

Creativity in General education: A Look into TED-Talks Most Viewed YouTube Post with Sir Ken Robinson and Opponents in the Education Field

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Abstract

This research will look at creativity in education. Using a speech by Sir Ken Robinson at the TED convention in Monterey, California in 2006 as the foundation for this research, it will try to determine if there is a necessity for creative subjects in public education. This research will look at national averages and PISA scores in order to find facts on efficiency of creative education. This research will take into account the opponents of Sir Ken Robinson and their arguments. Outspoke teachers like Tom Bennet and Dan Willingham have both underlined the utopia for Sir Ken Robinson's ideas and voted them impossible. Both praise the idea but argue that it cannot be carried out in the real world, as the funding and demand is too little. This research has concluded that the argument of impossibility is rooted in the median of educational policies and is not founded in the claims of Sir Ken Robinson. If there were, a will, to do as Sir Ken Robinson suggest, there indeed would be a way.

Keywords: Sir Ken Robinson, TED, Tom Benner, Dan Willingham, Educational policies

Introduction

In February 2006, Sir Ken Robinson (from here on referred to as KR), took to the stage at a TED conference in Monterey, California in the USA, and gave a speech, which was to become the most watched TED talk video of all times (youtube.com 2007). In the speech, KR laid forth his visions and opinions about education and the needs that are not met by the education community. Revolving around creativity, KR gives examples of why we are neglecting children's needs and promoting a system that is too rigorous and too settled in conformity (youtube.com, 2007). The video has gotten a lot of praise but has also sparked opponents in the education community. This research will look at arguments from both sides and try to conclude how we can actually find a median that would be acceptable to both sides. Most of the criticism of KR is based on the fact, that he has never himself been a teacher and that he tends to 'romanticize' the classroom and students (Tom Bennet, 2013). KR advocates the individual student approach and emphasizes the right of the student to level his or her abilities and skills (Bennet, 2013). As this sounds good in practice, but it will complicate the educational process and put a strain on school budgets (Willingham, 2010). If each student has to be evaluated and has the possibility to do as he or she pleases, the schools will be a chaotic place with very little direction. As this might not be the original idea from KR it is easy to see how it can be misinterpreted, KR speech is just a speech that does not carry any evidence of practice, it is an idea with a slight of utopia (Robinson, 2010). It is a fact though that over the past 20 years of education more emphasis has been put on language, math, and science in schools. In a way schools have adapted to the demands of life after school, but that life is impossible to predict, as we do not know what society needs in the future (Youtube.com, 2006). In his speech KR underlines this by saying:

**“We have a huge vested interest in it (education), partly because it's education that's meant to take us into this future that we can't grasp. If you think of it, children starting school this year will be retiring in 2065. Nobody has a clue, despite all the expertise that's been on parade for the past four days, what the world will look like in five years' time. And yet we're meant to be educating them for it. So the unpredictability, I think, is extraordinary.”*

In Finland, the education system is trying to meet theories like KR's speech by eliminating topics in the lower levels of education; the Finnish school system is often hailed as one of the best in the world and is ranked 4th in the world in a study made by MBC times. We must bear in mind that 4 years ago Finland was number one but has now been taken over by South Korea and Japan countries with a very different approach to education than Finland (MBC Times, 2017). So what is it South Korea and Japan has done better, looking at how the ranking has concluded its results we must look at the test. The PISA test (program for international student assessment) is a test of math, reading and science (OECD 2016), and schools are therefore only ranked by its results in these areas. According to KR this does not give a clear picture of actual performance, as education is more than math, reading and science (Robinson, 1999). This research will try to evaluate the arguments objectively by comparing a number of article that oppose KR's claims and weigh them with KR's actual theory.

** taken from transcript at:*

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity/transcript?language=en

Method

It is the aim of this research to clarify opinions and arguments set forth by a number of professional teacher in opposition to the inflammatory speech made by KR at the TED convention in 2006 in Monterey, California. By analyzing claims by teachers, it is the hope of

this research to clarify if more creativity is needed in education on all levels. To do this it will cover opinions, existing models and educational politics.

Assessments and Measures

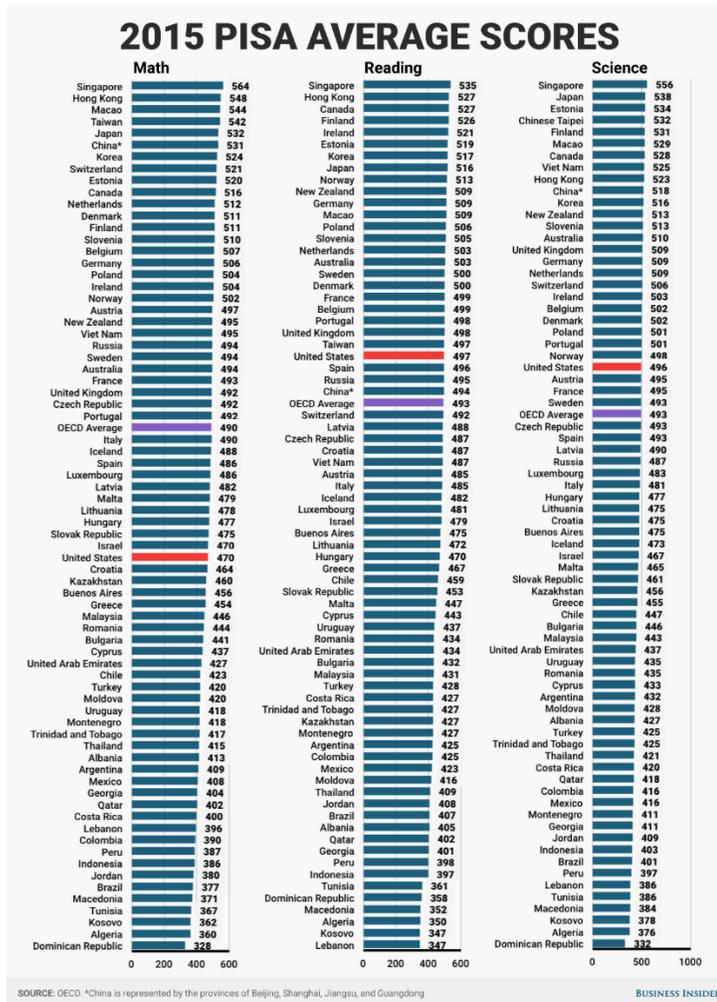


Table 1 (image from Business Insider Dec 6, 2016)

Table 1 shows the over result of the PISA test from 2015, as displayed in Business Insider as of Dec 6th 2016, but according to the same paper the ranking of best school system is different from the result of the PISA test:

1	Finland
2	Belgium, Switzerland
4	Singapore
5	Netherlands
6	Qatar
7	Ireland
8	Estonia
9	Japan, Barbados, New Zealand

Table 2 (Business Insider, Nov 18, 2016)

Business Insider (from here on called BI) published its findings of best education system a month before the PISA test results, and it showed a different picture. BI based its results from the World Economic Forum who releases its Global Competitiveness Report on the state of the world's economies every year. The WEF looks information from many different areas. The information is used to compile an overview of the education level of almost every country on earth. In the BI article *“countries were ranked according to the "12 pillars of competitiveness," which includes macro-economic environment, infrastructure, health and primary education, and labor market efficiency”*.

*** quote from BI article November 18, 2016*

Opponents

KR's ideas are in many ways, rooted in fiction and estranged from real planned curricular practices (Kirby 2013), the idea that every student can, by instinct, foresee his or her future is not a theory that is proved or even tested (Kirby, 2013). Should this be the practice of public schools the budgets would have to be quadrupled, and as the world is now this is highly unlikely

(Bennet, 2013). Having said that KR's views are shared by a large majority of educational experts who revel in the ideas of more creativity in the classroom. But in order to do this studies would have to prove its worth. A longshot example of focus on creativity, was in Sweden in the 1970's were the Swedish government approved citizen pay where everybody could pursue whatever they wanted within the law, for up to 3 years. This law created a thriving industry for Swedish artists who had time, to perfect their craft, and therefore became known. The export of artistic expressions, like music, movies and photograph exploded and became an important income for the Swedish economy. By the 1990's this law was repealed and today Sweden has very little export in the artistic area (Dilon 2002). This could be used as an argument to promote art and creativity in schools as it could be seen as proof of usability and a resource for nations worldwide, but this implies that there is no creativity in schools or society offered as of now and this is where a number of teachers are opposing KR (Bennet 2013). Tom Bennet (from here on referred to as TB) is one of the harsh opponents to KR's speech. In his article from 2013, "*The Second Coming of Ken Robinson- but he's not the messiah*" he refers to KR as, "*the godfather of unusually-used paperclips*". TB feels that KR's theory is superficial and brainless. Although very direct, he underlines his conviction by referring to creativity as an abstract that cannot be defined by art alone. As an example he uses own math class to underline that creativity already exist in most classrooms (Bennet 2013). Dan Willingham (from here on referred to as DW) is another opponent of KR who claims that KR's ideas are not in the least revolutionary but an old idea. DW is questioning the innovation of KR's theory, and asks what will make a difference in education (Willingham, 2010). TB and DW are both teachers with many years in education, their argument is rooted in experience, whereas KR's statements are theoretical in nature.

Ken Robinson

In 2011, Ken Robinson wrote the book “out of our mind”, in which he states that the world is becoming more complex and that people, therefore, need to be more creative to handle it (Robinson, 2011). KR defines creativity by dividing it into 3 areas “*imagination, which is the process of bringing to mind things that are not present to our senses; creativity, which is the process of developing original ideas that have value, and innovation, which is the process of putting new ideas into practice.*” (Robinson, 2013). It is important to understand that creativity is not just dancing and painting in KR’s theory, to him the idea of using creativity and implementing it into the classroom, is a revival of a natural skill everybody possesses, an ability everybody has in his or her subconscious mind. In his famous 2006 speech, KR claims that we are educated out of creativity, meaning that we are all creative from birth but we are taught never to use it (youtube.com, 2007). KR contests the idea that a certain group of people are not creative, and advocates the necessity of potential development as creativity is surprised. The reason KR feel creativity is essential in education is that he believes that in order to excel creatively we need to nurture it and develop it from an early age (Robinson 2011). It is therefore essential to initiate programs where children get to perform and practice their creative needs and skills (Robinson 2011). The idea KR proposes in a combination of creative connectedness, business and culture, by addressing the needs in all three areas the coming generations should be better prepared for a future that is in the midst of a revolution. By addressing skills in variety instead of just focusing on traditional topics in education curriculums, there is a growing chance of a waste majority being left behind. KR believes in opening up for possibilities throughout expression (Robinson 2013).

Discussion

It is easy to oppose the ideas of KR; TB and DW both have valid points, in pointing out that ideas can be beautiful, but hard to put into practice. The cost of education is a matter of constant review in all nations and the fact that there is an unwillingness to use government spending on the creative subjects makes it hard to fulfil. The question we must ask is if more creative subjects could sustain the demand for the market place. Are there enough theaters, galleries, or producers to handle a large influx of artists coming out of the education institutes? The fact is that our world today do not need dancers, it needs engineers, architects and knowledgeable business people (Willingham, 2011). KR agrees with this but still maintains that the ability to be creative will benefit the “traditional” areas, meaning an engineer could benefit from having learned how to move his or her body rhythmically, because it is through diversity we are at our best (Robinson, 2011). In his speech he advocates the observation of children so that we do not “loose” them in a rigorous system that has lost all flexibility. A study made by the center of disease control in America showed that in 2014 10 % of all children were diagnosed with ADHD, a number that is only raising. 50 years ago, this number was zero. The perception that a child who does not fit in with the common idea for “normal” must be mentally disabled is a fact in most public schools because time and resources are not allocated into better care of these children (Robinson, 2011). TB and DW both have a valid point in criticizing KR, but they are aiming their anger in the wrong direction. They both agree that KR is right in his analysis, but criticize KR for promoting a utopian idea and this is where they are wrong. The critic should be aimed at the right target in this case educational policies, who limit the choice for students in the early years of their education. Education should be for the individual and not for the masses, and the perception that all people would choose a career in arts if given the choice is far from

scientifically proven, where as artistic movement is proven to have beneficially effects for children throughout their education (Robinson, 2000).

Conclusion

The conclusion of a paper like this must be to look at the science of education. Even though the Japanese educational system is very different from the Finnish system, there is a common denominator; they both value the creative subjects on a much higher level than most other countries. The make-up and mix of creativity incorporated in to the classroom seems to be working. To have it work on a permanent basis, educational policies must be flexible enough to make it possible to execute it in national education.

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