

Weighing the quality of education



Jan. 16, 2020

By Nate Smelle

In your life there are certain people who stand out as mentors. They are the people there for you at the right time and place who are willing and able to share their wisdom and offer guidance. In my experience these individuals seem to come into your life from out of nowhere, bringing with them the precious gift of heightened awareness. Appearing during difficult times of transition and transformation, they infuse your life with the knowledge and wisdom they have attained through their own experience. Depending on the path you are on, they may enter your life as elders, friends, spiritual leaders, neighbours, or professional colleagues. No matter what category they might fit into, they all have one thing in common ? they are teachers. There to help us acquire knowledge, develop competence, and actively understand virtue, our teachers deliver the information needed to evolve our consciousness and move forward. We all have the potential to learn life's lessons through trial and error, however, without our mentors there to guide us through trying times progress occurs at a slower pace. Thinking of the people in my life that I consider mentors, many of them showed up in a classroom ... there to open my mind to new ideas and possibilities. Although I have gained valuable knowledge from every class I have taken, because each of us connect differently with one another, I do not consider every school teacher I have had to be a mentor. For me, the defining characteristics distinguishing a teacher from a mentor is the personal connections we shared. When I think of all the teachers that I would classify as mentors, every one of them devoted extra attention and even put in overtime, unpaid of course, to ensure I understood whatever it was that I was struggling to comprehend. Another common trait among mentoring teachers I have noticed is passion for the subject they are teaching. It is worth noting that I also possessed a passion for the subject being taught by every teacher I have considered a mentor. This first became evident to me in high school. On several occasions, I recall being late for my fourth period math class because I was engaged in a conversation with my English teacher Mr. Desmond Mullally. This realization became even more apparent in university when discussing philosophy before, during, and after class with my professors. On one occasion, I remember chewing on the life affirming philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche in the main entrance of Brock University with another of my teacher/mentors Professor David Goiccochea. Standing in the flow of student traffic coming and going for close to an hour, we became so enthralled with the conversation that the two of us ended up being 10 minutes late for the class he was teaching. While volunteering at the David Suzuki Foundation and finishing my degree at the University of British Columbia I came to appreciate the value of teacher/mentors even more. Unlike at Brock, each class I was enrolled in had at least 40 students. With each professor teaching more than one class a day, this made the opportunity for one-on-one time virtually impossible. Sure you could schedule an appointment and sit in a waiting room with a dozen or so other students until it was time for your 15-minute session; but the truth is that the conversations were never as rich. With so many students waiting in line for their turn, the opportunities to make a personal connection and acquire a new mentor were slim to none. Keeping a close eye on the ongoing labour dispute between the Ford government and teachers in Ontario, I have to wonder how

much this government truly values the quality of education. The irrefutable truth is that the government's funding cuts to education will translate into more students in every classroom, less teachers in every school (5,000 province-wide), and less course options for students. If this is what Minister of Education Stephen Lecce meant when he said "The government believes in setting students up for success," I have serious concerns regarding how much this government cares for the future of students in Ontario.