

POLICY BRIEF FOR NORRAG NEWS 39 BEST PRACTICE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

NN39 provides a critique of Best Practice rather than being a quick reference source to a whole series of current Best Practices in education and training.

Its forty short, sharp articles provide an extremely timely, and wide-ranging set of health warnings about the discourse of Best Practice. But at the same time, they do offer some excellent advice about pointers to what can be called genuine Best Practice.

Some brief history of Best Practice is offered, with its close connections to business management. But particular attention is given to the tendency for claims to Best Practice to be ahistorical. Too often such claims have little interest in past successes, let alone failures! Best Practice is usually said to be the most current wisdom, but seems to lack any institutional memory. Best Practice claims are now made in every sphere of educational endeavour from pre-school to doctoral research, and from curriculum innovation to quality improvement, and to educational outcomes.

It is important to be clear about source of the Good or Best Practice claim. Is it in fact research-based, and if so, from what kind of research is it derived? Is it based on agency experience, or on the national experience of a particular country? Many of our contributors discuss the very fragile evaluation base for many claims of Best Practice.

Best practices are not fruits just waiting to be plucked. They need to be re-potted, grafted, and reworked for different soil conditions.

Our authors acknowledge that there is potentially good practice or best practice, but these can't just be borrowed and mainstreamed. Or if there is borrowing, there needs to be an awareness of the culture, 'chemistry', history, and political economy of the education system that produced the innovation, as well as a recognition of the learning and adapting that has to take place, if these practices are to be effectively embedded in a new context. This is not just a requirement for a handful of policy-makers but for education communities more generally.

But this Best Practice issue of NN is not just about the most appropriate way to think about cross-national borrowing. It is also about the conditions, at the national level, under which educational institutions – and their inhabitants - are most likely to be innovative, creative and acquire meaningful experiences.

NN39 challenges us to consider what it means to secure literacy, to make schools 'free', 'friendly' or of good quality, to develop genuine research partnerships, to accredit qualifications, formalise the informal sector, offer microfinance, accept direct budget support, or adopt best practice in language. And a great deal else.

Norrage News does not approach its Special Issues as synthesising best practice in SWAPs, capacity-building, or in its many other topics. Rather it captures the inescapable diversity of views round any claim to best practice, and then encourages further debate among its readership.