

## **TEDx, London: The Education Revolution (September 17, 2011)**

Transcript of the Final Remarks (“Outro”) by Sir Ken Robinson

One of the privileges of not being with you in person today, is I get to talk to you twice; one at the beginning and here we are at the end. The reason why today’s conversation is so important is that we are living in revolutionary times; that’s why we need a revolution in education, and there are two big drivers of change. One of them is population growth. We live in a world now that is more populated than any time in history. There are about seven billion people on the earth which is more human beings than any other time, and we’re heading for nine billion. That’s reason enough in itself. But the second is technology and the way that technologies are transforming everything we do - economically, culturally, how we think and how we relate.

I published a book ten years ago called, *“Out of our Minds: Learning to be Creative”* and I’ve just issued a new version of it. The reason is that so much has happened in the last ten years. I mean, ten years ago there was no Google, no Facebook, no Twitter, no social media of any sort. There were no smart phones, no iPhones, no iPads; none of the things we take for granted. And that rate of change is going to accelerate; it’s not going to decrease. We’re not heading towards some calm pasture where all the change will be behind us; they will simply become more tumultuous.

By the way, I wrote the new version of the book on Microsoft Word. I don’t know if any of you use Microsoft Word; but, I don’t know if you noticed it, if you do, but it has opinions on what you write. It comments on your literary style. You get little green squiggles if it doesn’t approve of what you’ve just said. One of the things it disapproves of is the passive voice. So, you can't say that “the roundhouse was built”. You have to say who built it, according to Bill Gates, anyway. Why he’s got this thing against the passive voice, I do not know. But, I was writing about the history of public education and I wrote about the growth of intelligence testing. I wrote this sentence; I said, “The foundations of the modern intelligence test were laid in the late 19th century by Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin”; which is true by the way. I’ll just tell you that again, “The foundations of modern intelligence were laid in the late 19th century by Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin.” Well, Microsoft Word didn’t like that. It had little green squiggles because it had the passive voice, “were laid,” and it suggested the alternative in the active voice. What it suggested was: “In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sir Francis Galton laid a cousin of Charles Darwin, the foundation of the modern intelligence test.” Well not really, I feel.

But, it is interesting that the span of public education runs pretty much from the late 19th century to the present day and it’s becoming increasingly dominated by that type of culture. And what was subverted in the end as well, is the rapid changes that are overtaking those; some of them being driven by technology. So it is important that we sense the scale of the challenges that education is involved with and also the need for us to see education as the key to the future.

There was a great quote by HG Wells, another great 19th-century writer, one of the few people to look into the future and see something that has been borne out by events. But he once said that “civilisation is a race between education and catastrophe”. Well, there's some reason to believe he might be right and catastrophe is edging out in front a little. But it's not too late to catch up with it if we think boldly and fundamentally about the basic purposes of education and how we meet them. But what I also wanted to leave you with is this thought that, as we consider the changes that need to be made, we don't have to reinvent everything.

You're standing today, or sitting if you are, in a very long tradition of debate about alternatives to the mainstream forms of education. Many things that I argue for have been argued by other people eloquently in the past, and practiced by them. There was a long tradition in what was sometimes called 'progressive education'. I never liked the apparent dichotomy between 'progressive' and 'traditional'. But, an argument has been made really from the origins of education for more holistic approaches, more balanced approaches; ones that represent a real balance between the arts and the sciences, for example; between the humanities and physical education, the other things that I mentioned.

There have been notable pioneers and practitioners; from Montessori, Pestalozzi, Froebel, to the work of Piaget, Bruner, the list goes on .... Dewey. There have been great pioneers in education, many of them in the UK. There have been wonderful schools; you're meeting not far from one of the most extraordinary schools in the world, which is Summerhill. But also great schools in the public sector - great environmental schools, great innovative schools. I think it's important that we recognise the conversation is not happening in a vacuum. It's not a historical vacuum; it's not a cultural vacuum. The issue, though, is to make these principles not part of the alternative, but part of the mainstream.

I live in Los Angeles, as I mentioned earlier, and I was at a meeting recently of a great project called the *HeArt Project* that happens downtown here in LA. And it brought together, this particular meeting, representatives from across the city - the supervisor of the LA Unified School district, for example, which has 800,000 students in it. It is the largest school district in America outside of New York. And we were there to talk about the future of alternative education. What really interested me was this: that the principles of alternative education are designed to re-engage young people with education who have dropped out of it or been failed by it. And the principles are interesting; they're all based - all the alternative education approaches, all around the world - are based on a personalised curriculum. They're based on an intensive relationship between students and teachers. They're based on group activities and close links with the community; and they're based on trying to identify the individual talents and interests of each student, and shaping the environment so it helps to encourage them.

Well, I was saying at this meeting in LA that these principles of alternative education are actually the principles of education; just 'good education'. It seems to me bizarre that they have now become confined to the alternative to mainstream education and I think our job is to make the, what's been hitherto, in a way, the fringe of education - the periphery - it's to move those principles to the centre. I think if all of education were modeled on similar principles,

then our students wouldn't be dropping out in the first place and they'd be getting much more from education and we'd be getting much more from them.

The new technologies are among the factors that we need to change and they are among the factors that will make the change possible. They make available now tremendous opportunities to personalise education. They are not the whole answer. I believe it is true of all technology that technology on its own doesn't do much; it's what you do with it. You know, a camera doesn't produce great photographs but a great photographer might. A piano in itself doesn't produce great music but a great musician could. And the technologies we have available in the schools don't make for great education, but great educators can make something great of them.

So, as we look into the future from where we sit now, it is as hard for us to predict the future as it was for the architects of the 19th century to predict the world that we now live in. But if we are resilient, and if we invest in and believe properly in our true creative powers, if we apply them in all our educational settings, then we will begin to shape a different type of future for everybody. And it's important, therefore, that as we go away from today's conference, that we take seriously the pledge form that TEDx has put before us; asking us if we would be prepared to pledge ideas or resources or money or time to making something happen. Well, I want to say that I have done that; I do do that, I spend all my time in promoting changes in education and supporting those who do. And I'm delighted to offer my pledge to support whatever comes from TEDx to take this conversation forward and help to shape a future that we all want to live in. Thank you very much.

*Sir Ken Robinson, September 17, 2011*