

Study Programme Case Study

It is worth taking a moment to remember the beginning and the middle when you get to the end. The Beginning with a student who could not be in the building for more than a few minutes. Who could not be in a room with me one-to-one because it was just too much of an onslaught. This wild and beautiful creature who had been cloistered in her bedroom – her all white low stimulus bedroom – for years. Who in the Beginning came out to raindrops like hand grenades, boom boom on the roof. Who couldn't bear to see red on posters or chairs or book covers, who couldn't stand to see pictures of dogs real or cartoon. Who sent us a message 'I'm Here! Somewhere! It is just all too much!' by singing Les Mis numbers magnificently in the stairwell and leaving the echo as she bolted toot sweet.

This went on for quite a few months. So, we moved any posters with red on and consigned the red chairs to the dungeon. And I learned that there is no point gazing at a picture of Snoopy and trying to work out what is so freaky. It just is. And that deserves respect. Because anyone who finds a picture of Snoopy triggering, or a raindrop incendiary, deserves the George Cross for getting to college and staying for fifteen minutes. I am so much the better for learning this from a brave and lovely girl who was so isolated and so stuck.

The Middle was actual lessons, and ice cream at the Museum café, and going to the theatre to watch the pantomime with hands clasped firmly over hooded ears. Then the cinema to watch a whole movie - me trying to explain sotto voce why Hollywood boys and Hollywood girls behave so stupidly when falling in love whilst she is eating popcorn and me thinking 'I get paid for this!?' I get to share the experience of looking at an old, tired world of cliché through the fresh eyes of this bright total social newbie. The Middle included two months of talking about nothing but the definition of irony. It included cooking and learning to accept that money must be confronted, and queueing must be tolerated - to be at Thorntons standing in line to get an egg iced for a wonderful mother for Easter. And the discovery of reading books as the perfect way to travel. Books and books and books. Hot dresses and dancing and proms. The end of the Middle, held work experience placements and travel training and wit and vivacity and class discussions and love and respect and being known by fellow students.

The end of a fabulous college innings was iced with my sitting down one day in the sunshine to read the first full draft of her first novel. To get to the end of the opening page and see that a fresh way of seeing and expressing and characterizing was there, wry and cynical narrative voice was there, and of course the most subtle and intricate use of irony. And then to gaze at the Level 2 maths qualification which arrived this summer, just after she has gone and to think about how far a person can come and go when they set off and find good travelling companions. I mean this for her, and I mean this for us, who got to share the unfurling.

It is always worth the effort and the patience and the worry and acceptance. We can always learn from our students and set our sights higher and do what we demand of them - aspire.

As the great T.S Eliot said, 'the beginning and the end were always there before the beginning and after the end'. We should see this in all our young people and know that our time with them is a falling into step with their experiences so far and an unlocking of a future that they always had in them. What a privilege! She helped crystallize this idea for me. Oh, how we will miss her!