I started at Siena in year 7 and I remember Mrs Gotlib, who I had for English that year, wrote us all a letter about herself and asked us to write a letter back telling her about our interests. One of the things I remember the most is that she said she loved reading and she loved reading young-adult fiction, which I also love.

Mrs Gotlib was my English teacher in years 7 and 9 and also taught me psychology last year. I studied year 12 psychology in year 11 and received a perfect score. I also received a Premier’s Award for it this year. It was a nice affirmation that hard work pays off and it was a really nice moment of pride for me, my parents and Mrs Gotlib.

Mrs Gotlib has taught me to have a passion for learning that can last throughout your adult life, and to enjoy coming to school and enjoy being around the people you’re with.

My passion for learning, I think, is the main reason for my success in psychology. I loved studying psychology because you get to learn about the brain and how it works. It gives you an appreciation of what’s underlying people’s emotions … to know there’s something going on you can understand.

I’m a house captain this year at Siena. I saw these dedicated girls who put so much energy and love into the school and thought ‘that’s what I want to do, too’. I’ve taken up many of the opportunities available at the school. I’ve played AFL for the past four years and also play the clarinet in school bands and the orchestra.

I’m still deciding what I want to do after I finish here at Siena.

There’s always been a part of me that’s wanted to be a teacher, and it’s because of teachers who have inspired me and I want to inspire like they have.

There’s also a part of me that wants to do medicine – obstetrics – so I’m not really sure. I keep jumping between the two. I did want to study both at the same time but I’m told that’s not possible (laughs).

I come from a family of teachers. All my aunts are teachers, my mother and my father are both teachers. All my cousins have gone into law, so I guess I’d be the first one in the family to study medicine. I really want to help people and I know both professions are two of the biggest ones to aid people.

Love of young-adult fiction helped start a close bond between Siena College English and psychology teacher Kate Gotlib and year 12 student Emily Spagnol. Kate, a former Siena student herself, mentored Emily and celebrated her outstanding success in her accelerated psychology studies, where she received a perfect score and a Premier’s Award.

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**“IT WAS A NICE AFFIRMATION THAT HARD WORK PAYS OFF”**

This is my 17th year as a teacher at Siena College. I went to school here, too, so it would be my 23rd year here altogether. I always knew I wanted to teach, pretty much since grade 4, and this position came up at a time where I thought it would be nice and safe to start. Once I got back here, I realised there’s so many more ways to love it from the other side of the desk.

There have been many changes around the school, including amazing new buildings and facilities.

We had one computer lab with green screens and no internet when I was here and suddenly everyone has iPads. So technology has definitely changed.

While things have changed, essentially at its core Siena is the same, producing the same kind of amazing women.

I teach psychology and English. I always loved reading. I grew up with my mum telling me to turn the light off and I would keep reading with a torch under the Doona.

I discovered a passion for psychology later in my education, through my arts degree – understanding neurology and how brain function manifests into behaviours is fascinating. Scientifically, there’s so much that’s still undiscovered, so it’s exciting to teach it to the girls every day and see them develop a love for the subject.

I started teaching Emily in her year 7 English class. I still remember where she sat in the classroom. She was one of those students I saw myself in. We shared a passion for reading before the psychology.

We were always talking to each other in between classes about what the latest young adult fiction we read was. We both loved Pride and Prejudice and the Harry Potter series, so that was always underlying everything.

Kate says …

I had Emily in my class for year 12 psychology last year – she accelerated her studies in year 11. She did extremely well and won the Premier’s Award for getting a perfect score. Emily knows hard work pays off and where it will take her.

I think there’s a trap if you’ve been somewhere as long as I have, of being complacent or teaching things the same way or maybe not being able to find the same joy as the first time you taught it. Students like Emily help you rediscover that joy and then want to find better and more exciting ways to deliver it. Their energy feeds your energy.

You imagine what they’re going to be like when they’re older; there’s such boundless potential there for what they can achieve … to think that you’ve had any hand in that is a thrill.