

OECD/CERI International Conference
“Learning in the 21st Century:
Research, Innovation and Policy”

OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation—1968 to 2008



CERI

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

Centre pour la recherche et l’innovation dans l’enseignement



ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC
CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT



ORGANISATION DE COOPÉRATION ET
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUES

OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation – 1968 to 2008

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Introduction

In this note written during CERI's 40th anniversary year, I want to record some of the main activities and achievements of this international centre over the years as I see them. It is deliberately brief and a personal selection.²

The obvious context for CERI's creation forty years ago was the emergence of challenge to the ways that society had evolved up to then, symbolised by the revolts of Spring 1968. Education and students were at the heart of this challenge, though it was much more than an educational movement. Another feature of that context was the emergence of education as a nascent field of research and analysis at a time of rising investments and expectations for education. Despite the belief in some quarters that quantitative approaches have come relatively recently to educational research and policy advice, these were already highly influential at that time and well-represented among the approaches prevalent in OECD in the 1960s - educational and 'manpower' planning, and the economics of education.

CERI was created in part to provide a complement to such approaches through a more qualitative focus on educational research and innovation. It was the first specifically educational body created at the OECD. It needed the support of two major foundations – the Ford Foundation and Royal Dutch Shell – to launch it, as well as energy and vision from those most closely involved.

A Brief Summary of CERI's Changing Programme

Looking across the forty years, CERI has in my view shown its capacity to innovate and adapt to new policy and research priorities in its member countries. Nevertheless, it might be surprising to some how far continuing areas of work were already begun during the decade immediately following CERI's launch. I would sum up the two main axes of its work in the 1970s to be *equality in education* and *innovation in educational management*. As well as providing a forum for exchange among innovators on different educational programmes, some of the main projects included:

- Equal educational opportunities;
- Recurrent Education, as a strategy for lifelong learning;
- Early Childhood Care and Education;
- Integration of disabled children into school;
- Innovation in school management;
- The creative school;
- Innovation in higher education.

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² The outstanding source to understand the first half of this 40-year period, which predates the memories of most those still working in the Centre and which includes OECD's work on education more generally, is George Papadopoulos's *Education 1960-1990 – the OECD Perspective*, published by OECD in 1994.

Analyses of research into equality issues were provided by leading specialists such as A.H. Halsey and Torsten Husen, and picked up currents that were swirling internationally in the light of the meta-analysis provided by Christopher Jencks and his team in the early 1970s which questioned the potential of education to equalise life chances. The recurrent education work sought to provide strategies for organising and financing lifelong learning – itself understood as an ambitious and emancipatory societal reorganisation – long before the more recent widespread international focus on lifelong learning from around the mid-1990s. The work on early childhood at this time was concerned not only to improve policy and provision but developed an ‘ecological’ approach to frame the interwoven influences which shape this phase and addressed the very meaning of childhood as it has evolved historically. The early work on integrating those with disabilities, begun in the 1970s, has become a quasi-permanent feature of OECD educational work. I refer to the school innovation and management programme again in the following section, while the International Management of Higher Education programme (IMHE), which began in CERI in the very early years, has survived healthily as a separate programme to the present day.

During the 1980s, many of the same preoccupations found a place in CERI work but with different emphases. For instance, the focus on equality of opportunity increasingly looked at cultural diversity and migrants, predating by two decades its current priority. But there were also clear shifts in the work to reflect the climate and priorities of the time. Three particular new priorities stand out for me:

- the strong focus on educational standards and interest in indicators;
- recognition of the importance of information technologies in their influence on the workplace (CERI did a major study on human resources and IT in industries and services) and on education; and
- the need to address the major problem of very high youth unemployment levels which had taken the policy world by surprise after the heavy investments in education that started with the 1960s ‘baby boom’.

The growing need to promote sustainable development also found the emergence of a strong body of CERI work on environmental education.

The indicators development was clearly to have long-lasting significance for the international educational landscape. From the late 1980s (1988), CERI grew INES out of a set of networks, themselves innovating working methods in order to access significant volumes of expertise and resources. The subsequent development of *Education at a Glance* in CERI and later PISA stand as symbols of CERI’s ‘nursery seed-bed’ role. In response to high youth unemployment, I would single out in the CERI contribution the study prepared by the leading US and Swedish sociologists James Coleman and Torsten Husen on becoming adult in contemporary society. This raised profound issues about the nature of growing up and finding a place in the economy and society which complemented the conventional educational and labour market analyses of transitions from school to work.

From the 1990s to the present day, many of the same preoccupations continued but there were important new priorities. These included the focus on *learning* (the subject of this conference); *knowledge* - the knowledge economy and knowledge management; and the *international* dimension. Over the past decade, the long-running interest in the future found more explicit expression through, first, *Schooling for Tomorrow* and then *University Futures*. Each developed influential scenarios to help focus debate about possible and desirable futures.

Three examples of CERI bringing new dimensions (and sometimes uncomfortable conclusions) to emerging issues can be singled out from this list. First on internationalisation, CERI's work on trade in educational services jarred at first with many in education who refused to accept the economic stakes and even language at play in the rapidly-expanding international learning market. But the analysis revealed the size of the market and the enormous disparities between the 'exporters' and 'importers' of educational services, and provided the knowledge base for an informed debate by all concerned about major international developments in education.

Second on knowledge, the CERI work brought perspectives and practices from other sectors to help inform the educational world about how under-developed its own knowledge management practices are in a world in which knowledge is central. Beyond the education system, CERI's work extended to re-exploration of the nature of human capital in a knowledge economy in the late 1990s and its appropriate measurement. This led on both to international analysis on the complementary concept of social capital and to analysis of the role and impact of learning cities and regions. Third on brain research and learning, (a subject which remains a passion of mine), CERI brought together neuroscientists and educators to explore what had been described as 'a bridge too far'. This work created new synergies and opened up new avenues which will remain influential for many years to come.

CERI Innovations in OECD Working Methods

CERI is the part of OECD with 'Innovation' in its very title, which makes it the more fitting that it is leading the educational work in contribution to the current OECD-wide Innovation Strategy. It has innovated in its working methods as well.

It has created *decentralised programmes and networks*, whether to encourage specific groups and countries to work together in ways outside the main central body of activities, continuing exchange after seeds had been sown in the original CERI nursery. Examples here include IMTEC – the International Management and Training of Educational Change – which provided international training programmes for middle-level educational leaders and decentralised as early as 1973 only five years after CERI was established. The Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC) began in 1977 and brought educators together in the Asia-Pacific rim far from OECD HQ at a time when global travel was much more difficult. ENSI - Environment and School Initiatives - continued as a decentralised international network bringing together initiatives and educators promoting environmental understanding after being launched within the main CERI programme. The German- and Spanish-speaking Seminars were set up at very different moments in the past 40 years – the former in 1977 and the latter in 2000 – in recognition that reliance on work in the two official languages risks to ignore important large bodies of research and innovation.

CERI innovated in the workings of its Governing Board, with the Board discussing in small groups in some sessions and periodically inviting outside keynote speakers. It innovated in its financing, reflecting its origins in substantial foundation funding: over the 40 years, grants have been an important part of the budget and this has also served to bring the staff and the work in contact with a different set of stakeholders. In the early 1990s, the contradiction between the aim of reaching educators and the sometimes impenetrable style of OECD reports resulted in a series of projects closely involving journalists - the What Works in Innovation in Education series - adopting a journalistic approach to writing style and deadlines (the first was on school choice).

Despite the rapidly-changing international landscape, CERI should go into the future with confidence that its particular focus and value-added remains unparalleled. An international organisation like OECD needs a place where there is space to identify the up-coming big questions that will define the new challenges for education and to clarify what their implications might be for those responsible for policy.

A Selected CERI Bibliography

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