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THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN *Student Resiliency*

She lumbered along alone, with her head bowed down—turtle-like. We happened to leave the lunchroom at the same time that day. I wasn't in a hurry, so we sat in the sun on a split-log bench by the volleyball court. I put down the sheet of paper that I was carrying, folded my hands, and shoulder to shoulder, listened to her story.

Her life was pointless, she said. She had no friends. Her parents were divorced. School was irrelevant. She was self-conscious about being overweight and slow. She felt trapped. The year before, when she was 15, she had jumped from her apartment balcony. A metal railing below deflected her fall. While it possibly saved her life, she survived with a fractured leg and hip. That's why she limped. If only she had died, she lamented. Her mood was lifeless and as damply cool as the log on which we sat.

Her future could be happy and rewarding, I rejoined. She had a gentle manner. Maybe she could become a preschool teacher. Or work with troubled teens. It would help that she could relate to their experiences. I told her how rewarding it was for me to be a teacher. But nothing I said seemed to lift her mood or head. The bell rang, ending the lunch period. I felt defeated. Despite our talk, she hadn't smiled or perked up at all. Prodded by the bell, she clumsily climbed to her feet and shuffled away, leaving me to reflect for a moment longer.

Her home situation was dismal. She was stuck. Her future did indeed look bleak. I wondered if my time and effort had been wasted with such a hopeless case. But when I picked up my sheet of paper—what a surprise! Underneath it the log, damp from a morning drizzle, was completely dry. The paper itself had gone droopy, but left behind was a phantom in the exact shape and size of the paper. Silently, unnoticeably, it had desiccated the surface of the log. That dry area was a sign that my caring enough to listen to a depressed teenage girl might have left its mark, too.

Which teacher hasn't been called accidentally "Mom" or "Dad" by a student? It's a well-earned Freudian slip. Besides parents, teachers are often the most stable and accessible adult presence in the life of young people. Teachers are the anchor in a current of shifting relationships for some. Research shows that the presence of caring adults in the life of a young person contributes to resiliency. The JOURNAL has published a number of articles on this topic.¹ A sense of "connectedness" protects students from high-risk behaviors such as alcohol or other types of substance abuse and engaging in sexual activity. It helps them cope with emotional distress and fosters hope. Among other positive benefits, resiliency is a protective buffer to help them withstand misfortunes, even when they result from unwise choices.

It may not feel like it, nor is there evidence of an immediate impact with every student. Nevertheless, teachers, guidance counselors, and others who work with young people *do* make a difference. "So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith."²

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For more information on ways that teachers contribute to resiliency, see: V. Bailey Gillespie, Gary L. Hopkins, and Stuart Tyner, "Making Students Bulletproof—Resilience, the Paradigm of Hope," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 61:02 (December 1998/January 1999):10-14; Gary L. Hopkins and Tim Gillespie, "Connectedness: The Key to Student Success," *ibid.* 65:03 (February/March 2003):30-33; Shawna Vyhmeister, "Building Resilient Christians: A Goal of Adventist Education," *ibid.* 69:02 (December 2006/January 2007):10-18. All these references are available online at <http://jae.adventist.org>.

2. Galatians 6:9, 10, *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.