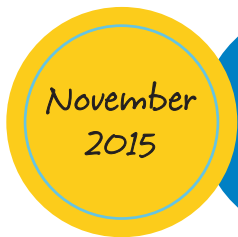


A monthly newsletter
filled with practical,
research-based
articles for K-12
educators across the
North American
Division



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Connection

A Note from the Editor

Several weeks ago, I read an article that had been floating around on Facebook and had already been “shared” over a thousand times before it was brought to my attention. I was so moved by the words the parent penned that I wanted to share it with our *Connection* readers here.

In her blog (www.momastery.org), Glennon Melton wrote of a conversation she had with her son’s elementary school teacher. What started out as a brief tutorial on Common Core led to a more intimate chat about the responsibility of teaching children to be active, positive contributors to their community. The teacher shared with Melton a weekly ritual that she has in her classroom: every Friday afternoon, she asks her students to write down on slips of paper who they would like to sit with the following week – as well as one nomination for “exceptional citizen.” She told Melton that she then takes these papers home and devotes a small portion of her weekend poring over them and *looking for patterns*. Rather than using them to create new seating charts, “she’s looking for children who are struggling to connect with other children. She’s identifying the little ones who are falling through the cracks of the class’s social life. She is discovering whose gifts are going unnoticed by their peers.” After the Columbine school shootings, this teacher was convicted that all behaviors – those stemming from evil and those stemming from love – have a pattern and that, with the right knowledge and awareness and intention, one could break the “codes of disconnection” and create new, positive patterns.

The theme for this month’s issue is “patterns,” and I love this idea of finding patterns in life, of using that insight to set forth on a more productive path. In *The Chalkboard*, we will highlight two new research studies that might break one out of a pattern – or rut – of teaching. Over at *The Locker Room*, we will outline ways to find a mentor to pattern our teaching style after, while at *The Desk*, we will take a closer look at ourselves and see if we can identify patterns in our own strengths.

May God bless you this month with a discerning spirit, content attitude and thankful heart.

*For the complete post, visit: <http://momastery.com/blog/2014/01/30/share-schools/>



THE CHALKBOARD
Finding New Patterns of
Teaching
PG2

THE LOCKER ROOM
Patterned for Success
PG3

THE DESK
Reflecting on Your
Patterns
PG4



The Chalkboard: notes for the elementary educator

“But I’ve Always Taught Like this...”: Finding New Patterns of Teaching

“I am *already* doing that in my classroom. . .” I overheard a veteran teacher huff under his breath during one staff meeting years ago. The principal was relaying some information from a conference about how to more effectively assess student learning, and the teacher, along with some other colleagues, were not terribly keen on these “new-fangled ideas.” And it’s hard to blame him in some respects, isn’t it? As teachers, you teach the same subjects, the same lesson plans, the same curriculum, year in and year out. And once you find something that works – a successful field trip that kids rave about, a great project that involves all levels of learning – you stick with it – and rightly so! There is something to be said for the “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” mantra. However, without careful intention and thought, one can quickly fall into a pattern of teaching that is closed off to new research, innovative findings, and beneficial studies that can inform and improve your efficacy in the classroom.

We wanted to highlight two such reports that have recently made headlines around the world of education.

One Stanford study¹ focused on beginning readers and the increased neural activity with phonics-based learning as opposed to whole-word learning. Led by Dr. Bruce McCandliss of the Graduate School of Education at Stanford, the team used a brain mapping technique that allowed them to monitor brain

waves while teaching participants to read, using the two different methods. They found that when participants were memorizing sight words, the right hemisphere was triggered, whereas when phonics was being used, the left hemisphere was engaged. “. . . we found that the participants could learn to read under both forms of instruction but the brain activation showed that learning happened in very different ways,” McCandliss said. He also noted that “strong left hemisphere engagement. . . is a hallmark of skilled readers, and is characteristically lacking in children and adults who are struggling with reading.” The team is hopeful that this research can also help to identify the reasons why the different teaching approaches elicit different brain responses and consequently, provide educators with more insights into how to teach reading more effectively.

Another study², also from Stanford demonstrated a potentially more successful way to teach abstract math concepts to children, something that can prove challenging to even the most veteran educator. This brain-based study built on our knowledge of how the brain uses visual symmetry to interpret the world and developed a strategy that utilized symmetry in teaching negative numbers. Because the understanding of negative numbers is generally the first step to more abstract learning, this team of researchers focused their techniques on that concept. They created tools to use with students to teach them negative numbers – including a numbered plastic strip. It included a hinge at zero – the point of integer symmetry

– and had movable numeric blocks on either side. Students could fold the strip at the zero and visually see how the negative and positive numbers corresponded and could cross each other out, allowing them to solve addition and subtraction problems. The research team spread out four hours of instruction over three weeks with these tools and methods and the results were quite encouraging. Students not only seemed to be able to quickly grasp the concept of using symmetry to solve abstract problems, but they also did better on topics that hadn’t yet been studied by applying that same idea.

At the Center for Research on K-12 Adventist Education, we feel it is always important to be attuned to new ideas, new research and new findings in the field of education, and through the *Connection*, we will endeavor to bring noteworthy studies to your attention to provide you with opportunities for continued growth and development.



1) <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2015/may/reading-brain-phonics-052815.html>

2) <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2015/july/symmetry-math-schwartz-070615.html>



The Locker Room: Notes for the Academy Educator

Patterned for Success

When asked for the secret to their success, individuals who are experts in their fields – medicine, business, law, education, etc – will often attribute their accomplished journey to the positive influence of a mentor in their lives. More than just a supporting force, these mentors or role models provide them with someone to pattern their lives after, to draw from their experiences and to seek out for advice.

Who do you have in your professional world that you look to as a role model? Whose teaching inspires you to be more effective, more positive, more compassionate, and more Christ-centered?

Here are some thoughts on cultivating and making the most of a mentoring relationship:

- **Find someone** in your same subject area. While there is much that can be learned from all teachers in all disciplines, it is most practical to identify a role model in the subject in which you teach. Creative techniques to hone descriptive writing skills are probably not applicable to P.E. teachers. I know of many Facebook groups that are specifically geared towards each subject, such as “Adventist Music Educators”

and “Academy Ministry Professionals.” Participation in these arenas might help you identify like-minded educators.

- **Connect often.** Whether your role model is someone you know in real life or is a blogger that you’ve never met, check in with them often! What have they been up to? What has been motivating them lately? What new things have they discovered recently? Having a fellow educator whose style you’ve already identified as resonating with your own means that you have an instant feed to a potential treasure trove of new ideas, methods, techniques and pins.
- **Try it out.** These fresh ideas will not do you any good, however, if they simply sit in a folder or file. You have identified this individual as someone worth patterning your teaching after, so give his/her suggestions a shot! Make it a goal to try one idea each unit or quarter.
- **Filter.** That being said, however, don’t try to pattern *everything* you do after another teacher. Your originality and teaching philosophy and creativity are what make you, *you* and simply adopting another teacher’s methodology would take away from your style. Rather, pick and choose the things that you feel would be most relevant to what you *want* to see in your classroom.

There is something to be said for learning from others’ mistakes – and successes! Use the networks that you have – or build a new one – to constantly be on the lookout for the resources that could help you become a more effective teacher.

“MENTOR:
SOMEONE
WHOSE
HINDSIGHT
CAN BECOME
YOUR
FORESIGHT.”

~ANONYMOUS



The Desk: notes for the administrator

Reflection on Your Patterns

“God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him.” Philippians 2:13 NCV

What made you become an administrator? What led you to the school and position where you are today? Most of you were probably teachers first, but something obviously brought you to your current administrative role. What was it?

Ideally, you are an administrator because you are passionate about building an environment and culture on your campus where students and teachers can thrive. Perhaps someone noted your leadership skills and suggested that you try out the spot behind the desk. Yes, you enjoy teaching, but you are more interested in the big picture, in strategic planning, and in creating a paradigm of quality Adventist education in your community.

But besides those general aspirations, what more are you doing to capitalize on your God-given strengths? Have you taken some time to reflect on what you do best and figure out how to do *more of that*? What patterns have you noted in your most successful work?

Research has shown that people who are able to use their strengths in their day-to-day work are *six times* more likely to feel engaged in their job, experience less stress and are more

productive¹. Popular Christian author Max Lucado writes about the “sweet spot” in his book, *The Cure for the Common Life*. He discusses how identifying the talents that God has blessed you with and using them in your job is the crux of this “sweet spot” and that living, working, *being* in that sweet spot will produce the happiest, most successful life.

It definitely seems worthwhile to take a moment to assess what *you* do best and how you can better capitalize on those assets in your job. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

Identify your strengths.

- The VIA survey² is an excellent test that will analyze your strengths based on 120 questions and qualify them with 24 different identifications.
- Another option is to involve others in this self-reflection. As described in the Reflected Best Self exercise choose 9-10 individuals who know you well and ask them to write a story about when you were at your best. Read these stories and analyze them for common patterns.
- Read *The Cure for the Common Life* and follow the Discovery Guide at the end of the book.

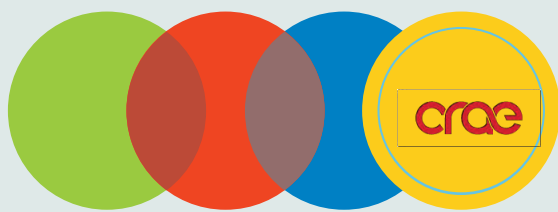
Play to your strengths. Identify the tasks that consume your day, but frame them within the context of your strong points. Do they match up? Are there things that you are admittedly quite terrible at, but yet have to do? Is there any way to “outsource” those tasks? I knew of one administrator who had a music education degree and immensely enjoyed teaching music. She ended up teaching elementary school Band, freeing up one period three times a week for the classroom teachers. The teachers, gratified by the prep periods, happily split up the daily after-school supervision, which had previously been one of the administrator’s responsibilities. We know that limited budgets are a reality for most administrators, and it will certainly take some innovative and creative thinking to look for ways to juggle and swap responsibilities, but perhaps look more closely at your schedule and budget through this lens may yield some surprising answers.

Extend this paradigm to your teachers. Many schools have gone the way of team-teaching. Teachers who have a passion for science education take over the science classes for the middle grades, while those with a knack for teaching math handle all math classes. Not only does this provide more opportunity for teachers to do more of what they love, but the students also benefit from the teachers’ increased engagement and specialized knowledge.

God has blessed each of us with a specific set of talents, and when we can identify them and *use* them to His glory, we have the potential to thrive in our work.

1) <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/167462/employees-strengths-company-stronger.aspx>

2) <https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register>



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