

Maria Szymańska  
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow

# The Transformative Shape of Creative Schools

Ken Robinson, Lou Aronica,  
*Kreatywne szkoły. Oddolna rewolucja,  
która zmienia szkolnictwo,*  
transl. Aleksander Baj,

[*Creative Schools: the Grassroots Revolution  
That's Transforming Education*]  
Element, Kraków 2015, 320 pages



Nowadays, education faces new challenges since although increasingly advanced technological and scientific research achievements are being made, questions on the deeper sense of education appear more frequently. They concern the fundamentals of teaching and learning in the light of personal, social, integrated, holistic, and sustainable development. The common access to the education, its possibilities offered to the wide range of clients does not seem to be sufficient. The effects of PISA tests do not satisfy those who truly care for the future generations. Technological and scientific progress is not often accompanied by integral human development, the true increase in personal creativity understood as man's features which meet the following criteria: novelty, originality, value, and sociality—aligned together and revealed in particular acts of doing, activities that are designated by it. Why does this situation transpire? This question should be directed to a school system which

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is responsible for the educational results to be obtained due to the obligatory predominant standards. It finds an answer in K. Robinson's and L. Aronica's book entitled *Creative Schools: the Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education* published by "Element" Publishing House, Cracow (Poland 2015). It is worth mentioning that K. Robinson is one of the world's most influential voices in education, is acknowledged as remarkable international leader on creativity and human developmental potential who deals with crucial issues concerning contemporary education, its role and challenges that are to be transposed on the process of teaching and learning, and its formal (e.g. headmasters, teachers, pupils) and informal (e.g. parents, educational environments) performers.

The Authors pose a problem to be solved—How to transform nations in order to make them positively creative, wise, rich insight, more human, responsible for the future? The answer to this question is particularly important in our times, when businesses making huge profits with concrete standardized tests are common, when "schools are struggling, and students and educators everywhere are suffering under the strain". In this context, in the reference to the reviewed book D. Angel, President of the Clark University states: "In my view, education is at a transition point where an increasing focus on learning outcomes is becoming the basis for assessing the educational experiences available to students. That can be a very powerful tool for engaging in greater reflection on the future of education in this country. We're asking the questions, 'What kinds of outcomes and what kinds of educational practices matter in this regard?'" For anyone attempting to answer these questions the study of the book by K. Robinson and L. Aronica is a must, especially as this issue has also been posed by Polish scientists such: K. Chałas, K. Szmidt, H. Kwiatkowska, M. Szymańska etc.

In *Creative Schools: the Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, K. Robinson and L. Aronica concentrate on the idea of creative schools which play an enormous role in transforming education. The book comprises an Introduction and ten Chapters which I will now proceed to outline together with the key aspects mentioned by the Authors.

The Introduction (*One minute to midnight*) shows that education is aimed at enabling pupils to understand the world around its pur-

poses: personal, cultural, social, and economic one; and the natural gifts that they possess inside in order to become self-realized units; active, sensitive citizens. K. Robinson says that our future is not stable, so the solution to the problem of saving our planet, education, etc. is not improving, what has been done so far, not reforming it, but transforming. The world needs a special kind of revolution, and the key to it—is the transformation.

The first chapter (*Back to Basics*) is dedicated to the movement of standardization which has began the decline in educational quality. PISA tests have infused every aspect of the educational system: the way in which the school functions, the philosophy that affects the development of divergent thinking. Leaving secondary school has become univocal with starting university studies. The university diploma does not mean a lot. It is not reserved for the talented; it has become so common that graduates have problems with finding jobs. The research shows that the graduates tend to lack two qualities: capability to the change adjustment, and creativity in generating new ideas. To rebuild them it is necessary to change the way of thinking about schools that should help pupils and teachers activate their creative potentiality instead of killing it.

The second chapter (*Changing Metaphors*) shows the meaning of industrial education that dominates nowadays. It regards industrial goals that are oriented towards educating technical, physical, managerial, administrative, professional (lawyers, doctors, scientists) employees; industrial structures (infusing secondary and higher education schools); industrial principles that expose linear ones (good for production), selectiveness, the culture of submissive. The chapter in this book shows that the system of education, on one hand, stresses the role of individualism; on the other hand, it eliminates those who seem to be different. The Author shows the meaning of transformation in the example of the Grangeton school. He says that children who were apathetic have become enthusiastic and committed; school results have increased thanks to the hard work performed by teachers and students, the innovative vision of the school and its visionary leadership. What is more, the school has not realized industrial goals but natural, organic ones—where all the education subjects have been treated as living organisms. The students were offered many interdisciplinary themes and possibilities to work to the best of their



abilities: creativity, innovation, critical thinking and problem solving; good communication circumstances and support; life and professional skills. The cultural education has created student conditions to help them understand and respect own culture and a variety of other cultures. Some remarks concern some obligations and thus the social education should provide students with the conditions to become active and sensitive citizens; personal education should supply young people with the necessary conditions to be integrated with the inner and outer world, for the inner world is as important as the world outside.

The next chapter (*Changing Schools*) shows the meaning of school policy that must be changed. It concerns creating such circumstances for pupils that should foster them to want to learn and provide possibilities to learn. Furthermore, the teachers' role is not only to teach students, but to enable them to learn; the headmasters' role is to construct the possibilities for teachers to work well, something which is tied up with the good leadership and culture of school. K. Robinson and L. Aronica show the decisive people's role in changing schools on the local, regional and national levels. It is seen in constructing the conditions necessary so that headmasters and schools can realize their own tasks. How the school policy is implemented in practice depends on the quality of education that either promotes the creativity of teachers, students and headmasters alike or, unfortunately, kills it.

The fourth chapter (*Natural Born Learners*) stresses the importance of the fact that all pupils are pupils by birth. They have interests, passions and their own capabilities for learning. They are characterized by the use of varied intelligence and this is something which the curriculum should respect. K. Robinson criticizes lesson plans whose functioning imitates an assembly line where there is no room for respecting individual intelligence, and time for reflection—something which is underlined by terming it Slow Education—a form of education that also leaves space for a slower pace of learning and teaching, paying attention to experiencing educational contents sensitively and play that makes learning and teaching more personalized.

The fifth chapter (*The Art of teaching*) stresses the role of teachers who not only teach, but first of all support students while teaching. Their engagement, creativity, innovations, knowledge, and practical skills are indispensable. Noticing that teaching and learning are relational appears very crucial. Students need teachers who get into

touch with them. The teaching and learning have to be based on axiology, creativity, inspiration, and the certainty that teachers apply in their work with students.

The sixth chapter is dedicated to the curriculum discussed from both a formal and informal perspective. The informal hidden programme cannot be ignored and its cultural, social shape appears to influence its implementation. The curriculum should feature diversity, depth and dynamics and the application of methods using *design thinking* and methods that foster building a new ethos are bound to make democracy come alive.

The seventh chapter (*Testing, Testing*) raises the problem of standardization. Exams often have become *the art for art*, where children serve as objects to be examined. This situation in its negative results is often caused by international rivalry. The Authors of the book claim that although the OECD intentions are remarkable, their realizations tend to lack depth. Exams do not bring true deep effects as mechanical learning and teaching reduces both creativity and innovation. Furthermore, test assessment does not tend to be sufficient and should also be based on different pieces of student work such as portfolios, participation in lessons, etc. Here the Authors recommend *Learning Record* introduced by the Fair Test organization. This model shows that students' achievements can be evaluated with many tools that they have nothing to do with the tests.

The eighth chapter (*Principles for Principals*) is devoted to displaying the necessity of culture change. Culture understood from the social point of view means a concrete societal way of living: its values, behaviors and coexistence codes. In the organic sense, it means development and revolution. K. Robinson stresses the meaning of customs and the environment in transforming education, something to be taken into consideration by headmasters responsible for the functioning of schools. Common leadership, personalization of school environment, curriculum, teaching programme, and evaluation oriented towards improving students' achievements—these are fundamental domains that each school leader ought to consider while remembering that the culture of the school (society, individuality, possibilities) determines their work effectiveness.

The ninth chapter (*Bring It All Back Home*) focuses on individuality, the complexity of life to be clearly noticed while analyzing the



aspects of the functioning of the school and educational transformation that resonates with parents' cooperation. The Authors indicate that close relationships between parents and the school, and other members of society are not just marketing elements—they are the substance of a school's philosophy and identity. Thus, all the students' families should be invited to the school in order for the communication to be effective. The collaboration between families and school should be permanent as far as students' learning is concerned in order to support it and family members should advocate the interests of the children. The authority is to be shared, and cooperation with local society is necessary.

The last chapter (*Changing the Climate*) stresses the roots of achievements. It exposes the way of dialogue and discussion concerning state education. It also underlines new strategies of development for health promotion, nurturing of ecology, promoting justice, and changing course.

All of the aspects mentioned in the book refer to experiences all over the world and societies are often afraid of taking risks in struggling for autonomy and identity. Educational policy which reflects cultural and social interests on different levels can only be transformed when there are people who are willing to undergo such changes. The Authors in their book show different approaches to this constructive change. There are those who undergo changes, and those who change the world, environment, and they are needed in education as without them the transformation would not go ahead.

Concluding, the book *Creative Schools: the Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education* raises the significant problems to be solved in education. It includes schools functioning in a manner that seems not to be creative or innovative enough to build a better life for all of the societies all over the world. They are rooted in overly strict standardization, "unhealthy" rivalry, killing creativity, the pace of the realization of the curriculum contents, poor methods of system assessment, immature leadership, neglecting good collaboration with families and other educational subjects, and treating the culture of a school on the surface level without reflection. All of these aspects are discussed by the Authors with a particular sense of humor without lowering the serious tone and with the usage of figurative language enhancing the quality of the book. Thanks to the "light"

style of writing, clearly stated problems and thorough analysis of the current state of education in America, the issue can be understood reflectively. The aspects discussed in it have a universal value and can be applied in the analysis of other countries' educational problems. The suggested solutions to the matters undertaken in the book can be adjusted and adopted in the educational field all over the world. They induce reflection upon tendencies in education, which the Authors emphasize with the usage of a metaphorical shift from seeing the school as an industrial edifice to something akin to an organic farm.

#### ADRES DO KORESPONDENCJI

dr Maria Szymańska  
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow  
maria.szymanska@ignatianum.edu.pl