Ken Robinson, an international adviser on education, believes today’s over-reliance on student testing has contributed to the development of an educational model that fails to prepare students for a fast-paced, ever-changing world.

PLAIN TWP. Think schools today are failing to prepare students for life and a career?

Ken Robinson, considered by many educators to be one of the foremost thinkers in education today, thinks so, too.

Robinson, a British-born teacher, researcher, trainer, examiner, adviser and author who has spent the past 16 years living in Los Angeles, used a mix of humor, videos, statistics and stories Wednesday to demonstrate his point.

He told an audience of 882 educators, and community and business leaders how the existing model for education no longer is sufficient in today’s world where the proliferation of technology is outpacing our sense of fulfillment, depression is on the rise and the gap continues to widen between the form of employment that existing education system facilitates and the types of work that children will be doing in the future.

“When the world is changing at this pace, we can’t afford to let this continue,” said Robinson, co-author of the book, “Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That’s Transforming Education.” “We’re living in genuine times of revolution. If we are to lead this, we need to think differently about our children and what they are capable of, and we have to do things differently.”

He believes the educational model needs to be rebuilt from scratch.

“It’s not enough to improve the current system of education and think it will be fine,” Robinson said. “It’s like trying to improve the steam engine and hope it will get us to the moon. It won’t. It was never designed to do that. It was designed for something else and it did it reasonably well for quite a long time.”

Root of failure

Robinson blames government’s over-reliance on testing to gauge learning as a primary reason students increasingly have become disconnected from learning and teachers have increasingly felt demoralized because they are instructed on what to teach.

“Testing has a place in education. The problem has been that in the past 50 years it has become an obsession,” said Robinson who noted that the $16 billion education testing and support industry trumped the National Football League earnings ($9 billion) in 2013. “... We’ve come to confuse raising standards in schools with standardization.”

He said students no longer are given much time for unsupervised play but instead are forced to sit in a classroom to prepare for and take tests, leading to issues with distraction and inattention.

“When you went to school, you probably had a few tests a year, our children, have them all the time ... and they’re being told if they don’t do well on these, their lives are going to go completely on the wrong track,” he said.

He said the over-testing and the pressure on teachers to focus on specific standards removes the freedom for educators to help students uncover their hidden talents and prevents them from cultivating those talents into a skill the students could use after they graduate.
“The result of that is a great many people go through the current system of education unaware of what they are capable of and feeling in many cases that they don’t have any talents at all,” he said. “Or, if they do know their talents, they feel they are not necessary or needed.”

To develop an educational system that engages students and helps them understand the world around them and the potential within them, Robinson encouraged the audience members to return to the root of why schools exist.

“We’ve built elaborate systems of education, but the heart of it are learners and teachers,” he said. “You can get rid of everything else.”

He encouraged them to embrace the arts to spark creativity and passion, and to incorporate projects, such as rebuilding a car, to demonstrate how science, math and technology concepts translate into practical skills.

He challenged the audience to be innovative and bold.

**What’s next**

Teresa Purues, president of the Stark Education Partnership, which was one of the event’s sponsors, said Robinson’s presentation is the kickoff to a series of group conversations to evaluate what the schools and the community are doing well and what steps need to be taken, collectively and individually, to ensure students are prepared in a world of uncertainty.

“There’s a lot of things we saw ... that already are happening in the schools, but how do we ramp those up to make sure every student every day has those kinds of opportunities to be creative and curious and work collaboratively and develop their potential?” Purues said.

She said the groups will involve not only educators but also business, community and nonprofit leaders, many of whom were in the audience Wednesday.

“This is about our whole community,” she said. “... How are we going to make the transformational changes that Ken is talking about so that we really can invest all of what we have in students developing their own potential?”

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