



INDEPENDENT LEARNING Pocketbook

By Peter Anstee

Cartoons:
Phil Hailstone



The Independent Learner



First Steps



Motivation and Perspiration



Inspiration and Aspiration



The Meta-Learner



Initiative and Collaboration



Staying Power



Embedding Independence

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Your inspiration

We might feel like we are sometimes tied to the mast, battered by the ravaging storms of curriculum change, syllabus requirements and that most pernicious of educational terms: coverage.

In the eye of the storm, though, is the haven of your classroom. Leave the storm outside and share with your learners what it is that inspires you about the subject(s) you teach and the special people you teach them to. Whether it be the beauty in the Fibonacci Sequence or Wordsworth's imagery; the first time a child reads a sentence or achieves the perfect rugby tackle – share it!

Seeing how learning still inspires you, your learners will aspire to experience the same feeling.



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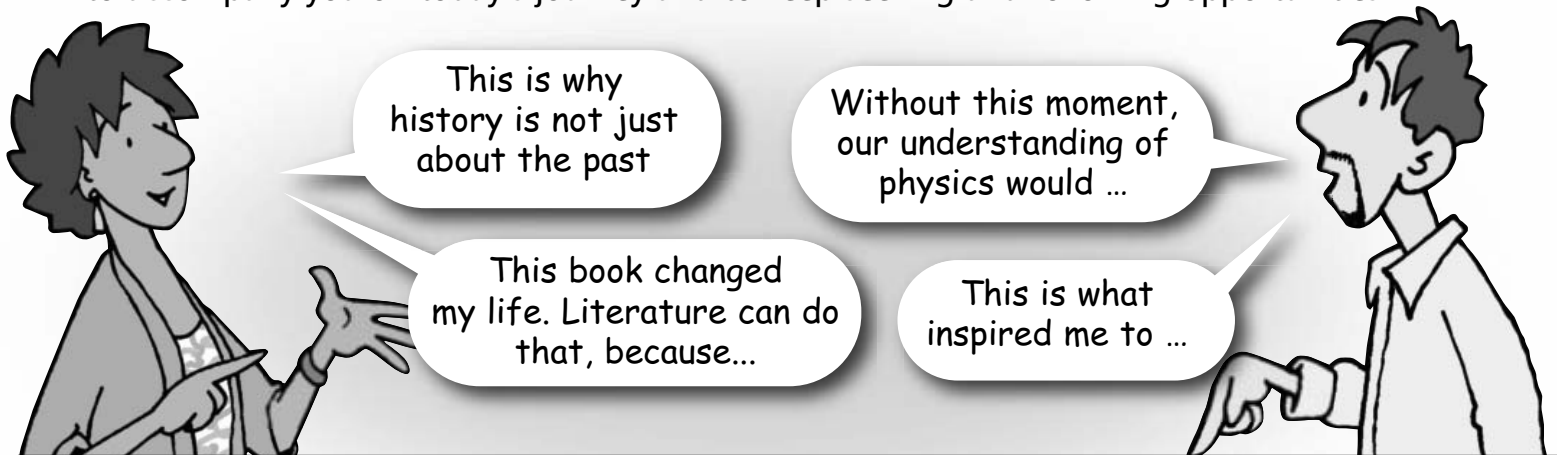
Why do we have to do this?



In my entire student life, I never encountered a learning objective. As a teacher, I have embraced them as a vital element of effective teaching, focusing planning on progress rather than tasks.

Let's be honest, though – how often do learning objectives send a shiver of excitement down the spine?

Alongside them, use images, quotes and your own words to show the significance of the learning, its place in your life and the doors it can help to open. These will inspire your pupils to accompany you on today's journey and to keep seeking and following opportunities.



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Learning for life



What are you currently:



What challenges have *you* got in store for yourself? Talk about your current and future learning projects with your students.

Young people are inspired by role models. Share with them *why* you continue to learn and the benefits you gain from lifelong learning.

Sharing your learning



Even better than talking about your own learning, bring it into school with you.



During quiet reading time, Mia reads rather than catching up with her paperwork.



Dan will always have his latest experiment on the window ledge.



Anya will model how to research a key historical figure by telling her classes who she is learning about at the moment and how she is building up a picture of her subject.

Allow clubs to be driven by the inspirations and aspirations of their members. Pursue your own project while the students pursue theirs, supporting each other.

From why to how



While your role in inspiring students to learn is vital, just as important is demonstrating **how** to learn.

Modelling is one of the most powerful teaching strategies and for many teachers it is instinctive to gather the class around and demonstrate the skills they should be developing. Others among us are less confident about modelling, anxious that it might expose us in some way or that some students will lose concentration.

It's worth persevering and developing modelling as part of your repertoire. It can teach so much, especially when a little fallibility and humour are thrown in. With a few imaginative and technological additions, it provides invaluable support to independent learning.

A little help from technology...



Demonstrating the skills involved in a science experiment, brushstroke technique, the uses of Pythagoras or how to begin a persuasive speech may not present too much of a challenge in itself, but if you are concerned about holding the attention of your learners during modelling that can be enough to discourage you from trying.

There are ways round the problem. If you feel the need to have two of you in the room – one to demonstrate and the other for crowd control, do just that! Video yourself without a student in sight and show the video to your class, providing a live or recorded commentary. Pause during playback to ask and answer questions.

Modelling struggle and progress



Tweak your modelling by adding a few deliberate errors, disasters and 'stuck' moments, the kinds of hurdles your learners will encounter. You might get laughed at, but you will have their undivided attention and they will soon see that this is your way of showing them how to learn.



At this point, if I am not sure whether to do a or b, I might ...

Returning to the assessment criteria, I can see that...



Something has gone a bit wrong here, but I know that failure is simply part of learning, so ...



Use the self-help area, displays, 'What If...?' cards and thinking aloud to demonstrate how to get past the struggles along the way. Model different levels of final product and the ways to progress from one level to the next.

As soon as your learners start to encounter the same issues, they will have the strength and skills to learn independently.

About the author

Peter Anstee



Peter has taught in comprehensive schools in Essex for over 20 years. Having led a highly successful English Faculty for 7 years, he has since held various whole school responsibilities including: improving the achievement of the more able, assessment and leading the development of teaching and learning.

Peter has run training courses on fast-tracking and on ICT in English. He has led whole school INSET sessions in every school he has worked in, on subjects such as underachievement in Year 8, independent learning, student motivation and differentiation.

Author of the *Differentiation Pocketbook*, Peter has also written for the TES and provided consultancy services to schools and local authorities. He remains first and foremost a classroom teacher...still reflecting and still learning his craft.