

EXPLORING RESEARCH, THEORY, AND PRACTICE
THAT WILL TRANSFORM ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS
topics for 'town hall' program
with sir ken robinson

FOLLOWING HIS FORMAL REMARKS

Every education system in the world
is being reformed at the moment.
And it's not enough.
Reform is no use anymore,
because that's simply improving
a broken model.
What we need . . . is not evolution,
but a *revolution* in education.
This has to be *transformed*
into something else . . .

- SIR KEN ROBINSON



sir ken robinson | transforming elementary education
FRIDAY 4 NOV AT CURTIS SCHOOL - 6:30 PM

introduction

In an effort to be as responsive as possible to the pressing concerns of participants, we invited all registered participants to submit topics for the 'town hall' portion of the program following Sir Ken Robinson's formal remarks. We received dozens of compelling and intriguing submissions. A jury of eight colleagues reviewed the submissions -- bearing in mind the evening's themes, making an effort to identify patterns, and sharing a desire to be as inclusive as possible of as many participants' submissions as possible. We realized we would have limited time, so we also met to prioritize those questions on the basis of relevance and recurrence. We collected 30 of the most compelling submissions into 12 themes, a number of which Sir Ken thoughtfully and helpfully explored during the program. Our apologies if your submission could not be included for discussion owing to our time constraints.

On the following pages you will find each of these 12 themes, that all of us will understand as vital questions as we continue to transform elementary education in our schools.



1 Parents as Partners in the 21st Century

CAROLINE BYFIELD

Curriculum Coordinator, Village School

LEIGH FITZGERALD

Director of Upper School, Wildwood School

PAT MCCOMAS

Division Director, Chadwick School

LISA NIVER-RAJNA

Science Specialist, Brawerman Elementary School

REHANI SLIPOCK

1st Grade Teacher, Sierra Canyon School

TRISH VALDEZ

Founding Parent, The Knowing Garden

A significant number of topics were submitted that addressed our schools' relationships with our students' parents; particularly strong feelings were registered about parents in independent schools, which may perhaps come as no surprise. Lisa Niver-Rajna from Brawerman Elementary School cites Stephen Covey, who writes in *The Third Alternative* that our top challenge is "to be creating partnerships among teachers, parents, and the community to unlock the potential of all children to lead their own lives instead of being led." In the same vein, Leigh Fitzgerald from Wildwood School asks "how can we truly work to make parents partners, but not enablers, in the educational process from K through 12?" Pat McComas from Chadwick School suggests that many of us "seem fearful to take risks, to in any way step out of line, because our parents might not 'buy' it" and wonders "what suggestions you might make to strengthen our resolve and our courage." Caroline Byfield from Village School wonders "How do we communicate our choices to families who are unfamiliar, intimidated, or even dismissive of these new approaches to education?" Trish Valdez from The Knowing Garden thoughtfully asks, "How can we support those families who *want* to be part of the revolution but have moments of doubt?" Finally, Rehani Slipock from Sierra Canyon School asks the underlying question we'd like you to explore, perhaps with some attention to the difference between public and private school strategies:

"How do you recommend recruiting parents to partner with schools?"



2 Transforming Assessment

DEB CHRISTENSON

Director of Curriculum, Wildwood School

BRUCE HARLAN

Science Teacher, St. Matthew's Parish School

WINNIE NEEDHAM

Assistant Head of School, Berkeley Hall School

LINDA SCHAFFER

Science Coordinator and Science Teacher, Curtis School

Winnie Needham from Berkeley Hall asks "how elementary and middle schools can help parents see the value in learning that promotes creativity and depth, when they undervalue learning if a program doesn't produce students who all test in the top 1% on conventional measures." Bruce Harlan from St. Matthew's confirms that "as a teacher in an independent middle school, I work in an environment where we feel the pressure to prepare students for application and admission to prestigious secondary schools, and the secondary schools are under even more pressure to get their students admitted to prestigious universities." Deb Christenson from Wildwood School begs the question, "How can we engage the post-secondary community -- especially the 'elite' Ivy League schools -- that their practices of admitting students using SAT/ACT scores and high school GPAs contribute to perpetuating broken traditions in secondary schools and preventing revolutionary change?" And Linda Schaffer from Curtis School notes that even within traditional assessment practices, a tradition of inflated grades diminishes any remaining relevance that traditional grading might have. It sounds like our minds may be made up about traditional assessment and reporting practices, and the college admissions procedures that sustain them.

Rather than carry that point further and, perhaps, to beat a dead horse, would you comment on any alternative or correlative assessment practices or assessment tools you believe to offer promise moving forward?



3 Elementary School v. Secondary/Post-Secondary

PATRICK F. BASSETT

President, NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools)

SANDEE MIRELL

Director of Professional Development, CAIS
(California Association of Independent Schools)

CHRIS THINNES

Head of Upper Elementary School & Academic Dean, Curtis School

The sample question provided to participants acknowledged that "many elementary schools and middle schools have implemented forward-looking instructional models in order to prepare students for their futures, yet most contemporary high school and college students experience what they have for decades." Sandee Mirell, Director of Professional Development for CAIS, wonders if you have any ideas about helping secondary teachers move away from being so much the sage on the stage," as she puts it -- and "how the transition between an elementary school experience and the secondary experience might be managed as seamlessly as possible." Pat Bassett, President of NAIS, suggests a simple solution: "Since lower school teachers routinely structure their work with students to encourage discovery, imagination, creativity, and divergent thinking, why don't we have them trade classes with upper school faculty periodically to see if the lower school teachers can rekindle that spirit in upper school students, while our upper school faculty can re-learn how to put interesting problems in the paths of children then give them space to solve them." So, then:

How do we best prepare our elementary students for their futures, while ensuring they will continue to flourish in their continuing education during these intervening years of change? And how can we help secondary schools and their teachers to change their practices? And if you care to take it on, how can we have a meaningful impact, or provide a meaningful service, to colleges and their faculties whose model has arguably changed least of all?



4 Transformative Models for Curriculum & Instruction

WESTLEY FIELD

Director of Innovation, Waverley College

CATHERINE RAMOS

Elementary School Assistant Director, Crossroads School

GITA LABRENTZ

Director, the Westside Waldorf School

Catherine Ramos from Crossroads refers to documentation on Challenged Based Learning by Apple Education and the New Media Consortium and asks whether Challenge Based Learning, as a framework for making learning relevant by having students of all ages work together towards solving real problems, provides a viable model for the transformation of education. Westley Field from Waverley College invokes blended learning, and its capacity to increase the quality of teaching, to encourage student reflection, to enhance collaboration, to individualize students' pace, to tailor their support, and so on. He worries, though, about the reluctance of schools to take transformative steps despite abundant documentation of student benefits. Gita Labrentz, from the Westside Waldorf School, wonders whether you've explored Waldorf Schools, or Steiner Schools, as an alternative model.

Whether it's the Steiner model, challenge based learning, blended learning, flipped teaching or reverse instruction, or project based learning, would you please discuss any specific models of curriculum and instruction you believe would best serve our students?



5 Minding the Gap

RAMANI DURVASULA

Professor of Psychology, California State University, Los Angeles

KARINA GARCIA

Teacher, Da Vinci Science High School

DELISA LEVINE

Resource Specialist Teacher, Valley Charter Middle School

NEAL WRIGHTSON

Head of School, Children's Community School

A variety of compelling and complex questions about the so-called 'achievement gap' were voiced by participants, not so much pertaining to global competition but to socioeconomic inequities and disparities in the United States. As a token of a type of such disparity, DeLisa Levine from Valley Charter Middle School asks, "As technology becomes a larger part of education in schools, how will students without access to technology fare in this environment? Will this become a factor which widens the achievement gap in such a way that makes it discriminatory?" Neal Wrightson at Children's Community School notes that "our country has widened the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' and nowhere is this more in evidence than in the stark contrast between public education and private independent and parochial schools. Don't we bear some responsibility to respond, in both institutional contexts, both by providing aid and increasing economic diversity in our schools, and through thoughtful design of our curriculum?" Ramani Durvasula at Cal State Los Angeles asks, sadly but profoundly, whether it's possible that we are using education "as a tool to fix something it wasn't designed to fix -- namely, poverty and disparities," suggesting that "it is easier to create 'programs' as a palliative to alleviate inequities than actually, as a country, to resolve them. She asks, "Can we as a society really make strides in education if we do not address this subtext?" Karina Garcia from Da Vinci Science High School asks the overarching question to which we'd enjoy your response:

"What do you think about the achievement gap and how we can close it?"



6

Global Citizens

SARINA FIERRO

Head of Lower Elementary School, Curtis School

LINDSAY ROSSALL

Assistant Head of Middle School, Viewpoint School

YONG ZHAO

Professor, University of Oregon & Author, *Catching Up or Leading the Way*

Lindsay Rossall wonders, in general, whether you have any further comments on what students will need in order to be successful as global citizens. Yong Zhao, author of *Catching Up or Leading the Way* and Professor at the University of Oregon, reminds us that "the current nationalistic discourse. . . [and the] mentality that our children must be 'globally competitive' does not help our children learn to work with others" and asks, "How can we help our children learn to *get along* with people who are different than them?" Sarina Fierro, from Curtis School, identifies the importance -- whether in the global community or in terms of local or national diversity -- of exploring difference, when she asks the questions to which we'd like you to respond:

"What do you think are some of the best approaches in helping young children view differences more positively, as assets both within their own learning communities, and with their peers outside their school communities? Is this perhaps an important dimension of their developing creativity?"



7 Integrating Creativity at Scale

VALERIE GREENHILL

Chief Learning Officer, EdLeader21

Valerie Greenhill from EdLeader21 asks, “How you would recommend K-12 schools integrate creativity 'at scale'?”

Do you have any suggestions about how to infuse creativity throughout a public school system, as opposed to a class or a pilot project here and there?



8 Outdoor, Experiential, and Environmental Education

BRAD WEAVER

Head of School, Sonoma Country Day School

Brad Weaver, from Sonoma Country Day School, tells the story of a dear friend who recently retired from a lifetime of public school service, working his last decade as the director of an environmental education center in an urban area of east Texas. A few weeks after his retirement, a young man approached him in the grocery store to thank him: specifically, to thank him for the one day at the center his public school had arranged for students to explore the woods, dig in the dirt, identify wildflowers, and so on. That one day at the center was the only day in this young man's school career that he felt any sense of passion for learning, engagement, meaning, or relevance. In addition to Brad's important but more sweeping question about what has happened to our schools, and his compelling concerns about changing the governing paradigms, we ask you this:

Could you discuss more specifically your thoughts about outdoor, environmental, or experiential education?



9 First Things First

CANDEE CORLISS

Lower School Teacher, the Mirman School

DENA SELLERS

Principal, Conejo Elementary School

Dena Sellers from Conejo Elementary asks "what are some first steps . . . to help change teacher and parent paradigms of the 'old' expectations." Candee Corliss from the Mirman School asks, "What would you emphasize as practical steps that a school's leadership can take to start to transform their institutional system to encourage more creativity, imagination, and innovation in the development of curriculum?" These represent questions we received from educators in both private and public school communities who are eager to hear suggestions of first steps -- concrete, practical, suggestions for implementation -- that could initiate significant institutional change.

What are your suggested action steps?



10 Special Education in the 21st Century

HENOCH DERBREW

Resource Specialist for Special Education, Da Vinci Schools

Henoch Derbrew, from Da Vinci Schools, asks if you could speak about 'special education' both in the US and abroad. Many of us wonder about the implications our efforts to transform elementary education for those students with learning differences who may require specialist support or accommodations. He asks, "What are your views about full inclusion, versus previous models or potential future models" of special education?

What are your thoughts about the implications of transformative change in 21st century schools for students with learning differences or special needs?



11 Accentuate the Positive, Eliminate the Negative

KAREN AKA

Chief Academic Officer, Academy 21 (Hawaii)

Karen Aka from Academy 21 in Hawaii asks what suggestions you might have to help educators to shift their focus to children's strengths, to get them into their 'element' (rather than following the 'diagnosis and remediation' approach to academic improvement).

Could you comment on our helping to identify, to encourage, and to cultivate students' strengths and passions?



12 Music Education

KYOKO SASAKI

Accompanist for Orchestra and Choir, Curtis School

Kyoko Sasaki from Curtis School confirms the importance of music education in students' lives, and asks the question to which we'd like you to respond:

Do you have any further thoughts on the importance of music education in elementary schools in the 21st century?

