My Journey

God’s timing is never something you can predict or feel coming. When I went back into teaching, it was another one of those experiences of, "It’s right. This time is right." God opened that door and brought us back into it. I’m in Adventist education, and it’s more than a job. It’s definitely a calling and a ministry.

Visit https://vimeo.com/nadadventist/ajaaronlong for more of Aaron’s story.

AARON LONG, junior high vice principal, Burton Adventist Academy

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A Multisensory Approach to SABBATH SCHOOL

BY CORY WETTERLIN

Unfortunately, the Greek’s atomistic worldview not only shaped the way in which reality was perceived, it also affected the way we live. If the best way to understand something was by its smallest components, then this must also be the best way to conduct an efficient life. Consider the relationship between science and religion as an example. Fragmented, science would stick to the study of empirical evidence and not comment on the religious or philosophical life. Religion would, therefore, stick to the study of more conceptual things and leave the empirical evidence to science. This separated the empirical part of life from the spiritual, social, and emotional parts of life.

Living Inside the Boxes

The Greek’s view shaped the modernist view of reality, which has taught people to look at their lives compartmentally. For example, work, social, church, family, health—are all boxed separately. It is not a problem, therefore, to act one way at work or at home, and another way at church, in both worship service and Sabbath School.

Modernism also brought an over-emphasis to the rational (objective) over the emotional (subjective) ways of learning. When a student comes into a Sabbath School class to learn about the love of God, there will most likely be logical information shared with the child about the love of God. They will learn memory verses and perhaps hear a Bible story about Jesus dying on the cross for them to show them God’s love. If taught in a dingy classroom, on hard seats by a teacher with no enthusiasm, the emotional connotation of the love of God will not be a very positive one.

If instead the love of God is taught in a well-lit classroom with comfortable chairs that are soft to the touch, and students are greeted by a socially loving teacher (both inside and outside the classroom), then the emotional connotation of the student regarding the love of God will be much different. Which learning experience is more likely to draw them toward the love of God in the future?

Reaching the Whole Person

Another significant category of fragmentation is that of personhood. In atomistic thinking, individuals are identified as a person by their thoughts. Because of the atomistic focus on the objective view of reality as the most important part of life, the objective-cognitive function is the most definitive understanding for a person to know who they are. One could argue that as long as you have your thoughts and feelings you will always be you. The criticism of this, however, is that personhood is also made up of relational aspects. The small-group setting of Sabbath School has the potential to help build a more corporate personhood. If the setting is a welcoming one that encourages interaction with other students as part of a discussion, creative project, or service opportunity to the community, this will help to build the social personhood of the students. It will also give the student a better sense of belonging within the church body in general. A positive multisensory environment can help to keep students coming back because it has become part of who they are.

A multisensory Sabbath School experience can also help to reverse some of the effects of Fragmentation on the learning process and social experience of students, which, in turn, can help dissolve the compartmentalization of life today.

In a multisensory approach, “outdoor” learning may be part of Sabbath School activities. (Stock/istock.com)
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the more dendrites are produced in the brain. The brain becomes denser and more active through these truly multisensory experiences. This also increases the retention of the knowledge that is being shared through the teaching experience. In certain circles, this has encouraged a push for an outdoor classroom emphasis for children. Compare the rich sensory and interaction. These multisensory experiences are valuable. If, however, the Sabbath School class consists of children sitting at a desk for the lesson study, the learning experience has been reduced to the symbolic level of learning and engages only two senses. The brain growth significantly decreases, and so does retention of what is being learned.

Often, by the time our children move to junior, earliteen, or youth Sabbath School, the decorated rooms, the songs, the stuffed animals are gone, and so are the creative mind-stimulating movement and projects. The students enter a room with a circle of folding chairs to open their Bibles, read, and have a discussion. It is no wonder that the learning retention, goes down.

A Multisensory Youth Sabbath School Program

When I was the youth pastor at the Pleasant Valley church in Happy Valley, Oregon, I gathered a creative group of Sabbath School teachers. I decided to develop a multisensory learning experience for the students when they came into Sabbath School. At the time, I didn’t understand any of the research mentioned in this article, I just knew that I wanted to engage multiple learning styles and make Sabbath School a worthwhile experience.

The first general factor of the every-week experience was the atmosphere of the room. With the help of a church member who was also an interior designer, we made a warm and welcoming environment for the students to walk into. We had to be very intentional about this because we were meeting in the fellowship hall, so the decorations had to be set up and taken down every week. We bought large plants, candle holders, pillows, curtains, and other decorative items that could be spread around the room. We bought floor lamps, which allowed us to change the lighting in the room to a warmer atmosphere. We also bought large (20+)-photograph frames to insert photos of the students from Sabbath School and other youth events.

The second general factor was breakfast. There was a rotating team of parents who would come in every week to make breakfast for the students. Not only does this increase the sensory input, but nothing can raise youth out of their beds and get them to church on time like knowing breakfast is waiting! The care and affection of the church for the youth could be seen, felt, and tasted every week.

A student team would also choose and lead worship music every week. The screen was used for song lyrics, illustrative graphics, and videos for teaching illustrations.

There was also a multisensory teaching team, which came up with specific, creative ways to teach the content of the Sabbath School lesson. For the study in Ezekiel we set up giant canvases made from queen-size bed sheets stretched over one-by-one-inch pieces of wood. We then brought in drop clothes, old T-shirts, and a bunch of house paint and brushes. When the students came in, we turned on an audio recording of Ezekiel 1 over the speakers and instructed the students to paint what they heard. Once the paintings of wheels-within-wheels, whirlwinds, and four-faced cherubim had been finished, we waited for them to dry, cut them out, and put them up on the wall. The rest of the 13-week series on Ezekiel had the paintings from the first week as a backdrop. There were other weeks when catapults were built with popsicle sticks, and a pile of Styrofoam bones was placed around the classroom waiting to be brought back to life.

Another intentional step taken for a different lesson series included the involvement of small-group leaders and mentors. Adult leaders were selected, and at a certain point in the lesson time the students would break into their small groups for discussion. This was a hard-hitting life-issues based series that asked some significant and personal questions. These small groups gave the students a context in which to share and to grow closer to those in their groups.

Healing the Fragmentation

How does this multisensory Sabbath School class approach help to meet the concerns of fragmentation and healthy brain growth? First, the atmosphere creates a positive subjective experience for the learning that takes place every week. The students have a sense of ownership of the space, which means that they can feel that they belong to the church. This helps to lessen the fragmentation often felt between the rest of the church and the youth ministry. Multiple adult volunteers being involved helps the generational fragmentation from between the students and the adults. This was especially
true with the use of small groups during the lesson time.

The stimulating atmosphere and activities also resulted in greater growth of the brain, engaging more of the brain, and increased the retention of the material being taught. I will never forget the first chapter of Ezekiel as I think back on those paintings. If you can’t have the “be there” experience when trying to teach the biblical narrative and theological concepts, immersion is the next best option.

It is financially prohibitive to travel to Jerusalem every week, but perhaps we can bring Jerusalem to the classroom. With artwork, food, small groups, and social experiences, perhaps we can get closer to the experience of visiting right from the classroom. It is more than possible to increase our students’ Sabbath School experience beyond the two senses found in typical symbolic education. Multisensory Sabbath Schools increase the learning potential of the scriptures that are

**Living outside the constructs of our boxes is possible.**

being taught. A sense of belonging is generated, and a more wholistic and positive connotation surrounding the learning process, and reversing the effects of fragmentation within our church and thus our society is created. Living outside the constructs of our boxes is possible—and this can start through Sabbath School! **9**

1. The atomic theory was first proposed by Democritus more than 2,000 years ago. Essentially, this theory leads us to look at the world as constituted of atoms moving in the void. The ever-changing forms and characteristics of large-scale objects are now seen as the results of changing arrangements of the moving atoms. Essentially this view is, in certain ways, an important mode of realization of the void. The ever-changing forms and characteristics of large-scale objects are now seen as the results of changing arrangements of the moving atoms.

2. Einstein’s theory explains the process of conversion of the material or energy. The process of conversion of the material or energy is the process of the movement of the atoms. Einstein’s theory explains the process of conversion of the material or energy.

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Cory Wetterlin is involved in youth ministry for more than 15 years and is currently an adjunct professor of theology at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.
Monte (left) and Craig Saxby approach the finish of their almost 2,300-mile bike ride from Washington State to Lake Michigan to attend the 2018 NAD Teachers’ Convention in Chicago. Kimberly Luste Maran

Two Media Ministries Win Telly Awards

Two Adventist media ministries recently received 2018 Telly Awards for their programming. The Telly Awards, founded in 1941, honor excellence in video on all screens and devices, including social media videos; promotional videos; commercials; television programming; online commercials, video, and films; and more.

Jesus 101 earned two Telly Awards in the 39th annual Telly Awards. “With more than 12,000 entries from all 50 states and numerous countries, this is truly an honor,” said cycling enthusiast Saxby.

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We need to make sure we are purveyors of hope whenever our life touches another.

Looking for the Hopeless

You probably have a Bible app on your phone. I do. Although it doesn’t take the place of my study Bible, there are times when it’s handy. I recently learned there is a Web site that records not only how many times someone accesses a digital Bible, but also which topics are sought most frequently. Far and away, the topic most often explored on an electronic Bible is the subject of hope. Hope.

Not much of a surprise, really. Fragile economic climate, family stresses, the moral fabric of our culture shifting under us like tectonic plates gone berserk, complex diseases for which even Big Pharma can’t find a pill. It’s enough to keep you awake nights. In fact, last year Americans spent nearly $45 billion on sleep aids. That’s useful information for those of us who deal in sowing and cultivating hope.

When Hopeless Meets Hope

Ellen G. White writes that, “those who surrender their lives to His guidance and to His service will never be placed in a position for which He has not made provision. Whatever our situation, if we are doers of His word, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexity, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend” (The Ministry of Healing, p. 248).

Hopelessness is nurtured by uncertainty about the future. Hopelessness is intensified by finding yourself in a situation over which you have no control. Hopelessness festers in a setting where your own bad choices have created no easy outcomes. Seems to me there is a lot of that going around right now.

And that’s why we need to make sure we are purveyors of hope whenever our life touches another. And it’s why when folk come to worship we must make sure they go away marinated in hope.

Remember, hope isn’t generally nurtured when we sit and listen to a 30-minute lecture on how vile we are. But when we discover that there is Someone in charge, that He can totally rescue us from our wretched record, that the end-game is in His hands, the world begins to look a different color. Worship is that event when we take our eyes off ourselves and put them on Him. No wonder Scripture says we are saved by hope!

And sometimes it just takes a seed. Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade” (Mark 4:30-32, NIV).

Go Looking

After church on Sabbath this past spring I saw a woman I’d guess to be in her late 30s walking across the parking lot. I couldn’t help but notice she was crying. Sobbing. At the far corner of the lot she sat down under a tree. I could hear her sobs from where I was standing. I approached and asked how I could help. She didn’t want to talk, so I called my wife, Ruthie, to help me.

Out poured the whole sordid story. She was a hopeless addict (her words), had three children—the first born when she was 17. All three were living with different families. She had scratches on her neck; her boyfriend had just thrown her out, burned all her clothes, and smashed her phone.

The woman refused everything we tried to give her. She didn’t want food, a place to sleep, or anything else we had to offer. Except hope. We told her how much God loved her. We assured her that He had a wonderful plan for her life. That there was hope. We prayed; she smiled. She smiled!

Hope does that, you know. That’s why we go looking for the hopeless.

Don Jacobsen is part of the NAD Prayer Ministry; a version of this article was published in the HOPE Heals e-newsletter.
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