We Are the Champions

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Education World Cup

South Africa has celebrated a successful hosting of The Soccer World Cup long after the last overseas visitors left – a proud year for South Africans. The same year Cape Town hosted the Worldwide Innovative Forum 2010: The Forum is sponsored by Microsoft and brings together teachers and school leaders in an international conference to celebrate the best digital practices in the Education World Cup. This award is the global culmination of local and regional events held around the world throughout the year, where teachers present ideas on how technology can further educational transformation to help improve the way students learn.

The judging community is composed of education experts from all over the world. The Judge had a number of criteria – or learning impact indicators:

- Objectives and outcome of the lesson should be stated and achievable.
- Instructional strategies should be thought out and engage students in their learning.
- Learning tasks and activities should be challenging, require participation and logical sequence.
- ICT tools used should be relevant for the tasks and the learning.
- Assessment and evaluation of skills: disciplinary, social and ICT according to national standards.
- Innovative ideas in the teaching process and in the use of ICT tools.
- The teacher as a change agent should be encouraging, inspiring, motivating and impacting.

Through virtual classroom tours and interviews on site by judges, these teachers demonstrated a profound dedication to helping their students learn by leveraging effective and engaging technology resources for teaching critical 21st century skills, such as collaboration, critical thinking and social responsibility.

Among more than 125 projects presented and 200,000 participants over the course of the year, 13 projects made it to this year’s final. I was a member in one of the 15 Judging Teams, assigning 7-10 projects each. At the event, we spent nearly 20 hours talking to the teachers and learning about their projects; then in a private room, we discussed, debated and shared with one another until the winners finally were selected.
The winning project was from Hellerup skole in Denmark. **Martin Ryum and Mette Hauch,** “Teachers Leave Them Kids Alone”: Expert groups of students engaged in peer-to-peer teaching and learning through producing, editing and analyzing a five-minute film in only one week. The film recognizes that some children are IT experts and can educate their peers and teachers.

The second runner up was: **Anna Karlsson from Victor Rydbergs skole, Sweden, “ICT Enriched Learning”:** In this project students worked to design, construct and program a robot using technology and mathematics in a laboratory environment, and were encouraged to bring an entrepreneurial and creative approach and attitude to their work.

Maybe Norway will be in the Education World Cup next year? Denmark, Sweden and Norway have invested considerable amounts of money and resources in ICT for education. The Scandinavian countries have followed more or less the same pattern of development. This started with investment in ICT infrastructure and teacher competence in the 1990s, followed by school development projects in recent years. Moreover, at the moment and during the last couple of years, the terms digital competence and digital literacy have been introduced.

Focus is also on what we might term systemic innovation, which is about changing the organization of teaching and learning on different levels in order to establish schools that can prepare students for the challenges facing us at the beginning of the 21st century. A particularly important issue with regard to change and innovation is teacher development and teacher training. How to use ICT for pedagogical purposes in the subjects, as well as teaching students digital literacy skills are important goals for teacher training in the near future.

It seems reasonable to claim that under certain conditions ICT can have beneficial effects on cognition and cognitive skills. With the appropriate tools for the task, appropriate teacher support and adequate assessment methods, digital tools can support and facilitate learning in new and better ways. But, as many studies have demonstrated, ICT-tools do not in and by themselves create these effects. On the contrary, if ICT-tools are simply introduced into classrooms without the proper contextualisation and support by teachers and other features of the environment, ICT-tools might have the opposite effects. Thus, research has demonstrated the importance of taking into account the complex interrelationships between cognitive skills, digital tools and socio-material organisation of learning situations in processes of acquiring knowledge.

However, it is very difficult to relate improvement in educational outcomes to a single cause, and national results are not necessarily measuring the exact same phenomenon. But, teachers, pupils and parents in several studies report that ICT has a positive impact on pupils’ learning and learning strategies (eLearning Nordic, ITU Monitor). Furthermore, in the Information society developing pupils’ digital competence becomes an important aim in itself and ICT is not just a means to an end. Internationally there is a lot of evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, which states that ICT-tools together with certain pedagogical practices have beneficial effects on outcomes. In a changing world it is also necessary for countries to continuously rethink and assess what counts as knowledge in schools and whether what schools assess and treat as adequate knowledge and learning is in sync with the demands and challenges we are facing.