Educating the East End has changed my life

Channel 4’s series inspired me to become a teacher. I was proud to be part of something that puts to bed tired stereotypes about teachers and teenagers

Nicky Morgan, the new education secretary, said recently [that she thinks teachers have an image problem](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11065894/Gove-set-out-the-reforms.-Im-pursuing-them.html). She even suggested that our popularity in the public domain has sunk to the gutter levels occupied by MPs. I have worked in both industries and think the secretary of state should know I receive a vastly different reaction when I tell people I am a teacher compared with when I said I worked anywhere near one of her “respectable” colleagues.

I do agree that the public may not always understand just how challenging work in schools can be. Documentaries about schools are vital as they raise awareness of this in the public eye. Then again, I could be biased. Channel 4’s Educating... series changed my life. There, I’ve said it. I cannot walk down a street in east London without someone shouting “bantaah” or “So what did you get in your observation?” A stranger hugged me outside Sainsbury’s. While these changes have all been great there is one that stands out above all others: the Educating... series is responsible for pointing me in the direction of a career in teaching.

It was back in 2011 when I finally decided to put an end to my short and unsuccessful political career. I realised I needed a change when being interviewed for a job to work for someone I found totally uninspiring. It clearly showed. The interviewer became increasingly annoyed with me. “You don’t want to work with us, do you?” It was shortly after this I came across [Educating Essex](http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2011/sep/22/tv-review-educating-essex) and was instantly hooked. As I watched the unrelenting [Mr Drew](http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2011/sep/29/educating-essex-teachers-passmores) patrolling the corridors of Passmores Academy, it became clear that I was having an epiphany. Gone were the strict yet spiritless teachers I remembered from school. The staff on my television screen were dedicated, humorous and passionate about improving the lives of the children in their classroom. These were people I could get on board with. These were the people I could see making the difference in our society I was so desperate to make myself. The next day I applied to become a teacher.

The programme sheds light on the daily challenges we face from challenging pupils, outside forces beyond our control and a workload that increases incessantly. Teachers are often seen as an easy target for ministers and politicians to score some quick political points off, causing parental anxieties about children’s futures. They portray us all as liberals who love nothing more than going on strike for a day. The TV series changed all that. Every message of support I’ve received since being on the show is a message for all my dedicated colleagues who want what I want: to allow children to succeed, wherever they come from.

Equally, [Educating the East End](http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2014/sep/05/educating-east-end-review-funny-inspirational) has also shone a light on the inspiring ideals of community education. [Frederick Bremer](http://www.bremer.org.uk/) school is not part of an academy chain that champions results on a piece of paper rather than the development of the whole child. The school is a kaleidoscope of races, social groups and religions; 93% of our pupils live within two miles of the school gates. It truly is a school in the heart of the community.

Most of all, viewers get a true view of an east London teenager. The stereotypical “gangsta” isn’t present. The public is able to see what I see on a daily basis: engaging, often well-spoken, sometimes angry teenagers trying to make sense of the world they live in. The wonderfully charismatic Tawny, who wanted to achieve her dream of being an actress or a singer not through instant X Factor-style fame but through learning her craft the old-fashioned way. The eccentric and vulnerable Acacia, who was a pillar of strength even though her home life had been turned upside down. The loveable Halil, the confident Lemar and the quirky Joshua. These young people will go on to shape our society and I, for one, think the future is bright.

What the series shows is that the children at our school, while all incredibly special, are not unique in this regard – fundamentally, these descriptions could be applied to adolescents up and down the UK. We have a wealth of talent and exciting prospects in our schools. The cynics and naysayers, though few in number, will attack teachers, teenagers and community education, but I am proud that I was part of something that puts to bed tired and untrue stereotypes. Besides, as the kids would say, haters gonna hate.

**National 5 Educating East End Questions**

1. In your own words, explain why the writer thinks documentaries about schools are important (paragraph 2). **(1 mark)**
2. How does the writer use word choice to demonstrate his initial reaction to Educating Essex? (Paragraph 3) **(2 marks)**
3. In your own words, explain what the writer thinks the Educating series shows the public (Paragraph 4). **(3 marks)**
4. Explain how the writer uses sentence structure in paragraph 5 to show how important the school is to the surrounding area. **(2 marks)**
5. Explain how the writer uses imagery in paragraph 6 to show his admiration for one of his pupils. **(2 marks)**
6. How does the writer create a more conversational tone in the final lines of the passage? **(2 marks)**
7. Referring in detail to two aspect of style from the passage, how effective is the writer in presenting the Educating series in a positive manner? **(4 marks)**

**Total: 16 marks**