

Features

Sir Ken Robinson's new 'Learning Revolution' echoes old gospel themes

Monica deRegt

The definition of revolution is “a forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favour of new system,” or “an instance of revolving, as in ‘one revolution per second.’” Synonyms include rebellion, revolt, uprising or turn, rotation, circuit.

On January 13, 2017, Abbotsford Christian School hosted a “Learning Revolution” event to address the need for significant educational reform across our nation. The event featured world-renowned speaker Sir Ken Robinson, an internationally recognized authority on innovation and creativity in education. He’s best known for his famous TED talk “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” (*ted.com*), which has been seen by an estimated 350 million people in over 160 countries and is the most viewed video in the history of the TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) organization.

While Robinson’s message might seem to reflect the first definition of revolution in that he calls for major redesigns to our educational systems, his ideas might better be seen as the latter understanding of revolution – a turn or return to another teacher who advocated for similar reform over 2,000 years ago.

A changing world

“We are dealing with an educational system that was developed in the 19th century,” explained Robinson to a crowd of over 1,100 educators from across the province; “it wasn’t designed for our current reality!” Speaking mostly about the standardization, testing and conformity that our current system demands, and how it was created over

150 years ago to work well with the industrial revolution that valued productivity and predictability, Robinson stressed that creativity, diversity and adaptability have now become the necessary skills for survival and success in our rapidly-changing culture. Creativity is as important as literacy in education, he says, but schools often educate the creativity out of students.

“Very many people go through education without ever discovering what they are good at! We have to get beyond the narrow conception of ability that is measured by tests and memorization,” Robinson exclaimed, noting that business leaders today are complaining that not many graduates are entering the workforce with the skill sets listed above. “The real mark of humanity is diversity,” he said, adding that part of the purpose of education is to help people find their talents, and that human talents are often buried deeply and only show themselves when called upon.

Rich soil

Using farming practices as a model (sound familiar?), Robinson compared our current education system to traditional farming methods that have focused too much in the last 50+ years on producing a high yield with little or no regard to the condition of the soil, which becomes stripped and devoid of nutrients. “Our education system has mined our minds in the way we have strip-mined the Earth for a particular commodity and for the future it won’t serve us.” He suggested that we take our cue instead from the organic farming movement and turn our attention to cultivating an environment for the plant (student) that will allow



Sir Ken Robinson speaking at the Abbotsford Christian School “Learning Revolution.”

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it to thrive and flourish. Stating that human resources are as rich and diverse as our Earth’s natural resources, he argued that we need to start digging deeper and stop disregarding the resources that are right under the surface.

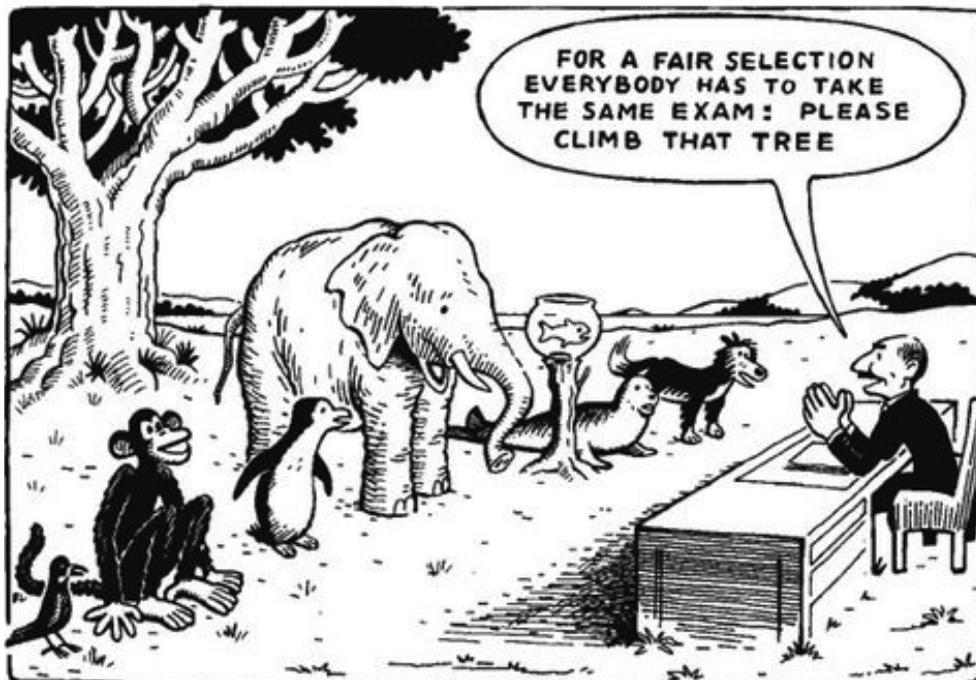
In a witty example of this, Robinson shared the story of two of his friends who grew up in Liverpool – Paul McCartney and George Harrison. When he interviewed them for his latest book, he asked them if their skills were recognized by their music teacher in school and their answer was no. “One music teacher had half the Beatles in his class and he missed it!” Robinson exclaimed with disbelief, “Well that’s a bit of an oversight, isn’t it?” He went on to say that education is about giving people access to their own lives and futures. Having a narrow view of education deprives people of access to what may be their defining talents.

Sandra Barthel, Vice-Principal at Abbotsford Christian Middle School, was moved by this story. “It made me, as a Fine Arts teacher, really think about what I look for in students . . . is it the ability to play scales, or get excited about the potential ‘tunes’ and ‘variations’ they can perhaps make instead?” Barthel questioned. As Christian educators, she added, we need to ask ourselves how we can best honour each individual learner and the needs they have based upon how God intricately designed each one of us. “Why are we using a factory model for our education system when God’s children are definitely not factory designed?

Robinson alludes to an education that is about helping people understand the world around them as well as the world within them. This is a perfect fit with our mission and vision as Christian educators – to instill in our students an understanding of their giftedness so that they can go out into God’s world to instill positive change.”

Ancient words

Cultivating creativity. Using gifts. Good soil. Non-conformity. These concepts are not original to Sir Ken Robinson – Jesus, the great Teacher himself, spoke of these things and employed them in his own teachings, calling upon seemingly unqualified young men to be his disciples, speaking out against the religious practices of the day and the dangers of focusing too much on productivity and not enough on community. Robinson’s learning revolution might be an attempt to overthrow a current system, but it is not in favour of a brand new system. It is, rather, a full circle turn back to the revolutionary ideas and teachings of One whose words never stop ringing true. ➤



Monica deRegt is the Features Editor for Christian Courier and is thankful to CC columnist Curt Gesch, her high school English teacher, for helping her to discover and cultivate a love of writing.