

AN OPEN LETTER to Academy Principals

If I were privileged to write to the principal of any day academy located

near an Adventist college campus, I would say:

Dear fellow educator:

As usual, this year I scanned the articles in the local newspapers concerning the National Merit Scholarships, and once again I found the names of students from almost every school in the area except our academy.

On this annual occasion academic excellence receives a little publicity, though of course only a tiny fraction of that devoted to sports. How sad that, year after year, so few Adventist students are named among these achievers of academic excellence!

I refuse to believe that Adventist young people are less intelligent than students from other schools. What, then, is hindering their scholastic performance? Why were Johnny's and Mary's test scores below the required level? What, besides their jobs, has encroached upon their study time?

A glance at the school calendar may offer a clue. Could it have been the icebreaker, or the new student reception? Might it have been the river trip, or the skiing day? Was it possibly the fall picnic, the boys' campout, the girls' campout, the classes missed for picture-taking, or the day off as a reward for Ingathering and publications campaigns? What about the barn party, the Christmas social, the many benefit films, and the student association banquet? The music festival, the Bible conference, and the temperance weekend, all required time to travel long distances from home. Could they have better used the time spent on class night on undignified skits promoting various activities? Could they have been studying on the spring picnic day, or during the evening and Sunday ballgames? One researcher estimates that out of 180 school days each year, 35 to 50 days are lost to instruction.

"Oh," you say, "none of the activities you have mentioned could be blamed for Johnny's unimpressive score on the Merit Scholarship examination." True, but what shall we say about all of these activities together?

I write these lines with genuine concern as a parent, a teacher, a local elder—and a graduate of a public high school where only two matters each year were allowed to interrupt the class schedule. "Be not conformed to this world," admonished the apostle (Romans 12:2). Is it by outdoing the

world—by creating even more amusements than "worldly" schools have—that we try not to conform?

There can be no question that Ellen White saw such a danger. The list of her comments on children's, questionable, and school amusements fills nearly two pages in the index to her writings. Particularly striking is the one found in *Counsels to Teachers*, page 354. Another in the same book on page 376, declares plainly that if students "would discard unprofitable amusements and indulgences of appetite, their minds would be clear for the pursuit of knowledge."

As I walked into my college classroom one late-October day, a freshman student was saying to her neighbor, "I've done nothing but go to class every day since school started, and I'm about to go out of my mind." Listening to her comment, it dawned on me how little the whirlwind of activities at her academy had prepared her for the monotonous routine of most adult lives.

So, dear principal, I urge you to cut the number of extras and outings. Of those you cannot eliminate, how many can be scheduled for alternate years only? You will thus help your students scholastically and financially. But it will not be easy.

You may have to deal with opposition from your counselors and fellow administrators. You might remind them that if they had to prepare and conduct five classes a day, they would have less energy for activities. You may even have to appeal to some of today's apathetic parents to take an active interest in seeing that Johnny does his assignments and in reducing the interference caused by television and other household distractions. And, sadly, you will meet opposition from the occasional teacher who likes fun and games better than teaching.

Do not be disheartened. Restoring to Adventist schools the academic excellence that is rightfully theirs and making our schools the centers of spiritual and scholastic achievement that their name implies is well worth the effort.

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