

## For Worlds of Education and the ISTP – David Edwards

Sometimes it appears that hope is draining from the world and that, for both young and old, pessimism is becoming the default position. The trouble with pessimism is that it is negative. It annuls the ability to act; to create something better which benefits future generations. I believe that education is the antithesis of pessimism. Education is optimistic. It is absolutely at the core of creativity; only through education can action be taken which will make the world a better place.

In the middle of March, I led an Education International delegation to the ninth International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTPs). The default position of the ISTPs is one of optimism. For the last nine years the ISTPs have represented something, which before their creation, would have seemed highly unlikely: teacher union leaders and Ministers meeting together to create policy which will enhance teachers' professional self-confidence.

In a sense, Finland was the best country to hold the ninth Summit. In a world where negative populism is on the rise, it is the perfect place to carry the burden of global attention-to be the symbol of educational optimism.

Finland's Director General of Education, Olli-Pekka Heinonen set the scene. Education in Finland is one of the cornerstones of society. It is developed in partnership with parents and teachers with their Union, the OAJ. It is based on the principle of excellence through equity for all. There are no dead ends in the Finnish Education. Trust informs its education system. Its aims are to achieve meaningful lives and the competences to get there. To achieve this Finland has a holistic, comprehensive public education system.

At the Summit we heard some powerful contributions on how to achieve collaborative leadership throughout education systems and quality early years education for all. For example, Scottish Minister John Swinney and EIS leader Larry Flanagan said that the key essentials were investing in school leaders and developing teacher agency.

The Spanish delegation pointed out that there were contradictory trends; the first was pressure for more regulation and the second a flourishing culture of innovation. This needed to be resolved. In education the aim was to achieve

collaborative leadership by working with teacher unions to support schools as learning organisations.

The Swedish Minister highlighted collaboration with teacher unions on its National Professional Development Programme and on achieving teacher leadership in the classroom. Lararförbundet President, Johanna Jaara Astrand also highlighted increasing inequity as one of the biggest problems to tackle. Lack of resources could also make it hard to be a leader in the classroom.

And for the first time at the Summits an important conversation was begun on early childhood education. Around the table we heard about the wide variation in ECEC teachers' salaries and conditions, resources and qualifications. OAJ President Olli Luukkainen, in arguing for highly qualified ECE educators, asked why since Finnish primary and secondary teachers had Masters degrees shouldn't early years teachers have the same entitlement? We heard from colleagues in Denmark, including a strong intervention from BUPL's Lasse Bjerg Joergensen who said that breakthroughs can happen when you use dialogue to develop a strategy that can become a shared commitment. He also highlighted the importance of qualified staff and proper working conditions for ECE staff.

My takeaway was that we must avoid pedagogical segregation that is occurring in too many jurisdictions. Qualifications and continuous learning are the key to this. More screens in the hands of toddlers are not. This is a vital discussion which is being further addressed at the International Conference on the Nordic Approach to Pedagogy hosted by Norway's Education International affiliate, UEN, at the end of March.

In the last session, we heard about the wicked issues facing unions and Ministers alike. They led to broadly five clusters of commitments from country delegations. A number of countries focussed on improving initial education, professional development and teacher mentoring. Another cluster focussed on curriculum reform with one country pledging to include sustainable development in the curriculum. There was a large group of commitments on ECE reform. Another set of commitments concentrated on helping schools respond to digitalisation. Teachers' working conditions, status, school leadership, supply and how to ensure the profession was attractive made up one of the largest clusters.

The ISTP in Finland pointed to the fact that education was still going forward and that it has an optimistic future. Ministers and unions can work on the basis

of an equal partnership in solving wicked issues. This optimism mirrors the actions of young people against climate change.

Recently we learned that Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish climate change activist, has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. She is one of 1.4 million school students who have already taken part in action against climate change and its deniers. I was proud to signal to marching students in Brussels, EI's support with a banner outside our headquarters saying, 'teachers across the world are with you and proud of you'.

As Angel Gurría, the OECD's Secretary General said at the ISTP, collectively we as educators hold the future of humanity in our hands. This is why it matters that we build trust, commitment and a culture of collaboration for our profession, our students, our societies and our planet.

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