

## Do schools kill creativity?

**R**esearch by Professor George Land has shown an alarming decline in our creativity as we go through the educational system. For example, when a group of three-to-five year olds were tested for divergent thinking (a prerequisite to creativity), about 98 per cent were rated as “genius in creativity”. The same children were tested again five years later and – alarmingly – the creativity geniuses had fallen to 32 per cent of the sample.

**“We don’t necessarily have to find the answer ourselves. All we need to do is ask someone else”**

Even worse, when the same kids were tested again five years later, when they were teenagers, only 12 per cent were rated as geniuses in creativity. When a group of adults (over the age of 25) was given the test, only two per cent received the “genius” rating.

### **Conformity in schools**

These are, of course, depressing statistics and people have used them to argue that there is something fundamentally wrong with our educational system. For example, Sir Ken Robinson, an international advisor on education, has eloquently argued that instead of promoting our children’s

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curiosity and sense of adventure, schools tend to encourage conformity and kill creativity. He has passionately demanded a complete restructuring of the educational systems of the Western world.

Without disputing the need to rethink our educational systems, I wonder whether there is another way to look at these numbers. As most of us would agree, there are positive things coming out of our current educational system (along with the negatives). Thus, we should be careful not to destroy the positives in an attempt to remove the negatives. There is no sense in throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

### **Accessing creativity**

Yes, schools teach us to conform. And yes, this harms our creativity. But conformity has its benefits as well – for example it makes us better, efficient and law-abiding citizens. Rather than risk losing all this in an attempt to reclaim our creativity potential, how about if we keep the educational system as is and search for alternative ways to improve our creativity?

For example, Jeff Howe, in his book *Crowdsourcing*, estimated that the probability of finding the correct answer in the game *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* is increased by 65 per cent when we phone

a friend and by 91 per cent when we ask the audience. This suggests that we don’t necessarily have to find the answer ourselves. All we need to do is ask someone else.

Academics call this Open Innovation – rather than try to come up with creative ideas yourself or on your own, it may be better to acknowledge that somebody else out there may already have the idea or the answer. Thus, even if only two per cent of people in the whole universe can be considered “creative”, the trick is to find ways to access them and their ideas. The solution to our schools destroying our creativity is not to revamp our schools; it may be to practice Open Innovation in a more strategic way. ■

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