

A peer-reviewed open-access journal indexed in NepJol

ISSN 3021-9965 (Print)

Published by Okhaldhunga Campus, Okhaldhunaga, Koshi Province, Nepal

Article History: Received May 2, 2024; Accepted on August 14, 2024


DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/oj.v1i2.69582>

Robinson and Lou Aronica's *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's transforming Education: A Book Review*

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I was much impressed by the Ted Talk of Sir Ken Robinson on “Do Schools kill creativity?” in 2006, which is still in YouTube. Later, in 2020 during my online course, Susan Hillyard, the campaigner of Drama for Language Teaching informed me that Ken Robinson died of Cancer on August 21, 2020. Meanwhile, she mentioned that he had written the best-selling book on Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education published first in 2015 by Viking and later in 2016 by Penguin Random House. Since then, I had a long-awaited desire to read that book. When I was assigned to review a book by my PhD course facilitator, Prof. Dr. Lava Deo Awasthi, I chose the same for the review. I was eager to understand how Robinson brought transformation and how we can do that in Nepal's context since the education system in Nepal too is waiting to be transformed.

After going through all ten chapters of 320 pages long book, I found it most influential and practical. The one who thinks we need some changes in our education, particularly schooling system, must read this book. The perspectives, methods, techniques and examples in the book are really mind-blowing for all the policymakers, school leaders, teachers, parents and the campaigners. The book

is authored principally by Sir Ken Robinson and co-authored by Lou Aronica, which presents variety of educational reforms campaigns driven by the political and commercial interests that represented how young people learn in their schools and how schools actually function. He informs the readers how standards culture is damaging the students and the schools throughout the world and presents the unique way of thinking about the education system. Throughout the book, he urges us to deserve the power to change the system. He acknowledges the various great schools, wonderful teachers and inspiring leaders in the world who are providing students a kind of personalized, compassionate and community-oriented education. In the introduction section, he mentions:

In 2006, I gave a talk at the TED conference in California called “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” The essence of that talk was that we’re all born with immense natural talents, but through education far too many of us have lost touch with them. (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, p. 14)

Reading introduction makes the reader ponder whether the current education system is really killing the creativity of the learners. He asks many questions such as “what is education for? What’s going wrong in education and why? What would it look like? These questions raised in book make us think about education system seriously. I believe the readers might learn a lot what education and learning mean after reading this book. Robinson defines learning, education and many other terminologies in the book. For example, he writes:

Learning is the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills. Human beings are highly curious learning organisms. From the moment they’re born, young children have voracious appetite for leaning. For too many, that appetite starts to dull as they go through school. Keeping it alive is the key to transforming education (p.16).

These lines really show the appetite of the writer for transformative education system. Robinson and Aronica, in the first chapter ‘Back to Basics’, write about the standards movements in education throughout the world. They present the examples of standards movements in UK and elsewhere and critique how these standards movement are fostering propositional knowledge through standardization and competition. Particularly Robinson mentions that the standards movements highlight formal education along with the curriculum, teaching and assessment, in curriculum, literacy, mathematics and STEM, in teaching direction instruction and formal written examination. The authors pointed out that the standards movements do not have course works, portfolios,

open book tests, teacher evaluation, and peer assessments. That raises questions why high stakes assessment? They rightly said that education is the one of the world's biggest businesses. The authors also appeal that we need a better metaphor. We need radical change in how we think about and do in school.

Chapter two is about changing metaphors. They present the various metaphors such as car in the industrialization. Robinson connects the metaphors used in his TED Talk speech "changing educational paradigms" of one of industrializations and challenges us to think education differently than a "mechanistic process" (p.38). He presents the urgency of different sort of education that integrates students' intrinsic motivation and creativity.

Other subsequent chapters such as chapter three on Changing Schools present the examples of various schools and projects in various locations. For example, Minddrive, a non-profit held by DeLaSalle Education Center in Kansas City project has been discussed in the book which provided students opportunity to build car and learn about mechanics (p.38). Grange primary school in central England involved students in the Grangeton within the school (p.38), North Star Self-directed leaning for teens in Massachusetts permitted students to select what they wanted to learn and foster intellectual curiosity. He further provides many examples of schools and universities where he believes are the good examples of right education. These examples were enough to set the path for grassroots revolution that also supports the writers' envisioning of being away from the standardization in education. The examples eventually focus on the reform movements that highlighted the enhancement of the teaching quality, balance curriculum, supportive and informative assessment systems.

Chapter four discusses how the various schools and reformative campaigns helped to foster the children's natural inborn qualities. He beautifully discusses who the natural born learners are. He says:

New born babies have a voracious appetite to learn about the world around them. The schools only need to provide the platform. He explains about the ecstasy and agony of leaning (p.105).

He further provides three principal elements of academic work as focusing on what philosophers call propositional knowledge, focusing on academic work on theoretical analysis of concepts, procedures, assumption and hypothesis and emphasizing on desk studies that mainly involve reading, writing, and mathematics. (p. 109). He poses the question whose problem is the imposition of all those things to the young children? His main focus is that the purpose of

schools should be to enable the students to pursue own interest and strengths. He further says, “bad memories may be a lack of engagement, not lack of capacity (p. 112). So, his appeal is to let the children play. He further puts, “Play is absolutely fundamental to leaning: it is a natural fruit of curiosity and imagination” (p. 124).

Chapter five presents the power of teaching. He begins with the comparison between the education and agriculture since education is a living process. The comparison between gardeners and the teachers is interesting. He highlights the two contemporary ways of engaging students in the art: making and appraising. According to the author, the teachers must fulfill four main roles: engaging, enabling, expecting and empowering children.

Chapters from four to ten present what Robinson envisions in creative schools. He describes the main roles and responsibilities of five main actors in creative schools such as students, teachers, principals, families and policymakers. In the discussion of teachers’ role, the writer investigates and presents the very interesting idea that the teachers must adapt with and individualize the teaching pedagogy to the level and need of the children. They need to inspire, instill the passion. It is the role of teachers to inspire passion, instill confidence and spur creativity among his or her students (p.127).

Chapter six outlines what should be taught in schools or what’s worth-knowing (p.128). Robinson says that the curriculum should follow the important principles of diversity, depth and dynamism (p. 157). The chapter restates the main four purposes of education such as economic, cultural, social and personal and discusses the eight competencies related to all four purposes. These eight competencies begin with letter C such as curiosity-the ability to ask questions and explore how the world works, creativity- the ability to generate new ideas and to apply them in practice, criticism- the ability to analyse information and ideas and to form reasoned arguments and judgements, communication- the ability to express thoughts and feelings clearly and confidently in a range of media and forms, collaboration- the ability to work constructively with others, compassion- the ability to empathise with others and to act accordingly, composure- the ability to connect with the inner life of feelings and develop a sense of personal harmony and balance, and citizenship- the ability to engage constructively with society and to participate in the processes that sustain. Moreover, in the same chapter the author advocates for the balanced curriculum that gives equal status and resources to all subjects like, the arts, humanities, language arts, mathematics physical education, and science. He further says that each of them should address the major

areas of intelligence, cultural knowledge, and personal development.

Chapter seven is on Testing which provides the in-depth discussion on the assessment of the curriculum. The author has provided examples from multiple schools and teachers that offer the ways of assessing students against the standard testing in creative schools. He says, "Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. Properly conceived, both formal and informal assessment should support students learning and achievements at in three ways: motivation, achievement and standards" (P. 214).

Chapter eight outlines how principals should act upon the schools and what their roles should be to make the creative schools. Drawing various examples from the European and American context, Robinson discusses the principles of principals. This chapter makes us realize what the leadership in creative school should be like. The roles of principles, changing cultures and adaptive systems, habits, habitats, cultivating the grounds and beyond the gates have been well discussed and presented in the chapter. His presentation of three core areas that every school leader needs to address are collaborative leadership, personalizing school environment, curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve student performance. He highlights the role of principals for empowering culture of learning particularly developing schools with the features like community, individuality, possibility.

Chapter nine "Bring It All Back Home" talks about the good parenting. He beautifully presents the scenario of United States of America and Europe where parents are understood quite differently than elsewhere. The author has explained the school-community partnership to develop the school as home for children. How the role of parents can be significant in creative schools is presented with variety of examples. The parents should be part of the vision "supplementing what the school is offering, so everyone wins (p. 213).

In the final chapter "Changing the Climate", the author states that however much the schools do to transform themselves, their cultures are critically affected by the political climate that envelopes them. The author defines who are policymakers and specifies the roles of them to make the school creative. The author interweaves the success stories and examples from multiples countries and presents the importance of the policies for the vision. He says, "the real role of effective leaders in education is not command and control; it is climate control". He further says that education should be based on the principles of health, ecology, fairness and care. To practice these principles, policymakers need to facilitate particular condition (p.249).

Finally, Robinson encapsulates his broader view-point in the 'Afterword' that "personalizing education might sound revolutionary, but this evolution is not new (p. 254). Developing creative schools is a revolution that might take time but we need to pay attention towards it. The book is a complete package to transform the mindset of the concerned stakeholders in education. The practical examples from around the world have shown that the attempts have been made to change the education systems which are not sufficient. The existing education systems throughout the world are still not integrating creativity since students are compelled to study the theoretical academic subjects rather than creative arts.

The book concludes that the existing education system throughout the world does not involve the creativity. The children are compelled to study the academic subjects rather than creative arts. The author points out that many countries are in the race of a higher program for international student assessment which includes their reading mathematics and science knowledge and skills. The book provides the plethora of examples how and why education system requires revolution in education. The traditional ways to teaching and learning has not become successful to transform the society. So, we need to devise the effective methods to educate and we need the schools to be the place where children find themselves growing according to their interest (Chalfin, 2016). To embrace the changes into our thinking, education system, particularly in curriculum, teaching pedagogy, assessment and climate, I highly recommend to all the concerned stakeholders to read this book. The book is in simple language with variety of examples, anecdotes and analogies to understand the grassroots revolution in schooling in Europe and America. As raised the issue of creativity and criticality in our school systems throughout the world (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019), this book can be the eye-opener to all.

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