

The First ISTP Pre-Summit for Teaching Professionals

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Introduction

A hesitant pre-service teacher was nestled among the 50 Pre-Summit participants. He saw the Pre-Summit meeting as a way to ignite his passion and desire for teaching. Early in the discussion he shared his pre-service training experiences and a sense of doubt and reluctance about joining the profession due to the politics and conditions teachers face on a daily basis. The entire audience listened with great anticipation. The young man's concerns echoed those of countless young adults around the world who have contemplated teaching as a viable career and have led to the global teacher shortage.

However, after the Pre-Summit, his sentiments had changed. He said, "It was so great to meet teachers from all over the world and have the ability to discuss the issues of the day with them. They opened my mind and for the first time of my life I feel strengthened and have decided to become a teacher. You Tagrid, and your colleagues did a great work. I hope that a Pre-Summit like this will be repeated every year and we will continue to learn from each other."

The Birth of the ISTP Pre-Summit for Teaching Professionals

The world of education is consistently changing and adapting to meet the diverse academic and social emotional needs of the students we serve. Similarly, the format, participants and themes at the International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) 2016 have developed and changed since its inception in 2011. Over the past six years, teacher leadership has increased significantly. Teacher leaders have been invited into the conversation as official delegates to share their insight and expertise from the classroom. No longer silent observers in an adjacent room, teacher leaders were invited as official delegates who could share their thoughts and ideas alongside union leaders during the second session. The mantra of ISTP 2016 was "teachers need more time, trust and tools." Each country's commitments aligned to this idea of providing teachers with the time, tools and trust to promote the continued development of education throughout the world.

One of the significant changes from previous summits to ISTP 2016 was the first ever Pre-Summit for Teaching Professionals. Over 50 current and pre-service educators and union members met at the KMK headquarters in Berlin to discuss the three themes as they impact their respective schools and countries. Throughout these discussions, which will be expanded on in the following sections, educators not only acknowledged the same societal and teaching challenges and circumstances, but provided actionable steps to address them. For example, the current refugee and immigrant influx in Europe was discussed both in the main ISTP sessions as well as at the Pre-Summit meeting. Educators were able to provide examples as to how they were accommodating the social-emotional, language and academic needs of the students immigrating to the area as well as the current student population and the impact of class size fluctuation and diversity.

A German educator shared, "[the Pre-Summit allowed me] To get in touch with other teachers and to see that we are all dealing with the same problems. Nevertheless the conditions in all countries are quite different, we all agreed that the social and emotional competences of the pupil is one of the most important things in class".

The forum allowed educators to discuss the challenges, but more importantly, provide insight and implementable strategies.

The idea for the Pre-Summit-Day for Teaching Professionals was born among Teacher Leaders who were part of our national delegations to ISTP 2015. As observers at the Summit, we listened to the conversations of our education leaders, but yearned to share our perspectives and offer examples of effective practices and policy. Conference protocol did not provide teachers with a platform to openly participate in the discussion, so we communicated our thoughts during health breaks, through social media and an informal International Teacher Meeting. During the meeting, 15 educators from 6 different countries, shared their reflections of the summit, and strategized about finding opportunities to collaborate with one another. We discussed the three summit themes that related to Teacher Leadership. It was during those conversations that the vision emerged for a space in which Teacher Leaders would reflect and share their ideas, examples, and insights in tandem with the annual ISTP.

The results of the Pre-Summit were more than the coordinating team, the KMK sponsors or the participating teaching professionals could have imagined. All participants provided feedback on each of the three themes of the ISTP 2016 and created a synthesized teaching professional response which was presented during the official ISTP 2016 summit. More importantly, each of the participating educators left with a sense of hope and drive to take an active role in their school or national education policy and local unions. It drove educators to stand up and make their voice heard and advocate for the best course of action for themselves and, most importantly, their students.

Responses from the Teaching Professional Community: ISTP 2016 themes and discussions

The KMK, the Foundations and the ISTP leading coordinator Udo Michallik and his staff provided the physical space and support for the first Pre-Summit for Teaching Professionals as well as a reception following the Pre-Summit which offered opportunity for consistent and ongoing discussion. The pre-summit was organized in 3 roundtable discussions, one for each of the themes. Participants had the opportunity to engage in discussion on each of the three themes.

Ideas and responses were recorded on chart paper and later synthesized into a series of three slides to be presented at ISTP 2016. One US educator described the atmosphere of the Pre-Summit as “Full of anticipation--educators were eager to learn and share from each other about the teaching profession as a whole.”

The following section details the synthesized ideas and reflections of the teaching professionals who participated in the ISTP 2016 Pre-Summit. The overarching theme of ISTP 2016 was Teachers’ Professional Learning and Growth: Creating the Conditions to Achieve Quality Teaching for Excellent Learning Outcomes. To facilitate the discussion of such a complex theme, three topics were outlined.

Topic 1: What knowledge, skills, and character dispositions do successful teachers require? Topic 2: What policies help teachers acquire the competencies they need to be effective?

Topic 3: How can governments implement these policies effectively?

Reflections of Topic 1: What knowledge, skills, and character dispositions do successful teachers require?

Much of the discussion on Topic 1 revolved around the community ideals and principles which must be present for educators and students to grow and evolve. Participants reviewed the 7 Core Principles of 21st Century Learning Centers presented by the OECD countries in 2012 and referenced in the ISTP 2016 report. These conditions state that schools and governing bodies must trust in educators' abilities, provide flexibility and opportunity for reflection of school and teaching practice, ensure the social-emotional well being is emphasized and school services support the "whole child", implement ICT tools are used and educators receive ICT pedagogical support, view the educator and student as evolving learners and emphasize student growth and development. The reason nations struggle to attract and retain effective educators is because these conditions are not being met. If schools and nations emphasize the opportunity for growth and development, rather than evaluation, and view schools as facilities for adult and child learning, the outcomes would mirror that growth and development.

Reflections of Topic 2: What policies help teachers acquire the competencies they need to be effective?

The consistent theme of topic 2 was that policies should be created collaboratively by lawmakers and education leaders in the field.

One of the ISTP Pre-Summit participants, commented "the Pre-Summit was a very important opportunity to work on a clear message for the main summit. As I found out later, the wording of the education ministers, the teacher union representative and the teaching professionals really do seem to differ slightly. This seems to make it even more important to have a Pre-Summit day and to work out a common message to ensure desired results."

Educators' experience and perspective should be the guiding force in policy creation. These policies should promote and increase the capacity to collaborate so that educators have the ability to share and exchange best practices and contribute to the growth of the profession. Additionally, policies created should respect the nexus of pre-service to in-service training and create or foster pre-existing systems which provide continuous support for educators. This includes a flexible mentorship program that is customized by schools and mentor teams to meet the needs of each individual educator. By developing reciprocative mentor programs which capitalize on the experience while encouraging collaboration, both the mentor and the mentee are increasing their content knowledge and skill. Educators have the ability to help elevate the profession if they are provided the necessary time and support.

Reflections of Topic 3: How can governments implement these policies effectively?

In order to implement the above outlined policies effectively, governments must acknowledge that professional development must come from those within the profession. Additionally, professional development is continuous and includes training, practice and feedback. These trainings should include learning activities and scenarios which can be implemented with students in the classroom. Governments should promote and support professional learning communities rather than individualized professional development programs. By instilling trust of the educators and their expertise, governments will witness productive and trainings which create positive results. The focus of these learning communities will stimulate the individual teacher's own development, their teaching responsibilities and their school's goals. When a professional development program is created and funded, it is necessary to provide adequate time and follow up support.

Discussing Teaching Collaboration in Germany: Reception with the German Foundations

Following the Pre-Summit, the German Foundations invited participants and education stakeholders to join a research presentation on collaboration. The Foundations conducted a representative survey among more than 1000 German teachers to gain a better understanding of the forms of collaboration among German educators and the impact this collaboration has on both educator and student growth and development. The catalyst for conducting this survey was to find evidence of the cliché of isolation and lack of motivation and enthusiasm among teachers. Findings show that the majority of teachers love their profession and most teachers refer to themselves as highly motivated. However, results concerning the type of collaboration among teachers show that although some forms of collaboration exists between teachers, they lack consistent complexity. Teachers say, that they prefer a much more complex form of collaboration, however the type of collaboration they are engaging in is inconsistent and surface level. For example, educators collaborate more frequently on school event planning than content and curriculum planning. These result allow for international comparison regarding collaboration with reports such as the TALIS report. The purpose of the reception and study panel discussion was to present the findings to all interested stakeholders. Additionally, the foundations and researchers sought discussion and confirmation from the teachers joining the Pre-Summit through panel discussion and reception discussion.

Conclusion

The inaugural Pre-Summit meeting held in coordination with the 2016 ISTP Summit in Berlin was an incredible success. It provided policymakers and union leaders with a fresh perspective on issues that are plaguing the profession, contributing to recruitment and retention efforts, and ultimately stagnating student growth in countries around the globe. Likewise, the event provided teacher leaders with the ability to connect directly with policymakers and union leaders in an effort to learn more about the policies they are prescribing and why.

Teacher leadership was one of the fundamental tenants of ISTP 2015. The 2016 Pre-Summit meeting was a perfect example of teacher leadership in action in the highest form. The Pre-Summit planning committee members applaud the willingness of both policymakers and union leaders for setting the example and letting teachers develop, plan, and lead global events. The Pre-Summit meeting illustrated the wealth of knowledge that teacher leaders can contribute if they are provided the opportunity, and the impact they can have on helping elevate the profession.

The Pre-Summit planning committee would like to encourage the conference organizers to utilize this committee and other teacher leaders to help plan and organize a similar event in Scotland.

Committee Members

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