

The European Training Foundation's Role in Policy Development (Nov 12)

By Nic Laycock
November 8, 2012



I was recently privileged to join a think tank looking at research in learning on an international basis. The discussion group included bespoke research organizations and governmental agencies based in Europe and North America, and a few people like myself, who travel globally and have on-the-ground experience of what is happening in places that are currently of little interest from a commercial perspective.

The debate was vigorous, characterised by the differing standpoints of those whose focus was commercial and targeted to specified needs of clients, in contrast to others promoting the need to gather a more inclusive database of success stories from around the world, regardless of commercial considerations.

What does research in learning require?

The whole group was held together by the basic tenet that it is only when a "fit-for-purpose" database is available that a research hypothesis can be formulated and tested by experiment. This led to a further discussion of what constitutes that database. Some, including me, argued for a gathering together of stories, great and small and of commercial interest or not, of work being done that may show ways forward in developing technology-enabled learning. Others argued that the database only needs to collect information specific to particular expressed organizational needs—a reactive approach—that then requires a more constrained activity.

In the end, both are right. Clearly, many commercially-based initiatives are proceeding without good knowledge of, for example, the excellent work being done in many parts of the emerging world in mobile learning—mostly of a micro nature, but which provide good insight and lessons that can be carried forward in a commercial and developed world context.

Where everyone was united in the end was in the assertion that it is evidence-based research that is needed to give any rigour to any such work and consequent experimentation with a hypothesis.

The European Training Foundation

The [European Training Foundation](#) (ETF), based in Turin, Italy, works strictly out of that model. Created by the European Union to work in [the vocational education and training policy \(VET\) field](#), ETF has huge expertise in policy formation developed out of a resource base or clearinghouse amassed during the 18 years of its existence. Initially an information repository, ETF has become an action-learning organization, combining information gathering with practice to test ideas and develop good practice. ETF works on behalf of the EU and with the varied 31 nation-states surrounding it to assist in learning-policy formation and practice in situations of change.

I spoke with Ian Cumming, senior knowledge management specialist at ETF, to find out about some of the work they are doing. The nation-states surrounding the EU are commonly characterised by the need for radical change and upgrading of their L&D policy, practice, and systems as a result of their recent histories. “Emergence from the Cold War era for the former USSR republics, recovery from war in the former Yugoslavia, and the Arab Spring have created the need for sound and practical systems that will enable these countries to join their more industrially advanced partners and competitors. Effective L&D supported by technology is a vital constituent in national recovery and the development of organizational and individual excellence.”

Ian clearly identifies eLearning as crucial to these developments. For example, “I have just returned from Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic with a population of just 17 million spread across the world’s ninth largest country, where ETF is supporting training system reform. The government is targeting four of the country’s 18 regions in a pilot initiative to reform learning access and vocational training. The ETF proposes to use collaborative and social computing solutions to involve the other 14 regions.” The spin-off is that the involvement of those not directly involved is feedback that reflects on the experience gained by those that are directly involved. Surely this is an example of peer learning on a big scale!

Ian tells me of a project to develop regional qualifications involving ETF’s partner countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco as well as the EU Mediterranean states of Italy, France, and Spain. “The project includes creating a common learning platform that will support ETF partners to improve national and regional competitiveness and individual employability of workers, including migrants. It must include a rich integration of work and learning, eLearning, eTraining, and an eSolution.”

ETF: Serious games and gamification

ETF is about to launch an expert consultation to explore the potential of serious games and gamification as a tool for policy development within the capacity flagship project [Torinet](#). Now that’s an exciting way to use our tools!

Learning Solutions Magazine, ©2012 eLearning Guild