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International Educational Cooperation in the Next Century

by Stephen P. Heyneman

We have come to consider the characteristics of the future relationship among sovereign states in the field of education. What will motivate nations to cooperate in the field of education in the 21st century? And, how will these motivations influence this cooperation, namely: the agencies charged with educational responsibilities; the staffing of these agencies; and the content of their programs.

Motivations for Educational Cooperation in the Next Century

Much has changed since the rivalry ended between communism and democracy. But among the most important of the changes has been the motivation for foreign assistance. No longer is foreign assistance justified as part of an “east/west chess match.” Humanitarian statements about helping the poor in low income countries will have to be submitted to a truer test of popular will within OECD countries. This assistance will continue, but it will never again be nested within the same east/west framework as it has been since World War II.

This means that international “cooperation” will change. “Aid,” as we know it, will decline. The importance of trade and private capital in economic development will increase. But rational aid declines, the strength and vibrancy of educational cooperation will increase. But why is that? Why will educational cooperation increase?

I believe that a new motivation for educational cooperation is now emerging, and will, in time, predominate over others. What is it; and where does it come from?

One motivation for cooperation that is emerging is an increase in demands for educational information. In the history of comparative education and international education, there has never been a period like the one we are in. The origins of the field lie in the 19th century, when colorful and literate individuals - Horace Mann, Mathew Arnold, Joseph Kay - travelled to different countries and gathered ideas for use in their domestic schools. But today we are in a period where new innovation, new legislation, and new empirical results of managerial changes are in more systematic demand than at any other time in history. In terms of political visibility, Comparative and International Education is in a “golden era,” an era which will continue to expand into the next century.

But who is asking for this information? The origin is not necessarily in central governments. The roots are often in local school boards, local education authorities, local teacher associations, organizations of businesses and tax-payers. Schools are bankrupt both in Moscow and Chicago, and local officials do not care where the ideas come from. Local officials will decide on their own whether the ideas are relevant to Chicago or Moscow. What they demand from their governments is information on what the good ideas are. And unless the government produces them, they will elect a new government.

This in turn puts new - and very healthy - pressures on domestic and international educational agencies. Resources for international education studies in the United States - with bipartisan support at both federal and local levels - is at an all time high. Technologies and techniques continue to improve. International willingness to collaborate continues to increase within Europe, Asia and the former Soviet Union. Given these tendencies, one can anticipate increasing demands for full membership in the international organizations responsible for carrying out educational comparisons - particularly the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, OECD, UNESCO, and APEC.

But what about the countries traditionally labelled as “developing” countries - in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East? What are their motivations for cooperation in the field of education? Have they remained stagnant?

Their motivations for international cooperation in the field of education have also changed. With the incorporation of 22 new borrowers into the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development from the Europe and Central Asia region - including the Russian Federation - the characteristics of those countries previously called “developing” have changed. These countries resent the term “developing” on grounds that there are many characteristics of OECD countries - family breakdown, crime, domestic violence - (continued on page eight)
which are unworthy of emulation. These countries have cultures and social structures as developed as any of the members of the OECD.

But sensitivity over the label is only a symbol of a wider phenomenon. All countries have shifted perspectives as a result of the end of the cold war, the expansion of the European Union and the inauguration of NAFTA and the regional trading agreements in Asia. Lesser industrialized countries - World Bank borrowers - now tend to see their interests as being in competition for trade advantage and labor market niches in services, manufacturing and agriculture.

From this new vision of economic interdependence has emerged a common vision for educational excellence. All educational systems must use resources wisely. All must treat all students fairly. All must provide intellectual challenge universally. Standards for performance of an educational system do not differ systematically between Ghana and Georgia (either the state or the country). Educational officials in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and in Europe and Central Asia hold to these same standards, and as a result, they are demanding the same knowledge of innovations and system reforms as are educational leaders within the OECD countries. This convergence of needs and interests can be expected to increase well into the next century. We now live in a world where universal coverage is becoming a reality; a world which now requires the requisite knowledge to manage these enormous systems so that they can provide the knowledge and cultural experience for which they were designed.

But are current organizations capable of meeting these new demands? And if not, what changes will have to be made to make them capable? What kinds of staff will they have to acquire? What kinds of programs will they be responsible for? And where will they garner their financial resources? It is these questions to which we now turn.

International Structures

Current structures have three crippling problems. First is an imbalance in institutional mandates. Some institutions have mandates to cover only the wealthier parts of the world - Europe, North America and OECD countries for instance; others have mandates that are regional for Africa or Latin America, or mandates that are world-wide but whose governing structure of one vote per country makes it difficult to specialize, or to maintain a professional state of the art.

The second problem is institutional duplication. Much of the professional expertise and infrastructure required for international comparisons are common right across agencies even though those agencies have differing mandates. UNICEF and the World Bank and OECD and Eurostat and UNESCO and IEA and the OAU and SEAMEO all have separate - but differing - professional capabilities. On the other hand, they all have overlapping data needs.

The third problem is the differences among countries in technical and financial capabilities. Standards of excellence in educational management are increasingly common around the world. Standards of excellence in the statistics and research necessary to monitor excellence and innovation are common as well. But the resources necessary to perform these functions are very different.

What we find is an increasingly clear understanding of the professional standards in education and an increasing demand for exchange of ideas about innovations and efficiency across the world, but at the same time, a widening gap in the ability of countries to afford this information.

However, key to understanding the difference between aid in the past and aid in the future is to know that this gap in the ability to afford educational information is an intolerable situation to the industrialized economies. For their own legitimate interests, they now depend on having valid comparisons and access to the best and most innovative ideas available from wherever they come. But these won't be available unless these three problems are solved. So, what can be done to solve them?

Solutions to Structural Problems

1. Strategic Vision. We will have to review the situation in depth, consult all the various countries and agencies involved, and develop a set of recommendations for a change in structures and institutional mandates of the international organizations involved in servicing international educational needs. These recommendations should minimize the current duplication; maintain the regional focus necessary; and suggest areas where statistical programs and functions can be combined.

2. Financial Reform. There are three major financial issues to be addressed.

   Regularity. No professional education system of information can exist if it is ad hoc. The world can no longer afford to have data which are so inaccurate that major mistakes in judgement can result. Systems must now be regular and predictable if they are to be professional. But this regularity requires stable financing.

   Fair Sharing of Financing Responsibility. Even within OECD countries, the burden of responsibility for financing educational statistics and indicators has been very inequitable. A small number of countries have led the way financially and technically. This is permissible when the product is an experiment to test whether it can be accomplished. But that has now changed. Educational indicators and assessments will now become regular programs, and therefore the imbalance in financing is unsustainable. To match this change, there must now come a new agreement to bear the financial costs in an equitable fashion.

   Subsidized Financing. Countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union - these countries need assistance and they deserve it. But they deserve assistance of two kinds. They need an increased level of resources through the lending programs and bilateral programs of technical assistance from the development banks and other agencies. These resources are necessary for long-term institution building. These include long-term assistance to departments of educational statistics and research at local, regional and national levels, university capacities, and local private education research and development industries. But these countries now need more than that.

   They need a grant-based program - an International Fund for Educational Research and Innovation - to allow them to participate in the major international projects so that they can
have access to information and technical discussions at the same
time as the OECD countries participating in the same exercises.
But the rationale for the fund is not, solely, humanitarian. Such
a fund - as it is in health, agriculture, population or trade - is an
essential ingredient for assuring that the educational statistical
base does not differ widely in quality or coverage in spite of the
fact that countries may be endowed with very different re-
sources.

3. Staffing Reforms. International agencies are not staffed at
all well to perform these new functions. Staffing is influenced
by national quotas; and when engaged, staff are kept "with
 tenure," without regard to the external demand for their particu-
lar skills. No plan to improve and regularize international
educational statistics will be effective without a thorough review
of how to engage the best people and to have them stay only so
far as they remain so.

But the career paths of the most technically advanced staff are
no longer limited to domestic experiences. NCES needs people
with an intimate understanding of the historical problems in
other countries. Whether one's task is to measure one of the 30
or 40 topics in science curricula in Florida or to calculate unit
expenditures in Tokyo or Moscow, one needs personal experi-
ence working with others who are addressing similar problems.
A period in an international agency will be a preferred career
path for some of the better minds in the profession. It also will
make it possible for international agencies to more systemati-
cally exploit secondments and honorary staffing programs.
Education ministries will inaugurate competitive programs
where the best will compete for the opportunity to work in an
international agency. This will imply that the expectations for
staff in international agencies would shift from being experts
themselves, to those whose job it would be to facilitate the
inflow and outflow of expertise.

4. Program Expansions. International education agencies will
have many new functions in the next century. Among them:
• the collection and analysis of a wide variety of educational
  statistics including unit expenditures, private contributions
to both public and private education, academic achievement
across a wide variety of curricular topics and performance
objectsives; regular utility would be regularly monitored in
both formal and informal labor markets, as would political
participation and political attitudes;
• systematic assessments of educational quality in higher
  education;
• international monitoring of performance of graduates across
  national boundaries; and
• new multinational firms selling educational equipment and
  software, examinations and accreditation services. There
will be "macro-universities" providing degrees simulta-
neously in different countries. Businesses will perform new
functions in the certification of skills; there will be new
roles for the licensing of professional; new standards for the
social sciences; a spread of new international degrees - such
as the international baccalaureate. There will be new
challenges to civic behavior and civil rights.

All of these new activities will require new functions on the
part of international education agencies. They will be called
upon to monitor and help regulate the activities of these new
corporations in ways similar to international pharmaceutical or
other commerce. They may also be called upon to protect
minority rights, but at the same time, to insure standards of
discourse of the minorities themselves so that they not endanger
civic peace. Educators and public educational systems will be
increasingly recognized as holding the key to good governance.2
Hence the role of international agencies in providing informa-
tion, skills, and "codes of educational conduct" will inevitably
increase.

Summary

Decline of the east/west competition has significantly altered
the reasons for educational cooperation among countries.
OECD countries now recognize their national interests are not
solely military, nor simply trade. Instead, they are intellectual -
the degree to which they can produce, develop and disseminate
new skills. This means that OECD countries will have to
dramatically improve their education systems.

But at the same time as educational demands are increasing,
the sources of educational finance are stagnant. The only hope
for increasing quality and coverage is to dramatically change
the pace of internal reform. This requires better information, not
just information about other wealthy countries, but information
about all countries.

This implies a significant shift in responsibility for interna-
tional agencies - their structure, staff, and programs. Educa-
tional cooperation in the next century can be expected to
dramatically increase in quantity and quality in spite of the fact
that aid will decline. Thus the major contact point in the field of
education will not be the bilateral agency. In fact, many
bilateral agencies will disappear. The international responsibil-
ity in education will shift to the domestic education ministry,
whose technical capacities and professional cadre with interna-
tional experience will increase dramatically.

In the lesser industrialized countries, needs and demands for
ideas are no less severe than in OECD countries. But they will
require new programs of assistance. These will continue to be
designed in collaboration with the development banks and
international agencies, but they will require new programs on a
grant-making basis. These can be financed through new
structures yet to be designed.

But the real issue is that education cooperation is now in the
domestic interest of all nations and regions. It will no longer be
a research experiment, or a humanitarian gesture. However, this
adjustment to these new functions will be very hard for the
current educational agencies and their staff. But this adjustment
will be very good for the field of education.

Notes

1Stephen P. Heyneman, "Comparative Education: Questions of
     Quantity, Quality and Source," Comparative Education
2Stephen P. Heyneman, "Good Governance in Education,

This paper was delivered at the meeting of the International
Commission on Education for the 21st Century, chaired by
Jacques Delors, February 9, 1995, Paris. The author is a chief
of a human resources division at The World Bank. The views
are the author's alone.