The Promise Is in the PRACTICE

Professional

Imperatives

BY WILLIAM H. GREEN

Picture
Removed

What should we as education professionals know and be able to do to improve our primary function—teaching? What will enable us to better meet the unprecedented needs of our students? The professional literature is burgeoning with calls for change, new conceptualizations of teaching and learning, and prophets of doom. Adventist education has had its share of these as well.

Are there any professional imperatives for teachers? Certain ideas, concepts, or practices that are so important or helpful that we must know about them? Let me suggest some possibilities that seem to fit well into Adventist educational philosophy, history, and calling. Though not exhaustive, the list emphasizes teaching and learning.

* Dimensions of Learning
* Models of Teaching
* Cooperative Learning
* Integrated Thematic Instruction
* Multiple Intelligence
* Learning Style
* Technology
* Distance Learning
* Values and Character Education

Dimensions of Learning

The Dimensions of Learning[1] program includes a framework for teaching based upon a conceptualization of learning. The

theory undergirding the practices comes from constructivist psychology, with a liberal sprinkling of critical thinking (cognitive psychology and philosophical logic).

The developers assume that teaching will be integrated and thematic, and will include cooperative learning. They recommend five interactive levels of learning:

• Positive attitudes and perceptions about learning.

• Acquiring and integrating knowledge.

• Extending and refining knowledge.

• Using knowledge meaningfully.

• Productive habits of mind.

The developers of Dimensions of Learning have produced excellent training materials with detailed procedures to show teachers how to help students to think on the five levels. The levels of learning they propose do not conflict with Christian principles. In fact, these five levels appear to strengthen desirable critical thinking skills. Teachers simply need to integrate a spiritual dimension into the paradigm.

Several features of this program make it a powerful and useful tool. It is a comprehensive framework for teaching and learning designed to apply to all grade and age levels, and therefore could easily be used in multigrade classrooms. Because of its comprehensive nature, other teaching innovations fit nicely into the framework. It can be used as a guide for viewing curriculum offerings and student learning. Curriculum planning, instructional techniques, and authentic assessment activities are integral parts. The program works equally well with single subject and multisubject curriculum organizations.

Models of Teaching

One powerful idea in teaching and learning is to look for methods, models, or strategies (organized systems of instruction based upon theory or the way scholars think in particular disciplines) with strong research bases. Such strategies should help teachers to substantially increase students' capacity to learn. A number of such strategies are available. Each teacher should develop a substantial repertoire of these methods and be able to use them appropriately—at the right time, with the right group of students, and using the right material.

Are there any professional imperatives for teachers?

Bruce Joyce and his colleagues have studied these powerful teaching methods, which they call models of teaching[2] and organized them into four categories: personal, information-processing, behavioral, and social. Their organizational schema helps us to understand what is available and what outcomes can be expected from using specific methods of teaching.[3]

It is comforting and exciting to find Bible examples of nearly every model of teaching that Joyce discusses; in fact, Christ used many of these in His own teaching. God thinks in wonderfully multifaceted ways. We need to teach our students to broaden and deepen their thinking avenues so they can think more like God. Ellen White tells us that we ought to teach our students to become "thinkers, and not mere imitators of other men's thoughts."[4] Developing a repertoire of teaching models will help accomplish this.

Cooperative Learning

Even though cooperative learning is one of the models of teaching included in Joyce, Weil, and Showers, because of its promise and popularity we believe it deserves emphasis. To get his audience's attention, and emphasize his point, a colleague of mine recently remarked at a national professional meeting in Canada, "If you're not using cooperative learning in your classroom, you ought to be sued for malpractice." Cooperative learning is a particularly effective method of teaching. Research indicates that cooperative learning produces positive social outcomes in students, as well as personal and academic ones. Of all innovations in education, none has stronger basic, applied, and program research to back its claims. In other words, with cooperative learning we get a lot of bang for our buck.

To be sure, not all cooperative learning is the same, and outcomes vary with the complexity of the structures used. In general, the more complex the structure, the greater the student outcomes. One would not get the same outcome from using groups of two students working cooperately as with using group-investigation methods.

A chapter in Ellen White's book *Education* is devoted to cooperation in the classroom. Christ sent His disciples

out two by two. Paul also took two or more apprentices, or companions, with him on his missionary journeys. Other examples abound in both the Old and New Testaments. We can use these models to help us integrate cooperative learning into all our educational programs.

Cooperative learning is a particularly effective method of teaching.

Integrative Thematic Instruction

Integrated thematic instruction is an idea that ought to resonate well within Adventism. According to advocates, integrated thematic teaching operates out of the nexus of brain research, curriculum research, and the best instructional practices.[5] It is a wholistic approach toward thinking that integrates subject matter across disciplines and grades. Because of the nature of Adventist organizational structure, with small schools and multigrade classes, integrated thematic instruction seems like a natural way to organize curriculum and instruction. Grade-level organization and strict adherence to graded textbooks and other supporting materials have proved inimical to the development of a strong small-school curriculum and the related instructional program.

In order to use this approach, a strong staff-development program is necessary because integrated thematic instruction is so different from the way in which most teachers have been taught. When one is used to thinking in compartmentalized terms (grade levels and graded curriculum materials and segmented subject matter), trying to think and teach in a more integrated, wholistic manner can be quite difficult. In addition, curriculum materials must be developed or gathered to support this method.

Multiple Intelligences

For many years, human intelligence was seen as singular or unitary. As a result, teaching methods have also been very proscribed and limited. School people traditionally have equated intelligence with linguistic and mathematical competence. Even within those areas, our testing programs have measured a limited range of abilities. Howard Gardner in his book *Frames of Mind,*[6] states that there are at least seven major intelligences: verbal/linguistic, musical/rhythmic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Since school curriculum concentrates on linguistic and mathematical intelligence, most children are deprived in some ways and some children are deprived in major ways. These ideas, and the resulting curriculum designed to implement them, fit in well with the tra-

ditional Adventist concept that learning is more than merely cognitive behavior. Development of the body and the spirit are part of a school program based upon Gardner's view of intelligence(s).

Learning Style

Related to Gardner's ideas is the concept that each person learns differently. Recently, much work has been done in the area of "learning styles." It is important to recognize that each person has certain styles of learning that are unique in some ways and similar in others. It can be affirming to realize that different ways of learning are normal. Since such differences exist, this calls for variations in teaching styles.

There are four basic approaches to accommodating learning style needs in the classroom. Anthony Gregorc advocates a "rich environment."[7] He suggests providing as many choices as is possible when any task is assigned or when students are assessed. Rita and Ken Dunn use a diagnostic-prescriptive approach. A Learning Styles Inventory[8] is administered to students, after which appropriate materials and methods are prescribed. Bernice McCarthy, in her 4MAT program,[9] uses a generic eight-part lesson plan that includes in every unit activities relating to the major learning styles.

The fourth major approach to learning style differences is using a repertoire of teaching strategies or models such as *Models of Teaching*[10] or Marzano, et al's *Dimensions of Learning.*[11]

Technology

Technology permeates today's society. Teachers need to harness technology to help them do a better job, and students need to be technologically literate in order to get and keep a job. Computers and computer technology can help teachers do some parts of their job better. For example, computer-assisted instruction, such as PLATO software, available from Home Study International,[12] can provide effective materials for students who need instruction in the traditional basic skills, as well as those who need advanced coursework in math and science.

For small schools where one teacher has to present many levels of instruction or may not have the training to teach advanced courses, a program such as PLATO can be an excellent tool. We must keep in mind, however, that such programs deal primarily with the bottom two levels of Bloom's Taxonomy or level two in the Dimensions of Learning program. If higher-level learning outcomes are desired, then teacher interaction and guidance are mandatory.

Distance Learning

Teachers can participate in distance learning through a combination of video and telecommunication technology. Substantial staff development and college coursework are available on videotape. Telecommunication networks can help set up the kind of professional networking necessary to support new practices. In-person coaching and group study interaction can be supplemented by a variety of technological devices, including videotape exchange, use of electronic bulletin boards, and various computer networks, as well as by telephone. All of those methods can effectively provide the ongoing professional interaction needed to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, increase collegiality, and build the kind of professional interaction required to sustain new practices.

Teaching Values

Seventh-day Adventist educators have always been interested in effective spiritual development of their students. Indeed, that is why we maintain a separate school system. The results of the Valuegenesis study[13] indicated that we have some work to do in this area. We are hearing more and more in the popular and academic presses about the need for moral and character development. These subjects are popular because of the moral crises in modern society.

Let me recommend for your consideration three sets of materials that I have found to be effective in this area. Ed Norton's Bible Labs[14] hands-on approach gets students involved in active witnessing. Rita Henriquez-Roark's character-development material[15] contains lessons written in an easy-to-use, direct-teaching format especially suited to middle-grade students. And the *Teaching Values* book by Doris and Roland Larson with Bailey Gillespie[16] is filled with usable activities for classrooms. It is an old but honored homily that a responding child is a learning child. In fact, mastery learning and direct instruction are largely built around that idea. The Larsons suggest eight ways to get students (and adults as well) to respond. Each method has numerous stimulating suggestions for students. This material will help you to initiate lively, stimulating devotions and Bible study. Another resource book full of ideas is Donna Habenicht's *How to Teach Your Child to Really Love Jesus.*[17]

Conclusion

We live in an era of rapid material and ideological change. Much of this change has not been helpful, nor has it been used in constructive ways. The Seventh-day Adventist school system was established to help our young people grow into healthy adults (spiritually, physically, mentally, and socially) in an imperfect world. We must seek to use all available resources to prepare them to live healthful, productive lives in present-day society. Are there concepts, skills, and practices that you are not taking advantage of? Have you given thoughtful consideration to the professional imperatives of teaching? The foregoing list should stimulate thought in these areas, which can then be translated into action. ✍

Witness and outreach are an important part of teaching values. Clowns for Christ are one activity of the Michigan Bible Labs program.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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