

Balance in an Unbalanced World

Betty Bayer, Associate Director of Education, Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada, Oshawa, ON

Today's teachers are encouraged, more and more, to be lifelong learners and to keep up with changes in technology that are relevant to education, but this can be very time consuming and for some teachers, it is an exhausting process. How can we manage? Where do we draw the line between "keeping up and keeping sane"?



And what about our students? How can we engage students by using the technologies they are comfortable with while still focusing on the learning and not the technology? Is multitasking using various technologies preventing the GenZ generation from getting a deeper understanding of information? How can we find balance, both for ourselves and for our students? How can we preserve the "quiet time" Mrs. White (1898) refers to when she says, "'We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God" (363).

According to Marilee Sprenger (2009), "we adults must help all students assimilate technology into their lives in a way that will enhance—not eclipse—skills like sustained thinking and connecting to fellow humans." We have a responsibility, as teachers, to provide students with opportunities, not only to engage with content using the technology that is part of their 21st century lives, but also to teach them when to unplug.

Robyn R. Jackson (author of *Never Work Harder Than Your Students*) suggests tips for making your lessons as compelling as video games. Some of these tips also provide ways to balance tech strategies with more "traditional" techniques to better educate the whole child, an important tenet of Adventist education. Following is my adaptation of a few of Ms. Jackson's tips. (Her complete list can be found on her website at www.mindstepsinc.com.)

- *Provide more immediate feedback.* Whether you use technology or not, students are accustomed to quick feedback. Personal responses, both from the teacher and from peers, should be built in to most assignments as part of the formative assessment process so that students can adjust their performance and improve.
- *Allow students to co-create their learning.* More open-ended lessons with built-in student choice help students take responsibility for how they learn and for how they will show that they have mastered the material. This also provides a perfect opportunity for students to incorporate technology or not, depending on their individual learning styles.
- *Make failure less risky by giving students multiple opportunities to succeed.* A retake or retest is not cheating. Neither does it provide an unfair advantage for some students. If our goal is truly for every student to understand, then we must be willing to provide several paths to the same goal. Some of these paths may incorporate technology; some may not. Several chances to solve similar problems or demonstrate understanding of a concept in different ways should make success achievable for all students.

- *Provide students with more opportunities for interaction.* Students can (and should) interact online by contributing to class blogs and responding to others' opinions. But they must also interact face to face as they work in groups to create meaning and complete projects. Let them learn how to support each other and to "bring their shared expertise to solve problems that are bigger than ones they can solve on their own." (Jackson, 2009)

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, build in time for reflection. Provide time and opportunity for students to describe what they thought about specific learning experiences. Assist them to analyze how they learn best, what was easy and what was difficult, and other ways that they would like to study the same material.

And be sure to provide the same opportunity for yourself. Build in time to reflect on your teaching practice. If you are an administrator, try to provide at least one period a week (preferably, one a day!) for each teacher to reflect and plan. Devote part of your staff meeting time to reflection, alone and together, on what is working for your students and what needs more attention and new strategies. Encourage creative thinking and experimentation with new methods. Build in "down time" into your school schedule.

Brian Dyson, CEO of Coca Cola Enterprises from 1959 to 1994, provides this relevant and sobering thought: "Work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls – family, health, friends, and spirit are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged, or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life." Modelling such balance for our students may be one of the most important lessons we ever teach them as we prepare them for the world of their future.

References:

Dyson, Brian G. Georgia Tech 172nd Commencement Address, September 6, 2009. Downloaded from <http://www.theleadershiphub.com/blogs/how-many-balls-can-you-juggle-30-seconds-impeccable-sense-brian-dyson>.

Jackson, Robyn R. "Tips to Make Your Lessons as Compelling as video Games." Mindsteps' Principles Tip Sheet. Downloaded from <http://mindstepsinc.com/2010/09/video-games/>.

Sprenger, Marilee. "Focusing the Digital Brain." *Educational Leadership*, September 2009, Vol. 67, No. 1, p. 34.

White, Ellen G. *The Desire of Ages*. 1898. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940.