



## Beyond “Talent, Technology And Tolerance”: What Are The Lessons For Education In The Future?

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### Abstract

*Richard Florida, an American theorist has argued that in the future we need to develop three things: Talent, Technology and Tolerance. Using this framework to inform our discussion, we examine key issues concerning policy and practice to support education for the future. This will be informed by perspectives drawing on British and Irish contexts and what these two States tell us about current issues. Global concerns over raising the academic attainment of all children for employability; responding to cultural diversity in the classroom; and having access to knowledge which informs young peoples choices are the three underpinning themes. We problematise aspirations contained in education rhetoric and suggest an agenda which reflects a flexible, equitable and imaginative way forward in providing for future generations of learners.*

### Introduction

What do we need for the future education? What are the aspirational targets that we should set ourselves to ensure the best possible outcomes for the next generation and indeed subsequent ones? Richard Florida [1], an American theorist has argued that in order to maximise educational outcomes for the future we need to develop three things: “Talent, Technology and Tolerance”. This is a useful starting point on which to base discussion of educational policy and practice for the future. This will be informed by perspectives drawing on our own cultural settings within the British and Irish contexts and what these two States tell us about current issues. (i) global concerns over raising the academic attainment of all children for employability; (ii) responding to cultural diversity in the classroom; and (iii) having access to knowledge which informs young peoples choices are the underpinning themes. We problematise aspirations contained in education rhetoric and (iv) suggest an agenda which reflects a flexible, equitable and imaginative way to inform education for the future forward and appropriate provision for future generations of learners.

### 1 Raising the academic attainment of all children for employability

Educational attainment is defined quite broadly depending on the ideological positioning adopted in terms of the role of education. For example Barro and Lee [2] offer a vocational view that ‘Educational attainment implies more skilled and productive workers who in turn increase an economy’s output of goods and services’. While others seek to define attainment in more holistic terms that include cognition skills and knowledge acquisition as well as personal development and achievement of pupils. The terms ‘attainment’, ‘achievement’ and ‘performance’ are common in the literature and are used interchangeably in professional practice, but it is worthy of note that the dominant perspective in the nomenclature of attainment is to denote the acquisition of knowledge as measured in an academic environment. Globally within educational systems this is most often measured in performance testing such as the Statutory Test framework and at GCSE [3] in the UK and in terminal examinations such as the national Leaving Certificate Examination in the Republic of Ireland. Such summative assessment approaches to educational attainment dominate [4] and in the Irish educational system the adoption of the matriculation structure of the leaving certificate examination is particularly high stakes as the results decide the type of university place a student may (or indeed may not) achieve [4]. However, emphasis on summative assessment and on technical rationalist approaches to education has been strongly criticized in that students learn quickly that what is of value is the final grade in the exam, and this has



been linked to resultant surface learning [4]. Yet achievement has a much broader focus particularly when what is of value is more than cognitive and when the affective, cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of human development are valued [5] for social integration and linguistic progress [6]. Additionally, the Teaching and Learning Research Programme has focused on valuable forms of learning, such as the process of learning, self-assessment of learning and unintended learning outcomes (see ESRC, [www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org)). So of key concern then is how do we really want our schools to serve our children? What is it that we really want them to learn?

In the UK national policy as evident in the strategy entitled 'Every Child Matters' [7] a new approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19 has been adopted. Organizations that provide services to children are required to work together in terms of policies and strategies to improve outcomes for children. A broader and more holistic approach to attainment is clearly evident. The government aim is for every child to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, and to make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being, reflecting the "No Child Left Behind" agenda in USA.

All qualified teachers in the UK must reach certain minimum standards as part of their initial training. These are frequently called Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) standards. The first standards were published in 1998; new standards were outlined in 2002, revised in 2007 and subject to review. These standards include that a teacher

- Respects pupils' social, cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds, establishing a purposeful learning environment where diversity is valued and pupils feel secure and confident.

## 2 Responding to cultural diversity in the classroom

Good practice starts from an understanding that the welcoming and care of all children including asylum seeker and refugee children are whole-school issues. A great deal can be done by schools to provide appropriate and welcoming induction procedures which involve parents as partners in this process. The classroom teacher today has to respond to the concept of diversity in its widest sense, with the arrival of children from many parts of the world. To assist in this work multi-agency cooperation and use of local communities as a resource help provide support for practitioners and need to be seen as part of the process of continuing professional development.

All children and young people should be able to achieve their potential, whatever their ethnic and cultural background and whichever school they attend [8].

In the national and political context, raising the attainment of culturally diverse pupils continues to be an area of importance. This is especially true for trainee teachers and trainers who have to ensure that the standards relating to the inclusion of minority ethnic groups are met [9]. Academic under-performance leads to disenfranchisement of particular groups in the UK and OFSTED reports have focused increasingly on this issue, noting that among the characteristics of effective Local Authority (LA) management is an acceptance by schools that support for raising the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is integral to the pursuit of higher education and part of school improvement. Government reports have also emphasized the need to develop appropriate strategies to raise the attainment of all pupils [10].

This paper is set within the context of government concern over the under-achievement of minority ethnic groups, in the UK and in Ireland, particularly those from Black Caribbean, Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds [11], and from traveling and ethnic minorities [12]. Recent statistics confirm that these groups of pupils generally have lower levels of attainment than other ethnic groups across all the Key Stages [13-14]. Informed by data from England and Wales, and the Republic of Ireland acknowledging that notions of community, ethnicity and identity have implications across the British Isles, Ireland and beyond, two central questions are raised:

- What does the school need to know, and need to do?
- What does the classroom teacher or teaching assistant need to do?

The third section of this paper which overlaps with the former issues of raising academic attainment among all pupils regardless of cultural background, is the need to consider the nature and availability of pupils' access to knowledge.

## 3 Access to knowledge



Schools face additional challenges also in terms of the micro dynamics of interpersonal engagement in terms of providing academic knowledge in the widest sense. This moves beyond academic disciplines of literacy and numeracy, to knowledge which ensures the health and well-being of children. For example, bullying has been a contentious issue in our schools for many years [15]. Students who experience bullying are regularly alienated from their peers, sometimes electing to remove themselves from what they perceive as the source of the problem (the bully and the school) thus are limiting their access to knowledge. Cyber bullying between students in a school is often rooted in the relationships in that school and indeed cyber bullying actions quite frequently occur within the school environs [16]. Internationally there have been several high profile cases of children suicide as a result of bullying, most local to us in Ireland the case of Pheobe Prince who on moving to America took her life in 2010 as a response to intense bullying and harassment by her new school peers. Given the key issues which schools today are facing, such as bullying, and more recently cyber bullying, challenges facing access to knowledge would appear to be self-evident [15,17,18]. It is noteworthy that the very technology that has aided so much of our development of knowledge to aid humanity is conversely also the tool used to harass and denigrate it particularly in the case of cyber bullying which relies exclusively on technology to denigrate others. Here we see clearly the overlap between access to knowledge and the use of technology: technology can form both an advantage and disadvantage for children's education and well-being.

#### 4 The Future Agenda

We propose the following points as part of the future agenda in education. Returning to the framework provided by Florida [1] we develop the themes of "talent, technology and tolerance" further.

- a) Talent – through a relevant and flexible curriculum.
- b) Tolerance – of difference and respect for majority and minority groups through a policy of social justice.
- c) Technology-through a critical and mindful engagement with technological usage.

#### Conclusion

It is entirely appropriate that we explore and debate education for the future and a variety of models and programmes are possible. There needs to be recognition of the importance of culturally specific needs and that in the development of "talent, tolerance and technology" we aim to reach out and include all children. Recent events in the Middle East demonstrate the power of technology and remind totalitarian states that the world is watching them. Children with these countries and elsewhere are the most vulnerable and what ever structures we put in place or maintain we need to be mindful of the future and the need to pursue an agenda of social justice to guide policy and practice. There is no blueprint for education in the future which can be passed around county to country, but we have sufficient knowledge to know that an educational system based on the equitable treatment of all pupils is morally acceptable and economically beneficial.

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