

# Another brick in the wall?

**While schools need to assess data to determine the effectiveness of their teaching, they should also foster creativity, both for students and teachers. There is a combination of science and art to teaching that we must nurture. And while students must master subject area fundamentals, we must also provide opportunities for them to express their creativity beyond successful test-taking.**

## **Education is not securing “bricks in the wall”**

My first year of teaching coincided with the release of Pink Floyd’s album, *The Wall*, with lyrics that included: “We don’t need no education,” “Leave those kids alone”, and “We’re just another brick in the wall.” At the time, I used that first statement to demonstrate the meaning of double-negatives to my students and to remind myself of my own frustrations with education encountered as a secondary student. Since then, they have echoed in my mind when I sense my students’ frustration in the classroom, and I think about and assess my own learning and teaching processes.

## **Teachers as artists and craftsmen**

When I work with teachers, I let them know that we recognize them as professionals and subject area specialists, and we want them to share their knowledge with their students. There is a curriculum and identified learning outcomes that need

to be mastered, but the routes and methods used to attain that mastery are not prescribed. We want teachers to combine their artistry and their unique blend of expertise and skills to transform and translate their knowledge of their subject, and their knowledge of the different ways that children learn, to benefit the students’ understanding.

We want teachers to communicate their passion for their subject. Students recognize and connect with teachers who can provide that spark. We should value teachers’ creativity and artistry, work with them to ensure that the expected students’ learning results are being met, and allow them the flexibility to develop their own special blends of teaching methods and pedagogical success.

## **Don’t leave the child’s wonder and creativity behind**

Similarly, it is important that we provide the atmosphere and conditions to foster and nurture student creativity. We are all

familiar with the great educational dialogue that has developed in the wake of the No Child Left Behind initiative in the United States, and its great emphasis on testing and results. It has opened the debate that education has become merely “teaching to the test” and that one of the results is that many students no longer receive a well-rounded curriculum. In the scramble to produce higher test results in mathematics and reading, less time and resources are provided for the students’ study of other areas, such as art, music, physical education (PE), and even social studies and science.

Sir Ken Robinson, an international advisor on education, creativity and innovation, produced a powerful and provoking presentation on TEDTalks last spring, entitled “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” That talk has generated widespread dialogue about the nature of today’s schools and what directions we should consider taking. His basic premise is that many schools neither invite nor provide opportunities for students to explore learning in ways that are meaningful and important to them. Schools have stripped their programs of those “extra” subjects like art, music, and PE in order to provide more time for the subjects state guidelines require to be tested.

The statistics indicate these steps are not producing the desired

results. He points out that 60% of U.S. students drop out of high school and that those students are increasingly disengaged and disenfranchised. They are made to feel substandard because so many of them cannot pass these tests, and not only do we lose their potential of academic mastery, but we are also never truly discovering what special talents and gifts they may have in other areas, like the arts, that are not being tested and not being developed.

Fortunately, this trend is not reflected in international schools. Most of them still strive to provide a rich and varied curriculum that emphasizes both academic development and success, as well as developing other creative areas of the whole child. These efforts even lead us as teachers and administrators to remind parents that they, too, need to allow opportunities for their child to take a break from academics, to be a growing child, to play. Children learn a great deal through play, not the least being how to get along with others, how to share, and how to be independent.

We do need education, and the person that emerges and grows from that education is not a common assembly of bricks, reflecting the same materials, processes, and results – and certainly not just “another brick in the wall.” Our challenge is not to “leave them kids alone,” but to provide them nourishment and a variety of growing environments that will allow them to best cultivate their talents and blend those with the talents and skills of others to create a fertile future.



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