



Faith-Ann McGarrell

While rereading *True Education* several months ago, a familiar passage reminded me of Mr. Gatewood:¹ “Teachers . . . should possess not only strength but breadth of mind; they should be not only whole-souled but large hearted.”² I entered the 4th grade at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School late in September, weeks after the official start of the school year. My parents had just moved our family from Georgetown, Guyana, to Berrien Springs, Michigan—from the equator to what felt like the Arctic. Being a quiet child, recently immigrated to the United States and adapting to a new school culture, I did not readily converse with adults other than my parents—much less teachers. Mr. Gatewood, who was not my teacher, somehow knew my name and my parents, and readily greeted me each morning with a hearty “And how is Faith-Ann this morning?”

This simple act created a sense of fitting in and belonging at a time when navigating the transition to a new culture seemed overwhelming.³

I soon learned that Mr. Gatewood’s whole heart was intertwined with his students—from the shy ones to those who had much to say. He made it his mission to be “large hearted” and “whole-souled” with his time, interest, and resources.

I later volunteered and worked in Mr. Gatewood’s classroom emptying trash cans, vacuuming, cleaning chalkboards and erasers, grading papers, and tutoring.⁴ He often “volunteered” me for activities I would not have pursued on my own—working in the school’s main office during the summer, assisting with registration, and tutoring. His favorite cheer was: “I know you can do it!” When asked what I would study in college,

I presented several choices to which he chuckled and said, “I think you’re going to be a teacher.” I, of course, disagreed.

Yet, in subsequent years I found myself gravitating toward teacher-like activities: tutoring, teaching Sabbath school, and working as a reader for various professors. Before I knew it, I was passionately pursuing teaching as my profession. One Sabbath, 15 years after high school graduation, at Pioneer Memorial Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan, I saw a familiar profile. It was Mr. Gatewood! I had the privilege of “surprising” him with the news that I had, indeed, become a teacher. He laughed and said with confidence “I knew it!”

Teaching is comprised of more than content knowledge. Parker Palmer in his classic *The Courage to Teach* says: “Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together.”⁵ He continues: “. . . teaching holds a mirror

to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.”⁶

Teaching, then, is a sacred act. It is not just about completing lesson plans, grading student work, or supervising students in various activities; it is more than maintaining one’s standing in a given community or enjoying the perks of the profession; instead, it is living in the present and simultaneously, the future.⁷ It involves guarding the condition of soul for it has a marked impact on the lives of those within the teacher’s care.

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Souled
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Teachers are to “. . . consider the highest good of their students as individuals, the duties that life will lay on them, the service it requires, and the preparation demanded.”⁸ This is not a humanly directed task; it requires partnership with the divine—God, through the Holy Spirit. To partner with the divine is a “noble work”⁹—one of building character, both teacher and student, and it is work that “cannot be completed in this life, but will be continued in the life to come.”¹⁰

And yet, this is what we as Seventh-day Adventist Christian educators are called to do every day! Individually and collectively, we engage in thinking about how best to prepare our students to live in this world, while anticipating a future world. When we look at our students, do we see them as they are, or as what they can become? Do we prepare them for the world in which they live, or the world they will inhabit 10, 15, or 20 years into the future? What skills and dispositions will we need to focus on so that we can empower them to succeed? And, when we look in the mirror, what will we do with what we see reflected there?

The task may seem difficult and overwhelming; however, we have help. We have a cheerleader who says “You can do it!” In Jeremiah, we’re told: “Call to Me, and I will answer you” (Jeremiah 33:3 NIV),¹¹ and in James we’re reminded that “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all” (James 1:5, NIV). From navigating the challenges of teaching in a postmodern world (John Wesley Taylor V) to following after the Master Teacher (Laszlo Gallusz) or wrestling with scientific discovery (Leonard Brand and Carl Person), we have the assurance of divine assistance. And when implementing new strategies or programs (Barbara Fisher, R. Lee Davidson and Tammy Overstreet, and Renard and Jayne Ann Doneskey), we have the assurance of wisdom and insight. Above all, when interacting with our students, let’s see them as God sees us now and as Mr. Gatewood saw the countless children that crossed his path each day—as characters fit for the kingdom. With

whole-souled, large-hearted devotion, we can each continue to grow in Him, and “. . . more fully to reflect . . . the light of the knowledge of His glory”¹² for eternity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Guy Larry Gatewood taught 5th and 6th grade at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School, Berrien Springs, Michigan.
2. Ellen G. White, *True Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2000), p. 171.
3. The significance of not only remembering names, but also pronouncing them correctly, is not lost on students and contributes to their sense of belonging and acceptance within the community of learners. The act of taking the time is what counts. See Corey Mitchell’s commentary, “A Teacher Mispronouncing a Student’s Name Can Have a Lasting Impact,” *The Rundown* (May 16, 2016): <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/a-teacher-mispronouncing-a-students-name-can-have-a-lasting-impact/#.Vzs1c5IEbhE.mailto>. Another useful resource is <https://www.name-coach.com/>, a program designed to assist in name pronunciation.
4. Volunteering in Mr. Gatewood’s classroom helped me complete the Pathfinder Investiture Achievement program: <http://www.pathfinderonline.org/classes/overview>. I later worked as his reader until graduating from high school.
5. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), p. 2.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
7. White, *True Education*, op. cit., p. 174.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Ellen White’s expansive thoughts on the value of seeing our students as what they might become are well stated in *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* where she encourages every teacher to “see in every pupil the handiwork of God—a candidate for immortal honors. He [the teacher] should seek so to educate, train, and discipline the youth that each may reach the high standard of excellence to which God calls him [or her]” (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1943), p. 229.
11. Jeremiah 33:3; James 1:5. All Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
12. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903), p. 22.

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