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Teaching Us Humanity: The Importance of Keeping Compassion in the Classroom

We live in a world where the only constant is change, where more scientific advances have been made in the past ten years than the past one hundred, and where anything you want can be at your fingertips in an instant. In an age of such mind-boggling technology, teachers must ask themselves: How do we keep up? Classrooms don't seem to be as fun as computer rooms, books aren't as easy to find as websites, and it's hard to get more excited about a future lesson being taught than about a future game being released. But there is something that teachers give us that not even the most high-tech super-computer can offer. The new laptop you buy is obsolete as soon as you walk out of the store. What teachers show us day after day is that we cannot afford to become ourselves obsolete.

Teachers are educators, mentors, and leaders. They guide us through our life, giving us what we need to become successful, and encouraging us to strive to our full potential. But the most important thing teachers can offer us is compassion. While the role of a teacher may have been viewed as one requiring cold professionalism, it is now safe to say that the relationship has evolved far beyond that. A teacher can be a dear friend to a student: a sympathetic ear that listens to our problems, a kind yet firm hand to steer us clear from trouble, and an abundance of life experience and knowledge that helps to direct and keep us on the path to achievement.

We see every year how the traditional curriculum practices are constantly developing, leading to more inspired and ingenious ways to catch a student's attention. Instead of writing notes on the chalkboard, teachers have been experimenting with PowerPoint, creating colourful and eye-catching presentations that keep students enthralled. DDR has found its way into the physical education department, where students can work up a sweat dancing in front of a screen rather than playing soccer outdoors. And with students taking tests and exams online, wrist-cramps developed from hand-writing essays for a lengthy period of time have happily declined.

With all of these fun new breakthroughs, it seems as though it's a win-win situation. In a world that is increasingly connected, we are learning ways to bridge the distances and find similarities in one another. And yet this connection is also our downfall: as technology makes it possible to communicate with our friends without even leaving the house, we find ourselves more and more reluctant to make a simple phone call, let alone talk to someone

in person. We are losing our interpersonal skills, trading them in for texting and Facebook.

It is simple human qualities that teachers possess that make them so unique. Patience. Understanding. Kindness. Teachers can look in our faces and realize that we don't understand the lesson, a luxury an online course doesn't provide. Teachers grant us with a wealth of common knowledge and random facts that would put any search engine to shame. Teachers can make us laugh in ways an inappropriate YouTube video never will. With companies now listing interpersonal and communication skills as the highest traits they seek in potential employees, we can see how important it is to keep that simple concept of face-to-face human contact alive. As tempting as it may be to give in and plug in, teachers must reject these technological luxuries, and focus instead on the student. Creativity, communication, and compassion must not become obsolete.

Ask the student how their weekend went. Make sure they understood the homework. Notice their new haircut. Instead of recognizing students by the names written on their seating plan, take time to admire the spark and flavour of each individual personality. A teacher who cares will notice the different social groups, the achievers vs. the stragglers, and which students need just a bit more help than they're letting on. The effects of indifference and apathy may not appear immediately, but the signs will show over time. Bullying, eating disorders, and depression can continue if no one takes the time to notice and put a stop to it.

Teachers, we must ask you this: Do not lose your humanity. Keep in contact with your students, get to know them, make the lessons and classes feel more personal. The curriculum was developed with students' best interests in mind, and any effort you make to help them relate will only improve the quality of their learning. Students will be the most engaged when they feel as though you care about them. Don't be afraid that they won't respect you; when a teacher makes the effort to make a student feel appreciated, they will only flourish. If a teacher can do this, they have successfully earned the title.

Remember, years down the road, they probably won't remember what you taught them. They'll only remember how you made them feel. ■