

Aruba, November 14 2011 - Miami Herald syndicated columnist Andres Oppenheimer told an audience in Costa Rica that on education, Latin American countries are living in the past.

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and celebrated Latin American author Andres Oppenheimer spent months visiting the prospering nations of China, Finland, India, Switzerland, Israel and Singapore recently. Though Argentine by birth and a current resident of Miami, Florida, in the United States, where he pens a syndicated column for The Miami Herald, Oppenheimer headed east to find out why some countries are surging in educational development while Latin America lags behind.

Oppenheimer found that for many countries, progress is linked to investment in education.

“None of the countries I visited have anything in common politically, but the one thing they have in common is a national obsession for education, science and technology,” Oppenheimer said Wednesday night at the Double Tree Hotel Cariari in Alajuela, northwest of San José. “They understand that economic development and education go hand-in-hand. In order to develop economically, these countries have invested relentlessly in education, and now they are beginning to see the results.”

Oppenheimer, a keynote speaker at a health and education forum organized by international consulting firm Deloitte and Costa Rican Medical Holding, spoke for an hour and a half on the relationship between educational development and economic growth in other parts of the world. He noted that countries like Argentina, Brazil and Costa Rica are falling behind.

“The reason Latin America is lagging behind is because we are obsessed with the past, while other countries are looking towards the future,” Oppenheimer said.

In characteristically wry and entertaining style, Oppenheimer pulled out a Singapore dollar to emphasize his point. On the back of the bill, the illustration included a university, students, and a classroom. At the bottom of the bill was written “education.”

“In Latin America, our bills have images of our past, such as farmers and past presidents and historical figures,” he said. “In other countries, the mindset doesn’t look at the past, it looks ahead.”

Oppenheimer said that countries like Costa Rica must consider further educational investment in long-term increments if it wishes to further develop economically. He said that given the four-year political system, governments are confined to thinking in the short term. For educational, technological and scientific gains to be made, Oppenheimer suggested that Costa Rica and other Latin American countries invest more of their budgets on education, create exchange programs with other countries, and establish long-term plans to promote scientific and technological advances.

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