

## “I imagine, Therefore I am”

Sir Ken Robinson argues (2010, “Do schools kill creativity”, Ted talk) for radical changes in how we should think about our own intelligence and creativity- and in how we should educate our children and each other to meet the extraordinary challenges of living and working in the 21st century.

Robinson conducted tests with children up to age 4, tests of complex problems for which they achieved a 98% success rate. The same test carried out on children aged 8 – 10 years showed that this had dropped to 50% and by 13-15 years of age its drop was much greater.

Howard Gardner (*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* New York: Basic Books, 1993) claims that 0-4 all children were at genius level in terms of multiple frames of intelligence. By age 20 this dropped to 10% and over 20 it dropped to 2 %

This appears counter intuitive. So how does it happen and how does it affect our leadership?

If we observe young children we will notice that they are continually asking why? Their minds are minds of enquiry. They are continually asking why upon the why upon the why. When children enter school often this enquiry is replaced by a curriculum which is predetermined, and decides for them what they need to know. It is as though knowledge is presented as a closed box which contains all you need to know. It is as though we are dumbing them down. Forget asking why – just accept what’s in this box. Although this knowledge is important, it is usually mainly technical and it is often taught in a way that shifts children’s enquiring minds from enquiry to performance. How well you do at school is determined by how well you can pass your examinations based on the prescribed knowledge of the curriculum and your ability to articulate it. Through this process we create a worldview as essentially all our learning comes from our past which effects the decisions we make in the present. This in turn affects our leadership decisions.

Our decisions are often made based on deep assumptions we have about ourselves and about how we see “The” truth of the world. Another way of putting this is that our learning from the past creates our worldview. Our worldview is the way we “see the world” and the way we see any situation we come across.

The school curriculum is based on rationality, on the Newtonian-Cartesian worldview, and the response that René Descartes, the champion of rationalism, received on the publication of his *Discourse of Method* (1637). Simon Blackburn (‘Think’. Oxford University Press 1993:37-40) reported all that was necessary, for Descartes, was intense self examination and intense reason, and, through this process, all would be revealed. In response to Descartes view Antoine Arnauld (1612-94) accused Descartes of arguing in a circle - the infamous ‘Cartesian Circle’ - where Descartes is committed to two different priorities, one being that knowledge is achieved by rational insight only and is known as ‘*a priori*’, it can be seen to be true immediately, without any experience of the way of the world, and the other is Descartes ‘reasoning’ about ‘God’ with his ‘trademark argument’ *Cogito Ergo Sum* “I Think, Therefore I Am”:

Looking in to his own ‘self’, which is all that he has at this point, Descartes discovers that he has an idea of perfection. He then argues that such an idea implies a cause. However, the thing that caused it must have as much ‘reality’, and that includes perfection, as the idea itself. This implies that only a perfect cause, that is God, will do. Hence God exists, and has left the idea of perfection as an innate sign of his workmanship in our minds, like a craftsman leaving a trademark stamped in his work.  
(Blackburn, 1999:37-40)

‘*a priori*’ logic is known to be true independently of or in advance of the subject matter; requiring no evidence for its validity or support. *For example, growth can go on forever.* The problem seems to me to be centered on our western worldview that growth is essential, that to consume more and more is beneficial to the workplace and as a result of this to society as a whole. This worldview is fraught with danger as it infers that we have the

right to never ending consumption and that success is rightly based on this. Bill Emmott, the editor of The Economist, wrote ('20:21 Vision, the lessons of the 20yh century for the 21<sup>st</sup>', 2004: 19) "That inequality of resources and power is another inherent weakness within capitalism. Indeed, one of capitalism's main motors is the very desire to create inequality, an inequality between those who succeed and those who fail. It is a competitive system. The incentive to create wealth, to build successful businesses, is an incentive to become unequal."

However, there is also '*a fortiori*' logic which is that 'business as usual projections' are often hid behind big assumptions that carry the seeds of self-destruction. *For example, despite periods of sustained growth, growth cannot go on forever.*

Using '*a fortiori*' logic A.J. (Arnold Joseph) Toynbee (1889–1975), British historian "*Demise of the Local State,*" *Choose Life: A Dialogue*, Oxford University Press (1989) wrote:

"I regard the state of which I am a citizen as a public utility, like the organization that supplies me with water, gas, and electricity. I feel that it is my civic duty to pay my taxes as well as my other bills, and that it is my moral duty to make an honest declaration of my income to the income tax authorities. But I do not feel that I and my fellow citizens have a religious duty to sacrifice our lives in war on behalf of our own state, and, a fortiori, I do not feel that we have an obligation or a right to kill and maim citizens of other states or to devastate their land".

This is the argument that we have both the right to think one way '*a priori*' as prescribed by the education system based on for example, continuous growth, but we also have the right to think differently '*a fortiori*' that continuous growth will be destructive. As F.C. Dane, wrote (Researching the Future – Method or Madness Research Methods, Brooks/Cole Publishing Co, California, 1990)

Science is:	Science is not:
A way to obtain new information Described by a philosophy Generalising from facts Grounded in paradigms Based on consensus A matter of faith Deterministic The best approach we have	An activity per se Defined by only one philosophy A way to prove theories true Blind acceptance of tradition Relying on personal authority Uncritical faith Predestination Refusing to search for a better approach

Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543) is quoted as saying:

*"To know that we know what we know, and to know what we do not know, that is true knowledge."*

I believe we need to rediscover our 4 year old self and be again asking why, why, why? Why must we have continuous growth if this is creating crass materialism? Why must we consume more if this is creating an unsustainable world and a legacy of destruction for future generations? Why can't we spend just a fraction of what we spend on killing each other, on saving those who are dying of hunger? Etc.

Education is about enquiry, not performance. We need to be able to say "I think *and* I imagine, Therefore I am".