



Asia-Europe Meeting

LIFELONG LEARNING & THE FORCE OF COMPARISON



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May the force of comparison be with you!

Be ready to compare yourself with others, or to be compared, is the slogan of our global age.

By CLAUS HOLM
Associate Professor, PhD,
Chair of ASEM LLL Hub

Who would you go to for the best advice on how to formulate lifelong learning policies? The

Deputy Director for Education and Skills and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the OECD's Secretary-General, Andreas Schleicher, is the answer; at least, this is the answer I have most frequently heard over the last few months. And on second thought, the answer is no surprise. The reason is that Andreas Schleicher has led the OECD's launch of the initial results of "PISA for Adults" – or, to be precise, PIAAC, the abbreviation for the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies.

Andreas Schleicher is part of the organisation OECD, which today is indisputably the most dominant player in the production of international comparisons of education and skill levels. For many years OECD was "only" responsible for the influential PISA studies that measured young people's education and skill levels. But with the results from PIAAC, OECD has now succeeded in enabling us to discuss adult education on an unprecedented scale. I think this is positive in two ways. First of all, the PIAAC survey demonstrates that it is not only the education of youth that it is important for us to consider; and sec-

ondly, the results from PIAAC give us a new starting point to discuss policies for lifelong learning on a global level.

On the other hand, we should not forget that the PIAAC survey also has its limitations. However, the reason why we forget is that the force of comparison today makes such a big impression on us. Be ready to compare yourself with others, or to be compared, is the slogan of our global age, where international comparisons, international rankings and international competition are the name of the game! Or to put it another way: if we decided to produce a film on lifelong learning policies inspired by the science-fiction movie *Star Wars*, the film would be titled: "Education Wars – may the force of comparison be with you."

It is therefore comparison of education that helps us predict the likelihood of each nation – or, rather, different groups within nations – to succeed in the face of global competition. Andreas Schleicher puts it – in this issue of *ASEM Magazine* – like this: "... in today's world economy, education and skills are the driving forces for progress. Investing in high-quality education will thus be the key for improving the economic and social wellbeing of people around the world."

So the PIAAC survey helps us in the sense that we are now better informed about adult education in relation to a comparison of a number of key skills: namely, literacy, numeracy and problem solving in the context of technology-rich environments. There is no doubt about that. But what is also quite clear is that PIAAC does not tell us the whole story. For example, PIAAC does not tell us anything about many contextual

"First of all, the PIAAC survey demonstrates that it is not only the education of youth that it is important for us to consider; and secondly, the results from PIAAC give us a new starting point to discuss policies for lifelong learning on a global level."

determinants – for example, local wisdom, the importance of geography, geopolitics, timing, and the nature of the state and its economic policies.

So this issue of *ASEM Magazine* has two messages. One is that we actually have the possibility to become wiser by comparing ourselves with each other, and the other is an invitation to use comparisons with caution. So what is most important when using the results from PIAAC? That the force of sound judgement is with the user. ■





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Read more at www.asemlllhub.org

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Education for better skills, better jobs & better lives

By ANDREAS SCHLEICHER,
Deputy Director for Education and Skills
and Special Advisor on Education Policy
to the OECD's Secretary-General



OECD's first Survey of Adult Skills tells us that when large proportions of adults have poor skills, **it becomes difficult to introduce productivity-enhancing technologies and new ways of working.**



health and, in turn, individual wellbeing depend on nothing more than what people know and what they can do with what they know. There is no shortcut to equipping people with the right skills and to providing people with the right opportunities to use their skills effectively. And if there's one lesson the global economy has taught policymakers over the last few years, it's that we cannot simply bail ourselves out of a crisis, that we cannot solely stimulate ourselves out of a crisis and that we cannot "just print money" our way out of a crisis. Instead, in today's world economy, education and skills are the driving forces for progress. Investing in high-quality education will thus be the key for improving the economic and social wellbeing of people around the world.

For the first time, the Survey of Adult Skills allows us to directly measure the skills people currently have, not just the qualifications they once obtained. The results show that what people know and what they do with what they know have a major impact on their life chances. On average across countries, the median wage of workers who score at Level 4 or 5 in the literacy test – meaning that they can make complex inferences and evaluate subtle arguments in written texts – is more than 60 per cent higher than the hourly wage of workers who score at or below Level 1 – those who can, at best, read relatively short texts and understand basic vocabulary. Those with poor literacy skills are also more than twice as likely to be unemployed. In short, poor skills severely limit people's access to better-paying and more-rewarding jobs. The rewards associated with numeracy skills tend to be even higher.

It works the same way for nations: the distribution of skills has significant implications for how the benefits of economic growth are shared within societies. Put simply, where large proportions of adults have poor skills, it becomes difficult to introduce

productivity-enhancing technologies and new ways of working. And that can stall improvements in living standards.

Prevention of fair policies

Proficiency in basic skills affects more than earnings and employment. In all countries, adults with lower literacy proficiency are far more likely than those with better literacy skills to report poor health, to perceive themselves as objects rather than actors in political processes, and to have less trust in others. In other words, we can't develop fair and inclusive policies and engage with all citizens if a lack of proficiency in basic skills prevents people from fully participating in society.

The case for acquiring and maintaining literacy skills is clear, but people's proficiency varies widely. Roughly one in five adults in Japan and Finland reads at the highest levels on the test. In contrast, in Italy and Spain just one in twenty adults is proficient at that level, and more than one in three adults perform at or below the baseline level. And

“Across the 24 countries that took the test, more than 80 million people do not possess the most basic skills needed to succeed in today's world”

Andreas Schleicher
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

even highly literate nations have significant shallow areas in their talent pools. Across the 24 countries that took the test, more than 80 million people do not possess the most basic skills needed to succeed in today's world. On top of that, in the USA, Poland, Germany, Italy and England, a difficult social background often translates into poor literacy skills.

The talent pool shrinks

And yet, the Skills Survey shows that some countries have made impressive progress in equipping more people with better skills. Young Koreans, for example, are outperformed only by their Japanese counterparts, while Korea's 55 to 64-year-olds are among the three lowest-performing groups of this age across all participating countries. The results from Finland tell a similar story.

But young Brits and Americans are entering a much more demanding job market with similar literacy and numeracy skills to their compatriots who are retiring. The share of these countries in the global talent pool will shrink significantly over the next decades unless urgent action is taken both to improve schooling and to provide adults with better opportunities to develop and maintain their skills.

What the data also show is that actual skill levels often differ markedly from what formal education qualifications suggest. For example, Italy, Spain and the USA rank much higher internationally in the proportion of young people with tertiary degrees than in the level of literacy or numeracy proficiency among people of that age. On average, young Japanese and Dutch high school graduates easily outperform university graduates in some other countries. In fact, in most countries at least a quarter of university graduates do not score higher than Level 2 on the literacy test, and are thus insufficiently equipped for what their jobs demand of them. Conversely, in Australia, Finland, Japan, the Netherlands and Norway, more than one in four adults without a high school degree have made it to Level 3 in literacy, which shows that people can, indeed, recover from poor initial schooling. Surely there are many reasons why skills and qualifications differ; but these data suggest that we may need to update and re-define our education qualifications.

We can't change the past; but we can do something about our future. The Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Canada, for example, have been much better in providing high-quality lifelong learning opportunities, both in and outside the workplace, than other countries. They've developed programmes that are relevant to users and flexible, both in content and in how they are delivered. They've made information about adult education opportunities easy to find and understand, and they provide recognition and certification of competencies that encourage adult learners to keep learning. They've also made skills everybody's business, with governments, employers and individuals all engaged.

Skills are underused

All this said, skills are only valuable when they are used effectively, and the Skills Survey shows that some countries are far better than others in making good use of their talent. While the USA and England have a limited skills base, they are extracting good value from it. The reverse is true for Japan, where rigid labour-market arrangements prevent many highly skilled individuals, most



“Young Brits and Americans are entering a much more demanding job market with similar literacy and numeracy skills as their compatriots who are retiring. The share of these countries in the global talent pool will shrink significantly over the next decades unless urgent action is taken both to improve schooling and to provide adults with better opportunities to develop and maintain their skills.”

Andreas Schleicher
DEPUTY DIRECTOR



notably women, from reaping the rewards that should accrue to them.

Underuse of skills is visible in many countries, and not just for women. It is also common among young and foreign-born workers and among people employed in small enterprises, in part-time jobs or on temporary contracts. To do better, countries need more coherent, easy-to-understand certifications that aren't just about degrees, but also incorporate formal and informal learning in life. Where people lack skills, countries need better policies that incentivise employees and employers to invest in developing relevant skills. Countries also need to better integrate the world of learning and the world of work. Work-based learning allows people to develop hard skills on modern equipment and soft skills, such as teamwork or negotiation in a real-world environment. It's often also a great way to re-engage youth who have lost their interest in education. And countries need experts, with the latest labour-market intelligence at their fingertips, who guide people to make sound career choices.

None of this is going to work unless skills become everybody's business: unless governments provide education that offers the right skills and makes learning available to all; unless employers invest more in learning, and labour unions help make investments in learning translate into better-quality jobs and higher salaries; and unless we all take more responsibility for our learning and make better use of learning opportunities.

None of that's easy, but global comparisons like the Survey of Adult Skills show everyone what's possible. They take away excuses from those who are complacent. And they help set meaningful targets in terms of measurable goals achieved by the world's most effective policies. ■



Andreas Schleicher

Andreas Schleicher is Division Head and his responsibilities include directing the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the OECD Indicators of Education Systems (INES)

programme and steering the development of new projects such as the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

PIAAC brings bad news for lifelong learners

The OECD report gives fresh impetus to the need to think more creatively about how to sustain skills among the ageing workforce. This is the good news. The bad news is that lifelong learners have not succeeded with it yet.

By TOM SCHULLER,
Professor and Director of Longview &
former Head of the Centre for Educational
Research and Innovation at OECD

At first glance the recent OECD study on adult skills (PIAAC) brings bad news for lifelong learners. Literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills start to decline

from age 30 onwards. This result holds even when factors such as education are controlled for, so it is not just a cohort effect – in other words, it does not seem to be due to the fact that older generations have had less, or less good, education.

The pattern is broadly similar across countries, though there are of course some interesting variations. On literacy, for example, the curve for Australia is much flatter (ie the decline is more gradual than most); in Japan it starts later, after the age of 35; in Scandinavian countries it looks steeper, but this is from a higher initial level. There is rich food for thought in these variations.

My initial response to the overall finding on age is as follows. First, the OECD report provides rich information on the interrelationships between formal education, further learning and (crucially) the application of skills in the workplace. But it acknowledges that there is still much to be learnt as to how what we learn – at whatever age – is actually used in work.

“The OECD tests cover only a certain number of skills. This is understandable, but it means that they exclude some of the skills which older people are more likely to have: an ability to handle customers, for example, or the wisdom of experience.”

Tom Schuller
PROFESSOR

Secondly, the report also confirms that the issue of an ageing workforce is one that requires considerable policy thinking. So the pattern of skills decline is one that demands solutions. Countries cannot afford simply to accept stereotypes about older people being incapable of learning. We should remember that the OECD survey applies only to adults up to 65, and we are now seeing many adults older than this staying in the workforce.

Thirdly, the OECD tests cover only a certain number of skills. This is understandable, but it means that they exclude some of the skills which older people are more likely to have: an ability to handle customers, for example, or the wisdom of experience. So although we should pay attention to the re-

sults, and may find them depressing in some respects, they do not tell the whole story.

In short, I see the OECD report as giving fresh impetus to the need to think more creatively about how to sustain skills among the ageing workforce – and how to provide opportunities to acquire new skills. This will surely be a mix of formal learning and new approaches to learning on the job. In the book *Learning Through Life* (see the interview with Tom Schuller on this book in *ASEMagazine* no. 1) my colleague Professor David Watson and I called for symbolic initiatives around the age of 50 to mark the entry into a new phase of life, which should include learning at work and beyond. I still believe that this makes good sense. ■



Tom Schuller

Tom Schuller is Professor and Director of Longview, a think tank promoting the value of longitudinal and life course research in the UK. He was formerly Head of the Centre for Educational Research and

Innovation (CERI) at the OECD and Director of the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in the UK.

The results from the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

RESPONSES FROM RESEARCHERS

Q&A

How will the results from PIAAC change our view on the importance of lifelong learning?

Ekkehard Nuisl von Rein

Professor and former director of the German Institute for Adult Education-Leibniz-Center for Lifelong Learning and full professor at the University of Duisburg-Essen and University of Kaiserslautern, Germany

How will the results from PIAAC change our view on the importance of lifelong learning?

“I was not really surprised with the PIAAC results in relation to the differences between the countries. They are not that big. You cannot say that one country is on an average level and other countries are doing better. The surprise is that the differences between the countries are less than the differences inside some countries. In that sense it was a surprise for me to see the results from the UK and Germany. But first of all we should consider ourselves lucky that the PIAAC

survey provides us with a very rich database and knowledge base for further discussions. With the PIAAC results we can begin to talk rationally about what we need to do to raise the quality of adult education and we also have a much better understanding of why adult education is an important to sector to focus on.”

Atanacio Panahon II

Professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, the Philippines

How will the results from PIAAC change our view on the importance of lifelong learning?

“Even though the Philippines did not participate in the PIAAC survey, the results are quite important for us. I think that the key message from PIAAC

is that lifelong learning is more important than ever. Actually you could say that after the PIAAC results it is on a global level difficult not to acknowledge the need for a developed lifelong learning system and a big effort in adult and continuing education. I am quite sure that we will be able to use the findings of PIAAC for fostering adult education and learning in our country.”

Kenji Miwa

Professor at Ochanomizu University, Japan

How will the results from PIAAC change our view on the importance of lifelong learning?

“We are not really surprised that we are in front in this international comparative survey. We

know that we have a very well educated workforce and population in Japan. The findings confirm less our system of adult education than that of schools. The outcomes of teaching and learning at school in our country are excellent, mainly because we build on quite traditional forms like learning by heart and training and exercises. But we have to analyse the findings further to see whether and how it is needed to raise the level of the less well performing groups – this then of course as an activity of adult education. In this sense the follow-up will for sure also be a push for adult and continuing education in our country.”

How have Finland and Japan become the giants of “PISA” and “PIAAC”?

By QUE ANH DANG

Japan and Finland have been among the best-performing countries in the well-known OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 15-year-olds. These two countries have also scored top marks in the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) which assessed adult literacy, numeracy skills and the ability to solve problems in technology-rich environments. This international survey of adult skills, also referred to as “PISA for Adults”, took place in 2011/12 and involved some 166,000 adults aged between 16 and 65 in 24 countries, of which 22 are ASEM member states. Japan has the highest average level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy with mean scores significantly higher than the survey’s average. Finland is placed second in the rankings of these two skills after Japan, but exceeds Japan in digital skills. Some 41 per cent of all Finns have either good or excellent ability to solve problems in technology-rich environments. Why have these two countries achieved such high scores? They are obviously so different.

Finns do not believe in measuring the essence of learning; therefore in the 1980s Finland abolished standardised tests. Thanks to the high quality of its teachers, Finland has a trust-based system to allow teachers freedom to teach with creativity, and students have autonomy to learn in different ways.

In contrast, the curricula in East Asian countries, including Japan, are content oriented and examination driven. Teaching is perceived to be very traditional and old-fashioned. Testing is a source of extrinsic motivation for students. While Western educators in general consider it important that learning should be a pleasurable experience, the traditional view in Confucian countries has been that studying is a serious endeavour. Students are expected to put hard work and perseverance into their study. Most Asian parents teach their children early that the route to success lies in hard work.

Given these differences in the two educational systems and ideologies, both Finland and Japan have achieved very high results in the international tests PISA and PIAAC. See below the answers of the ministerial representatives I have interviewed on this question.

Q&A

Why has your country achieved very high results in PIAAC?

Yu Kameoka

Chief Supervisor for Social Education Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan

What do you think is the most important contribution of PIAAC to adult education in your country?

The high levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy signify that Japanese adults possess some of the fundamental skills that are required in modern society. It would not be too off the mark to say that in many ways it reflects the quality of the Japanese school education system. I do also believe that it reflects the various conscious or unconscious lifelong learning activities undertaken by Japanese adults in their daily life as well as the training provided in the workplace. However, without further analysis I feel it is too early to make judgements.

Although it is difficult to directly compare the performance of 15-year-olds on PISA with the performance of the equivalent age cohorts on PIAAC, there seems to be a consistent progression of PISA and PIAAC results in your country. Will this pattern influence investment in school or adult education?

It is indeed not easy to make comparisons between the two surveys. Nonetheless, the high levels of literacy and numeracy demonstrated in PIAAC for Japan seem to be in line with the high scores in PISA. Hence I believe this gives credibility to the claim that the quality of school education does contribute to the achievement of high levels of adult skills in PIAAC. I guess the general public would not object to this view. Furthermore, PIAAC results imply to a certain extent that school outcome continues to affect the levels of adult skills in later life and that work experiences have a strong influence on improving and maintaining adult skills.

The results from PIAAC have their own limitations. What other results can maybe better explain the tradition, values and wider benefits of adult education there?

I agree that the PIAAC survey has limitations on measuring overall adult skills as there are other skills than literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments that could be equally important in life, such as interpersonal skills. According to our government's opinion survey, Japanese people seem to have most interest in lifelong learning activities in the field of health and sport, followed by culture such as music and art, then humanities such as literature and history. Maybe due to some problems regarding definitions, work-related activities come as the sixth choice and do not seem to be popular among Japanese people.

Petri Haltia

Chair of Finland's National Steering Group for PIAAC and member of the PIAAC Board of Participating Countries. Petri Haltia works for Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, the Division for Adult Education and Training Policy. His tasks cover adult education and training policy.

What do you think is the most important contribution of PIAAC to adult education in your country?

This is a complex question and a real answer can only be given much later. However, before the results were released, our expectation was that PIAAC might work as a warning system or signal. And PIAAC has already given us some signals – for instance, the big differences

between age cohorts were quite a surprise for us. At the upper end of the age distribution, the weaker results are worrying in many ways. For instance, how do the lower skill levels affect the efforts to prolong working careers, or how can we make sure that older people are able to take care of their everyday business, which increasingly requires the use of ICT skills?

Since the PIAAC results are very positive in your country, will the government give priority to any further improvement of adult skills in any specific areas?

A decision on what programme will be introduced or which measures will be taken is still to be seen. However, our minister asserted that in the current challenging climate of structural changes in the economy, it is by investing in the competencies of the labour force that we can secure the future. About 40 per cent of the jobless do not have basic occupational qualifications. The three-day right to education and the programme designed for improving young adults' skills are actions the government has already taken to address the problem. However, it's clear that stronger measures are needed, especially to slash the number of adults with a poor level of competence. We need to devise new and more powerful tools for this purpose.

Although it is difficult to directly compare the performance of 15-year-olds on PISA with the performance of the equivalent age cohorts on PIAAC, there seems to be a consistent progression of PISA and PIAAC results in your

country. Will this pattern influence investment in school or adult education?

The first reaction was mostly satisfaction with good results compared to other countries, but at the same time we still have too many adults with weak basic skills. This fact about the low-skilled Finns has made the headline on the biggest newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and our success compared to other countries was only very briefly mentioned. This might be a very Finnish way to react. As a small nation we cannot afford just to be happy that we did better than some others. We are going to encourage the research community as well as stakeholders in education and working life to make use of PIAAC by arranging seminars and discussing the results in different contexts.

How would you like to see PIAAC evolve in future rounds?

I would like to see in PIAAC more about the wider benefits of adults' skills, education and learning, not only immediate economic ones. They are indeed difficult to measure and are bound to national cultures. But perhaps one of the possible ways is to identify some gaps in the background questionnaires and include employers' views on skills needs and skills usage at work. I also expect more research papers using the PIAAC dataset to analyse the nature of all skills assessed and the relationships between them, especially the significance and meaning of "problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments". ■




 Book
review

Youth in transition: How do they cope?

A new book focuses on the many attitudes and different behaviours that affect **youth transitions in relation to work, wellbeing, employment and career interventions.**

By ANDERS MARTINSEN,
Head of Secretariat, ASEM LLL Hub

The new challenges for organisations and individuals globally, brought about by the recent recession, have also had an impact on youth, and more specifically on their transition to adult life. The book *Youth and Work Transitions in Changing Social Landscapes*, edited by Helena Helve and Karen Evans, is a selection of papers that present the recent research on youth–work transitions, wellbeing, employment, career interventions and research–practice gaps internationally. The particular focus of the book is the importance of successful transitions to adult life as manifested in psychological and physical wellbeing. Different international authors from Europe, the USA, Canada, South Africa, the Caribbean, India, Japan, Russia, Australia and New Zealand analyse the structural forces that affect the choices young people are able to make.

The book is divided into four sections, each of which contains several chapters.

The four chapters that make up the first section, *Perspectives on employment transitions and wellbeing changes during economic recession*, have a clear focus on the viewpoints from the UK, the USA and Finland. This includes not only a Finnish perspective around the questions on economic conditions as well as an analysis of the structures of youth employment, but also a comparison between the current economic recession and young people seeking jobs and the recession in the 1970s in the UK. Moreover, this section also includes a cross-country compari-



son of completion of the ‘big 5’ – education, entry into paid employment, partnership and family formation, as well as independent living arrangements. The aspect of this changing nature of the life course is still widely discussed, but this chapter points to the lack of systematic empirical research, particularly in the comparative studies of the transition to adulthood.

The subsequent section, *Biographical negotiations from youth to adulthood*, focuses on issues related to the more general topics of youth trajectories. One of the four chapters in this section gives a good view of the different strategies young people use in their work transitions under conditions of precarity and uncertainty.

New career aspirations, life changes and risks is the title of the third section in which the authors Karen Evans and Edmund Waite, among others, contribute with findings on how initial career trajectories take on historical significance.

In the last section, researchers from Australia and New Zealand, India, Japan, Russia and South Africa highlight the differences between normative conceptions of youth transitions and their realities among different sub-groups and in contrasting social and political contexts. Hence, these international contributors provide the basis for development of an extended dialogue between ideas and evidence. Following these findings, there is a clear need not only to know more about the above changes and options, but also how this is affected by, for example, the changing social expectations and economic recessions.

This is specifically highlighted in the closing commentary chapter where the challenges to conventional thinking and methodological issues that future research and theory in the field of youth transitions need to address are highlighted. Consequently, an additional typology, which helps to sort out the issues of structure and agency in work transitions, is also presented. As described, this goes beyond the simplistic polarity between “society makes them fail” and “it’s all their fault if they don’t succeed”.

In focusing on intergenerational interlinkages as well as wider cultural and socio-economic contexts, *Youth and Work Transitions in Changing Social Landscapes* is successful in focusing on the many attitudes and different behaviours that affect the current generation of young people in their work transitions, wellbeing, employment and career interventions. ■



Asia-Europe Meeting

News from

ASEM education and research hub for lifelong learning

Policy Briefs on Policies of Lifelong Learning

In early 2014, ASEM LLL Hub researchers will begin to issue Policy Briefs on Policies of Lifelong Learning. The objective is to deliver research-informed analysis and recom-

mendations on these new policies for the benefit of ASEM members, governments and stakeholders. You can already read two Policy Briefs. Please use the home page to read and/or subscribe to receive the Policy Briefs.

<http://asemlllhub.org/>

Read more

WWW.ASEMLLLHUB.ORG

About ASEM LLL HUB

The ASEM LLL Hub is the world's largest research network within lifelong learning. The ASEM LLL Hub brings together over 100 researchers in its five research networks,

senior representatives of 36 universities in its University Council, and senior officials from 22 ministries of education and five flagship international organisations. The ASEM LLL Hub was established as the result of preparatory work for the ASEM IV Heads of State Summit in Copenhagen in 2002. The work underscored that lifelong learning enables

governments to respond constructively not only to the changing demands of the knowledge economy but equally to strengthening social cohesion by engaging with the most vulnerable groups of society through raising participation in education and training, regardless of age and social and economic circumstances.

Three GOALS

THE ASEM LLL HUB SEEKS TO:

1. stimulate the production and dissemination of new research-based knowledge in the field of lifelong learning.
2. facilitate the exchange of students and academic staff, in the interests of strengthening mutual understanding and higher education collaboration between Asia and Europe.
3. be an advisory mechanism between researchers and policy makers, thus casting the Hub as an important source for sustainable human resource development and policy recommendations concerning competence development and effective lifelong learning strategies.

The FIVE RESEARCH NETWORKS

- DEVELOPMENT OF ICT SKILLS, E-LEARNING AND THE CULTURE OF E-LEARNING IN LIFELONG LEARNING
- WORKPLACE LEARNING
- PROFESSIONALISATION OF ADULT TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS
- NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING
- CORE COMPETENCES

SPONSORS & PARTNERS

THE ASEM LLL HUB WORKS IN CO-OPERATION WITH AND RECEIVES SUPPORT FROM ITS PARTNER UNIVERSITIES AND ASEM GOVERNMENTS. THE HUB'S ACTIVITIES ARE ORGANISED AND SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING MAIN SPONSORS:



Asia-Europe Foundation with the financial support of the European Commission



The Department of Education, Aarhus University



Danish Ministry of Education



Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

“Politicians in Japan, Singapore and elsewhere consistently stress the importance of skills, often pointing out that the East Asian states generally have few natural resources and therefore must rely on skills for their growth.”

Andy Green
PROFESSOR



SUCCESSFUL STATES ARE **INVESTING** IN EDUCATION

In his new book *Education and State Formation*, Professor Andy Green from the Institute of Education, University of London explains **how the East Asian states managed to become strong, education-driven economies.**

East Asia provides the outstanding example of a region that has achieved relatively successful economic and social development during the recent era of globalisation. Not only have many of the East Asian states, notably Japan and the four ‘tiger economies’ of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, achieved unprecedented levels of economic growth, but they have also distributed the benefits and growth quite widely. But why this success? Because

they are states that have invested explicitly in education to achieve success. This is the main conclusion in Professor Andy Green’s new book, *Education and State Formation*.

However, the book is not entirely new. Actually it is 25 years since its first publication, but now the second edition has been launched – and it’s not a tiny book! On no fewer than 400 pages, Andy Green compares not only the importance of education for the formation of the Western states – Prussia, France, the United States and England – in the 19th century, but also compares the educational significance of education in the formation of the East Asian states, especially since 1960.

Andy Green explains: “My comparison of the East Asian states gave me the opportunity to test whether my theories had a wider applicability – and whether they could contribute to the understanding of the role of education in economic development and state formation in a wider range of contexts than was originally conceived.”

But why are you so interested in the development of these particular states?

“They caught my interest when I reviewed the research on the role of education and skills formation in the rapid development of Japan in the decades of state-building following the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and its post-war reconstruction and subsequent



economic miracle in the period after 1945. The so-called East Asian ‘tiger economies’ – Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan – provided further examples. In each case it seemed that education played a remarkable role in the accelerated process of state formation that preceded and accompanied rapid industrialisation and general socio-economic developments in the East Asian region, which is also arguably manifested more recently in the equally remarkable rise of China’s economy.”

Growth demands investment in education

If a state wants greater growth rates than other countries, then it must invest in education. This is the conclusion to be drawn from Andy Green’s analysis of comparative evidence on enrolment and spending on education, which suggests that East Asia had an advantage over other regions, and this may have contributed to its superior growth rates.

According to Andy Green, the historical background is that Japan and the Asian tigers all had universal or near-universal

“If a state wants greater growth rates than other countries, then it must invest in education.”

Andy Green
PROFESSOR

primary enrolment in 1960, at the point of economic take-off. Andy Green says: “As in many countries in Europe in the 19th century, educational expansion in these countries often preceded the economic need for it. By comparison, the average for primary enrolments for developing countries as a whole was far lower, at 73 per cent. Secondary enrolments in the tiger economies were still low by comparison with developed

countries in 1960, at between 20 per cent for Hong Kong and 33 per cent in Taiwan, but they were also considerably higher than the average for developing countries, at 15 per cent – and incidentally for European countries when they were at the similar stage of industrial take-off.”

But what are the consequences of the state’s investment in education?

“If you look at the economic growth during the 25 years from 1960, Japan and the tigers grew on average at over 8 per cent per annum. Japan went into recession in the early 1990s but the ‘tiger’ economies were still going strong between 1990 and 1995, with Korea registering an average annual growth of 7.2 per cent. The use of the expression ‘dramatic’ is suitable, when countries have such high growth rates over such a long time.”

What is a strong state?

How would you describe the strong state which seems to favour such rapid and dramatic development of education?

“The strong states that have been most successful have been the states which have

had the competence and the political will to intervene extensively and effectively in economic development; which have made this their overwhelming priority; and which have managed to maintain their legitimacy through a relative absence of corruption and through their success in raising living standards and life quality,” says Andy Green.

Can you identify the importance of the use of education in these states more precisely?

“What I can say is that education has been at the heart of this process in all of the East Asian states I have analysed. Moreover, the same situations existed for the 19th century European states,” Andy Green states and points to the four functions of education.

The first function is that education is key to the fostering of the national consciousness and relative cohesion favourable to development. The second function is that education contributes to the development of modern modes of thinking and behaving necessary for social advancement, including population control. The third is that education also contributes to the inculcation of the labour disciplines and values necessary in the early years of development. Fourthly, education contributes to the formation of the specialist skills needed as the economy becomes industrialised.

Does politics work educational miracles?

State investment in education is not the only way for developing states to become strong states with enviable growth rates. But it is a good strategy. At least if you ask Andy Green. He says: “For countries embarking on the early stages of industrialisation, developmental states have proved highly effective. They have successfully promoted economic advancement and the broader process of state formation and made the most effective use of education in this process. So what I tend to say is that countries struggling to get on the developmental ladder can hardly afford to ignore the lessons that strong states tend to get there first.”

But is education the main explanation for the almost miraculous growth rates?

“I would not go that far. The situation is that nearly all accounts of East Asian development have stressed the major role of education and skills. This means that the East Asian miracle almost became an educational miracle as well as an economic miracle. Therefore, it should not be neglected when politicians in Japan, Singapore and elsewhere consistently stress the importance of skills, often pointing out that the East Asian states generally have few natural resources and therefore must rely on skills for their growth,” Andy Green answers and continues:

“At the same time you need to be aware that there are, of course, a lot of contextual determinants of East Asia’s rapid development which have played and continue to play a critical role for regional growth pattern – that is to say, the importance of geography, geopolitics, timing and the nature of the state and its economic policies. With that in mind I will be more likely to say that education is a necessary but not sufficient cause of the unique development in the region.”

The primacy of politics

Andy Green’s book is required reading for politicians and officials in developing countries who are responsible for choosing a strategy. They can choose between two strategies.

One comes from traditional neoclassical economics, which assumes that education has been effective because it has supplied the skills demanded by the economy and done this efficiently. According to this view, education understood as skills formation has been well attuned to the market in terms of both the demands of consumers of skills (employers) and the consumers of education (parents and students) – and the argument is that the reason for this matching of supply and demand is the market mechanism. The role of the state is purely to ensure that these systems work efficiently and that they are responsive to market demands. The role of the state is to rectify market failure.

But they can also choose another strategy. This derives from the so-called developmental skills formation theorists, who argue that the state played a much greater role than is acknowledged by human capital theory and that it went well beyond the conventional notion of intervening in cases of market failure. Instead, this kind of explanation stresses the major role that government manpower planning played in South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore and also the active role of government generally, not only in meeting skills demands, but also in creating demand for greater skills through industrial and other policies.

But how do you personally assess the explanatory power of these two approaches?

“I think that theories of ‘late development’ and the ‘developmental state’ have brought us much closer to an adequate historical understanding of the remarkable rise of East Asian economies during the 20th century than have the accounts of neoliberal economies. Likewise, I think that theories of developmental skills formation improve on traditional human capital theories by enhancing our understanding of the key role of the state in guiding educational development – including that of the private education markets – and in co-ordinating this with strategies for economic development.”

The future is more democratic

Andy Green’s book is first and foremost a historical book. It goes back in time, but does so with the purpose of obtaining experiences that we can use in the future. *So how does the future look for the East Asian states?* “Developmental states have proved to be a highly successful model in the early stages of industrialisation and modernisation,” Andy Green predicts and continues: “However, the developmental state tends not to survive – in a strong form at least – past the early stages of development. More democratic forms of state power tend fortunately to emerge over time. The developmental state, at least in the form we are familiar with, may have already passed its zenith in East Asia, except in China and Singapore. It has been more or

“The strong states that have been most successful have had the competence and the political will to intervene extensively and effectively in economic development.”

Andy Green
PROFESSOR

less abandoned in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan already, as global capital increasingly sidelines the powerful financial bureaucracies which lack the flexibility to adjust in the modern information society.” ■

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Andy Green

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*Imagine
a future world
without
a focus on
education*

The *ASEM Outlook Report 2012* offers interesting scenarios for the development of political organisation, economic control and distribution of resources, **but a focus on education and its importance is completely missing.**

POLICY REVIEW

By CLAUS HOLM
& ANDERS MARTINSEN

Albert Einstein once said, “Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life’s coming attractions.” This quote gives a good and summative grasp of the purpose of the *ASEM Outlook Report 2012*. As described by the authors, this report examines the current state of Asia–Europe relations and proposes possible forthcoming developments by taking a unique future scenario approach. Moreover, the report visualises the possible impact of current policy decisions and delivers innovative responses in order to ensure greater prosperity in different areas. This is done with a focus on four distinct policy areas: security and conflict manage-

ment; economic and financial integration; environmental governance; and public health and pandemic preparedness.

As a reader, one may wonder why these four sectors were selected. This choice must be said to have affected the lack of focus on lifelong learning and education as such in the report. The key focus of education is mentioned a few times, whereas lifelong learning is not mentioned at any point – something that is in stark contrast to the latest conclusions of the Asia–Europe Meetings of Ministers for Education (ASEMME).

The first volume of the two-volume publication is comprised of two sections and provides the reader with the up-to-date context for Asia–Europe relations. The first section accumulates different data to give a better understanding of the contemporary political and socio-economic conditions – both

in Asia and Europe. The same section also looks at statistics linked to different policy areas, and hence displays the similarities and differences in both regions, such as economics and population, but also research and education. Contrastingly, the second section explores the different stakeholders’ perceptions of the opposite region by drawing from the findings of the Asia–Europe Foundation’s (ASEF’s) *EU through the Eyes of Asia* and *Asia in the Eyes of Europe*.

The second volume of the report is developed through a series of multi-sector strategic foresight consultations conducted by ASEF. *Foresight is 20/20: Scenario Building for Policy Analysis and Strategy Development*, as the second volume is titled, provides analysis and policy recommendations considered to uncover possible shifts and trends in Asia–Europe relations. In addition to analysing

the changing roles of different stakeholders involved in international relations, this volume identifies emerging policy issues and future areas of co-operation in the four policy areas revealed above. All of the four sectors are presented in three possible future scenarios with their following opportunities and risks. The first of the three divergent and conflicting scenarios is characterised by global political organisation, economic control by authorities, and redistributed resources – a so-called *Grey Paradis*, relating to the “grey hope” described in the third issue of *ASEM Magazine*. Next is the *Glocal Blocs*, a future subjugated by regional political blocs, collective economic interest at the regional level, and resource utilisation. The last scenario, *MosaInc.*, is marked by weak political structures, economic self-interest, and resource abuse. Together, they are three highly attention-grabbing scenarios.

According to the report, the four different sectors analysed “... were selected due to their relevance; prominence in existing Asia-Europe dialogue; and potential for bioregional or indeed, global impact in the next 20–30 years”. All four sectors are unquestionably critical sectors in Asia–Europe relations and are not to be neglected. Furthermore, it must be said that the triple-scenario analysis of the four sectors is very thorough and enables policy-makers and other stakeholders to recognise the forces that are, and can, affect Asia and Europe. The aim of the report is therefore obtained.

However, the missing focus on education in this otherwise very interesting triple-analysis is in stark contrast to the conclusions not only of ASEMME3, but also ASEMME4 this year. Both meetings underlined that high-quality research, education and training systems that encourage lifelong learning are crucial for the development of highly qualified and employable citizens and economic growth in both regions. Furthermore, the focus of ASEMME4 was on studying ways to strengthen and develop an education partnership for the 21st century with the aim of enhancing co-operation and encouraging exchanges on key education issues in the Asia–Europe dialogue. Additionally, the EU honours education and research as strategic sectors for development co-operation with Asia. In the milieu of globalisation, international co-operation partnerships between EU and the Asian higher education institutions are becoming progressively essential for an enhanced responsiveness of education and research systems to the changing needs of the labour market in both regions. Programmes such as Erasmus Mundus Partnerships, EUforAsia programme, Trans-Eurasia Information Network, Asia Link and the

ASEAN-EU University Network Programme can be mentioned here.

A focus like this can be traced back to, for example, *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships* written by the EU Commission in 2001. Here it is stated that we should in particular “work to strengthen educational, scientific and cultural exchanges with Asia, through support for enhanced cooperation between higher education institutions, an intensification of academic, research and student exchanges between our two regions, and the promotion of structural networks enabling mutually beneficial cooperation.” This kind of concentration on educational matters is not reflected in the *ASEM Outlook Report 2012*.

Having 20/20 foresight is not a perfect vision into the future, but is remarkably clear if taking away the number of uncertainties that are beyond reasonable for a human to predict. That said, the whole line on the Snellen Chart must be understood to obtain

20/20 vision. Given the otherwise thorough work of the report, it seems as though the letter “E” for Education was skipped. ■



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Anders Martinsen has an MA in Lifelong Learning and is Head of ASEM LLL Hub Secretariat.



“ The missing focus on education is in stark contrast not only to the conclusions of ASEMME3, but also ASEMME4 this year. Both meetings underlined that high-quality research, education and training systems that encourage lifelong learning are crucial for the development of highly qualified and employable citizens and economic growth in both regions.”

Claus Holm & Anders Martinsen

IS THE IDEA OF THE LEARNING CITY TOO EUROPEAN?

The European idea of becoming a learning city is spreading. Nevertheless, two researchers are of the belief that **Asian experiences will develop the European idea of the learning city.**



The idea of becoming a learning city is spreading rapidly. The idea as such originates particularly from the European Union and from the Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development (OECD). But the researchers Professor SoongHee Han from Seoul National University (Korea) and Professor Atsushi Makino from the University of Tokyo (Japan) call for respect for the differences between European and Asian approaches to realising the idea of learning cities.

SoongHee Han states: "To us, the 'learning regions' programmes in Europe seem more instrumental and practical in terms of human capital promotion, individual competency and life skills development. In contrast with this, the learning city in East Asia, from our perspective, can be grasped more clearly within the contextual framework of social complexity, or in the context of self-organ-

"The learning city is not a hammer or a screwdriver; it is not a handy tool to use to fix something and then put back on a shelf again."

*Soonghee Han
& Atsushi Makino*

ising and self-growing complexities of communities and towns. The differences between the two continents of Asia and Europe, in this sense, need to be mutually respected and explained with different theoretical models. So we believe that the distinctive features of the Asian type of learning city can be characterised as a community relations model, in contrast to European learning cities which are basically built on the belief that learning is an individual process and learning

city programmes aim to enhance individual competency."

Atsushi Makino further elaborates: "As I see it, the European framework has influenced Asian practice, or, to put it differently, we have 'borrowed' the ideas into our practical context. I believe that the collective character of our way of thinking is also based on this individual concept, and is not opposed to it. The individual, by nature, does not have an isolated and self-reliant existence. Rather, a mutually reliant existence generates from the relationship among the people. This is the typical way of understanding the individual in the Asian context, and Western people call it 'collective'. In this sense, 'the collective' does not deny the existence of 'the individual', but implies a different way of constructing individuality within society as a whole. The Asian perspective on lifelong learning or community relations model definitely puts more emphasis on the mode of relations and group learning activities but it does not deny the individual as a subject of activities."

SoongHee Han and Atsushi Makino both consider the European approach to be domi- >

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"Japanese society is falling apart. We are right now facing two crises: the crisis of people's social existence and the crisis of social integrity."

Atsushi Makino
PROFESSOR



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Soonghee Han & Atsushi Makino



nant and also believe that one can learn from its lack of success. They reach this conclusion on the basis of an analysis from Japan, the Republic of Korea and China of the attempt to implement the idea of learning cities over two decades. More specifically, SoongHee Han states that: “Broadly speaking I would say that in all the three countries that we have analysed, the learning city policies were implemented along with governmental instruments to meet the global challenges which increased local uncertainties in each country, by means of adapting the people’s self-governing participation towards the emergence of a new civil society. The problem is the limits of this approach, limits that are connected to a technical and individualistic rationality.”

But let us look at how the idea of learning cities has been received in Japan and Korea.

Japan is falling apart

“Japanese society is falling apart. We are right now facing two crises: the crisis of people’s social existence and the crisis of social integrity,” says Atsushi Makino, and points to the need to go back to 1991 in order to understand the full picture of this serious diagnosis.

“1991 was the time when the economic bubble burst and Japan fell into a prolonged recession and in the aftermath of this recession the pendulum has swung from individual self-reliance back to social

“The community life of the kominkan had been forgotten, and had failed to be captured in the perspective of the urban modernity of lifelong learning.”

Atsushi Makino
PROFESSOR

integration. Markets were shrinking so that the reintegration of the individualised Japanese society has become the top issue with this community breakdown and the isola-

tion of individuals, rising unemployment and the breakdown of the welfare system, the need for environmental protection and foreign worker issues.”

What does this mean for the approach to lifelong learning and learning cities?

“A new role for lifelong learning was expected to reintegrate the broken society by way of independent citizens voluntarily participating. The ideas of learning communities and learning cities were adopted in this context. Specifically, it was a report from 1998 entitled *The Agenda of Future Social Education Administration to Cope with Social Changes* that suggested a so-called kominkan-based social education – an idea to activate community-building by greater participation of citizens.”

Do the kominkan!

The 1949 Social Education Law introduced the idea of a learning community centred around the *kominkan*. The kominkan is not only a facility for residents to engage in local learning activities on a municipality level, but it is also here that residents hold regular meetings to discuss fundamental community issues, train children for performances like



PHOTO

the lion dance for the community festival, organise a traditional puppet show, entertain the elderly, etc.

Atsushi Makino furthermore describes the kominkans as cultural centres, which are relatively small and located within walking distance to promote community activities and citizens' active participation. Take, for example, the case of Iida City, Nagano Prefecture. This city is a typical rural community with approximately 100,000 inhabitants. The city has 20 kominkan centres for community activities and learning.

"The citizens," Atsushi Makino says, "use the expression 'we do the kominkan' or 'we do the bunkan [bunkan are branches of the kominkan]'. And people say that you will understand the community if you do the bunkan. They believe community life resides in the notion of bunkan activities, which reproduce community relations. To put it simply, city life runs through the web of the kominkan and bunkan."

If "we do the kominkan" will this then solve Japan's problems?

"It is difficult to say at this point," Atsushi Makino admits, but he underlines that "the community life of the kominkan had been

"A learning city is an accomplishment of civilisation, of being cultivated and learned, not just being a skilled employee."

SoongHee Han
PROFESSOR

forgotten, and had failed to be captured in the perspective of the urban modernity of lifelong learning. The administrative expediency of the Japanese government was trying to merge and restructure the units of the cities without considering what really constitutes a community with a revitalised sense of community."

Koreans build communities

While in Japan the number of municipalities in 2010 that declared learning cities was about 5 per cent in total, the proportion of learning cities in the Republic of Korea in the same year reached 40 per cent.

But why this difference?

Soonghee Han gives us some reasons for this: "One explanation could be that cities

in Japan declared themselves as learning cities on a voluntary basis, while the cities in the Republic of Korea were officially designated and financially subsidised by the Ministry of Education. Another and even more important explanation is that in Japan the tradition of the kominkan had played a key role in fostering learning communities – long before the learning city initiative had emerged. In the Republic of Korea, community development in terms of culture, knowledge and civil participation was a rather recent phenomenon. Building communities with a vision of lifelong learning in the Republic of Korea was in this sense well-timed and topical.

So the Republic of Korea is also in the process of constructing a new community approach to building learning cities?

"Yes, exactly. The main goal has been to build communities and cities, which is also a way of saying that social inclusion in programme provisions had a broader goal than raising employability. This was the reality despite the fact that the programme was being implemented right after the shock of the Asian financial crisis. The learning city was a government instrument to promote local initiative and civil participation, to increase social inclusion or establishing a new civil society by having people experience and participate in civil education, cultural learning, and community activities."

Will you have success with this policy?

"Yes, and in a special way. The most popular programmes for adult learning, which have increased partly due to the sustained programme initiatives of learning cities, are not for improving vocational skills and workplace competencies. Rather we are talking about programmes dedicated to liberal arts, culture and sports. This feature of the East Asian scene clearly contrasts with the European competency-based learning city experience."

Cities are civilising processes

The learning city is not a hammer or a screwdriver; it is not a handy tool to use to fix something and then put back on a shelf again. In any case, SoongHee Han and Atsushi Makino warn against this perception, since it is too European and there is a risk that it will upset the traditional social stability and cohesion of societies like Japan and Korea.

Soonghee Hans says: "The metaphors of the knowledge society and personal competency development are major icons of the learning city policies in Europe. But these icons have been and still are less obvious and less relevant for Asia, where the issues of social inclusion and community rebuild-

ing are more important. A learning city is an accomplishment of civilisation, of being cultivated and learned, not just being a skilled employee." Atsushi Makino seconds this and continues: "Actually you could say that the recent discovery of learning cities in Asian countries, and especially in countries like Japan and the Republic of Korea, has restored the value of understanding how a society constructs and re-constructs itself by way of the relations of the people and communities, by virtue of human learning and education."

Some say the identity of the "relation-orientedness" in learning has to do with the Confucian tradition. While it seems that more research is needed to confirm this assertion, it cannot be denied that Confucian tradition is definitely a part of the way of life in this region, and also of the identity of lifelong learning and learning cities. ■

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SoongHee Han

SoongHee Han is a professor of lifelong learning at Seoul National University, Korea. His research has focused on the theoretical and philosophical construction of a learning society from a perspective of complex learning ecology. His research projects are mostly conducted in comparative and global contexts. He is also deeply involved in studies of popular education, critical theories in adult education, and human rights education in the Korean context.



Atsushi Makino

Atsushi Makino is a professor of lifelong learning in the Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo, Japan. He is one of the executive directors of the Japanese Educational Research Association and the Japan Society for Studies in Adult and Community Education. He has been involved in reforming the administrative system and educational system, especially lifelong learning systems in local-level governments of Japan. He is interested in the development of lifelong learning in the context of Japan's social change and the emergence of the concept of key competencies or core competencies in the decentralising and diversifying Japanese society.

ASIA STARTS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Australia's engagement with Asia is strong, but the question is whether the policies are too instrumental – interview with Professor Fazal Rizvi, University of Melbourne, Australia.



PHOTO

“In a nutshell, Australia’s engagement with Asia has always been associated with an existential anxiety about its location within the Asian region”

Fazal Rizvi
PROFESSOR

The 21st century is predicted to be an “Asian Century” as noted in the European Commission’s 2009 publication *The World in 2025: Rising Asia and socio-ecological transition*. The former Australian government’s 2012 White Paper *Australia in the Asian Century* expressed a similar sentiment. The fundamental conviction of the White Paper is that Australia’s engagement with Asia is essential for its prosperity, its social and economic vibrancy, and its security. But according to Professor Fazal Rizvi from the University of Melbourne, there are good reasons to critically investigate the assumptions and rationale behind Australia’s attempt to forge deeper educational and cultural engagement with Asia.

Fear and fascination

“In a nutshell, Australia’s engagement with Asia has always been associated with an existential anxiety about its location within the Asian region,” says Fazal Rizvi and continues: “Its response has emerged variously, in terms of deep fears in the post-World War II period to a more progressive notion that a closer engagement with Asia is not only inevitable, but should also be welcomed for the opportunities it offers.”

The background to this statement is, on the one hand, that from the very beginning of the European colonial settlement, Australia’s geographical proximity to Asia has required Australia to establish a coherent and consistent position towards Asia. On the other hand, Fazal Rizvi adds, history has shown that Australia has adopted ambivalent and contradictory positions, constantly shifting in line with changing geopolitical circumstances. In 1898 Cardinal Moran argued that Asian languages should be taught in all schools – a century before the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke declared in 1988 that all Australians should become “Asia literate”. But after World War II, Australia viewed countries in the Asian region as potential threats, and sought to understand the terms of its own concerns for survival and security. The phrase “Australia is a part of Asia” became a cliché in the 1960s although European history remained a much more important component of Australia’s national identity than its Asian geography. More recently, and especially at the beginning of the 21st century, the economic and political rise of Asia has led Australia to assume an inevitable decline in the power of Europe and the USA. Within the context of

such geopolitical shifts, Australia has faced a range of strategic choices related to the ways in which its geographical location within the Asian region might dictate its cultural, economic and political affiliations.

Asia starts in schools

But how does Australia carry out modern geopolitics in relation to Asia? The Australian White Paper *Australia in the Asian Century* is a good example of this. The White Paper was launched in October 2012 by the former Labour Government in Australia and it focuses on five key objectives: 1) economic strength; 2) strong minds through education and Asian-relevant capabilities; 3) expanding and integrating regional markets, including building the presence of Australian firms in those markets; 4) deeper and broader relationships with the region at all levels; and 5) regional security.

As a follow-up to this White Paper, Australia launched five country strategies for China, India, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea in July and August 2013. These country strategies take forward the objectives of the White Paper for Australia to build stronger and more comprehensive relationships with countries across the region. Australia has

“Australia needs to look at why the return on investment in learning Asian languages has been so poor. It is important to examine the cause of this failure outside the normal set of excuses.”

Fazal Rizvi
PROFESSOR

selected these five countries for the development of country strategies because of their size and economic links with Australia, as well as strategic and political influence in the region and globally.

Professor Fazal Rizvi explains: “The discourse of Australia–Asia relations is based on a dualism – Australians and their Asian others. It implies an instrumentalism that not only separates ‘us’ and ‘them’, but also views Asia instrumentally – as a means to our economic ends. So this instrumentalism also invokes conceptions of the Asian others whose cultures must be understood, whose languages must be learnt, with whom close relationships must be forged, and who can help us to realise our economic objectives.

There is thus created a crude social distance between Australian ‘us’ and Asian ‘them’, a distinction that is often exploited by right-wing ideologues.”

No return on investment

Australian schools and universities are urged to take more interest in Asian studies and Asian languages and they have been provided with financial resources with which to meet this objective. And this actually happens. At the university level, Asian studies, research about Asia and research collaborations have been given priority. At the school level, initial policy steps include ensuring that all Australian schools offer at least one of the priority Asian languages nominated in the White Paper – Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Hindi and Indonesian. Policy also includes implementing an “Australian Curriculum” that underscores a cross-curriculum priority of “Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia” under the National Plan for School Improvement.

Although Professor Fazal Rizvi welcomes many of these initiatives, he points out that “the question is not about the importance of Asia in the curriculum, rather about how we are going to teach about Asia, how we are going to regard the dynamism of Asia, the new cultural practices that are emerging throughout Asia partly as the result of various experiences of interactivity.”

He insists that “we need to look back at the previous policy attempts – for example, the so-called Rudd Report in the early 1990s highlighted the importance of Asian language training and almost half a billion dollars was invested in this area.”

Australia needs to look at why the return on investment in learning Asian languages has been so poor. It is important to examine the cause of this failure outside the normal set of excuses.

Beyond instrumentalism

The White Paper *Australia in the Asian Century* was used by the former Labour Government to build a narrative for its policies. It is also worth noting that the chair of the White Paper Task Force, Dr Ken Henry, was cleverly and foresightedly chosen to focus on “changing mindsets” of Australian society rather than “changing policy” of the government. But the shift to Australia’s new Conservative Government in September 2013 led to some important shifts in government priorities.

“However, the focus on the need for Australia to develop closer educational, political, economic and strategic ties with Asia has not been abandoned,” says Fazal Rizvi and continues: “The new government has stored the White Paper, away from the main gov-

ernment website, in the Australian National Library’s web archive, but at the same time it has implemented the White Paper’s recommendation to strengthen regional integration, with, for example, the appointment of the first Australian resident ambassador to the ASEAN Secretariat. The first trip that new Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, made abroad was to Jakarta. The Department of Education sent its senior official to the ASEM Education Secretariat, which had just moved to Jakarta in October 2013.”

“So you could say that there are no substantive changes in Australia’s policy towards Asia. We still treat Asia much as a means to our economic and strategic ends,” says Fazal Rizvi.

What would you do instead?

“In my view, you have to give educational institutions a major responsibility for creating spaces in which a critical examination of changing cultural practices can take place; where students are encouraged to explore the contours of global interconnectivity and interdependence, and their implications for questions of identity and culture. If our future is to be tied with Asia, then we need to develop forms of self-reflexivity about how our identities are historically constituted but are social dynamic. Such discourse views Asian cultures in their own terms and develops Australia–Asia relations that transcend instrumentalism.” ■

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Fazal Rizvi

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Is critical thinking a distinctive feature of Western universities?



Are Asian teachers typically neglecting students' doubts, while Western teachers are inclined to enhance students' critical capacity? In this article the researcher Pier Paolo Pasqualoni challenges this widely held assumption.

By PIER PAOLO PASQUALONI



There are a few thinkers whose ideas have had the power to shape institutions. Among them, the Eastern philosopher Confucius and his Western counter-

part Socrates not only figure most prominently, but they have also been particularly influential in shaping educational practices. If we accept the view that the conceptions of learning and teaching ascribed to those two ancient thinkers represent powerful constructions that over time have become reality, should this lead us to the conclusion that Western students, at least at university level, are living with – and through – the challenges of uncertainty while those students who have been socialised in a traditional Asian school system continue to search for certainties? Do Eastern students appreciate knowledge as it is presented by their teachers

more than Western students, who in turn are less inclined to take it for granted, thus constantly questioning any claims for knowledge and suspending judgements in a Socratic fashion? And are Asian teachers typically neglecting students' doubts, while Western teachers are more inclined to enhance the critical capacity of students?

An educational divide?

Much of the recent literature on the difficulty of assuming critical thinking skills when teaching Eastern students in particular seems to take for granted the existence of such an educational divide. As a consequence, critical thinking is depicted as a distinctive feature of those scholars, teachers and students who inhabit Western educational systems.

My objective is to challenge this widely held assumption by opposing the educational practices Confucius and Socrates recommended in an ideal-typical fashion, and finally to raise one question: Are Confucius and Socrates indeed unequal siblings

demanding very different educational means? To make my point, I will draw on my teaching experiences at several Eastern and Western universities.

The devil's name is selfishness

In a Confucian tradition, the emphasis on filial piety is extended to teachers in the same way that it is extended to other authorities. Nevertheless, the respect and reverence typically shown by Asian students to their teachers depend on the teachers following rituals of mutual recognition and acknowledgment, being benevolent and demonstrating their capacity and willingness to share and impart knowledge.

An excess of reverence might lead students to appear very selfish (to Western eyes at least) in the sense that they themselves seem reluctant to share their ideas. From a Confucian perspective this might be seen as a good example of his claim that every virtue, taken to an extreme, ceases to be a virtue and opens the way for all kinds of vices. After all,



if there is one devil whose influence Confucius tried to limit, his name is selfishness.

Sharing and developing those ideas one believes in, on the other hand, is the starting point and the key ingredient of any Socratic practice. It is a ritual, precisely in the Confucian sense, to be introduced at university level (at the latest).

Finally, it should be noted that Confucius was well aware of the importance of critique being addressed to all kinds of authorities, even if he probably would not approve of the interrogative style of Plato's Socrates, which sometimes seems more than un-

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friendly. These considerations are obviously not sufficient to challenge the widely held assumption that critical thinking is a distinctive feature of Western educational systems. After all, the question “Who are you to oppose their views?” resonates in the minds of those who might be sceptical about some knowledge claims but have rarely been encouraged to articulate their doubts in the various classrooms they have been inhabiting. To take our argument further, we thus have to turn to empirical considerations, which in this case will be rather experiential in their character.



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While being aware of the limitation of this perspective, I would like to give a preliminary account of how the considerable differences among students play out in the classes I have been teaching and why such differences matter.

Casually observing my classes, I noticed that some African and Western students are more inclined to share their ideas with the class. I also noticed the behaviour of Asian students: if at all, they tend to approach me during the breaks to ask questions, and then report back to their peer groups. However, their attitude is changing significantly at the master's level. I might tentatively draw the conclusion that Asian students, when entering university, are, on average, less confident and prepared to speak up in public spaces, but that universities, and smaller master's classes in particular, have a major socialising effect and bring about a significant change in behaviour. This, of course, sheds some light on the character of their previous educational experiences and their pre-university learning environments in particular. But it also paves the way to question whether the delicate task of fostering the critical capacities of students can or should be restricted to universities or whether assigning Confucian and Socratic educational practices their adequate place in an idealised life course is not a misleading approach at all.

When discussing these issues with teachers in a master's programme on educational administration, we agreed that the relative strengths of the Confucian and the Socratic teaching ideals depend on both the level – that is, not necessarily the age – of students and on the subject areas. Only a combination of both elements at an earlier stage could ensure the creation of global citizens capable of bridging cultural gaps and of coping with uncertainty.

Vanishing differences

There is empirical evidence that differences between Asian and Western university

students begin to dissolve and even vanish at the master's level, at least in smaller classes and in international programmes. The Socratic method, in appropriate settings, turns out to be a powerful tool to transform students into academic actors. This transformation cannot possibly take place without the constant exercise of a ritual, a ritual demanding the mutual recognition of teachers and students. The Socratic method should be regarded as a ritual, precisely in the deeper meaning, role and significance Confucius ascribed to this term, even if it needs to be balanced with the educational experiences that students coming from very diverse school systems – both public and private – might still carry with them. This implies the need to constantly re-negotiate the roles and relations of students and teachers, which in turn presupposes a rather intimate setting in which interaction can take place and the students are increasingly relating to and relying on each other. Thus, we are drawn back to a general issue to be accomplished by universities, one that concerns the distinctive features that distinguish them from traditional schools. This argument is echoed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who – in an overtly Socratic fashion – ascribes the university the attribute of being a place in which no claims about reality can be taken at face value and in which everything should be questioned. ■



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specialises in higher education research, social movements and migration studies and regularly leaves academia for teaching communication, conflict transformation, group dynamics, gender and diversity in adult education courses.

Criticism happens at universities

Recently, I was offered the opportunity to teach in an international programme at one of the largest public universities in South-East Asia. Since that time, I have continued to teach in similar international programmes across Europe, in Thailand and Taiwan. The latter offer the opportunity to teach very diverse classes, both in terms of cultural backgrounds and academic subjects. Students from a number of ASEAN member countries join the classes along with students from China, South Korea, Japan and a number of African and Western countries.

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