

# Dear School; Thank You For Ruining My Creativity

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In *From Education*, a controversial excerpt about the 19th century educational system, novelist Ralph Waldo Emerson, criticized schools for squandering students' natural passion for learning. Over a century later, the relevancy of this discussion hasn't faded, but instead has intensified, as a growing number of people recognize the discrepancies within the modern school system, and push for educational reform.

Research points to a stark decline in creativity among youth. After analyzing nearly 300,000 Torrance scores of children and adults, researcher, Kyung Hee Kim, revealed that "...The results indicate younger children are tending to grow up more narrow-minded, less intellectually curious, and less open to new experiences."

Various people, including world renowned educational advisor Sir Ken Robinson, have denounced modern day educational methods, and believe that they are at fault for hindering youth creativity. The issue at hand is not that the current educational system inherently kills creativity, but rather that it fails to foster it. Most notably, in the subject of creative expression through the arts.

Although humans are naturally visual and abstract beings, art programs are rarely deemed as highly significant to a students education.

"The arts face being squeezed out of schools by a focus on a narrowing range of core subjects" wrote Forbes Journalist Nick Morrison, "Fewer students are taking art subjects including art and design, music and drama once they cease to be compulsory..."

Consequently, resources for art programs are repeatedly cut in order to provide better funding for subjects that are considered more important. According to The Hornet Newspaper, "Since 2008, more than 80% of schools nationwide have experienced cuts to their budget...the arts are continuously the first to be diced on the chopping block. Oftentimes funding is more prioritized for STEM"

Along with being neglected, within the current school system, art has been stigmatized and even discouraged. In academic environments, heavy emphasis is placed on careers within the STEM field in comparison to the arts. Many students are reluctant to pursue majors in humanities because of the notion that they'll be unemployed and that it doesn't pay well. As a result, there is pressure to pursue a career in STEM even if it may not be of particular interest.

Ironically, it was within my tenth grade computer science class that I was told to, and I quote, "not go to university to pursue hobbies like journalism." This thinking is exacerbated in and

supported by an educational system that does not hold creative arts to the same standard as other subjects. And there are consequences.

In his famous 2016 Ted Talk, *Do Schools Kill Creativity*, Robinson revealed the harm that these values can cause, stating that "...many highly-talented, brilliant, creative people think they're not, because the thing they were good at at school wasn't valued, or was actually stigmatized."

Now, this is not to say that STEM fields shouldn't be encouraged in schools. They need to be, as technological advancements are on the rise. However, students should be given the ability to explore their artistic passions, alongside STEM, with proper funding and without pressure. Neither category of learning should be viewed as more essential than the other. Rather, both should be equally encouraged to create exceptional thinkers.

Further, there is a remarkable lapse between creative arts and STEM. Besides making STEM more appealing, art can help students expand their learning in expressive ways, which can ultimately support hard skills needed to solve complex problems. As mentioned in *LA Parent*, "A program that incorporates the arts into the curriculum has been proven to increase creativity, improve academic performance, increase motor skills, enhance visual learning, and boost higher decision-making skills." All of which can be beneficial for higher levels of thinking in math, science and engineering.

Even in professional life, this lapse is still evident. According to an article by the University of Central Florida, professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, Ali P Gordon, revealed that "Many of the world's top engineers and scientists have an appreciation for the arts or are artists themselves. Their interests and talents cannot be contained in a sole discipline."

The reason why educational systems fail to promote creativity in students, however, goes far beyond the lack of regard for creative arts. The school system's rigid learning style is equally responsible.

"What we do know is, if you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original..." says Robinson, "And by the time they get to be adults, most kids have lost that capacity. They have become frightened of being wrong."

The modern school system conditions young thinkers to condemn mistakes, thereby instilling a fear of failure. The initial idea behind the American school system was to support the rapid emergence of industrialism. Hence, the foundation of school is rather linear and methodical in terms of measuring intelligence. Because there are potential consequences for taking risks in an academic environment that values systematic and analytical thinking, students aren't always content with venturing into ideas that are unknown and uncomfortable. Perhaps, however, that's exactly what students need to embrace.

I feel as though a message many of us hear in school is to "think outside of the box." Unfortunately, thinking outside of the box becomes difficult when the school system encourages each individual to solve problems or write in a certain way.

And if you don't, you're wrong.

Not all children learn in the same way. It seems obvious, but this fact continuously gets overlooked in academic settings. Michael Huang, a student quoted in the New York Times wrote, "I'm someone who struggles when all the teacher does is say, 'Go to page X' and asks you to read it. Simply reading something isn't as effective for me as a teacher making it interactive, maybe giving a project out or something similar."

Students' brains are diverse, and the way they're taught should reflect that.

Admittedly, the process of the current school system can be beneficial. Students are given the opportunity to practice and master skills such as time management and discipline. This, however, is at the expense of other valuable learning experiences. School frequently trades creative learning for step by step analytical thinking. It might be far more beneficial if these ideas were rather viewed as counterparts in shaping a child's education. It doesn't have to be one or the other. Rather, there must be a balance between creative thinking and linear thinking, just as there must be one between art and STEM. As we look towards the future, bringing creativity back to education will inspire the next generation of innovators, go-getter's, and divergent thinkers.

And the progress has already been promising. With the emergence of STEAM programs across the country, and the appreciation for diverse learning styles within schools, change is rapidly forthcoming.

Sources: <https://barriebramley.com/creativity-decline-matter/>

Sir ken robinson ted talk

Forbes article nick morrison

News paper

La parent article

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