



by Margaret
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'Looking Forward'

The Learning Journey



forthright ten year old. As a class we were learning about coal mining and sang some of the folk songs about mining disasters. I had asked them to imagine what it would be like to be waiting and hoping for a family member to emerge after a pit disaster and then write about how they might feel. This group was great at creative writing and they put their hearts and souls into the task ahead. After a considerable period of time they finished and presented their work. Most stories were both sensitive and interesting. And then Hannah handed in what turned out to be a long diatribe about Margaret Thatcher closing coal pits and the year long miners strike. I admit that I was shocked and I did say that this wasn't exactly what I had asked the class to do. And at that point, in front of the whole class, she ripped her work to shreds! We were startled and speechless in equal measures, not because I ran and authoritarian classroom but because her response seemed out of all proportion to the comment I had made. The bell rang for



I DON'T think a day goes by without me learning something I didn't know the day before. Sometimes it is the simplest of things, the name of the butterfly that flew into the house and settled by a cupboard (Swallowtail) which lead me to ask my friend, whose son is a vet, what was the safest the way to help it get back on its journey. So that was two new things in a matter of minutes. Learning is a process that leads to change and over the years it has changed me on every level.

I was having a conversation with Sarah, a six-year old prospective pupil last week, and we were talking about what she enjoyed doing. Sarah said how much she liked writing and followed with saying 'By the way I don't need to do any more English as I am already very good at it!' She told me she was already half way through writing her second book - good for her, I can't wait to read it! This lead to a more general conversation about writing and I mentioned how much I also enjoyed writing. When I talked about how much I was learning from writing these articles in the Mallorca Daily Bulletin her ears pricked up, especially when I said we might be able to write one together in the autumn. We concluded from our conversation that learning continued throughout your life. She was very clear that I was still learning even at my ripe old age of 27, her kind suggestion not mine!

This lovely encounter reminded me of some of the wonderful learners I have had the pleasure of teaching over the years.

My first memory went back to Hannah who was an amazing but very

*Live as if you were to die tomorrow
Learn as if you were to live forever*
Mahatma Gandhi



lunch and I don't remember what happened that afternoon. But I was changed from that moment onwards.

Hannah could 'write', she always had something to say and expressed herself with fluency and clarity. In this area she was gifted, there was no doubt about it.

However in my experience a child who is truly gifted is unusual. I have taught many bright and well-rounded youngsters who seemed to be good at everything and they were kind too. These youngsters had compassion in bucket loads.

I remember once noticing one of our ten-year old boys (who even though he worked really hard was still learning to read) walking down the corridor with a brand new hard-backed copy of the first Harry Potter book under his arm. I knew it didn't belong to him, in fact I knew it belonged to Carole. He showed me the book and he said 'Carole lent it to me' and I knew it to be true. As well as all her other skills I knew Carole was generous and compassionate.

One of the most important characteristics of a teacher is that they are a learner and for me, this is a fact and it is not something for discussion. A good teacher learns something new every day, a good teacher is constantly learning from the learners they are surrounded by.

However what is worthy of further discussion is the question of how we learn and how we can teach in a way that enables all our young learners to thrive.

Inspiring compassionate learners and change-makers isn't something that can be left to chance

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