

THE TEACHER AND THE STUDENT **BY ASHLEY MCKENZIE, TUSTIN, CALIF.**

The following article is an essay written by Ashley for her English class, sharing the impact her teachers had on developing her passion for learning during her four years of high school.

I just graduated from Tustin High School. Based on my four years there, I have been able to grasp the purpose of education. I have been with the best of teachers and the worst of teachers, and I know the difference between a fulfilling education and an unfulfilling one. I have come to realize that the student–teacher relationship, and the student’s will to learn, are the basis of a well-rounded education. I have gone from ignorant and unhappy to knowledgeable and enlightened.

During my freshman year, I was completely ignorant of the purpose of learning and I didn’t care to know. I was immature and blind to the world around me. When sophomore year came around, my honors English teacher inspired me to think “outside the box.” She was very open and personal with us, and before I knew it, a true friendship had grown between her and the students.

Her outgoing personality and daring methods of teaching won her respect from the students. It made me want to meet her expectations and make her proud of me. She talked to us as a teacher and a friend. If a student was having problems with school, home or life in general, she would make a point to personally talk with that student after class. The relationship she built with students encouraged us to be comfortable with learning something new and working diligently.

I received my first perfect score on an essay in her class. She later took me aside and told me that through my essay, she learned something about the book we were reading that she had never realized before. It was from that conversation that I realized the importance of a healthy and encouraging student–teacher relationship in every classroom. This relationship embodies learning from the teacher, as well as the teacher learning something from the student. This kind of dedicated teacher is someone that opens up her heart to bring down the barriers of the fear of knowledge and the narrow borders of what a student is supposed to learn.

That year was just the beginning of my growth. My junior honors English class is where I discovered my will to learn. The class curriculum had the requirements of reading works from Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman and many others. It was a combination of reading the works of these three men and my English teacher that sparked my passion for learning.

The whole course, it seemed, was a philosophy class. The philosophies that we explored—transcendentalism, romanticism, deism, naturalism and realism—were intriguing to me. I felt that by reading about these philosophies, I got a chance to step into and experience different periods of history. My teacher had the ability to create a strong, open relationship with the class. He seemed to take whatever it was that we were learning and apply it to our own lives. I gained a global view, opening my eyes for the first time to the world around me. Because of this awakening, I wanted to learn as much as I could and advance to my fullest potential.

There must be a spark to light the fire of passion that will burn in each student.

This is something that is vital to our education. To find this spark, I believe, we must break down the walls of narrow learning—the set curriculum—and build better relationships between the teacher and the student. We must form a higher standard of teaching and learning that involves humanism. We must have more of an interactive learning environment where students see the importance of the subject at hand in relationship to our lives.

At the same time, the student should find what they love, their passion, and work toward fulfilling that passion. We should be inquisitive—always desiring to learn more. We should also be actively involved in our own education, whether it takes place inside or outside of school. The teacher lays out knowledge for us, but it means nothing if we don't take it.

I would be willing to bet that students centuries ago gained a much more profound education than we do today. They were in a learning environment where all the knowledge came directly from the teacher. The student-teacher ratio was a lot smaller, so we could assume that the relationship between the two played a significant role in the student's education. Because there were none of the modern conveniences students use today, that one-to-one connection meant that much more to the student and to the teacher.

I've gained happiness from learning. That is the true purpose of education. If you find someone who is ignorant of the world around him, he may not be a very happy person. Knowledge gives you a sense of humanity and connection with the world around you. It lets you know your place in this vast universe, and it all begins with the teacher and the student.

This teacher-student relationship relates closely to the mentor-disciple relationship that is the basis of my Buddhist practice. SGI President Ikeda has said, "It is the mentor-disciple relationship...that builds character. Many great scholars, pioneers and leaders of the world have come to note how crucial the mentor-disciple relationship is" (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 271).