



Teaching the teacher



A' for 'Aliphant' she said confidently and I was flummoxed. It was the first time that I was witnessing the downside of phonetics.

Khushi is our housekeeper's daughter who has recently come to stay with us. Since this is a long-term arrangement, we promptly admitted her to a nearby school. I then took it upon myself to help her with her lessons. However, when I embarked on this journey, I had not counted on the deadly combination of my lack of patience with her lack of a formal grounding in the basics of English language. To make matters worse, her teacher in the previous school had problems with her pronunciation, which she had successfully passed on to her students. Unaware of this, I thought phonetics would be a good way to teach a child the right spellings. I asked her for a word that sounded as if it might start with 'A,' and I got 'Aliphant'.

VALUABLE
LESSONS
FLOWERED IN
THE PROCESS
OF TEACHING
A CHILD ENGLISH

by
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So here we were, Khushi and I, learning or re-learning the Queen's language together.

Initially the lessons started out as a test of my patience. Khushi could not differentiate between sounds and hence consistently made mistakes in numbers and spellings. Soon I was spending my days, converting 'loin' into 'lion', 'beer' into 'bear' and differentiating between 'nineteen' and 'ninety'. I tried my best, my voice rising with each mistake, and my temper getting the better of me. The angrier I become, the more mistakes she made, binding us in a vicious cycle. My articulation improved and I was convinced that I would get a call centre job if applied for, but this did not help Khushi!

In my heart, I knew getting angry and impatient would not work, but I did not know how to control it. I tried practising breathing techniques before, during, and after lessons, positive affirmations, creative visualisations, and everything else that I could think of. Then, suddenly, realisation dawned. I recognised a pattern that whenever she was praised she performed better, paying attention and making lesser mistakes. My impatience subdued her, making study sessions a trying time for both of us. It was then that my learning started. Here is what I learnt from Khushi, my little teacher:

- Praise and rewards work better than punishment – this is true for every individual, irrespective of age
- Every person has some strong points – focus on those rather than the weakness, and the weaknesses will improve automatically
- Patience is a virtue one is not born with but it can be inculcated if you so desire
- Anger does not solve situations, love does
- A situation is only as bad or good as you perceive it

A slight adjustment in my attitude and overnight our learning sessions improved. Last week when Khushi came home from school, she proudly claimed that her teacher had made her classmates clap for her, as she was the only child who had spelt all words correctly. I beamed proudly as my attitude shift had finally started to pay off!

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