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Sir Ken Robinson: Creativity Is In Everything, Especially Teaching



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By [MindShift \(https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/author/mindshift/\)](https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/author/mindshift/)

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From *Creative Schools* (<http://www.amazon.com/Creative-Schools-Grassroots-Revolution-Transforming/dp/0670016713>), by Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica, published April 21, 2015, by Viking, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. Copyright by [Ken Robinson \(http://sirkenrobinson.com/\)](http://sirkenrobinson.com/), 2015.

Creative Teaching

Let me say a few words about creativity. I've written a lot about this theme in other publications. Rather than test your patience here with repetition of those ideas, let me refer you to them if you have a special interest. In *Out of Our Minds: Learning to Be Creative*, I look in some detail at the nature of creativity and how it relates to the idea of intelligence in the arts, the sciences, and other areas of human achievement. In 1997, I was asked by the U.K. government to convene a national commission to advise on how creativity can be developed throughout the school system from ages five through eighteen. That group brought together scientists, artists, educators, and business leaders in a common mission to explain the nature and critical importance of creativity in education. Our report, *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (<http://sirkenrobinson.com/pdf/allourfutures.pdf>), set out detailed proposals for how to make this happen in practice and was addressed to people working at all levels of education, from schools to government.

It's sometimes said that creativity cannot be defined. I think it can. Here's my definition, based on the work of the *All Our Futures* group: *Creativity is the process of having original ideas that have value.*

There are two other concepts to keep in mind: imagination and innovation. Imagination is the root of creativity. It is the ability to bring to mind things that aren't present to our senses.



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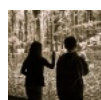
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Creativity is putting your imagination to work. It is applied imagination. Innovation is putting new ideas into practice. There are various myths about creativity. One is that only special people are creative, another is that creativity is only about the arts, a third is that creativity cannot be taught, and a fourth is that it's all to do with uninhibited "self-expression."

None of these is true. Creativity draws from many powers that we all have by virtue of being human. Creativity is possible in all areas of human life, in science, the arts, mathematics, technology, cuisine, teaching, politics, business, you name it. And like many human capacities, our creative powers can be cultivated and refined. Doing that involves an increasing mastery of skills, knowledge, and ideas.

Creativity is about fresh thinking. It doesn't have to be new to the whole of humanity— though that's always a bonus— but certainly to the person whose work it is. Creativity also involves making critical judgments about whether what you're working on is any good, be it a theorem, a design, or a poem.

Creative work often passes through typical phases. Sometimes

what you end up with is not what you had in mind when you started. It's a dynamic process that often involves making new connections, crossing disciplines, and using metaphors and analogies. Being creative is not just about having off-the-wall ideas and letting your imagination run free. It may involve all of that, but it also involves refining, testing, and focusing what you're doing. It's about original thinking on the part of the individual, and it's also about judging critically whether the work in process is taking the right shape and is worthwhile, at least for the person producing it.



New York Times bestselling author of *The Element*

Ken Robinson, Ph.D.

and Lou Aronica

Creative Schools

The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education

[schools-cover.png](#))

Creativity is not the opposite of discipline and control. On the contrary, creativity in any field may involve deep factual knowledge and high levels of practical skill. Cultivating creativity is one of the most interesting challenges for any teacher. It involves understanding the real dynamics of creative work.

Creativity is not a linear process, in which you have to learn all the necessary skills before you get started. It is true that creative work in any field involves a growing mastery of skills and concepts. It is not true that they have to be mastered before the creative work can begin. Focusing on skills in isolation can kill interest in any discipline. Many people have been put off by mathematics for life by endless rote tasks that did nothing to inspire them with the beauty of numbers. Many have spent years grudgingly practicing scales for music examinations only to abandon the instrument altogether once they've made the grade. The real driver of creativity is an appetite for discovery and a passion for the work itself. When students are motivated to learn, they naturally acquire the skills they need to get the work done. Their mastery of them grows as their creative ambitions expand. You'll find evidence of this process in great teaching in every discipline from football to chemistry.

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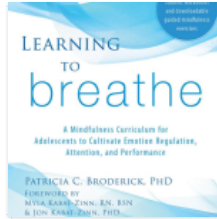
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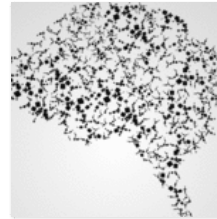
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