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# The Teacher Makes the Difference

**T**eachers are more than professionals, driven by an urge to impart to students in the best possible way the content of the subjects they teach. They are more than communicators, trained in the methodology of transferring information from one person to another. They are more than motivators, constantly on the lookout to light a lamp here and put out a raging fire there in the challenging environment of education.

Teachers are persons, dealing with persons. That relationship brings out the best and the worst in both. Love and hate, zeal and boredom, compassion and indifference, dignity and apathy compete for attention in the classroom. A Christian teacher is expected not only to understand this competition, but also to build better teacher-student relationships.

How can this be done? Three steps would help.

**Being yourself.** Strive to be genuine and authentic. Nothing turns off students like pretension and hypocrisy. While recognizing your strengths and limitations, avoid projecting either an exalted or an impoverished view of self. Strength is empowerment to excel. Limitation points to an assignment for the future, something to be overcome if possible by that extra training or struggle or to be accepted by claiming God's assurance, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, RSV).

**Knowing.** Knowledge is power. A teacher who has knowledge in terms of content, communication, and power has an enviable advantage. But one kind of knowledge is infinitely superior and can empower the teacher to build bridges toward the most difficult of students. Knowing God personally and experientially provides a totally different perspective on teaching and students. Consider Jesus. The secret of His success as a teacher lay not so much in the information He conveyed but in the transformation He was able to bring about in His hearers. A prostitute discovers she is a child of God. A leper finds that the image of God is latent in him. A paralytic learns the meaning of leaping for joy. Jesus could transform people because He lived a life with twin links—to people and to God. A Christian teacher who does not know God personally, does not take the time to talk to Him every day, does not read His Word or have a personal burden for every student within reach is in the wrong business. No amount of training can substitute for the transforming touch that comes from an experience with God.

**Modeling.** If knowledge is power, example is even more powerful. What defined Jesus as the Master Teacher was His life. "What He taught, He was" is the way Ellen White describes His commanding influence as a Teacher (*Education*, p. 78). No contradictions. No pretensions. No wavering. When a student sees in a teacher a role model to emulate, a person in whom to confide, a rock of strength to lean on, he or she has found the meaning of Christian education and the magnetic pull of Christian relationship.

The teacher always makes the difference.—John Fowler.



*John Fowler*

*In July 1995, Dr. John Fowler was elected Associate Director of Education for the General Conference of SDA in Silver Spring, Maryland. Previous positions he has held include Director of Education for the Southern Asia Division of SDA and Associate Editor of Ministry magazine.*