

*Together with the Crafts Council, craft and design superstar Yinka Ilori MBE has launched Craft School: Yinka's Challenge, a programme, competition and challenge for schools. Here, general secretary Michele Gregson explains why NSEAD is proudly supporting the project and why we would like to see every school rise to Yinka's challenge*

**Running until March 2022, Yinka Ilori's Craft School challenge has three themes; play, storytelling and empowerment. What might these three themes look like in today's classrooms and curriculums and, if we could use craft, art and design to make a better world, what would that look like?**

To answer these questions, I invite you to imagine an educational landscape powered by imagination. For me, it would be populated by independent thinkers, united in kindness and mutual respect. Regardless of background, age, ability or any other personal characteristic, all voices would have equal value, and all means of expression would be heard and seen. The inhabitants of my utopia would be healthy in mind and body, and purposeful and productive. Adaptable and resilient, they would have equity of access to all the resources needed to live well, thrive and be in harmony with nature. It would be a world full of joy and beauty, and a world where we could all be or behave like artists, whatever our occupation or age.

Certainly, I'm not unique in my daydreams, as this is a world imagined by many others. In April this year, NSEAD was privileged to

welcome peace and environment activist Satish Kumar to our iJADE conference. Satish proposed a head, heart, hands philosophy for education, which placed making and creating at the centre of life and learning. And, indeed, if we are to create the change that we want to see, I believe that a head, heart, hands model could help shape and be applied to today's system of education.



Our challenge is to persuade the policy makers that this is, not only necessary, but possible within our school curriculum. It shouldn't be a short-term fix, but an embedded vital part of a broad, balanced education. Together with the Crafts Council, NSEAD is calling for art, craft and design to be at the heart of a process of

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repair, and a long-term response to policies in education and more recent pandemic ruptures. How might we achieve this?

If we look the educational landscape that many currently work within, we see a system where the 'head' has privilege over heart and hand. Nick Gibb MP, the minister for School Standards is clear: 'Knowledge acquisition' is the key to equality of opportunity. In this context, knowledge is generally considered as information, to be absorbed, understood and committed to memory. In art, craft and design, there is also an inventory of knowledge, although it is, of course, inherently bound with practice, context and intention. It is also infinite and in a constant state of flux, growth and possibility.

Furthermore, the knowledge that a craftsperson, designer or artist requires is not easy to quantify, measure or inspect. This makes it easier to diminish and marginalise in our high-stakes assessment culture, which favours a narrow range of so called 'core' subjects. In the last 10 years, arts subjects have lost ground in the curriculum, with less time, fewer resources and fewer specialist teachers available. The revised Ofsted framework of 2019 recognises that the curriculum has become skewed, and needs to be rebalanced to allow for a richer and broader education. On top of this, the pandemic has inevitably had a huge impact. As learning moved online, our subject was beyond the reach of many children and young people. We are also seeing a post-pandemic squeeze on educational funding with the cutting of subsidies for higher education arts courses by 50 per cent – their value being measured by the Treasury in terms of crude economic outputs. The premise for the cuts will never capture the true worth and learning of what happens in art, craft and design classrooms.

# Play, storytelling and empowerment



## ‘Let us organise classrooms where learners can explore the innate power of being an artist, a maker and a creator – an agent for change and renewal’



Global events in 2020 exposed many inequalities in society which, in turn, sharply focused our attention on equity, diversity and inclusion in schools and colleges. We know that many students do not see themselves, their families or community in the curriculum. The artists, crafters, makers or designers that are studied often come from a narrow, white occidental tradition. The themes and focus do not relate to the diverse communities in which we live, and many miss the opportunity to understand and appreciate the full kaleidoscopic range of British culture. Talent is being squandered and learning opportunities missed.

These are truths that we must all confront. Out of the pandemic-fuelled chaos, we can create spaces for hope. And, there are reasons to be cheerful:

- We have witnessed a groundswell of popular interest and firsthand experience of the benefits of making and creating. The Covid-19 lockdowns and the closure of galleries, museums and public performances have



sharpened our appreciation and the understanding of making and creating – these are not luxuries but lifelines for many.

- The art education community is united more powerfully than ever, resisting reductive measures of value. The #ArtIsEssential campaign and protest, led by the Contemporary Visual Arts Network, is rallying educators from across all phases and sectors.
- Communities of expertise have been galvanised to tackle inequity and create expert resources to support art educators. The NSEAD's Anti-Racist Art Educator Action Group is a powerful example, creating resources and actions to help diversify and decolonise art, craft and design education.
- We have glimpsed new possibilities for training and professional development through the democratising energy of online provision. A myriad of networks, events, courses and resources have blossomed over the past 18 months.
- We have a box-fresh revised Ofsted

framework that gives schools permission to rebalance their curriculum.

- Young people themselves have embraced the opportunity to make artwork for their own purposes and have felt the power of communicating through their art.
- The tired model of teacher-learner, where the teacher transmits and the student receives, has been broken. Remote learning and social media have forged a new model of co-learning and co-creation.

So, here's a modest proposal to rebalance head, heart and hands: Let learners take the lead. Empower children to operate in their classrooms as artists, identifying their own intentions and where their own lived experience has value.

We should equip teachers to be confident and skilled facilitators of art, craft and design education that is a playground of experiences – diverse, full of curiosity and experimentation with a rich range of materials processes and techniques.

Let us co-create a curriculum that hears the stories of its learners and allows them new ones to be written. And let's organise learning where there are opportunities to be stretched and challenged by real, live briefs – practice-based, authentic and motivating in a way that high-stakes assessment alone can never be.

Finally, let us organise classrooms where learners can explore the innate power of being an artist, a maker and a creator – an agent for change and renewal.

For my money, Yinka's Challenge is a blueprint for the head, heart and hands utopia that I dream of. And, to finish where I began: What might a world crafted by artists look like?

It is one that is playful, and filled with colour and hope. ■

**Far left** Yinka Ilori at the launch of Yinka's Craft School

**Top left** Yinka Ilori with his former art teacher Dennis Doherty; chaired by Emily Gopaul

**Above left** Make Your Future workshop, Northolt High School, © Caroline Heron

**Above right** Make Your Future workshop, St Paul's School for Girls, © Caroline Heron

Craft School: Yinka's Challenge runs from September 2021 to March 2022. Participating schools are asked to create a response to a brief designed and set by Yinka based on play, storytelling and empowerment. To support teachers and learners through the challenge, there are digital resources and training sessions. [craftscouncil.org.uk/whats-on/teacher-cpd-craft-school-yinkas-challenge](https://craftscouncil.org.uk/whats-on/teacher-cpd-craft-school-yinkas-challenge)