

# A Teachable Moment

In these relaxed days of summer, most children and adults are free of classroom restrictions, but does that mean that there is no learning taking place? Indeed – sometimes the best learning happens along the way, when we least expect it. It may not always be pleasant, but sometimes the most difficult of situations can be the learning of a life time. Both with adults and children – what ever the experience – pleasant or unpleasant – it is in reflecting upon it that the real learning takes place. Let's consider what is meant by those "teachable moments."

Most likely, we've all heard the expression "a teachable moment." We know of those prime moments for learning in the classroom, but do really know what this expression means? We've all experienced it, or perhaps even missed it, without being aware – so much of our learning takes place in such moments or time-spaces in our lives. Sometimes this happens on a sub-conscious level; at other times, it is a very conscious experience. Whatever the case, it does help to reflect on it in awareness and acknowledge its worth in order to use more effectively each of the moments as prime time for learning important truths.

Can you remember sitting in a classroom trying to comprehend a lecture on long division and finding your mind floating out the open window into the deep blue of the crisp autumn sky? Suddenly, a flock of migrating geese grabs your attention! How could the numerical facts of mathematical rhetoric compete with this numbered flock so evenly paired and ordered behind its leader? At such a time, as a living, breathing lesson in geometry and science flies past, perhaps only fleeting understood, the dead chalk-talk of long division hasn't a ghost of a chance in excitement and wonder, and the classroom teaching of the day goes un-learned.

We all know that we learn best those things which pass through the vision-range of our focused attention or mind-set. Sometimes our richest learning comes in the midst of a crisis situation that captivates and holds our attention, whether that be the joyful "crisis" of a wedding, a new baby in the family, or a new job OR the distressful "crisis" of illness, loss of a family member, a position, or economic status. These do not include those truly major crises of national or global threats. There is also the little "mini-crisis" of responsibility at home or in the congregation: serving on a committee, having one's turn as reader, lector, acolyte or Altar Guild member.

Serving as Lay Shepherd, or working with the Youth Group, or women's group, or being a Church School teacher could be the focal point of one's special interest. Whatever the case, one may be sure that wherever the heart is, there will be one's head as well. And that, whatever the heart has felt or experienced, it will be profitable and aptly learned only if we use our heads to reflect upon and evaluate the experience. Or, in some cases, look forward to an experience because we have acquired a richer understanding of its potential.

Heart and head go together for truly effective learning. Head-learning alone is of little worth besides an impressive grade on an examination. When a real test of life comes along, all too often we fall short, as indeed Jesus was quick to point out to the Pharisees who knew the Law so well but failed to understand the true spirit of its meaning. This heart-learning is named "affective education" and is certainly not new on the educational scene. As a master-teacher Jesus took every advantage of those "teachable moments," at which time there was at least a

crack in the door to the heart, or a focused attention to a particular area. It was at the well that Jesus spoke of “living waters,” at a feeding of hungry people that he explained the “bread of life,” and it was from a cross that he said: “Father, forgive.”

These truths, however, were only half-understood until Pentecost when they finally began to firm up, with the reflecting grace of the Holy Spirit who leads into all truth, and, as one of my husband’s poems put it: “folds the wings of the mind and opens the door of the heart, and grows in the spirit to find, like a little child . . . the Peace of the Lord all round.”

*Genelda Woggon has been ministered to and by children for over 40 years in her professional work as a Christian Formation Leader, most especially through the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for the past 20 years. She coordinates the work of the Catechesis at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Asheville, NC and also serves as Consultant for the Catechesis in the Diocese of Western North Carolina.*