



Foto: Lijia Renata Delgado

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD GERVER: KEYS TO THE EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION



<http://www.richardgerver.com/>

Richard Gerver is one of the main advocates for the perspective which aims at transforming our present system of education. He stood out for his achievements as head teacher of Grange Primary School, where he managed to get pupils, teachers, and other staff members involved and working together in his innovative and motivating project, which led on to his award as School Head Teacher of the Year at the British National Teaching Awards. He assisted Tony Blair's Government as an advisor on education policy, and captured his work and philosophy on his first book: *Creating Tomorrow's Schools Today*. Nowadays, he travels around the world sharing his vision with the educational community.

INEE - You often speak about transforming education. Which are, in your opinion, the priorities to tackle that transformation?

R.G. - Firstly and most importantly, we must develop a clear understanding and vision for our children and their future. Too much of what goes on in and around education is driven by industrial thinking; short term policies, systems and strategies. We must take time to speak more and be more collaborative. The old African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child has never been more relevant. We must realize that the future of education relies on all sectors of society working much closer together to create a new vision and then work hard to enact it. So the first question should be; what kind of people do our kids need to be not just to survive but thrive in a world that is changing exponentially? We should be asking that question to educators, business leaders, social and charitable organisations, the arts and science community, sporting groups and all other stakeholders in society. In return we should be saying; and what are you going to do to help? That is particularly true of parents who must be encouraged/challenged to take a more active role in preparing their children for that global future. By the way, let's not forget that many of our children born today will not just be citizens of the 21st Century but of the 22nd Century too!

INEE - What do you think about standardized international external evaluations? Can they somehow contribute to rethinking education policies and taking decisions?

R.G. - The international testing systems are design to measure the system as it is; the tests are designed to assess current, traditional practice and are far too powerful an influence in the way politicians develop policy. What has happened is that we have turned the testing into political ammunition and as a result policy now reacts to test scores, as we all desperately try to claw our way up these tables. The international tests such as PISA are not tools for innovation but of measuring the status quo. Sadly though, some of the OECD reports are interesting and provocative but the media and politicians only tend to pick out the easy headlines. Therefore we end up in a mess of short term interventions designed to perfect a system that is out of date. For example, in the 2012 PISA league table; Shanghai came out on top; China have already realized that the overbearing academic system that helped them get there, is no longer fit for the more innovative culture the country needs to drive its next phase of economic development, and so it is taking drastic steps to move away to a more holistic curriculum that will allow space and time for its young people to flourish as individuals. Similarly; the OECD Skills Outlook 2013 published in October 2013, clearly stated that countries that had become obsessed with academic qualifications were the countries where young people were the most ill equipped for the modern work place.

INEE - To what extent can we implement a non-competitive education in today's society?

R.G. - The world today and tomorrow is not just about competition; it is more reliant than ever on collaboration. The world's very future depends on us recalibrating the way we live our lives and finding the solutions to problems created by previous generations. If we can't find a way to solve the environmental, economic and socio-ethnic challenges that face us, we have no future and that all requires a new way of thinking and behaving; which in turns requires a new education system.

INEE - PISA 2015 is, for the first time, assessing collaborative problem solving skills. What are your views on this new approach?

R.G. - That is an interesting and much needed development as long as the media and in turn, politicians read and understand those evaluations!

INEE - Studies such as TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey, OECD) show the importance of teachers' motivation. You also place the emphasis on passion for teaching. How can we keep that passion in this day and age?

R.G. - Teachers needed to behave like and be treated like professionals. They are the experts on how to design and develop learning. Teaching is a vocation and students learn best when they can feel the passion and sincerity of the teacher. We need to work harder to develop a system where teachers not politicians drive education forward. The reason why so many teachers feel so demotivated is because they feel dis-empowered and anyone who feels powerless becomes disillusioned! It has always fascinated me that politicians would never tell a brain surgeon how to do their job, but they think its ok to tell a teacher. This is a two way argument though; we need teachers to stand up, share their own vision, be committed to continuous action research and development and be at the forefront of the desire to transform the system. As a profession, we tend to sit back and wait for someone else to tell us how or what. We need to be more innovative, more entrepreneurial and enterprising if we are to help to develop a system of education that is fit for the future and worthy of our children.

INEE - We are very grateful to Richard Gerver for his kindness and the time devoted to answering our questions. He was interviewed by e-mail in March 2014.