

Robinson launches in, noting that its often newly elected politicians who are quick to tout the ways they are going to “fix” education, including “test[ing] everybody until they pass out”, telling teachers exactly how and what they must teach (they cannot be trusted!) and pushing the STEM agenda down everyone’s throats.

Such attempts at change, Robinson says, are misguided, damaging and completely missing the mark.

“We actually know what to do in education – we are already doing it, we have brilliant schools...” he tells his audience.

Robinson should know.

His first TED talk 'Do Schools Kill Creativity?' has amassed more than 50 million views on YouTube over the last 12 years, giving him the platform and following to become one of the most influential change makers in education.

Today is no exception. Robinson challenges delegates to re-think our school systems, to imagine a set-up where schools are little cultures of creativity where multiple types of intelligences can thrive.

“Every country is trying to improve education – over the last 20 years there's been a pattern of reform, and for the most part its been a catastrophic failure,” he says.

Casting his thoughts globally, Robinson notes the three principles he believes underpin all unsuccessful attempts to reform education.

These three things, he adds, are “misconceived and hostile to human development”.

1.) THE PRINCIPAL OF CONFORMITY

Humans, in all our entirety, are predicated on diversity and our society is all the better for it, Robinson says. Our talents, interests and abilities are wide-ranging and unique to each of us. This is what the education system fails to acknowledge – it has a narrow conception of what ability looks like, and that generates a “big conception of disability”, where creative talents and those skills not linked with academia are seen to not count. If we focus only on what is “happening between our ears” then we miss out on a whole gamut of other talents that we, and our students, have to offer.

2.) THE PRINCIPAL OF COMPLIANCE

In our bid to create conformity, everyone is being “driven up the wall” with testing. Our obsession with measuring outcomes and quantifying learning is squashing originality and creativity. We need to re-configure our focus away from standardised testing, he says.

“Every child is a seething bundle of resources – and you have to go looking for them,” Robinson concludes.

3.) THE PRINCIPAL OF COMPETITION

With its obsession on quantifying outcomes, the current education system works to pit schools and nations against each other which obstructs the process of learning. Teachers become the “service workers” for the testing industry, locked in a relentless cycle.

“We have created a system that actively stops people wanting to learn,” Robinson says. “If you get the conditions right, kids will learn...”

It’s in our power to change things, however.

“We have all we need to transform education – the problem is we are not connected,” Robinson says.

Wrapping up his address, Robinson argues we are all born with an insatiable desire to learn, driven by a burning curiosity to discover and interact with the world around us.

The education system needs to harness and foster this, not limit and squash it under a model that is geared for mass production, conformity and compliance.

“We have eroded the culture of learning,” he says.

“What great schools know is if you get the culture right, the learning takes care of itself, engagement goes up ... we shouldn’t be looking at yield, we should be looking at culture.”