



Celebrating our 20th issue (wow, it's been five years since *Teachers Matter* started!) got me reflecting on all I've learned about education. I always looked forward to going to class as a child. I used to think I did so because I was then who I am now: Someone who loves to learn. But truth be told, I wonder if I liked school because I could memorize facts. Earning those 95s (we didn't have the A-F grading system) on my report card made me happier than receiving a new pair of Jordache jeans.

Yet I have no memory of being excited by a scientific concept, a historical event, or a literary device I studied. Did I truly *learn* any facts, which seemed to be the teachers' goal back then, or did I develop skills for life-long learning, the philosophy today's best teachers talk about? Or did school provide practical life lessons?

Here's what I can recall:

Age 5

When my mom took me to observe a class before I started school, I saw a student take a note from her teacher to the teacher next door. How cool to be in the hallway alone, and to be the only student out of the 20 selected to do so. I aspired to that honour and eventually found that the way to earn it was by being quiet, sharing toys and smiling a lot.

Lesson learned: Play nice.

Age 7

My teacher gathered a group of us to read out loud and every time we made a mistake she marked it on the board. I had the most marks and tears in my eyes.

Lesson learned: Point out mistakes privately.

Age 8

Two friends and I laughed and sang songs when our teacher turned her head. One of us even sat backwards in our chair and scooted around a desk, much to the others' delight. We never got reprimanded. I also recall showing the class that your nine times tables are easy to remember: the number in the left column increases by one and the number in the right column decreases by one as you go from 1 X 9 to 10 X 9.

Lesson learned: Seek friends who make you laugh. And appreciate those who let you break the rules just a bit – as well as spotlight your knowledge.

Age 12

My teacher assigned a research paper, and my friend and I spent a few Saturdays at the public library taking notes from encyclopedias. The books and the quiet made my pre-teen heart pound more than the mall and Shaun Cassidy.

Lesson learned: There's more than one way to happiness.

Age 13

If you're hungry and chew gum, your stomach will growl. My science teacher told us that and said we could chew gum in class only if we had already eaten lunch. She also had us conduct an experiment that was supposed to show that different parts of your tongue identify different tastes – such as bitterness and sweetness. Everyone said it worked, except for me. I felt like a failure. Years later, studies showed that the taste bud theory was false.

Lesson learned: Stay true to your own conclusions. Sometimes you're vindicated.

Age 14

My friend painted a flower with watercolours, and the art teacher accused her of having someone else create it. It was too good to be her own work, the teacher argued.

Lesson learned: Some people should not work with children.

Age 17

My psychology teacher said if you're going to do something and worry about it, don't do it. He wasn't talking about prudent risk-taking, but breaking laws and acting unethically. He called this the concept of "unity."

Lesson learned: The world would be a better place if everyone learned from my high school psychology teacher.

So, it seems that facts, philosophy, and practicality mixed to deliver seven lessons I remember. Not a huge number, but at least they are huge lessons.

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