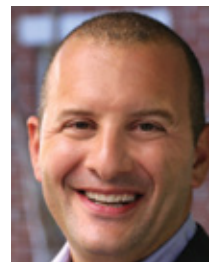


Leading Into the Unknown

Change is a part of education
and always will be

Richard Gerver



presented by



As we approach the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, we are in the grip of global transformations that have resulted in a new kind of world view. As a species, we now realize that we need to behave and act dramatically differently from our predecessors if we are to bestow upon our future generations any kind of meaningful inheritance. We are a world restricted by fear and a growing awareness of our inability to deal with the changes and challenges ahead.

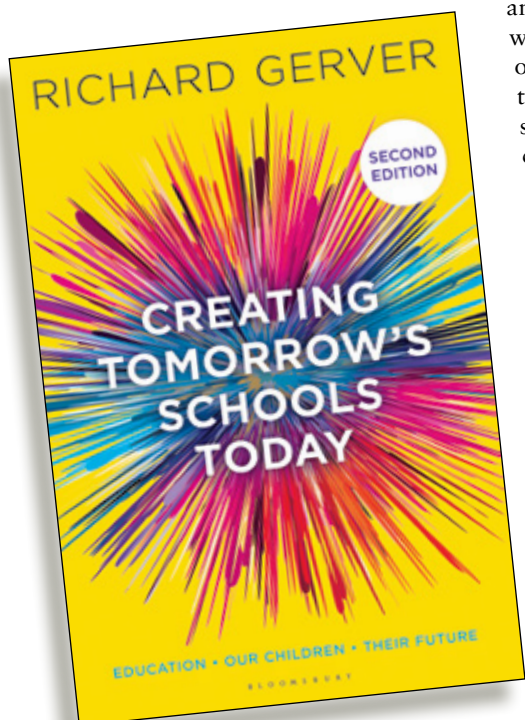
In many ways, education is a microcosm of

that global portrait. We all know things aren't working and in different ways, different factions are looking in different directions in the hope of finding solutions. All too often we will resort to the tried and tested, the ways that worked before. Yet what has defined humanity since the dawn of time has been its ability to create, to evolve its thinking, its actions and customs, to invent the world we now inhabit. I remember many years ago striking up a conversation with a retired family friend. He asked me about my dreams and ambitions.

I was eight or nine at the time and what I wanted was a big house with a pool, a Ferrari and a place on the England soccer team. He turned to me with the sort of smile only wise old family friends can muster and said, with a clarity that still affects me these years later, 'Richard, in my expe-

rience, the more you have, the more you want and, most importantly, the more you have will increase the pressure and fear you will live your life under because you will have more to lose.'

I still want the Ferrari and the house with a pool ... the England dream died on a school playing field when I was trodden into the mud for the third time on a particularly wet November day, but I do understand what he meant. I am not sure that I agree that you should limit your aspirations in order to live a trouble-free life, however, I can recognize in my own life how, at times, I have erred on the side of caution to protect what I have. I also realize, however, that if I don't keep exploring, keep asking what if and taking chances, I will never evolve.



In all that I do and all that I say,

I will not look back on my life and judge its success by the academic achievements, or otherwise, of my younger days.

I want to be able to say that I lived my life and challenged myself, that I gave it my all; created new things and made my mark; that, in my own way, I worked for others. To know that I loved, laughed and was trusted. I want to know that even as a speck of humanity, I was able to be someone; for myself and others. Of my education all I ask is that you help prepare me to live my dreams.

Neil Willenson:

Standing Up for Underserved Children



In 1991, Neil Willenson was studying film at the University of Wisconsin-Madison when he befriended a 5-year-old who was HIV-positive. The boy faced tremendous challenges every day. At school, parents asked that the boy use a separate bathroom, sit alone on the bus and some even called for him to be removed from his kindergarten class.

Seeing the struggles and discrimination that HIV-positive children faced, Neil knew he had to do something. He had planned on moving to Hollywood after graduation and pursuing a career in the movie industry. Instead, Willenson got a job as a forklift operator in Milwaukee and began to raise money to create a camp for children impacted by AIDS.

During the summer of 1993, Camp Heartland, now known as One Heartland, held its first camp. Children participate in normal camp activities such as canoeing, fishing, archery, climbing, and swimming. But, most importantly, the camp provides children impacted by AIDS a safe haven where they can be regular children.

Today, One Heartland is a thriving non-profit organization that has positively affected thousands of children's lives. One Heartland offers camps in Minnesota, Texas, California, and Connecticut and provides camps for children in transitional housing and LGBTQA youth.

Neil Willenson continues to stand up for underserved children with his continuing work with One Heartland and as a public speaker, "When I see children who are suffering, it emboldens me even more that I must contribute, I must alleviate their suffering."

WASB members will have the opportunity to hear Willenson's story during the State Education Convention. Willenson will be the keynote speaker at the WASB Breakfast, Jan. 22. For more information or to register, visit wasb.org/convention. □

I fear that as we, as a species, have developed, we have gone through the phases of hunger and thirst for new things and now find ourselves so laden with possessions that we can't go further for losing everything. Risk and the ability to take risks are the lifeblood of our evolution and intellect. We cannot afford to sit still, to hunker down and hope that our own inventions and evolution leaves us alone and lets us return to a safer, more rosy-tinted past place.

I believe that education is perhaps more guilty than most at trying to stick for fear of going bust. I believe that at the policy level we would rather return to the certainties of the past than explore the possibilities of the future and hope that all the change around us can be contained by the call for 'traditional' values.

Change is a part of everyday life and we are all the better for it. In some ways the world is coming out of great swathes of crisis and our children are hungrier than ever for evolution, for ownership and for new journeys.

Of course rhetoric is easy. The practical application, as with so many things, is far, far harder. We are currently an aging profession that is experiencing a decline in morale and interest in our fold. Teachers span nearly three generations and have varying appetites for the challenges that face us. School leadership is no longer an aspiration for most and for many is seen as a position of management, not one of vision and exploration.

To ensure that we can begin the process of transformation, not reform, that is the imperative; we must do a number of things:

First, we must come to terms with the fact that change is part of education and will always be so. It is not a job for those who

want the same thing day after day, year after year. I've planned it and resourced it so now I'm going to teach it until my pension clicks in! Schools of today and certainly of tomorrow must be dynamic entities, constantly innovating and driving change; cultures of risk-taking, creativity and development. For that to be the case, we need to attract the right kind of people to work in our schools and then nurture the right ones to lead them. Education is not the career of choice for most of our young people because it is just not cool ... but it should be.

Secondly, we must stimulate and

build the momentum for change by developing cultures that constantly question and explore what is happening and what could happen. Grange's phenomenal development occurred because of the culture that promoted constant discussion, questioning and action. We had no completed, time-scaled or costed action plans and definite outcomes at the start of our journey. We committed to asking ourselves questions and finding ways to answer them; 'How do we create Disneyland?' To ensure progress and real development there must be a move away from the culture that so many of us live by where things

end with a 'Yeah, but'. We need to develop cultures where problems are seen as challenges, as opportunities for creativity.

Thirdly, we must develop a tangible sense of empowerment and regain the feeling that teaching is a profession. A profession that contains talented people, of significant value and vision, who truly are drawn to the vocation because of their desire to give all of our children the best start to life. We must realize that teachers and those directly involved with our children do know best and are the ones who really do have our children's best interests at heart; not the media, the civil servants in government offices or the politicians. In a time of change and a time where we have an unprecedented level of control over our own lives, we must use it all to take control of education and its development for our children.

I am not a great academic or intellectual. I admire those who are; those who use those gifts for the good, anyway, but I do feel that our future lies not in the few who know or think that they know. It lies in those who are confident enough to realize that they don't; those who then have the courage, resilience and creativity to find out. In essence, this is where the journey in our schools must begin. We must build a culture that recognizes that learning, great learning, just opens doors to new learning and to greater questions. The school of the future recognizes that the future will always be unknown but that, by learning to deal with it, live within it and be excited by it, we will provide our children with the education they will need and that they deserve. ■

Richard Gerver is an educator, author and renowned keynote speaker. This article is excerpted from Richard Gerver's book Creating Tomorrow's Schools Today. Reprinted with permission.

See Richard Gerver at Convention

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Richard Gerver will deliver the keynote on Thursday, Jan. 22, during the 94th State Education Convention. A teacher in England, Gerver has been called one of the world's most exceptional educators by Sir Ken Robinson. Gerver will discuss what makes up great school leadership and provide inspiration for enacting meaningful change in our schools.

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