

Let's Teach Students to Think!

Editor: Beverly J. Robinson-Rumble
Senior Consultants: Humberto M. Rasi,
 Reo E. Ganson, C. B. Rock
CONSULTANTS
General Conference:
 Enrique Becerra
 John M. Fowler
Africa-Indian Ocean: Emilienne Rasamoely
Asia-Pacific: Milton E. Thorman
Eastern Africa: Hudson Kibuuka
Euro-Africa: Ronald Strasdowsky
Euro-Asia: Harry Mayden
Inter-America: Carlos Archbold
North America: Richard Osborn
South America: Roberto C. Azevedo
Southern Asia: K. Jesuratnam
South Pacific: Lester Devine
Trans-Europe: Orville Woolford
Southern Africa: Paul W. Coetser

Book Review Editor
 Clarence Dunbein
Research Editor
 Jerome D. Thayer
Copy Editor
 Randy Hall

Art Direction/Graphic Design
 Howard Bullard & Associates

Advisory Board: Reo E. Ganson, Enrique Becerra, John Fowler, Kathy Goddard, Lon Gruesbeck, Dunbar Henri, Betty Howard, Erma Lee, Warren Minder, Richard Osborn, Humberto M. Rasi, Michael Ryan, Virginia Smith

W • L • N • N • E • R
 1994 • 1994 • 1996

EdPress

Distinguished Achievement Award

THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION publishes articles concerned with a variety of topics pertinent to SDA education. Opinions expressed by our writers do not necessarily represent the views of the staff or the official position of the Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION (ISSN 0021-8480) is published bimonthly, October through May, and a summer issue for June, July, August, and September by the Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. TELEPHONE (301) 680-5075, FAX (301) 622-9627; E-mail: 74617,1231 (CompuServe). Subscription price, U.S. \$17.25. Single copy, U.S. \$3.50. Second-class mailing paid at Silver Spring, Maryland, and additional mailing office. Please send all changes of address to Southwestern ColorGraphics, P. O. Box 677, Keene, TX 76059, including both old and new address. Address all editorial and advertising correspondence to the Editor. © Copyright 1996 General Conference of SDA, POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, P. O. Box 677, Keene, TX 76059.

The story happens all too frequently. In fact, it happened to me three times just last week. In each case, I had walked into a business, one of which was educationally related, to make a purchase. The cashier carefully scanned into the checkout register the required information to complete my purchase. After the totals had been determined, I gave the cashier sufficient money to complete the transaction, plus additional coins to make even change. All of the checkout persons had to re-enter the transaction or calculate the new information using some form of electronic assistance. None of them seemed capable of completing the exchange using only mental calculations.

I have thought about these three individuals a number of times. Is this because of my background as a mathematics teacher, or do others see just as many examples of incorrect spellings, misplaced prepositional phrases, or “Where is Iraq?”-type questions? I have even asked myself: “Does this apparent inability to perform mental calculations say something about what is happening in our classrooms today?”; “Have teachers made students so dependent on electronic support that their mental capacities become stunted?”; “Is this a symptom of a larger problem, the inability to teach critical thinking?”; and “Are students becoming lazy and failing to use their minds?” Based on my extensive classroom visitation and evaluation work, I have decided that the answer to all of these questions is “yes.” If my conclusions are correct, then I would ask each of you to reflect on whether this happens in your classroom.

Adventist education has long had as one of its important aims to teach our students to think.

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought. Instead of confining their study to that which men have said or written, let students be directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation. Let them contemplate the great facts of duty and destiny, and the mind will expand and strengthen. Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions (Ellen G. White, Education, pp. 17, 18).

By the ever-learning student new light, new ideas, new gems of truth will be found, and eagerly grasped. He thinks; the laws of the mind require him to think. The human intellect gains expansion and vigor and acuteness by being taxed. The mind must work or it will dwindle. It will starve unless it has fresh subjects to think upon. Unless it is made to think hard it will surely lose its power of thinking (Ellen G. White, Letter 33, Feb. 27, 1886, to a minister working in Europe).

Educators can teach students to think. Young people can perform mental calculations, spell words correctly, construct grammatical sentences, and gain a general sense of world geography without an electronic calculator, a computerized “Spell Check” or “Grammatik,” or a “Windows” atlas application program.

Teaching students to think becomes even more critical if one looks more closely at what Mrs. White really implied. The two phrases: “thinkers, and not mere reflectors” and “its power of thinking” are not describing the ability to memorize. Rather, they demand that teachers help students to challenge their thinking, expand their thinking patterns, exercise higher-level thought processes, and contemplate God and His creation. Is Seventh-day Adventist education today focusing on these matters, or has it gotten sidelined by the technical details of teaching students to click a mouse and use the electronic activating buttons on a calculator? As you re-evaluate your class objectives, I challenge you to wipe the dust off the real “thinking” objectives, reincorporate them into today's lessons, and inspire your students to think for themselves.

Picture
Removed

Reo E. Ganson

And if this succeeds, perhaps I can receive the correct change and still keep my pocket relatively empty and light.—R.E.G.