits their possibility of being more autonomous and the quality of their delivery. Staff working conditions and wages are not in line with labour market standards.

In fact, vocational training institutions play a social role – in particular in North Africa and the Middle East where demographic pressure requires them to prepare a large cohort to enter the labour market<sup>55</sup>. They are often unable to respond to the demand for qualifications from enterprises (European Commission, 2005). They have not progressed in parallel with evolved industrial and economic requirements. With most of their equipment outdated, they play only a small and not very proactive role in supporting the linkages between research and development, technology innovation, and training.

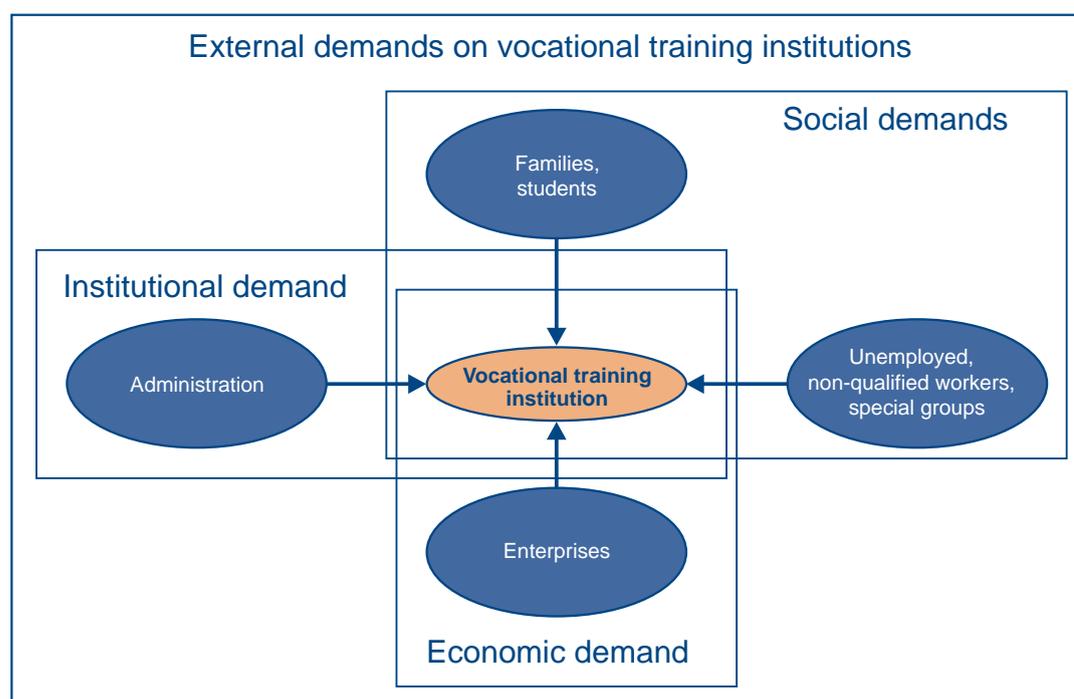
The diagram below summarises challenges for vocational schools in partner countries.

While the ETF partner regions and countries are at different stages of development, the common denominator appears to be that everywhere vocational training institutions have little autonomy and they have little interaction with their direct economic environment. They have few or no competitors and have not been able to develop skills to adapt to changes.

All of that said, this bleak picture should not hide the efforts made by a number of transition countries to improve the quality of their services in line with social, economic and institutional requirements.

### EMPOWERMENT OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

One key element in a well functioning partnership is that those involved are able to define their own best interests and possess the tools to act effectively. The



<sup>55</sup> The average annual demographic pressure in the region is estimated at +2.8% for the next 10 years. Forty million jobs need to be created throughout the region to maintain unemployment rates at the current level (Femise, 2003).

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work related to creating partnerships has to be seen as a learning process where the outcome of the partnership will materialise into a joint development process. For this reason, there is not one correct way of organising this type of cooperation. A dynamic, flexible education institution, meeting the interests of individual citizens and the community, has to be empowered by *all* its stakeholders and partners. Particularly in relation to partner countries it is important to be aware that these forms of 'doing' and 'doing' cannot and should not be imposed by donor driven projects. It should instead evolve through a gradually developing quest for partnership which the social and economic situation in each specific context necessitates. Also, it should be backed by a consistent political will to support the complex processes of decentralisation and empowerment of education institutions.

This is often a problem in transition countries where governments find it problematic to reduce their role in the micro-management of institutions and instead concentrate on developing framework conditions which will address key issues such as:

- How to ensure that vocational training systems can *involve* relevant stakeholders in a continuous development dialogue and meet new skills needs;
- How to ensure that vocational training systems are *dynamic*, able to produce the appropriate learning solutions to individual and local labour market needs;
- How to ensure that systems and the individual teacher are *flexible* enough to put the needs of individual learners first at all stages of their lives and *inclusive* enough to integrate weak and strong learners as well as ethnic minorities and thereby contribute to social coherence;
- What measures help vocational training systems and institutions to continuously adapt to the challenges of globalisation, technology, aspirations and attitudes of young people, and changes in the local labour market?

However, a sharpened focus on school empowerment is important *exactly* for achieving such macro-level goals.

There are three main elements involved in this empowerment challenge:

- the organisation and management of the institutions,
- teaching and learning aspects,
- the environment in which the institutions operate.

Organisation and management involves a capacity to understand and cope with education policies that are being applied, e.g. the vision and system strategy, the quality of management, financial conditions, decentralisation and levels of autonomy available to carry out strategic planning and making qualified and sound management decisions based on forecasting local labour market needs.

Teaching and learning involve developing and applying appropriate concepts of learning and the physical environments which support the teacher and stimulate the learner. It also involves up-to-date curricula as well as teachers and trainers being informed on technological and work-organisation developments in their sectors.

Environment relates to the nature and requirements of the local labour market, the state of regional development, and the cooperation structure between the training institutions and the social partners. The internal environment developed by management is also important, e.g. the ability to work with team and network-based schools, and the ability to organise creative and open learning environments.

For a number of countries, the empowerment of vocational training institutions has been a key development objective since the late 1980s. The UK, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries in particular have all reformed their institutional structure into networks of larger, more autonomous, and financially independent units. They are usually governed by tripartite bodies and funding is

results-based. These performance-based financing mechanisms in particular have proven to be a major challenge for the institutions. They have had to develop marketing strategies, competing with other education establishments. They have also had to make education departments within the schools think in economic and strategic development terms, based on the needs of a particular economic sector. Scale is often a key factor here.

In order to meet challenges of this nature and to be able to become credible partners for the local business community, a number of countries are in the process of developing very large regional institutions which do not only provide vocational training-related programmes, but also incorporate tertiary non-university programmes.

The legal base for this has typically been a new law on vocational training institutions that allows providers to retain profits and take loans to finance new activities, and replaces the central control of content provision with outcome-based framework curricula which the institutions – in cooperation with social partners - can turn into syllabi tuned to local student and labour market needs.

This type of institutional setup will be a key requirement if vocational training institutions are to meet the challenges outlined above and if they are to become local development centres that authorities and the local labour market consider to be drivers of local and regional development.

## TRANSFORMING VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS INTO LOCAL COMPETENCE CENTRES – A DANISH MODEL

Within this type of decentralised framework, Denmark (supported by the European Social Fund) is piloting a concept of local *competence centres* primarily within *adult and continuing education*. The objective of developing competence centres is primarily to address the urgent need for both private and public employers to develop and strengthen their

competitiveness, and to create local and regional frameworks for education institutions to interact so they can deliver the necessary range of services which will support this policy objective. This requires more complex tasks than any one institution can carry out on its own.

Denmark has a long tradition for close cooperation between social partners in matters related to vocational training and labour market issues. This means that many cooperation structures are already in place and can be used as a platform for development.

After a competition, 15 existing vocational training providers were selected to carry out a development programme on the lifelong learning needs of local companies and staff with a minimal educational background. The aim of the programme was to strengthen the interaction between all relevant local stakeholders and so develop active and inspiring cooperation among companies and education institutions, labour market partners, authorities and economic sector organisations.

Within a centrally defined framework, the 15 centres must develop solutions to concrete challenges, taking local conditions and realities as their point of departure. In this way the programme will provide experience with a number of different methods and competence centre models. The regional development dimension has been emphasised by the central authorities as the main focus.

The programme for each competence centre works within a framework of five centrally determined key activities:

- *Cooperate with companies on competence development and education planning.*

This can take place by, for example, discussing competence needs with local companies, and developing models and plans to be applied by the companies. A centre could also develop a network of companies and become the facilitator of the network.

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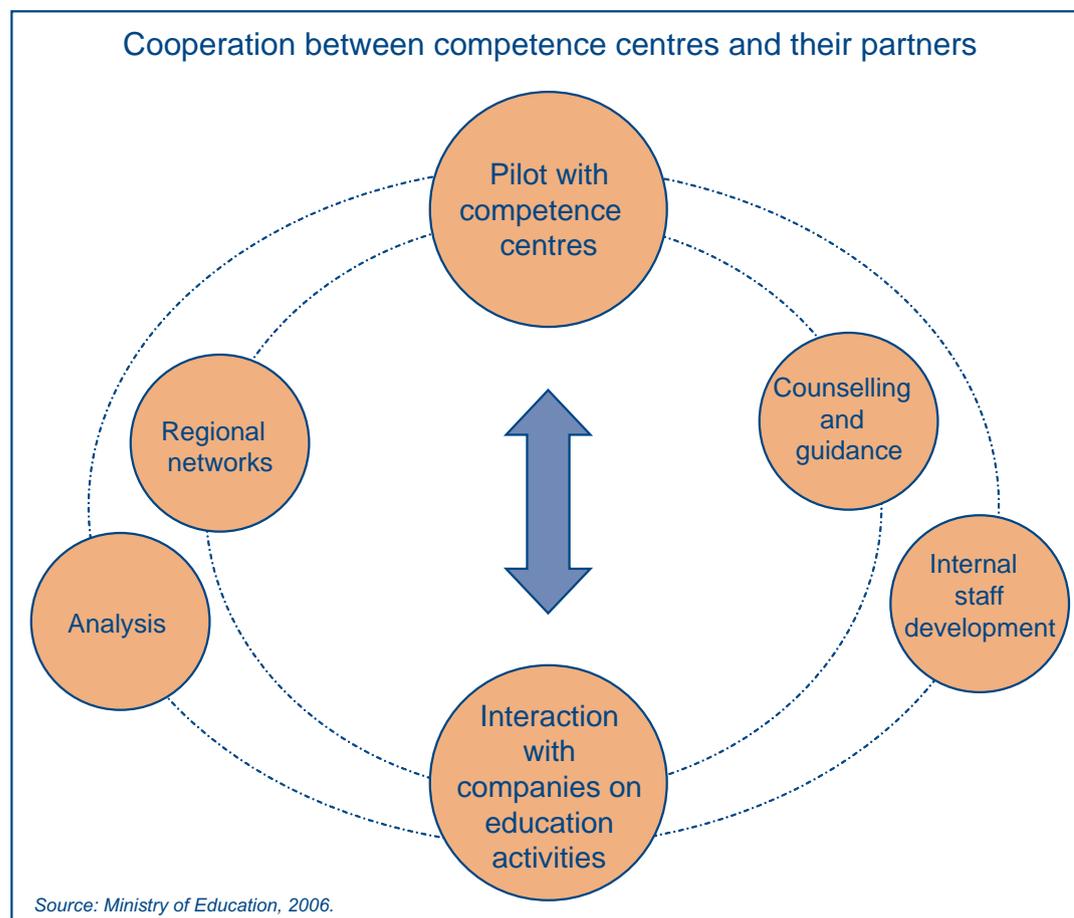
- *Engage in network and analysis activities with education institutions and relevant actors in the labour market.* This could focus on the potential for economic growth in the region. Which competence needs will arise? How do you get the different stakeholders – each with their own expertise – to cooperate?
- *Develop test methods for counselling and vocational guidance and an analysis of competence requirements of companies and individuals with outdated or short-lived qualifications.* This could take place in cooperation with companies that are planning to move production to low-cost countries or companies that are in the process of introducing new technology or work processes. In this case the competence centre could become a sparring partner for the company and its staff, assisting with competence needs analysis and helping to identify possibilities for re-qualification and skills upgrading.
- *Develop practical and relevant adult skills upgrading courses and programmes as well as new types of adult learning methods and approaches.* This may be competence development with strong links between content, methodology and the daily work situation of the learner. It may also be methods to assist companies to qualify and systematise internal learning

processes or strategies so that their internal learning environment may be analysed with a view to further development.

- *Initiate organisation and competence development in the providing institutions.* The institutions involved experience a shift of paradigm when they change their role from delivering courses to becoming competence development partners. The 15 centres must therefore qualify teachers and training consultants and ensure that they acquire the necessary competences.

These five areas for development would be central to any attempt to turn traditional vocational training providers into key local or regional development agents. In order to implement this approach and increase cooperation, a number of conditions have to be developed by local and national policymakers and governance officers:

- Long-term development goals have to be defined and agreed politically, nationally, regionally and locally.
- Decentralised governance with social partner involvement must be in place.
- Quality assurance instruments must be available among providers. These could include a culture and tools for evaluation and benchmarking.



- Teachers should have a background in industry and should have a wide range of methodological and pedagogical tools at their disposal.
- Facilitators and consultants must be recruited who will work mainly with 'the market', or the demand side (local companies).
- Social partners who recognise that education and training is a worthwhile investment are committed to providing the resources at sector level.
- Incentives are created for schools and labour market partners to cooperate.

The Danish schools are transformed into centres which are not one institution but a network of providers, public and private employers, authorities and political interests in the regional economic and social environment.

As mentioned, this pilot project is mainly directed at increasing the adult and continuing training capacity of vocational

training institutions. In a broader perspective, however, it is necessary for vocational training providers to develop these close cooperation links with the local labour market in order also to increase the level of quality in initial training.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

How will it be possible for vocational schools to start transforming themselves into regional vocational training technology and competence centres? One key strategic step is the enhancement of the capacity of schools to adjust their activities to changing local needs. In Denmark, in connection with the vocational training reform of 1990 which made vocational training institutions self-governing institutions (also financially), the focus has been on improving the ability of school management (board and executive) to carry out strategic planning not only for their own institution, but also related

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to a regional development perspective in cooperation with other providers operating in a region or sector.

This work has been strongly action-oriented and has started from a closer management focus on internal resources and external requirements. By focusing on the quality of decisions and measures that have been taken, it becomes increasingly important to evaluate the factors that have an influence on decisions. This was a new perspective for school managers who had always relied on central development planning. Now, the institutions themselves – in cooperation with the local social partners – became responsible for analysis, objectives, work plans, availability and use of financial and human resources. They suddenly had to think in business terms when evaluating past activities and planning future developments.

Why is it necessary to work strategically in vocational schools? Increased focus on decentralisation, autonomy, demand-driven provisions of training, demands on the flexibility of institutions to meet often urgent local demands – all of these things point to vocational schools having to enhance their capacity for strategic school development. This does not imply that vocational school managers have not carried out strategic planning in the past, but these have been different types of process – often directed at the political powers that be.

One of the problems in strategic planning in dynamic environments is of course that analysis and plans are not enough. Strategic decisions are taken continuously just as strategic processes continue all the time and on different levels. The surrounding environment is constantly changing – just think of the ICT revolution, the popularity of 'fashionable' qualification profiles versus actual needs for manpower within economic sectors, and politically motivated changes originating from the central government.

Strategy should thus be seen in a relationship with management and actions, rather than plans and analysis. A central part of the strategy and quality work in

vocational training institutions will be to set and optimise objectives as concretely and measurably as possible. It must be possible to document and assess the value for money of institutions.

When trying to develop strategic plans (from idea to joint acceptance and implementation) with a focus on models and processes, a number of important conditions have to be met:

- The entire management team has to participate – in words and actions.
- The degree and quality of information available is a determining factor for success.
- No more initiatives should be started than can be carried out.
- Acceptance of what happens to obtain a high degree of ownership
- Acceptance that interaction is more important than rules.

There are many factors that influence the overall situation of the institution: economic factors (e.g. interest rates), demographic factors (student age cohorts and the composition of the local labour market), social and cultural factors (attitudes towards education and training), technological factors (ICT developments), political factors (the role of schools in society), competitive factors (other providers, education sub systems). While taking these factors into account, a management team should always work to provide clarity on the following variables:

- the scope of the services provided by the institution,
- the correlation between the activities of the school and its environment,
- the correlation between the activities of the school and its resources.

Strategic planning provides both the direction and scope of the activities of the school in the long term, including how the school will match its resources and objectives with the expectations and demands of the key stakeholders.

An important aspect of the quality work going on in vocational training institutions at present is to get goals and objectives

operationalised as concretely and measurably as possible. It has to be possible to measure if objectives have been met. For this reason, objective setting, strategies, action plans and evaluation are key elements. However, it is important to underline that quality in vocational training provision means more than matching traditional productivity factors, such as costs and effectiveness. A focus on the education content and processes should go *hand in hand* with economic requirements and an overall strive for effectiveness so that strategy and quality are tied together through a focus on learning instead of, for example, reducing costs.

## STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY DEVELOPMENT IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

Several countries are developing national strategies that can stimulate a quality process in vocational training at all levels. Other countries focus more narrowly on supporting vocational schools to develop quality model institutions.

It is interesting to observe that, more often than not, vocational school autonomy under decentralised framework conditions in ETF partner countries has been perceived as an issue of central control through quality systems.

As already mentioned, Tunisia has carried out a huge programme (MANFORME) supported by a number of donors (EU, World Bank) with as its main objective “to develop a quality-based vocational training system at the service of the country’s economy”. Four axes were identified to reach the overall objective. One of these was to launch a quality process targeting the different phases in the chain of supply and demand of vocational training. A total quality management (TQM) approach was elaborated which involved a wide range of stakeholders from private, public and civil society. The action plan asked for strong involvement from the social partners at all levels of the system. The satisfaction of the

economic sector is the foundation of the reform.

The vocational training institutions were heavily involved; “the entire system” had to be “touched by the quality wave” (Ministère de l’Education et la Formation, 2004). Following a pilot approach involving seven vocational training institutions which were ISO 9001 certified in 2000, a total of 27 have now been active in the process. All are applying a National Curriculum for Quality in Vocational Training (RNQFP<sup>56</sup>). This curriculum presents a model for the organisation and the functioning of the vocational training providers. It is accompanied by a handbook and a set of standards and indicators to measure how the quality delivered by the centres conforms to national aims. This process is designed to offer vocational training institutions an opportunity to compare the development of their quality system with national standards.

Quality, however, is not only about processes. It is also about commitment of all actors and the timing should be considered seriously. We can speak here of a structured and administrative top-down approach resulting from a desire to adapt the vocational training system to the political commitment of a government.

In Jordan, a recent national strategy for the vocational training sector included the objective to develop quality. This should increase the productivity of the Jordanian labour force (NCHRD, 2006). It is expected that a national agency called the TVET Service Providers Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Unit will be set up with the aims of (i) developing and implementing vocational training criteria to control the quality of outputs in line with relevant regional and international standards, (ii) licensing vocational training institutions, and (iii) monitoring and assessing the performance of vocational training institutions.

Since 2001, in Russia and some of the other post Soviet states, a different approach to quality delivery in vocational training institutions has been developed

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<sup>56</sup> Référentiel National Qualité de la Formation Professionnelle.

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with ETF support. An assessment made clear that vocational training reforms were hampered because institution managers were insufficiently skilled to manage their institutions in a market economy. A series of five manuals was produced to raise awareness and provide new managerial skills to senior administrators and decision-makers (ETF, 2001-2004). While not explicitly mentioning the implementation of a TQM system, the five modules of the project directly refer to quality development aspects such as: vocational training as an object of management, planning in vocational training, quality management, perfecting organisational structures, effective management of financial resources. The quality management module in particular elaborates on an integrated model of vocational training quality management. It proposes the interaction of two cycles: the quality management cycle and the quality loop cycle. In a nutshell each achievement may be considered as a starting point for a new cycle. This interactive approach addresses the capacity of vocational training institutions to consider themselves as business organisations operating predominantly under market conditions (ETF, 2001-2004). This pilot project is based on a bottom-up approach with support of the vocational training administrations in the region. Its outcomes should help to develop a strategy for the development of a TQM system for vocational training.

While not directly linked to ETF partner countries, it is relevant to mention the efforts undertaken in South America (ILO, 2006). In Brazil, a sophisticated quality certification process based on ISO certification has been developed in the vocational training umbrella institution for the industrial sector (SENAI). It involved 180 institutions across the country. It forms part of a national quality policy and is developed in close cooperation with Brazil's national standardisation and certification agency. Similar examples are found in Peru, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala. Taking into consideration the important number of similarities (economic development, demography, poverty, the role of

vocational training as having primarily a social rather than an economic function) between ETF partner countries and South America, more analysis could be useful. It could identify active processes and make these success stories available for inspiration in the process of building quality vocational training systems in ETF partner countries.

Looking in detail at a number of actions undertaken with or without donor support, it is possible to say that, taken individually, many institutions try to contribute to the development of quality in vocational education and training. Nevertheless, their impact does not generate a mechanism that can lead the way towards a comprehensive quality system. The cost of such systemic development in terms of capacity building, external expertise, and tool development may be reduced by starting from the development of a model institution delivering quality services to its direct environment. This model development should be elaborated through intense networking and ownership of the local communities which would start with analysing the strengths and weaknesses and would target quality and relevance at the provider level as the primary goal to reach.

### SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

In both the EU and partner countries, a key question not only for vocational schools but education systems in general is whether schools are ready to meet the strengthened demand for quality education. In general there is little experience with what works and what does not work and the relationship between school management and quality urgently needs attention in all countries.

More attention to a culture of evaluation, increased mobility of students, freedom of choice and all the challenges that management faces with increased financial, organisational and pedagogical autonomy have highlighted the need to develop tools and share experience among practitioners and decision-makers. A number of organisations are showing an

increased interest in these issues, most notably the OECD which has launched a major project called 'Improving school leadership'. It aims to analyse the frameworks and conditions for school leadership.

Modern vocational schools are very complex organisations with many interests and purposes. They not only transmit competences, cultures and norms, but they also qualify young people and adults for occupations and the financial and social status that come with it. Much of this was formerly provided outside the school doors, in companies, by parents, and by peers, but is now performed as a part of the daily life of schools. This places enormous responsibility and pressure on the way schools are organised, their staff and not least school leaders.

In a number of countries, school leaders face a multitude of challenges. In addition to the challenges mentioned above, schools are met with the premise that educational standards are deteriorating, they provide poor value for money, they are unable to develop the new programmes and courses needed by the local economic community and they

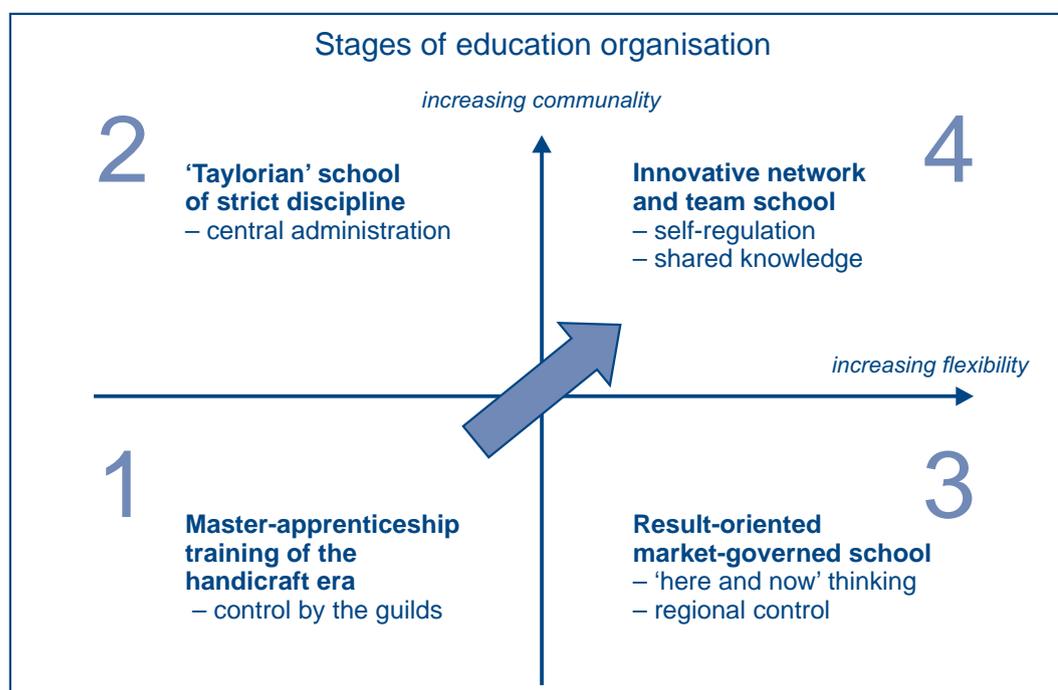
cannot manage the competitive environment among providers that is encouraged by central authorities.

An illustration of the developments in a number of countries in relation to vocational school development can be seen in Engeström's (1995) general description of the stages of education organisation<sup>57</sup>:

In summary, the most important elements in the development from a centrally managed 'Taylorian' school model to an institution providing increasing levels of communality and flexibility will be:

- moving from micro management to strategic management,
- nurturing a culture of innovation and development,
- moving towards team and network-based organisation and management,
- securing local ownership of the development process,
- delegating authority and financial responsibility.

Studies investigating effective school leadership indicate that the authority to



<sup>57</sup> See also the introductory chapter to this Yearbook with its reference to education cycles based on an evolutionary process as conceptualised by Roberto Carneiro (1993).

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lead does not need to be concentrated in the leader but can be dispersed within the school between people. There seems to be a growing understanding that leadership is embedded in various organisational contexts within school communities, not centrally in one person or one office. This reflects the need to develop school leadership models that mirror the decentralised, self-governing trend that is increasingly established in many societies.

An example of this is provided by a number of Danish vocational colleges, where the entire state subsidy per student is given to the sector department, which has to make ends meet for education expenses (salaries, equipment, teaching aids, teachers' in-service training, etc.) and pay a 'tax' to the common budget of the college. This 'inclusive' method of financial and pedagogical management highlights the need for multi-skilled school managers at many levels of the organisation. Some schools even go as far as to give teams of teachers financial and strategic planning responsibilities in order to increase their capacity to meet the needs of individual students and the local labour market.

Previously, vocational colleges were mostly managed by a narrow management team that would meet daily and take all the necessary strategic and financial decisions. Now practically every teacher is involved in managing resources and identifying priorities – based on the overall values and objectives agreed within the organisation. This trend in school organisation and management will become increasingly important if providers are to secure quality in all areas of their activities, from the provision of labour market relevant education and training to financial management and dynamic interaction with the local and regional environment.

The professionalisation and improvement of school leaders is necessary to be able to transcend the classic micro-management principles and move focus from management towards leadership.

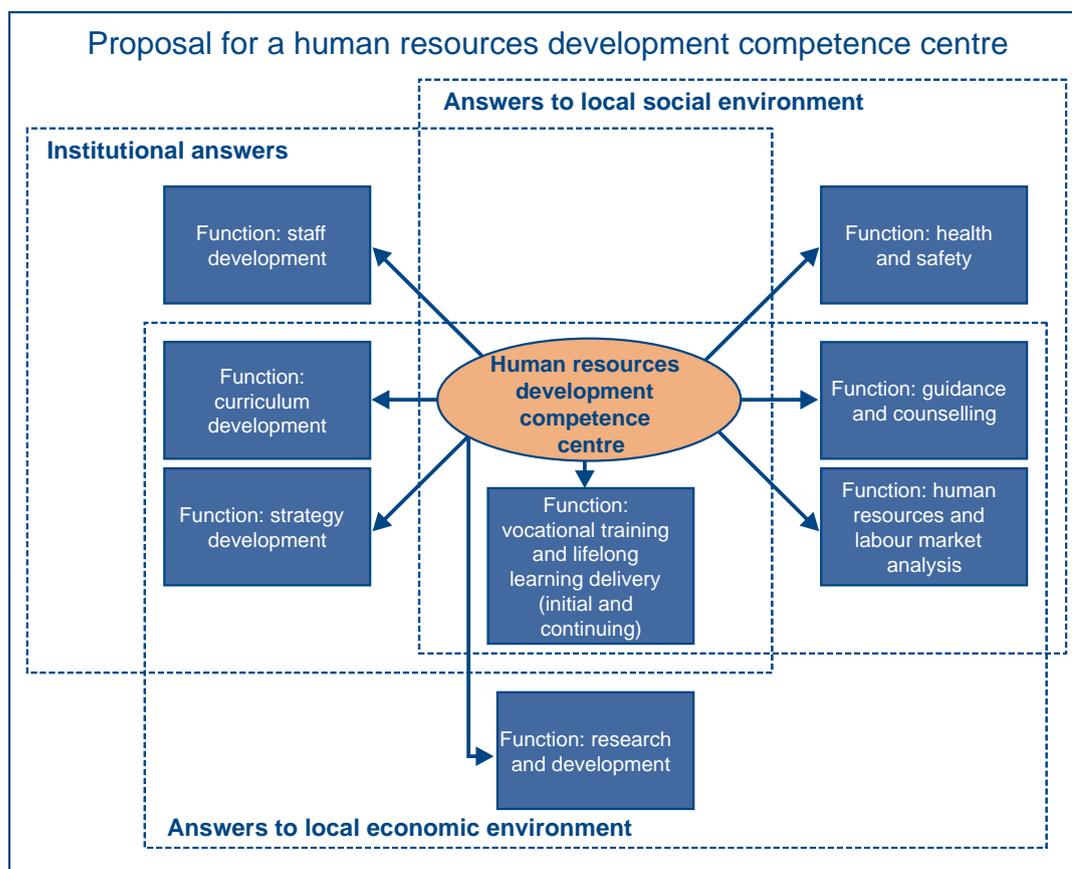
One precondition for this move is that policymakers establish a practicable local

'space for leadership' Authorities must show trust in leaders. They must give them space to lead but with increased accountability so that there are consequences if the schools do not reach objectives or leaders do not live up to their responsibilities. In order to practice effective leadership, local checks and balances must be in place too: it is important to have a competent and effective board level in institutions with a well defined role and clear objectives.

A second problem area is the lack of leadership tools. One such tool is the development of a culture of evaluation, and in this context it should be investigated if a number of management tools from the private sector could be used in relation to leadership in schools. However, schools do not deliver a standardised product, so objective setting is infinitely more difficult in an education environment than in a production company.

The third major challenge is for school leaders to become proactive in meeting the needs of the surrounding environment. In most education systems it is fair to assume that teachers are not driven by a 'winner' approach, so school leaders must be able to create an institutional culture of pride, taking responsibility and displaying the ability to read the trends and agendas of the day. Requirements for results will increasingly appear from many sides and interests, so teachers and school managers no longer have a monopoly in setting the professional standards in schools. The surrounding society will demand dynamic developments in a complicated setting and increased transparency in relation to results, efficiency, communication and dedicated services for a wide range of clients.

So school leadership must be increasingly tailored to local requirements and the old concept of a principal being 'first among equals' is no longer relevant in a dynamic school environment. In such a setting, schools must attract and continuously develop leaders.



**Conclusion: from vocational training institution to human resources development competence centre: delivering quality services in transition countries**

Learning from the experiences previously presented both in the EU and ETF partner countries, this final section proposes an approach to a model of an human resources development competence centre.

Developing a quality human resources development competence centre in a transition country implies developing a functional organisation that can reverse the negative forces exerted by its environment and provide innovative answers to solve identified problems. In the figure above below we present a positive mirror of what was presented in the figure on p.52: the external forces influencing a vocational training institution. It proposes a series of functional answers from a training institution in a transition country seeking to become not only a training provider but a human resources development

competence centre for its immediate environment.

Certain functions may help to transform a vocational training institution into a human resources development competence centre. These relate to applying quality criteria, providing services to the community, and playing a role in human resources policy development for its immediate environment in a lifelong learning perspective. The development of such functions should be supported.

In this new approach, initial training becomes only one of a number of services to be offered. Continuing training becomes the training priority. For this, advanced links with the labour market must be established. Other functions are provided by those who are most prepared to do it. Through a partnership approach, the host building (previously the vocational training institution) becomes a hub and welcomes within its walls any relevant institution or service that can answer client needs in a similar way as in the Danish competence centres. As we wrote above, these are no

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longer one institution but a network of providers, public and private employers, authorities and political interests in the regional economic and social environment. In this case, the direct clients of the competence centre are the local enterprises (economic demand), families and students (social demand) and staff (institutional demand).

This approach requires a new mindset from those active in this new organisation. They must be made to understand that quality is based on the demand of clients.

As explained in the previous section, the role of leadership in such a structure is crucial. To build a new strategy for the human resources development competence centre, a decentralised governance system is proposed involving representatives of the three identified groups of stakeholders (economic, social and institutional) under the leadership of the overall director of the centre. Quality management methods should be developed to exploit its full potential and to develop interaction between all stakeholders. Solutions must identify how financial resources can be used at the level closest to the 'customers'. Some ideas for this have also been given in the previous section.

Development steps in this transformation will have to be gradual. One cannot easily jump from a traditional vocational school to a regional competence centre. However, it is possible to start with some of the identified functions by choosing a prioritised set of services to be offered to clients. This could then form the basis for the gradual implementation of a selected number of actions. At an early stage local labour market needs will have to be analysed to map new competences that will be needed in the face of increased competition, globalisation and new technologies. This could imply the use of sector-based training consultants who would scan and develop the market for training in the relevant local community, in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders and with reference to a set of standards answering the demand for quality.

Both enterprises and individuals (students, unemployed, employed with special needs, youngsters) must upgrade their competences. The centre will also offer guidance and counselling services for all its clients.

The research and development function is intended to provide support to local enterprises in expanding their technical and management capacities. To perform that new duty, the role of students needs to be reconsidered. They become the vector between the centre and enterprises and help to identify fields for development. They leave the static role of learner to being active contributors to enterprise development. The centre becomes the place where solutions can be developed through projects providing win-win situations in which the three parties improve their knowledge and competences.

Teachers are confronted with the challenge of finding practical solutions and acting as facilitators in the technical and pedagogical process. Being closer to enterprises allows them in principle to better identify training needs and to propose the development of new curricula to rebuild the relationships with the social and economic environment. This is done simultaneously through the increased involvement of social partners in the identification of training needs. Continuing training for the immediate economic environment and the registered unemployed means that new pedagogical approaches to education and training and more flexible student-centred learning environments must be developed. Increasingly, staff development programmes aiming at encouraging new ideas and developing new skills at all levels of the organisation will be implemented. A move away from the classic pedagogic jargon towards new skills development concepts will greatly help communication between educators and private enterprises.

A tendency by donors towards more long-term sector-wide approaches to human resources development would be very welcome in this context but even more

important would be a sharper focus on policy learning approaches. These may help to secure political support and as such release resources for reform measures which will empower the education and training institutions.

This political commitment is a *sine qua non* if vocational schools are to contribute effectively to the social and economic well being – perhaps even prosperity – of the population.

## TEACHERS AND TRAINERS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM

*Søren Nielsen*

# 3

### INTRODUCTION

In all European countries, the roles of teachers and students are in a process of change as a result of new approaches to active learning. Responsibility is shifting from the teacher to the learner and the teacher becomes more an organiser and facilitator of the learning processes than the transmitter of expert knowledge. Capacities for change and adaptation as well as learning-to-learn have become important competences *per se* that learners should develop. Self-directed learning has become a necessity for an increasing proportion of the population in rapidly changing societies.

By focusing on teachers, teaching, and learning processes we also open up for a discussion about how to organise policy learning processes in the framework of vocational schools. As key stakeholders, teachers should develop the capacity to support vocational training policy

development and to establish discussion platforms on reform initiatives, embedded in schools and fitting into their contexts, and in this way enable ownership and sustainability of vocational training reform. Therefore, the focus on teachers is central to the overall discussion on how to support policy learning in partner countries.

This chapter, which draws on some of the arguments and findings of a new ETF publication on vocational teachers (Nielsen et al., 2007), asks three basic questions:

- Why is change in schools and teaching practice so difficult to achieve and why do macro reforms in education often fail?
- What are the consequences for innovation in teaching and learning of the current fixation on governance and framework conditions, in particular the Bologna Process, the EQF and the CQAF<sup>58</sup>?

<sup>58</sup> A Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for vocational training, which provides a meta-framework compatible with existing quality systems, was endorsed by the European Council in May 2004: [http://europa.eu/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/vetquality\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/vetquality_en.pdf).

- How do we bring teachers and trainers back in as key players in vocational training reforms in countries in transition – the ‘dance-floor’ versus the ‘balcony’ model?

First, this chapter will revisit the arguments developed for the ETF’s work on innovation of teaching and learning set out in the *ETF Yearbook 2005* (Grootings and Nielsen (eds.), 2005).

This forms the backdrop against which we will analyse two case studies taken from recent reform initiatives of vocational teacher training systems in transition countries in South Eastern Europe and Turkey. These case studies serve to illustrate some of the barriers for genuine reform.

Then we will broaden the focus by analysing, from an international perspective, why ‘macro’ level reforms in EU and OECD countries tend to fail, if they don’t pay much attention to the ‘micro’ level of classrooms, teachers and students. There is a need here to be aware of the different situations in EU/OECD and transition and developing countries and we are conscious of this. The statement that ‘macro’ reforms tend to fail applies, to a certain extent, to already ‘developed’ systems where the major needs concern such issues as the quality and relevance of outputs, soft skills and life skills, etc. In many developing countries, ‘macro’ reforms address such fundamental issues as legislative tools, funding systems, and improved governance structures.

The chapter argues further that vocational schools are the key focus for any reform and that the continuing professional development of teachers as well as school principals, configured in school-based innovative development projects, is probably the best way to ensure sustainable, qualitative change in education systems.

The chapter sums up the analysis by formulating a number of key policy issues for vocational teacher training reform in partner countries. A new ETF development project on capacity building for innovative teaching is presented, and in the

concluding section we will again argue in favour of the policy learning strategy and highlight the need for a sharpened focus on processes and ‘substance’ instead of structures and frameworks, if improved learning for students is to become a reality.

## TEACHERS AS PROFESSIONALS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Unless teachers become professionals and stakeholders of reform, as we recommended in the *ETF Yearbook 2005*, it will be difficult to improve results in terms of education system performance. The *Yearbook* argument evolved around the thesis that in modern vocational training systems, teachers are at the same time professional educators and key change agents. Continuing innovation and development has therefore become a core task of the modern professional vocational teacher. The crucial challenge is that both of these teacher roles are now changing.

Professional roles are changing:

1. Teachers will become lifelong and life-wide learning facilitators instead of transmitters of isolated blocks of expert knowledge and skills;
2. Several paradigm changes are taking place: new public management, education management, vocational training policies and school management are changing. A demand for increased repertoires of organising learning processes is appearing;
3. Learner needs and labour market requirements are changing and becoming more differentiated.

Stakeholder roles are changing too:

1. They have long been neglected but are now increasingly appreciated;
2. Vocational training reform is seen as an ongoing learning process;
3. Reform increasingly requires articulation between national and system authorities, and between local and school authorities;
4. There is an increasing need for teachers to go beyond the classroom –

into the school, the community, the vocational training system at large and even across borders;

5. Teachers will have to become more actively engaged in reform processes.

In their role of new professionals, teachers should be engaged as indispensable stakeholders. But the question remains: How best to involve teachers and trainers in ongoing vocational training reforms so that ownership will be better translated into quality learning and teaching and professional expertise from teaching and learning processes can guide systemic reform? Such an understanding of reform puts policy learning, capacity building and policy advice at both national and school levels in a new perspective and at the same time with considerably more urgency than before. Policy learning as a process requires a continuous interaction and dialogue between national and local partners. There are therefore strong incentives to include teachers among the principal stakeholders in reform and to put them back into the scene.

Unless teachers see their continued development as an essential part of their professionalism, the system will hardly be able to make the next big step forward in standards of learning and achievement.

This is not just another discourse on making teaching comparable to other respected professions – it is in the first place simply a very practical call to engage teachers and trainers in development teams and to make them apply a rich repertoire of teaching strategies to meet their students' needs. This will require a radically different form of professional development with a strong focus on coaching and on establishing schools as professional learning communities.

Unfortunately, in all South Eastern European countries as well as in Turkey the concept of continuous professional development among teachers is almost exclusively seen as continuing 'training' of teachers provided by centralised delivery

systems. In reality, continuous professional development is a much more promising strategy. It is cheaper, and it also helps to re-establish, if properly organised, a social recognition of teachers as professionals *and* stakeholders of reform.

In the next sections, we will analyse two examples of donor-led vocational teacher training reform.

## DONOR-LED REFORM OF PRE-SERVICE VOCATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

An ambitious and interesting example of reform of the initial education of vocational teachers is the project *New Concept for Teacher Training in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. This is a Tempus-Phare Joint European Project that ran between 1999 and 2002, and was coordinated by the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and a team of international experts. Three local vocational schools participated. The objective was to renew pre-service and in-service training for vocational teachers, focusing on general subjects, theoretical vocational subjects, practical vocational subjects, and with a dedicated training programme for teacher educators.

*The vocational teacher training model design in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*<sup>59</sup>

The vocational teacher training model for the career development of teachers in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is based on competence-based modules at four levels (see overleaf). The new concept for vocational teacher training is based on the European Credit Transfer System (established as part of the Bologna Process). It establishes links between the university, vocational schools, the ministerial curriculum, inspectors and the labour market. And last but maybe most importantly: it creates a career system for

<sup>59</sup> This section builds on the presentation by Natasa Angeloska Galevska, Vice Dean, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, at the expert meeting organised by Unesco together with the ETF and the ILO in Vienna, 21-24 November 2004. A preliminary analysis of this model was undertaken in the *ETF Yearbook 2005*.

teachers which can ensure stronger motivation, better status and mobility for teachers.

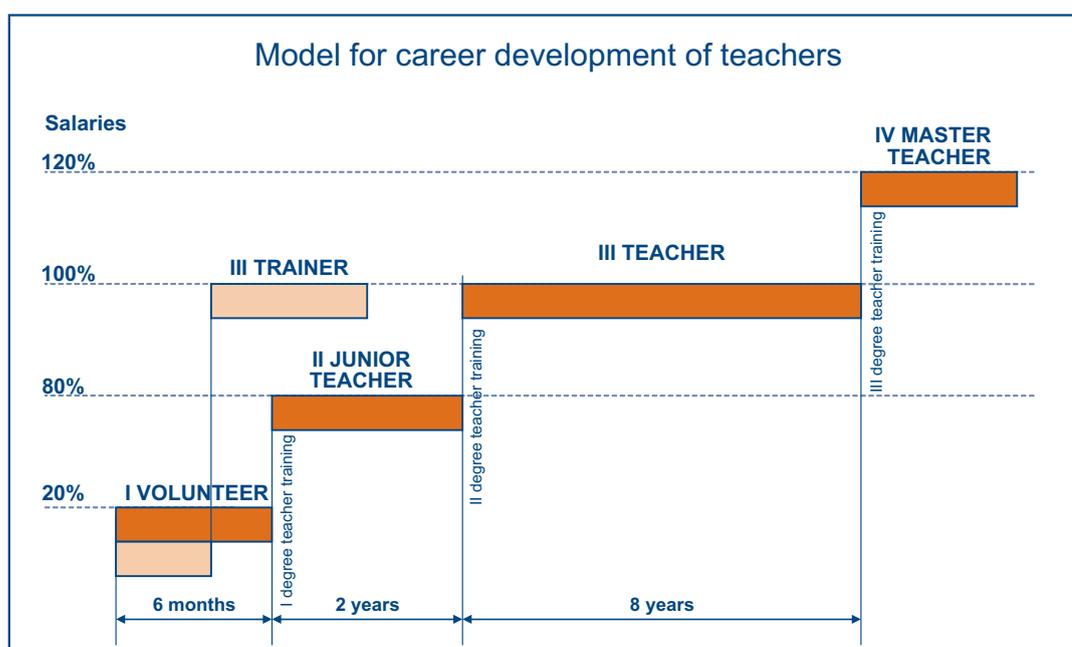
There are clear advantages to the new concept for vocational teacher training. The concept takes as its point of departure a definition of the competences that each vocational teacher should possess and it is practically oriented. This strategy of defining a professional profile in order to ensure that teachers acquire the skills to respond to the challenges of their changing roles is also one of the first trends identified in nearly all initial teacher education policy practices studied by the EC working group on teacher training (European Commission, 2003).

The emphasis on an outcome-based qualification profile for teachers means that this policy promotes not only a theoretically based, but also a profession-oriented approach to teacher training in teacher education institutions. It also helps to ensure that school staff education needs are the drivers for (i) teacher training curriculum development, (ii) teacher training programme development, (iii) teacher assessment, (iv) the individual certification of qualified teacher status, and (v) the accreditation and external approval of programmes.

The model in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is still not implemented. Why?

*The donor model – vocational policy copying*

The model of vocational teacher training in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is an example of vocational training policy copying. It is more or less a replica of the innovative Dutch vocational teacher training model, *Duale Trajecten Bve*, developed by the teacher training college Fontys in 1997. This becomes clear when reading the presentation of this model in Cort et al. (2004). The aim was the development of a demand-based training system, with the design of a four-year route (in four stages) that takes account of (sub) competences corresponding to the job profiles of the different functions in the Dutch institutes for vocational training and adult education (ROCs). The programme has a dual approach. It is not only about teacher training, but about developing an over-arching system of training for different jobs for the differentiated job profiles at these institutes: education assistants, trainers, coaches and teachers. These job profiles all work in the ROCs, however, their theoretical background and experience from the world of work is mostly different.



The innovative dimensions are the following:

- competence orientation,
- dual system (teacher training college and vocational schools (ROCs),
- common responsibility of all partners in the programme,
- innovative learning environment,
- direct link to the policy on professionalisation.

This course structure is competence-based rather than curriculum guided. The trainee can develop competences in a dual way of learning, coached by the educator from the institute for teacher training as well as by the coach in the workplace at the vocational school. For every level (education assistant, trainer, coach and teacher) sets of competences are developed. These competences are clustered in domains and most competences contain a set of sub competences.

The programme was developed as a result of cooperation between 13 different vocational schools and a teacher training college. This co-operation extends to developing, implementing and evaluating the programme. The schools and the teacher training college are both responsible for the quality and the organisation of the dual course. The model is highly innovative in its basic assumptions, content and methodology. It is a dual route for education staff, with a central role for learning in the workplace and an integration of work and learning. It is competence-based rather than curriculum-oriented at four levels – it is part of the dual training that a student can move on from, for instance, education assistant to teacher – and founded on a methodology of learning by doing. The training day consists of training, reflections and exchange of experiences and learning issues. Moreover, one of the basic assumptions in this programme is that people learn from each other. During the course the trainees meet each other – once a week – in the training group at the teacher training college. They work at

different vocational schools. Developing their own competences through learning by doing means that the training process is ‘coloured in’ by the trainees; the learning activities and subjects vary among different students on the course. Learning by doing means that the trainees develop their competences by working on real and useful products and performances. They direct the way they develop their own competences. The daily tasks in the working environment of the student at the ROC are the point of departure.

*The lack of ‘embeddedness’<sup>60</sup> and contextual fit*

A general lesson from the history of comparative education is that ‘every system of education is shaped by its local, historical, economic, cultural and social context. [...]... Education, in short, [...] cannot be de-contextualised from its local culture...’ (Crossley and Watson, 2003). In this case, a training system with a uniquely specific background was taken out of its original context.

In 1997 a number of ROCs approached the teacher training college of Fontys with a request for cooperation in the setting up of a teacher education programme as a response to three problem areas.

1. In the Netherlands the vocational training and adult education field has its own collective labour agreement which allows for function differentiation. This function differentiation was really a need for the ROCs to implement a new education concept. The problem was that the teacher training colleges with the traditional full and part-time teacher education did not sufficiently take account of this development. They educate their students to become ‘teachers’ and there were no possibilities to cater for the new functions mentioned in the collective ROC labour agreement.
2. A second problem was that the ROCs feared a large exodus of their teaching staff in the following ten years, mainly due to retirement, which made it clear

<sup>60</sup> *Embedding*: “to fix or become fixed firmly and deeply in a surrounding solid mass”: *Collins Shorter English Dictionary*, 1995.

that the traditional teacher education institutes would never be able to meet the requirements.

3. A final challenge concerned the fact that the education innovation aspired to by the ROCs might be encouraged if they started to educate whole groups of teachers and trainers together. In this way a kind of innovative potential would be created.

None of these conditions were or are present today in the context of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and it is hardly surprising that this design has been difficult to implement in the country.

## DONOR-LED GREEN / WHITE PAPER VOCATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING REFORM STRATEGY IN TURKEY

As one among very few countries, Turkey has treated the reform of its vocational teacher training system as a central part of general vocational training reforms.

The reform design of systemic vocational teacher training is very rich and offers many angles for discussion. For analytical purposes, in this chapter we will approach it from only two perspectives<sup>61</sup>. Both are central to the argument developed here.

The first is the impact of new EU education/vocational training policies in terms of risks of *policy taking*. The second is the involvement of teachers as professionals and stakeholders in vocational teacher training reform in Turkey.

Even though there are both divergent and convergent trends in the development of vocational education and training policies in Europe, some are common to all countries. In almost all countries it is possible to identify three levels of policy formation and discourse:

1. Globalisation as a discourse frame for vocational training policies in Europe;
2. EU vocational training policies with a focus on the Lisbon objectives, the Copenhagen process, the Bologna

process (for higher education, including higher vocational training), and the introduction of the Open Method of Coordination in EU VET policies;

3. National vocational training policies and reforms.

Furthermore, a sharpened focus in Turkey must be placed on how and through which mechanisms these policy discourses are transformed into practice in the national vocational training system – which is the fourth level of analysis.

Reforms and adjustments are needed in order to reap the full benefits of globalisation and address its challenges. But although it shares these challenges with most other countries and although the challenges are global in nature, Turkey has to find national solutions to face them. This is not easy.

European cooperation can support and inspire Turkey. There are good possibilities for shared learning. But the hard work will have to be done at home, through national priority setting and policy decisions. Policymakers and practitioners at all levels in Turkey therefore have to develop the capacity to become policy learners and policy interpreters. They have access to a variety of international models and measures that aim to achieve the same goal but they must be recast to come to a solution that fits the Turkish (education) culture and traditions. There is a need to develop capacities to translate goals into nationally preferred practices and to manage the internal processes involved and a number of critical elements of the policy-making chain must be identified and overcome. In the years ahead, Turkey will have to develop the capacity to 'shape' and implement its *own* policies. In short, efforts to intensify the organisation of policy learning platforms and to establish meaningful policy learning for key actors and stakeholders in Turkey are key to vocational training/human resources development reform in the coming years.

A number of EU funded interventions have been launched to support Turkey, among

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<sup>61</sup> Many other aspects, activities and achievements of the Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training (MVET) project deserve attention.

these the vocational teacher training reform project, Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training (MVET). Running between 2003 and 2006, this project aimed to strengthen Turkish capacity to organise and deliver modern and efficient pre-service and in-service vocational teacher education.

The project had four objectives:

- Improve teacher training standards, including key competences for teachers;
- Develop standard-based curricula;
- Design and test a quality management framework for vocational teacher training;
- Formulate a government strategy on vocational teacher training founded on a white paper/green paper<sup>62</sup> approach.

There are 25 vocational teacher training faculties in Turkey, they offer four-year programmes and have an annual student intake of 35,500 students (2004-05). Technical education faculties have serious problems concerning the structure of programmes, capacity and the fact that only about 5%-10% of graduates can find a job as a teacher upon completion. At the same time, these educated teachers have skills that are not recognised by the labour market. There is therefore a need to reconvert teacher training faculties into faculties of technology and applied sciences better responding to demands from the employment system.

These structural challenges of the whole configuration of the higher education system in Turkey became dominant and overrode the intended focus on capacity building for the innovation of teaching and learning through a reform of vocational teacher training programmes. So the agenda changed as policymakers and key stakeholders concluded that a reform of the higher education system in line with the

Bologna Process would be needed before the specifics of teacher training could be tackled. As a next step a reclassification of job titles and competence clusters of candidates from reconverted faculties of technology (quasi polytechnics) should be implemented following European 'standards' (EQF). A functional quality assurance system (CQAF) would be needed for the faculties in order to ensure a consistency of standards and a constant improvement of quality. And only then could the need to change the structure and content of vocational teacher training programmes be met and renewed modalities for university based in-service training for teachers developed.

Fundamental structural reform needs in higher education in Turkey run into a complicated alliance with new EU vocational training policy initiatives. Technical 'framework' considerations clouded the focus on 'substance' in the organisation of teaching and learning for future vocational teachers. The project implementation ran into difficulties not foreseen in the design and while a white paper was expected to be the final outcome of the MVET project, it was never produced. Instead there is now a broad final report and a vocational teacher training policy and strategy paper (MVET project, 2006a and b). These documents form the basis for the analysis in this section.

The radical EU requirements perceived as a 'must' for Turkey (see the implementation of the 'Common Principles on Teachers'<sup>63</sup>), are taking away the focus from real problems in Turkey. The discourse on vocational teacher training becomes overshadowed by a general criticism of the weak qualification structure in Turkey. The latter is not really relevant for the discourse on vocational teacher training because it concerns general labour market categories, even though this of course has

<sup>62</sup> A *White Paper* is agreed policy and strategy. It is a stage prior to implementation but it represents a commitment on what is politically, technically and organisationally feasible. A *Green Paper* is a set of policy recommendations presented for consultation to key constituencies at a stage where amendments (minor or major) can be made with the White Paper in mind.

<sup>63</sup> *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications*, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, 2005 ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/principles\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/principles_en.pdf)). This document has never been approved as a formal, official document. It might be taken forward again in late 2007, either as an EC Recommendation (formal status), or as a Communication (Commission opinion).

consequences for the vocational teacher labour market. This analysis is really about the need for a national qualifications framework and is, in the context of this particular Green Paper, problematic because it removes the focus from the innovation of teaching and learning. It is part of the environment and not part of the system.

The problem is that the policy and strategy set out very ambitious demands on institutional structural change which crowd out realistic and reasonable demands for change within the vocational teacher training system. Unintentionally, structural problems in Turkish higher education have now become stumbling blocks, hampering other reforms of vocational teacher training in Turkey. A reduction in complexity is needed to enable a sharpened focus on how to introduce new learning paradigms in teacher education; the qualification problem and the university faculty problem will have to be discussed in other fora. All three elements are interlinked but, as the Turkish experience has illustrated, it will not be possible to achieve serious change in the vocational teacher training system unless they are kept separate. Things must be kept simple and issues should be tackled one at a time.

The reform policy and strategy analysis places too heavy an emphasis on foreign 'drivers' for change and on EU 'requirements' for change in Turkish vocational teacher training. This is problematic for two reasons:

1. EC policies are seen as the final goals for Turkey, as challenges and demands, and not as part of open and tentative answers to the challenge of globalisation.
2. EC policies are seen as 'givens', as something countries will have to implement.

What is important instead is to prepare Turkish policymakers and experts for active participation in European policy learning processes (such as the Open Method of Co-ordination<sup>64</sup>, peer learning activities, etc.).

In many countries, and Turkey is one of them, there is now a need to start the innovation of vocational teacher training programmes from another point of departure. It must start with a reform of curricula for initial vocational teacher training, not with a reform of technical framework conditions. Intensified focus must also be placed on the continuing professional development of vocational teachers. Today teacher competence development is only perceived as a function of formal continuing training. Competence development would clearly profit from starting at the school level. The 'system' should assess in-service needs by starting from concrete school environments. An average teacher in Turkey receives about two days of in-service training during his entire career. It would therefore be quite obvious to try to re-model the vocational teacher training in-service system by undertaking needs assessments based on industry demands and by asking school leaders about their needs for teacher competences. Yet, this is barely developed in the MVET project and in the White Paper context.

Teachers and vocational school principals (and their associations) have a common interest in getting the qualification balance right. Any teacher reform initiative, which reflects on the issue of ownership, context fit and sustainability, should capitalise on the common interests of school leadership and teachers in discussions on the need for reform of pre and in-service vocational teacher training. However, teachers are strangely absent in the analysis behind the White Paper and the proposals that came out of the project. These concentrate instead on the levels of policy, system and teacher training provider (university). Challenges for vocational teacher training include the development of teachers' qualifications and the application of teachers' competences in teaching and learning arrangements in vocational schools. The analysis, however, stresses the lack of faculty-company linkages but ignores the faculty-school partnerships.

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<sup>64</sup> Defined by the Lisbon European Council as "the means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals..."

The teacher as an organiser of learning processes in school classes and school workshops should be the focal point of vocational teacher training reform. There is a need to analyse the quality and relevance of vocational teacher competences seen from concrete school demands. Here a lot can be learned from the Dutch *Duale Trajecten Bve* design (see above).

But why is the involvement of teachers as professionals and stakeholders in vocational training reform so important and what is the rationale behind the renewed focus on teaching practice and the emphasis on the 'micro' level in education reform? This we will discuss in the following sections.

## WHY ARE TEACHERS AND TRAINERS SO IMPORTANT FOR SYSTEMIC EDUCATION REFORM?

Vocational training reform in most countries has led to the redefinition, diversification and expansion of teacher functions. In modern vocational training systems effective teaching depends not only on teaching skills but on the ability to work in a team; collegiality is a significant challenge for teachers. Another issue is the need for teachers to re-conceptualise their own position within vocational training. It is not enough for teachers to acquire new skills and perform new functions. Effective motivation of teachers requires that they should fully understand the reasons for change – making them their own.

Many factors influence the changing demands for professional knowledge, competence, practices and performance of teaching staff involved in vocational training.

Andreas Schleicher (2006) of the OECD writes in the Lisbon Council Policy Brief that the most successful countries have something fundamental in common:

*“...they have all shifted policy away from control over the resources and content of education toward a focus on obtaining better outcomes. They have moved from “hit and miss” teaching practices to establishing universal high standards. They have shifted from uniformity in the system to embracing diversity and individualising learning. They have changed from a focus on provision to a focus on choice, and they have moved from a bureaucratic approach towards devolving responsibilities and enabling outcomes, from talking about equity to delivering equity. Most important, they have put the emphasis on creating a ‘knowledge-rich’<sup>65</sup> education system, in which teachers and school principals act as partners and have the authority to act, the necessary information to do so, and access to effective support systems to assist them in implementing change.”*

What is noticeable from the descriptions and analyses of vocational teacher training systems in South Eastern Europe<sup>66</sup>, and also highlighted in *ETF Yearbook 2005* as a characteristic in other ETF partner regions, is that teachers are not seen as subjects or as drivers of change. An almost universal experience in EU and OECD countries in recent years has been that it has become increasingly difficult for policy alone to change practice. Paradoxically, precisely during and since the 1990s we have seen a resurgence in large scale reform in most western countries, few of which had much impact on student achievement levels. At present, many OECD countries focus on policy and systems development without paying enough attention to the management of implementation processes (McLaughlin, 1990). A lesson learned here is that, contrary to the one-to-one relationship assumed to exist between policy and practice, the nature, amount and pace of change at the local level is a product of local factors largely beyond the control of higher-level policymakers (Hopkins, 2006). Government policy implementation has

<sup>65</sup> Knowledge-rich (in this context) means that both national prescriptions and professional judgments are informed

<sup>66</sup> See also Chapter 6.

most commonly used the school as the focus of intervention, yet international research evidence shows that we have to go even one level further down – to the classroom – to improvement achievement.

Increasingly strong evidence suggests that any strategy to promote student learning needs must seek to engage students and parents as active participants, and expand the teaching and learning repertoires of teachers as well as students. This implies a transition from an era of top-down ‘prescription’ to an era of teacher ‘professionalism’. A new balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches must be found.

The main argument developed in this *Yearbook* is that educational factors must be rebalanced in pursuit of quality. This is very relevant here too. But how do we get there? As Michael Fullan (2003) has said, it takes capacity to build capacity, and if there is insufficient capacity to begin with it is folly to announce that a move to ‘professionalism’ provides the basis for a new approach. We can’t just move from one phase to the next without deliberately building professional capacity throughout the system. Here the continuing professional development of teachers must be the central response.

Who, then, knows best what teachers should do, why, how, where and when? Most teachers would say that they do. They are the professionals who:

- have a profound knowledge of their field, based on both theoretical studies and a sound practice;
- know the students, their needs and what is best for them;
- work in accordance with professional standards and in the best interests of the client (the students).

According to this view they are the best placed to decide where, when and with whom preparation should take place, and how and with what means teaching should be organised. But this point of view does not fit very well into policymakers’ efforts to make both schools and teachers

instruments to achieve strategic goals, like for instance the Lisbon goals.

Another barrier to overcome is a tendency to reform fatigue among teachers almost everywhere. Reforms are in reality, and should also be perceived as, major social learning processes, and today, more than ever before, the huge challenge is how to organise such policy learning activities in the coming years. There is now an urgent need, on the one hand, to come to grips with and conceptualise what the new learning paradigm may yield when applied to education reforms in partner countries and, on the other hand, to develop new approaches to how such policy learning platforms and processes can be facilitated. This is not exclusively a South Eastern European challenge. An analysis of professionalisation strategies for teachers in EU countries points to the same need in all EU countries. Most changes are initiated from outside the vocational training system, either through political decisions or as a result of pressure from industry. The Cedefop study on vocational teachers (Cort et al., 2004) found that there is a tension between change pressures and the response of teachers:

*“Often they challenge the teacher’s view of the vocational training system, of their own role and of the way they teach. And in some cases the changes contrast with the teachers’ ‘implicit’, ‘tacit’ knowledge of how best to behave in specific teaching situations. This situation is made worse when government – or management – fails to provide teachers with the time, or the financial resources to retrain. Where these resources are not available, teachers (and their managers) will give priority to the needs of their students rather than to their own training. In short, and as a result of all these factors, whole-hearted teacher acceptance cannot be taken for granted and teacher resistance to change is one of the most significant threats to the success of vocational training reform.”*

In the Cedefop study, a key recommendation for policymakers in EU countries is therefore that:

*“Policymakers should be aware that for teachers, the changes introduced by vocational training reform represent a major upheaval. It is thus extremely important that they should pay attention to teachers’ professional wellbeing – where possible reducing workloads, improving financial incentives and making efforts to provide them with a more satisfying work environment”.*

This message to policymakers should be sharpened concerning vocational teachers in South Eastern Europe and Turkey.

The problem must be solved and probably the best (maybe the only) way is by creating a new teacher professionalism based on new forms of relationship with colleagues, students and society. The challenge is to develop what Sachs (2000) describes as “active teacher professionalism”. But it will hardly be enough to simply bring teachers back in. In the ongoing OECD activity on school principals (OECD, 2006-08) the issue of tensions between huge ‘macro’ reforms and the ‘micro’ level has been given full attention.

## SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS AS THE CENTRE OF REFORM INTERVENTIONS

There is a growing recognition that schools - and classrooms - need to take the lead in the next stage of education reform<sup>67</sup>. The current focus on ‘personalisation’ is about putting citizens at the heart of public services and enabling them to have a say in the design and improvement of the organisations that serve them<sup>68</sup>.

In education this can be understood as personalised learning (OECD, 2006), the trend towards tailoring education to individual needs, interests and aptitude so as to fulfil every young person’s potential. Personalised learning is about designing teaching, curriculum and the school organisation to address the needs of the students both individually and collectively. It is a system that is more accessible,

open to the individual and involves the learners in their own learning.

This requires professionalised teaching. A much sharper focus should therefore be placed on the crucial role of the continuing professional development of teachers and trainers also in ETF partner countries. Such development implies more than just making teaching more comparable to other modern professions. To personalise learning, teachers must use data and evidence when they choose teaching strategies that meet the specific needs of their students. They must be versed in the application of different methodologies that cater for individual learning styles. As Hopkins (2006) underlines:

*“This in turn implies radically different forms of professional development with a strong focus on coaching and establishing schools as professional learning communities.”*

Teacher professionalism will furthermore have to be supported by some form of educational accountability as a driver for raising standards. In the move from top-down ‘prescription’ towards teacher ‘professionalism’, an accountability system should strive to build capacity and confidence for professional accountability. More emphasis should be placed on internal assessment; in particular formative assessment will need to develop increasingly refined learning assessments, student progress data, contextual value added and school profiles. Perhaps the most substantial quality control instrument that needs to be developed is a culture of evaluation in vocational schools. If we are to move towards a system based on informed professional judgment, the capacity for all of this has to be built simultaneously at the school and system level as both schools and authorities learn new ways of working, establish new norms of engagement and build more flexible and problem oriented work cultures.

The continuing professional development of teachers and trainers is probably the key

<sup>67</sup> See also Chapter 2

<sup>68</sup> For an interesting and more theoretical discussion on bottom-up strategies as a tool for systemic change and going beyond the New Public Management thinking, see e.g. Sabel (2004)

to innovation and change also in countries of transition; it is much more than formal training, there are other pathways to relevant learning, and experience from EU countries and pilot schools in transition countries indicates that it is both effective and affordable. To this can be added that for transition countries there is an urgent need to reach out to the majority of vocational schools that were never part of the comparatively narrow reform circle.

Initial teacher education in universities or teacher faculties is an important lever but only one among others to increase the professional performance of vocational teachers. Of special interest here is the lack of a dynamic interplay between formal training and the different conditions of teaching practice in vocational schools. The institutions, in which teachers work, have a huge potential for helping to shape the quality of vocational teachers' work. This implies that any effort to professionalise vocational teaching needs to take into account initial teacher training providers as well as vocational schools.

New professionalisation strategies based on 'horizontal' learning principles form a promising response to future challenges. Such horizontal learning principles include (i) schools as learning organisations, (ii) engaging teachers as stakeholders in vocational training reform, (iii) central innovation funds for local school development, and (iv) establishing 'communities of practitioners' among vocational teachers as vehicles to nurture a culture where teachers may (again) become professional innovation agents.

## POLICY ISSUES FOR REFORM OF VOCATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE AND TURKEY

To sum up some of the overall findings and try to extract central messages from the analysis, key problem areas are presented in the form of issues and challenges which will require the attention of policymakers in the countries. These messages are presented as policy options for further

national analysis, not as definitive policy recommendations and normative "thou shall" to-do lists. The formulation of such statements is clearly the prerogative of national policymaking.

The following policy areas would appear to deserve serious attention in the countries:

1. The de-ideologisation of teacher and trainer training in South Eastern European countries, including the closure of vocational support institutions in the wake of post-war transformations, was necessary but also had negative effects on teachers' identities. These negative effects have been compounded by the relatively low social prestige and salary levels of teachers. Vocational teachers are over-worked and have lost their former social position. More should be done to build up a new concept of teacher professionalism so that teaching can be made more attractive again. Added emphasis on teaching as a "*profession*" is an important theme which should be further developed in teacher and trainer training institutions. To get the priorities right, the partner countries must start to reflect on this challenge. Teachers are not only transmitters of technical or commercial skills; they also have a central role in the socialisation of young people.
2. The fact that the provision of pedagogical qualifications is divided between university trained teachers of theory and "masters"/trainers/instructors, who often have no pedagogical training at all, is problematic. While the level of formal subject education of vocational teachers is high in almost all countries, their pedagogical training seems to be too academic and traditional and is not linked to the world of work. Almost everywhere, there is a lack of awareness of the fact that the primary socio-economic function of vocational teachers and trainers is not to produce "teaching" but to produce the "qualifications" needed in a modern economy. The qualification needs of companies require competent workers

who are capable of combining theory and practice. This calls for a new configuration of teaching, learning and practical work exercises. This configuration might gradually help to strengthen the capacity of individual students to move, as the context requires, between theoretical-analytical competence and a more experience-based, intuitive competence. However, developing this type of configuration is a serious challenge to the existing structures of vocational teacher and trainer training everywhere, including in most EU countries. A good way to encourage such an integrated approach is to support the efforts of vocational schools to become continuing vocational training providers. Continuing training offered to experienced workers from local companies will challenge teachers to combine their own theory with the experience and (often tacit) knowledge of their adult course participants. This procedure should, without hesitation, be required of the teacher and trainer training institutions in their provision of continuing training to teachers in vocational schools. It has been shown to be effective in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia.

3. There are too few specialised vocational teacher training institutions, although for continuing professional development of teachers the emerging vocational training centres in most countries offer promising perspectives. Vocational teacher training tends either to be integrated in general teacher training or to be a sub-speciality in other university programmes. At the same time, in most of the countries there are (too) many institutions that deliver vocational teacher training and this has a negative effect on the local aggregation of vocational education and training expertise and on vocational education and training research and innovation. There is also a lack of didactical thinking on vocational subjects which need institutional 'homes' and can best be developed in centres of expertise. Some institutional concentration would, therefore, be advisable.
4. In the countries of South Eastern Europe, the traditional way of instruction divides learning processes into theoretical and practical subjects. The content of the old curricula was (and mostly still is) systematically broken down into small basic units and terms which can be learned separately. The content and goals of basic technological subjects tend to be described via the laws of the natural sciences in their relation to basic technology. This is not useful for an understanding of the work process since teaching methods are not geared towards solving practical problems. There is a need to devote more attention to content development (substance) of the vocational subjects in their own right. Specific vocational subject theory is only weakly developed in most partner countries. The connection between learning and work is often reduced to irrelevant theory or mechanical exercises that require little reflection. In teacher and trainer training, insufficient attention is paid to work processes, job analysis, job configuration in companies, and on-the-job learning. Thus, there is a need not only for an overall reform of teacher training but also for intensive further education of active teachers. Teachers should not only have academic qualifications coupled with practical work experience, they must be trained to convert this experience into their teaching concepts. Teachers would profit from an understanding of the organisation of workshops and from being familiar with the changing work environments in real companies. Only then can they bring the learning of students closer to the world of work. Teacher training, both pre and in-service, should be geared towards closer cooperation with regional companies, and be based on a thorough understanding of modern learning and work processes.
5. The curriculum and organisation of pre-service vocational teacher training need to be modernised in all countries in South Eastern Europe. New combinations of theory and practice must be explored. More practical

teaching exercises are needed to develop hands-on experience and to avoid the 'reality shock' experienced by new graduates from university. Experiments with some form of a dual system of vocational teacher training should be promoted, with periods of theoretical pedagogical studies alternating with periods of practical teaching in vocational schools under the supervision of an experienced teacher. This will require that these teachers professionalise their advisory role. It is recommended that programmes be set up to train teaching practice supervisors in order to reinvigorate the relationship between theory and practice in teacher training. This strategy would have multiple benefits: (i) it would force vocational teacher training educators to establish close contacts with teaching practice supervisors at the schools and thus check the practical relevance of what they teach; (ii) it would make vocational schools share responsibility for the qualification of their teaching staff; and (iii) it would contribute to an increased awareness of vocational pedagogy in the overall vocational education and training system.

6. Many current teacher education training programmes in universities and in other higher education and training institutions are out of date. To concentrate on updating these teacher development programmes would have a positive, multiplier effect on the entire vocational education and training system. Teacher training methods need to focus more on the outcomes for learners in the form of learners' acquired competences. Such competences are more likely to emerge if experimental learning methods are used. Through active, project-based learning, learners are more likely to develop a deep understanding of vocational concepts and skills – a requirement in our rapidly changing economies. If the teacher training curriculum is based on solving problems similar to those experienced in the world of work, this transfer of knowledge and skills is more likely to occur.

7. Almost everywhere, the existing model for continuing teacher/trainer training is largely supply-based: universities, faculties, methodological support and vocational training centres, etc. provide training courses to vocational schools either free of charge or on market terms. These are only partially successful. Continuing vocational teacher training, in particular, is still focused on individuals rather than groups, and does not incorporate institutional and organisational development. It risks creating individuals who, metaphorically speaking, return from their cultural island to a resistant mainland. More emphasis should be put on demand-led training provision close to or delivered within the schools. Pilot projects could start immediately with selected continuing vocational training institutions initiating the training process by approaching vocational schools and, together with teachers and headmasters, defining actual training needs. Such needs assessments in school contexts are still not carried out in most partner countries. Action learning principles and on-the-job learning supported by external consultancies and the training of teachers and trainers in groups should be introduced. Genuine partnerships between training providers and vocational schools would probably emerge. Feedback mechanisms would allow the results of the pilots to be fed back as important inputs into regular teacher training programmes.

## THE ETF 'LEARN' PROJECT

The policy issues listed above form a huge menu for transition countries. This also suggests that not so much has been invested in the innovation of formalised systems in terms of teaching and learning. The ETF has been involved in teacher training for many years. Since 2001, a South Eastern European vocational teacher training network has been in operation. A new ETF project called LEARN now aims to establish an innovative teacher professionalisation

strategy in South Eastern Europe and Turkey. It is co-funded by the Italian Government, based on the approaches promoted in this chapter and will be carried out between 2007 and 2009. It aims at strengthening the national institutions which have a potential leverage for carrying forward ideas and projects in this field.

The project will link ongoing ETF activities and try to determine how international assistance, such as that provided by the ETF, can better contribute to the sustainable reform of national education systems. It will capitalise on and take forward the achievements of the ETF's '*Key Competences*' and '*Entrepreneurship Learning*' projects.

Over a three year period (2007-09) the project will use the principles of knowledge sharing to allow decision-makers and vocational training centre staff from the countries to learn about vocational training reform experiences elsewhere and to use these experiences for the formulation and implementation of their own reform objectives. The project takes as its point of departure the fact that the industrial model of knowledge is being challenged by the assumption that learning is happening all the time. Therefore, the project will make use of and test the principle of participating in 'communities of practice' as a promising way of achieving certain learning outcomes, to qualify the professionalism of vocational training centre and selected vocational school staff and make them stakeholders in reform. It is designed as a policy and peer learning project aiming to empower vocational training centres to gradually professionalise their roles. The main emphasis will be placed on designing and implementing projects with a focus on policy learning in partnerships.

- In the first year (2007) the project will clarify issues, familiarise participants with current practice in EU countries, develop their competence to act as a community of practitioners and define the shared project work of the next year.
- In the second year (2008) vocational training centres will formulate and implement a realistic school

development project. These projects should 'translate' entrepreneurship into the worlds of teaching and learning. Local capacity will be developed in each centre to carry out (i) innovative and (ii) school-based development activities. Vocational training centre staff will be prepared to participate in international vocational training networks and partnerships. Participants will apply peer learning principles and establish collaborative working methods supported by an electronic learning platform that the ETF will establish.

- In the third year (2009) results of the project work will be implemented in national vocational training centres and in selected vocational schools. International partnerships will be formalised. By this time, the communities of practitioners should be functioning adequately, and include practitioners from outside the Western Balkans and Turkey.

The project is grounded in horizontal learning processes which are important tools for policy learning. Policy learning activities will be based on the exchange of participants' own experience and the improvement of practice and competence development will go hand in hand. New learning theories argue that learners are more successful in acquiring, digesting and retrieving new knowledge, skills and attitudes when they have been actively engaged in these processes. Education reform can only be sustainable if reform policies are owned by local stakeholders who are motivated to learn new ways of organising education and training. This need for 'embeddedness' implies that local knowledge and initiative are key starting points for change. The project takes a peer learning approach with a focus on how to organise policy learning platforms and environments in and between the countries.

This is an example of innovative school-based continuing professional development coached by national vocational training centres and organised in accordance with horizontal learning principles. It builds on local ownership, shared knowledge starting from concrete

actions, and policy learning in networks. The suggested approach is not very expensive but requires the will to co-operate for achieving change from both teachers and leaders. It also requires a legislative framework, a governance culture, and school autonomy that make the initiative possible. With its ambition to achieve ownership and sustainability, the project tries to respond to Michael Fullan's dictum that it takes capacity to build capacity (Fullan, 2003). If there is insufficient capacity to begin with, it is unrealistic to expect that a move to 'professionalism' would provide the basis for a new approach.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter on teachers and trainers started by asking three basic questions:

- Why is change in schools and teaching practices so difficult to achieve and why do macro reforms in education often fail?
- What are the consequences for innovation of teaching and learning of the current fixation on governance and framework conditions, in particular the Bologna Process, the EQF and the CQAF?
- How do we bring teachers and trainers back in as key players in vocational training reforms in countries in transition?

The answer to the first question is that the training of vocational teachers and trainers in South Eastern Europe and Turkey has – to the extent that it has taken place outside the selected vocational pilot schools – followed the overall reform strategies utilised in the region. Anchored in what we can call the *old learning paradigm*, these strategies have been mainly based on the principles of: a) piloting in selected schools; b) curriculum driven change; and c) qualifications/outcome-based reforms. While the legitimacy of all these principles can hardly be questioned, we argue for a different approach, anchored in the *new learning paradigm* that is based on new principles, such as: i) a policy/strategy driven change; ii) local ownership and

empowerment of local actors in the reform process, and iii) learning process or "substance" oriented, rather than just framework oriented reforms.

We have argued that macro level reforms tend to fail if interventions are not rooted in the reality of the 'micro' level. New teacher professionalisation strategies with a focus on strengthening learning repertoires in the classroom are proposed as next steps.

But these cannot stand alone.

While schools should be given an increased role as the drivers for change – as genuine change in student performance often appears to be beyond the control of national policymakers – it will also be necessary to introduce an evaluation culture in schools and accountability systems for teachers.

The answer to the second question, as demonstrated in the example from Turkey, is that a new realism is needed in innovation of teacher education.

The chapter has formulated a long list of vocational teacher training reform options for policymakers. This almost programmatic reform agenda is based on the need to concentrate innovation of teaching and learning efforts on 'substance' and not on technical 'frameworks'. Recent European policy frameworks for vocational training development, such as the Bologna Process, the Common Quality Assurance Framework and the European Qualifications Framework etc., could lead to excessive focus on such frameworks in policy development, and push content relevance and teaching methodologies to the sidelines. EU policies are sound answers to the challenges of globalisation but they risk unintentionally crowding out the space for much needed reform of teacher education.

As the in-depth analysis of the policy development example from the Tempus project in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia demonstrated, policy taking and policy copying is never the answer to national reform needs.

The third question is topical not only in partner countries but also in the EU.

Reform fatigue is widespread and teachers will have to be recognised in their double role as professionals and stakeholders, if the quality of education is to be gradually increased. By focusing on teachers, teaching, and learning processes we also open up for a discussion about how to organise policy learning processes in the framework of vocational schools. Teaching staff and school managers are the professionals of the vocational training system. As stakeholders they should develop the capacity to help formulate vocational training policies and establish platforms for discussion of reform initiatives, embedded in schools and fitting into their contexts. This would encourage ownership and support the sustainability of reforms. Therefore, the focus on teachers is central to the discussion on how to support policy learning in partner countries.

Current reforms in vocational education and training are very complex development processes that hardly compare to the traditional reform conceptions with their clear stages of preparation, formulation, implementation and evaluation. This is especially true for

reforms in transition countries that seek to combine systemic reforms with structural changes and the modernisation of contents and approaches. Such reforms are not one-off events designed by external experts but ongoing change processes set within a broadly agreed reform agenda, which can be quite radical and requires further operational adjustments based on local experiences with innovation processes.

It is because of this that teachers who are actively engaged in local innovation and experimentation are an important source of expertise for national policymakers and that reform strategies have to build on engaging teachers and trainers working inside their school organisations.

This understanding puts policy learning, capacity building and policy advice at both national and school levels in a new perspective and increases their urgency considerably. Traditional top-down or bottom-up strategies are insufficient to make reforms work. Policy learning as a process requires a continuous interaction and dialogue between national and local partners.



## **NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS: TOOLS FOR RELATING LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

*Jean-Marc Castejon*

4

### INTRODUCTION

The problems experienced by young people entering the labour market can be read as a sign that qualifications supplied by the (initial) education and training system do not match marketable skills in the current labour market. In the past three decades most countries in the North Africa and the Middle East region have experienced an unprecedented increase in educational attainment among their populations, which has raised formal skill levels of the workforce far above what they were in the early 1960s. In spite of this, the gap between formal and real qualification has never been wider and this results in growing unemployment. The skills and attitudes produced by the education and training system do not sufficiently match the needs of employers. Indeed there is a general awareness that a globalising knowledge economy puts a great deal of

strain on the relationship between school and work. In brief, there is a need to recast the vocational education and training systems in the North Africa and Middle East region into effective skill formation systems. The challenge is not new, but recent trends such as the development of qualification frameworks are changing its parameters and offering new opportunities.

Although it is clear that a country's national qualifications framework (NQF) cannot develop in isolation from NQFs in other countries and that transparency of qualifications should serve international mobility, qualifications need to be elaborated at home and need to fit into a country's own context. Because qualification frameworks tend to lead to a strong focus on the generation, recognition and allocation of skills, they expose one of the critical challenges to vocational education and training: developing

context-specific approaches to employability. Just as the focus on GDP results is too narrow a focus for development strategies, so too a focus on the number of years of schooling may lead to too narrow a focus on education policies. The number of years of schooling is an important indicator of how well a country is advancing its education, but just as important is what schools teach. Education needs to be compatible with the work people do when they have left school. If most of the people going to rural school today will still be farmers when they leave school, then curricula need to be directed towards making them better farmers. Education used to be seen as a way out, an opportunity to get better jobs in the city. Now it is also being viewed as a way up, enhancing income even for those who, say, remain in the rural sector. This chapter argues that the reason why most countries in North Africa and the Middle East have not taken full advantage of the entry of cohorts of educated workers in to the labour markets, is not only in the dysfunctioning of the allocation of skills in the labour market. It is also linked to the way skills are generated in the classroom. The chapter proposes a model of the teaching/learning process aligned with new notions of learning which could better relate learning and employability in the region and create the conditions for a better use of the existing workforce.

## THE MISMATCH BETWEEN VOCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEMS AND THE WORLD OF WORK

In all the North Africa and the Middle East countries, access to education has improved substantially in the last decades. Given the fast population growth rates (with the numbers of young people increasing exponentially), this has been a major achievement. Education has generally been awarded priority in the same period, although there was a slight downturn in the era of structural adjustment programmes (the 1980s and early 1990s). More recently, education reforms and further expansion have given new momentum to the sector, as the following global data indicates.

Enrolment in primary education has become almost universal across the region, both for boys and girls. However, dropout rates are still significant in some countries, in particular in Morocco, where it is as high as 30%. In the last decade, gross enrolment in secondary education has also increased rapidly, reaching more than 80% in all the countries with the exception of Morocco and Syria. Similarly, in some countries (especially Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia), the number of young people entering post-secondary education has increased explosively. In Jordan, enrolment in public post-secondary institutions increased by 55% between 1999 and 2003. In Lebanon, where enrolment in higher education has traditionally been high, there was a gross enrolment rate of almost 50% in 2004<sup>69</sup>.

The trouble is that the remarkable global progress of the education and vocational training systems in the region (as shown in the graph below) are not reflected in the employment rates of school leavers, and especially vocational school leavers. The public sector, which has traditionally played an important role both in absorbing young people leaving the secondary and higher education system and in balancing supply and demand in the labour market, is no longer absorbing growing numbers of educated people. Demand for jobs in the public sector is such that young people are queuing to take up posts. Queuing times tend to reflect education level, with qualified candidates having to wait less (Huitfeldt and Kabbani, 2005). Hiring decisions are often based on position in the queue, which tends to depend on educational attainment rather than the quality of education. At the other end of the spectrum, low-skilled school-leavers or dropouts from the education system have few work choices, and typically take up traditional apprenticeships or jobs in the informal sector.

Overall, the continuing increase in the number of young people entering the labour market, combined with cutbacks in job opportunities in the public sector, has led to an imbalance in supply and demand. This in turn has resulted in very high levels of youth

<sup>69</sup> UNESCO 2006, Institute for Statistics Database

unemployment. In fact, there does not seem to be any direct link between the level of education and job placement. With education so clearly disconnected to the realities of the labour market, the risk is now not only that unemployment remains high, but also that this leads to a situation where industry is becoming attuned to a so-called 'low-skill

equilibrium'. This is a situation where the absence of adequate skills leads employers to opt for low-skill mass-production techniques, and for competing on price (labour costs) instead of on quality, thus reducing the ability to adjust to changing markets and eventually hampering economic growth and national welfare.

### The Jordanian paradox

The case of Jordan is symptomatic of a distorted pool of labour such as those described in this section: Entrepreneurs have access to plenty of unskilled workers, but far fewer skilled workers. The combination favours business activities that emphasise unskilled labour. The impact of the distorted pool of labour is reinforced by differences in the employment contracts of foreign workers and Jordanian workers (temporary vs. permanent) and different degrees of labour enforcement regulations that make foreign workers cheaper than similarly qualified Jordanians.

The situation has created what is now called the Jordanian paradox: although Jordan has been successful in investment, GDP growth, and job creation, unemployment has remained stubbornly high. Although job growth is strong, unemployment has remained high because the majority of new jobs have been filled by foreign workers. Of the 44,500 additional jobs created on average each year between 2001 and 2005, 16,500 were taken by Jordanians, and nearly 28,000 by foreign workers. With only one-third of new jobs taken by Jordanians, unemployment has barely changed over the past ten years, averaging 14.4% between 2001 and 2005 against 14.5% between 1996 and 2000. Today, there are approximately 300,000 foreign workers in Jordan – far more than the 175,000 unemployed Jordanian workers. Understanding why so many new jobs have been filled by foreign workers and why other jobs remain unfilled is crucial to aligning economic policies with the goal of creating jobs for Jordanians. A continuation of the policies of the past five years will lead to strong growth in investment and GDP, but is unlikely to alleviate unemployment. Jordanian workers are similar to foreign workers in their education, vocational training, and job experience. But they are often considered lacking in terms of their employability skills. When employers prefer foreign to Jordanian workers, surveys show that their preference can be traced to employability skills.

Jordanian policymakers recognise that the existing system of direct government provision of training is ineffective. Reform of the training system must start with redefining the role of the public sector so that it focuses only on areas that the private sector cannot or will not cover. Private sector involvement is crucial to ensuring that programmes emphasise the employability skills that employers seek. Government provision of employment services is generally ineffective unless it is specifically tied to education and training, or provided as a condition for income support.

Hypotheses have been offered to explain the paradox of high economic growth and high unemployment. Common explanations cite factors such as geography, a 'culture of shame'<sup>70</sup>, inadequate skills, wages that reduce living standards, job insecurity, and unacceptable work hours. We are concerned in this chapter with the fact that current education and training systems are ineffective as skill production systems.

<sup>70</sup> The expression 'culture of shame' refers to the idea that certain types of work activities are dishonourable and that performing these jobs would lower one's social status. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict coined the term in her 1945 book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. She proposed that Japan had a 'shame culture' rather than the 'guilt culture' that is common in the West. 'Shame cultures' are heavily influenced by concepts of honour, obligation, and duty in a way that applies less to individualist western cultures.

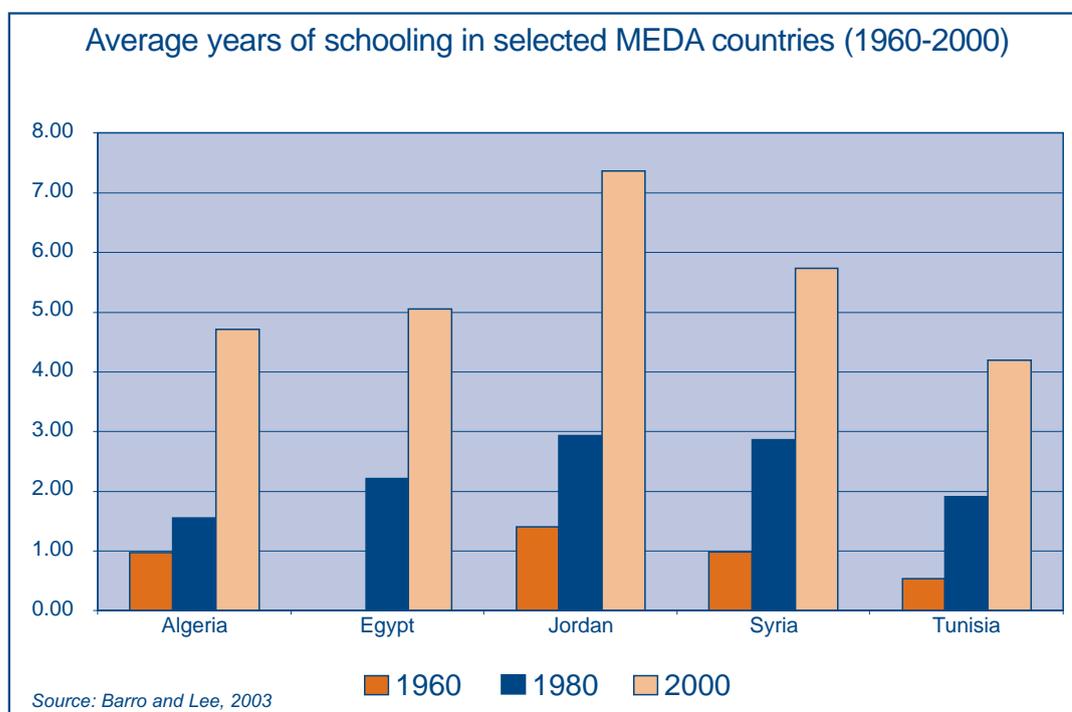
Often, higher education institution graduates try to obtain work in the private sector while waiting for a public sector job. Access to such jobs, however, is often limited because their training is considered inappropriate – typically too theoretical – by employers. Other factors limiting employment opportunities include limited contact networks. Graduates of vocational training programmes have no choice but to find work in the private sector. Many of them begin their careers by taking jobs in the informal private sector, where they face competition from young people who may never have been to school but who have completed apprenticeships. Even where public sector employment has changed radically (such as in Egypt), the number of regular but unprotected (informal) jobs has increased radically. Thus, although to some extent the public sector employment model is still in place, more young people choose (or are forced to accept) jobs in the informal sector as an option preferred to being unemployed while they wait for scarce public sector jobs or formal private sector jobs.

The process is strikingly described in the *Arab Human Development Report* (UNDP, 2004, p.150):

*“After completing their higher education, children of the middle class seek a job of some note (according to prevailing criteria).*

*This generally comes after a period of unemployment whose length depends, in the absence of efficient labour market mechanisms, on the capacity of the family to mobilise whatever money and power they may be blessed with. While awaiting their release, the graduates return to the bosoms of their families, where their dependence on patriarchal bounty increases in proportion to their expanding needs as they get older and in the absence of independent resources that would enable them to act freely. When fate or chance ends this period of unemployment, the graduate steps onto the lowest rung of a rigid, restrictive hierarchy, especially if the job is with the civil service. The graduate’s low status in this hierarchy is compounded by the poor work skills he or she has acquired, as a result of the declining quality of education.”*

Consequently, as in the EU, the transition from education to work has become a lengthy and uncertain process, and unemployment among young people has



reached disturbing levels throughout the region. The employment rate among adults under 30 in Algeria is more than 70% according to official figures. So far, the economic yield of improvements in education seems to have been limited. In fact, economies in North Africa and the Middle East seem to have been incapable of matching the improvements in education with comparable reforms in the labour market that would take full advantage of the entry of cohorts of educated workers to the labour market. Increased performance of the education and training systems does not seem to foster economic growth. The next section deals with this mismatch.

## BACK TO THE CLASSROOM: THE RESEARCH AGENDA

In a context such as the one described in the previous section, a whole series of issues are raised that are relevant to education systems: the need to communicate with external partners, beneficiaries and end-users calls for transparency and a broad re-examination of programmes. A new codification of learning opens up for discussion, comparison, and further review. The ‘secret garden’ of education and training programme content, design and management is exposed to external scrutiny. Different approaches to education lead to different notions of learning and knowledge, of expertise and experience and different approaches to assessment, based on the severance of the direct and mechanic link between learning outcomes and learning processes.

Qualifications defined by education and training institutions tend to be organised around the principles of inputs. They assume that qualifications from different segments of the education system relate to fundamentally different types of learning and the acquisition of different types of knowledge. Furthermore, they will differ in the extent to which they depend on duration of study, following specific curricula and periods of work experience. In contrast, qualifications frameworks stipulate that all qualifications have similar features and that outcomes can be

separated from the way in which they are achieved. The issue of validation or accreditation of informal learning highlights the problems of applying the principle of equivalence to qualifications. Informal learning is important and is likely to provide practical rather than theoretical knowledge. If the assessment criteria stress evidence of codified knowledge, the validation of many types of skill will be impossible. If, however, these criteria emphasise practical problem-solving in specific contexts, it will be treating the theoretical component as less important at a time when a knowledge economy thesis might argue that theoretical knowledge is more important than practical skills – an argument which of course remains to be tested.

What follows is an attempt to explore a possible new approach to the learning/teaching process in the context of qualification-led systems. There is a dearth of information about what exactly is going on in the classrooms of the countries. The systematic study of classroom processes that influence learners’ achievements should offer a wealth of information which would lead to questioning the current variables thought to be environmental or linked to qualities of teachers and learners. Attempts to hold schools and especially teachers totally responsible for learners’ achievements presents a problem in that there are multiple factors not under the control of school-level teachers and trainers that contribute to educational achievement. The following model is an attempt to group the variables that influence student learning.

<b>Context</b>	All those factors outside of the classroom that might influence teaching and learning
<b>Input</b>	Those qualities or characteristics of teachers and learners that they bring with them in the classroom
<b>Classroom process</b>	Teacher and student behaviour in the classroom as well as some other variables such as the classroom climate and teacher/learner relationship
<b>Output</b>	Measures of student learning taken independently from the normal learning process.

When we ask why some learners learn better than others, we must be clear about what we mean by learning. The validity of examination as a measurement of learning achievements can be misleading. In the case where examinations are designed to regulate access to post-secondary education, actual pass-rates do not reflect the students' knowledge and competences. In other cases, the absence of industry participation in the design and administration upwardly bias the results. An interesting experience was provided in Jordan when the Ministry of Education selected a group of students to be tested independently by the private sector in five different fields. The content of the examinations was prepared by industry representatives. Only about one third of the graduates who had earlier succeeded in exit tests passed the examination. We must also be clear on how we measure learning. When we judge how well students have learned, what we are really asking is how well they have done on a standardised measure of achievement. If we change the meaning of learning (e.g. if we want to know how many employability skills they have acquired), or if we change the particular measure of learning, then we may change the important variables that relate to student learning. There are a variety of learning outcomes that are relevant in today's world (such as cognitive development and character) and contribute to employability but that are not discussed when we talk about learning in the region.

### **Output**

In the above model, the most important category seen from the angle of a qualifications framework is the output category. The learning starts from the end point – with the result we want the student to achieve – and we work backward developing the teaching methods, curricula, teacher training, etc., that will advance students towards the desired results. The variables in the other categories are used to predict or relate to the variables measured in this one.

Apprenticeships provide certainly the best example of an output-oriented system. They are appraised rather positively in the

*Arab Human Development Report (UNDP, 2004, p.148), which says:*

*“What of those who never attend school or do not go on to complete its upper stages, most of whom are the children of the weaker social strata. Usually, this group joins the labour market early and so receives training through the apprenticeship system, which imparts useful practical skills, at least in terms of those required by the labour market. To that extent, the labour market may substitute for the lack of education, even if only in part. This group may, then, be more fortunate in acquiring skills that translate into a higher level of earnings, as studies in certain Arab countries have shown. From a freedom perspective, early school-leavers escape the loss of freedom that the education system exacts but often do not preserve their freedom in full, since the apprenticeship system, especially in the manual and technical professions, is itself a rigid and authoritarian pyramid.”*

Although apprenticeships in the region generally represent the informal segment of the vocational training sector, the strong tradition and experience of North African and Middle Eastern countries in this area carries a huge potential in skill co-generation. In its various versions, traditional apprenticeship in the region is the main entry point for dropouts and also for some graduates from pre-secondary vocational education. Policymakers have attempted to modernise it, expanding it into dual systems or introducing more standardised practice but, apart from in Algeria, this type of training is still largely unregulated. There is no contract to determine the number of hours worked and the exploitation of young workers as cheap labour is common. There is no training plan or pre-established duration. There is no acknowledgement that the apprenticeship has ended, except if the apprentice is promoted to the status of worker. At the end of the apprenticeship, there is no certification or any other written proof of acquired competences. Traditional apprenticeships offer narrowly defined skills which are acquired exclusively on the job with limited opportunities for lifelong

learning, although they have the advantage of being very practical. Knowledge and skill transfer from master to apprentice is often limited for fear of competition. Typically training is limited to traditional technologies. Government initiatives to improve traditional practice are limited, and even if they are successful they do not reach the majority of apprentices.

Nevertheless, apprenticeship systems include all the ingredients of an effective production system of qualification, except that they lack recognised qualifications. European countries have understood their potential to the extent that in some countries every single qualification of the systems can be reached through apprenticeship. Apprenticeship systems in North Africa and the Middle East would probably benefit from the implementation of qualification frameworks.

A striking example of this potential to target employability is provided by the Vocational Training Corporation in Jordan, which delivers training through non-formal apprenticeships. Given a push in the right direction (i.e. in the direction of real qualifications) and stripped of burdensome functions which have nothing to do with the provision of training (such as the accreditation of learning places in companies), the Vocational Training Corporation could become a powerful instrument for generation and allocation of skills in the labour market.

### **Classroom processes**

The second most important category is the classroom process category, which includes the variables that would occur in the classroom. There are two sub-categories here: teacher behaviour and learner behaviour. The teacher's behaviour includes all the actions a teacher would make in the classroom and include three additional categories: planning (all the activities a teacher might do to get ready to interact with students in the classroom), management (controlling student behaviour) and instruction (guiding student learning). Rosenshine (1995) showed that the approach to learning labelled 'direct' or 'explicit' learning was most likely to

positively impact on learning as measured by examination. Changing the desired outcome measure requires adjustments to teaching and learning methods. If, for instance, the desired outcome is creativity and independence, then open education may be a better classroom alternative.

The *Arab Human Development Report* (UNDP, 2004, p.147) analysed the status of knowledge acquisition and diffusion in the Arab world and identified a growing knowledge gap:

*"In Arab education institutions, curricula, teaching and evaluation methods tend to rely on dictation and instil submissiveness. They do not permit free dialogue and active, exploratory learning and consequently do not open the doors to freedom of thought and criticism. On the contrary, they weaken the capacity to hold opposing viewpoints and to think outside the box. Their societal role focuses on the reproduction of control in Arab societies."*

This contrasts with the variety of teacher classroom variables that have been related to student learning. For example, Walberg (1986) in a meta-analysis of teacher effectiveness research found support for the following individual variables:

- use of positive reinforcement
- cues and corrective feedback
- cooperative learning activities
- higher order questioning
- use of advance organisers.

The *Arab Human Development Report* (2004, p.148) calls for a widening of learning outcomes to be reflected in the classroom:

*"The suppression of freedom in education is not reserved for students but rather encompasses the totality of the system. Thus teachers, 'oppressors' of their pupils, are in turn subject to suppression by the educational administration whether at the teacher-training institute, or at local or central levels. And this is to say nothing of the oppression of teachers as a group within the society as a whole, a*

*trend that reflects the decline in the material and moral status of the majority of teachers.”*

The classroom process variables are the most direct link to student achievement. More specifically, teachers' classroom behaviour has a direct influence on student behaviour, which in turn is most directly linked to measures of student achievement. Students' behaviour includes a very important variable in relation to their achievements in recognition tests and that is academic learning time (ALT). ALT is defined by Huitt (2003) as "the amount of time students are successfully covering contents that will be tested". ALT is a combination of three separate variables: time on target, time on task, and success. Time on target is the percentage of the content covered on the test actually covered by the students in the classroom. Time on task is the amount of time students are actively involved in the learning process. Success is defined as the extent to which students accurately complete the assignments they have been given. A high level of academic learning time means that (i) students are covering important recognised content, (ii) students are "on-task" most of the time, and (iii) students are successful in most assignments they complete.

### **Input**

The third-most important category of variables, 'input', refers to descriptions of teachers and students prior to their engagement in the classroom. There are again two important subcategories: 'teacher characteristics' and 'student characteristics'. The most important teacher characteristics (in terms of predicting how well teachers will perform in the classroom and what influence they may have on student achievement) seem to be the teacher's values and beliefs. This variable is a measure of the teacher's belief that the student can learn and that he or she can teach. Another important set of teacher characteristics includes the teacher's knowledge with respect to the content domain (knowledge of subject matter), human growth and development (theories, topics and stages), learning

theories (behaviourist, cognitivist) and the teaching/learning process (concept and principles as well as their application in formal and informal environments).

As far as student characteristics are concerned, Bloom (1971) and other researchers engaged in the development of mastery learning have shown that when time to learn is allowed to vary, a student's prior knowledge is most important. Other researchers have shown that when the time to learn is held constant, as it is in most of North Africa and the Middle East and also in Europe, then a student's intelligence or academic ability is most important. This issue of 'time to learn' is very important. If we truly believe that everyone can learn and that it is important to learn, then it would seem that we should make a greater effort to provide the appropriate time to learn. However, if we believe that ability is more important and that only the most capable learners can learn all we want them to learn, then the present system will continue to produce a result that verifies that expectation. Other student characteristics that have been found to be important include study habits, age, sex/gender, motivation, learning style, cognitive development, socio-emotional development, moral and character development.

The *Arab Human Development Report* (2004, p.149) report assessment of the 'input' category is harsh with regard to the values:

*“Given the distinguished status of training as pillar in the process of qualification, its evaluation provides a mirror that reflects the defining vision and background of the authors of school books. If these books themselves show scant regard for the concept of freedom and its associated principles, values and human rights or for its legal basis (Civic Education), the questions and activities in the accompanying exercises reveal much about the trends that determine the pedagogical imagination. Whenever the texts incline, in context or meaning, to overlook rights and freedoms, it should be insistently required that training correct this*

*deficiency by deconstructing those values that are not compatible with rights and freedom and by introducing the values that would reinforce them.”*

## Context

The category of context includes all of those variables outside the classroom that have an impact on teacher and learner characteristics. The most immediate sub-categories of context variables include school characteristics and school processes. There are a wide variety of other context variables that influence the teaching/learning process. Some of the sub-categories of these include home, peer groups, community, religious institutions, society, culture and international conditions.

We have gone into some detail through an analytical grid of the learning/teaching process to illustrate the need to enter the classroom and revisit the notion of learning as required by qualification-led systems. The fabric of employability begins inside the classroom, so more knowledge is required about what is really happening in the classrooms. The co-generation of skills requires that actors play their role and become recognised in the value chain. Reform agendas usually stop at the doorstep of the classroom. Qualification-led systems open up the fabric of qualification. The *Arab Human Development Report* diagnosis in each reviewed category shows the distance that remains to be covered.

## CONCLUSION

From all of this, lessons can be learned about the enhancement of employability of learners via the development of qualification frameworks.

- For historical reasons linked to policy copying in the post-colonial period, almost everywhere in North Africa and the Middle East, public vocational training systems have been reluctant to work closely with the private sector. But without strong signals from the private sector there is no possible improvement

in vocational training performance. The gap between formal and real qualifications will remain wide and unemployment related to skill mismatches will remain high. At the moment, signal systems exist either in a weak form through national bodies, or in pilot situations where they are much stronger but lack scope. Beyond the important example of apprenticeships systems, there are few integrated approaches to institutional coordination between the vocational training system and the private sector. The most comprehensive approach, the ‘MANFORME’<sup>71</sup> reform in Tunisia, is itself now at risk because it seems to have overlooked social demand. Even the competency-based system set-up in Morocco is lacking a sound policy framework and this hampers its deployment at system level. High level committees have the greatest difficulty passing on their message to the institutional levels, and pilot projects find it no less difficult to disseminate their achievements. However, the battle of the contribution of vocational training systems to enhance the employability of learners is to be fought at the meso-level through active partnerships between the public and private sectors at institutional level. Current NQF projects are bringing to light that such institutional partnerships are still largely lacking.

- In North Africa and the Middle East, national qualification frameworks can provide a way to enhance the employability of learners. Arguably, it is not in the mandate of an NQF to stipulate what employability is about in each context. What an NQF does is to provide the ground and the rules on which and with which the game is played. This game is, very much in the terms of the Wittgensteinian theory (Wittgenstein, 1955), a language game. Reaching the same understanding of key notions, deciding together about when it can be said that a rule has been followed and when not. The whole issue of recognition of qualifications (in particular concerning the recognition of

71 ‘MANFORME’ Mise à Niveau de la Formation Professionnelle et de l’Emploi en Tunisie

prior learning) boils down to turning knowing-how into narratives. Is not the history of the European Qualifications Framework a matter of words? Codification and modelling creates a relationship and a language through which stakeholders can readily engage. Without the codification of a framework, the hierarchy of qualifications, the knowledge, skills and wider competences they each testify and the horizontal equivalences between qualifications are often just incomplete tacit knowledge of the qualification system.

- In the fabric of qualifications, the whole learning chain – from the generation (the classroom in a broad sense) to the recognition and allocation of skills

(employability) – is involved. But new knowledge is needed about the learning/teaching process. This chapter has proposed categories in which more knowledge, that is more research, is called for. Learning is always learning to play the games. Teaching and learning make sense in the context of marketable outputs. This does not mean that vocational training systems should bow down to market fundamentalism. But if 'qualification' is to be taken seriously, the learning process is a link in a circle of trust. This will take shape when the private sector recognises that it has a genuine say in the generation, recognition and allocation of skills in the labour market and when, for all the actors involved in the game, teaching and learning will come to make sense.

## **FOSTERING KEY COMPETENCES THROUGH LEARNER AND WORK-BASED VOCATIONAL LEARNING PROCESSES**

*Evelyn Viertel*

# 5

### INTRODUCTION

The following chapter provides a rationale for the development of key competences in the light of our understanding of how learning occurs and knowledge is created. It analyses how teaching and learning contribute to the fostering of key competences in the current education systems of South Eastern European countries, using evidence from an ETF research project undertaken between 2006 and 2007. Finally, it comes up with some recommendations for vocational training practice.

Changes in the economy and the labour market are transforming the way we look at knowledge, skills and learning. With the world of global information at our finger tips, the significance of acquiring and storing huge quantities of quickly outdated, pre-selected knowledge is diminishing tremendously. Many forms of knowledge

and skills repeatedly need to be replaced by new knowledge and skills at different stages in life. Technological changes, job changes, skills changes and changes in work organisation contribute to a heightened focus on innovation and a widespread belief in the importance of lifelong learning.

The emergence of a knowledge economy has brought along new notions such as the 'knowledge worker'. Forms of knowledge other than technical knowledge are now given more value in workplaces. Knowledge work, i.e. the creation and application of knowledge in the workplace, is regarded as crucial to most contemporary economic activity.

The importance of knowledge work and innovation in the economy is developing alongside an understanding of how learning occurs and knowledge is created. It is recognised that intelligence is

increasingly formed through collective action. Networks of peers, practitioners, academics and other professionals seem to have become the most valuable source of information and expertise. As a result, networking and participation in social processes are increasingly seen as the core of knowledge sharing and construction and, within this context, learning. Hence, people are becoming the architects and builders of knowledge and skills within the communities in which they engage – the so-called communities of practice. Participation in these communities calls for people with key personal and interpersonal skills, such as communication and team work skills, self-management and self-directed learning skills, and problem solving skills.

Developments in the contemporary economic and social conditions of the societies, in the field of learning theory, and in concepts such as 'situated', 'workplace' and 'organisational learning', have placed a much greater emphasis on key competences for lifelong learning. The OECD, through its DeSeCo<sup>72</sup> project, identified as the most important among these competences: (i) acting autonomously, (ii) using tools interactively and (iii) functioning in heterogeneous groups (Rychen and Salganik, 2003). Such changes also affect vocational training as a form of education that has traditionally been dominated by a narrow focus on qualification-related vocational knowledge and skills. Self-directed and innovative approaches to learning and work are becoming key competences of lifelong learners and will consequently need to be taken into consideration in the vocational training agenda. It is in this context that the ETF project Key Competences for Lifelong Learning began to explore the concept of key competences and its implications for vocational training practice in South Eastern Europe<sup>73</sup>. Participants in this project chose to focus on the concepts of 'learning to learn' and 'entrepreneurship competence' (see Annex 1 for a definition). The first objective of our research was to

assess to what extent vocational training systems in these countries are conducive to the development of these concepts. The second objective was to draw up conclusions and recommendations for introducing changes in vocational training practice. A thorough understanding of the processes through which learning occurs and the roles and required competences of teachers and trainers are central to this debate.

## KEY COMPETENCES - THE NEED TO 'PROBLEMATISE'

When Mertens (1974) first described 'key qualifications' (Schlüsselqualifikationen) and their importance, the German economy was undergoing a process of profound structural changes. Jobs and job contents changed, the labour market became increasingly unpredictable and hence vocational training faced the question of what to focus on. Mertens argued that reducing highly specialised occupation-related knowledge and skills in favour of a broader and more generalised vocational training would allow graduates to better adapt to new and changing work situations. He distinguished between four categories of key qualifications: 'basic qualifications', 'horizontal qualifications', 'broadening elements' and 'vintage factors'<sup>74</sup>. Although later attempts to specify these in more concrete terms were contested, what was interesting about Mertens' work was his change of perspective. Vocational training, he said, should not aim to respond to current, short-term labour market or skill requirements, but rather focus on the learners (be they students or employees) and the development of their competences.

Originally, the key competences debate was a wider discourse about holistic action competence and what makes up a modern vocational training system. Unfortunately, however, in some countries it gradually narrowed down into a discussion of various and continually changing lists of skills that

<sup>72</sup> DeSeCo is an abbreviation of Definition and Selection of Competences

<sup>73</sup> The project operated in Albania, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in 2006 and 2007. For a description, see [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu).

<sup>74</sup> For an explanation of these expressions, see Mertens (1974).

became ever more narrowly defined and taken out of context. Criticism focuses on the vagueness and inconsistency of terminology and concepts<sup>75</sup>, the claim that such skills would be easily definable and measurable, as well as the lack of attention to the context in which competence is developed. Early commentators issued warnings. One of them was Alison Wolf (1991) who referred to the assessment of core skills as a 'wild goose chase' rather than wisdom.

What followed in particular in Anglo-Saxon countries were relatively 'unproblematized' accounts of initiatives and programmes, in the framework of which bigger numbers of 'core' or 'key skills' descriptors were developed and learning units or training packages designed to incorporate such skills. The political and managerial agendas that were driving these developments often came without the necessary resources to support and sustain significant pedagogical change. The general approach appeared to be one of first elucidating and then, explicitly or implicitly, *teaching* key skills, where the real need seems to be for new pedagogical methods that allow teachers to help learners to develop these skills themselves.

Also the European Commission developed its own list of eight key competences and related descriptors in its *Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (European Commission, 2006c). The list of defined key competences and the specification of their interrelated knowledge, skills and behavioural dimensions are certainly laudable. However, at this advanced stage of the key competence debate, research might focus primarily on an informed exploration of the context-specific issues, including learning cultures, strategies, contents, sites and methods that foster the development of such competences.

There is also the question as to whether all workers at all levels do indeed need the

given set of key competences, as much of the literature suggests. For example, we know from evidence that the low-skilled sector in a knowledge economy is by no means shrinking; instead, our labour markets are becoming more polarised between the low-skilled and the high or very high-skilled sectors<sup>76</sup>. Jobs calling for low skills often require a less sophisticated level of key competences such as communication, learning, IT or entrepreneurial skills.

Returning to the South Eastern European countries that participated in the ETF project, this is an interesting point. We cannot automatically assume that all countries are currently moving towards a knowledge economy. With the exception of Croatia, the countries' competitive strength lies in relatively cheap labour. Labour is still mainly characterised by Taylorist work patterns and low-skilled manual, routine jobs rather than knowledge-intensive research, development and design work. Project participants argued that perhaps the issue of key competences does not apply equally to all economies and all categories of workers. Indeed it depends on the type of industry, labour market, work and work organisation. It became clear that the more an economy and its jobs are based on knowledge and innovation, the more the importance of key competences increases. However, *if* education and learning promote knowledge creation and innovation (and related key competences), and *if* they do so in societies that make effective use of people's knowledge and skills, then this itself can contribute to the emergence of a knowledge economy. So project participants emphasised that there is a dialectic relationship between the two sides – they condition each other. However, they also stressed that realities in both the economies and education practices of South Eastern European countries are still well behind those of more advanced knowledge-based economies in Europe. This suggests that the starting point for a debate on key competences in these countries will be quite different.

<sup>75</sup> The jargon includes, for example, transferable, key, core, generic, and lifelong learning skills; personal and graduate attributes; competencies and capabilities.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, the graph illustrating economy-wide measures of routine and non-routine task input in the United States between 1969 and 1998, in World Bank (2005).

A sound knowledge about learning, and how it occurs, gives us clues about appropriate pedagogical strategies that could be applied to the various settings in which contemporary vocational, workplace and organisational learning take place.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING PEDAGOGY – SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pedagogical strategies in vocational training for young people and adults have traditionally been influenced by behaviourist orientations to learning. Later, cognitivist, humanist and constructivist schools of thinking influenced pedagogies in education and within this context also vocational training.

Standard **behaviourist psychology** books of the 1960s and 1970s defined learning as a change in observable behaviour. Learning is mainly approached as an outcome, as the product of some process. Learning, theorists said, can be enhanced or inhibited by a manipulation of the environmental stimuli surrounding the learner. As a consequence, it would be the task of teachers in schools to provide for such stimuli and to design teaching in a way that would eventually result in the desired change of behaviour. Pedagogical strategies included the setting of behavioural (performance) objectives, instructional 'how to' guides, demonstration, frequent practice (drills) and positive reinforcements, such as rewards and highlighted successes. People were considered competent if they could prove that they had performed a task according to agreed standards. In the 1970s and 80s this triggered an emphasis on outcome-oriented standards in vocational training: a large number of standards were produced based on functional analyses. Standards reflected desired behaviour, and learners' ability to

exhibit that behaviour was tested. The focus was on predictable and reproducible knowledge and skills, as well as on summative assessment<sup>77</sup>. A reproduction of knowledge was thought to automatically imply understanding. The possession of knowledge was assumed to come with the ability to also use and apply it. This, of course, is not always the case.

Those who look to behaviourism in teaching generally frame their activities, implicitly or explicitly, by behavioural objectives and focus on the acquisition of habits. Teaching became dominated by the teacher who tried to direct students' learning towards achieving, and then measuring, desired learning outcomes. The assumption was that we know only what we can describe and observe, while what happened in the minds of the learners and the emotional or intellectual sides of the learning were given less importance.

Many educationalists were not happy with behaviourism that reduces learning with a response to external stimuli. Such criticism was especially strong from Gestalt<sup>78</sup> psychologists, who considered the whole human mind to be more than just the sum of its constituent parts. Where behaviourists looked to the environment, those drawing on 'Gestalt' turned to the individual's mental processes. In other words, they were concerned with cognition – the act or process of knowing.

**Cognitivist theorists** are less concerned with manifested behaviour but more with changes in how people understand, experience or conceptualise the world around them. Their focus is on gaining knowledge or ability through the use of experience. In cognitive psychology, "learning", as James Hartley (1998) put it, "results from inferences, expectations and making connections. Instead of acquiring habits, learners acquire plans and strategies, and prior knowledge is important" (p.18).

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<sup>77</sup> Summative assessment is one of two main types of assessment: summative and formative. Summative assessment is typically a final assessment resulting in a grade, while formative assessment can take place throughout a learning process and is used as a tool to aid this process. Summative assessments are usually made by the teacher, while formative assessments can be made by a teacher, a peer or even students themselves.

<sup>78</sup> 'Gestalt' is a German word that means 'figure', 'shape', 'build' or 'form', while Gestalt psychologists focused in particular on 'configurations' and 'patterns'.

Consequently, cognitivism suggests that the teaching process should use pedagogical strategies that enable learners to connect new information with existing knowledge in meaningful ways. Such pedagogical strategies can include the presentation of well-organised materials, and well-structured instruction that emphasise the logical relationships between key ideas and concepts, use carefully selected and presented problems, and build on prior knowledge and differences in the 'cognitive style' of learners. Cognitive feedback (formative assessment) gives information to learners about their progress with the task at hand. Reinforcement can come in the form of information – a 'knowledge of results' – rather than simply a character or other reward.

In the 1970s and 80s, a great deal of the theoretical writing about adult education drew on **humanistic psychology**. Its proponents focus on the human potential for growth. As Tennant notes, the concern with the 'self' is "a hallmark of humanistic psychology" (Tennant, 1997, p.12). There was a reaction against 'scientific' reductionism, i.e. people being treated as objects and rationalism. Instead the affective and subjective world was to be reaffirmed. Personal freedom, choice, motivations and feelings had to have their place. In humanistic psychology, learning is seen as a form of self-actualisation, it contributes to psychological health (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991, p.133).

Perhaps the most persuasive exploration of a humanistic orientation to learning came from Carl Rogers. He called for education that engages the whole person and his or her experiences, for learning that combines the logical and intuitive, the intellect and feelings. His ideas found a wide audience. "When we learn in that way", he said, "we are *whole*, utilizing all our masculine and feminine capacities" (Rogers, 1993, p.20). According to Rogers, learning is self-initiated, even if the stimulus comes from outside; it is pervasive in that it makes a difference in the behaviour, the attitudes, perhaps even the personality of the learner. Learning, he argues, is evaluated by the learners, assessing whether

learning leads to what they want to know, and the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience.

### **Constructivist orientations to learning**

The above-described theoretical positions are partly criticised for implicitly assuming that teaching amounts to selecting the right contents and pedagogical strategy to transfer knowledge and skills to a learner, and for suggesting that the learner operates individually in his accumulation of this knowledge and skills. They tend to underestimate the complexity of learning as an intellectual and social process.

Empirical research in the 1970s and 80s showed that there is no straightforward link between what teachers wanted students to learn and what they actually learned. Emotions, prior knowledge and intentions were found to play an important role. These insights eventually prompted education theorists to regard learning as the *active* construction of knowledge and skills *by* the individual learners themselves, thus paving the way for an increased emphasis on **constructivist approaches to education**. Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky, albeit from different disciplines and perspectives, were some of the scientists who had laid the early foundations of this type of thinking between the 1930s and 60s.

Bandura (1977 and 1986, among others) added a new social perspective to learning and Lave and Wenger (1991) a **social-situational perspective**. Rather than analysing what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved in learning, Lave and Wenger ask in their 'situated learning' model what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place. Learning, they say, involves participation in a social or professional 'community of practice'. People initially join communities and learn at the 'periphery'. As they become more competent, they move more to the 'centre' of this particular community. Learning is, thus, not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals, so much as a process of *social* participation. The nature of the *situation* impacts significantly on the process.

“Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and [...] the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. ‘Legitimate peripheral participation’ provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills.” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.29).

In this, there is a concern with identity, with learning to speak, act and improvise in ways that make sense in the community. What is more, and in contrast with learning as a form of ‘drilling’ or as internalisation, “learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.49). The focus is on the ways in which learning is “an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations” (p.50). In other words, this is a relational view of the person and learning.

There is continuing dispute among constructivist theorists of learning about the dual relationship between the individual and social sides of learning and the construction of knowledge and skills. Nonetheless, there is general agreement that learning involves the active construction of meaning by learners. This meaning is context-dependent, socially mediated and situated in the ‘real world’ of the learner. Learning is in the relationships between people. Learning does not belong to individuals, but to the various groupings and conversations of which they form a part. It is the task of tutors to work so that people can become participants in communities of practice – they need to care about association and explore with people in communities how all may participate to the full. Finally, there is a connection between knowledge and activity. Learning is part of daily life. Problem-solving and learning from

experience become central processes. ‘Situated learning’, however, is not the same as ‘learning by doing’ (Tennant, 1997, p.73).

### **Education theory and vocational training**

The main tension in the current way of looking at education lies between the behaviourist model and the constructivist school of thought. This also applies to vocational training. Behaviourist concepts in vocational training got manifested in concepts such as competency-based education or skill development and training, focusing on outcome standards related to functional skills and partial qualifications as well as related assessments.

A behaviourist approach to vocational training is suited to respond to short-term, relatively delineated skill requirements. It may be less suited for an initial training that aims to prepare learners to become self-directed and innovative learners and workers in a complex knowledge and innovation-intensive world of work and an ever-changing society. A modern vocational training system focuses on the development of holistic competence through longer learning processes that integrate theory and practice. Such holistic competence is related to a more broadly-based occupation or a group of related occupations rather than specific jobs or partial qualifications and entails closely inter-connected, *not separable* technical-technological, methodological and social-behavioural aspects.

In summary, in classical education approaches, the learning environment is arranged by the teacher in a way that is most likely to produce the desired behavioural change. In the contemporary social and economic context, the importance of these approaches is decreasing. At the same time the significance of holistic personal development, with specific emphasis on people’s self-regulating mechanisms and learning-to-learn skills, is increasing.

In addition, the latest interest in ‘situated learning’, ‘work-based learning’ and

learning in 'communities of practice' suggest that constructivism is now a major contributor to reform ideas in pedagogical practice. In vocational training, increased emphasis will need to be placed on experiential learning and problem and project-based approaches in collective and work-based learning settings.

## LEARNING TO LEARN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETENCE - FINDINGS FROM OUR RESEARCH IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Vocational training systems in South Eastern European countries were designed to respond to the demand for a large number of skilled workers required by industries with a traditionally low level of investment and innovation. Now, vocational training systems in these countries are undergoing reforms in all areas, while the economies and societies themselves are in transition. One result of the economic restructuring processes, prolonged periods of decline, the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, civil unrest in Albania, and the interethnic conflict in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been a relative impoverishment of vocational training infrastructure and materials. The latter is particularly strongly felt in Albania where schools and workshops, if they exist, are often in a sorry state and textbooks and teaching aids to support instruction are missing. Links with local enterprises, which used to be the main contributors to vocational training planning and design and the main absorbers of graduates from vocational schools, are frequently broken.

Furthermore, vocational training programmes, curricula and textbooks in most countries could not keep abreast with the developments in the economy, not least because funds for vocational training research and development are very limited. The exception here may be the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia which started vocational training reform in the

mid-1990s and has now redesigned all of its four-year vocational programmes. Serbia has covered some ground too by introducing vocational training reform in a number of pilot schools and programmes. However, a great number of vocational programmes are still outdated. The prospects of young vocational graduates in the labour market are relatively bleak, particularly compared to those of higher education graduates. Teachers and trainers have experienced a decline in status and their technical and methodological competences are frequently not up-to-date. These are all factors that impede students' learning and their motivation for learning.

Our research showed that the key competence concepts of 'learning to learn' and 'entrepreneurship' (see Annex 1 for a detailed description) and related pedagogical strategies were new to most of the teachers, school managers and policymakers interviewed in the course of our research. The assessment was carried out by undertaking a thorough analysis of available policy and curriculum documentation. In addition, representative numbers of the vocational student and teacher populations were asked to fill in questionnaires (a core set of questions contained within these can be found in Annex 2), while some participated in structured or semi-structured interviews with individuals or focus groups. The key findings of our research are summarised below, while detailed results are available in the countries' national reports<sup>79</sup>.

### Value, perception and motivation

Most vocational students and teachers in Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia who participated in our research considered learning important and useful, but stated that learning was undervalued in society, not least because it often did not result in better jobs or higher pay. Also, many did not see the need or possibility for lifelong learning in the current economic and social reality of their countries. Thus, vocational

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<sup>79</sup> For detailed findings of the assessments undertaken in the countries, as well as conclusions and policy recommendations – see Xhillari L. and Çabiri Y. (eds.), Jukić, B. (ed.), Janevski, V. (ed.), Raićević, S. (ed.) and Maksimović, I. (ed.) (all 2007).

students claimed that they rather learned to comply with their teachers' or parents' requirements and to pass tests with good marks. Most of them did not see learning as a form of self-fulfilment or a basis on which to build when engaging in further learning during later stages of life. Important drivers for learning among students were the wish to be enrolled at higher schools of learning or to become skilled at something and find an interesting job.

The majority of teachers who took part in our research saw learning primarily as a way of imparting information and increasing the knowledge of their students rather than a process through which effective learning strategies are acquired. They believed that they can have a significant impact on developing their students' responsibility for learning and their zeal and perseverance, but they also believed that the family environment affected the attitude of a young person towards learning.

This suggests that the 'learning to learn' concept is not yet fully understood among teachers: what has been learned does not represent the actual achievement alone, but it is the learning or knowledge acquisition strategies – the question as to how something was learned – which is to be further developed. The awareness about and mastery of effective learning strategies serve as a mechanism for empowering the learners for future self-regulated learning. Drivers for learning that are primarily extrinsic to the learners are problematic because, once they are removed, individuals are poorly motivated for learning.

### **The curriculum**

The curriculum distinguishes between vocational theory and practice, with the theory being taught in school classrooms and the practice, taken in poorly equipped workshops. Practical work carried out in companies takes place only rarely and is typically poorly integrated with the teaching provided at school. School-based vocational training includes a large number of general education subjects. Most of

these are modelled on subjects that are taught in gymnasium curricula. As a result, they are often unrelated to the vocational area chosen. The curriculum is divided by subjects and imparts the subject-specific knowledge from the given scientific disciplines – without an orientation towards acquiring general occupational competences.

The curriculum is largely prescriptive and provides not only the initial idea of what is to be learned but also the guiding pattern, or methodology, to achieve the desired learning objectives. It is, hence, a closed curriculum model that follows a behaviourist orientation to learning.

According to our research, a specific feature in the countries in question was the fact that a considerable proportion of students would take private lessons for some general education subjects in vocational training. Reasons for private tutoring varied from place to place. They were quoted to include the need for additional learning for some students in four-year vocational programmes to be able to enrol at university. In addition, both the fact that incentives for teachers to make sure that everybody learns did not always exist and that in regular classes some students could not fully master the teaching content were cited as reasons for private tutoring. The latter too points at a generally overloaded curriculum, which requires teachers and students to go through large amounts of factual knowledge, leaving almost no space for experimentation and innovation.

### **Pedagogical strategies**

Our research illustrated that traditional teacher-centred approaches dominated teaching practice in vocational training for a variety of reasons. Teachers themselves said they felt insufficiently aware of alternative pedagogical strategies, but also lacked incentives to introduce such alternatives. Some teachers also felt the need to be responsive to parents who advocate ways of learning to which they were used themselves. Finally, the poor learning conditions and infrastructure were cited as causes that hindered the introduction of new methods.

## FOSTERING KEY COMPETENCES THROUGH LEARNER AND WORK-BASED VOCATIONAL LEARNING PROCESSES

Teachers generally believed that their role in motivating for learning, raising self-confidence, developing creativity and encouraging critical thinking in students was important. In addition, teachers held that most of the methods and activities used during the teaching process were suitable for encouraging the development of learning skills and for nurturing creativity and an entrepreneurial spirit in young people. However, this was not supported by evidence.

Feedback from students revealed that, in education practice, teachers would tend to be authoritarian and their main concern would be that students were quiet in class. Students held that the teachers would not consider it a priority to encourage their students to take an active part in shaping the teaching process. Students claimed that teachers would mostly stand in front of the class, using one-way teaching methods and dictating almost always what students should learn. Students would not be encouraged to think of how to phrase a problem or how to find alternative strategies to solve a specific task. A considerable proportion of the students claimed that most of the teachers would not even encourage them to ask questions. Teachers would not encourage students to get involved in challenging activities at school, which could be a safe environment allowing for (controlled) risk-taking and experimentation.

While learning, students claimed that they would work mostly on their own. They stated that neither peer learning nor peer evaluation would be common practice in the examined schools, since only few would work together with their classmates in or after school.

According to the students, textbooks would often be used as the only source of information. Most teachers would not encourage students to gather information from sources other than textbooks, such as their peers, parents, friends, media or the Internet.

Students claimed they were willing to start their own private businesses, to be managers, to have a job full of challenges

and to continuously develop for their job. However, they said that most schools would not offer them sufficient opportunities to get acquainted with entrepreneurship practice. Few vocational students turned out to have the opportunity to visit an enterprise. Countries reported, however, that student exposure to the world of work varied significantly from one school to another. This indicates a lack of a structured approach.

The majority of students agreed that successful students know how to learn and that this was linked with an adequate allocation of learning time. At the same time students said that they would not be systematic enough to plan their activities. They admitted that they were last-minute learners; most would do their homework at the very last moment and learn only before a written test or oral examination. Students claimed that they mostly knew how, where and whom they could ask for assistance, although some said they were not ready to ask assistance from others. Teachers claimed that students would hardly ever ask for their help to learn more successfully.

Our research revealed that tests would largely be summative, individualised and serve almost always to check how many facts were remembered by heart. But both students and teachers also reported arbitrary and, at times, abusive use of marks. They were reported to not always make them a fair indicator of students' achievements. Marks were seen as a powerful tool in the hands of the teacher. At times they were used to punish students and restore discipline in class. In some countries examined, they were even said to be a source of corruption. Teachers participating in the research associated failure in learning primarily with the fact that students would not make proper notes while learning from textbooks, with students' inability to recognise facts in the teaching content and with the problems students experience in maintaining concentration.

We can conclude that what is absent in current teaching practices in the surveyed countries is that teachers encourage their

students to engage in meta-cognitive activities while learning. This means that students do not reflect on the learning strategies employed while solving the specific task at hand. Analysing how students have been able to organise and regulate their own learning in terms of choosing and using different knowledge acquisition or problem solving strategies, both individually and in groups, would be essential if students were to become self-motivated, self-controlled learners.

To achieve the latter, students would have to reflect on how they managed to understand the specifics of tasks and their contexts, on their learning needs, and on how they have identified available opportunities and handled obstacles. This would imply that they reflect on how they have accessed, evaluated and processed information or acquired new skills, connecting the new knowledge or experience with existing knowledge or with previous life experiences.

Entrepreneurship may seem a competence which is deeply rooted in a people's culture and upon which it is very hard to exert any influence. Indeed, creativity and the spirit of initiative were not for many years fostered as desirable qualities in education practices in South Eastern European countries. Now, an enterprising spirit has been recognised as a basic competence in these countries and there is policy support for developing it through lifelong learning.

We conclude that, to a large extent, current vocational training practices in the countries in question are not conducive to the development of effective learning strategies or to curiosity, innovation and independence. Nevertheless, given the relative openness of the countries towards change and ongoing curriculum reforms, the issue of developing 'learning to learn' and 'entrepreneurship' competences may be put on the agenda. Primary education could form the platform on which successive education sub systems could build in terms of developing key competences from basic to advanced levels.

A threat to the introduction of this concept in vocational training and generally in

education in South Eastern European countries is the lack of research capacity and teacher training on the topic. The ETF project has made a small contribution in this respect. We hope that this will trigger a wider debate within the countries about the pedagogical strategies that can underpin the development of key competences and related teacher training needs.

### FOSTERING KEY COMPETENCES IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING THROUGH ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

To foster innovation and learning among students, there needs to be a profound and lasting shift in methodological emphasis from the teacher to the learner.

A **learner-centred approach** requires that learners are active agents in their own learning, rather than being mere recipients of other people's knowledge. Since constructivist learning theories, as described in section 2 above, adopt such an approach, they are seen as a promising way forward. Here, learners are viewed as participants, contributors and elaborators of socially mediated knowledge. However, warnings from empirical research (see, for example, Kirschner et al., 2006) need to be taken seriously so that younger students especially are not left unguided or guided only minimally. Kirschner et al. argue that "the advantage of guidance begins to recede only when learners have sufficiently high prior knowledge to provide 'internal' guidance". Thus, in reality, learning in schools, workshops or the workplace will remain in alternation, to varying degrees, between guidance-intensive (teacher-driven) and less guidance-intensive or unguided (primarily learner-driven) initiatives.

A constructivist way of looking at the curriculum – one that underpins the fostering of the aforementioned key competences – is to view learning as a process. Such a curriculum would provide a framework for the interaction of teachers, students and knowledge. In other words,

the curriculum is what actually *happens* in the classroom (or other learning places) and what people do to prepare and evaluate this. In this model we have a number of elements in constant interaction.

Curriculum as a process
Teachers enter particular schooling and education situations with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ an ability to think critically and think-in-action; an understanding of their role;</li><li>■ the expectations others have of them; and,</li><li>■ a proposal for action which sets out essential principles and features of the educational encounter.</li></ul> Guided by these, they encourage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ conversations between and with people in the situation;</li></ul> out of which may come: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ thinking and action.</li></ul> They continually evaluate the process and what they can see of outcomes. <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Jeffs and Smith, 1990)</i></p>

This model is an open curriculum model in which the teacher enters the situation with a proposal for action and sets out essential principles and features of the educational encounter. This encounter is based on a genuine process involving the active participation of the learners.

New pedagogical models, tools and practices that support learner-centred approaches are being developed as a response to the increased need for sharing and collectively constructing new perspectives, exploiting distributed expertise and increasing reciprocal understanding. Educational researchers have worked towards developing pedagogical models for cooperative learning, such as joint experiential learning, progressive inquiry approaches, problem-based learning and project-based learning. They include group work, debate, the joint design and solving of practical problems, the presentation of alternative perspectives, a joint reflection over practice, information sharing, mentoring and coaching, peer review and team evaluation.

Students may work in a variety of ways: individually, in pairs or in groups. This has the broader aim of developing social and interpersonal skills, including the abilities to reflect, discuss, structure, present and defend concepts, make presentations to the group and offer support to each other in the process of learning. After having agreed on a common task, students collaborate as much as possible with minimal intervention from the teacher. Students give each other feedback. Together they review what worked and what did not in terms of both problem solving and learning strategies. This shifts the focus of learning to the participants and their actions.

All these methods differ greatly in terms of learning conceptions, process, interaction and classroom leadership patterns, from traditional school classroom methods in which students spend most of their time listening to lectures or learning facts from texts and completing a set of predefined tasks at the end of each textbook chapter.

As we have seen, new approaches to vocational learning place more importance on context and the social dimensions of learning. This has led to renewed attention from researchers and practitioners to tasks being embedded in 'real-world' contexts. The 'situation', as argued in section 2 above, impacts significantly on the learning process. For vocational learning it is the workplace that is the most relevant and 'situated' site. Under certain conditions the workplace can be a creative, motivating and effective learning place. **Work-based learning** bridges the worlds of education and work. It allows the curriculum to keep abreast of changes in work contents and organisation and forms the stage for solving 'real-world' problems in a 'real-world' mode. Work-based learning requires a holistic approach to practical and theoretical learning where both on-the-job and off-the-job learning are organised in such a way that learners can acquire new knowledge and skills and gain confidence by demonstrating their potential as workers and learners.

The concept of a 'community of practice' provides a useful model for considering

how the different partners come together and share their knowledge, their work-based learning experience and their competence, how the learning partnerships regulate themselves and, not least, develop their own dynamics to create new knowledge and skills. At the centre of the community are the learners who combine theoretical and practical knowledge and skills. This concept is an expansion of the 'situated learning' model, which incorporates (but goes far beyond) the application and further development of key competences. The main difference between this and previous concepts is the departure from a predominantly individualistic approach to skill development which has underpinned vocational training strategies so far.

This is not to deny the value of traditional vocational training methodologies, such as apprenticeships in the crafts sector, where students imitate their masters and in practicing certain skills again and again to eventually become equally skilful. It is to say that modern vocational training will increasingly capitalise on the new work-based learning model which builds on socially organised activities and collaborative, open and constructivist problem and project-based learning processes.

## CONCLUSION

A strong case can be made that key competences, such as 'learning to learn' and 'entrepreneurship', are fostered primarily through a change in pedagogical strategies. To allow for their application the curriculum needs to be relatively open. A process model is recommended, in which learners come together to engage in problem-solving, to discuss, experiment and evaluate. Suitable pedagogical strategies give the learners a stake in shaping and controlling the learning

agenda and situate learning as close to 'real-world' settings as possible. For vocational training, the workplace is the most authentic, situated site for learning.

The new learning environments require complex instructional designs that in turn call for a higher level of key, technological and pedagogical competences of teachers and trainers, as argued in more detail in Chapter 3 of this Yearbook. The emphasis in teachers' and trainers' roles is shifting away from arranging the learning environment and eliciting desired responses following a behaviourist learning model. The content of learning activity is carefully structured not only to facilitate the learning of an individual but of communities of practice in which conversation and participation can occur. Learning becomes increasingly embedded in tasks that communities (and the people with their specific knowledge and identity resources within them) set and solve, whereby learning occurs in a conscious or unconscious manner.

It is clear that, if schools and classrooms remain as they are, alternative pedagogical methods will make a modest impact. Governance, policy and the curriculum need to be supportive of competent teachers and trainers who require sufficient leeway to teach as they see fit. Schools are to develop as more autonomous, self-managing learning communities, as elaborated in Chapter 2 of this Yearbook. This means that education ministries, their central agencies and partners might have to restrict themselves to taking responsibility only for setting broad goals that programmes should achieve, for making resources available, for the accessibility and quality of education and for recognising and accrediting what people might have learned in unorthodox ways. But there is no longer any point for centrally prescribing what and how learning should take place.

## ANNEX I: DEFINITION OF KEY COMPETENCES

LEARNING TO LEARN	
<b>Definition</b>	'Learning to learn' is the ability to pursue and persist in learning. Individuals should be able to organise their own learning, for example through the effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. Competence includes awareness of one's learning style and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to handle obstacles in order to learn successfully. It means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance. 'Learning to learn' engages learners in building on prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts – at home, at work, in education and training. Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual's competence.
<b>Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Knowledge and understanding of preferred learning methods, the strengths and weaknesses of skills and qualifications</li> <li>● Knowledge of available education and training opportunities and how different decisions during the course of education and training lead to different careers</li> </ul>
<b>Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effective self-management of learning and careers in general</li> <li>● The ability to dedicate time to learning, autonomy, discipline, perseverance and information management in the learning process</li> <li>● The ability to concentrate for extended as well as short periods of time</li> <li>● The ability to reflect critically on the object and purpose of learning</li> <li>● The ability to communicate as part of the learning process by using appropriate means (intonation, gestures, etc.) to support oral communication as well as by understanding and producing various multimedia messages (written or spoken language, sound, music etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A self-concept that supports a willingness to change and further develop competences as well as self-motivation and confidence</li> <li>● Positive appreciation of learning as a life-enriching activity and a sense of initiative to learn</li> <li>● Adaptability and flexibility</li> </ul>
ENTREPRENEURSHIP	
<b>Definition</b>	Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports everyone in day to day life at home and in society. It supports employees in being aware of the context of their work and being able to seize opportunities. It is a foundation for more specific skills and knowledge needed by entrepreneurs establishing social or commercial activity.
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge of available opportunities in order to identify those suited to one's own personal, professional and/or business activities.
<b>Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Skills for planning, organising, analysing, communicating, doing, de-briefing, evaluating and recording</li> <li>● Skills for project development and implementation</li> <li>● The ability to work cooperatively and flexibly as part of a team</li> <li>● The ability to identify one's personal strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>● The ability to act proactively and respond positively to changes</li> <li>● The ability to assess and take risks as and when warranted</li> </ul>
<b>Attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Disposition to show initiative</li> <li>● A positive attitude to change and innovation</li> <li>● Willingness to identify areas where one can demonstrate the full range of enterprise skills — for example at home, at work and in the community.</li> </ul>

Source: European Commission (2006b).

## ANNEX II: KEY COMPETENCES FOR LEARNING – RESEARCH PROJECT IN ALBANIA, CROATIA, THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO AND SERBIA

### A SELECTION OF QUESTIONS RELATED TO TEACHING METHODS AND THE SUPPORT OF TEACHERS

Questions were addressed separately to students and teachers:

How often does the following occur? (very rarely or never – sometimes – often – always)

#### Content of teaching

- We do experiments and practical things to apply what we have learned in theory.
- Teachers use examples or experiments from real life.
- In our class we produce something real or useful.

#### Methods and support

- Chairs and tables in our classroom are arranged like in a theatre (or cinema).
- Teachers mostly stand in front of the class and talk to us.
- The teachers' primary concern is that we are disciplined and quiet in the class.
- What is important for teachers is that we memorise what has been taught in class.
- Teachers give us a choice as to which problem or task we would like to solve.
- Teachers explain clearly the task we have to do.
- Teachers encourage us to work in pairs or groups.
- When we do group work, we can decide with whom we would like to work together.
- Teachers allow for and encourage different ways of solving a problem or task.
- When we solve a problem or task, we can decide ourselves how we go about solving it.
- To solve a problem or task, teachers encourage the use of sources of information different from textbooks, such as the Internet, asking parents, consulting newspapers or magazines ...
- Teachers know the answers beforehand.
- Teachers accept different solutions or answers.
- When we have solved a task or problem, we also present the way in which we have solved it.
- Teachers encourage us to give presentations.
- All students in the class are given the same tasks.
- Teachers work primarily with the better students.
- Teachers work primarily with the weaker students.
- Teachers adjust tasks according to the capabilities of individual students.
- Teachers allow us to solve tasks at our own speed.
- Teachers give us sufficient time for asking questions.
- I can always get help from my teacher when I ask for it.
- Teachers give students the possibility to clarify specific questions after class.

### **Assessment**

- The main emphasis in tests is on whether I have memorised well all the facts that have been taught in class.
- In tests I am asked to apply the knowledge to concrete situations.
- The work by a whole group is assessed.
- Teachers assess how we worked and communicated in groups.
- Teachers assess how I have approached or solved a certain problem or task.
- Teachers give elaborate feedback on my work.
- Teachers encourage me to evaluate myself what I have done and how I approached and solved a certain task or problem.
- Teachers encourage my classmates to evaluate me, i.e. what and how I have solved a problem or task.
- Teachers assess my performance so that I know exactly what I am able to do and where I can improve.
- Teachers encourage us to evaluate their performance.

### **Career management skills/ career advice**

- I learn at school what my strengths are and what I am good at.
- I already have a clear picture of what I can do in the future.
- At school I have access to information about opportunities for my future education or professional career.
- My teachers discuss with me what I can do in the future.
- My teachers discuss with me what I need to achieve to be able to implement my ideas for the future.



## HOW TO ACHIEVE EDUCATIONAL CHANGE IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES: BETWEEN DREAMS AND REALITY

*Margareta Nikolovska*

# 6

### INTRODUCTION

Educational change<sup>80</sup> has many meanings and shapes. It can be about encouraging more autonomous public schools, it can be about introducing new forms of school-based management, setting up new *matura* concepts, establishing decentralised systems of delivery for public schooling, introducing new curriculum models, and so on. Overall, educational change covers education reform, education improvement, changes in schools, and individual change in teachers. It is almost always presented as a better solution for everyone – it will benefit students, teachers, bureaucrats, parents and

employers. However, change almost always generates friction, both between individuals and between groups, because it invariably produces winners and losers, especially in its first stages (Evans, 1996).

Education systems differ in the kinds of decision that have been taken to move them towards a state of educational change. They also differ in the scope and details of the centrally determined frameworks for innovation. Still, one issue that they have in common is their astonishing complexity of stakeholder<sup>81</sup> relationships. Success in educational change requires that stakeholders share common goals and respect each others'

<sup>80</sup> Gene Hall and Shirley Hord (1987), and Michael Fullan (2001) refer to change as a process, not as an event. Change cannot be marked by the date that a governing body gives effect to it by simply voting for a particular policy. Rather it needs to be conceived of as a process in which individuals actually operationalise policy.

<sup>81</sup> By definition a stakeholder is a representative or spokesperson of an individual or group that is affected by or affects a policy. In the education sector, this list is very long – education committee in parliament, legislative committees, employers, trade unions, teachers union, organised associations of students, parents, etc.

interests. However, where educational change means gain for one stakeholder, for another stakeholder it may mean loss. This is how we arrive at the reasoning developed in this chapter. The argument is that educational change is linked to policy tensions – if policy tensions are better understood, then they will be better managed. A better understanding of policy tensions in any given country context will provide additional knowledge about the complicated relationship and dynamics of the different stakeholders in educational change, and this constitutes an often hidden field of policy relevant knowledge which may be useful, maybe even indispensable, to the successful management of educational change in the partner countries.

This chapter concentrates on key policy tensions. Its list of tensions is not exhaustive. Through its five sections it analyses some critical issues of educational change as policy change. There are two sides to the coin – sometimes policy tensions act as vehicles for adequate policy adjustments and educational change, sometimes they block rational policymaking and implementation and inhibit educational change. In this chapter we will discuss three key policy tensions: foreign donors' policies versus the reality of national education policy; policymakers' policies versus the change initiatives of schools; and policy versus politics in partner country contexts in South Eastern Europe.

## **EDUCATIONAL CHANGE – BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES**

Education systems in Eastern European countries are much criticised for failing to address societal needs. As a result, education systems are under pressure to break with the past and explore new learning avenues.

Governments in partner countries face serious pressure from inside and outside their education systems.

Outside trends affecting the need for change include globalisation, the growing importance of knowledge in society and economy, innovations related to ICT, and a general emphasis on the role of the market economy. They demand change in key components of the education system, its resources, functions, processes and services. Pressure also comes from the world of work where new occupational profiles are becoming increasingly complex and demanding. Growing social inequality and increasing migration play a role too. These are multifaceted processes with economic, social, political and cultural implications for education. Education has to respond to the need to educate individuals so that they are able to cope with the changing nature of their communities and the increasingly important demand for key competences.

Education systems are also challenged from within. In most countries, the distribution of education functions remains with the central government. Curriculum, textbooks, teachers, funding and facilities are often still under the firm control of the ministries. At the same time the central government sets policy and provides management functions – such as payment of salaries and pre-service and in-service instruction. There is limited capacity to focus on education quality or on improving students' performance. Overloaded curricula prioritise factual knowledge. Acquisition and assessment of this knowledge mostly takes the shape of passive learning. Textbooks are centrally selected and often in short supply. Enrolment trends affect the daily school processes – teachers are coping with overloaded classrooms in the major cities, in rural areas schools are closing class by class. Salaries for school staff are questionable, education provision is not evenly distributed across the country, and financial challenges are pressing. Yet, equal access to education is seen as one of the basic human rights.

The image of the education system is also weakening in the outside world. Results from international student assessment studies are often poor. In response to the need to provide a new basis for policy

## HOW TO ACHIEVE EDUCATIONAL CHANGE IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES: BETWEEN DREAMS AND REALITY

dialogue defining and implementing education goals, the OECD PISA<sup>82</sup> assessment has been conducted regularly since 2000. PISA studies revealed wide differences in the extent to which countries succeed in enabling young adults to access, manage, integrate, evaluate and reflect on written information in order to develop their potential and further expand their horizons. Most partner country results were disappointing, showing that the performance of 15 year-olds is lagging considerably behind that of other countries, sometimes by the equivalent of several years of schooling and sometimes despite considerable investment in education. The results have also highlighted significant variations in the performance of schools within one and the same country and raised concerns about equity in the distribution of learning opportunities (OECD, 2004).

There are universal expectations that education systems will move from schooling to continuing lifelong education, from input-based curricula to learning outcomes, from teaching and delivery of curriculum content to learning as an interactive process involving both teachers and learners. All these trends bring different opportunities and challenges for education systems. Since the beginning of the 1990s, multiple waves of reforms in education have rolled across the partner countries and many governments have set education priorities that are consistent with the above challenges. Important steps have been taken to strengthen governance and implementation capacities, to commit resources to be able to respond to the needs and aspirations of both individuals and the larger society. Most countries have developed strategic documents, improved legislation, and renovated curriculum systems.

In spite of two decades of educational change, the impression remains that the implemented reforms have yielded only limited changes of attitude and that education systems remain largely unchanged. While it might still be too early to expect significant changes to happen, it is time to ring early warning bells. Reform has not changed enough practice in education, therefore the effects of these reforms are unknown and outcomes – when measured as student performance – remain unclear.

The political climate often makes it difficult for governments to exercise effective leadership and achieve consensus in issues related to education. In many countries, there is no natural political majority. The results of recent elections in some countries in the South Eastern European region make this very clear<sup>83</sup>. These circumstances require policymakers to navigate in a very difficult terrain, which usually involves a multitude of stakeholders, both inside and outside the education system. The list of stakeholders in education is very long, including the parliamentary education commission, heads of department in the ministry, legislative bodies, teachers unions, different associations of parents, teachers, students, etc. Often stakeholders have opposing interests. Change in education is a particularly complex issue. It has different consequences for different institutions inside the system; it means different things to different stakeholders. The interest of the stakeholders also changes over time – from full support and involvement to full neglect.

The question as to how different stakeholders have treated the issue of educational change in their positions is important. In a complex environment,

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<sup>82</sup> PISA seeks to measure how well young people, aged 15 and therefore approaching the end of compulsory schooling, are ready to meet the challenges of today's knowledge societies. The assessment is forward-looking, focusing on young people's ability to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges, rather than merely on the extent to which they have mastered a specific school curriculum.

<sup>83</sup> As an example, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2006 parliamentary elections the VMRO-DPMNE obtained about 33%, the coalition of its centre-left political opponent, SDSM, 24%. The majority of Albanian votes were given to the DUI - PDP coalition which received 12.12%, while the Democratic Party of Albanians won 7.5% of the votes. In Serbia, in the January 2007 elections, the Democratic Party won 64 seats out of 250, followed by the coalition between the Democratic Party of Serbia and New Serbia with 47 seats, G17 Plus with 19, the Serbian Socialist Party with 16 and the coalition led by the Liberal Democratic Party with 15 seats. Parties representing minorities won seven seats all together.

stakeholders at different levels often have to make decisions quickly against an already complex political and managerial background. The reality is that the ministries of education do not operate the system neither on their own, or in isolation from other interested parties. When communication among the various stakeholders is well-organised, policies can be better adjusted and the expectations for change in the system of education will become more realistic. However, sometimes there is very little interaction (or none at all) in the web of complex relationships among stakeholders and policy tensions are created as part of the ongoing process of education reform.

Often in education innovation agendas we find long-lasting and all inclusive reforms, which are a complex mixture of changing laws and structures, new curriculum frameworks, new assessments standards, etc. We also observe that the chain of educational change looks quite simple – one set of actors defines the problem, a completely different set of actors implements the chosen policy, and it is not clear if evaluation takes place at all. Sometimes we also find that in a short period of time the focus within one country shifts radically – moving from secondary education reform to higher education reform, from curriculum reform to decentralisation reform.

In this chapter we identify three key policy tensions which accompany educational change. They grow within the policy process and concern the relationship between groups of stakeholders that are affected differently by educational change. As key policy tensions we identify the following:

#### **International agendas versus national policy**

The first tension is the relationship between foreign donor policies and the national context. Educational change can only be successful and sustainable if policy development, formulation and implementation are firmly rooted in broad ownership and fit within institutional structures that will enable the

democratic participation of a country's stakeholders in the policy process. Institutional structures and capacities as implicitly imagined by international donors often do not exist in partner countries.

#### **Policymakers and schools**

The second tension is found in the relationship between national policymakers and schools (Grootings and Nielsen (eds.), 2005). It seems that in this relationship most policies are somehow lost. The schools' contextual settings (such as school leadership, school culture, and teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and concerns) influence the implementation of change and are of paramount importance if innovation initiatives are to have the intended impact on student achievement<sup>84</sup>. Sharing values and commitment is often a real challenge.

#### **Political environment and education policymaking**

The third tension is found in the interface between the political environment and education policymaking. How much do we know about the political environment in the partner countries and how it impacts educational change? Whether new policies are implemented or resisted depends in good part on the relationship between the political elite and the public administration.

## **INTERNATIONAL AGENDAS AND NATIONAL POLICY: TENSION IN POLICY PROCESSES**

Many countries are members of different international organisations such as the UN, the ILO, the WHO, the IMF, UNESCO, the World Bank, etc. Over time, as members of these organisations, they have committed themselves to broad policy frameworks formulated by international consensus.

In adopting these broad policy frameworks the international community (UNESCO) has set some challenging goals to be achieved by 2015: expanding and improving pre-school education; achieving

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<sup>84</sup> See also Chapter 3.

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free universal primary and lower secondary education of good quality; achieving gender equality; providing education and training for out-of-school young and adult illiterates; achieving recognised and measurable learning outcomes at all levels and for all education activities, etc. The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Dakar Education For All (EFA) are a couple of recent examples of targets that impact national education policies.

European Union benchmarks and targets presented in the *Education and Training 2010 agenda*<sup>85</sup> also have a strong influence on the partner countries' education and training policies. The EU agenda proposes benchmarks in five areas which are central to the strategic goals of the Lisbon strategy. These areas cover early school leavers; graduates in mathematics, science and technology; graduates who have completed upper secondary education; key competencies; and lifelong learning. The benchmarks present a clear move towards lifelong learning and an integrated approach towards quality, access and openness of education and training systems.

Improvement of education and raising the standard of learning are essential for national policies. Therefore, education authorities have embarked on the compilation of comprehensive and coherent lists of many goals and targets that relate to the development of the education sector. As a rule, most of these goals and targets which are found in EFA or EU Education and Training 2010 are included in the national education sector strategies.

Government agendas "to satisfy all" have lead to a lengthy process of preparation of national education sector strategies. These strategies present particular aspects of educational change. They are determined within a wider policy framework that involves national, regional and local governments. They also include references to international priorities. This wider

education policy framework accommodates issues that range from the age of compulsory schooling, teacher salaries, and the free supply of textbooks. It implies an all-inclusive approach which calls for a different range of actions, starting from an improvement of the quality of learning processes both for young people and for adults to the quality of the teaching process, with the implications for initial and in-service teacher training, support to teachers and trainers dealing with ICT, etc.

Thus, the first question is how the national education strategies developed so far can be translated into a coherent policy? It seems that this is possible only on paper. Even though the issues addressed are well articulated, there are gaps in the political, policy and implementation spectrum. Demand for and outcomes in education are differentiated based on diverse social expectations of different local groups in the system, but in spite of this, education administration and management are too centralised and this remains the main feature reflected in the national education strategies. The second obvious question is how far this process of defining an education strategy can create the necessary conditions for its implementation? Implementation requires, at least, broad consensus from key stakeholders in the sector, but consensus is difficult given the fact that both international and national targets need to be satisfied. In addition, a consensus on the nature of the reforms is limited by over-politicised public affairs, and a lack of capacity in public administration.

The donor community now greatly influences whether education and training sector reform is taken up as a policy priority, what focus such reform should take and how it is to be developed and implemented. The combination of individual memories, institutional legacies and donor policies in most countries means that the key issue is seen by most national stakeholders to be the absence of funds to

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<sup>85</sup> Following the conclusions of the Heads of State in Lisbon in 2000 and their endorsement of the common objectives for education and training in Europe in Barcelona in 2002, a new process of cooperation has been launched in the education and training areas. The overall objective is to make education and training systems in Europe a world quality reference by 2010.

purchase up-to-date teaching equipment, renovate premises and pay decent salaries – in short: to restore an institution that was perceived to be doing fine. Donor-led vocational education and training reforms that take place in a period of radical change of European and global education and training policy frameworks are serious challenges for the partner countries. Coping with this and avoiding jumping into automatic policy taking and policy copying under the pressures from many international discourses and EU processes of education and training policy is problematic for policymakers (Grootings and Nielsen, 2006b).

It is noteworthy that in some countries reform implementation has moved away from earlier objectives. This raises questions about how policies were developed and communicated, and why parts of them were lost on the way. Ongoing reforms in almost all aspects of the education system seriously overshoot the capacity of the ministries to support them at a level that will produce reasonable achievements. While ministries and other agencies are preoccupied and overburdened with all the reform activities they have taken on their shoulders, local schools cannot get timely decisions or support. Time is a critical resource in educational change, but in most cases this resource is forgotten.

Experience so far shows that policies to be implemented in partner countries are basically formulated at the top level and the question is therefore whether enough stakeholder dialogue took place. Somehow, the impression is often that educational change policies have been forced into the hands of national policymakers based on donor priorities, while at the same time these policymakers faced a difficulty in 'bargaining' between their own priorities and priorities of donors. The impression remains that the priorities for education reform policies have been chosen based on the agendas of others<sup>86</sup>. Often the reforms have deviated and shifted in various directions to maintain agreement with the policies of international donors and the presumed capacity of

ministries. A common frustration is that some levels of policymakers in the countries have a monopoly over the reform process. This creates tension in itself and this tension between different levels of the education system will be further analysed below.

## POLICYMAKERS AND SCHOOLS: TENSION BETWEEN POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

In many partner countries the formulation of policy is seen as a prestigious task, reserved for those with high status, and contrasting with the much less prestigious task of implementation. This is strengthened by the belief that there is an inherent resistance among teachers and trainers 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 teachers as something 'done to' them as opposed to something 'done with' or 'done by' them, which, of course, has not nurtured their commitment. Very often, "a teacher can use new curriculum materials or technologies without altering the teaching approach. Or a teacher could use the materials and alter some teaching behaviour without coming to grips with the concepts or beliefs underlying the change." (Fullan, 2001).

We will take curriculum reform as an example. Stipulating the objectives of curriculum reform means making a series of policy choices about new subjects competing for space in the curriculum, new knowledge that needs to be articulated, new student assessment methods, new textbooks and teaching materials. In addition to meeting the education needs and aspirations of the students, 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. Policy choices about curriculum reform ought to be the result of compromises of various kinds and they reflect the assumptions and values of those who construct them. As a

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<sup>86</sup> See also Chapter 3.

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result, specifying curriculum reform is a highly contested and complex process.

In 2005, the ETF conducted a peer review exercise on “curriculum reform”<sup>87</sup> in four Western Balkan countries (Parkes and Nielsen, 2006). During the past decades, ETF partner countries have worked intensively in the area of “curriculum reform”, and since the mid-90s through different EU Phare initiatives, renewal of the vocational curriculum started in a range of vocational profiles. As part of this initiative, usually pilot curricula were developed and sometimes also implemented. Often, in parallel with support from GTZ<sup>88</sup>, the renewal of three-year vocational profiles started in a restricted number of vocational fields. In some countries, governments initiated additional curriculum reforms – now in secondary general education. The case of Serbia is a typical one. Currently at least four types of curricula are implemented in some vocational schools. One of them is the pilot curricula, developed with the support of the EU CARDS vocational training programme which started in 2003. There are 55 schools involved in this programme. There are also pilot curricula, developed with the support of GTZ (in 2002), implemented in 32 vocational schools operating in the areas of business administration, finance and banking. A third type of pilot curricula were developed as a result of an initiative of the Ministry of Education and Sport in 2001. This intervention was focused on the “modernisation” of the curricula for nine clusters of education profiles, implemented in 31 vocational schools during the school year 2002-03. In addition, traditional curricula which did not undergo changes are still implemented in most of the vocational schools.

Often, several of these curricula are used in one and the same school and a variety of reform programmes can be in operation simultaneously without mutual coordination. This means that teachers are confronted with novelties which come

from different types of curricula and reform programmes. In some programmes they have to implement a “modular” curriculum, which introduces a different approach to student assessment compared to the traditional one, while in other cases they need to introduce “project based work” in the classroom. Although the objectives of curriculum reform are clear - to dismantle the old ideological curriculum and to offer a “fresh” look and new ideas - this all has a significant impact in the schools, which is not well understood by policymakers. Schools operating in this kind of change environment tend to jump from one activity to another, from one programme to another, implementing many activities which most of the time are connected to different donor activities limited in terms of time and available funds. Bryk and his colleagues (1998) in the evaluation of the Chicago school reform refer to these phenomena as “Christmas tree schools.”

*“Programmes range widely in content, purpose, and method, and they may include a variety of curricular, instructional, social, and technological approaches [...]. The lack of coherence includes fragmentation of the curriculum, fragmentation or lack of coordination in organizing the school day, poorly related or incompatible instructional strategies, inconsistent behavioural expectations, and the lack of a shared purpose and shared values.”*

With all these sets of diversified reforms active at the same time, the schools as institutions have changed. An interesting observation from the ETF peer review exercise is that policymakers see these various innovations as non-conflicting. It seems that policymakers and their advisors (most of whom come from universities and the field of science and have no relation to the practice of teaching) view schools only as factories that achieve (or don't achieve) results and not as human organisations with their own structural and

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<sup>87</sup> “Curriculum reform” has at least a two-layer perspective - one which refers to teachers and how they implement curriculum in the classroom, and the other which refers to policymakers and how they use it to reach systemic reforms.

<sup>88</sup> GTZ is German Technical Assistance with a history of supporting countries in South Eastern Europe to introduce the dual system of vocational training.

cultural rules, codes and heritage. They assume that policy instruments will 'drive' the necessary reform in schools. This technical or technocratic view seems to assume that schools are driven by relatively homogenous activities that can be 'fuelled' by a small set of easily accessible policy instruments – like school framework curricula and vocational training profile curricula. ETF experience shows the contrary: schools are highly complex institutions driven by a mixture of interrelated rules, values and beliefs<sup>89</sup>. This is the context in which policies –sometimes even conflicting policies – are implemented. There is little evidence of direct and powerful relations between policy formulation and institutional practice in schools.

The ETF 2005 peer review exercise has provided a rich body of knowledge in relation to curriculum design and implementation initiatives that aimed to improve student achievement. The curriculum is still seen as a single *product* prepared at the central level and not as a permanent decentralised *process*, and the curriculum design process is largely decided on the basis of education considerations with insufficient analysis of current trends and requirements. There is no effective mechanism to evaluate the relevancy and effectiveness of the curriculum (ETF, 2004).

The systemic curriculum design process is also weakened through centralised control. Curriculum planning needs to be interactive and participatory, with careful attention given to the lead client – the student. When planning and decision-making occur at central levels, curriculum is very inert, and much more time is needed for change. In addition, planning the curriculum at the highest levels cannot capture local conditions or stay abreast of changes in the communities. This system does not account for variation in need or capacity and, more importantly, provides no incentive for good performance of the teachers or school management.

In general, the peer reviews illuminate the fact that teachers were not opposed to the

new curricula, but there have been numerous references to the short timescale in which it had been introduced. They also expressed fears about shortage of teaching materials and anxiety about newly introduced student assessment procedures. Teachers pointed out that these new student assessment procedures caused quite a lot of disruption to teaching and learning processes in the classroom. Although teachers were strongly in favour of the modular curriculum, the peer review visit to pilot schools and discussions with teachers clearly indicate that the modular approach to curriculum design is a paradigmatic shift in education and training in the schools. Active preparation for each class, active participation in student learning activities, permanent feedback on student progress through learning sequences are all new requirements which the modular curriculum principle poses to the teachers - compared to delivering the traditional curriculum, teachers now need to do much more.

Certification and qualifications are major trouble areas for pilot schools where the new modular curriculum has been introduced. Modularisation and the recognition of modules in the certification awarded (at the present moment) give an additional burden to the pilot schools in terms of administration, complexity, regulation and communication (how student outcomes per module are recognised). Double administration of student records takes place in the pilot schools – the first one, where the teacher keeps records for each student as required based on the new modular curriculum, and the second one which is required by national legislation. This creates an additional workload for the teachers.

The peer review visit to the schools and discussions with teachers revealed that after the Phare investment finished, the system was not able to provide enough financial resources to support the wider implementation of this type of modular approach. Consequently, at school level more intense paper use for modular teaching and assessment was exercised. Lack of equipment and consumables

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<sup>89</sup> See also chapter 2.

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proves to be one of the major obstacles for implementation of this curriculum. It seems that the lack of correlation between the structure of training and provision of didactic equipment is a general problem and it is considered as substantial by the schools. With the exception of computers, it is a fact that vocational schools in general are rather poorly equipped from the point of view of specialised technology. This makes implementation of any kind of curriculum difficult. Why are policymakers then interested in launching such reforms? The core of sustaining effective reform models is first and foremost to better understand the reform costs, the financing strategies to fund them, and the policies needed to sustain them. Effective policy aligns budget and national education functions with school leadership priorities.

Indeed, despite the ambitions of formulated policies, very little seems to have changed in the schools. In education, the persistence of the same old problems is infamous. Successive waves of reform have failed to achieve the improvements they promised, and many staff development programmes have developed the cynicism of teachers rather than their expertise. The typical pattern when reform fails has been to blame the teachers rather than the designers. It now appears, however, that the designers' assumptions are often at the core of the chronic failure of change efforts (Evans, 1996).

In *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan (2001, p.3) argues:

*“One person claims that schools are being bombarded by change; another observes that there is nothing new under the sun. A policy maker charges that teachers are resistant to change; a teacher complains that administrators introduce the changes for their own self-aggrandizement and that they neither know what is needed nor understand the classroom.”*

Because of this frustration of both policymakers and teachers, one important issue is a search for an appropriate platform that will lead to an understanding of each others' perspectives. In the complicated 'all stakeholders' picture in education in the partner countries it seems that the lack of communication between policymakers and teachers prevails in spite of the urgency of establishing such channels. It is important to devise mechanisms that can strengthen relationships between these two crucial groups so that their respective needs can be accommodated and so that existing tensions can be better managed.

One relatively easy solution is to strive for meaningful partnerships between different stakeholders that play important roles in educational change – in this case policymakers and teachers. However, this is not easy to achieve since often the basis for all types of partnership is self-interest. As pointed out by Sack (1999), success in partnership depends on whether all concerned parties are explicitly aware of their own or their partners' interests. Success is also promoted when the partners share a common desire to attain each partner's mutual interests, while gaining mutual respect for each other's interests.

Implementation problems arise when policy needs to be implemented in the schools by those who haven't been asked for their opinion about the feasibility of the proposed policy (and most likely have never participated in the process of policy formulation and mapping policy choices). Exclusion of some stakeholders from policy formulation can have a dramatic impact in the phase of policy implementation<sup>90</sup>. The issue of consensus is also challenging, since public policymaking typically involves conflicts among competing stakeholders, which can be mitigated through policy dialogue<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> As an example, exclusion of the biggest opposition party from the process of policy formulation about teaching reform, can be a catalyst for a significant crisis in the process of implementation after some time.

<sup>91</sup> The UNDP 2002 policy paper: *How to build inclusive policy processes: institutionalising the dialogue between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders* identifies that “policy dialogue not only implies an exchange of opinions but also the formulation of an agreed position and approach, and the matching of different, frequently conflicting, interest of social groups.”

## THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND EDUCATION POLICYMAKING: TENSION BETWEEN POLITICS AND POLICY

How much do we know about the political environment in partner countries and the extent to which this has an impact on educational change? Can we make a clear distinction between the political and policy environment, and how can we incorporate this into our work as policy learning facilitators?

There is a political dimension to policymaking in education and it is impossible to overlook the existence of power relations between various stakeholders. Which political party does the minister come from? What is the political background of the director of a pedagogical institute? What is the balance of political power within the ministry between minister and deputy ministers? To an education expert these may look like irrelevant issues but because educational change is an endeavour that involves almost the entire community, they can become critical questions. Political capital<sup>92</sup> explains where local people are situated in terms of the balance of power in relation to other groups and the notion of political capital is critical in linking structures and processes to understand the impact this has on educational change.

The political wing of ministries and institutions usually consists of the minister and deputy ministers, directors and deputy directors, while further down the hierarchy ministerial staff, staff of pedagogical institutes, education inspectorates, and others can be broadly classified as the education bureaucracy (administration). They have interests and ideas that may or “may not coincide with those of the policymakers to whom they report or those of the educators they serve” (Fiske, 1996).

In addition, over time we have learned that performance of the political wing also depends on stakeholders outside the system. A lack of political consensus to implement decentralisation as part of a public administration reform will, for example, significantly delay the implementation of decentralisation in the education sector. ETF experience shows that in education reform in the partner countries one of the biggest challenges is to limit political top-down interference with administrative processes in the institutions. Daily politics influence educational change significantly. Hot political issues often set boundaries for such change. The impact, for example, which the Dayton agreement<sup>93</sup> and its decentralisation logic have on the wider democratic processes (including education) are significant for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The responsibility for education governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina is now divided between the two entities (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska), and one administrative district (District Brcko). For the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Ohrid Agreement<sup>94</sup> of 2001 exerts considerable influence over the decentralisation logic of education. This presents a major challenge for municipalities and for the national education authorities.

Sometimes governments may decide on educational change which has significant political influence over various groups of stakeholders. The most obvious example is found in decentralisation policy. The broad rationale for decentralisation in education is that decisions are best made close to the economic demand and social needs of the communities. The idea is to improve education by transferring authority from one level of government (or one set of stakeholders) to others. A multitude of stakeholders, including those who hold political positions, will need to undergo a significant change in power

<sup>92</sup> In this case political capital will be the representative power earned through elections, the power inside the government, the power to enact legislation, the power that enables leaders on various levels of the education system to get things done, the power they have inside the community, etc.

<sup>93</sup> The *General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, known as the Dayton Agreement, is the peace agreement signed in Paris on December 14, 1995.

<sup>94</sup> The *Ohrid Agreement* is a peace agreement signed by the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albanian representatives on 13 August 2001. The agreement sets the foundation for improving the rights of ethnic Albanians in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

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distribution in order to achieve the declared aim. This is how education decentralisation policy can also become part of a political agenda.

The traditional understanding of bureaucracy and administration explains that policymakers make policy, and implementers implement it. Policies are seen as a sequence of events which can be rationally planned and scheduled. From this point of view decisions involving implementation are regarded as being essentially non-political and technical (Nakamura and Smallwood, 1980). This model separating administration from politics was adhered to until Paul Appleby openly questioned it. He argued that policy is constructed when it is actually applied, because it is here that the education administration must translate it from more abstract statements of the education policymaker into concrete action of practice (Appleby, 1995). Nowadays in partner countries it is extremely difficult to draw strict lines and distinguish between those who develop policies and those who implement them.

It is well known that the most commonly used instruments for implementation of the educational change policy are legislation, rules and directives issued by the ministries and institutions involved. Therefore legislation, rules and directives are an articulation of the education policies as they have been created by policymakers. However, policy implementation is an ongoing, non-linear process that must be managed (Grindle and Thomas, 1991). It requires consensus building, participation of key stakeholders, conflict resolution, compromise, contingency planning, resource mobilisation and adaptation.

*“New policies often reconfigure roles, structures, and incentives, thus changing the array of costs and benefits to implementers, direct beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. As a result, policy implementation is often very difficult. Experience has shown that an inwardly focused, ‘business as usual’ approach will fall short of achieving intended results’ (Brinkerhoff, 1996).*

Educational change takes place in a complex web of political relationships, both within and outside the system. The issues confronting educational change are strongly connected to the political conditions of the environment in which they are embedded. Understanding the relationship between politicians and administrators vis-à-vis policy implementation is an important ingredient of moving educational change forward. Too often, education reform policy overlooks these relationships and educational change fails because of a lack of attention to these relationships hidden in the politics.

### EDUCATIONAL CHANGE AS POLICY CHANGE: IN SEARCH OF BETTER IDEAS TO MANAGE POLICY TENSIONS

Education reform has many meanings and shapes. It is implemented in different country environments and contexts. It is implemented for different reasons, with different objectives, and in different frameworks. Sometimes it has been carried out in the framework of decentralisation of education, of curriculum reform, of new *matura* concepts, etc. There are, however, some common characteristics:

- Educational change always involves a multitude of stakeholders.
- No educational change can exist in isolated educational segments or functions and no single segment or function can be altered without affecting others.
- Educational change is an attempt to change complex systems. Its basis is to solve a complex policy problem.

Enrolment fluctuations offer a typical example of a complex policy problem. Due to rural-urban migration, ministries are experiencing problems in major cities where many schools are under pressure due to a considerable increase in enrolments. At the same time rural schools are facing financial difficulties because student numbers are dwindling. Schools across the country have to fight to get enough students to avoid closure. The size

of the young population and migration movements in a given country shape the potential demand for education services to be provided by the government, at least in a mid-term perspective. Analysing the response to such demographic change offers an interesting case study of the opportunities of alternative actions that policymakers and their policy advisers choose in order to solve this problem.

In his analyses of policy problems, W. Dunn (2004, p.122) stresses that complex policy problems must be structured before they can be solved. The process of structuring the policy problem is the search for and specification of problem elements and their structure. The structure of the problem refers to the way these elements are arranged:

- Policy stakeholders: Which stakeholders affect or are affected by a problem as perceived by the stakeholders themselves?
- Policy alternatives: What alternative courses of action may be taken to solve the perceived problem?
- Policy actions: Which of these alternatives should be acted on to solve the perceived problem?
- Policy outcomes: What are the probable outcomes of action and are they part of the solution to the perceived problem?
- Policy values: Are some outcomes more valuable than others in solving the perceived problems?

The capacity to forecast expected policy outcomes is critical to the success of policy analyses and the improvement of policy advice in educational change. By forecasting policy outcomes the capacity to understand, manage and guide society is significantly improved.

In our specific case of enrolment fluctuation we often see that policymakers, their policy advisors and bureaucratic allies in the ministry will rarely go for a comprehensive list of policy outcomes. Adding a few new classes here and there or expanding the numbers of the students in existing classes is the likely solution to this complex policy problem. The learning conditions in these overcrowded classrooms and schools, and

the future impact of this policy decision are not of primary concern. The problem is urgent and should be solved with a quick decision by the ministry. The next school year is far away and perhaps the government will change. This scenario is a typical policy problem which requires critical questions to be asked:

- How is the problem likely to change in the future?
- Are we going to see pressure on existing schools and which are those schools?
- What will be the consequences for the teachers and other school staff and what are their demands?
- What are the other policy alternatives and are these alternatives politically feasible?

Often, these types of question are not asked.

With this enrolment scenario we present not only a perfect example of a complex policy problem, but we can also observe the typical behaviour of several groups of stakeholders. Politicians, policymakers, and bureaucrats see more immediate benefits for themselves by opting for the quick fix in the form of an access-related reform. Access reforms in education call for increasing the availability of education programmes and opportunities. These reforms normally involve investment to increase the number of schools, classrooms, teachers, teachers' salaries and teaching supplies. They are commonly understood as expanding the coverage of the education system. They produce gains for some or all parties and losses for very few stakeholders, if any. The beneficiaries of access solutions include enrolled students and parents, teachers and teaching unions, construction companies, builders and bureaucrats whose budgets increase. At the same time, the costs of access reforms are spread across wide groups of taxpayers. Quality reforms, on the other hand, involve efforts to improve the efficiency of invested resources, with the goal of improving the academic performance of students, increasing teacher productivity, reducing student dropout or repetition rates, achieving

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optimum teacher/student ratios, penalising the inadequate performance of teachers, granting greater autonomy to school boards, etc. When the costs of a particular policy fall directly and intensely on specific interest groups, and its benefits are too diffuse, policy adoption is politically difficult (Corrales, 1999).

One may argue that there are few similarities between this enrolment case and, for example, a curriculum reform case. Looking at both from a policy viewpoint, however, it seems that we are talking about equalities. They are both complex policy problems and both at least share the following important characteristics (Dunn, 2004):

- **Interdependency.** Policy problems are systems of problems, indeed. Systems of problems are difficult or impossible to resolve by using an analytical approach.
- **Subjectivity.** The external conditions that give rise to a problem are selectively defined, classified, explained, and evaluated.
- **Artificiality.** Policy problems are often products of subjective human judgement, policy problems also come to be accepted as legitimate definitions of objective social conditions; policy problems are therefore socially constructed, maintained and changed.
- **Dynamics.** There are as many different solutions to the problem as there are definitions of that problem.

Many people believe that policy problems are objective conditions that may be established simply by determining what the facts are in a given case. This view of the nature of policy problems fails to recognise that the same facts – for example, government statistics that show poverty, unemployment, and school dropouts are rising – are often interpreted in markedly different ways by different policy stakeholders. Hence, the same policy-relevant information can and often does result in conflicting definitions and explanations of a problem. This is not so much because the ‘facts’ are inconsistent (and often they are) but because policy analysts, policymakers and other stakeholders hold competing assumptions

about human nature, government and the opportunities for social change through public action. Policy problems are partly in the eye of the beholder (Appleby, 1995). In their analyses of education systems and recommendations to ministers, policy analysts often forget that when dealing with educational change and its components, they indeed deal with complex policy problems. Curriculum reform, teacher training, restructuring of the schooling system, and other important issues mobilise all stakeholders in the system. Under these conditions standard methods of decision theory (risk-benefit analysis), applied economic (cost-benefit analyses) and political science (policy implementation analyses) are of limited value. The process of making and implementing education policies occurs in societal systems where many variables lie beyond the control of the policymakers. It is these unmanageable contingences that are usually responsible for the success and failure of the policies in achieving their objectives (Dunn, 2004). By discussing policy tensions above, we have actually tried to offer a glimpse of these contingences.

### CONCLUSION: LESSONS FOR POLICY LEARNING FACILITATION IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES

What is the best way of supporting partner countries in achieving the desired result from managing educational change and policy tension?

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) point out that in order to understand policy change in modern industrial societies it is best to focus on a policy sub system (or domain), not on a government programme or organisation. A sub system consists of those stakeholders from a variety of public and private organisations who are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue, and who regularly seek to influence public policy in that domain. Policymaking in virtually any sub system is of sufficient complexity that stakeholders must specialise if they are to have any influence. They must understand relevant laws and regulations, the magnitude of the problem,

the influence of various key stakeholders, and the set of concerned organisations and individuals. An additional rationale for focusing on sub systems as the unit of analysis – rather than on specific organisations or programmes – is the repeated finding from bottom-up studies that there is seldom a single dominant programme at the local/operational level. Instead, there is usually a multitude of programmes initiated at different levels of government that local stakeholders seek to utilise in pursuit of their own goals.

In pursuing their education reforms, the ETF partner countries have had to respond to high pressure from within their societies from different directions. This highlights that education reform takes place within a broader political and policy context in the countries. As such, it is interlinked with many developments that in one way or another have a significant impact on the education system as a whole. To have the capacity to see and to predict the behaviour of different stakeholders affected by the chain of enacted policies, and to be able to develop an understanding of (and manage) different policy tensions that arise in the course of educational change is an absolute priority. It is not enough to decide that a new revised curriculum reform will be implemented, and it is not enough to cost this type of reform. What is critical is the capacity to analyse the policy problem and to develop an understanding and capacity to see impact and side-effects of the policy over a longer period of time.

Education and training reforms in partner countries (and indeed any type of major reform in any country) will only be successful and sustainable if policy development, formulation and implementation are firmly based on broad ownership and fit within institutional structures that will enable the democratic

participation of the stakeholders in the policy process. ETF perceives policy learning as an instrument to support stakeholders in the countries. If policy learning is understood as “relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioural intentions that result from experience and/or new information and that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives”, then it requires knowledge of the policy problem and factors affecting it. In that context, maybe the major framework for policy learning should be a platform which will ensure that, in fact, sufficient attention is paid to public policy choices; and in educational change when it comes to a policy choice it really matters if the curriculum is structured as a three-year curriculum, or as a four-year curriculum. It really matters if three new classes are opened in the most elite school in the city, and five are closed down in the suburbs, it matters if change agents in the pilot schools are dismissed and sent home, and instead new computers are brought in the classrooms. All of this is a policy choice and policy choices matter.

By focusing on the concept of policy tensions, this chapter has sought to develop a better understanding of how to implement education reforms. A clearer picture of what is and what is not known about the specific features of educational change is needed. A deeper analysis of the policy tensions in each country's individual context and of frameworks that will enable clearer viewpoints on educational change is necessary. The ETF increasingly sees this task as one that involves devising new approaches to help countries help themselves to overcome implementation barriers. Tools are needed for a structured and systematic examination of how evolving educational change policies will probably unfold.

## YEARBOOK 2008: TOWARDS POLICY LEARNING IN ACTION

*Borhène Chakroun*

7

### SUMMING UP ETF YEARBOOK 2007

This final chapter briefly summarises the contributions to this yearbook<sup>95</sup>, including the preliminary discussions on policy learning, to highlight a couple of key lessons learned and to propose a conceptual framework for *ETF Yearbook 2008*.

The challenge to balance learning inputs, outcomes and processes has been the central topic of this yearbook. In six chapters, it has sharpened focus on the question:

*How do we re-balance the tension in vocational training systems between input and outcomes and how can a renewed focus on substance and learning processes be fed into vocational education and training reform processes?*

The previous chapters have identified strategies for achieving quality in

vocational training systems. Five components for quality development have been analysed with a view to assessing their potential contribution to increased quality learning. These are:

- national qualification frameworks,
- vocational schools as providers of human resources development at local level,
- teachers and trainers,
- the national qualifications framework as a tool for relating learning processes to employability in the Mediterranean region,
- key competences and interactive approaches to learning processes.

The challenges involved in re-balancing the elements of vocational training systems in transition country reform contexts and a wider discussion on the options for policy learning in the political environments in partner countries have been analysed in a

<sup>95</sup> I am grateful for the comments and contributions from Søren Nielsen and Margareta Nikolovska, editors of the *ETF Yearbook 2007*, to finalise this chapter.

separate chapter that evolved around the often neglected dichotomy between education 'policies' and the reality of 'politics' in transition countries.

The topic of the *ETF Yearbook 2007 – Quality in vocational education and training: modern vocational training policies and learning processes* – was chosen as a natural way of rounding up and consolidating the first three yearbooks: the first one on policy learning (content), the second one on teaching and learning (teachers) and the third one on poverty alleviation (participants). In effect, these form the three angles of the universal didactical triangle.

The arguments developed link with ongoing developments in national vocational training reforms in many EU countries, where the shift from input to outcomes has now made way for increased attention to learning and teaching processes. The attempt to find a new balance between input, processes and outcomes is at the heart of the current generation of reform policies on national qualification frameworks and competence-based learning. By linking the (local and decentralised) organisation of learning processes to overall national qualification frameworks, the authors have been able to put issues such as quality assurance, funding, governance, access, etc, in a systemic perspective. A key concept around which the analysis has developed is 'qualification'. Qualification has to some extent constituted the hinge (a device for holding together two parts so that that one can swing relative to the other) binding together the national qualifications framework, schools, headmasters, teachers and trainers, and learning processes.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE ETF

There are of course many lessons to be learned from the analyses and findings in the preceding chapters but a few key points stand out and will probably offer inspiration and form guidelines for future ETF work in and with the partner countries. Four key messages are highlighted:

1. There is still a considerable gap between the realities of education and training in transition countries and the development horizon in advanced countries. There is a long distance from the 'Taylorian' school of strict discipline based on an organisation principle of central administration (the production phase type) and the innovative network and team-school based on management principles of self-regulation and shared knowledge (the innovation phase type). Everywhere, education is caught between preservation and innovation, between stability and change. Education systems in transition countries are undergoing tremendous change in these years, away from serving the old industrial model of seeking growth by expanding inputs towards new learning paradigms which stimulate productivity growth. But more attention still needs to be paid to avoiding complete discontinuity by reflections on realities on the ground and critical assessments of contextual fit. Partner countries cannot just jump the different stages of education development; this is an evolutionary process and implementers of new fashionable concepts should come with the acknowledgement that "every system of education is shaped by its local, historical, economic, cultural and social context. [...] Education, in short, cannot be decontextualised from its local culture."(Crossley and Watson, 2003).
2. One of the key lessons of recent education reforms in OECD countries has been that macro-level education reforms appear to fail if measured in terms of the performance levels of learners. There has been a surge in 'macro' reforms in most countries, sometimes based on hyper-policies implemented at full turbo. They never work because things are never that simple. A sharpened focus is now being placed on micro-level reform initiatives, based on schools as the central unit of analysis. Strategic school development within changed governance framework conditions deserves more attention.

National policies from central government shape schools, and today more directly than ever before because schools have more responsibilities devolved to them. This requires school leaders to be able to read policy signals, analyse their environments, determine priorities and enact leadership. In an overview of what is known internationally about school leadership a primary lesson is that “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.” (National College for School Leadership, 2007). Leadership demands vary according to different contexts, so successful school leaders need to be able to ‘read’ their contexts better. However, leaders are not passive players in their contexts, indeed, they are influential actors and should be proactive in shaping their organisational settings, cultures and ways of working. It is at this level that education reforms succeed or fail. This re-calibration or rebalancing of macro and micro levels should be given more attention in education reform work in transition countries. In this respect systemic macro reforms are certainly needed and the challenge for the ETF is now to help translate these into intelligent approaches also inside classrooms.

3. The discourse on national qualification frameworks has been very helpful for rethinking governance structures and the creation of a new interface, new signal systems and a common language between the worlds of work and education in ETF partner countries. The previous chapters, however, suggest that more work still has to be done to increase our understanding of the links between the consequences of an outcomes-based approach for learning processes. As was argued in chapter 4, we now face a research task: we need to intensify our studies of concrete learning processes. In education science, the causal linkages between outcomes (learning results) and inputs and processes are still not well understood. The example from Germany – where educationalists are

now trying to develop action-oriented didactical thinking by creating teaching standards (‘opportunity-to-learn’ standards) because learning results cannot be achieved directly through the definition of learning outcomes – can offer added inspiration to the ETF. However, developing such evidence-based standards is not risk-free. Teachers everywhere have capitalised on the negligence of teaching practice in reforms and have creatively utilised the space left open by policymakers’ concentration on outcomes.

4. It seems that there is too little reflection on the realities of political issues. As argued in chapter 6, in the reform debate in partner countries, technical issues – like the curriculum framework, students’ assessment standards and the accreditation of vocational training providers – dominate the discussions. Too often education planners and reformers forget that when they are deciding on, for example, curriculum frameworks, they are deciding on policy choices which will affect a myriad of stakeholders. Making policy choices in any education function means deciding on a public course of action that will put the stakeholders in a dynamic relationship. Too often, education reform policy overlooks the relationships found between *politics* and policy, and educational change may be weakened because of a lack of attention to these relationships. Policy choices should be politically feasible to sustain educational change. Political feasibility plays an important role. The question is how much ETF partner countries, in the reform of their education systems, pay attention to political feasibility. An analytical framework for understanding these political feasibility issues in education reform, and incorporating this understanding in ETF work would enhance the likelihood of finding more workable and achievable education policies. This dimension is somehow missing in the debate on how to design education reforms that will be also politically feasible.

## THE CHALLENGE TO GO FROM REFLECTION ON ACTION TOWARDS POLICY IN ACTION

An overarching theme in all chapters has been the discussion on strategies to enable policy learning, among other things by asking the question: how can we apply the changing learning paradigm for the facilitation of policy advice on structural vocational training reform in transition countries? But the concept, methodology and practical guidelines of policy learning are still at a rather theoretical level and need further elucidation and operationalisation. These chapters have tended to describe reflections on action.

Although the terms *policy* and *learning* are by no means newcomers to the discussion on vocational training system reforms, they have been moving *jointly*, in recent years, from the periphery towards the centre of the discourse on policy development. In part, this reflects the failure of vocational training policies such as ‘borrowing’ from abroad and ‘quick fix’ approaches of policymakers in partner countries (Philips, 2000).

Since the Advisory Forum 2003, policy learning has attracted considerable attention within the ETF. The perspective developed is 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). In this perspective, policy learning is viewed as a source of policy change and increasing policy effectiveness.

However, many of the fundamental elements of such learning remain conceptually unclear and, as a result, the entire approach remains difficult to operationalise. In fact, although there is no shortage of theorisation there is indeed a lack of empirical work and of lessons to learn from policy learning, particularly in the context of ETF partner countries. Moreover, the relationship between policy learning and policy change is still insufficiently well understood and needs further investigation. Such research could yield better

explanations and a better understanding of policy-making in partner countries and the role that the ETF can play in this field.

Clarifying conceptual, methodological and operational dimensions of policy learning and distinguishing these from related concepts (policy advice, policy analysis, etc.) are major tasks for the ETF team. They will constitute the focus of the 2008 ETF Yearbook.

Before going into detailed discussions on the scope, content and background of the 2008 Yearbook, we will briefly introduce the emerging consensus on the style that we would like to give to it.

## ETF YEARBOOK 2008 AS A NEW PUBLICATION GENRE

As stated in the foreword of this yearbook, “The 2008 ETF Yearbook will mark a new approach. It will be a more practice-oriented type of publication.” What is meant by practice-oriented publication is not the classic toolkits and how-to-do guidelines. Indeed, and for different reasons, it is doubtful whether this kind of practice-oriented publication can be of great help in our endeavour. First, the discussion on policy learning is still rather tentative – few cases are under actual consideration. Second, no findings are available other than preliminary lessons (see chapters 1 and 3). Finally, it is still hard to identify a specific set of tools that can be used in different settings and contexts.

At this stage, our own attention is less on prescriptions than on actions. The purpose is to explore some of the reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) on ongoing projects and interventions funded by the ETF in several partner countries. In practice this means investigating how a group of individuals acting collectively carry out activities that might meaningfully be understood as policy learning. This requires an intensive examination of a few comparable cases across different countries. It should be based mostly on an empirical investigation of the framework that can secure the active involvement of local policymakers and that can lead to ownership of development and reform policies.

A strong reason for going in this direction is that a publication on policy learning processes in ETF partner countries obviously does not yet exist. A review of publications on policy learning (Bennet and Howlett, 1992; Page, 2006; Mytelka and Smith, 2002; Leeuw et al., 2000) shows that the latter focus mainly on North American and European (the UK and Swedish) situations.

So, the underlying premise of the 2008 Yearbook follows from our goal of specifying and determining the policy learning approach as implemented by the ETF, and its contribution to vocational training policy change in partner countries. We focus on two issues. The first concerns the participation of and developments in partner countries. To get answers we must ask questions: "Can partner country governments learn? Who is learning? Does a policy learning process bring significant policy innovation and change?"

The second focal point concerns the role of the ETF in policy learning processes: "How are we designing, implementing and evaluating the learning process?" and "What expertise does it take to do this, even if it is, in some cases, being performed by external experts?" Finally, a more sensitive question: "What is the relationship, if any, between policy learning and the ETF's role of facilitating policy advice?"

In summary, the next yearbook must include chapters that are directly related to ETF projects in partner countries. Chapters must be based on the systematic enquiry of an empirical or analytic nature and should make reference to the policy learning concept. Finally, chapters should help to further develop internal and external dialogue on the concept of policy learning.

## POLICY LEARNING: THE CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

Bennet and Howlett (1992) identified different conceptions of learning and its role in public policy formation – political learning, government learning, policy-oriented lessons drawing and social

learning. They concluded that these concepts have different origins and describe different aspects of the learning process.

We would like to propose an approach that considers policy learning as a form of activity. This means more precisely that we need to analyse the activity of the protagonists engaged in this specific form of work (Pastré et al., 2006). In so doing, we join Grootings and Nielsen's (2005) basic assumption underlying the focal concept: "Policy learning is not so much that policies can be learned but that actual policies are learned policies."

By using activity as the unit of analysis we provide a frame to understand linkages between cognition, practice and participation in a community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). More precisely, we propose to consider policy learning as a process of participation in socio-cultural activities that regards individual learning as inseparable from community and organisational learning. Such a perspective, we believe, can help us in further operationalising the policy learning concept.

To come back to the *ETF Yearbook 2008*, we consider that it should make an attempt to operationalise the policy learning concept by addressing the five critical components of the learning process: **Who learns what? Why and how? And with which effects?**

A lot of additional, ground-clearing conceptual work will be required. The following four questions at least will need in-depth analysis:

- **Who are the subjects of learning?**
- **What is the objective of learning: content and outcomes of learning**
- **What are the key actions or processes of learning?**
- **What is the impact of policy learning on resulting policies?**

In Chapter 1, Grootings noted that "policy learning is one thing and policy action quite another." He argued that "facilitating policy learning is not the same as facilitating policy action." Although we share his concern about the distinction between the

two facilitation roles (policy learning and policy action), in describing the policy learning cycle he clearly presents the development of new policy as a major process. This suggests that it is not only the policies that need to change, but also the way in which policies are made (Raffe and Spours, 2007).

Goodin et al. (2006) consider that policy is made in response to a problem. Thinking about the way issues become policy problems takes us right to the heart of the policy learning process and its links with policy change. Making an issue of national qualification frameworks or of teacher training is certainly not a mistake. The question is who makes it an issue and on which terms? Understanding this 'genesis' can give insights about how issues become, or fail to become, policy 'problems' and how they will later be linked to policy making. This raises the question what kinds of policy 'problem' are preferred or supported and what kinds are not? And what is preferred by whom? So, in the end, the policy learning process comes back to power and interest – in other words: politics.

We consider that there are at least two broad approaches under which the discussion on the relationship between policy learning and policymaking can proceed. One is to take the 'policy cycle' as the frame of reference and examine how a policy learning project is embedded or can contribute to each stage of the policy cycle. The other approach is to start from the fact that policymaking processes in partner countries are not evident. Policymakers often work in the dark – that is, with little coordination and preparation of policy analysis and with a low level of consultation and involvement of social partners and civil society. The policy learning objective is then what Grootings, in his chapter, calls "developing policy awareness and capacity building."

From these debates an important issue begins to emerge: what about the facilitation role of the ETF in the policy learning process? What resources (conceptual, organisational, human and financial) are available to support this role?

## THE ETF'S ROLE IN POLICY LEARNING PROCESSES

Although there is a consensus, in house, that the guiding principle of ETF intervention should be the facilitation of a policy learning approach (Grootings, 2004; Grootings and Nielsen, 2006), the questions of how and in which role to engage with partner country governments and institutions have not yet been spelled out clearly.

We would like in the following section to first make a distinction between policy advice and policy facilitation and then in the second section to link the facilitation role with the mediation concept (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1985).

### Policy advice and policy learning

A critical problem, also for the ETF, is that policy advice and policy learning concepts are considered interchangeable. Such ambiguities manifest themselves in how different ETF staff have different notions of policy learning and policy advice, and how as a result they have different approaches in mind when using the same terminology. Moreover, not only is policy learning ambiguous, but so is policy advice. In fact a great deal of confusion surrounds the whole business of policy advice: its purposes, the best mechanisms, and where responsibilities lie for its various aspects.

From our side we consider that there is a tension between the two concepts and precisely what they offer partner countries. Although the problem of resolving this tension is not exclusive to the ETF, the question of the purpose of engaging in policy learning or policy advice is crucial: is it to ensure broad ownership and emancipatory learning or is it to provide policy analysis and, in some cases, unsolicited advice?

Let's start with the basics. A pragmatic definition of policy advice given by the New Zealand government describes it as "the products and activities that are intended to assist the government in its decision-making." The *Oxford Handbook of*

*Public Policy* (Wilson 2006 p.154), links policy advice with exercising power:

*“Policy in government is fundamentally about the exercise of power by the state. Policy advice is advice about how that power should be exercised, and to the extent that it actually influences what governments say or do it may itself represent the exercise of the informal power [...] it includes ‘the art of the possible’, the art of judging what can be achieved within the constraints which limit a government’s freedom of manoeuvre.”*

Policy advice entails policy analysis, and embraces risk, management and results. The aim here is not learning but policy. The role of the advisor lies in presenting the evidence, options, arguments and, finally, recommendations about the way forward. It is far from ‘helping people to help themselves’.

Wilson (2006 p.158) considers that the key to conveying policy advice is “to frame it in terms which are clear and succinct and engage the reader at the right level in the right tone, not labouring things he already knows but focusing on what he wants to know and what he needs to know [...] refreshing the issues with a new perspective and crystallising the key facts and arguments” (p.158). This is what we consider the role of the national ‘policy team’ and the aim of policy learning is to enhance the policymaking capacities of the team. This in turn also implies considerable changes in the roles that the ETF plays in partner countries. First, there is a shift of responsibility from the ETF to partner countries. ETF staff become more organisers and facilitators of learning processes than the transmitter of expert knowledge or skills. ETF staff still need good knowledge and skills but the ways to make these accessible to partner countries do indeed change considerably.

### **Mediation**

Once we agree on the role of ETF staff as ‘facilitators’ of a policy learning process, it becomes urgent to focus our attention on their activities, still assuming that their

activities should mirror what the partners are doing. This leads us to the interesting metaphor of ‘scaffolding’ as introduced by Bruner (1985) – 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 subtle assistance. It quite aptly characterises the support system that ETF staff should build to help people help themselves. The central question is how ETF staff can identify what Vygotsky (1978) called the ‘zone of proximal development’ – the difference between actual development as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

To push our thinking further, and following Engeström (2001) who tried to expand the Vygotskian perspective to include “minimally two interacting activity systems” (p.136) and who considers that it is important to “develop conceptual tools to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives, and networks of interacting activity systems” (p.135), we would like to consider that the “zone of proximal development” and the “scaffolding” encompasses the individual, the group and the activities of ETF staff themselves, as they come together, interact, and change across time. Like Engeström and Grootings (see chapter 1), we also find it important to account not only for the group but also for the diversity and the different starting points of the various stakeholders in terms of experience with policy development. This in turn will help us to develop more explicit hypotheses about the process of policy learning.

With this conceptual frame in mind, we can further elaborate on the *mediation* concept and the role of ETF staff in policy learning processes in partner countries. As we wrote above, Bruner proposes ‘scaffolding’ as an important tutoring function. Of course, policy facilitation is not tutoring of students, but nevertheless the concept of ‘scaffolding’ might be an appropriate frame in which to analyse the activity of the ETF staff and experts in charge of facilitating the learning process. Our assumption is that

policymakers in partner countries can be regarded as policy learners and policy learning can be facilitated by creating a relevant supporting system.

Bruner & al. (2006) developed detailed properties 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). Following Bruner, we should consider the existence of a crucial match between a support system in the social environment and an acquisition system process in the learner.

Finally, we would like to interpret the idea of a zone of proximal development in the same way as Cole (1985) put it: “The structure of joint activity in any context where there are participants who exercise differential responsibility by virtue of differential expertise” (p.155). Bruner and his team (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) demonstrated that where support is contingent on the activities of the individual (or in our case a group) and related to what the individual (or the group) is currently trying to do, then considerable progress may be made. Successful mediation involves progressive relaxation of facilitator control over problem-solving activities.

To come back to policy learning processes, ETF interventions should be *contingent* to the level of conceptualisation of the vocational training reform processes and that contingency should be based upon our knowledge of the country, our interpretation of the policy team capacities and the fate of earlier interventions.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has summarised the key elements of previous chapters and started to build a bridge with the ETF’s 2008 yearbook, whose exact shape is still in the process of being defined.

Two things will surely be on everyone’s ‘trouble agenda’: (i) how does the policy

learning process work, and (ii) to what extent can the ETF play a role in it? How can the *ETF Yearbook 2008* authors cope with either of these fundamental issues? With what has been said in this final chapter, at least some guidelines for further work have been provided. It should be a practice-oriented publication that offers insights into policy learning in action. This will require the investigation and discussion of five critical components of the learning process: *Who learns what? Why and how? And with what effects?*

Our expectations are that the ongoing ETF policy learning projects (Morocco, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Ukraine) and other ETF initiatives (NQFs, the LEARN project in South Eastern Europe, etc.) will provide rich indications on policy learning components. Methodologically, one of the major challenges involves collecting and processing solid empirical data that unequivocally illustrate the policy learning process and the related policy change. This requires ‘mini-longitudinal’ studies that can give an account of how such processes work. Our ETF team is already following and documenting the implementation of these cases and we hope we will be able to present feedback on intermediate findings in the 2008 Yearbook.

Within the policy learning project we have also planned a series of internal and external events that will help refine the system of concepts linked to policy learning. The big challenge is to attain greater precision in our ability to discuss and communicate about policy learning and the form of activity deployed.

Thus, to sum up the considerable task ahead, the 2008 edition will concentrate on the operationalisation of the concept of policy learning and look for relationships between the ETF facilitation of policy learning in partner countries and the involvement of local policymakers in specific processes. The 2008 Yearbook will be much more closely linked than before to an ETF development project on policy learning launched in four countries in 2007 and will benefit from lessons learned from the project and also from the intensive discussions among the ETF team and external experts taking place in 2007.

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