

What School Did

Women¹ spoke about a disturbing array of violence perpetrated by teachers and the school system. They tell about the ways teachers not only failed to support students who were experiencing violence at home, but often compounded the violence.

Joanne²:

My grade 2 teacher was not very nice to me she was always mean and reprimanded me for being slow. I was always behind in my printing and math so her method to get me to hurry in my schoolwork was to keep me in at recess and eventually she took me to the office and gave me the strap.... I never did tell my mother because I was afraid that I would be in trouble and I would get sent away like my brother. I barely passed grade 2.

My teacher was verbally abusive not only to me but my classmates as well. My opinion about him was that he wasn't happy unless he made every student in his class cry at least once.

Sierra:

The fact that one of my professors made me write an exam a week after I cam back really upset me. I felt that he had no compassion for what occurred to me. It was scary to go back because I still had some bruising on my face and trying to explain to my peers was dreadful

Fumi:

My grade-two teacher Mrs. Currie used to hit my hand with a ruler if I held my pencil incorrectly with my right hand, to force me to write with my other hand. I remember being terrified to go to school because of this teacher

Mr. Pigeon, the teacher that I had in grade eight, basically took over for [my abusive stepfather] once he left, with his emotional abuse. Mr. Pigeon allowed students to bully me in his presence and told me that I would not amount to anything in life. He said that I was a terrible student and the only reason he was passing me on to high school was because he was sick of me, but I had to go to summer school that year because I was stupid.

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I was constantly uneasy around any teacher with a controlling demeanor. Also if any of the kids that bullied me in school were in one of my classes, I either dropped the course or had very poor attendance.

Amina:

Report card night was hell for me, my brother and sister because this is the night were my mom saw the night as a critical night and she always said to us, "Tonight is your night", eventually we learned the code that this meant that if your teacher tells me negative things about you are going to get hit. We knew on report card night to wear as many layers of clothing because you could feel my mom's anger sipping through your skin. One time my brother and sister put a book, a textbook where they could fit it in their bodies so when my mom came home and hit us they couldn't feel it so much.

Priya:

The fact that I felt that none of the teachers cared about what was happening to me made the classroom a worse off place for me to be. I always wondered why they would just punish or yell or send me to the office instead of ever trying to just talk to me and ask what's going on in my life.

Marlene:

Back home, in [a European country in the 1980's], the teachers were allowed to beat us and our parents didn't do anything because it was the norm. The teacher could hit us with a thick wooden ruler; for every spelling mistake we would be hit once on the palm of our hand. She could slap us, pull our hair, hit us with a cane on our head or other places. Since my father was a carpenter, the teacher would ask him to make the ruler and I would be the first to "try out" the ruler.

Some of the memories of being in school during the time of my life that I experienced violence was the time that my teacher hit my palm, fingers bent back perpendicular to my palm, more than twenty times because of a spelling test I had written. She stopped because she said that she felt sorry for me and told me to stop crying and sit down because it was "nothing". When I sat down I couldn't feel my hands or hold my pencil and so she got angry and yelled at me because I wasn't copying what she had written on the board. Another memory that I have was the time that she hit me with a cane on the back of my legs. She

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hit me so hard that even though I was wearing jeans the impression of each whip of the cane was left on my skin. I couldn't sit down in my seat because my legs hurt and she came to me and asked why I wasn't sitting. I told her that it hurt and she simply said I had to sit down and took me by the shoulders and forced me down into a sitting position. This was the only time that my mom went to the school to complain about the teacher and I was so happy that she had gone but nothing happened to the teacher.

It was a vicious cycle. She would hit me because I didn't do well in school and I didn't do better because I was scared of getting hit

I realized that all the times that I've refused to write or read in public has been a direct influence of the impact of my experiences with regards to violence in the classroom.

Asha:

I also experienced verbal and emotional abuse by my grade three teacher and I wasn't alone in experiencing this, my whole class was affected by this man's abusive behaviour. He would call students stupid and if a student didn't know the answer to a question he would reply, "What do you **not** think??" It was impossible to learn in this classroom.

Any teachers, such as my grade 3 teacher, 5, 8, and some teachers throughout 10-12 directly contributed to making a negative experience through abusive, embarrassing and humiliating teaching and disciplinary practices. Also peers who adapted this type of abusive behavior and other bullying, violent behavior, make it difficult to focus on anything that was taking place in the classroom.

Grace:

In Grade 9 I was abused one night, and the next day I was crying in class and I was suspended...The principal made a pass at me and I turned him down, he never let me forget it...he made the rest of my high school years, hell.

I was sexually assaulted (grade 9/10) and went to a counselor in my school, that made me feel like it was my fault and called the cops when I told her not to and I told the cops that I wouldn't charge him, so they made it out to be my fault as well.

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[what didn't work for me was] teachers pointing put when/how wrong you were in front of the whole class, teachers yelling at you, being called to the office over the P.A., teachers not letting you use the washroom, knowing that my [abusive] boyfriend could come to my class, or be there waiting for me afterwards, and male teachers flirting with me.

Kari:

Teachers that threaten to humiliate you if you come late to class or don't do your homework. When teachers don't hold students accountable for racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, classist, sizeist remarks and/or contribute. Teachers that only focus on a certain group of people because of their privilege. Teachers that don't care.

During one of my women's studies classes in university just days before December 6th, a male student at the school opened the door to the lecture hall and starting yelling. He said, "You dykes should get back in the kitchen where we belong". That was scary - I didn't know what to expect next...

Leanne:

Put-downs by teachers – this was a huge issue for me in my schooling. I can remember I came to school once with a broken arm, and all my teacher said was, “don't expect to get any special attention because you decided to be stupid and break your arm.” Kids should not be going to classes to hear comments like this.

...countless times I can remember a student being called a name, or told to stop trying because they were never going to accomplish a certain task. This continued on during high school. I had a math teacher who enjoyed “punishing” students; one particular day a student asked for help, and instead was made to push a penny down a hallway for speaking out of turn.

¹ In 2007 some students in the Assaulted Women and Children's Counsellor/Advocate Program at George Brown College took part in a research study where they reflected on the ways they could now recognize that violence had had an impact on their own learning. This research was carried out as part of the Weaving a Web project to develop www.learningandviolence.net The rest of the themes identified can be found in other sections of The Impact of Violence on Learning.

² All names are fictional.