

Work, rest & play in an anytime, anywhere century

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Andrew Douch was a fantastic presenter at our State Library Day in March. He left many questions in the minds of our delegates, of which **time** was the big one! I challenged him to tell me how he maintains the balance between home and work, relationships, and his ongoing commitment to student access 24/7.

Editor

The questions

"If you are suggesting that teachers teach online in the evening, and make podcasts and such in their own time, isn't this asking teachers to spend more and more personal time working?"

"How do you have the time to teach a virtual class, make podcasts, etc.? Do you ever sleep?"

"Really, Andrew, how do you have a life ... when do you veg out with your 4 sons!"

THE ANSWER



I get asked questions like these a lot.

It's interesting to reflect on how the world has changed since unions fought for 888 (8 hours of work, 8 hours of leisure and 8 hours of rest). While the principle of work/leisure/rest balance is still as relevant now as it was in 1910, the division of our day into 3 discreet 8-hour periods, I don't think, is relevant any more.

Blurring the 888 boundaries

The borders between work and leisure are already blurred. We already take our planning, correction and report-writing home and work into the evening. We feel comfortable phoning our family members during the day, or minding our child at work if they can't attend school. We have 'social committees' at work, and our work itself increasingly involves an element of play. All these things blur the once clear boundary between work and leisure. I don't think my school is unusual in this regard. Any given day sees several humorous education-related emails circulated amongst staff. Being at work can be fun, and dare I say it, at times it feels like leisure. In fact I'd argue that working in a job you love IS a form of leisure. Take Anne Mirtschin from Hawkesdale P-12. She recently expressed it like this to me (in a tweet) "[teaching online in the evening] is more like entertainment. I don't watch TV much, and just love learning and the e-learning environment." That is what Sir Ken Robinson would call a teacher in her **element**.

Compare this to the Henry Ford clock-in-clock-out work ethic. Ford is well known for having sacked employees for laughing at work, or on some occasions for even smiling! Work was not a place for fun. Fun was reserved for a man's 8 hours of leisure and had no place in the factory. Today, most teachers approach their work oftentimes with a sense of play, happily blurring the boundaries between work, leisure and rest. I think it would be sad to go back to the rigidity of the 888 model unions fought for a century ago.

De-specification of time and place

The Internet has led to the de-specification of hours in many facets of life. We now buy our music online when we want to rather than waiting until Sanity is open during the day. We book our holidays online in the evening rather than trying to get to the travel agent during our lunch-break; we bank online; shop online. All week we keep in touch with our friends online via Facebook and Twitter rather than waiting to see them on the weekend. Our colleagues email us in the evening for help with their computers and our family members email us during the work day for help with theirs.

But when it comes to time and schooling, the paradigm hasn't changed much. We still think that students need to be at school, sitting in classrooms between the hours of 9:00 AM and 3:30 PM. Like other areas of our life, I think it's only a matter of time before we see that the system is actually more efficient and more convenient if students can access 'the classroom' 24/7. Just as for other spheres of life, this will be made possible in part by the automation of repetitious and routine practices and in part by the de-specification of work hours both for teachers and students. The need for a class to be together in time and space for learning to take place is diminishing rapidly. Bill Gates recently mused, "*Place-based colleges are good for parties, but are becoming less crucial for learning thanks to the Internet*".

A second point is that I think if teachers are teaching virtual classes in the evening, they should be entitled to take time off in lieu during the work-day. In other words, if we are going to de-specify our hours, we need to de-specify the hours we spend at school, too. This is certainly the case for me and I know it's true of some other teachers like the excellent Steve Collis at Northern Beaches Christian School. Steve teaches virtual classes online of an evening and comes in to work late on Tuesdays.

In my case, I teach online on Tuesday evenings, and usually take Friday afternoons off in lieu. It's a great trade off as far as I'm concerned. Instead of teaching tired weekend-ready students who are forced to be in class on Friday afternoon, I get to teach them after dinner, on Tuesday evening, when they are relaxed at home after a break from school. Plus I often get to have lunch with my wife on Friday afternoon while our own children are at school. There's not too much to resent about that trade-off.

Time and efficiency

The other important point that needs to be made here is that teaching online in various forms is much more efficient than teaching 'on the ground'.

Take podcasting for example. In a one hour podcast, I can cover more than in a week's worth of classes, and it amplifies the effectiveness of my teaching too. Students can listen to it when they are in a receptive mood. They can listen when they want to, where they want to, as many times as they need

to, for as long as they want to. They can come back and listen again for revision. If they are away sick they don't miss out. If their mind wanders they can rewind—instead of approaching me for a second explanation. On my forum, they can ask as many questions as they want, as they think of them, and someone will answer. As a result, I have fewer students needing my help out of class time than I once did. This efficiency also saves me personal time. I'm a more effective teacher than I was, but I'm spending less time to do so.

I'm also blessed to have a principal who *gets* this—and is open-minded enough about the 21st Century to give me the latitude to explore it.

Thank you Andrew, I think that's where it begins and ends—the 888 needs to be transformed into the AAA: anytime, anywhere, any place teaching environment.

~ Editor