

Beyond the Wall of Anger...Bright Splashes of Colour

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As I walked into class eighth I saw a strange sight. All the girls stood surrounding one girl who seemed to be quarreling with all the others. Noticing my presence, all the girls found their way back to their seats, after greeting me.

This was my first day of teaching. I was fresh out of college after doing my BS B.Ed. I had merrily gone to school, clueless of what was going to happen in class eighth. The first two periods with classes ninth and tenth had gone smoothly.

I introduced myself to the class, but deliberately did not ask them to introduce themselves as they seemed a bit agitated then. Specially that one girl. I thought it better not to talk about the scene I had seen just now. I spoke to them generally about the power of unity and the value of co-existing peacefully. One of my students stood up and complained about Fauzia, 'But Miss, Fauzia is the one who is always fighting.' Fauzia, the girl who had been in the middle still sat clutching her seat, visibly angry as she mumbled something to herself under her breath. She was wearing a slightly dirty uniform. Her curly hair was disheveled.

I had to hear Faiza's side of the story too, so I asked her what the problem was. She moved her head sideways in exasperation and kept her silence. I asked her again. And yet again. Finally she burst out in a mixture of hurt and anger, 'I don't fight with them! They always fight with me.' Saying this she broke into hysterical sobs. Just then the bell rang and I came out of the class, not very sure if there was anything else that I could do.

A few days later I was in class eighth again. I was their science teacher. I had asked my students to draw the water-cycle when Fauzia joyfully jumped up from her seat and offered to draw the water-cycle on the board. I asked her to please follow the instructions and draw it on the page that she had been given. She finished her drawing before everyone else, and proudly showed it to me. Fauzia was happy, relaxed and ready to listen at this point; I didn't want to miss the opportunity. I said to her, 'You are so cute Fauzia and you will look prettier if you comb your hair and wear a clean uniform.' She smiled and said, 'Okay Miss I will try to get ready for school properly.' I looked at her drawing which was truly a piece of art! I admired her drawing, showed it to the whole class and asked everyone to clap for her. All this pleased Fauzia and brought her guards down. Just a little bit.

I smelt the sweet faint smell of a small victory when Fauzia came to school the next morning wearing a clean uniform and with neatly tied hair.

But...

A few days later I came to school early and found Fauzia crying in an almost empty classroom. Some seats away sat another girl, also crying angry tears. There had been a fight. Fauzia had used abusive language. Again. I tried to help her understand the value of self-control, but Fauzia argued back. Soon she had left the classroom in defiant anger. My victory has been short-lived.

I was invigilating in class eighth as the first term exams began. Fauzia finished the three hour paper in thirty minutes. She then started doing what she loved doing the most: sketching. She had sketched a lovely scenery which I duly admired. I held it up for her class-fellows to see. Everyone clapped for Fauzia's wonderful drawing. The next day

too Fauzia was done with her paper in less than an hour. Then she called out to me. This had never happened before. Fauzia never spoke to any teacher herself, neither to ask a question, nor for any other purpose. I turned around and saw Fauzia's outstretched hand holding out a folded paper. 'I made this especially for you Miss. I hope you like it.'

I patted her on her face and thanked her for the Barbie drawing that she had made for me; how could a drawing of a Barbie mean so much to an adult, to a school teacher? It was more than a drawing. Each line, each curve reminded me of the patterns I was leaving on Fauzia's mind. Fauzia was slowly growing into a happier, kinder person than she had been on that first day in class eighth.

The result came out. Fauzia got the twenty second position in a class of thirty two.

I knew Fauzia could do better, and I told her so.

Fauzia then told me what her story was. Her parents had divorced. She now lived with her father and grandmother. Her grandmother taunted Fauzia and said hurtful things about her mother to Fauzia. She was too mentally disturbed to concentrate on her studies. I now understood where all her anger was coming from. She told me that she liked to paint and sketch; her mother was her inspiration for painting.

I got Fauzia a box of poster colours in the hope that if she is happy expressing some of her pain, she may be relaxed enough to focus on her studies. I asked her to please pay some attention to her studies. She made a promise that she would, but I wasn't so sure.

We were starting aerobics classes at the school. The other girls were excited to have this opportunity to exercise and have fun. Fauzia had first said that she wouldn't

take this class. But then she came around. She was now making an effort to be a part of other co-curricular activities too.

Fauzia's wall of anger was thawing. Her fights with her friends had almost come to a halt. Her behaviour with other teachers and her class-fellows was softer now.

As the second term exams drew closer, Fauzia started to approach me for help. She would often come to me in her free time to clarify her science concepts. She was an intelligent child. I only had to point the way for her and she grasped the concepts at the speed of lightning. It was all this energy and intelligence inside of her that was making her quarrelsome; now that her energies were channelized, Fauzia was a different person altogether.

Fauzia had kept her promise, the promise that she made to me on the day when I gave her a box of poster colours.

...In the second term exams Fauzia had secured the third position in her class of thirty two.

Fauzia had found the colours that she was looking for to brighten up her world. She had broken out of her wall of anger.

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