

Working on Our ABCs

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Barely into the first day of school, the high school girl appeared at my office door and posed the razor sharp question, “Why do Adventists hate Catholics so much?”

My mind was jarred into action! “Have a seat,” I suggested. There was a pause as I found my chair and stumbled through my thoughts looking for a strategy. I learned that this non-Adventist girl had come to her conclusion from the Religion classes she had taken at our school. Of course I wanted to know more. What had she been taught? I explored with her.



Her love of history ultimately led to a discussion of the Great Controversy in heaven to the book of Revelation and the end of time. We postulated why the Bible has the stories it has but leaves so much out. She was filled with questions and seemed genuinely hungry for answers.

The conversation with Annette (not her real name) graphically reinforced the need of our school to work on the ABCs which had been selected as the foci for the school year. **Academics, Backdrop and Commitment to Christ.** We believe that there is nothing more important than these three things for any Adventist school.

The “A” stands for academics. This is one of the primary reasons for having the school. Is learning revered in the school for what it can do to elevate the student? Is the sense of discovery nurtured? The object is not merely to help student’s get better test scores, but to obtain the learning that enlarges the student’s windows to both heaven and the world.

The “B” stands for BACKDROP. A painting hung at the back of a stage helps to set the tone for the performance. It is the historical setting or background of an event. In a school the backdrop is the aura that is pervasive. It is how people work, learn and play together. In reality it is the “unwritten curriculum.” In one way it is not as easy to discern as a curriculum printed in a school catalogue; yet in many other ways it literally “grabs you” when you walk through the front doors. It tells you if this a happy, productive, nurturing place or a place where people merely do what they have to do to survive.

“C” points to our Commitment to Christ. Getting to know Him and using that understanding together with academic learning makes for balance in the individual. We want to encourage students to share their faith experiences as a witness of what really matters to them. If the school is doing its “C” job, it is not likely that any student would feel compelled to ask Annette’s question.

To examine these three areas for needed improvements, the ASCD book entitled *The Schooling Practices that Matter Most* was considered and discussed with the teachers. Lists were made of

things that were being done well and items needing improvement as well as the specifics for making the improvement.

During the process, areas were identified where there could be greater student recognition and encouragement for program input. Now steps are being taken to address these realizations.

Standardized test results for the last several years were examined to study trends, celebrate school successes and lay a course of action for the future. The courses offered, those taken by students and the apparent successes were analyzed in some detail. Furthermore, teachers were asked to compare their own teaching practices with the research that has been shown to encourage the greatest level of student improvement. Then they were to propose concrete strategies to make changes in their own practices.

Assessing the backdrop is a little more intangible. Both academic practices and the spiritual program of the school spill over on the backdrop. For example, at our school greater attention is being paid to student attendance in class and whether or not students are practicing school and safety regulations. Some students, having an incomplete picture, may feel that the promotion of academics compromises the backdrop because it limits their freedom.

Our school, like yours, is God's school. We are seeking to help students make good life choices in their thinking, relationships and appearance. We encourage readers to remember all of His schools and children in their prayers. From Academics, Backdrop and Commitment to Christ all the way to Zed – we're still working on our ABCs. Even a good thing can stand improvement.