

## Asha's Story

- A number of forms of violence have influenced my experiences of learning in school, however, three are highlighted in my mind; sexual abuse by a babysitter at six or seven years of age and by peers at eleven years old. Other forms include bullying and physical threats of violence by peers throughout most of elementary school and the early years of high school. The third form of violence that influence my experience of learning was the impact of the psychiatric system (psychiatric assault) on my entire immediate family, including my mother, older sister, and my direct experience of being medicated and institutionalized for depression from fifteen to seventeen years of age.
- There definitely was a time when I was genuinely and innocently happy in school and loved the environment, was excited, and unselfconsciously engaged in learning....I'd say this became less and less of my experience of school and learning the older I became, the more varieties of violence I faced both in and out of the class room.
- ...after being sexually abused by my babysitter around six or seven years of age. I became less trusting with anyone; at school I became more withdrawn, I began to fear a lot of things. I became afraid to try to new things and become involved in things. I became more apprehensive and nervous to participate in the classroom. While I believe that this behaviour is greatly linked to my experience of sexual violence, I also believe that this behaviour was encouraged and even directed by the sexist attitudes and values of both male and female teachers in the classroom. I think this is the age when we first become aware of the gender stratification structure that patriarchal institutions reinforce.
- all of the feelings and behaviours that I described above were increasingly compounded in the way that I would participate in the classroom because the perpetrators of these direct threats were in classroom, learning with me. I was afraid to engage, to participate, to draw attention to me - afraid to give anyone any "reason" to harass me after (and even during) class.

- 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. I was terrified of being called stupid and often was because I was so nervous when he would call on me that I was unable to say anything
- My mother was institutionalized, and so heavily medicated that she was incoherent. I was not allowed to see my mother for weeks. I was told that she was not well enough to see us. This was the first time that I had spent any amount of time away from my mother and I remember feeling like she was locked up, as though she was in a prison that I couldn't even visit.
- Witnessing my mother and sister endure this is another memory of violence that impacted my ability to engage in learning, to be able to focus on learning in the classroom when this was happening to my family.
- ...my own experience for being institutionalized in the psychiatric system and receiving medicated psychiatric therapy had great influence on my experience of learning....It at first seemed like a break, at chance to collect myself. However, once I was admitted I was heavily medicated and weak.
- ...a guidance counselor helped both my sister and I through. She was so supportive and believed in both of us. I think the representation of women in the school system as teachers also engendered a positive experience for me. A classroom without violence or that had a system for addressing violence in the classroom also allowed the space to feel safe and nourishing.
- 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 fellow 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.

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*Student Reflections. Research Study, Assaulted Women and Children's Counsellor/Advocate Program, George Brown College, 2007.*  
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- ...when my mother or sister or I was “sick”, institutionalized and medicated, the classroom was one of the furthest things from my mind.
- My experiences of violence and experiences of gender and class oppression drastically impacted my ability to fully realize my potential in the classroom. Up until I entered this program, I rarely spoke in class, and if I was chosen to speak I would get so anxious that I wasn’t smart enough or that what I had to say wasn’t relevant enough, or that if I was wrong, I would be laughed at and humiliated in front of everyone. So, I would just not say anything in class, even throughout my undergraduate degree.
- It wasn’t until I entered this program that I really realized that my behavior in the classroom was largely due to the sexist behaviors of administrators in educational institutions, and that I had been “beaten down” to believe that I was not as capable as my male peers. And in many other ways, I felt this in terms of class, I was not as good as my best friend because I was poor and she was wealthy, I believe she was just more intelligent because of this background, not because of her family’s access to resources. And because of the abuse I experienced from the psychiatric system, believing that there was something wrong with my brain, so how could what I thought/said be a valid contribution is?