

Transplants and implants: educational reform in Qatar - not quite the panegyric!

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Abstract: In recent years, Qatar has embarked on an ambitious education transformation programme - *Education for a New Era*. The main aim of which is creating a world-class public school system, and Qatar is devoting considerable resources in ways which aim to bring about greatly improved learner achievement.

This paper reviews progress on the reform, reports briefly on bold plans to make Qatar's schools world-class, and provides a limited description of how the aims of *Education for a New Era* related to stimulating and sustaining Qatar's economic and social development.

The paper is particularly concerned with attempts to impose an approach to education - charter schooling - from without, while failing to acknowledge the unique setting and situation of Qatar as a modern nation-state with its own particular needs, history, culture and religion.

This paper also draws upon a review of the evidence - though that is perhaps far too strong a term to use in this context as actual evidence is sadly lacking - which was adduced in support of Qatar's move to a charter school system based on approaches more commonly seen in the United States.

Significant questions remain about how far Qatar is along the reform path, whether its direction will derive optimal outcomes, or whether there are alternative approaches that should inform the pace of travel and the eventual destination. Beyond the question of speed, there is the equally important issue of scale: just how quickly will reform occur and how many schools will embrace this approach within a reasonable period.

Of course, larger, often implicit questions remain: was Qatar's decision to adopt an approach to school education reform which is led and sustained by its independent schools, a sensible one, would it produce the outcomes prescribed for it by its champions, or would this approach require substantial local revision and re-organisation to ensure that it works in Qatar?

Keywords: reform, policy, leadership, management, corporatisation

Introduction

... the capacity to acquire and generate knowledge in all its forms, including the recovery and up-grading of traditional knowledge, is perhaps the most important factor in the improvement of human condition (Bezanson and Sagasti 1995: p. 5 - 6)

According to Ali Abdel Gadir Ali, (January, 2002) in *Building Human Capital for Economic Development in the Arab Countries*:

In the context of the developing countries of the region, but perhaps also applicable to the high-income countries, it has been argued that education systems have to meet a number of development goals given changing world

circumstances. These include a shift in the content of education towards an emphasis on learning how to learn, improving the effectiveness of the educational system in building human capital, ensuring universal completion of compulsory education of good quality, increasing country-level information on the various aspects of the performance of the educational system, and maintaining a sustainable financial basis for the educational system.

The importance of such developments is recognised in the Arab Human Development Report (2003) - Building knowledge society which states:

Arab states need to close a growing knowledge gap by investing heavily in education and promoting open intellectual inquiry. Openness, interaction, assimilation, absorption, revision, criticism and examination cannot but prompt creative knowledge production in Arab societies,

A little later, Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missnad Consort of Qatar's Emir and Vice-Chair of the Supreme Education Council (March, 2005) at the Oxford Islamic Studies Centre in London said:

Education is not only the right for every citizen, but also a pillar of developed and just society, Qatar recognises the power of education in stimulating a genuine cultural, social and political awaking. The principles of collaboration, respect for others, and popular participation have been the impetus to changes in all levels of our educational structure.

In the Supreme Education Council Annual report for 2005, Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missnad Consort of Qatar's Emir and Vice-Chair of the Supreme Education Council also said:

Reform's success depends on nothing less than teachers and students transforming themselves.

In 2005, Qataris proved many times over their willingness to consider new possibilities, to act in new ways, and to give new ideas a chance to bloom.

And earlier, addressing somewhat wider regional issues, Akkari (2004) suggested:

It is important to stress that the need for further and broader educational reform in the Middle East and North Africa is inextricably linked to continued economic and political reforms. Today's learners must be taught the technical skills that are needed to function effectively in tomorrow's world. Moreover, they must be taught the problem solving, co-operation and critical thinking skills that are needed to build democracy and citizenship.

Current conventional wisdom is that globalisation is profoundly re-shaping the nature of people's social and economic lives in general and working life in particular. It is often asserted too, that arrangements which may have worked in a previous age are no longer viable today, and this is perhaps more true of education than any other domain of public or private activity. Naturally, schools are not immune from the need to change either. And for that matter, neither is Qatar or any other country.

The educational challenges Qatar faces are significant, as they are in very many other places, although the reasons for such challenges are very different indeed. The consequences of not facing up to them are threatening and bleak, and failure to match up to them not an option. Qatar's current approach to reform is about taking an education system originally designed to deliver a minimum entitlement for all, and elaborating it: and elaborating it to respond to the increasingly sophisticated and rapidly changing national and international demands, though ideally by educating all learners to a high standard and preparing them for life-long learning rather than simply the cessation of schooling.

In recent years, Qatar has embarked on a more ambitious, and perhaps far-sighted education transformation programme - *Education for a New Era* - which is its current education reform initiative. The main intent of Qatar's *Education for a New Era* is to create a modern, world-class public school system, and Qatar is devoting considerable resources to innovation and change in its schools in ways which aim to bring about greatly improved learner achievement.

This paper reviews progress on this reform to date, reports briefly on the bold plans to make Qatar's schools world-class, and provides a limited description of how the aims of *Education for a New Era* may become one of the main-stays of stimulating and sustaining Qatar's economic and social development.

The Supreme Education Council

The Supreme Education Council which is responsible for implementing *Education for a New Era* was established by Emiri decree #37 in November 2002, and it strategically directs Qatar's education reform policy and the programmes deriving from it. The Supreme Education Council's wide remit is designed to enable it to provide effective leadership, co-ordination and strategic planning at national level for Qatar's education system. Its role is therefore central, not only to the immediate reform programme, but more widely to education, training and life-long learning in Qatar.

The Supreme Education Council has not replaced the Ministry of Education which remains largely intact, and still responsible for the large majority of Qatar's public education system. In a rather unusual and perhaps unique set of circumstances, the Supreme Education Council currently operates in parallel with the Ministry of Education although quite discreetly.

Broadly speaking, Qatar's *Education for a New Era* led by the Supreme Education Council, aims to significantly raise local standards by building a modern, state-of-the-art system to provide its people with a quality education comparable with that offered in the best schools around the world. In time, this may mean Qatar emulating rather than simply copying models of education and training drawn from the world's best, and adapting them to meet particular local conditions and needs. That is certainly an implicit intention of the Supreme Education Council which has the avowed purpose of building a world-class school system in the first instance.

There are clear signs, though they were by no means evident in the early stages of the reform, that Qatar is moving further towards an outcomes based approach, rather than one focussed on inputs and processes which characterised pre-reform education. There is the ever-present peril though, that *Education for a New Era* will founder if the earlier

concentration on process and procedure re-emerges in the nation's new independent schools, or if in fact the Supreme Education Council allows itself to become a *de facto* model of the intrusive Ministry of Education approach seen earlier and perhaps even today in some settings. It is also the case that the notion of outcomes based education as it is commonly understood in other places has not yet come so starkly to the fore in Qatar in the same manner, though it might over time.

Within the framework, of *Education for a New Era*, and following particular and quite limited forms of advice, in 2002 Qatar decided on a two-pronged approach to reform: (i) establishing government-funded independent (charter) schools over a multi-year period; and (ii) implementing annual assessments which it was claimed should measure learner achievement and thus by implication school performance, though just how was never made clear.

Education for a New Era

In terms of *Education for a New Era*, independent schools in Qatar are government-funded schools that are granted autonomy to carry out their educational mission and objectives while being held accountable to terms agreed in an operating contract. All independent schools must notionally meet established curriculum standards in Arabic, English, mathematics and science, as well as comply with periodic financial audits.

Qatar's *Education for a New Era* initiative is based on four principles:

- ❖ autonomy - allowing schools and teachers to be innovative in their approach to meeting the needs of individual learners and parents, within a framework of international curriculum standards;
- ❖ accountability - implementing an objective and transparent assessment system to hold all school leaders, teachers and parents responsible for the success of learners;
- ❖ variety - encouraging different kinds of schools and instructional programmes; and
- ❖ choice - allowing parents to select the school that best fits their children's needs.

Qatar's approach has quite literally resulted in some dramatic efforts to transform education, particularly noticeable in some of its schools, from a largely rigid, dated and centralised system, to one which may over time offer greater flexibility and choice, and which might be better able to meet social and economic demands. It is as yet too early to tell just what the outcomes are or might be in future, more so since there is no readily available or substantive evidence which fulfils this purpose.

Some significant questions remain however, about how far Qatar is along the reform path, whether its direction will derive optimal outcomes, or whether there are alternative approaches that should inform both the pace of travel and the eventual destination. Beyond the question of speed in *Education for a New Era*, there is the equally important issue of scale: just how quickly will reform occur and how many schools will embrace the approach within a reasonable period.

Of course too, larger, often implicit questions remain: was Qatar's decision to adopt an approach to school education reform which is led and sustained by its independent schools,

themselves based on the US charter school pattern, a sensible one; would it produce the outcomes prescribed for it by its champions; or would this approach require substantial local sorting out and re-organisation to ensure that it worked in Qatar?

The principal impetus for the change in Qatar, stems as it does in very many other places too, from the sustained and substantive body of evidence that suggests that among the key drivers of economic and social growth are national education systems which must support the development of capabilities, knowledge and skills in the individuals and communities they serve. Thus there are compelling social and economic reasons for creating and maintaining an effective policy framework which not only makes reform possible, but which results in appropriate well-founded education responses to changing demands and pressures.

What is happening in Qatar reflects to an extent what is apparent internationally, where more and more governments are examining ways in which they can better direct public and in some cases private expenditure to those areas which will better produce optimal outcomes for the state, industries and individuals. This should not just be about education, training and labour market expenditure being cost-effective; it must be effective from social and community perspectives as well. Clearly though, what is occurring in Qatar is unique and bears little resemblance to reform agenda in much of the western or developed world, save for the charter schools approach adopted in some parts of the USA with limited success to date.

There is now widespread awareness in Qatar, that resting upon past successes and upon finite, albeit enormous stocks of natural resources such as gas and oil, does not necessarily offer a sustainable long-term future which benefits the majority of people. Simply extracting and selling the national birth-right may not be advantageous for Qatar's long-term development, and there is growing understanding of the need to plan well ahead so that generations to come will have a sound economic future: and this includes a public policy focus on education in all sectors and the labour market for example, and deploying downstream and value-adding industries to the energy sector.

Essentially then, this paper is a review of, and reflection on, some aspects of *Education for a New Era*, from the stand-point of the informed observer, and someone intrinsically involved in taking reform further, though by no means entirely in the manner conceived of by the campaigners for US charter schooling. In so doing, it draws heavily upon extant materials within the Supreme Education Council and its three institutes, and from extensive personal communication with those who have been involved in the reform programme since its inception.

This paper is particularly concerned with recent attempts to impose an approach to education - charter schooling - from without, while failing to acknowledge the unique settings and situation of Qatar as a modern nation-state with its own particular needs, history, culture and religion.

It also draws upon a review of the evidence – though that is perhaps far too strong a term to use in this context as actual evidence is sadly lacking – which was originally adduced in support of Qatar's move to an independent (charter) school system literally based on the charter schools more commonly seen in the United States.

Qatar: important characteristics

Geography

Qatar is one of the independent Middle East nations which together with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia constitute the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). It has a total land area of 11,437 km², the highest point of which is Qurayn Abu al Bawl just 103 metres above sea level. Qatar is a peninsula bordered by the Arabian Gulf and Saudi Arabia, with which it currently shares a 60 kilometre long land border.

The Qatar peninsula, is shaped a bit like a thumb, jutting northward into the Arabian Gulf from the east coast of the Arabian Peninsula. It is about 160 kilometres long and some 55 to 80 kilometres wide. Qatar is dry, with most of the country covered in gravel desert with virtually no natural vegetation.

Demography

According to March, 2004 census data Qatar had a population of 744,029 (the July 2005 estimate is 863,051). In March 2004, there were 576,411 (77 per cent) persons reported as economically active. Population growth is estimated to be between 2.61 and 2.74 per cent per annum. It is also estimated that well over half, Qatar's population (550,700 people) lives in the national capital Doha

What is significant and very striking though, is the number of economically active non-Qataris in the overall population – 466,006 (81 per cent), compared with the number of economically active Qataris 110,405 (19 per cent) i.e. a ratio of four to one. As might be expected, Qatar's current unemployment rates are low, estimated to be rather less than three per cent.

With the possible exception of others among the smaller Gulf states, it is extremely unlikely that this demographic pattern would or could be replicated anywhere else in the world. And nor is there much evidence that the prevailing balance between Qataris and non-Qataris is likely to change significantly over the next several years if not longer.

Regional factors

According to the World Bank, countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are failing to create employment opportunities for rapidly growing populations despite their oil-powered booming economies. As a consequence, by 2025 there will be an estimated 100 million people looking for work in the region. Limited private sector activity and integration in the global economy are factors holding some countries back. It is also readily apparent that a number of these countries have booming youth populations, young people who have not yet entered or gained substantial experience from being in the labour market.

While concerns about employment and unemployment do not apply anywhere near as graphically in Qatar, the exact reverse being largely true - and other Gulf Co-operation Council countries, though labour market issues are now very much to the fore in both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, these countries are very much aware of the need to systematically address public policy in terms of ensuring appropriate measures which advance economic and social strength. Qatar seeks to be at the forefront of substantially revised education, employment, training and labour market strategies for the gulf and the wider region.

Qatar's approach, like that of other nations, is largely based on the assumption that economic development should be measured not only quantitatively, but also in terms of

quality of life: jobs, income, education, skills, health, and the environment. The Qatar Government believes that successful economies do not result from any *quick fix*, but from long-term investments in human, technical, financial, physical and environmental infrastructure to support people and communities that are the core of sustained economic development.

Economics

Oil and gas account for more than 55 per cent of Qatar's gross domestic product (GDP), approximately 85 per cent of export earnings, and 70 per cent of government revenues. Qatar has proven natural gas reserves exceeding 14 trillion cubic metres, which is more than 5 per cent of the global total, and third largest in the world. The Qatari riyal is tied to the \$US at a fixed rate of 3.65.

Qatar's gross national product grew astonishingly to QR 127 billion (\$US 35 billion) in 2005 – 2006, from QR 30 billion (\$US 2.75 billion) just 10 years earlier. This means that Qatar is now one of the wealthiest countries in the world and features in the World Bank's 10 richest nations list in terms of asset stock and global wealth per capita. In 2004, Qatar's gross domestic product rose to \$US28.5 billion, a 20.5 per cent increase over 2003. In 2004, the country also attracted \$US4.5 billion worth of foreign investment, a staggering 1,543 per cent increase, while its exports grew 33 per cent over the last two years.

Standard and Poor suggested an estimate for economic growth at 8.2 per cent in 2004, above 5 per cent in 2005 and 2006, before surging to 11.1 per cent in 2007, when new liquefied natural gas capacity comes on stream. Again, according to Standard and Poor, the impact of Qatar's economic success can be seen in estimates of per capita income, which were expected to climb to \$US 37,800 in 2007, from \$US 32,165 in 2004 a change of over \$US 5,600. More recently however, it was announced through the media that Qatar's per capita GDP now exceeds \$US 40,000 which already surpasses the Standard and Poor estimate for 2007. It is worth noting too, that these figures were estimated well before the recent rapid rise of crude oil prices which will see substantial extra and unforeseen increases in earnings for the Gulf states and Qatar.

According to very recent figures, total revenue for Qatar's fiscal year 2006 - 2007 is expected to grow to QR 56.9 billion (\$US 15.7 billion) based on an estimated oil price of \$US 36 per barrel, up from QR 38 billion (\$US 10.44 billion) during the previous fiscal year. Public expenditures in 2006 – 2007 are expected to be QR 54.6 billion (\$US 15 billion) up from QR 37.8 billion (\$US 2.87 billion) in 2005 - 2006, but this will still produce an overall budget surplus of QR 2.3 billion (\$US 632 million). In contrast, for the financial year 2005 - 2006, the budget surplus was estimated at a little less than 10 per cent of the 2006 – 2007 figure i.e. QR 217 million (\$US 60 million).

It is important to note too, that Qatar's 2006 – 2007, income and budget estimates are based on a more modest rate of return on petroleum exports - \$US 36 per barrel, while the current rate is around \$US 70 per barrel and according to many commentators likely to remain so for the foreseeable future at least. If the price for petroleum products remains as high, Qatar will effectively double its earnings from this source alone over 2006 – 2007.

It is also noteworthy, that the Qatar government is earmarking a good portion of its revenue for long-term development projects related to education, health and housing, and for infra-structure such as roads, sewage, electricity, water, industrial areas and air and sea ports.

Spending on education alone in 2006 – 2007 is expected to reach QR 5.7 billion, of which QR 523 million will go toward special projects rather than the operating expenses of the public education system.

Qatar: educational expenditure, standards and directions

The importance of a strong relationship between spending on education and training, and eventual economic and social outcomes cannot be over-stressed. Of course, there is far more to this than a simple equation, but in general terms at least, the association has become strong enough to be regarded as axiomatic in some quarters, and so apparent as to leave a very strong imprint on public policy perspectives in many situations. This relationship is certainly recognised in Qatar which is investing more heavily to achieve improved educational outcomes from its learners in schools, and in further and higher education.

This is illustrated by Qatar recognising just how important education and training are when in 2003, it began spending 3.29 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) as a public outlay on education, which then accounted for 12 per cent of total government expenditure in that year. It is also likely that this figure under-estimated actual expenditure in some areas, and that it will grow, and perhaps rapidly, over the next several years as reflected in allocations for 2006 - 2007.

In the fiscal year 2006 – 2007, Qatar will spend something like 10 per cent of its estimated income on education – meaning it is committing QR 5.7 billion (\$US 15.66 million) to this area, a very substantial increase over 2003 for example, even though expenditure as a percentage of overall total government expenditure has declined slightly. This means that while in the past, Qatar spent less than the OECD average on education in terms of its GDP, but remained quite close to the OECD average as a percentage of overall government expenditure, it now intends to spend far more than almost all OECD countries where public and private spending, on education absorbs an average of 5.9 per cent of GDP.

It is Qatar's recognition of how important education and training are to its long-term future that has driven recent substantial increases in expenditure, not only in schools, but in further and higher education, and which has helped shape and continues to shape public policy responses. This recognition also results in dramatic efforts to transform education and training, particularly in schools, from a largely rigid, dated and heavily centralised system, to one that offers greater flexibility, and choice and is better able to meet labour market and other demands. For example, skills mis-matches in the broadest sense of the term, which are somewhat endemic to Qatar's historic approaches to education and training are now widely recognised as a major impediment to sustained growth and long-term employment prospects here.

Information on education

Qatar's public education provision actually spans some 40 years or so, beginning in the early 1950s, characterised by gradual and systematic expansion to include near universal free comprehensive education for all, with the addition of services for those with special and other learning needs. In these respects, it shares certain parallels with developments seen in other Gulf nations, many of which now regard education as among their foremost national priorities.

Qatar currently has several types of schools which may be broadly classified as:

- ❖ public primary, intermediate and secondary schools funded and managed by the Ministry of Education;
- ❖ private Arabic medium schools partially funded by the Ministry of Education;
- ❖ private fee-paying, non-government schools including both community schools and other international schools offering diverse curricula; and
- ❖ 46 publicly funded independent (corporatised) schools operating through charters provided by the Supreme Education Council with an additional 20 or so schools planned for late 2007.

In terms of public education provision the most recent data show, the Qatar school population comprises: approximately 38,000 primary school learners in 106 schools; around 19,000 learners in 56 preparatory/intermediate schools; and some 16,000 learners in 41 secondary schools. Broadly speaking then, there are around 73,000 learners in all. In terms of gender, males out-number females in the school population, though the differences are not huge – generally around 51 per cent male/49 per cent female, with perhaps less observable difference in some age-related cohorts.

During the past decade, non-government school enrolment in Qatar grew from around 32,000 to over 44,000 – representing an increase of 40 per cent. During the same period, enrolment at Qatar’s government schools increased from nearly 65,000 to just over 73,000 – representing an increase of 13 per cent, or around one-third of the growth rate of non-government schools. To be fair however, it should be pointed out that much of the growth in non-government schooling has arisen because of the simply astonishing growth in the number of ex-patriates now working in Qatar.

According to the latest figures though, around 13,500 Qataris are actually enrolled in and attending the various types of non-government schools including private Arabic – approximately one-quarter of the total enrolment for all schools in this group. Detailed enumeration yet to be carried out by the Office of Data Collection and Management on behalf of the Supreme Education Council will identify where and how many Qatari learners are enrolled.

Since the move towards establishing independent (corporatised) publicly funded schools, the Supreme Education Council has approved 12 Cohort 1 schools and their operating charters in 2004; 22 Cohort 2 schools in 2005, and 12 Cohort 3 schools in 2006. So after three years, Qatar will have fewer than 50 or so independent (corporatised) publicly funded schools actually operating under the auspices of the Supreme Education Council.

As noted earlier, this leaves the overwhelming majority of Qatari and non-Qatari learners in schools operated by the Ministry of Education, or in the many private Arabic medium or non-government schools.

Even if some of the recent and seemingly optimistic projections are achieved, at the end of five years, Qatar will have around half its government funded schools still being operated by the Ministry of Education, and the other half broadly under the auspices of the Supreme Education Council, meaning two potentially competing and/or contrasting publicly funded school systems with no clear relationship between them, and an equally clear potential for

conflict, and perhaps worse: differentiated learning opportunities and learning outcomes depending on which type of school learners attend. If other, rather more optimistic projections succeed, then within a few years, the Ministry of Education will no longer have schools at all, and thus may cease to exist as an entity, with those of its current role and functions applicable to independent schools being largely subsumed perhaps by the Supreme Education Council.

The extent to which Qatar moves towards *independence* for all existing Ministry of Education schools, and how quickly this might be accomplished very much depends on a number of factors which are yet to be tested. It also depends on just how sustainable the current model of independent (charter-type) schools proves to be, and whether there are other approaches which Qatar might draw on which offer greater support for widespread education reform, while allowing and enabling schools to have a high degree of self-governance and/or self-management.

It is interesting to note in this respect, that even in the United States where the conditions for establishing charter (privatised or corporatised) schools are very favourable, no State or school district has yet seen its entire stock of public schools become chartered, or even anything approaching a majority of such schools. And in England, where the government has committed a great deal of resources to establishing new secondary city academies for example, success thus far has been very limited indeed, although there are ambitions by the current Blair-led government to have 200 new academies over the next few years.

In fact, in a lesson for Qatar and elsewhere, recent evidence from England adduced by OFSTED and the House of Commons Select Committee on Education shows that privately backed city academies, set up to replace failing inner-city schools, have had decidedly mixed results. England's 2004 league tables, published early in 2005, reveal that of the 11 academies listed, six improved their results at General Certificate of Secondary Education level, but five failed to show any improvement, of which one now has the second-worst results in England

Another important factor for Qatar to consider is the likelihood of how many independent schools might fail and what will happen to the learners, teachers and schools as a result – for the former in particular there may be dire consequences. But evidence is emerging that in the United States, unsurprisingly not all is well with charter schools. Over the past year or so, in Arizona, a pioneer in the charter school movement, which is ranked near the top in both number of charter schools and the strength of its charter school laws had a school closure rate 11 per cent, and 12 other states had closure rates that are even higher, Louisiana topping the list at 25 per cent.

This is relevant insofar as there have been numerous examples across the United States where charter schools have had their approval to operate revoked, or they have simply failed for a number of reasons. Thus, a *fall-back* position appears imperative – though one was not actually contemplated, let alone designed in the haste with which Qatar's independent schools were conceived. Despite strenuous endeavours by some state governments in the USA which are particularly well-disposed to charter schools e.g. California, New York and Texas, nothing like half of the public schools have been converted or new schools established. This suggests that Qatar's ambitions of 50 per cent in several years, and eventually the entire public school stock is unlikely to be attained or only accomplished

using very different approaches and quite possibly very different school models and/or structures such as clustering.

Moreover, Qatar does not yet have in place policies and programmes which allow it to deal in a planned and systematic manner with dual (if not actually *duel*) approaches to public education provision. That is to say: Qatar is investing heavily in ensuring *Education for a New Era* proceeds apace and brings about the educational and other outcomes expected via independent schools, while at the same time, the Ministry of Education appears to be conducting something of a business as usual approach with no great increase in resources, and seemingly no substantive plans afoot to improve the education achievement of the majority of learners who remain within its schools.

Education reform in Qatar

As noted earlier and broadly speaking, *Education for a New Era* in Qatar aims to significantly raise local standards by building a modern and comprehensive system to provide its people with quality education comparable with that offered in the best schools around the world. In time, this may mean Qatar emulating models of education and training drawn from the world's best, and adapting them to meet particular local conditions and needs.

That is certainly the intention of the Supreme Education Council which has the avowed purpose of building a world-class school system in the first instance. It is also evident in the very favourable stance through the Qatar Foundation in attracting and supporting overseas (further and) higher institutions, with at least five of the latter – thus far exclusively universities from United States - now operating in Doha's dedicated, purpose-built education city.

In order to be fair, it is important to note that Qatar had tried with only limited success to transform education in the mid 1990s. This seems to have been a largely internally inspired and managed programme which did not draw overly on the knowledge or experience available from other nations. There are undoubtedly many reasons why this reform fell short of meeting expectations, something which almost inevitably included: a lack of adequate planning; an absence of knowledge about operational, policy and programme experience in other nations; insufficient foresight and poor understanding of the complexities involved; few if any champions within existing institutions; a failure to grasp the enormity and scope of the task; little appreciation that sweeping reform requires time; and few if any substantive attempts to use the expertise and experience available internationally.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that a high-level of bureaucratic indifference and inertia combined with clear risk aversion were very much at the forefront of earlier failures to effect reform programmes – and here Qatar would be no isolated case. In addition, Qatar's schools and their staff seem to have been ill-equipped to deal with change and transformation strategies having become inured to long-standing approaches where large scale reform was not a feature, but one where detailed, centralised and micro-managing control was. In contrast, other countries, some far less well-resourced than Qatar, appear to have successfully carried out major reform programmes without at the same time jettisoning prevailing approaches to public education and opting for managerialist, quasi-competitive and choice driven models.

The more recent attempts at reform embodied in *Education for a New Era* stem from the late 1990s, and early in the new millennium, when the Qatar Government realised that its

education system in the broad, and its school system in particular, was not delivering the high standard of educational outcomes which would equip Qataris or the nation with the skills, experience and qualifications they needed to take their place in an increasingly globalised world. Moreover, if the desire to transform Qatar from an economy almost entirely dependent on energy production and export, was to be achieved, a new education system capable of transforming people and the nation was sorely in demand.

Qatar also needed to consider, and both urgently and systematically, what sort of approach it was going to use to inspire and manifest educational reform which was quite different from the largely incremental approach it had taken previously. In this sense, Qatar took very important decisions: it realised that its school education system was inadequate and rather than simply assuming that over time things would improve, Qatar actively embarked on a journey designed to lead it towards a world-class education system.

Having set out to reform education in Qatar, the questions then became: how should this be carried out, where should the responsibility vest, and in which ways could Qatar achieve its ultimate goals?

The answers to these and other questions are critically important to how Qatar's education system should or could be re-created, and they then offered abundant opportunity to craft a model of Qatari education for the future. This means of course that such questions, and their answers must not be taken lightly: it is imperative that the best available evidence is adduced to inform and shape the outcomes sought, and that international and national best practice models should be drawn on as a matter of course.

Noting that this does not normally mean simply emulating or attempting to mimic models developed elsewhere, though sadly in some respects, Qatar was led down a pathway toward answers which were unconditionally driven by the needs and challenges manifested in the very different circumstances prevailing in public education in the United States.

It is important to note though, that in its more recent ambitions for educational reform, not only did Qatar seek alternative solutions to what were perceived of as intractable problems with existing approaches, it set formidable time-lines which seem to be far shorter than those usually encountered in major public policy changes. This marks a clear boundary between otherwise traditional approaches to change based on incremental actions, and the more radical, sudden break and large-scale transformation which *Education for a New Era* demands. Needless to say, shortening the time-lines on any reform is not without its hazards and usually adds to the level of risk which will be encountered during any reform journey.

In brief: Qatar was going to reform education, and reform it in short order, and it was going to do it using an approach almost entirely developed in a different part of the world in response to very different challenges indeed. Scale and speed were the underlying elements of change. So *Education for a New Era* would go ahead largely by transplanting or implanting an approach developed in a very different setting for very different reasons.

So, in terms of what has happened in Qatar, this paper asks whether there is convincing evidence to support and sustain the neo-liberal claims about privatisation or corporatisation of a national or other public school system, are they more appropriately described in terms of being just a doctrine that continues its forlorn search for justification, or merely a persuasive and plausible ideology?

It asks these questions in particular, because it is just such neo-liberal perspectives which were used to justify – though this is perhaps too strong a term and those such as assert might be more suited - the shape and direction of independent (charter) schools in *Education for a New Era* and its impact on Qatar's public school system.

Moreover, we need to ask whether, even if the evidence does exist, will it lead to effective educational outcomes and satisfy the tests posed by Akkari and the more recent aspirations of Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missnad Consort of the Emir and Vice-Chair of the Supreme Education Council.

***Transplanting and/or implanting
Policy and programme concerns***

One of the issues involved in cases such as Qatar, is whether it is possible to view the policies and programmes donated or provided very often at some considerable expense by an individual or agency which are to be transplanted or implanted into another location in a manner akin to medical procedures which deal with organs, teeth and other matters. By extension, policy and programme donation or provision can assume certain parallels with procedures carried out surgically.

In public policy terms, particularly in education, there were, and in some cases there remain, dangerously naïve assumptions that what works in one location will automatically and inevitably work in another. This does not relate to the types of policy or operational lessons that might be learned and utilised, rather it refers to the propensity in some quarters to simply re-locate, insert or embed foreign models, replicas or approaches, or at least attempt to do so. This of course requires the suspension of the otherwise rational belief that something cannot be readily transplanted or implanted without substantial adjustment or change, so that it will take root and flourish, or at least not be rejected, or cause the recipient to become morbid, ill or dead!

In medicine, it is widely accepted that organ donation may be accompanied by a number of post-transplant challenges and complications which can generally be divided into two categories: complications specific to each organ transplant; and complications common to all transplants related to the immuno-suppressive drugs used to prevent rejection.

There may also be post-transplant rejection where the body's normal response is to reject the transplanted organ. Fortunately, immuno-suppressive medications can prevent rejection in 50 to 75 per cent of cases. Post-transplant problems can include infection which can be very serious for a transplant recipient as the medicine required to prevent rejection suppresses the immune system, and this raises the overall risk of infection.

Implants, though generally regarded as medically safer, may also be subject to post-operative complications, including infection, displacement, rejection, over-load and outright failure. So even here, there are obvious dangers to the recipient, dangers which need clear explanation and remedial action.

What such radical courses of action generally mean in medicine and in many other fields too, is that before any implant, transplant or other major procedure, the recipient needs to give informed consent which in many instances requires that significant risks be disclosed, as well as risks which would be of particular importance to the recipient. Naturally, a higher

standard of informed consent applies to negligence, where it is significant, that cause must be shown: i.e. had the individual been made aware of the risk they would not have proceeded with the procedure, or perhaps with the individual or organisation carrying it out.

Informed consent also means that information must be presented to enable persons to voluntarily decide whether or not to participate as subjects or in any procedure – including but not limited to large-scale impact on education for example. Informed consent is a fundamental mechanism to ensure respect for persons and indeed communities, through provision of thoughtful consent for a voluntary act. The practices used in obtaining informed consent must be designed to educate the subject population in terms that they can understand. Therefore, informed consent language and its documentation (especially explanation of purpose, duration, procedures, alternatives, risks, and benefits) must be written in *lay language*, i.e. understandable to the people being asked to participate or for whom the actions are taken.

In comparison, we need to ask if the same approaches are consistent with attempts to transplant or implant education policies, operational models and programmes into Qatar which were actually developed in a particular location for particular purposes, more so when the recipient is a *quantum leap* away in terms of culture, language, religion, history, scale, and very many other factors. This suggests that special care should be taken well in advance to ensure that the social and economic characteristics of Qatari society are not diminished and that there is evident respect for the rights and interests of the people involved, and/or the community as a whole. Here again, we are regarding a transplant or implant as broadly corresponding to a medical procedure such as surgery.

So too, we may need to ask if the state, region or nation has given genuinely informed consent for the procedure whether this is a transplant or implant: in other words, have those who are most heavily involved been given adequate advice and explanations in language they clearly understand so that they are wholly informed about the actions to be taken and any consequences which may arise as a result.

In many domains, by no means limited to medicine, it would be regarded as amiss and irresponsible, if not actually negligent, for the individuals or organisations carrying out a procedure to go ahead if they did not fully explain the risks as well as the benefits and the harm which may arise as a result.

Moreover, the individuals or organisations carrying out a procedure should not do so for their benefit, that is: they should manifest a central principle of beneficence which consists of a spectrum of obligations which promote welfare, ranging from the negative duty not to inflict harm, to the positive duty to do good. Beneficence requires that, even before a nation or people are asked to participate, those responsible for the intended procedures must first decide whether the overall balance of risks and benefits justifies requesting that participation. It also requires that individuals and organisations minimise risks. Understanding the nature and probability of risks and benefits is therefore essential, both from the prospective of those carrying out, and those for whom a procedure is undertaken.

It is unclear, apart from assertions which appear in the RAND Corporation's own largely self-adulatory publications, whether the Qatar Government every received a comprehensive, thorough, detailed and realistic briefing about charter schools which included informed and matter-of-fact commentary about any advantages and disadvantages which might stem from

adopting such an approach. That such a briefing lacked any discussion of the attendant risks in following a charter school model, rather than any other approach, were certainly not forthcoming in any overt sense.

Autologous transfusion

Persisting with medical analogies, it may also be worth considering an extension of transplanting or implanting educational policies and programmes as a form of autologous transfusion. This occurs where there is collection and re-infusion i.e. transfusion, of the patient's own blood or blood components. Although not completely risk free, autologous blood is generally regarded as the safest method of blood donation.

Here though, the reference to autologous transfusion of life-blood is not directed at Qatar: in other words Qatar is not really the metaphorical patient, rather the self-collection of blood and blood products is actually undertaken by the organisational donor for its own ends and purposes.

Consider these circumstances which actually arose in Qatar: the organisation undertaking a commissioned investigation i.e. a diagnosis, and one carried out at very high cost for the Qatar Government, gathered a wide range of material and information which was particularly advantageous for that organisation when and if any diagnosis subsequently became treatment, leading to an implant, transplant or other major procedure. And that is exactly what occurred following the diagnosis in question.

Having this information to hand clearly places such an organisation in a very profitable, or at least potentially so, position vis a vis actual or potential competitors when it comes to delivering outcomes – no matter how un-suited, ill-defined and/or relevant these may be. More so, retaining such knowledge and understandings in the form of an organ or blood bank, and releasing it not on demand, but according to pre-determined criteria including payment by instalment, would clearly amplify any advantage very significantly indeed. So too determining, the recipient's capacity to pay might play a significant role in how supplies were provided and at what cost: differential pricing is by no means unknown in medicine, education or other domains, particularly where the idea of market economies predominates and education becomes a private rather than public good.

Therefore, it might be argued that in gathering all this material together, and retaining it in a closeted manner, the organisation involved was putting into practice the methods that underpin autologous transfusion of blood and/or blood products, i.e. harvesting material which it would later use to its own advantage, thus reducing the risk of complications. Here too, we might extend the medical analogy of autologous transfusion to *blood doping* which refers to methods of boosting red blood-cell supply in advance of competition. Blood doping is an illegal practice used to obtain an unfair performance advantage over competitors where this is because blood doping enhances performance by increasing red blood cell mass thus delivering more oxygen to muscle. In sport, blood doping is illegal, but it is also very hard to detect

In order to preclude, or at least limit the impact of autologous transfusion and/or *blood doping*, the issues surrounding informed consent become rather more stark, as does the requirement that an organisation commissioned to undertake a task only ever acts according to the central principle of beneficence. The central principle here consists of a spectrum of obligations to promote welfare, ranging from the negative duty not to inflict harm, to the

positive duty to do good – shades of the Hippocratic Oath no less, which in its original form (translated by Edelstein, 1943) demands that physicians swear among other things that.

I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice. ... Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief. ... If I fulfil this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honoured with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot.

The emergence and rise of the RAND Corporation

It is noteworthy that many education systems across the world have undertaken substantial and in some cases continuing reform – Finland's is widely regarded to have taken around 30 years in carefully planned and measured stages, and New Zealand's more than 10, other countries including Australia, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Scotland, and Wales have also carried out extensive and far-reaching reforms embracing schools, curricula, further and higher education. Given that reform *per se* is no longer new, is extensively documented and information widely and freely available, developing a fully fleshed out approach reflecting Qatar's particular needs is neither impossible nor unrealistic.

This means that many systems now have lengthy histories leading and managing educational reform and the processes are sufficiently well-tested and documented that they can provide approaches if not exact blue-prints which Qatar could adapt for its own purposes, or more tellingly which RAND in its consultative capacity could have adapted for Qatar's use. As indicated elsewhere there are very grave problems to be faced in adopting mimicry, thus seeing what happens elsewhere in terms of lessons to be learned rather than models or blueprints to be copied, remains a paramount concern.

What is interesting to note perhaps is that there is little substantial evidence about why Qatar actually chose the RAND Corporation to first advise on, and then create, its education reform programme at least as far as Qatar's schools are concerned. Of course, the absence of such evidence may lead to speculation about the reasons, but that is not the main purpose of this paper.

There is scant, readily available evidence that the RAND Corporation had ever before successfully led or managed any major education reform programme i.e. local, regional or state, even in the United States, so just how it came to be responsible for actually reforming Qatar's national system very much remains open to conjecture. It is true that the RAND Corporation had carried out some studies and provided some commentary on various approaches to education in parts of the USA, but finding examples where it actually planned and carried out system-wide reform has proven to be difficult indeed. Though, the RAND Corporation's own seemingly timely study of Californian charter schools might have better informed its pronouncements in Qatar. Moreover, studies and commentary are far away from the practical reality of leading and managing the design and implementation of systemic reform.

That the Qatar Government approached and contracted the RAND Corporation to carry out at least the early stages of the reform is not in question, what was unclear, and remains so

even today, is just why the Qatar Government made this particular decision and engaged the RAND Corporation when there were numerous other courses of action it might have followed.

For example, in order to ensure it gained *best value*, using generally accepted customary practice Qatar could have sought *requests for proposals* i.e. tenders, from organisations and/or agencies world-wide which had clearly demonstrated achievement leading and managing reform, rather than simply selecting a particular company for reasons which remain entirely unclear. So too, Qatar may have benefited not only from a competitive bidding process, from which it would have been in a far better position to judge which organisations and/or agencies offered the best overall approach, including those which were sympathetic and inclusive of Qatar's cultural and religious heritage.

Failing approaches such as those noted immediately above, Qatar may have sought advice and intervention from organisations such as the World Bank, which it has done with very great success in developing its 2006 labour market strategy. It may also have availed itself of expertise from either the African or Asian Development Banks, or any major national or non-government aid agency with substantive experience in reforming national or regional education. None of this actually occurred, though more recently Qatar has worked actively with the World Bank on its labour market strategy which is now moving towards implementation.

Here though, are the RAND Corporation's own words on the matter:

The RAND Corporation reports for example that: Qatar was motivated by several concerns, but chief among them was its belief that the nation's school system is rigid and out-dated and does not produce high-quality outcomes. (Improving the Qatari School System, preface p 1 July 2002).

In 2001, the State of Qatar approached RAND to examine its K - 12 system and to recommend options for building a world-class system that would be consistent with other initiatives for social and political change, such as wider opportunities for women. The highly committed Qatari leadership was willing to consider radical and innovative solutions, and provided RAND (with sic) a unique, exciting opportunity to help them (it sic) design and implement a new system from scratch. (Education for a New Era, 2006).

Worryingly and perhaps regrettably, Qatar did not make the judgements such as those outlined above, nor did it seek alternative approaches from organisations and/or agencies other than the RAND Corporation: the direct consequence was that RAND emerged not only as the reform commentator and *master planner*, it also assumed the mantle of direct control over delivery, at least for the very substantial early phases of the reform when critical decisions were being made.

Generally speaking, more enlightened approaches to education and public policy recognise that attempting to transplant or implant models, no matter how successful they may have been in their original context, is unlikely to be successful even where there are marked similarities in language, culture and other factors. Rather, a far better way to proceed is to derive lessons from such models and examples, including the events that led to them, and use these to inform, develop and apply approaches that are consistent and congruent with local needs and demands.

A direct result of the RAND Corporation-led reform initiative noted earlier was to create the Supreme Education Council as the high-level body with over-arching responsibility for taking forward the four critical pillars of *Education for a New Era* noted earlier.

RAND's approach and corporate ideology

In approaching contemporary education issues, particularly those in Qatar, it seems to some observers, this author included, that the RAND Corporation has views which largely replicate the Ptolemaic universe in a number of essential ways.

Ptolemy's approach was based on a geo-centric model with the belief that the earth was at the centre of the universe. That this view persisted so long probably owes a great deal more to catholic church dogma than to any observed evidence as it clearly flew in the face of emerging knowledge, though there were attempts to stem the scientific tide in much the same way as proponents of the flat earth belief did too.

Underlying the RAND Corporation's Ptolemaic universe, are neo-liberal assumptions that competition within the market can produce better schools and force bad public schools to improve. Note though, that even within narrow notions of academic achievement and school improvement, there is little or no compelling empirical evidence to support this claim. There is also the question about whether this assertion can stand in the face of proof that the universe is not actually geo-centric, and that evidence is providing us with quite an alternative perspective.

No matter how inadequate Ptolemy's system was as a piece of empirical science, it was extremely attractive as a philosophical and artistic representation of the universe. In the Ptolemaic universe, the earth was at the centre of God's creation. It is thus a highly ordered universe, and this order can seem very re-assuring - at least to some!

In much the same way, and as has been demonstrated by the RAND Corporation's approach in Qatar, it adopted a plausible, largely untested and quite possibly erroneous belief that a *market model* developed to meet the needs of education in the USA, when applied to Qatar's schools and education system, would bring about major and sustained improvement.

What this shows, is that like world or other views illustrated by the Ptolemaic universe, in education there is all too often inadequate historical reliance on the methods of science to validate effectiveness and related claims, particularly about policy matters. We should therefore retain a sense of wariness if not outright scepticism about products, programmes, and practices claiming to *work*, but which lack the solid scientific evidence to back up such claims. We might also opine that even when available, the knowledge and capacity to judge the quality of the evidence is frequently limited.

Of course as we know now, other learned figures such as Copernicus began to challenge the established Ptolemaic and by now religious order of the universe. Copernicus demonstrated beyond all doubt that our solar system was helio-centric in which he proposed that the Sun, not the Earth, was the centre. To most of us now, Copernicus may seem an unlikely revolutionary: many believe for example, that his book was only published at the end of his life because he feared ridicule and disfavour: by his peers and by the church, which had elevated the ideas of Aristotle to the level of religious dogma.

Copernicus, this reluctant revolutionary set in motion a chain of events that would eventually (long after his lifetime) produce the greatest revolution in thinking that western civilisation has seen. His ideas remained rather obscure for about 100 years after his death. But, in the 17th century the work of Kepler, Galileo, and Newton would build on the heliocentric universe of Copernicus and produce the revolution that would sweep away the ideas of Aristotle and replace them with a modern view of astronomy and natural science: this is commonly called the Copernican Revolution. One wonders if the fate of the prevailing neo-liberal dogma which besets a number of places, will suffer a similar overthrow and eventual fate: to be consigned as a mere relic of the past, worthy of study and understanding, but not replication or serious consideration.

As in the case of Copernicus, and as we shall see Galileo, when astronomers challenged the Ptolemaic universe, they weren't just challenging a scientific idea; they were challenging a religious and philosophical construct that was central to the world view of the time. Much the same might be said of those who level challenges at the neo-liberal, ostensibly market-driven approaches to education which have powerful though not necessarily well-informed advocates and proponents. Well before Ptolemy however, who very much based his ideas on those espoused by Aristotle, a sun-centred solar system had been proposed circa 200 BCE by Aristarchus of Samos, but like the beta-max format, these lost out to Aristotle's and then Ptolemy's video home system (vhs) approach.

In much the same way, we might wonder if the market or commodity based approaches to education now more common in some countries, have gained popularity and favour due to ardent self-promotion and publicity, and because of any real failure to challenge them in an authoritative manner.

We need only recall the case of Galileo: as we know that in 1616 a committee of consultants declared to the Inquisition that the propositions that the Sun is the centre of the universe and that the Earth has an annual motion are absurd in philosophy, at least erroneous in theology, and formally a heresy. On orders of the then pope, Bellarmine called Galileo to his residence and administered a warning not to hold or defend Copernican theory; Galileo was also forbidden to discuss the theory orally or in writing. Yet at the same time he was reassured that he had not been on trial, nor been condemned by the Inquisition.

Somewhat later though, Galileo was again confronted by the Inquisition over his adherence to a non-Ptolemaic view of the universe. In 1633, he was formally interrogated for 18 days and on April 30, Galileo confessed that he may have made the Copernican case in his *Dialogue* too strong and offered to refute it in his next book. Unmoved, the pope decided that Galileo should be imprisoned indefinitely. Soon after, with a formal threat of torture, Galileo was examined by the Inquisition and sentenced to prison and religious penances, the sentence was signed by six of his 10 inquisitors. In a formal ceremony at the church of Santa Maria Sofia Minerva, Galileo abjured his errors. He was then put in house arrest in Sienna.

We might also speculate on the lot of those who publicly at least, seek to challenge the conventional orthodoxy presented by neo-liberal dogma: will they too be confined under house arrest, or suffer the far worse fate of those who opposed the dominant church and its draconian organ the Inquisition? Just what instruments of torture might the new neo-liberal inquisition show us, or might we be made to show that we recant by memorising and reciting the collected works of Milton Friedman?

Applying what's known or believed, even where it might not fit

Neo-liberals strongly argue that the market, when freed from state interference, is not only the most efficient, but also the most moral way of providing goods and services in society. They are thus vehemently opposed to social democracy, the welfare state and Keynesian-inspired economic management, all of which entail a strong role for the state.

The issue of education has always held a central place in neo-liberal ideology. Neo-liberals advocate the application of market mechanisms to schools and universities. The most common mechanism proposed by neo-liberals is that of vouchers, first outlined by Milton Friedman in 1955.

When reviewing policy and programme decisions it is usually important if not imperative to take into account the contexts in which those decisions were taken and given effect. Qatar took a number of critical such decisions on advice from the RAND Corporation, and very significantly without the benefit of alternative expert opinion or analysis which may have provided either a countervailing perspective, reinforced RAND's views, or fallen somewhere between these potentially polarised positions. Thus, Qatar's subsequent decisions were based solely on advice from the RAND Corporation which seem to wholeheartedly reflect its own corporate perspectives on issues such as accountability, choice, privatisation and market forces, and which seemingly bear little relation to the particular circumstances obtaining in Qatar, or to those which might have delivered optimum educational, social and economic outcomes for Qataris.

What seems equally readily apparent is that Qatar was provided by the RAND Corporation with an almost *faith* based, pre-Copernican doctrinal approach which stems directly from RAND's evident corporate adherence to what appear to be exclusively neo-liberal tenets and ideals - actually a set of proxy values, ideologies, and practices that actively seek to re-create societies and economies, leading eventually to non-universal education provision and other systems such as RAND advocated for Qatar's independent schools. Ultimately, of course, by following the RAND Corporation dogma, Qatar's independent (corporatised) schools then became in their early incarnations virtual facsimiles of the charter schools seen in parts of the USA.

So it can be argued that the RAND Corporation's behaviour in Qatar reflects a deeply embedded corporate economic and philosophical doctrine that guided its actions and its view of educational reforms, while conveniently ignoring other evidence, national and sub-national cultural and other differences. It also seems that the RAND Corporation's actions which may ultimately exacerbate social and educational inequalities over time, obviously did not occur to those involved, or if they did, it was simply and expediently ignored. On the face of it, the RAND Corporation may have adopted a well-known maxim of tabloid journalism: never let the facts stand in the way of a good story!

The RAND Corporation's corporate attitude and behaviour in respect of Qatar's reform also supports a perspective that RAND has a disturbingly superficial neo-liberal approach which relates rather more than simply to an economic structure, but instead represents a standpoint or even ideology, from which there is a marked tendency to see the world only in terms of market metaphors, and which directly equates public provision with inefficiency and ineffectiveness, and private provision with efficiency and effectiveness. Ultimately, of course, this approach can only mean the demise of, or a severe restriction on, public

provision, whether it is in education, health, or some other field, and that privatised provision must always replace the public if improvements are to be made.

The RAND Corporation's fundamentally neo-liberal approach to issues, no matter how complex, although in Qatar it is actually far from complicated, shows that it is concerned with, and adheres to, point of view that de-emphasises and/or rejects government intervention in the economy of which education is clearly a vital part, and expresses an equally clear desire to intensify and expand what is in fact a *quasi market* at best, by increasing the number of competitors or providers – in this case schools. The RAND Corporation's focus is thus on achieving progress in its terms, and perhaps even social justice though there is scant if any evidence to support this assertion, by encouraging so called free-market methods and fewer restrictions on business operations and economic development: a rationale which led directly to recommendations that Qatar should have new independent schools, though vouchers were really the preferred option! Here is what the RAND Corporation (2006) said in its own words:

In addition, the new approach ought to include educational data collection, analysis, and dissemination to the public. These basic ingredients could support either a centralised or de-centralised system for providing education. RAND presented three specific options for discussion with the Qatari leadership: (1) upgrade the existing centrally-controlled system with the basic ingredients described above; (2) develop a set of new schools independent of the Ministry and allow parents to choose whether to send their children to them; (3) offer school vouchers so parents could send their children to private schools and seek expansion of high-quality private schooling in Qatar. The Qatari leadership rejected the first option as too similar to the failed reform attempts of the past. While the third option was attractive, it was also riskier than the second, since it relied on the private market to open new schools. Thus, the decision was to adopt the second option ...

Much of the prevailing evidence and RAND's subsequent conduct very strongly suggest that it actually arrived in Qatar with an ideology, or at least a number of assumptions, for which it was then in search of evidence. Of course the main dilemma with any dogma, is that its holders are entirely convinced of the rightness of their actions, and either incapable or unwilling to seek critical information which may make a difference to those beliefs. This seems to be what occurred in the design and other issues associated with Qatar's reform programme, especially how to implement the new approach – to call what the RAND Corporation developed a *model* would be disingenuous in the extreme. The apparent failure to obtain and/or cite extensive or even substantive research evidence is perhaps all the more surprising given that the RAND Corporation derives its name from *Research and Development*, but apparently, this need not apply when it might offer alternatives to an otherwise dominant ideology!

In short, it seems at least from the available evidence, that despite RAND's claims, there was little if any critical fundamental evaluation or assessment of the known and emerging strengths and weakness of Qatar's existing education system, nor more importantly of the charter schools approach which had begun to be used in certain parts of the USA. Rather, the RAND Corporation arrived with the latent intent to implement neo-liberal supposition about vouchers, and failing vouchers, charter schools as a second best alternative. The RAND Corporation pursued this approach despite there being no general evidence then, and none

now, that in the USA, charter schools are any more successful than their counterparts in the public system, and emerging evidence that many of them are actually less successful. And this lack of apparent success extends well beyond learner achievement and into the other claims made by charter school proponents which broadly correspond to the so-called *trickle down* effect which of course should result from the normal workings of unfettered markets, educational or otherwise, but which almost never does.

This is an important issue because at the same time the RAND Corporation was publicly backing and advocating independent (privatised, corporatised or charter) schools as the saviour of Qatar's apparently under-performing education system, its own research was showing a far less promising and somewhat gloomier portrait of how successful charter schools were in the United States, and in California in particular. The best that RAND could argue was that learners in charter schools were keeping pace - hardly a ringing endorsement of charter school effectiveness, in fact, rather the contrary! And certainly nothing, which supports the trickle down effects pre-supposed by charter school advocates.

At its simplest, there seems to be a contradictory picture emerging here. On the one hand, the research evidence then as now, does not lend substantive or unequivocal support for a particular approach in this case privatised or corporatised charter schools, but despite this, RAND compellingly argued that such an approach should be adopted in Qatar.

In Qatar, the RAND Corporation obviously sought to *transplant* or *implant* an approach to schools which grew out of limited experience of charter schools in the United States about which contradictory evidence on learner achievement and other critical fields was already emerging, even in the RAND Corporation's own studies! Interestingly, vouchers and charter schooling have continued to very largely fail in gaining widespread acceptance in the USA and elsewhere in the developed world, and seemingly made substantial if not welcome progress only in Chile, which under its dictator Augusto Pinochet, adopted a very largely Friedman inspired neo-liberal approach to running, if not bankrupting the national economy and many of its public service systems.

In its seeming reliance on charter schooling as the sole means to address raising educational standards, the RAND Corporation deliberately ignored the great wealth of vital information from a number of high performing OECD nations such as Finland, Korea, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, among which there are obvious Anglophone examples which have readily and easily accessible information about school organisation and structures. Not that these approaches *per se* would have been necessarily any more successful if attempts were made to transplant or implant them *in toto*, as they are very much reflections of what particular nations need, rather than some generic model. But what might have occurred, is that Qatar may have learned lessons from other nations' successful educational reform, and then developed its own unique approaches. This would also have provided some basis for comparison between claim and counter-claim, and for a far more evidence-based decision than the one eventually taken by Qatar.

It also seems quite clear that drawing on evidence from systems with highly successful public schools such as those noted earlier, was very much antithetical to neo-liberalism and the RAND Corporation's central hypothesis, so it was both convenient and necessary to avoid using or even analysing such examples. Perhaps explaining why public schools and systems worked in direct contrast to neo-liberal claims about public sector ineffectiveness was simply

beyond the capacity of the RAND Corporation: again only surmise and conjecture is available to us.

More generally, experience world-wide strongly suggests it is effectively impossible to *transplant* or *implant* models, policies or programmes developed in one country directly into another without substantial modification which reflects the very many differences which obtain and the particular needs of Qatar, yet this is precisely what the RAND Corporation attempted in Qatar. Of course, this approach very much flies in the face of not only conventional and well-established wisdom, but the stark reality that recognises that countries should learn lessons from the policy, programme and operational experiences of others, rather than simply try to adopt them wholesale.

And an obvious question remains unanswered: given the experience with charter schools in the United States which is hardly flattering particularly in terms of learner achievement, the poor relative overall performance of United States learners compared with others in authoritative international studies, and the widespread recognition that some countries such as Finland retain outstanding public school systems, why did the RAND Corporation fail to substantively canvass any alternatives to the independent/charter school, privatisation approach, or even adduce any compelling evidence to sustain the principle that privatisation would improve teaching and learning? The answer to these questions may well be found in the Aristotelian, Ptolomaic and long held church views of the universe, and not in those of Copernicus or Galileo.

This paper also asks: was the RAND Corporation's conduct in failing to consider alternative approaches which genuinely argued for the reform and re-structuring of Qatar's education in ways which did not rely on a chartering approach, as had happened in numbers of other countries reasonable? On other than a rhetorical basis, the answer to this question must remain moot. That having been said, in accepted legal vernacular, professional and corporate conduct is usually regarded as acceptable if what takes place is both prudent and reasonable. These otherwise nebulous terms have been infused with a modicum of meaning, however, based on the very large analogous body of negligence law. Under these hoary principles, unattainable perfection is not required. The law in many western jurisdictions merely prescribes the actions that a reasonable person would take under similar conditions. .

These prudent and reasonable behaviours also belie a neo-liberal framework which takes as axiomatic that freeing schools from the public educational bureaucracy will lead inexorably to better standards of learner achievement, and which seem to form a substantial component of the RAND Corporation's ideals for Qatar's transplanted and/or implanted approaches to the independent schools. All of which need to be carefully examined and considered.

The RAND Corporation's assumptions about accountability

Accountability is generally regarded as the responsibility of an organisation to stakeholders, sponsors and clients for achieving its outcomes with prudent use of resources. Accountability has always been a basic concept in education, although ideas about how to accomplish it have changed. In recent years, the urgent need to improve schools has been a powerful incentive to adoption new accountability systems and it is from this perspective that the SEC views Qatar's independent schools.

Accountability is thus the demand by the community (officials, employers, and other stakeholders) for principals, teachers and others to prove that investments in education have led to measurable learning. For example, accountability testing is an attempt to sample what has been learned, or how well teachers have taught, and/or the effectiveness of a school principal's performance as a leader. In some situations, school budgets and other things may be affected. Increasingly information of this type is made public and it can affect policy and public perception of the effectiveness of schools and be the basis for comparison among schools. Accountability is an important factor in education reform. An assessment system connected to accountability may help identify the needs of schools so that resources can be equitably distributed.

Accountability has become one of the by-words associated with markets and choice, including in schools, hospitals and other public services. It is a polysemic term however, seldom defined with clarity or precision, leaving it largely open to interpretation. To be fair though, accountability is also increasingly associated with the public right to know and understand those undertakings carried out in their name.

These things having been said, it is important to note too, Crundwell's (2005) cautionary message about accountability. He writes:

Quite surprisingly, accountability in education is difficult to accurately define. In general, accountability refers to an individual's or an organisation's responsibility for developing and implementing a process or procedures to justify decisions made and to demonstrate the result or outcomes produced (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2005). Within the field of education, Adams and Kirst (1999) have indicated that views of what educational accountability is have evolved and changed as public schools have evolved and changed, and have typically followed economic and political movements.

When looking toward more comprehensive accountability measures, Qatar is now very much aware that using information deriving largely from assessment data as largely intended in the RAND Corporation's approach may actually fail to address the concern noted by Arens, et al (2004):

The public wants evidence of accountability, though they do not always consider test results adequate measures. In other words, current performance models of accountability may not suffice.

and

What McREL has both heard and documented over the past several years (and what rings true with our present examination of "accountability") (Goodwin, 2003; Lefkowitz & Miller, 2005.) is that the public is not convinced that standardised testing and single test scores are the ultimate indicator of student success. These community concerns undermine the legislation's focus on testing as the proxy for accountability. Participants in our dialogues insisted that there is more to accountability than just test scores.

In its approach to education reform in Qatar, the RAND Corporation seemingly assumed that accountability is one of those pre-determined conceptual terms that cannot be challenged

because accountability refers to the process of holding actors responsible for their actions. Nonetheless, operationalising such an open-ended concept is fraught with complications, starting with the politically and technically contested issue of assessing performance.

The RAND Corporation asserted for example, that Qatar's move to introduce independent schools:

offered change at the system level, which differentiated it from the modified centralised model. The charter school option introduced more variance, choice, and de-centralisation of decision-making; provided more incentives; and increased accountability.

and

Accountability independent schools would have greater autonomy than the current public schools, but would also be held accountable to the government. Accountability would be accomplished through two mechanisms. First, schools would apply for independent status and enter into a contractual arrangement. Regular audits and reporting mechanisms could be used to monitor compliance. Second, the model required that schools be evaluated regularly through a set of measures, including standardised student assessments. The results of the assessments and other information about schools (e.g., facilities available, courses offered) would be made available to all interested parties and summarised for each individual school. In this way, parents could judge for themselves whether the educational approach and results satisfy their children's needs. Therefore, schools might close either through irregularities that the contracting authority deems unacceptable or through lack of enrolment. Because funding would depend on the number of students enrolled, the school would be accountable to parents and students (Gill et al., 2001).

Even if the measurement problems involved in accountability were easily solved, or rendered simple, the factors explaining the process have received remarkable little research attention for example, although political science has sought broad generalisations to explain wars, treaties, military coups, legislation, electoral behaviour, and transitions to democracy, it has not produced empirically grounded conceptual frameworks that can explain how public accountability is constructed across diverse institutions.

The RAND Corporation's intent – whether implicit or explicit - through the use of standards, tests, and accountability, seems designed to restrict educators to particular kinds of thinking: thinking that conceptualises education in terms of producing individuals who are economically productive. In such an approach, education is no longer valued for its role in developing political, ethical, and aesthetic citizens, instead, the goal becomes one of promoting knowledge that specifically contributes to economic productivity and produces learners who are compliant and productive.

In summary, the RAND Corporation's educational policy regarding accountability alone, attempts on the one hand, to shift Qatar's emphasis from input and process to outcomes: but these outcomes must be economically valuable – at least in neo-liberal terms. This approach also supports parallel shifts from the *liberal* to the *vocational*, from education's *intrinsic* to its *instrumental* value, and as a result, from qualitative to quantitative measures of success,

the latter all too often narrowly described and employed simply because they are accessible and measurable.

It is interesting to observe perhaps, but by no means unsurprising, just how closely the RAND Corporation's recommended approaches to educational accountability in Qatar mirror those which emerged and currently beset the United States *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) where, according to the US Department of Education:

The Challenge: For too long, America's education system has not been accountable for results and too many children have been locked in underachieving schools and left behind.

The Solution: Information is power; testing and gathering independent data are the ways to get information into the hands of parents, educators and taxpayers.

The Act is designed to change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works.

No Child Left Behind will test every child in grades three through eight and give parents report cards for every school - highlighting success and shining a light on failure.

The law requires that all schools be held accountable for making sure that every student learns.

Testing tells parents, communities, educators and school boards which schools are doing well.

One of the cornerstones of the *No Child Left Behind Act* is the concept of adequate yearly progress (AYP). And some in Qatar are already seeking to make the sorts of comparisons ostensibly available via the adequate yearly progress model, even though the data do not, and cannot, support the claims being made even now. This is something of a concern, and reflects yet another disturbing practice which flows directly from the transplant or implant of foreign educational concepts into Qatar.

In the United States, the adequate yearly progress requirement provides for a measure of learner achievement on a year-to-year basis, demonstrated by learners' performance on mandated testing programmes. According to the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the states must develop target starting goals for and each state must raise the bar in gradual increments so 100 per cent of learners in the state are proficient on state assessments by the 2013 - 14 school year. Adequate yearly progress applies to each district and school in all states; however, under the *No Child Left Behind Act* sanctions on schools failing to achieve adequate yearly progress for two or more years in a row, only apply to districts and schools receive Title I funding.

Interestingly, according to the United States' National Education Association (NEA) (2006):

Accountability in education is important, and the NEA and its affiliates are working with parents and policy makers at all levels to make sure that state assessments provide regular, reliable feedback on how students, teachers, and schools are faring under the new Act.

However

The adequate yearly progress (AYP) provisions are among the more complex new requirements and have led to absurd results in some cases.

Moreover, the law's system of test results and ratings designed to measure progress and determine AYP is producing a picture that is complex, muddled, and often outright misleading.

Clearly a negative consequence of any evaluation largely or entirely for the purposes of accountability and which uses or mis-uses learners' achievement data, may be to penalise or reward based solely on the evidence from the assessment/s, but care has to be taken that such actions do not punish or reward entities that had little or no contribution to success or failure because such actions are not equitable. In other words, while it may be a contributor to accountability, assessment of and by itself is by no means a substitute, nor so far-reaching as to provide the sole basis on which evaluative judgements are made. Moreover, using learner achievement data exclusively or largely for accountability purposes carries with it a far larger set of reservations and concerns, not the least of which is perverting the purpose for which the data were originally gathered.

Accountability may not always be appropriate, in any meaningful way, in regard to schools and education more generally. It is largely self-evident that one is dealing with phenomena - developing learners' minds and bodies - over which no group or individual has complete control - including the learners' minds themselves. While everyone involved in the process is clearly responsible for doing the best job that they can, no one can properly be held fully accountable.

The views of the (USA) National Education Association (2006) about accountability systems are worth considering here:

As the emphasis on accountability - including holding schools and teachers accountable for student performance - grows, there are increasing calls to examine states' entire accountability systems, including standards, tests, alignment, professional development, rewards, sanctions, teacher quality, curriculum, resources, and the system's positive and negative effects on schools and students.

Accountability systems work best when all their components function together in a coherent way to improve students' learning. Unfortunately, many systems are anything but coherent. Instead, they often are a conglomerate of different policies, programmes, and regulations - which can and do work at cross-purposes.

Good systems of accountability, instead of relying solely or very greatly on standardised tests such as those seen in the approaches advocated most strongly by the RAND Corporation can be expanded to focus primarily on evidence about learning collected in the classroom

over time. Qatar still needs to consider the extent to which it can devise and use more comprehensive approaches to assessment which improve understandings and demonstrate accountability rather than relying exclusively on results from the Qatar Comprehensive Educational Assessment (QCEA) programme which are currently unsuited to formative and/or diagnostic purposes. Qatar is also now in the position of being able to reflect on whether the prevailing *assessment equals accountability* model proposed and introduced by the RAND Corporation remains apposite, or whether there are more constructive, useful and helpful approaches to each component of the equation, approaches which are fairer, more meaningful and appropriate.

So too, the RAND Corporation's essentially bureaucratic, and by and large externalised approach reliant as it is on the QCEA, fails to address or support the legitimate role of teachers, principals and others, and how their personal and professional accountability is integral to, and an inherent part of, good teaching and learning outcomes. Research clearly demonstrates that effective teachers are instrumental in helping learners meet the challenging standards they now face in classrooms and schools. Thus, it is imperative that importance of personal and professional accountability is not ignored with consequential failure to deal with some substantial issues affecting teaching and learning. For this reason too, we need to contemplate and ensure that accountability as inclusive of learners, teachers, families and the community, and not something which is merely *done* to learners, teachers and schools.

Unlike bureaucratic accountability, where the over-arching goal is uniformity and standardisation as manifested in *No Child Left Behind* and the RAND Corporation's approach in Qatar, professional accountability demands that teachers make their own decisions about how to meet the educational needs of individual learners. Such an approach seeks to ensure that teachers will be highly knowledgeable, competent, and committed to good teaching. Consequently, any accountability system should pay particular attention, not only to learner progress and achievement no matter how this is measured, but also to policies governing the preparation, selection, and evaluation of teachers and other staff.

The goal of improving learning through the improvement of teaching is at the heart of a professional model of accountability. Given the skill demands placed on teachers in today's classrooms, teaching must be undertaken as a professional activity. For example, teachers customise their teaching and learning to help meet individual learner's needs, they need to use data effectively for diagnosing learning needs, work collaboratively with other teachers, identify and share best practices, and hold one another accountable for their professional standards.

Becoming an autonomous and independent professional is dependant upon what teachers know and what they realise they do not know and externalised accountability systems based on unproven assumptions will not bring about this end in any real way.

Conclusions

From Canada and the United States to England and Australia, and in other places too, though not as markedly, a debate continues to rage over issues such as school choice, governance and indeed ownership – similar arguments are fiercely debated elsewhere, but probably nowhere near to the same extent as in this group of largely Anglophone countries. In the United States for example, the 1980s marked a period of savage criticism for public schools, which were accused of failing to meet the nation's educational needs (Chubb and Moe, 1990). To date the arguments involved remain very much apparent, even today. But

despite the obvious and very considerable investment in charter schools, argument about the educational *crisis* in the USA – whatever that means – remains unabated and unresolved.

The central issue is whether educational systems designed around free-market principles and directed by the decisions of particular interest groups for example, will be superior to the essentially government-run school systems most nations have today. Amidst the variety of arguments that have been made on both sides of the issue, a general pattern has emerged. Supporters of market education usually assert that their proposals will increase responsiveness to learners, families and other stakeholders and raise academic achievement; while critics argue that market systems cannot produce the social benefits many societies have come to expect from public schooling.

What is readily apparent is that the reform approaches typically advocated by neo-liberals where the pursuit of narrow economic goals leads to a *one-size-fits-all* strategy of standards-based reform carried out by teachers and administrators whose salaries and jobs depend on their learners showing test score gains is not one well suited to societies where there are deep seated social, religious and other reasons which exist in diametric opposition.

The role of citizen has narrowed to that of consumer. With vouchers and charter schools pitched as reforms, parents and learners can choose a school with as little effective commitment as if they were buying another product at the supermarket.

So what's been happening in Qatar post-RAND?

Well for a start, the RAND Corporation hasn't exactly left Qatar; it remains in the form of the RAND Policy Institute, although for the present at least, its direct influence on education, particularly the school reform programme may be very greatly diminished. The RAND Corporation seems like the Hydra though: a many headed monster of which one head could never be harmed by any weapon, and if any of the other heads were severed another, or sometimes two, would grow in its place. The stench from the Hydra's breath or its deadly venom was also enough to kill man or beast!

What has become more readily apparent in Qatar however, is the wider acceptance that it is crucial for policy decisions to be based on sound evidence and not just on someone, or some corporation's, opinion or perspective.

Quality policy-making depends on quality information, derived from a variety of sources - expert knowledge; existing local, national and international research; existing statistics; stakeholder consultation; evaluation of previous policies; new research, if appropriate; or secondary sources, including the internet. To be as effective as possible, this evidence needs to be provided by, and/or be interpreted by, experts in the field working closely with policy makers.

Qatar has latterly and ultimately proven to be rather adept at seeking out individuals and organisations who are better able to assist in enabling the reforms to continue, albeit in a different shape than originally conceived. Thus far, it has engaged advisers and organisations from a number of different locations: Australia, New Zealand, Germany and the USA to name several.

In terms of earlier analogies the people and agencies Qatar has now engaged to help lead and shape the reform, may be seen as the immuno-suppressive medication that ensures the

transplant or implant remains attached, or perhaps even as those new interventions so desperately needed to ensure the patient survives previous mis-diagnosis. Bearing in mind, that accurate diagnosis depends on the accurate interpretation of presented symptoms, and test results rather than on supposition and opinion. Mis-diagnosis is a serious risk every time there is subjective application no matter how intelligent, caring or professional this might be. Mis-diagnosis can and does happen in an array of circumstances and while there is no exclusive list of conditions to define when this may occur, a marked pre-disposition to certain outcomes is clearly capable of causing it to happen, as is the incapacity to accept evidence or material facts from other sources.

In more recent times, Qatar has found that it is helpful to use international comparisons as part of the wider evidence base which should influence and help re-direct important aspects of *Education for a New Era*. It is now recognised that this broader approach can contribute very positively to the policy-making process which in turn shapes programme and operational outcomes, in particular helping to guide decision-makers towards new solutions for challenges and problems, and new mechanisms for implementing policy and improving educational delivery. Seeking advice and direction of this type can also provide useful evidence of what works in practice and what does not work. It is of course important to take account of social, economic and institutional differences which may require adjustment to policy solutions that work elsewhere to meet local and national circumstances.

When looking at international comparators, it is important to do so as objectively as possible, or at least greatly reduce the extent to which subjective opinion intrudes. Officially published material tells the story which the promoters of a policy or project wish to tell publicly. In short then, the caution here is: beware of the panegyric or congratulatory, which is neither rooted in evidence, nor sustained by critical observation and nor by the evidence.

This means it is important to explore: to find out what criticisms are made as well as ways in which arrangements are successful; to find out the views of service users as well as providers; to find out the extent to which a policy has actually achieved its intended outcome and whether there have been any unintended or unforeseen drawbacks or benefits; and to explore potentially crucial differences in context which might mean that a policy which was successful elsewhere would not work in Qatar, or indeed elsewhere. Face-to-face contact will sometimes reveal more than looking at a web-site alone, but given the costs associated with study visits, it is essential to do adequate research in advance to be sure that a comparator is really relevant.

Put rather simply: should Qatar continue to follow a pathway, albeit a largely imported and otherwise alien one, which sees it increasingly privatise or corporatise schools, and impose compliance and accountability regimes more akin to those from the United States, or might it benefit from appraising approaches seen in other countries e.g. Wales, Sweden, or Finland, from which other illustrative and useful lessons might emerge?

The potential for Qatar's current approach to create educational disparity is almost self-evident, and equally concerning, with independent and other private fee-paying schools able to *cream* or *skim* learners from Ministry of Education schools due to both real and perceived advantages, particularly in such things as class size and teacher quality, both of which are likely to favour non-Ministry of Education schools. A consequence of this will be that existing inequalities especially in learner outcomes actually become larger over time.

If on the other hand, Qatar had adopted the sort of approach seen in New Zealand which has not actually privatised its schools per se, rather provided them with a very large measure of independence within the broad state system, via boards of trustees, then Qatar might be able to move more quickly towards quite a different outcome. It is worth noting however that New Zealand's schools are not really comparable with charter schools in the United States despite occasional claims that there are similarities and parallels.

Perhaps as Khalaf argues:

Written into every line is the unwavering conviction that reform efforts, which genuinely serve the region's interests must be initiated and launched from within.

There is scant support here for implanted and transplanted approaches which are merely imposed from without.

It seems therefore, that Qatar needs to be justifiably wary about following the more recently well-trodden paths that have emerged in some countries with which it shares few commonalities or even similarities, as this may lead, irrevocably to less than satisfactory social, cultural and other outcomes, and eventually to Qatar's detriment. One of the most compelling contradictions of current free-market reform is that it works to weaken all of the traditional social institutions on which it has depended in the past. Qatar need be wary too, lest it fall into the mire suggested by Blackmore (2000) who states:

Education has, in most instances, been re-shaped to become the arm of national economic policy, defined both as the problem (in failing to provide a multi-skilled flexible work-force) and the solution (by up-grading skills and creating a source of national export earnings (p. 134).

So too, Connors (2004) writing about Australia states:

Australians have traditionally seen the role of governments in education as including the responsibility to protect the quality and standards of education being offered, both in the interests of the direct participants as well as of the wider community. We have also expected our governments to act in ways that spread the costs and benefits of education fairly across the population, based on the assumption that education is a public good as well as a private benefit, and that our system of education should contribute to greater social equality, cohesion and advancement, as well as to the research and the formation of a highly educated and skilled workforce that favours economic advancement.

In recent years, however, schools policies designed to protect the educational interests of the least educationally advantaged and the most vulnerable to failure are being counter-acted by the effects of policies designed to entrench the privileges and to broaden the educational options of those already best placed, by market forces, to complete successfully a full secondary education and to proceed to further study and employment

As yet, there is nothing to suggest that there is detailed or compelling evidence to sustain a conclusion that partial or full privatisation or corporatisation was the optimum or best long-term solution for Qatar. It might also be argued that the information made available to the

Qatar Government was tailored to partisan neo-liberal ends: in other words, selective gathering of material which supported a pre-determined plan to implement charter style approaches.

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