

Arts and Culture Week Award April 2009

Thank-you remarks by Amy Newman

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Creativity is a human trait. Sir Ken Robinson describes creativity as the process of having original ideas that have value. He argues that this process is as natural as speaking.

Doesn't sound very revolutionary, does it?

However, according to Sir Ken, schools across the globe are still stuck in the Industrial Age. In fact, schools are killing creativity — we are systematically weaning the creativity out of our students.

But all is not lost – he believes that we can nourish creativity through two means:

- 1)...by teaching creatively
- 2)... by teaching *for* creativity

What he is saying is in direct opposition to the movement across the globe that is pushing towards narrowing, quantifying and standardizing education. He argues that schools need to be TRANSFORMED not reformed!

(Think artists in residence, apprenticeships in the arts, think the elimination of arts and culture week because it is redundant and takes place all year, think of children solving complex problems or searching for solutions by dancing, drawing or creating an instrument the world has never heard before. Think of children's artistic collaborations permeating our schools –and not just the gymnasiums! Imagine the Fraser Institute ranking schools with the highest creativity index and families scrambling to move into those neighborhoods....)

OK – that last one *might* seem far-fetched.... But scholars *have* studied and developed tests to measure creativity. E. Paul Torrance, known to some as the "Father of Creativity", uses four indicators: originality, fluency, flexibility and elaboration.

What interested me here primarily is the notion of flexibility – flexibility in our thinking and in our teaching – flexible responsiveness to our students and the problems or situations that arise everyday in the classroom.

In my work with student teachers and the Professional Development Program (or PDP) at Simon Fraser University, we try to model a disposition that is flexible, open to possibilities and one that encourages authentic creative expression. In the fine arts module our students are invited to demonstrate their understanding in multiple ways; writing is not always privileged over other means of expression. For example, in September our students distilled each of our PDP program goals down to a simple phrase, the essence of which was presented to the class as a series of tableaux. To illustrate their pathway to PDP, each student altered a shoe to demonstrate significant events, people and turning points in their lives that led them to the teacher education program. Cowhide was stretched across a hiking boot to create a drum shoe. Flowers of intense colors covered the entire surface of a sandal creating the effect of a living entity. A running shoe was swaddled in a receiving blanket and tucked inside a shoebox bed to illustrate a student's passion for nurturing children.

Two days ago, on their last day of PDP, our students shared their teaching portfolios with one another. They took various forms – one was a huge floor puzzle with learning statements on each piece; students presented live theatre, one created colored tapestries representing different learning goals. Quilts, paintings, scrapbooks and electronic media were used to share their key learning. No two were alike.

These on-campus experiences opened the door for student teachers to experiment, take risks, and be open to alternatives and possibilities in their own classrooms. They were encouraged to plan in ways that integrated the arts meaningfully into their everyday practice and attended to their students' different strengths and intelligences.

There are 28 distinct teacher education modules in PDP and we have been exploring ideas of a common curriculum across all modules. Rather than basing these on subject areas, they are broad educational strands such as ecology, indigeneity and creativity/artistry. The idea is that every module incorporates these key constituents, such as creativity and artistry, as a fundamental element in their work with student teachers. This is one of the aims of crafting a common curriculum.

In turn, we hope to encourage (or perhaps *implore*) all the student teachers to move into their schools with a disposition and understanding that teaching creatively and teaching *for* creativity are essential.

The work we are doing toward a common curriculum is ongoing. The seconded teachers who plan for instruction in the 28 modules are working together to use our strengths, skills, experiences and passionate beliefs to educate hundreds of students each year about the need to TRANSFORM schools – it is our hope that our student teachers will be agents of change and play an integral role in transforming schools and educational practice. Now that would be a revolution.

Sir Ken Robinson's interview with Riz Khan:

<http://vodpod.com/watch/1012965-riz-khan-schools-killing-creativity-10-sep-08-part-1>