

## **Coping With a Rapidly Changing Educational Environment**

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It was my recent good fortune to come into the possession of a number of old registers from the two schools that merged to form Fraser Valley Adventist Academy. They had been retained by the Conference office for the prescribed 55 years and were now being removed from their files. I started reading through them just for the fun of it, and in the process, I gained some interesting insights into what teaching must have been like at that time.

In several of the old registers I found that the teacher's closing report indicated that their salary for the year had not yet been paid in its entirety, usually short by anywhere from ten to twenty-five dollars. Promotion statements at the end of the year contained a wide variety of comments. Many of these were quite laudatory, while others were just the opposite with words like "lazy" and "slow" used generously. Some were quite blunt such as "Promoted to grade VII, too long in grade VI," or my personal favourite, "Passed to grade 2, He has spent 3 years in grade 1."

Teachers did not get off lightly either. The following gem was included in the year-end instructions for the school year 1949 to 1950 under the title "Summer Allowances." It reads as follows:

"To all teachers who are not gainfully employed during the summer months, the conference pays \$1.00 a day or \$7.00 a week during the summer holidays. This amounts to about \$65.00 for the summer. Married women with capable husbands are not entitled to this amount. And of course, we don't expect very many men teachers to take advantage of this either as most of you can earn much more than this if you go out and work off some excess avoir-dupois. Those who are receiving summer school help are not entitled to this help either."

As I chuckled about some of these findings, it finally dawned on me that these students were my contemporaries. I have indeed been involved in education, either as a student or a teacher, across seven decades. My first thought was that this couldn't be, so I started counting them off and sure enough, when I had used up most of the fingers on both hands I realized it was indeed true. It does not matter that in my mind I am still somewhere in my mid-twenties (in spite of a knee that sometimes hints otherwise). The truth is that we cannot stop the aging process, but we can develop attitudes that help us cope and stay current.

Let's admit it, the good old days were never really that good. If you think otherwise re-read the Summer Allowances policy. As teachers we owe it to ourselves and our students to keep ourselves as up-to-date as possible with teaching strategies, technical innovations – whatever it takes to do the very best job in the classroom. In many ways teaching is like riding a surfboard – if you stay on your feet and keep as close as you can to the crest of the surf, the waves of change will carry you as far as you want to go. If you stop, or lose your perspective, or fail to stay on top, then you "wipe-out." And if you wipe-out, your effectiveness as a teacher in the classroom is diminished accordingly.

That leaves us with the big question of how to accomplish this. As the years pass and the age gap between our students and ourselves widens, how do we stay relevant in the classroom? In

my own career I have decided that at least part of the answer is enthusiasm. I have always felt that teaching is one part dedication, one part experience and several parts enthusiasm. The biggest danger that teachers face, especially as they gain more “experience”, is that they will somehow lose their enthusiasm. And while I look back on the conditions for teachers 55 years ago and find them depressing from my perspective, I can only assume that those teachers from a by-gone era succeeded in the class room because they had a good measure of enthusiasm for their ministry and for the success of their pupils.

May we as teachers in the Twenty-First Century have the wisdom to face our own unique challenges with the same enthusiasm for our work as that which must have sustained those teachers decades ago in their challenges.