



Teachers can make or mar

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I studied in a private English-medium co-ed School in Dharwad, Karnataka from Kindergarten to the 10th standard.

Our School started in a decades-old girls' Kannada-medium high school building. I remember moving to our own school building in the same campus in the 8th Standard.

Our school had several factors conducive for education such as sufficient number of teachers, well-ventilated classrooms, a big playground, open spaces, toilets and drinking water facility. Our school was also close to home and the fees were affordable.

Our school followed the "Banking Concept of Education", the terminology made popular by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher of the twentieth century. In the Banking Concept of Education, the scope of action allowed to the students extended only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits, the teacher as the 'depositor' and the students 'depositories'. One additional thing we were required to do in school was to reproduce from memory in the exams.

We had four exams in a year, quarterly, mid-term, third-quarterly and the final exam. Based on the marks in the exams, ranks were given to students. Based on these ranks students were labeled 'intelligent' and 'dullards'. Students could fail in a few subjects in the first three exams but were required to pass in all the subjects in the final exam to be promoted to the next standard.

As I moved to eighth standard, A and B sections were combined to form one section. Therefore, the teacher-pupil ratio our Class became 1:56.

Two combinations were available to the eighth standard students and those, who chose Sanskrit as the first language would have English as the second language and Kannada as the third language. The students who chose English as the first language, would have Kannada as the second language and Hindi as the third language. For all the other subjects namely Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, we would sit together in one class.

Teaching is considered as a noble profession. A teacher has an important role in developing her students as critical thinkers, to provide education that can develop them into capable and responsible citizens who can then take on different functions needed to sustain and improve the general welfare of the society.

I remember two teachers who taught me in the 8th Standard, one for all the wrong reasons and the other one for all the right reasons.

We had a new Mathematics teacher with several years of experience teaching the subject in a nearby boys' School. He was also the younger brother of our principal. A chain smoker, he became popular for the innovative physical punishments he subjected the students to. The students whom he targeted were the ones unable to complete homework and those who got less marks in the test. His punishments were meant

only for the boys and done with an element of surprise.

Some methods included grabbing the fleshy part of the stomach and twisting it, banging head against the wall, hitting with the wooden foot ruler on knuckles, sometimes until the foot ruler broke and throwing a chalk piece and duster at the students who did not pay attention in his class. He made two sets of question paper for the test, one for the bright students and another one for the rest. Therefore, it was no wonder that the majority of my classmates dreaded attending, his class.

The other teacher, who I remember for the good reasons, taught us English and Kannada. I remember her for her knowledge, guidance and encouragement.

I distinctly remember her teaching us a Kannada poem on Shabari, a devotee of Lord Rama. She brought to life the poem through her gestures and recitation. We knew that she was not as comfortable in Kannada as she was in English but she always came well prepared.

In the English class, we were asked to read out passages from the English textbook. Our teacher made us experiment on our accent, gave advice on making the reading impactful. She encouraged us to be innovative while doing the exercise 'Use the following words to make sentences'. Her classes were fun-filled as she cracked witty jokes.

Nearly thirty years later I can still recall the words of appreciation from this inspirational teacher.

My two daughters study in a popular private school in our neighbourhood in Bangalore where

admissions are difficult to get and the fees high. I studied the state board syllabus while they study the CBSE syllabus. I have observed that ranks have now become grades, the best being 'A+' and the worst being 'E'. Examinations have been replaced by continuous comprehensive evaluation. Names of students who get 'A+' in all the semesters are displayed in the reception area. Many times during the parent-teacher meeting, the Teacher discusses the child's progress in her presence of the child.

Students who secure 'D' and 'E' grades are asked to attend remedial class every Saturday. Their names are announced in the classroom in the presence of their other classmates. This builds pressure on children. Aamir Khan's statement "grades create divides" in the movie "3 Idiots" holds true here.

I learnt from my children and their schoolmates that physical punishment does exist in the school. Twisting of ears, hitting with foot ruler, slapping, hitting on the head with the textbook, knocking on the head with the finger ring and throwing a chalk piece is common. In the name of discipline, many teachers create a fearful atmosphere in the class, discouraging students from asking questions. For many teachers, the goal is to complete the syllabus.

Each child is unique and learns differently. Children are happy and develop confidence and learn better when they receive appreciation and encouragement.

A teacher can make or mar.

References:

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