Apples

Book Review

Dai Fengju, Zhejiang University
Lin Xiao, Zhejiang University

Learner-centered education (LCE) is an education policy, widely promoted by international organizations and governments. This book introduces the definition and provenance of LCE and analyses its implementation in global, national and local contexts with Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory and three narratives: cognition, emancipation and preparation. Then, it comes to ten lessons concluded from the research and resolutions for the problems which exist in those contexts. This book is organized into three parts, with twelve chapters. Chapter one is the introduction.

Part one is from Chapter two to four, which focuses on LCE as a concept and as a "travelling policy" (p. 3) with local contextualization. Chapter two provides the definition of LCE by introducing the characteristics, provenance and critique of LCE, that is "a pedagogical approach which gives learners, and demands from them, a relatively high level of active control over the content and process of learning, what is learnt, and how, are therefore shaped by learners' needs, capacities and interests" (p. 20).

Chapter three explores three justificatory narratives: cognition, emancipation and preparation of LCE which fuel the travel of LCE all over the world, proposed by the author on the basis of the arguments of proponents of LCE. Cognition perspective refers to that people would learn more effectively if they have the initiative of learning. Emancipatory perspective refers to that LCE is a good way to change the unequal relationship between teachers and students and between adults and children. And preparation perspective refers to that LCE can be an appropriate preparation for the contemporary and future life. The changing working life in the changing economic world raises the need for flexible and personal form of learning and skills of metacognition and research.

Chapter four discusses the contexts of LCE from global, national, local and microsystemic perspectives with Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory as its framework. In global context, the United Nations and many international nongovernmental organizations play a key role in the promotion of LCE; many principles are raised on the basis of the three narratives. In national context, a change of government, movement towards democracy and state fragility may be

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a chance for the implementation and development of LCE. In the microsystemic context, several microsystemic contexts such as the demographic context, economic context, cultural context, etc. shape the education in low-to-middle income countries and influence the chances, appropriateness and nature of its acceptance and implementation.

Part two is from chapter five to chapter ten. Chapter five explores why countries all over the world try to implement LCE. It first introduces why LCE becomes a policy that developing countries are eager to borrow on behalf of their own development combined with the three narratives mentioned in chapter three. Then it explores why LCE's implementation fails in global south and analyzes constraints in the process of implementation including the shortage of teaching materials, the lack of professional teachers, poor motivation and so on.

Chapter six to Chapter nine are case studies with the special situations of several low-to-middle income countries: Gambia, China, Russia and South Africa, where LCE have been working as a promising policy but a problematic practice, which sets out a range of variations in different cultural, political and national contexts. These cases are chosen from the author's personal experiences and investigations. Chapter six introduces the implementation situation of LCE in Gambia which is described as "the intersection of the global and local" (p. 75). Education in Gambia is reliant on aid and subject to global and bilateral agreements, assistance and pressures. Policies in Gambia create space for LCE, but there is little direct reference to LCE in the policy document. Although Gambia is faced with a lot of barriers and challenges and the policy goal is hard to be achieved in reality for the lack of teaching material, government and global associations, such as the Fast Track Initiative, have worked hard to deal with those problems. Thus LCE in Cambia may have a promising future.

Chapter seven turns to the complex situation in China, which is described as "multiple paradoxes" (p. 86). China is moving towards LCE and praising the so-called "suzhijiaoyu" (p. 88) highly, which means that the policy "not only points to the processes of quality education, but to the desired outcome of quality people and a quality nation, with a new emphasis on the education of the whole person" (p. 88). In practice, it continues in another direction and puts more emphasis on examination. China emphasizes collectiveness, but in LCE, individual learner-centeredness is involved. High achievement and learning pleasure through teacher-centered forms of learning are demanded spontaneously though conditions in some places are so poor that cannot reach the high expectation. Besides, in terms of the three narratives, China values preparation narratives more than others.

Chapter eight introduces the implementation of LCE in Russia, which is described as the "shifting and resilient narratives on the 'educated person'". In this country, the traditional education is powerful. The development of economy and education is uneven, and it's hard for rural areas to access to teaching materials and technologies. And there is a shortage of young professional teachers because of young people's unwillingness to be teachers for a lot of reasons. And Russia puts more emphasis on emancipatory perspective than on other two narratives.

Chapter nine explores the emancipatory policy and classroom realities in South Africa. LCE is a policy used to change the unequal social situation in South Africa. It does have some positive effects. However, in practice, there are several key education policies still in place, such as the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), which collides over LCE. And many rural schools cannot get enough facilities.

Besides, many teachers cannot understand LCE thoroughly and clearly. But to some extent, the LCE practice in South Africa is developing. The good news is that teachers can raise their enthusiasm and are willing to have a try in their practice.

Chapter ten explores the pedagogical adaptation of mobile learners in higher education. Most of these learners are from low-to-middle income countries with traditional education, and then immigrate to the more developed world where the learner-centered classroom for higher education is the norm. This case tries to find out the answer to this question: "What happens if we move people rather than policy?" (p. 116) The results show that the vast majority of them can adjust fairly and quickly, and after the period of adjustment, they can enjoy the new way of learning. It shows that LCE is a rewarding challenge with lasting effects for many international higher education students.

Part three includes chapter eleven and chapter twelve. This part is about lessons and resolutions. Chapter eleven considers a series of lessons which discuss whether and how LCE can be a viable option for policy and practice not only for developing countries, but for countries all over the world. Those lessons are: national interest should be taken into consideration in the first place; LCE is not a policy that can be successful in all contexts; global, national and local contexts should be taken into account, etc.

Chapter twelve provides resolutions to problems which exist in the process of LCE implementation. The author promotes several minimum standards as basic principles of LCE: First, in making curriculum, it should go along with learners' lives and future needs and should include skills of critical and creative thinking. Second, in the process of teaching, the relationship between teachers and students should be considered and the learning challenges should be based on the learners' present level. Third, in the process of learning, pupils should be motivated. Finally, assessment should involve contents to test learners' skills and allow individual differences. These minimum standards should be fitted together and mutually reinforced by each other. Referring to some problems that are not the common features of all the contexts, the author illustrates that it needs "joint-up support" (p. 149): the three narratives should be combined together; besides, teachers play a key role in the implementation of LCE, they should be trained and motivated to break out of traditional teaching patterns; what's more, policy-makers should clarify the policy as clearly as possible.

To summarize, this book puts forward three narratives and the Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory to analyze the implementation contexts of LCE and to explore the current situation of LCE implementation in developing countries. It points out that the practice is inconsistent with the policy and many problems exist in the process of implementation and it analyzes that many factors cause this kind of inconsistency. Then, it provides some useful resolutions.

Except for the author of this book, many other scholars also do researches on this issue in contexts mentioned in this book. For example, Brodie, Lelliott and Davis (2002) explored the forms and substance in learner-centered teaching in South Africa. They found out that "the majority of teachers took up the forms without the substance" (p. 541). Carney (2008) explored the learner-centered pedagogy in Tibet, China and got to the conclusion that LCE was meaningful in local context to realize the "*suzhijiaoyu*". Both Brodie et al. (2002) and Carney (2008) hold the view that LCE is a good policy and the result of its implementation has a great significance.

This book has significant impact on the development and implementation of LCE. First of all, many countries are eager to promote LCE, but they have encountered many problems. This book works as guidance for countries which try to put LCE into practice. Second, in theory, policy-makers and governments pay more attention to the policy discourse and ignore problems which exist in practice. This book explores the relationship between policy and practice and points out the inconsistency which exists between them and provides resolutions for this. Third, this book is not only about theories that concern about the inconsistency. It analyzes all these with case studies, which makes it more persuasive. Besides, the choosing of cases is comprehensive. It is not only about studies in a certain context, the mobility of leaners is also taken into consideration. To sum up, this book plays an important role in guiding people to treat and implement LCE correctly.

Acknowledgements

References

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