



CLOSING PLENARY

Sunday, October 8th, 2017

Speaker: Andreas Schleicher, Director, Directorate of Education and Skills, OECD

In the closing session, Andreas Schleicher discussed the key takeaways from Qudwa 2017, all of which will be collated in a manifesto that points the way to education and teaching reform.

Mr. Schleicher started by highlighting the high expectations teachers face in the classroom today. Teachers are not only required to have a thorough understanding of their subject matter, but also an understanding of their students. “They (teachers) must be passionate, thoughtful, encouraging of responsibility and engagement, provide continual feedback and assessment on a daily basis, and collaborate with peers, parents, and schools,” he said.

Given these demands, he reflected that teachers have grounds to ask for more pay, but in the two days of discussions during Qudwa 2017 which saw 900 participants from over 70 countries share ideas and best practice, he did not hear a single participant raise the issue of salary. Instead, Qudwa participants focused on delivering promising answers to several issues such as equity, professional development, teaching in an increasingly complex environment, pedagogic innovation empathy, assessments, professional autonomy and more.

Mr. Schleicher praised the commitment of Qudwa participants to equity. This commitment by teachers came across in several ways. First, in the way teachers embraced diversity and adapted their teaching according to the needs and capabilities of students. Second, in the way teachers addressed social disadvantage. Mr. Schleicher said, “privileged children will always find their way in life, but other children have only one card to play, and that is meeting you.”

“How we treat the most vulnerable children is a deep reflection of who we are,” he continued. To this end, Mr. Schleicher quoted the Nepalese teacher Manil Maharajan amongst others who said “When students see a positive future, that’s when we can focus on the present”. Mr. Schleicher also explained the impact of quality education on global economy, and stated “On a global level, countries can choose to develop successful systems. If everyone (all students) was brought up to the same level, it would add 1.8 trillion dollars to the global economy.”





To embrace equity, Mr. Schleicher noted that teachers at Qudwa were creating a collaborative classroom environment which placed students at the front and centre of learning. He also underlined how teachers in Qudwa understood the importance of a teacher being a learner within the classroom and the professional autonomy that facilitates this. He quoted Richard Spencer, a Qudwa participant, who said “Students need to see their teachers learning,” Given the pace of social and technological change, Mr. Schleicher stated that Qudwa participants had agreed that “teacher development must be viewed in terms of life long learning, with research as an integral part of what it means to be an engaged teacher.”

What came out of Qudwa was a vision of a highly collaborative culture which recognises both teachers and students as resources and co-creators, and where teachers are continuously learning and developing. Moreover, he clarified that technology could only support teaching and never replace it. Technology could create a giant open-source community of teachers to share ideas and initiatives, simply by tapping into the human desire to collaborate.

However this is only possible, when “teachers feel a sense of ownership over their classrooms, which helps students feel ownership over their learning”. Fostering professional autonomy and having trust in teachers’ expertise was a coveted goal in collaboration with school officials, and was found to greatly affect the pace of change.

“Even the most effective attempts to push government mandates into the classroom drag on, because it takes time to push the communications down to the classroom,” said Mr. Schleicher. “The only way to streamline this is to involve teachers in changing curricula.”

Speaking to specific reforms that had been raised over the two days, he said: “subject matter will be less the core and more the context. In the past, the focus was on the provision of education, now it is about outcomes. In the past, the emphasis was on school management, now it is leadership, specifically evaluating and developing capacity.”

Mr. Schleicher explained that assessment and accountability evolve with time to ensure that good practices becomes culture.

Moving on to the role of parents, he said, “building trust between teachers and parents requires open communication and places where parents, teachers and learners do things together. It could be as simple as having breakfast together, or participating in innovative maker spaces.”

He further added that not only parents, but the entire community has a role to play in teaching and learning. To this end, he quoted Stephen Ritz, a Qudwa participant, who said “Push the walls of the classroom out and bring the community in.” Mr. Schleicher added, “The future will be integrated





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—subjects and students connected with resources of the communities. Invite people of different areas and careers to come to the school.”

Mr. Schleicher concluded the plenary by saying, “Education needs less ‘reform’ and more real change. The status quo will always have its defenders, but that is no reason to let go of the conviction that education is still the basis for building a more humane, fairer world.”

