

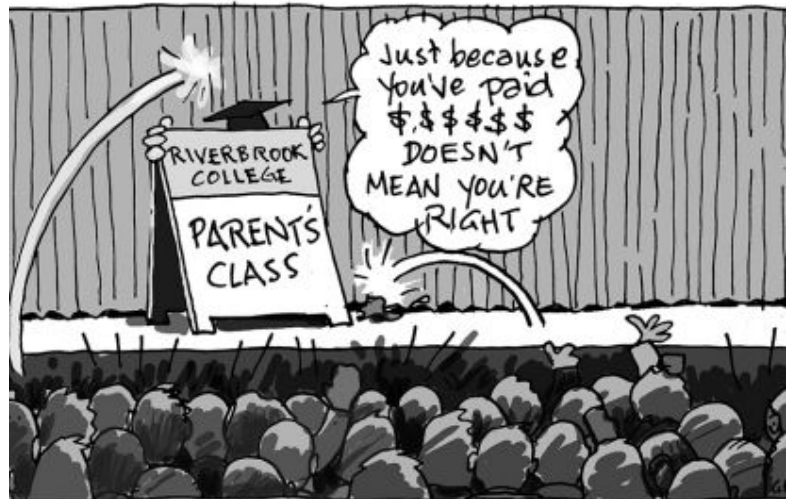
Your Say: Power of educating the parent

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As Professor Ken Robinson, educational guru and activist, rightly pointed out at the recent Education Expo, the education industry is ripe for disruption. So how do we do that?

My opinion is target parents. The power of the parent is underestimated in the education system. As a business marketer, turned teacher, my attention is drawn to the marketing angle of how to create change in an industry that lags and is dominated by politicians and parents. The educators, who are the exact group qualified to make the changes and recommendations, are stuck between these two bodies. This pattern is particularly apparent in the private school setting, where we often find evidence of "I pay I say", but with not much educational knowledge to back it up.

Many parents find it difficult to move away from the focus on academics and embrace a more holistic curriculum because they do not understand its value. While our schools continue to focus on academics, we are setting up generations for failure. The academic model is largely a myth that was created in the beginning of public education to serve the needs of the industrial revolution. It no longer works and, like Charles Darwin rightly pointed out, the survival of the fittest is not the most intelligent or the strongest, but the one who can adapt to change.



The new Lindfield Learning Hub in Sydney's north, which follows a stage-not-age approach, is very exciting for passionate teachers — or "learning designers" as they like to call us now — such as myself. It is a sign that change is a coming and it can't come fast enough.

Let's take a simple example, such as the subject of drama. I don't want to name and shame schools, but in my local area the most expensive school in the district does not offer drama in the weekly curriculum. Largely because parents do not see its value. The irony is the public local schools in the area have the most phenomenal drama, dance and art programs that children participate in weekly with specialised teachers. So all those parents who believe they are giving their children a better start in life because they're paying massive fees each term to fund the fancy school bus and expensive uniforms are sadly mistaken. And they will not realise it for a long time.

Drama is rapidly rising as the most valued subject in the curriculum. It allows for the development of all of the intelligences: spiritual (SQ), emotional (EQ), academic (IQ) and physical (PQ). In the age of Google, SQ and EQ are becoming more valued than IQ. It is important to make the distinction between drama and theatre. The extracurricular "drama" that is currently on offer at some schools does not suffice — it's what I'd refer to as theatre, which is largely concerned with communication between actors and an audience. Drama is largely concerned with experience by participants, irrespective of any function of communication to an audience.

Education is concerned with individuals, whereas drama is concerned with the individuality, capturing and nurturing the uniqueness of human essence. This is one of the main reasons drama has become such an important subject. It develops the whole child and often provides a much needed antithesis to the heavy emphasis on development and standardised testing of the child, which has dominated the schooling system for too long, shutting down the natural creativity of the student.

Craft is also making a comeback due to neuroscience discovering the connection between hands and brain development. This highlights the importance of crossing the mid-line to nurture the whole mind and its function.

We need to educate parents so we can educate our kids for today, not yesterday. Parents in the private arena hold much more influence than we like to admit because at the end of the day, the schools, especially private ones, are businesses selling a product. This is something that is often forgotten or overlooked. A successful business has a target market it provides a specific product to with the aim of making a profit. Although there is plenty of government funding, by supporting the private sector they are still largely influenced by meeting the needs of the consumers, giving parents significant influence on school practices.

The competition between private schools is now out of control, with one trying to outdo the other with its facilities. The ripple effect of this is that the public system feels subtle pressure of not measuring up, which is simply not true. In my professional experience and in certain socioeconomic areas where the community is financially and professionally supportive, public schools leave private ones for dead.

Prue Reid is a casual teacher