

THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND EDUCATION

# Selling Out Education

## National Qualifications Frameworks and the Neglect of Knowledge

Stephanie Allais



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# **Selling Out Education**

## **The Knowledge Economy and Education**

Volume 8

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The series is particularly aimed at researchers, policymakers, practitioners and students who wish to read texts and engage with researchers who call into question the current conventional wisdom that the knowledge economy is a new global reality to which all individuals and societies must adjust, and that lifelong learning is the strategy to secure such an adjustment. The series hopes to stimulate debate amongst this diverse audience by publishing books that: (i) articulate alternative visions of the relation between education and the knowledge economy; (ii) offer new insights into the extent, modes, and effectiveness of people's acquisition of knowledge and skill in the new circumstances that they face in the developed and developing world, (iii) and suggest how changes in both work conditions and curriculum and pedagogy can led to new relations between work and education.

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**Stephanie Allais**

*University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa*



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This book raises fundamental questions about National Qualifications Frameworks which have been adopted in many countries. This penetrating analysis raises fundamental questions about the relationships between these frameworks and the place of knowledge in the curriculum. The issues that Dr Allais raises should be of fundamental concern to all educational policy makers, academics and teachers. It is a book that should be read. - **Hugh Lauder, Professor of Education and Political Economy, University of Bath, Editor of *Journal of Education and Work* and co-author of *The Global Auction : The Broken Promises of Education, Jobs and Incomes*.**

This book is original in both theoretical and policy terms and brings together an impressive range of data on qualifications reform in developed and developing countries. For researchers it offers a critical examination of the link between the misplaced focus on 'learning outcomes' and the totally unrealistic claims for National Qualification Frameworks. At the same time it is the first attempt to bring together a critical political economy and a realist sociology of knowledge in a broader based social theory. For policy makers, it not only provides a trenchant critique of qualification-led reforms, but provides a serious and practical alternative strategy based on 'institution building' and a knowledge-led approach to the curriculum of particular relevance to developing countries. - **Michael Young, Emeritus Professor of Education, Institute of Education, University of London**



To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society. For the alleged commodity 'labour power' cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity. In disposing of man's labour power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity 'man' attached to that tag. Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime and starvation. Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighbourhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed. Finally, the market administration of purchasing power would periodically liquidate business enterprise, for shortages and surfeits of money would prove as disastrous to business as floods and droughts in primitive society. *Polanyi, The Great Transformation, p. 73*

A Moderate

His Holiness the Pope says the sun goes around the earth  
while the earth goes round the sun, say extremists in the north.  
In a war of propaganda, no one says what he means  
I think, the Truth, as usual, lies somewhere in between.

*Michael Rosen. Mind the Gap. 1992.  
Scholastic Publications. London*



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I dedicate this book to my little ones, Emma Wamucii and Joanna Muthoni Morgan-Allais.

## **INTRODUCTION: FIRST AS FARCE, THEN AS TRAGEDY....**

Karl Marx famously said, “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”<sup>1</sup>

Fads in education reform also repeat themselves, but sometimes, in a reversal of Marx’s aphorism, first as farce, then as tragedy. In this book I argue that many reform fads start out in rich countries as farces. But they have tragic consequences when they are implemented in poorer countries, often with the assistance of ‘experts’ from the richer countries. This book examines a particular manifestation of this depressing cycle.

My object of analysis is the development of learning outcomes and national qualifications frameworks, a reform trend that has rapidly gained international momentum.

I demonstrate that, far from being beneficial, outcomes-based qualifications frameworks are at best a waste of time and resources, and at worst destructive of education systems. Whereas in developed countries strong education institutions, traditions, and professionals may mask the problems of outcomes-based qualifications, this masking does not take place in poor countries where education systems and institutions are weak, and so the problems are clearly exposed. The experiences of developing countries can thus shed light on the key practical and conceptual problems of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks in both developed and developing countries.

My primary aim in writing this book is not, however, to convince people that investing time and other resources in the creation of learning outcomes and national qualifications frameworks is misguided. My primary aim is to convince educationalists about the value of organized bodies of knowledge, and that a primary role of education is assisting learners to acquire this knowledge; consequently, bodies of knowledge should be the starting point of curriculum design. This argument needs to be made because many of us, in the past and present, have abandoned or neglected organized bodies of knowledge in education. We have aimed to recreate the everyday world in the curriculum in the hope of making education more accessible to learners; we have over-emphasized competence and skills at the expense of knowledge; we have over-emphasized the social construction of knowledge at the expense of any sense that there are bodies of knowledge that are worth acquiring and that give us real insight into the natural and social world; or we have over-emphasized the extent to which the curriculum expresses ruling class ideology. There have been, and continue to be, valid reasons for all of these stances of educational reformers. Traditional curricula *do* need to be reformed, they *do* reflect dominant ideologies in various ways—although exactly *how* they do this is not straightforward and is

much neglected by educational researchers—and education systems *have* failed many young people. But, I suggest that while the aim of educationalists has been to empower learners, particularly those learners who have not succeeded in formal education, the marginalization of knowledge has had the opposite effect, and has had negative consequences for individuals and society, particularly for poor learners, and learners in poor countries.

My experiences in education in South Africa have offered a particularly clear lens on the conundrums of curriculum reform and debates about the role of knowledge.

The 1990s in South Africa were a heady time of possibility. We had overthrown apartheid, the most notorious system of racial oppression ever known, and we felt we could do anything. Many serious problems faced the new nation. Optimistic in what we believed to be a unique opportunity to create things anew, to build a new society, to make real and meaningful changes, we responded with a flurry of policy development.

I was a student activist in the early 1990s, before the democratic elections. As students we were involved in developing education policy in what was known as the mass democratic movement, broadly aligned to the African National Congress. There was excitement in the air, and a sense that we could develop new education policies that would unite our divided nation, overcome inequalities, and forge a prosperous new society. We were going to ensure redress for people who had been denied access to education. We would increase access to education, and improve education for the majority of the population. This meant transforming apartheid education institutions and apartheid curricula, which, particularly in the school system, had been authoritarian, prescriptive, and, obviously, had taught about the world from the perspective of the apartheid state and the perceived interests of the white population. We would ensure that workers could have their skills recognized, to open up possibilities for promotion, and we would ensure more training for workers.

The mass democratic movement had a tradition of robust and lively debate and discussion, and although many ideas for new education policies were brought back from study tours, visits, or the experiences of exiles, we believed that we were forging something unique and powerfully South African. After a brief stint teaching at a high school, I went to work for a trade union as the education officer. The union movement was also involved in education policy development, mainly focused on a system to recognize and improve workers' skills, which also promised to change our economy, and overturn the legacy of apartheid education. In particular the union movement was influenced by international counterparts who argued that a prosperous future could be achieved through an industrial compact between labour, the state and business, and that improving education of the workforce could increase productivity and therefore general prosperity, at the same time as increasing workers' autonomy in the workplace.

Some years later, first while working for a non-governmental organization in education and later for a government regulatory body, I started developing a profound sense that, despite our good intentions, we had somehow got things very wrong.

I was increasingly perturbed by the ideas of learning outcomes and the national qualifications framework, which, together, were key to the educational reform agenda. I started investigating the origins of these ideas more critically, and was surprised to find an unlikely alliance of trade union and business representatives, both of whom had brought ideas back from study tours of Australia and New Zealand. What could underlie this unusual friendship? Was it proof that we could build a society in everyone's interest, that the class and racial conflicts of the past could be overcome? This did not seem impossible at the time, given the powerful imagery of the rainbow nation, as well as the international influence of post-Fordist ideas and 'third way' politics. It seemed unlikely, however, and the more I investigated the education policies which emerged, the more it seemed to me that something valuable and important about education systems was being dismissed and undermined. I began to perceive that not just the national qualifications framework and outcomes-based education, but a whole approach to educational reform that styled itself as 'progressive', and claimed to be emancipatory, was likely to make things worse, not better, particularly for poor people.

I thought, though, that this was a problem peculiar to South Africa. Of course I read about similar problems in other countries, and noticed that in the United Kingdom and New Zealand these problems seemed very like our own. I never imagined, however, that ten years later, qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes would be spreading around the world like wildfire, into well over 100 countries. And until I conducted a comparative study of qualifications frameworks in 16 countries for the International Labour Organization, I did not imagine that in country after country, similar problems would manifest themselves. What intrigued me were the similar theoretical concerns about the relationships between knowledge, work, qualifications, and the economy, which surfaced in this study of qualifications frameworks (Allais, 2010b), cutting across national, educational, political, and economic debates.

In South Africa in the early 1990s, we who worked in education, as well as many who didn't, seemed to believe that education could work miracles in society. At the same time, we believed that almost everything about our existing education system was wrong, and needed to be completely changed. In this, we were not alone. Chapter 1 of this book looks at how, around the world, education has increasingly come to be seen as the solution to social and economic problems. At the same time, it is seen as the cause of many of these problems. This emphasis on the intertwining of education and economy explains the focus of policy makers on qualification reform and outcomes-based qualifications frameworks. Used in both education and work, qualifications are expected to provide a mechanism to mediate between these two spheres. Learning outcomes, it is claimed by their advocates, are the mechanism to ensure that qualifications improve relationships between education and work, make curricula better and more 'relevant' to the needs of the economy, provide learners with more choice and assist them to access education more easily, and increase the quality of education on offer. Learning outcomes are also presented as a key mechanism to

make education systems more learner centred. At a time when more and more is expected of education systems, and at the same time more and more criticisms are leveled at them, outcomes-based qualifications frameworks seem to have captured the moment, appearing to be a policy which addresses almost everyone's concerns. There is, however, little evidence that outcomes-based qualifications frameworks have achieved the goals claimed for them.

Why has this idea been attractive to many educationalists, including many progressive educationalists, as well as to policy makers around the world? My exploration of this phenomenon derives from a detailed tracking of attempts to implement outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, located in an analytical framework that draws on political economy as well as the sociology of knowledge.

In Chapter 2 I consider the educational ideas which have been drawn into the justifications for qualifications frameworks, and show that many of the ideas which are claimed as part of a 'new learning paradigm' in contemporary policy documents have a long history in educational debates and reform. I trace ideas about learning outcomes as well as different interpretations of the idea of learner centredness from the early twentieth century to the present. The common ground which often emerges between these sets of ideas is a degree of hostility to the idea of the acquisition of bodies of knowledge (which in schools take the form of subject areas) as the basis of the curriculum, and as a key purpose of education. Both approaches tend towards an anti-subject stance even when they explicitly claim to value knowledge, because they tend to reject or take insufficient account of the ways in which subjects are internally structured based on the bodies of knowledge from which they are derived; the boundaries between subjects; and the boundaries between subjects and everyday knowledge.

Having considered the history of the idea of learning outcomes and learner centredness in Chapter 2, I turn, in Chapter 3, to examine how these ideas became institutionalized in the reform of qualifications in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, in what became the models for many qualifications frameworks as well as competency-based approaches to vocational education throughout the world. The wider context in which this happened was the rise of neoliberalism in politics and the economy, affecting all areas of life and shaping policies in all fields. Neoliberal ideas about education (as well as other previous economic approaches to education) express similar ideas about knowledge to those discussed above: that subjects as defined by teachers or disciplinary experts in universities are not the best starting point for curriculum design, as they are outdated and irrelevant, and a cause of a 'mismatch' between the skills produced by education and training systems and those required by the labour market.

I show that with the growing influence of neoliberalism, criticisms of education institutions and subject-based curricula were harnessed to push through the marketization of education provision. Learning outcomes were introduced in the belief that they could at the same time ensure that curricula were more transparent and responsive to the needs of employers and learners, and that education was provided through more competitive and market-like mechanisms. Neoliberal public

sector reformers pushed for states to shift from providing public goods to regulating markets or quasi-markets through which services would be delivered. I show how outcomes-based qualifications frameworks fit with this logic as they are intended to operate as mechanisms for regulating and contracting provision of education. These reforms in Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand were not particularly successful, either in achieving their stated goals, or in gaining widespread acceptance. But this lack of success did not prevent them from being exported to poor countries.

What happened when these policies became a focus for reform in many poor countries—how they have affected, and are likely to affect, countries with weak education systems—is discussed in Chapter 4. The chapter focuses in detail on South Africa, as the country with the most advanced and most researched qualifications framework among poor and middle-income countries, and extends the analysis to other poor and middle-income countries introducing qualifications frameworks. The patterns which emerge in these countries are, in the main, similar to those discussed in richer countries; however, the problems that arise are far more serious. Firstly, in most instances the main achievement of qualification reform has been to develop many paper qualifications that are recorded on a ‘qualifications framework’ but are in fact never used, despite the involvement of industry representatives and other stakeholders in their development. Secondly, there is no evidence that such qualifications improve the capacity of state institutions to evaluate the quality of educational provision, nor indeed is there evidence that a regulatory state which places emphasis on the ‘quality assurance’ of different providers has increased the quantity or quality of provision. In some cases (particularly in South Africa) it may have decreased it. The waste that this leads to is a tragedy not just because of the scarce resources used up when there are a number of competing priorities, but also because many more serious educational priorities (such as strengthening the capacity of schools, colleges, and universities) are neglected. It is assumed that the introduction of an outcomes-based qualifications framework will enable providers to develop appropriate curricula, and state organizations to check up on them, thereby ensuring educational quality. This chapter concludes the overview and analysis of the main empirical research in this area. The following three chapters explore in greater depth the issues raised by outcomes-based qualifications frameworks.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the chimera of employer-specified competencies, and why they have not succeeded in increasing the take-up of vocational qualifications or in improving education/labour market relationships. I argue that outcomes-based qualifications frameworks and competency-based training reforms are more likely to be a symptom of weak relationships between education and labour markets than a way of strengthening such relationships. Much current qualification reform attempts to change the relationship between education systems and labour markets by changing aspects of education such as curriculum and assessment without changing the labour market and the economy. This ignores the extent to which developments in education will always be affected by, and so must be understood within, the context in which they exist. Differences in industrial relations, welfare systems and

social policy, income distribution, and production strategies are major factors in determining the shape of this development, and are a major factor in accounting for differences between national systems of vocational education and training. The chapter concludes with a brief critique of the claim that learning outcomes improve labour mobility.

In Chapter 6 I focus on the role that is claimed for learning outcomes in *curriculum* reform. The chapter starts by examining the explicit and implicit epistemological stance behind outcomes-based qualification frameworks. Outcomes-based qualification frameworks are premised on the idea that any ‘bit’ of knowledge can be selected, as long as it leads to the outcomes or competences required by employers. This resonates with much educational thinking, which argues that the selection of curriculum knowledge should primarily be driven by the interests of learners. Knowledge is viewed as information or facts—something that can be broken into little bits which can be selected and combined at will. This implicitly rejects or ignores the conceptual relations within and between bodies of knowledge. The bodies of knowledge which have formed the basis of most education systems, despite various efforts to change this, are not arbitrary selections of facts which can be acquired in arbitrary orders. They are organized in conceptual and hierarchical relationships. This is what gives them explanatory and conceptual power, enabling reflection and abstraction, and the transcending of the immediate contexts. The outcomes approach leads to curricula that are narrowly specified bits of information, making curriculum coherence impossible. I demonstrate further how these problems shed light on broader debates about the curriculum and the purpose of education. While many learners fail to master subject-based curricula, and the content of many syllabuses is influenced by dominant ideologies, the learning outcomes-approach does not offer a viable alternative.

Chapter 7 explores further the problem of starting with learning outcomes when thinking about education. It starts by demonstrating that outcomes-based qualifications frameworks have a similar logic to neoclassical economics—they are built on the notion of rational individuals making rational choices about investments in ‘human capital’, as well as notions of market imperfections due to information asymmetries. By specifying learning outcomes, qualifications frameworks are supposed to improve information in what policy makers see as the ‘learning market’, thereby improving individual choices, and making it easier for governments to regulate and support markets to supply education and training. Using the tools of neoclassical economics to analyze society, as if society were nothing but the market, ignores everything that other disciplines have learnt over time about what is specific to different spheres of society (to say nothing of the problems with neoclassical economics even when it is focused only on the market and the economy). What is particularly interesting is how the *educational* ideas like learner centredness and learner selected outcomes which are invoked in association with outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, and which have often been seen as progressive,

empowering, or anti-elitist by educationalists, have commonalities with the tools of analysis of neoclassical economics.

Chapter 8 returns briefly to specific cases, looking at some developments in the design and implementation of qualifications frameworks, particularly in Europe, and considers whether they offer a way out of the problems discussed earlier in the book. Some researchers suggest that while there are problems with the competency-based training model, or a strong learning outcomes model, there may be other successful ways of designing qualifications frameworks. Considering available evidence for the achievements of qualifications frameworks, I argue that while some frameworks *seem* to have achieved *some* successes, or at least, to have not caused much conflict, this is mainly because they do not attempt to achieve the kinds of claims made by the advocates of qualifications frameworks. At most, they attempt to make very modest contributions to achieving these claims. In theory, qualifications frameworks could be modest reforms which describe existing education and training systems, and try to make the relationships between different sorts of qualifications a bit more explicit. There is some evidence that qualifications frameworks could play these roles. But if this is all they are, qualifications frameworks cannot be the grand solution to problems in education systems that they are claimed to be—advocates of qualifications frameworks suggest that they are radical reform mechanisms which can change curricula, the delivery of education, and the relationships between education systems and labour markets. The chapter speculates on the current trajectory of qualifications frameworks and suggests that while in some developed countries they may lead to modest educational reforms, the increasing spread of qualifications frameworks could be indicative of the growing liberalization of labour markets and economies, which may be detrimental to education systems in the long term.

Three main arguments are made across these eight chapters, drawn from my analysis of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks internationally.

The first is that the economy (and more specifically the market) has come to be seen as a model for education. Education is understood within a neoclassical economic framework in which individual free agents conduct sensible transactions with each other in their own self-interest. This affects how delivery of education and the curriculum are thought about, as well as notions of the role of education in society, particularly from a policy point of view. I argue that the goals claimed for education in much policy rhetoric today are misguided and unrealistic, and reflect a lack of willingness to tackle structural economic and political problems; at the same time, they have considerable negative consequences for individuals and education systems.

The second arguments follows from the first: increasingly education is seen as the solution to economic problems. Further, it is seen as something individuals must purchase, and institutions must sell. Both of these developments correspond with the rise of neoliberalism. The rolling back of welfare states in the developed world and the denial of welfare in poor countries has decreased public provision of education at the same time as positioning education as the only alternative to poverty. This has led, in many countries in the world, to individuals being seen as

responsible for collective and individual welfare. This does not seem to be changing. While neoliberalism as a theory of economic growth has lost plausibility since the economic crisis of 2008, it seems to remain influential as an ideology that dominates education policy.

The third argument concerns the curious agreement between, on the one hand, ideas that have historically been influential in education reform, and which have generally been supported by those who see themselves as leftwing or progressive, and on the other hand, education policies that derive from neoliberalism. Specifically, much educational thinking has opposed the idea of the acquisition of bodies of knowledge as one of the main purposes of education and of subjects as the starting point of the curriculum. This has been associated with a conflation of curriculum and pedagogy which has run through much educational thought over the past century: many educationalists have confused *how* we teach with *what* we teach, and have suggested that it is learners who should decide what they should learn. This has had the effect making education seen as a malleable activity, open to be defined by anyone. If learners can choose what they should learn, so can employers, or other interest groups in society. Policy makers believe they can redefine education to fit the needs of the moment—frequently, to solve economic problems. The neglect and in some cases abandonment of bodies of knowledge and subjects (which has occurred to different degrees in different countries and different parts of education systems, as is explored in this book) means that education can be seen as a ‘generic service’, making it easier to treat it as a mere commodity to be delivered on the market by the most competitive provider. At the same time, people are denied access to bodies of knowledge which could enable them to better understand, critique, and challenge their current circumstances.

The idea that curricula should not be primarily aimed at the acquisition of bodies of knowledge, nor influenced and constrained by the structure of bodies of knowledge; the idea that knowledge can be acquired anywhere, whether in education institutions or the course of everyday life, and more extreme ideas like ‘deschooling’, produce fantasies about learning unconstrained by institutions, and individuals free to choose from a wide range of learning possibilities. This is very similar to the free market fantasy about education. Outcomes-based qualifications frameworks resonate with both sets of ideas. The progressivist fantasy gives moral support to the free market fantasy, and enables a labelling of opponents as conservatives. What neither sets of fantasies take into account is, firstly, what the necessary conditions are for the acquisition of knowledge, and secondly, how and why institutions emerge to enable knowledge acquisition, and how they can be sustained, particularly in poor countries.

I turn in the final chapter to a consideration of ideas which offer alternatives for thinking about reforming education systems. I do not offer an alternative policy that can achieve all the goals which qualifications frameworks have failed to achieve. Many of these goals are unrealistic, or based on misdiagnoses of problems, and some may be problematic goals. It is also unrealistic to expect one policy mechanism to be a ‘magic bullet’. This does not mean that none of the goals of qualifications

frameworks can be achieved at all—there may be other ways of making education systems more flexible to learners, for example, and ways need to be found to assist, say, admissions tutors in understanding qualifications from other countries. I explore some possibilities. But any alternative education policies need to start from the right place—with clearer ideas about what distinguishes formal education from other human activities, and what gives it intrinsic value, as well as what its limitations are, and what it cannot achieve. I suggest that thinking about the acquisition of significant bodies of knowledge is a good starting point for this endeavor.

These bodies of knowledge allow us to account for and explain the natural and social world in systematic ways as well as to participate in and reflect on key human experiences such as the literary, visual, or musical. At its best, this is what the traditional curriculum has done. But we also need curricula which, whilst preserving some subject areas of traditional curricula, challenge presumptions and prejudices, and enable us to go beyond the idea of a ‘given’ curriculum for all time, with subjects and knowledge within subjects based simply on what has always been taught. A focus on the knowledge itself, its intrinsic characteristics and values, as well as on how and by whom it is developed, can assist. Such a focus is a good starting point for thinking more clearly about reforming curricula, educational delivery, the intrinsic value of education, and the role of education in society, as well as in the world of work and in the economy.

NOTE

- <sup>1.</sup> The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Karl Marx. 1852



## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Many different policy interventions seem to go by the same name. Also, the same terminology is often used for very different policies. This leaves me in the difficult position of deciding what terms to use. In my experience in debating education policy, critics either suggest that I am lumping things together that are different, or they distance their favourite policy from those that I am criticizing by assigning it a different label.

National qualifications frameworks, for example, are different policy interventions in different countries, as will be explored later. There are also considerable differences in understandings of the terms ‘learning outcomes’, ‘competences’, and ‘skills’ in different countries and contexts (see, for example, Bohlinger, 2007; Brockmann, Clarke, & Winch, 2008; for a discussion of different uses across European countries). This partly reflects difficulties in translation between different languages and is partly because terms like outcomes always have to be understood in terms of the national traditions in which they are located. Various authors point out the complexity of the notion of ‘competence’ (Hyland, 1994). Linda Clarke and Anneke Westerhuis (2011), for example, make it clear that while European countries such as France and Germany use terms with similar meanings to outcomes and competences, they are seldom considered outside of the context of a curriculum. This is substantially different to both the use of the word ‘competence’ in competence-based training, and the most common use of the term ‘learning outcomes’, as both are explicitly separated from, not embedded in, curricula. There is also a difference between a notion of competence in relation to nationally agreed and recognized occupations (Netherlands, France, Germany) or competence as job-specific requirements (England) (Brockmann, Clarke, Winch, *et al.*, 2011) as the former tend to be much broader. In the former sense, competence has been embedded and interpreted in vocational education systems for some time. Georg Hanf (2011), for example, argues that the idea of ‘kompetenz’ was built into the German system from the start. The word ‘skill’ is sometimes used as a component of both competence and learning outcome, but its own meaning varies substantially, meaning anything from narrowly defined tasks requiring manipulation and hand-eye coordination, to activities with substantial intellectual and social elements (Brockmann, Clarke, Winch, *et al.*, 2011).

Even within the narrower notion of outcomes or competencies developed separately from curricula, some use terms like ‘competencies’ and ‘outcomes’ interchangeably, while others argue that ‘competencies’ are a sub-set of ‘outcomes’. Others even distinguish between ‘competencies’, ‘competences’, and ‘competency’. Brockmann *et al.* (2011) distinguish between competency and competence, but point out that the European Qualifications Framework uses the word ‘competence’ to refer to both of their meanings, and argue that the way it is used favours the English conception, which is embedded in a notion of a managerial hierarchy, rather than

the German notion of an autonomous and responsible worker. Competencies are also sometimes prefixed with the words ‘generic’ or ‘key’. Recently, some literature which uses the idea of ‘capabilities’ seems to use it to mean much the same as ‘competences’.

Not only are the same words used for different things, but different terms are used for what seem to be the same things. Sometimes, policy makers seem to change from one term to another to signal a policy shift or hoped for shift. In many cases, authors or policy makers seem to attempt to use a different term to distance themselves from an approach with which they disagree or which is seen to have failed. For example, in post-apartheid South Africa reformers took up the flag for ‘learning outcomes’, but were highly critical of ‘competencies’, seeing them as narrow and behaviourist. The adoption of the term ‘outcomes’ was intended to signal that the South African approach was broader. But the policy mechanisms produced were for all intents and purposes the same as the training packages that are part of the competency-based training system in Australia. In many countries there has been a continual series of slightly different types of competence or outcome specifications, often with different names. Structures too have continually altering names and mandates, so that, for example, in Bangladesh the National Council for Skills Development and Training has been replaced by the National Skills Development Council. While to those involved differences between terms may be significant, this area of policy is so laden with jargon that it tends to be opaque and tedious to outsiders, contributing perhaps to a lack of critical engagement in this area of policy. This is aggravated by the way in which terms that have a general usage in everyday language, such as ‘standards’, are recruited with very specific technical definitions and applications. For example, Stewart and Sambrook (1995, p. 97) argue that

Statements of *competence* which form the basis of NVQs [national vocational qualifications] consist of specifications of occupational standards. The concepts of *competence* and *standards* appear to become synonymous in practice as illustrated by the following quote: ‘An element of competence, with its performance criteria and range statement, constitutes a standard’ (Mansfield, 1991:14).

‘Competence-based training’ (sometimes competency-based training) is a phenomenon specific to the reform of vocational education. ‘Outcomes’ is often contrasted with this, seen as a broader and more general term, not limited to the requirements of workplaces, and expressing the broader goals of education in general. Many people say that competency-based training has nothing to do with outcomes-based education. They are right and wrong—different policies in different countries and at different times always have differences.

Something else that makes terms like ‘outcomes-based’ and ‘learner-centred’ difficult to deal with is that the terms both contain value-judgements and implied criticism of any alternative—which is clearly either not at all concerned with outcomes (nonsensical) or disregards learners (unacceptable). Some notion of aims

or objectives, and some concern for learners, is inherent to any educational process, but invoking these terms in association with specific policy reforms seems to imply that other policies have no regard for such matters.

There is no generally accepted or standardized use of these terms. Thus, while you may find in one policy document or analysis an attempt to distinguish between these various terms, in another the same term will be used in a different way. This is complicated by the fact that the concept of a competency or outcomes-based education system is an evolving idea, the details (and terminology) of which are constantly changing (Spren, 2001). Michael Young (2009b) argues that the terms ‘learning outcomes’ and ‘competences’ have become almost synonymous in recent policy documents, partly because they are both expressions of the increasingly instrumental approach to education, in which emphasis is placed on the economic benefits of general, as well as vocational, education, and all education is judged in terms of potential benefits for the labour market and economy.

I do not want to develop my own definitions of each of these terms—an exercise which seems pointless as others will use them in different ways. Rather, I am attempting to draw attention to what are underlying and fundamental similarities in the ways in which learning outcomes, competencies, and competences are used in many policy reforms across the world today. Consequently, I will use the terms more-or-less interchangeably, except where referring to specific policy interventions which use one or the other. I argue that there is a broad and common trend—differently expressed in different countries, with different effects on the ground, but nonetheless common. The trend is attempting to describe activities, mainly in the workplace but sometimes also in the citizenry or family, and using these descriptors of activities as the basis of curriculum reform, as well as to serve various other goals of qualification reform. This is a trend which must be taken seriously. Finding specific examples on the ground which don’t entirely correspond with all aspects of the trend does not refute the fact that there is a trend.

The word ‘qualification’ also has different meanings in different countries and sometimes within the same country depending on whether it is used in relation to education systems or to labour markets. A traditional usage of the word ‘qualification’ relates to a formal means of signifying that someone has completed a prescribed process linked to an education or training programme offered in an educational or training institution. But where qualifications are linked to official statements that an individual has been accepted to practice in a certain area (such as a lawyer, plumber, or teacher), the term ‘qualification’ means something close to a ‘competence’ for a given occupational practice. Thus, Phillipe Méhaut (2011), for example, distinguishes between diplomas and qualifications, with the former associated with education systems and the latter with workplace requirements.

In relation to qualifications frameworks as well as outcomes-based qualification reforms, a slightly different use of the word ‘qualification’ has emerged. Here it is mainly used in reference to (or as a short-hand for) the sets of formal requirements needed for achieving awards. This usage is common in official policy documents

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relating to qualifications frameworks. In this usage, the ‘qualification’ is the statement of learning outcomes and associated requirements needed for awards. As outcomes-based qualifications are a key focus of my argument in this book, I will in most instances be using the word in this sense, unless indicated otherwise, or unless context clearly suggests otherwise.

## QUALIFICATIONS

### *Culture, Currency, Commodity*

What should be taught, to whom, how, and who should foot the bill? These questions underpin much debate and research in education, and my work is no exception. My particular interests are in the curriculum (what should be taught?); the organization of education (what kinds of institutions should offer what kinds of education, who should pay, and how?); and in the role of education in society (why do we need education?). These are not questions that have easy answers. They raise difficult issues concerning the nature of knowledge, how it is developed and acquired, the nature of society, the possible and likely roles education can play in societies and economies, and so on. They have become increasingly complex as more and more people have completed, or attempt to complete, higher and higher levels of formal education. Tackling them inevitably draws on a range of disciplines—at a minimum these include sociology, philosophy, politics, economics, and, of course, education.

But education policies are often not informed by any of these disciplines, or draw on them very loosely. As Wallis and Dollery (1999, p. 5) cited by Bob Jessup (2012, p. 62) argue,

Policy paradigms derive from theoretical paradigms but possess much less sophisticated and rigorous evaluations of the intellectual underpinnings of their conceptual frameworks. In essence, policy advisers differentiate policy paradigms from theoretical paradigms by screening out the ambiguities and blurring the fine distinctions characteristic of theoretical paradigms.

As education has taken centre stage in the minds of policy developers, governments, and people concerned with development, and as education has been increasingly touted as the solution to social and economic problems, education policies have become increasingly instrumental: what can people do with the education that they are getting? This is of concern to left and right-wing reformers alike, although the end points that they have in mind for education are different. Policy makers on both sides of the political spectrum often seem to believe that if they start from this question, education systems will be able to respond, producing according to societies' requirements, and alleviating societies' problems. When this fails, education *per se* is blamed, instead of misguided notions of what education is, and what it can do for individuals and societies. In this book I explore a recent example of this type of education reform: outcomes-based qualifications frameworks.

In this chapter, I discuss the international prevalence of the idea that education is the key to economic and social success, and the growing popularity of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks as one of the main policies intended to ensure that education solves economic and labour market problems. Advocates of learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks claim that these policies can reform education systems in various important ways. The claims can be boiled down to three key areas: improving relationships between education systems and labour markets; reforming curricula, pedagogy, and assessment; and assisting governments to improve the quality and quantity of education available. Over 120 countries are currently reported as developing or implementing outcomes-based qualifications frameworks (Keevy, Chakroun, & Deij, 2011). This is an extraordinary development, considering that the first qualifications frameworks were launched at most only 20 years ago, and that there is little empirical evidence that they can achieve their goals.

I explain the context in which these policies have become popular with governments: education has taken on ever-greater prominence, touted as the solution to individual, social, and economic problems. Because of this, more and more has been expected of education systems, leading to reforms that are both utilitarian and unrealistic, as well as to ever increasing criticisms of the (inevitable) failures of education systems. I then explore why qualifications in particular have become the focus of policy reform, and why governments and policy makers have come to assume, without any theoretical grounding or empirical evidence, that qualifications can be used as instruments to influence education systems. This is followed by an examination of the specific claims made about learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks. Finally, I discuss the little existing evidence for the claims made about outcomes-based qualifications frameworks. I argue that the available research evidence suggests not only that qualifications frameworks do not achieve their goals, but also that they have many negative effects on education systems. In the rest of the book I explore the underlying problems with this policy mechanism, and why it nevertheless seems to have been so seductive.

Why start from exploring a policy that I disagree with, instead of developing positive propositions about education and society? For one thing, it is important to explain precisely why and in what ways a policy is flawed, particularly if, as is the case with this one, the policy seems to have captured the imaginations of policy makers internationally. We need to study the policy carefully, both in terms of empirical evidence for and against it, and in terms of its conceptual soundness, considered not in its own terms (this particular policy has an internal logic that seems quite plausible) but in relation to broader bodies of knowledge about society, knowledge, and the economy. Questions about the purpose and role of education in society are not easy to answer, and equally difficult are more practical questions about the organization of education systems. Engaging carefully with the policies that dominate our education systems can assist in thinking about why education frequently doesn't do what is expected of it, what education cannot do, and, conversely, what it can do, and what the conditions of possibility are. My analysis of the problems leads to

ideas for alternatives: why thinking about the nature and importance of knowledge is a better starting point for thinking about the curriculum; why education systems should be collectively organized and funded; and why economic and social problems need to be tackled directly, and not through education policy.

#### ‘RELEVANT’ EDUCATION AS THE SOLUTION TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL PROBLEMS

Let’s consider first the expectations that policy makers have of education systems.

“A new grand narrative of the role of education has emerged on a truly global level”, argues political scientist Jurgen Enders (2010, p. 209). The essence of this grand narrative is, in the words of Tony Blair, former British Prime Minister, that “education is our best economic policy”. For poor and rich countries alike, education is described in policy documents as the route out of poverty for individuals. As Phil Brown, Andy Green, and Hugh Lauder (2001) demonstrate, it is argued increasingly widely that economic competitiveness rests on the skills of the labour force. It seems that education’s importance is hard to overstate. For example, the OECD argues:

Recent research reinforces the view that human capital [by which they mean education] not only plays a critical role in economic performance, but also brings key individual and social benefits such as better health, improved well being, better parenting, and increased social and political engagement. (OECD, 2010, p. 7)

This could sound like a great opportunity for those of us who are concerned with expanding access to education, and many educationalists have enthusiastically embraced this narrative. But it has caused serious problems for education systems, as I will discuss below, after considering the origins and context of the ‘new narrative’ about education.

The new emphasis on education stems partly from a belief that while nation states have increasingly less control over the outcome of economic competition, education can be used as a weapon for individuals and governments to improve their prosperity (Reich 1997). A.H. Halsey, Hugh Lauder *et al.* (1997) argue that one of the reasons that education is treated as a universal panacea could be that it remains one of the few areas of social policy over which governments believe they can exert a decisive interest, and demonstrate their power to improve the conditions of everyday life. They go on to argue that exaggerated claims about education reflect political ideology—for instance, it is in the interests of the new right to argue that unemployment, poor productivity, and sluggish economic growth are supply-side problems, caused by education not being in tune with the needs of industry, rather than admit that neoliberal economic policies are not delivering even on their own terms (neoliberalism is discussed further in Chapter 3). Another factor is that education is an area in which governments can make claims which sound attainable, and which potentially have appeal to a huge group of voters: parents. This role for education

in improving individual and national prosperity came to prominence through the influence of the idea of ‘post-Fordism’<sup>1</sup>, which found support from many left-wing thinkers after the collapse of the so-called socialist bloc. Where socialism was seen to have failed as an alternative to capitalism, the reorganization, reinvigoration, and democratization of production were seen as the basis for achieving a reformed, more productive, and more egalitarian capitalist society (Kumar 1992). The post-Fordist approach to the economy *seemed* to many to provide a paradigm in which, by increasing the skills levels of a nation, international competitiveness could be achieved, thereby increasing the general prosperity of the nation. This was posited as the only alternative to the harshest forms of neo-liberalism. However, it was also seen as desirable because its more flexible organization of production was linked to the ‘democratization’ of the workplace (Desaubin 2002).

Related to the idea of ‘post-Fordism’ is the idea of the ‘knowledge economy’. Policy makers refer to this idea to suggest that the workforce and the economy require high levels of education. Since the 1970s, analysts such as Daniel Bell (1973), Peter Drucker (1969) and Alvin Tofler (1980) have argued that societies previously based on industrial manufacturing were being transformed into ‘information societies’, in which knowledge would become the dominant factor of production. New types of work were emerging, particularly in information management, finance, marketing, and sales, leading many to suggest a fundamental change in the advanced economies (Carlaw, Oxley, Walker, Thorns, & Nuth, 2012). As D. W. Livingstone and David Guile (2012, p. iii) note, today the existence of a ‘knowledge-based economy’ is “widely taken for granted by governments, mass media, public opinion, and most scholars today”.

The promise of the knowledge economy is a ‘win-win’ scenario: the boom and bust business cycle could be abolished through a new stage of capitalist development that would lead to a fundamental shift in power from the owners and managers of capital to knowledge workers (Lauder & Brown, 2009). According to analysts such as Nan Lin (2001), different social classes could come to share the same interests: “labourers can become capitalists, as they enjoy the surplus of their labour... The confrontation and struggle between classes becomes a cooperative enterprise – ‘What’s good for the company is good for the worker and vice versa’” (Lin 2001, p. 13).

Education particularly came to prominence in social policy within the ambit of ‘third way’ politics, which came to dominate the United States and Europe in the mid 1990s when previously left-wing parties started accepting many of the tenets of neoliberalism (Crouch, 2011). Alex Callinicos (2001, p. 48) cites former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown arguing “where the success and failure of an economy depend on access to knowledge more than access to capital, individual liberation arises from the enhancement of the value of labour rather than the abolition of private capital”<sup>2</sup>. Improved education and training was supposed to improve the competitiveness of industries, because, it was believed, “in the ‘knowledge economy’ competitiveness depends on the skills of the workforce” (Callinicos, 2001, p. 48). At the same time, education was supposed to benefit individuals. Thus, education was seen as a substitute for welfare provision. Anthony Giddens (1998, p. 117)

describes this as “investment in human capital wherever possible, rather than the direct provision of economic maintenance”.

As many rich states pulled back from industrial policy, and social democracies came under attack, policy makers turned to market mechanisms to play an increasingly greater role in delivering goods and services. Many poor countries also attempted to implement more market-oriented policies, dramatically restricting their already limited ability to deliver services to their populations. In this context, where public spending on social welfare is decreasing, education reform has been increasingly posited as the key factor in reducing social inequality (Lauder, Hughes *et al.* 1999), as well as the single best way of achieving national and individual prosperity (Ashton and Green 1996; Lauder, Brown, Dillabough *et al.* 2006).

The ‘third way’, argues Sally Tomlinson (2009, p. 5), was an “attempt to marry social democracy with market capitalism, to explain the diminishing of collective public welfare provision, the incursion of private capital and business, and the increasing expectations on individuals to provide for themselves”, based on the widely accepted political view that the costs of the welfare state were prohibitive. It makes sense, then, that a discourse of duties, rights, and responsibilities is invoked to ensure that individuals do not expect too much from the state. This supported a shift in policy rhetoric from ‘full employment’ to ‘full employability’ (Brown & Lauder, 2006). In the former paradigm, governments see it as part of their role to create jobs and support and develop industries which will create jobs, to ensure that individuals are employed. In the latter, their role is to encourage individuals to make themselves ‘employable’. The onus is on the individual to get a job, because, it is believed, it is wrong, or not possible for governments to play a role in ensuring that jobs exist. This is a characteristically neoliberal idea: it is the moral duty of human beings to arrange their lives to maximize their advantage to the labour market.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on the skills of the workforce and therefore on training has enabled governments to describe unemployment as a temporary phenomenon, resulting from economic change and individuals’ (and educational providers’) failure to meet the needs of the economy. Unemployment, according to this line of thought, is caused by the lack of ‘skills’ in the workforce, and not by structural problems with the economy, or by the economic philosophy dominant in the world, neoliberalism. The learner must be in a continual state of “up-skilling and re-skilling” in order to respond to shifts in the world labour market (Spren 2001, p. 62). The victim, rather than the system, is blamed for unemployment (Foley, 1994). Education is seen as a significant component of a comprehensive approach to workplace restructuring and workplace organization, with a highly skilled, mobile workforce making industry internationally competitive (Foley 1994). Thus, Kennedy (2012, p. 178) describes the expansion of post-compulsory education as “the most prominent policy to contain and manage surplus labour and sustain control over ‘free time’”.

‘Third way politics’ have been very influential: the idea that “efficiency as the market defines it and justice as socialists have conceived it” are reconcilable was, at the turn of the millennium, “the most politically influential ideology both in the

advanced capitalist countries and in the leading Third World states” (Callinicos, 2001, p. 209). Education is central to these promises about both economic competitiveness and social justice, as it is to the promises of the knowledge economy. These promises have proved illusory.

‘Third way’ politics did not succeed in achieving the claims made for it about ‘win-win’ systems. The recent dramatic failures of neoliberalism to achieve economic growth and prosperity has forced some degree of reality check on this type of politics. The idea of the ‘knowledge economy’ proved similarly weak, based on notions of labour markets, economies and employers, in short, capitalist economies, which are implausible. And in many instances the development of 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism has involved substantial elements of ‘deskilling’. As Livingstone (2012, p. 108) points out,

The image of contemporary society inherent in post-industrial/knowledge economy and human capital theories proves illusory. While an aggregate upgrading of the technical skills needed for job performance is gradually occurring, our collective acquisition of work-related knowledge and credentials is far outpacing this incremental shift.

Further, as Lauder and Brown (2009) compellingly demonstrate, the promise of the knowledge economy for high paid jobs in return for investment in education has been manifestly broken, with the majority of ‘knowledge workers’ forced into a global labour market for work that is high-skilled but low-waged. Of course many also remain in low-skilled low-waged work; as Kennedy (2012, p. 169) points out,

While some authors wax lyrical about the centrality of the development of skilled and autonomous human capital to the knowledge economy, it is also the case that deskilling and temporary low-skill employment contracts remain a core feature of ‘knowledge work.’

Brown, Lauder, and David Ashton (2008, p. 4) point out that while much policy literature focuses on knowledge, innovation, and creative enterprise, it has ignored the shift towards global standardisation of work, along with efforts to ‘capture’ and digitalise knowledge that had “previously remained locked in the heads of high-skilled workers.” They refer to this as ‘Digital Taylorism’. Much ‘knowledge work’, they argue, is being standardized in much the same way that the knowledge of craft workers was captured and translated into the moving assembly line in the early twentieth century:

Standardisation is well-understood in manufacturing, where the same standard components such as wheels, brake linings, and windscreens can be made in different factories around the world and shipped for final assembly at one location, in the knowledge that all the components meet international quality standards and will fit together. This not only gives companies flexibility but enables them to reduce costs. The same logic is now being applied to service-sector occupations which were previously difficult to standardise because

there were no digital equivalents to mechanical drills, jigs, presses and ships, all of which are required to create global supply chains in manufacturing.

They argue that in the same way that Taylorism transformed the distinction between conception and execution of work, digital Taylorism involves a power struggle within the middle classes, for it depends on reducing the autonomy and discretion of the majority of well-educated technical, managerial, and professional employees. Lauder and Brown's 'digital Taylorism' is echoed in Christopher Newfield's (2010) idea of the 'cognotariat', which captures the systematic stratification within the class or group of 'knowledge workers'.

A substantial body of research interrogates whether education causes or follows economic growth, and largely finds that the 'knowledge economy' vastly overstates the role that education can play in the economy (for example, Amsden, 2010; Brown & Ashton, 1987; Brown *et al.*, 2001; Brown & Lauder, 1992, 2006; Brown, 1999; Lauder & Brown, 2009; Lauder, 1997). Development literature emphasizes the importance of economic policy—fiscal, monetary, employment, trade—as well as industrial policy and land reform, and not of education, which cannot solve the structural problems of economies (Amsden, 2010; Chang, 2003, 2007).

However, despite these broken promises, education policy has been substantially dominated by the 'new narrative' of education as the solution to economic problems, with many negative consequences for education systems.

One such consequence for education systems is that education is blamed for social and economic problems, and this is linked to the first problem, the idea that education must be relevant to the needs of the economy. Norton Grub and Marvin Lazerson (2004) talk about the 'education gospel' in the United States: the idea that education is both the reason for and the solution to the key problems facing society. Education is positioned as the key to solving social problems—in order to 'socialize' people, to help them to find constructive ways of solving their problems, to enable them to become 'employable' or self-employed. But it is also seen as the cause of these problems—for example, societal problems and 'unemployability' are put down to weaknesses in the current education system. Various problems in the world of work—growing unemployment, particularly amongst young people, industrial stagnation, or lack of economic growth—are ascribed to a lack of skills in the workforce or potential workforce. Since the 1970s, increasing levels of unemployment have been blamed on the supposed lack of relevance of the education and training received. Thus, as Grubb and Lazerson (2006, p. 295) explain,

in many countries, an amazingly similar rhetoric has developed, one that first stresses the failures of schools and universities and then proceeds to reform them with more economic and utilitarian goals.

This has led to a tendency towards narrow, utilitarian approaches to education—what Grub and Lazerson (2006, p. 301) call 'the dark side' to the new arguments

for the usefulness of education and the need to expand it. If education is to be the solution to economic problems, it is thought that education must be ‘relevant’ to the perceived needs of the economy, not driven by what are believed to be the self-regarding interests of the academy or educationalists. This has led to a stressing of vocational education as well as the vocationalizing of general education. Vocationalizing the curriculum has been a major concern both at the level of rhetoric and in a plethora of education reforms since the mid-1970s. Generic preparation for employment is increasingly viewed as “a basic and essential condition of all school education” (Sedunary, 1996, p. 369). J.D. Marshall (1997) argues that ideas about the vocational purposes of education and business values are so embedded in education that ‘vocationalism’ has little or no meaning, for there is no alternative to it in the educational realm of discourse. Linked to this is the belief that education should be driven by employers because they best understand the specific skills required by the economy, and the role of the state should be to encourage individual enterprise as well as incentives for people to invest in their own ‘human capital’, i.e. education.

The idea of ‘relevance’ is one which has long dogged educational reform. In the following chapter I explore in more detail how reformers from various political perspectives have criticized the ‘traditional’ curriculum as ‘decorative’, ‘cultural capital’ of the elite, and of no practical value in the world. Tongue in cheek, Stephan Collini (2012) calls the debate one between proponents of ‘useful’ and ‘useless’ education. This debate has intensified in the light of changing economic conditions prevailing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has also intensified as more and more people have achieved higher and higher levels of education, and as education has been used more and more in labour markets. When belief in a meritocracy based on educational achievement is dominant, some researchers have responded by questioning the validity of this notion of meritocracy, but many others have turned to reforming education systems, with one particular aim being to assist children from poor socio-economic circumstances to perform better in education, in the belief that this will assist them in the labour market. This practical and laudable work has often brought into question traditional curricula, which were developed for elite education systems, and have often, as is explored in the following chapter, emphasized the notion of relevance to learners.

The paradox of education as both the solution to societal and economic problems and the cause of them is, perhaps, inevitable given the implausible roles ascribed to education. The desire to change education systems in such a way that they stop causing, and start solving social and economic problems, lies behind much contemporary education reform. *Qualification* policy in particular is being used to drive educational reform<sup>4</sup>.

#### QUALIFICATIONS, CURRICULUM, ECONOMY

Why have governments come to believe that qualifications can be a useful lever to reform education systems?

A qualification is traditionally seen as a token of sustained study for a designated period in a designated area. In the past, it *qualified* an individual to do something in the labour force. Because qualifications are used when people move between education and the workplace, they are seen as a mechanism for translating something obtained in one area to something desired in another. They have come to be seen as an indicator of the skills people have gained through education which make them more productive, and hence as an indicator of an individual's economic value in the labour market. This is, perhaps, the common sense notion of the role of qualifications in the labour market, and human capital theorists have tended to assume that this is how education always functions in relation to work. But while this is sometimes the case, there are many different ways in which qualifications play a role in the jobs that people get, and the salaries that they earn.

For example, instead of being used as indicators of productive skills, qualifications can function in labour markets as vehicles for social closure. Here qualifications are a mechanism for legitimating inclusion and exclusion, for example, in regulated access to an occupation or profession, and qualifications create labour market shelters for those who possess them (Freidson, 2001).

A different way in which qualifications function in labour markets is as positional goods—your qualification buys you a place in the queue. Here, employers use qualifications as a screening device, and will hire at the highest qualification level they can, regardless of the relationship between the specifics of the job in question and the qualification in question. For many job vacancies there are surpluses of qualified workers, so employers look for ever higher levels of qualifications, to obtain information about individuals *relative to each other* rather than as indicators of the attainment of skills necessary for the job in question (Collins, 1979; Shields, 1996). In other words, the value of a qualification may be dependent on how many other people have it, and not on its intrinsic worth. This phenomenon is referred to as 'credentialism'.

The presence of educational credentials dominates increasingly professionalized and formally organized societies, and this role for qualifications has taken on increasing significance over the course of the twentieth century. In the latter half of the century, more and more people started to obtain qualifications (Collins, 1979). In describing this phenomenon, Ronald Dore (1976) coined the phrase 'diploma disease', suggesting that credentialism had a distorting effect on education systems. Credentialism is also referred to as 'qualification inflation', because the social and economic value of qualifications diminishes while the level of skills and knowledge in the programmes they represent remains the same. This, Dore argued, leads to a vicious circle of more and more people trying to obtain qualifications, which in turn further lowers the value of qualifications. Randall Collins (1979) argued in the late 1970s that this was sustaining a false sense of meritocracy, and had serious negative consequences for people as they felt compelled to obtain higher and higher levels of qualifications, losing money in fees as well as in income whilst studying to obtain knowledge and skills that they didn't need and may not have wanted.

Qualification inflation or credentialism is a major contributor to what are perceived as education/labour market 'mismatches', because, while the common sense idea is

that qualifications should be indicators of ‘productive skills’, the actual content of learning programmes is seen as having an ever-diminishing relationship with the skills needed for specific jobs. This is part of what policy makers want to address. Angela Little (1997), in a review of Dore’s arguments twenty years later, concludes that education systems have become more preoccupied with qualifications and qualification reform as a result of qualification inflation: more qualifications are on offer and more money is spent by public authorities on administering qualification systems, and by individuals in gaining qualifications (Little, 2000).

Qualifications have also become a mechanism for trade in international markets for education (Holmes, 2003). Governments that want to encourage markets in education need common ‘currencies’, or at least ‘exchange rates’ which are reasonably consistent, and which are understood. Keith Holmes (2003) and Young (2005) point out that in relation to international trade in qualifications as well as international movement of people, poor countries and small countries are under pressure to get their qualifications recognized internationally.

All of this perhaps provides some indication of why governments around the world seem to have become preoccupied with reforming qualifications. Enter learning outcomes: a policy mechanism which is claimed not just to reform qualification systems, but to use qualifications to reform education systems.

#### WHAT CAN OUTCOMES-BASED QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS DO FOR YOU?

In most countries around the world someone familiar with their national education system could draw a sketch on a single piece of paper which demonstrated the main national qualifications available, and how they related to each other. Occasionally, the term ‘national qualifications framework’ is invoked to label such a grid.

Outcomes-based qualifications frameworks are meant to go considerably beyond this. There are many claims made about what they can achieve, and it is difficult to make sense of the documentation surrounding them. Documents are frequently normative, written as if they pertain to actually existing education systems and policies, when in fact they describe what policy makers hope will be the case. They are also prescriptive. Both the prescriptive and normative aspects of these documents may be largely due an assumption that learning outcomes have a ‘common-sense plausibility’. However, closer examination shows that they are not common sense at all, but are based on extraordinary assumptions.

The claims<sup>5</sup> made about outcomes-based qualifications frameworks can be reduced to three main (related) areas:

- If governments and policy makers can change the way qualifications and credentials are used in labour markets, they can improve the functioning of economies, increasing general prosperity and opportunities for individuals. Learning outcomes provide a mechanism to achieve such a change.

- By specifying the desired outcomes of an education programme, instead of specifying the content to be learned during such a programme, the curricula, pedagogy, and assessment will change in ways that make education more socially and economically useful.
- Qualifications frameworks can change the way education is managed, delivered, or regulated by the state, in order to increase the supply, flexibility, and quality of education provision. Learning outcomes provide a useful mechanism for this type of reform, as they specify required outputs, which can be used to introduce market or quasi-market mechanisms in governance and finance, as well as providing regulatory agencies with benchmarks against which to evaluate provision, and facilitating more inclusion of stakeholders in education systems.

Learning outcomes are the central mechanism through which qualifications frameworks are presumed to precipitate these changes. They are also, as I demonstrate throughout this book, the source of many of the problems that are experienced when countries try to implement qualifications frameworks. As Nigel Norris (1991, p. 339) argues, “The trouble with competence is that it now has a currency way beyond its operational or conceptual reach.” This currency has grown, and not shrunk, in the years since Norris made this observation. Below, I provide a brief overview of how, according to advocates, learning outcomes are supposed to play these roles.

It must be noted that the use of ‘learning outcomes’ here is very specific, and is not the same as a more colloquial use of the word which focuses on actual learner achievements; here, learning outcomes mean descriptions of what learners should have attained in order to be awarded a particular qualification (see *A Note on Terminology* preceding this chapter). All qualifications invoke some sense of ‘outcomes’. A qualification is a statement about an outcome of learning. The ‘outcomes’ of education systems—such as, how many people have qualified to become engineers in a particular year in a particular country, or what the graduation or throughput rate of a particular institution is, or what levels of mathematical ability are obtained by school students—are obviously of concern to governments and citizens. But in outcomes-based qualifications frameworks the term ‘outcomes’ is used in a very specific way: providing an exact and transparent (clearly understandable to anyone) description of competences. These outcomes are also supposed to provide a benchmark against which assessment can be conducted, learning programmes can be developed, and educational quality can be evaluated.

Let’s consider the first set of expectations about how outcomes-based qualifications can improve relationships between education and labour markets. The idea is that qualifications which have clearly specified outcomes will enable employers as well as other educational institutions to know exactly what it is that the qualified learner is competent to do. One problem ostensibly being tackled here is the education/labour market ‘mismatch’ discussed above, whereby traditional qualifications are seen to provide inadequate information to employers, who are then not able to know whether or not they should employ someone. I

have suggested above that the so-called ‘mismatch’ has its roots elsewhere, and in Chapter 5 I explore this in more depth.

Advocates also suggest that traditional qualifications provide inadequate information to learners, who are not, therefore, able to make clear choices about whether or not to invest in education and training and, if they do, which programmes to invest in, as well as to governments, which do not know which programmes to fund. It is indisputable that qualifications do not always play these roles, although the extent to which qualifications could ever make labour markets function perfectly smoothly is very disputable. The assumption behind outcomes-based qualifications frameworks is that a clear specification of exactly what competences or learning outcomes a particular qualification signifies will fix this problem. What is not considered is what it actually means to try to specify outcomes in this manner, whether it is possible, and what the consequences of trying to do it are for education systems. Further, the underlying issues in economies and labour markets which may be the real source of unemployment problems are also downplayed.

Another ostensible problem that outcomes-based qualifications frameworks try to solve is lack of mobility for learners, through education systems, between education and work, and across different countries:

The changing nature of work creates demands for more flexible, multi-skilled workers who are mobile across the economy and internationally. For efficiency, and fairness, this requires that a qualification or skill, however or wherever acquired, should have common meaning among employers selecting workers throughout the country. For individuals it implies they should be able to have their qualifications and skills recognised for entry into further studies or relevant forms of employment. (APEC Human Resources Development Working Group, 2009, p. 5)

Like much policy discourse in this area, the document cited above states a wish that ‘a qualification or skill, however or wherever acquired, should have a common meaning’. Of course this is to some extent applicable to some qualifications and some institutions, but the larger the geographical area in question, and the greater the number of types of institutions offering learning programmes and types of qualifications on offer, the less likely it is that qualifications will have a common meaning. The document above, like many others in this area, seems to reflect the idea that simply stating that something *should* be the case makes it possible that it *will* be the case, without a consideration of why qualifications and ‘skills’ do not currently have common meanings, what it would mean for them to have such meanings, and from where qualifications and skills derive their meanings. Outcomes are supposed to assist learner mobility, because, it is claimed or believed, they can give both education institutions and employers a clear sense of what learners have achieved.

Countries (as well as education institutions, and different areas of economies and disciplinary areas) have their own traditions and systems. “The new learning outcomes based levels”, argues the European Centre for the Development of

Vocational Training, Cedefop, (2009, p. 5) “can be seen as introducing a neutral reference point for diverse qualifications and qualifications providers”. Countries hope that learning outcomes will improve their ability to compare their qualifications with those in other countries, as well as to provide clearer information to employers at home and abroad about what qualifying learners are in fact competent to do:

Universal approaches to reference points, based on learning outcomes, make cross-border judgements as to the level, nature and equivalence of qualifications easier and more accurate. (Adam, 2008, p. 13).

Jörg Markowitsch and Karin Luomi-Messerer (2008) suggest:

The focus on learning outcomes, irrespective of learning paths, opens up possibilities for recognising non-formal and informal learning and, finally, the EQF [European Qualifications Framework] supports the transfer of qualifications between countries, and hence mobility of learners and workers.

In other words, learning outcomes are seen as a useful tool to mediate between different systems of provision, different types of institutions, different disciplines, and so on. What this actually means, and how it would work in practice, is not discussed; what is also not discussed is what the real causes of mobility problems in labour markets are.

Now consider the second set of claims made about learning outcomes—that they can reform curricula, pedagogy, and assessment. The logic here is that the specification of outcomes will ensure that curricula are developed appropriately and to the right standard, because outcomes can be determined outside of educational institutions, and crucially, can involve industry in setting standards. This last aspect—industry involvement in developing learning outcomes or competences—is also supposed to address the education/labour market ‘mismatch’. The ostensible problem, usually unstated but implied, although sometimes explicitly stated in policy documents, is that education programmes are ‘irrelevant’ to the needs of the labour market because educationalists are ignorant of these needs. The assumptions are that employers know what they want and can state it in terms of ‘competences’ or ‘outcomes’ that will have common meanings understood by all, and that once these outcomes have been developed by employers, it will be a simple matter for education institutions to develop programmes that lead to these outcomes. Because of this, Wheelahan (2010, p. 126) argues, “competency-based training models of curriculum are now the basis of vocational education and training (VET) qualifications in many countries because governments believe that they meet the needs of industry and ensure industry ‘control’ over VET”.

But the role of learning outcomes in the reform of curricula, pedagogy, and assessment is supposed to go further than this. Learning outcomes, Cedefop (2008, p. 9), argues,

... form part of an innovative approach to teaching and learning, which some have identified as part of a new learning paradigm. Learning outcomes are the

focus, and provide a key role in organising systemic aims, curricula, pedagogy, assessment and quality assurance. Increasing use of learning outcomes is expected to have profound implications for making systems more learner-centred, organising institutions, curricula and for the roles and training of teachers and trainers.

What are these profound implications? The Commonwealth of Learning and the South African Qualifications Authority (2008, p. 44) argue that qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes represent ‘new notions of knowledge’, and a ‘new hierarchy’ in which “education providers are no longer the leaders and standards-setters, and content (or inputs) is no longer the starting point”. What these ‘new notions of knowledge’ actually are is never really explained, but they are described as more learner-centred than ‘traditional’ systems or ideas about knowledge.

Like many ideas in educational reform, the notion of learning outcomes is proclaimed as a new ‘paradigm’, often invoking Thomas Kuhn’s notion of a paradigm (in ways that Kuhn would not be comfortable with). For example,

A paradigm shift is a change from one way of thinking to another. It is a transformation in thinking that is driven by change agents. In the context of learning outcomes a case can be made that they are an essential part of a Bologna paradigm change driven by the imperatives of the need to respond to globalisation. They are at the heart of an educational revolution that has been slow to gestate but is beginning to have a profound impact. (Adam, 2008, p. 6)

Steven Adam (2008) argues that due to the ‘Bologna’ process, whereby European countries have been attempting to align their higher education systems through learning outcomes,

Institutions are slowly moving away from a system of teacher-driven provision, and towards a student centred concept of higher education. Thus the reforms are laying the foundations for a system adapted to respond to a growing variety of student needs. Institutions and their staff are still at the early stages of realising the potential of reforms for these purposes. Understanding and integrating the use of a **learning outcomes** based approach remains a key medium-term challenge. When achieved, it will enable students to become the engaged subjects of their own learning process. [emphasis in original]

Adam goes on to argue that the “humble learning outcome has moved from being a peripheral tool to a central device to achieve radical educational reform of European higher education”. The use of ‘radical’ here, as well as the notion of a ‘new paradigm’, are invoked because the changes implied involve reforming education in a range of different ways—addressing curricula, pedagogy, assessment, provision of education, accountability of educational institutions, and the use of qualifications in society and in labour markets.

I do not, in this discussion, consider whether or not the changes that Adam *says* are being achieved have in fact *been* achieved, and whether it would be a good thing if they were, except to note that many people who teach in higher education in Europe may be surprised to read it. For now my focus is on the nature of the claim being made about outcomes-based qualifications. The essence of the claim is that it is possible and desirable to specify the outcomes of education programmes to education providers, and that this will change the way education systems operate.

‘Learner centredness’ is an idea frequently associated with learning outcomes. Advocates suggest that outcomes-based qualifications enable learner-centred curricula and pedagogy because they will force education institutions to teach to ‘outcomes’ that learners want to acquire. The idea of learner centredness is extended to the organization of education. National qualifications frameworks present ladders of qualifications described in terms of learning outcomes, suggesting that individuals are free to climb up them over the course of their lifetime, and free to choose and select the learning that is relevant to them. Once again this seems to be policy as wish-fulfillment: creating a framework that says that it is possible for people to ‘move up’ the education system seems to make it possible. When the background of the idea of the ‘knowledge economy’ discussed above is added to the mix, and the ideology that individuals who invest in education can become ‘knowledge workers’, and will be rewarded financially as well as with power, greater autonomy, and scope for creativity in work, it all seems very desirable. With these grand pictures of qualifications ladders within and across education and training systems and countries, the messy details of why, in fact, individuals do not move up education systems, what the real social and educational barriers are, and so on, are swept aside. Qualifications frameworks are also seen as ways of supporting learners to move between and within the different ‘tracks’ of education systems (such as between general and vocational education), which in many instances are designed with little possibility for student transfer (Hodgson, Spours, Isaacs, & Grainger, 2013).

The discussion above has touched on the third area in which outcomes and qualifications frameworks are supposed to be a reform tool: they are seen as mechanisms to increase the supply, flexibility, and quality of education provision, and solve what are seen as rigidities in the management and delivery of education. Let’s now consider this area in a bit more detail. Education systems are described as ‘supply driven’. This term is used to describe the traditional role educational institutions play in determining what education is offered and how. In many countries, particularly in school education and sometimes vocational education, this is associated with centralization of educational provision—in other words, the state, and not individual institutions, takes these decisions. The term ‘supply driven’ also invokes a sense of professionals in educational institutions acting in their own narrow self-interest. This, and the other ‘rigidities’ in education institutions are linked by advocates of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks to putative rigidities of the subject-based curricula and teacher-centred pedagogies. The alternative idea is that by using learning outcomes as the standard against which provision and assessment

takes place, institutions can be forced to be more accountable for what they are providing, as well as being forced to compete with other educational institutions. In other words, learning outcomes provide a mechanism whereby governments can shift from being primarily providers to being primarily regulators, or, as will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, such outcomes can be a mechanism for introducing quasi-markets into education systems.

In traditional systems of issuing certificates, diplomas, degrees, and so on, qualifications are linked to the completion of specific learning programmes. Behind the growing emphasis on learning outcomes and qualifications is a belief that this traditional approach gives education institutions an unfair monopoly on the issuing of qualifications. Learning outcomes, it is claimed, provide a vehicle for recognizing experiential learning by providing a benchmark against which it can be compared with knowledge taught inside education programmes (Jessup, 1991). This belief contains an implicit notion of knowledge, and what the conditions for its acquisition are, which I will for now just note, and will return to in Chapter 6. Policy makers argue that skills and knowledge obtained on-the-job or through informal learning are not recognized by educational institutions, and assume that they are frequently and substantially the same as learning obtained through formal education. It is assumed that this leads to serious wastages of skills within economies, as well as exacerbation of inequality as the skilled but unqualified fall behind the qualified. The same logic is used to claim that learning outcomes increase access to education by making entrance requirements more fair and transparent, because the outcomes provide an objective benchmark against which individuals can be evaluated.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the three sets of claims in favour of outcomes-based qualifications (improving education/labour market relationships; reforming curricula, pedagogy, and assessment; reforming how the quality of education is evaluated and how education is delivered) are related. The idea is that liberalized systems of education provision, or education provision which places more emphasis on employer requirements, will be responsive to the market needs of both direct consumers (students) and indirect consumers (employers), and will therefore produce the kinds of graduates that the labour market requires, as well as meeting the needs of individuals. Further, using learning outcomes as the starting point for curriculum design can break what is perceived as the monopoly or dominance of educators in curriculum design, and open up space for employers to contribute, thus again ensuring that education programmes are more relevant, and at the same time, enabling different providers to compete against each other in provision of the specified learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are also intended to improve the relationship between education, the economy and the labour market, as well as ensuring individual satisfaction.

There are other issues interwoven into these three sets of issues in different ways. For example, in many countries it is predominantly disadvantaged learners who are enrolled in vocational education programmes, and there is concern about the low status of vocational qualifications. There are concerns that this low status

discourages learners from enrolling in vocational programmes, which policy makers believe are more useful than general education programmes. They hope that qualifications frameworks will raise the status of vocational qualifications—by showing that they are at the same ‘level’ on a framework as other qualifications, and thus should be seen as equal by society. Thus, qualifications frameworks are seen as a tool to ensure that more people will obtain education which is ‘relevant’, and which produces ‘useful skills’, and therefore develop the economy. At the same time, the fact that outcomes or competencies are specified for all qualifications is seen as a way of ensuring that *all* education is more relevant to the economy and to the needs of individuals. It is also seen as a way of ensuring ‘world-class standards’ against which students must perform.

There are, no doubt, many problems with education systems, in terms of who can access them, what people get out of them, what they have to sacrifice in order to access them, and so on. Qualifications frameworks are claimed to solve many of these problems. Looking at the speed at which this policy has spread around the world, it seems as if at least some of these claims are believed by many policy makers.

#### AN EXPLOSION OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Antonio Novoa (2002) draws on Pierre Bourdieu (2000) in positing the spread of ‘banalities’ around the world, which become universally accepted as truth, and are then transformed into ‘magic concepts’ which claim to provide solutions to a wide range of problems. Learning outcomes seem to be a ‘magic concept’ sweeping the globe at the moment, together with lifelong learning, qualifications frameworks, and recognition of prior learning. Policy makers in many countries, with vast differences in their education systems, wealth, levels of industrialization, demographic trends, and so on, are involved in developing qualifications frameworks, and attempting to use outcomes to change their education systems.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s a handful of countries were introducing outcomes-based national qualifications frameworks, and implementing outcomes-based curriculum reforms. By now, as mentioned above, over 120 countries are reported to be developing a national qualifications framework. Policy makers in many countries, with vast differences in their education systems, wealth, levels of industrialization, demographic trends, and so on, are involved in developing qualifications frameworks, and attempting to use learning outcomes to change their education systems.

As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, the qualifications framework phenomenon started in the reform of vocational education in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. A Scottish reform in the 1980s which introduced outcomes-based, portable, ‘institutionally versatile’, modules for vocational education is sometimes seen as its origin (Raffe, 2009b). In the rest of the United Kingdom, a competence-based framework of vocational qualifications, known as National Vocational Qualifications, was developed in the late 1980s.

This approach to educational reform spread to Australia and New Zealand, both of which were engaged in major reforms of their economies and education systems during this period. Qualifications policy became a major tool in educational reform in both countries. Australia, using the English model as a base, developed a competence-based training system for its vocational education in the 1990s, which was institutionalized through ‘training packages’ in 1997. In 1990, the New Zealand Qualifications Framework was created. This framework was not restricted to vocational education, and embraced the entire education and training system.

For a decade or so, most development was seen in countries in the developing world, drawing heavily on the models developed in the United Kingdom. These were mainly countries directly influenced by the United Kingdom, such as former colonies, or Asian and Pacific states with strong relationships with Australia. In 1995, South Africa, like New Zealand, created a National Qualifications Framework for its entire education and training system. In the 1990s, various countries started developing frameworks of qualifications for vocational or workplace-based education and training—including Chile, Malaysia, and Mexico. The English National Vocational Qualifications were used as a model for these reforms. Competence-based training became a major feature of vocational education in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s and early 2000s (Vargas Zuñiga, 2005). Qualifications frameworks *per se* are more recent in Latin America, with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Suriname being reportedly involved in developing frameworks, and in Central America the one country with British colonial heritage, Belize, is developing a qualifications framework. In the Caribbean Community, a single set of Caribbean Vocational Qualifications was created, with a regional coordinating mechanism established in 2003. This framework has been specifically focused on the adoption of competency-based education and training, and includes the five-level framework of occupational standards which had already been developed in the region; a process of standards development; and a specific process of training delivery and assessment for certification (Keevy *et al.*, 2011). Many Caribbean islands<sup>6</sup> are involved in qualifications frameworks according to Keevy *et al.* (2011).

In Africa, besides South Africa which has already been mentioned, Namibia, Mauritius, Botswana, and the Maldives were involved in developing qualifications frameworks from the late 1990s and early 2000s. By 2002, under considerable influence from South Africa (Chisholm, 2007), a number of countries in southern Africa were developing qualifications frameworks, mainly with a focus on vocational education. By 2003, besides the frameworks in the countries mentioned above, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe had established an authority or department to further develop and implement a framework, and preliminary work towards developing a qualifications framework had taken place in many other African countries<sup>7</sup>.

In Asia and the Pacific, there was similar growth, also mainly in vocational education. From 2002, many islands started developing qualifications frameworks<sup>8</sup>. In 2007 the Malaysian Qualifications Framework was adopted, and Pakistan

started developing a qualifications framework. In East Asia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and The Philippines are reported to have national qualifications frameworks established, and Brunei Darussalam and the Republic of Korea are reported to be developing frameworks (APEC Human Resources Development Working Group, 2009). In South and Central Asia and the Middle East there are moves towards developing qualifications frameworks in many countries<sup>9</sup> (Keevy *et al.*, 2011).

Some European countries started developing frameworks in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Ireland, France, Malta and the United Kingdom are the only countries where there were fully developed qualifications frameworks, but almost all European Union countries, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, which are all European Economic Area members, have signaled that they will introduce or are introducing comprehensive, overarching qualifications frameworks covering all parts of their education, training and qualifications systems (Cedefop, 2010).

In 1999, the Bologna Declaration was signed, through which 29 (now over 40) European countries agreed to start aligning their higher education systems, using learning outcomes and levels, both of which are intrinsic to qualifications frameworks. This declaration was a big step towards a supranational education framework in higher education and arguably started the move towards qualifications frameworks as a Europe-wide phenomenon. There is also a long history in Europe of trying to align vocational education, which was brought to a head with rising youth unemployment since the 1970s (Brockmann, Clarke, Winch, *et al.*, 2011). In 2008, the idea of qualifications frameworks received a huge burst of energy in Europe with the adoption of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

Besides the European Qualifications Framework, other regional frameworks are being designed or implemented. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has been talking about a regional framework since 2001, and a concept document was released in 2005. The focus is on vocational education and training as well as promoting the development of qualifications frameworks in individual countries (Keevy *et al.*, 2011). According to Chisholm (2007), the process has been substantially influenced by the South African Qualifications Framework as well as the ‘expertise’ and ‘advice’ of South African consultants. She cites David Atchoarena and André Delluc (2002, p. 341) who argue: ‘For SADC, the development of compatible national qualifications frameworks represents a strategic instrument to increase the competitiveness of the sub-region and contribute to further economic and labour market integration’ (Chisholm, 2007, p. 301).

The need for a qualifications framework is also being considered for nations within the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC 2009). The Association of Southeast Asian Nations<sup>10</sup> is in the preliminary stages of developing a regional framework, using the European Qualifications Framework as a reference (Keevy *et al.*, 2011). The Pacific Islands countries<sup>11</sup> also intend to develop a qualifications framework, and have started with a unified register of qualifications, the Pacific

Regional Qualifications Register, as well as the development of an inventory of technical and vocational education and training programmes (Lythe, 2008).

In 2007, the Commonwealth of Learning facilitated the development of a Transnational Qualifications Framework for 29 small (population-wise) states<sup>12</sup> which are members of the Commonwealth, regardless of their geographical location. It is defined as a ‘translation instrument’, and includes higher education and post-secondary technical and vocational qualifications (Commonwealth of Learning and SAQA, 2008). Various members of the regional qualifications frameworks listed above are also members of this framework.

Many of these frameworks were predated by conventions or declarations developed through UNESCO (for example, the Lisbon convention and Bologna process in Europe and the Arusha declaration in Africa), which aimed to ensure that countries recognized qualifications and part qualifications within different regions<sup>13</sup>.

The major and notable exception to this international trend is the United States. There are no proposals for federal or state frameworks. However, many of the underlying trends are still the same: there has been a rapid increase in industry credentialing programs, and emphasis on ‘external certification of skills’ as opposed to the traditional college and university credentialing system. This is specifically for ‘continuing education’, which is offered through a diverse range of providers. David Bills (2004, p. 198) notes, quoting Lewis *et al.* (2000, p. 3), “what was once an eclectic assortment of individually accessed, non-credit educational courses is quickly being knit into comprehensive degree- and certificate-granting programmes”.

It is not just governments who are involved in outcomes-based qualifications frameworks. Learning outcomes and national qualifications frameworks, together with associated policies such as lifelong learning, recognition of prior or experiential learning, and competency-based reform of vocational education systems, as well as the idea of learner centredness, dominate the policy agenda of international agencies<sup>14</sup>. As Young (2010, p. 2) argues: “Not only does every country seem to want a National Qualification Framework, but virtually all the leading international agencies are involved in persuading any countries that show reluctance, that there is no other alternative if they want to be ‘modern’ and improve their economic competitiveness.”

Powerful international organizations including the World Bank, the OECD, and many donor and development agencies, are increasingly advising poor and middle income countries to develop qualifications frameworks (for example, World Bank, 2002). The International Labour Organization (ILO) has in the past recommended the adoption of national qualifications frameworks (Departments of Education and Labour, 2003; Jane Stewart, 2005), and has suggested the promotion of national, regional, and international qualifications frameworks (ILO, 2004). Donor funding to poor countries has increasingly been channeled into this kind of education reform. The South African Qualifications Framework, for example, has been largely funded by the European Union, as well as partly by the Canadian government, and the

Dutch government's funding arm has recently funded the processes of exploring the regional qualifications framework in the SADC area (SAQA, 2003). The European Commission is funding qualifications frameworks in many countries, including Somalia, Bangladesh, and India, and the European Training Foundation is assisting countries to develop qualifications frameworks.

#### EVIDENCE OR IDEOLOGY-BASED POLICY?

Despite their sudden and rapid rise to prominence in education policy internationally, there has been very little research on qualifications frameworks. This may in part be a by-product of their opacity and tendency to generate jargon which makes them difficult and tedious to engage with. It may also be because, in the eyes of most critical researchers and analysts, the exaggerated claims about what they can achieve are so implausible that they are simply not worth the effort.

Much of the international documentation in support of qualifications frameworks tends to be self-referential, mainly consisting of claims about what frameworks can do or are doing as policy reforms. For example:

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) have, during the last five years, turned into key instruments for the restructuring and reform of education, training and qualifications systems in Europe. While very few countries had considered this approach prior to 2005, the situation today is very different. (Cedefop, 2009, p. 1)

Qualifications Frameworks have become important structures in deepening access, inclusion, and achievement in education. (Donn 2003, p. v)

The [Mauritius national qualifications] framework was developed to ensure greater articulation between education, training, and the world of work and that training responds to standards set by industry. At the same time, it aims to encourage lifelong learning through recognition of prior learning and flexible delivery of training. ([http://www.logos-net.net/ilo/195\\_base/en/init/mau\\_2.htm](http://www.logos-net.net/ilo/195_base/en/init/mau_2.htm) accessed 9th September 2006)

None of these claims are linked to empirical evidence or clear examples of where frameworks have in fact led to the kinds of goals stated. For example, the reasons provided for a framework for the Southern African region by a SADC technical committee document are that it will benefit the development of frameworks in member countries (a circular argument) and will lead to “standardized terminology to ensure effective comparability of qualifications and credits across borders in the SADC region” (Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation 2005, p. 9). The document goes on to spell out the advantages that a framework will have for states, education systems, students, society, employers, stakeholders, and the global community. The document does not explain how a qualifications framework is likely to lead to these aims; it simply claims that it will.

The small amount of research which is available suggests there are serious problems with this type of policy reform. In 2009, I conducted an international comparative study for the ILO. Leading a team of researchers around the world, I compared qualifications frameworks in 16 countries,<sup>15</sup> as well as surveying available research into qualifications frameworks around the world (Allais, 2010b). The focus was on how qualifications frameworks had been or were being implemented, and what impact they had had to date. The countries we investigated<sup>16</sup> were selected to ensure a spread across geographic regions, favouring countries where implementation of the qualifications framework was advanced or at least underway, as many countries are in very preliminary stages. In most countries, (exceptions being Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, South Africa and Scotland) qualifications frameworks were focused on the reform of vocational education. The countries were a diverse mixture: in geographical size, they varied from the largest country on earth to a very small island; in population size, from the most densely populated country on earth to countries with tiny populations. They included very rich and very poor countries, countries with high and low levels of social equality, and countries on both ends of the spectrum of the United Nations human development index. We found that, despite the diversity of the countries studied, the goals of policy makers for qualifications frameworks were very similar. Equally similar was the litany of woes about education and training systems that qualifications frameworks were being introduced to solve: the ‘mismatch’ between education and the workplace, the ‘irrelevance’ of education and training to the alleged needs of employers, the lack of ‘transparency’ of qualifications, the lack of ‘accountability’ of education institutions, the lack of official recognition for learning acquired out of formal education systems, and the low status of vocational education.

What was stark in the findings was the paucity of evidence supporting the claim that qualifications frameworks have contributed to solving these problems. We found no publicly available research which presented clear evidence in favour of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, despite the flurry of countries developing qualifications frameworks. In some instances, lack of positive evidence was because qualifications frameworks were a recent intervention, and so it may have been simply too early to tell. It could also be the case that there have been successes, but that they are not recorded, researched, and publicized, or that my researchers simply failed to find them. Nonetheless, the absence of clearly available evidence of successes, particularly for the older frameworks, is an important finding for a policy that has been so widely accepted internationally, and that is growing at such a rapid rate: representatives of qualifications authorities, government agencies, and industry bodies interviewed did not have concrete evidence, evaluations, or research that showed clear achievements, and publically available information from these organizations also did not contain such evidence. The framework which emerged as the least *unsuccessful* was the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. This framework, which had the fewest ambitions with regard to the typical goals of frameworks I have discussed, is discussed further in Chapter 8.

The research found little evidence that qualifications frameworks have substantially improved communication between education systems and labour markets—a key goal in all the countries. The strongest evidence found was in Scotland, where there was some indication that the framework was being used by a national career guidance service. This is hardly a startling achievement, and is a long way from solving the so-called education/labour market mismatch. None of the case studies found evidence demonstrating that employers found qualifications easier to use than they had prior to the introduction of a framework, nor were other data found to demonstrate that competence and outcomes-based qualifications had improved the match between education and training systems and the labour market.

With regard to articulation amongst educational providers, there is some evidence of successes, but also evidence that in some countries, qualifications frameworks have *reduced* learner mobility across different sectors of the education system (Blom, Parker, & Keevy, 2007; Wheelahan, 2009). There is also some evidence of increased numbers of certificates being awarded that recognize existing skills, knowledge, and abilities of workers and potential workers. But in all cases this was on a small scale, and our researchers could not find evidence that it had benefited workers in any way other than improving their self-esteem.

Further, while we didn't find evidence of successes, we did find considerable evidence that implementing qualifications frameworks had caused problems in many countries.

In a number of the countries with longer experience of qualifications frameworks, a common problem was that many new qualifications had been designed and registered on the frameworks but not used. South Africa had the greatest number of unused qualifications—by 2007, 787 new qualifications had been developed, but only 180 of them had ever been awarded to learners. Of the well over 10,000 'unit standards' (outcomes-based part qualifications) that had been developed, just over 2000 had been awarded. The remaining unit standards were just documents in cyberspace which took considerable resources to produce. This is not unique to South Africa. In Mauritius *none* of the new, outcomes-based qualifications that were developed through the qualifications framework for the vocational education system had been used, eight years after the introduction of the framework. In Botswana, a mere ten courses had been developed against unit standards, a very small fraction of total provision of vocational education, and even government colleges did not use the newly designed unit standards. In Mexico, 630 'labour competence technical standards' had been registered by 2008. 530 of them had not been awarded to any learners. The situation with regard to the English National Vocational Qualifications was similar. Australia and New Zealand also had many qualifications with low take-up, and some which are completely unused. In all these countries, the new qualifications were designed by all relevant stakeholders, particularly representatives of industry—which policy makers claim ensures that they will be relevant to employers' needs. Further, in all these countries, the problem of overspecification was found—long, detailed qualification documents

were produced in the name of increased transparency, which became impossible to work with, and highly opaque.

There is, then, on the face of it, a fascinating conundrum: this policy mechanism is growing very fast, and yet has very little evidence in its favour. What is particularly interesting is the role that international agencies are playing in pushing this agenda. Strong claims continue to be made about the benefits of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, and yet supporters and implementers have not yet produced evidence to back up these claims. How can this state of affairs be explained, and what does it tell us? Policy borrowing as well as the influence of donor and development agencies have been significant factors in the spread of qualifications frameworks, as is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. But this does not explain why it is that this specific set of policies have become the policy *du jour*.

I start my story by considering the educational ideas which have been drawn on in order to justify qualifications frameworks, and show that many of the ideas which are claimed as part of a ‘new learning paradigm’ in contemporary policy documents have, in fact, a long history in educational debates and reform.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The notion of ‘post-Fordism’, although fraught with difficulty and highly contested within economic and social theory, is important to introduce here because of the extent to which it has proved popular with governments and education policy formulators. Post-Fordism is sometimes seen as a description of how economies are changing, and sometimes a prescription about how they should or could change. It emphasizes a move away from mass production (Fordism) to niche oriented, flexible production. Advocates argue that through this kind of reorganization, nations will all find their comparative advantage in the global market place, and thus prosperity will follow for all. The idea is both premised on and advocates for a ‘skilled’ and ‘flexible’ workforce, and is often linked to discussions about the ‘knowledge economy’, which are discussed further below.
- <sup>2</sup> Gordon Brown, “My Vision of a Fairer Britain for Everyone” *Times*, 3 June 2000, cited in Callinicos (2001, p. 48).
- <sup>3</sup> Brown (2006) suggests that the idea of ‘employability’ signifies a shift in the meaning of life, whereby people are economically enslaved by ‘opportunities’ for employment.
- <sup>4</sup> Another dominant trend in education policy is national and international standardized achievement tests. Critics argue this is leading to a narrowing of curriculum content, an increasing prescriptiveness of curricula, and narrow notions of what is ‘worthwhile knowledge’. For example, Emery Hyslop-Margison and Alan Sears write that “[t]hese ‘policy as numbers’ moves have affected pedagogies, thinning them out and reducing curriculum content to that which is valorized in tests and examinations” (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 96). The prevalence of international achievement tests is often linked to neoliberalism, and what is described as ‘performativity’ or an audit culture, as well as to marketization: “National and international league tables and rankings for schools and universities have grown enormously in popularity and have become a growing market of consumer information” (Enders, 2010, p. 209). There is a huge wealth of critical literature on this area, and it is, therefore, not explored in this book.
- <sup>5</sup> Of course, how outcomes-based frameworks have been implemented in practice differs from country to country, and many do not make claims as strong as these, as is discussed later in this book. However, in general policy documents from countries as well as advocacy documents for learning outcomes-based approaches make these claims.
- <sup>6</sup> Antigua & Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Trinidad & Tobago, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines.

- <sup>7</sup> Angola, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Egypt, Eritrea, the Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, the Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, according to Keevy *et al.* (2011), SAQA (2003), and personal communications with agencies involved in qualifications design. Kenya, Nigeria, and Rwanda were said to be investigating implementing frameworks.
- <sup>8</sup> Fiji, Kiribati, the Philippines, Samoa, Vanuatu, Maldives, Tonga, Tuvalu, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu started developing frameworks.
- <sup>9</sup> Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka in South Asia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and Tajikistan in Central Asia, and Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Oman, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates in the Middle East.
- <sup>10</sup> Including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam.
- <sup>11</sup> Supported by Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
- <sup>12</sup> This includes Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Cyprus, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Swaziland, The Bahamas, The Comoros (non-Commonwealth), The Gambia, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
- <sup>13</sup> The lists in the preceding 6 footnotes seem repetitive as many countries are involved in both national and regional frameworks, and some are involved in more than one transnational framework.
- <sup>14</sup> See for example (APEC Human Resources Development Working Group, 2009; Bjornavold & Coles, 2007; Cedefop, 2008, 2010; Coles, 2006, 2007; Commonwealth of Learning and SAQA, 2008; Lythe, 2008; OECD, 2007; Sellin, 2007).
- <sup>15</sup> The full report is published by the ILO, and an overview of the findings has been published in the Journal of Education and Work, along with some of the case studies, as well as in Young and Allais (2013).
- <sup>16</sup> Australia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Chile, England (the National Vocational Qualifications), Lithuania, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, Scotland, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Turkey.



## PLUS LA MEME CHOSE

### *The Early History of Learning Outcomes and Learner Centredness*

The novelties of one generation are only the resuscitated fashions of the generation before last. George Bernard Shaw, *Three Plays for Puritans*, Preface (1900)

Current attempts to ensure that education delivers according to the needs of the economy, as well as current critiques of subject-based curricula, are less new than they appear. Ideas about ‘relevance’, objectives, and learning outcomes, as well as the idea that subject-based curricula are obsolete, both of which have re-gained prominence in contemporary education policy, particularly through outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, have been influential periodically in the history of educational reform. And both sets of ideas have been supported by both left and right-wing educational reformers and policy makers.

For over a century, criticism of ‘traditional’ academic education and subject-based curricula has come from business leaders who wanted economy and efficiency in schools, and work-ready, relevantly skilled, and compliant workers. Politicians and industrialists (and people who claim to speak for industry) have argued that the traditional subject-based curriculum has caused economic decline. The subject-based curriculum has been associated with the ideas of an out-of-touch aristocratic elite, labeled by business leaders as out of touch with the needs of industry, contributing to industrial decline, not training people to be ‘enterprise-minded’, and not giving them useful skills.

Raymond Callahan’s detailed study of North American educational reform at the turn of the twentieth century demonstrates that reform in the early 1900s was focused on making education more ‘relevant’ and ‘practically useful’:

While the most specific outcomes of this pressure were the establishment of vocational schools and vocational courses in the existing secondary schools and the decline of classical studies, the utilitarian movement pervaded the entire school system from the elementary schools through the universities. A less tangible but more important corollary of the practical movement was a strong current of anti-intellectualism which, when it was given expression, generally appeared in such phrases as ‘mere scholastic education’ or ‘mere book learning’. (Callahan, 1962, p. 8)

Callahan describes popular journals and magazines in early twentieth century North America which featured prominent educationalists arguing that education should not be concerned with “culture”. A “gentleman’s education” was seen as being of no use in the business world and, it was suggested, also not “desired by the mob”. Such education was seen as inappropriately “preparing our children for a life of scholasticism” (Callahan, 1962, p. 50). This was linked to a campaign for running educational institutions as businesses. Callahan argues that the main procedure for educational reform between 1900 and 1925 consisted of making unfavourable comparisons between schools and business enterprises, applying business-industrial criteria (economy and efficiency) to education, and suggesting that business and industrial practices be adopted by educators. An interesting theme which Callahan picks up on, and which was to be a source of similar concern across the Atlantic for many years, was a comparison with Germany, and an argument that Germany’s industrial superiority was due to its greater emphasis on vocational education; this led to attempts to vocationalize the school curriculum.

Ironically, as Doll (1993, in Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 253) points out, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century curriculum was at least in some ways highly focused on the workplace: arithmetic, not mathematics, was taught to young learners, with an emphasis on “store clerk functionalism, keeping the sales slips and ledgers accurate and neat. Problem solving was introduced as early as the second grade, but it was heavily, if not exclusively, associated with buying in an urban store”. Ivor Goodson (1994, p. 49) laments the loss of ‘the science of common things’ from the 1840s, which he suggests was empowering for ordinary people. He argues that subsequently, “[k]nowledge increasingly became decontextualized and disembodied as the ‘disciplines’ developed closer and closer ties with the state and with university scholars”, by implication becoming disempowering to ordinary people.

Many progressive educationalists have shared Goodson’s concerns. Like the industrial reformers mentioned above, progressive educationalists have associated the subject-based curriculum with elites. They have argued that the school curriculum should be more aligned with the needs of society, and the interests and needs of individuals. Many, but not all of the educational reformers who have pushed for ‘child-centred’ or ‘learner-centred’ reforms have seen them as part of a broader left-wing struggle for an education system which can play a part in creating a more democratic and more egalitarian society.

Thus, from very different political perspectives, subject-based curricula and the idea of the acquisition of bodies of knowledge as a key purpose of education and the focus of curriculum development have been the target of much criticism. One early alternative for conceptualizing and designing the curriculum has been associated with terms such as objectives, outcomes, or competencies. Objectives or outcomes-based approaches start with tasks or activities in the everyday world, and specifically the world of work. Analyzing such tasks or activities, and then attempting to design a curriculum which prepares learners for them, it is seen as a way of overcoming the problems of ‘traditional education’, and ensuring the relevance of education.

The second approach, which is very different although also concerned with the need for education to be relevant to individuals, is child- or learner-centred reform. As I discuss below, this is sometimes presented with an emphasis on pedagogy only, but frequently slips into an approach to the curriculum. Reformers in this (very broad) tradition have suggested that the knowledge acquired at school must be more continuous with the knowledge of the everyday world of the learner as well as the knowledge of the working and social world into which they will progress.

In both approaches, the starting point for thinking about education, and designing curricula, is the projected or immediate utility of knowledge in the life of the learner. For some, the interests and life experiences of individual learners must drive the curriculum, while for others the workplace becomes the curriculum authority. These two approaches have frequently been at odds with each other politically, the former emphasizing humanism, autonomy and democracy, and the latter economic efficiency, the needs of employers, and the market. But in both cases, existing bodies of knowledge are not the *starting point* for designing a curriculum. This does not mean that either educational outcomes or child-centred education are *inherently* incompatible with the idea of subjects. Invariably subjects do still feature in various ways in many approaches which are labeled ‘child-’ or ‘learner-centred’, as well as in some objectives/outcomes-based approaches, as will be discussed below.

Both objectives/outcomes-based approaches and child- or learner-centred approaches have spawned many different lines of thought about educational reform. Neither can be associated with one simple reform agenda. They have sometimes been at odds with each other, and sometimes seen as sharing similar concerns. However, criticism of traditional subject-centred education has been a dominant feature of much educational thinking that has gone under both these labels.

Before considering the specific histories of qualifications frameworks (Chapters 3, 4, and 8), as well as the conceptual issues that they raise, it is worth taking a brief look back in time, to consider the predecessors of the current ideas about outcomes and learner-centredness. The cursory accounts below, both of outcomes/objectives-based approaches, and of child-/learner-centred approaches, are roughly chronological. This is not meant to imply a clear progression or move from one thinker or movement to another, but simply to show some of the ways in which similar ideas have emerged in the history of educational reform. I start with learning outcomes, and afterwards consider learner-centredness.

#### LOOKING BACK ON LEARNING OUTCOMES

Current policy documents describe learning outcomes as a new idea, even a ‘new learning paradigm’. But actually this idea has rather a long history. Previous versions of it have surfaced particularly when reformers have wanted to improve relationships between education and labour markets, or increase the ‘relevance’ of education to work. Developing statements of objectives, competences, or learning outcomes is one way in which reformers have attempted to make education relevant, accessible,

and useful to the individuals acquiring it, to their employers, and to society at large. The premise seems to be that if we can just figure out *exactly* what it is that we want learners to *be able to do* by the end of education, we can design education systems that enable them to learn it.

Many researchers trace outcomes-based education to teacher education in the United States in the 1980s, where there was a focus on developing and measuring teacher ‘competence’, largely as a result of political pressures as school education came under public criticism (Spreen, 2001; Stewart & Sambrook, 1995). But, as Terry Hyland (1994) points out, this idea had already gained prominence in the United States in the early twentieth century, under the influence of Frederick Taylor and the ‘efficiency’ cult. Taylor conducted time and motion studies in order to increase the productivity of workers in manufacturing. His most famous study was on the processing of pig iron. This led to a flurry of publications on ‘Scientific Management’ between 1910 and 1916 (Callahan, 1962; Wainwright, 1994). Various reformers and curriculum writers developed this into the notion of the ‘Scientific Curriculum’. For example, W.W. Charters, an influential north American educationalist propounded the idea of ‘activity analysis’: the notion that curriculum construction should begin by listing the major objectives of schooling, creating details of the lists of activities associated with work in which the student planned to engage, and then preparing study units on the basis of these objectives and descriptions of activities (Ravitch, 2001).

Franklin Bobbit (1876–1956), who claimed to write the first book on ‘the curriculum’, is an exemplary representative of this approach. I will consider his ideas in some depth because of their startling similarity to recent educational reforms. Bobbit was an enthusiastic follower of Taylor’s Scientific Management, and wanted to use it to improve schools. He argued that schools needed clearly specified objectives, based on analysis of tasks and roles in the ‘real’ world. His strongest criticism of the contemporary curriculum was a lack of clearly articulated objectives. The essence of the theory of the ‘Scientific Curriculum’ was that one should “go out into the world of affairs and discover the particulars of which these affairs consist” (Bobbit, 1918, p. 11). The task of the curriculum developer was to “discover the total range of habits, skills, abilities, forms of thought, valuations, ambitions, etc, that the members of any particular social class need for the effective performance of their vocational labours, as well as for their civic activities, health activities, recreations, language, parental, religious, and general social activities”.

Bobbit (1918, p. 11) argued that the curriculum was “that *series of things which children and youth must do and experience* by way of developing abilities to do the things well that make up the affairs of adult life”. As opposed to nineteenth century education, focused, wrongly in Bobbit’s view, on ‘facts’, the new education that he advocated would “train thought and judgement in connection with actual life-situations, a task distinctly different from the cloistral activities of the past. It is also to develop the good-will, the spirit of service, the social valuations, sympathies, and attitudes of mind necessary for effective group-action where specialization

has created endless interdependency” (Bobbit, 1918, p. 10). He emphasized the continuity between education and experience:

... as education is coming more and more to be seen as a thing of experiences, and as the work- and play-experiences of the general community life are being more and more utilized, the line of demarcation between directed and undirected training experience is rapidly disappearing. Education must be concerned with both, even though it does not direct both. (Bobbit, 1918, p. 11)

Bobbit suggested that just as steel plants had precise specifications for their products, which were not determined by the mill but by those who had ordered the rails, education must have standards specified by the community, and not by educators. “A school system can no more find standards of performance within itself than a steel plant can find the proper height or weight per yard for steel rails from the activities within the plant,” he argued, and went on:

... the commercial world can best say what it needs in the case of its stenographers and accountants. A machine shop can best say what is needed in the workers that come to it. The plumbing trade contains the men who are best able to state the needs of those entering upon plumbing; and so on through the entire list. (Bobbit 1913b, cited in Callahan, 1962, pp. 83-84)

Teachers’ expertise, according to Bobbit, lay in achieving the standard which had been specified by the experts:

After society has given to the school its ultimate standard in any particular case, it then is certainly the business of the educational and psychological experts to determine the time of the beginning, the intensity of the work, and the standards to be attained in each of the successive stages. (Bobbit 1913, cited in Callahan, 1962, p. 84)

The analysis of tasks and roles would lead to a list of desired skills, which could then be broken down into constituent elements, and specified as the objectives of the curriculum. Based as it is on the ideas of Scientific Management, which used manufacturing as a template, this ‘Scientific Curriculum’ may be the origin of the tendency to use notions such as ‘inputs’, ‘outputs’ and ‘efficiency’ in educational discussions.

Bobbit’s work was largely focused on *behavioural* objectives. He parts company with contemporary learning outcomes discourse in his attitude towards learners. Whereas the contemporary discourse puts emphasis on ‘learner centredness’, he saw “the interest of children as irrelevant to the educational process”. Instead, “curriculum work was a practical task whose only need for theoretical justification had been ‘discovered’ analyzing the behavior of successful adults” (cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 3). In this, he was at odds with his better-known contemporary, John Dewey (1859 – 1952), who stressed the importance of ‘child-centred theory’, and whose ideas I will return to below. Bobbit was also at odds with many of the

educational thinkers and reformers who re-used, re-worked and developed his ideas, who increasingly took on the notion of learner centredness. For, as discussed in the previous chapter, recent documentation about learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks places emphasis on both the notion of learning outcomes *and* the idea of learner-centredness, the modern version of child-centredness. The two ideas are seen as intertwined, and policy makers, advocates and researchers increasingly describe learner-centredness and learning outcomes as part of the same package of policies.<sup>1</sup>

Elliot Eisner (1967), a critic of objectives-based approaches to the curriculum, argues that the ‘Scientific Curriculum’ movement of the early twentieth century collapsed under its own weight in the 1930s, because of the large number of objectives and very complex curriculum which emerged. Bobbit’s approach led to long and unwieldy lists of learning objectives, something that remains a dominant feature of outcomes-based qualifications today. Herbert Kliebard, an authority on the history of the curriculum in the United States, quotes just a small selection of Bobbit’s objectives, to give a flavour of the types of objectives that were developed: “the ability to keep one’s emotional serenity, in the face of circumstances however trying”, “an attitude and desire of obedience to the immutable and eternal laws which appear to exist in the nature of things”, “ability to read and interpret facts expressed by commonly used types of graphs, diagrams, and statistical tables”, “ability to care properly for the feet”, “keeping razor in order” and “ability to tell interesting stories interestingly” (Kliebard, 1975, p. 40).

In the late 1940s and 50s, outcomes and objectives re-emerged. Specialists reintroduced the importance of specific educational objectives, often with links to, or invoking support from, the ‘Scientific Curriculum’ movement (Eisner, 1967). Ralph Tyler (1949), for example, although advocating broader objectives than Bobbit’s, had a similar notion of curriculum making as linear: content must be selected on the basis that it achieves specified objectives. The means must only be determined once the end has been decided upon. Tyler argued that subject specialists should be consulted in curriculum design, but the focus should be on what the subject can contribute to the education of young laypeople; for example, how science can contribute to personal health, meet needs for responsible participation in socially significant activities, or encourage reflective thinking. Tyler emphasized studying young people and contemporary life outside the school in order to design the curriculum (Tyler, 1949). Tyler’s doctoral thesis was supervised by W.W. Charters, champion of ‘activity analysis’, whose particular focus was on describing the competencies of teachers in order to better train them (Norris, 1991, p. 338).

The ideas of Benjamin Bloom (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956), particularly his notion of a taxonomy of learning domains, were very influential from the 1950s, and continue to be part of mainstream educational thinking, still widely taught to trainee-teachers in many countries. Bloom, and others working in his tradition such as Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) who have developed a ‘Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy’, have a very different idea of the curriculum to those of Bobbit and the Scientific Curriculum movement. Bloom’s original Taxonomy of Learning

Domains describes different kinds of cognitive processes. These are not specified competencies to be mastered and then moved on from, but rather, ongoing aims of educational processes. There may, however, be some continuities between these different schools of thought. The original taxonomy is dedicated to Ralph Tyler, and many later advocates of outcomes-based education link their ideas to Bloom. What the taxonomy developed and made mainstream is the notion of cognitive ‘skills’ disembedded from specific subject matters. Bloom’s taxonomy also contains the idea that cognitive ‘skills’ can be organized on a hierarchy, from the lowest level of simple recall or recognition of facts, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order, classified as evaluation. This notion of a generic hierarchy in the absence of the context of a specific subject or knowledge area re-surfaces in contemporary outcomes and qualifications frameworks policies.

Behavioural objectives acquired particular popularity in the United States in the 1950s, and were associated with the idea of ‘mastery learning’, as advocated, for example, by William Glasser, a psychiatrist outside of mainstream psychiatry in the United States who wrote an influential book, *Schools Without Failure* (Glasser, 1969). Glasser criticized traditional schooling for using norm referenced assessments in which students were ranked against each other according to achievements on assessment tasks, arguing that this just focused on selecting the ‘fastest horses in the racecourse’. The idea of setting objectives which all students should be able to master in their own time was seen as more progressive, enabling all students to succeed in education, instead of setting some up for failure. In mastery learning the specification of objectives is tied to a notion of learner-centredness. While it is not necessarily opposed to a subject-based curriculum, Glasser raised other themes familiar from much contemporary education policy, including criticisms that schools do not prepare students for life, and criticism of memorization and focus on ‘facts’. Schools, he argued, “usually do not teach a relevant curriculum; when they do, they fail to teach the child how he can relate this to his life outside of school” (Glasser, 1969, p. 50).

Another relative of the outcomes and objectives focus in educational reform is the criterion-referencing movement. Advocated by Glasser and others such as William James Popham, this movement gained force from the early 1960s, arguing for the clear specification of criteria against which learners would be assessed (Wolf, 1995). Popham (1972) also argued for more specific behavioural objectives. Drawing on Bloom’s taxonomy, he argued that educational objectives need to be disaggregated according to the types of behaviours they are designed to promote.

Criterion-referencing has been a major influence in mainstream educational thinking, with a far broader reach than outcomes-based curriculum reforms and qualifications frameworks. It could be argued that this notion has been, to a large extent, mainstreamed in educational thinking today. For example, the notion of “supposedly clear and free-standing descriptors of what pupils at different ‘levels’ should attain” (Wolf, 1995, p. 3) is a key part of the National Curriculum of the United Kingdom. It is often also linked to ideas about learner-centredness and

mastery learning, and invoked in opposition to norm-referencing<sup>2</sup>. While it is not necessarily opposed to subjects, as criteria can be set within subject areas, it has also emerged in relation to the outcomes-based qualifications movement, as Alison Wolf describes in her book about the competence-based reform movement in the United Kingdom and the National Vocational Qualifications which emerged, and to which I will return in the following chapter.

The ideas of Bobbit, Tyler, and Glasser show that outcomes approaches have a long lineage. However, as mentioned above, most accounts link their current popularity to their use in teacher education during the 1970s in the United States. Here the focus was on the competencies that teachers were expected to have, echoing the work of W.W. Charters. It is to this movement that the current spread of outcomes and competencies is usually linked:

CBET [competence-based education and training] can be traced to education of primary and vocational teachers in the US, starting in the 1970s. Performance-based modules were developed, starting in Ohio. By 1977 some 23 states had implemented performance-based vocational education, and in the late 1980s the concept shaped many programmes of vocational education and training. (Deissinger & Hellwig, 2005, p. 8)

I have shown above that this movement has clear roots in the earlier ideas of outcomes and objectives, and traces its genesis from Bloom and Glasser.

The same lineages can be seen in another figure who influenced the more recent outcomes-based curriculum reforms, particularly in the schooling sector: William Spady, sometimes referred to as “the Father of outcomes-based education”. He is described by Spreen (2001, p. 86) as “[p]robably the most significant actor in the OBE [outcomes-based education] arena”. Spreen traces Spady’s intellectual lineage from Tyler as well as Bloom. Like Bobbit, a central feature of Spady’s notion of education is that its prime purpose is to prepare learners for ‘life roles’ after their formal education is complete (Killen, 2007).

Roy Killen, Australian outcomes-based education advocate, argues in an unpublished memo on Spady that

Spady has never felt bound to conform to traditional ways of viewing education, particularly the organisational and systems aspects of school education. He is very much a “systems thinker” and this is why his ideas about educational reform are so challenging. They are not just ideas about what teachers should do in classrooms. They are ideas about how educational systems should be structured, how schools should be managed, how curricula should be designed and, ultimately, how learning and teaching should be driven by significant outcomes. (Killen, undated, p. 3)

This argument is one made by many contemporary advocates of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, as will be seen below in this chapter and in later chapters. The specification of learning outcomes is seen as a way of thinking about the

curriculum, but also of changing the way education is managed, funded, organized, and evaluated. Spreen links the emergence of learning outcomes in the United States to market-oriented influences, and points out that outcomes-based education incorporated corporate sector concepts into education. This is evidenced by a focus on notions such as ‘client satisfaction’, ‘efficiency’ ‘measurable productivity’ ‘accountability’, ‘standards’, and ‘quality assurance’. Defining learning outcomes was seen as a key part of institutional strategic planning, in much the same way as quality management literature emphasizes goals. It is striking how naturalized these concepts are in education policy today.

Spady’s ideas never became a major tenant of educational reform in the United States. They had a far greater influence on curriculum reform in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Spady provided consultancy services and advocacy visits to these countries, all of which had lengthy experiments in various types of outcomes-based reforms (Spreen, 2001).

Two common threads are worth highlighting across these different thinkers and attempts at educational reform. One has been mentioned at length above: a general tendency to oppose a subject-based curriculum, or reject the idea of subjects as the starting point for curriculum design. This is not necessarily inherent to all the positions mentioned above. However, what is common, despite substantial differences, is that the various outcomes/ objectives/ competencies movements all entail attempts to describe skills, including cognitive ‘skills’, as disembodied from specific subject matter. In most instances this has led to difficulties, for although some sense of outcome, purpose, and standard is inherent in educational processes, pinning down exactly what this should be has proved difficult, particularly when outcomes are specified outside of specific contexts and subjects or bodies of knowledge. It is perhaps this problem which leads to the second common thread: a desire for dramatic change to education systems. The change desired differs—from empowering individual learners to improving the ‘usefulness’ of education to employers—but substantial change is believed necessary; the current system is seen as failing. And perhaps a third common thread is that while reformers aim for system-wide change, their mechanism is often the production of detailed and narrow technical specifications. Wolf’s observation about reforms in England and Wales applies equally to outcomes-based approaches as a whole:

[a] curious aspect of competence-based reform, at least in England and Wales, is that, although the reformers’ ambitions are very wide, their focus has been very narrow. They would like to see major changes in the whole institutional context of vocational education and training but they have themselves treated the approach as an essentially technical affair. (Wolf, 1995, p. 131)

This ‘technicalism’ has in many instances been argued to have led to the downfall of outcomes-based approaches. Early and more recent criticisms of objectives and outcomes pointed out that they tend to trivialize education. This, Lawrence Stenhouse argues, (1975, 2002), is the consequence of an over-emphasis on endpoints and a

neglect of processes. Others (e.g. Scott, 2008) have examined how outcomes-based approaches have led to an atomized model of knowledge. I will pick up some of these critiques and debates in Chapter 6, after discussing more recent developments using outcomes and competencies. But first I turn to a brief and necessarily selective consideration of the history and major tenants of child/learner-centredness, as this is another key component of recent educational reforms.

### LOOKING BACK ON LEARNER-CENTREDNESS

Many advocates of child-centred or learner-centred education are opposed to a narrow instrumental notion of education and oppose the notion of outcomes because they value the importance of process, and do not like the idea of fixed end points. Others are critical of the behaviourism that has been part of many outcomes-based approaches. But many reformers and thinkers who have adopted the terms ‘child-centred’ or ‘learner-centred’ have argued that allowing learners to determine what they want to learn, as well as how and when, helps to ensure not only that they do learn, but that they learn something useful to *them*. Following from this has been hostility, in the ideas of *some* advocates of learner-centredness, to the idea of subjects as the basis of the curriculum. In emphasizing the notion of relevance, the idea of learner centredness has at times developed common ground with the idea of learning outcomes. This is particularly visible in contemporary policy documents advocating for outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, but can also be traced back through the history of the idea of learner-centred education.

Educational reformers attacking the subject-based curriculum under the rallying cry, ‘we teach children, not subjects’ have a long intellectual lineage. Although usually associated with the works of John Dewey in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, some track it as far back as John Amos Comenius in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and others to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Herbert Spencer in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Rousseau (1712-1778) is probably the best-known early figure in this history, frequently cited by later educational reformers. John Darling (1994), British expert and advocate for child-centred education, argues that he may not be the starting point of child-centred educational thinking, but he is the most brilliant early exponent, and that the remainder of child-centered or progressive educational theory can be seen as a series of footnotes to him. Rousseau argued that we should observe the mind’s pattern of development, and discover ourselves through education. Education should not be about learning an approved body of knowledge, but rather, discovering our individual nature and focusing our attention on creating the conditions for its fullest growth (Egan, 2008).

Rousseau wrote about a hypothetical boy, Emile, who would learn only from unmediated experience: from the real world, not in a classroom. As Barrow (1978) points out, his experience is not completely *unmediated*, because Emile would not be allowed to experiment with anything really dangerous. Further, in the sense that Emile’s experience would be completely artificial, removed from society, it would

be entirely *mediated*. What Rousseau principally implies is that Emile would have no academic teaching and no moralizing or rules. The former is qualified, for, while there is to be no direct *instruction*, there is a tutor who could take advantage of situations in order to advance learning; thus Barrow (1978, p. 20) suggests that rather than having no teaching *per se*, “the tutor must not be detected by Emile in the act of teaching”. For the first twelve years of his life he will not be actively introduced to books or reading. After this, he may start to gain some knowledge, starting with that most practical and relevant: for example, he will learn geography starting with the town he lives in, and science by the problems that confront him. Rousseau placed a strong value on practical learning—Emile should learn a trade. In the final stage of his education, from age 15 to 20, Emile would live with other people for the first time. At this time he would be introduced to ‘facts’ and books, including history and poetry, which, Rousseau argued, he would appreciate, as they would be new and interesting (Darling, 1994). Rousseau also wrote, more briefly, about the education of ‘Sophie’, who was to be brought up to be Emile’s wife, her main role being to delight Emile.

Many of Rousseau’s ideas are still popular today. His notion of child-centredness was based on the idea that education must be individualized. He also distinguished between “learning for the sake of learning, and the desire to find out about things that affect oneself and one’s wellbeing” (Darling, 1994, p. 8), which is related to current ideas of useful or relevant knowledge. Other ideas that still have considerable currency are: the danger that education is preparing learners for a world that no longer exists; the primacy of sense experience, learning through experience, and learning by doing; ‘learning how to learn’, which is seen as more important than learning any particular skill or content; an insistence on useful or relevant knowledge; and suspicion of art and abstract study with a complementary emphasis on the dignity and value of learning a trade (Barrow, 1978, p. 183).

A lesser-known figure following Rousseau, and sometimes cited as a key early thinker about child-centredness, was Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Darling (1994) argues that there is a clear intellectual lineage of child-centred thought, and that Pestalozzi, like other child-centred reformers, knew the work of his predecessors, and developed or revised it, and suggests that Pestalozzi called his son Jean-Jacques as a testimony to his ‘intoxication’ with Rousseau (Darling, 1994, p. 17). Pestalozzi, who lived in Switzerland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, also emphasized that instead of dealing with words, children should learn through activity and through interaction with objects, and should be free to pursue their own interests and draw their own conclusions (Darling 1994, p. 18). Like later child-centred reformers, Pestalozzi strongly emphasized the laws of nature, spontaneity, and self-activity. Children should not be given ready-made answers but should arrive at answers themselves; their own powers of seeing, judging and reasoning should be cultivated, their self-activity encouraged (Silber, 1965, p. 140), although Pestalozzi actually had very specific and prescriptive ideas about curriculum and pedagogy, which he saw as derived from nature (Pestalozzi, 1894).

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) came to prominence later in the nineteenth century. He was an English philosopher who expounded similar ideas, although he did not link them to Rousseau, perhaps because of the latter's left-wing politics, with which he disagreed (Egan, 2002). Spencer claimed superiority to earlier philosophers of educational reform because, he argued, his ideas were based on science. He argued strongly for the now commonly accepted notion that education should be about educating 'the whole person'. He also believed that children's understanding could expand only from things of which they had direct experience, and that education should start with the concrete. He emphasized that the process of self-development should be encouraged, and children should be told as little as possible. He argued that traditional subjects were ornamental affectations of the elite. His publications were widely read by those involved in building the new state schools in the United States in the late nineteenth century: by the end of the 1860s, his book, consisting of four essays initially published separately, had been republished in 15 editions by seven publishers. During the 1870s it was reprinted in New York nine times by one publisher, D. Appleton, alone, and in the 1880s there were fifteen printings, all but two of them in the United States (Egan, 2002). He was offered honours in the United States, England, Italy, Denmark, Belgium, Greece, Austria, and Russia. However, as Egan (2002) points out, despite this popularity, Spencer is rarely mentioned in educational texts today, and many of the ideas that he argued for are attributed to John Dewey, who held very similar ideas about education<sup>3</sup>.

John Dewey, mentioned above, was an educational reformer whose ideas dominated much educational thinking in the twentieth century and beyond. He is probably the most well-known voice of educational reform in the English speaking world, associated, amongst other things, with having "helped to legitimate child-centred educational theory" (Darling, 1994, p. 25). He is also linked with what is referred to as 'progressivism'<sup>4</sup> in education, which is often used as a synonym for child/learner-centred education. The Progressive Education Association in the United States codified many of Dewey's ideas to guide teachers, including examples such as, "Teachers will inspire a desire for knowledge, and will serve as guides in the investigations undertaken rather than task-masters"; and "Interest shall be the motive for all work" (Novack, 1975, p. 229). According to Darling (1994, p. 3), the progressive view "is that education should be designed to reflect the nature of the child". Dewey argued that education needed to shift its 'centre of gravity' so that it was centred around children. In terms that are very similar to the ways in which the current 'new educational paradigm' is discussed, he suggested:

Now the change which is coming into our education is the shifting centre of gravity. It is a change, a revolution, not unlike that introduced by Copernicus when the astronomical center shifted from the earth to the sun. In this case the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized. (Dewey, 1956, p. 34).

Like his predecessors and followers, Dewey positioned his ideas as new, and emphasized the out-datedness of the contemporary system: "... our present education is ... an education dominated almost entirely by the mediaeval conception of learning" (Dewey, 1956, p. 26). He emphasized "its passivity of attitude, its mechanical massing of children, its uniformity of curriculum and method" (Dewey, 1956, p. 34). Dewey argued that the knowledge presented in the curriculum must be driven by and related to the child's interests:

An end which is the child's own carries him on to possess the means of its accomplishment. But when material is directly supplied in the form of a lesson to be learned as a lesson, the connecting links of need and aim are conspicuous for their absence. (Dewey, 1956, p. 25).

Dewey's idea, much in line with the contemporary popularity of the idea of teacher as 'facilitator', was that "...the teacher becomes a co-planner of work, whose expertise is based less on academic knowledge—though a broad general knowledge will be necessary—than on an understanding of children and groups" (Darling, 1994, p. 27). The children would carry out the educational process, guided and aided by the teacher.

Another idea explored by Dewey which remains popular today is 'learning to learn', which was linked to a preoccupation (equally prevalent today) with what was seen as a rapidly changing world. As mentioned above, this was also a concern of Rousseau. Like today's reformers, 'learning to learn' was juxtaposed with learning 'a fixed stock of information'. Like reformers who preceded and followed him, Dewey emphasized that 'changes' in society required 'changes' in education. In particular, he discussed the growth of science-based inventions that

have utilized the forces of nature on a vast and inexpensive scale; the growth of a world-wide market as the object of production, of vast manufacturing centers to supply this market, of cheap and rapid means of communication and distribution between all its parts ... One can hardly believe there has been a revolution in all history so rapid, so extensive, so complete. ... That this revolution should not affect education in some other than a formal and superficial fashion is inconceivable. (Dewey, 1956, p. 9)

In the works of Dewey and many others the idea of 'learner-centredness' is often linked with ideas about student motivation—the assumption being that students will be more motivated if they can see the purpose of what they are learning, or if the starting point is their immediate interests. This has been influenced by the idea that children learn naturally, easily, and pleasurably if left to their own devices, and the idea, derived from psychological research into cognitive development, that learning involves the 're-construction' of knowledge by learners. It is believed that shaping education around learners' interests and inclinations will enable them to be active constructors of their own knowledge, instead of passive recipients (or memorizers) of inert knowledge. So, for example, Gay (2003) discusses teachers who draw

on learners' life experiences to teach "higher-order math knowledge" to African-American middle school students in the United States:

To teach algebra, they emphasize the experiences and familiar environments of urban and rural low-income students, many of whom are at high risk for academic failure. A key feature of their approach is making students conscious of how algebraic principles and formulas operate in their daily lives and getting students to understand how to explain these connections in nonalgebraic language before converting this knowledge into technical notations and calculations of algebra. Students previously considered by some teachers as incapable of learning algebra are performing at high levels—better, in fact, than many of their advantaged peers. (In Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 320)

The example above shows that the idea of *learner-centredness* is not inherently incompatible with the idea of subjects or a knowledge-based curriculum. Some advocates of learner-centredness see it as a primarily pedagogical notion: that the knowledge which is in the curriculum must be presented in ways that resonate with children's interests and existing knowledge. Thus, for some, disciplines or subjects should be the core of the *curriculum*, but *pedagogy* should be child-centred, to ensure that learning has meaning for the child. "Learning should be child-centred in that the learner comes to possess what he knows" argues Entwistle (1970, p. 203), who also suggests that ideas of child-centred education are focused on ensuring that schools are happy places.

But there is a frequent slip from arguments about learner-centred pedagogy to a notion of learner-centred curricula. The idea of the 'motivating curriculum'—that the curriculum will motivate learners to succeed in education if it is relevant to their interests and experiences—can contain a conflation of pedagogy and the curriculum. Some advocates of learner-centredness have gone so far as to denounce the idea of learner-centered pedagogy as a 'sugar coating', that simply appeals to learners' interests in order to in continue to teach predetermined subjects. Dewey argued: "When education is based in theory and practice upon experience, it goes without saying that the organized subject-matter of the adult and the subject specialist cannot provide the starting point" (Dewey (1993, p. 83) cited in Wheelahan, 2010, p. 114). Diane Ravitch (2001) discusses advocates of this line of argument who suggest that teachers must not just *start* with learners' interests in order to make the subject matter more interesting to them, but must *genuinely* work with what learners are interested in. This would mean, for example, that the pedagogical strategy of locating the teaching of mathematics in the everyday experiences of learners to help them make sense of mathematical concepts is not sufficient. Instead, as William H. Kirkpatrick, an early exponent of 'the project method' in the United States, argues, the teaching of mathematics should only involve mathematical ideas derived from, logical to, or embedded in the learners' everyday experiences. Kirkpatrick,

a mathematician by training, published an influential article in 1918, and later a textbook, in which he argued that projects in school must genuinely interest the learner and be chosen by them, in order to motivate them, promote democracy, and teach character and creativity. Others go further still, and argue against the teaching of ‘mathematics’ as a subject, and of subjects in general. Ravitch (2001), critic of child-centred education and progressivism, argues that while in some of his writings Dewey defended subjects as the basis of the curriculum, he did not oppose, and often endorsed, the writings of contemporaries which were more explicitly opposed to a subject-based curriculum.

Dewey was, of course, a highly prolific philosopher whose views shifted over time, and so cannot always be pinned down. The extent to which his notion of child-centredness is opposed to subjects is the focus of much debate. Like some present-day advocates of learner-centredness, (for example, Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006), he also argued against a neglect of knowledge in education, and suggested that children’s interests should be seen as leverage to teach them more, not as accomplishments in their own right (Dewey, 1956).

Nonetheless, throughout the history of learning outcomes and learner-centredness, argument emerge to the effect that the boundaries between subjects are arbitrary, the structure of bodies of knowledge is unimportant and structured bodies of knowledge are not particularly important, nor should they be the starting point in curriculum design. Boundaries between subjects as well as between school knowledge and everyday knowledge are seen as similarly arbitrary and as counteracting effective learning. In Chapter 6, I will provide some epistemological arguments against this position, but for now I will merely mention the view of Egan (2002), who argues that the ‘motivating curriculum’ is often not motivating at all. He points out that children are frequently bored by curricula that are derived from their ‘everyday’ experiences, and are often more interested in dinosaurs and distant heroes than social studies focused on ‘my community’.

What ideas of learning outcomes and the ideas of learner (and child) centredness as they have manifested at various points in the last century have in common is hostility, to varying degrees, to the subject-based curriculum. Both outcomes-based and learner-centred approaches have questioned the idea that subjects handed down by tradition should be the basis of education (Thornton & Flinders).

In the 1960s and 70s, the ‘freeschoolers’ took up the call against subjects, suggesting fundamental changes to schools. A.S. Neill, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner were the prominent voices. Like Rousseau, they were suspicious of ‘book learning’, and, like most of the progressivist or child-centred reformers discussed in this chapter, emphasized ‘natural’ learning instead. They all argued for a learner-centred starting point for education, and generally argued against the ‘traditional’ curriculum and against subject division in the curriculum. In discussing the idea of starting from the ‘interests’ of the child, A.S. Neill extended the use of the word ‘interest’ to one similar to that advocated in policy documents today:

not just what fascinates a child, but what they perceive as being to their advantage (Barrow, 1978). The idea of the constantly changing world emerges again. Postman and Weingartner, for example, wrote in 1971 that “change—constant, accelerating, ubiquitous—is the most striking characteristic of the world we live in” (Postman & Weingartner, 1971, p. 13).

The ideas of radical literacy educator Paulo Freire (e.g. Freire, 1974), and the struggles of liberation movements against colonial education systems, are sometimes used to oppose subject-based curricula, although Freire did not advocate an anti-subject approach. Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy emphasized that education should help learners to connect their personal problems to broader structural issues in society, arguing against what he described as ‘banking’ education, where facts are seen as things to be deposited into empty learners. Instead he advocated an approach which was based on dialogue. These ideas are often *invoked* as arguments against a subject-based curriculum. However, teaching people subjects does not necessarily mean treating them as blank slates, and, many of Freire’s ideas were not about formal schooling, but about conscientization; he was concerned with the role of literacy in political activism, and the ways in which it could be used to develop self-awareness and insight into the world. Freire’s approach is sometimes invoked to justify an anti-subject stance in the sense of working with issues of immediate concern to learners; this is something which may well be appropriate in activist groups. But, as I will argue in Chapter 6, it is less appropriate in formal schooling. I cannot here do justice to the nuance of Freire’s ideas, nor evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. The point for now is to note that he was a key left-wing figure who is often presented as being against subject-based curricula.

The concept of ‘deschooling’ is another idea that has emerged again and again in the history of educational reform. Many reformers in the 1960s and 70s referred back to earlier theorists, arguing, for instance, that the logic of Rousseau’s ideas implied that the school system itself was the problem. The ‘deschoolers’, who included Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman and Everett Reimer, argued for the abolition of educational institutions (Barrow, 1978). Although Illich later distanced himself from the term ‘deschooling’, what is common to these three thinkers is profound hostility to institutions, including, or perhaps particularly, educational institutions. Reimer, quoted in Illich (1970, p. 105), argues that “learning occurs only with great difficulty in the role of the classroom student”; it occurs “naturally at work and at play, but must be artificially stimulated when separated from them”. Like earlier reformers, and like today’s policy makers, they emphasized the changing world as a key motivating factor in radically changing education. Goodman was not completely against schools, but was strongly against teachers and professional training for teachers, and argued, like Rousseau, that there should be no prescribed curriculum until the age of 12. After 12, he argued for an extended apprenticeship system, in which an individual could be apprenticed in anything that interested them<sup>5</sup>. The ‘deschoolers’ were concerned with efficiency, and saw schools as wasting children’s time. Like many of today’s enthusiastic reformers, they were excited about the

possibilities of technology replacing schools, and, like Pestalozzi before them, were critical of teachers. As Entwistle (1970, p. 167) writes:

Enthusiasm for the mechanization of schooling often conceals a mistrust of the average teacher which is nowadays rarely expressed as candidly as it was by Pestalozzi, himself a central figure in the child-centred tradition.

The passage below gives some indication of Pestalozzi's mistrust:

I would take school instruction out of the hands of the old order of decrepit, stammering, journeymen-teachers as well as from the new weak ones, who are generally no better for popular instruction, and entrust it to the undivided powers of Nature herself, to the light that God kindles and ever keeps alive in the hearts of fathers and mothers, to the interest of parents who desire that their children should grow up in favour with God and man. (Pestalozzi, 1894, p. 97)

Thus, the ideas which dominate qualification reform today have a rich and long ancestry, despite their presentation by policy makers as 'new learning paradigms'. In fact, this tendency to present their ideas as new, forward-looking, and progressive innovations is another commonality across time and space between outcomes-based approaches and learner-centred approaches (Egan, 2002; Muller, 2001). Many of them have been associated with new developments in technology, which are seen as changing knowledge, the role of teachers, and the ways in which learners can access knowledge.

Presenting 'newness' as a virtue is common in education. Those concerned with social justice tend to position newness in juxtaposition to ideas that are seen as conservative or elitist simply by virtue of being old. Left-wing educational reformers have usually wanted to achieve 'radical' change, in the sense of dramatic and substantial change, and so favour ideas which seem to be new and forward-looking. Reformers associated with market-oriented approaches or economic efficiency link 'old' or 'traditional' approaches to education with backwardness, inefficiency, and irrelevance to industry. Callahan (1962), for example, writes that this type of charge was made by industry-oriented reformers in the United States in the early twentieth century. Educational reformers today likewise argue that the 'archaic' content and pedagogy of traditional education are out of touch with emergent social realities, including the impact of the mass media and the 'knowledge explosion' (Sedunary, 1996). David Harvey (2005) argues that the fetishization of newness as well as of technology is a product of capitalism, because new technologies often lead to profit increases and new market shares. As the ideas dominating qualification reform show, it doesn't even matter whether the ideas are really new, only that they are presented as such.

#### THE PENDULUM OF IDEAS

Conservatism in education has been associated with an invocation of tradition, and the arguments that the traditional curriculum embodies traditional wisdom, values, and authority, and that the culture represented in 'traditional' subjects transforms and

enriches individuals (Moore, 2009, p. 4). Matthew Arnold's notion of education as the 'best that has been thought and said' is usually invoked<sup>6</sup>. The traditional division of the disciplines and disciplinary knowledge "are endowed with timeless and universal features. The role of the curriculum is to transmit timeless truths through contemplative processes, and to inculcate appropriate deference to traditional bodies of knowledge, and instill respect for authority and traditional values" (Wheelahan, 2010, p. 107). Pring (1976, p. 144) expresses it thus:

Conservative restorationists argue that the curriculum should be anchored in the past and they emphasise canons of influential texts, formal and didactic modes of pedagogy, the inculcation of values rooted in stability and hierarchy, strong insulations between disciplinary and everyday knowledge, strong forms of classification between different aspects of knowledge, and indeed in some cases a belief that curriculum knowledge is either intrinsically justified or transcendental.

This is why the traditional curriculum is associated with conservative social and political agendas, and has led many to argue that the notion of 'an educated person' is circular: "What is often meant in calling people educated is that they have learned the kind of stuff that has traditionally been taught in educational institutions" (Darling, 1994, p. 63).

As discussed above, various arguments against this have been laid out through the course of educational reform movements. Reformers from the nineteenth-century onwards have observed that the "richness and abundance of understanding that should have come to all students from literacy through an education in the classics had too often descended into dry pedantry" (Egan, 2008, p. 21). Many have argued that the traditional curriculum is alienating, and leads to failure and students dropping out of education. And the idea of 'tradition' dictating subjects has a serious practical problem: it does not provide criteria with which to make decisions about which knowledge should be chosen for specific individuals or groups, either in terms of broad subject areas or in terms of selection of knowledge within subject areas.

And yet, learner centred approaches to the curriculum do not have a great track record in achieving the claims made for them—neither the more modest claims of ensuring student success at school, nor the more radical claims of ensuring that schools disrupt rather than reproduce the *status quo*. Egan (2002) points out that while learner alienation, drop-out and failure are usually discussed in relation to an assumed subject-centred approach, in fact learner-centred curricula are in many instances the orthodoxy in schools, have been *attempted* in different forms for over the past 100 years, and have not solved these problems.

One reason given to explain this state of affairs is that learner-centred approaches have not been 'properly' or 'thoroughly' implemented, or have become distorted and diluted in their implementation. Paul Goodman, a 'deschooler', argues that progressive ideas are distorted through their institutionalization (Goodman 1964). Some supporters of progressivism (for example, Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006),

argue that while aspects of progressivist or learner-centred reforms in Canada and the United States may have been adopted to some extent, or in official rhetoric, they were never fully implemented, and where they were implemented, conservative backlashes have mainly reversed them. Some researchers suggest that, while they have had some successes, particularly at specific times in history, vested elite interests have unleashed backlashes which have ensured that the subject-based curriculum prevails. Darling (1994), for example, describes progressivism as the established orthodoxy in the 1960s in primary education in the United Kingdom, a situation he attributes to the intellectual freedom of the 60s, but describes a ‘backlash’ against it in later decades. Scott (2008) agrees that in the 1970s and 80s curriculum theorists put more focus on knowledge, in particular transcendental knowledge, and Tomlinson (2009, pp. 26–27) links this with a return to education “as an allocator of occupations, a defender of traditional academic values, teaching respect for authority, discipline, morality and ‘Englishness’ and preparing a workforce for the new conditions of flexible, insecure labour markets”. Darling (1994) describes this shift as culminating in John Major’s announcement to the Conservative Party Conference in 1991: “The progressive theorists have had their say, and they have had their day”.

However, nearly all commentators agree that *some* reforms and ideas introduced under the banner of child-centred or progressivist reforms have been positive. These include, for example, acceptance that failure to learn the curriculum might be “due to faults other than the child’s recalcitrance” (Entwistle, 1970, p. 24), and that schools should not be dreary places. Tomlinson similarly (2009) suggests that the reforms actually instituted through the child-centred movement in the United Kingdom were much more modest than their critics suggested, and were generally necessary, with positive effects. There is also some agreement that child-centred or progressivist reforms have been influential, regardless of whether this is seen as positive or negative. Darling (1994), arguing in favour of progressivism, and Egan (2002) and Ravitch (2001), arguing against it, all agree that many aspects of it, or of the child-centred tradition, have become common-place and accepted wisdom, particularly in primary schools. Darling (1994, p. 32) points out that Dewey’s influence was massive in the United States and United Kingdom, as well as in Russia and China, countries which he visited and toured, and in many other countries which learnt of his ideas. Entwistle (1970) also claims that child-centredness is a foundation of much educational thought. Egan (2002) and Ravitch (2001) both argue that progressivism has become conventional wisdom in North American education; Egan argues that even where progressivism is not the default in terms of practices in schools, it is the default in terms of the concepts and vocabulary that dominate educational research and teaching.

But they and other critics suggest that there are problems with progressivism which are intrinsic to it. Young and Muller (2010, p. 19), for example, argue that when boundaries between knowledge areas are not made explicit (as they are in a subject-based curriculum) learners who stumble are less able to see what causes them to stumble. Drawing on the extensive work of Bernstein (for example,

Berstein 1977; 2000), they demonstrate that the difference between ‘progressive’ and ‘traditional’ curricula is not the presence or absence of rules, but rather their *visibility* or *invisibility*; in other words, the degree to which they are made explicit to the learners, as well as the degree to which learners are prepared by their home background to perceive and understand what is expected of them. They argue that progressive curricula are likely to *entrench* social inequalities (Muller, 2001; Taylor, 2000; Young & Muller, 2010). Even if learner centredness is only considered from the point of view of pedagogy, and not as the basis for curriculum construction, in other words, where learner centredness means using learners’ everyday experiences and interests in order to draw them into prescribed subjects, some argue that over-emphasizing context can sometimes make it more difficult for learners to acquire systematically organized knowledge in educational institutions. Bernard Charlot (2009, p. 92), for example, argues:

José leaves home with thirty euros and loses ten euros: how many euros will he get back home with? The pupil solves this problem without difficulty because the meanings “lose” and “subtract” converge. Now, José leaves home with thirty euros, earns money and comes back home with fifty euros: how much did he earn? To solve the problem the pupils have to do a subtraction, which they do not find logical, given that José earned money. One can give lots of examples in which the reference to the every-day world creates a difficulty for the pupil.

The effects, positive or negative, of learner-centred reforms and learning outcomes and objectives are difficult to evaluate empirically. One obstacle to such evaluation is the enormous number of uncontrollable variables which will always be present in research in schools. But more importantly, the different perspectives involve different notions of what education can and should achieve, and hence different criteria for educational success. For example, while some researchers (for example, Donnelly, 2005) argue for teacher-centred classrooms and prescribed syllabuses on the grounds that this leads to improvement in international and national achievement tests, critics argue against international and national achievement tests on the grounds that they lead to teacher-centred classrooms and prescribed syllabuses (for example, Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Zajda & Zajda, 2005).

The continued rediscovery of educational ideas may be located in the different manifestations of both subject and learner-centred curricula, and the fact that different uses and interpretations of outcomes, objectives and competences have also taken different forms across different levels and sectors of education systems. The extent to which a curriculum is centrally prescribed, and how prescriptive it is, also tends to confuse matters<sup>7</sup>. There are inevitably substantial differences between the education policies of various countries, between policy rhetoric and the reality of education institutions and education systems within countries, and between policies implemented at different times in the same country. In some instances the same education systems have some policy mechanisms which support ‘subject centred’

approaches and others which tend towards 'learner centred' approaches. 'Subject-centred' approaches have tended to hold stronger ground in senior secondary schools and universities, and 'child-' or 'learner-centred' approaches have been more prominent in adult education, primary education, and nursery schools, as well as in vocational education, especially in competence-based training. Elite education, particularly exclusive private secondary and tertiary institutions, has generally taken a more traditional subject based approach<sup>8</sup>.

What is contested is not just the merits of the arguments for and against these approaches, but the extent to which curricula and education systems are influenced by them today. On the one side, researchers and policy analysts argue that narrow subject-based curricula are increasingly entrenched internationally (Scott, 2008). Goodson (1994) talks about the 'impregnable fortress' of the subject-based curriculum, drawing the term from Kliebard, who concludes his study of the history of the American curriculum with the observation that "by and large, dethroning school subjects turned out to be a much more formidable task than the proponents of such change ever imagined" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 218). David Scott (2008) suggests that contemporary curricula are governed entirely by disciplines, and that any debates within governments about the correctness of this have been put aside:

governments around the world, although not exclusively so, have sought to reinforce strong boundaries between disciplinary and everyday knowledge in developing the contents of their curricula, and have reinforced strong insulations between learners, between learners and teachers, between knowledge domains and between institutions which focus on teaching and learning. (Scott, 2008, p. 146).

He argues that the ideas which predominate in contemporary curriculum thinking are: that traditional knowledge areas and the strong boundaries between them need to be preserved; that each of these knowledge areas can be expressed in terms of lower and higher level domains, and the former have to be taught before the latter and sequenced correctly; that certain groups of children are better able to access the curriculum than others, and therefore a differentiated curriculum is required; and that the teacher's role is to impart this body of knowledge in the most efficient and effective way possible. Other contemporary critics bemoan how 'conservative' schools and the subject-based curriculum are (for example, Murgatroyd, 2010). Like advocates for earlier child-centred reforms, Murgatroyd (2010, p. 260) attributes the problems with contemporary education to a focus on 'content' at the expense of 'learning how to learn' or 'skills and competencies', and makes much of the 'speed of discovery' of knowledge, which, he argues, means that "much of what is taught in schools is, by definition, outdated".

But still other researchers call for knowledge to be 'brought back into the curriculum' (Young, 2008), and suggest that knowledge is undermined or marginalized in contemporary curricula (Muller, 2000; Rata, 2012; Young, 2007). Young and Muller (2010) argue that this results in tracked or streamed systems,

which preserve classical education for the elite, and provide vocational or practical alternatives for the rest. Ravitch (2001), fiercely critical of progressivism in the United States, and until recently associated with conservative political agendas, suggests that progressivism has dominated educational thinking in the United States since the 1890s. She laments the loss of subjects in North American education, arguing that it has led to poor students being denied access to meaningful education.

It could be hoped that the different schools of thought would have moderating effects on each other. Entwistle discusses the notion of a counter-cyclical theory of education: when the needs of children dominate, theorists assert the claims of the disciplines, and vice versa: “Out of this, it is hoped, would emerge a satisfactory synthesis, a stabilizing of educational practice at a point mid-way between the extremes to which the pendulum swings” (Entwistle, 1970, p. 211). On the contrary, he argues that the problem with the swinging pendulum is that it leads to the worst sides of both approaches. Instead of producing some kind of happy medium, educational theory is perceived as in perpetual conflict: “There can be no gain, least of all for children .... For the middle ground is not a neutral territory where reasonable men come together to fashion a treaty of peace; it is a no-man’s-land where virtually nothing of rational educational theory survives at all” (Entwistle, 1970, pp. 211–121). Similarly, Egan (2008, p. 26) describes the history of education in the twentieth century as “a bizarre war between those who were ‘subject-centered’ and those who were ‘child-centered’, between traditionalists and progressivists”. The war has manifested itself, he suggests, in swings from the one to the other, as well as uneasy, (and, according to him, ultimately unworkable), compromises between the two. And, in Egan’s view, it is precisely the *failures* of *both* approaches that lead to this periodic and unsatisfactory swinging between the two.

Much educational literature assumes that learner-centred policies are intrinsically left-wing, and subject-centred policies intrinsically right-wing. Darling (1994), for example, suggests that attempts to halt the advance of the child-centred movement are the product of social conservatism. The clash between child- and subject-centred education, he suggests, is not a clash of intellectual ideas, but of ideologies. Referring to the opposition to child-centred education of R.S. Peters, Paul Hirst, and Robert Dearden, he argues that these “[p]hilosophers of education are therefore not spectators at the revolution, but counter-revolutionaries” (Darling, 1994, p. 86).<sup>9</sup> However, as can be seen in the very brief discussion above, the inherently conservative nature of the subject-centred curriculum is disputed. Indeed, Marxist Antonio Gramsci saw traditional education as empowering and necessary, as I discuss in further detail in Chapter 6. And many contemporary researchers (e.g. Young, 2008) argue for a left-wing approach to a subject-based curriculum, on the grounds that the knowledge which the elite are taught in school is useful or powerful, and hence should be taught to everyone: Young argues that it is the *power* of this knowledge that makes education a social justice issue. In other words, while most critical writers on education agree that it is inevitably political,<sup>10</sup> it is much less clear that particular ideas about education and the curriculum, as well as about

epistemology, are inherent to particular political agendas. Thus while it is difficult to separate ideas about what should be taught, to whom, by whom, and at whose cost, from broader political questions, the relationship between different approaches to the curriculum and particular political ideologies are not straightforward. This issue will be explored most thoroughly in Chapter 7. In order to lay the basis for this discussion, I will now pick up the story of learning outcomes and objectives, as well as learner centredness, as they emerged in qualification reform in the 1980s and 90s. The following chapter examines outcomes-based qualifications in vocational education reforms in the United Kingdom and Australia, and an outcomes-based National Qualifications Framework in New Zealand which was intended to reform the entire education and training system.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Dewey also supervised the doctoral thesis of W.W. Charters, leader of the ‘Scientific Curriculum’ movement, so there may have already been relationships between these two schools of thought (Ravitch, 2001).
- <sup>2</sup> Criterion-referencing and norm-referencing are often positioned as two alternative ways of conducting assessment. Advocates of criterion-referencing tend to suggest that norm-referencing is an unfair system of assessment. The very term ‘criterion-referenced assessment’ implies that there are ways of assessing that invoke no criteria at all. This does not make sense. All assessment is based on criteria, whether implicit or explicit. Norm-referencing is about what happens to the results of assessment; how they are used for ranking students within schools or for selection into professions. Although there is no necessity for this, in policy documents norm-referencing is usually associated with written examinations, and presented as a package with other ‘bads’ like memorization and ‘passive learning’.
- <sup>3</sup> Egan attributes this to Spencer’s unpalatable political ideas, such as social Darwinism and racism, as well as his opposition to public education, particularly for the ‘lower classes’, despite the fact that the educational ideas which he advocated were in many substantial ways the same as those of earlier and later ‘progressive’ reformers.
- <sup>4</sup> The term ‘progressivism’ is highly contested both by those who align themselves to it and those who are critical of it. Some suggest progressivism is so diverse that it can’t be pinned down (for example, Kliebard, 2004), while others (for example, Ravitch, 2001) suggest that the different strands, diverse as they are, have certain core things in common—particularly, she argues, hostility to subjects as the basis of curricula.
- <sup>5</sup> Even those sympathetic with the deschooling ‘school of thought’, such as Ian Lister (1974), have pointed out that in most instances apprenticeships are just as likely, if not more likely, to be as exploitative and oppressive to learners as schools.
- <sup>6</sup> Although Arnold and his idea are usually associated with a conservative political agenda, a close consideration of his works reveals that they are not open to easy labeling. His argument was that culture “seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely—nourished, and not bound by them” (Arnold, 1993, p. 79).
- <sup>7</sup> A centrally prescribed curriculum often seems, in critical educational writing from the United Kingdom and United States, to be assumed to be bad. Hyslop-Margison and Sears, for example, argue for a subject-based curriculum, but argue that it should not be centrally prescribed: “Policies such as centralized curricula development enforced by rigid testing and teacher accountability are designed more to constrain teachers than they are to define and measure student achievement” (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, pp. 16–17). It is possible, however, to be highly prescriptive without having a subject-based curriculum. The South African outcomes-based curriculum prescribed

## CHAPTER 2

learning outcomes to a very fine level of detail, without any subjects or indeed any content at all being prescribed. Ravitch (2010) discusses extreme examples of prescriptiveness around pedagogy in literacy and maths programmes in North American schools, as well as the negative effects of ‘skills-based’ accountability tests which are de-linked from a curriculum because there is no prescribed curriculum, and suggests that a prescribed curriculum may liberate teachers from this.

- <sup>8</sup> Young (2008) suggests this may be a key factor in perpetuating the idea that traditional education systems produce inequality, because it creates a perceived link between elites and the subject-based knowledge learned in elite schools, which is then seen as elite knowledge, or knowledge that operates in the interests of elites.
- <sup>9</sup> Although less critical of their intentions, he suggests that an ‘unintended’ consequence of their ideas was to give ammunition to conservatives in a ‘back to basics’ agenda.
- <sup>10</sup> There are exceptions, a recent one being Frank Furedi (2009), who argues for the depoliticization of education.