CHAPTER 4

SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING SOLD

Outcomes, Competences, and Qualifications Frameworks Spread to the Developing World

In the 1990s and early 2000s, it was to poor and middle income countries that most work on qualifications frameworks (and competence-based training) spread. What happened is the focus of this chapter. The patterns that emerge in these countries seem to be, in the main, similar to those already seen. However, the problems caused by this type of reform are more serious.

Some of early uses of the ideas of learning outcomes and learner centredness were discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 considered how these ideas re-emerged in qualifications in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Outcomes-based qualifications were used to drive marketization of provision and reform the role of the state in educational delivery; change curricula, thereby improving their relevance to individuals and employers; and improve how education related to labour markets by providing better information to employers about the abilities of the holder of a qualification. We also saw how these policies had support not only from the right of the political spectrum, but also from the left, firstly, in the context of the centre-left shifting substantially to the right through 'Third Way' politics, and secondly, through drawing on left-wing educational traditions that were critical of subjects as the basis for the curriculum, and of educational institutions as elitist or conservative reproducers of class inequalities.

Drawing on the English National Vocational Qualifications directly or indirectly, qualifications frameworks emerged next in South Africa, Botswana, and Mauritius, competence-based frameworks for vocational education were developed in the Caribbean and some Asian countries, and labour competence frameworks were developed in some Latin American countries. All generally followed the model of getting stakeholders, particularly representatives of employers, to develop outcomes- or competence-based qualifications (Allais, 2010b). There are also some examples of qualifications frameworks which were not narrowly modelled on the English National Vocational Qualifications.

There is very little research on qualifications frameworks in all of these countries. The framework on which there has been the most research is that developed in South Africa. The South African case is useful because it is an extreme instance of a qualifications framework, and thus highlights, in almost ideal-typical fashion, the nature and limits of the outcomes-based qualifications framework form. (However, it could also be argued that it was a *reductio ad absurdam* of policy which could be sensible if adopted in a more moderate way; I will return to this possibility in Chapter 8). In most countries, from the advocacy and descriptive documents which are available, it is hard to establish the extent to which frameworks have actually been implemented, never mind how effective they are. In most cases qualifications frameworks are relatively recent policy interventions, and it is not always clear what they will look like, and how they will operate in practice. Nonetheless, there are some indications of trajectories, particularly in the countries with more years of experience.

Across the globe, developing countries are adopting outcomes- and competence-based approaches to vocational education. I argue in this chapter that one of the reasons outcomes-based qualifications frameworks and quality assurance systems have great appeal in developing countries is because education systems, and particularly vocational education, are weak, and the state has no viable policy to ensure employment for all citizens. A policy focused on regulation of provision, rather than trying to build and improve providing institutions, and which claims to make people ‘employable’ without government intervening to create employment, seems like it would be appealing to policy makers. In all the cases I have studied, developing countries have attempted to follow the model of creating a framework of qualifications, using employers (and other stakeholders) to define ‘competences’ or ‘learning outcomes’ that are the basis of the qualifications, and setting up state (and in some cases private) regulatory bodies to regulate both private and public providers against the stipulated outcomes. The specification of outcomes is supposed to improve the quality and relevance of education, as well as to improve the ability of government to regulate education, which is often linked to a desire to open up markets, and ensure that new providers can emerge, as well as provide a means of holding existing providers to account without the state having to play a central role in delivering education.

But this approach, with the emphasis on a regulatory state ‘quality assuring’ different providers, has not increased the quantity or quality of provision, and in some cases (such as South Africa) may have decreased it. In most instances, the main achievement has been to develop paper qualifications that in fact are never used, despite the involvement of industry and other stakeholders in their development. This is a tragedy not only due to the pointless expenditure of resources in a context in which governments have very limited finances for a number of competing priorities, but because many more serious priorities—such as developing and supporting educational institutions—are neglected because the policy *appears* to be taking care of them. This chapter will provide some evidence of these trends, with a particular focus on South Africa, but also drawing on experiences from a selection of poor and middle-income countries. The analysis draws largely from the study I led for the International Labour Organization discussed in Chapter 1 (Allais, 2010b); the detailed case studies for the individual countries, which were all conducted by different researchers, are available online.[1]

SOUTH AFRICA

A qualifications framework was developed in South Africa in the mid-1990s. It was strongly supported across the political spectrum because of a broad consensus on a need for dramatic change, heralded by the liberation movement, and in response both to apartheid education and to problems with the economy as South Africa tried to reenter the global economy. Perhaps because of the political support, as well as the high ambition for what it was to achieve, the South African national qualifications framework was designed as a rather extreme model of an outcomes-based qualifications framework. In South Africa, outcomes-based qualifications were intended for all sectors of the education and training system, at all levels, and, according to the original policy, were meant to replace all existing qualifications. Given that it was introduced as a key policy to entirely change the system of education inherited from apartheid, it was seen as the most ambitious framework in the world. The stakes were much higher. Its failure would matter much more.

It is also one of the most advanced frameworks in the world in terms of the number of years it has been implemented, and is one of the few qualifications frameworks in the world that has been subjected to considerable scrutiny by researchers. What is evident is that the attempt to turn an outcomes-led qualifications framework into a real policy vehicle in which learning outcomes were stipulated separately from educational contexts led to a model that spiralled out of control, becoming completely unwieldy and unusable as a basis for educational reform. The outcomes-led framework model led to a system which was not only very complex and cumbersome, but also a very poor basis for educational reform. What's more, the education system in South Africa survived this reform only where the reasonably strong education institutions *ignored* the outcomes-led qualifications framework model. In the sectors where educational provision has been historically very weak in South Africa—such as vocational and adult education—the existence of outcome statements has not led to increased provision or improvements in quality, and there is considerable evidence that it has made provision more difficult. The failures of the South African qualifications framework are important beyond South Africa, because, despite these failures, the outcomes-led model is being pushed in poor countries as a major mechanism for educational reform. Angola is probably one of the starkest examples. Ravaged for twenty years by civil war, desperately needing new educational institutions, it is attempting to create a national qualifications framework with guidance from the South African Qualifications Authority.

High Hopes for Learning Outcomes

The idea of a qualifications framework emerged in South Africa in the early 1990s, shortly prior to the transition to democracy. The South African national qualifications framework was officially introduced in 1995. It was seen as a major policy intervention to contribute to overcoming the educational, social, and economic problems caused by apartheid. Like the Australian competence-based training and like the National Vocational Qualifications and competence-based models in the United Kingdom, it was supported by both progressive educators anxious to democratize education provision and policy makers anxious to marketize the education system.

The need to dramatically improve the education system in South Africa was (and still is) much greater than in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The educational, social, and economic problems in South Africa were much deeper than they were in these other countries. The idea of an education policy which increased relevance and competence, ensured that education contributed to eradicating economic problems and social inequalities, enabled democratization, and increased levels of provision, whilst also being a mechanism for ensuring quality provision, had appeal across the political spectrum.

Apartheid has been described as "the most notorious form of racial domination that the postwar world has known" (Thompson, 1990, p. 189). It was a political system which disenfranchized the black majority, and restricted most of the population to intentionally inferior 'bantu education'. Black people had very limited possibilities for participation in the economy. Education and training policy reinforced social and economic inequality by destroying and restricting access to education and training, by providing poor quality education and training to most black people, and by controlling the content of syllabuses for all population groups to reflect the interests of the apartheid state. The workforce was deeply divided, with higher skilled and higher paying jobs frequently reserved for white people, and 'unskilled' low paying, insecure jobs or unemployment as the primary options for black people.

The extreme inequality of the South African education system under apartheid, as well as the extreme social and economic inequality, the inefficiencies of the economy inherited from apartheid, and the rapid liberalization of the economy after re-entry into the global economy, meant that the qualifications framework took on extraordinary significance in South Africa (Allais, 2007c; Mukora, 2006). A policy which appeared to bring unity, to create a single *national* system, and which claimed to integrate mental and manual training, theory and practice, academic and everyday knowledge, and academic and vocational education, achieved widespread support. The idea of a qualifications framework resonated with groups and organizations across the political spectrum, and obtained a high degree of support from educationalists in many different communities. It also seemed to articulate the concerns of a diverse range of contemporary thinking on education and training policy, as expressed in a report commissioned by the Ministers of Education and Labour:

> It was characteristic of South Africa's transition to democracy that people of different political persuasions, bodies working within the formal schooling, training and higher education sectors, public servants and organised business and labour were able to find a strategic patch of common ground … The National Qualifications Framework was established as an emblem and an instrument of the single national high-quality education and training system

> that democratic South Africa aspired to create. (Departments of Education and Labour, 2002, p. 5)

Outcomes-based qualifications were seen as a solution not only to the educational problems, but also to the economic problems of apartheid. In a structure called the National Training Board, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, industry representatives involved in discussions with unions and the apartheid state saw the qualifications framework and the idea of outcomes- or competence-based qualifications as a way of addressing the low levels of skills in the workforce and labour market (Allais, 2003; Badroodien & McGrath, 2005; Cooper, 1998; Ensor, 2003). A national qualifications framework that overarched all education and training promised to be a mechanism that would ensure that learning was 'relevant' and of high quality, produce learners who were competent in the workplace, provide access to those previously excluded, recognize the learning that had been achieved informally, ensure that all qualifications were of equal status, and ensure that assessment was transparent and fair. It was hoped that organizing all qualifications and parts of qualifications on a hierarchy of levels would force society to value types of learning programmes which had historically been of low status, which would increase efficiency and encourage more learners to enroll in vocational programmes (HSRC, 1995).

The democratically elected government oversaw a rapid liberalization of the economy (Desaubin, 2002; Marais, 2011). Public sector reform was complex, but there was a strong emphasis on New Public Management-style reforms, introducing performance contracts for public servants and public entities, disaggregating government functions into different cost centres, and privatizing or corporatizing aspects of the state. It was believed that these types of reforms would introduce efficiency and effectiveness. As in the examples in the previous chapter, outcomes-based qualifications seemed to provide a basis for the measurement of private provision as well as the regulation and control of public provision, through providing explicit, formal, and measurable standards against which all education would be measured. This gave weight to the idea that outcomes-based qualifications would become the tools for driving the education system.

The framework was strongly supported by people and organizations who were part of the liberation movement, and who saw it as an emancipatory policy. This was particularly notable within the trade union movement, as it formed part of discussions between trade unions, business representatives, and government about industrial training. Union representatives saw the framework as a way of improving the poor education provided to black people, the difficulties faced by black people in accessing education, and the racist job reservation system which denied jobs to competent black people and sometimes used their lack of formal qualifications as a justification (Bird, 1992). The idea that skills and knowledge learnt through non-formal programmes and informal processes[2] should be certified was important to the unions, who hoped that certification of non-formal learning programmes, as well as of prior learning or informal learning, would formally recognize these forms of knowledge as ‘equivalent’ to what was learnt in formal educational institutions. They further hoped that this certification would provide redress and facilitate equity in employment. Outcomes seemed to provide a way of validating the knowledge of people who had been deprived of formal education, a way for them to describe their knowledge outside of a deficit model in which their knowledge was seen only in relation to the formal knowledge that they lacked.[3] Because outcomes would be developed separately from specific institutions or specific learning programmes, it was thought that they could be the benchmarks against which all learning was measured—whether the learning had happened in the classroom, the workplace, or simply in the course of life.

In the early 1990s, the policies that the unions developed were fed into the policy development processes within educational organizations that were part of the liberation movement—teacher unions, student organizations, non-governmental organizations, and so on. Although there was obviously much debate within the democratic movement, a national qualifications framework was ultimately adopted by the policy structures of the African National Congress, the then leader of the liberation movement, and soon-to-be dominant party in the new government.

However, despite support from the unionists, and with the exception of adult educationists within the democratic movement, the idea of an outcomes-based curriculum had not emerged from the *educationalists* within the democratic movement, and it had not been a part of the thinking about the curriculum. Curriculum policy was very under-developed in the African National Congress and amongst its allies. Many argue that educationalists were taken by surprise when the idea of learning outcomes emerged (Jansen, 2001).[4] Some were critical, associating outcomes with behaviourism. Others saw commonalities with progressive educational traditions.

There had been intense struggles against apartheid education, under the slogan ‘people’s education for people’s power’. The question of what to teach—what the curriculum should look like—was particularly problematic in South Africa, where education during apartheid had been so clearly used as part of a brutal social engineering project. The ideology of Christian National Education[5] was firmly located in a strongly authoritarian tradition, and the curriculum had been designed to instil a sense of final authority, downplaying the importance of interpretation and debate. Content-based curricula and even the idea of a syllabus came to be seen as authoritarian, and associated with using education for ideological control. People knew, for example, that history as they learnt it in school could not be correct, because in history textbooks they learnt about ‘peaceful separate co-existence’ and about how all the different ‘national groups’ in South Africa and the ‘independent’ countries surrounding it (the so-called Bantustans, which were the small areas of land within South Africa into which different ethnic groups were divided) were happily pursuing their own development within the confines of their own cultural ideas and preferences.

What was clear to the liberation movement was that something more than just arguing for increased access to education was needed. Education must be 'transformed'. The idea of learning outcomes as the vehicle for this transformation gained support amongst educational reformers in South Africa. Outcomes appeared to enable a policy whereby the knowledge of elite groups in educational institutions would not be able to take precedence over the knowledge of the socially disadvantaged. The qualifications framework was designed to remove the power of defining knowledge and skills from formal institutions, and to do away with educational institutions as the source of authority on qualifications. They would no longer define the benchmarks of what was worth knowing, nor be the only arbiters of what learners had achieved. Everyone would have a say in the outcomes of the educational process, instead of only the experts in a particular field. In particular, industry would be able to play a much larger role in defining standards, thus ensuring that education programmes were relevant to the needs of industry, and that industry invested in training[6]. Outcomes were also thought to enable academic freedom, because they would allow academics and teachers to "interpret the meaning of specified learning outcomes in their classrooms in contextually sensitive ways" (Higher Education Quality Council 2003, p. 18).

The notion of competence-based qualifications had already been introduced in the reform of vocational education in the apartheid state in the early 1990s (Gamble, 2004). Jeffy Mukora (2006) suggests that the curriculum reforms developed shortly before the end of apartheid had some similarities with the outcomes-based approach. Perhaps the late apartheid state wanted to appear to be implementing curriculum reforms that were modern and in line with international trends. Or perhaps, seeing the end of their control over the syllabus in sight, educationalists in the apartheid state were sympathetic to an approach which said that no form of knowledge should take precedence over another, because such an approach would make it possible that even after the transition, enclaves of Afrikaans schools would be able to continue teaching what they had in the past. Outcomes-based education, and outcomes-based qualifications seemed to fit in with the spirit of negotiation, reconciliation, and tolerance which characterized the South African transition, because difficult debates about which content to include in the curriculum—which version of history was 'right' for example—could be avoided. Instead, only learning outcomes would be specified nationally. Each teacher would be free to select the appropriate content which would 'lead' to the outcomes (SAQA, 2000c). This not only avoided difficult debates but seemed to provide an alternative to the highly-authoritarian and prescriptive apartheid curriculum: providing an alternative to the idea of 'truth' seemed more radical than providing different 'truths' in the curriculum.

Outcomes were seen as a mechanism for improving quality, because they would specify standards for all educational provision, and all educational institutions would have to meet the standards. Outcomes-based qualifications would indicate to institutions the standard expected of them, and regulatory bodies would be able to check up on what institutions were offering against the prescribed outcomes (SAQA, 2000d). Increased supply of education would lead, it was believed, to competition, which would, it was assumed, improve quality. It was also believed that outcomes-based qualifications would lead to new provision and new institutions (SAQA, 2000d, 2000e). Because any 'provider' would be able to offer learning programmes against the outcome statements, it seemed as if access to education could be increased, and other 'providers' that were not tainted by their role under apartheid, as many educational institutions were felt to be, would also be able to offer educational programmes. And because all providers would be offering programmes leading to the same outcomes, the qualifications framework would "remove the obsession with institutional learning as the measure of a person's worth, because national qualifications will be blind as to where the learning takes place" (HSRC 1995, p. 15).

Further, the model was supposed to facilitate a disaggregation of provision. Instead of learners attending one educational institution to follow one set learning programme, they could go to different providers for smaller parts of a programme. These small parts would all be designed against learning outcomes, which could be put together again into a qualification. Similarly, the idea was for learning programmes to be designed against single unit standards (single competence statements), allowing learners to acquire competences as and when they needed to or were able to. It was hoped that this would empower learners. Outcomes were also seen as the basis for stimulating entrepreneurial provision of new programmes, as, once learning outcomes had been registered on the qualifications framework, any provider would be able to design a learning programme against them. This is the same idea as that discussed above in relation to the National Vocational Qualifications in the United Kingdom: the idea that they would break the 'provider capture' of the 'educational market' (Hursh 2005).

Finally, learning outcomes would be used to remove barriers to education: institutions would have to be clear which outcomes learners needed to have met in order to attain access, and individuals would have a chance to be tested against these outcomes. This would prevent what were widely perceived to be unfair and elitist admission criteria. Outcomes appeared to enable qualifications to be recognized between institutions, because it would be clear what it was that the learner had achieved—what their 'competences' were. Because the competences that someone had achieved would be transparently specified and available for general scrutiny, it would be straightforward to decide which competences were applicable in other courses or programmes that a learner wanted to undertake, meaning that there would be minimal duplication (SAQA, 2000e).

In Chapter 1, I discussed three areas of educational reform that qualifications frameworks are supposed to reform: how qualifications and credentials are used in labour markets; curricula, pedagogy, and assessment; and how education is managed and delivered by the state. All three of these can be seen in South Africa. A national qualifications framework seemed to be a key mechanism to improve how education related to the labour market, and contributed to the economy, by making it more relevant to industry (curriculum reform through learning outcomes), and by increasing quantity, quality, and accountability of provision (learning outcomes as targets for regulatory agencies). It was supposed to improve efficiency of provision, in the interests of the economy and of individuals, by removing unfair barriers, and by ensuring that competences already achieved were recognized through a benchmark provided outside of educational institutions. It was supposed to reform the authoritarian and ideologically-laden apartheid curriculum, but at the same time, by not stipulating content, to contribute to the idea of national unity. It also created unity in a fragmented system by bringing everything within a single national framework. As was seen in Chapter 3 in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, in South Africa the idea of outcomes-based qualifications appealed to people with very different political sympathies.

By the early 1990s, then, the idea of outcomes-based education and a national qualifications framework had become central to the education policy of the African National Congress, and, accordingly, was a keystone in the policy reforms introduced by the newly elected government. When the South African Qualifications Authority Act (Republic of South Africa Act No. 58 of 1995) was introduced in 1995, this approach had the backing of all major groupings in South Africa. It was seen as symbolic of the transition to democracy, and the appropriate education policy to unite the divided nation.

Policy Borrowing

We saw in the previous chapter that the policies developed in Australia and New Zealand were both substantially influenced by the earlier English policies. This trend continued in South Africa. While the concerns and aspirations of those involved were specific to South Africa, the substance of the policy ideas was borrowed from the competence-based training system in Australia, the qualifications frameworks in New Zealand, and the English National Vocational Qualifications. Detailed policy proposals drawing on all three countries were developed by representatives of unions and industry in the early design stages (Badroodien & McGrath, 2005; Lugg, 2007).

The English National Vocational Qualifications were not frequently invoked in the design of the South African qualifications framework. One influential policy maker refers directly to them (Vorwerk, 2004), but others sought explicitly to distance themselves from this model, and develop what they believed to be a ‘broader’ notion of outcomes (French, 2009). The negative associations of the English model may in part have caused the South Africa policy makers to abandon the word ‘competence’, and adopt instead ‘learning outcomes’. South African policy documents argued explicitly that the latter term was broader and less behaviourist. It could also be that policy makers were looking for policy coherence, as the notion of outcomes had already become prevalent in curriculum reform of the school system, mainly through the ideas of William Spady discussed in Chapter 2. South Africa did not officially adopt ‘functional analysis’—as described in the previous chapter, the idea that the starting point in designing a qualification should be an analysis of occupational functions, conducted by employers. Unlike in the United Kingdom, the South African qualifications framework was comprehensive, aiming to cover all education at all levels, so it would have been impossible for all learning outcomes to be derived from the workplace; many of the unit standards and qualifications developed did not have a direct relationship with specific industries. Nonetheless, the outcomes-based approach, where it did not directly relate to a specific area of work, still started from 'activities in the real world', as opposed to knowledge areas or subjects—much along the lines of the invocation of Bobbit's 'activity analysis' discussed in Chapter 2. What's more, although functional analysis was not adopted, a very similar approach to functional analysis was used in the detailed requirements and specifications for qualifications and unit standards that were created, as well as in the manuals and guidelines for their development (SAQA2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d, 2000e), with the resultant qualifications looking substantively the same as the English National Vocational Qualifications and the Australian training packages.

It is interesting to note the curious balancing act in the policy community of, on the one hand, using international experts, and referring to models in other countries as a way of legitimating their ideas, and, on the other hand, stressing the homegrownness of the policies developed (Spreen 2001). Spreen (2001, p. 186) argues that once outcomes-based education had been indigenized, its international origins "vanished from official documentation". This is evident in various official histories. For example, writing on the history of the qualifications framework in one of its reports, the South African Qualifications Authority argues:

> The [South African] NQF is a distinctly South African phenomenon that has been developed in a unique political and historical context. The concepts and organizing principles were drawn from similar developments in Scotland, England, New Zealand, and Australia in the mid to late 1980s. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize the essentially South African nature of the NQF and its roots in opposition to apartheid. (SAQA 2004f, p. 22)

New Structures, New Qualifications

The idea of the qualifications framework in South Africa was to replace *all* existing qualifications in the country with a set of new qualifications and part qualifications (called unit standards) designed by new, stakeholder-based structures, and expressed in the form of learning outcomes. This, it was hoped, would ensure that new learning programmes and curricula would be developed. No existing educational provision would remain untouched—all educational institutions would be obliged to redesign their programmes on the basis of these specified outcomes, or to develop new programmes to meet the requirements of specified outcomes, and new providers would be able to emerge to offer new programmes against the specified learning outcomes. All would be held accountable by newly created quality assurance bodies. The apartheid education system would, in this way, be completely transformed.

A South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was created through an Act of Parliament in 1995, as an independent statutory body under the joint oversight of the Ministries of Education and Labour. A single comprehensive framework of eight levels and 12 fields was developed. This grid was supposed to include all learning that took place in South Africa, at all levels, in all areas. The key design feature was learning outcomes, developed separately from educational institutions and educational programmes, against which learning would be delivered, assessed, quality assured, and certified.

The South African Qualifications Authority created both permanent and *ad hoc* structures to develop the outcomes-based qualifications and unit standards which would populate the eight levels[7] and 12 fields[8] of the national qualifications framework. These included 12 permanent national standards bodies and a large number of standards generating bodies, created on an *ad hoc* basis. The national standards bodies were stakeholder-based bodies, which were given responsibility for overseeing the development of qualifications and unit standards in each of the fields of the qualifications framework.

The standards generating bodies, comprised of representatives of experts and interest groups (SAQA 2000c, d), were supposed to develop the outcomes-based qualifications and unit standards for all education and training in South Africa (SAQA, 2000a, 2000b). These would then populate the levels and fields of the qualifications framework. Gradually, it was hoped, all previous qualifications would disappear. Only the new qualifications and unit standards would remain. None of them would have a direct relationship to an educational provider—they would all be national qualifications.

New qualifications and unit standards soon started rolling off the mill, apparently in every conceivable area: from National Certificates in *Macadamia production and de-husking*, *Cigarette Filter Rod Production*, and *Resolving of Crime,* to Further Education and Training Certificates in *Victim Empowerment Coordination* and *Real Estate*.

All of these qualifications were outcomes-based, and most were comprised of unit standards, which had titles ranging from the extremely specific—*Manage venomous animals*, *Assist a frail care patient to relieve him/herself using a bedpan*, *Prepare, cook and assemble hot filled baked potatoes*, or *Pack customer purchases at point of sale*—to the curiously broad—*Show, explain, discuss and analyse the relationship between society and natural environment*, *Demonstrate an understanding of climate and weather in the context of renewable energy*, *Apply biblical models of transformation to perceived needs of the community, Explain and apply the principles of conceptual thinking,* and *Describe ideologies in community contexts*.

According to the original model of the qualifications framework, educational providers would be accredited by quality assurance bodies to offer programmes leading to specific qualifications. The quality assurance bodies would check up on how well they were doing this, and on whether or not they were assessing learners appropriately against the learning outcomes (SAQA 2000e). A set of quality assurance bodies was created. Two were created under the Minister of Education: one for all education below tertiary education, and one for Higher Education. These bodies were created through acts of Parliament. Another 25 were created for different sectors of the economy, as parts of bodies called Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which were under the authority of the Minister of Labour. These bodies were set up through a 'skills levy', whereby employers were levied one per cent of their payroll (Republic of South Africa, 1998). The employers could get most of it paid back by proving to their relevant SETA that they were conducting training. Ten per cent of the levy funded the running costs of the SETAs. These bodies had to apply for accreditation from the South African Qualifications Authority in order to be recognized as quality assurance authorities.

Outcomes-Based Education for the School System

At the same time as the South African Qualifications Authority was developing the qualifications framework along the lines described above, the Department of Education started developing an outcomes-based curriculum for the primary and junior secondary education system, known as Curriculum 2005. This was to be the major curriculum reform of the democratic South Africa, intended to be phased first into the primary and junior secondary system, and later into the senior secondary system. This is similar to the situation in Australia and New Zealand, where an outcomes-based curriculum for the school system was introduced alongside the competence-based training system for vocational education (Australia), or as part of the qualifications framework (New Zealand).

Curriculum 2005 will not be discussed or evaluated in detail here. Briefly, the Department of Education tried to do away with disciplinary areas or subjects, through the specification of learning outcomes, and by putting a strong focus on learner-centredness (Harley and Wedekind 2004). Sixty-six specific outcomes were specified, which were supposed to contain "the specific knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes which should be demonstrated by learners in the context of each learning area", and each outcome, like the unit standards and whole qualifications of the qualifications framework, was associated with assessment criteria that identified "the kind of evidence that must be gathered in order to be able to report that learners have met a specific outcome" (Spreen 2001, p. 112). In other words, this curriculum separated the idea of learning outcomes from the idea of content or knowledge (Curriculum 2005 Review Committee, 2000; Muller, 2000; Taylor, 2000).

Initially, there was a clear relationship between the emerging national qualifications framework and the outcomes-based curriculum for the school system (Lugg, 2007). However, the Department of Education developed its curriculum separately from the structures and processes of the South African qualifications framework. It drew heavily on the ideas of American education reformer William Spady whom, as Spreen

(2001) points out, the unions had also encountered in outcomes-based education in Australia. Many analysts have emphasized the differences between the outcomes-based curriculum developed by the Department of Education and the qualifications framework. Muller (2004), for example, describes the school curriculum as drawing on a progressivist thread that, he argues, had long existed in certain circles in South Africa. Because of its emphasis on continuous assessment and against examinations, and because of its long progressivist heritage, he argues that it was at odds with the qualifications framework, which he characterizes as systemically-driven, with a centralized framework and a 'one-size-fits-all' epistemology. Curriculum 2005, on the other hand, was teacher and learner driven, with highly particularized and individualized assessment procedures. But reformers within adult education and some within vocational education who could be characterized as progressivists saw the qualifications framework as similarly individualized. Both the qualifications framework and Curriculum 2005 were based on the idea of centrally prescribed 'outcomes', with individual teachers and trainers designing their own courses around the needs of their specific learners, using decentralized assessment instead of examinations. The two policies shared the same premises, as well as sharing much of the same terminology and jargon. However, although the Department of Education bought into the idea of outcomes-based education, it went on its own in terms of actual implementation of the outcomes-based curriculum for the schools, creating the impression that it was doing something fundamentally different. The Department continued exploring the policies of other countries, specifically engaging with policy makers from New Zealand, Canada, Scotland, England and the Netherlands, and in 1996 was involved in a set of study tours to look at competence-based education, invited and paid for by the Australian government (Spreen 2001). William Spady was a particularly significant influence (Spreen 2001). Visiting South Africa in 1998, he spoke at two conferences, and worked with the departmental officials who pushed the development of outcomes-based education in the Department.

The outcomes-based school curriculum led to a crisis in schools very quickly after its implementation, as many teachers simply had no idea what to teach, and the technical complexity of the curriculum was overwhelming for teachers (Allais, 2010a; Curriculum 2005 Review Committee, 2000; Jansen, 2002; Taylor, 2000). A review was commissioned by the Minister of Education, which reported by 2000 (RSA Department of Education 2000). Major changes were made to the curriculum, without, however, officially abandoning the idea of outcomes-based education.

Failures of the NQF in South Africa

Very few concrete claims are made, even by the South African Qualifications Authority, about what the qualifications framework has achieved. The main achievements which are claimed are the development of qualifications and the 'shifting of consciousness'. With regard to the former, most of the qualifications that were developed have not been used. And most people who obtain qualifications in South Africa obtain qualifications that were developed and designed outside of the elaborate representative structures established to develop outcomes-based qualifications and unit standards. These structures have in the main been disbanded. Thus there is little that has concretely been achieved. With regard to the latter, a report published by South African Qualifications Authority (French, 2009) claims that the qualifications framework has shifted thinking about educational quality, curriculum design, and assessment, and a relatively recent presentation by the Authority's former Chief Executive argues that the existence of the qualifications framework has "increased awareness" about quality assurance in higher education (Isaacs, 2009). Even if these claims were testable and found to be true, it is far from clear that the 'shifts' that they purport to have achieved are desirable.

Despite its well-meaning goals, as well as its wide support across the political spectrum, the implementation of the South African qualifications framework was fraught with problems. Critics described it as "complex and esoteric" (Breier 1998, p. 74), and "large, unwieldy, expensive, complex and somewhat unstable", as well as "out of line with the *modus operandi* of the formal education sector" (Ensor 2003, p. 334). Many people and organizations felt alienated by the terminology and structures that were set up around the qualifications framework, as they were unfamiliar to them, and did not fit with the traditional concerns of educational institutions (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002). Lugg (2007) documents the increasing unease of trade unionists, who were unable to participate meaningfully, partly due to the huge number of structures that had been created, and partly because of the alienating jargon that had increasingly been adopted. An employee of the South African Qualifications Authority, Nadina Coetzee, describes the implementation of the qualifications framework as characterized by "intense debate, tension and even resistance" (SAQA 2004a, p. 79).

In 2000, only three years after implementation had really started, there was an announcement of an official review. A lengthy (seven year) period of policy reviews ensued. Before it had even started, there were disagreements about the terms of reference for the review between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education (Lugg, 2007). When the review was completed, the two departments were unable to agree with each other on the review recommendations (French, 2009; Lugg, 2007). The review team suggested that both in terms of their analysis of the problems and in terms of their ideas about what should be done about them, the Departments of Education and Labour were "mirror-images" of each other (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002, p. 33).

During the review period (2000 to 2008), with no resolution and no policy pronouncements coming from its sponsoring departments, the South African Qualifications Authority continued to develop the qualifications framework largely according to its original design. Standard generating bodies continued to generate standards, quality assurance bodies to accredit providers, the Authority to register qualifications and unit standards, and so on. As Merlyn Mehl put it, writing in the *SAQA Bulletin,*

> …[u]nit standards, qualifications, qualification-sets and qualifications frameworks are more and more rapidly coming off the production line. (Mehl, 2004, p. 42)

By March 2005, 696 unit standards-based qualifications and 8,208 unit standards had been registered on the qualifications framework. The vast majority of the new qualifications and unit standards that were developed were never used—by 2007, only 180 of the then 787 newly developed qualifications had ever been awarded to learners. In other words, many hundreds of qualifications which were developed had not been taught, assessed against, or awarded.[9] By 2007, 130 qualifications were allowed to lapse after their official term ended, signalling that no one was interested in offering them, and 2,013 unit standards similarly elapsed, although some were replaced.

At the same time as these new qualifications were being developed, educational institutions were asked to submit their existing qualifications to the South African Qualifications Authority, for 'interim registration' on the framework (SAQA, 1997). These qualifications were referred to as 'legacy' qualifications; the intention was that they would be phased out as soon as new qualifications had been designed. A transitional period of five years (from 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2002) was announced, after which they would fall away. A dual reality soon emerged. On the one side was the national qualifications framework, with its unit standards, ideas about individualized assessment conducted by registered assessors, and particular ideas about quality assurance. On the other side was the formal education and training system, which never complied with the new models introduced through the qualifications framework.

For example, the individualized approach to assessment which was central to the design of the qualifications framework was not adopted by the formal education system. Young (2005) argues that outcomes-based qualifications frameworks are really assessment frameworks—because they aim to stipulate the competences or outcomes that learners should have achieved, by whichever route. The idea was that instead of national examinations, which, it was argued, tested limited skills, and did not cater for individual strengths and weaknesses, individuals would all be assessed against the learning outcomes, and found competent or not yet competent. Standards would be maintained through the outcomes:

> Reliability is ensured in that specified standards, outcomes and competences and their accompanying criteria are the basis upon which assessment is planned and administered. These are a constant, regardless of who is assessing and who is being assessed. Laying down these specifications makes it incumbent upon the assessor to use them as a guide in planning, developing and administering

> assessment. Because they are specific, known and clearly understood by all who are affected, they act as an in-built mechanism against assessor inconsistency, deviation or error. (Mokhobo-Nomvete, 1999)

Further, anyone who wanted to conduct assessment would have to be registered as an assessor. An assessment unit standard, with various learning outcomes, was developed. Quality assurance bodies were supposed to 'register' assessors who were found competent against this standard. The South African Qualifications Authority gave a four-year grace period for this to happen, ending in May 2004 (SAQA, 2001b). In some areas, particularly amongst providers of vocational or workplace-based training who had to deal with the new sectoral quality assurance bodies, there was a rush to get registered as an assessor, and correspondingly, a flurry of income-generation for institutions offering 'assessor training' against the standard. But despite the Authority's official proclamation that registration against this standard would be a requirement for all assessors, the Department of Education did not require educators under its auspices (i.e. teachers in state schools, and lecturers in public colleges and universities) to be registered as assessors. People working in schools and universities did not rush down this route, and very few were registered as assessors. School and college certificates continued to be assessed through a national examinations system.

Sometimes there was formal compliance with the qualifications framework. For example, higher education institutions would develop their qualifications and curricula as per their usual practice, and then have them 'translated' into learning outcomes in order to formally submit them to the South African Qualifications Authority. The Department of Education operated largely without reference to the qualifications framework. It developed a new senior secondary qualification for the school system, with an accompanying new curriculum, using its own systems and structures.

During this period in which the framework was under official review, the period of 'interim registration' of the 'legacy' qualifications was extended, until June 2006. The South African Qualifications Authority started referring to 'provider' qualifications instead of 'interim' qualifications, suggesting a shift in the way these qualifications were thought of, and perhaps an acceptance that they might start to be a permanent feature of the qualifications frameworks. The National Standards Bodies were disbanded. So while the intention was for the framework to replace all existing qualifications, it soon started incorporating them instead. And these previously existing qualifications were the ones which, in the main, were awarded to learners. The formal education and training system contained the vast majority of learners studying and qualifications being awarded in South Africa. Thus, the national qualifications framework, at least according to its design, was largely ignored by the systems issuing the vast majority of qualifications.

From the point of view of formal institutions, it seems that the qualifications framework was a house of cards. However, it was not entirely ignored. It increasingly came to dominate organisations providing workplace-based training, short courses for communities, on-going professional development, as well as any kind of community development work that involved education and training. The sectoral quality assurance authorities increasingly required all providers wishing to be accredited with them to offer unit-standard based courses. Complex quality assurance procedures were set up that were highly onerous for providers and gave limited information about the actual quality of provision (Marock, 2011). Given that these bodies had large amounts of money at their disposal—they were set up through a payroll levy which providers were desperate to access—many converted their offerings to comply with the unit standards and unit standards based qualifications. The National Skills Fund, a fund set up to channel 20% of the payroll levy into training programmes for unemployed people and training focused on community development, also required applications to be based on unit standards-based qualifications or unit standards.

With hindsight, the different behaviour of formal and informal institutions was probably inevitable. Formal education institutions, for better or for worse, tend to be conservative bodies. The formal system in South Africa was no exception. Although uneven—with some strong and many very dysfunctional institutions—there were institutionalized ways of doing things that continued to operate. But the world of training, informal education, community development, and so on, did not have the same institutionalized ways of operating, and, further, was in general much more fragile. It did not have the same ability to continue with business as usual. The non-governmental sector in South Africa suffered enormously when funding dried up after the end of apartheid, and donors started to channel their money directly to the state. This fragile sector, desperate for funds, tried in whatever ways it could to comply with the official requirements of the education and training system which were, ironically, ignored by the actual education and training system.

A Revised Framework

The lengthy policy review was finally terminated in 2008. The qualifications framework was split into three separate but linked frameworks—one for higher education, one for schools and vocational education and training, and one for trades and occupational education. The first two of the sub-frameworks were to be under the Minister of Education, and the third under the Minister of Labour. The outcomes-based model was partially abandoned. The unit standards and unit standards-based qualifications remain on the framework, but most have still never been used.

The first of the two sub-frameworks represent the formal education and training system—the learning programmes offered and qualifications issued in universities, colleges, schools, and adult learning centres. As discussed above, in practice they had abandoned the original model of the qualifications framework years before. The frameworks that emerged, then, were much more in keeping with the practices and systems of the formal system—they functioned more to describe the system than to shape it, although some changes to types of qualifications were introduced, and there is still much debate about relationships between qualifications at the time of writing. Both sub-frameworks comprised a small number of ‘qualification types’, such as Bachelor’s Degree. By 2011, the higher education framework contained 9, and the general and further education and training framework contained 12, as compared with the thousands of qualifications registered on the original framework. In 2009, the Minister of Basic Education introduced changes to the school curriculum, and finally declared that outcomes-based education is officially dead in South Africa.

The third framework is less developed at the time of writing. Some initial policy documents stipulated a combination of different types of reconceptualized unit standards. The initial approach was to develop qualifications and awards based on an Organising Framework for Occupations, which contained a 5-level classification system for organising occupations into clusters and identifying common features at successively higher levels of generalization. The claim was that by starting from a framework of occupations, and by ensuring that qualifications were designed by ‘occupational practitioners’, learners would qualify in an occupation, as opposed to in a knowledge domain, which would ensure that they would get a job. This framework, then, seems closest to at least some of the original claims made about the national qualifications framework. In the training or vocational education world, outcomes-based education seems to be very much alive, as in many instances providers are still required to use unit standards-based qualifications (Allais, 2012b), although a Green Paper released by the Department of Higher Education and Training says explicitly that this should no longer be seen as a requirement (DHET, 2012). The same document signals further possible changes to the qualifications framework.

In Chapter 1, I introduced a distinction between frameworks that primarily describe existing systems, and frameworks that are intended to replace existing qualifications and so introduce substantial changes to education systems. The South African framework was clearly of the latter type in its original design, with major claims or hopes about what it could achieve. The revised framework abandons the original design, and by implication, although not official policy proclamation, abandons the claims or hopes about what it can achieve. This is particularly worth noting because the differences between the old and new framework are not immediately apparent to an outside observer. A framework of sorts still exists, and strong claims continue to be made about the role of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks.

Despite the serious problems and manifest lack of success of the South African qualifications framework, it has played an important role internationally. Linda Chisholm (2007) explores the role of financial and technical ‘assistance’, as well as of conferences and consultants, in spreading outcomes-based education and the national qualifications framework to southern and eastern Africa, and the ways in which “particular coalitions in South Africa have tried hard to export their own brand of the NQF and OBE.” Referring to a ‘discourse coalition’ brought together by the South African Qualifications Authority “in the wake of the review of the

NQF which had proposed a significant diminution of its authority", Chisholm describes how "the donor, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), a team from qualifications framework structures and NGOs in South Africa, and consultants, trainers and others working in the field of qualifications and industry training from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Mexico and representatives from 9 SADC countries" contributed to the popularization of this approach internationally, even as serious doubt about it was growing in South Africa (Chisholm, 2007, p. 203).

SIMILAR TRAJECTORIES IN OTHER POOR AND MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES

The limited evidence available from other developing countries suggests many similar problems.

Unused Qualifications

The most startling common research finding is that qualifications frameworks have led to the creation of new qualifications which do not get used. In other words, qualifications based on learning outcomes, developed in processes which attempted to be participatory, and involved industry or relevant stakeholders, led to the development of new qualifications which then sat on qualifications frameworks, with no corresponding provision of education programmes. This is not unique to poorer countries. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is the case even in the relatively successful Australian competence-based training system. In most of the small number of countries internationally that have actually attempted to implement a framework, qualifications have been developed and not used. But it is most dramatically visible in countries where education levels are low, and provision is weak or haphazard. Besides the South African case, the starkest examples of this are Botswana, Mauritius, and Mexico.

In Botswana, a qualifications framework was created specifically for vocational education: the Botswana National Vocational Qualifications Framework. The Botswana Training Authority, an institution created in 1998, was mandated to develop a framework, and, after a four year planning and staff development programme that started in 2000, began to implement the framework in August 2004. As in South Africa, qualifications consisted of parts—known as unit standards—which could be separately awarded, and which were defined through learning outcomes or competences. Like in the United Kingdom and all the countries which have followed this model, the intention was that employers would be involved in creating these unit standards, in order to ensure that training would be relevant to the labour market. In line with the notion of 'functional analysis', workplace operations were to be the context for setting outcomes statements, which would be broken down into specific outcomes and performance criteria for the purposes of assessment. Task teams were constituted, initially located in 15 key economic sectors. Stakeholders were trained in designing unit standards. The unit standards produced look similar to their counterparts in other countries. Similar rules and structures were established.

The results? The development of unit standards was slow. Even slower, however, was the uptake of the unit standards once they had been developed. In 2008, 124 training providers were registered by the Botswana Training Authority, offering a total of 643 approved programmes. In a country with a small population, this probably accounted for a sizable percentage of educational providers. However, most of these providers did not offer courses based on the newly developed standards. Only ten of them used the unit standards registered on the qualifications framework. In other words, out of the 643 programmes offered across the 124 institutions under the qualifications framework, only ten programmes complied with the unit standards specifications.

Although the belief was that industry involvement in standards-setting would lead to relevant training programmes, the Botswana Confederation of Commerce and Industry did not adopt the unit-standards based qualifications. At the time of our research, government-run vocational colleges were also not using them. There were no official records of how many learners had actually been awarded unit standards, but based on the numbers of courses offered, they would be extremely low. Most of the unit standards have never been used.

The most used unit standards were 'generic' ones, such as using computers and learning about HIV/AIDS, which have no direct workplace link. Although no formal evaluation or tracer studies had been conducted, individuals interviewed felt that where courses had been conducted and unit standards awarded, they have not led to jobs or further study, the former because of a lack of available jobs, and the latter because there is no articulation between the vocational qualifications framework and the rest of the education system. However, in two instances, employer organizations which participated in the development of curricula and the formulation of unit standards felt that the qualification acquired by employees was relevant to the workplace.

In Mauritius, legislation was passed in 2001 that created the Mauritius Qualifications Authority and a qualifications framework. This framework was a bit like that in Australia, where a fairly loose comprehensive framework encompasses a much tighter framework for vocational education. For higher education, the focus was on making sense of the 'jungle of qualifications', rationalizing the number of qualifications, and attempting to make them easier to understand. In vocational education, where the now familiar outcomes-/ competence-based model was introduced, the aim of the qualifications was to introduce substantial reform to both the curriculum and the delivery of education and training. The Mauritian Qualifications Authority was in charge of the qualifications framework, but it had far more jurisdiction over vocational education and training than over other areas. In vocational education, it was made responsible for the generation of new qualifications and unit standards. As in South Africa, Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, the model was essentially competence-based training, with the intention of giving industry a central role in defining its required competences. Industry Training Advisory Committees were created. It was anticipated that the qualifications developed would replace the existing qualifications as well as create qualifications and unit standards in areas that had previously not had formal qualifications. According to the qualifications authority, 66 qualifications were generated, although public information is only available on about 20 of these qualifications and 476 unit standards. In 2009, at the time of our research, *none of these qualifications had been used by educational institutions or employers*, and there was no designated awarding body for them. The main state provider, the Industrial and Vocational Training Board, as well as many private providers, continued to offer the National Training Certificate that predated the qualifications framework. This qualification has a specified curriculum, and is assessed and certified through the Mauritian Examinations Syndicate or relevant international bodies.

In Mexico, a labour competence framework was initially envisaged as a framework for qualifications in vocational education and training, as well as in workplace-based training, but ended up focused on the latter, where it was used mainly for the assessment of prior learning. Providers of vocational education did not accept or use the standards. The competence standards developed described mainly low levels of competence in the workplace, and many competence standards were developed that were never used.

A five level framework was developed, with the levels derived from an analysis of the complexity of labour involved, the degree of autonomy of performance, and the different activities included in the qualification (Klapp, 2003). Lead bodies, including representatives of employers and workers as well as sector experts, used the English National Vocational Qualification 'functional analysis' approach to produce competence standards. Awarding bodies were accredited to verify the quality of the assessment centres in which candidates were to be assessed against standards. From 1996 to 2003, 601 competence standards were registered. A very small number of these were ever issued to learners. From 1998 to 2003, 256,282 certificates were issued against these qualifications. One qualification generated 29.7 per cent of the certificates, and 80.7 per cent of the issued certificates corresponded to only 26 qualifications. Those qualifications which were used were linked to specific government-driven programmes. Although the overall project included a focus on educational institutions, in most instances the standards developed did not relate to their courses, so they developed their own standards. Pilot projects were commenced in seven priority industries, and Tourism and Electricity reported some gains in terms of learners achieving certificates.

One reason for this is the inherent clumsiness of outcomes-based qualifications, as well as contradictions between them and the way in which educational institutions usually develop curricula, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Another is the shift to a regulatory state *à la* New Public Management, in contexts where state provision was already poor; in other words, reliance on the emergence of a market of providers, in the context of weak educational institutions. This is explored below.

The Regulatory State and Weak Institutions

Neoliberalism in the developing world, implemented through structural adjustment programmes and other types of loans with heavy conditionalities which have prevented the building of welfare states, has entrenched the privatization of limited state provided services and welfare, as well as deregulation of the economy. Simon McGrath (2010) describes a 'toolkit' of reform for vocational education in developing countries which is very much within the paradigm of New Public Management. This 'toolkit' starts from the premise that improving individual's 'employability' is a better way to bring the poor into the social and economic mainstream than is the redistribution of wealth. It includes systemic reform focused on: giving more power to employers in the shaping of policy directions, often through qualifications frameworks; quality assurance systems; outcomes-based and 'institutionally-neutral' funding (such as voucher type systems); and managed autonomy for public providers. In recent years, aid money for vocational education in developing countries has increased, as has technical assistance from a variety of international organizations. The World Bank, long-time critic of vocational education, has started advocating building vocational education systems. With this has come a shift from traditional notions of building technical skills, to a focus on skills as the basis for entrepreneurship. 'Aid' money has been channelled into reforms that fit within this toolkit.

In our study, the rationales given for the introduction of qualifications frameworks mainly included this type of logic (Allais, 2010b). In Botswana, South Africa, and Sri Lanka (as well as in more developed countries such as Russia and Turkey, although these are not the focus of the current chapter), outcomes-based qualifications were explicitly described by policy makers as necessary to shift what was seen as a 'provider culture' or a 'provider captured' system, to a 'user-led' or 'learner-centred', competition-based or marketized system. In Mauritius, the Industrial and Vocational Training Board, the main provider of vocational education in that country, was responsible for the registration of private vocational education providers prior to the introduction of the qualifications framework. One of the rationales of the qualifications framework was to introduce a new institution, the Mauritian Qualifications Authority, to take over the function of registration of providers, in order to separate provision from quality assurance, and to have a body which could hold *all* providers accountable, including the state provider. In Bangladesh, a framework for vocational education was supposed to bring coherence to a large and complex set of providers, including many government ministries, private institutions and non-governmental institutions. But at the time of our study, the documents associated with the qualifications framework had very little to say about these institutions—how they would be funded and supported, where provision will come from, and so on. The idea seemed to be that designing new qualifications which contained competence statements or learning outcomes as the benchmark for all provision, whether offered in formal education and training, workplace training, or on-the-job training in the formal and informal economy, would in itself regulate and therefore enable provision.

In some of the countries, this type of approach was explicitly based on commitments to neoliberal market policies and principles. In many others this was not explicit. What was common to many of the countries in our study was an emphasis on treating state and private institutions in the same way through contractualization and the introduction of accountability measures, in the belief that this would increase efficiency and effectiveness.

Most critical commentary on quality assurance agrees that it has a strong focus on marketization (for example, Vidovich & Slee, 2001). But most of this commentary is in the developed world. Marketization is applied to education systems that *exist*, and that are reasonably strong. Using market-based or New Public Management type models where delivery systems do not exist, or are very small and/or very weak, is an entirely different matter.

Some years ago, Young (2005, p. 14) pointed out that

> [t]he sub-Saharan countries … are attempting to introduce an NQF with relatively low levels of institutional provision. They presumably hope that an NQF will either act as a substitute for the lack of institutional provision by encouraging the accreditation of informal learning, or that it will act as a catalyst to motivate new provision, especially from the private sector. The danger is that qualifications will proliferate where there is no provision leading to them. An expensive activity without obvious wider benefits.

The limited body of critical research into qualifications frameworks that has been carried out since then, describes the failures of this type of reform in developing countries almost exactly along the lines of Young's prediction. As Gert Loose (2008) argues, one of the biggest problems with the promotion of competence-based training in developing countries is that what these countries actually need is the creation of an effective training system—the development of institutions, programmes, and curricula. These are just the things that outcomes-based qualifications frameworks and competence-based training do not address: competence-based training, Loose argues, has provided "*the definition of competencies and the methodology for assessing them*; but it *failed* to provide the "T" in CBET, a learning process as the basis for the creation of *training* itself" (Loose, 2008, p. 76, emphasis in original). So, for example, policy makers that I interviewed in Bangladesh argued that including a specification of 'pre-vocational' qualifications on the Technical and Vocational National Qualifications Framework would lead to increased access, as many people would not have the basic education needed to access vocational qualifications. However, there were no policy mechanisms under consideration other than specifying these qualifications. The assumption was that once qualifications had been specified, provision would start: institutions would take them up and start offering them, thereby increasing access to education and training. But there was no plan for which institutions would offer them, no notion of developing a curriculum or learning programme, no clear notion of who would teach them. This epitomizes Loose's point above: this model fails to provide the 'T', the training itself; it simply assumes that it will happen.

I was approached recently by an international non-governmental organization that had won a European Commission grant to develop a national vocational qualifications framework for Somalia. The assumption behind the project was that once clear standards had been set, educational providers would be able to emerge, and offer programmes against these standards, and that their provision could be evaluated against them. This is an extreme example: a country which for many years has not even had a functional government, far less any kind of systematic education provision provision, is given development aid on the premise that specified standards will be developed which will somehow lead to or enable provision. But the extremity of this particular situation is not that far removed from many other countries—from Angola to Afghanistan—that are implementing outcomes-based qualifications frameworks with assistance from development agencies and colleagues in qualifications authorities of other countries. And in South Africa, with a relatively extensive school and higher education system, but where provision was still extremely weak—in adult education, vocational and occupational education, and so on—the specification of outcomes-based qualifications resulted in little more than a large set of outcomes-based qualifications, never used by anyone. The irony is that reliance on the market to expand provision may make it less likely that education is responsive to the needs of the economy or society.

The focus on outcomes/ standards/ competences, as well as quality assurance and accreditation, shifts attention away from learning processes, and the need to build and support educational institutions to ensure that learning happens. Quality assurance systems do not *build* quality, they build procedures that *claim* to *measure* quality. Sadly, they can end up being used as a substitute for building quality. Poorer countries, and countries with weak institutions, may find themselves facing a whole new set of problems if they rely too much on such mechanisms. This issue may be most stark in technical and vocational education, where a considerable infrastructure of workshops and other facilities is required in order to ensure quality. Models which narrowly link funding to learner enrolments and outcomes-based qualifications may not encourage institutions to take a long-term perspective, and are unlikely to provide the necessary incentives for building and developing institutions. Qualifications frameworks and competence-based reforms are often introduced with the professed aim of promoting the 'autonomy' and 'empowerment' of vocational institutions. However, 'autonomy' without increased capacity, without increased financial support, and with a series of new 'accountability' requirements, may turn out to be rather less empowering for institutions than is claimed, and governments are unlikely to get the desired results. This is why, as Claudio de Moura Castro (2000, p. 263) writes, "all industrial countries—with absolutely no exceptions—operate large public training systems financed from regular budgets". De Moura

Castro (2000) also points out that governments which are not strong enough to repair institutions often have enough power to destroy them. This, sadly, may be the net effect of neoliberal public sector reform and the focus on contractualization in the delivery of education.

Further, setting up a viable accreditation system is a costly endeavour, and is based on the assumption that bureaucracies which are putatively incompetent at delivering good training are likely to be good or at least better at contracting it out and managing quality, or, that new institutions created for this purpose will be able to do so with no track record or institutional history. Conducting meaningful evaluation of educational quality is costly and time-consuming, and demands high levels of professional capacity amongst staff. This type of approach can lead to more emphasis on building quality assurance institutions and accreditation systems than on building educational institutions.

A model of decentralized, institution-based assessment has most potential to be effective when it is based on very strong institutions. Where institutions have substantially divergent standards, the outcome statements—notwithstanding all their detailed specifications—are not sufficient to 'hold the standard', to ensure that all teaching and/or assessment is at the same or a similar level. Thus, far more quality assurance is required—checking up on the institution, each assessment, and so on. The weaker the institutions, the more expensive this type of model is. Clearly, no country wants to spend more on quality assurance than it spends on provision. While registration and accreditation processes are important, they prove costly, time consuming, and ultimately ineffective, in the absence of more traditional quality measures such as prescribed curricula and centrally-set assessments[10].

In the context of vocational education systems which are underfunded, countries which want to improve educational quality need to make serious choices between focusing on improving the capacity of education institutions or on increasing quality assurance. Managing contracts and evaluating the performance of contracted institutions, whether public or private, demands enormous regulatory capacity from the state, and possibly leads to many additional expenses for the various players in the education and training system. South Africa, for example, now has a huge and complex set of regulatory institutions and processes that oversees a tiny, diverse, but mainly extremely weak system of vocational and occupational education (Allais, 2012b).

Our research, although conducted while qualifications frameworks were in fairly preliminary stages in many of the countries, suggests that there may be problems in many of the countries in the study; while there have been new developments in all the countries, there is little research available. In Botswana, the training authority which was supposed to accredit providers found this work difficult to carry out, particularly when donor funds that had initially supported it dried up. Subsequent to our research, a comprehensive National Qualifications Framework for Botswana has been developed, and legislation passed to create a new authority, as well as a human resource development council; however, implementation has not yet begun.

In Mauritius, while the qualifications authority officially took over the function of registering providers of vocational education and training, the Industrial and Vocational Training Board, the state provider of vocational education, continued to play a role in quality assurance for private providers that offered the National Training Certificate, the qualification that predated the new outcomes-based qualifications framework. In Mexico, because the criteria to become an assessing or awarding centre were so stringent, there were few assessment agencies, and these bodies charged high prices for assessment. In South Africa the plethora of quality assurance institutions initially introduced has been substantially changed after there was very little evidence of improved quality, and even some evidence that it had made it impossible for non-profit and community-based organizations to offer education programmes.

Reiterations of Policies and Complex Institutions

Another commonality across many countries is the reiteration of different versions of standards, outcomes, and so on, as well as of structures. 'Embedded' knowledge is renamed 'underpinning' knowledge, range statements (which attempt to define the context in which the learning outcomes or competences will be evaluated) are developed, and changed; the format of assessment criteria is changed.

The Mexican labour competences, for example, were reiterated in many different ways, as each proved to be differently interpreted by key stakeholders. The labour competence framework was developed through two complex multi-faceted projects. Both of these projects were concerned with vocational, technical, and workplace training, as well as broader human resource development. The first project, which began in 1994 through the Secretariat of Labour and Social Provision and the Secretariat of Public Education, was funded through a World Bank loan. This project established the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competence, CONOCER (which means 'to know' in Spanish). CONOCER is a government agency with broad stakeholder and inter-departmental representation. One of its key aims is the creation of a labour competence framework. The plan was for CONOCER to establish an integrated unitary framework of 12 competence areas and five levels, and to develop the labour competence technical standards with which to populate this framework. It was also meant to develop an assessment and certification system and a regulatory framework for awarding bodies.

There was a whole host of complex problems with the initial project, leading to long periods of impasse. These ranged from problems with the implementation of the framework, to problems with its administration and financing. In 2005, a new project began, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank. CONOCER was reorganized, with an emphasis on stakeholder participation, developing better relations with educational institutions, and working with employers. A new format was developed for competence standards, and new standards were developed. However, despite a stronger sectoral organization, with 10 strategic sectors identified, many of the sectors had poor industry participation. From 2006 to 2009, CONOCER issued 121,598 certificates using 128 of the competence standards, out of over 601 existing standards. Around 20 per cent of these certificates were based on the older standards from the first project. Both projects of which the labour competence framework was a component have seen many different formulations of the competence standards, as well as other technical modifications. For example, the framework originally had 12 horizontal divisions, but this was later reduced to 11, and then later again increased to 20. Despite the changes, the problem of unused qualifications persisted.

In 2008, the Mexican government relaunched CONOCER *again*, with what they implied was a new approach of focussing on working closely with enterprises and producing demand-oriented standards. But while there may have been many substantial differences, the two previous projects had also both claimed to be working with industry and to be producing standards that industry wanted. This is a recurring pattern in the development and implementation of competence-based training models: in many of our case studies, countries implemented models which were described as industry-led and competence-based, and then re-launched them with new names and new structures, with the main claim that the newer version was industry-led and competence-based.

As mentioned in the note on terminology, in Bangladesh, the National Council for Skills Development and Training was introduced to replace the National Skills Development Council. This body would oversee and monitor all activities related to the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework. Supposedly the new council had greater representation from relevant Ministries and other stakeholder groups, in the hope that this would give it a higher profile. However, the previous structure was also ostensibly stakeholder-based, and also had industry representation.

Many countries introduce qualifications frameworks, outcomes- or competence-based approaches, and describe them as new policy models, despite having attempted similar approaches before. In almost every country in our study, competence- or outcomes-based education and training was used in the reform of vocational education systems to replace *previous versions of competence-based models*. Almost every country had various iterations of competence-based models. A new model would be introduced as the solution to the problems that the old model tried to solve, and the same reasons would be given for why it would succeed: industry-developed outcomes would ensure that learners had the appropriate competences; competences would allow an appropriately modular approach, and so would create more flexibility for learners; and so on. In almost every case, the previous system of vocational education was already modular, and based on competences which were developed in the name of industry. In each case, there is no record of an examination of *why* the original model failed. It seems to have been assumed that either the standards were formulated in the wrong way, or that industry was not involved enough, so that solving these two things would ensure that this new version would succeed.

Chile is an interesting example of this phenomenon. For many years, competence-based training has been the focus of most reforms of vocational and workplace-based training in that country. Various attempts have been made to specify competences, and many reforms involving competences have replaced other reforms which had already involved competences. International organizations have been influential, including the World Bank, which played a major role in financing and supporting various reforms, the Inter-American Development Bank, the German development agency the GTZ (Gesellschaft Technische Zusammenarbeit), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The competence framework was only one of many attempts to implement the idea that seems to be so compelling to policy makers, and which Bobbit had argued for nearly a century earlier, as discussed in Chapter 2: if industry specifies the competences it requires for competent workers, providers will be able to produce them.

In Sri Lanka as well, a new competence-based training model was introduced to replace an old competence-based training model. One difference between the old and the new systems, according to Gajaweera (2010), was the scope of the system—the previous National Skills Standards and Trade Testing system was largely focused on the construction sector and was limited to four grades, the highest of which was the Tradesmen category. This competence-based training system was modelled on the English National Vocational Qualifications, through a World Bank project with British Council assistance. Policy makers wanted, firstly, to extend the system, and secondly, to make competence standards more relevant to industry, as a problem identified with the previous system was that industry was not involved in the development of standards. According to our research, although official documents championed the role of industry, and although the 'difference' between the new system and the old was meant to be active involvement from industry in setting the new competence standards, so far industry has not been very involved. This is a pattern the world over—involving industry in the setting of competence statements does not create a strong relationship between vocational education and work, nor does it seem to provide a good basis for developing strong vocational education, an issue that will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

Vocational Education Focus

Outcomes-based qualifications frameworks seem mainly to affect vocational education and training. In the poorer countries included in our study, those classified as middle and low income, qualifications frameworks have mainly been focused on vocational education. This is the most marginalized and low status sector of education systems, particularly in Anglophone countries. And in some cases, this type of reform has taken place only in the most marginalized section of the vocational education system—for low-level workplace-based training, or even, in some instances, not for training at all, but simply to recognize the competences workers already demonstrate in the workplace. In most instances, it is implemented in response to what is diagnosed as a problem with the irrelevance of education and training to the needs of the labour market. Even where the framework was ostensibly comprehensive, such as, for example, in Malaysia, Mauritius, and South Africa, the outcomes-based approach seems to have had the greatest impact in the vocational sector. In South Africa, as discussed above, the rest of the education and training system largely ignored the qualifications framework, and in Mauritius, it was only in the vocational sector where the qualifications framework was introduced as part of developing new outcomes-based qualifications. In Malaysia, while the framework as a whole was more focused on higher education, there was a competence-based framework of qualifications for low-level workplace-based qualifications. In this sector, mainly low levels of qualifications were awarded, and they provided limited opportunity to move up the education and training system. In Chile and Mexico, the frameworks were initially envisaged as frameworks for qualifications in vocational education and training as well as in workplace-based training, but in both they were only really used in the latter, and there they were used mainly for the assessment of prior learning. Providers of vocational education did not accept or use the standards. In both countries, the competence standards developed described mainly low levels of competence in the workplace.

None of this was very different from the early-starter rich countries which began the trend for qualifications frameworks. Although New Zealand attempted a comprehensive unit standards-based model, in the United Kingdom (except for Scotland), as well as in Australia, the competence-/ outcomes-based qualification model was targeted at vocational education[11]. It makes sense for vocational education to be the focus of these models, firstly, because it fits well with the claims made about outcomes-based qualifications' ability to improve education/ labour market relationships, and secondly, because vocational education programmes have always contained some notion of being 'competent' to do a particular job. It is also the case that in many countries vocational education does not have strong and organized voices speaking on its behalf, perhaps making it easier for policy makers to fiddle with it.

Frameworks in most countries are positioned as contributing to solving problems of increased unemployment, skills shortages, and perceived failures in the education and training system. It seems a strange irony that it is the weakest parts of most educational systems that are being called on to solve the problems of the economy through a reform which places no emphasis on supporting provision, perhaps suggesting the largely rhetorical nature of such reform initiatives.

Recognition of Prior Learning

One of the strongest and most consistently made claims about qualifications frameworks, as well as outcomes- and competence-based qualifications, is that they provide a basis for recognizing, validating, and certifying learning that has happened outside of the formal education system. This is variously known as recognition of prior learning, accreditation of prior experiential learning, and by other similar terms. It is thought to be helpful for individuals, because, it is hoped, having certificates will assist them to enter education programmes, get jobs, or get a promotion.

Some of the theoretical and conceptual issues raised by recognition of prior learning will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. For now, I merely want to point out that there is little evidence that learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks help people to gain qualifications on the basis of prior learning, and even less evidence that the qualifications thus obtained lead to further learning, jobs, or promotion. In South Africa, for example, the Qualification Authority's research in 2005 found that the South African qualifications framework had had "...minimal positive impact or a mix of positive and negative impact" with regard to portability of full qualifications (SAQA 2005, p. 45), and that the framework had also not facilitated credit accumulation and transfer (SAQA 2006). A more recent report produced for the OECD found that recognition of prior learning was not widely implemented, and had taken place only in small pockets of the education system (Blom, Parker, and Keevy 2007). One of the few examples of 'success' was found in our case study on Chile, which suggested that awards recognizing existing competences had improved workers' self-esteem. However, there was no evidence that they had led to workers gaining promotion or getting better jobs. They had simply received certificates which did nothing more than prove that they could do what they were already doing. In no county was there any clear evidence that workers who were given certificates benefited from them in terms of promotion, salary, or job security.

A particularly poignant story comes from Botswana, where the Botswana Training Authority developed unit standards for traditional dancers in the Kalahari. This project was funded by the government, and encountered many problems, such as the fact that the unit standards were in English, which none of the traditional dancers could speak. At great expense, the unit standard was translated into Setswana, and experts assessed dancers against the learning outcomes. Dancers were awarded certificates in a ceremonial and celebratory event. However, although policy makers were convinced that providing individuals with certificates for their existing skills would help them, these traditional dancers discovered that the certificates did nothing other than certify that they could do something that they were already doing. After the initial excitement had died down, some of the dancers approached the authorities to ask what they could do with their certificates. They were told that they could practice as traditional dancers—which is what they were doing before. There were no increased educational or work opportunities for them on the basis of this certificate. As Christopher Winch (2011, p. 96) puts it, "the award of a qualification for an existing workplace ability does not create a new skill but merely assigns a name to the skill an individual already possesses".

While the recognition of prior learning has particular appeal to policy makers and governments in developing countries, as it seems to hold out an alluring possibility of increasing qualification levels relatively cheaply, it is unlikely to be successful on a large scale. One reason for this is the prevalence of informal labour markets:

while skills and knowledge may be useful in informal labour markets, it is less likely that *qualifications* will be required than in more organized and regulated labour markets. Another reason recognition of prior learning is not a policy solution for poor countries is generally low educational levels. While workers may have acquired practical skills at work, lack of formal education will often remain a barrier to progress in workplaces where, say, literacy is necessary. Poor education is the real problem to be solved, and putting resources into awarding qualifications and certificates of dubious labour market value may well divert resources away from building education systems and ensuring access to them. Furthermore, this trend towards certification often ignores other barriers to education and training: over-emphasizing qualification barriers, it under-emphasizes the extent to which user-fees, the inability to take time off work, as well as other financial factors, prevent individuals from accessing education.

Differences

There are some divergences from the patterns discussed above. The Malaysian framework, for example, seems to be more successful than many others, with some degree of functionality and use that is missing in the cases discussed above. The national framework in Malaysia is made up of three sub-frameworks: the National Occupational Skills Standards; a framework for vocational and technical qualifications awarded in the state polytechs and community colleges; and a framework for higher education qualifications. As is the case in Australia, there are weak linkages between the three frameworks, and limited opportunity to move up the education and training system with them. While the qualifications in each of the three sub-frameworks are placed on a common set of ‘levels’, the relationships between them are relatively weak. Each of the three frameworks has different processes for developing qualifications, there are different assessment and certification systems, and the institutions which provide them are quality assured through different agencies.

One major difference between this framework and most of the others described is that it relates directly to providing institutions: there are clear sets of providers that offer the qualifications on each of the sub-frameworks. Universities provide the higher education qualifications; colleges, polytechnics, and community colleges provide the vocational and technical qualifications; skills centres provide the skills standards. While Malaysia did experience similar problems to the countries described above in the lower level competence-based qualifications—the skills standards—the fact that training for these certificates happened through skills centres which were funded and administered by the Ministry of Human Resource Development meant that at least training did happen. Keating (2010), drawing on Raffe (2003), suggests that one factor behind this relatively successful framework is that it works with the institutional logic of the country—it works with the providing institutions, instead of trying to change them through qualification policy.

Another difference between this framework and those in the other developing or middle income countries is that, like the Scottish framework, the Malaysian framework has been dominated by higher education. In 1996, in a drive to regulate a very active private higher education sector, the Malaysian government established a National Accreditation Board for higher education. It had responsibility for regulating the standards of private higher education institutions—colleges and universities—which had increased in number following the liberalization of markets and increased public investment. The Malaysian Qualifications Framework was subsequently set up in 2007 with the aim, amongst others, of extending this quality assurance system to the public providers. The stated intention of the government was to establish an overall framework that incorporated qualifications across all three sectors, but so far, the three frameworks have been mainly developed in parallel with each other, without developing relationships between them.

In Sri Lanka, a potential difference, and possible strength, of the new system under development is the much more centralized approach to curriculum development. This diverges from the general thrust of competence-based training models, where learning outcomes are centrally developed, but curricula are developed by each provider. There seems to be some emphasis on building education institutions—for example, a University of Vocational Technology has been established, and has had its first intake of students. This institution is intended to provide higher education to students who have carried out vocational education and training, as they are unable to enter the conventional universities. So far most provision of vocational education is through state institutions: 90 per cent of provision is through Vocational Training Centres under the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training, and these centres have been the focus of the implementation of the vocational qualifications framework. This is another difference with other countries implementing frameworks, and its effects would be worth monitoring.

The emerging system in Sri Lanka seems, therefore, to be some kind of hybrid of a traditional state-based provision system, and a competence-based training/qualifications framework model. It is hard to untangle the two, or to see which is dominant in practice. However, private and non-governmental sector vocational training centres have also been registered and accredited to provide courses within the framework, and so where the system may fit with the general pattern of qualifications frameworks described above is in this treatment of all providers, state and private, as competitors, to be evaluated against their performance in training learners against the competence-standards. The vast majority of education and training providers are government institutions, and government is concerned that its institutions should be accountable. Policy documents state that the national vocational qualifications framework will play an important role in managing resource allocation to these institutions. This could be a centralized system with a state monitoring its delivery institutions, but it could also be a move towards the regulated market and quasi-market which qualifications frameworks or competence-based training systems have been used to implement in many countries.

Policy Borrowing and 'Technical Assistance'

Policy borrowing—the role of international agencies, as well as the dominance of the English National Vocational Qualifications model and the Australian competence-based training system (itself modeled on the English model)—is a striking feature of this story. To give just a few examples, the framework in Mauritius was influenced by frameworks in Scotland, New Zealand, and South Africa. The framework in Botswana was developed with assistance and advice from 'experts' from the United Kingdom, South Africa, and New Zealand. Mexico and Chile both drew explicitly and heavily on the English National Vocational Qualifications model. In Bangladesh, while processes had been established to involve a range of stakeholders, in practice much work so far has been dominated by ILO experts through a technical assistance project being implemented by the ILO with the Ministry of Education, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Overseas Workers, and in partnership with the European Union.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Hyland (1994) prophetically pointed out that the British government would spread the model of the National Vocational Qualifications. The story of learning outcomes, qualifications frameworks, and competence-based training is a complex one, and there are various ways in which it can be read. As Ball (2007) discusses, a tension in all policy analysis is the need to attend to local particularities of policymaking and enactment, while being aware of general patterns and apparent commonalities. The national stories described above are based on varying amounts of research and yet, even where there is limited research, it is clear that although each country displays local particularities, they also all share some general patterns and commonalities, making Hyland's argument seem very plausible: the national stories of qualifications frameworks could be collected into one volume, entitled, perhaps, 'How NVQs Conquered the World.'

CONCLUSION

Based on my detailed analysis of the South African national qualifications framework (Allais, 2007c), and also drawing on research in other developing countries (Allais, 2010b), I suggest that outcomes-led frameworks in poorer countries are likely to be worse than a waste of money and time. Outcomes-led qualifications frameworks cannot realize the extensive claims made about them. Learning outcomes developed by employers or 'stakeholders' separately from educational contexts cannot provide a basis against which learning programmes can be designed, delivered, assessed, and evaluated. Neither can outcomes-led qualifications frameworks be the stimulus or the regulatory mechanism for provision. However, by being claimed as mechanisms to drive educational reform, they divert attention and resources away from increasing the quality and quantity of education provided. Because outcomes-led frameworks in poorer countries are positioned and described as mechanisms for overhauling education systems, increasing provision and improving quality, they appear to remove the need for the state to support and build institutions. They are likely to drive energy and resources away from institutions and into the fruitless project of defining disembedded outcomes. They force institutions into unhealthy and unnecessary competitive relationships, and undermine the very nature of the work of educational institutions, by making them work to objectives that are external and artificial to them. They provide an inappropriate basis for the state to attempt the complicated business of regulating and monitoring educational provision.

At the same time, such frameworks are frequently used as a basis for privatizing educational provision, or for creating a contractualized basis for it, even where there is state provision, introducing quasi-markets, with very detrimental effects, particularly in poor countries where there are small numbers of strong educational institutions. The problems with this approach are more visible in poorer countries because there are fewer strong institutions—education providers as well as other state institutions—which can make policies appear to be working, regardless of those policies' inherent strengths or weaknesses. Thus, in poorer countries, the policies are on display in their essence, and what becomes clear is that the emperor has no clothes.

The tragedy of qualifications frameworks in poorer countries may also have lessons for wealthy countries. When qualifications frameworks are introduced to *describe* existing systems of provision, existing education programmes, and existing qualifications, they may have a reasonable chance of successfully achieving limited goals. But most of the claims made to justify the introduction of qualifications frameworks are far stronger than this. It may be the case that the strength of educational provision in rich countries *hides* the failures of this model to live up to its claims. In other words, what the lessons of poorer countries show is what these policies do in their own right, what the real logic of them is, and the serious theoretical and practical problems with them.

Outcomes-led qualifications frameworks give the impression that a problem is being solved when it is not. They thus represent a significant waste of time and money, both in terms of policy development, and in terms of the enormous bureaucratic burdens they impose on underfunded and overworked educational institutions. It is more useful for poorer countries, or countries with weaker education and training systems, to concentrate on building or supporting institutions that can provide education and training. Similarly, poorer or weaker states should be cautious when assuming that adopting regulatory models which rely on contracts and accountability mechanisms will solve the problems that they have had in delivering education and training. Where provision does not exist in the first place, or where it is weak or uneven, and where an outcomes-led qualifications framework is introduced to drive educational reform, the *best* such a framework can do is reflect the (weak or non-existent) provision that is already there in the system. But it can have a worse effect, which is to damage the already weak educational provision.

Why this model continues to be pushed, despite lack of evidence of its success, extensive criticism of it in the United Kingdom, and growing criticism in Australia, is considered in the following three chapters, which also provide analysis of the conceptual problems with this model. I start, in the following chapter, with a focus on the chimera of employer-specified competences, and why they have not succeeded in improving education/labour market relationships. I argue that outcomes-based qualifications frameworks and competence-based training reforms are more likely to be a symptom of weak relationships between education and labour markets than a solution to them.

ENDNOTES

[1] Bangladesh: Mia (2010); Botswana: Tau and Modesto (2010); Chile: Cabrera (2010); Malaysia: Keating (2010); Mauritius: Marock (2010); Mexico: De Anda (2010); Sri Lanka: Gajaweera (2010); they are all available on the ILO website, www.ilo.org.

[2] Here I am distinguishing between non-formal education, meaning non-certified education, but organized with some degree of institutionalization; and informal education, referring to what an individual learns in life, outside of all organized educational experiences.

[3] Activists, for example, who often did not have much formal education training, had often been engaged in high levels of strategic planning, analysis, and organizing in the struggle against apartheid.

[4] Mary Metcalfe, provincial minister of education for the Gauteng province in 1994, and influential member of the National Education Coordinating Committee, for example, confirmed in a discussion with me that the idea of learning outcomes had not been present in ANC education policy circles prior to its introduction by the Department of Education (Personal communication, 3 February 2006).

[5] For more information and analysis on Christian National Education, see, for example, Hofmeyer (1982), Hyslop (1993), Kallaway (1984), Lowry (1995).

[6] The union most active in this process, the National Union of Metalworkers, had become very influenced by the idea of post-Fordism, and consequently was very concerned about raising skills levels of the workforce; it was also very influenced by Australian advocates of competence-based training (see Allais, 2007c, for an elaboration).

[7] From basic education equivalent to the first 9 years of schooling at level one, and Masters and above at level 8.

[8] The division into the 12 fields was explicitly not supposed to represent 'fields of learning' derived from or based on disciplinary areas (SAQA, 1997, p. 7), but rather was seen as a pragmatic division, necessary to facilitate the creation of structures for the 'standard setting' process. The twelve fields were: Agriculture and Nature Conservation; Culture and Arts; Business, Commerce and Management Studies; Communication Studies and Language; Education, Training and Development; Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology; Human and Social Studies; Law, Military Science and Security; Health Science and Social Services; Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences; Services; Physical Planning and Construction.

[9] In 2007, 172 unit-standards based qualifications and 2,211 unit standards had awards made against them to a total of 37,841 and 562,174 learners respectively (many of these will be to the same learners. The figures reflect the total number of awards, not the number of awards per learner). Data was supplied by the National Learner Records Database of the South African Qualifications Authority.

[10] Outside of university systems, where assessments are usually not centrally set.

[11] This trend may have changed in more recent qualifications frameworks in richer countries, as higher education has been included in many since the adoption of the European Qualifications Framework.