

World Knowledge Forum 2013

Jeremy Johnson, Salman Khan, Tyler Cowen, Frank Meehan: Dialogue with Global Education Gurus

During the 2013 World Knowledge Forum, some of the most innovative minds in education gathered to discuss questions critical to the future of education. The global education gurus included Jeremy Johnson, co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer of 2U, Salman Khan, founder of Khan Academy, Tyler Cowen, Professor of Economics at George Mason University, and Frank Meehan, General Partner of Sparklabs Global and founder of Kuato Studios.

Mr. Cowen iterated the consensus of the gurus by stating that there will be a “massive revolution in all forms of education.”

One of the main themes of the dialogue was that of disruption in education. Mr. Meehan cited his experience in numerous disruptive ventures, such as Spotify and Siri, as being a vital part of his motivation to form Kuato Studios. His company is trying to answer his own questions of, “How do entrepreneurs get trained?” and “How do we get collective knowledge and experience out to kids?” His firm has created a top 10 iOS game that teaches children how to code while playing.

Another salient theme throughout the dialogue was focusing on the “right questions” that Mr. Johnson brought forth, such as “How do we increase access and create a great experience while also maintaining educational integrity?” His company, 2U, is based on a for-profit model that partners only with not-for-profit educational institutions. He believes that this blended system has helped him “create the framework for a much more sustainable path for these programs to continue growing.”

Mr. Khan and Mr. Cowen have each taken a not-for-profit pathway to increasing access to quality education. Mr. Khan created the renowned Khan Academy, which seeks to provide “a free world-class education for anyone, anywhere.” Mr. Cowen has created Marginal Revolution University, an online resource that provides free courses in economics.

While discussing the merits of a for-profit model versus a not-for-profit model, Mr. Khan stated, “I don’t think there’s an absolute right or wrong answer.” However, he mentioned the personal commitment he had made to Khan Academy. “Most acquisitions get killed. A little part of me would have died inside if that happened.”

Mr. Cowen also noted the historical precedent that has been set regarding the perceived low status often associated with online education. “In the 17th and 18th century, opera was low status. It was the rock and

roll of the time." He mentioned that as the educational ecosystem is disrupted, "the menu of choice will be much richer and more diverse."

The theme of reexamining the methods of pedagogy and assessing students also emerged from the panel. Mr. Meehan noted, "Kids have to be drawn out of passive education and into interactive education. They have to be given tools to collaborate." Mr. Cowen echoed these sentiments by stating, "Teachers have to be more like basketball coaches. They have to be good at motivating."

When posed with a question of how content should change and how new standards will affect students' marketability, Mr. Johnson stated, "We are seeing a significant reinventing of curriculum. We can break it into smaller chunks and make it more relevant for individual learning." Mr. Khan built upon this idea, suggesting, "Credentialing architecture will be important. Based on industry, government, what the consumer of the credential wants."

Mr. Johnson also posed his own question and answer for the old educational regime. "Are traditional universities concerned?" he wondered. The panelists seemingly concurred when he concluded, "How could you not be?"