Introducing Professor Dr Ger Graus OBE

Professor Dr Ger Graus, OBE, is global director of Education for KidZania, where in 27 global locations children aged 4-14 can experience the world of work through role-play. Before this he was the founding Chief Executive of the Children’s University, a multiple award winning international charity providing 5-14 year olds with exciting and innovative learning opportunities outside of school hours. He started his working life as a teacher and went on to hold a variety of educator and leadership positions in and around Norwich and Manchester. In 2014 he was awarded an OBE for services to children and he is a renowned figure in the field of education and advises organisations globally on the learning agenda.

Top Twelve Take-Aways from Get a Grip Blog with Professor Dr Ger Graus

1. Children can only aspire to what they know exists. If the menu of experience is narrow the aspiration will be limited. The broader the menu of experience is the more aspirational a child can be.
2. It is our collective duty (not just schools) to provide as wide a menu of experience to all children as possible.
3. We should stop asking children ‘what do you want to do when you grow up?’ as children don’t know and their menu may be limited. Instead we should be asking ‘who do you want to be?’ Starting with values and principles.
4. Finances and cost along with geography can prohibit some children from accessing some experiences, however, there are many great free resources available. Schools, local government and everyone should be signposting what these free resources are (e.g. free museums, galleries, woodlands, parks, talks, activities). Also it would be great if we could decide on a list of experiences that every child should have access to by a certain age and then resource this to ensure it happens. As a society we should make these experiences available as part of an educational curriculum, not just a school curriculum.
5. Within our education system there is too much emphasis on grade improvement, a schooling vision and policy about education is needed. What seems to be lacking is making education purposeful, so children, parents and everyone understands what the purpose of school and education is. We currently have a debate about grade improvement not about education. We need politicians with vision instead of ambition.
6. Good independent schools afford their pupils lots of experiences, however the children that need this the most are in deprived areas and attending state schools where leaders and teachers are governed by a fear of failure (driven by OFSTED, league tables and an over obsession with health and safety). In these schools there is no sense of adventure and the fear of failure gets in the way of providing experiences. When a child, who had achieved a success was asked how she did it, she answered “I wasn’t scared of getting it wrong”.
7. From a young age, we should be giving children ‘Futures Awareness’ which is much broader and starts much earlier than the traditional Careers Advice which is often too limited and too late.
8. It is everyone’s job to raise the aspirations of all children. The schooling system has alienated parents from being part of education and some parents can behave
appallingly towards schools. We need everyone working together – parents, schools, businesses, local communities, policy makers.

9. Schools could help facilitate parental involvement in raising aspirations, one simple suggestion is for a school to set a piece of homework to do something with your parents where parents and their children share and discuss aspirations.

10. Much, perhaps all behaviour of children is copied from adults, this means we need to model the behaviour we want to see in our young people. Nationally we have lost some optimism and seem reticent about ambition. We should ask our children ‘what was the best part of your day to day?’ and we should ask adults and be prepared to answer in front of our kids ‘what do you love most about your job?’.

11. It seems teenagers feel more isolated, perhaps this is partly because we have lost the collectivist culture and are a more individualistic society than previously. This may mean we need to work harder to create a sense of community to help our children feel part of something bigger and cared for by a wider collection of people. If our children could walk in their local community and know that people were looking out for them, if people were saying ‘hello’ this may help reduce the isolation. It would also help families too, where families feel on their own it only increases the pressure. Start in primary schools, in many ways they can be the heart of a community and we should make it so.

12. It is not the children who lack aspiration, children are naturally positive and ambitious. It is us, the adults, who lack the ambition for them. There is no one solution, it is complex jigsaw puzzle but if we can find some of the pieces we can improve the situation.

More from Professor Dr Ger Graus

KidZania Global Director of Education
KidZania are 27 cities for children located across the world where children can experience the world of work. Everything in a KidZania city is scaled 2/3 of usual size and it designed so children aged 4-14 can role play many different jobs and see consequences. So if you stop a job part way through you don’t get paid! The rule for adults in KidZania is to be seen but not heard as the experience of independence is as important for children in KidZania as is what they see there. The UK KidZania is in Westfield London.

Imaginarium of Childhood
Dr Graus latest project, expected to launch in January 2020 is to create a global barometer of the state of childhood. By asking children to upload images that they associate with various phrases or words (e.g. happiness; what I’m most scared of; things I love; Father’s day etc) a huge global data bank of how children experience the world will be created to inform and influence how educators and policy makers view children and their education.