

Disruptive Teaching: Elementary School Teachers as Intellectual Risk-Takers

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Abstract

Standards-driven reform shaped the latter part of the last century. As a result, elementary schools in the United States typically center on content and assessment-focused measurable outcomes (Fitz & Lee, 2000; Manatt, 1995; Robbins, 2000). This compels schools and the teachers within them to be constrained by and focused on standardized assessment (almost exclusively Language Arts and Mathematics) and curriculum aligned with content standards. In addition, many teacher preparation programs are guided by this same environment and steer new teachers toward best practices in plan-instruct-assess-reteach models aimed at meeting their own standards in the teaching profession. This is in direct contrast to challenges from intellectuals like Sir Ken Robinson (2015, 2017) who suggests that schools have killed creativity and the ability to ‘think’. Harris (2021) echoes this challenge, suggesting we must move toward having creative agency in schools and the larger society.

This paper is informed by this creative agency and advocates that teachers can accomplish the goals of this standards-driven environment, all while becoming intellectual risk-takers (Beghetto, Karwowski, & Reiter-Palmon, 2021; Clark & Soutter, 2022). We recommend that teachers become intellectual risk-takers by rethinking standardized content through revolutionary, disruptive, and authentic practice by interrogating curriculum and even developing their own. While many possible entry points to this disruptive practice, we suggest teachers can have the creative confidence to address targeted populations (LGBTQ+, English Language Learners), promote culturally responsive practices, and implement content beyond ELA and math (visual and performing arts) in innovative ways that better meet the needs of 21st Century students.

Key Words: Curriculum Development, integrated arts, ELL, LGBTQ+