

able to draw out the major commonalities and make comparative studies on various issues related to education development. These countries are grouped into various categories based on different criteria so as to make comparative analysis and to identify regional and sub-regional trends, policies and strategies in education. Most of the analyses are based on loose classifications, broad concepts and quantitative data. But these are usually supplemented by qualitative data in the form of specific country cases which are presented in boxes and tables. These studies do not consist of only statistics and head counts, but rather there is conscious effort to address the teaching and learning situations “inside the black box” of schooling. On the whole, the analyses are systematic and the reports are well-written despite a few typographical errors (for instance, Box 6 is missing on page 50 in Volume 1, inaccurate entries in the last column in Table 1 on page 7 in Volume 4, and “Malaysia has the greatest income equality” instead of “Malaysia has the greatest income inequality” on page 29 in Volume 4). But these do not in any way disturb the easy flow of the writing styles in these booklets.

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Modularisation of vocational education in Europe: NVQ's and GNVQ's as a model for the reform of initial training provisions in Germany?

Hurbert Ertl, Oxford, England: Symposium Books, 2000, 127 pages, ISBN 1 873927 98 3, Review to appear in the *International Journal of Education Development*

In the arena of specific skill training two revolutions are occurring simultaneously. First is the development of unitary investment policies and labor markets across the breadth of the members of the European Union. European businesses, as in

the United States, may now consider opening new facilities in the area with the most advantages in terms of transport, local tax structures, and labor quality. And most importantly, workers now are free to move where there are new employment opportunities.

The second revolution concerns the implications of the first, the pressures to construct skill platforms or qualifications which are portable from one labor market to the next, and across national boundaries. This latter revolution is the subject of this new book by Hubert Ertl, a scholar specializing in the current problems of vocational education reform in Europe. Writing from the point of view of Germany, Ertl poses the question as to whether the new skill platforms designed for Britain, the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's) and the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ's), would be relevant and useful in Germany. To his credit, citing Michael Sadler's work from the turn of the last century, he is quite cautious about the problems and drawbacks of policy borrowing. But in essence this book is an explanation, or plea for having more flexibility in the delivery of initial training in Germany somewhat akin to the flexibility demonstrated by the delivery of skill training in Britain and reinforced through both programs and regulations of the European Union.

The book commences with a description of the resistance within the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (the Federal Institute for Vocational Training, or Germany's vocational parliament) to modularization. He mentions that it is driven by educational rather than pedagogical policy. Although Ertl suggests that the arguments seem unclear, he points to the resistance to anything which might threaten the German concept of the 'vocation'. Some have interpreted modularization as antithetical to this sacred concept, thus one purpose of this book is to convince the doubters in Germany that modularization is not the threat which it is imagined to be.

Following this helpful explanatory introduction, come chapters to explain the vocational training system in Germany; the concept of modularization, how modularization is seen from a European (i.e., from a labor market flexibility) perspective, how NVQ's and GNVQ's are organized, and a final

chapter which proposes a strategy to adapt modularization to initial training system in Germany. This chapter suggests that current occupational profiles, already used in Germany, should evolve into self-contained modules in cooperation with European agencies and regional vocational institutions.

The book has one over-riding problem and one compelling asset. Although the author acknowledges the (unusual) fact that German industry finances a large percentage (60%) of the vocational training costs, and that German firms have been less willing to support surplus number of trainees with the current recession (p. 19), the book fails to appreciate the full political impact of this distinctive aspect of vocational education finance between Germany and the rest of Europe. It is critical to remember that German firms join local vocational councils on a voluntarily basis. They may also withdraw whenever they believe the system is not working sufficiently in their interests to justify the investment. The turnover in firms belonging to the local vocational councils is about 30% / year.

It is also important to remember which kinds of German firms invest in the vocational training system and which do not. Larger (traditional industrial manufacturing) firms are the most likely members of the vocational councils. Small German entrepreneurial firms do not belong as a general rule. The German economy is shifting from one to the other, gradually but perceptively. Thus the traditional financial base for German vocational education may be slowing eroding.

One basic lesson of education economics is that no firm will agree to finance training which is portable to other firms or to other industries. The more modular the training the more likely the training

will serve the interests in making German workers mobile. However without change in government incentives, few companies can be expected to risk their own capital if it helps provide scarce skills to workers who may be used by their competitors. It could hardly come as a surprise therefore, to find that those who finance German vocational training would resist modularization. This book misses this point entirely.

But it does have an asset worth noting. It is true that labor markets are shifting in Europe and it is also true that vocational training has been one of the most parochial aspects of the education sector and of education policy more generally. These elements are incompatible with each other. This book represents what may be the opening gambit in a long and perhaps difficult debate over the next decade of who should decide on vocational policy. Should it be the user? And if so, could one expect a firm, such as in Germany, to finance skill training whose benefits they may lose? And even more generally, what of the public financing of vocational training, such as exists in Britain, France and many other countries? Suppose the modular training they finance becomes usable throughout Europe (as intended) and that the investment they make in the quality of that training is 'lost' to their particular firm or local economy? What will local taxpayers say about modularization then?

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