

# legacy

## Tribute to Sir Ken Robinson, a knight to the rescue of education

by Ana Moreno

### TRIBUTE TO SIR KEN ROBINSON

Covid-19 has put the world in check, every system is wobbling, including education. Old dynamics and ways of thinking no longer work to get out of this. And so, innovation is required, i.e, doing things differently. This will be possible thanks to a great old friend though still quite unknown to many: creativity. According to the recently deceased Professor Sir Ken Robinson, who is our protagonist today, it is the most abundant and also most necessary natural human capacity for the survival of the human being.

In 2006, in the TED conference in California, Sir Ken gave a death knell to the educational world: "schools are killing creativity". His cry was heard all over the planet: over 60 million visualizations, an estimated 380 million people in 160 countries listened to his words. No one was left indifferent; he seemed to be a visionary to some, a madman to others, and not a few saw him as a provocateur seeking popularity. However, our opinion will surely be different if we tackle the same lecture again today. In his 20 minutes talk, he recalls three aspects in a pleasant and sympathetic way: the extraordinary evidence of the creative capacity with which each human being is born, that we have no idea what will happen in the future and, finally, the interest education awakens at all levels.

But who was Ken Robinson? He was a Knight of Queen Elizabeth II

of England since 2003; why did he deserve this honour and how did he come to lead such an educational revolution?

**Ken Robinson** was born in 1950 to a working-class family of seven children. At the age of four, he contracted polio, which left him with significant consequences and forced him to attend a special needs school. When he was still a child, his father had an accident at work that left him a quadriplegic. However, thanks to his determination and the support of his family, he managed to study at university and end his doctorate. His doctoral thesis studied the possibilities of drama and theatre in education.

Amongst his many consultancy, teaching and research projects, he was the director of "The Arts in Schools Project", one to improve

the learning of the arts in schools in England and Wales. He taught Art Education for 12 years at Warwick University, serving as spokesperson for the department itself and ending up as Professor Emeritus at the same university.

In the late 90s, the British Minister of Education and Employment appointed him to a national advisory committee on creative education and culture. This commission carried out the largest national research on the importance of creativity in education and the UK economy. It published the so-called Robinson Report, whose real title was "*All our futures: creativity, culture and education*". The article highlighted the limited role that creativity had hitherto played and the importance it held in the future, both for the country and humanity itself. The Times published the following about the report: "*This report raises*



*some of the most important issues facing business in the 21st century. It should have every CEO and HR director banging on the table and demanding action”.*

He used creativity to resolve conflicts of all kinds and worked with ministers; he became the central figure in creating a strategy for the development of creativity and the economy that was part of the Peace Process with Northern Ireland.

Ken Robinson was one of four international advisors to the Singapore government in creating their strategy to become the creative environment for Southeast Asia. He was acclaimed by Fast Company Magazine as one of the “elite thinkers in creativity and innovation”.

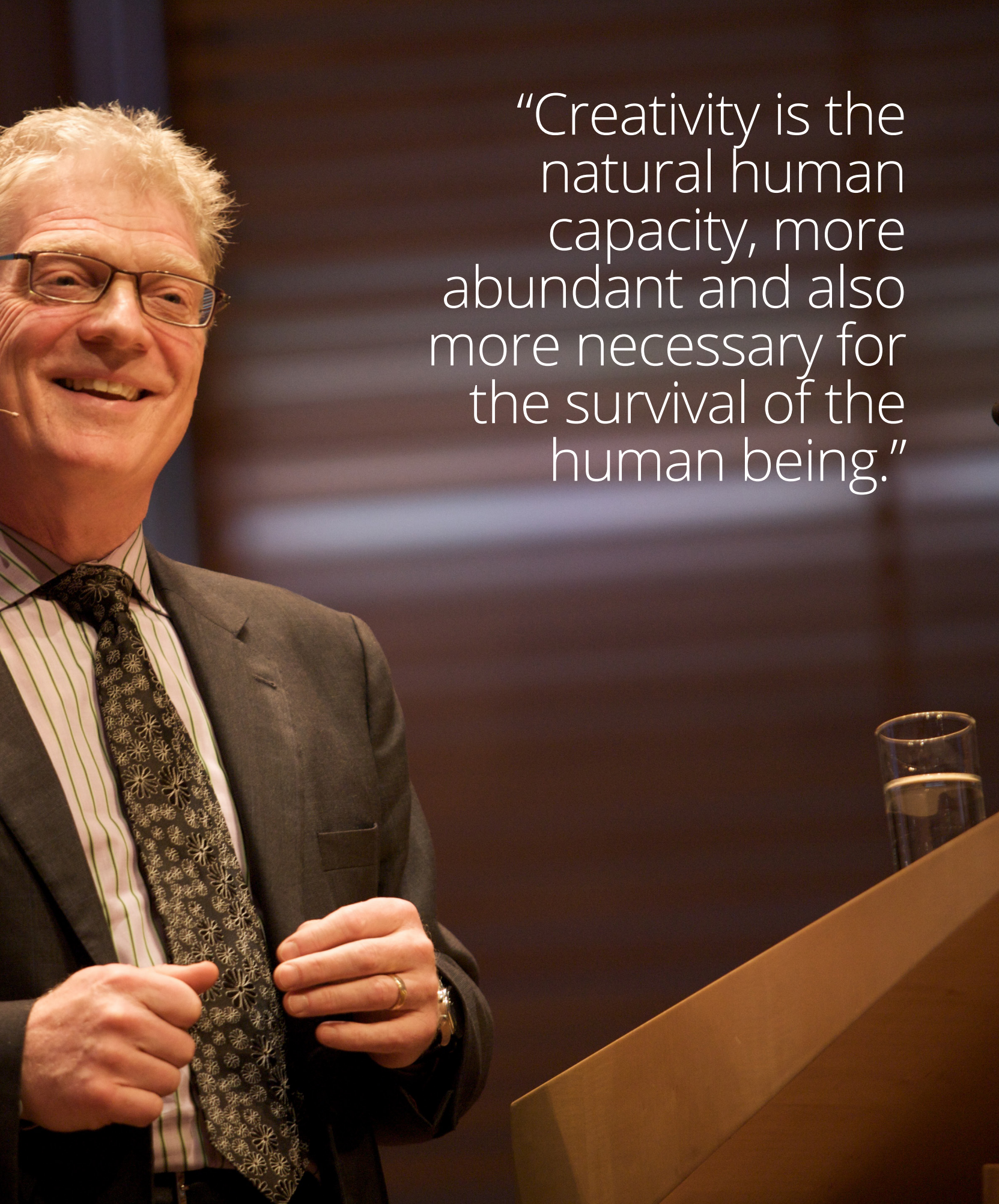
In 2003 Queen Elizabeth II knighted him for his services to the arts. In addition, Sir Ken was happy to support charities.

**His thoughts** are recorded in three of his major books. The first of these was published in 2001 “Out of our Minds: Learn to be Creative”. John Cleese said, “Ken Robinson writes brilliantly about the different ways in which creativity is undervalued and ignored in Western culture and especially in our national education systems”. His second book “The Element: How to find your passion, can change everything” was published by Penguin in 2009 and translated into 21 languages. The element refers to the experience of the moment when personal talent meets personal passion. In this encounter, he argues, we feel more ourselves, are more

***Why creativity is the most important competition for the future of humanity and the planet?***





A man with short, light-colored hair and glasses is smiling and speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a light-colored striped shirt, and a dark tie with a white floral pattern. His hands are clasped in front of him. A glass of water is on the podium to his right. The background is dark and out of focus.

“Creativity is the natural human capacity, more abundant and also more necessary for the survival of the human being.”



inspired and achieve the best. The book is based on stories of creative artists. "Creative Schools" was printed in 2015; it is inspired by his famous TED talk "How School Kills Creativity". He sought to offer an answer to all those who did not understand the revolution he was talking about in his session.

All his work takes on a special dimension at times like the current ones, as his reformist proposals on education and the role of creativity are no longer merely ideas but have become a matter of urgency for all the world's education systems.

This article is dedicated to collecting part of his great legacy. Some of the most representative ideas on his passion, i.e. the improvement of education, have been chosen to this end and have been included in his book "Creative Schools".

### SIR KEN'S BEST IDEAS FOR THE PRESENT TRANSFORMATION REQUIRED

**Education needs a transformation.** Education is indeed our greatest hope. However,

the old-style fruit of the Industrial Revolution is no longer an answer to our needs: a new educational system is required to help us face the current challenges and enhance the natural talents that we all have inside. It is not a question of repairing the system but of changing and transforming it.

**Purpose of education.** The first step for transforming school is to review what we understand by education. The purpose of education is to enable students to understand the world around them and to discover their natural talents. By doing so, they will fulfil themselves as individuals and become active and compassionate citizens. *"Education is our greatest hope. We need a new educational system that helps us face the challenges of today and that enhances the natural talents that we all have within us. It is not a question of repairing the system but of changing and transforming it."*

**How can you be part of this change?** We can start by distinguishing three forms of discernment: a critique of the current situation, a vision of how it should

***"The purpose of education is to enable students to understand the world around them."***

be, and a transformative theory for moving from one to the other. In his book, the author suggested bringing these three aspects together, based on his own experience and that of many others and drawing on research and some principles.

This revolution is based on faith in the value of the individual; on the right to self-determination; on the potential for evolution and personal fulfilment of human beings; and on the importance of civic responsibility and respect for others.

**Education is an organic, non-industrial process.** Education deals with living people who have emotions, feelings, talents and life circumstances. They are influenced by what happens and, in turn, influence the lives of others. They may oppose



or collaborate, become involved or disengage. It is therefore basic to understand that people develop under certain conditions, not others.

The four fundamental principles of their development would be:

- **Health:** well-being of the student as a whole: intellectual, physical, spiritual and social.
- **Ecology:** key interdependence of all these aspects of the development of each student and in the community as a whole.
- **Justice:** to cultivate the talents and potential of all students, regardless of their circumstances, and to respect the roles and responsibilities of those who work with them.
- **Caution:** creating optimal conditions for human development based on compassion, experience and practical wisdom.

The aim is to invigorate an organic culture within the centres themselves.

**Eight core competencies.** The four aims of education, in turn, suggest eight key competencies that schools should provide to their students in order to succeed in their lives:

- **Curiosity:** the ability to ask questions and explore how the world works.
- **Creativity:** competence to generate new ideas and put them into practice.
- **Criticism:** the capacity to analyse information and ideas and develop arguments and reasoned judgements.
- **Communication:** ability to express thoughts and feelings clearly and confidently in a variety of media and forms.
- **Collaboration:** skills to collaborate constructively with others.
- **Compassion:** the capability to put yourself in other people's shoes and act accordingly.
- **Calm:** capacidad de conectar

con la talent to connect with the emotional life within and develop a sense of personal harmony and balance.

- **Civility:** the talent to be constructively involved in society and participate in the processes that sustain it.

**Leading with principles.** Every great learning experience works on two fundamental figures: the learner and the educator. *For a school to stand out, a third figure is needed: a brilliant leader who brings ideas, experience, and a deep understanding of the kind of environments in which learners can and want to learn.*

High performance is driven by motivation and ambition, and great leaders know how to awaken both emotions in a human spirit. They can instil hope in those who have lost it, inspire determination in the desperate and guide the lost. As well as vision, a great leader needs support, means and skills.

## AS CONCLUSION

Benjamin Franklin was aware that a liberal and effective education was fundamental to make the American dream flourish. He once said that there are three kinds of people: those who are immovable, those who are movable, and those who move. Some people do not see the need of change and do not want to do so: current and time play in favour of renewal, so it is possible that the winds of change will leave them behind. *Benjamin Franklin once said that there are three kinds of*

*people: those who are immovable, those who are movable, and those who move.*

Those who are mobile see the need for change. Work with them and stimulate their energy; create partnerships and forge dreams and plans.

Finally, there are those who move: they represent the agents of change who are able to imagine a different future and who are determined to make it happen by acting personally and collaborating with others. They know that they do not always need to be entitled to do so. As Gandhi said, if we want to change the world, we must be the change we want to see. Because, when many people move, that creates movement. And if this movement has enough energy, then it becomes a revolution. And that is just what we need in the educational field.

*Dear Sir Ken, thank you very much for fighting to leave the world much better than the one you found it. May you rest in peace.*