



PRESS RELEASE

HIGH LEVEL POLICY FORUM ON “SKILLS FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS” SAO PAULO, 24-25 MARCH 2014

Chair: Mr. José Henrique Paim Minister of Education, Brazil
Co-host: Mr. Yves Leterme Deputy Secretary General, OECD
Co-host: Ms. Viviane Senna President of the Ayrton Senna Institute, Brazil

The Brazilian Ministry of Education, the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP), the Ayrton Senna Institute and the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) launched the High Level Policy Forum on “Skills for Social Progress” on 24-25 March, 2014 in São Paulo, Brazil. The objective was to invite diverse education stakeholders to debate skills that drive individual well-being and social progress. The Forum welcomed Ministers and High-Level officials from 14 countries, including: Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Korea, Latvia, Mexico, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, United States and Uruguay. The Forum also brought leaders of major educational initiatives, superintendents of major school districts, and leading researchers in the fields of education, personality psychology, and economics. In total 22 countries were represented.

Mr. Paim (Minister of Education, Brazil) and Ms Viviane Senna (Ayrton Senna Institute) opened the session by welcoming the participants and stressing the importance of skills development for Brazil. *“This Forum brings novel evidence about the science of learning and Brazil supports this debate’s new approach to what contributes to school success. We believe that social and emotional competencies need to be reflected in the ambition of educational public policies and we will systematise and finance initiatives that incentivise and develop social and emotional skills in students”* said Mr Paim.

Ms. Senna further motivated the Forum participants: *“We have solid data showing that these social and emotional skills are as important as cognitive skills with regards to children’s academic success, and as or even more important with regards to measure of wellbeing. (...) We all have this hidden curriculum with this type of skills, a set of skills that we sometimes do not know we have, and the challenge is to make this set more visible and intentionally developed.”*

The opening speech by Mr Leterme (Deputy Secretary General, OECD) underscored the importance of skills in modern times: *“Skills have become the global currency of the 21st century. Today the importance of enhancing the right set of skills is ever more pressing. We need to think more broadly and consider investing in a wider range of skills, where social and emotional abilities are just as important as cognitive ones”*.

The keynote speech of Professor James Heckman (Nobel Laureate, University of Chicago, US) presented evidence from his research showing that social and emotional skills are key determinants of life success and yet are “missing ingredients in achievement tests”. Prof Heckman also highlighted that social

and emotional skills are malleable and thus can be shaped by interventions and policy-making, and that families are crucial in shaping skills. He mentioned that the most successful interventions “supplement family life”, using for instance mentoring methods.

Paul Tough’s (journalist, author of *Why Children Succeed*) keynote speech highlighted the relevance of adverse childhood experiences, for skills development and adult outcomes, including health outcomes. He also argued that training can improve parental practices even for at risk parents: “*The research shows that even with relatively short interventions we can change the relationship between parents and the children going from an insecure to more secure attachment*”. Furthermore he highlighted the importance of social and emotional skills training during adolescence and instilling a “growth mindset” in young people, associated with the belief that people can change and improve in their abilities through hard work.

During the debates, the participants of the Forum underscored the importance of **holistic and comprehensive education** to equip children with diverse skills including cognitive and social and emotional skills. Many participants argued that we **need to bring back traditional notion of education** as providing not only information and knowledge, but also guidance on the values needed for good citizenship, such as cooperation, responsibility and goal-orientation.

Policy makers and policy players highlighted that in order to understand the process of skills development we need to acknowledge the **social and political contexts** children grow up in; violence, poverty and inequality have a considerable impact on children’s lives in many countries. Participants agreed that **social and emotional skills can be taught together with cognitive skills**. Many countries already engage in practices aimed at the development of social and emotional skills. Participants highlighted that such policies need to involve “*families and schools working hand in hand*”. Some of the promising practices and interventions mentioned by the roundtable participants were marked by their **interactive and informative nature**, such as peer mentoring and engagement of teachers, parents and communities. Participants also highlighted the need to also provide **support for teachers** and incorporate social and emotional learning in teacher training.

Researchers participating in the Forum provided further evidence that social and emotional skills can be **reliably measured** and these measurements can be used to enhance our knowledge on which practices work in which countries. Evidence on how skills develop in different context, for boys and girls at different ages can be used as a **roadmap for future policies and practices**. There was a general consensus on the importance of evidence-based policy-making, “*Public policies should be anchored in the analyses*”, Mr Soares (President of INEP, Brazil). Participants agreed that more work is needed in order to understand which skills matter for which life outcomes in which contexts.

Participants agreed that effective skills policies and practices necessitate collaboration between different ministries, as well as different levels of education system. Efforts need to be made to assure that policy-maker, players, teachers and parents work together in a **coherent** way.

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