



The Element by Sir Ken Robinson

Think you might want to read this book?

Are your students discovering their talents and pursuing their passions? In *The Element*, Sir Ken Robinson explains why and how all humans should tap into their aptitudes and interests in order to find more fulfillment in life and prepare for the complex problems facing our ever-changing world. Robinson lays out his thesis, and then he provides a plethora of examples where successful people found their element. To wrap up his book, Robinson explains what schools can and should do to help their students find their Element. If you love to read about how famous and successful people achieved their goals, this book is for you. If you are looking for a more academic analysis of talent and aptitude full of research and data, this will probably not suffice. Overall, Robinson effectively drives his point home and delivers many areas of growth for schools and teachers. Robinson is at his best in *The Element* when he passionately argues for the personalization of learning as opposed to the standardization of learning. Each vignette of a successful person finding their element despite setback, discouragement, and the failure of traditional schooling helps educators to remember the tremendous untapped potential that each child possesses and the role we play in helping children see that they are capable of far more than they know.

What would Socrates ask?

- Should schools commit to the development of creativity as a necessary and teachable skill just as strongly as they commit to the development of literacy as a necessary and teachable skill?
- What is the right way and right time for students to learn various subjects and skills?
- Should general education schools be transformed for students who do not fit into the traditional view of academic intelligence, or should these students attend specialty schools that cater to their unique needs and talents?
- Should school leaders move away from committees and toward “creative teams?”
- Should teacher evaluation and student assessment look more like the fast food model of quality assurance or the Michelin guide for high-end restaurants?
- How much of what we do in schools today is out of date and irrelevant to the rest of students’ lives?

Concepts

- *The Element* - “the place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at come together.”
- To find one’s element, focus on aptitude, passion, attitude, and opportunity.
- The world is changing at an unprecedented and rapid pace. Schools need to evolve alongside this change and adapt by finding better ways to help students discover and hone their talents in preparation for the ever-changing world they will enter.

- A “stratified, one-size-fits-all approach to education marginalizes all of those who do not take naturally to learning this way.” Personalization of learning is better than standardization.
- Schools need to question and challenge what they take for granted about the abilities of their students. Schools should determine how students are intelligent instead of determining if they are intelligent.
- We need to create environments in our schools where every person is inspired to grow creatively. Schools should be about helping young people to recognize and develop their talents.
- If schools and teachers design learning experiences that maximize “flow”, intrinsic motivation, and passion, kids will be fueled instead of drained.
- Instead of approaching students with templates of who they might be, teachers should get to know each individual student on a personal level.
- Teachers can fulfill the role of mentors in the lives of their students by recognizing talent/aptitude, helping them to convert their interests into passion, encouraging students to take risks, pushing students to stretch themselves, and helping students to reflect and grow.

Quotes from the author

- “I believe it is essential that each of us find his or her Element, not simply because it will make us more fulfilled but because, as the world evolves, the very future of our communities and institutions will depend on it.”
- “It is difficult to feel accomplished when you’re not accomplishing something that matters to you.”

Implement tomorrow?

- Examine your lessons for tomorrow, this week, and this unit. Where can you move your practice away from standardization and towards personalization.
- Be on the lookout for talent, aptitude, and authentic interest among your students. Help them to identify and develop their talents and aptitudes and stoke their interests into fully-fledged flames of passion. This is important work. It may be the most important work you do as an educator.

Organizations/schools working on answers

- [Reggio Schools](#)
- [Grangeton and Grange Primary](#)
- [A+ Schools](#)

Referenced books with the potential to impact leading and learning

Author(s) Last Name	Title
Toffler, et. al.	<i>Future Shock</i>
Isaacson, et. al.	<i>Einstein: His Life and Universe</i>
Csikszentmihalyi	<i>Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience</i>
Goodwin, et. al.	<i>Team of Rivals</i>
Jeffers & House	<i>Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway</i>
Wiseman & Noble	<i>The Luck Factor</i>
Halberstam	<i>The Amateurs</i>

The applicability of this book to education is



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