

Making a Difference

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I have been teaching in Adventist schools for many years and it is easy to wonder at times if what I am doing makes any difference. In a more general sense, does what we as Adventist teachers do make any difference in the lives of the young people we encounter over the years?



I am fortunate to work in a K–12 school, fortunate in the sense that I am privileged to see the young people move from elementary to junior high and then on to senior high school. I know that many of our teachers in smaller schools do not get to see their students advance through all the different stages and then finally graduate. Students do change, do mature, do become productive citizens of society. Students that were once hostile to the school and teachers can and do actually become friends for life. I have often smiled in disbelief as students who once seemed totally antagonistic to my teaching efforts became seniors who sought out my company and enjoyed spending a few moments in friendly conversation with me. One student in particular stands out in my mind. She was a totally rebellious, independent student in grade 10. She would argue about almost anything. She was a ‘get-in-your-face’, spare nothing, confrontational student that administration had often considered expelling. I was Vice Principal at the time and she became my responsibility because the Principal could not or would not deal with her. Somehow she managed to stay in our school and graduate. By grade 12 she had actually become quite pleasant to deal with. I really noticed the change when she came back to visit the school six months after her graduation and wanted to have a pleasant conversation with me.

Similar developments occur in all schools. Students that make it through the troublesome junior high years almost always become more responsible, more civilized, more pleasant to deal with as they move through their senior years. But are we accomplishing anything else that would validate our existence? Are we helping students to develop in areas other than academic and social? I do not want to diminish the importance of these two areas, but there must be something else that sets us apart and gives us a reason to exist.

Another story comes to mind as I think about this. We are blessed at our school to have recurring visits from former students. They often drop in to chat when they return to Calgary from colleges and universities all over North America. Recently a young lady who graduated two years ago and now attends Walla Walla University in Washington stopped in to ‘touch base’ with her former teachers. I remember her for her wonderful smile and contagious laugh. She was always pleasant as a student, could always make others laugh just by laughing herself, and always seemed so happy about life. Now she is studying to be a nurse. I could not help but think what good medicine she will be for the patients because of her extremely pleasant and positive personality. And I was impressed by two things: First, though she did not come from an Adventist background, she was now attending an Adventist university; second, she commented that she never would have made it so far if she had not come to our school. Here was this pleasant, positive student who felt that being at our school had really helped to keep her ‘on track’ and prevent her from going in one of the many negative directions that are so attractive to many young people today. I have many more stories of young people who clearly benefitted from the environment that we provide, an environment that offers the safety, guidance, and structure so necessary in the formative years.

As I see alumni taking up positions in the church, becoming involved in different aspects of the church community, playing the piano, leading song service, helping in Sabbath School, and eventually sending their youngsters to our school, I realize that it is important that our schools continue to exist and continue to offer their services to those who wish to send their sons and daughters here. We DO make a difference, not just in this life, but for eternity.