

A Teacher and Her Students Gain Practical Advantages After She Returns to Being a Student

Donald W. Mitchell

It's a challenge being a teacher: You must learn your subject, gain expertise in teaching, develop plans for every class, continually improve what you do, organize a room full of students, and grade lots of papers and exams.

With time, expertise and preparation improve. Teachers can find, however, that their initial enthusiasm wanes; as a result, their students may not be inspired as much as would be ideal. To counteract that waning enthusiasm, many teachers take workshops, gain advanced degrees to improve their knowledge, and continually read in their subjects.

In seeking improvement, few teachers decide to earn a master of business administration degree as teacher Mrs. Barbara Bidwell Gray Coombs did at Rushmore University. Let's look at what she and her students gained from her unusual route to improved teaching.

Mrs. Coombs had long been interested in business; her undergraduate minor was in business. Teaching was a newer interest, one she first explored after she was asked to teach typing at the age of 45 after many years in office work. That teaching job ended after nine months when the study center where she was working closed. Work as a medical secretary followed.

Ten years later, school called to her again; this time as a student. She earned a degree with honors in interior design, another interest that she had long wanted to explore.

A year later, she returned to teaching, this time at the Academy of Court Reporting where Mrs. Coombs helps court reporting, paralegal, and private investigation students learn about business. It's a long workday that begins at 6:30 a.m. and doesn't end until 10 p.m.

Mrs. Coombs finds the work rewarding because most of her students are former welfare recipients who need to find a way to earn a living. For those students who have not worked in years, this is quite a challenge . . . especially for those students who have the least education.

To stay sharp and reinvigorate her enthusiasm, Mrs. Coombs changes the way she presents her subject matter for each term. This also helps make the material more interesting to students.

Gaining a master of business administration degree appealed to Mrs. Coombs because she saw this as a way to gain more credibility at her school and because she had long wished to learn more about business management. Wanting to establish a number of administrative reforms, she knew it would be helpful to have a management degree. Who knows? Perhaps career choices in educational administration might open up for her. She chose Rushmore University so that she could continue teaching while earning her degree.

She began her MBA studies at Rushmore in 2001. Her student experience was a good one as she learned more about effective business management.

What were some of the gains? Naturally her knowledge of good business practices increased. Many of the other improvements were unexpected, but most welcome. Mrs. Coombs found that she could discipline herself to achieve more than before in reaching a tough goal, earning her MBA degree, especially through applying improved time management skills. She also learned how to see more sides of an issue, a good beginning to finding better solutions. In communications, she became more succinct and clear. Her confidence and effectiveness grew, both in the classroom and with colleagues.

How have these new perspectives translated into her teaching? Here's what Mrs. Coombs had to say:

“I have learned to have more patience because I do not always get a concept the first time around. I am better equipped because of my experience of earning a master's from Rushmore University to understand the struggles that my students sometime have in learning a subject. I struggled with some of the subjects that I had to read, but I was willing to take the time to understand because earning a master's was important to me.

“The bottom line: What I learned in studying for the master's at Rushmore has affected my classroom teaching because I am going into more detail. It is important to gain background material on a subject no matter whether it is English or math or something else. The more a person knows about a subject

the better he or she is equipped for the workplace. Becoming a well-rounded person is important, and I do not believe we have as many well-rounded people as we once did in this country. I believe it is true what is being said about America — ‘the dumbing down of America’ — today's students are not taught to the fullest of their potential. There is too much emphasis on proficiency examinations, et cetera.”

In 2007, Mrs. Coombs was recognized by Cambridge *Who's Who* as the outstanding person in court reporting education in the United States.

Students, teachers, and society gain when dedicated teachers go back to school and improve their self management and learning skills.

Will MBAs become as common for teachers as they are for business executives? Probably not, but certainly schools would be more effective if more teachers added this perspective.

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