



The lessons I want my students to learn... by Karen Boyes

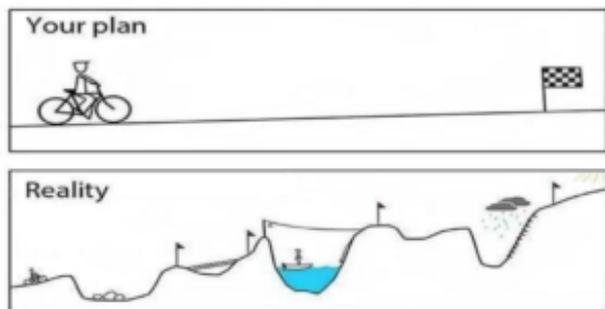
I was recently challenged to give a twelve minute talk at the African International Schools' Conference in Nairobi, Kenya on the topic of 'The lesson I want my students to learn.'

There were so many options I simply had to pluralise my offering. What follows is a summary of my talk.

"It's not fair!" "She always goes first." "His is bigger than mine!" "Everyone else is allowed!" A common cry both teachers and parents hear regularly.

One of the lessons I want my students to learn is, life's not fair.

My sister and I are 17 months apart in age and I am the eldest. We were always treated the same. We were often dressed the same, taught right from wrong and give strong values. We were encouraged to work for and value our possessions. I recall working hard to earn the money for a new bike. I researched the options and colours. Once I had the money, I made my purchase. I was a proud owner of a 10 speed bike. Three weeks later my sister purchased the same bike in a different colour! Life was not fair! I had done all the work and she had copied. It was the first time I recall feeling injustice in my life. It was a shock and at the time it rocked my world. Life was not fair!



In life, we often start on our journey with a goal in mind, a plan of perfection and in reality the journey is frequently very bumpy. It is, however in those bumps, those challenging times, where the best learning often happens.

Many teachers are facing students suffering from learned helplessness in their classrooms. They are paralysed with fear of failing and making mistakes. It is in the making of mistakes, the failing, the bumpiness, where life feels unfair. I want students to know they have a working brain and a functioning body and always have choices when faced with challenges.

Dylan Wilian says, "The purpose of school is to prepare students for a world that we can not envisage, so when they are stuck with something they have never seen before, they choose to think instead of remember.

When students find themselves at the bottom of the pit, I want them to know how to persist, try again and keep going. If plan A doesn't work there are 25 more letters in the alphabet. I want students to know how to make a plan and then stick to it, the self-discipline and being able to delay gratification. I want students to know about thinking flexibly, if they only focus on the black and white, they will miss all the beautiful colours the world has to offer.

I want students to know that their brain keeps on growing if they keep feeding it, keep learning and keep challenging themselves. I want students to be able to ask for help, to be able to be vulnerable, to know there are always people willing to lend a hand.

One of the lessons I want my students to learn is the when life is not fair, there are always opportunities, to look for the opportunities, to look for the silver lining, the lesson, the reward. It is always there.

One of the ideas I want teachers to know is you make every other profession possible – that is what you do each day. The world's future is in your hand, every day. And as American historian Henry Adams said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." You make a difference!

The next time you hear a student say "Life's not fair" remind them of the skills, dispositions and opportunities they have and how it is their choice how they view the situation.