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How Teaching Has Changed in the Last 36 Years

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How Teaching Has Changed in the Last 36 Years

Abstract

"Since I first started teaching 36 years ago, in some ways, teaching has changed significantly. In other ways, we're still trying to accomplish the same thing."

Posting about changes in professional education development from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/how-teaching-has-changed-in-the-last-36-years/>

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Comments

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How Teaching Has Changed in the Last 36 Years

 inallthings.org/how-teaching-has-changed-in-the-last-36-years/

September 14, 2016

Ed Starkenburg

Since I first started teaching 36 years ago, in some ways, teaching has changed significantly. In other ways, we're still trying to accomplish the same thing.

The preparation to become a teacher is more rigorous now than when I graduated from college in 1980 with a degree in elementary education. At that time, you had required courses to pass along with successful completion of 12 weeks of student teaching. I often tell my students today that in those "good old days," almost anyone could be a teacher because all you had to do was pass the courses and endure your student teaching. We relied on actual teaching experience to weed out the people who simply weren't cut out for the profession.

Today my students still have to pass the required courses in their education major, but their preparation includes passing basic skills tests (reading, writing, and math), several practicum experiences in PK-12 classrooms, instruction and evaluation in their personal dispositions, several unit plans that prepare them for an extensive [edTPA](#) (education teacher performance assessment) during their student teaching experience, and then for many of them, passing standardized [tests](#) for content knowledge and pedagogy. If students want to be licensed in other states or provinces, they may need to take other tests. So the preparation to be a teacher today has changed significantly. We hope this better prepares teachers who will stay in the profession longer than the average teacher stayed in the past.

Another big change is professional development for teachers. When I started as a teacher, professional development was required, but there was little structure that would really help teachers improve their effectiveness. In 36 years, we've seen several waves or reform that have improved professional development. Today, schools identify specific needs that will benefit students and teachers and the programs that bring them together to increase student achievement. Then the school arranges for those type of professional development they believe will make this probable. The types of assistance teachers receive from administrators and instructional coaches has also changed and continues to develop and improve. Professional development is more complicated today and is generally improving education's impact in students' lives.

Throughout the history of education, there has been an interesting battle between sameness and uniqueness. Classroom teachers often pushed for students to be treated the same and taught the same. The more alike everyone was, the easier the work and learning would be. The timeless struggle of fairness has always been part of this issue for schools and teachers. If we want to be fair, we treat everyone the same way, right? I've seen a big change in how we address these issues in 36 years. We now admit and confirm that everyone is unique. While your students may all be a similar age, they are far more different than they are alike. And so we realize that to truly be effective, we need to address the unique needs of each student. What resources do we have to meet these needs? Is our student teacher ratio low enough that we can have reasonable expectations? Will adding paraprofessionals to the school help? How can we use technology most effectively? These questions all help address and meet the unique needs of students within the total program of education a school offers.

The final big change I've seen in education is that in the past, teachers often worked in isolation. They closed their classroom doors after the faculty meetings and professional development and did their own thing. They did what they thought was right, what they wanted to do, and sometimes what seemed the easiest way to accomplish the goals that had been set. That isolation has been replaced with collaboration. As in many/most jobs today, teachers have to work with many others in order to do their jobs well. Teachers work closely with each other, with administrators and curriculum leaders, with instructional coaches, with parents and paraprofessionals, with consultants and school service agency representatives, and with mentors and friends. Sometimes teachers have

choices of those with whom they'll work and often they don't get to choose. Some of the collaboration is forced and some is chosen and self-initiated. There are times when teachers still get to simply be alone with their students to do the job. But good teachers see the benefits of community and collaboration in meeting as many of their students' needs as possible. This is not a career for those who want to be and work alone.

Those are the major changes I've seen in 36 years of teaching. If you read between the lines you can see that there are some very important things that haven't changed. Teachers still want to help students develop their God-given gifts and meet the potential God has uniquely planted within each person. Teachers still pray for wisdom from the greatest teacher so they will be able to perceive and accomplish what needs to be done for the students in their care. Teachers still rely on the wisdom and creativity of others for rich ideas on how to teach both the exciting and boring. We spend time online now rather than in paper journals and printed books to find ideas that expand the ideas in our curriculum and in our own minds.

Teachers still recognize the biblical truth that God "...gave some to be teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4: 11-13) That's very important work. The hours of planning, meeting, teaching, and assessing are worth it because building God's kingdom is the most important task He's given us.