

Class should be like...

Angie Bishop, Principal, Parkview Adventist Academy, Lacombe, AB

About a month ago I was working on teacher evaluations. The data I was looking at came from student surveys. I'm a firm believer that the best predictor of student learning is an excellent teacher. So as I was preparing for meeting with my teachers, a thought began to formulate.....Class is like Church. I shared that with the teachers of PAA. After the in-service on teacher evaluation with Dr. Ray Ostrander, I tweaked my thinking: "Class should be like Sabbath School".



Do you remember going to Sabbath School from Cradle Roll to Earliteens? Humour me for a moment as I go back to my childhood. My mom was involved in teaching every level from Cradle Roll to Primary. She was actively involved in Vacation Bible Schools and Pathfinders and eventually helped my father in his work as an Adventist educator. I remember the preparation she put into being ready for our Sabbath School class. These were events that you didn't want to miss; you even wanted your friends to come with you. Perhaps times have changed; however, good teaching still happens when four elements are put together by a skilled teacher.

The Classroom Environment

I can clearly remember the Primary room immersed in carefully chosen items all to help us know more about where our mission offering was going. Whether it was Africa or India, we couldn't wait to learn more about it. It was like walking into a new land. A piano for music, a place to bring your labels from all those vegetarian dinners, a felt board to have the lesson, stickers and stars . . . all of these helped us focus on what was happening for the next 13 weeks. It was welcoming, designed with a Primary student in mind to pique our curiosity.

There was respect and rapport, and a culture of learning was created by communicating that the content was important. As a child we knew what was going to happen. Whether you said your memory verse right when you came in or you were seated to hear the continuing story, you knew what to expect. I remember visiting other Sabbath Schools and there was always apprehension as to what might happen, because of the unknown.

Planning and Preparation

Do you or your teachers plan and prepare for each class or do you (they) just know the material? There is a huge difference. In order to guide student learning, teachers must have command of the subjects they teach but there is a lot more to a great lesson. Children learn differently at different stages of their lives; learning requires active intellectual engagement. Every class has a different mix of needs. Do you know your students well enough to meet these needs? I am sure that you wouldn't lecture to Cradle Roll students, but have you wondered why rhythm sticks

were used when you were five? It was because some of you are musical; students might still learn using rhythm, even at 17.

Teaching is a purposeful activity. “Every teacher should see to it that his work tends to definite results. Before attempting to teach a subject, he should have a distinct plan in mind and should know just what he desires to accomplish. He should not rest satisfied with the presentation of any subject until the student understands the principle involved, perceives its truth, and is able to state clearly what he has learned.” (*Education* 233:4)

Preparation and planning is what the general public never gets to see. This is where the myth of banker’s hours and summers off originates. It is in lack of preparation and planning that many an ordinary teacher gets trapped and never moves on to becoming an excellent teacher.

Engaging Students in Learning

Do you remember having to recite all 13 memory verses on 13th Sabbath? The Bible Sword Drills and Bible Quizzes (usually girls against boys...) were important for more than just winning at Egypt to Canaan. What songs do you remember? “Dare to Be a Daniel”, “The Captain Calls for You”, “Father Abraham” “The Arky Arky”? How many mission books do you remember? *Clever Queen, Dookie, Sookie and Big Moe*, and my all-time favourite *Jungle Thorn*, taught me about sharing the love of Jesus with everyone around the world. Moving felts on the board or being chosen to collect the offering engaged us physically, mentally and emotionally. Saturday morning cartoons would have been easier, but because our Sabbath School teachers and parents believed that what we were learning was important, we went to Sabbath School.

This component of teaching is truly where the artistry of a distinguished teacher stands out. It takes skill to intellectually engage students in challenging content, through well-designed learning tasks, and for the teacher to suitably scaffold to meet the instructional outcomes. Pacing lessons for engagement, reflection, and consolidation of new content takes passion and commitment. Of course, even the most skilled and best prepared teacher will on occasion find that either a lesson is not going as they would like, or that a teachable moment has presented itself. The teacher must be flexible and responsive to the changing conditions of a classroom. Teaching is hard work, probably one of the hardest professions to actually do well.

Professional Responsibilities

This component is perhaps the most difficult one to express in terms of a Sabbath School class. These teachers, wherever they are found, have a reputation as individuals who can be trusted and are often sought as a sounding board. Frequently they remind others that the children are our first priority. Students find support, even in the face of difficult situations or conflicting policies, but still these teachers consistently fulfill mandates regarding policies and procedures. Professional responsibility means that they demonstrate professionalism in service both to students and to the profession. The more one teaches, the more one can reflect and analyze what

works and what needs to be challenged. Professional responsibility means that there is always room for growth and development. Over time, the exceptional teacher develops the skill of thinking and analyzing instruction through the lens of student learning and it becomes a habit of mind, leading to improvement in teaching and learning. Have you noticed that some Sabbath School teachers never “graduate” to the adult Sabbath School?

The Challenge

Sabbath School took place 52 times a year and only lasted about an hour. Some Adventist school teachers arrive at 7:00 am to set up and find they have been teaching and supervising all day, with hardly a bathroom break. At the end of the day there is always tomorrow’s planning and today’s correcting, some phone calls and perhaps a meeting. Yet this is the profession we have chosen and we are paid to do this most rewarding work. Administrators, we need to support our teachers to be the best they can be. Teachers, have you taken all four domains into consideration to be the best you can be?

- Sources and ideas were taken from the Teacher Evaluation In-service of March 2, 2012, by Dr. Ray Ostrander. *Appendix A: The Framework for Teaching* (2011 Revised Edition) Teachscape. *Education*, page 233.