

# THE LASTING IMPACT OF NAZARENE EDUCATORS

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*If you are planning for a year, sow rice. If you are planning for a decade, plant trees. If you are planning for eternity, teach a child. —Chinese Proverb*

What do you want to be when you grow up?" is a common question posed to children and teens alike. The typical responses are a nurse, a doctor, a policeman, or a teacher. Being an educator myself, if the answer is a teacher then I always ask, "Why? Why do you want to be a teacher?" The vast majority of the answers sound quite similar: "I had a teacher who helped me through a tough time." "I had a teacher who really ignited my love of learning." "I had a teacher who really helped me, and I want to be like that teacher." It is clear in these comments that a highly effective educator can change the world one student at a time, and a highly effective Christian educator can even change eternity.

The words "Preach at all times and if necessary use words" by St. Francis of Assisi illustrate the imperative of all Nazarene college and university faculty: Modeling is the most basic form of teaching. As Nazarene educators model their deeply held faith principles, their students learn how to interweave faith and learning in their classrooms. So if modeling a Wesleyan holiness perspective is our goal, then one question

that must be answered is, “What are the distinctive characteristics of a Nazarene educator?”

#### NAZARENE EDUCATORS ARE CHRISTIAN

Nazarene educators are Christian, first and foremost. This means that we believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and our personal Savior. This belief is the internal driving force that shapes the educational behaviors and attitudes modeled in and out of the classroom.

Being Christ-like means we are called to serve others. Just as Christ built relationships; served others; sacrificed time and energies; and ultimately gave Himself in love, so too, do Nazarene educators. Jesus said it best, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love



one another” (John 13:35). This love is displayed by service and commitment to students, other faculty members, parents, staff, and community members.

Nazarene educators model Christ-like attitudes. Jesus accepted all who came to Him at their point of need. The Samaritan woman, the beggars, the lepers, the Pharisees, the little children, and the disciples all experienced Christ’s love. This selfless love characterizes Nazarene educators also. Acceptance of all who come to our classes at their point of content and practice level helps the students move toward completing a course and program of study. Ultimately, Christ’s attitude of humility should be ours as Nazarene educators. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:3-4). The assurance that we

have been called to serve in love enables Nazarene educators to model Christ's love in action and attitude to all who enter our classrooms.

Nazarene educators are a called people. It is often stated that teaching is a calling. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets . . . and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service . . ." (Eph. 4:11-12). Educators are emissaries for God in the lives of others. It is very rewarding and fulfilling to invest energy and self into others, but at times this leads to exhaustion. Sometimes teaching is difficult. When the road is rough and the days are long, it is this sense of calling, an understanding of being a part of something much larger for the Kingdom of God that helps re-energize and re-focus Christian educators.



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#### NAZARENE EDUCATORS ARE A HOLINESS PEOPLE

Overall, Nazarene educators are an optimistic bunch. Colleen Wilcox said it best when she stated, "Teaching is the greatest act of optimism."<sup>14</sup> The teaching

cycle is such that at the beginning of each year, each semester, each quarter, each month, and each week, teachers and students can approach the learning process with an optimistic perspective. If a topic is not learned the first time, there is always another chance. Formative assessment is crucial in a continual cycle of improvement implemented in today's classrooms. Nazarene educators have an added level of academic optimism because we are holiness people.

John Wesley believed the good news found in the transformative work of the Holy Spirit gave a hopeful future to all who called on the name of Jesus Christ. Humans are not doomed to a life of sin, but rather God has the power to break the will of sin and transform each of us into His likeness. This ever renewing, ever optimistic and transformative view of grace, resides in the heart of Nazarene educators.

Learning in its truest form is transformative in nature. The belief that all students have worth and can learn is a foundational principle guiding differentiation—an instructional perspective prevalent in classrooms today. But this belief of the worth of each individual is especially important as educators view their students in a spiritual sense. Being able to embrace God's view of humanity, that no matter the economic level, the ethnicity, the family structure, the previous academic successes or failures, God's grace extends to each and every one, allows Nazarene educators to confidently approach each student with compassion, love, and humility. With this perspective, educators see each student as an individual with individual strengths, talents, and needs.

As holiness people we are called to worship. Worship is the highest expression of love for God. In worship we come to God in loving obedience and service. For the Christian educator, teaching and learning are worship. Nazarene faculty are given the privilege of being at the intersections of life for students. Teachers see students in moments of readiness; moments of doubt and inquiry; moments of discovery; and moments of transformation. In these moments, as teachers allow the Holy Spirit to lead them to meet the identified point of need, they are offering their lives to the Holy One to be used by Him and for Him in His ways. When faculty members give of themselves in this way, it is the ultimate act of worship.

#### NAZARENE EDUCATORS ARE A MISSIONAL PEOPLE

Educators reside in a space where culture, family, school, and society intersect. It is in this intersecting space that the missional directive of the Church of the Nazarene blooms. Learning takes place best in a community of learners. In this community, a network of interpersonal intimacies is developed, where we know and are known. Needs are uncovered; strengths and weaknesses displayed; and encouragement and compassion given to all. In this network of intimacies, the mission of compassion and evangelism lives.<sup>15</sup> Nazarene educators are committed to care for those in need, to stand with the oppressed, and to work to protect and preserve the resources of God's creation. The Church is sent into the



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world, or the classroom, to participate with God in a ministry of love and reconciliation through evangelism, compassion, and justice. Nazarene educators model this as they become involved in the lives of their students. As they bring the world into the classroom and demonstrate Jesus' grace and mercy to all, they are teaching their students how to view their classrooms as mission fields.

The essence of visionary educators is the translating of their core beliefs, the things that set them apart from others, into the very fabric of their classrooms. For faculty in Nazarene higher education, those core beliefs flow from embracing the Wesleyan holiness perspective in actions and attitudes.<sup>16</sup> Foremost, we are Christian in thought, word, and deed. Second, we are holy as Christ is holy, working toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Thirdly, we are missional. The classroom is our mission field where we can demonstrate the Great Commandment of loving God "with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . [and] Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). Embracing these characteristics will enable us to teach in such a way to affect eternity. ■

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>14</sup>Coleen Wilcox, qtd. in Noah benShea, *The Journey to Greatness and How to Get There* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2006).

<sup>15</sup>Robinson, Ed, Faculty Convocation, MidAmerica Nazarene University (Olathe, KS, 2005).

<sup>16</sup>A special caveat for teacher education departments is that the issue of accreditation must be taken into consideration. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has a tendency to order the activities and duties of teacher education departments.

For Nazarene teacher education, the integrative model of faith and learning is a triangular approach. It is integration of faith, learning (content), and practice. In teacher education, content and practice are intimately intertwined. NCATE defines content knowledge and practice skills as "knowledge and skills," which can be easily identified externally through actions and performance. But NCATE also recognizes that external activities are driven by an internal perspective. NCATE terms this domain as "dispositions." Professional dispositions are "the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice" (NCATE *Handbook*, 2008). Or in other words, "disposition" is the world view or lens from which all actions and decisions stem. It is an internal locus of control. It is in this space where professional formation, as a student and teacher, intersects with spiritual formation as a Christian educator. Accreditation concerns need not be dismissed while integrating faith and learning in teacher education.

#### WORKS CITED

Robinson, Ed. Faculty Convocation, MidAmerica Nazarene University. Olathe, KS, 2005.

Wilcox, Colleen. Quoted in Noah benShea, *The Journey to Greatness and How to Get There*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2006.