

A lesson from my student

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I entered the teaching profession in 1996. It would be quite an easy task, I thought, as I was going to do something I loved. Whew!!! From day one, it has been a learning-unlearning experience all the way. Not a day passes by without me learning something new because each student has been unique and has added value to my teaching career. As a novice initiated into the teaching profession, I assumed there would be well-disciplined students, all eager to learn. I soon realized students are and will always be children and thus began my unlearning process. It is the teacher who must be firm and friendly to bring discipline and inculcate interest in the students to learn.

Students are learners and any interaction between the teacher and the taught is learning for both. Teens are a very confusing times for students. They are curious about things, they know a little about many things, yet they are not sure of anything. Their self-esteem takes a beating when they are reprimanded openly in the class, yet situations develop when anger takes control of the teacher. I narrate one such incident that happened in the early years of my teaching career.

I was teaching when I noticed this student talking in my class and asked him to keep quiet. He shouted back that he was not talking, and I was, for no reason, finding fault and scolding him. Maybe I was mistaken, but the class became silent following his outburst. All eyes were on me. My anger knew no bounds and in a raised voice I asked him to get out of the class. He refused saying he had done no wrong. I stood my ground. Finally,

he went out slamming the door behind him. It was a very painful experience for me. I soon noticed that he began avoiding me. I was hurt and part of me wanted to reach out to him and ask an explanation for his behaviour, but I made no move to patch up matters with him. My ego did not permit me. He passed out of school and occasionally when he did visit school he refused to acknowledge my presence.

My conscience told me I had gravely erred in my role. I introspected my action and my own childhood. As a teenager, I used to get hurt and angry too when I was blamed for things I had not done. I also did not like being scolded in front of other people. It perhaps was the same with him. Why indeed did I forget my own reactions at that age? I realized I should have handled the situation in a more responsible manner. I should have tried to find out the reason. Teenage is a stressful time and it is hard to comprehend the pressures children are undergoing. I never forgot the incident and consciously started working hard to develop patience when dealing with students.

One day, many years later, he came to visit his alma mater. I wasn't sure whether he was still sore over the incident. However, when he met me his first words were, "Sorry ma'am. I should not have spoken to you like that in class." I was stunned that he too had not forgotten and replied, "I am also very sorry. As your teacher, I should have behaved in a more mature way."

My love and passion for my job continues. There are situations and students that still pose a challenge

even today, but he taught me one of the greatest lessons. Ego has no place in the classroom for the teacher.

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