

A SPECIAL ENCOUNTER

Some days ago I was at the Los Angeles International Airport and I felt surprisingly lucky when I sited down beside Sir Kenneth Robinson. For those who don't know him, Robinson is considered a leading specialist in the field of education and he works with the main world organizations specialized in the development of creativity.

Because I had to wait more than a hour for the boarding I asked him if he was willing to have an informal conversation with me. I gladly realized that he wasn't in a hurry too because he accepted without hesitation.

I told to myself "Grasp fully this unique opportunity! Ask him whatever you would like to know in the most concise and authentic way".

ME: I remember an interview about your profession where you said that you have ascertained there's a large number of wasted talents. I usually use the term "unexpressed abilities". Is it more or less the same thing?

ROBINSON: I think so. Very many people go through their whole lives having no real sense of what their talents may be, or if they have any to speak of. They don't think they're really good at anything and so they simply go through their lives getting on with it, getting no great pleasure from what they do.

ME: Listening to your words a part of me got disheartened, on the contrary the other one is enthusiastic and wants to change this situation. If I told you I'd like to find my talent, what kind of suggestion you would give me?

ROBINSON: Don't you have more demanding questions? Of course I'm joking. I'm sorry but given that I don't know you I don't feel like to answer on the spot. However, I can tell you that if you haven't found your talent probably the reason lies in the educational system you received.

ME: It's such a comforting news! In fact, I lately started to doubt about it. So on a decision-making level which are the actions that could be done?

ROBINSON: Unfortunately I don't have enough time to go into detail. Nevertheless my answer is: we need to innovate. We must be aware that if we want to get innovation we have to challenge what we take for granted, things that we think are obvious. As I usually say, there are ideas that all of us are enthralled to, which we simply take for granted as the natural order of things, the way things are. Many of our ideas have been formed not to meet the circumstances of this century, but to cope with the circumstances of previous centuries! Therefore we have to disenthral ourselves of some of them.

ME: Can you give me an example, please?

ROBINSON: I'll give you two examples. Over the years I spotted there are some big unresolved problems. One of them is the idea of linearity. What I mean? That it starts here and you go through a track and if you do everything right, you will end up set for the rest of your life. But there's a clamorous misunderstanding because life is not linear. It's organic!

Another current deceit is the conformism. We have built our education systems on the model of fast food. We have sold ourselves into a fast-food model of education, and it's impoverishing our spirit and our energies as much as fast food is depleting our physical bodies.

ME: So in your opinion, what should a model of education virtuous and innovative be based on?

ROBINSON: On principles of agriculture.

ME: Have you said "agriculture"?

ROBINSON: Exactly. We have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process but, as I've just said, it's an organic process. And we can't predict the outcome of human development. However, we can create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish. It's about creating a movement in education in

which people develop their own solutions, with external support based on a personalized curriculum that follows their passions.

Why do I talk about passions? Because if you're doing the thing that you love to do, that you're good at, time takes a different course entirely. On the contrary, if people do something that doesn't resonate with their spirit, they will opt out of education because it doesn't feed their spirit neither their energy.

ME: Mr. Robinson, I thank you so much for the time you have offered me.

ROBINSON: I do thank you for the curiosity you have shared with me. Have a good trip!

CLARIFICATION

Of course this encounter happened only in my dreams, but the words of Kenneth Robinson are true and you may listen to them in the video "Bring on the learning evolution" on www.ted.com.