

# How to encourage a growing passion – By Lucy Redman

Our lovely girls are 4 and 7 and I am thus very aware of their education. I remember Dominic and I scouting around our local schools and meeting the various headmistresses and seeing their resources. I remember asking what importance they placed on the creative arts but found that the main reply was 'well, we teach it but have to stick to the national curriculum'. For years I have been convinced that whilst pure English and maths are fine for some children, a little thinking outside the box and hiding the fact that you are carrying out English and maths by reading a recipe and weighing ingredients for example when cooking, is a fun way to learn plus you can eat the result of your hard work and for some children is a more hands on way of learning.

When both parents go out to work it can result in less time with the children, to do art, cookery and gardening at home. These are important elements, which will set you up for life.

Last year I wrote an article for the Suffolk magazine about the outdoor classroom, Sensory Garden that I have designed for the children at Cherry Trees School. This garden incorporated elements to link with the curriculum including geography (it was divided into continents), climate change, history, music and pride of origin. It was a prototype for a garden, which I hope to create one day at the Chelsea Flower Show, and could be replicated in school gardens across Britain, instead of some of the pointless, 'designers whims' that we see created which are no use to anyone.

So you can imagine my great delight when our headmistress – Chris Lawson, said that Great Whelnetham Primary School, near Bury St Edmunds was to join the Eastfeast creative arts programme. Eastfeast started in 2005 with a year-long pilot programme at Aldeburgh Primary School. It was started by Christopher Lucas, former director of the Royal Society of the Arts, and he has been working with Clare Chacksfield focusing especially on fund raising to keep the projects going. Supporters include Adnams Charity, Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coast and Heaths/Dedham Vale AONB Sustainable Development Fund, Notcutts, Innovation Unit, to name but a few. At present there are 16 schools taking part in projects, which run for at least one academic year. The big idea is to work with a team of creative practitioners provided by Eastfeast – artists, cooks, puppet makers storytellers and gardeners. The children learn how to grow fruit and vegetables, looking at aspects of food production cycles and encouraging children to express their feelings and experiences through composition, song, poetry, drama, dance, storytelling and painting. There are special days of celebration where members of the community, are invited to join in with both the work and celebration and the whole project winds up with a grand barbecue where we shall devour all our hard work.

The Eastfeast launch started at our school on 21<sup>st</sup> April when the children were divided into their mixed age teams and worked in small groups with Jo Cornish (another mother and professional gardener) and I sowing vegetable and flower seeds into recycled tractor tyre flower beds which my husband had supplied and helped to fill with soil. We had great fun discussing Crop Rotation and deciding who was growing the Legumes, Brassicas, Root Crops and Others. The children moved around every half an hour, doing their activities which also involved cooking gingerbread men, making puppets and listening to a storyteller. The whole day was recorded in their journals, which they build up during the year. At the end of the day there was a special sharing assembly where we heard what each activity had achieved. On another occasion an old friend of mine and also former Otley College lecturer, Mary Pendred - who is now the Eastfeast gardening advisor, came and showed the children how to make willow runner bean supports. They are an absolute work of art and next January the school hopes to make a willow dome around a 'Storytellers Seat' along with a willow tunnel in the veg garden.

Another fun event was held on June 10<sup>th</sup>, which was called a Scarecrow Day, when the children made 3 huge scarecrows with the help from artists and puppet makers supplied by Eastfeast. The scarecrows were linked to children's stories - Winnie the Witch, The Big Friendly Giant and Scardy Bear were born! Jo Cornish has been working with small groups of children every week in the garden and I look forward to helping her more in September, now that our Open Garden season has finished. The whole school is looking forward to October when we shall celebrate the Harvest with apple pressing, pumpkin carving and shadow puppets. Roll on next spring when we can perfect our veg growing and the children can become even more aware of where our food comes from and how to grow and cook it and of course to enjoy the process of eating it as one big happy and healthy community.

I take my hat off to Eastfeast for their enthusiasm and feel that now is exactly the right time to encourage our children to get creative, and have fun in an informal outdoor learning space. They describe this as 'developing the twin concept of the open creative classroom and the creative curriculum'. Eastfeast is building up a fantastic pool of creative practitioners to work with teachers, parents and members of the community which is why their 'Communities for Learning' slogan makes a good deal of sense. If you are interested in getting your school involved or would like to become a sponsor please contact Eastfeast on or look on their web site [www.eastfeast.co.uk](http://www.eastfeast.co.uk)