

Part 2

1. INTRODUCTION: HOPES AND PROMISES OF POLICY LEARNING

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

Educational change is a poor traveller, as Andy Hargreaves writes later in this part. Supranational education policies and

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

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

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

In Chapter 7, Professor Ronald Sultana (University of Malta) shares his personal experience as a consultant, researcher and expert on policy learning. He builds a bridge between hopes and realities whenever policy learning principles are put into practice, concluding that awareness of the challenges involved in peer learning is critical in order to ensure that learning targets are attained and benefits maximised.

Former Slovenian education minister, Professor and the member of Slovenian Parliament Slavko Gaber (University of Ljubljana) paints a portrait of realities of a top-level policymaker in Chapter 8. Using examples from his own experience as a top level policy-maker, he insists that we should thoroughly rethink our Eurocentric approach to education and try to see its limits. He warns readers of fashioning individualism and favouring instrumental orientation, putting work and market competitiveness at the centre of the education arena at the expense of critical thinking, joy in exploring and in knowledge, and in becoming a member of the human global village.

In Chapter 9, Professor Louise Stoll (University of London) invites readers to consider leadership as an important

dimension of policy learning. Her essay explores the potential that learning communities offer for capacity building, illustrating this with three examples. She concludes that the decision to develop policy learning communities requires formal leadership that endorses values, promotes and models collaborative learning, enquiry and knowledge animation, and builds networks to support learning connections across different policy areas.

In Chapter 10, Professor Andy Hargreaves (Boston College) claims that the theory of change should influence what is borrowed. However, readily available policies that can easily be borrowed often distort the theory-in-action that policymakers hold about how people can be induced to change. He provides three examples of lessons in change, concluding that the transfer of policies between two systems is difficult and often doomed to failure.

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

About the authors:

Ronald G. Sultana is professor of educational sociology and comparative education at the University of Malta, where he directs the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research (<http://www.um.edu.mt/emcer>). He is the author, editor or co-editor of 21 volumes, and has published over 90 articles and chapters in his main areas of research, which include vocational education and training, educational innovation, and teacher training.

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Ljubljana. He has a background in teaching and lecturing, specialising in the sociology of education and holds a PhD in sociology. He has twice held the position of Minister of Education of Slovenia and has been a member of the Slovenian Parliament for many years.

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

Andy Hargreaves is the Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education at the Lynch School of Education, Boston College. His

most recent books are *The Fourth Way* (with Dennis Shirley - forthcoming 2009), *Change Wars* (edited with Michael Fullan 2009), and *Sustainable Leadership* (with Dean Fink, 2006).

Pasi Sahlberg is an education specialist and school improvement activist. He has global experience in education policy analysis, training teachers and leaders, coaching schools to change and advising education policy-makers in more than 35 countries. His main field of interest lies in educational change, school improvement and global education policies. His working record includes teaching, teacher training, research, state-level administration (Ministry of Education) and international education development (World Bank, OECD, EU). He has Ph.D. from the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) and he is *Adjunct Professor* at the University of Helsinki. He is currently a lead expert at the European Training Foundation.

