All it takes is one

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Are teachers born and not made? Can someone who simply drifted into the profession become a good teacher?

Kusum Negi shows that with passion, anything is possible...

"I do not consider teaching to be just my job. It is my passion and I would want to become a teacher in every incarnation," says Kusum Negi, a primary school teacher with more than a decade of experience.

When Kusum had started out as a teacher, she admits that she did not have the same passion for her job that she has now. Kusum had no real plans of teaching even though she had a degree in education until legislation issued by the then State Government allowed all B.Ed degree holders to be appointed as primary school teachers. At the time her motivation for taking up the job was the security it would provide. A few days into teaching, Kusum began to feel that teaching primary school students was not quite her cup of tea. But before she had a chance to quit she came across a student who was incapable of reading, writing, and performing basic operations that other children of his age were comfortable doing. Recognizing the difficulties faced by the child, Kusum decided to stay on and address them. With her attention and dedication, it was only a matter of time before the child began to perform at almost the same pace as his classmates.

This may seem like a small incident but it was a turning point in Kusum’s life – in her view of teaching and her belief in her own capabilities. She had faced, firsthand, the immense responsibility that came with the job. The initial feelings of boredom and dissatisfaction soon gave way to reflection and passion. Proud of her student's capabilities, she shares that her “first” student had successfully graduated from school.

"How did she do it?" you may ask. Kusum says that it came down to making the process of teaching and learning enjoyable for both herself and her students.

Here a few questions Kusum asks her students to assess their understanding and learning:

- Flowing water is said to possess energy. Using this principle, Man has developed machines. Can you name two such machines which work on this principle?
- If scientists could make machines that run on petrol and perform all your work: indoor, outdoor, farming, etc., what would be the benefits and pitfalls of such machines?
- If a person has iron deficiency in his body, which vessel would you use to cook food for him: iron, aluminum, steel?
- What sort of glass is fixed in the front portion of a bus: transparent, translucent or opaque?
- Breathing is a prime necessity for living things, and all living things inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. Can you name the organs used by fish, frogs, bheemal trees, and human beings to breathe?
- Fungi or “Mevle” are white plants. Because they lack chlorophyll, they cannot make their own food. How, then, do you think they stay alive?

According to Kusum, it was questions such as these that sparked off an interest in her students. Her students are slowly moving away from memorizing answers from the text books and are working out problems and coming up with unique and innovative solutions themselves. She cites an example of a child who, when asked for a procedure to make glass less transparent, answered ‘By using water vapour!’ This answer is definitely not found in the textbook! For Kusum the answer showed that the child knew the difference between transparent and translucent, and had gone beyond the textbook by “thinking differently”. The activities in her class are based on developing the imagination and observation skills of students.

It is from her own experiences that Kusum suggests that teachers empower themselves and their students by shifting away...
from rote-based teaching and learning. Making the teaching-learning process more hands-on would make the process successful and more importantly, more fun.

For Kusum, it was one student who led her on a new path. For the student, all it took was one teacher. And that made all the difference.

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