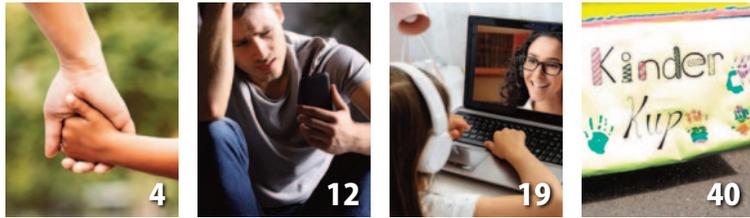


# ADVENTIST EDUCATION



Small  
Schools



VOLUME 84, NUMBER 3, 2022

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Anneris Coria-Navia



Maria Bastien Valenca

# Small Schools:

## An Asset to Adventist Education

Across the North American Division (NAD), more than 60 percent of PreK-10 schools are labeled as “small schools.”<sup>1</sup> In Adventist education, a small school is loosely conceptualized as having three or fewer teachers and hosting multigrade classrooms with three or more grades in each. In today’s educational landscape, single, and perhaps split-grade classrooms, appear to be the norm, and small schools are more reminiscent of the one-room schoolhouse of yesteryear. However, multigrade classrooms in small schools continue to flourish. The unique teaching and learning opportunities this environment provides have caught the attention of larger, even secular schools, so much so that they intentionally provide multigrade and multiage experiences.

As co-coordinators of this special issue on small, multigrade schools, we came to this topic from different viewpoints, but with the same end goal: to provide an exploration of theory and practice to support pre- and in-service teachers who work in small school environments. Maria Bastien

Valenca spent most of her K-8 years as a student in small schools, and with two teachers as her parents. Some of her best school memories are rooted in the freedom of flexibility that a small school provides teachers—explorations of science and art through black-and-white photography labs, math and home economics in the kitchen, and the opportunity to take on responsibilities in the classroom, such as leading fundraising efforts and working on a small school newspaper. Anneris Coria-Navia was inspired to undertake this issue as she searched for ways to disseminate a research project undertaken with Jerome Thayer, Elissa Kido, and Aimee Leukert on excellence in small schools, the results of which are also found in this issue. This research stemmed from the need to celebrate the excellent work that small schools were doing.

As both our teams pursued research on small schools, we were connected by the teachers and conference su-

perintendents with whom we were working, who desired and supported the need for another issue of JAE dedicated to this topic. In addition to our passion for small schools, we share a strong desire to support future educators in our care, as well as provide ongoing resources and support for teachers in the field. As education faculty, we were regularly faced with the challenge that there is no textbook on small schools, especially one that honors our distinct Adventist worldview, where the world of education and redemption are one.

Anneris Coria-Navia wanted to honor the contributions that her students have made over time by sharing some of the specific ways that what might be considered “usual” educational practice would not work in a small school. Maria Bastien Valenca wanted to ensure that teacher candidates could feel both prepared and perhaps excited about the possibilities that such an environment provides.

Martha Havens, in a previous special issue of JAE, explored the importance of the teaching principal putting teaching and instruction first. She noted that at the time of publication, “the North American Division *Principal’s Handbook* list[ed] 78 activities as ‘Significant Areas of Responsibility’ for a school administrator,” which, as Havens noted, did not even include “responsibility for finances, personnel, and curriculum and instruction.”<sup>2</sup> Teaching in a small school, whether a one-, two- or three-teacher school, includes wearing multiple hats (taking on a variety of responsibilities) that one might not have when teaching a single-grade classroom.

The topics presented in this issue explore aspects of these many roles and responsibilities and illustrate areas of interest that have arisen through conversations with students, teachers, superintendents, and other stakeholders connected with Adventist education. To balance the importance of research, theory, and concrete classroom practice, the articles in this issue come from a wide

*Continued on page 55*





## Highlighting Excellence in Small Schools

Small schools have always been part of the educational landscape in North America and many parts of the world. Rural schools, as well as private elementary and high schools, have historically been small, either by default because of location or by choice because of specialization.<sup>1</sup> But while small schools have always existed, attitudes concerning their effectiveness have often been negative. In the early 20th century, for instance, small schools were considered particularly worrisome for educational leaders. They saw the small size as a limitation, or “a chronic inflammation

on the body educational”—smallness meant a lack or shortage of many necessary things: resources and school materials, expertise in teachers, and funding for teachers to get more training, as well as the absence of a constructive educational community. Small schools were consolidated into larger ones to combat these problems.<sup>2</sup>

This perception, however, has begun to change and evolve over the

past few years. In the United States, support for small schools and downsizing efforts exists. Government grants and financial contributions from organizations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg’s “Challenge to the Nation” have fueled efforts to promote small schools.<sup>3</sup> A recent *Forbes* article, “Why the One-room Schoolhouse Is a Vision for the Future, Not Just a Relic of the Past,” suggests that Montessori schools, home schools, and one-room schoolhouses have the potential to improve educational systems significantly.

BY ANNERIS CORIA-NAVIA, AIMEE LEUKERT, JEROME THAYER, MARIA BASTIEN VALENCA, and ELISSA KIDO

These schools have been shown to use best practices in peer-based and team-based learning, an abundance of group work necessary for various careers, the ability to work with people of all ages and backgrounds, and to build a strong sense of community.<sup>4</sup>

These are truths that the Adventist educational system has long understood and held dear. Small schools—those with three or more grades in one classroom—have existed for decades and are prevalent within our system; in fact, one- and two-teacher schools, the focus of this study, make up 60 percent of the elementary schools in the North American Division (NAD). According to NAD data, in 2022, there were 151 one-teacher schools (down from 161 in 2021),<sup>5</sup> and 144 two-teacher schools (same as in 2021).

Small schools have an essential purpose in the Adventist educational system—both from a geographical and philosophical standpoint. They not only serve a population of students who would otherwise be without the option of attending an Adventist school, but also deliver education in a way that truly gets to the heart and purpose of Adventist education.

The Adventist educational system has not been immune to the negative perceptions surrounding small schools—that they lack resources and academic rigor compared to larger schools. Despite the incredible work we witness in our small schools, we have also fallen short in celebrating and acknowledging their efforts and achievements.

This article provides an in-depth examination of a qualitative study that focused specifically on *excellent* small schools in the NAD. The context for the study stemmed from findings from the 2016 Strengthening Adventist Education study by Thayer and Coria-Navia<sup>6</sup> and later published by Leukert, Kido, and Blackmer as part of the work done for the NAD Education Task Group Report<sup>7</sup> and the Strengthening Adventist Education Report.<sup>8</sup> As Busted notes, the one-room schoolhouse may be the solution to many American educational woes,<sup>9</sup> and the findings from this study certainly highlight the unique positives

that can result from education in a small-school setting.

### Methods

We started the project by meeting with union directors and associates in the NAD to identify the appropriate framework to use for the study. Educational leaders who were not available for in-person meetings contributed to the framework asynchronously. The NAD's *Journey to Excellence Standards* was identified as the framework for the study. The

**The most important outcome we wanted to measure was spirituality. It is not just a desirable characteristic; it is an essential characteristic. It is the foundation and the reason Seventh-day Adventist schools exist.**

standards included seven student outcomes and six teacher/school outcomes. The current *Journey to Excellence Standards* document (J2E) has 10 student standards very similar to the seven student outcomes in the previous version, with one addition, Personal Management. The current document does not contain any new teacher/school standards.

We then developed a list of actions/characteristics for students, teachers, pastors, and board members associated with these outcomes. We looked for actions and characteristics that contributed to excellence.

We requested the union directors to select excellent one- to two-teacher schools willing to be included in our study. Sixteen schools in five unions participated. We contacted the teacher/principal in each school and made arrangements for an in-person visit at a convenient time. Two researchers visited one school as a pilot study to refine the data-collection instrument and procedures. The remaining schools were divided among the two researchers.

Each school visit lasted 1.5 to 2 days and included classroom observations, daily activities, and a tour of the school facilities. Additionally, we interviewed a few students (5th grade and up), the teacher(s), some parents (2 to 4), the pastor, the school board chair, and 1 to 2 board members.

We looked only for evidence in outcome areas of excellence, although other areas where the schools were good could also have been studied. In addition to direct evidence of excellent outcomes (student work, performances, engagement, etc.), indirect evidence was indicated by enthusiastic comments by many stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, the pastor, and board members).

The following section outlines the outcomes with the performance indicators and the evidence that supported an excellent rating.

### **Student Outcome 1: Students' Relationship With Jesus Christ and Commitment to the Adventist Church and Teacher/School Outcome 1: Philosophy and Mission—Spirituality and Adventist Perspective**

The most important outcome we wanted to measure was spirituality. It is not just a desirable characteristic; it is an essential characteristic. It is the foundation and the reason Seventh-day Adventist schools exist. Since Student Outcome 1 and Teacher/School Outcome 1 both deal with spirituality, we are combining them in this section.

While there are different approaches and philosophies that can be used to measure spirituality, we chose to examine how students perceived their

teachers' and parents' goals for them. We did this by observing what children did, how they were active and led out in spiritual things, and their curiosity and love for participation in all aspects of faith-related experiences. On the teachers' side, we looked for modeling behaviors, enthusiasm about faith, activities in and outside Bible class, a spiritually based curriculum plan, and application of mission and philosophy statements.

In schools that were excellent in this area, pastors and teachers worked as a ministry team in partnership with the parents. All stakeholders praised the teacher-pastor relationships and the home-church-school relationship. Students, teachers, and parents knew when the pastor came to the school and what activities were carried out specifically by the pastor with the students. These activities included Bible studies, Bible class, sports, sermon preparation by the children, participation in church life, and outreach.

We witnessed students leading out in class and school-wide worship in joyful and powerful ways, giving personal testimonies and encouraging their classmates to develop their relationship with Jesus. Students enthusiastically told us about weekly chapels, where the entire student body could participate if they chose—with special music, song leading, Scripture reading, or storytelling. While there was evidence of Bible class being a salient part of the day, it was equally clear that students didn't relegate spirituality or spiritual lessons to just 45 minutes a day. When we asked them for examples, they spoke of service projects or object lessons their teacher shared throughout the day. Many students also seemed to recognize that their parents chose their school because they wished for them to be in an environment that nurtured their spiritual development.

Teachers seemed to be the underlying, sustaining force behind cultivating a spiritual environment in their classrooms. What the students noted about spirituality in their

classroom or different activities did not come about randomly; instead, they were the result of their teacher's intentional and careful planning. The teachers in these schools were genuine and honest about their faith journey and expressed a deep desire to share their love of Jesus with their students. Many whom we spoke with described their vocation as a calling—one in which spiritual mentoring and education were equally crucial to academic content. The Bible classes in these

**Because of the nature of a small school, in which students in different grades commingle in the same space, students' friendships did not seem bound by age or level. Often in our observations, we saw 8th graders playing happily alongside 3rd graders, with the conversation and activity evolving organically.**

schools were meaningful and exciting, the quality of spiritual activities was evident, and so was the Christian commitment and identity of the teachers.

A critical aspect of this outcome was how spirituality was embedded in the learning environment. The schools were decorated with visuals that reflected spiritual themes, and if there was a church near the school, it was open for students to use during the

school day. Both the church and school were inviting spaces for worship, had musical instruments, and were clean and organized.<sup>10</sup>

The mission and philosophy of the school were articulated in the interviews with the teacher, students, parents, pastors, and board members, and the school had a spiritual action plan.

### **Student Outcome 2: Interpersonal Relations—Skills in Interpersonal Relationships**

In Student Outcome 2, we looked for evidence of how students dealt with peers and adults from different backgrounds, their understanding and value of diversity, their interactions with peers and adults, how they dealt with conflict, and their understanding of digital citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

Schools that demonstrated excellence in this outcome taught social skills and self-regulation and were intentional in having students work together in teams regularly. Curricular and non-curricular activities had regular and substantive opportunities for students to engage in social interactions through play and learning. Students talked enthusiastically about being a family and caring for one another. They stated that they desired every student to feel a sense of belonging.

Because of the nature of a small school, in which students in different grades commingle in the same space, students' friendships did not seem bound by age or level. Often in our observations, we saw 8th graders playing happily alongside 3rd graders, with the conversation and activity evolving organically. Both non-Adventist parents and students shared that interpersonal relationships were among the primary reasons for the parents bringing their children to the school. Many parents noted that their children were bullied in other schools but felt safe and thrived in the small-school environment. Students quickly pointed out how important it was not to bully anyone in person or online.<sup>12</sup>

### **Student Outcome 3: Service: Ability to Respond With Sensitivity to the Needs of Others**

In Student Outcome 3, we searched for evidence of students' awareness of service opportunities, their sensitivity to the needs of others, their willingness to engage in service, and their initiative to undertake service activities without being always prompted by the teacher or parents.<sup>13</sup>

In schools that demonstrated excellence in this area, we noticed an intentional and positive service curriculum encompassing more than just a single act or day. Service to peers, families, church members, and local and global communities was, instead, a state of mind or an attitude of always looking for ways to help. A few students recalled helping one of their classmates move out of a home following a difficult domestic situation. The school provided a safe space to store the family's belongings while they relocated. Another school looked for specific opportunities to help elderly church members. Students talked about creating cards, knitting scarves, and putting together food baskets to share with those members. And finally, many schools served the local community by having students help to rake yards, participate in health fairs, or conduct food drives.<sup>14</sup>

### **Student Outcome 4: Healthful Living—Accepting Responsibility for Optimal Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Health**

In Student Outcome 4, we looked for evidence of students' values about optimum physical health, how they exhibited actions contributing to physical health, their understanding of good diet and exercise characteristics, and their attitude toward life.

Schools that demonstrated excellence in these areas had a health curriculum and integrated it across daily activities. Students were encouraged and given the time to take regular physical and mental breaks, offered healthy meals, and encouraged to carry these practices into their homes. Many parents told us their children had chosen a vegetarian or

## **Sidebar: Questions to Help Evaluate Small-school Practices**

### **How does your school attend to relationships between church, home, and community, with a focus on the philosophy and mission of Adventist education?**

- How are teachers and pastors working together as a ministry team? How can you facilitate your local pastor(s) having a regular and substantive presence at your school?
  - In what ways do classrooms and the whole school engage in worship together, and how is this integrated throughout the fabric of the entire school day?
  - What opportunities are there for connection between your school and local church, including opportunities for non-Adventist families in your school to engage with your church community?
  - How might you engage your school in service activities for your school, church, and local community?
  - What formalized plans do you have addressing recruitment and retention, including collaboration with homeschooling families and neighboring schools?

### **How does your school foster principles of mental and physical health and wellness?**

- How does your school foster healthy relationships and a sense of belonging?
- How is your school intentional in teaching social skills and self-regulation through curricular and non-curricular opportunities for social interactions?
- How can you intentionally foster the development of multi-age interpersonal skills?
  - In what ways do you encourage healthy practices such as regular physical and mental breaks, and other healthy living habits?

### **How do you intentionally support excellence across the disciplines?**

- How does your school encourage a climate of high academic standards and excellence? How is this intentionally communicated to your students?
  - In what ways do you integrate opportunities for written and oral communication across the disciplines, including engagement with peers?
  - What opportunities do your students have for engagement in the fine-arts curriculum?
  - How does your classroom environment facilitate learning, particularly in terms of lighting, space, supplies, and equipment?
  - How do you provide differentiation across levels to meet all students' needs?

### **How do you assess and support students for learning?**

- How are students supported academically by parents, teachers, and volunteers?
- What assessment data do you collect, and how are you using this to foster learning?

### **How can school leaders be intentional in their administrative role?**

- What is your formal vision for the school? In what ways do you work with your school board to ensure a long-term vision for your school?
  - Who is your instructional leader, and how does this person connect with entities such as school board, conference, and families?
  - Do you have the support you need to complete financial, and other administrative tasks?

plant-based diet because of the teacher's influence and the school environment. A teacher in one school challenged students to try 30 days of no processed or "junk" foods. The students we spoke with there were enthusiastic about the challenge and tried to hold one another accountable.

Several of the schools we visited had their own vegetable garden. Students were responsible for selecting what would be grown, maintaining individual plots, and harvesting the fruits of their labor. Additionally, some teachers integrated cooking into their curriculum and had students select recipes that could incorporate their freshly picked produce.

### **Student Outcome 5: Intellectual Development—Academic Achievement and Skill in Decision-making and Problem-solving**

In intellectual development, we specifically looked at how students desired to improve intellectually, do excellent work, and demonstrate high academic achievement.

Schools that scored high in this area created a climate of excellence. Students felt that their individual and collective academic success was important. They understood that their teachers had high academic standards and expectations. Children would state that their teacher wanted them to be "successful in life." Students also mentioned that they had choice and flexibility in their assignments and could make decisions about their learning.<sup>15</sup>

One of the clear benefits we observed in these schools was the opportunity for students to progress at their own pace. While students were formally identified as belonging to a specific grade, they often worked at different levels in various subjects. A 4th grader, for instance, might be using the 6th-grade math textbook and 7th-grade spelling workbook. Students also talked about redoing work that was not excellent on the first try without feeling as if they had failed. Parents repeatedly stated how they could see that the teacher deeply cared about academic excellence. They shared how they knew without a

doubt that their children were receiving a "quality" education.<sup>16</sup>

### **Student Outcome 6: Communication Skills—Skills in Written and Oral Communication**

When searching for evidence of communication skills, we looked at evidence that confidence and proficiency in oral and written communication were present in the school.

Schools that excelled in this area integrated many writing and oral

**Students spoke enthusiastically about playing percussion, recorders, piano, and singing. They also spoke fondly about their use of these abilities for service to others in the form of creating cards and sharing music in hospitals, nursing homes, and community organizations.**

communication opportunities across the curriculum. Students made presentations and read stories to one another, participated in school and church plays, and other performance opportunities. Students were encouraged to share their written work, peer review one another's work, and provide feedback on one another's presentations.

### **Student Outcome 7: Aesthetic Appreciation—Students' Appreciation of the Fine Arts**

Measures of excellence in appreciation of the fine arts included how students valued art and music

and the development of abilities in fine arts.

Schools that excelled in this area demonstrated intentionality in students playing instruments, singing, and engaging in varied artistic activities. Most schools had a dedicated fine-arts curriculum and teachers who were either hired staff or involved community members. Students' artwork was showcased in the school, the church, and the community through service projects. Students spoke enthusiastically about playing percussion, recorders, piano, and singing. They also spoke fondly about their use of these abilities for service to others in the form of creating cards and sharing music in hospitals, nursing homes, and community organizations.<sup>17</sup>

### **Teacher/School Outcome 2: School Environment and Resources: Physical, Social, Spiritual Environment, Facilities, Supplies, and Equipment (see Teacher/School Outcome 1 on page 5)**

For Outcome 2, we observed facilities and evidence of adequate equipment, resources, and supplies. Schools deemed excellent in the school environment and resources outcome provided evidence of adequate funding, best practices in budgeting as shared by the teachers and board members, and strategic plans for maintaining the physical environment's quality. Maintenance of the physical environment included generous support from church members for supplies and labor, involvement of students in the upkeep of the learning environment, and an up-to-date inventory of equipment and supplies. The learning environments had abundant natural light and were spacious.<sup>18</sup> Classrooms and other learning spaces had flexible seating, and students had input in how to use the learning spaces.<sup>19</sup> Gymnasiums were inviting, and exercise equipment and balls were in good working order. Playgrounds were safe and inviting, and children used them. Schools with these characteristics showed pride of ownership and abundant gratitude for the contributions of the community

members to the school. Board members said they find ways to provide “everything the students and teachers need.”

### **Teacher/School Outcome 3: Teacher Quality and Development—Teacher Pedagogical and Personal Skills**

In Outcome 3, we focused on evidence of teacher quality, professional development, and pedagogical and personal skills. Areas of focus were the use of appropriate methods, love for students, reflective practices, fairness, care for the whole person and for *all* students, differentiation and individualized instruction, and professional growth.

Schools that excelled in this area had teachers with formal training in multigrade instruction; these teachers had worked with a mentor and had a personalized learning plan.<sup>20</sup> Schools that exhibited excellence in this area also had very supportive boards, parents, and church members. Teachers mentioned that their conferences provide spaces for teachers to connect and learn with one another. The networks they built in those settings result in collaboration in other areas, such as virtual weeks of prayer or field trips.

Teachers were creative and innovative. They used approaches such as project-based learning and entrepreneurship. They supported self-directed student learning, peer collaboration, and the development of social-emotional skills as foundational pedagogies. The teachers were playful and humorous. They leveraged technology as a tool to support student learning and to communicate with families effectively and efficiently.<sup>21</sup>

### **Teacher/School Outcome 4: Assessment and School Improvement—Student and School Growth**

The indicators of excellence in this area included how assessment results were used to direct learning, how students directed and managed their own learning, how parents were informed about student progress and



whether standards-based assessment and reporting were used.<sup>22</sup>

We found that schools that excelled in this outcome had clear assessment plans that guided the assessment practices. Students were assessed regularly, and rich feedback was provided for student improvement. Students worked with a variety of people and in a variety of ways to receive and give feedback. Teachers, pastors, parents, and students in schools that were excellent in this area repeatedly mentioned growth mindset approaches. Additionally, schools had volunteers who assisted the teacher regularly in individualizing the instruction and feedback. Teachers mentioned receiving appropriate training and continuous support to improve their skills and knowledge. They used internal and external assessment data to make decisions about learning. Teachers who excelled in this outcome worked with teachers at other small schools to routinely analyze and share assessment data. Finally, parents reported that teachers regularly kept them informed of their children’s progress. They appreciated that the teachers had clear

lines of communication for academics and for each student’s personal growth and development.<sup>23</sup>

### **Teacher/School Outcome 5: Leadership and Administration: Administrative Functions**

Outcome 5 focused on how the school leader developed a vision for the school, whether the principal was an instructional leader, and how the principal communicated with internal and external entities. This outcome also focused on whether the principal empowered students to lead, provided support, worked with the school board, supervised and evaluated personnel, and how the school board dealt with school finances.

Schools that excelled in this area had principals who had received training in administration, had professional interactions with other principals, spent time with internal and external entities, and had adequate and regular administrative support for clerical and administrative duties. Principals in these schools

worked very closely with the board, were fiscally responsible, and had a clear and inspiring long-term vision for the school. They engaged the parents, the community, and the students in assisting the school in organizing and running fundraising events, community festivals, and outreach programs. Boards in these schools committed to finding ways that every student who wanted to be in the school would have the resources to do so. This commitment extended to non-constituent church students and families.<sup>24</sup>

### **Teacher/School Outcome 6: Community and Collaboration—Relationships With External Entities**

In Outcome 6, we looked for evidence of whether teachers and pastors formed a ministry team, how the school viewed the church, how the school was viewed by the church and the community, and how the teacher facilitated a relationship between church, home, and school.<sup>25</sup>

Pastors and teachers worked as a ministry team in schools that showed excellence in Outcome 6. The pastor had a regular and substantive presence in the school. Students, parents, and board members knew about the pastor's engagement with the school. Students were enthusiastic about the pastor's contributions to the school.<sup>26</sup> The students also shared with joy their involvement in the church. Non-Adventist parents made an effort to bring their children to church activities and spoke fondly of those opportunities. There was a collaboration between the pastor, the teachers, church members, parents, and students to carry out service activities. There was a formalized marketing, recruitment, and retention plan. School visits were welcoming, informative, and guided by the teacher. The recruitment materials were appealing and inviting. Teachers collaborated with parents of homeschooled children, neighboring schools

(Adventist, public, and/or private), and other educational entities.

### **Looking Forward: Supporting Small Schools by Fostering Excellence**

Noting the percentage of small and multigrade schools (more than 60 percent of elementary schools in the NAD have three or fewer teachers),<sup>27</sup> we recognize that small schools and their dedicated teachers are essential to the ecology of Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions. Students in excellent small schools are thriving. When we visited high-quality small schools, we noticed a sense of belonging and strong social ties among the students, teachers, parents, and church members. We also noticed rigorous academics and curious children who care for one another and can work well individually and in groups. We felt that teachers and pastors worked as a ministry team, and that board members and the entire church community were invested in the school. Students, teachers, parents, pastors and church members together build this positive environment for teaching and learning together through their shared mission.

As we move forward, how can we ensure that all small schools are centers of excellence, providing these same opportunities for their students? We recognize that all small schools can capitalize on their strengths while growing in areas where they may experience challenges. To support ongoing development, teachers in small schools may wish to evaluate their own practices and focus on areas using as a guide the outcomes and indicators described in this article (see page 7) as well as the synthesized questions. Unions and institutions of higher education can also tailor professional development to support the unique challenges and opportunities in multigrade classrooms, as well as honoring the multiple roles that teachers in small schools may fill. Small schools and multigrade classrooms provide great opportunities to meet student needs, and to foster our collective journey in supporting excellence. ✍

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*This article has been peer reviewed.*

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# Shifting Our Lens:



## Practical Trauma-informed Approaches for Educators

**S**ocial-emotional learning. Diversity and inclusion. Trauma-informed education.

These are buzzwords in education today, with interest growing as educators seek to support students and families amidst the realities of COVID-19's ongoing ramifications.<sup>1</sup> Teachers and administrators of small schools and multi-grade classrooms need practical solutions that align with our Seventh-day Adventist worldview and educational philosophy.

We (the authors) share the privilege of working with young people and teachers worldwide. Still, we have

noticed that in the reality of our broken world, our students (and, when we're honest, even we ourselves) are having a hard time concentrating on academic subjects and following through on tasks. The individual realities of various forms of household dysfunction, abuse, and neglect,<sup>2</sup> community violence, political strife, racial tensions, natural dis-

asters, and consistent exposure to what may be minimized as "lesser traumas" occur at an alarming rate.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, various people groups have experienced shared historical trauma or collective traumas. Certain categories of school children (racial, gender, special-needs, neurodivergent learners, etc.) also have diverse experiences that are shared and sometimes unique. All these experiences affect people's brains, biology, bodies, beliefs, and behaviors.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps we are like the Israelites in Exodus 5 and 6, who were so distressed by the burden of making the same number of bricks without straw being provided that when God sent

BY CHARITY GARCIA, INGRID WEISS SLIKKERS, and TARA BAILEY

His redemptive message through Moses, they *could not hear it* (vs. 9). While various Bible translations use other terminology, they consistently show a picture of people so devastated, with such broken spirits that they could not even hear the message of deliverance.

When I (I.W.S.) worked as a child-and-family therapist prior to becoming a university educator, young people with devastating personal stories would be referred to me. The impact of the stressors on their nervous system would cause them to not only have difficulties learning but also managing their emotions which, in the long term, led to significant potential for many harmful conditions. The brain is negatively impacted as cortisol hormone levels rise. Although cortisol production is necessary for healthy body function and useful in helping the body respond to stress, in recent years, we have been seeing levels that are toxic.<sup>5</sup> and can produce a variety of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, digestive problems, headaches, muscle tension and pain, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke, sleep problems, weight gain, and memory and concentration impairment.<sup>6</sup>

As a teacher in a one-room school, I (T.B.) feel this! Multigrade classrooms filled with multiple sad faces, negative thinking, insecurities, aggression, and off-putting behaviors paint only a small picture of what I experience year after year. Even after serving as an administrator and teacher for more than 20 years, I never get used to meeting the challenge of receiving new students into my classroom, knowing they will come with a wide range of mindsets, experiences, and backgrounds. As an Adventist educator, I know I play a vital role in how diversity is addressed within my small-school classroom.

I (C.G.) have had the unique opportunity to grapple with the realities that my co-author (T.B.) shared as a middle school and high school teacher, as well as responsibilities in preparing preservice teachers and inservice educators to meet the wide-

spread need for trauma-informed approaches with students. Hope is possible, particularly when teachers receive help by being empowered with tools and strategies for implementation. It is with this understanding that Seventh-day Adventist educators can approach the diverse needs of a variety of groups while allowing for individual differences and experiences. This is the heart of trauma-informed diversity and inclusion work.

**It is not uncommon for trauma to reveal itself within the foundations of learning and the learning process itself. Students who have unresolved trauma may have difficulty processing oral and written communication and thus will benefit from receiving instruction in multiple modalities.**

#### Scope of the Problem

According to Dan Siegel, “Trauma is the word used to mean overwhelming experience/s” or “experience/s we have that overwhelms our capacity to cope.”<sup>7</sup> Human brains are responding to chronic stress, which is at historic levels, due to the current state of our world. The raised cortisol levels are not allowing people’s bodies to move from a condition of crisis response into a rest and digest/restore response that is so vital for learning and social relationships.

The National Child Traumatic

Stress Network states that children who have experienced trauma can experience a variety of responses, including intense and ongoing emotional upset, depressive symptoms or anxiety, behavioral changes, difficulties with self-regulation, problems relating to others or forming attachments, regression or loss of previously acquired skills, attention and academic difficulties, nightmares, difficulty sleeping and eating, and physical symptoms, such as aches and pains.

Teenagers may use drugs or alcohol, behave in risky ways, or engage in unhealthy sexual activity.<sup>8</sup> “Higher level brain growth is stunted, leaving some children at as little as half their age in cognitive functions. Lower-level brain functions, which control instinctive flight or fight responses, overdevelop as a response to trauma.”<sup>9</sup>

The book chapter on trauma-informed restorative responses from *Revealing Jesus in the Learning Environment* states:

“Most trauma occurs in the context of relationships. Abuse, neglect, violence—these are all inflicted by another person, often someone close. Unfortunately, in this broken world relationships can often bring about more brokenness. The students that you have in your classes may have distorted perceptions of themselves, others, and even God due to how they have been treated. They may be suffering the lasting consequences of trauma from a relationship that was meant to build them up rather than tear them down.”<sup>10</sup>

It is not uncommon for trauma to reveal itself within the foundations of learning and the learning process itself. Students who have unresolved trauma may have difficulty processing oral and written communication and thus will benefit from receiving instruction in multiple modalities. Executive function (the mental processes and cognitive functioning that help one regulate behavior, remember, plan, focus, and think) is also often a struggle for many students. Explicit instruction, visual representation,

guided practice of procedures, and step-by-step goal completion are critical to their success. Understanding cause-and-effect relationships can also be very difficult for such students.<sup>11</sup>

Understanding these issues may also offer insight into why students may not respond well to classroom-management strategies that rely heavily on a consequences-driven approach without the added support of retraining the brain to respond differently in the future. Students may have difficulties with transitions within or between subjects or be unable to sustain focus on their academic work. This lack of focus does not result from student inattention; rather, it is a hypervigilant focus on what may appear to us to be all the wrong things. Our students may be paying attention to their environment and the smallest of changes in the tone, cadence, body language, or variety of sensory input

around them to ensure their own safety. (For alternative strategies, we recommend looking into Trust-based Relational Intervention out of the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development (<http://tcu.edu>), Lori Desautels' work on Connection Over Compliance (<http://revelationsineducation.com>), and Ross Greene's work on Collaborative Problem Solving (<http://www.cpsconnection.com>).

#### *Shift in perspective*

In the face of the staggering impact of trauma, Sandra Bloom<sup>12</sup> is credited for changing the perspective of asking "What's wrong with you?" into asking "What's happened to you?" This shift will revolutionize how we work with emotionally hurting people. The trauma-informed approach implements Howard Bath's<sup>13</sup> three pillars to achieve a healing and growing environment: *safety, connections, and managing emotions*.

When we consider our small-

school classrooms, especially the one-room classroom, it can be overwhelming for even an experienced teacher to meet the needs of students who may be experiencing the aforementioned challenges. Such children must feel safe for their brains and bodies to develop and heal. Deep connections or relationships, especially with key adults, are essential to growth. And the recognition and management of emotions are critical to well-being throughout one's lifespan.<sup>14</sup> To support students culturally and socio-emotionally, as well as be sensitive to their trauma, care and concern must come first—before curriculum and content. It is within this whole-person development that students are prepared "for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come."<sup>15</sup>



### *Implementation of the principles*

As we seek to incorporate these pillars into an already demanding structure, we must lean on Christ's wisdom, success, and strength (see Philippians 4:13; and *Education*, page 19). Countless strategies might be considered for each individual classroom setting. Still, teachers must continue to keep the three pillars in mind when deciding if the strategies they have chosen will be effective for their students. The authors and others have used the following strategies to effectively address the needs of these students:

#### **Safety**

Working hard to make sure students are physically safe (i.e., using various drills, COVID protocols, etc.) is key, but developing an environment where all students *feel* safe is also important. Be sure to intentionally build relationships and rapport with each student. Learn as much as possible about how every student thinks and what makes your students feel safe.

#### *Create predictable schedules and routines (and contingency plans for situations when flexibility is needed).*

Schools are typically very good at developing a structure through schedules and routines. Build on that strength by creating a strategy to use when things need to change. For example, when introducing the schedule for the year, make sure to post it in your classroom and talk about times when flexibility will be needed. Have specific color cards laminated to represent these specific times, and practice putting a card next to the place on the daily schedule poster where flexibility is needed. For example, a blue "flexibility card" could be placed next to the "outside at lunch" part of the schedule to show that lunch recess will take place in the gym due to weather conditions. Reassuring students that the teacher has a plan for the unexpected and specific physical actions for them to take when the unexpected occurs will make them feel confident about their continuing safety and security.

### *Expect unexpected responses*

When students experience traumatic life experiences, this can trigger behaviors that teachers might otherwise label as "challenging." Educators must be ready to face any unexpected responses when interacting with students. Preparation for such responses can help teachers turn a potentially disastrous situation into a learning experience. For example, a teacher can commit to asking the question "What's the need behind this student's behavior?" With this mindset,

**Small-school classrooms can quickly turn hectic as the teacher tries to meet the many instructional needs of each day successfully. Moving from one group to the next, there is always a risk of losing a personal connection to what is going on with individual students.**

teachers can identify the five to seven most common challenging behaviors (i.e. giving up/lack of caring, sassy responses, refusals that quickly move to anger or crying, students running out of the classroom) that are occurring in their classrooms and more proactively identify a set of phrases and actions to address those situations. Additionally, as teachers get to know their individual students and their likely responses, they can work with the child and the family to identify specific re-

sponses that will support the student so he or she may return to learning.

#### **Connection**

Relationships between the teacher and students can significantly affect student resilience<sup>16</sup> and academics.<sup>17</sup> According to Perry and Szalavitz, "It is people that change people, not programs."<sup>18</sup> One way to do this is to conduct daily check-ins with students. For example, ask students to use the metaphor of an engine, check in with how they are doing, and select the appropriate color—blue for "too slow," green for "just right," and red for "too fast" (see The Alert Program: <https://www.alertprogram.com/teachers/>). Alternatively, students could indicate how they are doing by giving thumbs up, down, to the side, or by identifying on a chart what most accurately describes their state of mind.

When a classroom consists of several grade, age, and ability levels, surveys can identify problem areas in students' lives and what makes them uncomfortable, after which the teacher or counselor can conference with them individually to be sure the survey results are accurate, and then take appropriate action to solve the problems identified.

#### *Implement meaningful interactions*

Small-school classrooms can quickly turn hectic as the teacher tries to meet the many instructional needs of each day successfully. Moving from one group to the next, there is always a risk of losing a personal connection to what is going on with individual students. Here are three strategies to help small-school educators implement meaningful interactions with their students:

**Strategy No. 1:** Focus on changing how you give directions or respond. You can reduce problematic behaviors with your patience and tone. Teachers make up 50 percent of every interaction with a student. *For example:* Your class is working on a group project, and some students do not want to participate. By choosing to be patient and taking the time to ask why, you

may be surprised to discover that they show you ways the project can become more engaging.

**Strategy No. 2:** Avoid authoritarian directives. Although we as teachers are the authority in our classrooms, we don't have to constantly try to prove it. We are there to serve and teach, so we must value every student's feelings. Children can sense when someone cares only about being in charge and not about how they feel, so we must avoid power struggles whenever possible. We must pause and consider how we say things and how our responses make others feel. *For example:* Write down the carefully worded directions on a sticky note and place them gently on the student's desk to avoid a scene while at the same time accomplishing the instructions being given. Allow a generous wait time for the instructions to be followed.

**Strategy No. 3:** Give each student a sense of control in decision making. This is when we can use our authority to guide students into good decision-making. Sharing decision-making power with our students enables them to own their own choices and commitments. Embed choice in your directions. *For example,* instead of saying, "Line up with the other students," you can offer them a choice by asking, "Would you like to go to your assigned position in the line or to the back?" Choice options should be carefully worded so students learn the benefit of making good decisions.

### *Build rapport*

When schools have intimate classroom structures and a small student population, building rapport with students and getting to know each of them as individuals will build trust. Here are a couple of strategies that have worked well for us:

**Strategy No. 1:** Greeting students daily by name is a very simple strategy but is easily forgotten. Every student, especially our traumatized students, should be called by name every day at school. This should take



place first thing in the morning. You can have a meeting time to allow all students to greet one another. This will give you the opportunity to greet the students with whom you are particularly looking to build a stronger relationship. Teach the class to greet with love, care, and respect.

**Strategy No. 2:** McKibben's 2-by-10 rule<sup>19</sup> is a strategy that can be used specifically for students who need to develop, as soon as possible, a trusting relationship with their teacher in order for effective learning to take place. To get to know them, talk to them for two minutes a day for 10 days in a row about topics unrelated to academics or behavior. Alternatively, if there are many students who would benefit from this strategy, but the teacher lacks the time to implement this with each one individually,

a group two-minute targeted journaling time could be used. For 10 days, the students take two minutes each day to journal how they feel that day. The teacher then responds to the students by writing in their journals outside of class time. This trust-building strategy should be repeated several times throughout the year, especially after students exhibit anger or frustration and after school vacations and long weekends.

### **Managing Emotions**

*Teach emotions and self-regulation strategies*

Actively teach and reinforce what students are already doing to help calm themselves when they are feeling

very excited or upset about something (i.e., spinning, shaking their leg or moving from side to side, covering their mouth with their hand, fidgeting with something, etc.). Introduce new strategies that can further this goal (i.e., box breathing,<sup>20</sup> humming a tune, drinking ice water, doing wall push-ups, etc.). Give students ample opportunity to practice a variety of strategies and to develop their own personalized list to refer to in the future.

### *Change the channel*

As trusting relationships are built between teacher and student, it becomes easier to direct students away from behavior that hinders learning. In a small-school setting, the teacher can train the entire school or classroom how to help one another stay focused on learning.

Sometimes in our small-classroom settings, it seems easier to separate and isolate students. Unfortunately, during these breaks, students may dwell on negative memories, current stressors, angry thoughts, or worries, which can be counterproductive.

It can be helpful for students to learn that they can “change the channel” within their minds in order to focus better at school. Explain that their brain is like a remote control that they can use to “switch the channel” to help them calm down. Cognitive distractions or brain breaks can help reduce negative thinking. For example, for young children, these switching activities can include a listening center or a “find the picture” activity. For older students, you might try creating a think tank within the classroom, provide coloring pages for older children, or use more abstract strategies such as counting all the green items in the room, saying the alphabet backwards, etc.

### *Identify and build on strengths*

Doing something well provides a foundation for doing other things well. This strategy lends itself well to small classroom settings, as it provides the opportunity for the teacher to build a family of strengths.

It is often easy to focus on the weaknesses of students. However, when students feel needed and valued, the atmosphere changes—they feel empowered to be the person God created them to be. It is important that students experience competence to develop a more accurate self-narrative and to create a positive self-image. We want them to say, “I really enjoyed helping the younger students with their artwork. When I grow up, I want to help children.” Or “I am good at fixing things. I could be an engineer or mechanic someday.”

When giving negative feedback, teachers can start and end with a positive comment: (1) “I love how you remembered . . . ,” (2) “You made a small error when . . . ,” (3) “Great job getting back on track after . . . .” Helping students see their competence helps shift our energy as teachers from “fixing problems” to “identifying and reinforcing strengths.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The trauma-informed perspective may seem overwhelming. However, trauma-informed education is not a list of activities, items for the classroom, curriculum, or even changing our language, it is a way of being—a way of viewing ourselves and the children we lead through God’s eyes of full acceptance.

We invite you to join us on a journey where together, we keep the three pillars of the trauma-informed perspective always in sight: *safety, connection, and managing emotions*. To do this, Pause each morning and evening and ask yourself, How did I see these three pillars today? How can I be intentional about planning to see them tomorrow? When we choose this “lens,” we will be able to create safe environments for children from any background to be seen and fully accepted—and to be aware of their value in God’s eyes. We will teach while recognizing and managing our own emotions and, possibly most im-

portantly, seek to connect intentionally and deeply with each child, as here is where transformation happens.

Remember the children of Israel who couldn’t even hear the message of redemption and freedom? Much like them, we are in for a journey before reaching the ultimate promised land. Through times of tribulations, lack of resources, and discouragement, Moses led the people. And though he faced fear, frustration, and even anger, he held on to God’s hand and leaned on Aaron and others. Seek and be open to joining other educators, not only for support but also for practical implementation ideas. As small-school educators, we can partner with other small-school educators by sharing strategies and resources through e-mails, Zoom co-planning sessions, or administrative working sessions. God dwelt every step of the way with Moses, and He promises to do the same for us. ✍

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## Using Online Education



## to Address the Challenges of Small, Multigrade Schools

Small schools face practical challenges in delivering high-quality education while operating with limited staff and budget constraints in multigrade classrooms. Educators in these schools require support and services that not only increase student learning but also preserve the teachers' bandwidth (the emotional, mental, and physical energy needed to engage in tasks fully).<sup>1</sup> According to the Adventist Education website's statistics, 60 percent of all schools within the Adventist system in the North American Division (NAD) are staffed by fewer than three teachers.<sup>2</sup>

One way teachers in these challenging positions meet the learning needs of students is to seek out innovative alternatives to traditional methods of instruction. Using online education and resources is one such creative alternative that many teachers worldwide have explored. In this article, *online education* will be defined

as self-contained teaching and learning that occur independently of the classroom. Learning engagement happens via the Internet, and like the face-to-face classroom, has the following elements: a clear learning progression, alignment to standards, learning outcomes or objectives, and formative feedback (either within the resource or provided by the classroom teacher). This article explores how online education is being used to increase students' learning in small multigrade schools and offers practical applications for educators searching for innovative, research-based teaching methods.

BY LORI IMASIKU, MICHAEL GAYLE, MICHELLE BACCHIOCCHI, AND MELANIE KARTIK

## Addressing Practical Concerns of Small Schools

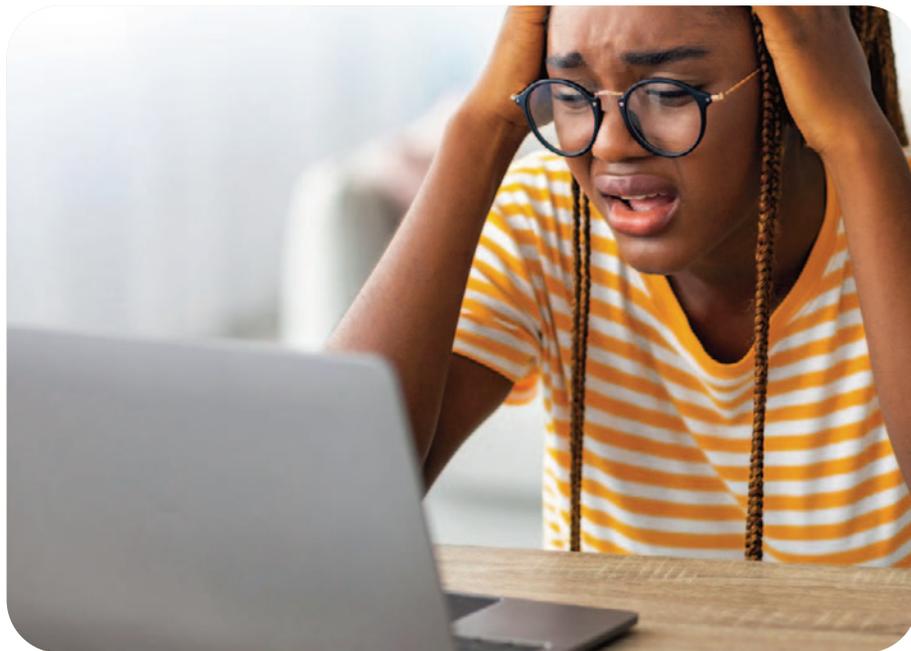
Online education addresses several practical concerns of small schools, such as student access to the curriculum due to a limited instructional capacity to deliver the curriculum. Often in small schools, the number of subjects exceeds the number of qualified teachers available. Increasing teacher positions can be cost-inflating, while training existing teachers can be taxing on the budget and the teachers. Many small and rural schools have addressed these obstacles through technology by integrating hybrid teaching and learning models and exploring ways for their teachers to collaborate with other educators.

There are poignant lessons to learn from the global transition to online.<sup>3</sup> Studies have found that online education using digital tools and resources benefits both teacher and student.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, online education is especially relevant for small schools in rural settings, as it can meet the unique needs of students in small schools.<sup>5</sup> Effective tools for online education include open resources available to all teachers and beneficial online practices such as the integration of asynchronous learning.

Farmer and West found that concerns surrounding online education fell into three main categories: personal, instructional, and relational. Educators need to be aware of the negative outcomes, such as decreased personal interactions and increased screen time, with the addition of online use. It is important for educators to offer balance within the curriculum to ensure that relational and personal needs are met within the classroom. Technology enhancements should be integrated into the classroom with teacher support and monitoring of student learning.

### Online Specialists and Collaboration

In Greece, foreign-language instruction is part of the core national curriculum. Children in rural schools on the Greek islands often do not have as much access to foreign-language



(mainly English) instruction as do their urban counterparts.<sup>6</sup> Larger urban schools have more teachers and larger budgets to train teachers in specialized subjects, which creates inequitable educational opportunities for those attending rural schools. To address this inequality, Lymperis<sup>7</sup> explains that these Greek schools have begun collaborations in which urban teachers or language specialists are able to provide instruction delivery online to students attending schools without access to foreign-language instruction. Initial research found that the implementation of hybrid models of teaching and learning increased student achievement (and possibly future access to competitive educational programs) and cost less than hiring a teacher or sending existing teachers for extensive training.

Online education can take the form of teacher collaboration, as modeled in New Zealand rural schools. Schools have partnered to share resources and teaching staff in order to address student needs that cannot realistically be met in small one- and two-teacher schools.<sup>8</sup> McLean et al.<sup>9</sup> found that teachers and principals in rural multi-grade schools face additional stress due to the number of responsibilities placed on each staff member.

The Ministry of Education in New Zealand established the Virtual Learn-

ing Network (VLN) to address this challenge. This online community of educators allows for reciprocal sharing of resources “utilizing digital technologies to enhance learning outcomes and opportunities for learners.”<sup>10</sup> Collaboration enables teachers to digitally share their teaching skills and curriculum across a network of schools, increasing student access to diverse curricula and teaching styles and allowing students in rural settings to have educational experiences that are equivalent to what is offered in schools with more resources.<sup>11</sup>

### Asynchronous Learning and Flipped Classrooms

Asynchronous learning began as correspondence education, also known as “distance learning” or “video learning.” This format enables sharing of information that does not occur simultaneously and allows students to learn at their own speed and on their own timetable. In comparison, synchronous learning is live, interactive information that occurs in real time. Using asynchronous methods, teachers can delve deeper into content using pre-recorded lessons that students can view and review by taking notes before meeting

in class. Flipped classroom models utilize asynchronous methods in which instruction occurs at home, and hands-on learning occurs in the classroom. These models have been found to increase student achievement and may help to address some of the challenges of multigrade classrooms.<sup>12</sup>

The flipped classroom method is the application of online-to-offline learning that is student-focused and individualized, rather than traditionally teacher-centered. For example, a teacher can assign a Khan Academy instructional math video for students to watch at home. Then, during school, students engage in independent problem-solving practice supported by the teacher. Students are doing what would typically be considered homework in school with the benefit of the teacher to provide guidance for arriving at correct solutions and minimize frustration. This online-to-offline approach increases student interest, independent learning, and deeper reflection.<sup>13</sup> In addition, this mode of learning allows students to balance home and school life and adds flexibility for the educator.<sup>14</sup> With thoughtful preparation and implementation, flipped classroom strategies can be effective for multigrade classrooms.<sup>15</sup>

### Open Educational Resources (OERs)

Open Educational Resources (OERs) further expand the possibilities for effective online education and help to address small schools' financial concerns. OERs include both digital and non-digital resources that are readily available without fees for procurement, use, or license.<sup>16</sup> OERs can be created and distributed by individuals or groups and housed in public online locations or spaces for educators to find and share texts, videos, blogs, courses, activities, tutorials, and more.<sup>17</sup> OERs should be vetted for quality, original content, rigor, and alignment to Adventist values. As mentioned above, the vetting should be a collaboration process with other small schools.

Carrete-Marin and Domingo-Pena-fiel<sup>18</sup> suggest that OERs offer windows of possibility for students and teachers in multigrade settings, particularly

rural schools with limited resources. These public and free resources allow educators and students to share, access, edit, and redistribute lessons and materials created with limited-to-no restrictions. Educators may modify materials to meet the needs of the learners in the classroom and accommodate for exceptionalities as needed. Additionally, OERs can reduce costs by replacing traditional textbooks with free open textbooks. Open resources are especially advantageous for teaching multiple subjects and grade levels, and addressing unique learner needs.

**Adaptive technology allows for differentiation and remediation with less impact on the teacher. Artificial intelligence can be used by teachers to improve practice through avatar interaction and simulations that allow teachers to practice teaching methods.**

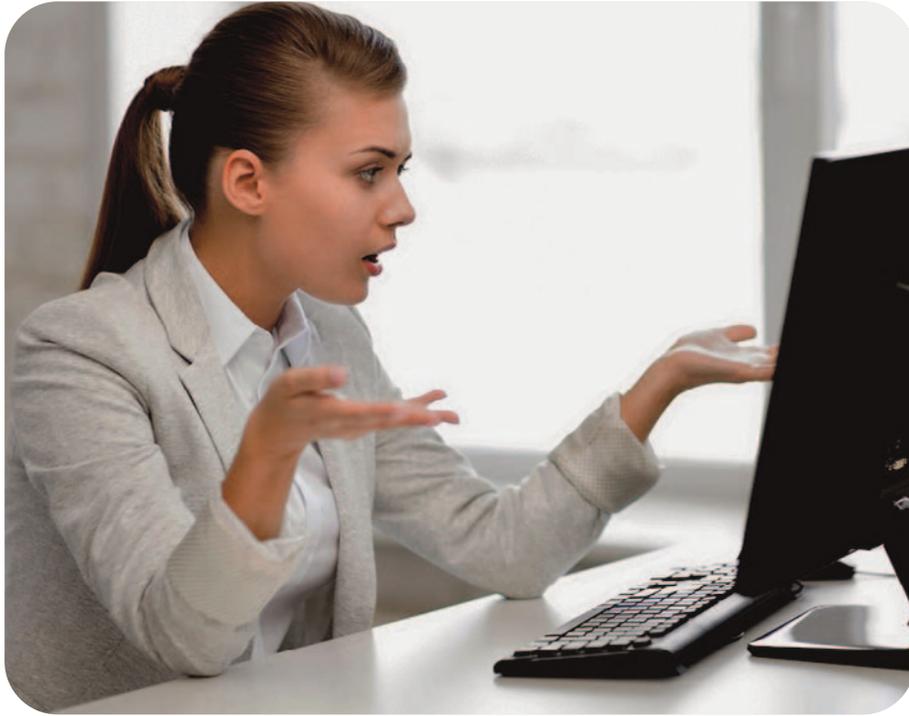
### Artificial Intelligence and Immersive Learning Environments

Education has a long tradition of the teacher delivering and the students memorizing information deemed important. Many factors over the years, including research on learning styles, curricula goal changes such as through Common Core, the introduction of online schooling, and advances in technology, have disrupted this traditional view of education and have made it possible for technology to become an important aid in teach-

ing and learning. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can take many forms—from adaptive Web-based programs to robots in the classroom. Artificial intelligence is designed to “learn” student or teacher behavior and adapt accordingly.<sup>19</sup> Adaptive technology allows for differentiation and remediation with less impact on the teacher. Artificial intelligence can be used by teachers to improve practice through avatar interaction and simulations that allow teachers to practice teaching methods. While the training of teachers will require investments in time and money, it will allow teachers and students to engage with sophisticated technology. Simulation classrooms are being used nationwide to prepare preservice teachers and to provide professional development training.<sup>20</sup>

Artificial intelligence simulates human intelligence, while virtual reality (VR) provides immersive learning environments. Immersive learning allows students to learn through experience. Virtual reality in the classroom in its simplest form looks like a virtual field trip. Virtual field trips allow students (especially those in more remote or rural areas) to experience museums, landmarks, or other areas of interest without ever leaving the classroom. In a more-advanced model, virtual reality can allow students to be completely immersed in learning environments, interact with peers in other locations, and complete a variety of educational tasks.<sup>21</sup>

Virtual reality was first embraced in the medical profession so that students pursuing healthcare degrees could practice procedures without patient risk, but it has now become a valuable tool in the K-12 classroom as a customizable immersive learning environment that increases student experience with curricular goals. Small schools can use emerging online technology such as AI and VR to provide students with adaptive, personalized, and immersive learning environments that might not otherwise be accessible. VR technology has become more cost effective for education purposes<sup>22</sup> and teacher training can be accessed at little to no cost



through several professional-development platforms such as professional conferences and state continuing-education clock hours.

### Factors in the Adoption of Online Education

An abundance of online resources and learning models exists for educators, but access to these materials is only the first step. Fullan<sup>23</sup> notes that for sustainable change to happen within the context of education, teachers must believe in the effectiveness of the change and their efficacy in implementing changes. Adopting new technologies in a classroom can be an overwhelming prospect for educators, particularly those already feeling overtaxed or not confident about their technology capabilities.<sup>24</sup> This lack of self-efficacy and capacity to easily determine what is and is not useful in the classroom are the most prominent barriers to success in technology integration.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, educators may have varying perceptions regarding the value of technology overall, which impacts the level to which online learning is integrated. However, in the *Lifeline: A Handbook for Small School Success*,

published by the North American Division,<sup>26</sup> small-school educators are encouraged to incorporate technology to improve student learning in all academic areas and workforce skills development, as well as to increase student levels of engagement. Teachers need extensive, good-quality training, mentoring, and follow up to help them feel comfortable with the new approaches and to implement them successfully.

Access to technology does not alone correlate to its acceptance in the classroom or increase students' academic success.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, educators need to determine the usefulness of the proposed educational technology and evaluate their ability to effectively implement it within the classroom. The perceived ease of use and effectiveness in student learning are significant predictors of classroom use. Online-education resources can increase teacher productivity, aid the teacher in personalizing instruction for the student, and increase student engagement in learning.<sup>28</sup>

### Action Steps

The following teacher and researcher recommendations are based on evidence and strategies that have benefited small schools. The action

steps presented here, together with online resources, have the potential to effectively help small schools and their teachers meet student learning needs while working within budget constraints, time parameters, and the bounds of the educators' personal energy resources:

- *Integrate hybrid teaching and learning models:* Schools and teachers may increase instructional proficiency by integrating online teaching in core content areas and curriculum extensions. For example, a school might add a language course (e.g., Spanish, American Sign Language, Chinese) via an online course or teacher. Such instruction could be delivered either synchronously or asynchronously. Adventist institutions that offer online courses include West Coast Adventist School (<https://wcasdl.ca/>), Richmond Academy (<https://www.rasda.org/>), Atlanta Adventist Academy (<https://www.aaa.edu/trueconnect>), Prairie Adventist School (<https://pacesca.nada.org/>), and Griggs International Academy, which serves students globally (<https://www.griggs.edu/>). These schools have established models to support small schools in their capacity to deliver the curriculum.

- *Form a Virtual Learning Network (VLN):* Like integrating hybrid models, partnering with other teachers and schools in a VLN can create or supplement the collection of resources already available to the school. Schools in a VLN can share curriculum components or content areas. For example, in a VLN with three participating schools, a teacher in one school could teach upper-level math for all three schools, while a teacher in another school teaches upper-level English. A teacher from a third school might provide science instruction, with the labs taking place at the three respective schools. There are many possibilities for such arrangements. Teachers in Adventist schools should work with the conference superintendent to facilitate such collabora-

rations. There are also opportunities for VLNs to connect teaching and learning across conferences, with unions facilitating such collaboration.

- *Flip the classroom*: In a flipped classroom model, students engage in lessons that are taught asynchronously (outside of class time) via video or multimedia. After the lesson, students do guided practice or what otherwise might be called “homework” in class with the teacher. This model requires careful planning by the teacher and robust Internet access by students. Resources such as Nearpod and Edpuzzle<sup>29</sup> allow for both original content creation and the use of pre-made content. These applications also integrate with learning-management systems such as Google Classroom and Canvas. By using these resources, an educator could build an extensive library of instructional videos, raising the potential for far-reaching benefits to be achieved through the flipped classroom model.

- *Incorporate Open Educational Resources (OERs)*: Small schools can make use of OERs (free and freely adaptable resources) including books, units, lessons, and videos for instruction and assessment. OERs are published under guidelines that are less restrictive than traditional copyright laws, which helps save time and financial resources in planning and implementing materials for the classroom. For example, OER Commons (<http://oercommons.org>) is an online library of thousands of freely available educational resources. Additionally, there are many “branches” of OER Commons called “hubs” managed by states and other organizations. Hubs like #GoOpen Michigan and the OER Commons Hub: K-12 Teaching and Learning<sup>30</sup> are specially curated collections relevant to K-12 educators. These sources should be vetted to ensure quality, original content, and alignment with the principles of Adventism. The Adventist system has several online, long-distance schools and centralized resources, such as the Adventist Learning Community and CIRCLE websites, which provide numerous examples of lessons, unit

plans, and instructional material.

- *Use Adventist Education Resource collections*: Along with taking the above action steps, teachers in small schools are encouraged to use websites and other resources that provide summaries of various available technologies to help them sort through how such materials might be useful in particular contexts.<sup>31</sup> In the context of Adventist education in particular, there are many resources that have already been developed or curated to assist teachers with varying levels of technology. Online professional-devel-

**Online education can lighten the load for the teacher and enhance creativity in teaching and learning using available tools and resources. Becoming aware of the simple and effective use of online tools and resources can change teachers' overall perceptions of technology.**

opment opportunities at the Adventist Learning Community (<http://www.adventistlearningcommunity.org>) include courses and webinars specifically for small-school teachers. Resources such as the Curriculum and Instruction Center Linking Educators (<http://www.circle.adventist.org>) and the technology page at <http://www.adventisteducation.org> are available to support teachers looking to integrate technology and online education into their classrooms. The Adventist Education website was updated in 2022 to be more streamlined for the full range of Adventist education technology.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Small multigrade schools are common within the Adventist educational system. These schools require support and streamlining of services to increase student engagement in learning while also preserving teacher bandwidth. Integration of technology and online education offers excellent resources for such schools to implement, especially in contexts where the educator’s emotional, mental, and physical reserves are already maxed out, and outside support is low, as is often the case in small schools.

Educators will find it helpful to frame the selection of resources based on their answers to these three questions, which will help them determine whether and to what degree integrating a specific online learning resource will be successful in their classroom:

1. Does it meet student learning needs?
2. Does it address a pragmatic concern associated with small-school teaching?
3. Will it enhance the educator’s capacities for what is most important—student engagement?

Not all available online learning opportunities will fit every context. Still, the addition of even just one or two interventions in a small-school context that meet the criteria outlined above could lead to a deeper student understanding and an overall sense of teacher efficacy and empowerment. This, in turn, could increase educators’ motivation and create thriving educational environments in small Adventist schools.

Online education can lighten the load for the teacher and enhance creativity in teaching and learning using available tools and resources. Becoming aware of the simple and effective use of online tools and resources can change teachers’ overall perceptions of technology.<sup>33</sup> Asynchronous learning strategies positively affect time management and enhance student achievement—a win-win situation. The incorporation of open resources can foster creativity in both students and teachers and meet a range of instructional and learner requirements.

Online education is not a remedy for all challenges, but it may help fill the gap for hectic schedules, unique student needs and differentiation, and stimulate inspiration levels in teaching and learning. ✍️

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*This article has been peer reviewed.*

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Scott R. Ward

## A Three-story Approach to Teaching Scripture

Children are not born Christian. Nor are they born Seventh-day Adventists. They must be led to Jesus individually and personally. Discipleship doesn't happen by simply being in a Christian environment—there must be a very intentional process for every child. Teaching children only about doctrine does not make them Christian or Adventist, either—it can give them a wonderful picture of who God is, but it cannot replace a personal relationship with Jesus. In my experience, it is only when the beautiful gospel story of who Jesus is and what He has done is presented to the children and young adults in our schools and classrooms that they will be open to giving their lives to Jesus. Then, embracing the lovely truths our denomination holds dear will nurture that relationship into the fullest life that can be had both now and in eternity.

### The Importance of Story

In my 31 years of ministry experience, running student colporteur programs, children's ministries, youth ministries, young-adult ministries, and yes, even teaching at the seminary, I have found that most of the young people I have encountered within Adventism seem to understand the doctrines of our church better than they understand the gospel. I once even served under a senior pastor who said, "The gospel? The gospel is for other Christians to teach—we have the truth. We will teach the truth!"

But the truth is that worldview forms from the earliest moments of a child's life. These significant developments need to happen at each stage of life, at home and at school, for children to build a strong foundation

for the correct doctrine to stand upon so that they can develop a healthy personal relationship with Jesus. This perspective is why we must begin leading our children to God from birth—the teaching of the great *Shema*<sup>1</sup>—the foundation of Jewish scripture. We must teach them at home and away from home, when we lie down and when we rise, and as we are going along the way. And the best way to teach our students—educating them in the ways of the Lord—is to follow the tradition of Jesus and other great teachers who taught with stories.

### Examples in Scripture

In establishing a biblical narrative approach for educating young people from their earliest years, we can learn much from the apostle John, who wrote:

"We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy" (1 John 1:1-4, NLT).<sup>2</sup>

This Scripture passage is John's personal testimony. It helps to explain why he wrote his gospel stories the way he did. It perhaps even helps us understand why he would later use vivid imagery to describe in great

detail the movie-like narratives given to him in vision on the Isle of Patmos and recorded in the Book of Revelation. John desired through his writings to communicate the story of Jesus and how believers' lives can become a part of that story.

One of the most transparent and valuable narratives I have used in this approach to Scripture is in John 1:35 to 39—the calling of the first disciples. I have preached this passage at weddings, every baptismal class I've taught, countless sermons, and the seminary classroom. My job as a seminary professor is to teach my students how to reach children by partnering with church schools. To do that, I must set the example of using narrative if I expect them to do the same because I understand that they will more likely do more of what I “do” than of what I “say.” So, this passage is the one I always share when discussing how to disciple children in the tradition of the great *Shema*:

“The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, ‘Look! There is the Lamb of God!’ When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

“Jesus looked around and saw them following. ‘What do you want?’ he asked them. “They replied, ‘Rabbi’ (which means ‘Teacher’), ‘where are you staying?’

“‘Come and see,’ he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day” (John 1:35-39).

The invitation is to come and see. It is to come and live. It is to come and follow in the footsteps of Jesus, learning His ways and following His example. It seems interesting to me that much of Scripture and almost all the teachings of Jesus are in narrative form that actually “show” us how to live. Yet, the majority of what has been taught in many Adventist classrooms and from many Adventist pulpits historically has tended to be more doctrinal in nature, tending more to weaving a variety of Scriptures together to form teachings rather than teaching through stories. Thankfully, this is changing in some places, especially with the Encounter Bible Curriculum.<sup>3</sup> However, we still have a long way to go, so setting forth this approach to Scripture

**Think about what kind of passion it must have taken to sell all your earthly possessions because you are so excited to have the opportunity to be with Jesus. Imagine what it would take to give up all you have worked for your entire life.**

throughout all subjects and in the hidden curriculum of our schools is very important.

### **How We Lost Our Way**

Have you ever thought about the stories of the deep, passionate love that the Millerite founders of our denomination had for Jesus? Think about what kind of passion it must have taken to sell all your earthly possessions because you are so excited to have the opportunity to be with Jesus. Imagine what it would take to give up all you have worked for your entire life. What were their devotional lives like? What habits lit such passion? I think we have a general idea that they were passionate, but I want to understand more fully “how” they fueled this enthusiasm and kept it alive. We must remember that this fervor was already in place during the great religious awakening in America in the mid-1800s when the Millerite movement took place.

This great passion for Jesus led to the discovery of our denomination’s doctrinal truths—not the other way around. I have a hard time believing all those sacrifices were made out of religious duty—it’s much more likely they were made out of passionate love for Jesus, just like the New Testament apostles who turned the world upside down because of their profound, loving experiences with Jesus and their subsequent on-fire relationships with Him.

The core problem I see with the current approach often taken to leading young people to Christ is that although we have faithfully kept the great truths discovered during our denominations founding, we have somehow forgotten the passionate, on-fire gospel context that made the discovery of these truths possible. This is why we have a hard time sharing the gospel—even with our own children—because we are focused on holding up the pillars of truth rather than holding up Jesus, who *is* “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Did you notice that the “way” comes before the truth? And the way I read it—*way and life*—both strongly refer to relationship theology and discipleship.

I love the doctrines of our church that we refer to as “the Truth”—they are critically important because they paint the most beautiful and compelling picture of who God is and why we should love Him—but if we fail to put the overwhelming emphasis on Jesus Himself, the

truth becomes irrelevant to the people we are trying to reach—including children in our schools. I see this as a significant challenge to our churches and schools today—to put the gospel foundation back under the truth, so it can stand firm and stand tall again.

### How to Find Our Way

How do we put the gospel foundation back in place? The proper hermeneutic, for me, is a narrative, gospel-based hermeneutic, that is, *relationship theology*—the story of God’s love—which lays a strong foundation for discipleship. Interestingly, it seems that Ellen White set this example herself by writing on the life of Christ and telling the stories of His ministry more than she wrote on any other topic.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, her best-selling series, *Conflict of the Ages*, tells story after story showing how God’s story can mingle with human stories in the greatest story ever told—the story of redemption.

So, as we continue to look at stories, we must remember that discipleship needs to happen according to the *Shema* found in Deuteronomy 6—every day, all day long, as children are learning about their world. If we teach them the ways of God and share the stories of His love, that will win their minds and prevail. But, on the other hand, if we fail to teach the children enrolled in Adventist schools the stories of God daily, then the stories the world is telling—through smartphones, computers, and movies, and in other innumerable ways and means—will take precedence. In society today, where in many families, both parents have to work, it is more important than ever that church leaders and educational administrators work together to advocate and support putting our children in places where they can be discipled daily by loving Adventist Christians who are teaching from a gospel

worldview as a foundation for life and truth. This is the only way we can hope to keep our kids with us in this world and in the world to come.

It is essential to clearly understand that every environment that children are in attempts to disciple them—there are no neutral environments in the world. Businesses want to disciple us into materialism, atheists want to disciple us into godlessness, Hollywood wants to disciple us into hedonism, and so on. Especially in a capitalistic society, everyone seems to be

## Suggested Additional Readings

### Articles

Barry Hill and Phil Fitzsimmons, “What Five Students of the *Encounter* Adventist Bible Curriculum Taught Us About Their Spirituality,” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 83:3 (2021): 4-9: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae202183030406.pdf>.

Barbara J. Fisher, “Age-appropriate Experiences and Rituals That Help Students Encounter God, Part I,” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 82:1 (January–March 2020): 12-17: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae202082011206.pdf>.

\_\_\_\_\_, “Age-appropriate Experiences and Rituals That Help Students Encounter God, Part II,” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 82:2 (April–June 2020): 4-8: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae202082020405.pdf>.

\_\_\_\_\_, “The Four H Teaching Strategy—An Interactive, Multisensory Approach to Teaching Bible,” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 78:5 (Summer 2016): 16-26: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae201678051611.pdf>.

\_\_\_\_\_, “Bible Stories in the Classroom: The Why and the How,” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 77:1 (October/November 2014): 24-31: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae201477012408.pdf>.

Beverly Christian, “Values Education and Faith Formation—A Neat Fit or More?” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 77:1 (October/November 2014): 16-21: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae201477011606.pdf>.

Glynis Bradfield et al., “Together Growing Fruitful Disciples Framework,” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 74:5 (Summer 2012): 19-23: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae201274051905.pdf>.

\_\_\_\_\_, “The Growing Disciples Inventory—Assessing the Spiritual Development Goals of Christian Education,” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 74:5 (Summer 2012): 24-29: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae201274052406.pdf>.

### Books

Barbara Fisher, *Developing a Faith-based Education: A Teacher’s Manual* (Sydney, Australia: David Barlow Publishing, 2010).

Donna J. Habernicht and Larry Burton, *Teaching the Faith: An Essential Guide for Buioing Faith-shaped Kids* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2004).

### Resources

*Encounter Adventist Curriculum—Bible* <https://encounter.adventisteducation.org/index.html>.

wanting to sell us whatever it is that they are producing to increase their bottom line by trying to tell us stories about how happy we will be if we buy into their philosophy of life. If our young people cannot see how the story of Scripture fits into the story they are living daily, they will have great difficulty seeing the importance and relevance of being Christian. The competing stories the world is telling will most likely prevail.

With this in mind, the narrative is the primary hermeneutic I'm focusing on concerning working with young people. Jens Brockmeier and Hanna Meretoja agree with this hermeneutic when they say, "we propose viewing narrative as a hermeneutic practice in itself, a practice of meaning-making. This practice—or perhaps better, this plethora of practices—is of crucial significance for complex processes of interpretation that underlie, for instance, our ideas of self and identity."<sup>5</sup> This is especially important to remember, considering that finding one's identity is one of the primary tasks that young people face, and our goal is to help them find this identity in Christ within the Adventist Christian community of believers.

### **A Narrative, Gospel-based Hermeneutic**

It is very interesting to me that one of the best passages that helps me to keep discipleship in mind throughout the day is found in the Old Testament. But when you think about it—discipling didn't begin with Jesus in the New Testament—did it? It began with Jesus coming to the Garden of Eden to walk and talk with Adam and Eve. During this time, Jesus was teaching Adam and Eve to tend the garden, and He was teaching them all His ways of creating and enhancing the beauty that surrounded them—and also warning them of the potential dangers in their world. Curt Thompson in his book,

*Anatomy of the Soul*, also brings out this beauty in Scripture when he writes:

"That is why I believe that faithfully telling and listening to our stories is one of the single most important things we can do as followers of Jesus. Storytelling inevitably engages our memories—both the



speaker's and the hearers'—and so opens the door to a different future. The Bible is so powerful in part because it contains the *story* of creation, rebellion, redemption, and recreation, all of which are told in the rich, messy, beautiful, tragic, hopeful tapestry of the lives of God's ancient people."<sup>6</sup>

In my own seminary classroom teaching, I use a three-story approach<sup>7</sup>: First, we must understand the biblical story (for example, David's story if we are studying Psalm 23), then share our own story—that is, how we apply the text to our lives—then send our students out to reflect and find their own story. This is how this passage and the example of my application can help them. Students reflect on how this passage of Scripture can draw them closer to Jesus and have an impact on the way they interact with the world around them. When we do this, it becomes His (Jesus/God's/biblical) story, our own story, and their story. This is perhaps the most important part of my gospel narrative approach to Scripture—we must see our story “within” God's story—and we must understand our story through the lens of God's story, and then share our “God-impacted story” as it intersects with the stories of those we meet.

As a youth pastor, I used the three-story approach to help academy students prepare and deliver worship talks weekly in chapel services. As a seminary professor, I take seminary students into 8th-grade classrooms near the university where I teach, and together we teach the students how to do this. It is an engaging experience for the students. We also work with the school to provide opportunities for the students to share their talks with lower grades. Students have also shared their stories, sometimes two to three at a time for 10 minutes each, as the sermon on education Sabbaths.

The gospel story must be at the center, with discipleship as the process, and a life-changing personal relationship with Jesus as the goal. I believe that keeping these three in mind as we study Scripture and as we soak in it devotionally, will help to keep us on track and give us a true understanding of the purpose and meaning of Scripture. This will help us in leading our children to Jesus and in finding their own identity in Christ.

### Conclusion

There is much more to be researched and said on this topic, especially regarding how a narrative approach to Scripture dovetails with developmental psychology and the well-researched ways in which children need to be taught and nurtured spiritually in each phase of life. As we interact with young people, we must remember that as Christian educators, our primary goal is to help them find their place in the story of God. We must show them where they appear and how choosing Jesus can change their lives. Then we must show them where they fit into the community of believers and provide opportunities for them to “live” their stories in mission and outreach opportunities in the world around them. We must play our part by

being ready daily to share how our devotional times with Jesus each day are impacting our lives and decisions at home and in the classroom as we share life as a part of our school and classroom families.<sup>8</sup> ✍

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*This article has been peer reviewed.*

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Shema is a daily prayer recited by the Jews throughout history and is taken from the words of Moses found in Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 to 9.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this article are quoted from the *New Living Translation* of the Bible. *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, Copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

3. I recommend taking a detailed look at how the Encounter Bible Curriculum does this at <http://encounter.adventisteducation.org>. Especially see the Spiritual Growth and Lordship models under the Approach tab and the Transformational Planning Framework under the Structure tab.

4. See these books by Ellen White: *Steps to Christ, The Desire of Ages, Christ's Object Lessons, Confrontation*, etc.

5. See Jens Brockmeier and Hanna Meretoja, “Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics,” *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 6:2 (Winter 2014): 1-27; the quotation is from page 2.

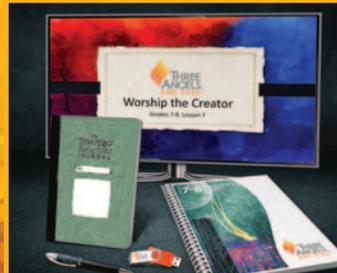
6. Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul, Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carrollton, Texas: Tyndale Momentum, 2010), 81.

7. As a youth pastor, I used the three-story approach to teach young people to share worship talks. This was started by Steve Case in Northern California. Youth pastors at that time were all trained to use this approach with teens. See <https://yfc.net/about/3story/> for more information.

8. For more on this topic see James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2016) and Kara Powell and Brad M Griffin, *3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager: Making the Most of Your Conversations and Connections* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2021). This book takes on the three big questions: *Who am I? Where do I fit? What difference can I make?* Children and young adults need support from parents, educators, youth leaders, and other caring individuals who can help guide them to answers. They need to know that they are part of God's great masterpiece.

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Christy Scott

# Library Management for the Small School in Four Steps:



Teachers in small Seventh-day Adventist schools are frequently required to be proficient in instruction of both traditional disciplines and other aspects of a student's education, including art, music, physical education (PE), as well as library management. A review of teacher-training programs throughout North American Division (NAD) Adventist universities revealed that while art, music, and physical education are frequently addressed in individual teacher-training courses, no such course exists for library management. This omission suggests that teacher training may provide inadequate instruction in areas traditionally covered by school librarians since the assumption is that schools have trained librarians; however, in small Adventist schools, there is no librarian.<sup>1</sup> Researchers in the area of library and information sciences have noted a lack of knowledge among pre-service teachers surrounding the term *information literacy* and uncertainty regarding how to select books for their classroom libraries.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the importance of classroom and school-wide libraries is consistently demonstrated in the research. School librarians and strong library programs are indicators of better reading scores across all grade levels. One study revealed that strong library programs could predict higher math scores in elementary and middle

schools. Data from more than 30 national studies (U.S.)<sup>3</sup> illustrate a connection between strong library programs and improvement in standardized test scores, while one review of international studies found support of the positive impact of libraries on student achievement throughout studies from Australia, the U.K., Canada, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Uganda, and Pakistan.<sup>4</sup>

Visually attractive classroom libraries can increase motivation for reading, and students with access to such environments tend to read more.<sup>5</sup> Unsurprisingly, quality library programs and access are strongly correlated with higher student test scores, and school library use has a strong relationship to reading attainment,<sup>6</sup> suggesting the importance of tackling school-library management in every school.

For teachers without formal training in library science, the process of creating, maintaining, or using a currently existing library may feel daunting. However, the process can be broken down into four basic repeatable concepts—evaluation, planning, purchasing, and organizing. This article will walk teachers through what each concept covers, why it is important, and provide suggestions for beginning the process.

Throughout this article, we will refer to the library as the “school library,” but for teachers in multi-teacher schools, the four steps can also be applied to classroom library if these are separate collections.

### EVALUATE – What Do I Have?

Whether starting from scratch or with a pre-existing collection, evaluation is essential for a positive student experience. How many books are in the library? What is their condition? What is the quality of the story books? What is the quality of reference books? Are the books relevant to the classroom, various reading levels, and students' interests? Is the information presented in the books accurate and up to date? Are there multiples that are out of date or not being used? What is lacking? Do you have books for student interests and reading levels, and for the various curriculum area? Teachers can apply similar questions when evaluating existing software databases including questions such as, Is it in a format that can be accessed?

If you are working with a pre-existing collection, a good first step is to locate and remove out-of-date or damaged books. In an existing collection, large numbers of inappropriate or irrelevant books serve as clutter that keeps the best books from being found for reading and research. One library volunteer shared a story of the church library being combined with the elementary school library and finding that there were five copies of a mid-20th century Pacific Press title topically of interest for adults. The title was never circulated to students but took up space on the shelf. Reducing or removing such titles may feel controversial but means saying "Yes" to a library that supports student success. Using a collection-management policy or having clearly stated goals for the collection that have been approved by shareholders can help reduce controversy surrounding weeding of materials.

Another initial step is to look for outdated information. Books that reference the Soviet Union or other countries that no longer exist may be discarded, and if necessary, a notation made to replace them. Books that refer to Pluto as a planet, or older books about science topics such as biology, dinosaurs, physics, and astronomy, should also be evaluated. In her CREW (Continuous, Review, Evaluation, Weeding) guidelines, Mona Kerby recommends reconsidering any title older than five years in most science and geography topics, and utilizes acronym WORST (Worn out, Out of date, Rarely used, Supplied elsewhere, or Trivial and faddish) for multimedia items such as software or databases.<sup>7</sup>

**Books for the school library should contain high-quality illustrations and text, support the curriculum, and be appropriate for the community culture. Teachers can also consider current student interests when selecting books or other materials.**

If students learn that the library has materials that are outdated, in poor condition, or do not match their interests, they will be less likely to use it. Culling old, out-of-date, or damaged books from the shelves will generally increase student library use. Additionally, removing these books offers a better picture of the usable collection, making it easier to answer questions about how many books you have, what reading levels, what curriculum support, and what areas of student interests may be lacking.

One question frequently asked by pre-service teachers is "How many books should a school library have?" The answer will depend upon your student body, the space available, and your curricular needs. A library to support the entire school and all grade levels will need more titles than a classroom library for two or three grades. Catapano, Fleming, and Elias recommend a minimum of 10 books for every child in a classroom library, with a minimum of 100 books. This offers a beginning guideline, but keep in mind that it is essential to offer materials that appeal to a range of interests as well as reading material at, above, and below grade level so that students may select books they can read independently.<sup>8</sup>

Books for the school library should contain high-quality illustrations and text, support the curriculum, and be appropriate for the community culture. Teachers can also consider current student interests when selecting books or other materials. For example, books on training dogs may not support the curriculum; however, if students have an interest in this topic, it is worth investing in several titles for different reading levels. Conversely, if previous students have expressed interest in a topic, but the current group does not, these titles may be among those that can be easily discarded, especially if they are out of date or tattered.

Students should be able to find books that represent them. When selecting materials, teachers should seek to be aware of their own implicit biases and cultural knowledge, and aim to select stories that provide positive representation of diverse backgrounds, including different races and cultures, special abilities, family types, and physical bodies. In homogenous communities, providing diverse stories may be the only introduction a student has to different backgrounds or cultures, making such books especially important in these libraries.

### **PLAN – What Is My Collection Plan?**

Librarians use collection-development plans to guide purchases. These documents provide collection objectives and help librarians advocate for funding, clarify selection or deselection of titles, help support challenged books, and even assist with evaluation for accreditations.<sup>9</sup> National or local organizations may provide collection standards that must be considered, but the IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), notes that regardless of access to existing standards “collection development decisions should be based on curriculum requirements and instructional approaches.”<sup>10</sup> A collection-development plan with academic and non-academic goals that has been approved by the school board and other stakeholders may save time and prevent headaches later, should a title be challenged. The plan provides a framework for individuals making decisions about the collection. A collection plan considers learners, curriculum, and selection criteria.

Who are the learners using the library? Consider information such as socioeconomic status, cultural backgrounds, languages spoken and read, reading levels, homes with computer access, and what public-library services exist and are accessible in the area. If reviewing a previously completed collection plan, look for any changes in the learners from the last update. These considerations will determine your goals. For instance, if your community does not have a public library, then a stronger fiction collection may be a priority. For example, if a significant percentage of your learners also speak Spanish, you may want to include more Spanish-language titles. If your community has a strong immigrant population from a particular area, then look for titles that connect students with their families’ life experiences. Additionally, considering the academic levels of the students in the classroom will help to guide selection.

As a teacher creating a collection plan, you will benefit from a thorough knowledge of your school’s curriculum. Consider topics that are taught in each grade and over the course of a year. Detail the ways your collection should supplement or support the curriculum. If students will be doing research in particular areas, a strong non-fiction section to support those assignments and

**In your plan, be certain to differentiate between instructional materials (those assigned in the classroom) and library titles that are available to students but not required to be read or assigned for research purposes.**

up-to-date reference materials may be a priority.

Finally, selection criteria help to inform which books you will choose and why. The American Library Association (ALA) provides a workbook for putting together a selection policy and includes criteria you could adopt. Selection criteria should be questions easily asked when you are making a purchasing decision for books or media related to the library. Kerby recommends the following four basic questions in her book on collection development.<sup>11</sup>

1. Is the item new, and has it received favorable reviews?
2. Is the item appropriate for your users?
3. Does the item have a pleasing design?
4. Is it cost-effective?

In your plan, be certain to differentiate between instructional materials (those assigned in the classroom) and library titles that are available to students but not required to be read or assigned for research purposes. You can include criteria specific to the community as well as general criteria. A working collection plan can guide your purchasing decisions. Still, before making large purchases, teachers will want to have their criteria approved by the school board or other decision-making group.

### **PURCHASE – What Will I Buy?**

After evaluating the needs and having a collection plan with selection criteria in place, purchasing books and other materials comes next. While collection plans will vary based upon the individual needs and resourcing of the institution, as well as local or national standard requirements, basic components of a selection policy might include the mission of the school library, statements of intellectual freedom and freedom of information, objectives of the collection (including criteria for inclusion and relationship to the curriculum and identities of its users), who is responsible for selection/purchasing, policies relating to controversial materials, and reconsideration of titles in the collection.<sup>12</sup> In some schools, a particular person, such as the principal or secretary, will purchase selected books. In many institutions, there may be a limited budget. If your school is required to spend a certain amount of funding per student on library materials as part of a state or national accreditation, this may help you deter-

mine the number of books that you will buy each year.

In addition to books, collection plans should include guidelines for software, databases, and periodicals that might be provided in the library.

If you are starting with no library or have discarded much of the existing library due to age and condition, it may be tempting to buy many inexpensive books, but quality titles that will last through many readings, provide factual up-to-date information, and use excellent language and illustrations to tell stories that students enjoy reading will serve the students best. Beginning with the topics covered in the upcoming year's curriculum will help you add strategically to the collection.

Research has revealed that teachers generally have knowledge of where to buy books in a thrifty way but may struggle with what to buy.<sup>13</sup> The evaluation of gaps, the collection plan, and the curriculum goals for the year will help you make wise selections. For instance, if students are assigned to read a book of poetry during the school year, they will need poetry books covering a range of reading levels below, at, and above where they are currently performing. If the collection evaluation reveals out-of-date books on astronomy and genetics or other subjects, the teacher should discard them and look for replacements.

Subscription trade magazines such as *Hornbook* and *School Library Journal* can help purchasers identify books that have received favorable reviews. Resources such as The Children's Book Review website (<https://www.thechildrensbookreview.com/>), blogs, and social media accounts are available without a subscription. The American Library Association nominates and selects outstanding books for a variety of awards, including the Newbery Award. Some awards sponsored by the ALA and other organizations, such as the Coretta Scott King Award and the American Indian Youth Literature Award, are multicultural in scope; others may be regional or chosen by young people, suggesting titles students will enjoy.

A 2009 survey of 17,000 pupils in the United Kingdom indicated that the most common reason students used a school library was because it had books that interested them. More than half of the students who did not have access to a school library said they would use one, particularly if it had books of interest. Another important reason given by 50 percent of the students was that the school library is a friendly space.<sup>14</sup> This brings us to the final step: organizing the collection for student use.

### **ORGANIZE – How Should I Organize My Collection?**

Collection organization is an important predictor of the friendliness and accessibility of the library for students. When the library is well-organized, and students are encouraged to use it, this makes it clear to students that teachers consider reading a valuable component of their education. Teachers should select an organization method by considering the goals of the collection and where the books will be located. The resources needed for a classroom collection may differ from those needed for the school library, which has its own dedicated space.



Collection organization should help students think about the ways that books can be categorized, and the method of organization should be clear to the students using the collection. A classroom collection might be organized by category or genre. A larger collection might use Dewey Decimal Classification (most commonly used in public libraries and K-12 school libraries) to help students become familiar with using call numbers to retrieve and organize books. Stickers can help students locate books by genre or reading level. Dollar store bins, IKEA spice racks, and Pinterest book display ideas can inspire ways to attractively display books, even without library-specific display cases.

Creating a friendly space for students means paying attention to the number of books on shelves so that students can easily see and including titles that are of interest to them. Providing seating in the library, whether in the form of a small bench, chairs, a bean-bag chair, or even floor pillows, will enable students to comfortably review potential books. Adding bright colors, posters or pictures, or even a Library Lion mascot or another favorite stuffed animal can help present the library as a welcoming space. Catapano, Fleming, and Elias provide a check sheet for organizing the physical environment that offers additional selections such as a chart for students to vote on or rate books, a display area for recently read-aloud books, or for teacher- or student-recommended books.<sup>15</sup>

Collection circulation is also an important aspect of organization, as it helps teachers keep track of who currently has each book, while allowing students to take books home to read. First, evaluate the needs of your school, and then choose the best method to meet those needs. Simple classroom systems, such as writing the name of the book, and the name of the student who

is taking it, on index cards, with the book title and the date it was checked out and placing them in an index card folder with student names, are effective ways of keeping track of the collection. Students may be recruited to help keep a classroom library organized during the school year, and to send reminders about overdue books.

For teachers who want more control, a Library Integrated System (LIS) will offer a searchable catalog and student accounts. The North Pacific Union Confer-

### Suggested Further Reading

- Mona Kirby's *An Introduction to Collection Development for School Librarians* (<https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/introduction-collection-development-school-librarians-second-edition>) is a practical text that includes worksheets and guidelines for evaluating a collection, creating a collection-development plan, and purchasing titles. Kirby additionally covers school library book challenges. While this book is geared toward those with librarian certification and training, it is readable and practical for anyone working in a school setting.
- Catapano, Fleming, and Elias provide a practical perspective on building a classroom library, with ideas that may be useful to those in multigrade classrooms or small-school libraries in the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*: <http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/>.
- Audrey Campbell and Joy Palmer provided step-by-step details on organizing the small school library beyond the scope of this article in their 2011 article in this journal: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae201173053805.pdf>.
- Named one of the Association for Library Service to Children Great Websites for Kids, *The Children's Book Review* is a resource that publishes reviews and book lists of books for kids of all ages: <https://www.thechildrensbookreview.com/>.
- A subscription is required to access the reviews database, but Reviews of the Week are available for free on the *Hornbook* website, making it another source of book reviews for collection selectors: <https://www.hbook.com/>.
- The Resources for School Librarians is a website maintained by retired School Librarian Linda Bertland, which links to information about teaching and learning, information access, technology, and program administration. It contains a wealth of practical resources including lesson plans, excellent examples of collection development policies, and ideas for facility designs: <https://www.sldirectory.com/index.html>.
- *Banning Books From the Classroom: How to Handle Cries for Censorship* published by *Education World* provides suggestions to avoid controversy in the classroom and how to handle controversy when it occurs: [https://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/banning-books-from-the-classroom.shtml](https://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/banning-books-from-the-classroom.shtml).
- This page provides an excerpt from the Intellectual Freedom Manual on responding to informal challenges or expressions of concern: <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/respond>.
- The above articles, along with other readings and resources are linked on the Library Management in Small Schools LibGuide, which may be accessed at <https://wallawalla.libguides.com/educ497>.

ence recommends two such systems for automating school libraries: Readerware and Resource Mate.<sup>16</sup> A classroom library or smaller school library could use a site such as LibraryThing (<https://librarything.com/>), to offer a searchable online catalog and even track checkouts in an online system without teachers having to learn and maintain a larger automated system.

### What Comes Next?

Teachers who complete these four steps: *evaluate*, *plan*, *purchase*, and *organize* are likely to see an increase in student use of the library collection and space. Once a collection is organized, it becomes easier to evaluate using a particular emphasis, such as a diversity audit, to track books used during a school year and discard those that are not or to review books covering specific topics. The existing collection-development plan can help identify titles currently in a collection that do not match the organization's goals and may also be used alongside the evaluation results to determine which new titles should be purchased.

Creating an organized school library requires time and persistence, but the rewards will be students who have access to reading material to support their course work, are more likely to enjoy reading, and achieve high test scores across the curriculum. ✍

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*This article has been peer reviewed.*

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Pauletta Berry

## How Library Volunteers Can Help Your Small School



*“Volunteers don’t get paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.”<sup>1</sup> – Sherry Anderson.*

Serving as a library volunteer has been one of my joys for the past few years. Because a teacher’s schedule is packed, one of the best decisions regarding the library might be to find a volunteer who loves books and children. Many retirees enjoy having time to contribute to their community and can be a valuable resource for the school. After a few weeks, you will know the strengths of your volunteer(s), what training might be needed, and the tasks they can handle well.

As a volunteer, I spend every Tuesday morning at school working with another volunteer. Our school has five teachers. Each teacher has two grades in her classroom. We have a small room that houses 10,000 books used by grades K-8. Classes visit the library on Tuesday mornings. We have 30 minutes for each class. The classroom teacher sends three to four students at a time, and we check books in and out and help students make selections as needed. Your school may be smaller, but my ideas would work well even in individual classrooms.

If your library currently needs to be more organized, the first task of your volunteer would be to label

and organize the books. First, divide the books by audience: elementary, junior, and teen. Fiction can be labeled and shelved alphabetically by the author and non-fiction by the Dewey system. Resist the temptation to print lengthy call numbers, and use only the first three digits or up to two decimal places on each call number. This will make it much easier to shelve books in a small library.

Once the books are ready for checkout, set a schedule for library visits. Volunteers can also enhance a teacher’s classroom resources by gathering books from the library on a requested topic and taking them to the classroom for research that week.

If the volunteers are trained in your school’s curriculum needs and reading goals, they can also select books for the library. I spend several hours each quarter reading book reviews and compiling lists of books that would be great additions to our library. This task relieves teachers of extra hours in their work schedule. Teachers should communicate to the volunteer a list of books that would be useful in their classroom for study or student reading. As a volunteer, when I have prepared a list of books for purchase, I submit the list to the school principal for review before the final order is placed.

Our school uses Resource Mate (<https://www.resource-mate.com/>) to catalog our library collection. As new books arrive, volunteers log the books on the com-

puter, print labels, stamp the books with the school's name and address, and add library book pockets and date cards. We are currently considering updating our library books with bar codes so we can use a scanner to check out books and fully use our library system. This process will be time intensive. Again, it will all be done entirely by volunteers.

Schools are periodically scheduled for an accreditation review. A part of that process involves an audit and evaluation of your school library. Volunteers are very familiar with the library content. They will help tally resource totals, complete the forms, and prepare the library for evaluation.

Volunteers can also do the following things:

- Keep the library space clean, attractive, and well organized;
- Put up bulletin boards to encourage reading and create interesting book displays;
- Repair damaged books;
- Weed out old and unsuitable books;
- Keep track of overdue books, and prepare reminders for teachers to share with parents;
- Conduct or organize story time with younger children;
- Think of fun and creative ideas like having a Library Lion mascot or inviting a reading assistance program to bring therapy animals to the classroom so children can read to them
- And finally, their spouses or friends may have woodworking talents to help build new library shelves or other skills that might be useful to the library.

Volunteers are truly Friends of the Library. So, before giving up on having a quality library, look for some great volunteers. Start small with one or two of the ideas or duties above. Be sure volunteers have gone through appropriate background checks to work with children.<sup>2</sup> Watch them as they interact with the students to be sure they enhance the learning atmosphere. As confidence grows in the volunteers, share some of the goals and dreams for the library with them. Don't overwhelm them with too much at once; add additional volunteers if needed. Two or more kindred spirits often make the task more fun and allow vol-

unteers to have days off as needed without sacrificing library days. And don't forget small tokens of appreciation or simply saying thank you to your volunteers. ✍

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McKenzie Wallace



Laura Bowlby



Kalicia Clements

**P**roject-based Learning (PBL) presents a pivotal tool for schools, particularly small schools, and naturally lends itself toward building entrepreneurship skills in students.

PBL requires “the use of a project as the primary teaching tool and defines the positions of pupils/students as active actors in the learning process.”<sup>1</sup> A critical aspect of PBL is a driving question that guides the students and can be answered only as they research and create their projects (See Sidebar 1 on page 41).

At the end of the project, students must have an opportunity to share their knowledge, either through a celebration or presentation. This type of student-led approach creates a skilled, independent learner: “Research shows that students who have learned within a project-based model show greater intrinsic motivation for learning, express greater autonomy in learning, are more self-sufficient and possess better developed meta-cognitive skills, as well as greater autonomy compared with students who worked within a traditional model of instruction.”<sup>2</sup> A student with these types of abilities will be well suited to entrepreneurship—having the drive to initiate and follow through on a business or idea to implement in the world beyond the classroom.

#### Review of Research on PBL

Research reflects the value of PBL for student development of practical skills and entrepreneurial dispositions. Katarzyna Łobacz and Ewa Matuska analyzed data from a study conducted in Poland, Italy, and Spain, which sought to grow “entrepreneurial skills through the implementation of projects aimed at solving real problems using modern digital tools.”<sup>3</sup> The researchers found the program positively affected students’ preparation for entrepreneurship.<sup>4</sup>



## Project-based Learning and Entrepreneurship in Small Schools

The project-based learning approach gives students an opportunity to not only learn theories but also to put their knowledge into action and develop attitudes along the way that they will need to succeed in the workforce. Łobacz and Matuska found that through their PBLs, the students they studied developed an aptitude for entrepreneurship by learning “transferable competencies” such as “effective time management,” “effective interpersonal communication and the use of feedback,” “teamwork and task coordination,” etc.<sup>5</sup> They also concluded that students learned “technical competencies” like “storytelling supported with IT tools” through the implementation of their projects.<sup>6</sup>

While the previous study supports the hypothesis that PBL promotes entrepreneurship, other research relates specifically to the effectiveness of this teaching methodology in the elementary school classroom. In this study conducted in Serbia, Bojan Lazić, Jelena Knežević, and Sanja Maričić divided 3rd-grade students into two groups—a control group and an experimental group to examine the effect of PBL on mathematical achievement. While the control group was taught mathematics according to the traditional model, the experimental group was taught through

projects that clearly connected to daily life.<sup>7</sup>

The researchers tested the students before and after the study. They found that the students from both groups scored similarly before the experiment. But when tested afterward, students from the experimental group achieved better scores than those in the control group.<sup>8</sup> “[B]ased on the results obtained . . . the project-based model of work in mathematics education has caused a significant improvement of student performance in mathematics.”<sup>9</sup>

The same researchers also observed that “even students with the lowest marks [from the experimental group] achieved a significant improvement of performance after implementation of the project-based model.”<sup>10</sup> They surmised that perhaps student improvement in the PBL groups was linked to the in-

struction being more interesting and enjoyable to the learners.<sup>11</sup>

If student improvement resulted from better engagement from instruction being linked to real-life scenarios, it seems likely that similar results would be obtained if testing was conducted in other subjects. Indeed, one research review of 20 studies concluded, “PBL can promote student learning and may be more effective than traditional instruction in social studies, science, mathematics, and literacy.”<sup>12</sup> This research indicates that PBL would be a useful resource for teachers as they seek to equip their students with 21st-century learning skills.

Though studies reveal benefits from using PBL, the available research does not specifically examine the usefulness of this teaching methodology for small,

## Sidebar 1. PBL Definition and Examples

### Definition of Project-based Learning:

“Project based learning is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real world and personally meaningful projects.”\*

### Examples of PBL Driving Questions and Projects<sup>†</sup>

1. *What kinds of choices can my family make to conserve energy, save money, and protect the Earth?* Project culmination included an energy-conservation science fair that the public was invited to.

2. *How have natural disasters affected our landscape and the Earth’s structure? How can we as a community be prepared for natural disasters in our area?* Project culmination included creation of survival kits, distribution of evacuation maps to the community, and the school became a Red Cross evacuation site.

3. *How can we prepare for learning this school year through a study of the Olympic games?* Project culmination included posters for school hallway for students and guests to observe.

4. *How can we learn more about America through the study of roadside attractions?* Project culmination included a presentation of a state’s roadside attractions, seeking to convince people to visit that state. It also included a proposal for the addition of a new roadside attraction.

5. *What is a transformed life like?* Project culmination included



Student learning about the world for her Olympic games project.

students sharing stories they researched about extreme makeovers and how that translated to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

### Resources for Teachers

One rich source of ideas for teachers creating projects in a PBL format for their classroom is <http://pblworks.org>. This source gives ready-to-use projects and rubrics that can be adapted to fit into your curriculum requirements.

Also, collaboration with other teachers through formats such as professional learning clubs is helpful when forming projects. Many of the above projects were created or inspired by various teams of professionals and implemented by more than one teacher.

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<sup>†</sup>Since PBL questions are answered through multiple projects to lead students to their conclusions, they meet multiple standards in the areas of literacy, science, mathematics, etc. These standards should be identified in teacher preparation for the project. (In the review of a project, teachers often find that more standards than expected were met.) Project milestones might include elements such as creating maps, research, visiting onsite locations, brainstorming lists, reading a book, and building artifacts. The project culmination should include solutions to the driving question with real-life examples.

multigrade classrooms. Shareefa et al. define *Multigrade* as “two or more grades being combined and taught by a single teacher delivering instructions of multiple curriculum grades simultaneously.”<sup>13</sup> As one Turkish study of small elementary schools found, the difficulties of multigrade classroom instruction are many. One challenge they found was that “planning and implementation are difficult processes in joint classrooms.” A teacher from the study stated, “We cannot plan an activity that will make all grades in the classroom participate. While dealing with one grade, others only wait.”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps PBL could be part of the solution to this difficulty faced by small-school teachers.

Two teachers of small multigrade schools (Laura Bowlby in Oregon, Kalicia Clements in Michigan) found that they could successfully engage learners of all ages by teaching multiple standards simultaneously through Project-based Learning. Students not only gained knowledge in traditional subjects through PBL, but also had the opportunity to develop entrepreneurship abilities as they innovated in their projects.

### **Laura Bowlby's Experience With PBL and Entrepreneurship in the Classroom**

“My personal experience with PBL illustrates the richness of this teaching method for small schools and the possibilities it presents for inspiring student entrepreneurship and innovation.

“One project that I started with my 22 students (Grades 1-8) in 2019 at Madrone Adventist Elementary School in Cave Junction, Oregon, and recently implemented with my 19 students (Grades K-8) at Canyonville Adventist Elementary School in Canyonville, Oregon, was a young entrepreneurs’ fair. First, I created a driving, multifaceted question to guide the students: ‘How can starting a business earn me money and enhance my understanding of different people’s roles in my community?’

“To answer this question, the students had to create a business. At one-room schools, it was great to be able to involve the whole classroom together in this project. The PBL was adaptable for each grade level, with more detailed requirements for the older students. The students brainstormed several different job ideas and then had to choose from the

ones they had innovated and write about their potential businesses. The writing requirement was different for each grade level.

“Once their business was identified, students had to create a name, logo, and business plan. As they created their business plan, they had to think about something that was most needed in their community or that many people would be willing to pay for. They also had to identify investors (parents or teachers) and their customer base and outline their finances. Finally, they had to share how they would grow due to this experience.

“The culmination of the young entrepreneurs’ project was a fair hosted for the community. In preparation for the fair, students advertised their products with an insert in the church bulletin and by posting flyers around town. The fairs were both hosted in the middle of town, one in an empty parking lot, the other at the city hall parking lot (see Sidebar 2). With involvement from chaperones, students were able to sell their wares and put their learning into action. Students made and sold items such as birdhouses, popcorn, natural mosquito and tick spray, Scentsy™ bags, fresh hot food, desserts, baked bread, furniture, and soap.

“I created a rubric on a four-point scale (*emerging*, *developing*, *proficient*, and *exceeds*) to guide students

### **Sidebar 2. Key Factors to Keep in Mind When Holding a School Event in a Public Space**

1. Choose a place that is visible to the general public.
2. Evaluate the safety of the space.
  - a. Have an adult at every booth.
  - b. Have guests purchase tickets to use in place of cash.
  - c. Make sure the space is not too close to a roadway.
3. Ensure bathrooms, parking, and electricity are available.
4. Purchase a permit, if necessary, from the local city hall or government-related agency. They may also have specific requirements that must be met.
5. Work with the city to create a relationship in advance (i.e., through service projects).
6. Consider inviting firefighters/police and gifting them discounts or vouchers to your event.
7. Advertise through fliers on public bulletin boards, social media, etc.
  - a. Create large, visible signs to display prior to and during the event.
  - b. Send out special invitation letters to constituents and local community partners.
8. Set up your event space well in advance on the same day as far as possible. (This draws interest to the location and also helps with preparation.)
9. Consider weather (e.g., rain, snow, lightning, wind) and also the time when people get off work for the best accessibility to the event. This may also require having a contingency indoor location.

## Young Entrepreneur's Rubric

To Be Used by Judges on the Day of the Culminating Project

Emerging: Beginning Stages	Developing: Progressing in Knowledge and Skills	Proficient: Meets Standards	Exceeds: Extended Understanding and Application	Benchmarks and Expectations: What Judges Should Expect to See
1	2	3	4	Dress appropriately for a business owner.
1	2	3	4	Make sure your business sign is visibly hanging on booth. Business sign is neat and easy to read with visible logo.
1	2	3	4	Make sure you have enough product for at least 50 people, or, if you are running a service, make sure you are prepared for at least 50 customers.
1	2	3	4	Make sure you have put in your order for a booth and have filled out your order form neatly and in a readable manner.
1	2	3	4	Put a neat table covering on your table. Create a visually appealing space.
1	2	3	4	Have a list of your inventory that you can check off as you sell, so you know exactly what you have and what you have sold, and when.
1	2	3	4	Display your products or explanation of services in a neat, orderly manner.
1	2	3	4	Ensure collection methods are in place. Have a safe and sanitary way to collect tickets at the fair, and other cash when selling outside the fair.
1	2	3	4	Make sure each of your items is available in \$1 increments. Have a method for giving a receipt to your customers.
1	2	3	4	Be prepared with a final list of your costs to give your teacher (include only costs of product and whatever you needed to make it salable).
1	2	3	4	Have a schedule making sure your booth is covered at all times between 3 and 6 p.m.. You need to be there the majority of the time.
1	2	3	4	Display your business plan. Be prepared to answer questions about your business and business plan to the judges, who will be circulating.
1	2	3	4	Display your completed entrepreneur packet—all sections must be filled out thoroughly—and completed project folder. Be prepared to answer question posed by judges and customers.
<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	

and make sure expectations were clear for the day of the fair (see Young Entrepreneur's Rubric on page 43). The learners were advised to dress appropriately for a business owner, create a visually appealing space for their wares, etc.

"After selling their products and paying back their investors, students were asked to set aside 10 percent to pay for their booth space, 10 percent for tithe, and 50 percent for charity. The remaining 30 percent was to be split with their partners, if any. This illustrated to students the costs associated with running a business. Some students took home as little as \$2, while others profited almost \$400.

"Over the couple of months that students worked on the young entrepreneurs' project, it made a big impact. The process involved math, language arts, and writing. Students also had to do research for their businesses and, for many of them, exercise engineering skills in building their products. The project also incorporated history as they learned about entrepreneurs and inventors to aid and inspire them as they created their businesses.

"Additionally, the fair connected the students and schools in both locations with their local communities. Students had positive interactions with community members who were their customers. Then, when students returned their tithe and gave to charity, various churches and institutions received checks from the schools.

"Through participation in the entrepreneurship PBL, students grew in their understanding of goods and services and the way money works in their society. They obtained a desire to participate in their own communities and contribute to them through the skills this project promoted, like business management and leadership. Students applied critical-thinking skills by figuring out what businesses would bring in the greatest cash flow based on the population of the community. They used their

creativity to express themselves and take risks, trying out unique ideas. They collaborated with one another and with the larger community to make their businesses a success. As an extra bonus, the kids had a very good time!"

In small schools, using PBL to enhance the curriculum and drive learning is effective.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, many successful small-school teachers have been teaching this way for years. Encouraging student leadership, differentiating the requirements (in rubrics) to meet the needs of the wide span of learners, and allowing for individual originality and ingenuity are just some of the benefits of PBL. Rather than PBL being something that small schools can contrive a way to implement, this methodology seems to naturally fit small schools' needs.



Kindergarten entrepreneurs sold water and other miscellaneous items.

### **Kalicia Clements' Experience With PBL and Entrepreneurship in the Classroom**

“PBL has also been an asset to the students, families, and surrounding community of our one-room K-8 school in Michigan. By using NAD standards-based learning through PBL, students can engage, at their own ability level, in a school-wide initiative to not only master grade-level objectives but also to gain useful life skills.

“One of my school’s favorite projects is our garden. The students learn how to start seeds indoors, measure seedling growth, and research individual plant needs, harvesting periods, and planting depth and spacing. Students collaborate in choosing plant types and

designing the garden space each year. They illustrate their garden plan using graph paper and scale measurements based on their research regarding plant needs.

“This project inspires students to adopt part of the garden over the summer to ensure it receives good care, and it encourages them to return the following year to learn and benefit from the harvest and seed-collection process. It is rewarding to watch students comprehensively understand the life cycle of a garden. They can try foods fresh from the earth and learn about individual plants and how to harvest their seeds. They not only learn the importance of a garden, how to keep it healthy, and the benefits of delicious food, but also how to use items from the garden to



**Charlotte Adventist Christian School (CACS) garden project in the early summer.**

create products for fundraising and donating to local businesses and community centers.

“The students learn how to use items grown in the garden to produce lip balm, healing salve, pumpkin butter, and old-fashioned soap. They study the healing properties of the natural herbs, flowers, and plants included in our products, and they are able to communicate this information as we share the blessings of our garden with our families and community.

“Students engage in entrepreneurship opportunities as they practice basic financial skills by determining the long-term costs and profit, learning how to build connections with small businesses, and speaking knowledgeably about their products. Additionally, students participate in forward-thinking through planning other projects that promote entrepreneurship development, such as making decorative pillows or even colorful playdough for local daycare centers.

“Through these projects, the students also attain objectives in science, mathematics, language arts, health, and art. It is incredible to participate in student learning as they contribute to projects like our garden.”

### Conclusion

In the multigrade setting especially, PBL is a key component to student success, entrepreneurship, a love for learning, and lifelong skills. Both teachers who contributed to this article, Laura Bowlby and Kalicia Clements, found this teaching methodology to be an effective way to instruct all students, from multiple grades, in one-room classrooms and to inspire their students’ excitement for learning and innovation. Projects like the fair and garden described earlier illuminate the depth and variety of instruction that small-

school teachers can bring to the classroom through planning opportunities such as these.

While this article relays positive experiences from the perspective of the teachers with PBL, more research could be done to provide data to support PBL’s value for small schools.<sup>16</sup> The usefulness of PBL to multigrade classrooms could perhaps be examined further through student surveys. Or a study could be conducted comparing student achievement scores from small Seventh-day Adventist schools in the NAD that often utilize PBL versus

## CACS Handmade Products

As part of our Bible Labs this year, the students will have the opportunity to make a variety of handmade products. Some of these products will be available to purchase to raise funds for future Bible Labs; the remainder will be donated to the community food pantry for the holidays.

Some of the products include:

### Healing Salve

A medicinal ointment made with healing calendula flowers (grown in the school garden!) along with other natural ingredients. Great on cuts, scrapes, burns, rashes & stings!

1 oz. tin \$7  
4 oz. jar \$20



### Cold Process Soap

Old fashioned soap made with all natural ingredients; gentle, moisturizing and cleansing!

1 bar \$4  
3 bars \$10



### Pumpkin Butter

Made with pumpkins from the school garden!

½ pint jar \$4



### Applesauce

Made with apples from Country Mill Orchards

1 pint jar \$4



### Wild Violet Jelly

Made with foraged edible wild violets!  
(Available in May)

1 ½ oz. jar \$3



Charlotte Adventist Christian School (CACS) Handmade Product Order Flyer—Students distributed these to family, friends, neighbors, and the community.

small NAD schools employing mostly traditional instruction methods.

While research like this would take time to collect and analyze, the experiential evidence we already have indicates enough reason to keep using PBL in small schools. Through its continued implementation in small schools and the study of its effectiveness, we believe our students will develop into thriving citizens. ✍

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*This article has been peer reviewed.*

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**Laura Bowlby, MA**, is the Principal/Teacher at Canyonville Adventist Elementary School (Grades K-8) in Canyonville, Oregon, U.S.A. Prior to her arrival at Canyonville, she taught at five other Adventist schools including Madrone Adventist Elementary School in Cave Junction, Oregon, and Ruth Murdoch Elementary School in Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. Ms. Bowlby has more than 25 years of experience as an educator and holds a Master of Arts in curriculum and instruction from Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.).

**Kalicia Clements, MA**, is the Principal/Teacher at Charlotte Adventist Christian School (Grades K-8) in Charlotte, Michigan, U.S.A. She has taught in a one-room school in the Michigan Conference for 10 years. Mrs. Clements holds a Bachelor of Science in elementary education, language arts, and music education, and a Master of Arts in curriculum and instruction from Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.). She has a passion for leading children to Jesus through Bible study, hands-on learning, art, and music.

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**McKenzie Wallace, Laura Bowlby, and Kalicia Clements**, "Project-based Learning and Entrepreneurship in Small Schools," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 84:3 (2022): 40-47.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Katarzyna Łobacz and Ewa Matuska, "Project-Based Learning in Entrepreneurship Education: A Case Study-based Analysis of Challenges and Benefits," *Przedsiębiorczość-Edukacja [Entrepreneurship-Education]* 16:2 (2020): 88. doi.10.24917/20833296.162.7.
2. Bojan D. Lazić, Jelena B. Knežević, and Sanja M. Maričić, "The Influence of Project-based Learning on Student Achievement in Elementary Mathematics Education," *South African Journal of Education* 41:3 (August 2021): 1, 2. doi.10.15700/saje.v41n3a1909.
3. Łobacz and Matuska, "Project-Based Learning in Entrepreneurship Education," 89.
4. *Ibid.*, 96.
5. *Ibid.*, 91.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Lazić, Knežević, and Maričić, "The Influence of Project-based Learning on Student Achievement in Elementary Mathematics Education," 3.
8. *Ibid.*, 6.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 7.
12. Sally Kingston, "Project Based Learning and Student Achievement: What Does the Research Tell Us?" *PBL Evidence Matters* 1:1 (2018): 2: <http://bie.org/x9JN>.
13. Mariyam Shareefa et al., "A Challenge Made Easy: Contributing Factors for Successful Multigrade Teaching in a Small School," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 28:3 (September 2020): 1,643.
14. Baris Kalender and Erol Erdem, "Challenges Faced by Classroom Teachers in Multigrade Classrooms: A Case Study," *Journal of Pedagogical Research* 5:4 (December 2021): 83. doi.10.33902/JPR.2021473490.
15. While PBL is effective in enhancing student learning, there may be challenges in implementing it for teachers working within the context of a nationally mandated curriculum. Teachers should work with their district (or its equivalent) to ensure projects in a PBL format fit within their mandated curriculum. Projects can be written to match district, state, or national standards. One article written about PBL in South Korea references the difficulties of implementing this teaching methodology with national curriculum requirements and other pressures, while also highlighting the value of offering creative projects for students. See Buck Institute for Education, "Breaking With Tradition, Korean Teachers Explore PBL," *PBL Works* (n.d.): [https://my.pblworks.org/resource/blog/breaking\\_with\\_tradition\\_korean\\_teachers\\_explore\\_pbl](https://my.pblworks.org/resource/blog/breaking_with_tradition_korean_teachers_explore_pbl).
16. Research findings on the effectiveness of PBL in large schools have been mixed until two recent large studies conducted by the University of Southern California's Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research and Michigan State University (2021): [https://cesr.usc.edu/sites/default/files/Knowledge%20in%20Action%20Efficacy%20Study\\_18feb2021\\_final.pdf](https://cesr.usc.edu/sites/default/files/Knowledge%20in%20Action%20Efficacy%20Study_18feb2021_final.pdf), and the University of Michigan in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Education (2018-2019): <https://mlpbl.open3d.science/techreport>. Together, these two studies assessed the performance of more than 6,000 students throughout the United States and across all socio-economic backgrounds and found sustained gains in academic performance. Similar studies would help strengthen support for use of PBL in small schools.



Amanda Ramoutar

## A Framework to Guide

# Special Education Practice in Small Schools



Special education is an approach to providing equitable learning for students with identified disabilities through specially designed instruction.<sup>1</sup> The approach is often criticized for demanding too many resources, including specially trained teachers, dedicated settings, and specialized equipment.<sup>2</sup> As such, small schools may typically appear less than capable of implementing special education practices. These schools are characterized by a small student population, few staff members, and multigrade classrooms.

Often, teachers working in small private schools raise concerns about what constitutes special education practice, what types of evidence count as such practice, and the practical ways these can be identified. Classroom teachers working in small private schools can implement special education pedagogical practices and meet the individual needs of learners in a myriad of ways, even within the confines of limited resources. The framework shared below can help capture evidence of special education in action. This tool is theoretically informed and can be used to fit the context of small schools.

### The Teacher's Dilemma: Examples From Small Schools

Leanna<sup>3</sup> is a 3rd- and 4th-grade teacher of all subjects except music and physical education. Despite being in her eighth year of teaching, she feels unprepared with knowledge in special education other than having taken one class for her undergraduate degree. She has a strong desire to learn all that she can to gain better tools to help her students succeed. She has recognized over the years that she continues to face more and more students with special needs.

Peter has taught kindergarten through 2nd grade and 5th through 8th grade over the past 15 years. At his small school, he is often called upon to take on a variety of roles when issues arise. For example, he is the resident mediator and is often called upon to help de-escalate classroom disruptions, some of which are triggered by a student's needs not being met. Sometimes he serves as a counselor, providing a listening ear to peers unsure of how to meet the needs of learners. As a result, he has felt frustration and helplessness as he watched students in lower grades with emerging special needs but not knowing exactly what to do or when to begin interventions.

Bridget works at an early-childhood education through 8th-grade school where she teaches English as a second language, Spanish, and music to approximately 140 students. She has noted that through the past decade, more and more students have been struggling to connect or process the information she teaches. She wants to find ways for her classroom to be a safe environment for students, and she wants them to enjoy their experiences in her classroom.

All of the three teachers in the examples above have experienced being unable to successfully meet their learners' needs as they would have liked. Research suggests that while there continues to be a level of concern related to the increased workload that results from responding to the needs of students with special needs in classrooms, generally, teachers working in small schools are in support of accepting students with mild disabilities into their setting. Still, teachers desire validation that they are indeed using the right kinds of strategies and other instructional resources.<sup>4</sup> It is evident that few small schools have clearly defined procedures for assisting students with special educational needs.

### **What Counts as Evidence of Special Education in Small Schools?**

In the United States, some private schools benefit from collaborative partnerships for special education services provision with public school districts due to the intentional efforts of school administrators who have worked to develop this relationship. However, services for students placed in private schools by parents are not legally guaranteed. In public schools, however, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)<sup>5</sup> mandates the supports and services that must be offered in order to ensure that the needs of learners with disabilities are met. Upon recognizing that a student is not responding to instruction successfully, the teacher can initiate a referral, after which the school district intervenes to have the child evaluated. If he or she is deemed eligible for special education, an entire multidisciplinary

team is involved in creating and implementing an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for the student to receive services (where necessary) and tailored instruction. All of this includes parental involvement and is provided at no cost to the families because of the Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) principle of IDEA. (See Sidebar.)

Unlike structured systems in public schools, small private schools are often challenged by an overwhel-

### **Sidebar. Essential Facts About Special Education**

**S**pecial education should be recognized as a service and not as a place, such as a specific classroom or with a specific teacher. There are 13 disability categories identified by the U.S. Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Research indicates that of the 13 disability categories recognized by the IDEA, learning disabilities are most prevalent in classrooms across the United States when compared to the other categories. These categories alert educators that special education services should be provided for students whose educational performance is impacted as a result of their disability. Disabilities can range in severity from mild to profound, and the categories are: (1) emotional disturbance, also known as emotional/behavioral disorders, (2) deaf-blindness, (3) autism spectrum disorder, (4) hearing impairment, (5) visual impairment, (6) multiple disabilities, (7) intellectual disability, (8) other health impairment, (9) specific learning disability, (10) speech or language impairment, (11) traumatic brain injury, (12) orthopedic impairment, and (13) developmental delay. Special education services are also provided for students identified as being gifted/talented in some states. Learn more about IDEA and types of special-needs students may be diagnosed with from the U.S. Department of Education by visiting <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>.

For students with diagnosed special needs, consideration is usually given to a continuum of options for educational placement, ranging from the least-restrictive environment (general education classroom) to most-restrictive environment (residential care/treatment facility). A significant guideline of IDEA is that learners with identified disabilities should be included in general education classes along with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible.

Students with severe and profound disabilities are often not served in the general education setting because their needs cannot be met satisfactorily there. Educators working in small, private schools should note that students with mild high-incidence needs such as high-functioning autism spectrum disorder, specific learning disability, emotional/behavioral disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (classified under other health impairments), and mild intellectual disability may be included for learning in their classrooms. Learn more at <https://www.ncl.org/news/newsroom/the-state-of-ld-understanding-the-1-in-5/> and <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities>.

ming lack of resources, so enacting such a multi-faceted response may be difficult. This by no means suggests that small schools cannot or should not respond. So, how can special education be done in small private schools? Special education in action is about good teaching, and good teaching is based on instructional best practices. Therefore, any teacher willing to enact best practices for the delivery of instruction will be providing special education for his or her students. Best practices are most often applied after engaging in specialized teacher preparation training or professional development related to special education. Such opportunities for training are available through university degree programs and short courses. For teachers with little time and financial resources to invest in ongoing development, options such as online learning, open-access courses, and scholarship opportunities may be explored.

As educators in small schools consider distinctive teaching and learning decisions, they make in support of their commitment to “work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord . . . ,”<sup>6</sup> the Special Education in Action Framework presented on page 51 can be used.

### **Framework to Evidence Special Education Practice**

The Special Education In Action Framework is a tool for analysis that permits teachers to move past a description of theoretical ideas toward a deeper understanding of the practical ways they can implement special-education pedagogy. With the knowledge that small schools and multigrade classrooms are powerful and productive starting points for providing high-quality instruction,<sup>7</sup> this framework links evidence-based best practices to the features of classrooms and observable teaching practices.

Furthermore, the framework

documents the link between theory and practice. Using the framework, teachers can show how they are responsive to identified needs and provide specially designed instruction. As can be seen, the framework links classroom practices that are within reach of any teacher, even those with limited financial and human resources, with the assumptions that underpin them based on the ethos of education. These are aligned with concepts that are relevant to best practices in education and challenges believed to inhibit the provision of special education.



## The Special Education in Action Framework

Assumption	Related Concept	Key Challenge	Classroom Practice Evidence
1. Each student is of inestimable value.	Human-rights conventions proposed by the United Nations detail that everyone has the right to education, should be treated with dignity, and that education should prepare students for life. <sup>8</sup>	Giving focus to personnel and infrastructural limitations.	<p>The teacher creates a classroom environment that encourages a sense of belonging, highlights students' strengths, and provides meaningful opportunities for students to improve on identified weaknesses.</p> <p>The teacher does not complain to students about how difficult teaching them is or that he or she lacks the necessary support and services.</p> <p>The teacher sets high yet reasonable expectations for students to allow them to maximize their potential.</p>
2. The teacher frequently assesses learning and is aware of each student's progress or lack thereof.	Response to Intervention (RTI) uses a teach-and-assess approach in the general education classroom to document progressively intensive interventions or strategies that have been used with the student. <sup>9</sup>	Lack of knowledge about what to do when a student is not showing progress.	<p>The teacher keeps a log of each student's performance after an assessment is given. This data is used to determine if concepts must be retaught.</p> <p>When concepts are retaught, the teacher researches another method to get the concepts across to the students, understanding that the original approach was ineffective. This is repeated multiple times until progress is achieved.</p> <p>The teacher provides clear demonstrations of skills and examples of concepts and provides students with multiple opportunities to practice what they have learned.</p>
3. Lesson planning occurs with students' needs in mind.	Differentiated instruction (DI) is based on equity pedagogy and is a response to diverse learner needs through the provision of accommodations and modifications. <sup>10</sup>	Aiming to cover curricular content and insufficiently adapting instruction to student differences.	<p>The teacher gives accommodations to students who require them.</p> <p>The teacher makes modifications to lesson outcome expectations for learners with identified needs.</p> <p>The teacher measures students' success based on predetermined individualized expectations and not in comparison to peers.</p>
4. Others are willing to help.	Collaborative consultation is an ongoing process and is interactive in such that expertise, knowledge, and experience are shared voluntarily for the purpose of problem-solving. <sup>11</sup>	Making the right connections with those who can help.	<p>The teacher brainstorms about effective instructional approaches with other educators. On-location and remote consultations are utilized as necessary.</p> <p>The teacher makes use of technological and pedagogical resources accessible through the World Wide Web.</p> <p>The teacher seeks out professional-development opportunities to further build instructional competencies.</p>
5. Families are willing to partner with the school.	Family-school partnership involves collaboration to support and improve the learning and development of the student. <sup>12</sup>	Parents and other family members defer to the school or are unengaged.	<p>The teacher communicates regularly with parents about the student's progress and alerts them to what instructional goals are being worked on.</p> <p>The teacher empowers families to support the learner by providing strategies they can utilize at home.</p> <p>The teacher advocates for the child by making recommendations of external service providers that families can access to further support the learner's development.</p>

It is important to remember that while all the combined evidence outlined in on page 51 represents special education provisions, even when enacted in part, they still make a significant difference to the quality of instruction students receive. Simple actions on the part of the classroom teacher that serve to provide special education are a step in the right direction of meeting the needs of students.

Note also that some suggestions listed as classroom practice evidence may not directly solve the problems of lack of support, services, and personnel but are designed to not exacerbate the learning situation. The aim should be to respond to identified needs in the best possible way.

There are two main ways teachers in small schools can identify a student's educational needs. The first is through informal teacher observation during the delivery of instruction. The second is through formal, comprehensive evaluation reports, which can be accessed privately and paid for by parents, and the results can be shared with the school. In addition, a teacher may be able to identify which consultants might be helpful by reaching out to their public school district or completing an Internet search for resources available in their area. Educators in both large and small schools should also seek to develop professional-learning communities, which can serve as a resource for information sharing.

The variety of differences among learners—those considered nondisabled and those with mild disabilities in general education classrooms—begs consideration for making sure that responding to these differences becomes a regular part of classroom practice. Even in small private schools, each student should be given an equitable opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and not experience exclusion from participation. Remember that research-based strategies for working with learners in the classroom constitute special education practice. Also, note that any actions a teacher takes in the classroom to respond to identified needs count as evidence of special education practice. Additionally, a practical starting point for engaging in special education practice is that teachers should perform their duties from the viewpoint that each student is valuable; that students' progress should be monitored; that planning is needed to meet any student's needs; that others may be willing to help; and that families should be seen as partners in this work. ✍

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*This resource article has been peer reviewed.*

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#### Recommended citation:

**Amanda Ramoutar**, "A Framework to Guide Special Education Practice in Small Schools," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 84:3 (2022): 48-52.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. There are several definitions of special education that focus on meeting the identified individual needs of learners with disabilities. These include labels such as specific learning disability, autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and emotional and behavioral disorder. Typically, students receive special-education support and services when their needs impact their educational performance.

2. James M. Kauffman et al., *Special Education: What It Is and Why We Need It* (London: Routledge, 2018).

3. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

4. Marcel A. A. Sargeant and Donna Berkner, "Seventh-day Adventist Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion Classrooms and Identification of Challenges to Their Implementation," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 24:3 (2015): 224-251.

5. U.S. Department of Education, "Individuals With Disabilities Act" (2022): <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>.

6. Colossians 3:23, 24 Holy Bible, *New International Version*®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

7. Jerome Thayer, Martha Havens, and Elissa Kido, "Small Schools: How Effective Are the Academics?" *The Journal of Adventist Education* 77:3 (February/March 2015): 15: <https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae201577031505.pdf>.

8. Mike Cole, ed., *Education, Equality and Human Rights: Issues of Gender, "Race," Sexuality, Disability and Social Class* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2022).

9. Debi Gartland and Roberta Strosnider, "The Use of Response to Intervention to Inform Special Education Eligibility Decisions for Students With Specific Learning Disabilities," *Learning Disability Quarterly* 43:4 (2020): 195-200.

10. Marieke van Geel et al., "Capturing the Complexity of Differentiated Instruction," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 30:1 (2019): 51-67.

11. Sylvia Rosenfield, *Instructional Consultation* (London: Routledge, 2013).

12. The IRIS Center, "Family Engagement: Collaborating With Families of Students With Disabilities" (2022): <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/fam/#content>.

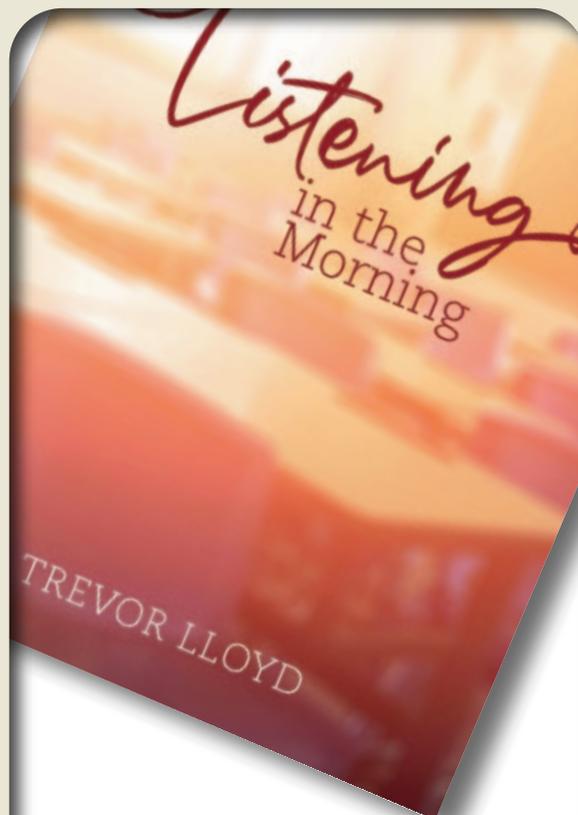


Thula Norton Lambert

In this collection of 80 devotional readings, Trevor Lloyd has skillfully interwoven the stories of biblical heroes along with the stories of Seventh-day Adventist education pioneers. Educators can gain fresh insights from the lives of familiar Bible characters such as Elijah, Jacob, Samson, and David to inspire change both in their personal and professional lives. Gleaning from Jacob's encounter in the wilderness, every classroom can become, as Lloyd aptly describes, a "house of God and a gateway to heaven" (p. 90).

Lloyd also chronicles the experiences of well-known Adventist education pioneers, including Ellen White, Goodloe Harper Bell, W. C. G. Murdoch, and Arthur Spaulding, alongside educators such as Robert Parr, Fernando and Ana Stahl, as well as Denton and Florence Rebok. They planted the seeds of education in far-flung mission fields. These stories provide the reader with a timely reminder of the humble beginnings of Adventist schooling 150 years ago and its ongoing rich heritage.

The book's stated purpose is to help staff at Adventist schools, colleges, and universities rise to the challenge, in this time of crisis, of faithfully maintaining



**Trevor Lloyd,  
*Listening in the Morning:  
Devotional Readings for Teachers***

(Warburton, Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing Co., 2022). ISBN 9781922373670 (Print) and 9781922373687 (E-book). 200 pages. US\$9.99.  
Available from Amazon

the heritage of a century and a half of Bible-based Adventist teaching and learning.

Each entry concludes with discussion questions addressing relevant education issues, best practices, or educational theories. The theories and approaches of Maria Montessori, John Frederick Oberlin, Jean Piaget, and Jerome Bruner are presented in a way that encourages the reader to explore further his or her compatibility with the plan for wholistic educa-

tion as outlined in the book *Education*.

The readings are set in a variety of cultural settings and cover an array of topics. Entries can be read as standalone readings or can be read consecutively over several days. For example, school leaders can explore topics such as the importance of crafting a mission statement, servant leadership, or the overall design and plan for Adventist education. The book also includes topics of an interpersonal nature, such as dealing with resentment and bitterness among staff. Other topics specific to teaching and learning are also presented, including building rapport with students, alternate approaches to schooling, and the importance of manual labor in the curriculum.

The book also includes stories that contain more overtly, deeply spiritual themes such as waiting quietly on God, God's answers to prayer, Christ's sacrifice, and Christian service. Much like the Master Teacher Himself, the author skillfully uses stories and discussion questions, taking readers much beyond the initial story and inviting them to engage in a thoughtful examination of their values and practices.

Lloyd seamlessly integrates fictional stories and allegories to encourage reflection and call attention to universal values. The story of The Ring of Gyges, set in ancient Greece, points readers to Jesus' selfless sacrifice. In the tale of "John Pettigrew's Mirror," the characters all see themselves reflected in a new light. Lloyd's use of this tale parallels the view of writer and educator Parker Palmer, for whom good teaching emerges from teachers' identity and integrity, their *inwardness*.

Lloyd's use of fiction occurs throughout the book. The French medieval tale of Gudule is used to introduce a discussion on resentment and bitterness among staff at church schools. Lloyd includes a scene from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* to symbolize the Christian's assurance of salvation in Christ. By including fictional stories in this manner, Lloyd demonstrates, perhaps unintentionally, a method for introducing fictional works into the curriculum.

In addition to such stories, Lloyd draws on his own rich personal experience as an educator to inspire readers through his use of personal anecdotes. Entries such as "Hope That Begets Hope," "Two Pastors, Two Daughters," and "Princess at the Gate" inspire hope, compassion, gratitude, and contentment.

Entries also address larger philosophical issues. The author echoes pre-eminent Adventist historian George Knight, who has also urged Adventist educators to engage in ongoing evaluation to ensure that their practices remain aligned with the original plan for education. *Listening in the Morning* fills a void at a moment where Adventist institutions in many areas of the world are facing unique challenges.

Published during the year marking the 150th anniversary of the founding of the first official Adventist school, this book is highly relevant to the challenges faced by modern Adventist educators. In addition to the issue of maintaining the unique character and mission of Adventist education, Lloyd addresses issues such as improving the Bible curriculum for non-Adventist students and retaining Adventist youth in the church.

The entry entitled "A Day of Small Beginnings" recounts the providential meeting between Edson White and Goodloe Harper Bell, the first salaried Adventist

teacher, and the humble beginnings of Adventist education. Lloyd concludes this reading by asking, "What safeguards and checks might be put in place to ensure that the objectives of Adventist education are not pushed out of sight?" He offers an answer to this fundamental question several entries later in the chapter entitled "China Follows 'The Blueprint'"—the story of how Denton Rebok, pioneer educator and missionary to China, consulted "the blueprint" for Adventist education.

*Listening in the Morning* is original, inclusive, and engaging. It is the first devotional book written specifically for Adventist educators that uses this combination of personal biography, Bible stories, fictional tales, and Ellen White's writings to discuss larger issues in Adventist education. There is something for everyone—from novice to more-experienced teachers and school leaders.

I highly recommend *Listening in the Morning* as a devotional book for educators. It is well-documented, using a combination of internal references or footnotes at the end of each chapter. A few well-placed illustrations would have perhaps made the book more visually appealing. The author also recounts several secondhand anecdotes from memory in cases where sources cannot be referenced; however, these observations do not detract from the overall message: God has been speaking to Adventist educators over the past 150 years. The essential question is: Are we still listening? 

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**Thula Norton Lambert**, "Book Review of *Listening in the Morning: Devotional Readings for Teachers*," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 84:3 (2022): 53, 54.

**Guest Editorial** *Continued from page 3*

variety of educators in the field, from university researchers to local volunteers, each providing their expertise in support of pursuing excellence in small schools.

- Coria-Navia et al. highlight excellence in Adventist education as documented through observations and interviews with educators and educational administrators throughout the North American Division. The authors emphasize the significant role small schools serve within the ecology of Seventh-day educational institutions.

- Garcia, Slikkers, and Bailey discuss what it means to be trauma-informed educators. They also consider how small schools can intentionally create learning environments that help students feel safe and supported—emotionally, socially, and academically. Their work provides strategies for the multigrade teacher’s toolbox to support student learning in the face of the challenges students face today.

- Imasiku et al. explore a feature that, in recent years, most teachers have needed to grapple with—online education. Their study explores pragmatic approaches specifically for the unique circumstances of small schools and teachers—considering how to meet student learning needs utilizing online resources, discussing collaboration, artificial intelligence, open educational resources, and asynchronous learning that addresses the unique circumstances of small schools.

- Using her background in elementary education, Scott provides recommendations for teachers in small schools as they consider how best to run their library program, highlighting the impact of a well-stocked library on student achievement.

- Berry writes from the perspective of one of the essential members of the small-school support team—the volunteer. She shares practical suggestions for assisting within the library environment.

- Wallace, Bowlby, and Clements explore Problem-based Learning, entrepreneurship, and innovation as a tool for teachers in small schools to involve students across multiple grade levels, simultaneously helping them take ownership of their learning experiences and preparing them for real-life opportunities.

- Ramoutar considers what specially designed instruction might look like for students with special needs within the small-school environment. She presents a framework that captures evidence of special education in action and explores how classroom teachers working in small private schools can enact special-education pedagogical practices.

- The issue also includes Ward’s perspective on a three-story approach to teaching Scripture and engaging youth and young adults, and Norton Lambert’s review of Trevor Lloyd’s *Listening in the Morning—Devotional Readings for Teachers*.

As the articles in this issue demonstrate, the small-school environment is unique. While it presents challenges, it also provides opportunities that make it an asset to Adventist education worldwide. We hope readers take from this issue principles and best practices that will enhance teaching and learning, grow faith, and promote excellence in all schools.

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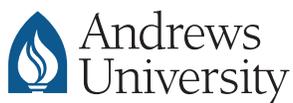
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