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An Old Friend in a New Country

I have just returned from my first accreditation visit to the South Pacific as associate director of education for the General Conference. After a brief visit to Avondale College, we found Sonoma College's 400 students from Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, and Polynesia studying in a lush garden-like campus, dusted with ash from the eruption of Mt. Tavorvur two weeks earlier.



Lisa M. Beardsley

Next, I traveled to Port Moresby for an accreditation site visit at Pacific Adventist University, where most of the 500 students study education, theology, or business. I was especially anticipating this leg of our journey because the vice chancellor and I had studied together in the Philippines. I had last spent time with Nemani Tausere and his pretty Tahitian wife, Francy, at Fulton College in Fiji about six years ago, when he was principal and I was the graduation speaker. What a joy it was to share evening tea with these dear old friends in a new country.

I have found that the relationships formed while at Adventist schools are helping me be more effective in my work around the world. I never dreamed fellow students would occupy significant positions of leadership all over the world and thereby provide an important network of influence.

Not only was I able to renew old friendships, but I also made new ones, such as with the students we met for interviews (see group picture on page 47). I also had the happy fortune of working with Barry Hill, director of education for the South Pacific Division. Our partnership was cemented over a week of long days evaluating the schools, writing and editing reports, and sharing many a laugh.



Author on swinging bridge over Dora Creek at Avondale College in Australia

Prestigious universities have long understood that the success of their graduates later in life depends not only on academics but also on the social networks created while at school. Beyond the three R's of reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic is the fourth R of relationships. Richard Osborn (now president of Pacific Union College) a few years ago introduced me to the fourth R by giving me a book by Parker Palmer.¹ As teachers foster the development of a relationship between the student and the academic subject, they also can create personal relationships with students that make the classroom a fun and safe place to learn.



Nemani Tausere and his wife Françoise Angele

According to Vygotsky,² experiencing a relationship in which knowledge is mutually constructed is fundamental to the development of human cognition. Palmer contends that "knowing of any sort is relational, animated by a desire to come into deeper community with what we know." He elaborates: "Knowing is how we make community with the unavailable other, with realities that would elude us without the connective tissue of knowledge. Knowing is a human way to seek relationship and, in the process, to have encounters and exchanges that will inevitably alter us. At its deepest reaches, knowing is always communal."³ By experiencing the classroom as a safe place in which to explore, students can begin to discover truth for themselves. To enter into that environment with students while developing their proficiency is the Christian educator's challenge. It will only be

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later in life that students will realize the value of their networks and sense how the quality of their relationships affects their success and satisfaction in work and life. Social scientists describe this as the building of social capital.

It need not be an either/or proposition: what you know versus who you know. But isn't the most important reason for Adventist education to help students develop a relationship with God and their Savior, and thereby become more like they were created to be? The significance of this is emphasized in the prayer of Christ: "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:25, 26, NIV).

So perhaps who you get to know while in school may be most important



Students at Pacific Adventist University, Papua New Guinea

after all. Imagine the thrill of finding out that you have an Old Friend in that New Country.—Lisa M. Beardsley.

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