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Policies for Profit and Progress?

Education Policy Trends in the United States

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How should we look at trends in education systems and why?

What are the trends shaping education in the U.S. today?

Can the same policies for profit and progress be used on both sides of the Atlantic?

Trends in education policy influence many aspects of society.[1] Education is now recognized as one of the most important factors for social progress and future profits, making it a top priority for policymakers and for business leaders. By equipping people with the necessary competencies for individual happiness and employability, we can lay the basis for a prosperous and democratic society.

Education policy in the United States has undergone various initiatives and legislative actions for reform throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Reforms have touched all levels, from pre-school to university and, like the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), influence one of the world's most developed education systems.

To understand these education trends, many of which are the product of certain policy decisions, it is necessary to determine the important categories for analysis: the learner, his or her capabilities, the content and curricula, the regulatory, institutional, and professional contexts, the support, tools, devices, results, and the time frames. This analysis may be applied comparatively not only to analyzing the United States, but any other education system in the world.[2]

Trends Shaping Education in the U.S. Today

Tremendous changes are currently underway in the American education system which will have an impact on society, on politics, on business, and on the international community.

PERSONALIZATION: MORE LEARNER-CENTERED EDUCATION The first of these trends is personalization. Learning experiences in the U.S. are becoming more personalized and learner-centered. Education providers are offering services better tailored to the needs, aspirations, and capabilities of individual learners. Increased coaching, guidance, and counseling and, to some extent, the provision of so-called supplemental education services on the basis of NCLB legislation programs have been integrating more learners more holistically into learning.

Yet, despite increasing learner-focus, the question of equality of access to education still exists; not enough disadvantaged youths are succeeding in the American education system. For them, public officials and private entrepreneurs must work to deliver more tailored education for learners with special needs and learners from varied socio-ethnic (migratory) backgrounds. Educators and public officials should thus design policies to provide more counseling, coaching, and guidance on the basis of prospective analysis of future qualifications. With education modules that are also designed to meet future job requirements and to give people a sense of achievement (self-efficacy), more "life-long learning" will happen.

POTENTIAL IS ENHANCED: "NEW TOPICS AND MORE KNOWLEDGE DOMAINS" As learning experiences become more personalized, so, too, does their potential grow. Experts

and researchers are pushing the frontiers of science by teaming-up at an early stage with educators, supplying more profound knowledge, and translating this into curricula and course offerings. More universities are responding to a surge in student demand for courses in such areas as global health, environmental protection, clean technologies, and fighting poverty. Additionally, the move towards a more interdisciplinary approach (for example, courses in biophysics) increases the potential of learning. Even with these new developments, the challenge remains to design persistent, "sustainable" curricula that are more integrative to sharp-edge technological knowledge and new heuristics (educational discoveries made by students), but which are also increasingly permanent by building on service learning, thus increasing civic engagement.

PERVASIVENESS OF LEARNING: "LEARNING LESS LOCALLY BOUND, MORE INTERNATIONALIZED AND E-INTERMEDIATED" Education is expanding from its traditional boundaries and becoming less locally bound and increasingly international and e-intermediated.[3] Students are studying abroad and technology even makes it possible to study anywhere without leaving home. Apart from distance learning, mobile and casual (outside of the classroom) learning are gaining ground among tech-savvy people. Informal learning experiences are gaining relevance and learning is not only reserved for on-the-job knowledge; other activities also hold learning opportunities and are being put to use. Still, with learning processes becoming more pervasive and informal, we need more understanding, assessment, and accreditation of pervasive and informal learning.

More research should help to refine our understanding of learning processes, be it individual, social, casual, mobile, blended, or set in immersive environments. Policymakers and learning designers have to create more refined educational statements. Refined educational statements covering credentials, informal learning experiences, and the competency gains of individuals may also help companies to choose the right people for the right tasks—thus increasing their competitiveness.

PARTNERING: COLLABORATION TO CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFITS AND PROGRESS Partnering is occurring at various levels in the education field. American universities are establishing partnerships with other (mainly international) education institutions; public-private partnerships, particularly in developing countries, fuel a new dynamic in the market for education provision; and many schools are partnering more closely with local stakeholders (parents and municipalities) in order to deliver tailored education services.

The relative newness of the partnering trend means that we still have more to learn about its benefits and weaknesses. Governance and monitoring of educational partnerships are lacking, which can adversely affect quality control, the monitoring of market access, pricing strategies, and outlook. The opportunity for adopting others' "best practices" exists, but is not being maximized. By further monitoring and analyzing partnerships, policymakers can fine-tune education policy. Given the international nature of many of these partnerships, this could be an excellent opportunity for transatlantic cooperation.

PROFESSIONALIZING: PROFILING, MORE PROFESSIONALIZED MANAGEMENT Within the changing institutional contexts, a move towards more professional education management can be seen. On the one hand, evidence-based design of courses and educational institutions is gaining ground. On the other hand, many—now more autonomous—public institutions are improving their management, sometimes learning from their private competitors in education. Schools are working on profiles and are improving their staff training and retention policies. New "expert cultures" are emerging. These include a new focus on student aid; learning environment design; learning technology experts; and guidance, counseling, and coaching experts.

This trend of professionalization should be supported by education governance. As new fields of expertise become more prevalent, they may also help to trigger opportunities for improving learning. By promoting more professional education management, policymakers can improve schools' management and, ultimately, educational success rates.

PRIVATIZATION: MORE PRIVATE MONEY AND EXPERTISE In recent years the change from public funding to a combination of public and private funding for education has encouraged private money and entrepreneurship in the education field. More parents are spending more money. More private expertise is used, as in the case of New York City, where troubled schools are being managed by private companies on the basis of service level agreements with school districts in order to improve student learning at these schools. With more private education providers entering the market and with public education institutions forming their own entities, such as public-private partnerships or spin-offs from universities, the once harsh distinction between public and private education is increasingly blurred. With more players, a refined definition of education provision as a service is needed. This includes safeguarding the quality of education provided and redefining competition laws in certain fields, like education technologies, to prevent hindering innovation.

PRACTICE-, PRODUCTION-, PROJECT-ORIENTATION: NEW LEARNING AND TEACHING METHODS New learning and teaching methods are being developed and applied in response to new educational research results concerning the way in which people learn. The rise of "self-learning" is changing the role of educators. In an environment defined or shaped by "self-learning," teachers' roles in the classroom are increasingly those of tutors and coaches. Thus, it is becoming more and more important to have expertise in supporting the self-learning of learners than it is to be an expert in certain fields. Learning by applied/practical experience has increased in relevance. Computerized simulations, experimentation, and project-based learning help learners to acquire teamwork skills and to work in issue- and solution-centered ways. With the changing role of

educators, many educators need to be retrained to learn more collaboration and teamwork skills and teacher credentials may have to be adapted in the future.

PLAYING THE EDTECH GAME: APPLICATION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION Education technology ("EdTech") is gaining relevance as new technological options are used to create educational tools and services. Markets for educational technology ranging from software solutions for supporting the reading and writing skills of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to software suites that support principals in their school management have been developed. Although the exact paring of technologies with different aspects of learning needs fine-tuning, many educators, officials, and education entrepreneurs have been actively embracing the progress being made in information and communication technologies. Students are profiting from these technological advances by being able to more easily access course materials on the basis of smart information infrastructures. Yet, the full advantage of whiteboards, computers in classrooms, pod casts, social software, and virtual environment technologies still has to be reaped. New forms of collaboration by colleges, publishers, technology providers, and student organizations have only begun. Combining traditional forms of software development with open-source oriented forms, preserving the potential for profits and, at the same time, granting open access to online education and course materials for all students is a challenge.

ACCELERATION: TIME SQUEEZING AND JUST-IN-TIME LEARNING In the past few years, the time allotted for learning processes has diminished. Many programs have been designed to take less time or to be more flexible. Learners are signing up for programs to get credentials quickly and according to the time they can spare. In the reduction of time for curricula, there is the tendency that more content is discussed in less time of instruction. The hectic pace of learning means that students and educators alike must continue to safeguard their motivation for learning and foster the key competencies of learning. Individuals must still be able to learn at their own appropriate pace. This "right-timing" is also important when it comes to evaluating and assessing achievements in education so that reforms can address long-term issues, rather than provide a short-term solution.

PREOCCUPANCY WITH PERFORMANCE: OUTPUT MATTERS, ACCOUNTABILITY COUNTS Professionals in education (as well as parents and politicians) have become more concerned with the results, the benefits, and the returns of education. The management of educational institutions is gaining relevance; a "culture of accountability" is slowly developing. School scorecards for parents, more refined reporting of input and output ratios, and inflows and outcomes of education are more widely available. More (sometimes cumbersome) procedures for education practitioners have been established.

In the aftermath of NCLB and other legislation, it might partly be stated that "what gets measured gets managed." That is to say, emphasis on those areas being watched and measured may be placed before other aspects of education. Indicators suggest that the common saying that "not everything that counts can be counted" may hold true. A culture of accountability in which competent education providers can opt in for certain measures and also opt out at others is still to be established. Less resource-consuming procedures need to be designed. Most of today's indicators do not accurately reflect a student's progress in learning and gaining skills and competencies. Today's challenge lies in designing procedures that account for the progress of individual learners and educational institutions in the longer run.

Policies for Profit and Progress: Transatlantic Education Policy Challenges

The American education system and the way people learn have undergone dynamic shifts in recent years. For-profit education providers benefit from policies allowing greater profits. Entrepreneurship and private and public initiatives in education have contributed to the progress of the American education system, helping to integrate more people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Yet, in light of the trends discussed here and the emerging knowledge economy, challenges remain. These challenges are transatlantic in scope and perhaps can best be dealt with through partnership that builds on the strong tradition of academic exchange and collaboration. Both the U.S. and Germany have to empower more people with learning skills and competencies in the emerging knowledge-based economy by providing more personalized learning opportunities. Transatlantic collaboration on "best practices" and new avenues in counseling, coaching, and guidance would thus be fruitful.

Since both nations need to enhance the potential of their (would-be) learners by acquiring new competencies and knowledge in new domains, there is definitely a case for collaboration on identifying future qualification requirements to inform the design of more sustainable curricula. In these curricula, service learning, intercultural learning, eco-excellence (sustainability), and new languages may be more prominent, both fueling competitiveness and supporting democracy.

In addition, more technology should be applied to enable increasingly pervasive learning experiences. Here, the U.S. could definitely provide lessons learned (guidance) for its German counterparts in education. New forms of transatlantic collaboration between universities/colleges, publishers, technology providers, and student organizations, as well as transatlantic projects of open-source based educational software development, could combine American and German strengths. Education policymakers are well-advised to remain preoccupied with performance in the future, providing individuals with measurable and accredited new modules and credentials—benefits—for their learning investments. Therefore, transnational accreditation issues need special attention in a "Transatlantic

With this Issue Brief, we present an analysis of educational trends and policies, primarily in the United States, as they shape the future of education. By no means exhaustive, the trends discussed here are both the result of specific policy decisions and, in some instances, can be used to provide the point of departure for a comparative assessment of educational systems on both sides of the Atlantic. In an ever-shrinking world, transatlantic cooperation on education policies becomes increasingly important in the development of tomorrow's research, innovation, and progress across a wide range of sectors. The challenge of preparing our work force, and our society at large, for the challenges of the twenty-first century requires a top to bottom understanding of how our education systems perform, where they need to be improved, and how we set the benchmarks for success.

Learning Partnership."

Given that an appropriate mix of financial resources has to be achieved and that new philanthropists from the Gulf states and other developing countries, like China, are changing the international landscape of education policy and development aid, the U.S. and Germany should also join forces in trying to align forms of educational philanthropy—globally and locally. They should experiment with appropriate collaborative settings and forms of public-private partnerships or even private, intergovernmental partnerships together with the emerging players in educational philanthropy to ensure access to quality education for more people by using these "Gifts for the Future" in an appropriate way.

A "Transatlantic Learning Partnership" could take up the challenge together and allow Germany and the U.S. to collaborate and compete for the best people, the best practices in financing, managing, and providing education—not only through education, but also an exchange of policy-learning. Increasing the exchange of people (teachers, educators, and students), benefiting from others' practices, gathering new experiences, and extending policy-learning by forming new networks and forums with other emerging players in education may help both countries to design policies for progress and profits in the future.

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2 "Who wants/needs to/is able to learn what, where, in which regulatory, institutional, and professional contexts, how, with which support/tools/devices with which results, in which time-frame?"

3 Jargon for technology; i.e., electronic tools being used as devices for distance learning.

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