

2016 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

From Peter Pans to Supermans

(Original)

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What about a little bit of freedom?

While ministries of education are plodding on standardized programs – and both teachers and students don't sleep nights in struggle to follow them whatever it takes, – wouldn't it be a solution to make a step away from standards and give a little more way to creativity? And see what it will lead to.

...I am looking through my students' essays. "Learn English idioms", "memorize phrasal verbs", "practice the Continuous tenses", "improve pronunciation". It is the first day of the semester, and their question was "What are your expectations of our course?" I am reading the answers trying not to miss a word, for this is where the most important part of class planning for the term begins. Now I know what they need. And according to that I will plan the lessons.

Listen to the students more – this is the first thing we can do. "Flipped classroom" strategy is spreading around the world. It is passing on more responsibility to the students, making them equal participants of the studying process. So why not apply it to the very first stage – class planning? It will make it easier for us, teachers. It will make it more effective for the students. Most importantly, they will feel that their opinion matters. Looking at pages covered with painstaking writing from top to bottom, I realize how important it is for the teenagers to simply express their ideas. After all, education is a step in the process of the socialization, and every school task forms a teenager as a future citizen of his country. Shouldn't they learn to be not indifferent?

Of course, our little citizens will also write about "playing games and watching movies". Children always remain children. But in that, they will also be right. Joe Fatheree, a great teacher from a small American town, suggests his students producing music and short films,

as well as engineering and using 3D printer. Oh, what does he teach? Literature! He just realizes that nowadays, competing with social networks and video games, education does not have the right to be boring.

Neither can it be bookish. That is what they have come to in Finland. "Cafeteria classes" will teach children mathematics, foreign languages and management, imitating work in a café. No need explaining children why they need all these rules: real life will be the motivation.

"Bringing education out of classrooms" – the strategy they begin to use in more and more countries. Speaking about foreign languages, we will see that the leaders in learning English, for example, are the countries that do not take it as a school subject only. In Sweden, or the Philippines English makes a normal part of life in cinemas, public places, and the mass media.

As I've said, children always remain children. Always keeping the window open for Peter Pan. But the other part of them is a superman, a future serious adult, looking forward to solving problems. That's why, if you ask them for opinion, along with "playing games" they will suggest some hard challenges like "Continuous tenses" or "phrasal verbs". So dare ask them, give them freedom – and you will have an ally instead of a headache.

I am writing that because that works. I never spent nights writing endless reports about the classes – as most of my colleagues do. I was lucky to work in relatively free environment where my boss respected my view on the course, and I, in turn, respected the view of my students. And instead of that formal report I'd probably better send him fantastically creative final essays and a million of "thank you" from my superman-Peter Pan dreamers.

Some people may argue that freedom is dangerous. In school, like in the big world: too much freedom leads to chaos. This is what developing countries have in their history and still fear. The most developed ones, though, know that freedom within the given limits – the ones that make you and the others live in a better world – does not create any chaos. For a person feels good and respected. Giving freedom means respect.

Isn't this the best lesson we can teach them?