



Keep learning first in education

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It is still taken for granted in much worldwide conversation that education means learning. Therefore, it is unsurprising that too few education policies manage to keep student learning in clear sight. More often than not, education policies begin by emphasizing administration, governance, finance, school management, teacher training, curriculum reform. Too often, the learning of students is last to be considered. Policies that begin and end with student learning comprise a wholly different approach. Policies that focus on the kind of learning experiences that students deserve, will set different priorities. When policies move away from the generic concept of student and toward the idea of each student as an individual, learning inevitably changes for the better.

**Education is about
real learning.**

Much policy research over the past 30 years in East Asia has too often concentrated on education in a vacuum. While radical changes have taken place in the workplace, schools still educate for a past era workplace. Education policies around the world are increasingly driven by an economic discourse as national governments fund education as a means to drive GDP upward and become internationally competitive. For education, this inevitably means a trade-off, with the individual learner being sacrificed in the name of economic globalization.

Kai-ming Cheng has been trying to shake up this mentality in Asia by pointing out the crisis in the basic education system of the United States. He has joined leading Asian educators at the forefront of the worldwide discussion about the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development's Programme of International Student Achievement (PISA). In recent years he has played an increasing role in explaining why several Asian countries top the ratings. This is prompted enthusiasm among educators, policymakers and funders in the United States.

In 2011, he held a symposium on learning with ten learning scientists and ten policy leaders from international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF, and OECD. At the symposium, five dimensions were identified as a banner for policymaking — to change education discourse into learning discourse. He continues to promote his thesis that the state of basic education is neither about money, nor about the quality or knowledge of teachers. Rather it is about real learning. Recently invited to Bangkok by the UN Commission, he helped explain why Thailand's reform of education policy, including curriculum, teacher training, school finances and management, could not raise Thailand's PISA ranking.

In 2014, he has brought together speakers from the National Science Foundation, OECD and UNESCO for a global learning convention in Shanghai to achieve true integration among researcher, practitioner and policymaker. Researchers in various areas of learning, including neuroscientists, pedagogy experts, assessment experts, and specialists in ICT, discussed how to move forward.

Kai-ming Cheng continues to influence educational policy with his five point advocacy: Instead of talking about school management or leadership, talk about learning leadership; Instead of talking about education finance, talk about learning resources and learning environment; Instead of talking about teaching force; talk about learning professionals; Instead of talking about assessment of students achievement, talk about assessment for learning; Instead of using ICT, information and communication technology to replace teachers, use ICT to liberate learners.