



HSEM WHOLE EDUCATION CONFERENCE REPORT

How well are we preparing young people for life and work in the 21st century?

KEY NOTE SPEAKERS

Keri Facer gave a talk, throughout which the message was clear: ‘Business as usual in schools is NOT an option!’ She encouraged us to move our thinking away from ‘future proofing’ towards ‘future building’: creating balance-tipping movements of thinking, with various points of intervention, rather than one shared vision of change.

Keri Facer’s keynote address made much of the importance of human relationships, dialogue and wonder in the future education system (and mentioned HSEM by name, as well as the splendidly named Slow Education), in terms of building allies and creating collaborative movements. The part of her address that resonated with me the most was when she said that schools, working singly and collectively (but especially the latter) under-estimate their power and should have the confidence to change from an often passive to a more active mode in their dealings with the wider world.

She touched on the work of a number of groups, many with projects in collaboration with Whole Education that were developing enquiry based learning approaches, working with new curricula, pedagogy and technology – such as Opening Minds and Apps for Good. She also cited parents and communities as critical partners in developing our educational landscape – all key Human Scale principles.

Keri described the development of human relationships as a process, and prioritizing it allows us the space and time to consider the people and the resources around us. She mentioned the Nottingham Wonder room (see references at the end) and the Museum of Uninteresting Objects as ways of engaging young, enquiring minds.

Other speakers focused on the changing political and economic landscape our schools are operating in. Interestingly, **Kristiina Kumpulainen** (Finnish National Board of Education) cited a number of obstacles and barriers to educational innovation – even in famously successful Finland! – that we might recognize: research tends to stay in the journals, and schools tend to stay the same despite

evidence to encourage change; numbers of children with Special Education Needs are increasing and the gap between those that succeed and those that fail is getting ever bigger.

However, her focus was: what really makes Finland so successful? There are some fundamental differences in attitudes towards education, which might lead to an answer – in particular, the principles of educational equity, the local autonomy and power to make locally-relevant decisions, and the high value placed on the teaching profession.

Kristiina's suggestion was that system level transformation was not only possible, but essential – where all elements of change must be considered. This resonated with the Human Scale mission – it is not easy to implement small, specific Human Scale change without an inherently altered culture of belief and attitude towards the purposes and expectations of education, teaching and learning. It is this holistic vision of progress - and specific examples of schools that exemplify this - that will help us make the kinds of radical changes the system needs.

It was **Larry Rosenstock** from High Tech High that offered such an example. Talking on Skype from San Diego, Larry shared some key principles that have led to radical change in his part of the world. The discussion remained philosophical, even though what he was demonstrating illustrated good examples of successful and radical changes to their system.

Again, this struck a chord with Human Scale delegates – we too have some excellent examples of successful and radical revisioning of schools and educational offers in the UK, led and supported by HSEM. All these schools have succeeded largely because they have been driven by a philosophical need for change. Redesigning schools based on Human Scale principles in practice is an enormous challenge – with possible upheavals and logistical headaches. But the resultant change leads to a system that engages, inspires and motivates, teachers, pupils and parents alike.

In focusing our minds to how successful we are as a system in preparing young people for the world beyond school, **Caroline Waters** from BT referred us to the global and economic landscape that now requires very different sets of skills and knowledge than were relevant and appropriate some years ago. She pointed out that the knowledge economy that drives both teaching and learning in this country – that dictates our curriculum, pedagogy and assessment – is entirely fake! In fact, knowledge is not only ubiquitous via the internet – but usually free.

Caroline suggested we invest in teaching the 'habits of learning' – education is not just about training employees to function well in the work place, but all citizens need to be equipped to deal with the world around them – customers, investors and so on. She also suggested that products be not be the sole guide business activity in the future, but instead human capability will be sold – just consider the ever-dominating markets of India and China in terms of human resource and skill.

Caroline's message was simple: stop teaching facts (they are not required any more) and start educating minds to consider and cope with the world around them.

It was a good day for Human Scale Education again when Caroline went on to say that what was becoming ever more important was to educate the whole person – to create a happy person, a happy employee, a happy customer – so that society functioned better in general. It has been too long a mistake to think that the best-qualified students are the happiest or best employees. We are also out of touch with the purpose of a good education if we lose sight of these

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

During breakout sessions delegates engaged in discussions and heard from presenters addressing questions such as; 'Is the classroom and the role of a teacher changing?', 'Improving the English education system: are we on the right track?' and 'Do we need courageous leaders now more than ever?'

In his breakout session entitled 'Lessons from America: New York and Nashville, and with particular reference to a current HSEM partner, **David Jackson** described a visit to NYC to witness the iZone, a research and development hub for NYC schools where innovations are incubated. Its three constituents are innovation, iLearning, and the so-called iZone 360 where 26 schools are developing new internal schools designs that will spread across the NYC system. David spoke very highly of these developments though he acknowledged that they were not 'perfect'.

Pertinent to the work HSEM is developing in Nottingham and Swanage, **Robert Hill** discussed the 'Promise, Potential and Pitfalls' associated with Coalition Government policy on 'Chains' of schools and teaching schools. Although this wasn't discussed, a chain of schools committed to human scale education might be an interesting prospect. It could allow, for example, for the rapid circulation of practice and might enable different approaches on a school-by-school basis.

Peter Rubery described how Teaching Schools provide initial teacher education, in collaboration with the local HEI, and CPD for teachers in neighbouring schools. They will increasingly carry out the functions of LEA Advisory Services. As such, our work with Hadden Park High School in Nottingham, and the development of tailor-made teacher training programmes to support the development of a Human Scale School and a hosted Regional Development and Research Community seems apposite.

John Dunford introduced his 'Better BAC' – an alternative to the EBAC introduced by the Coalition Government. Having piloted this project in some schools throughout the country, John and his team were asking for comments, critiques and support for the project. Human Scale Education would have a lot to offer this project, in terms of suggestions for developing pedagogy and assessment around the development of the curriculum. It also begs the broader question of the changing role of the teacher, and whether initial teacher training and current CPD are fit for purpose.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the conference was very well attended, the audience comprising a spread of Headteachers, classroom teachers, academics, charities etc. and the speakers, both in the plenaries and the breakout sessions were of a high calibre. The numbers were up on WE's last Annual Conference, the speakers better and the venue a lot more congenial. All this suggests that WE might be coming into it's own and is increasingly a force to be reckoned with. This would bode well for HSEM since we are a partner.

REFERENCES

Films from the key speakers can be found at the following website:

http://www.wholeeducation.org/pages/overview/introduction/423,0/whole_education_conference_.html

Nottingham Wonder Room:

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/impactcampaign/campaignpriorities/nurturingtalent/nottinghamuniversitysamworthacademy/thewonderroom.aspx>

High Tech High:

<http://www.hightechhigh.org/>

New York City: iZone

<http://schools.nyc.gov/community/innovation/izone/default.htm>