



EDUCATION: A MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE

On 8th July 2021, CRF members gathered for our Summer Lecture – **Education: A Manifesto for Change.** Richard Gerver, award-winning educator and author, shared insights about how the education system needs to evolve to ensure future talent develops the right skills to meet society’s and business’s future needs.

Richard began his keynote by referencing the reaction to change, on a human level, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular he highlighted the hoarding that went on in the early phases, as an example of how education still prepares us to live lives of certainty. He cited Minouche Shafik, the former Deputy Governor of The Bank of England and her comments to the World Economic Forum of 2018, where she highlighted that:

“Anything that is routine or repetitive will be automated.”

Therefore, it is:

“the soft skills, creative skills. Research skills, the ability to find information, synthesise it, make something of it...”

that we need to focus on as we develop models of education that can help prepare to lead the future economy. Richard emphasised the need for developing high levels of resilience and self-management skills more explicitly, explaining that it is often our most naturally gifted young people who struggle the most, in competitive and changing environments, because they are used to succeeding and feeling ‘in control’.

Richard identified the skills and behaviours that are expected at the highest levels of success by sharing his work and discussions with the Nobel Prize winning physicist Barry Barish and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, both of whom referenced creativity, curiosity, and the ability to look beyond routines and conventions. Richard challenged us to consider whether we create cultures where asking ‘stupid questions’, is encouraged.

In order to nurture and to promote the very best from future generations, Richard talked about the Google experience



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and in particular the research into what made their most successful and innovative teams so. Citing Project Aristotle, he highlighted the importance of developing a culture that promotes:

- Psychological safety
- Dependability
- Structure and clarity
- Meaning
- Impact.

He suggested we use those same findings, together with the OECD’s findings from their 2013 report [The Skills Outlook](#), which found that in education:

- There was an over-reliance on formal qualifications rather than actual skills.
- The importance, in the future, of interpersonal skills over routine cognition.
- The vital importance that people can learn, adapt and change and
- The need for closer links between the world of work and education.

Finally, he talked about his meeting and interview with former US President Barack Obama, who talked about our need to take a step back from immediately designing technological solutions to our problems, urging people to explore the human issues and challenges first.

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Q&A: RICHARD GERVER

Q You talk about the importance of developing breadth, but doesn't the resistance among younger generations to being exposed to views or ideas they might disagree with, and the no-platforming and rise of safe spaces we see in universities, work against this? Is this a problem and if so how might we best address it?

A *I do think it's a problem. Indeed it's the number one fear I encounter at university level – that meaningful debate and the opportunity to experience expansive ideologies is in lockdown. The polarised and angry nature of debate on social media is making young people feel vulnerable and scared. The education system needs to respond by helping young people to understand the power of constructive debate and of engaging – if not agreeing – with other people's views. Beyond changing the education system, however, in our workplaces we can also consider creating opportunities for the sorts of debates we would have had in our youth, and for people with different viewpoints to have open conversations. This will hopefully remove the fear of debate and help people realise that dialogue is deeply constructive for people and organisations.*

Q Are there specific areas of the national curriculum that you would change?

A *What's really important is to remember that every community in our society is different and therefore the lived experience of every young person in those communities is different. Therefore what individuals need to learn and be immersed with is different. We've heard a lot about the digital divide during homeschooling, but I would like to hear more debate about the analogue divide – the inequality of opportunity for young people to experience green spaces, visit museums, have access to books or go on holiday. We need to make sure each school has the opportunity to personalise its curriculum. We also need to broaden the discussion away from being purely about academic achievement. We have been too focused on preparing young people to take exams and academic recall and as a result we have lost sight of the more expansive opportunities young people need. It's one reason it's vitally important to reset the relationship between the education system and the corporate sector.*

Q When we open doors to young people in the workplace, what opportunities and experiences should we look to facilitate?

A *It's important for young people to see the human interactions that are necessary and to help them experience the skills and discipline they will need to succeed in the workplace. For example understanding the need to show up on time, listen to others' point of view, to develop soft skills.*

Q Why are the changes you advocate happening so slowly?

A *The problem is the people who set policy believe that the answer is to make the system run more efficiently without understanding the shifting needs of wider society, which is much more complex. Every debate we have about new developments in education always comes back to the measure of how we get more kids through exams. We talk about innovation in education, but we continue to evaluate schools on the same measures we were using twenty years ago. If we want to see a step change in outcomes, we need to develop new methodologies for holding the system to account, and we need to depoliticise the process of designing the structure of education, and place it in the hands of educators themselves.*

Q How do we square the need to increase focus on arts and humanities with the recent emphasis on STEM subjects?

A *We need to get the narrative out there about the importance of a broad-based education, particularly for scientists. We need to have people with expansive viewpoints and different ways of viewing the world to create new opportunities. Whilst STEM subjects are vital, when I talk with the CEOs of tech and pharmaceutical companies, they say what they are missing is not people with technical expertise, but people from a range of backgrounds who can bring diversity of thought.*

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Q There still seems to be a disconnect between what the education system values and what employers are looking for. How can we educate the educators? And do we need to rethink how we train teachers, perhaps giving them time in business?

A We do need to give teachers a broader range of experiences. The typical model involves recruiting young people straight out of school and university before they have accumulated lived experience. One model we could emulate is Australia. Every seven years teachers can apply for long service leave which allows them to travel or spend time in another sector, and helps them bring a wider perspective on the world they are preparing students for. It also shouldn't be a one-way transaction. There's also a huge amount people in business can learn from the experience and leadership skills of teachers. We have to create one knitted-together narrative, rather than believing that education and employment should sit in separate silos.

Q Do you think that spirituality (not necessarily religious) has been lost and encouraging young people to develop gratitude and appreciation of the world around them would deepen their educational experience?

A Absolutely. The constant striving for shiny, new things in the world of education means we often leave behind some of the most important parts of our lived experience, such as connecting with nature. If there's one thing the pandemic has taught us, it's the importance of reconnecting – both as children and adults – with those things that make us human. Within education we need to work hard at recreating those experiences for our children.

FURTHER READING

CRF. 2021. **Strategic Workforce Planning – Unlocking Future Capabilities to Drive Business Success.** Research Report. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/research-report-strategic-workforce-planning-unlocking-future-capabilities>

World Economic Forum. 2021. **Preparing for the Future of Work – Platform.** <https://www.weforum.org/projects/future-of-work>

SPEAKER



RICHARD GERVER is an award-winning speaker, author and thinker, who began his career in education as Headmaster of the failing Grange Primary School. In two years, he famously transformed the school into one of the most acclaimed learning environments – celebrated by UNESCO and the UK Government. Richard has since transitioned to the stage where he delivers passionate, and provocative speeches, drawing on his insights from frontline education to explore the links between great leadership, human potential, change and innovation.

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