

Spreading the word': An analysis of the impact of Australasian educational ideas on a new nation state

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Educational systems in Australia and New Zealand have been subject to a bewildering variety of changes in the last two decades that have been intensely scrutinized and debated. However both countries enjoy favourable international opinion as reflected, for example, in the attainment and retention of high standing in international comparisons of student achievement. What happens then, when policies and practices that have proved successful in these two nations are used to inform a developing and changing system in an emerging nation state?

This paper discusses the impact of Australasian educational ideas on a pre-service teacher education program in a small Middle Eastern nation. An analysis of four years of research into the practicum, the internship and the role of mentor teachers is used to comment on the degree to which 'imported' practices have been able to contribute to creative solutions for an education system under review and development. Commentary about the use and issues of international 'policy borrowing' is also included.

Introduction

The UAE has reached world class levels in many sectors (e.g. commerce, aviation, architecture, technology and tourism) in a very short time span, but its education system has struggled to keep up with the rapid development in other sectors. Although the education system is currently lagging behind the rest of the country, this is not due to a lack of attention. Indeed two key policy agendas have combined in the last decade to exert a focus on change. One of these is the UNESCO program 'Education For All' (EFA) in which the UAE is a participant. This initiative arose from the World Declaration of Education for All which called for:

a learning environment in which everyone would have the chance to acquire the basic elements which serve as a foundation for further learning and enable full participation in society. This vision implied both access to education for everybody, and meeting the diverse learning needs of children, youth and adults. It focused on learning societies, and saw broader and deeper partnerships at every level as the way forward. (UNESCO, n.d.)

Zayed University is a newly established local institution that is seen as having an important role to play in supporting educational reform in the UAE through the preparation of young Emirati women teachers. It is now entering its eighth year of operation and is staffed by an international faculty from countries such as the USA, UK, Gulf nations, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The College of Education (COE) has maintained a fairly stable staffing since 2001 and about 30% of the faculty have been from Australia and New Zealand. The student teachers in the current program have come from a background of largely teacher-directed rote learning using state-developed curriculum and test-driven assessment, and the majority are first generation university students. Their pre-service teacher education program at Zayed University aims to introduce them to a wide range of teaching methodologies integrated with modern technology, and emphasizes a learner-centered approach to teaching in schools. Students are encouraged to implement these approaches in their practicum settings. This paper will examine the contributions

of faculty from Australia and New Zealand (referred to here as Australasian) from the time since 2001 when the College of Education was accepting its first cohorts of students.

Before examining these contributions in more depth it is helpful to consider the nature of ideas about teacher education that characterise Australasian policy and practice. Essentially they include the following:

- A learner-centered approach to classroom practice
- A high level of teacher autonomy in curriculum decision-making
- A focus on individual needs of learners
- A focus on the use of diagnostic and formative assessment to guide learning
- Depth of understanding about learning theory and about creating an appropriate environment for learning
- Depth of understanding about curriculum content
- Repertoire of strategies for implementation and assessment of curriculum
- Involvement of students in learning decisions
- Variety in activities to promote learning
- A high degree of collegiality in the school setting

Schooling in the Emirates comprises a public and private sector. Public schools (and the upper grades in private schools) are segregated by gender. In the primary sector, which was the context of the project discussed in this paper, students have subject teachers from the early grades and the timetable is organized into periods of 50 - 60 minutes. Primary boys' schools run from 7.30 am to 12.30 and girls' schools from 8.00 to 1.00. Schooling is administered by a central Ministry of Education (MOE), together with ten education Zone offices across the seven Emirates. The MOE operates a separate Curriculum Center for curriculum development and contains a Department of Supervision, comprising curriculum Supervisors who provide professional support to teachers and also evaluate their performance. A high percentage of teachers are expatriate Gulf nationals and there has been a concerted effort in the last few years to recruit more Emirati nationals to the profession.

The situation facing the new faculty in 2001 was that highlighted in a recent report on the elementary schools sector (Harold et. al. 2004) noted that:

In summary, a picture has emerged of classrooms characterized by teacher-directed curriculum delivery, using a narrow range of teaching techniques and dominated by a tight timetable, an emphasis on content coverage and pervasive summative assessment requirements. Students tend to be passive recipients of basic facts and knowledge and have few opportunities to interact with the teacher and curriculum in any depth.....The UAE education system stands poised at a critical stage of its development. If it is to truly achieve the promise of Vision 2020 and the potential of its future citizens it must devise ways to help teachers implement more varied teaching and assessment strategies in their classrooms. Some of these changes are already underway and will continue to be built upon. Others may require new and different ways of thinking about the work of teachers and schools.

This then was the context in which the new faculty were required to shape a program of teacher education that would prepare young national women to introduce new approaches to teaching. The Australasian faculty at the COE are all experienced and senior teacher educators and thus have been able to exert specific influences on the pre-service program. Their influence can be grouped under 4 broad categories, including impact on:

- Overall policy decisions
- Course planning, content and implementation
- Practicum
- Internship

Policy decisions

When the Australasian faculty arrived at the university many early policy decisions had been made that were based on a North American model for university structure and administration. These structures still remain and Zayed University key administrative and leadership positions are almost all filled by American faculty. However within the COE framework specific program decisions have been made in a flexible and collegial way, allowing input of ideas from all faculty. When a major review of the program was made in 2002, the committee in charge of the review was led by an Australian faculty member.

During the last 4 years other contributions have been made to policy decisions in the form of specific research projects. Among university-funded COE research projects in this time, five have been done with Australasian faculty as the lead investigators. These include projects on the practicum, mentor teachers, beginning teachers, teacher attitudes to special education and professional development. Data from these projects have contributed to policy and practice decisions within the College.

Beyond the College of Education, Australasian faculty have also made significant contributions to policy development at a national level through leadership of Ministry of Education contract research. For example of nine major research contracts in the last three years, five have been led by these faculty members. These have included evaluations of teaching in Grades 1-5, the use of school libraries, private schools, and school dropouts.

Course¹ planning, content and implementation

The new faculty joined the university in the Fall semester of 2001 at the same time as the second cohort of students. The first cohort had begun in the previous semester so only a few courses had been developed. Some decisions had already been made by the initial faculty who were mostly from North America. These included decisions about textbooks and the overall framework of the program. However the bulk of the courses were yet to be planned and although there were some pre-set parameters such as the six Zayed University learning outcomes (ZULOs) and thirteen COE learning outcomes (MALOs – ‘major’ learning outcomes) within which planning had to be done, new faculty had a high degree of professional autonomy in making decisions about content, activities and assessment.

The Australasian faculty were able to adapt and include material used successfully in courses at their previous institutions, including readings, specific class activities and teaching approaches that demonstrated key principles of teaching and learning, and specific assessment techniques.

Practicum

The school placement program had also been partly organised when the new faculty arrived and was initially envisaged according to a North American model with an ‘internship’ or block practicum in the final semester of the program. However the American placement coordinator resigned early in the semester and the author was appointed to this position. In consultation with other colleagues it was decided to plan and implement ongoing course-related practicum experiences throughout the whole program, culminating in the internship. Again a model was adapted from previous experience in Australia and New Zealand contexts. The support material from previous institutions was also adapted to the UAE context. This included handbooks for faculty, student teachers and school personnel that set out placement tasks, responsibilities of each party, and assessment formats.

Internship

The internship placement in the final semester is a North American concept that local audiences would refer to as a ‘block’ practicum. For this aspect of the program an Australasian model was

¹ ‘Course’ refers to a specific paper within an overall program.

adapted in a similar way to the practicum, including goals, tasks, roles, and assessment techniques. The internship was planned for a half semester (ten weeks).

The impact of Australasian educational ideas in practice

Impact in the on-campus program

The actual impact of Australasian ideas about education has probably been felt most strongly at the university level in the pre-service teacher education program. Evidence from a longitudinal research project on the practicum experiences of a cohort of students together with other observational, assessment and anecdotal evidence suggests that student teacher beliefs and practices are being influenced by these new ideas (see Harold, McNally & McAskil, 2002; Harold & McNally, 2003; Harold & McNally 2004a, 2004b)

For example student statements about the *role of the teacher and the learner* indicated that they could see themselves differently to current models in the profession:

- *Teaching is challenging and not easy*
- *I would like to be a teacher with new ideas. I want to be different from my teacher at school*

During their second practicum the belief statements in this category had shifted somewhat and there was a greater awareness of the needs of learners. The impact of academic course content was evident in comments such as:

- *As a teacher, I would like to give the students what they want to learn about as an addition to their curriculum. I believe in the democratic management*
- *The teacher should help the students to learn and depend on themselves*
- *In my view [using groups] groups will help students to improve skills. This will be my role as a teacher*

Another aspect of student teacher acceptance of new ideas was evident in their comments about the *classroom environment*. Early in the program this aspect drew a strong response from student teachers and indicated that students had begun to absorb some key understandings from course workshops they had completed at the university. Some comments related to the physical environment, (e.g. “*create an attractive classroom environment with plants, curtains, instructional media such as posters, TV, video, computer, and printers, to help student do their work*”). Many of the responses centered on the social and emotional environment that they saw as important for teaching. There were statements, for example, that indicated student teachers valued such things as “*being honest with students*”, “*understanding the behavior of the students, listening to their problems, and helping them solve them*”, “*having a fun classroom*”, “*trying to be fair*”

Views about the relevance of the classroom environment were more frequent in the third semester of their program. Some of them appeared to express a ‘wish list’ for their future classrooms:

- *In the classroom learning environment more group conversation [is needed] to make a relationship between the student and teacher.*
- *I will have an English center, and all the students will come and have their English lesson in it. I would like to design it and have an English library in it so the students can use it in any time they need to.*
- *My classroom will have different materials which can help my students, like projector, computer, TV, stereo.*

A set of beliefs that had been evident in the first semester, re-emerged here. Several participants expressed support for the concept of a ‘student-centered’ classroom. This reflected some specific ideas from university course work and indicated that they were thinking beyond the traditional ‘teacher delivery’ model that is prevalent in many local classrooms:

- *I want the classroom learning environment to be student centered.*
- *Students should feel comfortable giving their ideas and opinions.*

- *I think that the students learn from activities more and this will attract them always to the class.*
- *The classroom should have students at the center of the [program] to share their ideas and give comments and also give their ideas about classroom seating and topics which interest them.*

Student teacher views about specific *teaching methods* introduced in coursework also reflected the impact of new ideas. Prior to the second practicum, their statements in this category reflected a marked emphasis on the perceived efficacy of strategies and approaches discussed in their on-campus coursework. The value of using group methods was a common theme and other comments related to the importance of sound planning, and the use of portfolio assessment techniques. The impact of course content was evident in comments such as the following:

- *I would like to apply the skills and strategies I learned in my education courses.*
- *We should teach discovery lessons*
- *I want to make my class funny with different activities and material.*

The follow-up responses to the first two practicum experiences indicated that the student teachers' underlying beliefs about teaching had remained fairly consistent. However many acknowledged that their course content and practicum had added a new dimension to their thinking or reaffirmed their beliefs. Some were beginning to show a critical perspective, however. For example, when asked to comment on what specific changes had occurred in their thinking as a result of their experience the comments included the following:

- *My mentor teacher said to me that I call on certain students. Actually she is the one that does that but maybe she does not realize this.*
- *My mentor teacher was very strict with the students and chose weak students to do some exercises on the board. But I like all to share and I can't be strict at students because I love children*
- *My mentor teacher does not believe in using group work because she thinks it is a waste of time with not so much learning especially with the heavy curriculum*

In the third semester of their program the impact of teaching methods courses continued to show in belief statements such as the following:

- *Students should feel comfortable in the classroom, asking and answering the questions, getting involved in activities.*
- *I want to realize student needs by using the new methods and by understanding them.*
- *[Children] learn through authentic materials and tasks. I would like to have group work in my class. I would like to use different styles of teaching. I would like to plan one week before the lesson to have many different ideas. I would like to assess the students and give them activities, which will tell me about their understanding*

In their first semester of teacher education, this cohort had been introduced to the concept of the teacher as 'warm demander' (McNally, 2001), and it was a concept that was firmly rooted in the belief systems of some group members, as apparent in the following statements made two semesters later:

- *I want to be a 'warm demander' teacher.*
- *I would like to be a 'king' of warm teachers.*
- *I want to be a 'warm demander' teacher who cares and realizes students' needs.*

Impact beyond the campus

Beyond the campus it was more difficult to analyze the impact of new educational ideas. The nature of the practicum itself impacts on the student teachers' opportunities to fully realize the requirements inherent in the College program. Many of the UAE schools that we worked in do not have the kind of well-developed culture of mentoring and student teacher participation that we take for granted in most Australian and New Zealand schools. The impact of cultural norms on the relationship dynamics among student teachers, mentor teachers and students had some

different aspects to what the researchers 'took for granted' in their previous settings (e.g. the broad influence of Islam within the daily program, gender issues relating to faculty supervision, and the approach to rewards and penalties). The daily operation of the school program also had some aspects that impacted occasionally on the continuity of the practicum (e.g. unexpected teacher absences for professional development; uncertainty about staffing).

Evidence from the practicum research project indicated that the student teachers were able to recognize differences between their ideas and the mentor teacher's, but appeared to identify more strongly with the similarities. Realistically, the importance of the affective domain is apparent in the comments and concerns about personal relationships with mentor teachers, and is consistent with international experiences (e.g. Mau, 1997; Sharpe et al, 1994). Student teachers placed a high value on support and assistance from mentor teachers and are thus less likely to be critical in the short time they were in the classroom.

The likelihood of students effecting change appears to be greatest in classrooms where they are allowed to 'experiment' and try out their 'new' ideas (e.g. use of varied, student-centered strategies). This is not always easy as the use of student texts or workbooks dominates classroom practice and, because of the requirements of external accountability (e.g. teacher evaluation; exam system) many teachers are reluctant to deviate from the coverage of specific content. It was clear that some student teachers had been given opportunities to try new approaches however. While this may be acceptable on a 'one off' basis in a practicum, it may be more difficult to sustain in a full time teaching position. On the one hand, the UAE espouses a strong desire to introduce modern teaching methods and to make their education system compatible with international best practice. On the other hand, the infrastructure to support this is still evolving and the compulsory sector is strongly bound to traditional practices. (Harold, McNally & McAskill, 2002)

One strategy to try and reduce the 'mismatch' between school practice and COE expectations has been to use specific schools for practicum on a consistent basis so that a relationship is built up with the principal and teachers who become familiar with the COE requirements and more flexible in their accommodation of these.

Evidence from the profession indicates that Zayed University student teachers and graduates are generally held in high regard by principals and practicing teachers and are often asked to take a lead in professional development workshops during their internship. This is especially the case for the use of technology in the classroom. Comments such as those below indicated positive views of some of the mentor teachers working with Zayed University student teachers (Harold & McNally, 2004c)

- *When I got an active and exuberant student teacher from Zayed University who showed great enthusiasm and contributed in various teaching activities.*
- *Two years ago, I had a wonderful student teacher from ZU who truly worked hard*
- *It is a great privilege to have the responsibility of training the new comers. At the same time, I, myself have benefited by the knowledge of new methods to make learning English more interesting and fruitful.*
- *I would like to thank Zayed University for all its efforts concerns in succeeding this internship and graduating professional students with high efficiency.*

Teacher education literature in Australia and New Zealand is clear about the direction in which pre-service teacher education must move. Martinez et al (2001) argue, for example, that optimum professional growth occurs when teachers (at any stage of their career):

Engage in the expanding multiple knowledges about teaching, learning and schooling; when they attempt to articulate some integrated statement of their personal practical theories; and when they work in contexts that are open to and encouraging of their

attempts to implement and evaluate those professional principles drawn from their integrated personal philosophies.

Ussher (2001) takes a similar perspective, believing that “the opportunities for risk-taking, for solving educational dilemmas’ must be to the forefront for students to develop true reflective practice”.

While the Zayed student teachers undoubtedly faced challenges in their practicum experiences the degree to which they can fully espouse the kinds of practices described above may still be some way off. The development of ‘multiple knowledges’, for example, in the present context is constrained by language and communication issues and the challenge for the faculty is to explore ways of overcoming these barriers while respecting the cultural context within which the student teachers work. There is an ongoing tension between the developing ‘identities of self’ as teachers emerging in the university context and the reality of their practicum experience in an environment where teacher identities are qualitatively different. At one end of the continuum, student teachers were in classrooms with mentor teachers who saw their role as one of helping the student to perpetuate the accepted norm of ‘delivering information’ to learners. When asked what they saw as their role the following comments were typical of this kind of mentor teacher (see Harold and McNally, 2004c).

- *[Showing her] listening methods, lesson plans and the way of delivering information.*
- *In my opinion, the way of dealing with the students in the class and delivering information to them is the most important things that the student teacher has to be aware of.*

On the other hand there were mentor teachers who saw their role differently. They commented on allowing the student teacher to try the new approaches, either from the teacher’s own understanding, or as advocated by the university faculty, and some even commented that there was reciprocal learning occurring.

- *The student teacher should depend on herself when teaching [and] use new interesting educational means.*
- *[My role is to]help, advise, guide, mentor, counsel and make them confident, to bring out the best of them.*
- *[I should]cooperate with the student teacher, give her a suitable atmosphere for practicing teaching, and direct her about the new methods of teaching and learning sources.*

The practicum research project (McNally and Harold, 2004) indicated that the student teachers each took different ‘journeys’ to become beginning teachers. As we looked at the changes in the participants’ perceptions of ‘learning to teach’ over the preservice period there was evidence to support the premise that they were willing to embrace new ideas from western education systems. However, there were clear differences in how their development as a teacher is played out in an Islamic culture where many of the systems and practices familiar to Australasian educators are relatively new.

The whole concept of introducing new educational practice across cultural boundaries is problematic, over and above the language difficulties. The faculty is constantly aware of the potential (and sometimes actual occurrence) for the kinds of misunderstandings between faculty, student teachers and school personnel about the aims and requirements of the teaching practicum, noted by Martinez et al (2000). The next section of the paper discusses the ‘borrowing’ of educational practices in more depth.

The Concept of Policy Borrowing

Education, as an arena of policymaking, is not alone in its history of 'borrowing' policies and practices cross-nationally. One of the more recent (and dramatic) illustrations of the universality of the phenomenon across public sector policy arenas would be the neo-conservative political ideologies directing market-driven reforms of the late 1980's. The Thatcher Government in Great Britain and the Reagan Administration in the US produced a wave of privatization reforms that ultimately sweep through most of the policymaking arenas of the world (Marshall & Peters, 1990). This widespread 'commercialization' of public sector policy and practice was visited upon many unsuspecting public entities (utilities, healthcare, and transportation being some of the first), and there was a time during the late 80's when there seemed to be no public sector system that couldn't be improved by 'borrowing' and injecting market-driven remedies (Lauder, 1990). Education was not spared the attention of policymakers during the 1980's, and the wave of 'privatization' and market-driven reforms washed over systems around the world.

This illustration of the universality of the concept of policy 'borrowing' highlights two important aspects of the phenomenon as it relates to State level policymaking within an educational context. First, education reform policy that is 'borrowed' rarely comes as an orphan, isolated and alone (Halpin & Troyna, 1995). Rather, it is most often a part of a much larger political and/or economic 'package' of policies that trickles down to the educational reform policy arena. This realization helps to explain why a singular reform 'remedy' such as privatization had such widespread appeal and acceptance across the diversity of educational systems within which it was prescribed as a reform.

When one finds a small, densely populated, unilingual and centrally governed country such as Britain adopting the same reforms as a large, sparsely populated, multilingual and decentralized country such as Canada, one can hardly avoid the conclusion that they are singing from the same hymnsheet. (Levin, p.133)

Second, is the issue of policy as 'compensatory legitimation', and the realization that the rationale and motivation for 'borrowing' one policy over another might have less to do with its successful implementation across the border, and more to do with the power of its political symbolism (Weiler, 1983; Whitty & Edwards, 1992). Halpin & Troyna (1995) have examined the political nature of this phenomenon of 'borrowing' policy across political borders and concluded;

Cross-national policy borrowing rarely has much to do with the success, however defined, of the institutional realization of particular policies in their countries of origin; rather, it has much more to do with legitimating other related policies. (p.303)

Looking across the range of public policymaking arenas it is clear that education is not alone in its history of 'borrowing' policies and practices cross-nationally. The 'cross-pollination' of ideas and practices are a result of, among other factors, the mobility of experts and the speed with which we can now communicate. It is also important to note that when looking at Nation/State level policymaking, the rationale and motivation for choosing one policy over another may have more to do with its relationship to other public sector policies or ability to legitimate a political agenda, than it does with its 'fit' within a political, social, and/or cultural context.

Phillips and Ochs (2003) coined the term 'cross-national attraction' to identify an initial step in a process of utilization of external ideas and practices in the process of education reform. They acknowledge that the term 'borrowing' has been criticised and a range of other terms including copying, appropriation, assimilation, transfer and importation have been suggested as alternatives. The idea of looking to other countries for strategies and ideas in education is not new and has occurred throughout much of the 20th century. It is usually related to current political and societal

concerns at the time, in particular to the search for the 'best way' to educate a nation's populace. 'Policy borrowing' may be defined as "the use of foreign examples by policy makers at all stages of the processes of initiating and implementing educational change

Most often this use is *intentional* or *deliberate* and Australasian faculty at Zayed University were actively involved in examples such as the following:

- Borrowing of written policy (e.g. documents and texts). For example, in the U.A.E. some curriculum subjects are using American texts as the basic curriculum (e.g. Harcourts for science, Parade series for English. These are scrutinized for any 'inappropriate' material and translated into Arabic.
- Attendance at international conferences to disseminate ideas. Australasian faculty regularly participate in education conferences in Australia and New Zealand to share ideas and to keep updated on current issues and ideas.
- Visiting other institutions to discuss ideas.
- Inviting/employing 'experts' to bring new ideas and practices to the country and/or to advise on their implementation. Invitation of 'experts' to advise on projects. For example, a small team from Australia has been involved in a Ministry contract to develop new assessment practices. They in turn invited other 'experts' to assist in the development of this long-term project. Zayed faculty assisted in an advisory capacity. A related example of this can be found in recommendations from projects conducted by outside researchers.
- Employing international teaching or administrative faculty to develop specific ideas or strategies. For example, Zayed University College of Education has employed teacher education specialists from a range of western universities (USA, Australia, Canada and NZ).

Second, there is a kind of '*unintended*' policy borrowing relating to the last point above. This can occur, for example, when expatriate teachers bring a range of ideas and strategies that are not specifically targeted to current education reform but that have an influence on it anyway. This influence may be positive where the teacher's pedagogy aligns closely to new ideas that are valued, or it can be a negative one where a teacher may resist change if it seems counter to their own views of teaching, or if there are systemic structures that make it risky for them to change their practice.

While there is a strong drive in the UAE for the use of ideas and expertise from other countries, it is not an uncritical one and there has been ongoing debate about the impact of 'globalization' on local culture and society. In a number of recent statements the Minister of Education has highlighted the need for balance between international opportunities and Emirati culture and values:

We must understand and engage the forces of globalization if we are to create economic opportunities and first-rate educational and cultural institutions. And we must in the course of understanding and acting, adhere to international standards and benchmarks as well as to the deep-rooted values of our communities. [authors' emphasis] (Nahyan, 2005).

Concern about negative impacts has also been expressed by local academics. For example, a media studies professor, noted at a recent conference that:

Without the creation of public policies that reiterate and work to juxtapose domestic culture with that of the other, the UAE is set to become a global entity without a local identity (Piecowye, 2005).

Thus far the UAE appears to have maintained a clear sense of Islamic values in its education system. The curriculum for subjects such as Arabic and Islamic Studies is developed locally and Islamic values infuse the structure and day to day functioning of schools. In other subject areas such as mathematics, science and English, the 'borrowed' text-based curricula have been scrutinized to ensure that specific content does not offend local cultural norms.

The practice of policy borrowing in the UAE needs also to be considered within current broader critical perspectives. Halpin and Troyna (1995:303) for example, contend that policy borrowing has more to do with legitimation of other related policies than the success of particular policies in their country of origin. They add, however that active policy borrowing is more likely when there is "some synchrony between the characteristics of different education systems involved and the dominant political ideologies promoting reform within them". In the UAE this level of synchrony seems most apparent in the tertiary sector which, in addition to the national university, comprises institutions mainly from the USA, Australia, and the UK. These institutions are managed by personnel from the country of origin using similar policies, and curricular and assessment standards as in that country.

From Tikly's (2004:8) perspective the importation of education policy from 'dominant' countries is part of what he terms the 'new imperialism' where the rhetoric of 'development' can be seen as "an aspect of emerging global governmentality". There is a tension between 'worthy' goals of education such as a basic right and a means for individual growth and citizenship, and the 'human capital' discourses where a primary purpose of education was to inculcate skills and technical knowledge to contribute to economic growth. Tikly's contention is that western textbooks, materials and resources form a continued hegemony that encourages a Eurocentric kind of education for children around the world.

Ball (1999) takes a different perspective on the issue, contending that there is a process of 'policy convergence' across countries that are very diverse in culture and economy. He sees this as a *paradigm* convergence rather than the simple invocation of policies in different national settings and argues that the adoption of policies with similar underlying principles (market form and 'performativity') and operational mechanisms is leading towards "new kinds of remade/reformed teachers and new forms of education which are the unintended outcomes of current policy enthusiasms" (Ball, 1999:2). Ball's use of the term 'policy enthusiasms' is pertinent to the UAE context where the speed at which other sector changes have been accomplished may lead to the adoption of policies that are expected to accomplish rapid reform when in fact the process is a much more time-consuming one. However the acceptance of a 10-year time frame for an Abu Dhabi-based development project indicates a more realistic perception of the process.

Conclusion

The UAE has undergone very rapid development in the last two decades, not only in education but also in other spheres of public life. In education a variety of types of policy 'borrowing' have occurred, some very successful, others less so. What is lacking currently is a research-backed database and critical analysis of what has already occurred. The MOE has undertaken several baseline studies in the last 2 years to inform policy decisions, but the death of Sheikh Zayed last year has resulted in a reorganization of the governance of the country. The Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education and Youth have been merged to form one Ministry of Education, under the leadership of Sheikh Nayahan. Recent media statements indicate that he intends to 'fine tune' some existing policies and practices and forge ahead with other new developments in a more systematic way than has been done in the past. For example, earlier this year a team of international consultants and academics (including 2 New Zealanders from Zayed University) were charged with undertaking a major review of the Ministry's administrative structure and functions, along with a review of curriculum in the public schools sector. Several current policy guidelines and initiatives (e.g. Vision 2020) have been suspended while the reviews are taking place. In recent weeks, further media statements have highlighted key elements of the next stage of reforms including self-managing schools, greater powers for

principals, the development of a new national curriculum and improvements in teacher education. These elements are very familiar to Australian and New Zealand audiences.

The UAE retains a strong sense of local cultural identity and values within the Islam framework, while at the same time embracing change and development with the assistance of international policy and practices in all sectors of its society. Paradoxically this remains both a strength and a challenge for its continued development. Australasian educational ideas have been introduced systematically in the Zayed University program and have had a definite impact on student beliefs about teaching. However until there are systemic changes in current educational policy and practice their wider impact on actual classroom practice remains unclear.

The data and issues discussed in this paper highlight some important areas for further research. For example, there is a need for further longitudinal studies of graduate professional practice to ascertain the extent to which they can realistically implement the ideas from their preservice phase. More needs to be known also about the school cultures in the UAE that allow for this to happen in contrast to those which inhibit the acceptance and growth of cross-cultural educational ideas. The field is rich with potential for understanding much more about changing educational policy and practice.

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