

Love in Many Colours

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“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and in front of the lamb.” (Revelation 7:9)

I recently watched Greaves Adventist Academy’s “Support Haiti Concert” on television and the internet. This event confirms my beliefs regarding a multi-cultural school and more importantly, the multi-cultural classroom. I believe that a multi-cultural classroom enhances student learning through respect, love and acceptance.

Mutual respect is an important factor in the learning process. Without respect, the student does not feel comfortable sharing and participating in class discussions and activities. The teacher, as facilitator, must both model and live the concept of mutual respect. Embracing others’ cultures and accepting others’ beliefs is the bond that weaves the fabric of a positive classroom atmosphere and culture. As a Seventh-day Adventist teacher, I do not share many of the beliefs of my students who belong to other faiths, but there is always a common bond. My students generally have good moral backgrounds, and morality is not based on a specific religion. When students see that I am not critical of their thoughts and beliefs, the atmosphere is relaxed and comfortable, and learning can more effectively take place. It is amazing that people of very different beliefs – Seventh-day Adventist, evangelical Christian, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and Muslim--can share their thoughts about moral issues and pray together afterwards. In Matthew 24: 14, Jesus states: “And all the gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” This promise is being realized in my classroom, in Greaves Adventist Academy, and in other Seventh-day Adventist schools, like my previous school, South Side Christian School in the Alberta Conference.

Respect is important but love is the most important quality we can share with one another. Jesus commanded: “Love your neighbour as yourself” Matthew 22:39. To me, this command is very clear: I must love my neighbour and have no problem doing so. What is also clear to me is that my neighbour includes all people and all my students. While we are different, we are also similar. We focus on the similarities and love one another, in spite of different values and beliefs. Issues like heaven and hell, the state of the dead, and biblically clean food are frequent topics in my classroom. Amazingly, all the students have a concept of good and evil in the biblical sense, even though their religions are not Christian. Moreover, students learn from people they love. Teachers who love their students can broach difficult subjects and cross traditional religious boundaries to reach the student. Personally, no one has reached me by preaching to me; love brought me to the Lord. The only way to reach the most difficult students are through respect and love. As a Christian teacher, my first duty to my students is to reflect God’s love, and the second is then to impart academic knowledge. Love is contagious, and in my multicultural classroom that is evident.

All people need to be accepted for who they are. If Jesus had rejected the adulteress, the woman at the well, or the thief on the cross, we would not have the opportunity to see them in heaven. Students need to be accepted to form relationships. Teaching children acceptance alleviates many potential societal problems. When I model acceptance to my Muslim students, they can quietly share their negative feelings, about Judaism, giving me a chance to respond rationally and in love. Often in my teaching career I have had students who have struggled in other schools due to the fact they were different--morally, intellectually, or physically. I have had students of both genders who were overweight or handicapped participate in my physical education classes. They felt comfortable and accepted. ESL students read in my class with no fear of being ridiculed because of the class culture. Most students fail in school, not because they lack intelligence, but because they do not fit in to the mold.

Seventh-day Adventist education is the best system in the world; if it wasn't, I would not choose to be a Seventh-day Adventist teacher. It saddens me when our church leaders and members do not support our schools and universities. Seventh-day Adventist teachers nurture our own Seventh-day Adventist children, but must also spread the gospel message to other children, regardless of who they are and where they come from. My classroom is a family where all children are respected, loved and accepted. This is what I desire to do, both for the Lord and for them.