

Views of Educators and Policy Makers in the Asia-Pacific Region Towards Schooling for the Future: Survey Findings

This note has been prepared by John J. Cogan, University of Minnesota, USA, and Neil Baumgart, University of Western Sydney, Australia. It gives the background to an Asia-Pacific research project being carried out by the Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC) based on the scenarios developed by the OECD/CERI Schooling for Tomorrow project. It presents some key findings on the views expressed by educational leaders in the Asia-Pacific region concerning the likelihood and desirability of the different scenarios and it outlines the next phase of the research that will follow up the survey with detailed interviews.

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Background

Over the period 1997-2001, OECD/CERI carried out the first phase of its study on 'schooling for tomorrow'. One of the outcomes of the initial work was the development of six OECD/CERI scenarios for schooling over the next 15-25 years. These provide the background to the Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC) research project begun in 2001. These scenarios were described in Chapter 5, "What Future for Our Schools?" in *Education Policy Analysis, 2001 (OECD)*, prepared for the meeting of Education Ministers held in Paris in April, 2001. The full report on "trends and scenarios" from this project entitled, *What Schools for the Future*, was published in October 2001. And the work continues, thus our reason to be here today.

The six scenarios were organized under three main groupings¹:

The Status Quo Continues	Re-Schooling	De-Schooling
Scenario 1: <i>Robust Bureaucratic School Systems</i>	Scenario 3: <i>Schools as Core Social Centers</i>	Scenario 5: <i>Networks & the Network Society</i>
Scenario 2: <i>Extending the Market Model</i>	Scenario 4: <i>Schools as Focused Learning Organisations</i>	Scenario 6: <i>Meltdown & Teacher Exodus</i>

The purpose of the scenarios was to sharpen understanding of how schooling might develop in the years to come and the potential role of policy to help shape these futures. They are seen by OECD/CERI as an effective way of bringing together strategic aims, the long-term processes of change, and multiple sets of variables. Perhaps surprisingly, forward thinking of this kind has been relatively little developed in education compared with other policy sectors, despite education's fundamental long-term nature. The six scenarios have been developed in terms of five dimensions common to each:

- ◆ Attitudes, expectations, political support;
- ◆ Goals and functions;
- ◆ Organisations and structures;
- ◆ The geo-political dimension;
- ◆ The teaching force.

¹ They have since been reclassified, with the market model as part of "de-schooling" and the "meltdown" scenario as a "worst case" of the Status Quo.

Proposing several scenarios underlines that there is not one pathway into the future but many, and they are not expected to emerge in a “pure” form. Distilling the infinite range of possible futures into a limited number of polar “types” stimulates consideration of the strategic choices to be confronted and the principal dimensions of change. The scenarios invite the questions: *a*) how probable, and *b*) how desirable, each is.

The Proposed Study

The impetus for the study being undertaken currently in the Asia-Pacific region, under the auspices of the Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC), was the Rotterdam meeting on Schooling for Tomorrow, in November 2000, supported jointly by the Dutch Government and the OECD/CERI. It was at that meeting, the concluding session for one phase of the project and consideration of what should come next, that my Japanese colleague, Ninomiya Akira, and I discussed whether the kinds of conclusions and the resulting scenarios that had emerged from the work in Europe and to some extent in North America, would hold amongst educators and policy makers from the Asia-Pacific region where PCC operates. And so with the co-operation of our colleagues we set out to find out.

It occurred to us that it might be interesting to take the six scenarios developed through the original project and utilize these in a survey and interview format with educators and policy leaders in the Asia-Pacific region. We conferred with members of the PCC Executive Committee and other interested individuals about this over the winter and spring of 2001, met with David Istance and Mariko Kuroiwa in Paris in March of that year (Cogan), and shared our interests with Carol Mutch, the incoming Chair of the Pacific Circle Consortium.

All agreed that there would be, in their opinions, considerable interest in this project within the PCC group as well as others outside the OECD member states in the Asia-Pacific region. Consequently, we spoke with individuals in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Viet Nam and Mexico, states outside OECD about the proposed study and all were very interested in cooperating. The research plan was finalized at the 25th Annual Conference of the PCC in Christchurch, NZ in late September 2001. Survey data were collected over the fall and winter of 2001-2002, between PCC meetings, and then analyzed and the preliminary report on the survey phase was discussed at the 26th Annual Conference in Seoul, Korea in early May 2002.

The Survey

The survey phase was carried out as follows. First, researchers were identified in the interested nations/societies. Next, the six scenarios were organized into a survey questionnaire format. It was then sent to a purposive sample of educators and policy leaders in the participating societies. Respondents were asked to rank order the six scenarios from 1-6, 1 being their most preferred choice; 6 their least. The ranking was done in terms of two factors: (1) the desirability of the particular scenario and (2) the probability of it actually occurring. Respondents were also asked to give accompanying rationales for their choices if possible so that there would be explanations for their selections. In the end, few did so.

What the First Phase Found

The survey, conducted under the auspices of the Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC), ascertained the views of over 300 senior education officials and policy makers in 11 societies drawn from five regions of the Pacific Rim. Participating societies included: Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Viet Nam, China, Hong Kong (SAR), Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Mexico and the United States. Based on the six scenarios for Schooling for the Future, the survey form asked respondents to read a description of each scenario and then to rank the six in terms of their desirability and their probability. In the PCC study, the scenarios were numbered, not named as in the original study, so as to reduce the possibility of selection bias based upon the label.

Although there were some minor differences across societies, and most notably between societies in Oceania and North America/Mexico and those in South East, East, and North East Asia, a surprisingly high level of consensus emerged from the findings. Those scenarios regarded as being *most desirable* were those associated with *re-schooling*, described as follows:

- **Scenario 4:** schools develop as focused learning organisations, meeting individual needs and encouraging lifelong learning; they focus principally on knowledge rather than social outcomes; schools are well resourced, emphasise research and development, network with tertiary education institutions, and communicate internationally in developing best practice and state-of-the-art facilities.
- **Scenario 3:** schools function principally as core social centres under varied arrangements and in tune with the society's diverse needs; major investments in schools as key centres in the society leads to improved quality and equity, and well-earned recognition for far-reaching achievements (academic, social, cultural, vocational, community development, IT, etc).

In contrast, however, respondents thought these desirable scenarios had relatively low likelihood of implementation and the scenario thought to be most probable was the *status quo*, described as follows:

- **Scenario 1:** schools remain robust, bureaucratic organisations with strong pressures towards uniformity through well-defined curriculum and assessment strategies attuned to explicit standards.

The second scenario thought to be most probable was a *de-schooling* scenario emphasising a market approach to education. However, this scenario was not ranked nearly as highly as scenario 1 although it did receive relatively higher ranks in East Asia and North East Asia than in other regions. This scenario can be described as follows:

- **Scenario 2:** schools develop as extensions of the market model for education; governments encourage diversification and competition; change is stimulated by consumer demand and information on performance; monitoring of schools by public authorities declines as new providers introduce entrepreneurial management modes.

The Further Research Problem

The next phase of the study seeks to understand why very senior education managers, educators and policy makers ranked current bureaucratic models as most likely to continue, while acknowledging that they are not the most desirable scenarios. If the most desirable forms of schooling (scenarios 4 and 3) are perceived as having relatively low probability of implementation, why is this? What factors do policy makers and educators perceive as inhibiting desirable development? Conversely, if bureaucratic models are most likely to remain, even though they are perceived as relatively less desirable, what factors do policy makers and educators perceive as likely to maintain this *status quo*? Are the factors simply ones of inertia, resulting from large bureaucracies and vast commitment to infrastructure (buildings, management hierarchies, etc)? Are they political in nature? Or are they perceived as “safe” by parents and the broader society, reluctant to face radical change in an area as sensitive as education?

Conversely, if there are highly desirable scenarios of *re-schooling* such as 4 and 3 described above, why do senior educators and policy makers perceive these as unlikely to be implemented? Are they perceived as “risky” changes? Or are educators simply over-whelmed by the dominance of investment in the *status quo*? What would need to happen for such changes, perceived as most desirable, to be implemented?

The Interviews

The second phase of the project is now underway and it is a series of interviews of educational and policy elites in the Asia-Pacific region, some of whom participated in the initial survey round; others who did not. There will be between 5 and 10 of these 'experts' interviewed in each society that remains in the study currently about 8 of the 11. Each educator or policy elite is being asked to answer the questions posed above to try and ascertain why the two most highly ranked scenarios in terms of desirability are also the ones ranked near the bottom on the probability that they will occur. These interviews are taking far greater time to schedule and complete than was anticipated. These individuals are, by their very nature, difficult to reach, and even when reached it can take weeks, even months in some cases to schedule the interviews. Then there are the inevitable cancellations due to unforeseen conflicts and the problem of re-scheduling begins anew. We are less than optimistic that all researchers will have their interviews completed by the April 2003 27 Annual Conference of PCC in Minneapolis. So this phase of the project will not likely be reported on in earnest until the 28th Annual Conference of PCC in Hong Kong in the spring of 2004.

One of the reasons for being at this Forum was to share our work to date with you. But equally important is to learn about other developments in the Schooling for Tomorrow project that can hopefully inform and influence our work. We thank you for this opportunity to be here and deliberate with you.