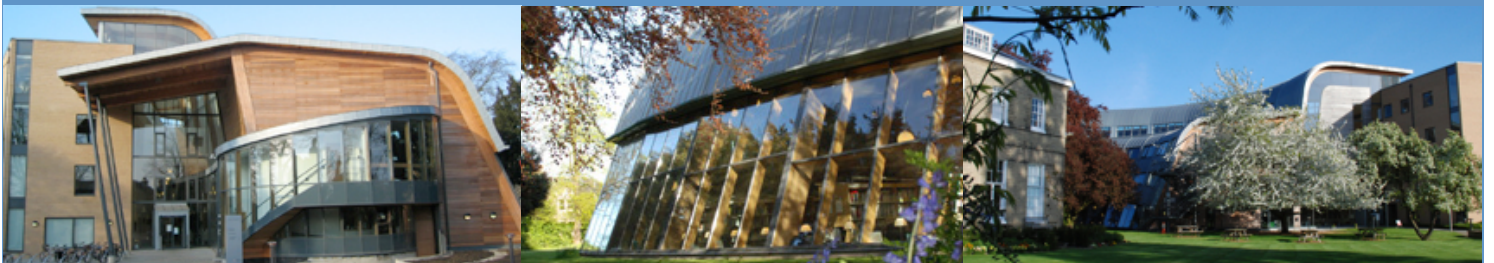


A Game Changing Summit

The International Summit on the
Teaching Profession

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InForm is a series of papers whose purpose is to capture significant ideas and events that enhance our understanding of leadership, learning and their inter-relationship. These offer reflections on recent seminars, policy papers and emerging issues nationally and internationally. They attempt to capture the implication for policy and practice in leading the learning of students, teachers and of those who exercise a leadership role in classrooms, schools and communities.

This issue reports on a recent high profile event in New York City in March, attended by a galaxy of international speakers together with teacher unions from around the world. The Teacher's Summit, organised by Education International (EI), was an arena for discussion and debate, contesting policy direction but, most importantly, reaffirming the pivotal role played by the teaching profession in improving schools. John Bangs, a key player in EI who attended the session, offers his own personal reflections on the achievements and implications of the event.



'A lot of rhetoric these days includes mention of the supposedly negative impact of teacher unions on reform.'

Professor Ben Levin

A remarkable and unique event has just taken place. Ministers and teacher union leaders from sixteen countries sat down together in New York on the 16-17 March to discuss the global future of the teaching profession. Entitled 'The International Summit of the Teaching Profession', it was the product of three organisations; the US Education Department, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and Education International (EI). Some may be more familiar with the first two bodies but perhaps less so with the third. Yet EI's agreement to act as co-signatory to the invitation letter and its equal role in organizing the Summit was highly significant; it was the first time that the global federation for teacher unions had linked up with governments to jointly organise a conference on the future of the teaching profession.

Why did it take place? After all, as Professor Ben Levin has noted 'a lot of rhetoric these days includes mention of the supposedly negative impact of teacher unions on reform' as a default position for many governments. Along with my colleague Bob Harris, I represented EI in the Summit's preparations and what became clear in those discussions was the mutuality of strategic decisions taken by the US Education Department and the American Unions; The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The first 'mutuality' is that both Unions have consistently argued that they are something much more than defensive organisations solely concerned with annual negotiations on compensation (pay) and working conditions. They represent the professional interests of their members and are centrally concerned with creating the conditions for equity and high achievement for all young people. Both Unions provide effective professional development for their members and were central in instigating the US National Board for Professional Standards. It shouldn't be so surprising therefore that an American Education Secretary dedicated to the same principles should agree to the idea of a US based Summit.

Yet two further circumstances gave this Summit an extra dimension. The first is that the NEA and AFT are



profoundly internationalist in outlook. They are members of EI and play key leadership roles in supporting teachers and development projects across the world. This internationalist perspective for education has not been a noted feature of previous American administrations. However, Education Secretary Arne Duncan is deeply interested in how the US performs in OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment - thus creating a synergy of interest with not only the American Unions but EI - which represents all teacher unions on OECD's Trade Union Advisory Committee.

The second circumstance is more immediate. Tea Party inspired Republican Administrations in an increasing number of States, including Wisconsin, have decided to drive through de-recognition of their public sector unions (the better to implement swingeing cuts) - the biggest of which are the NEA and the AFT. Duncan's decision therefore to co-host a Summit publically with representatives of teacher unions is highly significant. As the Opinion Editorial he co-authored with OECD's Angel Gurría, and as EI's Fred Van Leeuwen made clear: 'Some believe that teachers' unions are stumbling blocks to reform, but the international picture tells a different story. Many of the world's top performing nations have strong teacher unions that work in tandem with local and national authorities to boost student achievement. In the top performing education systems such as Finland, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada, teacher unions engage in reforms as partners in a joint quest to advance and accelerate learning. These high-performing nations illustrate how tough-minded collaboration more often than not leads to educational progress than tough minded confrontation.'²

'Some believe that teachers' unions are stumbling blocks to reform, but the international picture tells a different story.'

Duncan, Gurría and van Leeuwen

This statement represents a conscious choice; that of agreeing to work with teacher unions on education reform, not to seek their elimination. It is also a choice of international significance, as is OECD's agreement to be the Summit's co-organiser. It elevates to global level something that has been very much a European concept up until now – that of social dialogue. The choice was also implicitly one in favour of publically financed education - it was no accident for example that WNET, America's public service broadcaster was a main sponsor.

Alongside the decision by the American administration to take part it is also highly significant that Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Singapore, Slovenia, and the UK agreed to attend. Indeed China's acceptance of the invitation was intriguing since it does not recognise independent unions. Nevertheless it decided to take part in a Summit in which independent Unions played a key role. Perhaps a sign of a new openness was evident when the Chinese Minister announced that his country did not emulate 'tiger mothers' but preferred to concentrate on developing the whole child!

More countries would have attended. New Zealand's Minister withdrew at the last minute because of the Christchurch earthquake. An early decision not to invite Sweden despite EI's advocacy, because it did not conform with the OECD criteria of 'high performing and rapidly improving education systems', was, I believe, later regretted particularly since its approach to teacher involvement and its pay system featured subsequently in the OECD's background paper. Yet Japan's decision to attend was nothing short of heroic given the dire circumstances of its recent tsunami. International organisations such as the International Labour Organisation and the World Bank for their part beat a path to the Summit.

The Summit was not a talking shop - remarkable only for its unique arrangements. It took place under 'Chatham House rules', which allowed for a discussion. The co-hosts contributed to the OECD's background paper, 'Building a High Quality Teaching Profession - Lessons from around the World.'³ It contains some fascinating conclusions, particularly for the UK. It advocates effective teacher



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Building a High Quality Teaching Profession - Lessons from around the World

policy as the way forward for outstanding education systems and recognises that 'school reform will not work unless it is supported from the bottom up'. Not surprisingly it contains frequent references to OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)⁴; a fact which will not have gone unnoticed by the US Government which is still debriefing on whether to sign up to it. References to the importance of professional development and appraisal feature strongly in the paper and are seen as a key to teacher quality. One highly relevant finding for the English system concludes that: 'the frequently cited claim that the best-performing education systems all recruit their teachers from the top third of graduates - however that is defined - is not supported by evidence.'

In one concentrated sentence, which ought to be the cornerstone of any country's teacher policy never mind the UK's, the paper goes on to say that: 'successful reform cannot wait for a new generation of teachers; it requires investment in the present teacher workforce, providing quality professional development, adequate career structures and diversification, and enlisting the commitment of teachers to reform.'

There is much else in the background paper including sections on teacher evaluation and compensation involving an edgily neutral description of individual and group performance related pay systems.

The paper is divided up into four sections which were reflected in the Summit's agenda - 'recruitment and initial preparation of teachers'; 'teacher development, support, careers and employment conditions', 'teacher evaluation and compensation' and 'teacher engagement in reform.' The last section contains something for which John MacBeath, Maurice Galton and I argued for in 'Reinventing Schools'⁵: 'Teachers need to be active agents, not just in the implementation of reforms, but also in their design.'

Indeed 'Reinventing Schools' and Professor Nina Bascia's work, (a recent supper seminar speaker in the Faculty) is cited in support of the background paper's argument that; '...the better a country's education system performs, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners.'³



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Building a High Quality Teaching Profession - Lessons from around the World



'The better a country's education system performs, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners.'

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The Summit itself was an extraordinary affair. Linda Darling Hammond offers a good summary of its flavour⁶. All Government and teacher organisation representatives contributed. The organisers faced tremendous pressure to admit not just Ministers and teacher union leaders but ranks of advisers and, in the case of the US, local and regional officials. The 'participants' sat around a square of tables around which sat many more observers. The debate was introduced by OECD's Andreas Schleicher, who spoke to the background paper. Four rapporteurs - Fernando Reimers, Kai-ming Cheng, Linda Darling Hammond and Ben Levin - offered reflections at the end of each section. The conversations were facilitated by Australia's Tony Mackay. US Secretary Arne Duncan, OECD's Director of Education, Barbara Ischinger and EI's Fred Van Leeuwen welcomed the Summit. In the words of Fred Van Leeuwen: 'We have a common interest in raising the level of debate...there are very real issues in national discussions - especially as the world recovers unevenly from the fallout of the world banking crisis. At a time of cutbacks, it is all the more important to focus on teacher retention and support'⁸.

The debate itself was often preceded by reports from countries designated as discussion starters. The fact that the Finnish Minister highlighted Finnish teachers' knowledge skills and commitment and, as Linda noted, sounded to an American delegate 'like a teacher union President,' was all the more remarkable since she was a Conservative member of her coalition government. Her contribution complemented that of Hong Kong's whose Minister emphasised the organic relationship between teacher evaluation and development. Their contributions led to a consensual discussion marked by only one disagreement - that of gender imbalance in the teaching profession. A sharp debate focused on whether such an imbalance should be seen as a disadvantage or whether the predominance of women teachers should be seen as something to celebrate.

The discussion on the section on 'Development, Support and Retention of Teachers' drew its consensus from the background paper but not before a spiky discussion about test data driven performance tables with the UK teacher unions responding sharply to the England Minister's criticism of 'mushy' information. This section also included reflection on the most effective forms of

professional development - collaborative professional development - and the mismatch between collaborative professional development and individualised high stakes performance measures including individual financial incentives.

The game-changing discussion focused on teacher evaluation and compensation. This was largely to do with the synergy between the US Unions and the presentation by Singapore's Minister and its teacher Union leader. There was little disagreement for the proposition that governments needed to understand what evaluation was for and that clear distinctions had to be made between evaluations of the system, the school, the teacher and the child. The way was clear for a fierce debate on the merits and demerits of performance related pay. The Singapore delegation highlighted a number of features of its teacher policy which went beyond measures which focused on leveraging teacher performance and individual incentives. In Singapore professional development is at the core of its learning service. Expectations of leadership are built into teaching tracks or career routes. Indeed the focus is on clear and exciting career prospects. Its performance system, which Singapore's Minister described as 'enhanced', focused on how teachers could contribute to the learning of their colleagues as well as self improvement. As Darling Hammond noted, performance management in Singapore is not about digitally ranking or calibrating teachers. Emphasis was put on developing the holistic development of the student and on pedagogic initiatives and innovation. On pay/compensation both Minister and Union representative said that pay had to be taken out of the consideration of career choice. In other words, pay should not be an inhibiting factor for a prospective teacher considering joining the teaching profession. Pay was a necessary but not sufficient condition for entering teaching it was argued. The Singapore delegation emphasised that teacher evaluation was a formative process and that teacher development was systemic to teacher policy. Pay/compensation based on teacher achievement and success was a consequence not the determinant of teacher policy.

This description was in synergy with teacher policies in such countries as Finland and Norway as well as in recent policy initiatives from the American Unions. The NEA, for example, had just published a policy document, 'Teacher Assessment



'The game-changing discussion focused on teacher evaluation and compensation.'

and Evaluation' focusing on a similar systemic approach to teacher evaluation and development. The debate on merit pay had not gone away but had been sidelined by a debate on what really mattered in teacher policy. What had also not gone away was something that Brazil reminded delegates of -the right to a common entitlement to learning. Deemed a rapidly improving country, its delegation emphasised that its first task had to be to ensure that all its pupils were actually offered, and received, education in the first place.

The final section on teacher engagement in reform contained few fireworks. Governments and delegates focused on discussing future arrangements for partnership. If there was any edge to this last session it was on delegates wishing to further explore educational issues raised by the Summit. A number of governments asked their teacher representatives to contribute and vice-versa.

Summing up, Arne Duncan committed himself to hosting a future forum for dialogue. Responding to El President Susan Hopgood's proposal for a global forum on teacher policies, Duncan agreed to a further Summit in 2012 and it was reported that the Netherlands Government would consider hosting a similar event in 2013.

The Summit was a first and it worked because there was consensus on the importance of the topic - teacher policy. The McKinsey aphorism that no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers was often referred to. Had the debate been about the structure of the education system and the role of the private sector it would have been a very different conference. There is a lesson there.



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