

30th March 2018

“I realize that, if I were stable, prudent, and static, I would live in death. Therefore, I accept confusion, uncertainty, fear, and emotional ups and downs. Because that is the price I am willing to pay for a fluid, perplexing, and exciting life.”
- Carl Rogers

Dear Neeraja,

When I wrote to you asking if it would be okay for me to join the Reflective Writing course at Poorna, I did not fully appreciate what I was getting into. I'm not really sure what made me sign up- *why was I adding one more item to my already full schedule?*

Was I hopeful that I would gain some insight or confidence as a teacher? Perhaps, the course would help me teach my students how to write better. Was I feeding the 'student' in me; ever-ready to learn and grow, to read papers and submit assignments? Would the course help me consolidate my experiences-make the last four years more tangible, meaningful? Maybe this is where I would find patient listeners and co-travellers, finding solace in the parallels between our experiences at school.



Looking back, I think all of these and other reasons (that I haven't been able to access or articulate yet) were responsible for my decision to sign up.

I had fallen ill a few days before the course began, had had sleepless nights due to a terrible wheeze and was generally weak and dull. However, I remember that on the morning of the first day I was charged and raring to go.

As I sat in class, listening to the stories you shared, I was found myself travelling to many classrooms, meeting different teachers and students. In the accounts you and my classmates shared, I found solace and comfort. An important realisation began to dawn upon me- I was not alone in this sometimes difficult, sometimes unpredictable experience of teaching and learning. It wasn't a new realisation, I was always aware of

it, cognitively but now, I could actually feel the knot in my neck relax, the grip on my pen loosen and my breathing even out. Not only did I find myself calmer, thanks to this feeling of community, I found myself more receptive, open to the world around me- I starting writing poems- first in class and subsequently about anything and everything. So, from a stray dog rummaging for food to the *Tabebuias* in bloom, I found beauty and wonder every day. I looked forward to bus rides to school, breathing in my surroundings; the golden morning sun, the bright and young green of Spring, the rhythm of the *pourakarmika*'s broom, *mynahs* squabbling and children's excited chatter about sleepovers and summer.

This gave me so much happiness and meaning- I began to fully appreciate the power that I possess. The power in one's vision, the power to reflect the many facets of the beauty that lies hiding, inside.

Session after session- I found myself diving deeper and deeper, discovering fascinating things on my way to the ocean floor. Like the rough and choppy surface of the ocean, I left behind my fear of judgement and low self-esteem and found myself in clear, calm water, amidst jewel like fish and coral. Words that had developed cobwebs, were dragged out of dusty corners, adorned with the latest fashion trends and made to walk the ramp.

Reading the two excerpts from Parker J. Palmer's book, *The Courage to Teach*, were turning points for me. The first excerpt that emphasised a teacher's selfhood, her *being* as important to examine, really resonated with me. I think it played a catalytic role in allaying my fears related to my teaching competencies (or lack thereof!).

It is hard to imagine that so much can happen in just four weeks!

I must mention that this has been my first experience of a somewhat 'formal' training or course related to education and it has opened so many doors for me and as a result for my students as well. For me, personally, this course came at an opportune moment- the last year has been a wonderful, productive and satisfying one for me. I've forged new bonds with colleagues, negotiated personal and professional boundaries, found myself to be more 'available' in the classroom, brainstormed creative methods of teaching, taken risks, learnt to farm and get my hands dirty and found greater connection and meaning in my work and life. As the academic year comes to a close, I find myself content but there is a desire to find a tangible way of recording everything this year had to offer. This course has done just that by

helping me catch the train again, a journey filled with questions, conversations and reflection has been revived.

As I look within, I can see that there are many things that have stopped me from writing and journaling in the past. Predominant among them is fear- fear of discovery- of the unknown and the power it wields. Once a discovery is made there is only one of two paths to take- you act to effect change or you don't. Change requires unbridled courage, energy and conscious action. Armed with this awareness, I hope I can overcome this fear, write more often and enter the battlefield and maybe with this will come the realisation that these battles are often in my head!

I had hoped that the course would help me observe critically and objectively, to record my experiences well and often and to use my observations to change my practice. As I write this, I find myself smiling, a warmth spreading -starting from my fingers typing this; up my arms to the rest of my body...A seed has been sown. This time, the conditions are conducive. The sun is shining, the soil is rich, rain is forecast, and it is time for the plant to emerge.

For this thoughtfully designed course, for your patience and diligence in going through our work and for the openness and honesty in the classroom and making it a safe space, thank you, Neeraja. I can already see the impact of my learning here- in my plans for next year and as I stay with my learnings and let them ferment, I'm sure there will be many ripples that will follow.

Warmly,
Roshni