

Creativity in Education

Hi there.

I'm Justin Ward. I'm a Specialist Leader of Education and I've been a teacher now for over 20 years. I've taught in all Key Stages from Year 1 to A-Level and GNVQ.

I work at Grafton Primary School in Holloway and I've also had the opportunity to share my practice with other schools across London with head teachers who wish to improve their arts provision and by teaching on a number of postgraduate teacher training courses.

Now, if I tell you a little bit about the school – it's an oasis in the middle of a very urban, inner-city area. If you know anything about Holloway, you'll recognize the 99p shop culture. It's got a vibrant ethnic mix of people. We have 510 children in the school and 33 different languages spoken. And like so many other schools in Islington, we're very high on the social deprivation index. And Holloway's services are not so vibrant. There are few bookshops and theatres yet if you walk through the doors of the school you'll see it is abundant with creativity.

Our intake is polarized between some very privileged families who can afford to buy houses within the smallest radius of a catchment area and those much poorer families who feed the school from four council estates on each side of the building. These children don't come from homes where the walls are lined with classic literature. They don't get taken to the theatre. They don't get taken to the gallery. For these families, perhaps even a trip to the cinema is not very high on the list of priorities.

So as educators, we have a huge responsibility to offer our children a rich and diverse curriculum. In our school we value creativity. We want our children to be curious about the world. We want our children to manipulate information, not just remember facts. We want our children to be articulate speakers and learn through drama and performance. We want them to have great thinking skills and analytical minds. Most of all we want them to enjoy coming to school.

List the things we do at Grafton and show slides of art work:

National Gallery

Cognitive Acceleration

Every child learns a musical instrument

We know that if you work on the whole child – and replenish each of the wells of emotional, creative, physical, spiritual and cognitive then we can educate children to be resilient, resourceful and well prepared for the 21st Century.

However, I work in a school very much like yours. It's ruled by government directives and no one can avoid the paranoia of OFSTED inspections and league tables and SATs results.

And over time, parents have been conditioned to respond really well to things like this:

KS2 test results and progress

	All pupils	Low attainers	Middle attainers	High attainers
Pupils eligible for KS2 assessment ?	58			
Percentage of pupils achieving 3 or below in reading and maths test and writing TA ?	3%	29%	0%	0%
Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above in reading and maths test and writing TA ?	95%	57%	100%	100%
Percentage of pupils achieved level 4B or above in reading and maths test and level 4 in writing TA ?	84%	29%	94%	100%
Percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in reading and maths test and writing TA ?	34%	0%	18%	87%
Percentage of pupils making at least 2 levels of progress in reading ?	98%	86%	100%	100%
Percentage of pupils making at least 2 levels of progress in writing TA ?	96%	71%	100%	100%
Percentage of pupils making at least 2 levels of progress in maths ?	95%	71%	100%	93%
Average point score ?	30.8			

... and not so well to things like this:



So in our schools we tend to do a lot of this.



Slide of pupil sitting an exam.

So what are we doing?

Testing. Endlessly testing testing testing.

Now here's a slide of all the studies that show that creativity helps children to learn. And you think this is going to be one of those animated powerpoint slides which when I press my button, is going to reveal the other side. Well no... there are none.

In fact, we know that if you do more of this... (creativity)

SLIDE of art work

then children perform better at this (sitting exams)

SLIDE of exams

Now at the end of the last Tory government, morale was pretty low. And that good old bleeding heart liberal, Tony Blair knew that he had to do something about this in schools. He redirected government money, via the Arts Council to initiatives like Creative Partnerships, which meant for the first time, school's like ours were able to do exciting large scale projects.

SLIDE of large scale project TESSA

We could employ an artist in residence in school. Suddenly we had a music specialist and a writer in residence. Now I'm not saying this pot of money allowed us to do all of these things. For some of it we got there on our own steam but there was definitely a shift of focus and suddenly what seemed to make sense for our children became aligned with what made sense to the government.

Around about the same time we became engaged with the National Gallery's outreach initiative called Take One Picture. Every year the gallery would release a painting onto their website

I want to tell you a little story about a girl I know called Samisha.

Samisha was... no homework, poverty stricken, late for school, often had to be the head of the family... they didn't see themselves as achievers... parents probably had a really rubbish time at school. It becomes incredibly hard to smash that cycle of poverty. But nevertheless, Samisha really enjoyed her trip to the art gallery and she took part in a process of work based on the Umbrellas by Edgar Degas.

Blah blah blah...

VIDEO of kids talking about Take One Picture – Video.

But I think everyone of us here today has a duty to offer a curriculum that nurtures young people so that not only do they have the capacity to succeed but that their lives become meaningful.

Now, I'm not saying we should throw the baby out with the bath water. I'm not saying we should stop assessing our children or measuring their academic success. I know you can't stop performing for OFSTED or give up on driving children towards a SATs examination level.

But what you can do is inject a bit of creativity into your curriculum so that every child like Samisha out there stands a better chance.

Thank you