

# Towards A Creative Future: Rethinking Schools For The 21st Century

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Schools are in need of a complete overhaul to meet the challenges of the 21st century, according to the last testament of the world's leading advocate for creativity in the classroom.

Sir Ken Robinson spent a lifetime making the case for more creativity in the curriculum, before his death in 2020.

His TED Talk "[Do Schools Kill Creativity?](#)" is the most-watched of all time, with more than 72 million views, and in 2003 he was knighted by the Queen for his services to the arts.

Now his final thoughts have been published, setting out a vision for rethinking schools for the 21st century, completed after his death by his daughter Kate.

The result, *Imagine If...Creating a Future for Us All*, sketches a blueprint for change to create schools based on the principles of creativity, collaboration and compassion.

Rather than separating the curriculum into discrete subjects, Robinson advocates a structure based on flexible disciplines, focused on equipping students with the ability to meet the challenges they will face throughout their lives.

These personal, social, cultural and economic challenges will be met by instilling what Robinson describes as eight core competences: curiosity, creativity, criticism, communication, collaboration, compassion, composure and citizenship.

This adds up as more of a revolution than an evolution, but it is one that Robinson insists is sorely needed.

“In order to effectively raise children who will thrive in the world they are inheriting, we must revolutionize education. The revolution we need involve rethinking how schools work.”

This means moving away from what Robinson describes as the “factory” model of education which prevails in many school systems, according to daughter Kate.

“The fundamental issue within education systems as they stand is they are driven much more by data points than by real people,” she says.

“Children are on a conveyor belt and things are added to them as though we are making a car, but cars are inanimate objects that don’t care what happens to them, whereas children do care.

“The overwhelming emphasis is on output, whereas it should be focused on the experience.”

It is also a model that fails a significant proportion of children, often the children who stand to gain the most from education.

Pre-pandemic, almost [one in five children](#) in England left school without basic qualifications, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds faring worse.

But this is the inevitable result of a school system that values conformity over diversity and only one kind of ability - academic - so it is no surprise when some children quickly realize they don’t fit into this approach, Kate says.

Her father frequently made the point that we exist in two worlds: the world within us and the world around us, with education systems often focusing purely on the latter.

“Dad felt the purpose of education was to help young people understand the two worlds and the interplay between them,” she says. “Young people leave school with a rudimentary understanding of the world around them but not the world within them.”

Instilling creativity into the classroom can help children tap into this world within, but it is not about separate subjects or spending more time on the arts; instead it is about diffusing the arts throughout the curriculum, incorporating them into literacy, numeracy, science etc.

The value of this approach can be seen in the methods used in alternative provision, which frequently employ the arts to try to re-engage children excluded from mainstream schools

The ideal schools, Kate says, and those her father would have loved, would offer a holistic education, exposing children to the arts and culture as well as academic areas of study; would be interdisciplinary, without separating by subject; would value teachers and treat them as professionals; would mix age groups; would keep assessment in perspective; would understand the importance of play and would value the voices of children.

“The case has never been against formal school, it is looking at how we do it,” Kate says. “We’re at a point where we can’t continue to do what we have been doing.”

Critics of this approach is that while it may work for small groups of motivated children, it is unsuitable for a mass education system, but Kate rejects this objection.

“It is not unrealistic; schools can incorporate this into their daily life,” she says. “The argument is that personalized learning is a logistical nightmare, but we have to have buy-in from the learner.

“A lot of things we do because it’s the way we’ve always done it but what is education for? Is it for the admin team or is it for the children?

“The more complex the challenges become the more creative we must be to meet them, and to channel that into a sense of purpose. Just imagine the world we could be living in.”