

**E**xcited about his first college teaching job, Dr. C enthusiastically introduced himself to his freshman English class. He had completed his doctorate at a distinguished Midwestern university the preceding summer, and felt excited about the prospect of delivering carefully prepared lectures to eager students.

Things didn't go so well for Dr. C. When students looked at the required reading list, they nearly fainted. Many ran to the registrar to drop the class. Word got out quickly that Dr. C was a difficult teacher, and students did everything they could to avoid his courses. His freshman English class enrolled only 13 students the second semester, while 62 students signed up for the other section of freshman English taught at the same time.

It wasn't only that Dr. C required a lot of work. Students said his classes were boring, and that it was difficult to take good notes from his fast-paced, long, and detailed lectures. When Dr. C looked at his student evaluation forms at the end of his first quarter of teaching, he was devastated. While the students rated his knowledge of the subject matter as excellent, they felt his teaching needed improvement in every other way.

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Dr. C could not understand what had happened. He had tried to teach exactly as had the teachers he so admired in graduate school. Many of them had presented lectures consisting of drafts of chapters from forthcoming books. Although they demonstrated impressive scholarship, these lectures were so technical and detailed that they often left even graduate students more baffled than enlightened.

Dr. C didn't understand that to teach effectively one has to understand the process of teaching and learning, in addition to the subject matter. To launch a successful teaching career, the young professor needed to seek advice from successful teachers, attend seminars on college teaching,

and take classes in educational methodology. From these sources he would learn that lectures are not always the best way to teach college students. He must search for creative alternatives. For example, he discovered that good questioning techniques could stimulate productive discussion and increase learning.

Teaching college students requires an understanding of adult learners. A typical class might consist of students in their late teens and early twenties, defined not as adolescents but as young adults.<sup>1</sup>

Increasingly, college classes also include some older adults as well. In recent years SDA colleges, like public institutions, have enrolled an increasing number of older students who are returning to school to complete their degrees or to take additional classwork. Consequently, it would have been helpful for someone like Dr. C to study characteristics of adult learners and ways to increase student participation in class discussions.

Helpful concepts from research about teaching college students include the following suggestions:

1. College students, as adults, have a great deal of first-hand experience. They learn best when helped to convert this experience into learning.<sup>2</sup>
2. Adults learn best when they are



actively involved in the learning process. If allowed to go to sleep, they will. Keeping them actively involved will enhance learning and make the classroom experience more enjoyable. Appropriate questioning techniques can greatly increase active participation in the lecture/discussion.<sup>3</sup>

3. Adult learners are different from younger students and from one another. Adults become more unique the older they get.<sup>4</sup> Varying teaching methods will help guarantee success for students with various learning styles.

4. College students have many decisions to make and problems to solve. They appreciate problem-centered approaches to learning. They want the material to be practical and to have ready application to day-to-day living.

5. Adult students achieve more when they accept responsibility for their own learning. This may mean that students sometimes assist in choosing course objectives, materials, and even methods of evaluation. It might require a teacher to begin the course without a completed syllabus—or at least to include a statement inviting students to provide input on the class schedule.

6. Adults, like students of any age, need to feel important, successful, and valued. College students have tender

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## *Lectures are not always the best way to teach college students.*

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egos. They fear giving a wrong answer or appearing stupid to the rest of the class. The way the teacher asks questions and responds to students' answers can enhance learning and increase student involvement.

7. Adults have difficulty remaining focused on the teacher's lecture. They have numerous preoccupations that constantly distract them from the learning process. Many are working full-time or part time and have to juggle work and home responsibilities. Accordingly, their classroom experience must be orchestrated carefully. Once their attention is lost, the teacher may never get it back.

8. Adult students learn almost as much from one another as from their teacher. They are more likely to remember something a class member has said than something the teacher said. Encouraging class participation, therefore, can broaden the students' knowledge while actively involving

them in the learning process.

Many adult students have a wealth of information and experience that they should be encouraged to share with the class. This can enrich both the students' and the teacher's interaction with the classroom.

Although research has shown that lecturing is one of the least effective teaching techniques, most of us still expect that the good teacher will come to class with carefully prepared lectures to deliver! This expectation needs to be reevaluated. Teachers must examine the amount of class time they spend lecturing, and the amount of time students spend actively learning and sharing with one another.

### **Improve Class Discussions**

Good class discussions are essential to optimal learning in the college classroom. In fact, learning how to conduct productive classroom discussion will do more to improve classroom effectiveness than any other skill the college teacher could master. The techniques listed below will help you improve discussions in your classes:

### **Make Each Person Feel Valuable**

Be sure to express appreciation for each student's contribution to the discussion. Say "Thank you for sharing

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## ***Teaching college students requires an understanding of adult learners.***

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that insight," "Thank you for your comment (or question)," or "That is a good question." This will encourage group participation and active involvement by even shy or reluctant students.

As class progresses, listen closely to the students' comments and questions. After the first few sessions, encourage students to hand in written questions or comments if they feel unsure or puzzled about a certain aspect of the class discussion or the textbook. This can help you bridge gaps in the students' informational background. It will also increase their ability and willingness to participate in the discussion.

Several years ago I gave a lecture on breastfeeding to a family health class at Loma Linda University. The students were upperclassmen, so I assumed a basic knowledge of human anatomy.

A young man in the back row raised his hand. "This is probably a stupid question," he said, "but how does the milk get out of the woman's breast? Do you have to poke a hole in the nipple?"

Several humorous answers sprang to mind. However, I knew that it had taken courage for him to ask the question. If I treated his inquiry flippantly or condescendingly he would hesitate to speak in class again.

Therefore I responded very matter-of-factly, describing the structure and function of the human breast.

No one snickered, the student's dignity remained intact, and he continued to feel comfortable about asking questions in class. The affirming climate of the discussion had helped broaden this student's—and others'—understanding of the topic.

### **Discourage Students From Blurting Out Answers**

This principle is well known in elementary school teaching, but college teachers sometimes forget that the technique is valid in higher education as well.

Class members can be trained to allow some time after your question for thinking, and then, after a pause, to raise their hands or let you call on someone for the answer. A gentle reminder to wait just a moment before answering will give everyone in

the group time to consider the issue.

The result? More thoughtful answers, and a wider range of students who participate, rather than only the ones who always blurt out whatever comes into their head.

To remind students to take a few seconds before answering, structure questions with the following introductions: "I will call on one of you to answer this question after you have had a chance to think about it for a minute," or "Raise your hand if you can tell me..."

### **Wait Before Calling for Answers**

Recent research indicates that teachers usually wait only one or two seconds for an answer. A more effective waiting time after asking questions would be at least three to five seconds.<sup>5</sup> If you allow adequate wait-

ing time, students are likely to increase (1) the length and appropriateness of their response, (2) their own spontaneously initiated questions, and (3) their interactions with one another.<sup>6</sup>

### **Focus the Discussion**

As you review your plans for teaching the class, decide how much time you will devote to each topic. Time wasters must not be allowed to sidetrack or monopolize class discussion. As the teacher, you have the responsibility of guiding the class discussion and keeping the discussion under control. When you see interest waning because a student is monopolizing the discussion, use some prepared comments to bring the class back to the topic. For example, you might say, "I'm

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Medical Students at Los Angeles," December 14, 1949; E. A. Sutherland, tape recording of autobiographical address presented at the College of Medical Evangelists, 1946.

<sup>12</sup> For Sutherland's contribution, see Warren Sydney Ashworth, "Edward Alexander Sutherland and Seventh-day Adventist Educational Reform: The Denominational Years, 1890-1904," Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1986, pp. 141-160. For that of Griggs, see Arnold Colin Reve, "Frederick Griggs: Seventh-day Adventist Educator and Administrator," Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1984, passim.

<sup>13</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 864.

<sup>14</sup> John R. Mott, "Report of the Executive Committee," in *Student Mission Power: Report of the First International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A., February 26, 27, 28 and March 1, 1891* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library Pubs., 1979), p. 21-23; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 183.

<sup>15</sup> See S. A. Witmer, *The Bible College Story: Education With Dimension* (Manhasset, N.Y.: Channel Press, 1962), pp. 35-37; Sandeen, pp. 181-183; G. R. Knight, "Early Adventists and Education: Attitudes and Context," in G. R. Knight, ed., *Early Adventist Educators* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1983), pp. 7, 8. A similar Bible school movement was also developing in the holiness churches during the 1890s. See Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974), pp. 52, 54, 62ff.

<sup>16</sup> R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1979), p. 214.

<sup>17</sup> Roy Israel McGarrell, "The Historical Development of Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology, 1884-1895," Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1989, pp. 277-283.

<sup>18</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., p. 917.

<sup>19</sup> See Knight, *Early Adventist Educators*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, G. I. Butler, "What Use Shall We Make of Our School?" *Review and Herald* (July 21, 1874), p. 45.

## EFFECTIVE TEACHING TECHNIQUES FOR COLLEGE CLASSES

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sorry, but we do not have time to pursue that matter further just now. Perhaps we can return to it later."

### Let the Class Answer One Another's Questions

Adult students have often acquired in-depth information about a variety of topics. If encouraged to share their knowledge, they can enrich the class discussion. Call on those students who are knowledgeable about various subjects to share their expertise with the class. Be careful, however, that the tone of the discussion not become condescending or critical toward those who are less informed.

### Plan Good Questions

In addition to preparing subject matter, select some thought-pro-

voking questions to throw out to the class. This will encourage learning through active participation, and keep students involved and interested.

### Encourage Students to Personalize the Lesson Content

Questions should not be strictly theoretical or factual. Ask your students to make applications, based on their own experience and reading. In a Bible class you might ask, for example: "How would you have felt if you were Nicodemus?" or "What would you have thought if Jesus had asked you that question?"

### Make the Information Practical

College students want information that will help them attain their personal goals. Accordingly, look for ways to apply the principles of the topic to daily life and to the students' future professions.

### Use Closure

Closure is one of the most effective teaching tools—and according to many experts, one of the most neglected. One way to achieve closure, ask class members to talk about the learning experience they have just completed. To get them started, you might hand out slips of paper that begin:

"What was the most valuable thing you learned today?" or

"One thing I will do differently as a result of this class is..." or

"Based on what we did in class today, next week I want to learn more about..."

You can also ask them to share the responses with a neighbor or a small group. Verbalizing important concepts from the class discussion helps to reinforce the principles in their thinking.

### Conclusion

Dr. C survived his early failures and disappointments as a college teacher. He worked as hard on his method of teaching as on his material, and went on to become an outstanding teacher. Since he began to follow suggestions like the ones listed above, he has come to enjoy his teaching more. His students are more responsive and enthusiastic, and they are achieving a broader and deeper understanding of the topics discussed in class.

Recently Dr. C received a letter from a former student who enrolled at an Ivy League university. The student said that he initially doubted his ability to compete with graduates from elite colleges. But he soon found his undergraduate education at a small Adventist college was not a disadvantage at all. "In the classes I had from you and

a number of other professors," he wrote, "I developed a love of learning. I also received the study skills and information I needed to do well here."

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Alison Clarke-Steward, Marion Perlmutter, and Susan Friedman, *Lifelong Human Development* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1988), p. 442.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (Chicago: Association Press, 1980), pp. 12-30.

<sup>3</sup> Robert M. Gagne and Marcy Perkins Driscoll, *Essentials of Learning for Instruction* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1988), pp. 26-32.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey S. Turner and Donald B. Helms, *Lifespan Development* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1987), pp. 317, 435.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas L. Good and Jere E. Brophy, *Looking in Classrooms* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 493.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Ryan and James M. Cooper, *Those Who Can, Teach* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1988), p. 468.

## HOW DOES ADVENTIST EDUCATION AFFECT YOUTH ATTITUDES?

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some that I will fail to pass, and it bothers me thinking about it."

"My parents couldn't pay the academy bill, and they, almost crying, had to take me out. I have been going to church schools all my life and I wanted to finish in a church school."

"I would like to attend academy but with my dad and five kids it's just too expensive."

These are just a sample. As a church we have done a great deal with worthy student funds, but we need to do more. Would that we could put a Christian education within the grasp of every teenager who really wants it. As a church, we must seize this challenge to educational and financial leadership.

This article has offered some glimpses from the first year of a study that can help us redesign our approaches to religious education. With the succeeding years of research, the information should point toward some positive solutions. Working together as educators, parents, pastors, and church leaders we must find ways to keep more of our precious youth