

Ávarp ráðherra 13.08. 2114

Future Teachers – A Profession at Crossroads

Hilton hótél, Reykjavík, 13. August kl. 9:30.

I wish you all welcome to this conference, Future Teachers – A Profession at Crossroads, which is part of the Education program under the Icelandic presidency in the Nordic Council in 2014.

„Who travels widely needs his wits about him”., and in Icelandic “Vits er þörf þeim er víða ratar”. This saying is from the poems of Hávamál, expressed as the words of Óðinn, the Nordic god. They are a part of a long oral tradition that is preserved in Sæmundar Edda written around the year 1280. These word resonate with us today as we live in a period of rapid technological development, globalization and natural and societal change. Regardless of where we think the world is heading, most people agree that a good and solid education is the best thing to bring on that journey. We need all the wits that education provides. We need reason and reflection and understanding of the complex environments we are participating in.

If we are to succeed in preparing young people for life and work in the 21st century, the education and competence of teachers must reflect the education and competence which we want their students to acquire. The theme of this conference Future Teachers – A Profession at Crossroads is therefore very appropriate as the teaching profession is at the center of the changes now taking place in society and in education.

This spring the Icelandic Ministry of Education published a White Paper on educational reform. In this policy we are following the example of other countries that have set a reform agenda and have been successful in improving the performance of their students. Behind the educational policies of the different countries is a growing body of international research and comparative studies. The distinguished keynote speakers participating this conference are at the forefront of an international group of scholars and have been contributing significantly to the increasing body of knowledge on education.

In the White Paper on Education reform in Iceland we set two targets: to improve literacy at the end of compulsory level and to increase upper-secondary graduation rate. We need to raise the bar and put forward high expectations for our young

people. In implementing the reform we have to learn from the countries that have been successful with their educational systems, but at the same time taking into account the realities of the Icelandic situation.

Central to our reform agenda is the emphasis on strengthening the teaching profession. Since 2008 a five year master degree is required to become a teacher in Iceland and last year we established last year “Teachers Council”, a body for Professional development of teachers and headmasters. The main objective is to improve Teacher professionalism in Iceland. In the end though it is the leadership and professional capabilities of teachers, administrators and all the people involved in education and their cooperation that will bring forth and sustain positive changes.

But reform in education means that we have to be open to new ways of teaching and learning, also through the arts. The Icelandic government has sought collaboration with the other Nordic countries to further develop the Biophilia teaching project. Biophilia is a large-scale pilot education project that builds on participation by academics, scientists, artists, teachers, and students at all academic levels. It is based on creativity as a teaching and research method, where the natural

sciences, music and technology are linked together in an innovative way.

The project was originally developed by Björk Guðmundsdóttir, the City of Reykjavík and the University of Iceland, in connection with the release of Björk's album *Biophilia* in 2011. Music and science workshops for children were held alongside Björk's concerts around the world.

Participants at this conference are invited to take part in *Biophilia* Education workshops, which give an example of how the education material has been used so far. The participants will be encouraged to take part to exchange ideas and opinions on the project and teachers' professional development.

In June this summer the Nordic Education Ministers met here in Reykjavik and had open and fruitful discussions on the condition of education systems in the Nordic countries and common challenges. Prominent in that discussion was teachers' education and professional development. An important issue to consider is what the Nordic countries have in common in education, what are our differences and what we can learn from each other and develop together.

There is a strong international current in the discussion of teaching profession apparent for example in the International Summits on the Teaching Profession that have been organized by the OECD and Education International. Perhaps a growing consensus is expressed in the declaration of the first Summit in 2011:

“The highest-performing systems are those that make teaching an attractive and respected career that invites the best candidates; provides high quality initial teacher education, good mentoring, effective professional development and attractive career structures; and where teachers work collaboratively with school leaders in the design and implementation of reforms and innovations. In this context, teacher evaluation can be a critical lever.”

At this conference we are dealing with complicated, but crucial issues. We have three experienced keynote speakers that will share their experiences and insights into fundamentals of education and principles of educational reform. In seminars and workshops you the participants will

discuss and debate the visions potentials of education and the role of the Teaching professions.

I would like to thank the Teachers' Council that has been responsible for organising this conference, the Nordic Council of Ministers for their cooperation and all the others that have helped in the preparation. Also thanks to all of you for taking the time to participate and contribute to this important debate.

At the end I will take the permission to again quote Óðinn from Hávamál where he says:

To ask well, to answer rightly,
are the marks of a wise man:
Men must speak of men's deeds,
What happens may not be hidden.

I hope you will have many questions that will be answered wisely and that many new things and ideas will be revealed.