



Early College Folio

A Growth MindSTEM for Next Gen

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Transformative Encounters with Inspirational Educators

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Dear readers,¹

Have you ever wondered “*What your child is living with?*”

Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D., once posed the question, “What are your children living with?” The profound impact of educators on a child’s life is immeasurable, shaping not only their academic journey but also influencing their values and perspectives.

“If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves...

If children live with encouragement, they learn to be confident.

If children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient.

If children live with praise, they learn to appreciate.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.”

Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.²

“Once upon a time, in the ancient city of Syracuse, there lived a brilliant mind named Archimedes. His days were filled with the pursuit of knowledge, and his heart beat to the rhythm of mathematical mysteries. Archimedes, with his unrivaled passion for the subject, became not just a mathematician but a legend in the world of numbers.

One day, he...” the story went on and on.

I was sitting with my friends in a classroom in a small village named Pyar, Myingyan Township, Mandalay Region, central Myanmar. Everybody was following to the rhythm of the sound with the eyes wide open. This scene I would never

forget in my life. “There are many kinds of stories in the world, not just stories related to Myanmar or history; there are also stories related to Mathematics,” he said in a clear and charming voice. As an eleven-year-old student in the fifth grade, this was the first time that I had heard these words since I progressed to middle school. I felt so lucky encountering the owner of that unforgettable voice, U Aung Win Myint, a teacher whose passion for math resembled that of a storyteller. His calm demeanor and penchant for infusing humor into lessons made math not just a subject but a narrative told through numbers.

Under U Aung Win Myint’s guidance, math transcended its abstract confines, becoming an integral part of our daily lives. By relating mathematical principles to real-world scenarios, he emphasized the practicality of math, dispelling the notion that it existed solely within textbooks and classrooms. This approach not only made math relatable but also showcased its relevance in various aspects of our reality.

His enthusiasm for the subject was contagious, and it wasn’t long before I began to see the beauty in numbers. He presented math problems from various angles, challenging us to think differently. I was fortunate to have a teacher like him—a kind, visionary mathematics teacher. I once solved a math problem differently from his instruction. He patiently observed, then replicated my approach on the blackboard, making the entire class follow suit. His appreciation and kindness left me amazed. This act was typical of him, defying the conventional Burmese teaching style that demands strict adherence to instructions. He set himself as an example, reminding me of a quote from Zen Buddhism in which the monk says to the master: “Hey! The cup is full! Why do you keep pouring tea?” And the master responds, “Like this cup, you are full. I can teach you nothing. Empty the cup you must.” This was truly eye-opening for me.

Beyond being a teacher, U Aung Win Myint became a mentor who extended his support even after I left my village for further education. His influence led me to not only enjoy math but also become a peer teacher, aiding fellow students who need additional help in remote (residing in farm houses) areas. This experience ignited my passion for teaching and community service, laying the foundation for my future endeavors.

Another influential figure in my educational journey was Venerable U Nayaka, the school principal and a teacher at Phaung Daw Oo, where underprivileged students could pursue education for free. Revered as “Phone Phone Gyi,” he exemplified a visionary leader striving to modernize education while preserving traditional values creating “Theravada Palipadaka exam,” the foremost one which included Math and English (considered not relevant to monks) for monks’ education. His emphasis on critical thinking among monks, traditionally resistant to modernization, showcased his commitment to preparing the next generation for the challenges of the contemporary world.

Inspired by Phone Phone Gyi’s leadership, I have incorporated the four Brahma Viharas, loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy, and equanimity, into my own management style. These principles have proven effective in leadership roles, fostering positive engagement with diverse groups of people.

Recognizing the uniqueness of each student’s learning style and personal behaviors, I advocate for an inclusive classroom that accommodates diverse forms of learning. Like the Bodhisattva in the 550 Jataka stories, who tailored guidance to individual personalities, teachers should strive to understand every detail of their students, uncovering hidden aptitudes through attentive practice.

My desire to serve my community was fueled by the teachings of the Bodhisattva and the impact of dedicated educators like U Nayaka and U Aung Win Myint. My experience with them is just one example of the profound impact educators can have on the world of STEM. Their influence extends beyond the classroom, shaping not only individual lives but also contributing to the broader fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Teachers like them are the driving force behind scientific breakthroughs, technological innovations, and engineering marvels that shape our modern world. As we celebrate remarkable developments in STEM, let us not forget the unsung heroes in our classrooms—the dedicated teachers who ignite the spark of curiosity and guide students toward a future of boundless possibilities. For me, it all started with an exceptional math teacher, and it continues with the vast world of STEM awaiting exploration.

Notes

¹This article was drafted with the use of generative AI.

²Dorothy Law Nolte, “Children Learn What They Live,” 1972/1975 as cited in Marilyn Price-Mitchell, “Children Learn What They Live: Lessons from Dorothy Law Nolte,” 2011, <https://www.rootsofaction.com/children-learn-what-they-live-lessons-from-dorothy-law-nolte/>.

Let me learn!

A poem by Yadanar Lwin.

Hello Anyone...
Help me. plz...
I’m stuck here.

I’m wondering
Who could bring me out.
Hoping to hear a voice
Then many voices
To thousands of voices
Million billion of voices
Speaking out about how to help people of my kind,
The blooming youths,
The future of our society.

I’ve been to many pages
I’ve been to many places
Many words’ve been said

Seeking the path ahead
 Where & how I can move on
 For my higher education
 Like my friends
 And any other does

Still, I'm right in the middle of nowhere
 Darkness is here and there
 And it's everywhere for me.
 I am blocked
 By the so-called rules

There're millions of my kind
 Needing a helping hand
 Hiding their griefs deep inside
 Wiping out their tears behind
 Swallowing up all their uncomfortableness
 Without saying a thing
 Trying to keep their bad feelings suppressed
 under the great understanding of life
 Then to move forward
 Pretending it's never happened

Their way's been lost even before they began their journey
 As they are in a tight corner
 There's no doubt that
 There's slightest hope
 Engraved in a deep part of their hearts

If they're given choices
 They can't be happier than that
 They won't have to give up
 They won't want to give up
 They wouldn't have given up their education

Ongoing covid 19 and
 Political turmoil
 It's been for two years in Burma
 That 80% out of 800,000 college students lose education
 The darkness penetrates
 Into each and everyone's life
 Especially the poor ones

Though I'm on top
 where I am not legalized student
 My hard-earned education is not credited
 And I cannot march forward from here
 Why and how come to this

We've gotta reflect soonest
 What's wrong with our system
 What'd have been done
 What change'd be brought

Rule
 Only one syllabus
 Still, it carries a lot
 It's weight is dense
 But what's the original intention for.

The best options so far
 Community Colleges
 2+2, 3+1 programs
 Saving time and money
 And more human capital
 Broadening the horizon
 To the margins of the world
 Where education is in hunger
 Work integrative programs
 Trying for all inclusiveness
 From diverse social classes
 Having varying circumstances
 Escalating the college access
 To most vulnerable ones

Altogether, it's assuredly to move faster and more efficiently
 Toward the more harmonious and sustainably beautiful world,
 nurturing the students to be loving, kind-hearted and sensible members of
 global community
 Reaching the college access out to as many and diverse students as possible.

YADANAR LWIN was born in Pyar Village, Myingyan Town, western south part of Mandalay Region. She has been serving Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education High School as an administration and communication officer for eight years since her high school completion in 2015. She organizes and teaches Free English classes for poor students, loves to write poems in her spare time. Moreover, she has been leading Reading Workshops for youths and children for five years. Also, she works a part-time job as a freelance English Instructor. She has completed a Diploma in Education, in 2023, and a Diploma in Social Science, in 2018. She especially likes to learn more about peacebuilding through Buddhist teaching. She is a Buddhist devotee who believes Buddhism can be a bridge between diversities in this globalized world.