

Who or what in your educational experience has influenced your direction in life?

People often say that a good teacher can change lives. While the word “teacher” in everyday conversations tends to be used only in reference to schoolteachers – my definition of teacher tends to be used more loosely.

As a child, I didn’t understand why I went to school every day. The concept of education and learning was just not something I was able to wrap my mind around as an elementary-aged kid. The idea of waking up every morning to sit in a classroom in order to learn was something I did not understand. As a five-year-old, I attributed most of my learning experiences to ones that have happened outside of the classroom. I learned what it meant to be compassionate from my neighbor Rita, whose gifts of fresh fruit and vegetables were like a Christmas meal to my single mother and our large family. I learned selflessness from my eldest sister who dropped out of college to help my mom take care of my siblings and me. I learned how to self-advocate from my classmate Sienna, who even as a kindergartner would advocate for my classmates and me during playtime.

But most importantly, I learned the importance of education from my first-ever educator: my mother. My mother taught me what it meant to be alive – everything from how to count to how to wash my hair. But most of all, my mother sparked my fervent passion for learning – a passion that I still hold to this day. Ever since the moment I could speak, my mother instilled the mindset in me that education is the key to success, a mindset that still rings true as I move on to the next part of my educational career in college. As a senior in high school, I now know that I am not merely going to a building and listening to my teacher lecture our class about the alphabet, or other things we learned in that kindergarten class. I now understand that school and therefore, education is truly life changing.

In addition to the teachings from my mother that have molded me, I have learned an immense amount from my community of Utqiagvik. Our community is built on Iñupiaq values, values that have taught me humility, cooperation, respect, and ultimately, what it means to be a good, positive, and functional person in our society. Specifically, I owe a lot to who I am now to a group of my community’s leaders: my school board. As I have served on my school district’s school board as Student Representative since my sophomore year, I have learned so much about advocacy, public service, and myself, guiding me to choose to further my educational career by studying political science. While being on my school board, I had the opportunity to showcase the values that I learned throughout my life, all while learning a variety of new values. I showed compassion as I listened to the stories of fellow students in my district. I showed selflessness as I worked earnestly to ensure that my peer’s voices were heard. I advocated time and time again as I spoke at the Alaska State Capitol, various AASB conferences, and to my school board. Lastly, I used my love for education and learning to take the leap of faith at the end of my freshman year when I decided to apply to be Student Representative. I was incredibly nervous but was overwhelmed with love for my community and our schools, motivating me to take on such a big role at fifteen years old.

So, while most of my learning has occurred in classrooms throughout my life, I have also learned an incredible amount of information outside of my school buildings. I believe that knowledge

can be found in all corners of life, from our elders to our teachers to our parents, to our friends, or even strangers passing on the street. My outlook on life and my plans post-high school stem from this mindset. I have been influenced by the people in my life, but also the experiences that have come with growing up and changing. As I embark on my studies in a university setting, I bring the insights gained throughout my life as I continue to learn in any setting.