

Utbildningsförvaltningen
Artikel till Lära, intervju med Andy Hargreaves
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Andy Hargreaves was one of the most noted – and appreciated – speakers at the large, international school conference held in May, in Stockholm.

– Teachers forced to work together through rules and regulations will tend to cooperate less. Politicians and headmasters should refrain from micro-management. Instead, the idea is to create a working environment where working together has a purpose – where working together is profitable. So says Andy Hargreaves from the UK, one of the speakers at the international school conference, The Stockholm Summit, which, for three days in the month of May, attracted delegates from around 20 different countries to Stockholm. Andy Hargreaves is currently a professor at Boston College, in the US, and has written and contributed to 27 books on education. He has conducted research on, among other subjects, how teaching is affected by teachers working together, changes to the education system and the surrounding culture. LÄRA Stockholm met him for an interview.

How do you believe school reforms affect teachers and education results?

– Of course there is an effect, but family structures and changes in the community's technology also have a significant impact. In many developed nations, the government wants to stimulate the country's development as a nation of knowledge through school reforms, but, in general, these reforms have actually had the opposite effect.

What will characterise teaching in the future?

– Unfortunately, I can see a clear trend toward increased competition among schools, more exams and greater homogenisation of school curricula. The results would be decreased cooperation, less knowledge and a restraining of creative environments. Over the long term, this kind of development is extremely negative – among other things, it will become harder for schools to recruit teachers. No one wants to be micro-managed in their work.

Why do politicians interfere so much at the state level in the development of schools?

– In the wealthy parts of the world, globalisation has contributed to national governments having less and less economic control. Keeping pace with this development, national school issues, among others, have become more important as a political platform to show the electorate politicians have the power to act.

Do you have any advice for the educational policy decision makers?

– Yes. They need to make the purpose of education clear and, at the same time, invest in resources that allow for change. Sustainability is also

important, finding methods that allow the work to proceed in the chosen manner – regardless of whom the leader is or which party won the latest election. Breadth in leadership is central. With many leaders, the possibilities of a positive continuation to the work increase and more individuals are able to focus on the purpose of education.

– We should also risk giving teachers and headmasters enough elbow room to create an environment where diversity and creativity flourish. The same thing holds for diversity in an organisation as it does for biological diversity: good, robust environments display wide diversity! It is important that changes are driven at a pace that allows the energy to be sustained over the long term, instead of suddenly running out. Rest periods are needed in all change processes.

Do you see any important trends in schools in your home nation?

– In the UK, more and more schools are hiring extra staff to assist teachers. They can be for supervision, preparing curricular material before lessons and supporting weaker students, for example. Many schools actually have more support staff than teachers. This is one way for the community to recognise that the teacher's role is important – after all, you don't need a teaching qualification to make photocopies.

– Certain schools do more to ensure that good students help the weaker ones. In a project that is currently ongoing, weaker students can ask for help from good students at other schools. Those who volunteer to help others are awarded mentor status and extra credits at their own school.

Do you have any advice for teachers?

– Every teacher needs to think about their responsibilities, not just for the students in their classes, but for students in other classes and subjects, as well as students at other schools.

Which structural community changes should the next decade be prepared for?

– The increase in the numbers of foreign students is an important change. Another one is that students will be more and more digital; their learning will be faster, more condensed and include several subjects at the same time – but it will not necessarily be better. A third, and very important, change will come when many of them who are under 30 search for teaching jobs. Structural changes become easier to effect when this generation has taken over. They will be used to working together in temporary groups and will have grown up with fast changes.

How do you see the future of schools?

– One scenario is that politicians will try to gain more control through increased standardisation and more national exams. This would lead to a decrease in quality and less enjoyment in state schools, as well as an increase in the number of private schools. A better scenario is one that parallels what has happened in Finland: a large community investment in education that leads to schools gaining better status, with more flexibility, diversity, freedom of choice and creative educational environments.

– The third, and most likely, scenario is a development toward more individually adapted education. The advantage of this is that education becomes a life-long process for more people, and that students are allowed to make more decisions that are directly linked to their own lives. This means that people will be able to study with plenty or little teacher support, quickly or slowly, online or offline, in the school or at home. A big disadvantage is that it restricts creativity.

What are the biggest challenges facing Swedish headmasters in the next decade?

– Different valuations will be much more common and cultural diversity in the classroom will increase. How will Swedish headmasters handle diversity that presents a threat to what is currently seen as fundamental valuation, for example? The solution can be found with the coming generation of teachers – they will provide schools with incredible possibilities because of their attitude that is open to change and their abundant energy.

You have been to Sweden ten times on business, what image have you built up of the Swedish school system?

– You Swedes are good at adult education and offering your citizens continual education over their entire lives. In Sweden, tradition, pedagogy and what you teach often go hand in hand. Then, you have a system with study circles, which is not at all common in other countries. And, last but not least: in Sweden, there is the insight that education is good for the whole community, not just the individual, concludes Andy Hargreaves.

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Further reading: "Hållbart ledarskap i skolan" ("Sustainable Leadership in Schools") by Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink (2008), as well as "Läraren i kunskapssamhället" ("Teaching in the Knowledge Society") by Andy Hargreaves (2004), both by Studentlitteratur.