READY FOR ANYTHING: PREPARING CHILDREN FOR THE FUTURE

BY CRAIG AND MARC KIELBURGER

What will your child be when they grow up? Maybe a quantum automotive programmer, or a multi-phasic data sculptor.

Ok, we made those jobs up. But consider this: just ten years ago, ‘social media manager’ or ‘mobile app developer’ would have seemed like imaginary job titles to most. With the accelerating pace of social and technological change, the World Economic Forum estimates that 65 percent of children today will end up in careers that don’t even exist yet.

It’s hard enough to get kids to do homework for known subjects. How can we prepare them for a future job market that we can’t predict? Our education system must give young people the necessary skills to adapt.

And those skills are not what you might think.

Literacy, numeracy and scientific knowledge will always be critical. But recently, the World Economic Forum asked executives from some of the world’s leading companies what they thought the most important job skills would be in 2020. Their number one response? Complex problem solving. Other skills on their top ten list included critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and emotional intelligence.

Unfortunately, our school systems — built during the industrial revolution — are not well equipped to impart these skills, according to world-renowned education expert Sir Ken Robinson.

“The emphasis on standard academic work is eroding the talents and abilities students need to face the future,” he says.

“We have become obsessed with two aspects of education — math and languages,” adds Peter Gamwell, co-author of The Wonder Wall: Leading Creative Schools and Organizations in an Age of Complexity (Corwin Press, 2017).

Robinson and Gamwell agree: our education system must shift to a student-centred, practical model of learning. Robinson points to the Big Picture schools in the US. Small groups of 15 students work with an advisor and tailor their studies to their own interests.

A student who loves soccer could research physiotherapy and then, through partnerships with organizations and businesses in her community, apply her research to creating an injury prevention program for local sports teams.

Gamwell notes that schools across Canada are piloting the “Genius Hour.” Every few days, students get one hour, carte blanche, to take on any project that interests them, like developing a video game or learning to silkscreen t-shirts.

These initiatives ignite a passion for self-directed learning and create opportunities for creativity and problem-solving — skills easily adapted to changing times.

Robinson is also a strong advocate of service learning, incorporating social and environmental actions into core curriculum. A class might look at the science behind global warming, and then take on a project to address it — from writing letters to politicians, to launching a local campaign to raise awareness about energy use. In addition to creativity and problem solving, youth pick up better leadership, collaboration and emotional intelligence—the ability to handle interpersonal relationships with empathy. These skills are timeless.

Yesterday’s classroom won’t prepare our kids for tomorrow’s job market. It’s time to rethink education, teaching the lessons they’ll need for careers we can only imagine.