

Futurelab conference transcript

Spaces, Places and Future Learning: Using innovative technology and practice to re-imagine learning spaces

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Rich Mix, London

Changing times; changing curriculum

Mike Rumble, QCA

Mike:

Thank you very much. If you're not sitting next to somebody, please move so you are because I'm going to ask you to talk to one another in a minute. You've got to find a friend.

I work in a team, or I used to work in a team, called Futures Innovation and E-learning. In a minute I'll tell you why I'm no longer in a team called Futures Innovation and E-learning.

I used to work in the Futures team and this is Futurelab and we're talking about the future. I think you might like to see what a 10 year-old thinks of the future. This 10 year-old boy was asked to write a poem about the future. What's interesting about this 10 year-old - I've used this poem a lot and so have my colleagues - we've shown this to thousands of adults and we've had the response from all of them that we had from you: laughter. Can you imagine what that 10 year-old would feel like if he knew the response that he'd got to something he wrote? If he actually knew that thousands of adults were presented with his poem that he wrote in a classroom and got that response? Can you imagine what that would do for that youngster's self-esteem? You the audience, can you imagine what a difference it makes when the audience you've got is a real audience and you get that feedback from a real audience? Interestingly, the colleague who was given this was in the classroom and took this poem to the teacher and said, 'This is a really interesting one', and she looked at it and said, 'He's trying to be clever.' Isn't that the purpose of being in a classroom? Isn't that why we're there? That's what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it? Demonstrating that we can be clever? Really, that's a great achievement. OK? Just think about that.

We've been asking a lot of young people what they'd like to learn from school that they don't currently learn. I said I'd tell you why we no longer have a Futures Innovation and E-learning team. The reason is because that youngster's only got one life and if what we do is spend our time thinking about what we might do in the future and how we might change things and how we might prepare things in the future and how we might improve the education system in the future, then that youngster will be through their education and out the other side. So if there's one message that I want you to take away today, it's that the future starts now, 'the future is in the past' just like that lad said in his poem, and if we're going to make a difference we have to make it starting today. Even if only we make a small difference today, even if you go away from this event and you make a small difference to what learners experience then you've made a difference to that learner in terms of their future. This youngster recognises how important education is to the rest of his life. This is my job. One of the first things you do when you come into QCA Curriculum Division is you have to learn that off by heart. My job is to develop a model, world-class curriculum that inspires and challenges all learners and prepares them for the future.

I could spend a whole day talking to you about what that might mean and what it means to us. But actually it's not just a joke to say that we learn it off by heart. I talk to schools a lot and I say, 'Have you got a mission statement? Have you got aims for your school?' and most of the teachers say, 'Yes we have.' I say, 'Can you tell me what they are and can you tell me when the science teacher is planning a science lesson for Thursday afternoon next week, whether they're thinking in their minds, how is this learning going to help us, this learner, move towards our aims? What difference is it going to make in terms of achieving our aims or am I just going to plan some learning for that hour on Thursday afternoon?'

If we have aims they have to make a difference. So knowing them off by heart makes a significant difference. They're there, they're in the front of your mind; it's the thing that we remind ourselves about in QCA all the time. What do we mean by modern? Do we mean a curriculum that makes use of new technology or do we mean a curriculum that's actually relevant to young people's lives today, now, it has a purpose to them, a resonance for them? It's not a curriculum based on an agricultural economy of over a hundred years ago. Did it ever occur to you to think about why we have long summer holidays? It's actually not so we can all go to Lanzarote. It's so the children can help out at harvest. We have a reasonably long Easter break. It's not so that we can celebrate a Christian festival. It's so the children can be involved in planting the fields. We have a subject-structured sort of curriculum that's based around a concept of subjects that's a hundred years old. The structure of education is very similar now to the structure of education about a hundred years ago and yet the world has changed.

So what about world-class? Does world-class mean those tables that you see published in the Daily Mail every now and then that say, 'We've compared achievements in science at the age of 13 with other countries in the developed world and we come third'? Is that what we mean by world-class? That when we compare pupils' achievements across other countries in the world we're somewhere up there in the top ten? Is that world-class? Or is world-class something that means that what youngsters learn today they can transfer elsewhere in the world? They can take with them wherever they go in the world? And I don't just mean they have some internationally recognised qualification. I mean that the personal qualities they developed, the skills they developed, are skills and qualities that they can transfer with them and go somewhere else.

The bit that wasn't read out in my CV is that I live in Australia. That's not too different culturally for living and working in than the UK. That's what a lot of Brits think when they go over there. Actually it is. It's very different. You have to learn a new language. It's a new social structure. It's culturally different. We need young people, if they're going to be world-class, to be able to live, grow, work, interact, in their own communities, in their wider communities and in the international global communities. That's what we think is world-class.

And what about inspiring and challenging all learners? How many of you know a 14 year-old that goes to school every morning saying, 'I'm going to be inspired today'? Or comes back at the end of the day saying, 'I was really challenged today.' I don't mean that it was difficult, that what they were doing was difficult. I mean challenged. Challenge isn't about how hard something is. It's about setting targets that are achievable, that you get satisfaction from achieving. That you know you can get to. When it's going to be hard work to get there. That's what challenge is about. What we want is a curriculum that actually challenges learners and prepares them for the future.

Here's an interesting one. Never do a presentation about the future because someday someone will come back to you in five years and say you got it wrong. My father was a baker. At the age of 14 he left school, then he went into the family baking business. He made bread. Apart from the fact that he had to learn a little bit about new technologies in his time as a baker, when he retired at 63 he was still a baker. Fundamentally what he had learned as a child he was still employing when he retired. One of the new technologies that came, that I can remember made a huge impact on our family, was when the coke ovens were changed over to gas ovens, because it meant Dad could lay in bed for an hour and a half longer in the mornings because he didn't have to go and rake out the ashes and light the new fire. The one thing we do know about the future is that people are going to travel more and they are going to change the nature of their work. We've already seen a change in the nature of work in our own lifetimes. Agricultural, manufacturing, service. We're going to see changes in industry, changes in the nature of work, changes in the way in which people work. So that's the only thing we know about the future.

There's one word that I haven't used yet, which is the most important of them all. As far as we're concerned, that is the word. All. All learners. Not just the ones that are going down a particular route towards academic achievement, university, but all learners, irrespective of their background, irrespective of their circumstances, irrespective of their physical needs, their intellectual needs. All learners. They are all entitled to a world class curriculum. That's our objective. That's my job. I said that to someone. He said, 'And what do you do in the afternoons?'

Right. I said you're going to need to talk to a friend. Take a piece of paper. I want you to draw on that piece of paper a little stick figure. It doesn't have to look like that one. You can be a better artist than I am. Draw a stick figure and I'm only going to give you one and a half minutes, and in that one and a half minutes I want you to talk to the person next to you and write down words, phrases, anything you like, that describe what that stick person will be like if the education system's been successful. If we've got a world-class curriculum, if we've achieved that objective I put up before, and that's a 16 year-old, at the end of statutory education, I'd like you to write down words, phrases, whatever you like to describe that person. What would be the qualities, the characteristics, the particular ingredients that we can look at in that person and say, 'The education system has been successful'? Don't just write them down for yourselves. Talk to the person next to you. You've got 90 seconds.

There's not enough talking going on. I want to hear more talking. Just 30 seconds more.

Now I'm going to ask people to shout words out and I want you to shout them really loudly. As loud as you can. Be proud of whatever you've written. So somebody up towards that back corner, shout me something out. *Multitasking*. Someone down here. *Happy*. Someone here. *Optimistic*. *Continuing*. *Confident*. OK, so far, and we've done this with thousands of people, and I know there's at least one person in the audience who's been very, very good, because they heard me do this last week and they haven't cheated, but no one has ever shouted out "five A-star GCSEs". And I'm not just talking about educationists there. I'm talking about employers, parents, children. I'm talking about a very, very wide audience. It won't surprise you to know that those are the kinds of words that you get up there. Don't worry about reading them all. I'm assuming that those generally are the same kind of words that you've written down.

Right. I've got one more job and this is a very quick job and it'll only take you a few seconds. I want you to imagine your stick figure. The head is knowledge, the hand is skill and the heart is an attribute or an attitude. Now I want you to take those words that you've just written down and draw lines to join them to the head for knowledge, the hand for a skill, the heart for an attitude or an attribute. Try drawing some lines.

This is an activity that actually can take quite a long time and you can go into depth with. We've just touched on it but it's an interesting one to do with a wide variety of audiences. Put your hand up if most of the lines you've drawn went to the head for knowledge. OK. Put your hands up if most of the lines you've drawn went to the hand for skill. OK. Put your hand up if most of the lines you drew went to the heart for attitudes and attributes. OK. Thank you. So the question here to ask yourself is do we have a curriculum at the moment that's geared towards knowledge, or to skill, and actually, when you come down to it, they're inseparable. You learn to persevere by persevering at things. You learn to take risks by taking a risk at something. You had to acquire skills and knowledge in order to learn a great deal of any of those other attributes that you've identified. They are inseparable. But there is a question of balance.

This is quite interesting. One of the things we've been doing a lot of at QCA is talking to learners. It really, really is a good idea you know. This youngster, quite interestingly, let me deal with the 'act properly' first. I don't know whether that means, 'I want to be in theatre' or 'I want to be well behaved'. I suspect it's, 'I want to be in theatre'. I don't know who this youngster is. But do you notice they don't want to learn history? They want to

learn how to be a historian. They actually emphasise the fact that they understand the difference between learning history and learning to be an historian because they put the word 'true' in there. It's actually quite profound. That youngster knows the difference between learning knowledge out of context and learning that knowledge, that history, as part of becoming a historian, learning how to use history, how to explore history, how to learn from history, how to make something out of it.

So we're asking three questions at QCA at the moment. We're no longer working on what the future curriculum should be like. We're trying to change the curriculum now so that it actually prepares young people for the future. We always ask three key questions and we're working with a lot of local authorities, a lot of individual schools, a lot of clusters of schools, we're working with anyone that'll work with us. But we always ask three key questions. The first thing is, let's make a decision about what it is we want to achieve through the curriculum. Because the problem is, like having no school aims or local authority aims or governmental aims, if we don't actually remember what those aims are, how can we make sure we're achieving them? How do we make sure we're aiming towards them? So let's at least agree what it is we want to achieve. Then we can do something about it. Too much of curriculum change is driven by the media saying, for example, as I read just the other day, that young people can't identify the continents of the world. The Independent on Sunday then produced a map that showed major land masses, which, I'm sure someone will explain to the reporter, are not continents, and one of those was an extremely, extremely long, thin one. I'm assuming that's Antarctica on a Mercator projection of the world. The fact that Antarctica is actually almost round, of course, most young people would recognise that, because they're used to seeing things from space. But we need to have an idea of what we want to aim for, what the curriculum should be trying to achieve, so instead of tweaking it in response to minor complaints or minor issues, we can actually develop a curriculum that's got some long-term aims to it.

The second question. Not how do we organise schools, but how do we organise learning? This is about learning spaces. That's only a small part of it. For those of you that were in the session that was in this cinema just now, a large part of the learning space that we talked about was actually outside the building. It was in the open air. Well we say, how do you organise learning to achieve those aims?

And then finally, how do you measure the impact? How do you know that you're making a difference? Now the Government has its own way of making decisions about whether we're making a difference in education or not. It has a narrow range of measures that it uses consistently year on year. But if you're an educational establishment, if you are in education, if you're responsible for learners at any age group, how do you know that you're successful? Because one of the criticisms that's often levelled is that the Government's narrow range of measures is too narrow. Fine. I actually think that the range could be much wider and should be much wider, but that doesn't stop the fact that in your own establishments, if there are other things that you value, how do you know that you're successful? How do you know that if your aim is that young people should be happy in their learning, how do you know that they're happy in their learning? What measures do you use to know that you're making it successful, that you're achieving?

So those are the three key questions we're asking. And we've started by suggesting some aims. These are actually the aims of the National Curriculum. They're just slightly reworded and brought together. We've decided to put these up as a proposal for people to look at and right at the end you will see a URL where you can get all this information and material. Which all, by the way, is draft, because as soon as we publish it and say, this is it, people will take it and say, that's what we've got to do then. And what we're saying is you actually need to think about it yourselves. You need to think how it's relevant for your institution, for your learners, for your organisation. But we're saying, hang on a minute, we are an educational community, that's our business, and if at the end of statutory education or any educational process, the learners we're working with have not become successful learners, what on earth are we doing? If we can't achieve that one, what hope have we got of

achieving anything else? That's our core business. So it's perfectly reasonable that our first aim should be successful learners, so that whatever stage of education we're in, whether it's nursery, foundation, key stage 1, key stage 2, 3, 4, adult education, further education, higher education, whatever we're in, what we should be saying is at the end of whatever part of the process we are in, people should be leaving it as successful learners, having achieved something, having made progress, having enjoyment from their learning.

And linked to that, almost inseparable from that, is the idea they should be confident individuals. A lot of those qualities that you wrote down are actually qualities that require self-confidence. Those two are inseparable. If you're an unsuccessful learner, if you spend your entire life within education failing as a learner, you're certainly not going to be a confident individual at the end of it. But whether you become a confident individual is not just about what you learn, it's mainly about how you learn. It's about the process of learning, not necessarily the outcome of it.

And the other thing that we're saying is a reasonable aim for education is 'young people should become active and responsible citizens who feel that they can make a difference'. And that starts in their own establishments. It starts with 'I can make a difference to my own learning'. It starts with 'I can make a difference to what happens within the group with whom I learn. It starts with 'I can make a difference to what happens in my school, or the establishment in which I'm learning', and then it extends outside to the wider community. We have a large number of young people who are disengaged, who feel that they can make no difference. And I would argue that one of the reasons for that is because they can't make a difference to their own learning in the first place. So they have learned that they can't make a difference and then all of a sudden, when they reach adulthood, we expect them to suddenly believe they can make a difference and to take part in the world and to vote for things.

So let's take the three of those. How do we organise learning? OK, we do need to think about what we want young people to learn. Not just the content, not just the knowledge, not just the specific skills. All those are important. It is important that you can read, you can write, you can handle numbers, you know how to use new technology, those things. No arguments about that. But, if you want young people to be creative, inventive, collaborative, that's a *what?* as well. So how do you organise learning in your establishment to develop collaborative learners? And if you think that's something that's tackled later on in life, believe me, the foundation stage curriculum is a lot nearer to the kind of curriculum that you've just described with your stick figures than the secondary curriculum is. Collaborative learning is something that is actually a fundamental outcome of early years education. Getting young people to relate to each other, communicate with each other, share, learn from each other is fundamental. Then all of a sudden we go through this period in time where we drop all of that, and then universities complain and employers complain because young people, when they come in, can't work together collaboratively. So that's a *what?* just as much as learning how to read and write.

So we need to think about the *how*. How does that happen? If you want people to take risks and to learn from their mistakes, how do you organise the learning so that they do that? At home? Think of the audience. If that 10 year-old boy knew the response he would get to his poem, think what that would have done for his learning, his progress, his self-confidence, an aim of the successful learner.

So the *who*, who do we involve in the learning, is actually an important ingredient as well. Let's bring in experts where we can. Let's involve other adults. Involve parents. Involve the older community. Involve local industry.

The *when*. Time is an interesting one. I've talked to a number of schools that actually have quite flexible timetables. There's a school in Dudley, Leasowes School, where they have a two-week design/technology lesson. It's a secondary school. They talk about suspending the timetable. My argument would be that that's not suspending the timetable, that's

having a flexible timetable. I can't go into the depths of it but there are all sorts of benefits to being able to study something for a consistent period of time instead of, 'The bell's gone, we'll pick this up again next Tuesday afternoon'.

Some of the things you learn, you learn by consistently applying yourself. So we need to think about when learning takes place, and some of it takes place outside school, as well as inside school. Oh and by the way, when we talk about curriculum, we talk about every experience that a young person has that's within the control of the school. So what they learn at lunchtime when they're in the dinner queue is as much a part of the curriculum as what they learn in the science lesson. Because some of those attitudes that you wrote down, they learn in the dinner queue, and they learn when they're walking around the school, and they learn when adults speak to them in the school. They don't learn them in lessons. So when you think about where learning takes place, does it take place out on the moors, in a classroom, in a lecture theatre like this? When you're talking about using space what we want is flexibility. It may be appropriate to bring four classes of learners together into a lecture theatre like this, have an expert present to them, and then break off and go into smaller units, and then maybe work in small groups, individually, whatever. That's about the how, the where, and the what. We need to start from what we want them to learn though.

Oh and by the way, Ofsted is often held up, as, 'We can't possibly do that because of Ofsted inspections'. Just read those through again. You'll notice it's got an Ofsted logo on it. It's an Ofsted slide. There is nothing that says that you have to teach any particular subject every day. There is nothing that says you have to teach subjects. You can combine things. You can make them make sense to the learner. You don't have to teach any subject every week. You can have whole weeks of studying something, learning something, in depth. You can have whole months of it. Actually when people talk about the national curriculum, and they talk about how the national curriculum constrains what you do, what they're often talking about are things like QCA schemes of work, which are not statutory. They are guidance. If you decide that's not the way you want to do it, then you do it your way. But I would challenge you to go back to those three questions. What is it you want to achieve, how are you organising the learning and how do you know you've achieved it? Ofsted inspections are about outcomes, not compliance.

So let's go on the third one. The impact. Evidence of achievement. I know that there are constraints in terms of accredited qualifications and the measures that are imposed on education establishments in terms of their success. But that's not the only assessment that takes place. Assessment takes place in every room, in every conversation, that an adult has with a learner. But it also takes place when learners have conversations with each other. We need to think about why we're assessing. What's the purpose of the assessment? Who does the assessing? Is it always a teacher that does it? Is it the youngster's peers? If you want to know if someone's gained in confidence over a period of time why not ask their classmates? It may be that that doesn't lead you towards a GCSE but it certainly helps you to know whether you're being successful as an education establishment in terms of developing confidence in young people. And the *what*? Is it a test? Is it a piece of video? Is it comments by other people? How do we carry out the assessment? Do we do it online? Do we simply record evidence of learning? Do we do it at a particular time? Interestingly, I've said we've done a lot of 'learner voice' work, one of the interesting things that we've got from youngsters is that they don't mind being tested. They really don't. They don't mind being measured, scaled, tested. They do mind that it all happens at one time and puts them under pressure. But the thing that really surprised us was that they were passionate in saying to us they mind that the assessment of their achievement is used to measure other people's success. Because, they say, it affects the way the school looks at their achievement. We need to be aware of that and do something about that.

OK. Finishing off. The interesting thing from this for me is that this youngster presumably has decided he wants to learn sign language because he's come into contact with somebody with whom he needs to learn sign in order to communicate. But look at the jump that he's

made. Having discovered that he can now communicate with somebody he couldn't communicate with before, he's made the leap that says, 'So now I want to learn more languages. Now I want to open up my world so that I can talk to even more people and share with them'. That's a primary age child. 'I want to be a carpenter.' Economic awareness. 'I want to be financially self-sufficient.' 'I want to be able to spell.' See, a youngster that recognises that there are certain things in this world that are important to you. 'I want to build good things. I don't just want to be a carpenter. I want to get some satisfaction out of my life.' But look at the one in the middle. 'I want to learn how to live without being in trouble.' There's a youngster that actually is so aware of their own environment that they're aware that there is a serious potential for them to get into trouble. But they're also aware enough to know that they don't have to go down that route. And they want, from their school, some help in making the decisions that will keep them out of trouble.

Thank you very much. That is our URL. You'll find a lot more materials than the ones I've just shown you. The important message from me is that actually you have a lot more freedom and flexibility in planning and structuring education and learning, what happens, how it happens and where it happens, than you may think you have. But do, when you're being innovative, when you're being creative, when you're trying things out, think about the learners. Think about the impact it will have on them and think about how you're going to demonstrate that you've made that impact, that you've made a difference. Thank you very much for your time.

Chair:

We've got about five minutes for questions.

Q:

I notice Mike, I don't know, have you had an eye cast towards what's happening in Scotland in relation to curriculum development, with relation to particularly the curriculum for excellence. We have four major headings: successful learners, the same three that you have but one we have is effective contributors at the end there. Has that in any way informed part of what you've been doing?

Mike:

What's happening in Scotland certainly has informed us. What's happening in Northern Ireland has informed us. What's happening in Australia has informed us. We actually did a great deal of research around the world. The trouble is you always try to come up with new words and be different, but actually if somebody's come up with the right words, let's stick with them. And in most parts of the world we're actually expressing the same ideas. So yes, we did. We did listen to what you're doing.

Q:

In your talk just now you've lots of open questions. It's the kind of open questions any of us could have stood and asked, and in your job you must be battling with some really interesting, very pertinent issues about how vocational qualifications are coming into the academic streams and how that will be the divisive, or will be creative [unclear] in your innovative language. I'm not sure that you're giving much pragmatic help to those senior management teams in schools who have to come up with a vision for their learning goals. So I suppose I'm a bit disappointed that there's not more meat in your talk. You know, it's a very complex landscape now and it would be nice to feel somebody's at the helm.

Mike:

OK. There are two reasons for that. One's the short period of time, but the other is that we are actually working with any school, with any local authority, with any group of schools that want to work with us. But actually looking at what you need to do within your own establishment, how you should go about it, is a very personal and very localised discussion and decision. The great danger we have - we use a phrase of guidelines becoming tramlines - is that if what we do is to stand up and say, 'Here is a model for approaching this',

invariably what we find is that a significant proportion of people take that away and say, 'That's now QCA policy, that's what we should do.' What we're trying to do is to open those broad debates in sessions like this but to follow them up in detail if people want to pursue them with us. Because we say, very definitely, that one of the significant ingredients you need to consider is that the curriculum is relevant to the learners in your community and that means looking at what is statutory but also looking at the way you organise learning to make use of your own environment, to make use of the expertise and experience you have in your own community, and to look at the needs of the learners in your community. So no, I can't give you some simple answers and say here's a model, take it away and use it, but one of the things you will find at that website is that we've actually got quite a large community of schools who are holding this kind of debate, and we need to share with each other and to exchange ideas.

Q:

I'm wondering how you square what you've been saying today, which certainly strikes chords with many people in audience I'm sure, with the drive for standards and particularly, for example, the impact of Key Stage 2 stats on the Year 6 teaching as opposed to [unclear] necessarily learning, and what your view is of that and how we, as those of us on the harder edge perhaps closer to schools, have to deal with that, and support schools in raising standards at the same time as trying to be imaginative and innovative.

Mike:

The first thing I'd say is that the two are not separated. Nothing I've talked about will lead to a reduction in standards. The first message is that if you are successful in generating young people who are enthusiastic about learning, and have the skills for learning, then standards will actually go up. I understand the point you're making, which is about if there is a narrow range of measures that are applied to an establishment and they are measured by that, then there is a tendency to focus the teaching on raising those standards. That's actually the point that was echoed by the learners themselves, who said they don't mind being tested, they object to the fact that their achievement is used to measure other people because it changes the establishment's attitude towards them. And I think that's the battle we have to fight. It would be wrong of me to say that we can go to ministers and change the tables and the narrow range of measures. We may be able to do that in time if what we get from the education community is a wider range of measures. That third question, that we can demonstrate our valid, reliable measures of a more successful and broader education. I was actually in a meeting discussing that yesterday. Then we can start presenting those as a wider range of measures. What we have to do as an education community - and you could well sit there and say it's easier for me because I don't have to work in a school directly myself, but I did - is we have to resist that very narrow range and do what's best for the learners in our establishments.