

## **Book Review**

### *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*

**Dr. Ken Robinson**

Reviewed by Kim Allen

If you haven't seen Dr. Ken Robinson's TED talk, I highly recommend you do (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>). This clip, viewed more than 10 million times, demonstrates Dr. Robinson's perception of the changing world of education, and the impact it is having on the process of creativity in youth. Dr. Robinson is known for talking about how children today are rapidly being diagnosed with illnesses, ADHD in particular, brought on by the condition called "childhood" in order to be successful in school.

In fact, it was from this YouTube video that I picked up his book *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*. Dr. Robinson uses the word "element" to describe "the place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at come together" (p. xiii). From the very beginning of the book, the reader is taken on a wonderful journey through stories about regular, ordinary people becoming highly successful by combining their talents and their passion. The book also offers a commentary on the current state of education, and offers refreshing insights on tactics educators can use to help all students reach their potential.

The book begins with the story of Gillian, a young girl described as a highly active girl who performs poorly in her academic work because she is always busy, moving her body and being distracted by the world around her. By today's standards, Gillian would be immediately diagnosed with ADHD and more than likely, says Robinson, would be medicated and sent to special instruction. But Gillian came of age in the 1930s, long before it was common to have a diagnosis of ADHD. Gillian was, however, sent for psychological testing as she was simply unable to be successful in school. After a short observation, the psychologist told her mother that Gillian wasn't sick, but that she was a dancer. The recommendation was to take her to dance school so that she could be in her element. Of course the story ends happily when we learn that this is the story of Gillian Lynne, one of the most accomplished choreographers of all time. Gillian went on to have a wildly successful career in the field of dance where she excelled by living her passion and her talent.

*The Element* is filled with story after story of very successful individuals, both celebrities and ordinary people, finding success by living in their element. Dr. Robinson also makes a strong point in favor of creativity—he expresses a concern that collectively we are neglecting creativity in favor of a highly structured, overly organized approach to child development. Dr. Robinson is critical of the current public school approach to education, and makes relevant commentary on how we need to put play and creativity in the forefront of child development. He suggests that we might all have increased happiness and satisfaction in life if we make better use of our natural talents and resources.

Hearing Dr. Robinson talk about the changes in education made me think about the role of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS). I would argue that this book represents the very core of what FCS professionals must do to engage and educate their target audience. We must understand that the world in which youth and their parents exist creates extreme pressure to live inside a preconceived idea of success. Robinson argues that we need to “eliminate the existing hierarchy of subjects” (p. 247) so that all students can feel that their talents are valid. He also argues that arts and humanities are just as important as math and science. In fact, he argues that we need to redefine “subjects” altogether by recognizing that nearly all professions are diverse and include math, science, arts, and the humanities.

This book was great for me as a professional because it helped me view the world of education through a new lens. It was even better for me personally as I was able to see my personal talents as well as my children’s talents as highly valuable. This radical view is needed if we are to continue to make an impact on the lives of the families we serve through education.

### **Reference**

Robinson, K. 2009. *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*. U.S.: Viking Penguin.