

Educational Excellence: For Time and Eternity

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Excellence and quality are subjects of much debate in the educational world today. The constituencies that schools and school systems serve are increasing their demands for excellence. Parents' expectations of teachers, principals, and superintendents seem to be at their highest level. What does excellence represent in Adventist Christian education and how is it achieved?

Excellence in Adventist Christian education represents more than having educational institutions with good reputations, adequate resources, quality graduates, competitive programs, and sound financial operations. It promotes the harmonious development of physical, mental, and spiritual powers, the training of youth to be thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men's thought, and the preparation to be effective citizens on this earth and for rewarding citizenship in the new earth. It also endeavors to restore in man the "image" of God — his Creator (Gen. 1:27), the source of all knowledge and wisdom. Godliness "godlikeness" — is the goal to be reached. (E.G. White, Education, 1952, pp.13-19)

Similar at least in part to the Adventist Christian approach to excellence in education, the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education issued the following statement: "Our goal must be to develop the talents of all to their fullest. Attaining that goal requires that we expect and assist all students to work to the limits of their capabilities. We should expect schools to have genuinely high standards rather than minimum ones, and parents to support and encourage their children to make the most of their talents and abilities." (A Nation at Risk, 1983, p.13)

One cannot preach excellence while modeling mediocrity. Adventist teachers are not only competent in their particular disciplines, but are also committed to Christian values. There are very fine Christian teachers in the public system. But for Adventist educators, commitment to Christ is an essential ingredient. Student/teacher interaction is part of the fabric of our institutions. Our teachers are here not simply to do a job, but to help their students succeed.

My son recently shared with me what his OAC chemistry teacher at Kingsway told the class: "If you don't understand something or need additional help, do not hesitate to call me at home any time. I want you to succeed and will do anything to help you." This is not an isolated example. Our teachers find their own personal fulfillment in the fulfillment of their students. They help their students prepare for time and eternity.

When Rick Bacchus, president of the Ontario Conference, was asked why he believed in Christian education, he said: "I attest to the fact that the lessons one learns, and the character one forms within the atmosphere of a Bible-based curriculum, are more precious than gold. ...Not only does Christian education and the work of redemption go hand in hand, Christian education is the work of redemption. In the support of our schools, we are engaged in missionary work of the highest order. The salvation of our

boys and girls are at stake. We can't afford not to become active participants in this vital work. The business of Christian education is God's business."

While carrying out God's business, Adventist education administrators welcome the input and feedback of each and every one of you. We want to listen to each other as we pursue excellence in Adventist Christian education. We endeavor to be quality driven, customer conscious, and continuously seeking to improve. Will you share with us your dreams and expectations of the educational system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada? We are here to serve you.

Erasing the MYTHS of Adventist Education

Your children are growing (so fast!). It's time for them to start school, and you have choices to make. There's so much to consider. You want them to receive the best possible academic program. Developing interpersonal skills is also important, you know. You try to visualize (way down the road) their eventual job prospects. And as an Adventist parent, you know you are also guiding your children down an eternal path. In conversations with fellow parents, you hear debates on the pros and cons of church school education.

This issue of the Messenger takes a look at some of those perceptions. For answers, we requested professional input from Adventist education superintendents across Canada. (They were delighted, as they are frequently asked these questions by their constituents.) Here's the information they had to share.

MYTH: Curriculums are not well rounded

Robert Crux, Education Superintendent, Alberta Conference

One of the haunting questions that curriculum specialists of our modern era continue to struggle with is: Who decides what is worthwhile to know and experience, in order that human beings might reach greater potential and develop a more just social order?

- 1 If it is true, as William H. Schubert, a contemporary curriculum practitioner, suggests, that curriculum is defined as whatever is advocated for teaching and learning — including both school and non-school environments
- 2 then it becomes vitally important for us to understand the ideology or philosophy underpinning the curriculum of a given school system. What philosophy or whose ideology will be used as the framework for curriculum content taught in our children's school? Who determines what content is to be included in a "well-rounded curriculum"?

For Adventist educators, a well-rounded curriculum means having the freedom to integrate faith with learning in all subject areas that are mandated to be taught by the province. Teachers in Adventist educational institutions offer a curriculum that is Christ-centered and a view of life that is whole. The apostle Paul declared that Christ is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

- 3 Like pieces of a puzzle, the subject areas within the curriculum fit together from a Biblical perspective, giving students insights of the majesty and character of God. Obviously, this integration is achieved more easily in courses such as science or social studies than in mathematics. But teachers strive to weave Christianity naturally into their presentations, rather than taking "time out" for "spiritual commercials."

A primary reason that Adventist schools promote a Christ-centered curriculum is to be able to answer the three most important questions that mankind has been asking throughout the ages of this earth's history:

- Where did we come from?
- What is our purpose in life?
- Where are we going?

Understanding the Scriptures' answers to these questions enables men to be masters and not slaves of their circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions.

- 4 The uniqueness of the Adventist education system rests in the hands of dedicated teachers who are bringing the mind of man into communion with the mind of God the finite with the Infinite. The effect of such communion on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate.

5 References

- 1 Schubert, William H. (ed.), Curriculum Reform, 1993 ASCD Yearbook, Alexandria, Va., 1993, p. 110.
- 2 Ibid., p. 80-81.
- 3 Colossians 1: 17, New International Version
- 4 White, Ellen G., Source and Aim of True Education, Education, Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., Boise, Idaho, p. 19.
- 5 Ibid., p. 14.

MYTH: Academic standards are low

Adventist schools, while committed to passing on Christian ideals and values, are also concerned with preparing students academically in order to help them compete in the career marketplace. "But, do Adventist schools provide a strong academic program?" Teachers and administrators are asked this question frequently by parents who have to look long and hard at their bank accounts, as well as pastors and church members who are worried about increasingly tight church budgets, as they question the value of an Adventist education.

The Valuegenesis survey reveals that students in Adventist schools say their teachers are competent, have high expectations for them, expect them to do their best, and do all they can to encourage academic achievement. This is evident as we review the academic

results of the students who attended Parkview Adventist Academy during the last five years.

The Alberta Diploma Examination Program is intended to develop and maintain excellence in education standards through certification of academic achievement. Grade 12 students are required to write a minimum of two examinations to receive a high school diploma. The program consists of specific course examinations based on the prescribed program of studies for core grade 12 courses.

Students at Parkview Adventist Academy are achieving on or above provincial results in most diploma examination courses. The results are shown in the table below. Students who attend Adventist schools are distinguishing themselves academically and are providing Christian leadership wherever they go. These young people say that attending an Adventist school really made the difference for them.

Subject

Standard of Excellence 80% or higher
Acceptable Standard 50% or higher

Alberta PAA Alberta PAA

English 30	12.8	20.6	95.8	96.3
Social Studies 30	16.2	24.7	93.4	99.1
Mathematics 30	19.2	31.9	87.4	92.5
Biology 30	22.0	26.2	90.2	91.0
Chemistry 30	22.3	24.5	90.7	87.8
Physics 30	27.8	23.8	92.4	92.3

MYTH: Students are sheltered and isolated
Bonnie Walker, Associate Superintendent, British Columbia Conference

Sheltered? You bet! Sheltered from Satanism, gangs, drugs, extremes. Isolated? No. In the British Columbia conference, where I work, exciting things happen.

- All three of our senior academies and one junior academy send students on a regular basis to third-world countries to help build orphanages and churches.
- Students from smaller schools have helped in projects through Extreme Work Out and Piece of Pie Ministries.
- Six of our schools report financing students in Africa and India.
- Packages of school materials have been collected and sent to Costa Rica.
- Three of our larger schools take spring vacation trips to bring gymnastic programs to public schools all over our province. At these schools our students witness to healthy lifestyles and saying "No" to drugs and alcohol.

- Food is collected for ADRA.
- Parks and roads are kept clean.
- Children are "adopted" at Christmas with students purchasing presents and sharing the day with "their child."
- Technology, including the Internet, keeps schools in contact. Pen pals are encouraged, and material is gathered.

Sheltered? Yes. Isolated? No.

MYTH: Multi-grade classrooms are detrimental
 Dave Higgins, Education Superintendent, Ontario Conference

Do children really receive as good an education in multi-grade classes as they do in a single grade? This question, educators feel, is often asked by many parents. Literature reviews on multi-grade classrooms indicate that it is very important for educators and school boards to demystify the myths of "multi-gradeness" through positive information and a strong public relations program.

The bottom line is that multi-grade or multi-age research studies spell out varied advantages of the program for children, teachers, and parents.

Advantages for children: In a 1983 study of a Montreal Catholic school, J. Perras compared the academic achievement and cognitive development of math and French pupils in multi-grade and single-grade classes. He found no significant differences between the two groups. In his conclusion, he stated that it can be affirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt that being enrolled in a multi-grade class has no negative effect on school grades. Rather, the study indicated a tendency toward an improvement in scholastic achievement

Another factor that this study brought out is that the multi-grade program favors socialization, independence, and interaction with peers. The youngest child in the class feels more secure, demonstrates more assurance, and feels more appreciated, while the oldest child in the class develops a social sense and a spirit of cooperation.

- 1 Advantages for teachers: Many multi-grade teachers say the program has a revitalizing effect. One teacher, describing the positive side of a multi-grade classroom, said, "My class was composed of pupils who learn more quickly because they were chosen for certain characteristics, especially autonomy. Such pupils like school work and learn much better. The teacher, therefore, does not lose as much time giving a lot of explanations. As well, it is a class where we can add enrichment and where there are fewer discipline problems."
- 2 Advantages for parents: The advantages of multi-grade classes from parents' perspectives center on the variety of experiences offered. This entails acquiring good work habits, a sense of discipline, responsibility, independence, and positive relationships among pupils of different ages, especially the younger ones.

In all, a review of the literature on multi-grade classrooms shows that the experience can be satisfying and enriching for parents as well as children.

Students studying in the various multi-grade classrooms across this union have the following in common:

- small classes, individual attention
- Christ-centered curriculum which inspires the joy of learning
- acquisition of knowledge and purpose in preparation for service in their communities and a place in the world to come

Multi-grade classrooms are here to stay. Their numbers have been increasing dramatically across all types of school districts, especially in urban areas. The message is clear: educators, parents, and students need to take multi-grades as seriously as they do single grades. And yes, multi-grade classrooms are not detrimental!

The Multi-grade Classroom: Myth and Reality, A Canadian Study, The Canadian Education Association, Toronto, 1991, p. 24.

Ibid, p. 25.

MYTH: Schools are under-equipped and under-financed

Dennis Plubell, Education Superintendent, British Columbia Conference

In the distant recesses of my childhood memory, I still see my mother kneading bread on a kitchen table dusted with flour, and I can almost smell the bread baking in the oven. The memory is reinforced from time to time when my wife makes bread. It tastes just as good as I remember it in my childhood, but she uses a compact electric mill to grind our own wheat and a Bosch mixer to do the kneading.

Adventist education has changed over the years. But we still endeavor to train young minds, hearts, and hands for a lifetime of service for the Master. Not every school has the same facilities, equipment or financial resources. While basic facilities, equipment, and materials are essential, real quality in Adventist education is dependent on the skill of the "baker."

Some claim that Adventist schools are under-financed and under-equipped. Across Canada there are striking differences in school funding. In Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba, the provinces give direct grants for operations to independent schools, including Adventist schools. I have seen some fine school facilities in these areas. In other areas there are equally fine institutions because of the sacrificial commitment of the local church members.

Arguably, there is the sense that this type of commitment is waning. A detailed statistical study might reveal changes in support for Adventist education. Indeed, there are many good church programs competing for the few denominational dollars. But as long as there are young people who need to meet the Savior and dedicated teachers with the God-

ordained mission to touch eternity by touching young lives, Adventist education will succeed. For Adventist education is about making a difference in people.

For more information on Adventist education, please contact any of the Adventist education administrators in your area. (Left to right) Mike Lekic, Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada; Dennis Plubell, British Columbia Conference; Robert Crux, Alberta Conference; Don Krause, Canadian Union College; John Janes, Parkview Adventist Academy; Dave Higgins, Ontario Conference; Lee Patterson, Manitoba/Saskatchewan Conference; David Streifling, Newfoundland Conference; Jim Jeffery, Canadian Union College; Nilton Amorim, Quebec Conference; Robert Lehmann, Maritime Conference. (Not pictured: Bonnie Walker, British Columbia Conference; and Malcolm Graham, Kingsway College.)