



## Lessons Learned as a New Teacher

By Wes Eby, Global Representative

### Introduction

I always knew I would be a teacher. The only career I ever considered was education. I dreamed of it, talked about it, planned for it. In high school, my heroes taught the social studies and English classes. When I enrolled in college, I declared history as my major with double minors in English and education. Even when a freshman counselor attempted to guide me into four different career choices, I rejected his advice and pursued my goal. After graduation, with diplomas in hand, my fiancée and I married on a gorgeous August evening. Three weeks later, we migrated to a tiny fishing village in the Southeast to begin teaching careers.

### First-Year Teacher Lessons

Before saying anything else, I confess to these three lessons: (1) teaching was hard work; (2) teaching was not fun; (3) maybe I missed my calling and teaching was not for me. Negative? Indeed! Disheartening? Absolutely! Please allow me to explain.

My wife, Roberta, and I accepted jobs in a location that shall remain nameless. My assignment? A seventh-grade, self-contained class of 30 students. My classroom? A former office that had been designed for no more than three administrators. The students' desks lined three walls and filled the space in between, barely leaving room for aisles. My antique-looking desk at the front crowded the area by the one small chalkboard. Can you believe that the school did not provide

me with teacher's editions of the textbooks? In fact, I had to "shop" and pay for a set of used texts as a basis for instruction. What a way to begin!

The school lacked discipline throughout all grades 1-12. For example, at the first assembly program in the gym with junior and senior-high students, a girl walked to a mic on the stage to speak. But the rowdy student body prevented her from talking, even when the principal and other staff members tried in vain to quell the commotion. Another startling experience was when my wife and I attended one basketball game where students threw bang snaps or poppers onto the court during the game that exploded when stepped on. Firecrackers on the campus became a daily means of entertainment. And the administration did not enforce an end to this mischief until, during the Christmas banquet for seniors and faculty, a student threw a firecracker at the speaker's table and it exploded in the face of the senior class president. Shocking behavior!

Although I achieved discipline in my classroom, I did not feel support from the school administrators. Yet, I had my share of challenges. One day, a student's father barged into our classroom after lunch and pulled back his arm, fist clenched, ready to strike me. I admit that as a young, 21-year-old, novice teacher, my body language signaled my intense fear as I waited for the punch. Only by the grace of God was the irate parent calmed down enough to walk with me to the principal's office for a conference, where he learned his son had greatly stretched the truth about an earlier incident.

Have I shared enough to be convincing of the three lessons stated earlier? Teaching was hard and not fun at all. That year, I often wondered if I had chosen the right occupation.

Before that year ended, I had written letters to four other school districts about the possibility of employment. When nothing surfaced from those inquiries, I nervously approached the assistant superintendent of personnel in the district where we were teaching. Although the deadline had passed for transfers within the district, he listened to my impassioned plea for a change. He then offered me a choice of four schools, all junior-high level. My reply: I want a school that has a reputation for strong discipline. And he obliged. Even though the school required a longer drive than the other options, I gladly accepted.

And that leads me to the second part of my "saga."

### **Second-Year Teacher Lessons**

Again, I will start with three lessons learned: (1) teaching was a snap; (2) teaching was a delight; (3) I knew the Lord called me to be a teacher. Positive? Indeed! Miraculous? Absolutely! Briefly, here is the "why" of this 180-degree turnaround.

At the start of my second year, I walked into an elementary school where the highest level was the seventh grade. A new junior-high building was being constructed on adjacent property, and the elementary school provided space for five self-contained, seventh-grade classes until the new building could be occupied. One of those five classes served as my "home" for the next two years.

The classroom was spacious, more than adequate for the 28 students, with a large separate “coat closet.” Two walls contained huge chalkboards. And the school provided me with teacher’s editions of textbooks. What an improvement in the setting!

The students had been classmates for the previous six years, so they knew each other well. The parents were also well acquainted. In the first week, I had several moms offer to be room mothers. They supported our class with parties, activities, and field trips. Whatever the need, the parents pitched in wholeheartedly. The school had an active parent-teacher organization, and my class had 100 percent participation.

The students added such joy to my career and life. These smart kids were eager learners and well-disciplined who challenged me as I worked to keep up with them. Parents indicated their pleasure and amazement as they observed their children diagramming compound and complex sentences on our large chalkboards. In our study of world history, during a unit on the early Greek civilization, the students created a Greek newspaper with sections for news, fashion, sports, classified ads, and comics. When completed, we posted the newspaper on the front foyer bulletin board for the entire school to enjoy. At Thanksgiving time, the class divided into two groups and wrote original dramas—one about the first Thanksgiving and the other about early Greek life. The students wrote, cast, costumed, and presented the plays for parents with little direction from me. I simply gloated in their achievement. At the end of the year when the class took the required standardized achievement test, all but five scored above grade level and six scored at the eleventh grade.

Is this enough proof for why I proclaim that the lessons learned that year include teaching is a snap and a delight? And why did my attitude toward teaching make a complete about-face?

## **Conclusion**

I have been a life-long educator even after I changed careers to become a writer and editor. Yet, I continued to teach—graduate classes in the evening or adult education for immigrants learning English in a church setting. My teaching contexts often involve helping Nazarenes gain a better understanding of becoming global Christians by partnering with God in His mission to redeem the world. For those of us whose calling is teaching, we never really retire.

In the book of Acts, we read about the early Christians and their role as educators. “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (5:42, NIV, emphasis added). The phrase “never stopped teaching” has long impressed me that retirement is not an option. As long as God allows me to breathe daily and think clearly, I’ll continue to teach. Even now as I share lessons learned as a novice teacher many decades ago, I’m still fulfilling my childhood dream.

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