

NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
SCHOOL OF LETTERS

MSC PROGRAMME IN COUNSELLING AND CAREER GUIDANCE

LABORATORY OF EXPERIMENTAL PEDAGOGY

CENTERS FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ATHENS (23-25-1-04)

**PROMOTING NEW FORMS OF WORK ORGANIZATION AND OTHER
COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMPETITIVENESS AND
EMPLOYABILITY**

With the Support of the European Committee

ATHENS 2004

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EDUCATIONAL CHANGE FOR SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

Pierre Laderrière. Ex-Head of Organization of Institution Management in Higher Education, OECD

Introduction

Sustainable employment is not always understood in the same way by the various social partners, if not stakeholders, within national socio-economic policies. In the current and likely future economic conditions, it should now be clear that such a concept no longer reflect the idea of a lifelong job in a firm, as exemplified earlier in the Japanese model. It is currently interpreted as a situation where a socio-economic policy is permanently able to feed the economy with an adequate supply of human resource (i.e. in both quantitative and qualitative terms). In such circumstances, periods of unemployment are not denied, but they should be based on an initial relevant education background and activated through dynamic method of re-skilling. Hence the idea that sustainable employment is closely linked to education and training. But, as we know, such a relationship is a complex one, as demonstrated by numerous and difficult debates on this key issue in the past.

In the last ten years or so, the question of the linkage between education and active life, has become more complicated with the emergence of a new developmental concept applied to modern societies : the idea of life-long learning (LLL). Developed and encouraged by all the major international bodies, LLL is supposed to respond to the various needs of a fully-fledged learning society which now seems to characterise societal development. Indeed, such a world trend implies that an initial education and training as good as it could be, can no longer extend over a life-span and should either regularly or on an ad-hoc basis, be renewed, extended or deepened according to societal changes. Contrary to the past, with the exception of some countries with strong traditions of multidimensional adult education (i.e. Scandinavian countries), the adult segment of LLL will not be limited to various kinds of retraining for employment. It will become broader and more open, especially in a context where social human skills are more closely articulated with vocational skills, under the general heading of “competence”. Before considering how far educational measures could help individuals to cope with the various changes affecting our societies, and the current difficulty for the education and training systems to develop in what could be considered as a right direction, we should briefly recall the new context of contemporary societies.

I. A new context

Even if the changes in work organisation are presented in an other session, it is necessary to recall major trends likely to directly or indirectly influence curriculum development and learning outcomes. Firstly, we are witnessing a reduced number of hierarchical principles and lines of bureaucratic controls, in favour of increased self-organisation and self-regulation, both individual and collective. This is because, secondly, the concept of project (always more or less relatively autonomous) and teamwork are developing rapidly, based on more or less permanent dynamism and creativity. This implies, thirdly, that know-how and life skills are closely linked particularly in cross-disciplinary competencies, and that a certain polyvalence of skills is increasingly necessary to facilitate mobility in context where quantitative and qualitative factors are more and more intricate. Fourthly and finally, mastery of all communication skills, especially with regard to integrating them into various networks, is essential to enable individuals to fine-tune their employability and update their knowledge.

It should be added that such a trend is taking place within a more competitive atmosphere and world, implying a more systematic performance based activity related to the idea of project mentioned above. It therefore means that a lot of human activities are now measured, confronting outcomes to primary objectives and that is why the concept of competences, a slightly broader concept than skill as it contains more human initiative in mobilising acquired skills in a given context, has recently emerged in the developed countries (Laderrière, 2002: 105-135). The request for personal commitment in work and society at large is still widely debated, but it is in line with an other contemporary trend: the development of social individualism and, consequently, the more frequently asserted concept of clientele and its requirements. The latter are well known: quality in the goods or services one intends to purchase, optimisation of the cost/benefit ratio, demand for transparency and accountability.

A last major trend should also be underlined: decentralisation . It is a generic term describing the situation whereby decision-making and management are brought closer to their implementation points; in a context of increasing complexity and greater knowledge and initiative-taking by individuals and institutions. This concerns either public or private sectors. In such a development, institutions, especially, are required to increasingly acquire the status of “learning organisation”, thanks to high level human resource. The above list of emerging contextual factors is far from exhaustive. Their weight can vary according to national/cultural context, socio-economic developments being generally unequal in a given large region or country. At a given place and moment, they may be viewed as both constraints and opportunities. How far educational measures could help individuals and/or community groups to cope with the above changes in minimising the adjustment cost and in facilitating a smoother transition from learning to active life and vice-versa throughout the life-span?

Faced with the above issue of a minimum of coherence between education and societal developments, we could be tempted by two completely contradictory solutions. The first one would consist, for the educational and training system, to accept without any discussion the immediate requirements of the production and administration sectors in terms of skilled labour. The second one would consist of entirely rejecting the demands of such sectors, in the name of the preservation of strict autonomy of the school system, for the benefit of an overall development of the

individual. Even if some people and groups are still backing these two points of view, in the current European debate on the future of education, it appears that these positions cannot be kept for long. Since more than ten years, indeed, various changes were introduced in the European learning systems which exemplify the very complex and subtle relationships between education and the society at large, which has always existed. Because of a lack of research interest and sometimes of relevant methodological instruments or for ideological reasons, these relationships were not always reviewed, clarified and acted upon if needed. An example of an informal adjustment has been the earlier discovery of the “hidden curriculum”, showing how school life was transmitting life and work habits to youngsters beyond the formal syllabi. Our hypothesis is that if the question of the contribution of education to sustainable employment is posed in Europe since several years, it is because the educational systems were unable to cope with the very rapid changes affecting the society of large and its work organisation in particular, and to take them into account to review and possibly rebuild their management accordingly. It has never been asked to the European education system to drop their humanistic and therefore multidimensional approach of the development of human being, especially in a period when it has been agreed upon in several quarters, including in the business sector, that a strong general culture is indispensable to educate and train the labour force. What has been underlined since roughly forty years (i.e. the creation of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), was that, precisely, the consideration of the multidimensional features of the education systems was unbalanced at the expense of the acquisition of the relevant competencies required in active life. In the most selective/elitist systems, it was meaning a priority in favour of academic education, those students failing to achieve its specific standards, being sent (in fact socially “downgraded”) in vocational education and training (VET), except when strong autonomous VET were able to feed labour market with high level skilled workers and technicians.

For several years OECD tried to demonstrate that a fair lasting economic and social development was requiring a permanent action in favour of individual acquisition of qualifications sufficiently flexible to respond to technological and labour market changes. Through numerous and varied thematic and national reviews, the Organisation has shown that insufficient policy in this field was impeding such a development. Since then, other voices joined OECD claims, specially the European Union through multiple initiatives, one the most emblematic being its constant support of a real lifelong learning strategy for all, as a spearhead of the formal Union’s goal of labour mobility.

II. Quality off and in the system

When looking at the issue of “educational change for..”, it is strange to start with quality matters and not with some sweeping adjustments responding to sustainable employment’s needs. Quality, here, only means, for the education and training systems, to meet their major objectives as they are generally spelled out and agreed upon in any democratic society. Of course, major changes will be considered below, but it should also be recognised that some of major difficulties currently faced by the systems, could be initially found in their inability of self-regulation, in line with their basic aims. We will briefly outline some obstacles that they were unable to overcome.

i. Basic skills and quality issues

It is not the place to come back on the debate on quality of education in developed countries initiated in the middle of the 80's. After several years of publications of developmental indicators of schools and adult education achievements, the first results of PISA confirmed that many systems were no longer able to meet societal learning needs. It was interesting to note that the traditional elitist systems of middle and south of Europe and the previously well-praised dual systems of the German speaking countries and traditions, were no longer able to correctly qualitatively, if not quantitatively, correctly feed their respective labour market, without talking about the weak situation existing in some Anglo-Saxon countries. What struck many observers since mid-80's was the sometimes high percentage of pupils which did not acquire in time (and even later...) the basic skills required in any life, including of course, in the active (labour) life. And even if it was not so easy to prove it methodologically speaking, the educational systems were accused either to contribute in youth unemployment or not to be equipped to combat it.

Several hypotheses were advanced to try to explain such a situation. Firstly, the lack of a real culture of evaluation within the system was pinpointed. Both centralised and decentralised systems shared the same obstacle, even if, by definition, management traditions in decentralised systems were more open to the building of a true multidimensional assessment of the entire system. The more centralistic (mainly public) systems were more reluctant to go in such a direction, still feeling that tight central decisions and administrative controls were guaranteeing quality.

Secondly and closely linked to the above point, the lack of evaluation was also meaning that a true performance based management was impossible. Formal objectives, of a general nature, and not fed back by seriously based evaluation, cannot be concretised in a management by objectives at the level of the responsible institution and/or local authorities. Thirdly, the overall societal changes outlined in the first part were not rapidly taken into consideration to revise the curriculum, either for ideological reasons and for preserving education/schooling from outside influence or because of the always weak effort of educational research and development activities and innovation strategies. Hence, too slow curriculum development increased the mismatch between school outcomes and societal needs, whatever effort was made to reinforce the relationships between academic and more vocationally oriented education. It is worth noting that such a slow process had also negative effects in a sector which was supposed to be preserved from such a trend through an optimal alternation between education and work : the dual system. Contrary to the earlier situation, such a mode of apprenticeship no longer protect against unemployment and was sometimes too slow to modify content and learning methods in certain and new branches of activity.

ii. Vocational education and lifelong learning

Then, one of the major issue has been the place of Vocational Educational and Training (VET) in the overall curriculum. If, as indicated above, the dual system had no longer the very positive effects it earlier provided, it meant that the place and role

of VET within the entire system had to be reascertained. In elitist systems, entirely based on positive achievements in academic fields, and therefore negative choice as an entrance basis in VET, there was a growing risk of being unable to “produce”, in quantity and quality, the human resources required by societal developments. And we know that to cope with this issue, these systems had, in fact, to provide more academic/general education in VET, but in a more subtle way that just superposing academic and vocational contents in an education and training sector led to isolation of the rest of the system. What curriculum development and education R&D were saying is that more interdisciplinarity was needed, together with new skills in terms of communication and human behaviour. Until now, only Scandinavian countries made a strong effort to give VET streams an equal role to academic streams in school education, while offering in tertiary education a real alternative to University education in developing polytechnics delivering VET diplomas at higher education, in an efficient way, to both young students and adults.

As already mentioned, the strong adult education tradition in Scandinavian countries helped in the development of life-long learning in these countries after the relative failure of restructuring the overall system in the 70's and 80's on the basis of the earlier concept of recurrent education. But as Eurydice surveys, in the beginning of the 90's have shown, if the majority of the European countries backed the LLL concept launched by the Commission and other international bodies, the real political effort of these countries, only concerned adult education or the adult segment of the LLL. We have, in fact, back to the earlier issue of curriculum development. As already mentioned (Laderrière, 2002: 181-189), there will be no real LLL permeating the whole life-span, if initial education and training are not preparing the individuals to positively and regularly come back to learning experiences throughout their entire life. For the time being those having failed at school and therefore much in need of further education are firmly resisting it, because of their earlier negative learning experiences. Hence the need to reshape completely the initial content and learning methods to possibly articulate such learning sequences with further sequences, as requested. Apart from the usual resistance of a professional milieu which rarely thought about the way the education they provided was used by individuals in real life, co-ordinating and practically integrating initial and further education in a life-long perspective is a true cultural revolution for the majority of the human resources acting in education. Except in a very few countries, initial education and diploma are still framing individual career. It therefore means that such major changes in the educational sphere will only be possible if parallel changes occur in social life and employment.

An interesting example of maintaining the “status quo” has recently been offered by a state of the art of career guidance emerging from a common survey of OECD and the European Commission (OECD, 2003 : 39-57). As this issue is tackled during the Conference, we will just recall that its mission is widening to become part of LLL and, that, therefore, it plays a key role in helping labour markets work and education systems meet their goals. Current innovations seem rather meagre against current and likely future needs and if we compare current outcomes with a previous appraisal of the situation in the European Union (Leclecq, 1997: 113-119). No real progress was made in the direction of the intended upheaval. And this is not a surprise, as a real renewed career guidance system can only be settled at the crossroads of initial and further education and training throughout life and curriculum development, in conjunction with the acquisition of career management skills.

It should nevertheless be underlined that the very weak progress in the above field has not delayed the development of two important innovations. The first one is the full recognition of credits acquired, generally by adults, through non-formal and informal learning, including through the growing sectors of distance learning or experiential learning, and usable for transfert purposes. The progress made above is permitted thanks to a second innovation (Colardyn, 1996: 23-63). Unequally developed according to countries and their specific values, it deals with the establishment of an agreed list, by Ministries of Education, Ministries of Labour or equivalent and social partners, of different standards, including, of course, vocational/professional elements, which should be attained by any type of learner. But as already mentioned about the current state of LLL, it is again a demonstration that, for the time being, important decisions are mainly concerning the adult segment.

If we summarise, in a positive, sense, the major weaknesses referred to above, we could say that education and training systems could help in sustaining current and likely future development in employment, only if they are able to:

- Guarantee the acquisition of basic skills and quality education in general, through permanent evaluation, management by objectives and curriculum development;
- Ensuring the right place of VET in a perspective of LLL, through the evolving role of VET, the feedback of LLL on initial education, the renewal of career guidance, the deepening of credit recognition and the establishment of a national list of standards.

III. Can education and employment get closer?

Even if we have not specifically focused on practical close linkages between education and training and employment in the above, we should remember that some of the mentioned strategies and logistics could not be achieved without such closer links. But is it sufficient to ensure a fair transition from education to employment? Even if we all agree that these two major functions in society should remain separated as their aims are different, their joint contribution to individual and society development could call for a kind of “common spirit” which could make their relationships easier. Our hypothesis is that Europe, if not developed countries in general are strongly divided on this issue. A minority group, mainly composed of two groups, the Anglo-Saxon one and the Scandinavian one, has gone further in trying to retain in the daily functioning of their education and training systems, managerial elements, not exactly similar to what exist in the business sphere, but sharing certain values, aims and strategies permitting contacts, dialogues and exchanges. We will try to outline some trends in this direction.

Firstly, the decentralisation process in society has reached the educational systems. Of course, the power is developed through quite different forms according to national values and experiences, from a true transfer of power to the French model of “deconcentration” (i.e.: giving more leeway to the local units of the central administration). There is still a debate about to what institution any decision-making process should be devolved. Will it be to local authorities or directly to school or both of them, it being understood that national authorities will continue to exercise an overall framing and follow-up of the systems? Unhappily, there is a lack of serious assessment of the various outcomes of these decentralisation policies. Major changes are recorded in several developed countries, but it will be indispensable to obtain a comparative analysis of the results of measures which started to be implemented

fifteen years ago. By and large, business work and the relevant employment policies are generally decentralised and educational changes in this field could help in establishing an active dialogue. Let think of alternative modes of alternation between education and work or of local dialogues on curriculum adjustments.

Secondly, the decentralisation process in education modifies the overall management of the school institution at all levels. We already know that adult education and its various forms was decentralised by necessity of responding to local needs, if not by socio-cultural traditions. Initial education institutions, some of them being involved in adult education, now consider such experiences and retain some of their characteristics. It generally means, in conjunction with the emerging autonomy and responsibility (accountability), the following features:

- The participatory preparation of a school plan, divided in short, mid- and long term perspectives and in chapters detailing objectif, means and strategies of implementation for both qualitative and quantitative purposes;
- As it was already referred to above, a management by objectives, piloted by a true school leader team (Stegö, Gielen, Glatter, Hord, 1988), based on permanent multidimensional evaluation of outcomes, articulating both self and outside evaluation, to ensure that the educational training systems respond to needs at any level of its management structures;
- The systematic development of a partnership policy going beyond the internal mobilisation of major actors of school life (teachers, pupils/students/parents, etc.), interesting various and alternative stakeholders according to the aim of the education and training institutions, such as representatives of the various local authorities, of the business and trade-union world, of socio-cultural associations and interested community groups.

There is no need to recall that various firms and administrations functions in the same spirit to achieve their particular goals.

Thirdly and closely linked to the above, we should mention the slow but fundamental modifications affecting the management of human resources in education (Laderrière, 2004). The above developments cannot be fully implemented if the teaching and non-teaching bodies are not acquiring a new so-called “open professionalism” (Laderrière, 2004). Let us concentrate only on the teaching force to understand what is at stake. The following list of tasks being characteristic of such an professionalism is of course non-exhaustive:

- Education that is focused on pupils’ individual and group learning, in a context of greater attention to children’s overall development.
- In close co-operation with the school’s staff, that is the tasks of “teaching teams”:
 - An ability to identify pupils’ needs and learning problems;
 - Determining the specific teaching objectives of the school’s programmes, analysis of these and, on this basis, the possible revision of these objectives;
 - Improvement or adjustment of teaching programmes or methods in a wider action-research context;
 - Assessment of results.
- Co-operation with parents, representatives of the local community, those responsible for other socio-cultural activities, and so forth: in order words, the duties of the “educational team”.
- On-going dialogue with pupils, not only for the sake of knowing them better and providing individual advice, but also in order to present the teaching programme to them clearly and to discuss it with them.

- Participation in on-going teacher activities, both as trainers and trainees.
- Participation in school planning and management, and coming forward with opinions about the development of the school system in general, on the basis of experience acquired in carrying out the tasks listed above.

This kind of development assumes that teachers, particularly secondary school teachers, are not specialists in one or several subjects, but are specialists in the teaching methodology connected with this (or these) subject(s), in the specific context of the level or type of school to which they have been appointed, in line with various teaching and learning strategies. This implies that teachers have mastered the basics of their specialised subject(s) and the knowledge and skills to be taught in that subject, but specialise in the ways and means of conveying that knowledge and those skills.

It is not necessary to elaborate very long on the notion of “open professionalism” mirrored by the listing of the above tasks. One considered that the need to drop the mostly negative features of traditional professionalism, i.e. relative authoritarian relationship with the clientele, narrow management of the profession, almost absolute freedom of initiative, etc. called for a redefinition of professionalism in education. That is to say that the teacher could develop, implement and modify, if need be, the appropriate teaching/learning strategies by relying on norms framing a permanent listening dialogue, co-operation and information/training. It also means to break with the “pedagogical individualism” and to systematise a scientific approach of the teaching practice for both individual teacher but also for team teaching. It should therefore concern the permanent or non-permanent teams, the subject matter or pluridisciplinary departments and the professional networks.

In offering teachers acting alone or in team an authority based on more scientific approaches, this identity make them – and the school – more self-sufficient in their permanent tasks of adapting education to the needs of pupils and society. The autonomy is indeed – with a high level qualification – one of the features of a recognised professionalism. The autonomy can help the teacher, when he or she judiciously mobilise existing support structures (pedagogical advisers, inspectors, pedagogical centers, R&D activities, etc.) to better appreciate proposed innovations and implementation measures in conjunction with the specific context of his or her school and of the surrounding community. Such an emphasis on support structures fully reinforces the idea of “opening” in the sense that a “true professional” is an individual which seeks – possibly outside its own institution – for alternative solutions to the problems to which he or she is faced with.

A growing professionalism of this type cannot be separated from a coherent teacher policy which should lead to a status clearly reflecting the professional identity illustrated by the tasks mentioned above. Integrating recruitment, training, working conditions and socio-economic status in formulating, decision-making and implementing relevant actions is very difficult politically speaking. The emergence of this “open professionalism” calls for a broader interdepartmental co-operation in decision-making. Hence, a permanent dialogue – if not the destruction of impenetrable barriers between a vast number of decision-making bodies – is required to avoid the persistence of various economic, juridical, administrative, etc. obstacles going directly against a necessarily progressive implementation of such a policy. That is to say, here as in other policies, short or mid-term consideration should not hinder a long term vision which would go in the direction outlined above.

In as much as the conditions for an evolution towards a real and new professionalism are closely intricated, and, as it was expressed earlier on, is a matter for a strict

coherence of the policies, strategies and procedures, many obstacles remain. They are indeed tackled by the various industrialised countries in different orders and with a varied intensity and unequal results. We know that it is a very complicated task. The business and administration sectors have not yet succeeded to implement fully and positively such human resource strategies. Nevertheless educational efforts in this direction could, also, favour a clearer dialogue between education and employment by using similar concepts and exchanging experiences which could be of interest for both of them. A recent example concerning teacher training policy seems to back such approach (Laderrière, 2003: 29-48).

Fourthly and lastly, one major change which should definitively affect education systems refers to their reform strategy. As resented in detail as a conclusion of a Council of Europe symposium in Prague at the end of 1999 (Laderrière, 2000: 25-39), it could of course appear a bit far from what is generally done in the field of employment where the main actors are generally private. But even if the management of an education system has to do with a key social sector mostly depending from public decisions and means, overall improvements in the way it could be regulated are of high interest for all sectors in society that it is feeding with its “knowledge production”, including, of course, the most important of them: employment. Let say that there was an agreement that the concept of reform should be reformulated, based on societal and educational observation, analysis and forecasting. No real changes would really occur without research, development and innovation tools. It meant that reform projects should be prepared, disseminated and generalised very carefully in trying to get the larger consensus as possible. It was than agreed upon that the monitoring of the change should be based on systematic evaluation as already mentioned, but also on the development of quite varied support structures (Laderrière, 2001: 81-92) designed to adapting the operational framework in schools.

Conclusion

We know since a very long time that school is not an enterprise (Laval, 2003). But because of the scandalous lack of educational R&D, to regularly nourish required changes in the system (Laderrière, 1999: 29-31), we are not clear about the major modifications to implement, including those which could smooth the transition between education and employment. Of course, this serious gap between education and business concerning R&D and its use to improve both respective services and products is one of the reasons why the relationships between the two sectors are often conflicting at the expense of the individuals and the society. The two sectors gets sometimes closer for what we can call a bad reason, i.e. the fact that educational institutions, to cope with changes, just import business management methods in front of an R&D desert in this field. Nevertheless part II and III above selected new and on-going changes, unhappily sometimes in a minority of countries. We should therefore be less pessimistic than the current situation seems to show.

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