

Parable of a Child

There is a difference between education and experience. Education is what you get from reading the small print. Experience is what you get from not reading it!

But isn't it true that great learning comes from both education and experience? Let me tell you a parable:

A young school teacher had a dream that an angel appeared to him and said, "You will be given a child who will grow up to become a world leader. How will you prepare her so that she will realize her intelligence, grow in confidence, develop both her assertiveness and sensitivity, be open-minded, yet strong in character? In short, what kind of education will you provide that she can become one of the world's truly GREAT leaders?"

The young teacher awoke in a cold sweat. It had never occurred to him before -- any ONE of his present or future students could be the person described in his dream. Was he preparing them to rise to ANY POSITION to which they may aspire? He thought, 'How might my teaching change if I KNEW that one of my students were this person?' He gradually began to formulate a plan in his mind.

This student would need experience as well as instruction. She would need to know how to solve problems of various kinds. She would need to grow in character as well as knowledge. She would need self-assurance as well as the ability to listen well and work with others. She would need to understand and appreciate the past, yet feel optimistic about the future. She would need to know the value of lifelong learning in order to keep a curious and active mind. She would need to grow in understanding of others and become a student of the spirit. She would need to set high standards for herself and learn self discipline, yet she would also need love and encouragement, that she might be filled with love and goodness.

His teaching changed. Every young person who walked through his classroom became, for him, a future world leader. He saw each one, not as they were, but as they could be. He expected the best from his students, yet tempered it with compassion. He taught each one as if the future of the world depended on his instruction.

After many years, a woman he knew rose to a position of world prominence. He realized that she must surely have been the girl described in his dream. Only she was not one of his students, but rather his daughter. For of all the various teachers in her life, her father was the best.

I've heard it said that "Children are living messages we send to a time and place we will never see." But this isn't simply a parable about an unnamed school teacher. It is a parable about you and me -- whether or not we are parents or even teachers. And the story, OUR story, actually begins like this:

"You will be given a child who will grow up to become...." You finish the sentence. If not a world leader, then a superb father? An excellent teacher? A gifted healer? An innovative problem solver? An inspiring artist? A generous philanthropist?

Where and how you will encounter this child is a mystery. But believe that one child's future may depend upon influence only you can provide, and something remarkable will happen. For no young person will ever be ordinary to you again. And you will never be the same.