

## **What Do Our Students Really Want From Us, Their Teachers?**

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Recently, I received an e-mail from a former student who had graduated some time ago. I must admit that this student was not an easy student to get along with during her tenure at our institution and had challenged the limits of my patience on a number of occasions. After graduation, I never expected to ever hear from her again, so her e-mail surprised me. In the e-mail she shared how God had blessed her with an exciting career, a wonderful new family, and a newfound relationship with God. Then, she stated something that took me by surprise: even though we didn't know it, for her, we represented what being a Christian was really all about. She had been raised under difficult circumstances, and was the only Christian in her home when she decided to attend our Christian institution. She informed me that despite the fact that it has been years since she graduated, she *still* uses the people problem solving methods *we* modeled in the classroom, and views *us* as her role models in her work.

I find it most intriguing that as faculty, we may teach students about Math, History, and Science, but the thing that they will remember most about us is our character. Whether we want to or not, as Christian teachers, we are obliged to add to our job description the responsibility of being spiritual mentors to our students. Getting involved in spiritual mentorship is not as difficult as some may perceive. As teachers, we can make a conscientious effort to find teachable moments within the classroom and/or extra-curricular activities where spiritual lessons or values can be integrated with student learning regardless of the subject matter. Jesus used this concept throughout his ministry. He consistently used spiritual illustrations aimed at helping his audience think introspectively and at drawing them closer to God's ideals for character development. "He who co-operates with the divine purpose in imparting to the youth a knowledge of God, and molding the character into harmony with His, does a high and noble work".<sup>1</sup>

Lest we forget, as teachers, we play a role in the great gospel commission within our classroom. Our classrooms should be places where students can see that being a Christian is a rewarding experience. As teachers we need to formally recognize that we play a significant role in making Christianity real for our students.

So what do our students really want from us as teachers? Here are some things I have learned over the years. Students want...

1. Teachers who are not afraid to share how God helped *them* overcome difficult challenges in life.
2. Teachers who show they are interested in them by taking time to call students who are absent from school for extended periods or taking the initiative to say a word of encouragement when they are down.
3. Teachers who take time to listen to students--their problems, hopes, and aspirations--and are not afraid to pray with them about academic challenges or personal problems that they may share.

4. Teachers who are conscientious of their limitations as teachers and who can utilize the resources of the school and community for referrals when it is appropriate.
5. Teachers who will take the time to creatively include biblical concepts into their curriculum regardless of the subject.
6. Teachers who are not afraid to admit when they are wrong and seek forgiveness from students.
7. Teachers who intentionally design class service learning projects that will give students opportunities to interact with people and develop their people skills and who create reflection assignments that allow students opportunity to share and discuss their experiences with other students. After all, they will spend most of their adult lives dealing with people.
8. Teachers who take time to attend student-led activities (sporting events, worship activities, community service activities, etc.).
9. Teachers who can accept the fact that *students* can bring knowledge to the classroom (e.g., understanding their generation) and that *teachers* can learn a lot from them.
10. Teachers who model Christian behavior, attitudes and lifestyle.

What do students need from teachers? Students need us to be *real* Christian teachers, teachers who recognize that their classroom experiences with their students are often replayed years after the class is done. In a world obsessed with reality television, why not strive to make your daily interactions with your students a *Christian* reality experience? You can do it; just be real.

1. White, E. (1952). *Education*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.