



Teaching: The Art of Loving God's Children

By George R. Knight

Do you like children?

Asked "Why do you think you want to teach?" a young person almost invariably includes in his answer, "Because I like children."

Teachers rich in experience with children smile and wonder what it really means to "like" children. Can you like children when, for the seventh time in a day, you have told them to stop shouting, to work for five minutes without asking a question, not to play too close to open classroom windows, not to talk during rest time, not to wrestle in the lunch line, not to paste without spreading paper first?

Can you like children when they won't learn what you have so carefully planned for them to learn, when they can't think of anything to write about, when they miss the same words over and over, when they forget, put off, argue, and defy you?

Can you like children when they are dirty, when their noses run, when they smell, when they use offensive lan-

guage, when their parents thwart your every attempt to "help" them?

The classroom is a wonderful place to find out whether you really care for children. I remember my first day as the third-grade teacher at Houston Junior Academy. Wearing brand-new clothes, I had just arrived for the opening exercises. As I sat at my desk examining my neat lesson plans, and perusing the names in my grade book, I made a last-minute check of the textbooks spread out before me. By that time, the children had begun to gather about my desk to examine and to evaluate their new teacher. They smiled at me, and I smiled back. About that time the young lady at my right side began to make strange sounds and suddenly regurgitated her breakfast—splattering my beautifully prepared lesson

plans, splashing my grade book, and inundating my right shoulder. To say the least, it was a warming reception.

Getting Things Backwards

Do you *really* like children? This question is central to the teaching profession, because children are the most important people in the entire educational process. Superintendents, supervisors, principals, and teachers are secondary in the educational establishment. From the Christian perspective, they are employed by the community as agents to help restore the image of God in children. The teacher is the servant of the pupil, the principal the servant of both teacher and pupil, and the superintendent the servant of the entire educational community. Unfortunately, we sometimes get the whole con-

Associate Professor of Educational Administration
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan

cept of education backwards and see children as being in school to provide jobs and status for educators.

Children are what schools are all about. They are God's purchased possession, and teachers and other educators have a sacred obligation to seek the very best for their young charges. Teaching is an art rather than a science, and it involves the nicest—most delicate—work ever entrusted to men.²

Central to the task of teaching is the teacher's personal relationship with his students. Teachers are privileged to come close to young people in a manner and to an extent not possible for other adults in our society.

The teacher's greatest gift to his students is his own companionship. This is one of the strongest influences in the teacher's repertoire, but seems to be one of the most neglected and underemphasized aspects of the ministry of teaching. All too often, we as teachers focus on commanding, dictating, and directing in the classroom while failing to develop significant social relations with our students. One Christian educator has noted that if teachers

would gather the children close to them, and show that they love them, and would manifest an interest in all their efforts, and even in their sports, sometimes even being a child among children, they would make the children very happy, and would gain their love and win their confidence. And the children would sooner respect and love . . . [their] authority.³

It is easy to hold ourselves aloof from our charges, thereby confusing coldness and reserve with genuine respect.

Patterns of Involvement

In schools where I have visited or been employed I have noted two basic patterns of teacher involvement with students. On one hand, I have seen teachers huddled together

in the faculty lounge or on the steps of a building overlooking a playing field while the students are out "doing their thing." On the other hand, I have seen teachers actively participating in the activities of the young in such a way as to create a bond of affection and mutual endeavor that will be carried over into the classroom. The first group of teachers may have a pleasant social event with their peers, but they are losing out on a very meaningful professional experience.

Good teaching relationships between students and teachers are not most easily established in the classroom. They are generally made in the field, in the shop, and on the playground as teachers and students learn how to work and play together.⁴ Ellen White has noted that:

The true teacher can impart to his pupils few gifts so valuable as the gift of his own companionship. . . . To strengthen the tie of sympathy between teacher and student there are few means that count so much as pleasant association together outside the schoolroom. *In some schools the teacher is always with his pupils in their hours of recreation. He unites in their pursuits, accompanies them in their excursions, and seems to make himself one of them. Well would it be for our schools were this practice more generally followed.* The sacrifice demanded of the teacher would be great, but he would reap a rich reward.⁵

The writer strongly believes that the relationship between the teacher and student outside the classroom will, to a large extent, color and condition their relationship inside the classroom. I operated on this basis when I was a school principal; I did my best to play and/or work with the pupils at least once each week, and I encouraged my secondary teachers to do the same. I hoped that this would enable the students to see me as something other than a stern authority figure, someone sitting behind a desk who held their fate in his hands.

I found both as a teacher and as an administrator that socializing, recreating, and working with the students allowed me to understand them better and to enter into their confidence more easily. This paved the way for me to call them aside in a casual manner and talk with them on a friendly basis when they were having difficulties.

We need to show our students that we care for them and that we desire the best for them. If we really care, they will generally know it from our activities and attitudes. If we have related to our students as friends and helpers, as well as being their leaders and guides, then they

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will not feel resentful when we put our hand on their shoulder and inquire about the burdens that trouble them. They know we care, because we have built a meaningful relationship with them throughout the school year. They will be able to believe in us, because we have shown that we believe in them.

As teachers we must beware lest our teaching become a crisis ministry in which we are always facing problems in the classroom and are defensively seeking to placate both parents and students. How much better to demonstrate actively that we care more for our students than for the subjects we teach or the rules we enforce! We will have entered into the joy of teaching when we show our love for God's children by coming into close relationship with them in their daily activities.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Evelyn Wenzel, "Finding Meaning in Teaching," in *Creativity in Teaching*, edited by Alice Miel (Belmont, Calif. Wadsworth Pub. Co., Inc., 1961), pp. 56, 57.

² Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 292.

³ _____, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1923), pp. 18, 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116; _____, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1913), pp. 203, 208.

⁵ _____, *Education*, p. 212. (Italics supplied.)

Where Are Your Children Sheltered?

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children in a Christian school does not mean that you are a crusader against the public school system. It means you want an education for your child that cannot be given by the public school. Parents send their children to the Christian school because they do not want them sheltered from the real world."

But what of the hothouse analogy? Young plants are

placed in a hothouse, not to make them weak, but *because* they are weak. To suggest that a hothouse has an unwholesome, weakening effect is erroneous. The church school, like the hothouse, protects "tender plants" from the harshness of the outside elements until they are strong enough to stand on their own, and not be "tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men . . ." (Eph. 4:14) Children need a church school to strengthen them for the future task of witnessing to the world. They need a good shelter where the training of the Christian home is continued and where devastating scars on the character are eliminated to the fullest extent possible. A public high school administrator estimates that of every ten pupils who come from Christian homes, nine compromise with the world because students are not fully able to cope with being different and are not able to take the scorn and ridicule sometimes showered on them by classmates.

Students under worldly influence are like the disadvantaged people described in the book of Job. "They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter." (Job 24:8) Christian education shelters the student in the Rock of Ages. It is a shelter from "rock" music and from being "stoned" on drugs.

It is a sad and painful truth that the worldly school does not ADJUST Christians to the world; it CONFORMS them to the world. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed . . ." (Rom. 12:2)

The transformed individual is the adjusted individual who has learned how to cope successfully with the world in which he finds himself. He learns within a philosophical framework that gives meaning and purpose to life and that eliminates confu-

sion. Within the framework of a Christian philosophy, our youth may confront the wiles of the devil in various forms such as Evolution and Situation Ethics. They will successfully face reality because they will know who they are, where they came from, and where they are going.

Soldiers are not rushed to the battlefield before going through new entry training. The Seventh-day Adventist school is the new entry training camp for those who would be soldiers of the cross in this great controversy between Christ and Satan.

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Safeguarding Our Students' Health

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to prevent fire hazards?

6. Are student workers properly supervised?

Abused or Neglected Children

1. Are the teachers aware of State laws regarding the course of action to take if they suspect that a child is being abused or neglected at home?

2. Does the school have a policy for handling child-abuse situations? In some States a teacher, nurse, or administrator can be prosecuted if they know of an abuse but do not report it. However, parents must not be accused without proof. The police department or county child welfare workers can suggest ways for faculty to proceed.

Health Education

Most States have mandated areas of health that must be included in the curriculum. These generally relate to the use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. These areas are required in 35 States. More-complete health-education programs are required in 16 States. Every