



Faith-Ann A. McGarrell

What Makes **the Difference?**

I was recently reminded of Parker Palmer's well-known quotation, "We teach who we are,"¹ and I paused to ask myself, "Who am I, really, as an Adventist educator? What makes me different or unique from others engaged in this noble profession?" I think we should all ask ourselves these questions regularly. The answers can radically shift our perspective and keep us focused on *why* we do what we do.

On the surface, educators share similar passions. Most are excited about their specific content areas, feel the thrill of satisfaction after mastering various instructional techniques, and experience "ah ha" moments when an assessment approach works well and reveals some eye-opening insight. We love our students; they energize and challenge us. We share in their delight as their eyes light up in discovery. Their desire to learn about themselves, their communities, and their place in this world feeds our purpose.

However, as Adventist educators, we must see our roles, whether teaching or serving as educational administrators, as more than a profession or a job. The call to the education ministry is sacred (Ephesians 4:11-16). And responding to that invitation demands a commitment to the One who calls. In addition to the recurring tasks of planning lessons, grading papers, supervising students, working with our fellow educators, partnering with parents and church members, maintaining certifications, pursuing professional development, and interacting with our local communities, we have a spiritual calling that wholly depends on our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Called to Reflect Christ

We are called to reflect Christ's character, which requires spending time in God's presence. Time in Christ's presence—reading the Word, conversing in prayer, interacting with others, and spending time in nature observing His handiwork—helps smooth our

rough edges. Daily, we recognize our need for God and appreciate the gifts of His compassion, grace, and mercy; we learn the importance of humble service and seek after that which is pure and noble (Philippians 4:8). We strive to be peacemakers in a world charged with conflict and energized by discontent (Matthew 5:3-10). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12, NIV).² Matthew also records Christ's words, which reflect what happens when we follow Him: "'You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven'" (Matthew 5:14-16). An interesting thing about light: The best surfaces for pure reflection are smooth—glass, mirrors, or polished metals.³ Like Job, we can trust that all we learn in our relationship with God will polish and refine our characters like pure gold (Job 23:10). A personal relationship with Christ changes who we are! It revolutionizes our worldview and reshapes our understanding of our purpose.

Called to Point Others to Jesus

Just as Christ desires the best and highest for us, as Adventist educators, we must desire the same for our students, colleagues, and those with whom we interact. To achieve this, we must embrace our personal responsibility to keep our daily connection with Christ strong, pursuing it with the same level of intentionality put into maintaining certificates, degrees, licenses, or other aspects of professional growth. All are essential as we fulfill our responsibilities to those students in our care and others we encounter. This level of conscious, intentional interaction is no easy task. Ellen White, reflecting on what it takes to maintain this level of commitment to the profession, wrote, "[Teachers] will spare no pains to reach the highest standard of excellence. All that they desire their students to become, they will themselves strive

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to be.”⁴ She closed this chapter with the observation that the more we strive toward this goal, the more we will ask ourselves: “Who is sufficient for these things?” Indeed, the task is mammoth, the call sobering.

As a Christian educator, I believe that to teach who we are, we must intentionally nurture our spiritual growth as diligently as we nurture our professional growth. Palmer sums up this process by saying, “. . . good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.”⁵ We are the living examples of what it looks like to follow Jesus that our students and those with whom we interact daily.

And ultimately, this is what Adventist education seeks to accomplish. Adventist education, at its foundation, is about introducing Jesus to all who come within the walls of our schools. In the book *Educating for Eternity*, George Knight emphasizes that “[t]he primary aim of Christian education in the school, the home, and the church is to lead people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.”⁶ To engage wholeheartedly in teaching who we are, we must first know who we are in Christ and allow the transformation to take place in our own lives daily. And from this experience, we offer the same opportunity as we write curriculum, deliver instruction, plan assessments, manage staff, create budgets, implement policies, initiate schoolwide plans, and many other teaching and administrative tasks.

Called to Trust in Divine Power

Thankfully, we have promised assistance. We do not do this alone. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them” (John 6:44). Paul captured this sentiment by reminding us that without the life-transforming love that comes from God, we are but “a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1). Words matter, but ultimately, the transformation comes from what God does in each heart to transform our characters into a reflection of His. We have a limited, temporal vision of how our lives will impact the lives of others: “for now we see only a reflection as in a mirror” (1 Corinthians 13:12). For this reason, “we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). We have everything we need to do the work Christ calls us to do (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

The articles in this issue present various aspects of Adventist education. Each one makes a difference in students’ lives in our schools and even after they leave.

- Kathleen Forbis et al. examine the influential role mentors can have in the teaching lives of beginning teachers. A well-mentored teacher will likely remain in the profession and impact students’ lives positively.
- Richard A. Sabuin and John Wesley Taylor V ex-

plore the essentials of creating a spiritual master plan and offer a guide for doing so. The guide is already used on Adventist college and university campuses and in many secondary schools and can be readily adapted for primary schools.

- Glynis Bradfield and Ray McAllister address the role of character and integrity building in promoting strategies to maximize academic integrity in the online learning environment.

- In the Best Practices at Work feature section, Shondell DeVelde explores the value of nutrition awareness.

- The three remaining articles continue our emphasis on STEM. Ryan T. Hayes and D. David Nowack explore the use of chemistry to bolster Adventist science education and knowledge of God’s creation. Katherine Koudele tackles the proverbial “blueprint” for Adventist education from the agricultural perspective, and Melodie Anne Reed Williams provides a collection of engineering resources that can be used to build STEM awareness.

We hope the articles in this issue stimulate your thinking about the profession and inspire innovative approaches to planning content and improving instruction, and to doing so with faith and learning as the foundation.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), ix.
2. All Scripture references in this editorial are quoted from the *New International Version* of the Bible. New International Version (NIV). Holy Bible New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
3. Thomas J. Fellers and Michael W. Davidson, “Introduction to the Reflection of Light” (n.d.): <https://www.olympus-lifescience.com/en/microscope-resource/primer/lightandcolor/reflectionintro/>.
4. Ellen G. White, *True Education: An Adaptation of Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000), 174.
5. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 10.
6. George R. Knight, *Educating for Eternity: A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2016), 70.



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