



"... the rock which resists the waves from age to age ... the wave which lashes incessantly the rock ..."

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風情

BALANCING

*Change and Tradition in*  
GLOBAL EDUCATION REFORM

Second Edition

Edited by IRIS C. ROTBERG

# Balancing Change and Tradition in Global Education Reform

*Second Edition*



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For  
Gene, with whom I shared the joy of exploring  
the countries described in this book,  
and for  
Maya, Sam, Eva, Madeline, Tess, Emma, and Quinn,  
who will be the best judges of the success of our school reforms

Conservatism makes no poetry, breathes no prayer, has no invention; it is all memory. Reform has no gratitude, no prudence, no husbandry . . . each is a good half, but an impossible whole. Each exposes the abuses of the other, but in a true society, in a true man, both must combine. Nature does not give the crown of its approbation, namely, beauty, to any action or emblem or actor, but to one which combines both these elements; not to the rock which resists the waves from age to age, nor to the wave which lashes incessantly the rock, but the superior beauty is with the oak which stands with its hundred arms against the storms of a century, and grows every year like a sapling; or the river which ever flowing, yet is found in the same bed from age to age.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

# Foreword

Mary Hatwood Futrell

Isaac Asimov, the science fiction writer, said, "It is change, continuing change, inevitable change that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be." I believe that Asimov's statement describes well the transformation that defines education, not only in the United States but also in countries throughout the world. However, very few analyses bring together in one source information about the changes being implemented in a diverse set of countries, the policy deliberations that inform these changes, and the impact that changes have on children's educational experiences. This book is an attempt to do just that by presenting an analysis of education reform in sixteen countries.

As I have visited schools throughout the United States and around the world, listened to educators and policymakers, and attended international conferences, I have become increasingly concerned about the widening disparities in educational opportunity among countries—and often within the same country. Resources in many nations are so limited that the countries are forced to choose between providing even a minimum education to their low-income and rural populations and strengthening educational quality for relatively few children. Because of the disparities in national resources, some nations are reforming their education systems, while others are still struggling to establish education systems. All, however, recognize the critical role that education plays in securing the future of the country and the quality of life of its population.

Industrialized countries have the resources necessary to provide both universal and high-quality education, and many have made significant gains in strengthening instruction and broadening access to upper secondary and

higher education. Yet, increasingly, educational outcomes are not meeting expectations. There are common themes in the reforms described in this book—worldwide concerns about access, decentralization, choice, privatization, standards, tests, and accountability. There is no unanimity, however—either among or within countries—about the specific reforms to put in place: centralized or decentralized decisions about curricula and resources, public education or vouchers, standards that encourage critical thinking skills or directive teaching techniques, high-stakes testing or diagnostic assessments, or education programs that are religious or secular.

*Balancing Change and Tradition in Global Education Reform* is a timely and valuable study that presents a unique and comprehensive analysis of education reforms on a global scale. After reading this book, we see that education reform is not simply a national or regional effort but, in fact, a global movement. Only time can tell whether we are witnessing real change or the politics of words. Socrates cautioned 2,500 years ago, “Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth and, yet, take so little care of your children, to whom one day you must relinquish it all?” For many children, that question remains unanswered. Others are fortunate enough to be given rich educational opportunities. But even countries with generally strong education systems are reexamining the assumptions and priorities on which these systems are based in order to assess their responsiveness to societal change and the relevance of their programs to the demands children ultimately will face in a global context.

This book describes attempts in sixteen countries to strengthen education both for the children who have not been well served (or not served at all) and for the children who have had an opportunity to attend good schools but whose educational experiences still might not be keeping pace with societal change. The book demonstrates in country after country the high priority given to education reform in the face of rapidly changing societies and global demands. It highlights how decisions about education will ultimately facilitate or impede economic growth, improvements in the quality of life, and social justice.



# Preface

Iris C. Rotberg

A nation's priorities are typically reflected in its education system. As a result, when a country is subject to major societal shifts—political, demographic, or economic—it focuses attention on its education system and seeks to “reform” that system so it becomes more consistent with the changing societal context.

All of the countries represented in this book are reexamining their education systems in a fundamental way and assessing the trade-offs and consequences associated with their efforts. Each country's reforms, whether real or rhetorical, stem from its particular societal context and are molded by that context. In some cases, the context facilitates change; in others, it limits it. But in one way or another, the reforms in all countries must balance change and tradition.

Some of the countries in this book have undergone major changes in their political and economic systems. In others, demographic changes—increased ethnic and racial diversity of the student population or changes in the size of the school-age cohort—have contributed to a perceived need for reform. Many countries have proposed reforms in response to publicized educational successes in other countries or to changes in the global economy.

The reforms often represent a reaction to the country's existing education policies. For example, a country with a decentralized, flexible system like the United States attempts to institute more uniform and rigorous academic standards. Conversely, countries with traditionally centralized systems, like France, China, and Japan, try to institute changes designed to encourage more flexible and diverse teaching methods. Some of the school



reform proposals result in a fundamental transformation of schools. Others do not move beyond political rhetoric into real changes in the education system.

Regardless of the reasons for educational change, there is a consistency in the issues that countries address. All countries face decisions on resource allocation, the equality of educational opportunity across diverse populations, access to higher education, student testing and tracking, teacher accountability, school choice, and innovation. These decisions, in turn, have a significant impact on students' educational experiences and on the distribution of educational opportunities across different population groups in the society. What a country does also affects educators' working conditions and, therefore, makes a difference in the country's ability to attract and retain the qualified educators needed to maintain academic standards.

This book began as a reaction to the international test score comparisons. I have been concerned over a period of many years that these comparisons, frequently presented to the public with great fanfare, provide misleading information about the quality of education, given the enormous range of values, choices, and societal pressures in different countries. We have, therefore, missed the opportunity to highlight—to public officials, educators, and the general public—information beyond test scores that would be relevant to formulating education policy. This information includes the difficult policy choices about school reforms made by nations throughout the world, the trade-offs implicit in these choices, and their impact on the learning experiences of diverse student populations.

In focusing narrowly on test score comparisons, we also have missed the opportunity to emphasize the limitations of attempting to transfer education policies from one country to another. The education system represents a country's social and political priorities and often its historical antecedents. To the extent that the education system is a proxy for a country's social structure, it does not transfer readily to countries that are quite different in values, culture, and history. We hope this book will provide insights about the underlying value systems that form the basis for national education policies and the extent to which policies can be transferred among countries with different political and social systems.

Countries were selected for the book to represent both the diversity of societies and education systems and the commonalities in their educational problems and proposed reforms. The most difficult problem I faced in making these selections was deciding which countries *not* to include, with the knowledge that each country omitted represents an important loss of valuable information.

The authors included in this collection were selected to have "firsthand" experience in the countries they describe. They were invited to write essays that give the reader an understanding of each country's education policies

and reforms in a political and social context. Thus, they were asked to go beyond structural or statistical descriptions of school systems and, instead, focus their analysis on the implications of the policy choices that were made or rejected. Authors had wide editorial latitude in drawing interpretations that they felt were appropriate.

Inevitably, the essays will raise as well as answer questions. The range of societal and educational issues in each country is too broad to address fully in one chapter. The authors, therefore, have had to make difficult choices in selecting the themes to emphasize; as a result, some important issues are not given the attention they deserve. In all countries, for example, minority populations face political, cultural, or economic environments that affect their educational experiences. In some cases, these topics are addressed. In others, the authors felt that the issues required an in-depth, comprehensive analysis that goes well beyond the scope of their chapters.

My intellectual debt begins with the colleagues and friends directly involved with the education systems described in this book: Chinese colleagues in 1981, recently emerging from the Cultural Revolution, who discussed their professional and personal hardships during that period and their efforts to rebuild the Chinese education system; South African educators who described the obstacles they overcame during the apartheid regime and the creative energy they experienced in the years of independence that followed; Japanese friends who shared their personal hopes and concerns as their children prepared for the university entrance examinations; and many others from each of the participating countries. I am grateful to colleagues at the George Washington University whose insights and suggestions contributed to the themes of this book: Mary Hatwood Futrell, the dean of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development; Ralph Mueller, the chair of the Department of Educational Leadership; and faculty and students in the education policy, international education, and teacher preparation programs—John Boswell, William Cummings, Elaine El-Khawas, Karen Foreman, Colin Green, Lisa Hansel, Ginny Hudson, Gregg Jackson, Jae Hoon Lim, Yas Nakib, Becky Skinner, and Jim Williams.

My experience in developing a course on international education policy with Jim Williams was invaluable as I conceptualized the framework for this book. Lisa Hansel's article, written while she was a doctoral student at the George Washington University, also provided pertinent comparative information about education policy in England, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Both the course and the article pointed out the need for bringing together, in one accessible source, current education policy deliberations in various countries throughout the world, written by "insiders."

I would also like to thank Tom Koerner, the vice president and editorial director of Rowman & Littlefield Education, for his many substantive contributions to the conceptualization of the book and for the expertise and support

that he and his colleagues provided throughout the preparation of the manuscript. I am particularly grateful to the contributing authors for their input to the overall framework of the collection, to which they generously gave their time in addition, of course, to their work on the individual chapters.

Randi Gray Kristensen, an assistant professor of English at the George Washington University, was a superb colleague whose editorial assistance and insights enriched the book's presentation and style. I would also like to express my appreciation to C. Ann Robertson for her many important contributions to the book's quality and consistency and to Mary Ann Kennedy, who was extremely helpful in providing a wide range of administrative assistance during the preparation of the book.

# Preface to the Second Edition

Iris C. Rotberg

The second edition of *Balancing Change and Tradition in Global Education Reform* was written approximately five years after the first. It includes the original chapters along with an update for each country. The updates are intended to be read along with the original chapters, which continue to provide the most comprehensive overview of each country's education system.

The updates describe trends in education policy that have occurred since the original chapters were written. They also describe the change process itself and the link between the changes each country has experienced—or debated—and its broader societal context. In some cases, the education policies described in the updates represent a continuation or expansion of policy innovations described in the original chapters. In others, there has been a backlash to change, and the country has returned to its more traditional practices. It is not uncommon for countries to move in both directions at the same time: they might adopt policies in response to new political, social, or economic circumstances while attempting to balance these policies with others designed to maintain traditional values and practices. The policy discussions reflect the tension between the two approaches and the difficulty in meeting what often turn out to be conflicting goals.

I am grateful to the authors for their contributions to the book and for their insights about the change process and the link between countries' education policies and their broader national goals. I would also like to express my continued appreciation to faculty and students at the George Washington University, to Tom Koerner and his colleagues at Rowman & Littlefield Education, to Randi Gray Kristensen, to Cynthia Orticio, and to Mary Ann Kennedy. I have been fortunate to have them as colleagues.

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DRAMATIC POLITICAL/  
ECONOMIC CHANGE

