

ISTP: Building on COVID - inclusion and well-being

The International Summit on the Teaching Profession meets in the second half of this week in Valencia, Spain. The ISTP is a joint event organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Education International (EI), the global confederation of teacher unions. It brings together small delegations at Minister and union General Secretary level to discuss educational issues where unions and governments can co-operate. The three-day summit is tightly moderated, with contributions limited to a couple of minutes to stop the politicians making speeches. The summit also takes place largely in private.

John Bangs, a Special Consultant at Education International, former Assistant Secretary of the NUT and a frequent participant at most of the summits, told *Education Journal*: “This is the first in-person teachers' Summit since 2019. The Spanish Government's dedication and commitment to organising the Summit is both welcome and remarkable particularly since they first agreed to hosting it in March 2019! So much has changed since then. The world faces at least three existential crises; the continuing pandemic itself; a sharpened awareness that climate change is now actually a clear and present danger, and the threat of war and the erosion of democratic values.

“All of these are reflected in the Summit agenda which is probably nowhere better expressed than in the third session where delegates are asked to tackle the not inconsiderable issue of how to define the future role of teachers and school communities in securing a sustainable future!

“That countries now see the Summit as a unique and necessary forum is exemplified by a joint request from the Baltic country delegations, both Unions and Governments, for the Summit to discuss practical strategies on meeting the educational needs of the new influx of refugees from Ukraine.

“The fact that there are fifteen countries attending, including the US and the UK, the Eastern European and Nordic countries, Singapore and Spain, is actually a testament to the fact that governments are at least prepared to act on the principle that there is more that binds Unions and Governments on the importance of education than divides them.

“This is now particularly important because EI's latest evidence is that some governments' understanding and enthusiasm for seeing education as an engine for post pandemic recovery is now stalling-particularly in relation to funding. There couldn't be a more important Summit.”

David Edwards, General Secretary of Education International, said: “The idea of moving forward with hope in this Summit's theme, is accompanied by the understanding that proactive collaboration between governments and teacher unions is fundamental to making sure that no student is left behind.

“This understanding was described by US Secretary for Education Cardona as intentional collaboration when he addressed the 2021 ISTP. I welcome the Spanish Host's agreement to schedule a pre-Summit seminar which will act as a bridge between last year's US hosted Summit and the Summit in May. The idea that intentional collaboration is vital to achieving teacher professionalism and well-being, whole child education and equity echoed throughout the discussions in last year's Summit. Those ideas provide an essential backdrop to addressing this year's Summit themes and sub-themes.”

From a policy perspective EI asked a number of questions. Will teacher unions with governments consider and develop the proposals on digital education within the OECD/EI Principles on Effective and Equitable Recovery? Will governments with teacher unions act to agree partnerships for developing together, within the public sector, digital learning infrastructures, digital provision, professional support and learning for teachers and equitable and sufficient digital provision for students? Will teacher unions and governments pursue proposals to improve teachers' working conditions and professional development including improved working conditions in the digital environment?

Will governments with teacher unions develop agreed protocols about the development and use of digital technology in schools which are defined by the values of equity, human wellbeing, creativity, democratic values and sustainable development? Will governments and unions initiate research together on the relationship of digital technologies and students' social and emotional wellbeing?

ISTP: Building on COVID-19's Innovation Momentum for Digital, Inclusive Education

The OECD published a report by its Director of Education and Skills, Professor Andreas Schleicher, for presentation at the ISTP. *Building on COVID-19's Innovation Momentum for Digital, Inclusive Education*, observed that nothing has hit education systems across the globe harder and more thoroughly than school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The disruption has yielded many observations, but two are particularly important. Firstly, digitalisation has not just helped maintain teaching and learning during school closures but transformed it. Schools are now waking up to a digital world that will fundamentally change learning. Secondly, students, schools and education systems that were not ready for this transition have fallen significantly behind. Inequities in digital infrastructure and equipment, and people's digital skills are but one aspect of many education systems' insufficient inclusivity. Digitalisation and inclusive education are two of the themes of the 2022 International Summit of the Teaching Profession. This report looks at the pedagogical implications of digitalisation and how inclusive education can be the driver of more inclusive societies.

Chapter 1 discusses the effectiveness and anytime-anywhere flexibility of education technologies. To teachers, the collaborative possibilities they open up are also of growing interest. Digitalisation can boost professional learning and exchange among teachers and schools. Online education communities strengthen teachers' networks, allowing them to co-create and share best practices gained from research and classroom experience.

Perhaps the most transformative force in education, however, is artificial intelligence (AI). Though still early days, data-driven personalised learning allows students to take greater ownership over how they learn and where they learn. Technology can take over teachers' routine tasks, freeing them for what matters most: working directly with students. Real-time classroom analytics displayed on a dashboard can tell teachers what they may be missing: students who are having trouble following a lesson, who source information poorly or who are bored, for example. The report cautions, however, that integration of AI software into teaching requires well-deliberated policy on ethics, fairness, transparency, safety, accountability and data privacy.

Interactive table tops, gamification, simulations and augmented reality are the new digital tools in hands-on blended learning. But technology has evolved much faster than pedagogy so we need to help teachers leverage its potential. While COVID-19 expedencies of remote learning sped up everyone's digital uptake, this did not take place in optimal circumstances. What do we know about teachers' formal training in digital and media literacy?

According to the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018, only 56% of teachers in OECD countries received formal training in digital technologies for teaching and only 43% felt it had properly prepared them. We also know that educating students about online risks was left out of most teachers' professional development.

Teachers would benefit from explicit training on online risks and, on the flip side, positive engagement in the digital sphere. This kind of digital citizenship requires tech competence and engagement; critical thinking in digital spaces; the ability to negotiate platforms and source reliable information; a readiness to interpret, understand and express oneself through digital means; and empowerment over one's data rights and right to privacy. Generally, education – especially in secondary and not earlier – focuses on students' basic operational digital skills rather than combining them with social and creative ones, including the capacity to create digital content. A more comprehensive digital skills approach would generate more positive tangible outcomes.

How should digital and media literacy be integrated into school curricula? Generally, digital skills are integrated into existing subjects or feature as independent classes or units. Some countries are entirely overhauling their curriculum or have already done so. What is key is that media and digital literacy learning be holistic. It works best when students' voices on the subject are heard and when parents, teachers,

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Unleashing digitalisation's full potential in education requires unprecedented investment in technology and professional development. Education systems must be ready to partner with the private sector. Beyond financial implications, it is a collaboration that should extend to the design process of education software to ensure that it is inclusive of minority populations of students.

Chapter 2 is devoted to inclusive education. Vulnerable students, especially, have suffered socially, emotionally and academically because of the COVID-19 crisis; they deserve special attention in its aftermath. The long-term consequences of pandemic-induced learning gaps are estimated to be an average decline of 3% in individual earnings. These students may also experience more fragile social, emotional and physical health in the future. The report looks at equitable opportunities that even out the disadvantages of students' particular socio-economic backgrounds. Economic arguments for inclusive education encompass poverty reduction and the productivity gains obtained by improving the academic outcomes of low-performing students. On the opposite side of the balance sheet, the costs societies incur by not supporting disadvantaged students include losses in gross domestic product (GDP) and tax revenues, and rises in social welfare and health spending.

The equity gap in OECD education systems was spotted well before the pandemic. Data from TALIS 2018 show that, on average across OECD countries, at least one in five teachers (22%) needed training on special education needs (SEN), with a significant shortage of teachers able to teach students with SEN in lower secondary. Regarding immigrant and refugee students, TALIS 2018 shows that, on average, one in three teachers (33%) did not feel sufficiently equipped to teach in multicultural settings. This is critical when one considers that 17% to 30% of teachers in OECD countries work in schools with culturally or linguistically diverse student populations. From simply a numerical point of view, classrooms are insufficiently inclusive of refugee students: a refugee child is five times more likely to be excluded from school than a non-refugee.

We see the marginalisation of other diverse groups as well. The enrolment rates of Roma children in early childhood education across Europe are far below that of the population average, with higher drop-out rates later on in education. Students with an Indigenous background, gifted students and those in LGBTQI+ communities are all, in varying degrees, more vulnerable to poorer socio-emotional and academic outcomes in non-inclusive schools.

The benefits of inclusive education are manifold. Studies show that students with special educational needs do better academically in inclusive settings and are more likely to enrol in higher education. Cultures that are more gender-equal are associated with a reduction in the negative gender gap in mathematics. But the most compelling argument for inclusive compulsory education is its potential for strengthening social cohesion. In countering our natural intolerances and hidden biases, and expanding our world and belief that we can excel, education that reaches out to all students is one that cultivates trust, that most intangible of bonds holding societies together.