

## WHERE HAVE THE FLOWERS GONE?

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In the early 1990s, Project Affirmation, sponsored by the North American Division, put together a three-year plan, with the purpose of clarifying and affirming the mission of Seventh-day Adventist Education within the Division. By that process, it was the Division's hope to revitalize Adventist education.



Dr. Tom Smith, coordinator of the project, pointed out twelve serious realities affecting our educational system.

1. The increasing costs of education.
2. The long-term declining enrolment in our schools and colleges.
3. The increasing number of parents, with limited finances, desiring a Seventh-day Adventist education for their children.
4. A declining proportion of money available for education from various levels of church organization.
5. A demand for quality education and preparation for the real world.
6. Increasing competition from public and other private schools.
7. Continuing demand for biblically based education, leading to faith and service commitment.
8. Increasing student choice in educational options.
9. Increasing demand for participation in change at the local level.
10. Declining youth commitment to institutional religion.
11. Declining commitment to service and the public good.
12. The increasing complexity in bringing about large-scale change, and the subsequent need for taking initiative at the local level. (1)

Seminars were organized throughout the Division, at which educators, representatives of parents and churches studied the project, analysed the issues and made recommendations. A decade later, I am back in education after spending a few years in pastoral work, and I cannot help asking the question: "Where have the flowers gone?" We still are confronted with the same realities, and the suggested solutions - to the extent that they were implemented - did not pay the expected dividends. Not fully, for sure.

Within the scope of this article, it is impossible to do justice to every single reality. Since they are related to a logic extent, they will be grouped for analysis. I do not want to be a prophet of doom, but everybody knows that the cost of education will continue rising. The trend in world finances and in church finances, as well, predicts that things will get worse rather than better. On the one hand, parents are struggling to send their children to, and maintain them in private schools. On the other hand, prospective students are requesting a widening of our curriculum to include subjects offered by our competitors. Unfortunately, we do not have the funds to inject into our educational system.

How are we going to cope? For the last decade, the leadership has been advocating a greater participation from the local Conferences and churches. In general, our Conferences in Canada are having a hard time making ends meet. Some of our church schools are so small we cannot expect them to bring about change. I hear people saying: "We will survive with the Lord's help." (But to merely survive is not why we instituted an educational system. We must make an impact, or else, we have lost our very "raison d'être.")

What are the answers? In my humble opinion, parents must be convinced that Christian education is God-inspired, and is able to train their children for life, successfully. Above all, it contributes to a great extent, to maintaining them in the church, and preparing them for the kingdom. With this conviction, parents will become committed to encouraging their children to join our schools, although we cannot offer them as much as public schools. However, we are offering them what they will not get elsewhere.

Project Affirmation accomplished a super job through group interaction. "A small, cohesive change group is necessary to provide leadership in the change process." (2) That small group was ever-present at the Project Affirmation seminars. But an important element was missing.

The group members were strictly adults! Young people need to be a part of the change process. They need to become aware of the issues, and to bring their contribution to the debate, to be on the problem-solving team. After all, isn't it their life training and their future - even their eternal future - that are at stake? Especially at a time when they are, increasingly, choosing their educational options!

### **Resources:**

1. Tom Smith, PhD. "*Twelve Serious Realities Confronting Adventist Education*," p1-6
2. 1989 Search Institute, p6 "*Objective: Psychological Ownership*"