



# Leading the Journey

## An E-newsletter on EXCELLENCE in Leadership

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**Berit von Pohle**  
Director of Education  
Pacific Union Conference



**Ed Boyatt**  
Retired educator with 32  
years in administration

**Albert Miller**  
Associate Superintendent  
Northern California  
Conference

**Rob Fenderson**  
Principal  
Redwood Adventist  
Academy

**Gale Crosby**  
Vice-President  
for Education  
Oregon Conference

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### Meaningful Student Relationships

*Albert Miller*

Every time I answer the phone at my desk I see the following quote: “A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world.” It is a constant reminder that the only way to truly get to know students whose parents have entrusted them to us, is to meet them in their world, not mine. Few “meaningful” conversations take place with students in my office even though my door is always open and students walk in whenever they wish. Some have visited in my office, but it is mostly just to say hi and then move on.

Getting to know students outside the classroom setting is the longest lasting, most effective way to have an impact on their lives. If you’re “lucky” enough to also teach, you have probably noticed that your ability to reach kids in the classroom is enhanced by the interactions you have with them outside the classroom,

not the other way around. At any school, the opportunities to interact with students outside the classroom are numerous and you’ll have to choose at times. But the more of those activities that you can take advantage of the better the relationships will be. Field trips, sports trips, class outings, Saturday night activities, having the students over to your house for a Friday night vespers or Saturday night games, maybe just a trip to Taco Bell, driving the bus for tours, all of these are opportunities to get to know students on a personal level and then know how to tailor your interactions with them later.

Few students remember much of the activities in our classrooms. What they remember most are the personal relationships that are formed and those are best formed outside our offices and classrooms. I’ve read that an administrator shouldn’t spend more than 30% of their time at their desk. Some days that’s hard to do. But the closer we come to accomplishing these friendships, the more meaningful and effective our work will become. ☸

### On Being a Student-Centered Administrator

*Rob Fenderson*

A school’s climate is determined to a great extent by how the administrator views his or her role. As a student-centered administrator, I believe the following to be true:

**Relationships trump rules.** This does not mean there are no rules. It means that the rules are there to **protect** relationships. It also means that when rules are broken every effort is made to mend and repair broken relationships. When dealing with rules and discipline, confrontation is never likely to be effective. Respect a student’s dignity by dealing with issues in the same way you’d like your mistakes to be dealt with. As much as possible, let consequences be natural ones.

**Encourage students to lead, but be a mentor as well.** Students learn leadership skills by leading, making mistakes, and leading again (just like the rest of us!). Be there to celebrate successes, help fix mistakes, and give encouragement to try again. Avoid “bailing out”, but be there for support.

**Nothing takes the place of spending time with students.** Those extra activities that you support and

sponsor say a lot. You can’t “fake” this one. You either spend time with them or you don’t. The trips you take, the sports events you attend, the music groups you chaperone, these are all incredible opportunities to make a difference in students’ lives and develop relationships that enhance the learning environment when you’re back on campus.

**I say “yes” if I can, “no” if I must.** Enough said.

**Don’t let your ego get in the way.** I regularly remind myself of a favorite G.K. Chesterton quote, “Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly”. Self-importance can get in the way of relationships. This does NOT mean we take our responsibilities lightly, but that we don’t take **ourselves** too seriously.

**Make it fun!** Have you ever noticed how hard people are willing to work when they’re having fun? And that goes for us as well as our students. The following quote from famed author James Michener says it best: “The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his information and his recreation, his love and his religion. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence at whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him he’s always doing both.” ☸

**Mission: Strengthening Adventist education one leader at a time**

# Student-Centered Learning

Ed Boyatt

Adventist educators believe that students, not teachers, are at the center of the learning process. Quality teachers are still the most important asset in Adventist education, but the role of today's professional teacher is not a "sage on the stage, but the guide on the side."

In a teacher-centered classroom, a teacher is the most active while students are passive and receptive. This passivity changes when students take more responsibility for their learning. We should shift away from a teacher being the primary source for knowledge. The main function of a student in the past was to memorize what the teacher says is important. But when teachers believe in a constructivist-learning model of learning, students become researchers and begin discovering for themselves. Inquiry and engagement are awakened when students are active participants in the learning process.

The master teacher now becomes the master learner. Students now see their teacher modeling how expert learners approach a learning task. This modeling is essential as we address the goal of students becoming life-long learners. The why and the how of learning is just as valuable as the content we wish students to understand.

This is why Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a goal of the Pacific Union. DI is student centered. DI focuses on the individual student rather than the whole class structure. When teachers respect the learning preferences and level of achievement of each student, they will provide multiple ways to reach learning outcomes. Fast learners will receive enrichment while slower learners will be remediated. Then we can say that instruction is differentiated.

The challenge for the Adventist principal is to promote DI in their faculty meetings and their supervision of learning. I am confident that Adventist education can model student-centered learning while developing the skills of differentiating the learning process. Students come first. That is why we are educators. ☩

# Why Students Come First

Gale Crosby

Her name was Jill and her statement caught my attention. "I told my Dad how you've been teaching." She said it in an I-caught-you-and-told-on-you tone of voice. "In fact, I told him you've given us an assignment every time we meet for class, including test days." It was my first year of teaching, so Jill's statement caught me off guard.

She went on to inform me that she had told her father my tests were tough, including essay questions, which she was quite certain were not allowed in an Algebra class. Not to mention my use of surprise quizzes.

When she finally slowed down a bit, I summoned up my courage and asked, "And what did your father say?"

By that time, I was envisioning a meeting with the principal to review my teaching methods or perhaps a school-wide parent meeting to talk about, well, me.

Jill lowered her head, looked at the floor and said, "Well, my dad said...(she paused long enough for me to contemplate starting a new career)...my dad said...he loves you. In fact, he said if I complain anymore about your class he'd personally double my assignments and that your class was exactly what I needed to learn some valuable life lessons. So I guess I'd better get going so I can start on my assignment. See you tomorrow." And with that she was gone.

Jill is exactly why students come first. What I was trying to teach Jill, and what we all teach each of our students goes way beyond assignments, surprise quizzes and hard tests. It is amazingly this: each one of our students is a living son or daughter of a loving God,

# Why Are We Doing This?

*Leadership, NAD Principals' Handbook (excerpt)*

The principal should remember the school program exists to serve the needs of students. In planning the program, the following considerations are to have high priority:

- Create and maintain a school climate conducive to student learning.
- Lead in the formulation, implementation, and enforcement of school rules and regulations that foster student learning.
- Model consistent fairness in dealing with parents, staff, and students, which supports student learning.
- Provide leadership in the development,

who wants them to be His personal friend, who wants to restore them into His very image. God wants our students (and you and I) to look like Him, to act like Him and to treat others like He treats us. Our goal in SDA Education is to produce students who are "just like Jesus".

Students come first because of the value Jesus places on each one of us. Because the amazing God of the universe put you first, ahead of even the needs and wishes of His own Son. When we truly realize how much God values us, then we are motivated to value our students, putting their needs first in our schools.

Ellen White's comment about teachers has given me cause to pause: "We (as teachers) should be what we would have our students become." We, as SDA educators, have become saved, have become an integral part of His plan of salvation and have become 'just like Jesus' and yes, that is indeed what we want our students to become.

When we take on the title of 'teacher' we are taking on the very title Jesus loved to be called when He was on earth. When we work with young people, we are doing what Jesus took delight in doing when He was here. We are literally doing the work of Jesus Christ when we become SDA Christian Teachers.

At the start of this school year, it is good to be reminded of **why students come first** in our schools. It is simply this: There will be young people this school year who will choose to live forever with a loving God in a perfect place because of you.

It will be our unimaginable privilege to walk hand in hand into a world made new with each child who we have had the honor of teaching. Now go and do and be 'just like Jesus'. ☩

coordination, and implementation of a balanced curricular program to ensure student learning for all.

- Recognize that:
  - \* If it is good for students, then it is probably good for the school.
  - \* If there is no fun in it, there is not going to be any long-term learning.
  - \* Students are more important than teachers.
  - \* Teachers are more important than principals.
  - \* Principals are only important when they are helping students and teachers. ☩