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# What Makes **the Difference?**

I was recently reminded of Parker Palmer's well-known quotation, "We teach who we are,"<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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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