

High Level Policy Forum on “Skills for Social Progress” Sao Paulo, 24 - 25 March 2014

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Summary: Policy Makers’ Forum

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1. Introduction

On behalf of the co-organisers, the Brazilian Ministry of Education, the Ayrton Senna Institute and the OECD, I would like to thank the ministers, vice-ministers and high-level officials for contributing to a highly stimulating debate on “social and emotional skills for social progress”. We had the pleasure to welcome representatives from 14 countries, including (in alphabetical order): Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, Korea, Latvia, Mexico, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Sweden, United States and Uruguay. All participants brought valuable insights into this first ever high-level policy event focused on enhancing social and emotional skills.

2. Setting the scene: What can policy makers learn from the evidence?

- The draft OECD report: “Skills for Social Progress” sets the **policy contexts** by describing the diverse socioeconomic challenges our societies are facing including persisting societal inequalities.
- The keynote presentation by Professor Heckman and my opening speech points to the **importance of social and emotional skills in improving educational, social and economic outcomes**. These skills are likely to enhance individual’s capacity to work with others, manage emotions and achieve goals. As such, social and emotional skills matter as much as cognitive skills in improving individual wellbeing and social progress.
- The sole focus on achievement tests as an indicator of children’s potential in success can be misleading as these tests do not capture social and emotional skills.
- Social and emotional skills as well as cognitive skills are **malleable**; hence there is a scope for policy inputs. Research shows that interventions which foster social and emotional skills tend to have a long-term impact on individual’s diverse measures of life success, and that interventions which helps improve family contexts (e.g. by incorporating mentoring programmes) are particularly successful in fostering skills. Social and emotional skills are malleable beyond early childhood.

- Skills development has consequences for **social inequality**: fostering the right skills through education is an important tool that governments can consider using to narrow the already wide gaps in educational, economic and social outcomes.
- **Families, schools and communities** all help in raising skills throughout the life course.
- **Skills (both cognitive and social and emotional) can be measured meaningfully**. However, measurement needs to take into account incentives and effort, given that any measure is based on task performance. Such information will provide parents, teachers and policy makers means to not only monitor the process of social and emotional development, but also to adapt the learning contexts and introduce relevant interventions.

3. Conclusions from the Policy-Makers' Forum

- Policy-makers around the world, including five Ministers and six Vice-Ministers of Education, **acknowledged the importance of cognitive and social and emotional skills** for individuals' lifetime success. Participants highlighted the importance of skills such as literacy and numeracy, as well as team-working, perseverance, resilience, and communication.
- In considering skills policies, participants, including Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico and Paraguay, highlighted the importance of acknowledging the historical and political context, as well as socioeconomic **inequalities** across different population groups..
- Participants, including Columbia, Norway, Peru and Uruguay, highlighted the importance of social and emotional skills in building tolerance, collaborative behaviour, learning to be a responsible citizen, dealing with conflict and solving problems in a non-violent way. Several countries including Columbia, Ecuador, Latvia, Mexico, Norway, Portugal and Uruguay, highlighted the need for **holistic, child-centred approach**.
- Some participants expressed concern about overburdening schools and teachers and emphasised the need to **support the systems in order to ensure their capacity** to incorporate social and emotional skills policies and practices, given current challenges many systems face.
- Participants also emphasised the **role teachers and parents can play** in social and emotional development. Portugal, United States and Uruguay were among countries emphasising the need for schools to work in harmony with the families. Participants mentioned a number of **educational initiatives and new practices** specifically aimed at raising social and emotional skills in primary and secondary education and engaging families, teachers and communities. For instance, Uruguay's programme *Crece contigo* encourages teachers to visit homes in order to teach parents the practices needed to foster skills such as perseverance.
- Policy-makers acknowledged the need to invest in **skills development starting from early childhood** in order to ensure children have a good start in life, as mentioned by Norway. Sweden mentioned the importance of incorporating learning, play and care.
- At the same time, policy-makers emphasised the **need to continue investment in skills** through later levels of education to make sure that the investments made in early childhood are followed upon, and their effects do not wither.
- Participants also mentioned the importance of **work-based learning**, with internships and apprenticeships playing an important role in teaching youth how to interact in the work place and the skills needed to succeed. Programmes designed to raise entrepreneurial skills can also be useful in triggering youth's creativity, curiosity and problem-solving skills.

- The Argentinian education system already **measures social and emotional skills**. In addition, Columbia, Norway, Paraguay and Portugal highlighted the importance of measuring attitudes towards specific subjects learning (mathematics), tolerance, and corruption. This information has proven useful for countries to adapt policies and practices. Argentina and Brazil mentioned that learning contexts should be taken into account in assessing social and emotional skills.
- Participants also acknowledged the need to consider the **capabilities of teachers** in fostering social and emotional skills. Mexico and Uruguay mentioned the need to incorporate practices for social and emotional skills learning into teacher training and professional development of those already in the workforce..
- Participants recognised the importance of **working together across different ministries** and areas of policy-making, highlighting the need to maintain policy coherence and regular information exchange. In addition, participants acknowledged the need for continuous dialogue between **policy-makers and the scientific community** in order to feed back the evidence base into policymaking.
- Despite recent progress made in enhancing the evidence base on social and emotional skills, there are important **gaps in the evidence of which skills matter for which outcomes**, and how **these skills can be raised** in different countries. Brazil was among many countries highlighting the need for large scale data collection. In particular, long term evaluations of “what works” is missing. We need more evidence to help policy makers.

Conclusions and directions for future work for policy makers and the OECD

- **We learned** that there is a considerable role policy-makers, teachers and parents can play in fostering skills for children’s well-being and societal progress.
- **We recognise** a number of existing initiatives in a number of countries, aiming at incorporating practices for social and emotional skills development into schools, families and communities. We can learn a lot from these experiences.
- **We recognise** the need to strengthen collaboration between different areas of policy-making as well as different stakeholders such as parents, teachers, school administrators and policy makers to ensure coherence in policies and practices for skills development as well as to ensure mutual support among schools, families and communities. This calls for enhancing the level of information teachers and parents have access to regarding the (changing) levels of children’s social and emotional skills; hence the relevance of regularly and accurately measuring these skills
- **The OECD will continue making efforts** to help strengthen the existing evidence base by collecting longitudinal data on skills formation from childhood until early adulthood across different countries. We will also continue seeking inputs from top scientists such as Professor Heckman so that countries share a better knowledge-base to improve policy decisions. Last but not least, we will continue to work closely with countries from OECD and partner economies to learn from their experiences and to further promote the powers of social and emotional skills across diverse stakeholders. I am sure these efforts will be complementary to the considerable investments that have already been made (or scheduled) by the Brazilian Ministry of Education and the Ayrton Senna Institute.