

What's the point of school?

I spent part of my summer holiday reading Guy Claxton's book, "What's the point of school?" It was a fantastic read and thoroughly enjoyable and insightful. I read the book whilst on holiday in France with my wife and one year old son. To give a very brief summary; Mr Claxton believes that in the current education system we are not preparing our students for life after school.

I have to say that much of what he said I totally agreed with. He talked about schools focussing entirely on exam results and thereby removing any of the fun of learning. He goes on to suggest that all we are creating is very knowledgeable people however, we are not creating great learners. When people start their first day of work in the big wide world they get dressed up in their smart suit, shiny shoes with a whole host of A-levels, AS levels and GCSEs but rarely is their first question, "what date was the Spanish Armada?" If it is of course, then fantastic and your boss will be mightily impressed and also think you're a little odd. You might be better equipped for your new job if you know the latest non celebrity to be kicked out the Big Brother House, at least you will have something to discuss during your lunch break.

The workplace does not want just knowledgeable employees but they want their employees to be imaginative, creative, collaborative and resilient. They want to be able to trust them to be able to get on with a task, to be able to research, share and adapt. And yet many companies are let down by their employees, however, often it is not their fault as they have not been taught these skills.

I agreed with many of Claxton's views and I feared that many schools do knock the creativity and imagination out of our students. It was suggested that on average a secondary school student asks only one question a month. Having a one year old child who is the most inquisitive young man I have ever encountered I started to wonder how long it will be before he loses his enthusiasm for learning. Maybe by playgroup he will be put off by being told what fingers to use for his finger painting and then in Primary School he will be instructed to learn all the dates of the kings and Queens when in fact he is more interested in what they actually did and by secondary school he'll probably have all his teachers dressed exactly the same, using the same powerpoint designs, drinking the same decaffeinated coffee and all complaining about the same thing which is everything!

We need school to be able to excite students, to unlock their inquisitive minds. Teachers need to be unique, they must not be afraid to show their personality.

The most pleasing experience about reading this book was when I finished and I thought about our school. I fully believe that we do create motivated, hard working young men who are also curious, collaborative, inspiring, imaginative and positive.

Today I showed a colleague from another school around various classes. We went into about 5 different rooms without warning and in every single one of those classes I saw everything you would want to see in an ideal school. Collaboration, questioning, imagination and inspiration were present throughout. There was also a smile on the faces of all the teachers who were in the classroom. Guy Claxton has written a great book, it seems like we are already acting it out!