

# Preparing children for a world where creativity is crucial

Neil Walker



A recent conference talking about building a world-class education system for the future, Andreas Schleicher said "In whatever way you construct your list of 21st century skills, you'll always come across creativity in some form or other."

Schleicher heads the respected Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which conducts a test of school children around the world every three years for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The outcomes of the PISA test send government education ministers around the globe into frenzies of excitement as they try to emulate the best performing school systems and seek to impose those ideas onto their own country's schools and, as such, is probably one of the most powerful drivers of education strategies across the world.

In England, our current educational strategy is based around the learning of facts in particular, traditional, disciplines. Due to the way that accountability processes are used to measure success or failure, much like football, your position in a league table affects the leaders' future employment so there is a certain pressure for many state schools to marginalise creative subjects such as the arts, music, etc. in favour of more 'academic' ones.

GCSE entries into arts subjects in England fell by 8% in 2016 with a corresponding rise in STEM subject entries. As a scientist I applaud the increase in the study of STEM but I can see the problem that we seem to be teaching skills and knowledge that apply today's techniques for today's problems rather than looking to the future.

We live in a fast-changing world and producing more of the same knowledge and skills will not be enough to address the challenges of the future. When I was at school, teachers could expect that what they taught would contain many inaccuracies and gaps that have been updated.

These days, with the rapid pace of economic and social change, schools have to prepare students for jobs that have not yet been created, technologies that have not yet

been invented and problems that we don't yet know will arise.

I am not arguing that great depth of knowledge in a particular discipline is not important. However, future success is no longer about reproducing content knowledge, but about extrapolating from what we know and applying that knowledge to novel situations.

It is here that creativity, and associated skills, comes into play. Many of the most successful inventions and creations of recent years have come about through merging ideas from different disciplines.

This demands open-mindedness, making connections between ideas that previously seemed unrelated and becoming familiar with knowledge in other fields.

To go back to Schleicher again, he stressed that future jobs are likely to pair computer intelligence with creative skills, adding: "Things have changed and the dilemma for educators is now that routine cognitive skills - skills that are easiest to teach and easiest to test - are also exactly the kind of skills that are easiest to digitise, automate and outsource."

The people who will be most successful in the future are those who have the imagination, and playfulness, to marry different ideas together or to see an opportunity that others have overlooked because it is not obvious.

The question then is, how are our schools preparing young people for this world where creativity is going to be so crucial? In many cases by removing art, drama, music, etc. from the curriculum to concentrate on EBacc subjects. This is counter-intuitive to what most teachers believe but it is understandable if our education system is run by bean counters: imagination is not the easiest thing to count.

Education today should be much more about ways of thinking which involve creative and critical approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. It must also be about ways of working, including communication and collaboration and the tools they require, to enable our pupils to recognise and exploit the potential of new technologies, or indeed, to avert their risks. Art, music and drama are not more important than maths, English and science but maybe they are as important.

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area? First, expect the unexpected from the coming campaign. The choice will be between at least four men; only the Conservatives, among the big parties, had a woman in the final selection. Next, consider who has a different approach to policy. The election needs deferential ideas and dependent candidates, but just because they are not from a local background doesn't mean they are not politicians; their ideas deserve just as much scrutiny as all the others.

Being all things to all people will not be enough. Look out for the candidates that offer both practical ideas and are willing to take a risk. Then consider the political dynamic; the left are in the ascendancy via the Labour candidate and if he secures a victory, Momentum will gain momentum, which is not good for moderate politics in the North East.

I don't get a vote, as I live south of the Tyne, but if I did I would be asking some questions.

Which candidate will have the most influence on those in power and on businesses who can invest here?

Which candidate was on the right side of the Brexit debate? Which candidate has already proven he can create jobs and wealth?

Which candidate has innovative ideas and the ability to form a consensus around what he believes?

Which candidate will best challenge the orthodox Labour establishment in the region?

Which candidate is slightly maverick, full of energy and will engage the attention of Government Ministers in the way Ben Houchen has?

I would conclude that person is Charlie Hout.

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