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### Eight Tips for Teaching through Tough Times

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## EIGHT TIPS FOR TEACHING THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

Glynis Bradfield, North American Division, USA



*How can a teacher strive for excellence when the world around them is falling apart?*

When a country is in turmoil because of war, civil unrest, natural disaster, or major economic crises, the basic questions of life can bedevil even the youngest student. How can a teacher strive for excellence when the world around them is falling apart?

When praying for Adventist schools where countries are in turmoil, I reflect on my time spent teaching and leading a school during hyperinflation and civil unrest in the Congo. When dealing with serious issues in your region, consider these 8 ways to strive for excellence:

1. **Give God a chance.** We cannot help students respond with resilience when we are not replenishing our reserves. Acknowledge God, who is ready to direct our paths. Believing God's promises to care for us even in the shadow of death comforts, calms, and restores. Sharing God's plans and promises can rekindle hope and purpose amidst the unknowns.
2. **Continue to make vision-driven decisions.** This is not a time for divided loyalties or lengthy debate over policies and procedures. With the school's purpose clearly in mind, consider available information about the turmoil or trauma. Then, work together to prayerfully decide on the best next steps. Teachers can help students thrive through challenging circumstances by treating each student as an individual with great potential, not settling for less despite the tough circumstances.
3. **Make time for personal renewal.** Seek new times and ways to continue daily life and health routines. While we cannot control events, we can control their effect on our thoughts, emotions, and actions. Reduce stress by taking a five-minute nap, breathing deeply for a minute, contracting and expanding body muscles, and other simple personal renewal activities.
4. **Communicate and continue.** Re-establish school security and emergency networks daily. Increase communication with staff, students, parents, and stakeholders. Continue the school routine

- for the stability of the community and the students as long as possible.
5. **Prioritize and document.** Plan for smaller units of study and teach core units first in preparation for disruptions to the academic calendar. We documented progress each week with short narrative reports that would be easier for other teachers to follow if we were evacuated or closed school, or the families had to relocate.
  6. **Support each other.** Hold short staff meetings daily to pray and share information impacting the school situation. Make team decisions, supporting flexible solutions and adapting creatively. Talk about and teach resilience.
  7. **Re-establish classroom climate often.** Fear of life-threatening situations or the unknown inhibits and exhausts. We reordered the schedule to begin with a combined music, art, worship, and writing class each morning. Students arrived at school with questions that parents were too busy trying to survive to answer. This first hour provided students with time to debrief and to express themselves through drawing or writing so teachers could better understand their concerns and prayerfully adjust learning activities to help them thrive. We also implemented a buddy system, where student partners shared their concerns with each other.
  8. **Make positive memories.** As disasters often disrupt weekly cycles and special occasions, facilitate simple celebrations in the moment. Model a growth mindset and an attitude of gratitude. Play a favorite game or celebrate a birthday in a new way. Share personal experiences that help students recognize God's leading in the past, which can reassure them of His continued presence even through the unknown.

When civil unrest erupted in our region after months of tension, most of our students and their families were evacuated. While disruptions like this are difficult, students and staff alike learn to live the Serenity Prayer, asking God for the serenity to accept what we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.



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