

the book, providing insight into both the research process and the children's thoughts, enabling the reader to create their own interpretations alongside the analysis given. The children did not uniformly feel that more ICT was necessarily desirable, one even explicitly stating 'I don't think it's a good idea' alongside a drawing of a frazzled looking boy standing beside a desktop computer (107). The authors note that 'the children's perceptions of future forms of education were remarkably mundane, rooted in the present-day context of the classroom and constrained by school rules, regulations and expectations' (110). The slightly unimaginative nature of the responses is suggested to demonstrate that the 'ICT-savvy' children are also 'school-savvy' with a strong awareness of how difficult it is to effect change in school environments.

The final chapter draws from the findings of the research project as a whole to make recommendations and suggestions for change. The authors advocate a 'think small' approach, making adjustments that fit more closely with the realities of pupils' experiences of primary education. In contrast to other proposals for change and more technology led initiatives, Selwyn et al do not see a need for primary schools to buy new equipment or for subject teachers to receive yet more training, they suggest that 'instead the answer to changing ICT use in school for the better could involve something as simple as changing the ways that schools talk about technology with their pupils' (156). The authors' proposal has five distinct elements: to establish a dialogic approach to ICT; to encourage a democratic approach to ICT; to encourage a 'loosening up' of ICT use wherever possible; to empower teachers to act as orchestrators and managers of pupils' ICT use and to develop children's 'critical digital literacy' alongside their 'media literacy'. Each of these proposals is outlined in some detail in the chapter which contains concrete suggestions on how practitioners can develop the ideas.

In this book, Neil Selwyn, John Potter and Sue Cranmer have been able to share the differing perspectives of over 600 primary pupils in considering the place of ICT in their lives. The detail provided on the children's current uses of technology, combined with a realistic sense of what could be possible, ensures the book meets one of its key aims – to reinvigorate the debate and reimagine ICT in school. In the current educational climate where the curriculum for both primary and secondary schools is under review in the UK, it seems vital to take into account the perspectives of the learners who are most affected by any change. By listening to and recording the experience of children from a range of backgrounds, this book provides a major contribution in developing that understanding.

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Education today 2010: The OECD perspective, by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, OECD, 2010, 86 pp., £21 (from www.sourceoecd/education), ISBN 978-92-64-09061-3

It is unusual to find a single book that aims to say something about every aspect of education, from early years, through primary and secondary, to tertiary education, and then on to lifelong learning, while covering cross-cutting issues such as rates of return, equity, and knowledge management along the way. To find a book that attempts this task across 30-odd

countries is more surprising still – and finding one that does so inside 80 pages is little short of amazing.

The brief chapters on each educational sector or policy field give a summary of some of the relevant data, and the policy recommendations which the OECD has made, with useful references to the OECD sources on which these summaries are based. Some of these sources are quite surprising: I had no idea that the OECD published on neuroscience, and that it draws on this work to support its lifelong learning policy prescriptions. Some of us will be reassured to know that, for older people, ‘good educational interventions can do much to maintain positive well-being and to prevent [mental] deterioration’ (52).

One reading of the factual summaries here is that the OECD countries are all rather close together in terms of readily-observable educational provision: primary school class sizes cluster in a narrow band from the mid-teens to the upper-twenties (Russia, incidentally, reporting among the smallest class sizes); apart from a handful of poorer member states, completion rates for upper secondary education are all over 80%; tertiary education participation rates cluster in the 30–40%-plus area, apart from a few outliers at either end of the range; and so on. This extent of marked similarity across countries with very different histories and social and economic structures might suggest a happy convergence on the right educational answers: surely so much experience, leading to the same policy conclusions, must be telling us something?

But a second reading of the data seems to suggest something else: that these educational systems are not as close together as they might first appear. There is, for example, a division between countries whose school teachers see their tasks primarily in ‘constructivist’ terms – ‘helping students actively to develop and construct their knowledge’ (20) – whereas in other countries teachers see their tasks mainly in terms of transmitting content – Eastern Europe, interestingly, is apparently a transitional case. The range of ‘intended instruction hours’ (21) for 7- to 14-year-olds runs from 4700 in Poland to 8500 in Israel (with no apparent learning benefits for countries at the upper end of this range). In upper secondary education, some countries have a majority of students studying in general education tracks, while others have a majority in vocational tracks – with no obvious reasons for the country categorisation. Although tertiary education participation rates cluster fairly closely, completion rates vary widely, especially in non-university programmes: and even for universities, only seven countries have completion rates of 80% or above. Might these and other differences actually be more significant than the similarities?

Looking across the data from different educational sectors, Korea (South Korea, obviously) is easily the winner of the ‘educationally most changed’ award. Where its upper secondary completion rate for today’s 55- to 64-year-olds was less than 40%, it is essentially 100% for its 25- to 34-year-olds. Where its tertiary participation rate for 55- to 64-year-olds was around 10%, for 25- to 34-year-olds it is around 60%. Its 15-year-olds contend with their Finnish peers over the PISA prizes for reading, science and maths. And of course Korea has been a stunning economic success.

The OECD’s premise is that education and training underlie countries’ abilities ‘to shape dynamic and sustainable futures’ (3), and it observes its member states giving increasing attention to their education policies. There are, it concludes, ‘positive returns to higher levels of educational attainment. . . for the individual, but also for the economy at large’ (58). The implication is that, for example, Korea’s educational revolution has driven, or at least supported, its industrial revolution: the direction of causation is clear. But if my second reading of the data presented here is more compelling than the first one – that there is little meaningful international convergence on an educational ‘one best way’ – then there seem to be implications for thinking about the educational attainment/economic development nexus.

Does this lack of convergence mean that educational outcomes can only be seen as a reflection of various national cultures and/or political priorities, rather than the (as it were) objective basis of economic development, and which might be susceptible of improvement by technical interventions of various kinds?

The large issues that the very conciseness of this book brings into focus might suggest that brevity is an underrated virtue in the educational literature.

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Politics, modernisation and educational reform in Russia: from past to present, edited by David Johnson, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2010, 176 pp., \$48, ISBN 978-1-873927-41-0

The nine chapters in this volume in the Oxford Studies in Comparative Education series discuss various aspects of educational reforms in Russia from the eighteenth century to the present. In his introductory chapter, Johnson suggests three ‘permutations’ in the Russian context. The first is a climate of engagement of Tsarist Russia, where knowledge transfer was encouraged and educational ideas, frameworks and practices were imported from the West and adapted to Russia. The second is a climate of disengagement of Soviet Russia, where the Communist Party saw the role of education as developing people into active builders of communism and treated knowledge from outside with suspicion. The third is a climate of re-engagement which started under Gorbachev with his policy of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. It is against this background that the subsequent chapters attempt to answer the central question of whether educational change and reforms have been successful at different stages of Russian history and in post-Soviet Russia in particular.

In his chapter, Harris offers an eloquent and detailed historical account of rival roles of Russian state and private education during the nineteenth century and argues that processes such as the nurturing of critical thinking which were ‘carried out privately or in small groups, in contradiction to the official state system, proved of central importance in the transformation of imperial Russia’ (17). He then shows how in the twentieth century writings that aimed to challenge Tsarist rule were reinterpreted in a ‘correct’ way and used to validate the socialist order and ideology. While at university in Soviet Russia I remember how we were asked to take notes from numerous writings of thinkers mentioned by Harris and how each volume would be accompanied by ‘correct’ interpretation supporting the then existing regime.

In the next chapter, Pavlova discusses dualism in discourses on the ways educational modernisation should be achieved in post-1998 Russian education. While all reformers, she states, agree on the ultimate goal of educational reform (the enhancement of social and economic change), they are diametrically opposed as to the ways reform should be implemented, with one group favouring inculcation of market values in the curriculum and the other group preferring preservation of elements of Soviet education. Compromise between these two approaches has been found and both positions have been accommodated in the school curriculum, but according to Pavlova, it has not been a happy ‘marriage’. She, however, falls short of providing any evidence either to support her claim or to illustrate the complexity of and conflict between modernists and traditionalists in the reform process.