

overheard at the extra-curricula café

Nokia nightmare*

Latté: Hey, don't creep up on me like that. Shocks like that can be very dangerous.

Cappuccino: I did not creep up on you!

Latté: Yes, you did. A shock at my age could cause a heart attack!

Cappuccino: You did have your head buried in that device of yours.

Latté: Device? It's just a 'phone.

Cappuccino: Ah, that's where you are wrong. It's a Smartphone. It's a camera, a computer, an address book, a Sat Nav and you could probably persuade it, if you knew how, to fill in your tax return.

Latté: All I was doing was trying to discover if anyone had sent me a text message.

Cappuccino: And had they?

Latté: No, I don't think so.

Cappuccino: Don't think so! Why have you got a phone which you cannot operate?

Latté: The other day I went into the kitchen to find my son had made one of his periodic unannounced visits. He had dismantled my dumb phone, extracted its heart, that's the sim card, and transplanted it into a Smartphone.

Cappuccino: And how much have you paid for this service?

Latté: Nothing. I didn't ask for it. I was quite happy with my old phone. We had a simple but fruitful relationship.

Cappuccino: Like you could make and receive calls and texts?

Latté: Exactly.

Cappuccino: But now you have discovered that there is much more to mobile 'phone life?

Latté: I must say that it did seem very interesting when my son was demonstrating it to me. You can even read the Bible on it.

Cappuccino: So what's the problem?

Latté: Seeing something demonstrated, and doing it yourself, are two very different things.

Cappuccino: Yes, like bricklaying and plastering.

Latté: Exactly. I have been reminded of one of the foundational truths of pedagogy.

Cappuccino: What's that?

Latté: Learning is a strange blend of fun, delight, fear - terror even - and anxiety; ending sometimes in despondency and other time in elation.

Cappuccino: Well, that's certainly more profound than some of the dodgy pedagogy that I have heard lately.

Latté: I tried to read the instruction booklet that came with the Smartphone. I got to page 29 before it told me how to make a call.

Cappuccino: Isn't learning like that sometimes? Long periods of not much happening, then all of a sudden, 'eureka'.

Latté: I haven't reached that 'eureka' moment with this Smartphone.

Cappuccino: Consider then, how school life appears to some of our pupils: long periods of confusion which lead to darkness, loneliness and, ultimately, disaffection.

Latté: Interesting you should say that. We have a pupil at the moment, rejoicing in the name of Brook, who is really disaffected. I had this bright idea. I asked Brook for some advice about my phone. She took one look at it and had it working in a few seconds. I asked her if she had one herself. She hadn't but had experimented with other people's phones.

Cappuccino: So you are now au fait with your device?

Latté: Well, Brook and I agreed that she would give me a five minute tutorial after school each day.

Cappuccino: And what did you do in return?

Latté: I said to her that if she had any questions, anything whatsoever, about school life, that I would answer them.

Cappuccino: Very brave of you. And?

Latté: Brook's questions were rather challenging. They included things like 'What am I doing here?'

Cappuccino: Did you answer?

Latté: I did the best I could, but, more importantly, I got her introduced to our church young people's group.

Cappuccino: Isn't that just passing the buck?

Latté: No. Brook and our church group speak the same language, which I don't. I see it as an appropriate referral.

Cappuccino: So what's the outcome?

Latté: Brook is more settled. Learning has its brighter periods. On my recommendation, she has even joined the school's IT club. She's more relaxed and so am I.

Cappuccino: Why's that?

Latté: Well, when my Smartphone rings, I know how to answer it, rather than madly pressing every button in sight, and tapping the touch screen in a frenzy like a demented woodpecker.

Cappuccino: So, it's a win-win situation?

Latté: Yes, but there's just one app I need to master.

Cappuccino: What's that?

Latté: A signal that beeps when you are about to approach. It might avoid a heart attack.

***NB.** Nokia phones are great. No phone was harmed in the writing of this piece. ■