



Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 - Community Assembly

### *Commemoration (Part I)*



*As you will know, Madame Gulliver is retiring at the end of this term, having given 35 years of exemplary service to CCHS. Given that we would normally have experienced our Commemoration Service during this week, I thought it was fitting that a colleague of Madame Gulliver's standing and service should provide our three assemblies this week. Each of the assemblies will have a different theme and focus. Please take some time to read each of them to appreciate and commemorate our School, as well to celebrate the fine work of such a long-serving member of staff.*

As we approach the 113<sup>th</sup> birthday of the school, Mr Lawlor has asked me to present a series of assemblies reflecting on my experiences of working at CCHS for the last 35 years. My first reaction was, where on earth do I start? However, the theme of today's reflection is supposed to be my experience of teaching our wonderful CCHS students over the years. So just like Maria in the Sound of Music, 'Let's start at the very beginning!'

Having completed my PGCE at the age of 23, I came to the school in 1985 for an interview, well not really an interview, more a series of pleasant 'chats'. The school needed a part-time French teacher and also someone who could teach some Drama. I had no actual training in Drama, but it was my hobby and any misgivings I might have had were allayed by the instruction of the Head teacher, Miss Brooks, who told me, 'I don't mind what you do, so long as they are out from behind their desks' Even more reassuring was the advice of the previous Drama teacher, who told me not to

worry if I tried to do an activity and it didn't work, the girls would be far too kind to say so and would just politely get on with it.

When I started at CCHS, teaching was very different on the surface, in that there were no computers we didn't even have use of a photocopier, we had to produce worksheets, using a machine called a 'Banda', which took ink from a carbon master and reproduced the page as many times as you turned the handle. As part of my training, I had learnt to draw stick men in order to create my own visual materials and how to repair a cassette tape if it broke. When computers began to be used in the late 80's I could immediately see the advantage of them in language teaching and even more so in the advent of the interactive whiteboards and as the youngest in the Faculty I was given responsibility for the development of the use of computers in Languages.

So, I came to the school at a time of great change in the education system. O levels were to be replaced in 1988 by the GCSE and my training had focussed on a 'revolutionary' approach to language learning. This entailed a complete rethink on what should be taught and why; out went understanding of grammar and in came 'functional language', being able to buy things in shops, book in at campsites and travel on public transport. I can still remember, my shock and horror when I first encountered this idea, wondering why it was not possible to do both. That is, have a secure understanding of how to construct sentences and to be able to manipulate the language sufficiently to 'get things done'. So how fortunate for me, that I found myself teaching in a 'grammar' school - (note the intended pun!) with young people, who loved learning, always wanted to know 'why?', invariably pushed the boundaries of their learning and were never satisfied with rote learning and set phrases.

As the years progressed, my focus has always been on the 'bigger picture' of what we should be teaching and why, making sure my students understand the structure of sentences so that they can apply their learning creatively and in new situations and of course, this can still be done through games, songs and 'fun'. But the 'bigger picture' for me is bigger than just the usefulness of the language, it is the wider skills, the development of confidence and problem solving skills.

Over the years, there have been so many changes in syllabus, including the most recent new GCSE which focuses on grammar! Well, it's just like that old dress in your wardrobe, if you keep it long enough, it will come back into fashion!

My message to you in all your subjects, is not to be satisfied with being given the knowledge you need for your exams, insist on understanding the how and the why, in that way you will be able to apply your knowledge not just in exams, but in your future lives. To finish today's reflection, I will share the words of some of my former students,

'Most of the time it's in understanding other cultures that having studied languages comes in handy. Gives you an insight it how to communicate effectively. (Jenna. B. Associate business director - PR and events agency)

My languages have helped to provide a structured way of learning that I can apply to any field' (Emily. K - Freelance copywriter and marketer)

'My experiences through learning languages have helped me to adapt rapidly to new situations and I should imagine this is essential for any career that a CCHS girl feels minded to try' (Miranda D. Deputy Director - Department for International Trade)

*Madame Gulliver*