

Let the Learning Remain

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I have been told to write about a teacher who left a lasting impression on me. How can I write about one; there were so many who chiseled me into who I am today, each one in her own way. What they all had in common was a respect for the student.

Mrs. Hayat was my teacher in class three. After Montessori, my interest in studying was waning. Until Mrs. Hayat came along. Her methods were just so apt. She had this unique ability to teach us language without us knowing what was happening. We never heard her correct us; we only remember the corrected version. The process of being corrected was so subtle that it left no mark, let alone a scar, on our curious little minds. Only the teaching remained, and there was no impact of the teacher herself.

In class three we were doing elocutions and readings in the library period. Mrs. Hayat never embarrassed us by catching us unaware and asking us to read. Never. That was never the point. True to her name, Mrs. Hayat imbued a new spirit and zeal in my love for learning.

Then there was Mrs. Lobo. Four feet tall, white short hair, wearing laced shoes and a sleeveless long dress. Just thinking of her at this moment fills me with pure joy, even after all these years. Even in my sleep I can see her fingers playing the piano. She was so full of energy, like a bundle of dynamite!

Mrs. Lobo would incorporate every child in the annual Christmas play. I wasn't a star (then!) but I tried to please her. She challenged me in a constructive way. My repertoire of musical knowledge was more Urdu national songs and old filmi songs, so I struggled slightly with the English songs Mrs. Lobo would teach us. The music class was

more than just singing songs; it was about the language, about keeping pace with each other, about adjusting to each others' weaknesses, about team effort. Mrs. Lobo kept an ear on each one of us forty children. She would correct one child's pronunciation, while singing, without missing a beat, or tell another child that she was out of tune. She was totally in control of her little team.

I wasn't particularly talented in singing but she encouraged me, told me to do it again and again, asked me to stay back and practice with her.

I remember my first performance in a school play. I was to play the role of an old woman, sitting and knitting and having muffins. In this play on the story of human life, each child played a different stage of life. In class two, my performance felt so important to me!

Mrs. Lobo was our teacher from class 1-7. I was in class eighth when I heard the news. I must have been so traumatized that I have no memory of it today. My mother tells me how I came home from school one day and just slept till the next morning. Even then I didn't want to go to school. My mother had to call up the school to find out what had happened. Mrs Lobo had had cancer. She had passed away. We had found out in school that day. School must have felt so meaningless to me. So meaningless, that my system completely collapsed under the weight of the loss.

But as often happens, life went on. While doing my MSc in Clinical Psychology I met Mrs Rubina Feroz at the Karachi University. Her gift to me was her patience in the face of all my, 'But Ma'am....' statements. She very expertly chiseled my attitude without thwarting my spirit of inquiry. She would invite me to carry on the discussion with her after class. Mrs Rubina is a good friend today.

Writing this story I know one thing for sure: Teachers should be free-spirited and joyful. Only then can they make room in their teaching for the voices of children to be heard. Only then can they channel the flow of energy in their classrooms in multiple directions, not just from themselves to the students.

The author is a renowned television and stage actor.