

A Creative Curriculum for Living:
*engaging, nurturing and enabling
through the creative curriculum*

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Early adolescence is a time when a young person should be establishing themselves as an individual in their own right; really coming to terms with their own identity and securing a sense of purpose and direction in their lives. This is a profoundly important phase in human development and the child should be guided and supported by adults around them. It is natural that children want to grow up and they will do so in good time. However, children are not little adults; they need time to learn and to make sense of themselves and the world around them. It is perhaps appropriate to ask, “Are we trying to rush children through school? What more could we do to engage their families in this vital developmental journey?” This is where we begin in our school’s journey towards a creative curriculum for living.

Many schools have welcomed the work of Mick Waters and are taking the opportunity to look afresh at the way in which they teach Key Stage Three. Some schools have reduced it to two years in order that students can be rushed through and spend more time on “what matters;” GCSE and Level 2 examinations. By doing so they are, I believe, not allowing pupils to enjoy learning and really understand themselves. The removal of SATs and the new orders for KS3 present us with a wonderful opportunity to really capture the hearts and minds of young people and enthuse them with a desire to learn and grow into rounded people, excited by the role they can play in their own future.

At the school where I am Head, we have developed two courses (Cultural Studies in Y7 and Curriculum for Confidence in Y8), with the explicit aim of enabling pupils to:

- Have a greater say in their learning
- To make learning genuinely accessible
- To make learning active and exploratory
- To shift the paradigm of the teacher from “font of all knowledge” to “co-learner”

The kind of curriculum that we are trying to develop has its roots in arts based learning processes and in particular in the work of Dorothy Heathcote. The basic concept is that instead of teaching discrete subjects, History, Geography, RE, PHSE, ICT and Drama are taught through a single dramatic context. Cultural Studies has been running at the school since September 2005 and the teachers involved are gradually harnessing the relevant skills and understanding to make it a reality.

I have been thrilled to see colleagues who are involved in developing these courses grow into powerfully creative and reflective practitioners. Working with external

practitioners and with the support of Creative Partnerships and the SSAT, colleagues have been inspired and creative practices have found their way right across the school curriculum. There are countless examples of colleagues using such approaches outside of the two Key Stage Three courses. Indeed, many teachers have shown an extraordinary appetite for changing their practice and resisting the temptation to go for the safer and easier option.

Throughout the development of the course we have benefited from Dr Elaine Millard (currently Chair of NATE) acting as a researcher and helping to guide us as we seek to create a more responsive way of working. She has written a number of papers that reflect on the development of the course which she is only too happy to share with colleagues, "They're not meant to sit on shelves!" Below is a short extract from a report published recently based on pupil interviews:

The students reported high quality "circle" time where they were able to share views and learn from each other. One said:

"You can really get your mind into it. You listen to everyone and you listen to all the views and it builds up and you think, "Ah ye, it's like that". You change what you think when you know more"

Dr Elaine Millard June 2007

Later in the paper she goes on to write

As I reported in 2006 one of the impressive aspects of the course was that boys and girls were equally clear about the benefits of the work they were doing for cultural studies. Once again each student was able to name some aspect of the studies which they had enjoyed and talked about that topic knowledgeably. I have argued elsewhere that the use of more active learning methods and a focus on the students' own experience helps boys in particular to make connections to the world outside the classroom and become more involved. The ability of the course to motivate all but one of the boys was evident in their ability to discuss a range of work that had involved them and a number of different ways of recording and presenting their work.

This is a sample from students whose interviews have been analysed.

Name	Topic	Activity
<i>Olivia</i>	<i>Martin Luther King</i>	<i>Writing a speech</i>
<i>Luke</i>	<i>The Battle of Hastings</i>	<i>Drama/ writing an account of the battle</i>

<i>Shane</i>	<i>Aswan Dam</i>	<i>A report on the need for water</i>
<i>Rebecca</i>	<i>Plots and Protests</i>	<i>Rap protest poem- No Saturday school</i>
<i>James</i>	<i>Writing- persuasion</i>	<i>Speech about pollution</i>
<i>Ashleigh</i>	<i>Millions</i>	<i>Designing and imagining being in a hermitage</i>
<i>Jenny</i>	<i>Shakespeare's Theatre</i>	<i>Finding evidence about Giles Allen- summing up who owned land on which The theatre was built. Making a decision.</i>
<i>Darrell</i>	<i>The Miners' Strike</i>	<i>A miners' viewpoint in a courtroom drama</i>
<i>Liam</i>	<i>The Tudors</i>	<i>More detailed knowledge about this which I started to like in Y6</i>

Dr Elaine Millard June 2007

As I have said, the work isn't really entirely original - there were schools doing similar things twenty years ago. We have managed to get a considerable number of teachers from within the humanities area to adopt the same pedagogical approach. Over the last two years, a significant number of colleagues from across the country have been asking to come and look at what it is that we are doing at Kingstone. This suggests that we are at a time when educators have a new found confidence and are enthusiastic about taking up Mick Waters' challenge and providing an alternative approach to teaching the National Curriculum.

On Thursday July 2nd we are holding a conference **A CREATIVE CURRICULUM FOR LIVING** in Barnsley (details below) which will capture our journey so far and will also enable delegates to find out what a creative curriculum may look like in their own educational contexts. A second day on Friday July 3rd will be based at Kingstone School itself and will show delegates how the curriculum works in practice.

One of the biggest challenges for any school adopting a more creative approach is the need to establish an assessment process that is rigorous and which will not disintegrate under scrutiny. What if we could create an assessment process that proved to be a viable alternative to SATS, GCSE and A LEVEL? An assessment arrangement that placed the student at the heart of the process, that invited the student to share what they had learnt both in terms of the knowledge that they had gained but also in terms of what they had learnt about themselves. What if the pupil were asked to evidence their learning using an e-portfolio that captured key moments (on audio files, movie clips, digital images, e-documents etc) and that was illustrated and annotated by the student? What if this process required engagement from families and employers who became a real audience with whom the child shared their understanding? Last summer we piloted such a process where parents sat alongside their children and shared their learning experiences in a way so rare other than at the traditional parents evening. There were

fascinating results and reactions to the experience. This process will be shared by teachers, parents and academics at the forthcoming conference.

Creative Partnerships are again helping us to develop this form of assessment model. As a School of Creativity we are currently working with NATD (*National Association for the Teaching of Drama*) and The Specialist Schools Trust to share the work at the conference. Our aim? To encourage other schools to think about similar models.

In the long term we are seeking to transform the child's experience in school and create a curriculum and assessment process that genuinely nurtures human development and enables young people to come to terms with who they are and how they relate to others and indeed the rest of the world.

Education is not something that we should be rushing young people through. We should be giving them space, slowing time down, allowing them to play and encouraging deep and disciplined reflection in order that they might do it better next time around. This way of working engages both teacher and student because it's relevant. And when it's relevant, it works.

A Creative Curriculum for Living Conference
2nd July 2009
Tankersley Manor Hotel, Barnsley, South Yorkshire

*Relevant to anyone interested in revolutionizing curriculum, reducing disaffection, inspiring learners and enabling deep learning. There will be a choice of workshops on offer. An open plenary and discussion will allow for Q+A with a guest panel including **Jonothan Neelands, Luke Abbott, Guy Shearer, Dorothy Heathcote**, workshop providers, students and teachers. A package offering a second day at The Kingstone School on **Friday July 3rd** will also be available.*

To register an interest in attending the course please contact Kirsty Fechter on 01226 215757 or email k.fechter@barnsley.org

Or book online at www.makingthecurriculumlive.co.uk

**The cost for the one day experience will be £150 with lunch and refreshments.
The additional day including hotel accommodation will be £235.**