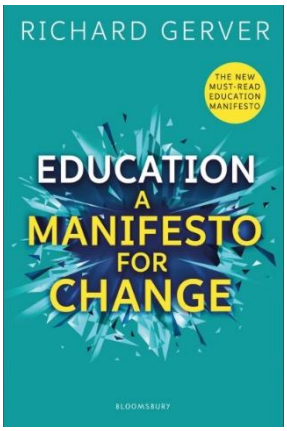
BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION

EDUCATION: A MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE

Richard Gerver

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'Educators are, like it or not, some of the most important people in changing the future. It has to be our aim to help to bring the best of our society together: the people and the organisations that best exemplify and champion the role of active citizenship, of values and of purpose, people and organisations who believe and evidence that we, you and I, can change the world for the better.' Richard Gerver

Richard Gerver's new ground-breaking book is a call to arms to inspire all those involved in education to consider **new visions and values for the future of the school system** and to secure **the best future possible for our children.**

Extract taken from Introduction to *EDUCATION: A MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE*

I left the front line of education in 2007 after a 16-year career as a teacher and headteacher. To this day, the decision to leave remains the most difficult and emotional moment of my professional life.

I eventually chose a career in education after a few years of trying to find my direction, aspiration and sense of value after leaving school myself in 1987. It was a tough but extraordinary time for me. I had done okay at school; I was average, academically and sportingly. If I had a talent, it lay in the arts but I was no game changer.

After 15 years of formal education, I walked out of the gates of my school with my friends and peers for the last time in June 1987; many were off to university, some to jobs, and me? Well, as I walked out for that last time, I was heading out to be something, I thought, but I had no idea what.

Over the next couple of years I did a little acting, tried advertising sales, estate agency, copywriting and even sold the very first 'mobile phones'. Eventually I decided to head back into higher education.

It was during that first happy year, a year when, for the first time in my life, I experienced the joy of being surrounded by likeminded people all studying something we love something

we all related to and felt mattered to us, that a passion for learning was reignited in me for the first time since I was 13 or 14 years old.

My decision to teach was crystallised during that first joyous year at college. As I look back on it, thanks for that epiphany were due to three people.

Firstly, my mother, a woman who had not only given everything to raise my brother and me but a woman who had had the courage to allow us to follow our own dreams, passions and pathways, even if, for the most part, they resulted in dead ends. She bestowed in me a belief that I would find a passion and, when I did, I'd know it and that I would then go at it hard, with commitment, enthusiasm and desire.

Secondly, there was a fellow student, a young woman, training to be a teacher, who, having agreed to a first date, gave me the chance to understand a little about education from a teacher's eye. She was a practical, organised and determined person, who taught me so many of the disciplines I lacked. It was she who encouraged me to believe I could teach and that I should go on from my degree and complete a teaching qualification. Nearly 30 years on she is still my driver and has transmitted the same qualities on to our own children.

Finally, there was David: MY teacher. We all have one. He taught me English and drama from the time I was nine until I went to secondary school. When I first started thinking about becoming a teacher, it was the memory of him – the person, the educator, the inspiration, the life changer – that flashed into my mind's eye and confirmed my desire to make a real difference to the next generation.

When I eventually began my teaching career and throughout it, I obsessed over one question: what did I want the students I was lucky enough to teach to look like as human beings when they left my care? It's a question I have asked many times. I am sure that I am not the only person to have chosen to become a teacher for what some may say were ideological reasons, but they were crucial drivers for me and remain so to this day.

I wanted to become a teacher to help to prepare others to live their own live happily, with purpose and with success. At my most ideological, I wanted to help to prepare future generations to lead the world to even better places, to find solutions to issues around the environment, the economy, equity and social cohesion that have come to dominate our age. Selfishly, I wanted to make a difference.

I will never forget my last day as an educator, saying goodbye to colleagues and children for that final time: people who had become a family. In that final job, as Headteacher of Grange Primary School, our shared experience of creating something remarkable was the hardest thing to walk away from.

Recently, a happy series of coincidences led me to meet up with some of the teachers from my very first teaching job. They are long retired now and I was invited to speak at their annual retired teachers' lunch. It was a deeply moving experience, sharing their memories of the various children and events that still lived with them today. Some, now quite old, spoke with passion for the jobs they once did; the light in their eyes ignited when they talked about Lucy, Tom or Ashraf; their pride in knowing that they had made a difference.

Only days later, I had a reunion with some of the staff from Grange and of course, as old colleagues do, we talked about some of our former students; strikingly, many have gone on to become teachers themselves – lump-in-throat time for sure.

I found myself reminiscing about my own career.

In 2010, my first book, *Creating Tomorrow's Schools Today*, was published. I had never intended to write a book and actually, in its first draft, it was just a personal reflection on my teaching career, my beliefs and my experiences at Grange. It will always be that for me but I was lucky as it captured the interest of educators and parents worldwide and, by so doing, opened up a whole new world for me. A world that has taken me not only on geographical adventures but cultural ones too; it has also given me the chance to meet and experience lives and environments well beyond education. It has led to me being given access to world leaders, sporting icons, cultural heroes and business titans. I would be lying if I told you it hadn't been amazing – a recent life filled with pinch-yourself moments.

Towards the end of 2017, however, I was giving a speech in Edinburgh about education and its future. After my input, a young teacher came up to me and asked me to sign a well-thumbed copy of Creating Tomorrow's Schools Today. She smiled, thanked me and then said, 'I never thought I'd get the chance to hear you speak, as I'd been told that you were no longer involved in education.' I was a little taken aback but understood what she was saying. That was the final straw and the catalyst for this book.

The truth is that once a teacher, always a teacher. You just have to spend time with the retired teachers from previous generations and iterations of education to understand that. When I left Grange and the front line, I never saw it as walking away from teaching. It wasn't because I'd become disillusioned or bored; it was because I truly believed that I had the opportunity, at that time, to broaden my own knowledge, experience and education. I had also been reminded by my wife that I had spent my career urging my students to seize opportunity and to have the courage to take risks in order to realise their potential, and that I should do the same.

Whilst I hadn't planned to write another book about education, a number of key experiences over the last ten years have increasingly meant that I knew I had thoughts and ideas I needed to share.

In the decade since I left Grange, I have travelled to and worked in some of the most interesting and dynamic education systems in the world: Finland, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Colombia. I have even had the honour of working with schools in Pakistan. What is clear is that they are all focused on the future, not the past, and are all researching new models of learning that will best prepare their young people for that future. As a result, they are asking crucial questions about testing, curriculum, socio-economics and health. Many, including China and Singapore, have made the brave decision to move away from focusing on making their systems more efficient and test-focused, in order to find new models and pathways that better develop young people for a future that can no longer be about seeking out and locking down certainty, but a world that is exponentially changing and challenging: a world that is filled with both increasing opportunity and challenge. In the book, I will cite examples of this and how it should influence our own thinking and practice.

During my travels I have also had the chance to meet, talk to and work with people who have helped to shape the world we are living in and transitioning to: people such as Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, who believes that we spend too long talking about what we should teach and not enough about how people should learn, a belief underlined by the philosophy that he and Steve Jobs actioned when recruiting in the early days at Apple by 'never employing anyone who needed managing'.

This is something that his first employer, Nolan Bushnell, the founder of Atari, underlined when talking to me about the future of work and the need for a higher value of human skills that will be at an increasing premium, with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and other disruptive technologies.

These provocations are further supported by globally significant reports on the future of education, skills and work, such as the 2013 'Skills Outlook' produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This report cites four key challenges for us to consider as we develop policy on the future of education in order to ensure that young people are to be most effectively prepared for the future:

1. To review the over-reliance and focus on formal qualifications rather than the development of actual skills.
2. To ensure the understanding of the importance of interpersonal skills over routine cognition.
3. To understand the increasing importance of people learning to adapt and change.
4. To explore closer links between the worlds of work and education.

These findings were further underlined to me by a man whom I regard as a personal hero, the former President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, who told me when we met in the summer of 2018 that the current models of education prevalent in countries like the US and the UK need far greater thought. He believes that the model created to take people from farms to factories and offices, a model that focused almost entirely on academic and technical development, needs radical evolution if we are to help young people in the pursuit of a different future in a different world.
Amongst all of the chaos, confusion and uncertainty in the modern world, I have come to believe that we are on the verge of a new renaissance, a deeply human one that will be led by our children. I want to explore how we can best support them through their education to aid that possibility.

As educators we must be people passionate about the future and the people who can create it: our children. We must always find the strength and energy to consider our legacy and not to be engulfed by the stress and pressure of the right now. This book will articulate my own personal vision for that legacy, which is essentially built around the gravitational pull of how we help the next generation to be:

- healthy
- skilled
- aware
- hopeful
- of value.

I worry that on a policy and headline level, education is still stuck in a reactive mode, one still striving for efficiency rather than change, desperate to rediscover some long-lost sense of certainty – of a world where we felt safe and secure, a world that I am afraid no longer exists. That is no reason to mourn, however, or to feel worried. The future is, as it always has been, bright; yes, there are and will be challenges, some grave, but we are a remarkable species who can always do better and be better. Education, great education, can be a significant steer for that, if we take the time and find the courage to embrace it.

As a result, as an educator, I have never been more passionate about education and about what we all need to do, together, to ensure we give young people the very best platform in life to aspire and achieve, to dream and then to turn those dreams into reality, to have hope that leads to ambition, purpose and a profound sense of value.

I have deliberately withdrawn from the front-line educational debate over the last few years; that is a truth and in the first chapter I'll explain why but I don't believe that education has ever been more important than it is now. This book is not a how-to guide; there are far better qualified people than me, producing stunning, practical advice for teachers. This book is not meant to be a heads-down, professional manual. I want this book to be a heads-up, big-picture piece, one that I urge you to use to debate, discuss and develop new visions and values, whether you are an educator, a parent, a carer or someone with an interest in education, who wants to get involved.

My aim is to share my experiences and thoughts about education since leaving the chalkface. It is an exploration of the world as I have seen it and what I believe that means for us all and, most pertinently, for our children as we continue to head into the unknown. It is, in essence, a response to my primary reflex of so much of what I have encountered over the last ten years.

I wish I knew then what I know now.

RICHARD GERVER IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

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