

## **Week 15 Summary and learning**

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### **Video 1: TED Talk by Sir Ken Robinson How to escape education's death valley 2013S**

The speaker begins by sharing his journey to the United States, a move he made 12 years ago alongside his wife, Terry, and their two children. He humorously recounts how they initially thought they were moving to America but instead found themselves settling in the specific cultural and geographical landscape of Los Angeles. Through this experience, he became aware of certain stereotypes and cultural assumptions Americans hold—particularly the myth that Americans lack an understanding of irony. The speaker is quick to dispel this notion, noting from his travels across the country that Americans do indeed grasp irony, just as much as British people are not all as stereotypically reserved as often depicted.

Moving to the core of his talk, the speaker addresses the irony inherent in the educational legislation known as "No Child Left Behind." Despite the well-intentioned title, this policy has, paradoxically, led to the exclusion and disadvantage of millions of students. In some regions, as many as 60% of students fail to complete high school, and in certain Native American communities, this dropout rate rises to a staggering 80%. The speaker connects this to the severe economic repercussions of educational failures, pointing to studies that predict halving the dropout rate could potentially contribute nearly a trillion dollars to the U.S. economy over a decade.

The speaker challenges the misconception that the American education system is underfunded, arguing instead that it suffers from a fundamental misdirection. The solution lies in recalibrating the focus of education to align with three principles essential for human growth and flourishing: diversity, curiosity, and creativity.

He explains that human diversity is a cornerstone of flourishing societies, yet the existing education system under "No Child Left Behind" emphasizes conformity, which overlooks individual talents and unique learning styles. This policy has created an environment where standardized testing, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, has become central. As a result, disciplines such as arts and humanities are often sidelined, further stifling the individuality of students. This narrow focus has also led to an increase in Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD) diagnoses, which the speaker suggests may reflect a disinterest among students due to the uninspiring nature of their education rather than an actual epidemic.

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The speaker then delves into the role of curiosity as an innate motivator of learning. When curiosity is nurtured, children become eager and natural learners, exploring and engaging with subjects that ignite their interest. However, he observes that the current educational system often disregards curiosity, reducing teaching to mere information delivery rather than fostering a mentor-learner relationship that inspires and stimulates intellectual growth.

Standardized testing is criticized for its dominance in the educational system, as the speaker argues that while tests serve a purpose as diagnostic tools, they should not overshadow the broader goals of learning. Rather than supporting education, an overemphasis on testing can actually obstruct it, hindering the development of critical thinking and understanding.

The third and final principle, creativity, is identified as a fundamental aspect of human life that education should aim to cultivate. Unfortunately, the speaker argues, educational systems often focus on standardization over creative exploration. He offers Finland as a positive example of a broad-based educational system where arts are integrated alongside other disciplines, and standardized testing does not dominate the curriculum. In Finland and other high-performing countries, education is individualized, taking into account each student's unique needs and fostering a culture of curiosity and respect for teaching.

In discussing these international models, the speaker emphasizes the value these systems place on the teaching profession, ensuring educators have the support and professional development they need. Effective systems, he points out, devolve responsibility to the local school level, empowering teachers and students to innovate and engage in meaningful learning experiences. Education, he stresses, is a human system that must adapt to the diverse needs and aspirations of individuals.

The speaker illustrates his points by sharing insights from alternative education programs that have successfully re-engaged at-risk students. These programs provide personalized attention and a diverse curriculum, and he argues that such approaches should be mainstream rather than considered exceptions in education.

To underscore his vision for reform, the speaker uses the metaphor of Death Valley—a place famously desolate and dry, yet capable of bursting into bloom after rainfall. This metaphor illustrates the potential for growth and transformation within students if the right conditions for learning are established.

The speaker concludes by underscoring the critical role of leadership in education, emphasizing that leaders should focus on creating an atmosphere of possibility rather than

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imposing control. By nurturing creativity, engagement, and curiosity, he envisions a path toward a transformative educational system that empowers individuals and fosters lifelong learning.