

Why Teach in an Adventist School?

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In my early years of teaching, I often asked myself why. Buried in paperwork, struggling to keep one step ahead of my students, juggling the demands of home and school, balancing the requirements of province, administration, parents, students, and the NAD, spending summers in prep and recertification courses . . . if I hadn't loved it, I would have quit long ago. But after more than twenty-five years in an Adventist boarding school, I find myself asking different questions. Why did I choose to teach in the Adventist system? Have I really made a difference? Has my school made a difference in young lives? As the world and the church have become more secularized, as families disintegrate and values change, as more and more pastors and conference administrators see Adventist schools as a drain on the budget, as buildings take precedence over people, do Adventist schools still serve a purpose? George Knight's recent article in the *Journal of Adventist Education* entitled "Why Have Adventist Education?" addresses many of my concerns. After 40 years in the pastoral and educational ministries of the Adventist church, Dr. Knight still believes in the importance of Adventist education. And so do I, for many of the same reasons.

It is easy to get discouraged when I look for immediate results. Why don't students respond more enthusiastically to spiritual things? Why won't they give up the music, the videos, the fashions that seem to keep them from Christ? Why do they continue to complain about cafeteria food, cheat on tests, and talk during prayer? Aren't they listening? Don't they care? But Dr. Knight was right. Even after three years of walking and talking directly with Jesus, not one of His twelve closest students were yet truly converted. In time, however, they changed the world. God has called us, as Adventist teachers, to introduce Him to our students, to talk about His love, to model His life, to labour with Him. The teacher in me wants to see the results of my efforts. But I must learn to wait patiently on the Lord. The final evaluation is yet to come.

I also get discouraged when I see the numbers of Adventist parents and pastors who do not recognize the importance of Adventist education. It is sad that many non-Adventist parents, though not specifically seeking religious philosophy or doctrine for their children, recognize and choose Adventist schools for their safe and nurturing environments, their emphasis on values, and their focus on the whole child, while many Adventist parents are content with secular education. Knowing the impact of peer pressure, especially in a culture that glorifies violence and immorality and celebrates drinking, drugs, and casual sex, shouldn't parents choose to put their children in an environment where most of their peers share an Adventist value system and choose a lifestyle based on those values? I've seen many Adventist parents relocate their families, giving up practically everything, to do just that. But I've also seen Adventist parents, and even more tragically, Adventist pastors, who claim that Adventist schools are too expensive, too conservative, or too ill-equipped.

Are they right? In terms of standards and facilities, I don't think so. But the cost of Adventist education has become a real concern. Parents of dormitory students who work

during the summer and school year to help defray the costs are still often looking at \$500-900 a month to keep their children in an Adventist school. And even with union and conference subsidies, schools are struggling to avoid deficit budgets and keep their doors open.

So what is the answer? Why isn't Adventist education keeping up proportionately with the growth of church membership? Why, as Dr. Knight points out, was the ratio of Adventist students to members only 5 to 100 in 2000 when it was 25 to 100 in 1945? According to Dr. Knight, "as the denomination continues to mature, it needs to constantly reassess its commitment to Adventist education" (p. 9). In my opinion, that means moving education up on the priority scale. Instead of building buildings and landscaping properties, we should be investing in lives. Instead of reducing church and conference subsidies to schools, we should be increasing them. Instead of expecting Adventist parents to shoulder tuition costs alone, we should, as a church, make it possible for every Adventist child to receive an Adventist education. "Every man and woman in our ranks," admonished Mrs. White, "whether a parent or not, ought to be intensely interested in the Lord's vineyard. We cannot afford to allow our children to drift away into the world and to fall under the control of the enemy" (CT 210). "Nothing is of greater importance than the education of our children and young people. The church should arouse and manifest a deep interest in this work. . . . While we should put forth earnest efforts for the masses of the people around us, and push the work into foreign fields, no amount of labor in this line can excuse us for neglecting the education of our children and youth" (CT 165).

Are Adventist schools perfect? Certainly not. But instead of criticizing its imperfections, we must come together . . . home, church, and school . . . to support the mission of Adventist education in reaching the young people of the church. That's why I teach in an Adventist school.

Resources:

Knight, George, *Journal of Adventist Education*, Summer 2005, pp. 6-9.

White, E.G., *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*.