

Adapting to School Life

Posted on 12:00pm Monday 8th Jun 2020

The week beginning the 16th March was probably (hopefully) the weirdest of my teaching career. It began with the all students in. As the week progressed the year groups gradually ebbed away, until we ended up saying goodbye to our Year 11s with sweets, photos, speeches and giggles in the main hall.

They had signed shirts, asked teachers to write messages in their books, clutched exercise and text-books, hugged (any attempt at social distancing was completely futile), and walked around their school for the last time as students. The mood was euphoric and tinged with sadness.

To add to the surreal nature of proceedings I was celebrating my 50th birthday that day and they all sang happy birthday to a red faced me. A year group robbed of the satisfaction of completing an exam, robbed of a Prom, robbed them of the delight and relief of their last exam.

I didn't return for 8 weeks. Never before have I had such a long break from education as a teacher. When I returned it was to supervise 8 delightful students, children of care workers, GPs and nurses who by then "knew the drill". They sat at computers and worked on their home learning that had been set by teachers - while I attempted to give assistance and not get within 2 metres of them. Tricky. Mostly they showed just how resilient, good humoured and self-sufficient they had become.

One day we were left with just two students by 12.30. We decamped to an office where we worked socially distanced at computers. One boy, aged 11, had arrived that morning hood up, in a foul mood. He was now chatting easily with the girl from year 10 but he was bored without his friends or the focus of a proper lesson. I said: "Do you want to go outside and run around a bit?" Watching from the hard-court area where I sat with a cup of tea, I'd see him doing sit ups and planks. It truly was a case of showing initiative and self-coaching. I could almost hear him telling himself "right now, three-minute plank" or "ok, twenty sit ups." It was a memory I will cherish.



Working from home has been very strange. My bread and butter, my normal days, are full of interactions as a drama teacher and form tutor and suddenly it's me and a laptop, answering e-mails from anxious staff, formulating grades for GCSE, participating in virtual meetings, learning a new language (Zoom, furlough, Teams, socially distancing), planning online work, checking and marking submissions.

No rehearsals, no drama club, no theatre trips or art exhibitions. But lots of ideas for an online exhibition and sharing some of the fabulous work I've been sent, including a skilfully edited duologue by two girls filmed in their separate homes. I've been posting a challenge and a #thingstomakeyousmile photo on our arts Instagram post every day since the start of lockdown. I've been watching theatre online, reading plays, and longing to see my students face to face again.

Whatever else comes out of this for the students, they will have tapped reserves of patience, creativity, and determination unknown to them previously. They will also have experienced boredom, frustration and loneliness. There is absolutely no doubt that this generation, whether they are 2, 12 or 22, are going to need our support, love and care in the years to come.

By Helene, May 2020