

Stockholm Summit 2010

From the 17th – 19th May 2010, 190 participants from around the world came together for the 2nd Stockholm Summit with just over 30 international speakers included in the programme as keynote or seminar speakers.

May 17

The Opening

Education director, Thomas Persson from Stockholm City opened the event by welcoming the delegates to the second Stockholm Summit. After his introduction, Per Tullberg, director general of the Swedish School Board described how the Swedish school system had been centralized.

Following a period where we believed that the local level, where the best decisions were made and decentralization provided better teachers and better results, Sweden is now taking steps towards a state organized control and inspection of schools and educational system. Criticism of the schools' results and pressure from politicians has led to a constant tug of war between the two systems, summarized Per Tullberg.

Claes Johansson, Gapminder

Earmarked as the first keynote speaker, Hans Rosling was prevented from making it to the Stockholm Summit as a result of the ash cloud which has severely disrupted air traffic, thus leading to Gapminder sending his colleague Claes Johansson as their representative.

Gapminder's website is a visual depiction of how prosperity evolves in the world. With data highlighting information such as the life expectancy and number of births per woman, Claes Johansson was able to show what the world looked like in 1950, split into developed and developing nations. Today the image, shows an even spread of countries across all levels of prosperity - making the mass media's use of the term 'developing nation' irrelevant today.

South and East Asia are responsible for the biggest push towards greater prosperity, but are also responsible for a large share of today's carbon dioxide emissions across countries such as China and India. However, it is in the west, where global warming has been built over a period of years.

A South African delegate quizzed Gapminder on their information and wondered how they authenticated the data the site is based on, bearing in mind that in some countries, there are strong incentives to falsify information and records on living standards submitted to the UN. Claes Johansson pointed out that the UN was aware of the problem, with those within Gapminder keen to highlight development trends.

- Gapminder exists to create better understanding - a requirement so that the youth and students are aware of their responsibility, Claes Johansson stressed.

Claes Johansson also reminded attendees of Gapminder's tools and custom materials aimed at educators and useful in teaching at secondary level.

A new feature on the site is Dollar Street. Streets are lined with information on how to live in those parts of the world where one has no more than a couple of dollars to live on. It also shows how the standard of living changes when one has more finances to live on.

Andreas Schleicher, OECD

After lunch, Andreas Schleicher from OECD presented figures outlining countries that had increased public spending on education because it had proved profitable to their country. It's a move that appears to work best for countries who strive to reduce the impact of social influence and not a tiered school system that is notoriously difficult for students to break out from.

The need for manual labour has also significantly diminished. Essentially if there is a job that can be described, it can also be carried out without through automated means.

- Education today must prepare us for jobs that presently do not exist and for as yet diagnosed problems we may encounter, said Andreas Schleicher.

Andreas Schleicher also showed the correlation between how well one performed as a 15-year-old and the likelihood one would go on to study at university. His conclusion was that it was incredibly difficult to reverse the trend of students who had reached the 15-year-old mark.

Money matters – there is a correlation between how much a country spends on education and schools results in science. How then is one supposed to spend? OECD countries do things differently. Some invest in higher salaries for teachers, an increase in teacher working hours or simply to give the teachers more time to plan and cooperate but ‘pay’ for these by having larger class sizes. Others on the other hand invest in keeping class sizes small, but cut down on the other factors.

A delegate wondered why OECD invested a lot of time in high performance results. Should we constantly chase economic growth? Is it not time to embark on a new path? Andreas Schleicher agreed that we needed to find new ways instead of constantly increasing productivity.

- In order for this to work, there is a need for better competence. There is no longer any room in society for people without education. Those who fail in school pay a high price. The example shown by Finland proves everyone can succeed.

Speed networking

The day's schedule concluded with speed networking - an opportunity to expand and join new networks. A chance seized upon by among many others, Priyadarshini Kelkar from India.

- Speed networking is very useful for me. In a short time it presents me with an opportunity to make contact with a lot of people and allows me to develop relationships with among many things, Swedish schools. The purpose of my network is to alert young people to the threat posed by terrorism, to promote understanding and tolerance – to achieve world peace.

Roger Saulsman from Australia opted to listen to Professor Ben Levin from Canada.

- His idea about people tasked with communicating research results to schools is interesting. There aren't enough scientists around to do this themselves. I received tips on how to track down more of Ben Levin's work, which I would like to immerse myself in.

Reception at City Hall

In the evening, delegates were invited to a reception at the Prince's gallery in City Hall.

May 18

Pasi Sahlberg, Professor at the University of Helsinki

Pasi Sahlberg believes that the reforms being implemented in several countries within the education sector all have a similar focus – core subjects, standardization, testing, measurement and control. Pasi Sahlberg sees good things in this, but believes they can be achieved in other ways. One can broaden teaching content to include the arts and social studies, investing in creativity, learning from what has previously been done before as well as to have confidence in what we can accomplish in our schools.

The perception of what qualifies as quality is based on academic scores - mathematics, science and languages are highly valued. The school focuses on a conflicting way of interaction between students, instead of developing collaborative efforts.

Less is more was the phrase Pasi Sahlberg used to describe the Finnish school. Finnish students spend a lot less time in school than their foreign counterparts. For example, a 15-year old Italian is likely to have spent 2-3 years more time in school than a 15-year old Finnish student. Even when the volume of work of homework is taken into account, Finland still places fairly lowly. Finland also tests their skills over shorter periods – but the students learn more.

Even the amount of teaching hours per Finnish teacher is low. American teachers spend almost double the amount of time as their Finnish counterparts. While American teachers teach, the Finnish teachers work closely together with planning, supporting those students who require more help etc.

- It is very hard to get teachers to choose and remain in the teaching profession if their working environments are not good, said Pasi Sahlberg.

Finnish high school students dream profession is to become a teacher – not a doctor or lawyer. It has with it, a clear image of what type of person becomes a teacher. Teachers are considered nice, smart and believed to be capable of raising children. These values are ‘difficult to import’ to other countries

In Finland, the best in class often chooses to undergo teacher training, but only one of ten candidates is accepted. In other countries, it is normally the second or third choice option to begin a career as a teacher. How does one get the best students to consider a career as a teacher? That is the crucial question that needs to be answered, according to Pasi Sahlberg.

Pasi Sahlberg’s success recipe for the schools as a whole is to personalize teaching, reduce classroom instruction, teach cooperation and collaboration, value commitment and risk taking – not just knowledge within core subjects. To find every individual student’s talent and strength is an important task for schools.

Parallel seminars

During the rest of Tuesday morning, delegates were able to choose between six seminars running concurrently. Some chose to listen to Dr. Karanam Pushpanadham describe India’s schools leadership, its realities and challenges.

Karanam Pushpanadham described India’ school system that finds itself at a crossroads with influences of philosophical and religious teachings - mainly from Buddha and Gandhi. He spoke of the social structure in India, which is a country split by the gulf between the different

social classes, sexes and a high proportion of illiterates. There is considerable variation with regards to religions, languages and cultures. But it is also a country with compulsory schooling and one of the world's largest democracies.

- Our school needs are the same as in other countries, we face the same challenges in the form of globalisation and rapid change. We can learn from each other, concluded Karanam Pushpanadham.

Ben Levin, professor at the University of Toronto

Ben Levin from Canada held a seminar on working with research based results on learning. He asked the workshop attendees to consider the following: teachers faced with deciding the best way to teach, how the students are taught needs to be adapted to the specific school, if research really is "too theoretical"...

Research has generally strengthened its position in society, he stated.

- We are interested in research results which tell us what foods are best for us, what will happen to the environment etc. In the past, research was viewed as an effective sleeping pill that bored people to death.

In the 1960s, there existed research findings which showed the negative effects of smoking, but it wasn't until the early 1980s that those results were taken seriously. Evidence that smoking led to ill health had not been stronger, but there existed forces that worked hard to change the law.

- It requires people to feel that roll since the gap between research evidence and action taken is too long, Ben Levein added.

All teachers do not need to teach in the same way, but they can be guided by irrefutable evidence. Freedom is not the same as the absence of structure. Knowledge gives greater freedom, even as a teacher. Although surgeons have checklists designed to maintain structure, their work still demands some creative input since every patient is different.

Minister for Education Jan Björklund

Sweden's Minister for Education, Jan Bjorklund, giving a brief speech said that a high quality of teachers and school administrators ensured a school maintained at a high standard. However, actions and reforms in education will only give results in the long term, a generation ahead.

He also pointed out that education focused talks within the EU had become possible as opposed to in recent years when education had been viewed as a purely regional issue – largely in part to increasing competition from Asia.

Ann-Marie Begler, Swedish Schools Inspectorate

Ann-Marie Begler represents the Swedish Schools Inspectorate which believes the key variables of effective schools include expectations of students, controlling and evaluating results, having leaders who are involved in teaching, high level of competence amongst teachers and a high level of safety and security in schools.

Parallel seminars

One of the afternoon's seven parallel seminars was held by Professor David Hopkins from the University of London, who spoke about the potential of system leadership (leadership

system). System leaders are individuals who can shoulder the system-wide roles and are almost always keen to develop and improve other schools as much as their own. These are necessary catalysts for sustainable system reforms in education, David Hopkins stressed.

Dinner at Stockholm's archipelago

The evening brought with it retreating sunshine and enveloping heat, which was ideal with dinner awaiting us on board the sea vessel Gustavsberg VII, which took all the delegates to Vaxholm – a small town in Stockholm's beautiful archipelago.

May 19

Yong Zhao, Professor at the University of Michigan

The theme for Yong Zhao's lecture was the challenges and opportunities of digitalization and globalization.

- The time needed to send and receive information has shortened dramatically. Digitalization has made the world a village. The only thing that has so far been able to limit and threaten globalization is an ash cloud!, said Yong Zhao.

He spoke of how distance mattered very little nowadays and that the challenge facing schools and education was the ability of people in different parts of the world to offer higher quality at a much lower price than we can.

What should we teach? Yong Zhao saw the dangers of educational reforms based on centralization, standardization and testing. The results of PISA and TIMSS studies (which measures skills set in mathematics, science and reading comprehension) are taken very seriously since "our children must be better than others." Yong Zhao's solution instead comprised diversity within education across multiple disciplines.

- Imagine if there was only one discipline to train for in the Olympics...We need to complement each other's knowledge, not train on the same things in different countries. Globalization makes it possible to individualize the market because what we have to offer is expanding.

Yong Zhao urged schools across the globe to play to their strengths.

- Think about why you are valuable to other parts of the world instead of trying to fix the situation.

So far we've been able to show an appreciation and valued the skills related to the left side of the brain. However, this has diminished in value, due to Asia doing things better and cheaper as well as the fact that this knowledge can be automated and isn't demanding enough anymore.

Everyone wants the school to give a broad knowledge base, but we only test knowledge in language, mathematics and science, said Yong Zhao.

- Key intelligence for the conceptual age is the ability to create designs, stories, music, meaning, play and have the capacity for empathy. The right half of the brain controls the artistic traits such as ideas, storytelling, fiction writing – soft human skills that school devalues. Painting and drawing is something we do in Kindergarten.

- All children are different and don't grow as quickly. If someone deviates in developments, we believe something is wrong and contact a psychologist. Personalize education instead of standardizing it! It should also be locally based, but have a global perspective, stressed Yong Zhao.

Andy Hargreaves, Professor from Boston College

Speaking of efforts to be better and preferably best, Professor Andy Hargreaves said it was important for people to have their own goals, their own dreams and visions.

- You do not become number 1 by simply wanting to be number 1. "You need to find your *own* dream, not just rent it from someone else."

The core of Andy Hargreaves lecture was to show what makes different types of organizations so successful that they surpass all expectations. He had looked closely at 18 organizations within the business, sports and education sectors and concluded that success factors related to leadership remained the same regardless of the operation.

Australia's national cricket team, Cricket Australia has a leadership that dares to keep the players and team captain together, even when the going gets tough – a long term and sustainable leadership which has proven to be a success. Working to spread interest in cricket globally as well as collaborating with their rivals outside the field of play have been other success factors, added Andy Hargreaves.

Another example highlighted was the Grange School in Britain, which despite being based in an area renowned for its social problems, was able to turn around a negative development in its students thanks to the school management's ability to handle fears and failures.

- The important thing is how you deal with fear and failure. That's what defines leadership, added Andy Hargreaves.

What management did was to adapt teaching for the students. The school has since achieved great results and won national competitions through the creation of a Visual Arts college which the students have an aptitude for.

The company Shoebuy.com is yet another successful example. Shoebuy.com chooses to grow slowly so as to maintain control of the business. They actively encourage employee creativity and are constantly testing new ideas actively. Failure is acceptable as it stimulates creativity and innovation. Andy Hargreaves goes so far as to argue that a leader should be able to say, "I want to see more of your projects fail," because a culture of fear does not permit risk taking and creativity. This is what characterizes the best companies, the best sport performances and the best schools.

Reflections over lunch

During lunch, Dr. Brian Annan from the University of Auckland, New Zealand who had also partaken in a parallel seminar pointed out that the quality on display at the Stockholm Summit was of the highest quality. He also believed that the number of delegates was a manageable amount as opposed to other conferences he had participated in. Having attended the inaugural Stockholm Summit in 2008, he was able to see the differences and evolution between both events.

- In 2008, leadership was the primary focus of the event. This year, the focus has been on individualized training and evaluations. To be or not to be.

Conclusion

At lunch, the program was concluded in the auditorium to make room for the delegates' networking activities and school visits. Director of Education, Thomas Persson from Education management from the City of Stockholm thanked the speakers and delegates for their participation. He hoped that they all had productive days in Stockholm and looked forward to seeing them again for the third instalment of The Stockholm Summit.