

kills wed aren't we open to learn

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

correct or beautifully structured, but just our personal response – what we thought of the characters or the plot developments in the chapter, so we can have discussion points for the following class. These informal responses alone make up a large portion of the final grade, and all the teacher asks is that we comprise just our own thoughts and nothing borrowed from other sources. I've lost count of the times he has been furious at students for submitting work copied word-for-word from online summaries.

None of us are impeccable students and I don't pretend to have handed in these assignments every day on time; but I've never submitted anything that wasn't one hundred

percent my own. It was hard to keep up at times, but I now find myself gleaning an immediate interpretation from anything I read or watch. I couldn't have been more grateful to my teacher.

I ask one of my instructors, Dr. AQMA Rahman Bhuiyan, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of English and Modern Languages at NSU, why students tend to be so closed off. He cites the coaching culture in our country which stunts creativity and innovative thought. "They don't get an opportunity to develop their own ideas, enquire or even make mistakes; which is a privilege that all students have but only a few seem to exercise. They just regurgitate the

same ideas fed into them, which is not what education should be," he says. He laments, "Students seem to be too interested in what will appear in exams rather than try to inculcate a thorough grasp of the subject matter."

It's a complaint I've discussed at great length with Shababa Iqbal, one of my classmates from North South University. "Many of my classmates complain that some classes aren't exciting, but then they want an easy way out," she shares with me. "They can't deal with the idea that the teacher treats them as adults, challenge them and make sure that the syllabus content isn't too easy. When I ask my classmates how a particular

SARAH ANJUM BARI

INNUMERABLE conversations in the media are addressing how education policies and teaching methods in Bangladesh need to change. Much is being said about the need to implement creative strategies and disposing of the archaic methods of limiting students within traditional, lacklustre lectures that we memorise only to forget shortly after sitting for exams. Amidst all the scrutiny directed at teachers, we overlook the part that students need to be in an environment conducive to learning. If classrooms are a platform for the exchange of knowledge, how open are we to accept the knowledge our teachers are trying to impart?

Last year's "I am GPA 5" media storm, and the resentment recently expressed over the inclusion of creative questions in public examinations hammers down on how comfortable we have become with the rote methods of cramming. It was deplorable to put HSC students under such nation-wide humiliation, and it is true that the primary responsibility lies within teachers and educational institutes to make the best of both the aforementioned scenarios. It is baffling, however, as to why we – the students of a country making such strides intellectually – still close ourselves off to truly effective ways of learning.

While recently attending a university lecture for a social science class, an inquisitive student had to stop asking questions and engaging in intellectual discussions with the teacher because other students found it too distracting and tangential to the topic at hand. In another case, a teacher was requested by some students to "dumb down" the content so it would be easier to understand. Hearing about these instances reminded me of the innumerable times I have heard some of my inventive or passionate instructors criticised by annoyed students because their lectures were considered too intense; because they answered queries with analyses and explanations that were too comprehensive, or because their assignments push us to think for ourselves.

One of my favourite teachers, a professor of English Literature, is known for setting daily assignments that require us to write 200 words responding to our assigned reading. It doesn't have to be typed up, grammatically

teacher is, they just comment on whether they got a good grade or not from them, never about their experiences or the things they learnt in the classroom. Some students can't deal with constructive criticism and instead of using them for their betterment, they quickly label that teacher as cruel," she explains.

In a phone call with another lecturer of East West University, Mr. Arafat Noman sheds light on how students from rural settings pose a different kind of challenge for him. He tries to know their stories and urges them to open up about their own ideas – which are in fact impressive and in abundance – but the educational or familial environments they have been brought up in repress them from confidently sharing their views. Mr. Noman spends a great deal of time trying to make these students feel comfortable enough to realise that their ideas matter.

Meanwhile, I am pleasantly surprised to hear my views seconded by a school student as well. Sharose Islam, an A level student of Scholastica school agrees that, "I really do think that some teachers need to change the traditional style of teaching. But students need to learn to cope and give them a chance. Too often we take advantage of liberal teachers. We must be more respectful towards them and have the right to expect the same behaviour in return. We must also accept interactive discussions, really focus on learning in the classroom and receiving the knowledge our teachers are trying to share with us."

This culture of expecting to be spoon-fed by instructors needs to go if we ever want to grow not only as an economy but as a dynamic society. It is up to parents to instill an inquisitive, creative nature in young students in schools. I stress on the word creative, which contrary to popular opinion refers to being able to think innovatively in any subject of one's choice, be it the arts, sciences or business. As for university students – it's high time we stopped waiting around for teachers to implement policy after policy to make us learn better. All of us are interested or passionate about something or the other, and if we don't allow ourselves to learn on our own, our teachers might as well stop trying. It's a two way street.

The writer is a student of English and Economics at NSU, and an intern at the Editorial department, *The Daily Star*.