

A class full of teachers

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Everyone is a teacher. A child teaching a grandparent some intricacies of a smart phone, a young agent explaining an insurance plan to a senior citizen, a physiotherapist teaching an accident victim to walk again or a mom teaching the basics of the kitchen to her soon-to-be-married son!

I had wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember. I became one, without formal training, in a small private school run out of a residence. It was in the nascent stage with small numbers in the middle school. I was ecstatic to be in the class and my students loved me. I was thrilled one day when a colleague teaching in the (bed) room next to mine, popped in to say she loved the way I taught energy transfer to class 7!

Marriage and kids brought on different kinds of teaching–learning. I was nudged back into teaching by a friend who wanted me to help her daughter with her middle-school English. Thus began an exhilarating two decade long journey of private tutoring students in the last two years before board exams.

One quality and three boys of the hundreds of students that passed through my humble tuition classes, come to mind. All the boys, from different schools, in different years, brought with them something profound and which I recognized and respected. They were completely humble, fearless while questioning and dedicated to their

learning. The lesson I learned was one can be humble yet question. One does not have to be blindly assenting to someone whom you also respect.

This phase presented to me to an opportunity to teach in a reputed institution. Running private tutoring at home, however large the number of students, and teaching in formal settings in an institution, were vastly different. Facing a class of teenagers waiting for a lamb to pounce upon is not reassuring. But those kids taught me so much.

From them I learned to look forward to each day with joy and not to take myself too seriously. But what still rings in my ears are the words one student said to me as I fumed and vented at them. There had been a series of abysmal outcomes of a test-series. They were on the verge of taking the preliminary assessments conducted by schools prior to the board exams. As I glared at her sitting in the front row, astoundingly smiling at the end of my tirade, she spoke.

“Lalitha,” she said, “You even scold us in such superb language! I’m just listening to your English.” I replied something gruffly and exited to smother a smile that insisted on coming out despite my dark mood.

This opened my eyes to how one could take the positive even from the negative. The message of my displeasure had no doubt been heard but after that she had

tuned out and rather paid attention to something more useful.

I also learned to keep my wits about me when anxious about my kids.

The author is a former teacher who continues to learn everyday by observing the world of schools, teachers and students.

