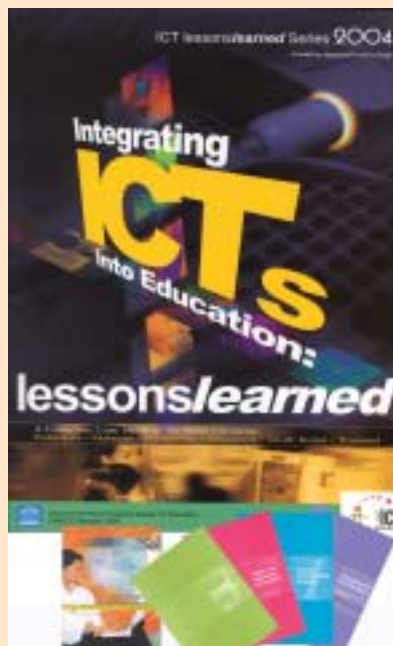


Book Review...

Integrating ICTs in Education : Lessons Learned, ICT lessons learned Series 2004, . UNESCO : Bangkok, funded by Japanese Funds in Trust, 143 pages.

Usha Vyasulu Reddi

In the din of the ICT debate, conscientious supporters of the use of ICTs in education have been asking for evidence of successful applications of ICTs in education in Asia. There are a number of country and case studies available, there are an equal number of normative papers by protagonists of ICTs. And while we are aware that each country is diverse and needs a different perspective in the application of technologies, few efforts have brought together a collection of country experiences and synthesized the lessons learned in various country settings. The current tool kit under review is one excellent attempt to examine the Asian experience in terms of common indices of application of ICT in the formal school system. The six Asian countries covered are South Korea, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.

Divided into eight booklets and

enclosed in a folder, the toolkit examines the experience of six countries under several headings: the Broader Environment Context; Policy and Regulatory Environment; Management and Financing; ICT in Schools Policy, Vision and Strategy; Technology Infrastructure and Connectivity; Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Content Development; Professional Development; and Monitoring and Evaluation. Each heading is divided into an Overview and a Synthesis of experiences that summarizes the lessons learned.

The first section places the ICTs in education policy within the broad environmental context of the education system and identifies three major issues: responsiveness of the education system, ICT in education policy and ICT infrastructure support, and the economic and social/cultural context. The experience of the six countries indicates that supportive public policy and implementation frameworks backed by ICT infrastructure support are critical to the effective integration of ICTs in education and that an ICT in education policy is one of several key economic strategies to ensure sustained economic development of any country.

In the section on Policy and Regulatory Environment, the survey of six countries shows that some countries piloted ICT use in schools and trained teachers without an ICT in education policy. Others found it important to have a policy to serve as a framework and a guide. Malaysia and Singapore carried out pilot studies prior to launching policies. The enabling and restricting laws, e.g. censorship are examined and examples of inter-ministerial collaboration are provided. But there is variation in the region covered and while one would commend the efforts of the countries, there is a niggling doubt as to the extent the overall polity influenced what could and could not be done. Perhaps that explains

the variation in the experience between Singapore and Malaysia on the one hand and Philippines on the other.

The third section on management and financing of ICT in education is important. All countries face technological challenges of hardware acquisition, bandwidth, and software teaching tools. However, successful integration also depends on the quality of the rest of the tools, the learning environment and the participants themselves. Successful integration also depends on sound management and financing policies and should take into account a large number of factors influencing the context in which ICTs are used.

There are five other sections of this toolkit, each equally important since the issues they raise determine the health of the educational system as well as identifying each factors in the successful integration of ICTs in education. The fact is that not only the six countries under study, but almost all of developing countries, share these experiences.

The toolkit also speaks of the difficulties that some of the countries had in getting the persons on the ground, i.e. school principals and teachers, to 'buy in' to the use of ICTs as an integral part of the school curriculum.

In the final analysis, while the eight sections of the toolkit and the synthesis of experiences and lessons learned tell us what is needed to make for the successful integration of ICTs into education, I was still left wondering how I would use the East and South East Asian experiences in other parts of Asia and Africa. There is an underlying homogeneity of policy frameworks and experiences, of political will and systematic policy and implementation that single out the Asian tigers which may or may not work in other parts of the world, say South Asia or Latin America.

And I leave you with this thought of how to use the valuable lessons put forth in this toolkit in your own educational environment... **ECA**

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