

'For me ... it is not enough'

Think Piece 18: September 2013



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser speaking at the 2012 WISE conference. The 2013 WISE Summit – Reinventing Education for Life – will take place at the Qatar National Convention Centre, Doha, 29-31 October 2013 where more than 1,200 prominent education, corporate, political and social leaders from over 100 countries to take part in three days of debate, dialog and networking.

Wendy McGuinness

Wendy is the Chief Executive of the McGuinness Institute.

'The Educate a Child initiative is already having an impact. In just six months we have started working on another 25 projects in Africa and Middle East and Asia, we have reached 500,000 children. This is just the beginning. And for me, it is not enough ... The fact that we have more than 60 million children globally receiving no education at all is a formidable challenge. The children who still have no access to schooling are the hardest to reach, in the most persistently difficult situations of poverty, conflict, natural disaster or marginalisation.'

- Her Highness
Sheikha Moza bint Nasser

Not enough action is being taken to ensure that children everywhere will be adequately equipped for the 21st century. In November 2012, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser of Qatar, UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, spoke at the 4th World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) held in Doha. The summit, themed 'Collaborating for Change', was designed to bring the world's leading thinkers together in one place to explore how collaboration can foster cross-sector innovation and can accelerate progress toward this goal.

I had the privilege of attending this summit and witnessing Her Highness officially launch a new global initiative, *Educate a Child* (see www.educateachild.org.qa). This initiative aims to accelerate progress towards achieving one of the UN's Millennium Development Goals – universal primary education – and deliver quality education to millions of children across the world. As the driving force behind WISE, Sheikha Moza is not afraid of big ideas. She recognises that big problems require big solutions and that universal primary education is critically important for all our future. Informed citizens are more likely to make better decisions, encouraging dialogue rather than conflict as a solution to complex issues.

Her Highness has served as the inspiration for this think piece, which sets out my observations and reflections from the summit and my thinking about how this global conversation about education is relevant for New Zealand.

Education has stagnated

Considering the vast economic, social, environmental and political change across the globe in the last century, it was interesting for me to hear speakers discuss how, by contrast, public education systems

have changed very little. Education models should be scrutinised; they need to be frequently assessed, updated, and, if necessary reformed, to meet the changing needs of society.

Awards showcase novel solutions

It was truly inspiring to hear global experts discuss the different challenges in their own countries and the exciting initiatives that are developing. The 2012 WISE Awards, presented on day two of the summit, showcased some world leading examples of pioneering education projects that have transformed communities and broken traditional moulds. This year's theme for the awards was 'transforming education'.

As an example, one of the most inspiring award winners was a non-profit organisation called Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangsthab that has introduced solar-powered floating schools to the flood prone regions of Bangladesh. This ensures that children from these regions can continue to attend school during the height of the monsoon season. Each boat has space for 30 students, an internet connection, and provides a basic education up to the equivalent of New Zealand's Year 5. The scheme also provides parents and other villagers with on-board education in health and nutrition, sustainable farming, accounting, and climate change adaptation. Almost 70,000 children have benefited since the start of the project in 2002. You can read more about the awards winning projects at www.wise-qatar.org.

Purpose is key

As a country, New Zealand needs to determine what being educated in the 21st century means. Is the goal of education in the 21st century to:

- create employable citizens? (i.e. to enter the workforce)
- create new knowledge? (i.e. new products, services and models)
- inform public policy? (i.e. how to use knowledge for public benefit)
- resolve conflicts so that we can live together peacefully?
- resolve global issues such as famine, disease and climate change?
- achieve self-actualisation? (i.e. gain wisdom)
- all of the above?

The speakers at WISE had diverse and differing opinions on this, and the extent to which one was seen as subservient to another seemed to depend on the speaker. However, without broad consensus over what the goal of our public education system should be, it is unlikely that all stakeholders – parents, teachers, students, government, society – will be satisfied.

Maths matters

'Stop teaching calculating, start learning math' was one of the most memorable sessions. Conrad Wolfram, a mathematician and CEO of the European arm of the Wolfram Group, spoke about how maths education is failing to meet the needs of society, a perspective echoed in meetings I attended with think tanks in London later that month. 'Computers are central', emphasised Wolfram. While computers do the calculating, we should be focussing students on asking harder questions, developing conceptual thinking, and encouraging them to play with a multitude of new ideas. Wolfram went further; he has built a new, problem-centred, computer-based maths curriculum. He challenged countries to be the first to adopt this computer-based approach and leapfrog others in embracing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Education is a big idea

WISE was a great place to start a conversation, and I feel enormously fortunate to have had the opportunity to participate. I would have liked to see more discussion and ideally consensus on what the purpose of education is in the 21st century and what values should drive transformation. However this lack of consensus only reinforces the important role WISE has to play as a truly global forum on education.

It was my first introduction to the Middle East, and I was impressed. I left appreciating the power of will, in particular Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. Her seven words still resonate in my head – *'And for me, it is not enough'*. My overall reflection was simply how much work needs to be done globally in order to develop an education system that empowers communities to be able to trust one another. An informed global society is critical to improving overall wellbeing, managing climate change and minimising war and conflict – and therefore a key component of building a sustainable future.

Following my return from Doha, I sought out people who were doing interesting things in the education sector. This led me to the Sir Peter Blake Trust, who suggested I talk with Andrew Patterson, a broadcaster and writer, who has an interest in business and

education. Following the example of WISE, I asked him to highlight any novel initiatives happening in New Zealand. Below he discusses three examples that reflect the 2012 WISE themes of 'collaborating for change' and 'transforming education'.



Christian Silver (centre) leading a Decode workshop at Kristin School, Auckland

The Institute has also been following the work of Frances Valentine, who over the past 15 years immersed in the world of digital technologies and education. Frances was the Chief Executive of Media Design School, where she was instrumental in developing specialist degree level qualifications in game development, animation, digital media and design in New Zealand. Check out her latest venture, The Mind Lab, which opens on 23rd September 2013 in a purpose built facility in Newmarket, at www.themindlab.com.

Thinking about the importance of computer-based learning, one of the youngest participants at our workshops, Christian Silver, has just recently developed a project called Decode, which aims to educate youth about computer programming. Silver, a student at Kristin School in Auckland, says Decode is a bit of a mix between a school project and a whole bunch of personal interests: 'As a programmer myself I've always been amazed by the field and its possibilities'. Learn more on our blog or see his website: www.decode.org.nz.

What is clear is that countries that embrace new approaches to education will be rewarded with an informed, engaged and proactive society. Congratulations to WISE for starting a global conversation on education and to kiwis who are working on showcasing the way forward.

The three examples below were written by broadcaster and writer Andrew Patterson. Andrew presents Sunday Business on Radio LIVE.

1 Dare to Dream

The power of positive role modelling

We all like to be inspired. Dare to Dream brought together more than 200 people from a range of backgrounds who all agreed to visit a school on the same day and speak to students about their dreams and how they had gone about achieving them. Inspired by the late New Zealand yachting legend Sir Peter Blake, the charitable trust established in his name continues his legacy by encouraging young people to fulfil their potential while actively engaging with their communities. The project inspired thousands of students to follow their dreams. The Trust is working with partners to establish a junior speakers' bureau that would allow schools to place a request, via a website, for a high achieving young person to speak to students to outline the pathway they took to achieve their success. The power of role modelling has been found to be one of the most effective methods for achieving personal success.

2 Point England Primary School

An exemplar of innovation

Located in one of Auckland's poorest suburbs where the average household income is less than \$19,000 a year, Point England Primary is arguably one of the country's most innovative schools. Despite its challenging social demographics it has completely eliminated the digital divide by providing every student between the ages of 7 and 12 with a laptop for use in the classroom. Using Google docs, the school has avoided the need to purchase expensive software licences and all written work is exchanged digitally between teachers and students. A separate trust has been established to fund the purchase of the computers, allowing families to rent-to-own scheme where they pay \$3.50 per week. This trust has also spent almost \$600,000 establishing a neighbourhood wireless network, allowing students to use their laptops at home for completing homework. The Trust has had assistance with gaining valuable media publicity for their cause and financial support, and in May 2013 received a \$100,000 from US hip hop artist Will.i.am.

3 In-Zone Project

Challenging the status quo

In 2012 the United Māori Mission began a bold experiment. Take 50 boys from some of the most socially challenged parts of New Zealand, house them in a converted hostel and send them to one of the country's most prestigious state secondary schools, Auckland Grammar, which just happened to be located less than a mile from its front gate. Known as the 'In-Zone Project', this initiative was aimed at giving boys with leadership potential (who had proven themselves to be motivated), an educational opportunity that may not have been available to them in their local community. The results have been outstanding with one student having moved up eight class levels while others have achieved academic success in a variety of subjects. Volunteers have helped to refurbish the hostel, have helped with fundraising and lend their time as homework tutors.



Left to right: Blake Leader Samara Nichols and children; students using netbooks at Point England school; two students from the In-Zone project after winning academic prizes.

This think piece is dedicated to the person that nominated me to attend WISE. This conference gave me hope for the educational prospects of those 60 million children. For links to presentations from the 2012 WISE Summit and to learn more about the October 2013 Summit please visit www.wise-qatar.org



The McGuinness Institute is a non-partisan think tank working towards a sustainable future, contributing strategic foresight through evidence-based research and policy analysis.

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